TITLE: Soviet Strategic Forces:
Portrait of an Elite

AUTHOR: Rose Gottemoeller

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL
FOR SOVIET AND EAST EUROPEAN
RESEARCH

1755 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
PROJECT INFORMATION:

CONTRACTOR: Georgetown University

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Rose Gottemoeller

COUNCIL CONTRACT NUMBER: 806-10

DATE: December 4, 1992

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

Individual researchers retain the copyright on work products derived from research funded by Council Contract. The Council and the U.S. Government have the right to duplicate written reports and other materials submitted under Council Contract and to distribute such copies within the Council and U.S. Government for their own use, and to draw upon such reports and materials for their own studies; but the Council and U.S. Government do not have the right to distribute, or make such reports and materials available, outside the Council or U.S. Government without the written consent of the authors, except as may be required under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 5 U.S.C. 552, or other applicable law.

* The work leading to this report was supported by contract funds provided by the National Council for Soviet and East European Research. The analysis and interpretations contained in the report are those of the author.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Soviet Strategic Forces: Portrait of An Elite
Report of an Interview Project
Rose Gottemoeller
Georgetown University

STUDY CONCEPT

- This report describes the results of a series of interviews, most of them conducted in Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan, with individuals serving in the strategic nuclear forces of the former Soviet Union, and with those responsible for their training or for overall national policy toward nuclear weapons.

- The research began with the hypothesis that, during a time of upheaval and profound changes between the center, Moscow, and the republics, the strong professionalism and loyalty of the nuclear elite would serve as a factor of stability and security for the nuclear weapons themselves. In the interview process, I thus sought to draw out the key defining experiences of the elite, beginning with individuals' rationales for entering the service, proceeding through their selection, training, careers; and considering too the nature of their family lives.

- The revolutionary changes in the Soviet Union created both barriers and opportunities for the research. Sensitivity about my subject matter in the General Staff prevented me from visiting field facilities. Nevertheless, the greater openness in the former Soviet Union permitted wide access to interview subjects.

- Finally, the breakup of the union offered me previously unimagined opportunities to explore the motivations of individuals serving in the strategic forces of what are now independent countries—Ukraine the prime example.
CAREER CHOICE

• Respondents noted clear dynastic tendencies within the Strategic Rocket Forces (SRF) and the Navy, with sons following fathers and even grandfathers into service. Interestingly, these tendencies have taken unique twists during this period of upheaval: Maj. General Vladimir Tolubko, who is the nephew of Marshal Tolubko, CINC of the SRF during the late 1970s and early 1980s, has taken the oath of allegiance to Ukraine and is one of the strong supporters of an independent Ukrainian nuclear arsenal. He is one of three Tolubko nephews and two sons serving in the SRF.

• The strategic forces are also considered an important means to rise above social class for those from families of workers or peasants. The “social climbers” have a difficult time, however, because they do not have the easy access to perquisites enjoyed by those with dynastic connections.

• An opportunity to gain first-rate technical education and training was cited as a reason that might gain increasing importance as non-military higher education, previously free, becomes expensive; and as service laws are changed to permit young officers to resign their commissions after a limited number of years in service. (Under current laws, leaving before twenty years in service is very difficult.)

SELECTION, TRAINING, CAREER PATHS

• Selection processes for the higher schools serving the strategic nuclear services are similar to those in existence in schools of higher education across the country: examinations, interviews, character references. In all, a grueling process that takes three weeks.

• Unlike most schools, the selection process also includes a wide array of psychological tests, the point of which is to discover an individual’s fitness to serve in the nuclear forces.

• Several instructors in these schools, however, reported the importance of their own judgement in the process of selecting successful candidates and seeing them through to the start of
their careers. All the tests in the world, they commented, cannot substitute for the judgment of a competent commander.

- Training in the higher schools extends for five years, although one respondent clearly felt that this period was excessive. For most SRF jobs, he said, three years of technical school training would be sufficient.
- Upon graduation, a student receives the rank of lieutenant and probably becomes an operator in a missile unit. From that point on, unless interrupted by poor health or family disaster, he will remain a strategic forces officer for twenty or twenty-five years.
- Officers must pass particular gates on their road to the top, and many are not permitted through at every stage. Young lieutenants sweat to gain their first promotion in two years, and majors sweat to be admitted into the SRF Academy in Moscow for advanced training. Those who "top out" at a certain grade often make interesting careers in technical fields such as computing, or as instructors and trainers in strategic forces schools or in the field.
- Patterns of service are difficult to discern. Some individuals might spend most of their careers in a single SRF army or Navy fleet, while others will be posted from one end of the country to the other. One individual interviewed served at nearly a dozen different sites, from the Baltic states to Kazakhstan.
- The formation of "teams", e.g. individuals graduating from a school and serving together over time as a cohesive unit, does not seem to occur. Respondents noted encountering their old classmates repeatedly in the course of their careers, but no particular effort seemed to be made to use "old school ties" to promote cohesion.

FAMILY LIFE

- I had the opportunity to interview both men and women on the subject of family life, and responses were consistent: life had been isolated in the garrison towns, but it had always had its
own strong dynamic and rationale. The culture of garrison existence had been so powerful that it tended to draw sons into service after their fathers. --Wives could simply not find jobs in the garrison towns, so they tended to devote their attention to their large (by Soviet standards) families, and to improving their apartments.

--The investment made in living quarters tended to make it difficult for families to move once the husband received a new posting, particularly if they were living in a pleasant part of the country.

--Many husbands simply left their families behind, therefore, as they moved around the country, expecting to return to the "home" apartment to retire. This tendency has severely exacerbated the military housing problem.

With the economic crisis in the former Soviet Union, the smooth fabric of that life has been interrupted. --The plus side of this development is that wives, in desperation to earn more to supplement family incomes, are pioneering small enterprises and home labor in the garrison towns, concepts that might successfully be used to create viable peacetime economies there.

--The negative side is that the formerly cohesive nature of the societies has been lost, and the support system that went with it. Many individuals and their families now simply want to leave the service.

--This negative attitude did not seem to translate in any way into an urge to abuse the trust placed in nuclear officers. Most individuals who had resolved to leave service had a clear sense of new opportunities in existence in the outside economy, and were eager to pursue them. They appeared to have no desire, for example, to revenge themselves for a lost career in service.
FUTURE OF THE STRATEGIC FORCES

- Two crises have brought home to the nuclear services the profound impact of the Soviet Union's breakup. Both crises unfolded in 1992, the first the product of grand political maneuvering, the second of grassroots discontent in the Strategic Rocket Forces. --In January 1992, the Ukrainian government began to demand that anyone serving on Ukrainian territory take the oath of allegiance to Ukraine, including members of the strategic nuclear forces. This demand was followed by the assertion that Ukraine would assume administrative control of the nuclear weapons on its territory, in effect taking over all maintenance, supply and personnel matters. --In February and March 1992, riots and threatened strikes affected SRP officers and enlisted men at the Baikonur space launch facility in Kazakhstan. Living conditions were the focus of the discontent. In an effort to ensure the flow of foodstuffs, energy and water, the Kazakh government assumed responsibility for supply activities in the aftermath of this crisis—effectively undertaking "de facto administrative control" of these troops.

- The men serving in the strategic nuclear service appear not to have reacted convulsively to these crises, thus avoiding escalation across the force. They have instead adapted to circumstances through a combination of accommodation, realism and professionalism. --In my interviews, these factors were seen most clearly in the changing military education system, especially in the SRC and PVO schools in Khar'kov. --The schools early took the oath of allegiance to Ukraine, but proceeded to embark on a restructuring and civilianization program. --Having taken the oath out of economic necessity, those serving at the Khar'kov schools have seemed intent on a smooth transition to demobilization and/or civilianization.
--This pragmatic attitude is evidently linked to a resolve to maintain professional standards as "sacrosanct."

- The denuclearization policy of Ukraine and Kazakhstan have eased tensions in this arena, because men serving in the strategic nuclear forces have known they face either demobilization or transfer to Russia. --In Ukraine especially, the potential for an economically viable retirement has heavily influenced nuclear officers serving there.

- If Ukraine and/or Kazakhstan abandon their denuclearization policy, then will come the moment of profound challenge for the strategic nuclear services. --The challenge might be limited, however, by the intent expressed by pronuclear activists in Ukraine to establish a minimal nuclear deterrent force, which would require only a small institution to support it.


CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ........................................ iii

Section

1. INTRODUCTION ............................................. 1
   Study Concept .............................................. 1
   Notes on Usage and Sources .............................. 3
   Elita ...................................................... 6

2. SELECTION, TRAINING AND CAREER PATHS .......... 18
   The Schools ................................................ 18
   Selection and Training .................................... 20
   Career Paths ............................................... 25

3. FAMILIES ................................................. 29
   Life in the "Gorodki" ...................................... 29
   Role of Zhensovet ......................................... 31

4. FUTURE OF THE STRATEGIC FORCES .............. 40
   Crisis in the Nuclear Services ......................... 40
   Adaptation ................................................. 45
   Future Challenges ......................................... 51

Appendix

A. LIST OF QUESTIONS FOR "PORTRAIT OF AN ELITE:" ..... 54
1. INTRODUCTION

STUDY CONCEPT

This study began with the idea that the nature of a key military elite, the men who serve in the Soviet Union's nuclear forces, had come within reach. The rapid-fire changes of the Gorbachev era meant that this closed and secret society could for the first time in history be studied directly, through interviews and visits to facilities or garrison towns inside the country itself. The hypothesis with which the study began was a positive one for the strategic nuclear forces, for it stated that the men serving in this elite were a key stabilizing factor, who would remain firm guardians of their nuclear weapons and thus upholders of the Soviet state no matter what changes occurred in the relationship between the center and republics in their country.

