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Soviet/Russian Military Capabilities: Assessing Tech, Manpower, & Loyalty

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Abstract

Since the Imperialist times of Peter the Great, Russia's military ideology has been largely predicated on the goal of creating a large and powerful army. In an attempt to gain territory and prestige, a nation's military strength was often reduced to a mere game of numbers in order to overpower the opposing side. Of course, weapons and tactics were also involved, but they meant nothing without the men who were needed to utilize them and perform accordingly. Overtime, as new threats began to emerge and a different international dynamic began to form with improved technological systems and weaponry, large conventional armies became significantly less effective. For a long time, however, Soviet Russia was unyielding to change. A Peter the Great mentality rang supreme in the minds of military elites who fostered a strong opposition to any means of reform despite repeated attempts by Soviet and Russian leaders. This force against change resonated in the attitudes and loyalty towards the Soviet and Russian military establishment, and further set Russia back in terms of its outdated technology and overall decreasing military capacity. Although some may say that Russia was a bit late in the game to display noticeable trends in military improvements, this study seeks to answer the question of where Russia lies now in terms of its military capabilities and citizens' attitudes towards the military itself and their duty to serve. In other words, this study tests the question of how an improvement in military technology, coupled with a more streamlined personnel base, reflects a change in Russia's military capabilities and in associated attitudes overtime.

Background on the history and progress of military reform in Russia is provided and analyzed in light on capability measurements, followed by an evaluation of the 2008 Russo-Georgia War. Additionally, a case comparison of the 1979 Afghanistan crisis and the current intervention in Syria is conducted to demonstrate a change in capabilities and attitudes towards the military establishment. Finally, an analysis of loyalty towards military duty from a psychological perspective is preformed and further coupled with a discussion of how a shift in attitudes has occurred in parallel with military reform in both Soviet and present day Russia. The assessment of loyalty further adds to the analysis of military capabilities due to the connection between increased loyalty and compliance on the one hand, and enhanced military capabilities on the other. The study ends with implications associated with the findings.

Keywords

Soviet, Russia, Military Capabilities, Syria, Afghanistan, Russo-Georgia, Technology, Loyalty, Attitudes, Manpower, Social Sciences, Political Science, Rudra Sil, Sil, Rudra

Disciplines

Community Psychology | Comparative Politics | Eastern European Studies | International Relations | Other International and Area Studies | Other Political Science | Politics and Social Change | Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies

**SOVIET/RUSSIAN MILITARY CAPABILITIES: ASSESSING TECH,
MANPOWER, & LOYALTY**

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Senior Honors Thesis in Political Science

University of Pennsylvania

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE	1
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	2-3
TABLE OF CONTENTS	4
ABSTRACT	5-6
LIST OF TABLES & FIGURES	7
1. Introduction	8
1.1 Statement of the Problem.....	8
1.2 Objectives & Methodology.....	10
1.3 Significance of the Topic.....	11
1.4 Literature Review.....	12
2. Military Reform: From Imperial Russia to the Putin Era	15
2.1 Setting the Stage.....	15
2.2 Imperialist Russia & The Soviet Era.....	17
2.3 Gorbachev and the Cold War.....	23
2.4 The End of the Soviet Union.....	28
2.5 Putin Takes The Wheel.....	30
3. The Russo-Georgian War: A Stepping Stone	35
3.1 Background.....	35
3.2 Assessment of Current Literature.....	36
3.3 Discussion of Conflict.....	37
3.4 Post-Conflict Actions & Implications.....	42
4. Assessing Soviet/Russian Military Capabilities	46
4.1 Overview – Soviet & Post Soviet Eras.....	46
4.2 Current Russian Military Capabilities.....	48
5. Capabilities Compared: The Cases of Afghanistan and Syria	60
5.1 Background – Middle Eastern Relations.....	60
5.2 Discussing Afghanistan v. Syria.....	62
5.3 Summary.....	70
6. Assessing Soviet/Russian Attitudes	72
6.1 Defining Loyalty.....	72
6.2 Background – Loyalty and the Military.....	74
6.3 Changing Attitudes – Soviet and Post-Soviet Era.....	75
6.4 The Case of Komsomolsk-na-Amure.....	80
6.5 Assessing Current Attitudes.....	81
7. Concluding Remarks and Implications	89
8. Bibliography	92

ABSTRACT

Since the Imperialist times of Peter the Great, Russia's military ideology has been largely predicated on the goal of creating a large and powerful army. In an attempt to gain territory and prestige, a nation's military strength was often reduced to a mere game of numbers in order to overpower the opposing side. Of course, weapons and tactics were also involved, but they meant nothing without the men who were needed to utilize them and perform accordingly. Overtime, as new threats began to emerge and a different international dynamic began to form with improved technological systems and weaponry, large conventional armies became significantly less effective. For a long time, however, Soviet Russia was unyielding to change. A Peter the Great mentality rang supreme in the minds of military elites who fostered a strong opposition to any means of reform despite repeated attempts by Soviet and Russian leaders. This force against change resonated in the attitudes and loyalty towards the Soviet and Russian military establishment, and further set Russia back in terms of its outdated technology and overall decreasing military capacity. Although some may say that Russia was a bit late in the game to display noticeable trends in military improvements, this study seeks to answer the question of where Russia lies now in terms of its military capabilities and citizens' attitudes towards the military itself and their duty to serve. In other words, this study tests the question of how an improvement in military technology, coupled with a more streamlined personnel base, reflects a change in Russia's military capabilities and in associated attitudes overtime.

Background on the history and progress of military reform in Russia is provided and analyzed in light on capability measurements, followed by an evaluation of the 2008 Russo-Georgia War. Additionally, a case comparison of the 1979 Afghanistan crisis and the current

intervention in Syria is conducted to demonstrate a change in capabilities and attitudes towards the military establishment. Finally, an analysis of loyalty towards military duty from a psychological perspective is performed and further coupled with a discussion of how a shift in attitudes has occurred in parallel with military reform in both Soviet and present day Russia. The assessment of loyalty further adds to the analysis of military capabilities due to the connection between increased loyalty and compliance on the one hand, and enhanced military capabilities on the other. The study ends with implications associated with the findings.

LIST OF TABLES & FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1 – Service Avoidance Efforts Over Time

TABLE 2 – Comparison of Russian Armed Forces, 2008 v. 2020

TABLE 3 – Russia’s Military Expenditure (% GDP)

TABLE 4 – Soviet Losses in Afghanistan, 1979-1989

TABLE 5 – 1984 v. 2004: Comparison of Attitudes Towards Military Service Among Grade School and College Students

TABLE 6 – Military Attitudes and Preparedness Assessment: Grade School vs. College Students

TABLE 7 – What Do You Feel When People Speak of the Russian Armed Forces (% of All Respondents, by Age Group)

TABLE 8 – If someone from your family were to be drafted to the army, what would you prefer?

TABLE 9 – Would you be in favor or against increasing the military service term from one to one and a half years?

TABLE 10 – Would you like your son, brother, another close relative to serve in the army now? If negative, why?

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1 – Russia’s Military Expenditure (% GDP) from 2006 to 2014

FIGURE 2 – Russia, United States, and China: Military Expenditure (% GDP) from 2006 to 2014

FIGURE 3 – Top 15 Defense Budgets in 2015 (in US billion \$), Russia 4th

FIGURE 4 – Levada Center 2011 Poll Military Attitudes (% Respondents)

1. INTRODUCTION:

This section introduces the research question being explored and its overall significance given the prominence of Russian military affairs in present day. Associated inquiries and scholarship that sparked interest in this study are discussed, and the progression of associated questions and topics leading to the hypothesis are also laid out. Additionally, the objectives and research methodology are explained, which are mainly qualitative in nature, though quantitative data from polls and country statistics are included and analyzed as well.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Since the Soviet era, Russia's military capabilities and the changing nature of Russia's military reforms has been an extremely controversial and divided topic among experts of Russia's political, economic, and defense strategies. However, as an inescapably crucial element for the continued security and presence of Russia within the international arena, Russia's military capacity has also contributed a great deal to exposing the nation's "backwardness" in terms of defense and combat readiness. From outdated warfare tactics to slowed technological innovation, Russia's vulnerability has been exposed in several conflicts throughout time. As those in positions of authority began to recognize Russia's military shortcomings, a slew of reform proposals and changes were created. These reform proposals were seen as vital for the continued success of Russia's military after its weaknesses were exposed during conflicts such as the 1979 Afghanistan crisis and the 2008 Russo-Georgia War. Nonetheless, they were met with great opposition from military elites who have been tied to a more traditional military ideology that dates back to Peter the Great's time and favors large conventional forces. Thus, it is important to consider the

extent to which these reform proposals have been realized throughout Soviet and Russian military history and, consequently, how changes (or a lack of changes) reflect Russia's military capabilities both then and now.

To this end, a slew of questions follow. Was Russia playing a game of catch up after President Mikhail Gorbachev and President Boris Yeltsin dropped the ball on military reform leading up to and following the collapse of the Soviet Union? Was it even possible for President Dmitry Medvedev and following, for President Putin, to try to reverse more than a decade of mismanaged military operations and bring about change in one or two years (as some proposals suggested)? Moreover, as technology was advancing and other nations like China and the United States were moving forward with their equipment, tactics, and weaponry, where was Russia in the midst of all this? How was Russia dealing with the end of the Cold War world when hundreds of thousands of discontented soldiers and military personnel came out extremely disinterested and pessimistic about Russia's military and defense industries? Overall, this paper assesses how the gradual advancement in Russia's military technologies and the notable decrease in military personnel overtime can be reconciled with the changing attitudes of the Russian population, particularly towards the military establishment and their duty to serve. The main question being explored is: *What is the effect of improvements in technology and a change in military personnel standards (quantity, length of service time, benefits, etc.) on Russian military capabilities and on attitudes towards one's duty to serve and the military industry overall?*

1.2 OBJECTIVES & METHODOLOGY

In an attempt to answer this question, the history and progression of Russian military reform and ideology will be analyzed first. This discussion will start with the military legacy left by Peter the Great and will continue into present day military reform under President Putin. Following, the 2008 Russo-Georgian war will be assessed as a major stepping stone in the reform timeline. This war highlighted several shortcomings present in Russia's military policy that escalated the pace of changes. Next, Soviet and Russian military capabilities will be assessed in relation to technological innovations, trends in military expenditure (as a percent of GDP), budgetary allocations for research and development, and quantitative trends illustrating military manpower changes overtime. Additionally, the cases of the 1979 Afghanistan intervention and the current intervention in Syria will be compared and analyzed in light of changing capabilities on the Russian side. Last, literature on Russian sentiments towards the military establishment and one's duty to serve will be analyzed from a psychological perspective in order to better understand the degree of loyalty that corresponds to the continuum of change in technology and human resources. Additionally, the analysis of loyalty conducted in this study is not just a side issue, but rather an important indicator of compliance and reliability that impacts an institution's overall capabilities. The story Komsomolsk-na-Amure will be included in this discussion in order to demonstrate peoples' growing dissatisfaction towards the changing military industrial complex. The study will end with a discussion of the implications related to this question.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TOPIC

Russia's presence as a military superpower has been the topic of international debates and discussions for many years, especially after the Cold War era. An enigma to most, scholars all over the world have continuously attempted to decipher and understand Russia's military strategy in order to better comprehend *why* the Russian state chooses to act the way it does and execute certain strategic initiatives both in the near abroad and in relation to the West. The search for this *why* has prompted a slew of questions all yielding to the same core concern: how has Russia remained so relevant in military discourse despite all of the set backs and opposition it has faced from the military sector itself to pursue advancements necessary for its continued success? Upon exploring more scholarly literature on topics of military reform, personnel cutbacks, and changes in attitudes of servicemen towards the military industry, this core question became more tailored. In particular, William Zimmerman and Michael Berbaum's piece titled "Soviet Military Manpower Policy in the Brezhnev Era: Regime Goals, Social Origins, and Working the System" was very intriguing in how it presented the Soviet military draft from the perspective of men who sought deferment and eventually left the country. Alexander Golts and Tonya Putnam's work on military reform and assessing Russia's military capabilities coupled with the Zimmerman and Berbaum piece further begged for a reconstruction of the core question into one that asks: how is technological innovation and a decrease in military personnel overtime reflected in the attitudes of Russian servicemen towards their duty to serve and the military establishment overall?

1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

The scope of research for this work cuts across various fields of scholarship and draws upon a wide variety of work produced by political scientists and military experts from both the United States and abroad. This work takes on a historical perspective that weaves into political-military literature produced by Alexander Golts and Tonya Putnam.¹ Golts and Putnam characterize the nature of the Russian military starting with the policies created under Peter the Great. Additionally, literature on Soviet Russian military ideologies by scholars like Nikolai Pavlenko and William C. Fuller are analyzed and then applied to the assessment of changing attitudes and opposition movements related to reforms.²³

Additionally, a crucial piece that paved the way for the central topic being explored is Zimmerman and Berbaum's article titled "Soviet Military Manpower Policy in the Brezhnev Era: Regime Goals, Social Origins, and Working the System."⁴ This work addresses the prevalence of deferments that Soviet men relied upon in order to be exempt from military service. In effect, this area of research sparked momentum in asking more questions dealing with Soviet attitudes towards the military itself and towards one's duty to serve, as well as how changing Russian military capabilities (as a result of reforms) affect these attitudes and the loyalty of personnel. Consequently, this study adds to Zimmerman and Berbaum's piece by taking it one step further and assessing trends in Russia's military history in order to get to the *why* behind certain attitudes associated with deferments and an overall lack of loyalty towards service.

¹ Alexander M. Golts and Tonya L. Putnam, "State Militarism and Its Legacies: Why Military Reform Has Failed in Russia", *International Security* (2004).

² Nikolai I. Pavlenko. *Russia v period reform Petra I* (Moscow: Nauka, 1973).

³ William C. Fuller, *Strategy and Power in Russia, 1600-1914* (New York: Simon & Schuster: 1998).

⁴ William Zimmerman and Michael L. Berbaum. "Soviet Military Manpower Policy in the Brezhnev Era: Regime Goals, Social Origins and ' Working the System'", *Europe-Asia Studies* (1993).

