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SUMMARY

This paper is an up-to-the-minute account of political developments at the pinacles of power in Russian science, mainly in 1993. It describes the maneuverings and the shifting balances between (1) the Ministry of Science and Technology Policy and its minister, Boris G. Saltykov, (2) the State Committee for Higher Education with ministerial status and its chairman Vladimir G. Kinelev, and (3) the Academy of Sciences under its President Osipov and Vice Presidents Gonchar and Makarov, as well as other players, in the context of the continuing crisis of Russian science and the society at large.
SUMMARY OF POLITICS OF RUSSIAN SCIENCE
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Science in the USSR was organized in a manner different from most other countries. The differences may be summarized in three main points: 1) the existence of a gargantuan military-industrial complex with its own system of research and development; 2) the preeminence of the Academy of Sciences as a functioning research institution; and 3) the constant effort to organize planning of science.

It is doubtful that anyone ever knew how much was allocated to military R&D in the USSR. One suspects that the secrecy cloaked an enormous amount of inefficiency and waste, as well as some important projects meeting military needs. It is the tradition of the military sector being separate and not being accountable to civilian science agencies that should be emphasized to understand the current context.

The Academy of Sciences in Russia is the heir to the USSR Academy, which in turn was the heir to the Russian Academy established in the 18th Century. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Academy built up an extensive network of research institutions in the natural and social sciences—a constant emulation of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes in Imperial Germany. Thus, in addition to the elected Academicians and Corresponding Members of the Academy, there are tens of thousands of researchers and support staff employed at institutes administered by the Academy. Most of them are engaged in basic research, and the Academy has traditionally viewed itself as the guardian of the values of basic science. Many of those affiliated with the Academy regard it as a unique and invaluable Russian creation.

Throughout the Soviet period, efforts were made to create a mechanism to plan, or at least coordinate, science. The last of the agencies seeking to fulfill this role was the State Committee for Science and Technology (GKNT), precursor of the current Ministry of Science and Technology Policy (MinNauka). The GKNT never succeeded in organizing a coordinated program of S&T. The "levers" at its disposal were a modest amount of budget authority, the ability to assist with information, and the authority to design and finance "State Programs" in various fields of science. This was not enough to match the clout and independence of the large industrial ministries in applied science.

In basic science, it was able to have some influence on Academy and University research, but these institutions also received budget funding from other sources.

The conflict between the GKNT as agent of the government seeking to influence science policy and the desire for autonomy on the part of the Academy represents a "built in" tension in the system.

The major players in basic science in Russia today are the Ministry of Science and Technology Policy and the Academy of Sciences. The State Committee for Higher Education also plays a role, and it has the potential to grow over time.
Minister of Science and Technology Policy Boris C. Saltykov is the key figure. His Ministry, largely assuming the role of the GKNT and occupying its premises, is the conduit for budgetary funding for science (including the Academy) and higher education. Saltykov’s status has been somewhat diminished in the eyes of many due to two changes in the past year that were widely interpreted as “defeats.”

First, the Ministry of Science, Higher Education and Technology Policy surrendered responsibility for Higher Education to a separate State Committee for Higher Education with ministerial status. Second, Saltykov himself was relieved of his post as Vice Premier.

Both of these changes were multi-sided. Saltykov himself never particularly wanted responsibility for higher education. However, there was a major effort two years ago to reduce the number of ministries, and the alternative to giving the portfolio to Saltykov was to combine it in a “super education ministry” under Eduard Dneprov. Since the programs for science and education emphasize linkages, it made sense to try a single administration. However, this was opposed not only by Kinelev, but also by many of the university and other higher school (VUZ) rektors in Russia. At their self-organized conference in late 1992, they vociferously demanded an independent ministerial-level administration.

Within the Ministry of Science, Higher education and Technology Policy, higher education was under the jurisdiction of a State Committee for Higher Education, Chaired by Vladimir G. Kinelev. Much of Kinelev’s time was devoted to an effort to attain independent Ministerial status. It may well be better for all concerned that he now has this status. It may be easier to promote scientific cooperation among “equals” than in an environment of constant bureaucratic warfare.

Saltykov’s dismissal as Vice Premier was certainly a demotion. On the other hand, it did not affect his role in science. What he lost was overall coordinating responsibility for the “social welfare” portfolio—clearly a thankless and impossible job in Russian conditions. (Perhaps comparable to agriculture in the Soviet period—no one could possibly expect much from the individual in charge.)