Such changes were already looming in the Fall of 1990, when the proposal for this work was written. But because it was developed well before the coup that precipitated the outright disappearance of the Soviet state, I did not expect that the burden shifted on to the strategic forces would be quite so confusing or difficult to bear. As of this writing, the nuclear forces are officially subordinated to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), but this is an entity that has gained little legal or practical power. Meanwhile, the commanders-in-chief of the nuclear services are dually subordinated, to the CIS and to the Russian Minister of Defense. Since the lines of command, control and communications continue to run from the Ministry of Defense in
Moscow to the forces in the field, this arrangement seems to make sense, except for the weapons that happen to be deployed in the independent states of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine.

It is in these states that the men serving in the strategic nuclear forces have faced the most strain, coping with competing demands on their allegiance while they have had to cope with breakdowns in supply and maintenance capabilities endemic to the system as a whole. As summer approached, Strategic Rocket Forces men in Ukraine complained that they cannot keep the temperatures at a steady state around their silo-based missiles—the freon needed for air conditioners is not longer available, and they fear explosions of highly toxic liquid fuel will poison the surrounding countryside and, possibly, strew nuclear materials over a wide area. Last February, Strategic Rocket Forces officers in Kazakhstan battled enlisted men who went on strike, unable to bear the poor conditions—lack of food, lack of water, lack of supplies—in the harshly isolated, bitterly cold deployment areas for the heavy SS-18 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).

The lead hypothesis of the study thus has been receiving sharper testing than I would ever have predicted when I embarked on the research. Impacts on the work have been two-fold: analysis has had to be reconfigured to take account of the possibility that what is emerging is not a single strategic nuclear force structure, but more than one, with simultaneous albeit clumsy links to both Moscow and a republic capital. This duality has most clearly emerged in the case of Ukraine, although I have heard hints of a weaker but similar trend in Kazakhstan. These developments will be further discussed below.
The second impact had to do with my access for research purposes. I had hoped to visit multiple facilities, including especially garrison towns. This access was not granted, and I was told directly by Maj. Gen. Nikolay Stolyarov, who has had responsibility in the Russian armed forces for personnel matters, that I would not get it: the subject of the allegiance of the nuclear services to the state and their overall role in upholding the remnants of it was simply too "difficult" ("slozhnyy").

While this lack of access was a disappointment, however, it did not deal a death blow to the project. The greater openness of the Gorbachev years meant that more people were willing to talk to me without fear—SRF and Navy retirees, even active duty officers put forward to talk to me on an official basis. I therefore believe that the work breaks important ground. It is an exploration of the character of this important elite, a first-hand account of life in the strategic services, and an analysis of where the nuclear services might be headed in the future. Most importantly, the research grapples with a key question that applies to the armed forces as a whole: when the state disappears, what are the sources of loyalty and allegiance for its soldiers who remain in uniform? What impels them to continue to do their duty, even to the point of using their weapons in wartime? These are the questions that are specifically dealt with in the final sections of this report.

NOTES ON USAGE AND SOURCES

The Soviet, now CIS, strategic arsenal is made up of three different kinds of weapons: long-range intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) deployed by the Strategic Rocket Forces, submarine-
based ballistic missiles (SLBMs) deployed by the Navy, and long-range bomber weapons deployed by the Air Forces. On the surface, this configuration of weapon systems looks very like the "nuclear triad" deployed by the United States. A closer look, however, tells a very different story. The USSR has always deployed the great majority of its strategic nuclear weapons on ICBMs—60 percent compared to the approximately 30 percent deployed on ICBMs by the United States. The Strategic Rocket Forces, therefore, have always been considered the key nuclear service, competing only with the traditionally dominant Ground Forces for the title "first among equals" of the Soviet services, nuclear or conventional. The Navy has been the second but less important nuclear service, and the Air Forces, a poor third.

Because of this emphasis on the Strategic Rocket Forces, I looked first to SRF officers for interviews, and knocked hardest on the doors of the SRF command for permission to visit facilities. As a result, this research reflects most heavily the history and daily life of the SRF. However, I also had the opportunity to interview several naval officers who had served on nuclear submarines, and was able to make good use of some recent journalistic accounts of visits to strategic submarines in the Northern Fleet (Kola Peninsula). I have thus far had no access to bomber pilots, and that is a gap in the research. Because bomber weapons make up less than 15 percent of the total arsenal, however, bomber pilots were simply a lower priority to me.

Nevertheless, the mix between SRF and Navy respondents to my interview questions was strong enough that in most cases I refer to more general "strategic nuclear forces" rather than to these services.
individually. The exception is first-hand accounts that strongly reflected on the culture or history of the individual services. In that case, reference to the specific service was made.

To organize the interviews, a question protocol was used consistently. It focused on issues of career choice, selection, training and daily life. (For a list of the questions, see Appendix A.) Not all respondents were willing or able to address every question, but most talked in detail about their personal experiences, and in some cases made an effort to generalize based on broader insights. For example, I interviewed several individuals who had served as instructors at the SRF Academy. These men had some extremely interesting views on the link between instructor and trainee in the process of forming an SRF officer, and in the overall realm of performance evaluation. Because they were experienced teachers, I found their views to be especially insightful.

For an interview result to be reported, I generally depended on the rule that two respondents would have had to report the same or very similar experiences—for example, in the selection procedures, formal and informal, that they went through to enter SRF schools. Exceptions are clearly noted—for example, one respondent was from among the first class of SRF officers, and he spoke in detail of the history of the organization. His remarks are clearly noted as coming from a single respondent.

Except in cases where the individual had an official position as spokesman, as in the case of General Stolyarov, I did not refer to individuals by name in the text of this report.
Although people were willing to talk to me quite openly, in most cases they were nervous about having their names appear in direct association with their remarks. Since the insights themselves were more important than the individual who uttered them, and since I was depending on the rule that two respondents would have to report similar experiences, this approach seemed to be warranted.

Finally, it must be noted that those I interviewed were strategic forces officers. Enlisted men play a limited role in the strategic services, and cannot be considered members of a highly trained, cohesive elite in the same way that the officers can. Once a young man enters a school feeding one of the strategic services, he will receive the higher education, technical training and aculturation that will permit him to accept an almost life-long commission—twenty-five years—as a nuclear officer. This is very unlike the process by which a young conscript lands in the strategic service, serves for two years, and then is gone. His duties tend to be not highly technical, in many cases menial. He will likely have no opportunity to work in close proximity with the nuclear weapons themselves. Thus, the officer corps is the focus of this study of the "nuclear elite".

ELITA

The use of the Russified word "elita" to describe our Western concept of an elite military force was confusing to many people interviewed. To them, the word "elite" was associated with the privileged class of Communist Party aristocracy, a slightly unsavory word with which the members of the strategic nuclear forces did not want
to be associated. Their reactions varied, however, in an interesting way: several laughed and declared that the poor living standards and working conditions of strategic forces clearly signified that they were in no sense a privileged class. "These men are workhorses, not an elite," said one individual. U.S. servicemen would refuse to serve, declared another, "if they were as undefended as ours are in the social sense." Others drew back in clear distaste at having a tag applied to them that had been dishonored by association with Communist Party bureaucrats and do-nothings. The great Strategic Rocket Forces: these were men of action and honor, totally outside the Communist ruling class.

Those who had this second reaction were clearly much easier to talk to about the concept of an elite that I was reaching for: men with a clear sense of professional purpose and mission, highly trained into a cohesive force, enjoying significant psychological rewards—and less significantly, material rewards. The men who objected to being associated with the concept of an elite in its Communist Party guise were those who, when I raised these points, said, "Of course, if that is what you mean by an elite, then the strategic forces are one."

Those who focused on the lack of material rewards and poor living conditions were those who could not be convinced that the strategic forces were a model military organization. They did not, however, translate their disillusionment into rebellion, or criticize the dedication of those serving. They simply wanted to get out and move to something new: an auto parts store, a trading company in the new
"commercial" structures, a relative waiting with a new job in some distant part of the country.

To these individuals, the poor conditions of service and the complete lack of material rewards had in themselves become a terrible burden and reason to try the wide world outside of service. Opportunities just might be present that had not been there before. Although they might be something to be feared, they might also offer an advantage that had never before been present to those serving in the armed forces—and not only in the strategic service.

This sense of opportunity and choice is common to all of post-Soviet society today. Those who try to take advantage of it should not be censored nor should those who continue to do their duty as they see it. The situation is only interesting to this discussion in the sense in which it contrasts so sharply with the past—the formative years of the strategic nuclear forces.

One of those whom I interviewed spoke in detail of the history of the Strategic Rocket Forces. His story highlights the influence that the particular character of Soviet nationbuilding in the post-World War II era had on the formation of the only major military institution to be born after the war.