Furthermore, literature focusing on the Cold War era during Gorbachev's presidency, the 1979 Afghanistan crisis, the 2008 Georgia conflict, and more current articles pertaining to the current intervention in Syria have been analyzed and included in this study. The data found in this scholarship is interpreted in terms of the value added in relation to changing military policies and its effect on Russia's military capacity and attitudes towards the military itself. In particular, the more recent news articles published about Russia's actions in Syria have been extremely interesting to analyze as new details are continuously emerging and substantial research in this area is difficult to rely on given its real-time development. Notwithstanding this limitation, both American and Russian news sources were used to obtain a better idea of Russia's actions and military initiatives in the region. Furthermore, psychological scholarship on the relationship between military duty and loyalty was also explored and applied to this study in order to gain a better understanding of what the attitudes reflected in polls conducted by organizations such as the Levada Center actually mean when dealing with the issue of civilian loyalty to service.

Last, although this study is mostly qualitative in nature, it also contains a quantitative element in the form of data obtained from sources such as the World Bank and the Levada Center that deal with changes in military expenditure overtime (as a percent of GDP), changes in amounts of arms and personnel both during and after specific reforms, and polls conducted regarding Soviet and Russian attitudes towards the military and the duty to serve.⁵⁶ All of this information combined helps draw out trends dealing with

⁵ N. Zorkaya et al., "From Opinion Toward Understanding: Russian Public Opinion 2012-2013", *The Levada Center* (2013), <http://www.levada.ru/old/books/obshchestvennoe-mnenie-2012-eng>.

⁶ "Data - Military Expenditure (% of GDP)", *The World Bank* (2016), <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS>.

military advancements and how this corresponds to a change in overall perception of the Russian military and one's duty to serve.

2. MILITARY REFORM:

This section discusses the military ideology that dates back to Imperialist Russia and Peter the Great, as well as its progression overtime. In Russia's history, the notion of a large, conventional armed forces was viewed as key to Russia's military success and prowess. Interestingly enough, this mindset persisted for over one hundred years, and still resonates in the minds of many military elites and reformers. With a changing dynamic of international threats and the types of actors involved in disputes, military reform for Russia became a top priority. However, the unwavering ideology from the past greatly impacted the course and pace of reforms during both the Soviet era and present day. Leadership initiatives started under President Gorbachev demonstrated a strong desire for reform during the Cold War era, while the collapse of the Soviet Union and the election of President Putin into office really sped up the pace of reforms to what Russia's military position is currently. Additionally, factors involved in the push for reforms are analyzed, along with their overall effect on Soviet and Russian military capabilities and the perception of the Russian military by international actors.

2.1 SETTING THE STAGE – IMPERIALIST RUSSIA & THE SOVIET ERA

Historically, military manpower in Soviet Russia was considered an unlimited resource. The goal of creating large and powerful armies reigned supreme in the minds of Soviet commanders and lieutenants for many years, and military personnel were seen as a necessary factor in building up a country's status and regional dominance⁷. Wars and conflicts were reduced to a mere numbers game, where large opponent armies had to be met with even larger home armies ready for brutal bloodshed and endless fighting. An

⁷ Golts and Putnam, "State Militarism and Its Legacies", 18.

early yet clear example of this war mentality dates back to 15th to 17th century Imperial Russia. A man by the name of Alexander Nevsky, who was later given the title “The Great Russian”, united people against the Tatar-Mongol threat. Nevsky obtained a large army of foot soldiers to defend the Northwest region of Novgorod against a large group of Catholic mounted knights. Here, it is evident that in order to obtain a competitive advantage over the opposition, ground force personnel and associated tactics were the only things Nevsky and his army could rely on. Thus, the traditional philosophy of war emphasized the importance of mass armies as a symbol of strength, power, and ultimately victory. This quantitative mentality of building up armies still persists in Russia’s military strategy to this day, although somewhat less strictly than before.

When considering the Soviet and post-Soviet era, several conflicts that occurred during this time recalibrated the perception of and standards for Russia’s military and defense operations. This paper will be focusing on a few, namely the 1979 crisis in Afghanistan, the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, and the current conflict in Syria. Additionally, with changing international dynamics, internal problems of draft aversion, difficult living conditions for military personnel, and a severe lack of funds for proper research and development resulted in a lack of significant progress with regard to Russia’s military strategies and capabilities.

Counter-intuitively, the more men enlisted in the armed forces did not reflect a growing desire or want to serve – there was neither a strong patriotism involved nor enticing benefits granted by the regime. Benefits that were promised, such as housing, education for one’s children, and medical care, depended on one’s length of service and typically were not delivered in a timely manner. In fact, it could take longer than a year in

many cases to receive the promised compensation for service. Additionally, many of the men who served had opposing sentiments toward the regime, and even tried to get around the draft by creating a myriad of excuses in order to be granted permission to be exempt from service.⁸

Overtime, however, the growing reforms and corresponding shifts in attitudes of military personnel changed the focus of priority from striving to enlist more men into the military to the idea that a more streamlined army can act more effectively overall. Furthermore, with a decreased personnel base, Russia could now allocate more funds to the research and development (R&D) sector for greater technological innovation. This would set Russia on a path to catch up to other great powers' capabilities, like those of the United States, and thereby reestablish their military prowess in the international sphere.

2.2 IMPERIALIST RUSSIA & THE SOVIET ERA

To begin, Peter the Great ruled during a time when the size and might of a state's military was directly correlated to the reputation of the state itself.⁹ His primary objective was to build a large army to reflect the grand power and presence of the Russian empire and make it known to all. The belief that a state's capacity is largely connected to the capacity of its armed forces underscores what Golts and Putnam call "defense-mindedness." In their piece, "State Militarism and Its Legacies: Why Military Reform Has Failed in Russia", Golts and Putnam define defense-mindedness as "culturally embedded attitudes regarding the central role of the military in constituting the Russian state, together with the belief that Russia's security is ultimately guaranteed by the ability of its

⁸ Zimmerman and Berbaum. "Soviet Military Manpower Policy", 1.

⁹ Golts and Putnam, "State Militarism and Its Legacies", 4.

leaders to draw upon the full capacity of the state and its citizens for defense of the homeland.”¹⁰ In other words, Peter the Great left an ideological legacy emphasizing that a state’s military capacity constitutes the very essence of that state itself, and that a country’s national security is heavily reliant on those men willing to serve. In fact, defense-mindedness is the very ideology that permeates the minds of General Staff officers and the military elite who oppose military reform policies. Indeed, many high-ranking military personnel long for the return of the more privileged position of the Russian military forces.

Next, the current independence of the Russian military and Defense Ministry is historically rooted in legacies that similarly go as far back as Imperialist Russia. Since imperial times, the Russian military was known to independently execute various operations, handle the budget, and obtain personnel without much government interference.¹¹ As a result, the Defense Ministry became accustomed to governing its own establishment, leaving little room for reforms proposed by the regime to actually get in the way, especially since the majority opposition typically controlled the sector. Additionally, the pervasive mentality of defense-mindedness was reinforced by the inherent isolation of the military establishment itself.¹² This isolation fostered an even stronger sense of the mass army mentality promoted by Peter the Great within the existing institutional structures, leaving little leeway for this mentality to diffuse or be more amiable to change.

The resulting military policy under Peter the Great looked as follows. First, in terms of creating a large standing army, Peter’s policy was centered on conscription. For every

¹⁰ Golts and Putnam, "State Militarism and Its Legacies", 19.

¹¹ Golts and Putnam, "State Militarism and Its Legacies", 4.

¹² Golts and Putnam, "State Militarism and Its Legacies", 5.

twenty households belonging to peasants, one man was sent to serve for thirty years.¹³ This policy created a continuous flow of personnel that left many future leaders satisfied, and went on to serve as the standard process for the next 170 years.¹⁴ Second, with regard to autonomy as a characteristic of the military institution, Peter the Great epitomized on the concept of internal unity and proximity among those within the military circle. Both soldiers and commanders were interdependent, which cultivated a sense of commitment and purpose on both sides.¹⁵ Finally, it is interesting to consider the way in which Peter handled funding and resource allocation. Peter relied on the army to collect taxes that would be used directly for its purposes, and most other funds collected by the state were fed into the military establishment as well. Additionally, the living conditions for service men were different from those currently described as poor and unsanitary. Rather than allocating more money towards this sector, Peter promoted the policy of troop quartering in various homes around the country.¹⁶ It is important to note, however, that Russia was much more primitive and much less developed at the time of Peter the Great compared to present day. Thus, certain standards and policies that were successful during Peter's time (i.e. quartering troops) would have proved impractical in today's society.

Although Russia saw many victories in its early reign, several defeats followed after the industrial revolution left the country technologically inferior to other growing powers. For example, the loss on the side of Russia during the Crimean War (1853-1856) has been popularly attributed to the Russian army's lack of equipment, machinery, and weapons,

¹³ Golts and Putnam, "State Militarism and Its Legacies", 22.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Nikolai I. Pavlenko. *Russia v period reform Petra I*, 86.

¹⁶ Golts and Putnam, "State Militarism and Its Legacies", 23.

along with its poor planning and deployment of troops to Sevastopol.¹⁷ This inevitably left many personnel uneasy and displeased. The defense-mindedness mentality prevailed once again when the armed forces were not ready to take on smaller armies that they were faced with as they were not streamlined. Additionally, Russia lost again in the 1905 war against Japan. What came out of this defeat, however, was a new initiative on rearmament, although no changes were made to policies concerning military personnel or the institutional structure itself. Thus, much of the dissatisfaction already present among servicemen with regard to the standards concerning their conditions persisted since no reforms were made with regard to this specific area.

Moving on, it is necessary to assess the status of the military during World War II prior to delving into the reforms that preceded and followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. First, between 1935 and 1941 when the German threat became very apparent, the Soviet army increased its military manpower base from 930,000 men to approximately 5 million, respectively.¹⁸ Undeniably, the quantitative military build-up legacy as initiated by Peter the Great, coupled by vast influx of funds to the war effort secured the Soviets a victory that reinforced the ideas of defense-mindedness and the advantages of the organization and standards of the armed forces as they were.

During the Cold War era under President Leonid Brezhnev (1964-1982), the Soviet Union began seeing an increasing trend of military deferments where citizens submitted excuses to avoid being mobilized, regardless of the legitimacy of these claims. As Zimmerman and Berbaum show in Table 1 below, the percentage of deferments steadily

¹⁷ William C. Fuller, *Strategy and Power in Russia, 1600-1914*.

¹⁸ Golts and Putnam, "State Militarism and Its Legacies", 27.

increased until the late 1970s, with an approximate 20% increase between 1959 and 1978.¹⁹ Moreover, the increase in attempts to defer service occurred prior to the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, thereby showing that there was something larger than the fear of being drafted for this war that was serving as a disincentive to one's overall commitment to serve. To bolster this argument, Zimmerman and Berbaum claim that upon analysis of the medical deferment group in particular, 90 of the 166 non-server respondents actually were granted their deferment, and 10 of those 90 people admitted to submitting fake excuses.²⁰²¹ Additionally, almost all citizens who used *blat* (or informal deals to get around certain duties) to circumvent military service admitted to being capable of serving despite the reasons they used to get out of it.²² Therefore, more citizens' were showing attitudes of decreased loyalty towards the military and their duty to serve as evidenced by an increase in the quantity of fictitious accounts that were made to get out of the duty to serve.

¹⁹ Zimmerman and Berbaum. "Soviet Military Manpower Policy", 7.

²⁰ Zimmerman and Berbaum. "Soviet Military Manpower Policy", 8.

²¹ Also meaning that there could be more than 10 fake claims, but the Soviet fear of admitting that one has lied to the regime may prevent accurate figures.

²² Zimmerman and Berbaum. "Soviet Military Manpower Policy", 8.

<i>Year respondent reached age 18</i>	<i>Proportion who attempted to avoid military service (n/cases in category)</i>
1923–28	4% (1/24)
1929–33	4% (4/90)
1934–38	3% (2/70)
1939–43	5% (5/103)
1944–48	6% (7/109)
1949–53	9% (10/118)
1954–58	17% (36/208)
1959–63	19% (23/124)
1964–68	27% (63/237)
1969–73	27% (45/165)
1974–78	38% (24/63)
All respondents	17% (220/1322)
Tau_b	-0.23, $p < 0.0001$.

TABLE 1 – Service Avoidance Efforts Over Time

Source: Zimmerman and Berbaum, "Soviet Military Manpower Policy", 7.

Overall, Zimmerman and Berbaum underscore the notion that the Soviet regime lacked full effectiveness in its military manpower policy, claiming that instances of deferment greatly diverged from rhetoric and written policy presented.²³ To take this one step further, one may reasonably deduce that as the number of deferments being requested and granted increased, the gap between the numbers of military personnel being pulled into the armed forces and the number who actually followed through and accepted to serve also increased. Thus, as goals of the regime continued remained unmet, the reality of military capabilities solely based on manpower capacity did not reach its full effectiveness as expected by the regime.

Nonetheless, it is interesting to further juxtapose the decline of Soviet military manpower over these years with the increased favoritism for technological innovations in

²³ Zimmerman and Berbaum. "Soviet Military Manpower Policy", 3.

the military sector, particularly by some of the military elites. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Marshal and Chief of the General Staff Nikolay Orgarkov strongly supported the policy shift away from nuclear weapons and towards more high-technology equipment and machinery.²⁴ This went along with President Mikhail Gorbachev's (1985-1991) nuclear disarmament policies that worked alongside President Reagan on both the Intermediate-Range Nuclear forces (INF) agreement, and the later Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START). Moreover, with reductions in nuclear arms on both sides, Orgarkov and other military officers anticipated the growth of Western military capabilities and the game of catch-up that the Soviets would have to play somewhere down the road.²⁵ Thus, although the Soviets exhibited less manpower and a weaker technological prowess compared to other international actors during this time (i.e. a weaker military capacity), the awareness of this status set them on a positive route to getting back into the game shortly following.

2.3 GORBACHEV AND THE COLD WAR

Gorbachev strove to institute several reform policies that would change the course of military operations and the perception of the Soviet military character by international actors such as the West. There are several important reforms that Gorbachev was eager to pursue in the mid to late 1980s. The first that he tried to launch was a unilateral moratorium on testing nuclear weapons.²⁶ Quite ambitiously, Gorbachev hoped that the

²⁴ Alan R. Collins, "GRIT, Gorbachev and the End of the Cold War", *Review of International Studies* (1998), 7.

²⁵ Harry Gelman, *Gorbachev and the Future of the Soviet Military Institution, Issue 258 of Adelphi Papers* (1991), 28.

²⁶ Alan R. Collins, "GRIT, Gorbachev and the End of the Cold War", 6.

