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MILITARY INFLUENCE IN RUSSIAN POLITICS

BY

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## MILITARY INFLUENCE IN RUSSIAN POLITICS

Mikhail Tsypkin\*

### Introduction

The society of the former Soviet Union was militarized. The military received preferential treatment in the allocation of resources. Foreign policy relied heavily on military instruments. Military needs were used to justify extraordinary secrecy in matters of security.<sup>1</sup> As David Holloway notes, however, the militarization of the Soviet

society "had to be explained not in terms of the influence of the military, but rather in terms of the priorities of the state, which were determined by civilian leaders."<sup>2</sup> The military apparently played a limited political role in the Soviet regime, but were granted by the Communist leadership an exclusive competence in decisions on the weapons and structure of the armed forces.<sup>3</sup> The military's relative lack of political clout in the Soviet system is confirmed by Gorbachev's ability, as Communist party leader, to use his dominance over the military to allow various civilian groups to violate this exclusive competence.

The onset of Gorbachev's *perestroika* and new thinking gave rise to the hope that Soviet<sup>4</sup> society would

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<sup>1</sup>David Holloway, "State, Society and the Military Under Gorbachev," *International Security*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Winter 1989/90), pp. 5-8. Also see Stephen Meyer, "The Sources and Prospects of Gorbachev's New Political Thinking on Security," *International Security*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Fall 1988), pp. 124-163; A. Arbatov, "How Much Defence Is Sufficient?" *International Affairs*, No. 4 (April 1989), pp. 31-44; and Mikhail Tsypkin, "The Soviet Military: Glasnost' Against Secrecy," *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 40 (May-June 1991), pp. 51-66.

<sup>2</sup>Holloway, "State, Society and the Military," p. 8. A similar point has been made by Stephen Meyer in "How the Coup (and the Threat) Collapsed: the Politicization of the Soviet Military," *International Security*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Winter 1991/92), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Benjamin S. Lambeth, "A Generation Too Late: Civilian Analysis and Soviet Military Thinking," in Derek Leebaert and Timothy Dickinson, eds. *Soviet Strategy and New Military Thinking* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 217.

<sup>4</sup>The term "Soviet" in reference to military and other institutions of the former USSR, will be frequently used here, despite its current obsolescence, for two reasons. One, the Soviet military and other institutions clearly existed until the August 1991 coup. Two, even immediately after the dissolution of the USSR in December of 1991, the Armed Forces have remained, to a considerable degree, the last "Soviet" institution: while deployed throughout all the fifteen former union republics, most of them still continue to be commanded from Moscow.

become less militarized. Once the conflict between communism and capitalism was replaced by international cooperation as the cornerstone of the Soviet security policy, the rationale for militarization disappeared.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, a de-militarization of Soviet society and its post-Soviet successors has begun in earnest: defense budgets and military manpower and weapons, both conventional and nuclear, have been cut, a global withdrawal from Berlin to Cam Rahn Bay has been undertaken, and secrecy has been replaced by *glasnost'* to an unprecedented degree.

Can the demilitarization of the Russian Federation, the main successor state to the former Soviet Union, be reversed? The political system, which both encouraged the militarization of society and denied the military political power, is now gone. Is it possible that as the civilian institutions of the Soviet state have crumbled, the military has been in fact increasing their relative political power, and will become a major political influence in the new Russia, leading to a remilitarization?

To answer this question, I have investigated the Soviet military's role in

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<sup>5</sup>Holloway, "State, Society and the Military under Gorbachev," pp. 5-8. Also see Meyer, "The Sources and Prospects of Gorbachev's New Political Thinking on Security," pp. 124-163; Arbatov, "How Much Defence Is Sufficient?" pp. 31-44; and Tsyarkin, "The Soviet Military: Glasnost' Against Secrecy," pp. 51-66.

the political process from the preparation for the unsuccessful conservative *coup d'etat* in August 1991, until the immediate aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. I have concluded that the military's *opportunity* and *motivation* to exert political influence have definitely increased. The military's *actual political influence*, however, has been so far circumscribed by the traditional reliance on civilian politicians for legitimation of any political intervention by the armed forces, by the military's concentration on their narrow sectional interests, and by the disarray in the high command, which has resulted from the collapse of the old USSR state structures and their replacement by the governments of the new Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In the face of the weakness of civil society and democratic political institutions, the military will be a critical component of any power coalition in Russia and other successor states. Their political influence, however, might lead to a remilitarization of society only if Russian hyper-nationalism becomes a major political force.

The failed conservative *coup d'etat* of August 1991 burst the bubble of endless speculation in Moscow and in the West about the likelihood of military intervention in the politics of what was the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, in order to revert the process of reform. Plans for the attempted coup gave the

military a crucial role. Then Defense Minister Marshal Dmitriy Yazov was a member of the State Committee on the State of Emergency.<sup>6</sup> Military units were brought into the streets of Moscow as a symbol of the irreversibility of the coup. The military was instructed to maintain public order in cooperation with the KGB and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>7</sup> The city governments of Moscow and Leningrad were effectively transferred under the control of the commanders of respective military districts. In Moscow, commandants of military academies and commanders of military units were appointed to run the city's thirty-three boroughs.<sup>8</sup>

The military, however, proved to be an unreliable instrument for carrying out the coup. The High Command was split between the service chiefs supporting the coup (the Air Defense Forces and the Ground Forces minus the Airborne Troops) and those opposing it (the Air Force, the Strategic Rocket Forces and the Airborne Troops). Some troops on the streets of Moscow began to fraternize with the anti-coup demonstrators; some of their commanders

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<sup>6</sup>Radio Liberty Daily Report, No. 157, August 20, 1991.

<sup>7</sup>"Ne general'skoe eto delo...." *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, August 27, 1991.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid; "Prikaz komendanta goroda Moskvyy no. 2," *Central TV*, August 21, 1991, in *Soviet Media News and Features Digest*, August 21, 1991, pp. 2, 3.

said they would not use force to implement the orders of the new Emergency Committee (State Committee for the State of Emergency). In Leningrad, the democratic mayor, Anatolii Sobchak, talked the local military commander out of bringing troops into the streets, as ordered by the Emergency Committee.<sup>9</sup> This was compounded by similar hesitation and splits in the KGB and the police forces of the MVD--the Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>10</sup> Its enforcement instruments blunted, the coup failed. Why did the military try to intervene into politics? Why was their intervention so half-hearted?

In the late 1970's Timothy Colton foresaw a situation remarkably similar to that of the 1990's:

One can envisage ... a reformist civilian leadership embarking upon policies of ideological revision, military demobilization, shifting of investment priorities, and accommodation with foreign adversaries such as would alarm military leaders....The combination ... of multiple assaults on officers' key interests with the tensions of waging a difficult war--perhaps ... an embroilment with guerrillas ... --could conceivably bring about intervention [of the military in politics], either unilateral or

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<sup>9</sup>Radio Liberty Daily Report, No. 158, August 21, 1991.

<sup>10</sup>Mark Galeotti, "The Role of the Security Forces," *Report on the USSR*, Vol. 3, No. 36 (September 6, 1991), pp. 6-7.

(more likely) in coalition with some civilians.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, a set of remarkably similar circumstances after Gorbachev's accession to power resulted in a crescendo of concerns about possible military intervention in Soviet politics over the last two years. These concerns began to be expressed after the military played the leading role in the massacre of nationalist demonstrators in Tbilisi, Georgia, on April 9, 1989. Suspicions were voiced that the massacre was a result of a plot by party, KGB and military hard-liners to terrorize the democratic opposition after its successes in ousting party officials in the elections to the USSR Congress of People's Deputies.<sup>12</sup> The first rumors of a

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<sup>11</sup> Timothy J. Colton, *Commissars, Commanders, and Civilian Authority. The Structure of Soviet Military Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 288.

<sup>12</sup> For early maneuvers of the conservative forces to forestall the democrats' electoral success in the spring of 1989, see Esther B. Fein, "Soviet Conservatives Try to Turn Back the Clock on Gorbachev's Policies," *New York Times*, February 27, 1989, p. A3. On the massacre in Tbilisi, see "Vystuplenie E.A. Shevardnadze na plenum TsK Kompartii Gruzii 14 aprelya 1989 g.," *Pravda*, April 16, 1989; T.G. Shavgulidze, "Zaklyuchenie komissii Verkhovnogo Soveta Gruzinskoy SSR po rassledovaniyu obshchego imenno mesto 9 aprelya 1989 goda v gorode Tbilisi," *Zarya vostoka*, October 5, 1989; Anatoliy Sobchak, "O sobytiakh v g. Tbilisi," *Izvestiya*, December 29, 1989; "Voiska vykhodiat na ploshchad'," *Ogonyok*, No. 7 (January 1990); "Zaklyuchenie komissii s'yezda narodnykh deputatov SSSR po rassledovaniyu sobytii, imevshikh mesto v g. Tbilisi 9 aprelya 1989 goda," *Smena*, January 3, 1990; "Chrezvychaynaia situatsiia," *Novoe vremia*, No.

possible military coup date back to the summer of 1989, just after the democratic opposition in the first Congress of USSR People's Deputies took the initial steps towards establishing itself as a credible political force.<sup>13</sup> Throughout 1990, the press debated the likelihood of a military coup.<sup>14</sup> A chain of events in the end of 1990--beginning of 1991 heightened such concerns.

Paratroops in full combat gear conducted unannounced exercises around Moscow in September 1990.<sup>15</sup> Mikhail

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8 (March 1990); "Vokrug istiny," *Ogonyok*, No. 10 (February 1990).

<sup>13</sup> V. Ostrovskiy, "Dmitriy Yazov: Glasnost' ukreplyaet bezopasnost'," *Moskovskie novosti*, July 16, 1989; N. Gevorkyan, "Voennyi perevorot nevozmozhn," *Moskovskie novosti*, June 11, 1989.

<sup>14</sup> "Psikhologiya ekstremizma," *Literaturnaya gazeta*, February 22, 1990; Aleksandr Nikolaevich Yakovlev, "Sotsializm: ot mechty k real'nosti," *Kommunist*, No. 4 (March 1990); Vladimir Sokolov, "K rynku-pod prikrityem armii?" *Literaturnaya gazeta*, September 12, 1990; Andrei Nuykin, "Voennyi perevorot: pro i kontra," *Moskovskie novosti*, September 16, 1990; Col. General Boris Gromov, "Ne nuzhno nagnetat' strasti," *Moskovskie novosti*, October 14, 1990; Andranik Migranyan, "Segodnya perevorot nevozmozhn. A zavtra?" *Moskovskie novosti*, December 2, 1990; D. Tabachnik, "'Taynaya vecherya' s uchastiem TsRU?" *Komsomol'skoe znaniya*, December 16, 1990.

<sup>15</sup> For arguments supporting the idea that a coup was in the wings, see Major M. Pustobaev, "Chto nam pishut iz armii," *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, October 12, 1990; A. Pankratov, "A kto-to podumal--ucheniya idut....," *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, September 26, 1990; Grigoriy Zaychenko, Sergei Mitrofanov, "Perevorot namechen, no poka otlozhen?" *Kommersant*, No. 38 (September 24 -- October 1, 1990). For denials of coup attempts in September, see N. Krivomazov, "Kak desantniki na Moskvu khodili," *Pravda*, September 19, 1990; V. Urban, "Lozh' o 'voennom perevorote'," *Krasnaya*

Gorbachev held a confrontational meeting with a group of military officers--members of soviets on November 13, 1990.<sup>16</sup> On November 17, 1990 People's Deputy-Colonel Viktor Alksnis issued an ultimatum to Gorbachev to restore "order" within thirty days or resign.<sup>17</sup> Subsequently, Gorbachev turned toward a more conservative course.<sup>18</sup> Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze resigned on December 20, 1990, partially blaming his decision on attacks by the military.<sup>19</sup> The decision to implement an unprecedented joint patrolling of some cities by police and the military was made on December 29, 1990.<sup>20</sup> A bloody crackdown was attempted by the military against their target of choice--the Lithuanian nationalists, in Vilnius on January 13, 1991. Troops in large numbers were introduced into Moscow on March 28,

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*zvezda*, September 27, 1990; Vyacheslav Lukashovich, "Veter strakha v parusakh perestroyki," *Krasnaya zvezda*, September 29, 1990; N. Velan, "Lish' by poshumet'...." *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, September 29, 1990; S. Shatalov, "Zachem vvodit' v zabluzhdenie." *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, October 21, 1990.

