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Civil-Military Relations
in the New Russia

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An Occasional Paper from the Mershon Center project entitled
ASSESSING ALTERNATIVE FUTURES
FOR THE UNITED STATES AND POST-SOVIET RELATIONS

Under a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Mershon Center of The Ohio State University is conducting a project to explore possible alternative futures for the United States with the successor states of the Soviet Union and the conditions that might make various futures more or less likely. The project is not an attempt to forecast the future. It does, however, bring together thoughtful and knowledgeable people to identify some of the potential elements that are likely to influence the nature of future relationships among the countries that have had such a profound influence on international security for half a century and still have much potential for determining our collective future well-being.

This undertaking has involved teams of American and Russian scholars, including several American graduate students in the advanced stages of their formal educations. Working closely with their mentors on this project, the students represent the next generation of area specialists who will have important responsibilities as the future— that this project explores—unfolds.

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Abstract

Most theories of civil-military relations argue that military officers accept civilian rule under the following conditions: when civilian rulers retain political and societal authority; when officers are materially and ideologically well-treated by the state; and, when the state respects officers' professional autonomy and corporatism. When these conditions disappear, militaries are thought to take politics into their own hands.

Each of these conditions is currently under severe strain in Russia, and yet (as of March 1993) Russian military officers have not tried to unseat Yeltsin. The author first describes both the grave realities of military life in Russia, and the politicization of the Russian officers corps. She then argues that the Russian military is neither too split to act, nor so accepting of Yeltsin's democratic legitimacy that intervention is unthinkable.

Instead, the author holds that the primary reason why military officers have not participated in an anti-Yeltsin coup is that Yeltsin has bent over backwards to meet the interests of military officers. He has provided them with increasing sums of money from the state budget, increasing rights to defend themselves if attacked by anti-Russian nationalists, and increasing control over the direction of foreign policy, especially in the regions immediately beyond Russian borders. She ends by questioning whether or not Yeltsin can continue this policy direction forever, given his democratic idealism. She recommends that, given this dilemma, the West not put undue strain on Yeltsin by demanding too much demilitarization too quickly.
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According to most standard theories of civil-military relations, the Russian military officer corps should have attempted to overthrow the Yeltsin government by now.¹ This paper will explore the question of why direct Russian military participation in politics had not yet occurred by the close of 1992. The major argument of this paper is that two political choices are open to Russian military officers: direct seizure of power (likely in support of a technically civilian leader), or participation as an interest group in normal politics. The Russian military officer corps is not now apolitical, and is unlikely to be apolitical in the foreseeable future. Thus, whether or not a coup occurs depends largely on the political strategy followed by Boris Yeltsin and other top civilian leaders. When a military institution finds itself in crisis, civilians can either ease the transition or push officers over the brink. So far, Yeltsin has been walking a fine line between those two alternatives, and he is in danger of stumbling. Only by constantly reaffirming his respect for the military institution, and by acting effectively on policy issues dear to officers, can Yeltsin hope to retain those officers’ loyalty.

This will likely present Yeltsin with a dilemma, since the preferences and values of Russian military officers may not match those of democratic reformers. Military officers may want more policy autonomy, more of a budget share, and more of a Great Power foreign policy than the liberal members of Yeltsin’s coalition are willing to give them. By compromising with the military institution too much, Yeltsin may lose the backing of the radical democrats who put him in power. In turn, this dilemma has major consequences for world security, since what the Russian military wants is not necessarily what the U.S. government or the NATO alliance would want. By pushing the Russians too hard to transform all of their security interests immediately and completely, the rest of the world might be pushing Moscow into the hands of authoritarian counterrevolutionaries.

The Theoretical Argument

The Soviet military was considered by theorists of civil-military relations to be a classic example of a professional general staff military system. Soviet General Staff officers shared specialized training that set them apart from other Soviet citizens, and retained their status as General Staff members throughout their careers.² They enjoyed an elite social status and great official societal respect, demonstrated by the emphasis placed on military themes in popular literature, elementary education, and holiday celebrations.³ Military officers had a clear service mission: defense of the state from external enemies, whose identity was well-defined. Overall, Soviet military officers held a privileged and honored place in a society which gave them an important professional duty to perform.⁴ As a result, Soviet military officers must have developed a corporate identity, with pride in the status and achievements of the organization to which they belonged.

Most theories of civil-military relations predict that such professional militaries are ideally suited to remain loyal servants to the state.⁵ The retention of civilian control over the power of such military officers is supposed to be
unproblematic. That is, it is supposed to be unproblematic if certain conditions are met: if officers believe that civilian leaders retain political and societal authority; if officers are materially and ideologically well-treated by society; and if officers' professional autonomy and corporatism are supported by the state. As long as professional officers feel that the state is stable and that their own positions are secure, what Samuel P. Huntington has called "objective" civilian control over the military is assured.

But when these conditions disappear, and the military's corporate identity is threatened, disaffected officers are supposed to desert their clients and take politics into their own hands. Sometimes this direct political action can take the form of a military seizure of power; other times, military institutions may line up behind particular civilian factions. These predictions are thought to hold true not only for unstable Third World governments, where there is often a cultural expectation of military involvement in politics, but also in countries with long-standing, seemingly stable political systems which lack a tradition of military intervention.

It is true that in countries with highly developed and legitimate civilian control organs, military or military-backed coups are supposed to fail. Yet this does not mean that they are not attempted. And certainly no one could claim that legitimate procedures for leadership transition are highly institutionalized in Russia today. Russia lacks a constitution and a true independent judiciary; its parliament, elected at a time when no one realized that Russia would soon be a real state, would likely look completely different if elections were held today; and President Yeltsin has lost the popularity he held a year ago. Russia is ripe for a counterrevolution.