West would follow in the Soviet Union's footsteps and also delay its nuclear testing. In July of 1985, Gorbachev stated:

“Out of a desire to set a good example, the Soviet Union has decided to unilaterally halt all of its nuclear explosions...The Soviet Union anticipates that the United States will respond favorably to this initiative and halt its nuclear explosions.”²⁷

Thus, it is clear that Gorbachev was attempting to decrease the pace of furthered progress of Soviet nuclear technological capabilities for the time being, and strongly hoped that the United States would do the same so as to level the nuclear capabilities playing field.

Due to the lack of reciprocity for the first proposal on the part of the United States, Gorbachev went on to propose a second, three-part policy initiative that was to be fulfilled in a timeframe of fifteen years.²⁸ This initiative ultimately set up a multi-stage process for the dissemblance and removal of the most powerful nuclear arms owned by the superpowers. Additionally, it halted the production of additional nuclear weapons by countries, which is important considering the larger context of weapon development and technological breakthroughs during the Cold War era.²⁹ Perhaps this way, however, Russia believed that it could delay its weapons production (and the associated costs) relative to that of other superpowers, thereby not harming itself much in terms of relative military or defense capabilities.

Unfortunately for Gorbachev, the West once again did not agree to cooperate with the terms of the proposal. Many political scholars at the time believed that the Soviets were

²⁷ Alan R. Collins, “GRIT, Gorbachev and the End of the Cold War”, 4.

²⁸ Alan R. Collins, “GRIT, Gorbachev and the End of the Cold War”, 6.

²⁹ Ibid.

trying to denuclearize the West and, consequently, achieve an upper hand in military power among the international players.³⁰ Whether or not this was actually Gorbachev's intention, as it is now very difficult to prove, it nonetheless showed a side of boldness and strength for the Soviet state. Ultimately, the promotion of ambitious ideas that seek cooperation usually relay a larger message about the actor proposing it; that is, Russia's proposition of mutual disarmament bolstered how other actors perceived Russian military capabilities altogether by associating their capabilities with a newly defined boldness and determined presence.

Scholarship assessing power perception and leadership, particularly in relation to multi-actor involvements, suggests exactly this. A capable leader is one that can foster functional behaviors among all of the actors involved.³¹ In this case, Gorbachev was setting goals, attempting to control the actions of superpowers involved, and suggesting ways to achieve these goals. Overall, this created the persona of leadership surrounding both Gorbachev and the Soviet Union, particularly with regard to the nation's prominent role in military affairs.³² Moreover, regardless of the Soviet Union's actual military capabilities and financial standing at the time, the Soviets were playing a smart card by engaging in such discourse and making themselves known via bold declarations and proposals seeking cooperation. Moreover, the fact that Gorbachev continued making proposals to the West despite their rejection further emphasizes that he was in a position of confidence and had purpose – qualities of a leader that signify a capable country standing behind him or her.

³⁰ Alan R. Collins, "GRIT, Gorbachev and the End of the Cold War", 6.

³¹ Robert G. Lord, "Functional Leadership Behavior: Measurement and Relation to Social Power and Leadership Perceptions", *Administrative Science Quarterly* (1977), 3.

³² Robert G. Lord, "Functional Leadership Behavior", 4.

The next proposal that Gorbachev worked on came in the fall of 1986 during the Reykjavik mini-summit.³³ Rather than publicly communicating his newest military reform proposal, he decided to write a letter addressed to President Reagan and privately disclose his ideas instead. The core of these reforms were centered on the elimination of all intermediate-range nuclear forces (INFs) from Europe, and he further urged to set a cap on the warheads used in INF systems by both the United States and the Soviet Union.³⁴ Gorbachev's confidence in these proposals is illustrated in his later remarks that are published in his book *Perestroika*:

“And still Reykjavik marked a turning point in world history. It tangibly demonstrated that the world situation could be improved....At Reykjavik we became convinced that our course was correct and that a new and constructive way of political thinking was essential.”³⁵

According to this statement, Gorbachev believed in the idea that both the USSR and the West could cooperate and constructively move forward in this hot nuclear build-up climate. The idea of interdependence is important for a state's increased sense of power and capabilities.³⁶

Following, Gorbachev's reform proposal in 1987 called for an elimination of intermediate-range missiles in a more technologically feasible way compared to the 1983 Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). Both Reagan and Gorbachev worked out standards and

³³ Alan R. Collins, “GRIT, Gorbachev and the End of the Cold War”, 7.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking For Our Country and The World* (New York: Harpercollins, 1987), 240.

³⁶ David A. Baldwin, “Power Analysis and World Politics: New Trends versus Old Tendencies” (1979), 16.

conditions that eventually led to the signing of the INF Treaty in December of 1987. This treaty paved the way for a large reduction in weapons by all superpowers, and a renewed sense of cooperation emerged between the United States and the Soviet Union. In fact, President Reagan, who was initially hesitant to trust the Soviets and rejected Gorbachev's previous proposals, stated "our people should have been better friends long ago."³⁷

According to international relations theory dealing with cooperation strategies and payoffs, mutual cooperation is crucial for progress to occur both on a local and global level. When assessing Russia's capabilities on a state level, one can expect more positive outcomes to emerge as a result of multilateral cooperation in cutbacks of weapons and development as set by the treaty. As explained by Robert Jervis in "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," when multiple players are involved in the same deal, more agreements can be made, more problems can be solved, and a reduced fear across the board of nuclear threat, destruction, and harm is realized.³⁸ Jervis goes on to further note and reject the claim that:

"The belief that an increase in military strength always leads to an increase in security is often linked to the belief that the only route to security is through military strength. As a consequence, a whole range of meliorative policies will be downgraded."³⁹

Thus, a nation's military strength and associated capabilities need not solely stem from an increase in weapons, military personnel, and improved technology. Rather, a nation's improvement in its military capabilities can also come from a mutual agreement with other

³⁷ "The Summit; Remarks by Reagan and Gorbachev at White House Welcome", *The New York Times* (Dec. 9 1987), <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/12/09/world/the-summet-remarks-by-reagan-and-gorbachev-at-white-house-welcome.html>.

³⁸ Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma", *World Politics* (1978), 15.

³⁹ Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma", 17.

superpowers to fulfill goals that involve reducing the development of tech, arms, and personnel given the Cold War climate.

2.4 THE END OF THE SOVIET UNION

The year 1991 marked both the end of the Gorbachev era and the end of the Soviet Union itself. President Gorbachev left a difficult military legacy for President Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999) to manage due to a growing resentment coming from military men who served under the Soviet Union. This resentment and dissatisfaction stemmed from the poor living conditions that they were subject to, the lack of promised educational and medical benefits by the regime, and the observable resignation by military professionals from their duties.⁴⁰⁴¹ The former Soviet republics now consolidated under the umbrella of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and agreed that Russia would take control of all of the political-military affairs that spanned their domain. Officially, the 1992 Collective Security Treaty (CST), also known as the Tashkent Treaty, gave Russia the authority to provide armed forces whenever necessary to the CIS.⁴² As growing nationalism called for a unique national identity to form among the republics, they inevitably sought to develop their own armies and policies that were separate from the overarching control of Russia. Consequently, Russia under Yeltsin also formed its own Armed Forces division and created a Ministry of Defense, both of which handled external threats. For internal conflicts, a separate division consisting of other troops and power ministries was created, which

⁴⁰ Marcel de Haas, "Russia's Military Reforms: Victory After Twenty Years of Failure?", *Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 'Clingendael'* (2011), 12.

⁴¹ Ray Finch, "Vladimir Putin and the Russian Military", *Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO)*, 3.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Yeltsin heavily relied on during the 1993 fight against the Supreme Soviet and the 1994-1996 Chechen conflict.⁴³

Russia's state of "post-Soviet developmentalism"⁴⁴ was greatly lacking in the area of military capabilities and loyalty towards service, as evidenced by the 400,000 officers who left the armed forces in the years 1991-2002.⁴⁵ Perhaps part of this can also be attributed to the 1992 reforms that streamlined the number of departments from five to only three – Air, Ground, and Naval forces – thereby intrinsically cutting out personnel by eliminating the other two divisions. Moreover, new deferment standards under Yeltsin left an increasingly smaller quantity of conscripts who were willing to complete their conscription duties. In fact, there was a 16% reduction in recruits who fulfilled their conscription duties between 1994 and 2002.⁴⁶ Combined with the low morale of servicemen and poor living and health conditions, this "severely damaged the level of professionalism of Russia's military."⁴⁷ On the whole, when considering all of the internal problems that personnel faced under Yeltsin, Russia's military morale and capacity was indeed quite weak.⁴⁸

At the same time, however, one can attest to Yeltsin's positive political and military ambitions when initially taking office. According to Robert Barylski, "history was on Yeltsin's side because he was moving with deeper trends, the societal pressure for democratization, and the military was aware of such historical forces and hoped to work

⁴³ Ray Finch, "Vladimir Putin and the Russian Military", 3.

⁴⁴ Susan A. Wengle, "Post-Soviet Developmentalism and the Political Economy of Russia's Electricity Sector Liberalization", *University of Chicago Department of Political Science* (2011), 1.

⁴⁵ Marcel de Haas, "Russia's Military Reforms", 12.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Marcel de Haas, "Russia's Military Reforms", 13.

⁴⁸ Ray Finch, "Vladimir Putin and the Russian Military", FSMO, 3.

with them rather than against them.”⁴⁹ The military willingly switched its trust from the State of Emergency Committee (SEC), a group involved in the 1991 coup, to the military promises and leadership highlighted under Yeltsin. One such promise involved fostering a sense of unity among the military. Another enabled the military to use Gorbachev as a “political scapegoat” for its dissatisfaction.⁵⁰ Finally, he developed a more positive image around the military as in institution itself, which enabled him to take control of the growing momentum for change and progress.⁵¹

Yeltsin’s fist press secretary, Pavel Voshchanov, even called Yeltsin a “battering ram” for his determination and hard work.⁵² Notably, Yeltsin weakened the Community Party, defeated the coup in 1991, and generally knew how to appeal to various groups as a leader. Thus, although the military legacy Yeltsin left was a far cry from his initial proposals and ambitions with regard to uniting the military and improving the discontent surrounding poor living and health conditions, the fact that Yeltsin took office as an effective commander with ideas and support for reform should not be overlooked. Who knows how soon the Communist Party would have fallen apart if it wasn’t for Yeltsin?⁵³

2.5 PUTIN TAKES THE WHEEL

Whether for better or for worse, the course of history continues to move forward despite obstacles that may emerge along the way. President Vladimir Putin (2000-2008)

⁴⁹ Robert Barylski, *The Soldier in Russian Politics 1988-1996* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 122.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Robert Barylski, *The Soldier in Russian Politics 1988-1996*, 122-123.

⁵² Jonathan Steele, “Boris Yeltsin”, *The Guardian* (April 23 2007), <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/apr/23/russia.guardianobituaries>.

⁵³ David Winston, “From Yeltsin to Putin”, Hoover Institution (April 1 2000), <http://www.hoover.org/research/yeltsin-putin>.

came into office after Yeltsin with the reality of Russia's weak military position, yet change and progress remained the objective.⁵⁴ There were several factors that accounted for military conditions that Putin inherited. First, low morale and loyalty created a bleak atmosphere for reform.⁵⁵ The inefficiency of the MIC and the poor working conditions in factories, as later exemplified by the case of the industrial town named Komsomolsk na-Amure, put a further strain on the defense budget and further harmed citizens' attitudes towards the military establishment.⁵⁶ Additionally, maintaining the armed forces was very costly, which negatively affected Russia's military effectiveness and made it even more difficult to improve the living conditions of servicemen.

More importantly, however, was the constant dilemma that President Putin and Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov had to deal with – a dilemma that dates back to the military ideology of Peter the Great. This debate can be consolidated into the following question: Was a smaller, more high-tech and 'Western' style army better for Russia given the changing nature of the political-military climate in the late 1990s and early 2000s, or was a larger, more conventional style army with some modernized equipment (i.e. Peter the Great's vision), more suitable?⁵⁷ The larger question on the table was which of the two options would more significantly improve Russia's military capacity and status as a military superpower in the international arena?

In the fall of 2004, Minister of Defense Ivanov attested to a major area of concern for the military industry - the increased suicide rates of servicemen as a result of poor

⁵⁴ David Winston, "From Yeltsin to Putin".

⁵⁵ Marcel de Haas, "Russia's Military Reforms", 12.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Marcel de Haas, "Russia's Military Reforms", 13.

conditions and low salaries.⁵⁸ Additionally, another significant problem facing the military involved conscription, as many men simply chose to leave the armed forces and resultantly broke their loyalty towards service.⁵⁹ At this point in time, President Putin knew that the atmosphere was ripe for change. He called for a reduction of the armed forces by 10% by January 2005, which was equivalent to approximately 100,000 men, with the intention of pumping this money into the Research and Development (R&D) sector to upgrading technology and equipment.⁶⁰ Additionally, the terms for conscription were changed in 2006 from two years of service to one year.⁶¹ Although this technically meant that more men would have to be conscripted each year, such expectations were left unfulfilled.⁶² After the fall of the Soviet Union, the age group of men between 18-27 who could be drafted dramatically shrunk, and the government was unable to raise salaries to attract more men to enlist otherwise.⁶³ Thus, as Russia's army gradually became smaller yet funding for technological advancements and R&D increased, Putin continued to pave the way for a more capable and powerful armed forces that would be subject to improved conditions and training.

The *Gosudarstvennaya Programma Razvitiya Vooruzheniy* (GPV), translated to the State Program of Armaments, details the military initiatives of modernization and arms

⁵⁸ Nabi Abdullaev, "Army Must Police Itself, Ivanov Says", *The Moscow Times* (April 2006), <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/sitemap/free/2006/4/article/army-must-police-itself-ivanov-says/205752.html>.

⁵⁹ Marcel de Haas, "Russia's Military Reforms", 12.

⁶⁰ Marcel de Haas, "Russia's Military Reforms", 16.

⁶¹ Jim Nichol, "Russian Military Reform and Defense Policy", *Congressional Research Service* (Aug. 24 2011), 35.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Jim Nichol, "Russian Military Reform and Defense Policy", 36.

build-up over a ten-year period.⁶⁴ Under Putin, this program was quite ambitious. The GPV-2010 called for a renewed focus on R&D to kick-start technological innovation, and the GPV-2015, which was to be fulfilled by 2025, strove for a 70:30 ratio of modern to old weapons, respectively.⁶⁵ Thus, Putin set a high bar for moving Russia forward with regard to modernization of equipment and weapons, alongside significantly reducing military manpower on the whole. Reforms announced by the government called for reducing forces to under 1 million personnel compared to the 1.2 million serving in 2008.⁶⁶ By getting rid of dissatisfied personnel and setting standards for technological innovation, one may logically conclude that Russia's military capability was starting on a positive path towards progress and efficiency. In other words, if X (which stands for technological innovation) contributes to improved military capabilities for Russia, while Y (which stands for distressed military personnel) either produces no change in Russia's military capabilities or otherwise negatively affects Russia's military capabilities (such as if the servicemen commit suicide, do their jobs poorly because of their discontent, etc.), then more of X coupled with less of Y improves Russia's military capability overall as net effect.