<sup>16</sup>"Armiyu ne otdelit' ot naroda," *Krasnaya zvezda*, November 15, 1990.

<sup>17</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 222, November 23, 1990.

<sup>18</sup>Gorbachev's former economic advisor, Stanislav Shatalin, attributed this turn to military pressure; see S. Shatalin, "Nel'zya borot'sya so zlom pri pomoshchi zla," *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, January 22, 1991.

<sup>19</sup>"Chetvertyy s'yezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR," *Izvestiya*, December 21, 1990, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 19, January 28, 1991.

1991, in order to intimidate Boris Yeltsin's supporters in the Russian Federation's Congress of People's Deputies and those Muscovites prepared to demonstrate in his defense. These events culminated in the August 1991 attempted *coup d' etat*.

The post-coup events confirmed the military's continuing political influence. After the announcement of the dissolution of the USSR on December 8, 1991, several high-ranking military officers stated their opposition to the dissolution, and threatened an armed forces intervention against it. Russia's President Boris Yeltsin immediately sought the support of the armed forces to ensure the dissolution of the old regime. Then President of the USSR Gorbachev also sought the support of the military in his opposition to the dissolution. Yeltsin received the military's support, while Gorbachev was denied it.<sup>21</sup>

The military's support for Yeltsin did not end their attempts to exert political influence. On January 17, the Officers' Assembly (a gathering of officers delegated by all units of the armed forces) had a stormy meeting, attended by Yeltsin and Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbaev. It formed a Coordinating Council tasked with "advising" the civilian leadership on military policies, a

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<sup>21</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 233, December 10, 1991; No. 236, December 13, 1991; No. 237, December 16, 1991.

clear attempt to short-circuit the chain of command appointed by civilian politicians.<sup>22</sup>

A useful theoretical framework for measuring the military's political influence has been developed by S.E. Finer, who suggested that military interventions in politics are conditioned by the political strengths and weaknesses of the military, and its disposition and opportunity to intervene.<sup>23</sup> Their disposition to intervene depends on how the military sees its role vis-a-vis the government and the state, on the military's desire to prevent civilian "meddling" in its "professional" matters, on the military's reluctance (or lack of such) to perform police functions.<sup>24</sup> The military may be predisposed to intervene if they are motivated by a sense of the soldier's manifest destiny, as well as by self-interest.<sup>25</sup> The opportunity to intervene arises when civilian power becomes dependent on the military because of war or a domestic political crisis, or when civilian authority is weak.<sup>26</sup> The political strengths of the military include their "centralization, hierarchy, discipline," as well as the

public's perception of the military's virtues: bravery, self-abnegation, patriotism.<sup>27</sup> The major political weakness of the military is a lack of legitimacy of their rule.<sup>28</sup>

This approach appears to attribute equal importance to factors both internal and external to the military. Samuel Huntington suggests that "the most important causes of military intervention in politics are not military but political, and reflect not the social and organizational characteristics of the military establishment but the political and institutional structure of the society."<sup>29</sup> A recent study of the politicization of the Soviet military has shown convincingly that the political environment is the clue to understanding the problems of the armed forces of the former Soviet Union.<sup>30</sup> This study focuses primarily on the political factors crucial in affecting the Soviet/Russian military's ability and motivation to intervene in politics, particularly on the interrelated issues of civilian control, legitimacy of military rule, and Russian nationalism.

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<sup>22</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 12, January 20, 1992; No. 21, January 31, 1992; No. 22, February 3, 1992.

<sup>23</sup>S. E. Finer, *The Man On Horseback*, 2nd enlarged edition, revised and updated (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), passim.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 20-24.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 28-41.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 64-71, 78, 79.

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<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 8, 9.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 12-19.

<sup>29</sup>Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968) p. 194.

<sup>30</sup>Meyer, "How the Coup (and the Threat) Collapsed," pp. 5-38.

## Historical Background

It has been frequently said that a military coup in the Soviet Union is unlikely because there is no tradition of successful military coups in Russian/Soviet history.<sup>31</sup> This is indeed so. But it is equally well established in the Russian/Soviet tradition that whenever the civilian authority is weakened by a succession of crises or by a revolutionary upheaval, no government can survive without controlling and/or receiving political support from the military. On several crucial occasions during the last three centuries, the military decided the fate of several political leaders by extending or denying them military support. At the beginning of his reign, Peter the Great's success in his power struggle was closely linked to the changing loyalties of the Moscow musketeers.<sup>32</sup> In the eighteenth century, "the real force behind ... Russia's palace revolutions ... was the regiments of the guards which Peter had founded and which he had raised to the position of one of the most influential government organs."<sup>33</sup> The plot against Paul I, who

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<sup>31</sup>Stephen Foye, "The Case for a Coup: Gorbachev or the Generals?" *Report on the USSR*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (January 11, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>32</sup>Michael T. Florinsky, *Russia. A History And an Interpretation*, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1958), pp. 308-314.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 432.

was assassinated in 1801, would have been impossible without the help of the military, especially the Guards, who were outraged by their mistreatment at the hands of the unbalanced monarch.<sup>34</sup> The first attempted revolution in Russia came in the form of a military coup in December 1825, which failed because the majority of the capital's military garrison remained loyal to the Tsar.<sup>35</sup> As social turmoil increased in the late nineteenth--early twentieth centuries, the Russian monarchy relied more and more on the military for maintaining internal order, to suppress revolts and impose martial law.<sup>36</sup>

In the fateful year of 1917, the lack of support for Nicholas II on the part of his military was crucial in his decision to abdicate and thus end the Russian monarchy.<sup>37</sup> In the same year, Lenin destroyed the Provisional Government's control of the military, while winning the loyalty of some military units deployed in the capital; without this success the communist revolution in Russia could

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<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 625-627.

<sup>35</sup>Michael T. Florinsky, *Russia. A History And an Interpretation*, vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan, 1958), p. 750.

<sup>36</sup>Richard Pipes, "Militarism and the Soviet State," *Daedalus*, Vol. 109, No. 4 (Fall 1980), p. 3; William C. Fuller, Jr., *Civil-Military Conflict in Imperial Russia 1881-1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), *passim*.

<sup>37</sup>Fuller, *Civil-Military Conflict in Imperial Russia*, p. 261; Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), pp. 273-286, 309-313.

have never happened. After the Bolshevik coup, most of the attacks against the new regime were led by the officers of the old army, while the communist government could not have won the civil war without the tens of thousands of former Tsarist officers, forced or attracted to serve in the Red Army.

The removal of Trotsky from the Red Army command was a crucial step in Stalin's campaign against his arch-enemy. Stalin, who jealously guarded his power against any personal or institutional challenges, made a special effort, through a mixture of terror and privileges, to ensure the military's political quiescence. No other government branch was purged as thoroughly or urgently as the Red Army during the Great Terror--probably because Stalin saw the military as the greatest potential threat to his personal power in any crisis; once the military was purged, Stalin felt free to unleash unlimited terror against the whole society.<sup>38</sup> The 1953 coup by the Politburo against secret police chief Lavrentiy Beria would have been unthinkable without the direct involvement of some high-ranking

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<sup>38</sup>Adam B. Ulam, *Stalin. The Man and His Era* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), pp. 448-450, 459.

military officers and of substantial numbers of troops.<sup>39</sup>

The refusal by Minister of Defense Marshal Georgiy Zhukov to support Nikita Khrushchev's opponents played an important role in the failure of the 1957 attempted coup. Khrushchev's eventual loss of support among the military emboldened the plotters who overthrew him in 1964. The military in Russian and Soviet history never took power for itself. The Russian/Soviet political elites, however, have generally found it impossible to keep or achieve power without active support from the military, because of the country's lack of representative institutions, vast ethnic diversity and sheer size.

#### Motives for Intervention

During Gorbachev's years in power and since his fall last December, the Soviet military has accumulated many of the traditional motives for political intervention. It may be motivated to intervene in politics in order to prevent what they perceive as civilian intervention into what is "properly" their affairs. This tendency towards military syndicalism--that is, the belief that only the military is

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<sup>39</sup>A. Skorokhodov, "Kak nas 'gotovili na voynu' s Beriyev." *Literaturnaya gazeta*, July 27, 1988; S. Bystrov, "Zadanie osobogo svoystva," *Krasnaya zvezda*, March 18, 1988, March 19, 1988, March 20, 1988.

competent to judge military policy--has been very prominent in the USSR. The first five years of Gorbachev's rule have been characterized by the imposition of civilian views on a number of issues of military policy. The potential for conflict has been unusually great because of the extreme militarization of Soviet society: the military has traditionally viewed everything, from high school education to rock music to defense industry conversion for civilian uses, as within its area of competence.<sup>40</sup>

Many developments under Gorbachev have harmed the military's self-interest and prestige. The withdrawal from Eastern Europe and the impending eviction from the whole Western periphery of the former USSR represent assaults on the "emotional geography" (to use S. E. Finer's term) of the Soviet Armed Forces. After all, these areas were the scenes of the great victories by the Red Army in World War II, and the presence of Soviet Armed Forces there provided a living link with these important memories. Writer and

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<sup>40</sup>For an example of the debate on civilian competence in military affairs, see Arbatov, "How Much Defence Is Sufficient?", pp. 31-44; Major General Yu. Lyubimov, "O dostatochnosti oborony i nedostatke kompetentnosti," *Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil*, No. 16 (August 1989), pp. 21-26; Lt. General Ye. Volkov, "Ne razyasnyayet, a zatumanivaet," *Krasnaya zvezda*, September 28, 1989; and Norman M. Naimark and David E. Powell, "Moscow's Cult of Militarism," *National Interest*, No. 4 (Summer 1986), pp. 53-64.

newspaper editor Aleksandr Prokhanov, one of the most eloquent conservative spokesmen in Moscow, thus expressed this sentiment as Soviet troops began withdrawing from Eastern Europe: "the bones of Russian infantrymen are turning over in their forgotten graves."<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the economic geography of the Soviet Armed Forces makes the retreat painful: the rule of the thumb has been that, with few exceptions, the westernmost officer billets are the best, while the easternmost are the worst, as far as living conditions and availability of food and consumer goods are concerned. The dissolution of the USSR on December 21, 1991, has resulted in the prospect of the former Soviet armed forces being split among several successor states, something generally unpopular among the officer corps.<sup>42</sup>

The simultaneous withdrawal from the Third World has been also quite damaging to the military's self-interest and prestige. Being posted to Angola or Iraq used to mean access to hard currency and goods unavailable at home--and thus an opportunity to tap the Soviet black market for considerable personal enrichment. Soviet involvement in proxy

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<sup>41</sup>Aleksandr Prokhanov, "Tragediya tsentralizma est' tragediya prolitoy krovi....," *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, January 5, 1990.

<sup>42</sup>An opinion poll of the delegates to the January 1992 Officers' Assembly showed that 67 percent of them wanted to continue with unified armed forces of the CIS. See *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 12, January 20, 1992.

wars against the United States throughout the world and far from the traditional Russian sphere of interest confirmed the superpower status of the Soviet military. The retreat from these conflicts signified the crumbling of the Soviet military's global reach, and doomed their military clients to a more or less imminent defeat. The crushing of the Soviet-trained and Soviet-equipped Iraqi military by the United States and its allies must have been especially humiliating for the Soviet generals.