The Russian cultural perception of these two changes is, of course, that Saltykov has lost power and status, and therefore must be severely weakened and probably on his way out. This may indeed be the case, and it is certainly the impression being given by representatives of the Academy (including the current russian Science Attache in Washington). But in Western management terms, it might also be argued that his Ministry has been “downsized” to become “leaner and meaner,” and that he has more time and resources to devote to his core constituency of basic science. He does still control significant budgets, and his opponents still consider it worth fighting with him. He cannot be ignored.

Major opposition to Saltykov continues to come from the Academy of Sciences. The Academy Presidium is particularly concerned about its loss of status and resources in the current economic crisis. Having enjoyed a privileged and usually unquestioned position as the distributors of resources and perks (including foreign travel), Academy officials are experiencing a severe readjustment period. Matters recently came to a head over the Chairmanship of the Russian Science Fund.
The RSF has been aborning for several years. It was initially designed to be a Russian NSF, with a large and growing share of resources distributed according to peer reviewed applications. Its creation was delayed multiple times between 1990 and 1992. When it was finally established, it was given responsibility for only 3% of the science budget, rather than the 10% or more initially envisaged. The Fund was supposed to be an independent agency supporting research at all types of scientific institutions. However, the Academy leadership resented this intrusion on its control over distribution of resources through its Presidium and Institute directors.

The temporary Chairmanship of the RSF was given to Academy Vice President Gonchar. He did not resign or take a leave from his Academy post to assume these duties. His Assistant was his assistant from the Academy, Zishchenko. They carried out a first round of applications and awards in early 1993. They deserve praise for managing to conduct a program quickly in a situation of increasing social and institutional breakdown. However, the process was widely criticized for Conflicts of interest, insider involvement and cronyism. The peer reviewers worked very rapidly, with some individuals processing up to 50 proposals in a day. And they did not recuse themselves from judging proposals written by close colleagues and in some cases co-authors.

When it came time to appoint a permanent Director of the RSF, Saltykov rejected the Academy's preference for Gonchar and chose Fonotov, a relative outsider. Zishchenko continues as his Assistant, and the RSF remains (for now) housed in the Academy Presidium Building with its database on the Academy's computers.

This decision seems to have been the final straw for the Academy leadership. A delegation consisting of Academy President Osipov and Vice Presidents Gonchar and Makarov visited Russian President Eltsin early in the summer and demanded that Saltykov be removed. They proposed an alternative candidate from the ranks of junior Academicians. They reportedly also questioned the need for a Ministry of Science at all, since the Academy could fulfill all its functions. Reports of this session circulated in Moscow all summer, contributing to general unease.

Following their meeting with Eltsin, Osipov and Makarov departed for another of their many trips abroad, giving Saltykov and his supporters an opportunity to counter-attack. Gonchar and Makarov, in particular, are not on very firm ground when they argue that "scientists should work for scientists, not for bureaucrats." As of this writing (September 1, 1993), Saltykov remains as Minister, and the wrangling continues. That Osipov, Makarov and Gonchar now deny that any discussion of these matters with Eltsin took place (they have accused the press of yellow journalism) suggests that they have not been successful and are seeking to put the best possible face on matters.

Saltykov has a few things going for him. First, he is widely respected in the international community, and has done better than most of his colleagues in working with Western assistance programs. (No one has done brilliantly, but Saltykov has been fortunate to have George Soros's International Science Foundation, the U.S. National Science Foundation and the EC come through with at least some genuine assistance. Many others are still trying to get programs on track.) Second, he does have support from colleagues in the government. Third, he is deeply religious and scrupulously
honest. It was this combination of spiritual commitment and rectitude that led Shatalin to propose his candidacy for the ministerial post in 1991. In an atmosphere where corruption charges are flying on all sides, the combination of competence and honesty is difficult to find, much less maintain.

We know that Eltsin personally likes Saltykov. (We know that he actively disliked Marchuk.) But we also know that Osipov was his hand-picked choice from Ekaterinburg to head the Academy. One anecdote about Saltykov during his tenure as Vice-Premier may be worth repeating in this regard. All Vice Premiers have direct phone lines to the President. Eltsin sent Saltykov a memo asking if his failure to make use of the line "was a reflection of excessive modesty or an indication that we have no social problems."