Even a theorist who has rejected the "professionalism" argument, William E. Odom, believes that a key reason for military obedience in the Soviet Union was the commonality of interests between military officers and the Communist Party. Presumably, now that the Communist Party is no longer the guardian of the Soviet state, a key lever of civilian control over the Russian military has vanished. For civilians to keep professional militaries under control, military officers must be kept happy. When military satisfaction disappears, military subservience is thought to leave also. And if the fabric of society disintegrates (as arguably it has in Russia today), in Samuel P. Huntington's classic words, "The wealthy bribe; students riot; workers strike; mobs demonstrate; and the military coup."

The Reality of Russian Military Life

In Russia today, all of the restraining conditions on military intervention in politics seem to be gone. Russian military officers seem no longer to be respected by society as a whole. Many mid-level officers and their families are now living essentially in closets (and, it is rumored, sometimes tents) because no housing is available to them, and there have been many complaints about their miserable pay, now delayed by the Russian currency crisis. Officers returning from stations in Eastern Europe and the non-Russian states of the former Soviet Union have not been allocated sufficient housing by local districts, despite orders and financing from Yeltsin. Some officers withdrawn from the Baltic regions now face "moldy dried fruit" in cafeterias and a complete absence of fuel supplies on Russian bases far from working supply lines.

Many Russian servicemen reportedly feel that society has unjustly blamed them for the war in Afghanistan, for the use of force domestically against pro-democracy demonstrators in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1990, and for carrying out the troop movement orders associated with the August 1991 putsch. And Russian officers are now regularly harrassed, beaten, and killed in many "near-abroad" regions in the former Soviet republics which used to be their home bases. Particularly noteworthy here are the violent conflicts that have erupted between Russian troops and
Estonian paramilitary groups, examples of Russian Army officers being kidnapped and attacked as by-products of the Armenian/Azerbaijani war, and the new outbreak of attacks on Russian military installations caught in the crossfire of the civil war in Tajikistan. Between March and October 1992, 110 servicemen (including officers) were killed either in battle or by “hooligans” in the near-abroad regions. Societal respect for Russian military officers seems to be sorely lacking.

Moreover, the state to which most officers took their original loyalty oaths—the Soviet Union—is gone. It is hard for outsiders to imagine what it must be like to have the state one is sworn to defend and protect disintegrate from within. Feelings of helplessness must be reinforced by the fact that the new Russian state is so beset by rifts that it is virtually impossible for the Yeltsin government to make coherent policy.

Adding to this, a civilian, Andrei Kokoshin, has been installed as First Deputy Minister of Defense. This is an unprecedented move in the post-Stalin era; the only civilian previously allowed into a high-ranking Defense Ministry position since World War II was Defense Minister Dmitrii Ustinov, a military industrialist whom many officers of the Brezhnev era bitterly resented. Kokoshin’s appointment was expressly made for the purposes of installing some civilian oversight into the Defense Ministry. Increased civilian control was also on the agenda when Russian military officers were sent to school at Harvard University in 1991, to learn from their former American opponents how to behave in a democracy. When these events are added to the fact that experts from the former NATO enemy have been invited in to help disarm the Soviet nuclear arsenal, the corporatist pride of military officers used to a fair amount of control over military policy must be under serious strain.

The professional mission of officers is also no longer clear. It is still largely undecided whether Russia or some remnant of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) will eventually emerge as the military’s client state. Some of the Russian troops under attack in the “near-abroad” regions are technically under CIS command. Many Russian officers seem to favor the permanent establishment of a multilateral cooperative defense arrangement, retaining for Russia some semblence of a buffer zone. The current absence of agreed-upon borders to defend deprives the Russian military of a solid mission.

A mobile defense doctrine based on a mixed conscription/volunteer service system seems to have been developed within the Russian General Staff. However, it is not obvious that any doctrine will truly direct procurement or personnel policy for the foreseeable future. The Defense Ministry has complained that there are an insufficient number of high-quality weapons left on Russian territory, and that the Russian defense industry is no longer turning out new competitive products. Furthermore, personnel levels are at a shockingly low level. The Russian Defense Ministry Collegium recently announced that approximately 70 percent of Russian conscripts dodged the draft this year; the Collegium estimates that the overall troop strength is at only 55 percent of the normal mark. Thus the military-technical situation is both fluid and messy, depriving professional military officers of a sense of order not only in the general affairs of their country, but even in military affairs.

For all of these reasons, the majority of Russian military officers must feel both confused and betrayed. Their state, mission, status, and dignity have been stripped from them. Severe discipline problems have been reported in the military press. The Defense Ministry has admitted that troops (and even some officers) serving in the near-abroad regions have acted as unsanctioned mercenaries and arms merchants. Some high-ranking officers in the Russian region of Khabarovsk have been indicted on charges of organized crime corruption, and illegal military sales worth millions of rubles. Why haven’t frustrated officers of the old school thrown their support behind an authoritarian figure, either military or civilian, who promises to restore order, economic recovery, and a valued role for
the military in Russian society? A coup may still be brewing, especially in the unsettled political situation in the capital right now. But with each passing day, the mystery of why there has not yet been a coup deepens.

Explanations for Quiescence

A large part of the explanation undoubtedly lies in what Stephen M. Meyer has called the “politicization” of the Russian military. The officer corps has been fractured into groups with competing political agendas, and a coherent “military viewpoint” is probably no longer achievable on many political questions.

Recently, a wide variety of political groupings have emerged in the officer corps, despite the official rule against political activity in the military. “Shchit” (“Shield”), the union of democratically oriented servicemen whose firebrand member, Major Vladimir Lopatin, made a splash a few years back in the Soviet Congress of People’s Deputies, has now split into two factions who refuse to listen to each other’s speeches. Three top advisors to Defense Minister Grachev, all Shchit members, recently either resigned in protest or were fired from their positions because of political disagreements with the Ministry. The Defense Ministry has tried to ban a new “Independent Union of Servicemen,” apparently unrelated to Shchit, and this new union is suing Defense Minister Grachev as a result, claiming that they have a social, not political, mission. Meanwhile the “Independent Political Science Association of Military Experts,” led by Gen. A. I. Vladimirov, is advising the radical democratic faction within the Russian parliament.