The deteriorating economy has had a painful impact on military officers. Those transferred back to the Soviet Union from Eastern Europe have frequently been left without housing and without much hope for it. Many of them were transferred to the Baltic states, and are now in fear of an imminent new eviction. Thousands of officers discharged from active duty have to find new jobs at a time of anticipated high unemployment. The salaries of active duty officers compare very unfavorably with the incomes of those operating in the nascent market economy. Cuts in the armed forces' size have made military careers look unpromising.

The military has a primarily narrow sectional interest in political matters: the well-being of the officer corps, and the protection of defense policy-making from "incompetent" civilian intervention. Even during the

emotional moments of the August coup, officers' self-interest played an important role: a detachment of paratroopers asked for a pledge to improve their housing situation as a condition for defending Yeltsin's government.<sup>43</sup> The decision to give an oath of loyalty to Ukraine by a large number of officers based there was apparently motivated by their fear of losing jobs, by the Russian government's failure to provide for officers who have to leave Ukraine, and by Ukraine's decision to offer salaries and benefits higher than those in the forces under CIS/Russian command.<sup>44</sup>

An opinion poll of participants in the January 17, 1992 Officers' Assembly showed that about 90 per cent of them were in favor of resurrecting the old USSR. Taken in isolation, this figure appears to reflect a strong motivation to intervene in politics to settle an issue of the broadest political importance. The same opinion poll showed that 71 per cent were in favor of the military establishment having a decisive influence on the government's *military policy*.<sup>45</sup> In another opinion poll, officers from ten regiments deployed in Russia, although

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<sup>43</sup> Mikhail Sokolov, "Slovo protiv broni," *Sobesednik*, No. 35 (August 1991).

<sup>44</sup> Vera Kuznetsova, "Sevastopol' poteryan dlya Ukrainy," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, March 11, 1992; Lyudmila Savel'yeva, "O chem zabyt mayor Astakhov," *Izvestiya*, March 3, 1992.

<sup>45</sup> Aleksandr Putko, "Nastroeniya v armii bespokoyat i samikh voennykh," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, February 5, 1992.

strongly disapproving (56 per cent) of Yeltsin's reforms, believed overwhelmingly (90 per cent) that governing Russia should be left to professional politicians.<sup>46</sup> These attitudes indicate the officers' preoccupation with their own situation, made especially precarious by the dissolution of the Union, and a desire to exert pressure on the government to defend their self-interest. Conspicuously absent is a strong ambition to implement their own broad political agenda.

To sum it up, the Soviet military has strong, although limited, motives for intervention into politics in order to redress their grievances and obtain better conditions. Has the opportunity to intervene in politics been there?

#### Opportunity to Intervene

Increased dependence of the civilian government on the military leaves the latter in a better position to intervene in politics. War, for instance, can increase such dependence. Gorbachev, however, was lucky and insightful enough to pull out of Afghanistan and thus diminish the military's role in the

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<sup>46</sup>F. Makarov, "84 protsenta voennosluzhashchikh schitayut, chto sotsial'naya napryazennost' vozrastayet," *Krasnaya zvezda*, March 6, 1992.

political equation in the Kremlin in the late 1980's.

Civilian dependence on the military can also increase if the civilian government has to rule by force. As centrifugal tendencies in the Soviet Union grew in 1990 and 1991, Gorbachev's government came dangerously close to rule by force. In late 1990, for instance, eleven cities or regions of the Soviet Union (all of them outside of the Russian Federation) were under what amounts to martial law.<sup>47</sup> It is possible that what Gorbachev's conservative critics described as his lack of decisiveness in using force was at least partially rooted in his realization that by using military force to rule he was increasing the already dangerously high level of dependence on the military in the face of a near collapse of the civilian government.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union has made use of the military to rule by force more difficult, as long as the armed forces are at least theoretically subordinated to the non-existent "commonwealth" authority. The passive role of the CIS military in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict around Nagorny Karabakh confirms this difficulty. Once the inevitable happens, and the bulk of the former Soviet armed forces pass under the control of Russia, the military

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<sup>47</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, November 29, 1990.

may again be used to rule by force in case of economic and/or ethnic unrest in the Russian Federation, or conflicts with other successor states.

Open political crisis, instability and the absence of a legitimate government create an opportunity for military intervention into politics. The Soviet political system lacked legitimacy, including an accepted mechanism for the transfer of power. This was demonstrated by Gorbachev's continuous fiddling with the constitution to give himself more power, his staying on as General Secretary of the CPSU until after the August coup, and his refusal to subject himself to a popular vote. Wide public recognition on who or what constitutes sovereign authority was absent at least until after the August coup, as demonstrated by the so-called "war of laws" between the "center" and the Union republics.

The establishment of independent states on the ruins of the union has alleviated the situation, especially in the case of Russia, which had been torn between its traditional imperial and new nation-state identities. Russia's new government, however, can easily lose its legitimacy, because its citizens' hopes of speedy benefits from economic reform are being increasingly frustrated. In addition, just as before the August coup, substantial segments of the public have little or no attachment to the new civil

institutions. Although the level of public mobilization is quite high in the large cities, even there public associations are still weak (with the exception of the better organized non-Russian nationalist movements), and public mobilization in small towns and rural areas is quite low. Thus, the military had an ample opportunity to intervene in politics by August 1991, and is likely to still have it in the future.

#### Military Centralization and Discipline

The main political strength of a military establishment is arguably the centralized, rigidly hierarchical nature of the institution, which may make it into a powerful instrument for political intervention. The fact that we talk about "the military" indicates that we tend to view even very large armed forces with complex structure as a single institutional actor, tightly controlled by its high command. There was little direct evidence in the recent past of interservice rivalry, or disobedience or mutinies significant enough to disrupt the centralized control of the Soviet military.<sup>48</sup> Yet, even in the pre-Gorbachev days, there existed factors that

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<sup>48</sup>The mutiny in the 1970's on a destroyer in the Baltic appears to have been an exception.

were potentially damaging to the cohesion of the military.

The ethnic composition of the commissioned officer corps was becoming increasingly different from that of the enlisted conscripts, who were also becoming less ethnically uniform. While 97 per cent of commissioned and non-commissioned officers are ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians and Tatars, about thirty eight per cent of the conscript pool came from Central Asia and Transcaucasia.<sup>49</sup> As the social conditions in the Soviet Union deteriorated, the standards of living of junior and even middle-ranking officers declined, while the top generals, like the rest of the privileged *nomenklatura*, preserved and even continued to expand their luxuries.<sup>50</sup>

These threats to the military's cohesion have become much more pronounced since 1985. The tidal wave of various forms of nationalism made ethnic conflicts in the armed forces a serious problem by the summer of 1991. The economic collapse, combined with a rapid and poorly prepared withdrawal of Soviet forces from Eastern Europe, reduced the junior and middle-ranking officers' standards of living even more.

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<sup>49</sup>A. Pusev, "I snova raschet na 'chudo'?" *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil*, No. 9 (May 1990), pp. 43-47.

<sup>50</sup>Vladimir Sergeev, "Dachnye privilegii pri svete gasnosti," *Ogonyok*, No. 13 (March 1990), pp. 17-19.

*Glasnost'*, at the same time, made them more aware of the privileges enjoyed by the top-ranking officers. Deteriorating living conditions have led to increasing corruption and subversion of discipline. The most glaring examples can be found in the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany, where officers defect with secret weapons, political officers make a brisk business reselling Mercedes cars, soldiers rummage the German dumps in search of consumer goods, and the chain of command has turned into a system in which the stronger pump hard currency from the weaker.<sup>51</sup>

The military's cohesion was further threatened by the politicization of the commissioned officer corps resulting from elections of many officers to legislatures (soviets) at various levels.<sup>52</sup> The positions taken by military officers--people's deputies testified to a considerable political polarization within the officer corps. Colonels Viktor Alksnis and Nikolai Petrushenko became the leaders of the reactionary *Soyuz* group in the Congress of People's Deputies. Major Vladimir Lopatin became a prominent spokesman for military reform for the democratic

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<sup>51</sup>V. Zhitarenko, "Zauryadnyy iuda," *Krasnaya zvezda*, December 22, 1990; *Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 245, January 4, 1991; *Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 35, February 19, 1991; *Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 191, October 8, 1990.

<sup>52</sup>For a detailed study of politicization of the Soviet military, see Meyer, "How the Coup (and the Threat) Collapsed," pp. 5-38.

opposition. Many of today's junior and middle ranking officers have become opposed to the Marxist-Leninist political orthodoxy. An analysis of the voting patterns of military officers--members of the RSFSR First Congress of People's Deputies in 1990 showed that while senior officers cast only 16 percent of their votes for the reformist "Democratic Russia" bloc, 82 percent of their votes were cast against; "among the middle-level ... officers the figure is 63 percent (37 percent against), and among junior officers -- 73 percent (22 percent against)."<sup>53</sup> Despite the pressure of the High Command to vote against Boris Yeltsin in Russia's presidential election in June 1991, he nonetheless came out a winner in several electoral districts comprising major military bases.<sup>54</sup>

This radicalization, however, is by no means uniform. Even junior officers in the divisions returning from Eastern Europe have been sympathetic to anti-reformist ideas and personalities, such as Colonel Alksnis.<sup>55</sup> This is hardly surprising: these officers have been suddenly uprooted from what used to be the most desirable billets in the

Soviet Armed Forces, without being exposed to the political ferment of the last several years at home, and have been moved to unprepared garrisons, mainly in areas gripped by nationalist fervor. In this turbulent political atmosphere, a number of officers--People's Deputies began to use their parliamentary immunity to severely criticize the policies of reform.

Use of the military for police operations began to weaken the discipline even prior to the August coup. Vice Admiral Belov, Commander of the Tallinn naval base, was critical of the actions of the military in Vilnius, in January 1991, and vowed no similar action in Estonia.<sup>56</sup> Several officers from the Vitebsk paratroop division said in an interview with Lithuanian radio that they would not shoot civilians if ordered.<sup>57</sup> A group of anonymous officers from the Moscow Military District published a protest against the use of the military to intimidate Yeltsin's supporters in Moscow on March 28, 1991.<sup>58</sup> The actions of Soviet troops against Armenians in Nagorny Karabakh were publicly decried by a group of junior

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<sup>53</sup>Julia Wishnevsky, "The Two Sides of the Barricades in Russian Politics Today," *Report on the USSR*, August 24, 1990, p. 17.

<sup>54</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 113, June 17, 1991.

<sup>55</sup>N. Andreev, V. Litovkin, "Tri pis'ma iz armii," *Izvestiya*, February 13, 14, 15, 1991; also see N. Andreev, "Ofiterskiy korpus," *Izvestiya*, April 4, 1991.

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<sup>56</sup>"Vitse-Admiral Belov: Ofitery Tallinnskogo garnizona protiv primeneniya voennoy sily," *Informatsionnoe Agenstvo Novosti*, January 30, 1991.

<sup>57</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 14, January 21, 1991.

<sup>58</sup>"Russkie soldaty! Russkie ofitery!" *Svobodnoe slovo*, April 16, 1991.

officers stationed there.<sup>59</sup> The military's ability to mobilize the reserves for police duty was weakened. The call-up of reservists for an operation in Baku, Azerbaijan in January 1990, was successfully resisted in some areas.<sup>60</sup> In 1991, the USSR Ministry of Defense had to agree to the demands of Uzbekistan that Uzbek conscripts could be sent to troubled area of Transcaucasia only on a voluntary contract basis.<sup>61</sup>

The cohesion of the high command was shaken by debates over one of the most controversial issues of military reform--replacing conscripts with volunteers. The services which require skilled personnel and are relatively small in size--the Navy, the Strategic Rocket Forces, the Air Force and the Air Defense Forces--have stated their preference for volunteers over conscripts, and the Navy has begun experimenting with contracting enlisted men. The huge Ground Forces, on the contrary, have shown no interest in volunteers, most probably because their skill requirements are generally lower, and their size makes reliance on volunteers unrealistic, with the notable exception of the relatively small and elite

Airborne Forces.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, until the August coup, there had been no visible significant breakdowns of the military chain of command or mass disobedience in the armed forces. Even the unpopular and hastily prepared troop withdrawal from Eastern Europe was implemented strictly according to schedule.