Both Saltykov and the Academy leadership have other antagonists. More conservative elements in the Academy consider Osipov to be a creature of Eltsin, and they have recently begun to agitate against him. Academician Koptiug of the Siberian Division has been one of the leaders of these efforts. Liberals in the Academy, and regional groups like the Petersburg Scientific Center, also represent loci of opposition.

There is also no shortage of pretenders to Saltykov's job. Malyshev, currently a Presidential Advisor, has made no secret of his desire to assume the Ministerial portfolio. Former GKNT leader Laverev, like Malyshev, has made repeated visits abroad hinting that he remains a key figure. These individuals do not appear to have significant power at the current time. But they are actively seeking possibilities to return to important positions. They are also seeking financial support from the West—preferably to be channeled through their hands—which they could then use to enhance their political status in Russia.

How Saltykov will be affected by the latest top-level shuffle, in which Vice President Rutskoi and Vice Premier Shumeiko were relieved of their duties pending the outcome of a corruption investigation, remains to be seen. Vice Premier Shumeiko, to whom Saltykov reported, was seen by some as a key to preserving his position. But it is not yet clear how Shumeiko's portfolio will be handled during his "administrative leave." Once again, Saltykov's reputation for integrity could prove invaluable. On the other hand, no one expects to last more than two years in the current supercharged political environment. More serious than removal of an individual Minister would be administrative changes altering the roles of the Ministry and the Academy.

There is already a new agency involved in applied science—the State Committee for Industrial Policy. It is headed by Shurchkov. One of the Vice Chairman is Dmitry Piskunov, well known to some of us from his work as Director of the Analytical Center for Problems of Scientific-Technical and Socio-Economic Development. His connections with Shurchkov go back a long way. The Committee appears to be an attempt to establish something on the lines of Japan's MITI. However, it has no budget to allocate and no enforcement mechanisms for its recommendations. The staff is currently at work on a "Basic Conception of Industrial and Technical Policy"—the sort of general programmatic document that no Russian ministry can ever be without.

The GKPP occupies the premises previously housing the VPK. However, the military scientific and production sphere appears to be completely outside its purview.
There does not seem to be any way for the GKPP to get data from the military, and the one-year experiment of running the military R&D budget through civilian institutions has been abandoned.

There had been some discussion of the possibility of combining the functions of the GKPP with the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations (FER) to achieve the beginnings of the MITI model. The departure of Sergei Glazev as Minister of FER has likely set back these plans (Glazev was a colleague of the science policy specialists. It is not yet clear how his successor will react to such proposals.)

The GKVSh has its own modest budget for supporting scientific research. The VUZy are in difficult straits, but many of them are better off than some research institutes. They are still receiving some financial support from the state on a regular basis. The official "State Program for Higher Education in the Russian Republic" foresees VUZy in the future becoming the major centers of research as well as training. Success in this endeavor will depend on administrative capabilities, and even more on financial conditions.

This account has focused almost entirely on the executive branch. The Russian Parliament has a Committee on Science and Education, Chaired by V.P. Shorin. Shorin has shown a genuine capacity to grow on the job, and is performing quite credibly. His committee staff, however, is quite small given the range of issues they cover. Shorin recently helped to achieve a large increase in the budget for science. However, like all such legislative acts, actual implementation is a matter of negotiation between the Parliament, the Ministry of Finance, and MinNauka. As of this writing, no additional funds have actually been provided.

All of the players tend to pose the issues in apocalyptic terms: the "survival" of the Academy, the "death" of a unique Russian system of organizing science, etc. Barring anarchy, civil war, or total financial collapse, the actual outcomes are likely to be far less dire. A certain number of research institutions and VUZy may well be closed--the trend in the past three years has been to open new ones. The R&D system is likely to shift more toward one based on university research and teaching--it is not economically possible for the state to support massive numbers of individuals engaged solely in research. But the Academy is a unique institution, and it is not likely to vanish. It is not unreasonable to expect to see something like the German pattern in Russia, with a certain number of "pure" research institutes alongside an active university-based system. Evolution of such a system is not aided by the incessant (and inevitable) kneecapping attempts by major players.