However, as Klein argues, even though Russia's defense budget has increased five-fold in the period between 2000-2008, and plans to further increase the defense expenditures by 23% were anticipated after the war in Georgia, such increases were short of insufficiently improving the armed forces.⁶⁷ Klein attributes three reasons to this

⁶⁴ Roger McDermott, "Russia's Conventional Military Weakness and Substrategic Nuclear Policy", *Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO)*, 8.

⁶⁵ Marcel de Haas, "Russia's Military Reforms", 17.

⁶⁶ Jim Nichol, "Russian Military Reform and Defense Policy", 2.

⁶⁷ Margarete Klein, "Russia's Military Capabilities: 'Great Power' Ambitions and Reality", *SWP German Institute for International and Security Affairs* (2009), 26.

projection. First, even with reforms seeking to reduce the size of the armed forces to 1 million personnel, Russia's army still remained quite large to be supported by funds that amounted to only 6.3% of the US defense budget.⁶⁸ Next, accounting for all of the 'catch up' that had to occur with technology and weapons, and coupled with the expenses designated towards educating and training personnel to use the new equipment, Russia faced very high costs in both money and time. Finally, with high inflation rates and corruption, where money was getting into the wrong hands, Russia again was subject to less money than expected to use towards modernization.⁶⁹ Accordingly, although an abundance of scholarship exists praising Putin's ambitious reform plans and leadership, it is also important to remain mindful of the realities and budgetary limitations that he faced, which limited the implementation of his goals to some extent.

⁶⁸ Margarete Klein, "Russia's Military Capabilities", 26.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

3. THE RUSSO-GEORGIAN WAR: A STEPPING STONE:

This section discusses the 2008 Georgia conflict in relation to Russian military capabilities both during the war and after when a slew of reforms were implemented. Background on the nature of the conflict is given, followed by an assessment of current literature on the topic that either emphasizes Russia's shortcomings and weak military character throughout the war, or otherwise glorifies its initiatives and capacity compared to past performances. This section argues that the truth lies somewhere in between, where Russia's military capabilities were seemingly weak relative to Russia's expectations of its performance, but were nonetheless a demonstration of improvement since Soviet times. Furthermore, this discussion takes on the position that the Russo-Georgian war can be framed as a stepping stone in Russian military reforms because of the fact that many changes were made after Russia's military weaknesses were exposed. However, such reforms could not be put together overnight, and thus were in the process of being implemented both before and during the war itself, making this war more of a channel through which an increased pace of reform implementation in the fields of technology, personnel, and overall military structure followed. Overall, these reforms significantly boosted Russia's military capabilities.

3.1 BACKGROUND

Towards the end of President Putin's term and the beginning of President Medvedev's (2008-2012) time in office, the perceived threat of NATO expansion into Russia's sphere of influence, particularly in the uncontested regions of South Ossetia and

Abkhazia, became a major concern.⁷⁰ Russia did not look favorably upon another actor infringing on the energy reserves and oil resources that Russia currently maintained for its own geopolitical advantage, which was located between the North Caucasus and the Middle East. Georgia, under the pro-Western leadership of Mikheil Saakashvili, expressed its desire to join NATO in 2008, which would in turn bring Western influence very close to Russia. NATO's interest in coming into this area signaled an act of aggression and infringement from the Russian perspective, and moreover positioned Georgia as an aggressor as well.⁷¹ President Medvedev ordered a military advance into the region in order to show Russia's power and control over the land and resources there. The result was a five-day war that proved to be a victory for Russia on the one hand, yet also served as a reminder of certain inadequacies present in Russia's military effectiveness overall.

3.2 ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT LITERATURE

Current literature on the topic approaches the war from one of two angles. On the one hand, there is an abundance of literature that emphasizes the shortcomings of Russia's military capabilities during this war (perhaps from the side of Russian interests as a way of softening the image of aggression). On the other hand, there is literature emphasizing the drastic improvements of Russia's military capabilities since the 1990s and its military prowess throughout the five-day war. The analysis of the Georgia conflict in this study points to the idea that the reality lies somewhere in between. Perhaps Russia's ambitions at the time exceeded the outcome of their actual performance, leading to literature

⁷⁰ Ariel Cohen and Robert Hamilton, "The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications", *Strategic Studies Institute (SSI)*, 5.

⁷¹ Mohammed S. Rahman, "Georgia and Russia: What Caused the August War?" *Identity, Culture & Politics: An Afro-Asian Dialogue* (2009), 8.

demonstrating the lack of coordination and technological capabilities of the Russian armed forces. Equally important to note, however, is that Russia's military capabilities during the Russo-Georgian war were also significantly better than those previously demonstrated in conflicts during the 1990s, such as those during the Second Chechen war. Thus, it is fair to say that although Russia experienced several shortcomings that misaligned with possible expectations, the 2008 Russo-Georgian war still holds as an example of a capable military force upon consideration of the bigger picture.

3.3 DISCUSSION OF CONFLICT

To start, literature that establishes Russia's weak military capacity during the Russo-Georgian war highlights problems such as Russia's stock of poorly trained military personnel, a lack of effective correspondence between the ground forces and the air forces, a serious gap between outdated and modern technology, and a poor leadership structure at the head of command and control. These issues are analyzed further below, along with their counterparts.

First, with regard to an inadequately trained personnel base, the overall notion exists that both professional troops and conscripts were unqualified to fulfill their duties.⁷² Despite a Russian law banning the use of conscripts in war at the time, approximately 30% of the soldiers in Georgia were conscripts with little to no training and military background.⁷³ Pilots were also reported to be insufficiently prepared for their jobs, comparing their mere 40 flight hours of training to those of NATO forces that averaged

⁷² Cohen and Hamilton, "The Russian Military and the Georgia War", 43.

⁷³ Athena Bryce-Rogers, "Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War", *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* (2013), 14.

around 120-150 flight training hours, which is over three times as much.⁷⁴ As a result, Russia lost a lot of machines and aircrafts due to the inability of those in charge to properly handle them, thereby pointing to an internal weakness within the Russian armed forces and its various units. On the flip side, however, it is also notable that about 6,000-10,000 Russian troops were quickly coordinated and mobilized into organized “elite formations” upon entering Georgia.⁷⁵ An efficient command and control sector was critical in order for this deployment to be actualized, and troops were thereby equipped with necessary weapons, tanks, rocket launchers, and other systems within hours of announcing the initiative.⁷⁶ These claims point to an observable improvement since the 1990s when the lack of such command and coordination existed and such quick turnaround was simply not practical. Therefore, despite internal problems that may have been present on a deeper level, Russia’s military capabilities showed some improvement when analyzed from a broader, historical perspective.⁷⁷

Next, reports claim that the Russian military particularly failed in the area of communication and coordination between the air and ground forces. Notably, radios that were used to communicate between units were not operating properly, causing men to rely on their personal cell phones in order to call command posts and obtain intelligence necessary for executing missions.⁷⁸ Additionally, intelligence that the Russian armed forces were provided was also inadequate during several missions and the GLONASS navigational

⁷⁴ Athena Bryce-Rogers, “Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War”, 14.

⁷⁵ Felix K. Chang, “An Initial Look at Russian Military Performance in Georgia”, *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (Aug. 13, 2008),

<http://www.fpri.org/enotes/200808.chang.russiaesurgentgeorgia.html>.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Felix K. Chang, “An Initial Look at Russian Military Performance in Georgia”.

⁷⁸ Cohen and Hamilton, “The Russian Military and the Georgia War”, 49.

system was a huge failure. Many casualties resulted from poor operation of the Identification of Friend or Foe (IFF) technology.⁷⁹ For example, the air force demolished the wrong targets with bombs and strikes multiple times, which inevitably hurt the ground troops who were relying on their help to complete operations.⁸⁰ Additionally, the Main Battle Tanks (MBT Tanks) were so old that even their line of aiming at the target and firing prevented accuracy of effective and clean shots. Army General Alexei Maslov attested to the obsolete machines being used, claiming that “Although work to develop a tank battlefield information management system (BIMS) is already under way, its installation on outdated tank models is too costly and therefore not recommended.”⁸¹

Undoubtedly, poor communication during a time of war breeds many mistakes and complications of the intended outcome. Although it is true that even literature praising Russia’s military capabilities during this time attests to the fact that several Russian aircraft losses were caused by ground-based air defenses, and that losses such as that of Russia’s Tu-22M3 bomber still remain unexplained, it is nevertheless uncontested that the observable fast pace of successful air strikes could not have been completed without at least some proper coordination between forces.⁸² Additionally, Russia used over 300 aircrafts that were always on alert, thereby showing “greater skill and coordination than had been seen in the 1990s.”⁸³ Thus, historically speaking, Russia has undoubtedly shown

⁷⁹ Dale R. Herspring and Roger N. McDermott, “Serdyukov Promotes Systemic Russian Military Reform”, *Foreign Policy Research Institute* (2010), 13.

⁸⁰ Athena Bryce-Rogers, “Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War”, 13.

⁸¹ Herspring and McDermott, “Serdyukov Promotes Systemic Russian Military Reform”, 14.

⁸² Felix K. Chang, “An Initial Look at Russian Military Performance in Georgia”.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

improvements in its air force capabilities even though other factors point to how potential for more growth and development still exists.

Next, perhaps Russia's military capabilities lagged behind expectations of performance due to the lack of some modern technology. During the war, only 10-15% of Russia's arms were considered modern.⁸⁴ Of the arms and equipment they had, 60-70% of them broke over the duration of the conflict.⁸⁵ Moreover, it is known that soldiers were not all properly equipped with protective armor leading to dangerous fighting conditions and more casualties than expected. In fact, reports conveyed that Russian soldiers took helmets and body armor off of Georgian men to use on themselves, which shows a certain degree of helplessness on the side of the Russian servicemen who were risking their lives due to a simple means of vulnerability.⁸⁶

Interestingly enough, the Georgian forces were comparably smaller than the Russian forces, and were also at a disadvantage due to their smaller defense budget. Nonetheless, the Georgian tanks and aircrafts were equipped with more high-tech devices than were Russian tanks and aircrafts, with technology such as night vision, more advanced GPS systems for accurate targeting and precision, Identify Friend and Foe (IFF) systems, and more.⁸⁷ Coupled with poor intelligence at times and poorly trained personnel, ill-equipped units further contributed to the lack of efficiency and effectiveness of the Russian armed forces during the war.

⁸⁴ Felix K. Chang, "An Initial Look at Russian Military Performance in Georgia".

⁸⁵ Cohen and Hamilton, "The Russian Military and the Georgia War", 46.

⁸⁶ Cohen and Hamilton, "The Russian Military and the Georgia War", 45.

⁸⁷ Athena Bryce-Rogers, "Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War", 15.

Finally, it is important to note that some degree of difficulty existed with regard to Russia's military leadership structure during the unraveling of events in Georgia. A quote by General Nikolai Makarov sums up the story quite well. Makarov stated that the Russian military was "forced to handpick colonels and generals from all over Russia" in order to obtain a group of more competent and capable commanders.⁸⁸ Thus, some officials at the top of command may have not been the best fit for leading the Russian army, thereby causing the military to "hand pick" other, more adequate leaders for the job in order to improve Russia's military capacity for the remainder of the conflict.

At the end of the day, despite several deficiencies of the Russian military in 2008, Russia still emerged victorious. One may ask then, how is this the case? During the war, Russia relied on large, conventional forces where strength in numbers was key, and utilized traditional tactics that date back to the times of Peter the Great. Relying on size and speed of military personnel, and using tactics on the ground such as column formations to attack the enemy surely caused the Russian side many casualties.⁸⁹ Although clearly a con of a Peter the Great style army, it is important to take a step back and realize that Russia still demonstrated a renewed capability of executing such a large operation with the tools they had available to them. Perhaps Russia didn't have all of the proper technology that they desired, or the best training of personnel, but they did show great improvements in terms of their performance given what they did have. Thus, the 2008 Russo-Georgia War unraveled some weaknesses in Russia's military status with regard to technology, communication, and personnel training, but still showed an improvement in military

⁸⁸ Cohen and Hamilton, "The Russian Military and the Georgia War", 44.

⁸⁹ Athena Bryce-Rogers, "Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War", 11.

capability compared to past performances. In the end, this left President Medvedev and Premier Putin to re-evaluate the pace and course of necessary reform.

3.4 POST-CONFLICT ACTIONS & IMPLICATIONS

After the conflict, President Medvedev called to speed up the pace of reforms listed in the GPV-2015 that were authorized under former President Putin. The idea behind Putin's agenda for the GPV-2015 was to cut back on military units and officers, and use the money from this to invest in R&D and weapons procurement.⁹⁰ However, priority was still given to nuclear deterrence, which took up about 25% of the defense budget.⁹¹ The new GPV-2020 that followed under President Medvedev called for a much stronger and faster push for allocating more of the defense budget into the R&D sector in order to modernize weapons and equipment such as aircrafts, submarines, tanks, and other machines that Russia was lacking. Additionally, 25% of the budget was put towards upgrading the Navy, as it was seen as an extremely important sector for Russia's military advantage. As Klein attests, "The enormous demand for modernization can only be met if the army were to be reduced significantly and the defense budget to be increased substantially."⁹²

Interestingly, the armed forces under Medvedev began to greatly resemble the Western model.⁹³ For instance, the number of brigades was reduced, and many of the mobilization forces were swapped out for more permanently ready units in order to

⁹⁰ Athena Bryce-Rogers, "Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War", 11.

⁹¹ Marcel de Haas, "Russia's Military Reforms", 24.

⁹² Margarete Klein, "Russia's Military Capabilities", 6.

⁹³ Marcel de Haas, "Russia's Military Reforms", 29.

achieve greater efficiency if conflict were to occur.⁹⁴ However, opposition still lingered from military officials who felt the necessity and power of a large army. These officials further believed that a larger mobilization force with substantial divisions were necessary to deal with threats coming from their borders, particularly from the Far East.⁹⁵ Additionally, the initiative of creating a Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) Corps also came underway in order to have more available combat troops and better combat readiness overall.