Far on the other side is the “Union of Officers,” a group which believes that the United States is now occupying Russia and dictating Yeltsin’s policy. This group signed the charter of the National Salvation Front, the infamous fascist/communist coalition which wants to overthrow the government. The National Salvation Front is supported by the newspaper Den’, which often carries articles or statements by officers. Albert Makashov, a retired three-star general, was pictured in uniform on its pages recently, saying:

All colors, all hues of the people’s movements should unite to repulse the anti-people’s regime, the destruction of the USSR, [and] the attempt to finish off Russia. And all of these movements, after our inevitable victory, will participate in the [new] state government.

A weekly “General’s Column,” written by Viktor Filatov, recently called for the true Russian Orthodox to fight alongside the Serbs in former Yugoslavia, saying, “The liberation of Russia from the occupiers should begin with our victory in Bosnia.” He claims that the so-called American occupation of Russia began through the work of the USA and Canada Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, led by Georgii Arbatov, “as through the traitorous open door of a fortress.” Arbatov traded glorious Soviet weapons for “toilet paper and tampons,” according to Filatov’s argument.

There is thus no question that the Russian officer corps is split into many political factions, each with its own agenda. There are no reliable figures about how many officers really accept the rhetoric of any of these groups; it is probable that the vast majority of officers lie somewhere in the middle. Nonetheless, a coherent political outlook among officers is certainly lacking.

However, in a comparative study of military intervention, Amos Perlmutter argues that a small number of key activists, often less than 5 percent of the officer corps, can be sufficient to propel the military as a whole into politics.
Then an initial coup can be followed by countercoups as various factions within the military demand power. It may not be necessary for the entire military institution to share a broad political agenda for a coup to occur. Instead, a coup requires only a small but cohesive group of officers who share a limited agenda, united primarily by their desire to see the military organization better treated.

One of the reasons for the failure of the August 1991 putsch was certainly lack of cohesion among the Soviet military. Commanders refused to follow the deployment orders of their supervisors, and tank drivers promised not to shoot at their fellow Russian citizens. Yet at the time, many observers commented that the putsch really needn't have been so overtly militaristic. The attempt was what Samuel Finer has called a cuartelazo or “barracks coup,” rather than a simple coup d'etat. Finer gives two examples of successful coups d'etats in Argentina in 1944, and the countercoup in Syria in 1948, where heads of state were removed by single commando raids, followed by simple announcements of abdication. What worked in these cases was not a display of brute military force, but rather proof of efficient competence, so that authoritarian legitimacy could be established through the appearance of order and control.

Even some cuartelazo coups, involving large troop maneuvers, have been relatively bloodless. Finer predicts that when shared disillusionment is high enough, “a whole regime can often be subverted by a handful of troops,” since officers standing on the sidelines will throw their lot in with the victors if the coup succeeds. Major common grievances among a significant portion of the officer corps should be all that is necessary to carry out a quiet coup, even if some officers refuse to participate, and even if regular military troops won't fire on their own people. And in fact, both the fascist Union of Officers and the democratic Shchit Union share the concern that there is currently an insufficient guarantee of the social rights and living conditions of officers in Russia.

It is also important to keep in mind that one of the major reasons for the failure of the August 1991 coup attempt was errors in planning. The ringleaders did not nab Yeltsin before they announced the takeover, and thus allowed him to act as a lightning rod for protest. If Yeltsin had not been standing on a tank outside the White House, there would have been no figure around which to rally. No one would have presented an obvious figure to lead the opposition.

Furthermore, several of the eight main coup plotters apparently tried to back out after the putsch was launched; cohesion at the center was absent. The Wall Street Journal reported that the mistakes made by the plotters may be explained by the fact that several of them spent the putsch in an alcoholic haze. This has recently been at least partially confirmed by the published report of Russian Prosecutor General Valentin Stepankov. The August 1991 coup attempt may simply have not been serious enough. Its failure may tell us nothing about how a well-planned and well-executed coup might succeed.

A second explanation for why the putsch failed and a coup has not occurred is that the Russian officer corps accepted the legitimacy of Yeltsin’s democratically elected leadership. Particularly since the new Russian General Staff and Defense Ministry leaders were chosen under Yeltsin’s rule, the Russian High Command may be loyal to the ideals of democracy and of Western-style reform. Certainly, if a large proportion of the Russian populace supports democratic ideals, we would expect a significant fraction of the Russian officer corps to reflect that belief. The revolutionary impulse that has affected society as a whole must have hit the Soviet military as well. After all, a politically satisfied population, and a state with a healthy economy and open access to foreign high technology achievements, would certainly be beneficial to the professional goals of any military organization. Those officers who believe in Yeltsin's abilities to transform the Soviet state must be optimistic.
What we don’t know is how many officers stationed at which level believe in Yeltsin. Even those appointed by Yeltsin will not necessarily remain loyal to him. Gorbachev appointed Gen. Dmitrii Yazov as Defense Minister, after all, and received the August 1991 putsch in return.

Furthermore, sociologists tell us that military officers in general are not naturally liberal or idealistic. Instead, according to Huntington, “The military ethic is...pessimistic, collectivist, historically inclined, power-oriented, nationalistic, militaristic, pacifist, and instrumentalist in its view of the military profession. It is, in brief, realistic and conservative.”45 Those attracted to the officer’s profession back when the Soviet Union existed are unlikely to support political radicalism, social permissiveness, or economic daring. A little reform may be a good thing, but the current chaos in Russia must be horrifying to the officer corps as a whole.

Perhaps it is not democratic idealism that restrains officers; perhaps it is fear that society as a whole would not support a coup effort, if belief in democratic procedures has suffused the population.46 If this were the case, then the absence of a coup could be attributed to realism, not lack of motive. Yet opinion polls reported in 1990 indicate that around 40 percent of Russians believe that concentration of power in a “strong hand” leader is often necessary.47 Yeltsin himself reportedly told the U.S. Congress that his power can only be taken away by God. And the level of public protest during the August 1991 coup attempt, while laudable, was relatively small. Most Muscovites and virtually all residents of St. Petersburg went about their daily activities; those who stood down the tanks were the exception.48 It does not seem that fear of public reaction should be a strong disincentive for a military coup now.