According to this individual, there had been long-range artillery "units" (chasti) since 1946, but the SRF was founded in 1959 by Nikita Khrushchev, who was "crazy" about the new missile technologies. His enthusiasm set off a major debate in the Soviet armed forces, for Khrushchev used the new technologies to argue for fewer men under arms. Because the USSR could now be defended by threat of nuclear retaliation,
Khrushchev declared that the Ground Forces could be cut by 1.5 million men—unilaterally, without reciprocal action by the United States or NATO.

For the army that had marched victorious into Berlin at the close of World War II, this attack on its perceived viability and dominance was greeted with disbelief, even rage. The debate over the move was long and bitter, in the end contributing to Khrushchev’s ouster four years later.

The formation of the SRF therefore took place during a time of challenge to the established order and to the premier service, the Ground Forces. If the Rocket Forces were to consolidate successfully, every advantage would have to be thrown their way, and quickly. The story of the first years of SRF shows that Khrushchev evidently did everything that he could to ensure this success. The first actual SRF deployments, which, according to this individual, occurred in 1961, were staffed by officers impressed into the SRF as they completed existing higher military schools—the Rostov artillery school, tank schools, navy schools, aviation schools.

My respondent had been trained as an aviation mechanic. He claimed that everyone in his class was simply lifted out of the air forces to become a “raketchik.” When I asked if anyone questioned the decision to turn them into Strategic Rocket Forces officers, he answered no—no one dared. Many, too, saw the newly forming service as an opportunity for rapid advancement.

But not all. Navy men, for example, tended to be unhappy because, rather than being stuck in a hole in the ground on the taiga, they would
have served in a force that offered opportunities to roam the blue ocean and visit foreign ports: a rare privilege for a Soviet citizen, especially in the 1950s and 1960s. Nevertheless, many of the Navy men did very well in the SRF. They had been trained as navigators, and had the technical skills necessary to cope with the missile environment. One very successful SRF officer, Ivan Ivanavich Oleinykh, who rose to become CINC of the Plesetsk SRF army, was one of this original class of SRF officers, who had come from Navy ranks.

But not all officers had the technical wherewithal to deal with the missile age. The aviation-trained officer noted, with some hauteur, that the "tankisty," those who had graduated from tank school, had the hardest time adjusting to SRF routines and duties. They simply did not have the training that they needed. Once selected, however, getting out was "complicated" (slozhno): a Russian euphemism for "practically impossible." Once the state asked, a man could not refuse to serve.

Initially, this enforced dedication to service did not bring any material rewards. When the SRF was first starting out, the food was not good, and the officers and enlisted men alike lived in barracks—twenty people to a unit. Because they had come out of school together, the officers all began as bachelors. When they began to get married, their families lived 30-40 km away, and could only be seen at intervals, when the officer was not on combat or routine duty. Living was tough, he said, and the focus was more on the missiles, this wondrous and horrible new technology, than on the people who worked with them. As my contact summed it up, the food was lousy, the barracks were crowded, but the environment for the missiles was pristine. The officers may have had
poor uniforms for everyday use, but they wore white coats while they were working with the missiles.

The difficult conditions of service did not, however, prevent the formation of a cohesive military force. The officers were "all young together"—they were dedicated to what they were doing; or at a minimum, were blessed with the camaraderie that comes of working closely together on the same mission and tasks in a difficult environment.

In 1964, however, the situation of the raketchiki began to change for the better. At that time, Khrushchev articulated a fundamental principle: SRF men must live well. As a result, a crash program began that resulted in the construction of base towns adjacent to missile deployment sites, a first for the SRF. These base towns were so firmly identified with Khrushchev that they went by the name "Khrushcheviki." They were designed on a standard pattern: stores, school, day care center, hospital, polyclinic, pool, sports complex, sauna, and officers' club—and of course, apartment buildings. By Western standards, the apartments would not be considered luxurious, but they were fine: two mixed-use rooms (living and sleeping), and a kitchen.

Living was improving in other ways too: salaries were good, and an officer could support a family of four—himself, wife, child, mother-in-law—and have money left over to acquire luxuries such as a refrigerator and a carpet. Thus, material rewards for SRF service began to fall into place.

Khrushchev also worked on the other symbols of elite service: The SRF officers ceased to wear white coats over scruffy uniforms. Instead, in one officer's words, "they began to dress like bomber pilots." The
timing of this upsurge in notice of the SRF bears noting. In 1964, the economy of the USSR was in the midst of a long upward cycle, and the improvement in the lot of SRF officers might have been due solely to the overall rise in living standards of the country as a whole.

It is curious, however, that Khrushchev should launch a comprehensive "reward" program for the SRF—defined by the principle that the officers must live well—just as his fortunes as national leader were beginning to falter. The SRF had been formed in the heyday of his campaign to cut back on the armed forces—especially the Ground Forces—by depending on the high-technology missile systems that the SRF would man. The campaign resulted in one successful unilateral cut in the Soviet armed forces in 1960–62; in 1964, Khrushchev proposed a second one. This second cut, however, provoked a strong reaction, and was a contributing factor in Khrushchev's downfall in November 1964.

Khrushchev possibly tried to balance the reaction to his cutting campaign by appealing to his new cadre of SRF professionals. Not only would he, in that case, have at least one loyal group of supporters in the armed forces; he would also have a model to showcase to the rest of the services—an example of the material advantages that a trim, modern, and professionalized army could enjoy.

This explanation makes rational sense, but the benefits of an SRF career would be difficult to maintain in the long run, even for a leader like Nikita Khrushchev, who could provide every advantage that the system offered. The difficulty emerged from a structure of SRF service that generates hardship difficult to compare to that suffered in the Ground Forces or even the Navy.
Several respondents explained it in this way: The SRF may have enjoyed the best living conditions in the armed forces, but that fact did not make up for the remoteness of the service. The Ground Forces and other service officers had a chance of being posted in or near a big city where they could grab a good apartment. Once they had laid claim to the apartment, one officer said, “even a gun would not get them out.”

Likewise, Ground Forces personnel had at least a remote opportunity to serve abroad. If a man served for only five years in East Germany, he would be “set for life” in terms of the durable goods he could acquire there.

For SRF officers, such chances were almost unheard of. Stuck out in the taiga at remote deployment sites, they could only dream of apartments in the big city. As for service abroad, it was impossible. SRF men were privy to super-secret programs, and could not possibly take that knowledge beyond the borders of the USSR.

Interestingly, although the SRF officers focused on remote duty sites as a unique problem of their own service, it was also named as a major difficulty for Navy men serving in the Arctic. In recent newspaper commentaries, officers serving on the Typhoon-class submarines out of Severomorsk have said that they feared having to retire in the Arctic and spend the rest of their days there. They could simply see no way, whether through changes of assignment or amassing capital, to acquire an apartment in a better region of the country.

This problem has probably been exacerbated by the economic crisis that has accompanied the breakup of the Soviet Union. Whereas previously the bonuses earned for service in the Arctic and other remote
locations gave an officer a good cushion for the future, today they have been eaten up by inflation. Thus, service that was in earlier times both an adventure and a boon now imposes extreme sacrifice—indeed, trapping those serving in the most inhospitable places, burdening them with the most difficult hardship.

But these recent problems were certainly not seen to be the fault of Khrushchev, who did everything he could to improve the lot of his raketchiki, transforming them into a service favored by the privileges of the Soviet system: apartments, health care, their own system of retail stores, recreation facilities—everything, in theory, to make life comfortable on the taiga.

These isolated environments in turn led to a unique culture for SRF officers and their families, a culture that led successive generations of sons into the service. As one second-generation SRF officer put it, the very rhythm of life in the base towns led most of the SRF sons into service. They knew no life outside the officers' club, sports complex, and school; had no friends who were not from those circles.

The psychological tension of the environment was also a strong influence. In the 1960s, there was always a sense of crisis: fathers went off to alert duty, sometimes for weeks at a time. Their wives, crying, would bid them farewell, fearing they would never see them again. This sense of crisis was exacerbated by two very real high-level alerts, the Cuban missile crisis (the "Caribbean crisis") and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. As a result, among the children of the base towns there was always a sense of danger, a psychological preparation for attack from an unseen enemy. It created an impetus to serve among
the sons of the raketchiki—and many of them are serving today, even to the third generation.

One officer maintained that the base town building program begun by Khrushchev continued until 1985. He was unclear, however, as to why it ended. It is possible the end of the program was tied to the close of the deployments of the fourth-generation ICBMs. It is also possible, however, that the building program simply fell victim to the stagnation that was plaguing the Soviet economy overall.

What is clear is that Khrushchev had begun a system of special care and privilege for the SRF that augmented a sense of being on the front line of East-West crisis. These factors did much to counteract the hardships imposed by isolated service in harsh conditions.

The similarity of these “garrison town” experiences also ensured that the children of SRF officers themselves went into the service, thus producing what one officer called “dynasties.” This phenomenon is not unique to the SRF nor to the armed forces of the USSR. The sons of military men often go into service.

In the case of the SRF, however, these dynastic tendencies may have served a more important function: the service was new in 1959, its first corps of officers impressed out of other service schools. If there had not been, within one generation, a tendency for the sons to follow their fathers, the SRF would have had to depend on other, probably less reliable, means of carrying on: continued raiding of other service schools, or dependence on the glamor of its high-technology weapon systems as an attractant, or the crisis atmosphere that the service offered. Each of these doubtless played a role.
Early in its history, however, the SRF was able to take into its newly formed schools students who had already been seasoned to its culture. They could therefore help to bring the service quickly to maturity as a tightly knit organization with very loyal members.