Moreover, Russia was buying more weapons from the West, such as from Israel and France, due to the shortcomings of the Russian Military Industrial Complex (MIC), which the military industry was not too happy about but which nonetheless was a quicker alternative to improving Russia's technological stance at the time.⁹⁶ In April 2010, Medvedev also announced a reduction in the number of military districts from six (Moscow, Leningrad, Siberia, Far East, North Caucasus, and Volga-Urals) to only 4 joint strategic commands (West, East, South, and Central). The aim behind this action was to obtain more control over the units as a result of more joint groupings of districts.⁹⁷ Thus, President Medvedev was trying to make numerous improvements in a short time period despite the limited financial flexibility that Russia and the rest of the world was facing after the 2008 financial crisis.

The table below (TABLE 2 - Comparison of Russian Armed Forces, 2008 v. 2020) summarizes the military changes outlined by the GPV-2020 from which changes in Russian military capabilities can be more readily interpreted. From this table it is notable that there

⁹⁴ Marcel de Haas, "Russia's Military Reforms", 29.

⁹⁵ Jim Nichol, "Russian Military Reform and Defense Policy", 38.

⁹⁶ Marcel de Haas, "Russia's Military Reforms", 30.

⁹⁷ Marcel de Haas, "Russia's Military Reforms", 29.

is a very significant decrease in the number of units as well as in the types of units in the Russian armed forces within the twelve-year period. Evidently, this is also reflected in the 278,500 decrease in total personnel which shows the beginning of a shift in military ideology from the unyielding desire to keep a large conventional army by traditionalists. Furthermore, the 60% increase in modern conventional arms and 50% increase in modern nuclear arms suggests potential for an improvement in Russian technological capabilities to coincide with a reduction in military manpower. As more advanced weapons and equipment are produced, more training and education is necessary to ensure that military personnel can effectively use this new technology. Thus, despite reductions in manpower by 2020, servicemen who remain will be better trained and equipped, thereby empowering Russia's armed forces as a net result.

Overall, it can be said that the 2008 Russo-Georgian conflict, in the words of Dale Herspring and Roger McDermott, forced Russia to acknowledge that "the forces currently at the state's disposal were in no condition to fight a modern war" as far as their expectations went, and therefore significant reforms were necessary.⁹⁸ At the same time, however, it is important to recognize that the fast pace of reforms that occurred after the 2008 Georgia war could not have just suddenly materialized. These reforms were being planned and gradually implemented both prior to and during the war itself, leading to the conclusion that the conflict served as a means through which these reforms could be pushed through more quickly and systematically.

⁹⁸ Herspring and McDermott, "Serdyukov Promotes Systemic Russian Military Reform", 12-13.

Category of Comparison	RF Armed Forces 2008	RF Armed Forces 2020	Differences
Command & control (C ³) tiers	Military Districts – armies – divisions – regiments	Joint Strategic Commands – army corps – brigades	Decrease in levels of command
Administrative organization	6 Military Districts	4 Joint Strategic Commands (OSKs)	Decrease in number of administrative organs and increase in joint control
Types of units	Regiments and divisions	Regiments and divisions converted into 80 brigades	Decrease in types of units
Combat readiness	Low: 20% of units in permanent readiness	High: all units in permanent readiness	Increase in combat readiness by 80%
Number of units	1,890	172	Decrease in number of units of more than 90%
Personnel			
Total number	1.2 million	921,500	Minus 278,500
Number of officers	355,000	220,000	Minus 135,500
Number of warrant officers	142,000	--	Minus 142,000
Number of contract soldiers and NCOs	80,000	425,000	Plus 345,000
Number of conscripts	423,000	276,500	Minus 146,500
Arms / Equipment			
Share of modern conventional arms	10%	70%	Plus 60%
Share of modern nuclear arms	20%	70%	Plus 50%

Sources: Gavrilov 2011; Felgenhauer 2011; 'Brigadnomu' 2009; 'Genshtab vystroil' 2009; Yuzbashev 2009; Zaks 2011; 'Russia Plans \$650bn' 2011; 'Russia to Buy' 2011; 'Ministerstvo oborony prishupilo' 2011; 'Minoborony RF zakupit' 2011; 'V ramkakh gosprogrammy' 2011; 'Rossiyskiye voyemnyye obeshchayut' 2011; 'Rossiyskaya armiya zakupit' 2011; Khranchikhin 2010c; Haas 2010: 92-95; 'Russia Announces Rearmament Plan' 2009; Felgenhauer 2010a and 2010b; Litovkin, 2009c; Nikol'skiy 2009. See also Annexe A: Chronology of Military Reforms since 2008).

TABLE 2 – Comparison of Russian Armed Forces: 2008 v. 2020

Source: Marcel de Haas, "Russia's Military Reforms", 34.

4. ASSESSING SOVIET/RUSSIAN MILITARY CAPABILITIES:

This section discusses Soviet and Russian military capabilities, and the international perception of Russia's past and present military character including any changes that have occurred overtime. The analysis of Russia's current military capabilities, although limited due to the availability of publicly open data on this topic, incorporates quantitative data brought in from sources such as the World Bank in an attempt to assess trends in military expenditures and arms procurement overtime. Russia is further compared to other countries like the United States and China in terms of relative military spending and technological innovations. This data is coupled with qualitative evidence from multiple scholars and military experts who attest to the new systems and equipment that Russia is demonstrating on battlefields and testing grounds. Additionally, recent statements warning NATO and the West to pay attention to Russia's renewed sense of military prowess further serve as grounds for concluding that Russia's military capacity has improved as a result of reforms and increased attention paid to R&D.

4.1 OVERVIEW – SOVIET & POST SOVIET ERAS

Since the late 1970s, a great shift has occurred in the overall perception of Russia's military capacity. During that period, many people saw the army as one of the most, if not the most, important and honorable institutions that existed. However, the public's perception of the armed forces quickly deteriorated with the failure of the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, Gorbachev's backwards policies, and the crisis in Georgia. As Barany puts it, there was a "profound negative shift in the military's institutional psychology that has

undoubtedly contributed to its pervasive malaise”.⁹⁹ Several factors may have accounted for this transition. First and foremost, it must be noted that the strategies, tactics, and equipment used by the Soviet armed forces were outdated. As former VDV intelligence chief, Colonel Pavel Popovskikh, stated several years after the crisis in Afghanistan:

“Our army is still being trained based upon regulations, which were written in the 1980s! The regulations, manuals, combat training programmes, and the volumes of standards have become obsolete...If the Airborne Troops have remained at that prehistoric level, then we can confidently say that the General Staff and the rest of the troops continue to train for a past war.”¹⁰⁰

It is evident from this that the Russian army, operating on older standards, was lagging behind in warfare strategies and up-to-date weaponry compared to other international actors leading up to and during the conflict in Georgia.

Russia’s lack of adequate funding in the R&D sector undoubtedly contributed to the slow rate of modernized weapons and systems that were produced. As Renz and Thornton point out, “The Russian defense industry, it is clear, has failed to make the leap from the Cold War era ‘dumb iron’ equipment to 21st century ‘sophistication.’”¹⁰¹ In 2007, the Ministry of Defense (MOD) Sergei Ivanov urged for an audit to be conducted on the military budget. The result was an unraveling of the myriad of corruption problems that existed behind the scenes. In fact, the MOD found that 70% of the budget was used for alternative

⁹⁹ Zoltan Barany, "The Politics of Russia's Elusive Defense Reform", *Political Science Quarterly* (2005), 16.

¹⁰⁰ Herspring and McDermott, "Serdyukov Promotes Systemic Russian Military Reform", 12.

¹⁰¹ Bettina Renz and Rod Thornton, "Russian Military Modernization: Cause, Course, and Consequences", *Problems of Post-Communism* (2012), 8.

purposes than those originally designated.¹⁰² As a next step, former defense minister Serdyukov secretly snuck in to the Navy's Nakhimov School through the back door to check up on the conditions and practices going occurring. What he found was an utter shock: the Navy was operating in extremely unsanitary living conditions with ill-suited circumstances for proper training and health of soldiers. In fact, Admiral Bukin was fired as a result, and serious talks of reforms immediately went underway.¹⁰³ Indeed, the static nature of Russia's equipment and systems development, coupled with poor conditions and low morale of soldiers was reflected in Russia's overall performance leading up to and after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

4.2 CURRENT RUSSIAN MILITARY CAPABILITIES

Given the history of Soviet and Russian military reforms and the associated ideologies that have been guiding military policy for many years, a thorough assessment of Russia's current military capacity may follow. Prior to delving into this analysis head first, however, it is necessary to note that limited data availability and transparency on present-day military projects has served as an obstacle to the scope of deductions made. As military expert Julian Cooper notes in "Russian Military Expenditure: Data, Analysis and Issues":

"Secrecy with respect to military spending was a central feature of Soviet practice and this legacy lives on in present-day Russia, with incentive structures that do nothing to promote a greater transparency."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Herspring and McDermott, "Serdyukov Promotes Systemic Russian Military Reform", 2.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Julian Cooper, "Russian Military Expenditure: Data, Analysis and Issues", *FOI - Swedish Defense Research Agency* (2013), 50.

Of the information published on the 2013-2015 Russian military budget and expenditures, about half of the documents were open, and the rest were classified under two levels of secrecy – “sekretno” (secret) and “sovershenno sekretno” (top secret).¹⁰⁵ These classified documents explain national defense spending plans and projects in great detail, but the publically available data still contains significant information for use by this study. As the remainder of this section will demonstrate, accessible information on Russia’s increased military budget spending coupled with claims of Russia’s technological progress lead one to logically conclude that the increased military spending is in fact working to improve Russia’s military capabilities.

To start, the World Bank provides helpful information related to the trends in Russia’s military expenditure as a percent of GDP from 2006-2014. According to the World Bank, ‘military expenditure’ is derived from the NATO definition that includes:

“...all current and capital expenditures on the armed forces, including peacekeeping forces; defense ministries and other government agencies engaged in defense projects; paramilitary forces, if these are judged to be trained and equipped for military operations; and military space activities. Such expenditures include military and civil personnel, including retirement pensions of military personnel and social services for personnel; operation and maintenance; procurement; military research and development; and military aid.”¹⁰⁶

As seen in FIGURE 1 below, Russia’s military expenditure as a percent of GDP has increased significantly since 2006, and although it has dipped between 2009 and 2001, it has been on

¹⁰⁵ Julian Cooper, “Russian Military Expenditure”, 35.

¹⁰⁶ “Data - Military Expenditure (% of GDP)”, *The World Bank* (2016), <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS>.

a steady incline ever since. Additionally, compared to the world average shown in red, Russia's *relative* expenditure on its military has consistently exceeded the world average, with an increasing gap in recent years as well. To take a closer look at the years 2011 through 2014, TABLE 3 below shows that Russia's military expenditure as a percent of GDP has been steadily increasing between 2-3% each year, with continued future projections.

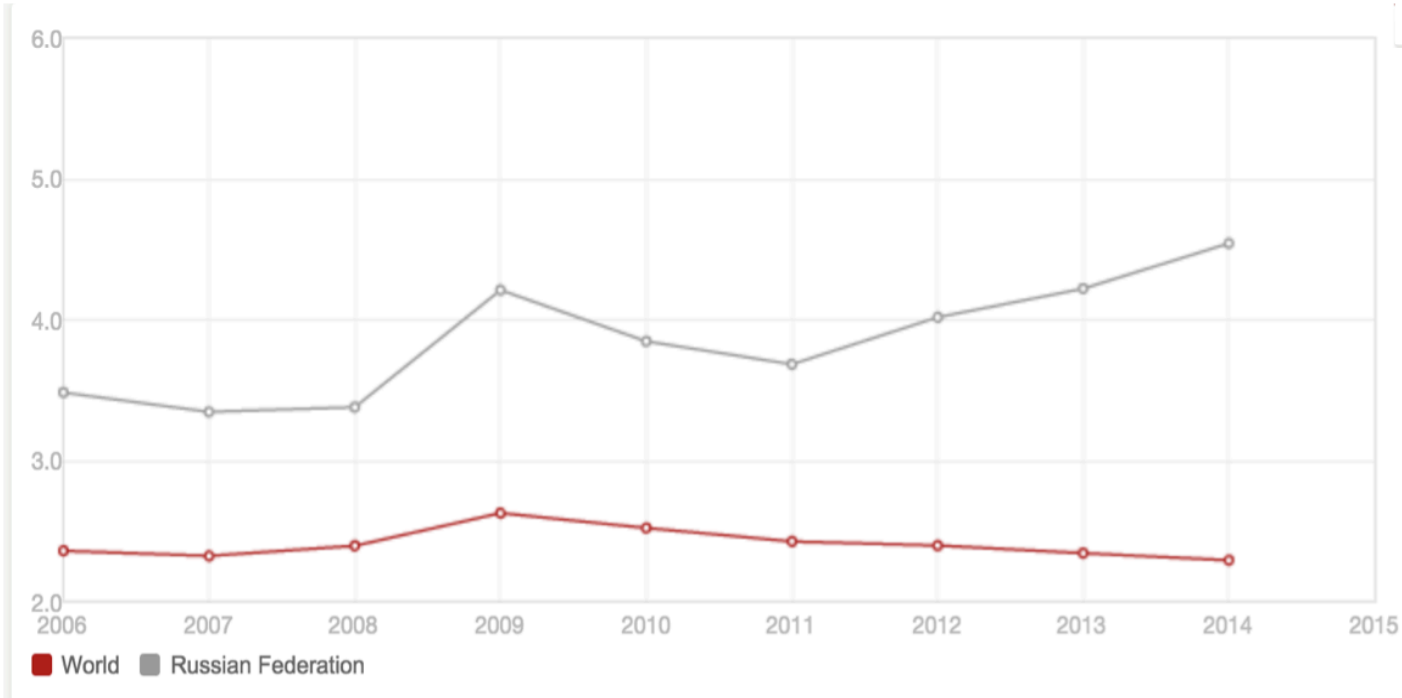


FIGURE 1 - Russia's Military Expenditure (% GDP) from 2006 to 2014
Source: "Data - Military Expenditure (% of GDP)", *The World Bank* (2016)