If neither factionalism nor democratic idealism are sufficient explanations for the quiescence of the Russian officer corps, how do we explain the absence of a coup?

Compromise and Participation As Keys to Control

The best action that reformers can take to assure the support of military officers is to co-opt them. Only by gaining the support of key military officers is civilian control possible. Otherwise, vital military information can be withheld indefinitely from civilian leaders. When civilian policy goals are bound to seem threatening to military interests, then the best way to gain military acquiescence is for civilian reformers to work with reformers inside the military organization to build support. That way, military officers can become convinced by people they trust that change is a good idea.

Mikhail Gorbachev and his advisors seem to have adopted this strategy when he set out to reform Soviet military doctrine in the late 1980s. A joint civilian/military community was formed to discuss and develop reformist ideas. As a result, efforts from that era to institute “defensive defense” planning at the military-technical level seem to have been much more successful than earlier efforts made by First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev, who tried to transform Soviet doctrine to one of minimum deterrence.49 Civilian reformers interested in gaining a foothold on military policy should try to befriend military officers, not challenge them.

Logically, the same advice holds true for those wanting to retain military loyalty while transforming state and society. The more support and the more opportunity for political expression given to military officers in a time of crisis, the less likely that the military organization will explode against the confines of hostile civilian control. As many theorists have pointed out, there really is no such thing as an “apolitical” military organization. Military
officers in all states have political interests and channels of influence. To keep the military from staging a coup, civilian leaders must convince military officers that their interests are being sufficiently met through existing channels.

It is along this line that Yeltsin has been walking: the line between satisfying the political interests of the military, and maintaining the momentum of his radical economic and political reform plans. Some analysts have argued that Yeltsin has gotten too friendly with the military, and that Russian military officers and defense industrialists are now working together to control the government through the conservative Russian Security Council, a state body that Yeltsin created in 1991. Yet the very liberal former Acting Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar sat on that council too. And, the fact that another strong liberal, Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, is still in office indicates that Yeltsin has not given up control completely.

Furthermore, there have been a great number of reports in the last few years of conflict between defense industrialists and military officers in the Soviet Union. If, as the Western analyses indicate, it is the defense industrial interests that are now dominating the Russian government, there is no reason to believe that the interests of military officers will necessarily be protected. While perhaps joining defense industrialists in favoring a less drastic economic reform policy, military officers are much more likely to be immediately concerned with issues facing their organization specifically. Even a relatively conservative government might not solve the current problems of Russian military officers.

Based on the conclusions drawn by the classic theorists of civil-military relations cited above, we would expect the Russian military as a whole to value four basic policies:

• fair treatment, both economically and socially, of military officers and servicemen;

• retention of autonomy and military prerogatives in policy areas where the Soviet General Staff traditionally dominated decision-making;

• the reestablishment of order in society, reinforced by the popular legitimacy of the political regime; and,

• retention of Great Power status for Russia as the Soviet successor state.

All of these things would help to restore the professional role, mission, and prestige of the Russian officer corps, and the vast majority of officers are therefore likely to support them, regardless of their general political orientation. These values are probably of lesser concern to defense industrialists, who are more likely to favor conservative economic policies and retention of their own former privileged status in society.

Yeltsin's Actions

To determine whether or not military participation in a coup (as opposed to a simple conservative backlash) is likely, we must then examine the current achievements of the Russian government on these four points. Has Yeltsin done enough to maintain military loyalty?

Yeltsin appears to be doing his best to ensure that socio-economic policy for servicemen is fair and generous. On July 21 he decreed that 39 billion additional rubles would be appropriated from the Russian state budget for new
construction of housing for those released from the service by force reductions.\textsuperscript{52} He also met with various senior officers and regional political leaders to try to ensure that such housing would actually be built. Yelena Agapova, the Ministry of Defense press secretary\textsuperscript{53} whose duties seem to include fostering cooperation between officers and civilians, declared:

Today, thank God, the approach is different. Politicians have recognized that the state has no right to remain eternally in servicemen’s debt, year in and year out only noting the increasing number of servicemen without apartments on a long-term basis.\textsuperscript{...} We do not think that this is just talk; this is the position espoused by the president, which he has once again affirmed.\textsuperscript{54}

In other words, the Ministry of Defense leadership seems to have accepted Yeltsin’s good intentions on this issue. However, Yeltsin’s September 8, 1992 agreement (signed by Defense Minister Grachev) to withdraw all 20,000 Russian troops from Lithuania within a year will add more pressure to an already sticky situation. While Lithuania has reportedly offered to build housing in Russia for 10,000 of those troops, there are already now roughly 122,000 military families in Russia who lack apartments. This is up from 104,000 families at the start of 1992.\textsuperscript{55} Yeltsin may not be able to solve the housing issue satisfactorily.

Yeltsin probably helped his image in the eyes of officers concerned about their own safety, by accepting the right of servicemen, announced by Grachev on July 30, 1992, to defend themselves with force if attacked.\textsuperscript{56} Before that policy was announced, officers from Russia’s 7th Army and 19th Independent Air Defense Army, both stationed in the Caucasus, had sent open letters to Yeltsin demanding action on their behalf because of armed attacks on their installations.\textsuperscript{57} Immediately after the policy enactment, the number of reported attacks plummeted,\textsuperscript{58} but later the attacks were said to be increasing again, particularly in Moldova.\textsuperscript{59} The “hardship pay” of those serving in the near-abroad regions has been increased,\textsuperscript{60} so Yeltsin seems to be trying to demonstrate sympathy toward the military on these issues. It is not clear, however, that his actions will be effective enough to satisfy officers.