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<sup>59</sup>"My, russkie ofitsery, zayavlyayem: eto genotsid!" *Epokha*, No. 21 (June 1991).

<sup>60</sup>"Zadachi u nas odni," *Krasnaya zvezda*, February 10, 1990.

<sup>61</sup>L. Savel'yev, "Prizyv-po soglasheniyu, sluzhba-po pris'yage," *Pravda vostoka*, May 15, 1991.

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<sup>62</sup>Mikhail Tsyarkin, "Will the Soviet Navy Become a Volunteer Force?" *Report on the USSR*, Vol. 2, No. 5 (February 2, 1990), pp. 5-7; V. Volgin, "Na flot-po kontraktu," *Trud*, May 17, 1991; O. Vladykin, "Voennaya reforma: realii i perspektivy," *Krasnaya zvezda*, June 12, 1991; Maj. Gen. Geliy Batenin, "Kak poroilet' sindrom 41-go," *Novoe vremya*, No. 8 (February 1991); Maj. Gen. V.G. Strekozov, "Zakony ob oborone i statuse voennosluzhshchikh--pravovaya osnovaa sotsial'noy politiki sovetskogo gosudarstva v vooruzhennykh silakh," *Voennaya Mysl'*, January 1991, pp. 5-13; "Kto yest' kto," *Central TV*, March 20, 1991, (Interview with Gen. Yazov); Col. Gen. Aleksey Mironov, "Naemnyy ryadovoy: 'za' i 'protiv'," *Moskovskie novosti*, January 28, 1990; Col Gen G. Krivosheev, "Voinskaya sluzhba: ravenstvo pered zakonom," *Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil*, No. 4 (February 1990), pp. 18-24; V. Moroz, "Proshu zachislit' riadovym....," *Krasnaya zvezda*, April 3, 1990; A. Antoshkin, "Naemnaya armiya: dorozhe ili deshevle?" *Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil*, No. 9 (May 1990), pp. 38-43; E. Lunev, "V armiiu... po kontraktu," *Sovetskaya kul'tura*, April 7, 1990; "Vremya vozrastayushchey otvetstvennosti," *Krasnaya zvezda*, May 18, 1990; V. Serebryannikov, "Kakaya armiya nam nuzhna," *Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil*, No. 9 (May 1990), pp. 34-38; Col. N. Karasev, "Skol'ko stoit professional?" *Morskoy sbornik*, June 1990, pp. 8-12; N. Burbyga, "V desantniki-po kontraktu?" *Izvestiya*, July 23, 1990.

### Gorbachev as Commander-in-Chief

To understand the real state of the centralization of the Soviet military prior to the August coup, one must consider a "weak link," that appeared in the all important nexus between the military High Command and the top civilian policy-maker -- President of the USSR, General Secretary of the CPSU, Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Armed Forces and Colonel of the Reserves, Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev. Leaving aside the military's discontent over many of his actions or inactions (to be discussed later), Gorbachev appears to have simply paid little attention to the military. Between March 1985 and August 1990, Gorbachev had only two publicized exposures to the military during his visits to the Pacific and Northern Fleets in July, 1986 and September 1987, respectively, as well as an unpublicized meeting with top military officers in July of 1985.<sup>63</sup>

Gorbachev was demonstratively disengaged from the military at a time when the Soviet Armed Forces were receiving one jolt after another, including:

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<sup>63</sup>"Nagrada rodiny - na znameni goroda," *Izvestiya*, July 29, 1986; "Na zemle zapolyar'ya," *Pravda*, October 1, 1987; Harry Gelman, "Gorbachev and the Future of the Soviet Military Institution," *Adelphi Papers*, No. 258, (The International Institute for Strategic Studies), Spring 1991, p. 13.

deteriorating living conditions, unprecedented negative publicity, the withdrawal from Afghanistan, unilateral personnel cuts and major reductions of nuclear and conventional weapons, the loss of Eastern Europe, and the increasing use of the military to police the disintegrating empire.<sup>64</sup> In 1990 several senior and middle-ranking officers-- People's Deputies attacked Gorbachev's reforms in a most vitriolic fashion. Colonel General Al'bert Makashov, for instance, referred to proponents of the "new thinking" in foreign policy as "learned turkeys," and implied that a military coup might solve the country's problems.<sup>65</sup> Gorbachev did not punish Makashov, just as he left unpunished other similar attacks, the sharpest of them against Eduard Shevardnadze, which contributed to his decision to resign from the post of Foreign Minister in December 1990.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>This policy of not-so-benign neglect was rather typical of Gorbachev's management style when it came to institutions whose influence he found excessive. For instance, in 1988 Gorbachev practically stopped the work of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the CPSU, thus disabling the transmission belts connecting the top communist party leaders with the party bodies throughout the USSR. [See *Materialy plenuma tsentral'novo komiteta KPSS, 25 aprelya 1989 goda* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1989), pp. 65, 92-93.]

<sup>65</sup>Col.Gen. A. Makashov, "My ne sobirayem'sya sdavat'sya," *Krasnaya zvezda*, June 21, 1990.

<sup>66</sup>Col. Gen. I. Rodionov, "Kogda perestanut glumit'sya nad armiyey i derzhavoy?" *Molodaya gvardiya*, September 1990, p. 7; "Ne mozhem otnesti eto k dostizheniyam nashey vneshney politiki," *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, November 12,

Gorbachev finally addressed the military on the situation in the country and on the conditions of the armed forces only on August 17, 1990.<sup>67</sup> In this speech, Gorbachev defended the whole range of his policies, as well as the need for military reform, but avoided stating his own views on the crucial issues of military reform. On September 9, 1990, Gorbachev issued a presidential order to improve the social conditions of the military: it addressed some important procedural issues of military justice, and decreed compulsory life and disability insurance for servicemen, but failed to address the critical issues of housing and food.<sup>68</sup>

The crucial meeting between Gorbachev and military officers--People's Deputies on November 13, 1990 was a direct reaction not only to the growing discontent and anti-reform mood among the military, but also to the challenge to the existing chain of command presented by Boris Yeltsin, then Chairman of the Russian

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1990; Maj. Aleksey Vashchenko, "Persidskiy zaliv-eto ryadom," *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, November 30, 1990; *Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 241, December 20, 1990; *Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 242, December 21, 1990.

<sup>67</sup>"Rech' M. Gorbacheva pered ofitserami," *Central TV*, August 17, 1991, reproduced in *USSR Today. Soviet Media News and Features Digest*, August 17, 1990, pp. 1-16.

<sup>68</sup>"O nekotorykh merakh po usileniyu sotsial'noy i pravovoy zashchity voennosluzhashchikh," *Krasnaya zvezda*, September 6, 1990.

Federation's Supreme Soviet. The RSFSR government protested the October 24, 1990 nuclear test at the Novaya Zemlya test range, demanding that the USSR government respect Russia's sovereignty and consult with Russia's government on issues of "defense and security."<sup>69</sup> On November 2, 1990, RSFSR Prime Minister Ivan Silaev met with military officers--RSFSR People's Deputies. Silaev promised that the Russian government would act to improve the living conditions of the military, and was reported to have offered additional food rations to officers.<sup>70</sup> According to one report, the issue of establishing the Russian national guard was tentatively raised by Yeltsin's personal representative Gennadiy Burbulis.<sup>71</sup> In the face of the continuing failure of the USSR government to reverse or even stem the decline of officers' living standards, Yeltsin bid for the loyalty of the armed forces.

Already on November 4, Minister of Defense Yazov met with the same group of officers and promised a meeting with Gorbachev to discuss their

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<sup>69</sup>"Zayavlenie Prezidiuma Verkhovonogo Soveta RSFSR i Soveta ministrov RSFSR," *Rossiya*, No.1 (1990).

<sup>70</sup>V. Urban, "Komu reshat' problemy armii?" *Krasnaya zvezda*, November 4, 1990; "Armiyu ne otdelit' ot naroda," *Krasnaya zvezda*, November 15, 1990.

<sup>71</sup>Larisa Zakharova, "Nuzhna li prezidentu armiya?" *Literator*, No. 44 (1990).

complaints on November 13.<sup>72</sup> The nine days in between were apparently necessary to pack the meeting with conservative officers--People's Deputies from the USSR as a whole.<sup>73</sup> The November 13 meeting did nothing to reassert Gorbachev's authority over the military. Most speakers were highly critical of *perestroika* and *glasnost'*, while Gorbachev sounded defensive. To underscore his low prestige among the military, the Defense Ministry's daily published Gorbachev's speech *after* the transcript of angry complaints by officers, contrary to the established tradition.<sup>74</sup> On the next day, Colonel Viktor Alksnis, a spokesman for *Soyuz*, the anti-reformist group of People's Deputies, said that Gorbachev "lost" the armed forces at that the meeting.<sup>75</sup> On November 16, 1990 Gorbachev signed a decree raising the salaries of all officers in command positions, from platoon to corps, by 45.7 to 34 per cent respectively.<sup>76</sup> This action, undertaken as it was only in response to the pressure of angry officers and Yeltsin's challenge, could hardly enhance Gorbachev's prestige with the military.

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<sup>72</sup>V. Urban, "Rasschityvaem na pomoshch' sovetov," *Krasnaya zvezda*, November 4, 1990.

<sup>73</sup>Zakharova, "Nuzhna li prezidentu armiya?"

<sup>74</sup>"Armiyu ne otdelit' ot naroda," *Krasnaya zvezda*, November 15, 1990.

<sup>75</sup>*Moscow TV-1*, November 14, 1990.

<sup>76</sup>Interview with Marshal D. Yazov, *Central TV*, November 25, 1990.

### The Struggle for the Military's Loyalty

The period of January through August 1991 saw a battle for the military's loyalty between Boris Yeltsin and his supporters in the RSFSR government, on one hand, and on the other, an increasingly isolated Gorbachev in an uneasy and uneven alliance with the conservatives in the Central Committee of the USSR Communist Party, the RSFSR Communist Party, and the USSR government. The year 1990 ended with the frantic public activity of Colonel Alksnis, the spokesman for the *Soyuz* alliance of conservative members of the USSR Congress of People's Deputies. In a series of interviews, he assailed the reforms that had led to the Soviet accommodation with the West and to the disintegration of the Soviet empire, and promised that in 1991 the military would play a decisive political role--if they were saved from a split.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Tatyana Kolgushkina, "Alksnis mog by skazat' bol'she," *Sovetskaya molodezh'*, December 1, 1990; V. Urban, "O pol'ze sporov s prezidentom...," *Krasnaya zvezda*, December 8, 1990; "Armiya i politiki," *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, December 14, 1990; D. Tabachnik, "Taynaya vecherya' s uchastiem TsRU?" *Komsomol'skoe znamy*, December 16, 1990; "Soyuz sokhranen budet," *Krasnaya zvezda*, December 31, 1990; A. Riskin, "Viktor Alksnis: 'Soyuznyy dogovor-eto blef'," *Yedinstvo*, December 31, 1990.