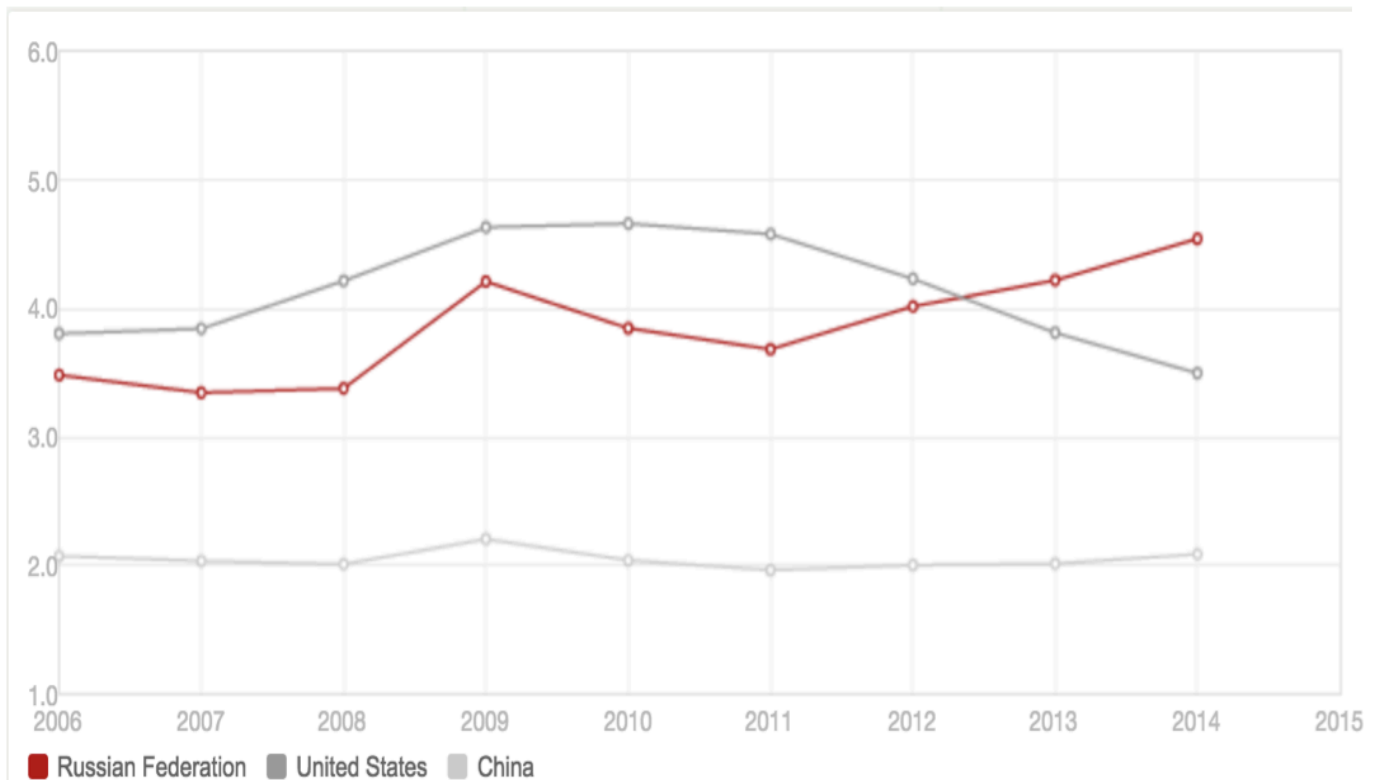


FIGURE 2 – Russia, United States, and China: Military Expenditure (% GDP) from 2006 to 2014

Source: "Data - Military Expenditure (% of GDP)", *The World Bank* (2016)

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014
Russian Federation	3.7	4.0	4.2	4.5

TABLE 3 – Russia's Military Expenditure (% GDP)

Source: "Data - Military Expenditure (% of GDP)", *The World Bank* (2016)

Relative to more specific superpowers such as the United States (shown in dark grey above Russia on FIGURE 2) and China (shown in light grey below Russia on FIGURE 2), Russia (shown in red) has also been doing notably well in terms of increased military spending. As illustrated in FIGURE 2, between 2012 and 2013, the United States

plummeted while Russia rose in military spending, with China remaining relatively stable. This shows that Russia has both caught up to and surpassed the US in military expenditure as a percent of GDP, with the gap between the two nations increasing. Furthermore, this suggests that after 2012 when President Putin came into office for the second time, more money was pumped into the military sector as highlighted in his objectives. In fact, Putin's ambition to improve the military sector and allocate more money towards military expenditure is reflected in his rhetoric and objectives, and is further acknowledged by many scholars in the field. As stated by Brookings Institute scholar, Steven Pifer:

“Russia is in the midst of major modernization of its armed forces. This has been driven by Vladimir Putin's ambition to restore Russia's hard power and supported by revenues that flowed into the Kremlin's coffers between 2004 and 2014 when the price of oil was high. The modernization programs encompass all parts of the Russian military...”¹⁰⁷

Additionally, Jonathan Masters, a scholar and editor for the Council on Foreign Relations, expressed that even though oil prices have declined between 2014 and 2015 due to international sanctions, President Putin has made it clear that he has “exempted defense spending” from any major budget cuts.¹⁰⁸ Thus, although specific details on the exact break down of fund allocation within the military sector is limited, it can be deduced that funding and expenditure is at the very least remaining steady from its 2014 levels in order to uphold Putin's military modernization proposals and objectives.

¹⁰⁷ Steven Pifer, "Pay Attention, America: Russia Is Upgrading Its Military", *Brookings Institution* (2016), 1.

¹⁰⁸ Jonathan Masters, "The Russian Military", *Council on Foreign Relations* (2015), 4.

Next, qualitative information regarding Russia's military reforms is helpful in assessing the extent to which Russia's current military capabilities can be understood. For starters, it is undeniable that Russia is going through a historic change in its military programs. Claims have been made warning other nations and actors to pay attention to Russia's growing military might and its push towards modernization. As the Council on Foreign Relations states, "Russian armed forces are in the midst of a historical overhaul with significant consequences for Eurasian politics and security."¹⁰⁹ Additionally, the 2015 Military Balance Report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) claims that there is some "unease about possible gaps in NATO's capacity to counter Russia's use of hybrid warfare techniques."¹¹⁰ The same report claims that Russia's military modernization is advancing and investments are being made in the navy, air force, and military force for new weapons and equipment. Most importantly, Russia's nuclear program, which stands at the core of its military strategy, is also showing signs of notable improvements in the types of arms and reaction speeds of such weapons being produced and tested.¹¹¹ Therefore, the qualitative evidence attesting to Russia's improving military effectiveness that further warns NATO about its own capacity relative to Russia's unquestionably affirms that Russia's capabilities are improving overall.

Moving on, a major initiative taken by President Putin was to modernize and improve the capacity of Russia's naval forces, which others have been calling "more rust

¹⁰⁹Jonathan Masters, "The Russian Military", 1.

¹¹⁰ John Chipman, "IISS - The Military Balance, 2015", *The International Institute for Strategic Studies* (2015), 2.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

than ready.”¹¹² In effect, the navy has been working towards modifying old ships and manufacturing new ones. According to Garrett Campbell, “The navy has unveiled a significant capability: Its Caspian Sea corvettes and frigates can fire cruise missiles at targets over 900 miles away. This is a previously unknown capability.”¹¹³ In the same vein, Western scholars and military experts have taken Russia’s military advancements, particularly with regard to naval modernization efforts, to demonstrate that Russia’s new ships and fleet improvements “display a unique capability” and “highlight the results of its naval modernization efforts, much of which are unknown.”¹¹⁴ Many of these modernization projects and demonstrations of new equipment go hand-in-hand with stated military objectives, yet are still surprising experts in the field. Clearly, therefore, if experts are expressing the need to pay attention to Russia as an improving military power given its observable modernization turnaround, it is difficult to dismiss Russia’s military capabilities as improving overall.

The navy is also not the only division with improvements that have caught the eye of scholars and experts in the field. Russia’s air force has similarly been showing incredible advances in its capabilities, especially when considering the current intervention in Syria and the reliance on air defense strikes over ground forces. In fact, a recent New York Times article stated that:

“Russia’s fighter jets are, for now at least, conducting nearly as many strikes in a typical day against rebel troops opposing the government of President Bashar al-

¹¹² Garrett I. Campbell, “Russia’s Military is Proving Western Punditry Wrong”, *Brookings Institution* (2015), 2.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Assad as the American-led coalition targeting the Islamic State has been carrying out each month this year.”¹¹⁵

The same article also quotes President Putin’s statement:

“It is one thing for the experts to be aware that Russia supposedly has these weapons, and another thing for them to see for the first time that they do really exist, that our defense industry is making them, that they are of high quality and that we have well-trained people who can put them to effective use...They have seen, too, now that Russia is ready to use them if this is in the interests of our country and our people.”¹¹⁶

Thus, as events like the crisis in Syria unfold, Russia’s military modernization efforts and the fulfillment of reforms initiated by Putin become more visible. As a result, one can better legitimize the actual state of Russia’s improved military capabilities.

The most up-to-date evidence available for assessing Russia’s military capabilities is published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). Their Military Balance report “provides the best available public information on global military capabilities, trends, and defense economics”¹¹⁷ and contains several important points to be recognized. As shown by FIGURE 3 below, Russia’s defense budget in 2015 totaled \$65.6 billion USD, coming in fourth only to the United States, China, and Saudi Arabia. Russia is therefore still

¹¹⁵ Steven Lee Myers and Eric Schmitt, “Russian Military Uses Syria as Proving Ground, and West Takes Notice”, *The New York Times* (Oct. 14 2015), http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/15/world/middleeast/russian-military-uses-syria-as-proving-ground-and-west-takes-notice.html?_r=0.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ John Chipman, "IISS - The Military Balance, 2016", *The International Institute for Strategic Studies* (2016), 4.

remaining as one of the leading nations, given previous projections made by the World Bank data, although it has dipped below the United States once again.

Even so, the IISS claims that “Russia’s employment of advance cruise missiles over Syria...highlighted that advanced weapons systems are no longer the preserve of Western states.”¹¹⁸ In effect, Russia has ‘caught up’ to the West in certain technological advances. Additionally, Russia’s new *Armata* tank shows a great shift in technological innovation that has defined Russia in previous years before reforms implemented under President Putin took hold.¹¹⁹ Further innovations include Russia’s ability to disrupt certain electronic and electro-magnetic signals used for communication purposes by other parties, new air defense systems and combat aircrafts that have been deployed into its Western Military District, new cruise missiles and ballistic missiles that can bring targets in Europe into reachable distance, and more high-speed precision weapons and vehicles for use by ground and air forces by development programs that China is part of as well.¹²⁰ Thus, it is evident that Russia’s military spending is reflected in its new technological and systems capabilities, and its relative international position further attests to its solid standing given the degree of improvements that have occurred.

¹¹⁸ John Chipman, "IISS - The Military Balance, 2016", 3.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ John Chipman, "IISS - The Military Balance, 2016", 1-4.

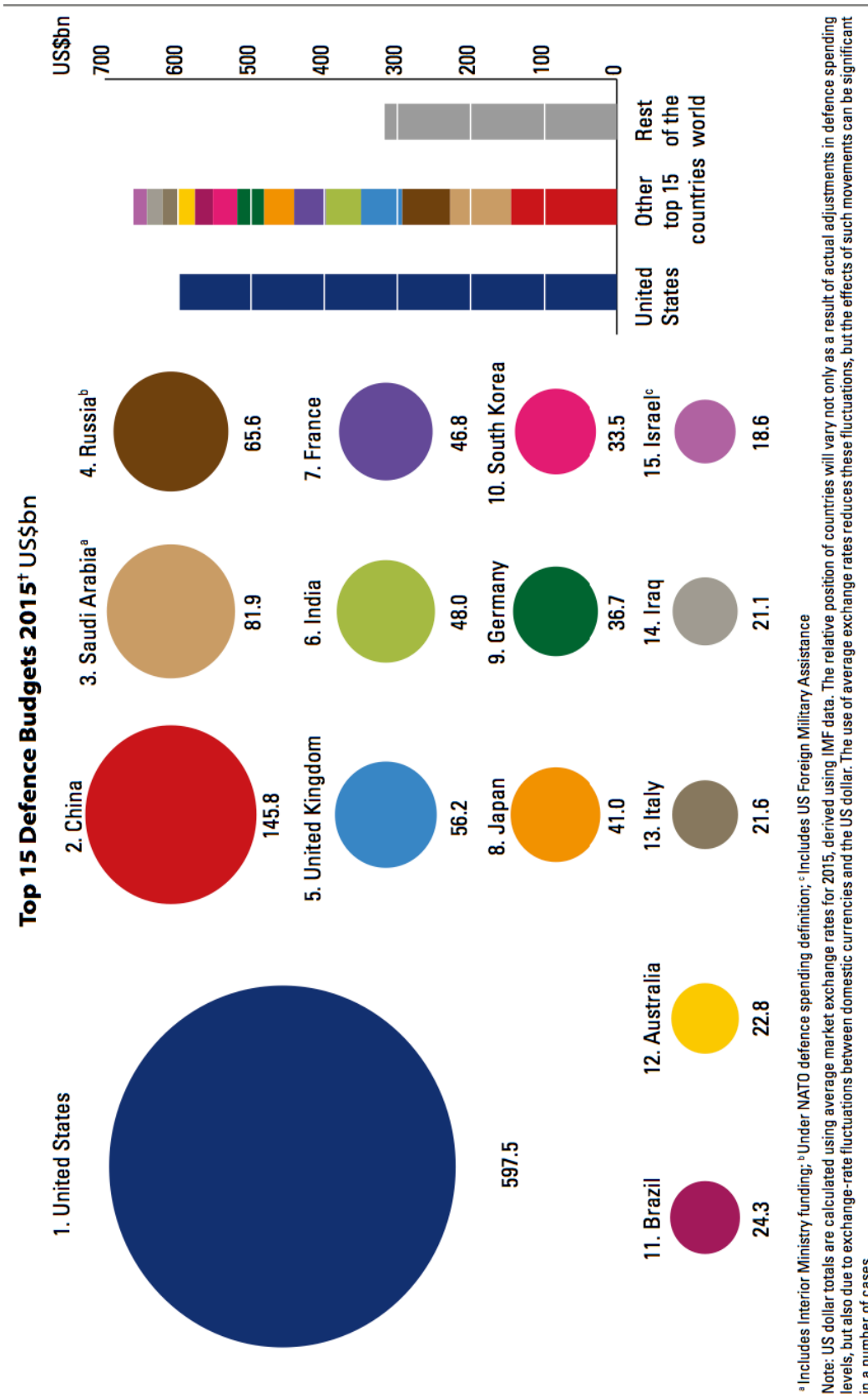


FIGURE 3 – Top 15 Defense Budgets in 2015 (in US billion \$), Russia 4th
 Source: John Chipman, "IISS - The Military Balance, 2015", 4.