Regarding military autonomy on defense policy, Yeltsin has also compromised to meet military interests, in this case more than radical democrats would have liked. The General Staff has always had primary responsibility for technical military policy in the Soviet Union. While a civilian General Secretary sat at the head of the largely civilian Defense Council, it was always General Staff officers who provided the information upon which defense policy questions were based. By controlling the military information civilians received, officers controlled the military-technical policy options considered.\textsuperscript{61} Many observers noted that this relationship continued in the Gorbachev-era Supreme Soviet, where military officers, KGB officers, and military industrialists controlled the Committee on Defense and State Security.

For a while it looked as though Yeltsin might appoint a civilian Minister of Defense. Democrats thought that this would be the best way to get civilian control over military information on everything from budgets to weapons stocks. Instead, the job went to former Colonel, now Army General Pavel Grachev, former Commander of the Airborne Forces. The Defense Ministry under Grachev’s leadership is now responsible for planning its own new organizational structure and doctrine. While this is apparently subject to both presidential and parliamentary approval,\textsuperscript{62} it is unclear that anyone outside the General Staff now has either the expertise or the desire to challenge Grachev’s ideas. It is probably not accidental that emerging doctrine plans call for development of the “Mobile Forces of Russia” as the backbone of the military, based on the Airborne Forces from which Grachev came.\textsuperscript{63} Military officers seem once again to be firmly in control of the information and planning underpinning the defense policy process. It is true that Yeltsin appointed civilian ministerial candidate Andrei Kokoshin as First Deputy
Minister of Defense. Kokoshin reportedly has access to all military information. A civilian has managed to enter the military fortress. Yet some analysts have reported that Kokoshin’s duties may be circumscribed to acting as a liaison with the defense industry. Certainly, if he had to appoint a civilian to do the job, Yeltsin could not have picked a candidate more congenial to the General Staff. Kokoshin, former Deputy Director of the Soviet Academy of Sciences USA and Canada Institute (ISKAN), is a man whom the Defense Ministry newspaper referred to in 1989 as “our man in Congress.” He worked at ISKAN for many years with retired Gen. Valentin Larionov, the General Staff officer responsible in the 1960s for putting out three editions of the classic Soviet military work, *Military Strategy*. Larionov is said to have tutored him on military-technical subjects, and to have reviewed his writings to make sure that the information they contained was accurate. Gen. Yurii Kirshin, former Deputy Director of the Soviet Institute for Military History, sent his son to work in Kokoshin’s group of graduate students at ISKAN. And Kokoshin has repeatedly given press interviews stressing the military background of his family, his own childhood desire to be a naval officer, and his understanding of military concerns and values. The civilian First Deputy Minister is undoubtedly sympathetic to General Staff concerns, in addition to being in favor of “defensive defense” doctrinal reform, and can act to reassure the military that the civilians in control are on their side.

This trend of meeting military interests has occurred among Yeltsin’s other choices for military posts as well. Many analysts think it significant that hard-line Afghanistan war heroes, like Col. Gen. Boris Gromov, have been appointed to top Defense Ministry posts. Gromov’s December 1990 appointment as Soviet First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs (the Soviet ministry controlling the internal police troops) coincided with a surge in the level of violence used by internal Soviet troops, especially in the January 1991 Vilnius Radio Tower incident. The 1990 appointment also indicated an unusual level of cooperation between the Soviet military and internal security forces. Gromov was appointed to his Internal Ministry post at the same time that Boris Pugo, one of the August 1991 putsch leaders, became Ministry head. This means that Gromov has been tinged by association as a possible coup participant. Certainly, this appointment must have involved great compromise from Yeltsin’s point of view.

Yeltsin nonetheless recently turned down for promotion Maj. Gen. Aleksandr Lebed, the outspoken new commander of the Russian 14th Army in Moldova. Lebed, who was appointed by Yeltsin to fill that post as the Moldovan civil war expanded, has consistently argued that Russian troops should intervene in the Transdniester conflict to protect ethnic Russians living in Moldova. Lebed’s promotion had been supported by the Defense Ministry Collegium, and he is reported to be a Grachev protégé. Lebed was quoted as having made some rather inflammatory comments about civil-military relations in Russia:

> I sense powerful support. The vast majority of generals and officers feel as I do. For seven years the army was torn to shreds, impudently dismissed to barracks; people wiped their feet on it and poured dirt on it—enough of all that.

> There is not and cannot be discipline in the pure form. The state is being destroyed, everything is falling apart, everything is being stolen before your very eyes. What discipline can there be? Anyone, especially people in uniform, must sense that the state is behind them. That is essential to them.

More recently, Lebed provoked sharp complaints from the Moldovan government when he called the Moldovan flag “the banner of Romanian fascists;” he also repeated that “the [Russian] Army is angry, it is at the end of its tether.”
It seemed for awhile that by opposing Lebed, Yeltsin might have inadvertently been adding fuel to a pro-coup fire, especially if Lebed was right about the level of support he held within the officer corps. Deputy Defense Minister Gromov said that he "didn’t approve" of Lebed’s statements, but no one in the military seemed to have publicly said anything very strong against Lebed. Given the trend of Yeltsin’s military policy, then, it is not surprising that on September 18, 1992 Lebed got his promotion to Lieutenant General after all.

What about the issue of domestic order? This is one of the hardest points on which to gauge Yeltsin’s performance, since we lack any objective measure of how legitimate the government is in the eyes of the people, and of how much pent-up unrest may be lying below the surface. It is probably in Yeltsin’s favor that, as Huntington would put it, students don’t seem to be rioting. It is probably not in Yeltsin’s favor that periodic threats of strikes have continually arisen in the energy and manufacturing sectors of Russian industry. And mobs have been demonstrating periodically, most recently outside the main Ostankino television tower in Moscow (the ill-defined protest apparently had an anti-Semitic theme). Nor is it beneficial that Russian society is widely seen to have replaced glasnost’ with naglost’, a word literally meaning “insolence,” that apparently now indicates unfeeling, self-serving, and perhaps criminal behavior toward one’s fellow citizens.