In early January of 1991, a weekly magazine of the Ministry of Defense published an article by Boris Yeltsin, entitled *The Military Are Our Children*.<sup>78</sup> The fact that this mouthpiece of military conservatives published Yeltsin was important in itself: it meant that Yeltsin had some support among the High Command. In his article, Yeltsin continued to court the military by promising to improve the living conditions of the officer corps. His goal apparently was to warn the military, without offending them, against intervention in politics on the conservative side. Yeltsin reassured his readers that the military should play an important role in a state with Russia's martial traditions, and that it was legitimate for servicemen to be members of legislatures. Both of these ideas were at odds with the stridently anti-military mood then prevalent in the democratic movement. At the same time, Yeltsin said that a military coup would aggravate economic, social and political crises, and that only a small group of "adventurers" within the military could attempt it. The Soviet Armed Forces, he continued, might split up as a result of a coup, and a civil war, possibly involving nuclear weapons, might ensue. Then Yeltsin

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<sup>78</sup>B. N. Yeltsin, "Armiya--eto nashi deti," *Syn otechestva*, No. 1 (January 1991).

shifted back to his courtship of the officer corps: the military, he said, is not a

dark, reactionary force ... the healthy forces in the military would not allow it to take the path of destruction. The guarantee of this is the officer corps of Russia, which has always kept immortal the loftiest moral values: honor, glory, courage, valor, loyalty to the people and to the Fatherland.<sup>79</sup>

The massacre of Lithuanians in Vilnius on January 13 marked a new round of fighting for the military's loyalty. Gorbachev's lame explanations and his denial of any knowledge of plans for the crackdown, coupled with his refusal to condemn it outright, could only further damage his standing as commander-in-chief: he appeared to be either not in control of the military, or to be shifting the blame on them.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, Colonel Alksnis accused Gorbachev of being behind the crackdown, losing his nerve once blood was shed, and making the armed forces a scapegoat.<sup>81</sup> Yeltsin's response, in contrast, was direct, forceful and statesmanlike. He condemned the violence in Lithuania, and appealed to Russian servicemen not to take part in attacks against civilians, pointing out that

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<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup>*Moscow Radio 1*, January 14, 1991.

<sup>81</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 15, January 22, 1991; V. Romanenko, "Polkovnik Alksnis: 'Moskva nas brosil'," *Argumenty i fakty*, No. 4 (February 1991).

the use of servicemen from the RSFSR in police operations outside of the Russian republic contravened RSFSR laws.<sup>82</sup> Yeltsin announced that he would proceed to establish an RSFSR Committee on State Security (in order to eventually control the KGB and the military on Russia's territory), and that he believed that a Russian army should be created.<sup>83</sup>

On January 18, Yeltsin met with members of the military trade union *Shchit* (Shield), an organization of retired and anonymous active duty officers close to democratic politics and highly unpopular with the Ministry of Defense. Reportedly they discussed the defense of Russia's government against a hardliners' armed attack, and the possibility of establishing a Russian army.<sup>84</sup> On January 31 Yeltsin established the RSFSR State Committee for Defense and Security, and appointed Colonel General Konstantin Kobets, Chief of Communications of the USSR Armed Forces and Deputy Chief of General Staff, as the Committee's chairman.<sup>85</sup> Kobets was not forced to resign his commission in the Soviet Armed Forces in order to take on his new job, probably

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<sup>82</sup>B. Yeltsin, "Soldaty, serzhanty i ofitsery...." *Aimoda*, January 15, 1991.

<sup>83</sup>Leon Aron, "Moscow Diary: January 12-17, 1991," *Global Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Spring 1991), p. 49.

<sup>84</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 15, January 22, 1991.

<sup>85</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 23, February 1, 1991.

an indication that the High Command did not want to sever all relations with Yeltsin.

The impact of these events on middle-ranking and junior officers yielded a further decline of Gorbachev's prestige, as well as some positive responses to Yeltsin's calls for a Russian army, despite top-ranking officers' harsh criticism of the idea.<sup>86</sup> As for the high-ranking officers, General Kobets complained of a largely negative reaction among them to his acceptance of the new appointment.<sup>87</sup> A spectacular manifestation of Yeltsin's growing popularity among the officer corps was the support given to him by Colonel Aleksandr Rutsnoi, a pilot highly decorated for his service during the war in Afghanistan, a member of the RSFSR Supreme Soviet, and former member of the ultraconservative Russian nationalist organization *Otechestvo* (Fatherland). Rutsnoi denounced the violence in Lithuania, as well as Gorbachev's dishonesty in the matter, and said that

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<sup>86</sup>Yuriy Teplyakov, "Kto zhe ubil?" *Moskovskie novosti*, January 27, 1991; Marshal of the Soviet Union S. Akhromeev, "Byt' ili ne byt' Soyuzu?" *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, February 7, 1991; "Politicheskie ambitsii i sud'ba Otechestva," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, January 18, 1991; Maj. Gen. V. G. Strekozov, "Zakony ob oborone i statuse voennosluzhshchikh--pravovaya osnovoa sotsial'noy politiki sovetskogo gosudarstva v vooruzhennykh silakh," *Voennaya mysl'*, No. 1 (January 1991), p. 9.

<sup>87</sup>A. Krayniy, "Samoe interesnoe nachalos', kogda ya vyklyuchil diktofon," *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, March 26, 1991.

Russia's mission was to stop the bloodshed.<sup>88</sup>

On March 28, 1991, Gorbachev ordered tens of thousands of troops into Moscow's streets to prevent a mass demonstration in support of Yeltsin. The intimidation, however, failed. Gorbachev began to change his political course back to one of accommodation with Russia's leader, culminating in the signing, on April 23, of the Nine plus One agreement between Gorbachev and nine union republics.<sup>89</sup> Even before that, the Soviet president attempted to balance his policy of control over the armed forces through accommodation of the conservative elements in the High Command. In his April 7 address to a conference of Soviet Armed Forces Communists, Gorbachev for the first time criticized General Makashov for his attacks against reforms, and warned the military against interfering in politics. Still, Gorbachev found it necessary to support such positions of the conservative military officers as continuing control by the Communist party of the armed forces, and the preservation of centralized Union

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<sup>88</sup>*Radio Rossiya*, January 21, 1991; Douglas Smith, "Moscow's 'Otechestvo': A Link Between Russian Nationalism and Conservative Opposition to Reform," *Report on the USSR*, July 28, 1989, pp. 6-9.

<sup>89</sup>"Sovmestnoe zayavlenie o bezotlagatel'nykh merakh po stabilizatsii obstanovki v strane i preodolenii krizisa," *Pravda*, April 24, 1991.

government structures.<sup>90</sup> This could not strengthen Gorbachev's position vis-a-vis the military: he was trapped between the legacy of his neglect of the officer corps, and his record of political zigzags between reform and reaction, never decisively committing himself to any course of action. The conference reaffirmed the Communist party's domination of the armed forces.<sup>91</sup> This, in effect, meant Gorbachev's failure to strengthen his control over the armed forces because (according to his senior advisor, Aleksandr Yakovlev) his control over the Communist party itself was marginal by the summer of 1991.<sup>92</sup>

The RSFSR presidential campaign in May-June 1991 marked a new stage in the leading politicians' courtship of the military and the military's involvement in politics. Former Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov, the conservative candidate, selected as his vice-presidential running mate Colonel General Boris Gromov, the last commander of the Soviet forces in Afghanistan, who had assumed a high profile in Soviet public life. Boris Yeltsin selected Colonel Aleksandr Rutskoï as his running mate.<sup>93</sup> General Makashov,

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<sup>90</sup>*Central TV*, April 7, 1991.

<sup>91</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 67, April 8, 1991.

<sup>92</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 156, August 19, 1991.

<sup>93</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 95, May 21, 1991. On Gen. Gromov, see M. Khondoshko,

endorsed by a Stalinist communist group and by several military units, also became a presidential candidate, running on a platform of reversing Gorbachev's reforms.<sup>94</sup>

In the course of his campaign for the presidency of the RSFSR, Yeltsin stepped back from his call for a Russian army, a demand that apparently disturbed many officers.<sup>95</sup> On the last day of his presidential campaign, Yeltsin again cautioned Gorbachev against using the armed forces against civilians in Russia, a view apparently shared by many in the officer corps.<sup>96</sup> Yeltsin visited a major naval base at Severomorsk and promised to improve officers' housing conditions there.<sup>97</sup> In the election, Yeltsin's ticket

gained 60 percent of the vote, Ryzhkov and Gromov gained only 16 percent, and Makashov finished together with several other minor candidates. Makashov failed to get the majority of the votes even in his home base, reportedly receiving 43% of the vote "in his own constituency (presumably the Volga-Ural Military District), including 95% in the construction battalions, but only between 24 percent and 35 percent" in a military academy located there.<sup>98</sup> The presence of a military officer on the ticket did not make much difference regarding voter appeal, and Makashov's, the only ticket led by a military officer, did miserably. Ruskoi and Gromov were apparently needed to strengthen the respective presidential candidates relations with the armed forces.

After his election as Russia's president, Yeltsin said that Gorbachev should consult with him on military issues.<sup>99</sup> Gorbachev, possibly aware of his inability to control the Communist party and the armed forces through it, ordered on June 22 that military councils, which oversee military activities in military districts, include chairmen of local legislatures (soviets) instead of local Communist party leaders, and become subordinated directly to the USSR President, rather than to the Central

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"Miting v Kieve," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, September 17, 1989; Nikolai Bulavintsev, "Pravda vyshе sensatsii," *Sovetskaiya Rossiya*, November 15, 1989; B.V. Gromov, "Zashchishchali obuchali stroili," *Voенно-istoricheskiy zhurnal*, March 1989, pp. 11-15; Col Gen B. Gromov, "Sovetskie vooruzhennye sily. Novoe kachestvo," *Pod znamenem leninizma*, No. 2 (1990), pp. 32-36; V. Dolganov, "Polkovnik Vilen Martirosyan: 'Voenny perevorot vozmozhn'," *Komsomol'skaya znamiya*, September 28, 1990; Col. Gen. Boris Gromov, "Ne nuzhno nagnetat' strasti," *Moskovskie novosti*, October 14, 1990; Aleksandr Putko, "Gromov dolzhen stat' ministrom vmesto Yazova," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, June 8, 1991; Col. Gen. Gromov, "Priznayu lish' diktaturu zakona," *Situatsiya*, No. 7 (1991).

<sup>94</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 92, May 15, 1991.

<sup>95</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 108, June 10, 1991.

<sup>96</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 109, June 11, 1991.

<sup>97</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 105, June 5, 1991.

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<sup>98</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 113, June 17, 1991.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*

Committee of the CPSU.<sup>100</sup> (The replacement of party officials by legislative leaders in military councils had been advocated since the beginning of 1991 by politicians close to Yeltsin.)<sup>101</sup> Never to be outdone by Gorbachev, Yeltsin issued on July 20 (eight days after his inauguration as Russia's president) an edict banning Communist party cells from all "places of work," including the military, on RSFSR territory.<sup>102</sup> General Mikhail Surkov, chief of the armed forces' CPSU organization, refused to implement Yeltsin's order on the grounds that the military were subordinate only to all-Union authorities.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, some military units began to dismantle their Communist party organizations without waiting for orders.<sup>104</sup>

By August 1991, the Russian government seriously challenged the Union government's command of the armed forces. One might say that the military began a transfer of their loyalty from the USSR to Russia. This was part of the process of formation of a new

Russian state, based on a new Russian nationalism, which appeared to reject the imperial heritage.

The centralization of the military was shattered in the process of the August coup and fell apart after the dissolution of the USSR. Ukraine's decision to form its own armed forces, and her success in attracting the loyalty of many servicemen, have driven the last nail into the coffin of the USSR armed forces. The process of decentralization can be stopped only when Russia makes the inevitable step of formally claiming the bulk of the former Soviet military. The Russian government has already transferred to its "jurisdiction" all the former Soviet forces deployed outside the CIS (in the Baltic states, Georgia, Germany, Poland, Mongolia, and Cuba).<sup>105</sup> The Russian Ministry of Defense was established on March 16, 1992, and President Yeltsin became acting Minister of Defense (another indication of the political importance of the military).<sup>106</sup> A purely Russian military will be ethnically much more cohesive than its Soviet predecessor, and, unlike the CIS forces, will clearly owe their allegiance to one government--that of Russia.