Following in a father's footsteps was always offered first as the reason why young men entered the service. Other reasons were less consistent: a way to rise above class, or to win a higher education and solid career. But the most prevalent response did have variations. Those interviewed noted that life in the SRF towns produced in some a reaction: they felt stifled by its narrowness, and wanted to get as far away from it as possible.

Despite these variations, a number of factors seem to have accelerated the rapid consolidation of the service: the dynastic tendency, the special towns and their facilities, and the rapid emergence of esprit de corps thanks to shared experiences of crisis. One would expect that a sense of participation in the rapid advance of Soviet missile technology would also have contributed to the process. According to one officer, however, this advance was not a boon, but a negative factor in his career. He was among the first class of SRF officers, those who had been drawn from other service schools. They had been expecting rapid advancement, the members of this "class," but instead they found themselves shunted aside in favor of graduates of the new SRF schools -- "greenhorns" as this officer called them.

The reason for this discrimination? We were told, this officer said, that our technological training was inadequate to the new generation of missiles arriving on the scene in the late 1960s. We
therefore had to take a backseat to neophytes fresh out of school. He was critical of the high command for this decision, saying that they wasted many experienced officers by shunting them aside in this way. His own career was stalled, he said, at a time when he expected to be gaining promotions.

Thus, according to one source, technological advancement was not a positive factor contributing to esprit de corps and the overall consolidation of the service. Instead, it was an unexpected barrier to advancement for the first generation of SRF officers.

This effect was not reported by other sources, so it is difficult to say whether it continued over time, or indeed affected all of the first generation in similar ways. Indeed, the same source's account of the advancement of Oleinykh to the command of the SRF army at Plesetsk seems to indicate that it did not. Nevertheless, technological progress and the deployment of new missile classes clearly was a mixed blessing for the service as it was growing and consolidating during its first ten years.
2. SELECTION, TRAINING AND CAREER PATHS

THE SCHOOLS

Five schools make up the system of higher education for the Strategic Rocket Forces: Rostov, Krasnodar, Kharkov, Perm and Serpukhov. These are what is known as "VUZy" (Vysshye uchebnye zavedeniya) in the educational system that is still intact in the former Soviet Union. They offer a five-year higher education in engineering or other "high-technology" fields; the students graduate with the equivalent of a U.S. university degree. Every officer entering the SRF must have a higher degree of this kind. One of my respondents noted, however, that this requirement is a bit of overkill. According to him, most SRF jobs could be performed with the equivalent of a three-year technical school (tekhnikum) degree. Nevertheless, he said, the powers-that-be decided in the 1970s that a high-technology environment like the SRF required a five-year degree.

To get into the SRF, one must either graduate from one of these five SRF schools, or from one of a few demanding higher schools training rocket scientists and engineers. Graduates receive the rank of lieutenant, and serve at that rank for two years to see how they perform. A similar system exists to "feed" the Navy's strategic submarine service: there are five naval higher schools in the St. Petersburg area, training in navigation, anti-submarine warfare, nuclear power, diesel-electric and gas-turbine power, and electronics. Except for the institute training for diesel-electric and gas-turbine
submarines, each of these schools has fed the nuclear service. Graduates would receive assignments on either attacks submarines (SSNs) or strategic strike submarines (SSBNs).

In the past, competition for a place in these higher schools was very tough; three or four applicants for each place were typical. In more recent years, fewer people have been applying, and one or two applicants per place has been more typical. Those I talked to attributed this drop in interest either to the idea that the romanticism has gone out of military service, or to the fact that better and more certain livings can be made elsewhere. They did not seem to believe that it was caused by a surge in pacificism or anti-nuclear feeling, which is a notion that has often been expressed in the media, especially by conservative military spokesmen.

Several individuals expressed the view that this drop in interest might soon be reversed. They attributed the possibility to several factors. First, parents see it as a way to ensure that their sons get a high-quality education and "not end up as drunkards". Second, concerns are looming that university and other higher education in the former Soviet Union will soon cost money—previously, it was entirely free of charge. Military education, however, will continue not only to be free, but also high-quality.

Those I interviewed felt that these factors would play an especially strong role because of the change in the military service law. In the Soviet armed forces, a military higher education resulting in a commission locked the individual in for twenty or twenty-five years of service. (Twenty years to receive a partial pension, twenty-five for
Accepting the diploma and commission, therefore, was essentially a commitment to a military career, from which one could escape only with difficulty—by getting oneself declared mentally incompetent, for example.

The new service law, which was under discussion at the time of my interviews, was to include various options for leaving the service after a certain period of time. One version proposes that an officer could resign his commission after five years of service following his graduation from a military school. One can imagine, therefore, that in the future military higher education might look more and more attractive to those unable to pay for higher education—once a limited service period was completed, a young man could walk away with an excellent technical education to apply in the civilian economy. Such crossovers from a military to civilian career were virtually impossible under the old system.

SELECTION AND TRAINING

Selection for the military schools proceeds according to the normal routine of Soviet higher education: entrance exams—e.g., in mathematics (written and oral), physics (written), Russian (written); character references—in the past these came from one's secondary school, and from the Komsomol or Communist Party; and interviews with a selection panel at the school. One respondent noted proudly that he got 5's (the highest mark) on the mathematics and Russian exams, and 4 on the physics exam, and that these were certainly sufficient to get him into the Navy school that he had chosen.
In addition to academic testing, each applicant to an SRF school is given a series of psychological tests (тестирование) that were portrayed to me as very similar to the tests given to fighter pilots, and very similar to the tests given to Strategic Air Command officers in the United States. The tests assess such things as an individual's ability to perform under pressure, his reaction to extremes of hot and cold, and his ability to work in tight spaces in close proximity to others. According to two senior staff officers, these tests are extremely difficult and designed for young, hearty souls. They both admitted that they would not like to have to take them at this point in their careers.

Along with the psychological testing goes a battery of physical tests, to determine the overall health of the applicant. Several interviewees noted, however, that physical type, size, and strength are less important in SRF jobs than overall mental fitness and academic achievement. One individual even noted that, although first and second year students in SRF schools work hard at athletics and are in good physical shape, by their third and fourth years they are spending more time at their books, and begin to "soften up." He saw that as a natural consequence of the academic grind to which they are subjected in their later years at school. It had no impact, in his view, on their fitness to serve as SRF officers.

The entire selection process takes three weeks, and selectors and selectees alike find it a grueling process. Several instructors commented on the degree to which their own perceptions and insight played a vital role in the selection process. All the tests in the
world can be given, they commented, but an experienced officer interviewing a candidate can get a much clearer picture of his chances for success in the SRF.

Selection interviews typically probe a candidate's reasons for wanting to enter the service, and this was a question which interested me as well. I asked it both in the personal sense—"Why did you choose the nuclear services?"—and in the general sense—"Why do individuals choose the nuclear services?"

The answers that I received to these questions were varied and interesting. Most respondents mentioned the "dynasty" factor, i.e., the sons who followed their fathers, or nephews who followed their uncles. Most also mentioned the opportunity for social advancement that nuclear service offered to those who grew up on collective farms or in factory towns—the strategic services gave them a means, in theory, to rise to a higher social class. This effect is not surprising from an historical perspective, for the Tsarist officer corps readily accepted the sons of workers and peasants who wanted to rise above their class. Most interesting is the fact that the effect evidently continued unabated in the "classless" post-revolutionary Soviet Union.

One retired submarine officer interviewed noted that "conditions were bad for the social climbers." They came into service with the highest expectations, but the least means to fulfill them. They had no connections to smooth the way to getting a decent apartment and other perquisites. Moreover, they tended to be practical people bent on one goal—penetrating the naval elite. They were bereft, therefore, of any romantic ideas about naval service that might have eased their
disappointment in the system and the tough conditions of service. All of these factors combined to create bad family problems, drinking and divorce first among them.

The romantics—and this individual included himself in their number—were much better off. He noted that he got into the Navy partly because his father had been a Navy man, but mostly because he had romantic notions not only about service at sea, but also in the Far North. Hunting and fishing were good, he said, as were Murmansk restaurants. The fresh air, the great outdoors—all of these drew him to serve in the Northern Fleet.

As for those with dynastic connections, they tended to make solid careers. According to the naval officer, these individuals would often only ‘punch a ticket’ in the Northern Fleet and then return to good staff jobs in Moscow. Many turned out to be excellent servicemen and submariners, however, outshining their fathers in some cases.

This view was confirmed by several SRF officers interviewed. Noting that the ‘hereditary tendency’ has sometimes extended to three generations, one officer said simply that the SRF does not suffer fools gladly. A ‘bezdarnyy’ (ungifted) son, no matter how important the father, would not do well.

One retired officer interviewed had an interesting reason for entering the Strategic Rocket Forces. His entry, he claimed, was completely by accident. Two of his friends dared him to come along for the entrance examinations. He was a skilled metalworker (slesar’), and did not see any particular reason to switch jobs. Nevertheless, when he passed the examinations and both of his friends did not, he decided that
he might as well enter the SRF school. He had a successful career in the service, retiring as a colonel and instructor at the SRF Academy in Moscow.

Thus, although a good pedigree can help in some cases, it does not seem to be necessary or sufficient for a successful career in the strategic services. If one does well on the entrance exams to an SRF school, a career in the service is very possible, whether one's background is welder, kolkhoznik, factory worker, or SRF princeling.