Yeltsin’s July and August 1992 retreat from the more radical planks of Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar’s privatization platform may have calmed societal fears of economic collapse and profiteering somewhat, although his wobbling now looks suspiciously like that of pre-putsch Gorbachev in 1990 and 1991. Many military officers have been wary of accepting economic assistance from the West, and Yeltsin’s refusal to dance to the International Monetary Fund’s tune may thus play in his favor. Perhaps the key question to answer on this point is whether an alternative candidate could promise more order than Yeltsin. It is unlikely that a right-wing extremist, like Makashov or Terekhov or the infamous “Black Colonel” Viktor Alksnis, could deliver the kind of social support that a military takeover would require. A good bet instead might be Yeltsin’s Vice President, Aleksandr Rutskoi, himself a former army colonel (now promoted to Major General in the Reserves). Reportedly, Rutskoi’s popularity exceeded Yeltsin’s in a recent public opinion poll. Rutskoi is a member of the shadowy Russian Security Council, and is now working in alliance with defense industrialists in the newly formed Civic Union political bloc, the so-called centrist opposition. It would be trivial for Rutskoi to assume the presidency if Yeltsin were suddenly to succumb to, say, a heart attack. Given the current free-fall of the ruble and the widespread perception of disorder in Russian society, it might even be easy to declare a state of emergency and martial law following the President’s death. And future meetings of the Congress of People’s Deputies, dominated by Civic Union sympathizers, may yet decide to throw support behind an attempt to impeach Yeltsin. Yeltsin does not seem to be irreplaceable in the eyes of the Russian people.

This brings us to the final point on the list. Has Yeltsin done enough to maintain Russia’s status as a world power? Many senior military officers seem to believe that Russia’s foreign policy is now bowing unduly to the wishes of the West. The conflict which has erupted between the General Staff and the Foreign Ministry in some ways resembles that which Shevardnadze provoked in late 1990, when he threw his support behind the treaty limiting conventional forces in Europe (CFE), the reunification of Germany, and United Nations efforts to legitimate the use of force against Saddam Hussein in Iraq. Current Foreign Minister Kozyrev has repeated, ominously, Shevardnadze’s prophetic warnings of a forthcoming coup.

Officers are speaking out against a variety of Russia’s current foreign policies, and are having a great deal of influence on changing the policies they dislike. Three have received particular attention.
First, the Defense Ministry has repeatedly refused to withdraw troops from locations in the near-abroad areas after Yeltsin has stated that such withdrawals will take place. Based on the order in which reports about these cases have appeared in the Russian press, a pattern seems to have been established whereby the Defense Ministry, operating under pressure from local commanders in the field, sets a non-withdrawal policy which is then confirmed by Yeltsin. In other words, Yeltsin signs off on policy turnarounds that the Defense Ministry has already implemented.

This began in the Transdniester region of Moldova, where ethnic Russians were under attack by Romanian Moldovans earlier this summer. Many officers, not only Lebed, urged Russia not to withdraw its troops too hastily from Moldova as the civil war heated up. Officers of the 14th Army sent Yeltsin an open letter demanding that they be allowed to stay and guard ethnic Russians until peace was established in the area. Russian military troops were widely reported to have participated in the military defense of the ethnic Russian enclave of Bendersy. While some witnesses indicated that Russian troops in Moldova acted on their own initiative, others said that the orders came from the Moscow High Command. Recently Russian officers of the 14th Army sent another open letter, this time to Grachev, demanding once again that they not be withdrawn. Their argument was the same: that the Russian population needed them as guards. This time it is clear that their pressure worked; three weeks later, Grachev declared that the Army would remain in Moldova until the conflict there was completely settled. A similar series of events occurred in Tajikistan: Yeltsin stated that the Russian 201st Division would be withdrawn because it was suffering attacks and could not be strengthened; high-ranking military officers protested that the Russian troops should stay; and a few days later, Grachev confirmed the report of the division commander, Gen. M. Ashurov, that no withdrawal would take place.

The most infamous case of this pattern's recurrence is of course in the October 1992 Russian announcement that withdrawals from the Baltic states would be halted until mutually acceptable agreements could be reached by all sides. On October 10, the Council of the Officers' Assembly of the Northwestern Group of Forces "decided to declare a moratorium on the withdrawal of Russian forces from the Baltic region." On October 20, the Russian Defense Ministry "announced the suspension of the withdrawal." And on October 29, Yeltsin signed the order to halt the pullout officially. Deputy Defense Minister Gromov has said that the issues of concern to military officers here include compensation to Russia for the military bases left behind; continued guaranteed access of Russia to Baltic sea ports; and social guarantees for the Soviet military veterans left behind in states which no longer want Russian occupiers on their territories, in addition to the more straightforward demands for housing for departing troops.

In each of these cases, it seems clear that Yeltsin's so-called decisions followed military actions. There is no indication in press reports that Yeltsin participated in the military decision-making in these cases. Yeltsin thus seems to have ceded some foreign policy control to military officers.

The second major issue of concern to the General Staff is its opposition to the return of the disputed Southern Kuril Island chain to Japan. Yeltsin had hoped that a settlement on that issue would highlight his September 1992 visit to Tokyo. The visit was eventually cancelled, since Yeltsin could not muster sufficient domestic support for an agreement.

The Russian Foreign Ministry supports returning the southern islands gradually. The first step, in their view, would be to fulfill a 1956 Joint Declaration between the Soviet Union and Japan, returning the southernmost Habomai island group and the island of Shikotan to Tokyo. Simultaneously, a peace treaty would be signed to end
World War II officially between the two parties. Then, later, negotiations could be held on the remaining two disputed islands, Kunashir and Iturup.92

On July 30, however, the Russian General Staff publicly stated that Russian troops were stationed on the southern Kuril Islands, apparently including Shikotan and the Habomai group. Its statement reportedly added that a "one-sided" withdrawal would seriously damage Russian security.93 This reinforced CIS Commander-in-Chief Shaposhnikov's statement earlier in July that Russian troops should not be withdrawn from the disputed Kurils within two years, as Yeltsin had promised.94