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<sup>100</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 119, June 25, 1991, and No. 123, July 1, 1991. Also see Stephen Foye, "Gorbachev's Return to Reform: What Does It Mean for the Armed Forces?" *Report on the USSR*, July 12, 1991, p. 8.

<sup>101</sup>"Rossiya, armiya, reforma," *Rossiya*, No. 6 (1991).

<sup>102</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 137, July 22, 1991; and No. 147, August 5, 1991.

<sup>103</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 148, August 6, 1991.

<sup>104</sup>*Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 150, August 8, 1991; and No. 152, August 12, 1991.

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<sup>105</sup>*RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 47, March 9, 1992; Army General K. Kobets, "Priority voennoy politiki Rossii," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, February 5, 1992.

<sup>106</sup>*RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 53, March 17, 1992.

Russia's military establishment, however, will still likely suffer from several decentralizing tendencies. The differences between the more radical junior and middle-ranking officers, on the one hand, and the conservative senior officers, on the other, will remain. The officer corps now tends to challenge the formal chain of command, as demonstrated by the creation of the permanently operating Coordinating Committee of the Officers' Assembly, tasked with defending the interests of the armed forces. Centralization will also be threatened whenever the interests of Russian foreign policy collide with the interests of a large enough group of officers, as exemplified by the growing resistance of former Soviet forces to a withdrawal from the Baltic states. Three officers of two paratroop divisions have threatened to take "all measures necessary ... including the use of our professional capacities," if the terms of withdrawal are not to their liking.<sup>107</sup>

#### Public Perception of the Military

One measure of the military's potential political influence is how it is perceived by the public. The Soviet military was viewed very positively by

large segments of the public at the end of World War II and for some time afterwards. The nearly miraculous character of the victory over Nazi Germany born out of the depths of defeat, has contributed to a great popularity of the military. One may assume that much of this psychological capital was squandered during Brezhnev's regime: twenty years of force-fed "military-patriotic upbringing," as well as the absurd and massive campaign to give legitimacy to Brezhnev's rule by turning him, thirty years after victory, into a war hero, must have left the public anesthetized to the talk about military heroics.

The defeat in Afghanistan was certainly a blow to the "heroic" image of the Soviet Armed Forces. Especially painful has been the stream of revelations about brutalities committed in Afghanistan both against enemy fighters and civilians and Soviet troops themselves. The affair of the German youth Matthias Rust, who penetrated Soviet air space and landed his Cessna aircraft near the Kremlin, demonstrated the military's deficiency as the nation's defender. The virtuous image of the military has been damaged by numerous revelations about the privileges enjoyed by the senior officers.<sup>108</sup> Military

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<sup>107</sup>RFE/RL *Daily Report*, No. 14, January 22, 1992, No. 10, January 16, 1992.

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<sup>108</sup>Vladimir Sergeev, "Dachnye privilegii pri svete glasnosti," *Ogonyok*, No. 13 (March 1990), pp.17-19; Aleksandr Putko, "Gromov

officers are often viewed as just another variety of the bureaucratic fat cats; a writer for the Defense Ministry daily sadly recounts a conversation between two women, overheard at a military cemetery:

What a nice cemetery, said one  
... Yes, said the other, the  
military always grab the best  
for themselves.<sup>109</sup>

Most of all, the cause to which military service was dedicated, the Communist empire, has been made to look hollow at best and evil at worst.

Nevertheless, despite these obvious image problems, the Soviet military consistently remains one of the most popular institutions in the USSR. According to an opinion poll in July 1990, support for the military was 35 per cent (down from 44 per cent in December, 1989), which still left it with a bit less public confidence than the Republican Supreme Soviets (40 per cent) and churches (36 per cent), but better off than the mass media (34 per cent), the USSR Council of Ministers (20 per cent), the KGB (24 per cent), and the CPSU (14 per cent). As the systemic crisis deepened in 1991, the popularity of

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dolzhen stat' ministrom vmesto Yazova." *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, June 8, 1991; Petr Shevchenko, "T'ma privilegiy," *Komsomolskaya znamya*, May 28, 1991.

<sup>109</sup>Col. A. Khorev, "Ekho zlosloviya," *Krasnaya zvezda*, December 12, 1987.

the military apparently increased: a public opinion poll published a week before the August coup stated that the military's 50 per cent approval rating was second only to that of the Russian Orthodox Church. Obviously, the January 13, 1991 massacre in Vilnius did not hurt the standing of the armed forces. Indeed, officer schools were more popular among young people in 1991 than in several previous years.<sup>110</sup>

This does not mean that substantial segments of the public agreed with the conservative politics of the pre-coup military high command. In a summer 1990 poll, 40 per cent described the positions of top military officers as "conservative" and "backward." At the same time, a substantial minority of 38 per cent believed that only a small number of servicemen had such "backward" political views.<sup>111</sup> One tends to agree with the Soviet pollster that the general public there simply did not identify the military with its command. The senior officers, because of the privileges they enjoy, were viewed as part of the hated Communist *nomenklatura*. The rest of

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<sup>110</sup>A. Khokhlov, "...a Ryazan' -- gorod leitenantov," *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, August 2, 1991.

<sup>111</sup>Aleksei Levinson, "KPSS, KGB i armiya terayut samykh vernykh storonnikov," *Novoe vremya*, No. 47 (November 1990); Yuriy Levada, Aleksei Levinson, "Chto mozhet otnyat' u obshchestva 'chelovek s ruzhyem'?" *Moskovskie novosti*, September 9, 1990; *Radio Liberty Daily Report*, No. 152, August 12, 1991.

the military then were regarded as victims of the "system," not responsible for the words and actions of their command, just as the Soviet populace did not consider itself responsible for the actions of the communist leadership. Thus, the popularity of the military did not automatically translate into the public's approval of any actions ordered by its high command.

The August 1991 coup must have confirmed this public perception of the military. High-ranking generals, true to their image, were ready to use the armed forces to defend the interests of the *nomenklatura*. Middle-ranking and junior officers, as well as enlisted men, emerged from the crisis with the reputation of a "people's army" unwilling to shoot unarmed civilians, generally confirmed in the public's mind. Indeed, according to public opinion polls, thirty percent of Russia's urban dwellers came to view the military more positively after the August coup, and only 12 percent came to view it more negatively.<sup>112</sup>

### The Problem of Legitimacy

Popularity of the military does not automatically translate into the legitimacy of military rule: the percentage of those

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<sup>112</sup>"U pobedy mnogo roditeley, porazhenie--vsegda sirota." *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, September 25, 1991.

expressing confidence in the military (between 35 and 50 per cent in various polls, as indicated earlier) is substantially higher than the 22 percent of those favoring a military coup at the end of 1990.<sup>113</sup> A government not possessing authority (i.e., where people do not recognize its legitimacy) will have to rule by force, a prospect obviously not relished by the August plotters, whose resolve crumbled in the face of rather modest resistance.

The military's uncertainty about its independent political role, and about the public's readiness to accept such a role, has been visible even through the numerous angry political pronouncements made by high ranking military officers. In January 1991, Defense Minister Yazov said that military intervention in politics was likely, but only on order from the civilian authorities.<sup>114</sup> The most prominent military officers, such as Yazov, the late Marshal Sergei Akhromeev, and the last commander of

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<sup>113</sup>Yuriy Levada, "Takoy dlinnyy god," *Moskovskie novosti*, January 6, 1991. A recent Gallup poll in the United States has found the popular confidence in the military to be 68 percent, the highest for all national institutions. It was quite above that of organized religion (56 percent), much higher than the rating of the President (50 percent), much higher than the rating of the Supreme Court (39 percent), and overwhelmingly higher than that of the U.S. Congress, (18 percent) (*San Francisco Chronicle*, October 16, 1991). But nobody expects a military coup in the United States.

<sup>114</sup>"Armiya, vidimo, budet vmeshivat'sya v politiku." *Nasha gazeta*, January 1, 1991.

Soviet forces in Afghanistan, General Boris Gromov, denied on several occasions that the military could even contemplate a coup d'etat.<sup>115</sup>

High-ranking military officers signed protests against reform invariably in the company of civilians. This was the case, for instance, with the *Word to the People*, a very transparent call for a reversal of reforms, published shortly before the August coup. It was not only signed by General Valentin Varennikov, the Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Forces, and General Gromov, but also by a number of non-military public figures.<sup>116</sup> Only when specifically military issues were involved, did high-ranking military officers band together without a civilian "cover," for instance, to protest Boris Yeltsin's call in the aftermath of the January 1991 massacre in Vilnius, to establish a Russian national guard.<sup>117</sup>

There is no trace of a "manifest destiny," which might legitimize political intervention in the eyes of a military

establishment, in the Soviet and Russian military tradition. Neither the monarchy's claim of the divine origins of its power, nor the CPSU's messianic claims would allow the military to develop a sense of manifest destiny. Some intellectuals in the conservative coalition, such as the writers Prokhanov and Karem Rash, have been trying to foster the sense of manifest destiny among the military. Prokhanov called upon the military to save civilization amidst impending chaos in the Soviet Union.<sup>118</sup> Rash, who has become a popular figure among the conservative military circles, has created a manifest destiny myth out of the hugely overblown figure of World War II, Deputy Supreme Commander-in-Chief Marshal Georgiy Zhukov, and proposed the military as the new elite for the Soviet Union instead of the Communist party.<sup>119</sup> There have been no indications, however, that such pronouncements had any significant impact so far on the demoralized military establishment. Appeals to save the *derzhava* (approximately translated as a "great state") mostly have come from

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115V. Ostrovskiy, "Dmitriy Yazov: Glasnost' ukreplyaet bezopasnost'," *Moskovskie novosti*, No. 29, July 16, 1989; S. Akhromeev, "Kakie vooruzhennye sily nuzhny Sovetskому Soiuzu," *Ogonyok*, (December 1989); N. Velan, "Lish' by poshumet'....," *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, September 29, 1990; Col. Gen. Boris Gromov, "Ne nuzhno nagnetat' strasti," *Moskovskie novosti*, October 14, 1990.

116"Slavo k narodu," *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, July 23, 1991.

117"Politicheskie ambitsii i sud'ba Otechestva," *Krasnaya zvezda*, January 18, 1991.

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118A. Prokhanov, "Dostatochnaya oborona," *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, April 6, 1990.

119Karem Rash, "Armiya i kul'tura," *Voennistoricheskii zhurnal*, No. 8 (August 1989), pp. 6, 7. On Rash, see Holloway, "State, Society and the Military under Gorbachev," pp. 22, 23; and Mikhail Tsyarkin, "Karem Rash: An Ideologue of Military Power," *Report on the USSR*, Vol. 2, No. 31 (August 3, 1990), pp. 8-11.

generals, while average officers have preferred to complain bitterly about their living conditions.

Prokhanov, one of the most politically astute spokesmen for the coalition of Russian Communist party functionaries, defense industry executives, anti-reform military officers and conservative intellectuals, has understood that the military's intervention into politics would fail without a political movement legitimizing it. In the spring of 1990 he called for the creation of a political party representing the interests of the military.<sup>120</sup> What could be the platform of such a political party?

### Russian Hyper-Nationalism

Hyper-nationalism is "the belief that other nations or nation-states are both inferior and threatening and must therefore be dealt with harshly."<sup>121</sup> Russian hyper-nationalism has been a tool of the Kremlin since the end of World War II. It was used openly by Stalin during his last years, during the campaign for Russian "priority" in all

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<sup>120</sup>Prokhanov, "Dostatochnaya oborona."