But one important factor has been used to exclude people from the strategic services: nationality. According to one interview, if an individual's passport read something other than Russian, Ukrainian or Byelorussian, then he would be excluded from serving in the Strategic Rocket Forces. If this rule was strictly adhered to, then the SRF has no Jews, no Central Asian nationalities, and no Balts.

This claim is difficult to assess without a thorough survey of those serving in the SRF. Nevertheless, it seems clear from the publicity surrounding the breakup of the Soviet Union and its nuclear arsenal that few non-Slavs have ended up in the strategic services. Whereas, for example, it seems feasible from the number of Ukrainians trained as SRF officers that Ukraine could have its own nuclear service, it does not seem feasible that Kazakhstan could do the same, at least in the short run. Ukraine's potential in this regard is bolstered by the presence of one of the major SRF schools, Kharkov, on its territory. This subject will be taken up in greater detail in the section on the future of the strategic services.
After a student enters a school and embarks on training, he is under constant scrutiny as to his performance. In fact, for the first year of the five, he is essentially on probation, and can be asked to leave at any time. If he gets 3's (C's) in his grade book, he will be asked to leave. His instructors watch him closely, not only for his academic performance, but also for his self-control and willingness to submit to military discipline.

The instructors interviewed commented repeatedly on the importance of their judgement in determining a young man's fitness to serve, and in predicting his future level of success in the strategic forces. As one commented, young people come into the adult world with very broad horizons and enthusiasm. It's up to a wise commander to get the best out of that youthful enthusiasm, while not making too much of the pecadillos. For that reason, the teacher-student/commander-neophyte relationship is the most important factor determining who will become a good SRF officer. It essentially comprises, according to this officer, a "dynamic process of selection." One might also comment that the structure of such interpersonal relationships enables the formation of systems of influence that ease the way to future promotions. Lacking them, a young man would probably be doomed to an indifferent career.

CAREER PATHS

Students graduate from the SRF schools with the rank of lieutenant, and probably the position of "operator" in a missile unit. When a young man receives captain's rank, he becomes a "senior operator"; when he becomes a major, he receives the command of a unit. Deputy division commanders, according to my sources, are usually colonels, although
general officers have been known to hold those jobs. Beyond the deputy division commander level, all jobs are held by generals.

This straightforward recitation does not convey the sense of the gates that each SRF officer on his rise to the top must pass through. Two separate individuals, without prompting from me, drew pyramid structures with particular barriers represented on them. If an officer did not pass a barrier, then he could consider his career stalled at that level, or perhaps "topped out". The first comes at two years after graduation from school. One of my respondents noted how the young lieutenants sweated to know if they were to be promoted to the next level on time. Any extra time at that grade did not bode well for future success.

The next big decision point comes when an officer reaches the rank of major, and is up for selection to the SRF Academy. If he does not attend the SRF Academy's advanced courses, then he knows that he is condemned to an indifferent career. The colonels and one-star generals wait, in turn, for selection to the General Staff Academy. By this time, however, they may be commanders of a division or even an SRF army, and so can be considered to have "made it."

Those who do not make it can nevertheless count on a lifelong career. Unlike the U.S. armed forces, where officers generally must be promoted up or get out, the professional Soviet officer corps has held onto officers until they have retired at twenty-five years—or, if they were willing to take less than their full retirement pay, at twenty years. The only legal way to leave earlier was due to medical disability, including mental illness, or family problems. Papers
bearing such reasons for discharge, however, could cause serious difficulties for an individual trying to establish himself in a new career and civilian life.

To accommodate the great mass of officers who could not rise to the top of the hierarchy, there have been many horizontal directions in which an individual could head. According to my sources, these have especially included technical specialities such as computer programmer. Positions as instructors at SRF schools have also provided an excellent horizontal niche, as have jobs as training or maintenance specialists in the field. An individual might, in addition, continue to spend his time moving among operational units in similar jobs at the same grade.

I was curious as to whether there were any particular patterns to an officer's career: would an individual tend to serve in the same SRF army over time, or would he move from one end of the country to the other? Likewise, would he tend to serve consistently with his cohort out of school, or would he encounter completely new people as he moved from one base to the next? The answer that I received from my respondents was consistent: "po raznomy", or "in various ways."

As one individual said to me, he knew of men who had served their whole career in a single SRF army, eventually rising to the top command positions. In his own case, he said, he had served all over the Soviet Union: Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan, "where the wind blew so hard that I had to bend double against it when I came out of the shelter of buildings." (It is interesting to note that everyone who served in Kazakhstan mentioned the wind, its ever-presence and its strength.) Another individual ticked off an even more extensive list of
assignments: four in the Baltic states (including his first), two in Kazakhstan, one in Ukraine, one in Russia (in the field), and one in Moscow.

This same individual talked about what combat alert duty (boyevoye dezhurstvo) was like during his days in the SRF. It was, he said, a "sobachaya smena"-dog's shift: six hours in the silo, six to sleep, six for study and other work, then back to the silo again. The alert duty went on for four 24-hour periods, then an individual would have two days off at most before returning to regular work in the unit. He noted that each person going on alert duty underwent a medical check. If someone seemed sick or out of sorts, then he was denied permission to serve on alert. Although difficult, combat alert had its rewards: extra pay, and extra vacation—45 days v. the normal 30 days.

As to the colleagues one could expect to encounter, in some cases, individuals said that they served consistently with those whom they had known at school. In other cases, they said that they were constantly encountering new people, with no particular assignment pattern evident. Thus, the formation of "teams" of individuals who have worked and studied together over time does not seem to be a particular goal of SRF personnel policy. I had hypothesized that such policies might be emphasized, in order to build up a coherent elite over time. My sample of interviewees is small, however, so it is worth returning to this subject in future research.
3. FAMILIES

LIFE IN THE "GORODKI"

Any man serving in the strategic forces, and his family, must have one signal characteristic: the ability to lead a secluded ("Zamknutyy") existence among a very narrow group of people. Life in the gorodki, SRF base towns, is isolated and intense. In the 1960s especially, the atmosphere was charged with a sense of crisis that created an atmosphere of life on the edge.

Although the crisis atmosphere might have been self-induced from the perspective of foreign capitals, from the perspective of an officer on the ground at an SRF base, it provided his reason for being. It clearly contributed to a feeling of tight community in the base towns, from the senior officers to the smallest children. The atmosphere that they created also encouraged a strong sense of duty among family members, which resulted in many sons following in their father's footsteps.

At the same time, the situation was not the same for every officer, since families adapted in different ways to the harshness and isolation of service conditions. One officer, for example, told how he watched his daughter grow for only two years of her childhood, while he was serving in Ukraine and his family was with him. Otherwise his wife, a Moscow native, stayed in Moscow to work and live, seeing her husband as often as she could. She recounted how, while her husband was serving in
Kazakhstan, she commuted for three days a week to Alma-Ata—no easy feat considering the uncertainties of Soviet air transportation.

Situations like these are created by the complexities of Soviet life, especially its housing conditions. In the case described above, the wife, as a native Muscovite, had a family apartment there. Her right to that apartment, and to live in Moscow, had to be maintained at all costs, even if it meant commuting to Alma-Ata.

She also had a responsible job as a teacher, which would have been difficult to obtain in an SRF garrison town. The wives of SRF officers generally are highly educated, with degrees as doctors (vrachi), teachers, or engineers. There are never enough jobs for them, however, in the little towns, which have perhaps two or three stores, one clinic, one hospital, one pool and recreation center, and one school. Left in the unusual situation, for the Soviet Union, of being jobless, the wives put their energy into raising their children and fixing up their apartments.

This investment of time and energy makes it difficult to move when the time comes for the next posting. The difficulty is greater when one considers the poor conditions that might await them. Only very senior officers—the unit commander and his deputy—inherit particular apartments from their predecessors. Everyone else takes what he can get, in some cases much worse than the previous quarters. One submarine officer's wife left him when the "apartment" that they were assigned turned out to be a storage room for guns and ammunition.

Because of these great uncertainties, many wives simply stay put when they get situated in a comfortable location, keeping the children
with them while the husband moves on to a new assignment. This is one more reason why apartments do not "free up" for new arrivals. In a good location, a family may stay in an apartment until the husband retires from service, when he has a right to return to where they reside. It then becomes his retirement residence.

The issue of viable living space is also a key reason why SRF officers living in Ukraine have elected to remain there, although it has meant taking the oath of allegiance to a new country. The city of Khmelnitsky, near missile deployment sites in Ukraine, is not a typical garrison town in that it is comfortable, well located, and has a pleasant climate. The SRF officers who have elected to remain there, and taken the oath of allegiance to Ukraine, have done so because they cannot conceive of uprooting their families into the uncertain environment of Russia, where living conditions are already unbelievably poor for those returning from Eastern Europe.

But the housing dilemma and the tensions it produces during the current period are only a single aspect of life as it has been in a strategic forces unit or "collective," to use Soviet parlance. The family members might live a narrow existence, according to some, but the traditions and routines of service life have done much to foster their mental health and physical comfort.

ROLE OF ZHENSOVETY

The ways in which officers' wives cope with life in the gorodki is one telling illustration of this phenomenon. A woman who had lived for many years in SRF garrison towns told me that life there "is like a cauldron where everyone is thrown together to cook." If organizations
like the women's councils (zhensovety) did not exist, then the wives would have no escape valve for the tensions that build up. Officers interviewed affirmed this view, saying that the gorodki were places where "gossip could come to rule as law" if measures were not taken to ensure the good morale of family members.