Many articles appearing in the military press have argued that the Kurils issue is a crucial security concern, since withdrawal would leave Russia vulnerable on its Pacific coast, and would set a precedent for the return of other territories seized during World War II. Nonetheless, many of these reported comments from officers have stressed the desirability of compromise on this issue. A major general wrote a long article in the Defense Ministry newspaper, for example, accusing a Japanese/American alliance of planning to develop a forward naval base on the southern Kurils if they were returned. However, he ended with a statement of support for Yeltsin's staged withdrawal plan.95 Such a statement also appeared in the General Staff position paper to the Russian Supreme Soviet on the issue.96 The Commander of Russia's Pacific Fleet, Adm. G. A. Khvatov, suggested that a reduction in Japanese troop levels might make the islands' return more palatable to the Russian military.97

It is unclear how much of the General Staff uproar over the islands reflects a genuine security concern, as opposed to an attempt to regain pride lost by the fall of the Soviet Union. It is also not clear how strong an effort has been made by the General Staff to stonewall Kozyrev's policy. Conservative nationalists in the Supreme Soviet may have been much stronger opponents of the negotiation proposal than the General Staff was. What is clear is that the Russian military officer corps has maintained high visibility on this issue, certainly higher than what one would have expected in the past. (One Russian report did state, however, that the Soviet military also blocked a 1973 Foreign Ministry plan to sign an agreement on transfer of the southern Kurils, despite Defense Minister Andrei Grechko's support for the plan.98)

Third, Russian military officers have expressed grave misgivings about the further disarmament of Russia's strategic nuclear forces, and about cooperation with the United States in developing an Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) defense system against third-party strikes. Many officers are apparently convinced that the United States still views the projected ABM system as having an anti-Russian mission; in their view, fewer incoming warheads from the Russian side would make the U.S. ABM defense operation easier. Furthermore, some Russian officers are concerned that American high-precision conventional weapons could knock out a significant percentage of Russian missiles remaining under a 3,000 warhead limit.99 The collapse of the Soviet economy means, in the view of some officers, that Russia can no longer hope to keep up in the military technology competition.100

This opposition has occurred despite the fact that Defense Minister Grachev publicly lauded the nuclear disarmament and defense agreements reached by Yeltsin and U.S. President George Bush in June 1992, and despite his implication that the General Staff helped write the accords.101 Given that Yeltsin's June acceptance of the American proposals came as a surprise to those who thought he had already been pushed too far by demands for disarmament, the Russian side may have reached the end of the line on these strategic nuclear issues.
Conclusions

It seems clear that the Russian military feels itself to be under siege. It is also clear that Yeltsin has been bending over backwards to give the military what it wants. Yet not all of his actions have been successful in accomplishing their objectives. Yeltsin may not be able to provide sufficient military housing, sufficient weapons, and a sufficiently autarchic foreign policy to meet military officers' demands while still retaining any vestiges of democracy or economic reform.

Yeltsin may best be able to keep officers loyal if he continues to make it clear that their concerns are valid, and that they have a right to speak up. The Defense Ministry Collegium has gone out of its way to affirm its support for President Yeltsin. These statements have definitely disgruntled members of the Union of Officers, who complain that this "creates an artificial division of the president with the army, on one side, and the people and its constitutionally elected parliament on the other." Members of "Shchit," traditionally on the opposite side of the political spectrum from the Union of Officers, are also unhappy about the statements.

There are currently rumors circulating in Moscow that the Defense Ministry Collegium will step in to support Yeltsin if the conservative centrist opposition in the Congress of People's Deputies tries to unseat him. Such direct participation in politics would fit well the outlines of Huntington's model of "subjective" civilian control over the military. It is not clear what methods would be used in such a case, or what the results would be. Nonetheless, if it meant that Russian political and economic reforms would be kept basically on course, it might be the least painful outcome of the current political upheaval.

Eventually, however, it may not be possible for Yeltsin to maintain both his integrity as a reformist leader, and the loyalty of conservative military officers. It is hard to imagine that Yeltsin will allow himself to become a pawn of the military institution, given the democratic ideals he has publicly supported since 1989. An anti-Yeltsin coup may thus become likely if Yeltsin proves either unwilling to meet military demands, or unable to solve the social, economic, and corporatist problems officers now face. Yeltsin must demonstrate, continually, both sympathy toward the military and competence as the crisis in Russian society continues. If he does not, the patience of the Russian General Staff may very well snap.

The interests of the rest of the world in this case are not clear-cut. There have been complaints from the West that Yeltsin is not doing enough on arms control issues, that, for example, he does not seem able to wrest control over biological weapons programs away from the military. Simultaneously, Baltic leaders are demanding immediate withdrawal of Russian troops, and Japanese leaders seem intransigent on the Kurils issue. The analysis presented here suggests that it may not be in Yeltsin's interest, or ultimately in the interests of Russia's neighbors and former enemies, to meet all of these demands at once. It may not be possible or desirable to declaw the Soviet bear in one fell swoop.

Instead, policy-makers in the West, in Eastern Europe, and in the new post-Soviet states should choose their battles carefully. Leaders outside of Russia must come to a clear and unified understanding about which Russian demilitarization issues matter to them most, and which could safely be put off for a few years. It would do no one any good to have forced, immediate removal of Russian troops from all of their now-foreign outposts, for example, if such a demand pushed officers into political action. Immediate, drastic disarmament beyond what has already been done may not serve Western goals best.
The results of a potential coup in Russia cannot be known in advance. Perhaps a strong-arm leader could reestablish societal order, and make the transition smoother. On the other hand, a military government in Russia at this point would add an element of uncertainty to an already fragile and potentially unstable European security order. Potential coup leaders, regardless of their ultimate policy strategies, might insist on sacrificing societal well-being for the moment to reestablish Russian military power on its borders and abroad. It is probably therefore in the interests of the rest of the world to make a military coup in Russia as unlikely as possible. This may only be possible if Russian security policy is given time to adjust to the new realities of the post-Cold War era.