<sup>121</sup>John J Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future. Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Summer 1990), p. 21. For a recent discussion of the impact of hyper-nationalism on European security, also see Stephen Van Evera, "Primed for Peace," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 3, (Winter 1990/91), pp. 23, 24.

fields of human endeavor.<sup>122</sup> In the 1960's and 1970's it was concealed under the "internationalist" phraseology of anti-Western propaganda. With *glasnost'*, Russian hyper-nationalism has emerged as a political movement in its own right, promoting the ideas of Russian spiritual superiority to the West, of the Russian natural right to lead the Soviet empire, of the Russians' victimization by non-Russians, etc.<sup>123</sup>

Russian hyper-nationalism could produce a political movement which could then legitimize military intervention into politics to stop the process of reform. Indeed, for several years, persistent efforts have been made to link the conservative minded officers with Russian hyper-nationalists. The two share a number of views: both glorify the Soviet/Russian military tradition and view military service as indispensable for forming the personalities of young men; both distrust the West; both oppose the dissolution of the Soviet empire and the introduction of democracy and a market economy.

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<sup>122</sup>Mikhail Heller and Aleksandr M. Nekrich, *Utopia in Power. The History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Present* (New York: Summit Books, 1986), pp. 490-492.

<sup>123</sup>Mikhail Antonov, "Kak nam spasti i vozrodit' Rossiyu," *Golos rodiny*, April 4, 1991; Valentin Rasputin, "Intelligentsiya i patriotizm," *Moskva*, February 1991, pp. 6-19; "Vse okazalis' na pepelishche...," *Slovo*, February 1990 (Interview with Igor' Shafarevich); "Pis'mo pisatelei Rossii," *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, March 20, 1990.

Efforts to establish such an alliance date back at least to 1988. At that time some high-ranking military officers began holding regular meetings with conservative Russian intellectuals to discuss issues of the "military-patriotic upbringing" of young people. One such gathering was held in March 1988, symbolically in Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad), and was attended by such literary personalities as Anatoliy Ivanov, the editor of the journal *Molodaya gvardiya*, one of the most prominent anti-reform periodicals, and by Stalinist writers Ivan Stadnyuk and Felix Chuev. Among the proposals put forward was the establishment of a new "patriotic" journal, *Syn otechestva* (The Son of Fatherland).<sup>124</sup> The proposal was indeed implemented, and *Syn otechestva* began publishing in 1990 as a weekly magazine of the Defense Ministry's daily, *Krasnaya zvezda*, and became a mouthpiece for Russian hyper-nationalists.<sup>125</sup>

By August 1991, the military press in general became one of the main purveyors of Russian hyper-nationalistic literature. The journal of the Main Political Directorate of the Soviet Armed Forces published a portrayal of Russia as

the most abused nation of the USSR, written by V. Fomichev, an author regularly featured in *Pul's Tushina*, one of the most rabid Russian chauvinist periodicals.<sup>126</sup> The Defense Ministry's *Journal of Military History* published Tsarist secret police reports viciously attacking Armenian nationalists. Other examples are Karem Rash's paeans to the exceptional virtues of the Russian officer, Nina Andreeva's praise for the Red Army's occupation of the three Baltic states in 1940,<sup>127</sup> and an interview with the leading Russian hyper-nationalist, Stanislav Kunyaev, published by the military daily, *Red Star*.<sup>128</sup>

The publications controlled by Russian hyper-nationalists have opened their pages to anti-reformist military officers. *Molodaya gvardiya* (The Young Guards), for instance, has published several articles including: a vitriolic attack against Andrei Sakharov by a veteran of the war in Afghanistan; an angry denunciation of democracy by

<sup>124</sup>"Vstrecha s pisatelyami," *Krasnaya zvezda*, March 12, 1988; "Vruchenie premiy ministerstva oborony SSSR," *Krasnaya zvezda*, March 6, 1988; P. Tkachenko, "V poiskakh pravdivogo slova," *Krasnaya zvezda*, April 8, 1988.

<sup>125</sup>See, for instance, Aleksandr Prokhanov, "Armiya: mysli shtatskogo cheloveka," *Syn Otechestva*, No. 27, (August 17, 1990).

<sup>126</sup>V. Fomichev, "Rossiya: lyubov' i bol' moya....," *Kommunist Vooruzhennykh Sil*, No. 1 (January 1990), pp. 3-10; Vladimir Fomichev, "Mysli sovpadaut," *Pul's Tushina*, No. 3 (January 1990).

<sup>127</sup>"Dashnaki," *Voенно-istoricheskiy zhurnal*, No. 8 (August 1990), pp. 8-16, and No. 9 (September 1990), pp. 47-65; N.A. Andreeva, "Istoricheskie prichudy," *Voенно-istoricheskiy zhurnal*, No. 6 (June 1990), pp. 10-16; Karem Rash, "Armiya i kul'tura," *Voенно-istoricheskiy zhurnal*, No. 5 (May 1989), p. 4.

<sup>128</sup>V. Kazakov, "Sovremeneni li 'Nash sovremennik'?" *Krasnaya zvezda*, December 20, 1989.

Colonel General Igor Rodionov, Commandant of the General Staff Academy; and Marshal Akhromeev's broadside against Boris Yeltsin.<sup>129</sup> Similar examples could be given for the rest of the Russian hyper-nationalist press.<sup>130</sup>

Marshal Yazov's favorite periodicals were *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, *Nash sovremennik*, and *Den'*, all published by Russian hyper-nationalists. He forcefully promoted subscriptions to these periodicals among officers, and issued a special order (No. D-12) on July 7, 1991 to this effect.<sup>131</sup> The offices of *Den'*, whose editor is Prokhanov, were installed, free of charge, in a building owned by the Ministry of Defense, on the

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<sup>129</sup>Sergey Chervonopiskiy, "Ne dadim v obidu derzhavu," *Molodaya gvardiya*, November 1989, pp. 130-134; Col. Gen. I. Rodionov, "Kogda perestanut glumit'sya nad armiyey i derzhavoy?" *Molodaya gvardiya*, September 1990, pp. 3-10; Marshal of the Soviet Union S. Akhromeev, "Vooruzhennyye sily SSSR sluzhat narodu i otechestvu," *Molodaya gvardiya*, May 1991, pp. 8-19.

<sup>130</sup>See, for instance, I.N. Rodionov, "Lish' polnaia pravda mozhet ubedit'," *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, April 20, 1990; Iu. Borisov & G. Samoilenko, "Voennyye arsenaly: perspektivy i real'nost'," *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, February 2, 1990; Marshal of the Soviet Union S. Akhromeev, "Komu meshayut generaly," *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, November 14, 1990; Marshal of the Soviet Union S. Akhromeev, "Byt' ili ne byt' Soyuzu?" *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, February 7, 1991; Capt. 1st Rank A. Bobrakov, "Tak chto zhe meshaet ispolnit' zakon?" *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, October 21, 1990.

<sup>131</sup>B. Moseychuk, "Ye. Shaposhnikov: 'Izbavlyayemsiya ot lishnego vesa'," *Argumenty i fakty*, No. 38 (September 1991); Lev Kolodnyy, "Belyy dom protiv chernoy sotni," *Moskovskaya pravda*, October 4, 1991.

orders of then Commander of the Ground Forces, General Valentin Varennikov, one of the leaders of the August coup.<sup>132</sup> Russian hyper-nationalists attempted (with some success) to involve some members of the the Russian Orthodox Church's hierarchy in their alliance with the military. In March of 1991, they organized a conference characteristically named *For Russia, United and Indivisible* (an old slogan of Russian monarchists), which was attended by the leader of the reactionary Russian Communist party, Ivan Polozkov; General Varennikov; Colonel Petrushenko, one of the leaders of *Soyuz*; members of the ultra-chauvinistic and anti-Semitic organization *Pamyat'*; Russian hyper-nationalist writers Yuriy Bondarev and Prokhanov; as well as by some Russian Orthodox church officials.<sup>133</sup> Russian hyper-nationalist organizations were calling for a military coup.<sup>134</sup>

A number of attempts were made in the months preceding the August 1991 coup to launch a mass movement on a Russian hyper-nationalist platform. The *Soyuz* group of People's Deputies announced the formation of an All-Union

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<sup>132</sup>Sergei Kiselev, "Varennikov sidit, a delo yego zhivet," *Literaturnaya gazeta*, November 6, 1991.

<sup>133</sup>The Rev. Mark Smirnov, "S partbiletom i krestom," *Rossiia*, No. 11 (March 15-22 1991).

<sup>134</sup>See, for instance, "Tol'ko my otdadim prikaz, kotoryy zhdet vsya strana!" *Nashe vremya*, n. d.

Popular Movement, *Soyuz*.<sup>135</sup> In July, an organization named *Otchizna* (Fatherland), led by retired General Boris Tarasov, was established, with the idea of turning it into a mass political party, represented, just like the Communist party, at the workplace.<sup>136</sup> But no Russian hyper-nationalist mass movement emerged. This was at least partially due to the hyper-nationalists' inconsistent attitude toward the future of the Soviet Union, as well as to their identification with the Communist party. In 1989, Russian hyper-nationalists were the first to call for the establishment of separate Russian state institutions and of a Russian Communist party.<sup>137</sup> Apparently, they believed that the emergence of separate conservative Russian institutions, especially of a separate Russian Communist party, would outweigh Gorbachev's reformist

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<sup>135</sup>"Deklaratsiya vsesoyuznogo narodnogo dvizheniya 'Soyuz'," *Politika*, No. 5 (1991).

<sup>136</sup> Gavrilenko, "'Otchizna'--radi Otchizny," *Krasnaya Zvezda*, July 11, 1991; Lt. Gen. B. Tarasov, "Otchizna zovet," *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, July 10, 1991.

<sup>137</sup> "Za politiku narodnogo soglasiya i rossiyskogo vozrozhdeniya. Predvybornaya platforma bloka obshchestvenno-patrioticheskikh dvizheniy Rossii," *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, December 29, 1989; "Plenum TsK KPSS--5-7 fevralya 1990 goda. Stenograficheskiy otchet," *Izvestiya TsK KPSS*, No. 3 (March 1990), pp. 61-69. Also see Alexander Rahr, "Gorbachev and the Russian Party buro," *Report on the USSR*, January 5, 1990, pp. 1-3; Vera Tolz, "Russian Academy of Sciences to Be Set Up," *Report on the USSR*, February 16, 1990, pp. 19-20; John B. Dunlop, "Ethnic Russians on Possible Breakup of the USSR," *Report on the USSR*, March 2, 1990, pp. 16, 17.

influence upon the all-Union institutions.<sup>138</sup> The hyper-nationalists, however, continued to insist on the preservation of the Soviet empire, which (together with their anti-free-market and anti-democratic attitudes) marked them as little more than stand-ins for the discredited Communist party that had rebuilt and kept together the Russian empire after its collapse in 1917.<sup>139</sup> They demonstrated no plan to reconcile the contradiction between their "empire-saving" proclivities, and their assertions of Russian separate statehood in the Union.<sup>140</sup> Perhaps they hoped that the establishment of such a statehood would serve as a catalyst for Russian nationalist sentiment in favor of keeping the empire (which practically coincides with Russia's pre-Communist borders) together.

This ambiguity was demonstrated by the attempt, as mentioned earlier, to establish in July of 1991 a new mass political party, *Otchizna*. It was to

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<sup>138</sup>Elizabeth Teague and Vera Tolz, "Moves to Create a Russian Communist Party," *Report on the USSR*, May 11, 1990, pp. 1-3; Julia Wishnevsky, "Two RSFSR Congresses: A Diarchy?" *Report on the USSR*, July 6, 1990, pp. 1-3; Alexander Rahr, "The Russian Triangle: Gorbachev--El'tsin--Polozkov," *Report on the USSR*, July 6, 1990, pp. 4-6.

<sup>139</sup>See L. Saraskina, "Primirenie na lobnom meste," *Znamya*, No. 7 (July 1990), pp. 191-204.