Two kinds of measures are apparently important, the first having a long tradition, the second newer and under development. The first is voluntary service and education activities associated with the women's councils; the second, new employment programs based in the garrison towns. As day-to-day conditions of life have worsened for SRF families, the traditional service activities have apparently been eclipsed, while the employment programs have gained in importance. Creating jobs in the gorodki is seen to serve multiple purposes, which will be discussed in detail below.

As for the traditional volunteer activities, they have a long and honored history. In the 1930s, a young military wife named Valentina Semenovna Khitagurov went to serve with her husband in the remote Far East. Seeing the desolation at remote bases, she decided that steps had to be taken to "humanize" military service. She thus started a movement to improve base facilities and help young draftees adjust to service. In the years after, the more than 100,000 volunteers in her movement—they were known as khitagurtsy—planted flowers and vegetables, washed clothes for young soldiers, visited them when they were sick, helped them to write letters home, etc. One woman with whom I talked, who had known Khitagurov in her old age, said that she remained throughout her
life a well-loved figure and a symbol of the voluntary service ethos that has been a centerpiece of zhensovet activity.

In recent years, the movement has continued to play a role. During the war in Afghanistan, for example, a “big sister” program was instituted under which women wrote to young soldiers serving there. With the emergence of ethnic conflict in various regions of the former USSR, a “Committee for Work in Hotspots” (Komitet po rabote s goryachimi tochkami) was created to help those serving in conflict areas—and their families—to manage.

This voluntary service work is only one aspect of zhensovet activity, however. Another major area is education and training. The women’s councils have traditionally organized all kinds of classes for women and their children: knitting, sewing, crafts and cooking for the women; and dance, music, crafts and hobbies for the children. A popular class that I observed in Kharkov involved silk-flower making. Several of the participants asked me if they could make a living doing it in the West. I had to answer, “No.”

Related to these activities, and often drawing on them, are musical evenings and special parties to celebrate holidays—a New Year’s party for the children, for example, that showcases a children’s folk dance group and choir. In addition to the voluntary work needed to put such events together, each zhensovet had one paid position, an instruktor po rabote sredi, who was a kind of chief administrator and facilitator for its activities, from classes to parties. She could also disburse funds to pay for them. This woman was part of the Main Political Administration (MPA) or Communist Party hierarchy, and was responsible
to the political officer of the unit. In turn, the political officer was officially responsible for morale, so his leadership was important to the zhensoviet. In the end, of course, the military commander of the unit had the ultimate responsibility for morale, and the tone that he set was of great importance.

With the dismemberment of the MPA and banishment of the Communist Party from the armed forces, the paid facilitator has also vanished, to the effect that there is no central focal point for organizing recreational activities, and no central fund to pay for them. The effect on morale has been significant, although some commanders have continued to support the activities from their own funding sources. The classes observed in Kharkov were still actively attended, and were seen as one way to provide training for money-making ventures.

In the past, however, their main purpose was much different. Several individuals, male and female, told me that the lack of jobs for wives in garrison towns meant that the women lavished an inordinate amount of time on their living quarters, using the skills gained in craft or sewing classes to beautify their apartments. This care, in turn, meant that the apartments became more difficult to leave when it came time to move. It became, in effect, yet one more reason why wives and children tended to stay put in apartments when the husband moved on to another post.

The same phenomenon applied to progeny. SRF families, I was told, tend to be mnogodetnyy (multi-child, i.e., big), which in Soviet parlance means two or three. These children enjoyed a situation unusual for Soviet families, a mother at home who could be almost wholly focused
on their upbringing. This phenomenon might be one factor contributing to the tendency of SRF sons to follow their fathers: an overall positive memory of family life in the service, even when it meant separation from their fathers for some period of time.

But women's council education activities extended well beyond home and family, encompassing events designed to expand intellectual scope and interest. One event used was the usnyy zhurnal, literally, "oral journal," an afternoon or evening of mixed presentations, information and entertainment. These journals would be organized into different "pages"; for example, the first might be a general political page during which the commander-in-chief of the SRF would come to speak, and then answer questions; the second, the women's council from a garrison would do a presentation on their day-to-day lives and special problems; the third, a famous actor, who would often donate his services, would do an "artistic portrait." Between each page would be additional presentations of music, dancing, poetry, etc.

In the past, oral journals at the Central Army Hall in Moscow would draw 800-850 people. They were also popular on the local level, where the local women's council would serve as the organizing mechanism. Since 1990, however, as people have become more wrapped up in the day-to-day problems of living, they have begun to lose interest in these types of activities. There is simply no energy for intellectual pursuits.

Generally speaking, the pure service and education orientation that characterized women's council activities in the past has been overshadowed by the economic crisis under way in the former Soviet
Union. It has produced a single-minded focus on raising the earning power of military families who have not seen their incomes advance at anything near the rate of inflation. That has meant finding paid employment for the wives of serving officers. Several individuals stressed that the women tend to be highly educated—doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers—but may have never been able to find work. They are now in the position of putting skills learned in zhensovet classes to work in home-based labor or small enterprises and workshops. Often, these activities involve sewing or knitting, i.e., the garments industry, or high-technology industries such as radioelectronics. This emphasis on developing employment options seems to be taking precedence over the traditional zhensovet service and education roles.

In addition to the near-term financial benefits of such work to military families, several senior officers indicated that they see an important long-term need that it could answer. According to these officers, the immobility burdening many SRF families will have to be addressed. Developing light industry in the gorodki is one way to do so, especially if it can draw on talents, resources and facilities already in the area.

The scenario unfolds as follows: as radical cuts occur in nuclear forces, many nuclear missile deployment sites will close down. In theory, the garrison towns attached to them should become ghost towns. In reality, however, many of the people now living and serving in these garrisons have no place to go, for the military housing elsewhere is enormously overburdened. But in the gorodki, housing is not only available, but much improved by its inhabitants. Therefore, officers
should be encouraged to stay where they are upon demobilization. The
jobs to convince them to do so can be developed in situ, by turning
military facilities into light industrial parks and encouraging small
enterprises. There is already one such "enterprise zone" being
developed at the SRF garrison town of Plesetsk. It should be noted that
my respondent stresses that an enterprise zone approach would work only
in the European regions of the former Soviet Union. They would not be
appropriate for extremely remote sites with poor roads and rail service.

The home-based projects and workshops being developed to employ the
wives of officers can thus be seen as a leading edge for future
developments, if the final goal is indeed to develop the gorodki into
viable towns with jobs and other economic activity outside the military
sphere. Indeed, although the zhensovet may no longer place its major
emphasis on the traditional role of morale-building, it may be leading
the way in developing important job skills and potential. Therefore, it
might have become, through natural evolution, a "grassroots" institution
enabling demobilization and demilitarization.

This process has not occurred without loss, however. The women's
councils have always performed special advocacy for the wives and their
children, serving as a focal point for the commander's attention in
providing aid for difficult family cases. Today, that advocacy role
seems to be in flux, because the Main Political Administration has
disappeared from the armed forces, and has not thus far been wholly
replaced. The women's councils have the potential to resume that
advocacy role, but they now seem to be dependent on the effectiveness
and forbearance of the local commanding officer.
Although the role here foreseen for the women's councils is positive, I must note that these organizations bear some of the guilt for obscuring the realities of Soviet, now post-Soviet, life. One of their primary functions was to communicate the myths of the Communist system to families and especially to the wives, who in latter years have probably had the greatest reason to disbelieve as they struggled with increasingly difficult living conditions. This mythology likely served as a barrier at times to the resolution of problems.

A brief story illustrates the phenomenon: I was interviewing two members of the zhensovet at a higher military school in Kharkov. They were both younger women and both quiet—perhaps shy, perhaps terrified. I talked to them about my work, and showed them photos of my children to help them to relax. Then I started to ask them about their plans, now that Ukraine has become independent. Were they planning to stay on in Kharkov? The first woman's husband was about to undergo a routine transfer: they would have been scheduled to leave Kharkov no matter what upheaval had occurred in the world. The second woman, however, who was bolder, said simply that her family was getting out of Ukraine. Her husband had no intention of serving in the Ukrainian armed forces.

Where were they going? I asked. To Leningrad, she replied. (She never once called the city by its newly resumed name, Saint Petersburg.) Had they had any help in arranging this move, either from the Ukrainian or Russian Ministry of Defense? No, she scoffed, they had arranged the move, and her husband's new post, themselves, using family and other connections.
At this point, a third woman entered the room. She was purposeful and confident, and the two women with whom I was talking addressed her respectfully by her first name and patronymic. They also stiffened visibly, and I did not hear another interesting word out of them. I heard instead about all of the programs that the *zhensovet* had organized, all of the classes that it had arranged, all of the kindergartens that it had opened. The late arrival was the official representative of the *zhensovet*, and its senior board member. Her instincts as an old-line Soviet propagandist ran true: she was not about to talk to a foreigner about the difficulties of moving people around in the wake of Ukraine's declaration of independence.

I do not expect the tradition of xenophobia to give way totally in the face of difficult questions of the kind that I was asking. Nevertheless, I must note that my positive portrayal of the potential of the women's councils to serve as a "leading edge" in developing new opportunities should be tempered by an old reality: the councils were propaganda organizations, and this old role might inhibit their institutional flexibility.