Additionally, in late 2015 Russia and Iran discussed a deal in which Russia would provide Iran with a new S-300 air defense system.¹²¹ Although this process was delayed by sanctions, the point to be made here is that such an action portrays Russia as a steadfast partner of its allies – one that now has the capacity to provide arms and technology to *others* when in its history this has not always been the case. Recalling the 2008 Georgia War, Russia obtained arms and equipment from Georgian forces to use themselves, and historically also relied on countries such as Spain, Israel, and France, to purchase more high-tech equipment. Now, seemingly, Russia is less dependent on other actors for weapons and equipment, and is in the position to manufacture and supply others with new systems. Overall, such a turn demonstrates an improvement in Russia’s military capabilities. Even with cutbacks in personnel, Russia’s significant technological growth has filled and exceeded that gap, thereby enabling Russia to emerge as a stronger military superpower given today’s political-military climate.

Finally, it is noteworthy to acknowledge that reports such as the IISS Military Balance brief and other scholarly articles warn NATO about its capacity to stay up to par with Russia’s improvements. Statements such as “Russia’s recapitalization of its cruise-missile inventory raises questions as to NATO’s ability to currently defend against such systems,” as well as “...now training needs to increase against radar-guided air-defense missiles like Russia’s SA-20 and SA-21” have been made in this report alone.¹²² In the previous year’s IISS military budget report, similar concerns were addressed.¹²³ Aside from IISS, the Brookings piece by Steven Pifer, makes the claim that the “United States has to pay

¹²¹ John Chipman, "IISS - The Military Balance, 2016", 2.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

attention. Russia may be a power in long-term decline, but it retains the capacity to make significant trouble.”¹²⁴ Thus, Russia’s improving military capacity is being felt all over the world, and such qualitative evidence is suggestive of the fact that military modernization efforts are mostly going as planned, and a renewed sense of military might for Russia is resonating both near and far.

¹²⁴ Steven Pifer, "Pay Attention, America: Russia Is Upgrading Its Military", 1.

5. CAPABILITIES COMPARED: THE CASES OF AFGHANISTAN AND SYRIA:

This section analyzes the changing nature of Soviet and Russian military capabilities overtime by juxtaposing the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan with the current intervention in Syria. First, background on Russian relations in the Middle East is provided in order to set a foundation for the analysis, followed by a discussion of the similarities and differences that are present between the two conflicts. Additionally, military capabilities are assessed in relation to reforms that have occurred dealing with technological breakthroughs in weapons and equipment, personnel cuts, better training and living conditions given the smaller quantity of personnel, and more. Notable changes have also occurred with regard to the prevailing military ideology as evidenced by President Putin's current strategy of "no boots on the ground." Moreover, the most recent events involving Russia's withdrawal from Syria and associated implications of this decision on Russia's character of military leadership are discussed. Finally, claims made by scholars and military experts attesting to Russia's military empowerment and its overall improvement in executing operations are evaluated.

5.1 BACKGROUND – MIDDLE EASTERN RELATIONS

In an attempt to further the core analysis being presented in this work, a juxtaposition of the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the current invasion of Syria warrants some attention. The Soviet Union's decision to invade Afghanistan in the late 1970s undoubtedly proved detrimental both in terms of casualties and overall Soviet military reputation. As will be discussed in the following pages, the ends did not justify the means as Soviet preparedness and capacity was not very masterful.

To begin, some background should be provided about the Soviet Union's relationship with the Middle East in the 1970s. Russia's overall goal in the region was to support the Communist regime and promote its rise to power. After a coup in 1978 brought the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan to power, whose ideology was mainly Communist in nature, Afghan Islamists began challenging Afghan Communists.¹²⁵ A year later in 1979, an Islamist revolution occurred in Iran that resulted in the United States losing control over the region. The king who came to power, King Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, was still friendly with the United States after assuming his role.¹²⁶ However, Islamist radicals quickly overthrew the King, and took actions to nationalize the oil industry and essentially ruin relations between Iran and the West by breaking alliances and international agreements that were in place.¹²⁷ Additionally, during this time the Soviets did not side with the West. Instead, they supported and armed Saddam Hussein, who was the socialist dictator of Iraq and an enemy of Iran.¹²⁸ Furthermore, the resource rich region of Saudi Arabia was also in a fragile position due to the neighboring conflict brewing in Iran and Iraq, thereby alarming the United States about a spill over, which would jeopardize its strategic interests there (i.e. oil reserves). The Carter Doctrine of 1980 produced by the United States thereby threatened the Soviets that if they went into Saudi Arabia, the United States would respond by going to war.¹²⁹

Following in 1982, more opposition movements sprung up against communism in Iran, which was the cause of great alarm among the Soviets. Iran's communist party, the

¹²⁵ Iakovos Alhadeff, "The Russian Expeditions in Afghanistan (1979) and Syria (2015): A Comparison", *Word Press* (Oct. 9 2015), 8.

¹²⁶ Iakovos Alhadeff, "The Russian Expeditions", 3.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Iakovos Alhadeff, "The Russian Expeditions", 9.

Tudeh Party, was outlawed, and opposition groups killed many Iranian communists as well.¹³⁰ Coupled with the Iran's nationalization of oil companies, tensions between the Soviets and the Islamists of Iran quickly escalated.¹³¹ Overall, the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan was precipitated by a strong desire to spread communism abroad. In addition to this, the Soviets also wanted to maintain control over the rich oil and gas resources that were in the region, particularly those located near the former Soviet colonies of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan.¹³² The United States, however, saw the Soviet presence in Afghanistan as a threat to its interests in Saudi Arabia because after the loss of Iraq and Iran, the West wanted to keep that at the very least.¹³³ Thus, Soviet strategic interests and a motivation to maintain its geopolitical presence in the region paved the road for a series of military initiatives that followed.

5.2 DISCUSSING AFGHANISTAN V. SYRIA

In assessing the Afghanistan and Syria crises, a few notable similarities and differences are necessary to lay out prior to analyzing Soviet and Russian capabilities. First, President Putin was the first leader since former President Brezhnev who sent military aircrafts on bomb strikes outside of the area known as the former USSR.¹³⁴ In the case of Syria, contrary to the objective in Afghanistan, Russia does not wish to control the entire area. In Syria, Russia is mainly interested in protecting socialist dictator Bashar al Assad

¹³⁰ Iakovos Alhadeff, "The Russian Expeditions", 8.

¹³¹ Iakovos Alhadeff, "The Russian Expeditions", 6-7.

¹³² Iakovos Alhadeff, "The Russian Expeditions", 8.

¹³³ Iakovos Alhadeff, "The Russian Expeditions", 9.

¹³⁴ "A New Spectacle For The Masses; Russia In Syria", *The Economist* (Oct. 3, 2015), <http://proxy.library.upenn.edu:2132/printviewfile?accountid=14707>.

against those who are opposed to his leadership.¹³⁵ Furthermore, Russia currently has stronger alliances compared to those during the late 1970s, such as the support of China and the added benefit that American interests are no longer aligned with Turkish and Saudi ones.¹³⁶ Thus, Russia can conduct smaller operations in Syria than it had done in Afghanistan, and has a firmer position given its interests and alliances. Nonetheless, a common factor of both invasions is that Russia still faces the challenge of finding a common ground between its regional interests and promoting stability overall.¹³⁷

Next, the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister at the time of the Afghanistan intervention, G.M. Kornienko, noted that the decision to intervene in the region was reactionary in nature and predicated on the desire to stabilize and “Sovietize” Afghanistan.¹³⁸ This decision came after the Soviet Union learned about NATO’s aim to send American medium range missiles into Europe.¹³⁹ Similarly, Russia today is concerned with maintaining the status quo in the Middle East and keeping its client relationships in the region. In fact, many articles attest to this, claiming that Russia’s “approach today is more conservative and guarded – some might even say reactionary...the focus today is more on preserving the status quo and ‘freezing the conflict.’”¹⁴⁰ Therefore, reactionary actions and an objective to stabilize the status quo resonate in both the Afghanistan and Syria cases.

Given this background, Soviet military capabilities in Afghanistan can now be compared with current Russian capabilities in Syria after modernization programs have

¹³⁵ Iakovos Alhadeff, “The Russian Expeditions”, 12.

¹³⁶ Iakovos Alhadeff, “The Russian Expeditions”, 14.

¹³⁷ Oleg Kulakov, "Lessons Learned from the Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan: Implications for Russian Defense Reform", *Academic Research Branch - NATO/OTAN* (2006), 1.

¹³⁸ Oleg Kulakov, “Lessons Learned”, 2.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Sergey Markedonov, "Syria 2015: Echoes of Afghanistan 1979?", *Russia Direct* (Oct. 1 2015), <http://www.russia-direct.org/opinion/syria-2015-echoes-afghanistan-1979>.

occurred. In 1979 when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, the first striking indicator of their poor performance was their overall lack of an exit strategy and a clear, strategic objective.¹⁴¹ Consequently, many of the strategies and tactics were developed *cum opus fuerit*, or as the need arose. Four tactical innovations that proved to be useful came out of this, including the armed group concept, the bounding overwatch maneuver, new air strike tactics, and enveloping detachments.¹⁴² Furthermore, because the Afghan region was very mountainous and the Soviet Union was ill prepared to deal with this non-linear battlefield, many traditional formations for its ground force units were unsuccessful. As a result, the Soviet Union had to redefine traditional unit formations and learn to be more flexible to adapt in such situations.¹⁴³ Undoubtedly, the Soviets had a lot to deal with and amend while already on the battlefield, which inevitably cost them a lot of time and lives.

In comparison to today, a lot has changed with regard to Russia's clear preparedness and tactical capabilities. Russia has a clear objective (i.e. to support Assad), and has outlined the majority of its strategies and objectives in great detail, making all of this information known to the public.¹⁴⁴ Among these training exercises were helicopter deployments of rockets and bombs against ground targets, air and ground cooperation training, and flying simulations with one engine off to see what to do if an engine failure occurs.¹⁴⁵ Thus, in recognition of the lack of preparedness that became a reality during the Afghanistan crisis, Russia is taking the initiative to be better prepared for what lies ahead in Syria via training and exercises that are being shown to the international community.

¹⁴¹ Oleg Kulakov, "Lessons Learned", 1.

¹⁴² Oleg Kulakov, "Lessons Learned", 3.

¹⁴³ Oleg Kulakov, "Lessons Learned", 4.

¹⁴⁴ Bill Powell, "How Putin Wins Syria", *Newsweek* (Oct. 6 2015),

<http://www.newsweek.com/2015/10/16/how-vladimir-putin-wins-syria-380090.html>.

Next, to add to the Soviet lack of military preparedness and overall capabilities in 1979, it is interesting to address how climate and terrain worked against the Soviet troops. As previously mentioned, the very mountainous terrain, hot climate, and unconventional enemy forces (by European standards) were “entirely different from what the Soviet armed forces had prepared for.”¹⁴⁶ The *mujahideen*, or Afghan armed forces, took the Soviets by surprise because they didn’t fight a traditional European-style war that the Soviet forces were anticipating.¹⁴⁷ In contrast, Russian armed forces are currently having an easier time in Syria as far as the terrain is concerned since it is much flatter there. As stated by scholar and writer Yegor Kholmogorov, “There are practically no mountains to contend with in Syria.”¹⁴⁸ Russia also has the advantage of better technology today compared to 1979, which is an added bonus when dealing with difficult terrain and climate conditions.

Next, in Afghanistan the air assault and helicopter capabilities were also not fully up to par at the start of the war, and had to be gradually improved during the war process itself.¹⁴⁹ The Soviet forces experienced shortages in proper technology systems and equipment, lack of a well-trained personnel base, and “the Command’s preference for large-scale operations often got in the way of tactical efficiency.”¹⁵⁰ The most impressive systems that were considered new and were introduced during the ten-year period of the war included the TIFV 2, the APC 80, the Mi 8T helicopter, the Su-25 ground support aircraft,

¹⁴⁵ Bill Powell, “How Putin Wins Syria”.

¹⁴⁶ Oleg Kulakov, “Lessons Learned”, 3.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Yegor Kholmogorov, “Why Syria Is No Second Afghanistan for Russia”, *Russia Insider* (Sept. 29 2015), <http://russia-insider.com/en/military/why-syria-no-second-afghanistan-russia/ri10028>.

¹⁴⁹ Oleg Kulakov, “Lessons Learned”, 3.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

the ASU 74 assault rifles, and new helmets and mine clearing gear for ground troops.¹⁵¹ Even though this new equipment was produced and utilized, there was a marginal improvement in Soviet capabilities as many changes were being made during the war itself, requiring quick turnaround in training personnel to use the new equipment effectively. As TABLE 4 below shows, there were still significant casualties and injuries that resulted despite this new equipment and technology that was provided, which points to an overall weak trend in capabilities.

In comparison to Russia's current intervention in Syria, President Putin has called for a policy of no boots on the ground, using mainly air strikes to carry out operations.¹⁵² Although some claim that the main reason for this is Putin's "fear of awakening painful memories of the Soviet debacle in Afghanistan"¹⁵³, a stronger defense can be made for the extraordinary improvement in Russian air capabilities since 1979, with aircrafts and systems that even shock NATO and the West.

¹⁵¹ Oleg Kulakov, "Lessons Learned", 4.

¹⁵² Sergey Markedonov, "Syria 2015: Echoes of Afghanistan 1979?".

¹⁵³ "A New Spectacle For The Masses; Russia In Syria", *The Economist*.

Stages of the presence of the Soviet troops in Afghanistan	Killed in action total/per month	Wounded and ill total/per month
First (December 1979 -February 1980), 2 months	245/123	5,306/2,653
Second (March1980 - April1985), 62 months	9,175/148	226,649/3,656
Third (May1985 - December1986), 20 months	2,745/137	114,861/5,743
Fourth (Jan1987- Feb1989), 26 months	2,262/87	119,609/4,600
Total losses for 110 months	14,427	466,425

TABLE 4 – Soviet Losses in Afghanistan, 1979-1989

Source: Oleg Kulakov, “Lessons Learned”, 5.