<sup>140</sup>On Russian "empire-savers," see Roman Szporluk, "Dilemmas of Russian Nationalism," *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (July-August 1989), pp. 17-20.

advocate the preservation of the Union. At the same time, it claimed to be in favor of separate state structures for Russia, and promised to support Yeltsin--but only if he helped prevent the empire from disintegrating.<sup>141</sup> At that time, such a political program was utterly unrealistic: any attempt to maintain the empire by relying on a Russian state effectively merged with the all-Union Communist bureaucracy, hated both in Russia and in the republics, was doomed.

Whatever the secret hopes of Russian hyper-nationalists, in 1990 and 1991 the Russians appeared unwilling to shoulder the imperial burden. According to an opinion poll of Russians, 57.1 per cent said that Russians should not interfere with the development of other nations in the USSR.<sup>142</sup> Demonstrations by women in Russian cities against the call-up of reservists in January 1990 for police duty in Azerbaijan, and the condemnation of Soviet military violence in Lithuania in January 1991 by the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Aleksii II pointed again at the Russians' reluctance to save the Communist empire.<sup>143</sup>

The democrats quickly followed the hyper-nationalists with their own calls for separate Russian statehood.<sup>144</sup> Unlike their opponents though, the democrats clearly expressed the need to break with the old imperial structures in order to liberate the Russian people from the burdens of the empire. They succeeded in harnessing some Russian nationalist sentiment to their proclaimed cause of a non-imperial Russia reformed along Western lines. By August 20, 1991, the democrats, rather than the Russian hyper-nationalists, were able to mobilize a substantial segment of the public.

The political fortunes of the Russian hyper-nationalists and their allies in the armed forces declined precipitously immediately after August 1991. This reversal, however, may turn out to be only temporary. The demise of the Communist party, although a temporary setback to the hyper-nationalists, may well represent a longer-term advantage for them: the discredited Communist party was a liability as a political ally. The peculiar current circumstances under which Russian nationhood has to be

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<sup>141</sup>Gavrilenko. "'Otchizna'--radi Otchizny;" Tarasov, "Otchizna zovet."

<sup>142</sup>"Sud'ba russkogo naroda," *Sem'ya*, No. 29 (1990).

<sup>143</sup>Aleksandr Kolesnikov, "Nabat Zakavkaz'ya: ego ekho ranit vsiu stranu," *Sobesednik*, No. 6 (February 1990); "Slovo patriarkha Aleksiya," *Izvestiya*, January 15, 1991.

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<sup>144</sup>"Sozdan izbiratel'nyy blok 'demokraticheskaya Rossiya,'" *Ogonyok*, No. 6 (February 1990), pp. 17-18. After losing the election to the Russian Congress of People's Deputies, the hyper-nationalists bitterly complained that the democrats "stole" their program; see "V novykh politicheskikh usloviyakh," *Literaturnaya Rossiya*, October 26, 1990.

established make an emergence of Russian hyper-nationalism quite possible, if not likely. First, it is difficult to make the new Russian state coincide with territories populated by ethnic Russians: twenty-five million of them live outside the Russian Federation, while the latter includes significant non-Russian enclaves, such as Tatarstan, striving for independence. The military already attempted to act on the side of the Russian minority in Moldova: units of the 14th Army there joined the militia of the rebellious "Dniester republic," a Russian enclave seeking secession from Moldova; it has taken some time for the CIS military command to restrain their forces in Moldova. A return of the military's alliance with the local Russians is quite possible.<sup>145</sup>

Second, many Russians are shocked by the loss of territories and populations which had been part of the Russian empire for centuries: this relationship, from the Russian standpoint, was so close, that the pre-1917 name of the whole empire--*Rossiia* (Russia)--equally applied to the lands populated by ethnic Russians and non-Russian populations. Even the democrats in Yeltsin's coalition find it very difficult to stomach a new non-imperial Russian

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<sup>145</sup>Vladimir Socor, "Moldova," *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 7 (February 14, 1992), p. 13; *RFE/RL Daily Report* No. 51 (March 13, 1992).

state, such as that symbolized by Ukrainian independence.<sup>146</sup> Third, in addition to this unprecedented humiliation, Russia faces an economic collapse, a dire shortage of positive national images for emulation and self-identification, and a painful intellectual and material dependence on the free-market democracies--yesterday's enemies.<sup>147</sup> As a result, many Russian supporters of democracy have begun to lament the loss of the empire.<sup>148</sup>

In view of these powerful multiple pressures it is hardly surprising that various attempts to breathe new life into a Russian hyper-nationalist movement have been made since the dissolution of the USSR. A Congress of Civic and Patriotic Forces, organized by the Russian Constitutional Democrats and

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<sup>146</sup>"St. Petersburg Mayor Anatolii Sobchak...told Russian TV on January 8 [1991] that a Ukrainian army represents a 'landmine under the future of all mankind' because, if created, Ukraine would 'certainly use' its army. He said that Ukraine 'must not be permitted' to create an army." *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 6 (January 10, 1992). This doomsday language makes the democrat Sobchak sound like one of his Russian hyper-nationalist critics.

<sup>147</sup>Public opinion polls confirm the Russians' dismal self-image: when respondents in various former republics of the Soviet Union were asked "in which republics [of USSR] do people now live better," the Russians were the only ones to name Russia as the worst place to live, compared to the other republics. (See Aleksei Levinson, "Gde v SSSR zhit' khorosho," *Izvestiya*, April 12, 1991).

<sup>148</sup>Vera Tolz and Elizabeth Teague, "Russian Intellectuals Adjust to Loss of Empire," *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 8 (February 21, 1992), pp. 4-8.

the Christian Democratic Union, was held in Moscow on February 8-9 1992, and reportedly called for the reestablishment of the Russian empire. Vice-President Rutskoi, who has emerged as a prominent critic of free-market economic reform and of the dissolution of the Union, addressed the congress.<sup>149</sup> The *Otchizna* (as mentioned earlier, created just before the August coup, and still led by General Tarasov) held its first congress on February 22, 1992, and elected General Makashov (finally pensioned off) into its leadership.<sup>150</sup> Military officers, both retired and on active duty, have been described as the "backbone" of *Otchizna*.<sup>151</sup> On February 23, 1992, a coalition of Russian hyper-nationalists, and conservative Communists (with the participation of the ubiquitous General Makashov) staged a violent demonstration in downtown Moscow.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup>RFE/RL *Daily Report* No. 27, February 10, 1992 and No. 31, February 14, 1992. Also see Alexander Rahr, "Challenges to Yeltsin's Government," *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 9 (February 28, 1992), pp. 2-4; William C. Green, *The Congress of Civic and Patriotic Forces of Russia: an Observer's Report*. Moscow, February 8-9, 1992 (unpublished manuscript), passim.

<sup>150</sup>Yuliy Lebedev, "Kommunisty obreli 'Otchiznu'," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, February 25, 1992.

<sup>151</sup>V. Yermolin, "Dlya Rossii spasenie v yedinstve. Dlya politikov -- v omonovskikh dubinkakh?" *Krasnaya zvezda*, February 25, 1992.

<sup>152</sup>Yevgeniy Krasnikov, "23 fevralya: kommunisty rvut tsepi OMONa," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, February 25, 1992.

The emergence of a victorious coalition between the hyper-nationalists and the military is, however, far from a forgone conclusion. Even a highly visible Russian hyper-nationalism does not necessarily translate into a coherent political movement. The hyper-nationalist groups have been so far unable to unite and are quite badly split internally between extremists advocating violence, and relatively more moderate elements who hope to assume power through an electoral process.<sup>153</sup> Only an effective Russian hyper-nationalist movement can involve the armed forces in politics, because the military, despite all their angry rhetoric, continue (as described earlier) to have only a relatively narrow sectional interest in political matters.

### Conclusions

The policies of reform, initiated by Gorbachev, have resulted in a demilitarization of Soviet society, but the concomitant collapse of the political system has left the Soviet military, by August 1991, with a greater potential for political influence than under the old Communist regime. The crisis of legitimate authority, combined with the

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<sup>153</sup>Lebedev, "Kommunisty obreli 'Otchiznu'"; Arkadiy Dubnov, Galina Koval'skaya, "Patrioty ne ponyali drug druga?" *Novoe vremya*, No. 7 (February 1992); Green, *The Congress of Civic and Patriotic Forces*, p. 19.

relatively high level of popularity enjoyed by the armed forces, has left the military with ample opportunity for political intervention against reform. Gorbachev's policies have left the military with a variety of serious grievances, more than sufficient to motivate such an intervention. Nevertheless, the military did not intervene on their own, and effectively denied their support to civilian politicians whose anti-reform agenda was obviously shared by a number of top military officers.

The tradition of the Russian and Soviet militaries has made them important elements in the political balance of power at this turning point of history. The same tradition, however, required that political intervention be legitimized by a civilian authority and/or political movement. When no Russian hyper-nationalist political movement emerged to provide legitimacy, the military pulled back from supporting the August 1991 coup. Moreover, the coup occurred at the moment when the centralization of the armed forces' command was already being severely tested by the struggle between the declining USSR government and the rising star of Russia's president Boris Yeltsin.

Civilian resistance to the coup, however courageous, was in reality minimal: in Moscow, less than three percent of the population took to the streets to defend their first elected

government.<sup>154</sup> The military turned out to be the crucial element in the balance of political power: their lack of support for the coup was in itself a powerful political action, because it amounted to support for Russia's government under Mr. Yeltsin. True to the tradition, it turned out to be impossible to rule Russia at such a critical juncture without the support of the military.

What does this portend for the future? The incentives for the military to exert political influence (their self-interest) and opportunities for doing so (lack of credible civilian institutions) are not likely to disappear in the near future. Mass political parties are lacking, and chances for their emergence in the near future are small.<sup>155</sup> The deepening economic crisis appears to preclude a speedy establishment of legitimate political institutions. The military is frustrated by a further decline of living standards, as well as by the disintegration of the Soviet Armed Forces. Still, whatever the exact outcome of the heated arguments between Moscow and Kiev about the ownership and command of the former Soviet armed forces, Russia is likely to inherit the bulk of the military because of the size of its population, and

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<sup>154</sup>Personal communication from Prof. Roman Laba, an eyewitness to the events of the failed coup in August, 1991.

<sup>155</sup>Vera Tolz, "Political Parties in Russia," *RFE/RL Research Report*, Vol. 1, No. 1, January 3, 1992, pp. 13, 14.

because the officer corps is predominantly Russian.<sup>156</sup>

The military in Russia is likely to continue to seek political influence, but the thrust of this search will be narrowly limited, unless it is combined with a strong Russian hyper-nationalist movement. On its own, the military will not attempt to remilitarize the Russian society on a broad scale, beyond their goal of obtaining as big a slice of the budgetary pie as possible. Only if involved with a successful mass political movement striving to "redress grievances" allegedly suffered by Russia at the hands of non-Russians during the dissolution of the empire, to protect Russia from the sense of inferiority by at least partial isolation from the West, and to restore a sense of national pride by turning towards the "glorious" past, will the military effectively facilitate a remilitarization of Russian society in the short to medium term.

In any case, there are neither the economic nor the ideological underpinnings for militarization on the scale of the global conflict of the Cold War. Still, Russia faces a truly crushing load of internal and external security problems: internal ethnic and labor unrest, and brewing conflicts with some

of her neighbors. If the international community fails to help Russia and her neighbors to alleviate these problems, the rise of Russian hyper-nationalism and return to the traditional reliance on the military as an paramount instrument of foreign and domestic policies are very likely. Just as they had in countless crises throughout their long history, the Russians would then have little choice but to assign to the military an important political role in order to compensate for the lack of domestic stability and for the lack of secure relations with their neighbors.

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<sup>156</sup>Russia plans to have 1.2 to 1.3 million troops, more than *all* the other former Soviet republics taken together. (Eric Schmitt, "Russia Is Said to Plan for a Smaller Armed Force," *New York Times*, April 3, 1992, p. A6.)

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