Furthermore, few Soviet or post-Soviet women's organizations can be said to have much power. For that reason, the leading edge role that the *zhensovets* might play would likely be limited to proving a principle. Large-scale implementation and, in the end, the interesting jobs to emerge from it, will probably fall not to the wives, but to their demobilized husbands.
4. FUTURE OF THE STRATEGIC FORCES

CRISIS IN THE NUCLEAR SERVICES

The winter of 1992 was a difficult time for the strategic nuclear forces of the former Soviet Union. In the train of its independence process, the Kiev government required all men serving in Ukraine to swear an oath of allegiance to it. By the spring, this policy had been joined by a second—the declaration that Ukraine would exercise administrative control over the nuclear forces on its territory.

The Kiev government reasoned that it had an obligation to ensure the nonuse of nuclear weapons on its territory (negative control). Therefore, it argued, Ukraine “owned” those weapons and had the right to administer them. This right would include scheduling and organizing maintenance and training, controlling the supply network to the bases, and exercising its authority in personnel decisions to include both promotions and transfers.

Ukrainian insistence on administrative control was from the outset a major source of dispute with Moscow. The Russians insisted that the strategic nuclear weapons were CIS strategic assets that could not be owned by the individual CIS country on the territory of which they

---


happened to be based. The consistency of this Russian position was later clouded, however, by the insistence of CIS Commander-in-Chief Yevgeny Shaposhnikov that all nuclear weapons on the territory of the CIS should in fact be owned by Russia.\(^3\) Shaposhnikov went so far as to muse, in a November interview in Izvestiya, that he was uncomfortable with the command of the strategic nuclear forces, and believed that it rightfully belonged with Russia, not the CIS.\(^4\)

Whether the source of these perorations was the technical difficulty of establishing a CIS link into the nuclear command and control system or his own self-doubt, Shaposhnikov succeeded in creating yet more tension between Ukraine and Russia over this issue. Ukrainian President Kravchuk rejected this view, again insisting that Ukraine had to guarantee to the world that the nuclear weapons on its territory "will not be used by a third state."\(^5\) The Ukrainian parliament, at the same time, was steadily hardening its position against ratifying START and the Lisbon Protocols. In November 1992, it seemed unlikely that Kiev would ratify the two agreements without major prodding (and assistance) from the Western governments, especially the United States. Indeed, President Kravchuk and Prime Minister Kuchma both publicly warned of such an outcome.\(^6\)

This dispute created a complex, heavy burden for the strategic nuclear forces serving in Ukraine. They had already, out of economic

\(^3\)See Marshal Yevgeny Shaposhnikov remarks, Nezavisimaya gazeta, October 8, 1992; and Krasnaya zvezda, September 30, 1992.


necessity, sworn an oath of allegiance to Ukraine. Several nuclear officers interviewed noted that most of those serving in Ukraine could safely serve out their time, without being pressed particularly about moral choices and decisions. Kravchuk had proclaimed, about the same time that they were taking their oaths, that the last of the strategic nuclear weapons would depart the country in 1994.7 The officers probably believed that by that time they could embark on a safe retirement, perhaps building new careers in a relatively comfortable and prosperous Ukraine.8

The dispute with Russia changed that simple vision, as did the Ukrainian parliament’s increasingly pronuclear stance. A further contributing factor, it must be noted, is the longer denuclearization period allowed by START and the Lisbon Protocols. Instead of contemplating retirement at the end of 1994, the strategic nuclear officers in Ukraine suddenly found themselves serving, under tense and uncertain circumstances, until the end of the START-I reduction period, the year 2000.

We can only speculate as to how SRF officers serving in Ukraine have responded to this changed circumstance. We know that some bomber pilots reacted to the overall situation by removing themselves, and

their aircraft, from Ukraine. Missle officers, for better or worse, do not have such mobile platforms. They must content themselves by staying with their units, or leave entirely for an uncertain future in Russia.

In Kazakhstan, by contrast with Ukraine, trouble for the strategic nuclear forces sprang not from grand political maneuvering, but from crisis at a local level. February 1992 saw a series of riots by SRF construction troops at facilities at Baikonur, the space launch complex. The riots were over supply issues: inadequate food and water, heat, and electricity. Less than one month later, junior members of the Baikonur officer corps threatened to strike over similar issues.

According to an individual interviewed in Kazakhstan, also at issue was the absolute isolation of the troops serving at Baikonur. Even if granted leave, there are no buses or trains to the area, and places on the military aircraft flying in and out are almost impossible for a normal soldier to obtain. SRF enlisted men are therefore virtual

---


12This difficulty in a country-wide context was confirmed to me by representatives of two separate servicemen's unions, Schit' and the Independent Union of Officers. A serviceman will often, according to these individuals, spend his entire leave trying without success to get home.
prisoners at Baikonur—and, no doubt, at other isolated bases—for the length of their time in service.

The Baikonur riots lasted only a few days, but they evidently shook the government of Kazakhstan enough for it to take some significant steps. Apparently resolving never to allow a breakdown to occur again, Alma-Ata assumed the responsibility of ensuring that Baikonur and other military sites in Kazakhstan were reliably supplied with food, water, electricity, and other energy supplies.\footnote{K. Borodinov, “From Alma-Ata: Servicemen in Kazakhstan Are Under the President’s Protection,” Krasnaya zvezda, Mar. 18, 1992, in FBIS Central Eurasia Military Affairs Report, Apr. 1, 1992.}

This resolve, in turn, has seemed to produce an interesting impact on the Strategic Rocket Forces deployed in Kazakhstan. Although the Nazarbayev government has eschewed loyalty oaths and claims of administrative control in its effort to work with Moscow rather than at odds with it, its assumption of supply responsibilities for the SRF bases in its territory have produced a de facto administrative control, at least in part, over the SRF troops deployed there. According to one Kazakh official interviewed on this point, such control is a natural effect of the long denuclearization transition, which will now extend from 1993 to approximately 2000. Kazakhstan will never officially insist on administrative control as the Ukrainians have, he asserted, but instead will naturally accumulate “administrative control functions,” as the transition drags on, for the nearly 50,000 SRF officers and enlisted men serving there.

An interview conducted in Alma-Ata during my October 1992 visit confirmed this opinion. The government official interviewed, noting the
"de facto control" effect, stated that certain SRF unit commanders are now reporting to the Nazarbayev government in Alma-Ata, "rather than to the White House in Moscow." If this statement is correct, then SRF officers in Kazakhstan are also in the midst of making difficult choices, even absent the histrionics of the Ukrainian situation.

The emergence of this administrative control issue, and the crises that gave birth to it in both Ukraine and Kazakhstan, point to the unprecedented challenge under way to the strategic nuclear forces of the former Soviet Union. Nuclear officers are being forced to make choices that in kinder times were as remote as a trip to the moon. Under current circumstances, however, they are a daily reality. The officers in question seem to be adapting through a combination of accommodation, realism, and professionalism.

ADAPTATION

These three characteristics were most clearly visible to me in the adaptations taking place in training at the higher military schools (VUZy) feeding the strategic forces. This discussion includes consideration of both strategic offensive and defensive forces, since one of my most interesting and productive research opportunities was a visit to the Higher Military Radioelectronic Engineering Academy for the Air Defense Forces (PVO) in Khar'kov.

The Khar'kov PVO Academy, along with the Khar'kov Higher Military Engineering School for the Rocket Forces and a third aviation engineering academy, have formed the basis for a new national defense university of Ukraine, the main purpose of which is to turn out highly skilled technical specialists for Ukraine. Maj. Gen. Vladimir Tolubko,
formerly head of the SRF Academy only, has assumed the overall directorship of this university, and has moved his offices into the elegant building of the PVO Academy on the main square in Khar'kov.

Tolubko emphasized to me that the university would train specialists for both military and civilian employment, emphasizing the needs of the Ukrainian government in fields such as nuclear energy and civilian space launch. The chief of military education in the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, Maj. Gen. Yury Prokof'ev, confirmed this plan, noting that 90 percent of the space engineering work of the former Soviet Union had been done in Khar'kov.

The university will also clearly continue to train military specialists, including those studying "po kontrakty" (on contract) from other countries. These, whether civilian or military, need not be limited to the CIS states. General Prokof'ev stated that the university would welcome Americans—anyone, in fact, who could pay for instruction.

The range of military specialties to be offered was less clear. Air defense and space defense were clearly to remain in the curriculum, but missile specialties were not openly included in the list. For example, Tolubko in one interview noted that the university would be training "raketchiki," which is normally taken to mean those serving in the Strategic Rocket Forces. When pressed on the question, however, he stated that these "raketchiki" would be trained for strategic defensive purposes (e.g., space/missile defense), or for the civilian space launch industry.

Although it should be noted that the same laws of ballistics apply to both offensive and defensive missile applications, it is impossible
to draw inferences from this information about intent to establish Ukrainian strategic nuclear forces. The Ukrainians clearly have the technical training base available should they decide to do so. This circumstance would be the most stressing and challenging for existing strategic troops in Ukraine. Far from making a choice of early retirement, they instead would have contributed to the birth of a new nation, which they would then have to decide to serve or not. Thus far, they have been spared this difficult decision.