As the end of the Soviet Union reaches its first anniversary, Yeltsin must navigate a fast and rocky river, and the outside world should be careful not to tip the boat. The fact that the Cold War is over does not mean that Russia no longer matters to the outside world. More unilateral Russian military intervention in the "near-abroad" areas could provoke another great power war in Europe, and a resumption of old weapons production levels could exacerbate Third World proliferation issues. Undue pressure now for ever more security concessions could pull Yeltsin under, and leave Russia in the hands of unpredictable militaristic authoritarians. As the military gains power in Russian political life, it is probably in world interests to keep them aligned with the forces of reform, not reaction.
Notes


7. Such factional alliances, where civilians keep officers loyal through promises of resources and power, constitute what Huntington calls “subjective civilian control.”


12. See, for example, the ITAR-TASS report about Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) naval officers, in *RFE/RL Research Report* 1, no. 30 (July 24, 1992).


16. For reports from both sides of this conflict, see *FBIS-SOV*, July 17, 1992, p. 69; July 30, 1992, p. 57; and July 31, 1992, pp. 55-56.


19. This according to the Chief Military Procurator of Russia, as quoted in a blurb in *Kommersant-Daily*, October 31, 1992.


27. M. Madeov, Ostankino First Program television network, September 18, 1992, as reported in FBIS-SOV, September 18, 1992, pp. 36-37; and Eribar Dzhafarov, Ostankino First Program television network, September 27, 1992, as reported in FBIS-SOV, October 2, 1992, pp. 4-5.


32. Widely diverging reports of their motives have appeared in the Russian press. One report quotes a letter the three wrote in resignation, which laments that “the conservative majority in the Defense Ministry doesn’t want change,” and states that no one is taking sufficient care of the social concerns of officers. See “Tri sovetniki khlopaet dver’iu,” Rossiiskaia Gazeta, October 27, 1992. Another report states that the three were fired because they disagreed with the decision to halt Russian troop withdrawals from the Baltics. See Pavel Fel’gengauer, “Armiia poka neitraf’na,” Nezavisimaia Gazeta, October 30, 1992. “Shchit” reportedly issued a statement saying they resigned because they felt improperly dragged into the conflict between Yeltsin and the conservative Russian legislature. See Moscow Russian television network, October 24, 1992, as reported in FBIS-SOV, October 24, 1992, p. 12.


39. *Ibid*


42. *Ibid*, p. 156.


45. Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, p. 79.


48. The *New York Times*, August 25, 1991, reported in a box summarizing the putsch chronology that approximately 50,000 people demonstrated outside the Russian White House in Moscow; that is much smaller than many street demonstrations in Moscow have been. Interfax, as reported in *FBIS-SOV*, August 21, 1992, p. 74, stated that around 5,000 people took up the defense of St. Petersburg.


51. *Ibid* In addition to Yurii Skokov, the Security Council secretary and apparent leader, attention must be given to Arkady Volskii, Chairman of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. Yeltsin has carefully bent in Volskii’s direction, especially through his June appointments of industrial leaders to ministerial positions in the government; see Serge Schmemann, “New Kremlin Team Raises Questions on Yeltsin’s Aim,” *New York Times*, June 14, 1992. While Volskii himself holds no official governmental post, his decision to join with Russian Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi (a former Colonel in the army, promoted to Major General in the Reserves) in forming the new Civic Union bloc may give him further leverage. See Elizabeth Teague and Vera Tolz, “The Civic

Recently, Volskii revealed in an interview that Yeltsin "does consult with us and we do meet with him....In the majority of cases not only the Supreme Soviet but also the president and the government send us draft documents." Quoted in Marina Shakina, "Arkadii Volskii: 'Like Ladybugs in a Jar,' " Novoe Vremia 27 (1992), as reported in FBIS-SOV, July 31, 1992, p. 18.


53. She was promoted to that position in October 1992, after having served as the Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Krasnaia Zvezda, the Defense Ministry daily newspaper. See "Novoe naznachenie," Nezavisimaia Gazeta, October 27, 1992.


56. Interfax, July 30, 1992, as reported in FBIS-SOV, July 30, 1992, p. 31.


62. See Grachev, "Changes in Army and Navy," and also Semenov, "Oborona."


64. This according to an official at the Russian Embassy in Washington, D.C., interviewed by the author in June 1992.


67. From interviews conducted by the author at ISKAN in Summer 1989 and Fall 1990.

68. For example, Agapova, "Nash Chelovek v Kongresse."

69. Foye, "Post-Soviet Russia."


74. ITAR-TASS in English, September 17, 1992, as reported in FBIS-SOV, September 17, 1992, p. 48.


76. Interfax in English, September 17, 1992, as reported in FBIS-SOV, September 18, 1992, p. 29.

77. Mayak radio network, September 18, 1992, as reported in FBIS-SOV, September 21, 1992.


79. This is reported by Rahr, "Moscow One Year after the Attempted Coup," p. 3.


82. The various versions of the reports are summarized in RFE/RL Research Report 1, no. 28 (July 10, 1992).

84. Mayak radio station, October 14, 1992, as reported in FBIS-SOV, October 14, 1992, p. 8.

85. ITAR-TASS, October 7, 1992, as reported in FBIS-SOV, October 8, 1992, pp. 49-50.

86. Gen. Eduard Vorobev, Deputy Commander of the Russian Ground Forces, as quoted by Interfax, October 7, 1992, as reported in FBIS-SOV, October 8, 1992, p. 50.


89. Moscow BALTFAX in English, October 20, 1992, as reported in FBIS-SOV, October 20, 1992, p. 6.


94. RFE/RL Research Report 1, no. 28 (July 10, 1992).


97. Tokyo KYODO, August 1, 1992, as reported in FBIS-SOV, August 4, 1992, p. 15.


100. Pavel Felgengauer, “Military Expect Intervention by the West,” Nezavisimaia Gazeta, August 1, 1992, as reported in FBIS-SOV, August 4, 1992, p. 44.


104. Moscow Russian radio network, October 24, 1992, as reported in *FBIS-SOV*, October 26, 1992, p. 12.