The emphasis on adaptation in the mission structure of the Ukrainian schools is nevertheless important, as is the overall reorganization that went with it. Ukraine has 34 higher military schools on its territory—according to Prokof'ev, far too many for the needs of the nation, even assuming continued contract training of students from abroad. The move to combine three of the best high-technology VUZy into a single defense university is part of a positive trend toward consolidation and downsizing in the overall system.

The response of individuals to these changes also indicate a tendency toward accommodation, realism, and professionalism. As noted in the earlier section on selection and training, some officers and their families were making arrangements to move back to Russia, plans that they had engineered through personal and professional contacts. Since a government-sponsored system to organize such transfers was not quickly forthcoming, individual efforts to arrange them are clear examples that pragmatic steps to work the system are still effective—indeed, they are the only realistic way to achieve the desired result.
It is likely that similar transfer arrangements are also being worked out by individuals at the SRF unit level in Ukraine and Kazakhstan, and possibly also in Belarus. I have no direct statements on this, however, since individuals interviewed were very cautious about discussing the current environment in the field. I must also reiterate the effect noted above—that SRF officers in Ukraine willingly swore allegiance to the country early in 1992, expecting within a few years to be retired there. This effect would have been less pronounced in Kazakhstan no matter what the Alma-Ata government’s position were to be on loyalty oaths. By all accounts, the SRF bases in Kazakhstan are an extraordinarily harsh environment in which to serve. Thus we can speculate that, under any circumstances, more officers would be seeking transfers from Kazakhstan than from Ukraine.

The individual pragmatic approach in the training realm was also reflected in discussions that I had in Alma-Ata in October 1992. Kazakhstan’s difficulty in high-technology military training lies not in a surfeit of schools, but in an overall lack of them. Unlike Ukraine with its 34 military VUZy, Kazakhstan has only two, both of which train for specialties outside the high-technology realm. The Kazakh armed forces are therefore bound to make use of schools in other republics, whether through contract arrangements or some other system.

In the near term, that system is apparently based on the personal professional contacts of unit commanders based in Kazakhstan. One

---

14 Belarus, with only 72 mobile SS-25 missiles, is the simplest case among the CIS states where nuclear weapons are deployed, and the one most likely to achieve early nonnuclear status.

individual noted, for example, that he had recently completed the space engineering school at Mozhaisk, near St. Petersburg. When asked whether citizens of Kazakhstan would continue to study there, he replied that arrangements were still being made, but not because a contract system had been worked out between the two governments. Instead, individual unit commanders were recommending promising individuals directly to the commandant at Mozhaisk, depending on personal contacts with him to procure a place for their proteges. The tuition of these individuals, in turn, were in some cases being paid directly from unit funds.

The training issues described above are far from the most perfect illustration of adaptation for serving strategic nuclear units. Nevertheless, accommodation, realism, and professionalism seem likely to extend from those training to active duty personnel—the first two factors because the economic and housing crises in the country demand it; the last, because not only a professional code of ethics continues to exist, but also because professional networks continue to operate effectively for their members. Those who can exercise professional contacts to move to safer ground do so, but those left in place can continue to rely on their superiors in the unit or base command structure.

This system, developed during the Soviet era but tested as never before today, places superhuman demands on commanding officers. Many of them seem to rise to the demands, but others are overwhelmed by them. One individual interviewed told the story of a unit commander at an SRF

---

16 As one SRF officer put it, "I can only say that the one thing that remains sacrosanct here in the rocket forces is alert duty." Moscow Ostankino Television (1st Program), Feb. 23, 1992, in FBIS Soviet Union Daily Report, Feb. 27, 1992.
base who was remarkably successful at moving manpower, spare parts, and supplies when and where he needed them. Eventually, however, this individual suffered a heart attack that forced him to retire from service. His unit suffered as a result—the commander’s replacement could not reproduce his effectiveness.

In some ways it seems absurd that a single individual could have such an enormous influence on a unit’s health and well-being. In other ways, however, it appears to reflect the reality of economic and political relationships in the former Soviet Union. Military bases always had an organic relationship with the politicians and economic leaders in their local areas—the Party secretary with control over local construction assets, or the kolkhoz director who controls important sources of food supply.

During the breakup period, these relationships appear to have become more important, as economic and political relationships have coalesced across the board at regional and local levels. Kolkhoz and enterprise directors, political leaders, and military commanders all have an interest in maintaining a stable local environment, and they maintain a close relationship to achieve it. One might speculate, for example, that this effect has also contributed to the "de facto" administrative control described in Kazakhstan. Having experienced the scare of last February’s riots, local authorities will do everything in their power to ensure that light and heat continue to be supplied to SRF bases on their territory, along with food, water, and other supplies. To ensure the flow, it does them no good to appeal to Moscow at this juncture. Instead, they turn to Alma-Ata. The growth of regionalism
thus reinforces the trend toward Alma-Ata's de facto administrative control of SRF forces in Kazakhstan.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

As long as the denuclearization promise inherent in the START I and Lisbon Protocols continues to be relevant, the Strategic Rocket Forces and strategic nuclear forces in general will not be challenged in a fundamental way. In May 1992, the presidents of Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus signed the START I Treaty and Lisbon Protocols, thereby acquiescing to the use of START I as the instrument by which their territories will be denuclearized. The agreements were afterwards ratified by Russia, Kazakhstan, and the United States, but as of this writing, they had not been ratified by Belarus and Ukraine. Ukraine, of the two, was a particularly difficult case, with the parliament in Kiev insisting that it could not vote to ratify unless some important conditions were met—some of them having to do with increased economic aid from the West, others with security guarantees, especially against potential Russian aggression. Without such support, Ukrainian Prime Minister Kuchma and President Kravchuk warned, START and Lisbon might never be approved for ratification by the Ukrainian parliament.17

As long as the denuclearization policy of the non-Russian republics remains intact, the challenge for the strategic nuclear forces is not unlike the one facing the rest of the armed forces: How can they grapple with the problem of downsizing and demobilization, moving men out of the service and yet helping to provide for their economic welfare

17Freeland, November 5, 1992; Reuters, November 10, 1992.
after their retirement? That the Strategic Rocket Forces are considering the problem was evident in the interviews that I conducted. Bases will close as radical reductions set in, and this real estate must be turned to good economic purpose in order, in turn, to ensure a smooth demobilization. Relevant here were the references to "industrial parks" and small enterprise development mentioned earlier. In this context, the problems of the strategic forces are no worse than that of any other service, and their prospects seem somewhat better. Although they will undergo radical reductions, there remains a consensus around their missions as well as a plan for their future modernization. As for the "raketchiki" and bomber pilots serving in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, they are either scouting a safe and comfortable retirement, or preparing to transfer to Russia.

It is when these comparatively easy choices are upset that the challenge will come to the institutions. If the challenge is to come, then it seems likely to come first from Ukraine, where a significant pronuclear lobby exists. Even in this most difficult of circumstances, however, it is important to recall that the members of the pronuclear lobby who have been most outspoken about the need for a Ukrainian nuclear arsenal have insisted that it will be a minimal nuclear deterrent. Maj. Gen. Vladimir Tolubko, for example, spoke in our discussions of a minimal force made up of the 46 silo-based SS-24 ICBMs in Ukraine.

A small arsenal would mean that the problem for the strategic nuclear forces essentially remains the one they face today: downsizing and demobilization. Only a very small percentage of those now in the
forces would face the decision to serve Ukraine rather than the CIS.
Indeed, if the Ukrainian government so chose, it could probably train a completely new cadre of troops within a few years—its training facilities certainly remain in place to do so. In that case, the issue would be one of building a new institution, not trying to convert the loyalties of the old.
Appendix A

LIST OF QUESTIONS FOR "PORTRAIT OF AN ELITE:
STRATEGIC NUCLEAR FORCES OF THE FORMER SOVIET UNION"

1. Family background: Did you come from a military family? Professional/Technocratic? Workers?
2. Career choice: How did you become interested in military service? How did you become interested in the strategic nuclear services? Did you consider it a life-long profession or career?
3. Education: Did you attend a special military secondary school? Higher military school? University? Tekhnikum or college? What were your major subjects? Physics? Engineering? Other technical or nontechnical specialization?
4. Selection for service: How did you come into the strategic nuclear services? Through the draft? From higher military school? How competitive was the selection process? Was there a high demand for places?
   -- What criteria were used? Physical stature, fitness? Mental capacity, academic performance? Psychological fitness? Political reliability?
   -- What was the process? Entrance examinations for special schools? Medical or psychological testing? Letters of recommendation? Who were the recommenders?
5. Training: Did you undergo rigorous training to weed out those who would not make the grade as nuclear officers? Are nuclear officers held to more rigorous training standards? Do you think that your training experience contributed to a feeling of belonging to an elite organization?
6. Career patterns: What was your first assignment in the strategic nuclear forces? How long did you stay there? What was the nature of the job? Were your colleagues from training assigned to similar jobs? Were any of them with you in the same unit? Was your unit cohesion maintained over time? Did you expect to work with the same people in different assignments? Did you move frequently from job to job? Did you expect to travel long distances to a new assignment? Or might you be assigned within the same division?
7. Social welfare: Were you married when you entered the strategic nuclear service? Did your wife work? What were conditions like for the families living on the bases where you were assigned? In terms of living quarters, food supply, medical care, education? Did your base or unit itself produce any food or construct housing and other family
facilities? How were social issues addressed on the base or in your unit? Were there several mechanisms that could be used?