For starters, the pace of air strikes in Syria has been pretty high. Russia averaged about 45 air defense strikes in October that were executed by 34 fixed-wing aircrafts and 16 helicopters.¹⁵⁴ Additionally, Russia has been working with both Syrian and Iranian ground forces to coordinate strikes, including air strikes at night that involve drones.¹⁵⁵¹⁵⁶ Michael Kofman, an analyst with the CNA Corporation claimed that this portrays a “tangible leap for Russia into a mix of 1990s and even current Western combat ability.”¹⁵⁷ Additionally, the Su-35 jets that Russia has deployed also are said to technologically exceed aircrafts manufactured by the West.¹⁵⁸ Thus, it is evident that the technological superiority

¹⁵⁴ Dmitry Gorenburg, "Russia's Syria Operation Reveals Significant Improvement In Military Capability", *The Interpreter* (Nov. 13 2015),

<http://www.lowyinterpreter.org/post/2015/11/13/Russias-Syria-operation-reveals-significant-improvement-in-military-capability.aspx>.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Steven Lee Myers and Eric Schmitt, “Russian Military Uses Syria as Proving Ground, and the West Takes Notice”.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Nikolai Shevchenko, "Leaked NATO Report Praises ‘Professionalism’ Of Russia’s Air Force In Syria", *Russia Beyond The Headlines* (March 9, 2016),

http://rbth.com/international/2016/03/09/leaked-nato-report-praises-professionalism-of-russias-air-force-in-syria_574179.

that Russia is showcasing corresponds to Russia's overall improvement in its military capabilities and is being noticed by experts abroad.

Moreover, precision and accurate targeting has plagued the Russian military during the Afghanistan War and even during the Georgian War in 2008, but these capabilities have since been showing improvement. In Afghanistan, the Soviet forces had a difficult time identifying the enemy.¹⁵⁹ As previously mentioned, the *mujahideen* forces rose drastically in numbers during the duration of the war, from 45,000 in 1981-1983 to 150,000 by 1986, and employed tactics unfamiliar to European-style war.¹⁶⁰ As a result, the Soviets had a tough time locating and weakening them. Current reports, however, show that precision systems and difficulty locating enemies are no longer an issue. In addition to Russia receiving Syrian intelligence, its aircrafts have also been equipped with state-of-the-art precision-guided munitions (PGMs) for the first time in its history.¹⁶¹ In application, these systems have allowed Russian forces to find and eliminate weapon storages that opposition groups took from government forces in the very beginning.¹⁶² According to Michael Kofman, the target range and precision of Russia's cruise missiles, a range of over 900 miles, represents "a technological leap that could prove worrisome for military commanders in NATO."¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Oleg Kulakov, "Lessons Learned", 4.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Dmitry Gorenburg, "Russia's Syria Operation Reveals Significant Improvement In Military Capability".

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Steven Lee Myers and Eric Schmitt, "Russian Military Uses Syria as Proving Ground, and West Takes Notice".

According to the most recent news, President Putin has issued a withdrawal of “the main part” of Russia’s military forces from Syria.¹⁶⁴ Although the act of withdrawal may initially come off as a sign of weakness to some, this decision by Putin has instead showed a level of confidence and leadership on the side of the Russian armed forces by taking command of the situation. First, Russia’s decision to withdraw troops from Syria signals that Russia feels like it has done its duty of protecting Assad’s regime from falling apart during the last six months.¹⁶⁵ Putin has claimed that he believes “that the task put before the defense ministry and Russian armed forces has, on the whole, been fulfilled.”¹⁶⁶ Russia had a clear mission of enabling Assad’s people to be represented and preventing the Syrian regime from collapsing, and now that it has felt that it has contributed significantly to this, Russia is being cautious not to overdo it so that Assad feels compelled to behave responsibly during peace talks.¹⁶⁷

According to Mark Galeotti, a professor of global affairs at New York University, Russia has “stabilized the regime, turned momentum around on the battlefield so the regime has the upper hand, and now we’ve got ceasefire and political talks”¹⁶⁸, which is exactly what Russia wanted. Overall, this demonstrates a sense of Russian independence and dominance over the situation, as well as great military power. Salim al-Muslat, a

¹⁶⁴ Denis Dyomkin and Suleiman Al-Khalidi, “Putin Says Russians to Start Withdrawing From Syria, As Peace Talks Resume”, *Reuters* (March 22 2016), <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-pullout-idUSKCN0WG23C>.

¹⁶⁵ Patrick Wintour and Shaum Walker, “Vladimir Putin Orders Russian Forces to Begin Withdrawal From Syria”, *The Guardian* (March 15 2016), <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/14/vladimir-putin-orders-withdrawal-russian-troops-syria>.

¹⁶⁶ Denis Dyomkin and Suleiman Al-Khalidi, “Putin Says Russians to Start Withdrawing From Syria, As Peace Talks Resume”.

¹⁶⁷ Maxim Trudolyubov “Why Putin Made a Hasty Retreat From Syria”, *Newsweek* (March 22 2016), <http://www.newsweek.com/why-putin-made-hasty-retreat-syria-439081>.

¹⁶⁸ Patrick Wintour and Shaum Walker, “Vladimir Putin Orders Russian Forces to Begin Withdrawal From Syria”.

spokesman for the rebel high negotiations committee further stated, "If this is a serious step, it will form a major element of pressure on the regime because the Russian support prolonged the regime."¹⁶⁹ Thus, it is clear that Russia's withdrawal, although the exact withdrawal date of all troops remains vague, is a conscious act to remind Assad that it cannot do all of the work for him and that Russia has done a significant amount already.

Last, some scholars view Putin's decision to withdraw as a bargaining tool that shows "that the Russian military is back."¹⁷⁰ Many believe that the intervention in Syria served as a channel through which Russia could demonstrate its military modernization and advanced capabilities. Putin himself stated that the Syrian mission has "served as an excellent proving ground for Russia's refurbished weaponry."¹⁷¹ Overall, the recent events regarding Putin's latest action in Syria serves as a real-time example of Russia's improved military capacity and confidence.

5.3 SUMMARY

Indeed, Russia's military capability as it currently stands has greatly benefited from the lessons learned during the Afghanistan War of 1979. Although the war seemed like a great failure at the time, it has nevertheless provided Russia with the opportunity to improve itself in the channels of technological innovation, air and ground coordination, personnel training, modernization of equipment and arms, improvements in tactical innovations, and much more. Additionally, even though many Russians are still weary of the country getting involved in the Middle East again with memories of Afghanistan still

¹⁶⁹ Patrick Wintour and Shaum Walker, "Vladimir Putin Orders Russian Forces to Begin Withdrawal From Syria".

¹⁷⁰ Maxim Trudolyubov "Why Putin Made a Hasty Retreat From Syria".

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

fresh in their minds, the intervention in Syria, as Putin stated himself, could “send a message to the United States and the West about the restoration of the country’s military prowess and global reach after decades of post-Soviet decay.”¹⁷² Accordingly, the Russian military has greatly improved its capacity to target enemies and execute operations with new equipment that makes the use of large conventional forces quite obsolete. It’s capability is acknowledged by military powers worldwide, and demonstrates that sometimes less personnel, but personnel who are better trained to use the advanced technology, can deliver the result of improved capabilities overall. As Micah Zenko, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations stated, “We are going to school on what the Russian military is capable of today.”¹⁷³

¹⁷² Steven Lee Myers and Eric Schmitt, “Russian Military Uses Syria as Proving Ground, and West Takes Notice”.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

6. ASSESSING SOVIET/RUSSIAN ATTITUDES:

This section evaluates Soviet and Russian attitudes towards the military establishment and one's duty to serve. In particular, changes in Soviet and Russian loyalty and commitment towards service are assessed overtime, given the nature of more recent reforms aimed at streamlining the personnel base and improving their overall living conditions. The concept of loyalty is defined using its counterpart, disloyalty, which refers to the breaking of bonds for self-serving reasons. Interestingly enough, attitudes towards service duty have been persistently unfavorable among Russia's youth with an emphasis on disloyal actions and sentiments such as draft evasion and deferments. However, some improvements in these attitudes have occurred during periods such as the 2008 war with Georgia, as well as more recently under Putin's reforms (although some may argue that a lack of loyalty and compliance still dominates). Additionally, organization theory is used to establish a connection between one's loyalty towards service, personnel compliance and commitment, and the overall effectiveness of Russia's military capabilities. Attitudes of Military Industrial Complex workers in the company town of Komsomolsk-na-Amure are further discussed, followed by quantitative polling data assessing recent attitudes and trust towards service duty. The overall nature of this analysis, however, is tricky given the inherent fear among the Russian people to publically express their genuine sentiments in surveys and polls.

6.1 DEFINING LOYALTY

Perhaps the most challenging part of this study deals with the assessment of Russian attitudes, particularly in terms of loyalty, towards military service both as it is seen by those who are serving or have the potential to serve, and also by other Russian citizens

that make up the general population.¹⁷⁴ Before delving into the analysis head on, however, it is important to define what is meant by 'loyalty' for the purposes of this study. According to scholar and military expert Coleman, the definition of loyalty can take on many forms and is therefore difficult to define because it can take on so many different meanings for the individual involved.¹⁷⁵ The individualistic nature of loyalty, therefore, calls for a different approach in defining it, particularly framing it in terms of what is meant by "disloyal." Someone who commits an act that is disloyal, or acts in a disloyal way, breaks the bonds of loyalty for reasons that are self-serving.¹⁷⁶ In relation to the study of loyalty towards military service in Russia, one can apply this definition to mean that attitudes of loyalty are reflected in the bonds expressed by servicemen to other servicemen, by servicemen to their commanders and others in positions of authority, and/or by servicemen to their unit, division, etc. Any break in this bond for self-serving reasons, such as those involving matters of health, education, the fear of hazing or harassment, poor living conditions, and others qualifies as a 'disloyal' act. This disloyal act can further be qualified as a lack of compliance and commitment towards the military institution, thereby weakening overall capabilities. As explained by scholar Amitai Etzioni, "an organization requires the commitment of its member in order to operate efficiently."¹⁷⁷ Additionally, for already weak

¹⁷⁴ Data for this was difficult to come by, so anything that involved Russian attitudes towards the military or army, and the duty to serve was considered in the analysis. This include both those who do serve, youth who are considering military service, and the general population including families of those who have to send off their sons, brothers, close relatives to the armed forces.

¹⁷⁵ Stephen Coleman, "The Problems of Duty and Loyalty", *Journal of Military Ethics* (2009), 5.

¹⁷⁶ Stephen Coleman, "The Problems of Duty and Loyalty", 6.

¹⁷⁷ Amitai Etzioni, *Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations* (New York: Free Press, 1975), 196.

organizations, it is particularly important for the commitment of its members to be even stronger in order to make up for this weakness.¹⁷⁸

Another important point to be made is that during military training, no one explains to military personnel what exactly is meant by 'loyalty', even though it is regarded as one of the most important virtues of military service. As a result, military personnel are "forced to rely on their own everyday understanding of loyalty when interpreting virtues."¹⁷⁹

Inevitably, this leads to problems because one's views of a loyal action can be interpreted as disloyal by someone else. Furthermore, there is also a notable distinction between 'duty', or the course of action in a given situation, and 'loyalty', the ethnically correct option as seen by the person conducting the action.¹⁸⁰ Many times, duty and loyalty seem to be at odds with each other when dealing with military duty specifically. Bearing in mind such nuances and the established definitions for loyalty and duty, a better assessment of Russian attitudes towards military service and the military institution as a whole can follow.

6.2 BACKGROUND – LOYALTY AND THE MILITARY

To start, some history on Soviet and Russian attitudes towards military service duty is provided. Article 132 and 133 of the 1936 Soviet Constitution states, "Military service in the Red Workers' and Peasants' Army is an honorable duty of the citizens of the USSR" and "to defend the fatherland is the sacred duty of every citizen of the USSR."¹⁸¹ In essence, military service was seen as a universal law and one of great honor and prestige. Basic

¹⁷⁸ Amitai Etzioni, *Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations*, 196-197.

¹⁷⁹ Stephen Coleman, "The Problems of Duty and Loyalty", 7.

¹⁸⁰ Stephen Coleman, "The Problems of Duty and Loyalty", 8.

¹⁸¹ "1936 Constitution of the USSR", Bucknell University (1996)
<http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/36cons04.html>.

military education was provided during both grade school and college years for eligible males in an attempt to instill military discipline and ideology into the minds of citizens willing to serve.¹⁸² Overtime, however, as military prestige and professionalism declined and Soviet military ideology faced opposition with regard to reform, so did the associated honor that emotionally bound one to his duty to serve. Although organizations still exist today that serve to educate young citizens about the military, such as ROSTO (Russian Defense, Sport, and Technical Society), studies conducted more recently have shown that levels of military preparedness have been declining among Russia's youth.¹⁸³ What, in turn, does this mean with regard to the attitudes and loyalty of Russian citizens towards military service and associated capabilities?

6.3 CHANGING ATTITUDES – SOVIET & POST-SOVIET ERA

Scholar V.V. Shevtsov conducted a study in 2004 focusing on youth attitudes towards military service among grade school students and college students in an attempt to evaluate trends over the twenty-year period between 1984-2004. Several findings are notable for the purposes of assessing loyalty in this study. First, Shevtsov found that during this twenty-year period, the category of youth “readiness to serve voluntarily in the armed forces” dropped 3.4 times among grade school students, and a shocking 46 times among college students (see TABLE 5, below).¹⁸⁴ More striking, perhaps, is the indicator titled “Attitudes toward military service,” in TABLE 5 that shows that 55.3% of grade school

¹⁸² Jason P. Gresh, "The Realities of Russian Military Conscription", *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* (2011), 10.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ V. V. Shevtsov, "School and College Students' Attitudes Toward Military Service", *Russian Education and Society* (2007), 2.

students and 67.5% of college students have negative attitudes towards their duty to serve. Overall, this is a great contrast compared to the percentages for this category in 1984 (8.3% and 9.6%, respectively), and has to do with several factors including the decline in preparedness to serve that the Russian youth feels.

Dynamics of Indicators of School Students' and College Students' Attitudes Toward Military Service (% of respondents)

Indicators	1984		2004	
	School students	College students	School students	College students
Prepared for voluntary military service	91.7	87.8	26.7	1.8
Are preparing specially for military service	86.0	29.7	16.9	7.8
Consider themselves physically ready for military service	52.6	72.3	18.9	21.8
Prepared for unquestioning fulfillment of requirements of disciplinary regulations	81.3	77.7	51.8	44.0
Show a constant interest in military literature	68.6	42.3	4.2	2.2
Attitude toward military service:				
positive	85.6	67.7	33.8	15.1
neutral	6.3	22.6	12.9	17.3
negative	8.3	9.6	55.3	67.5
Consider these to be the main difficulties of military service:				
hard military discipline and regulations	15.6	19.0	22.0	32.2
great physical, nervous and emotional stresses	62.7	65.7	27.1	25.8
harassment in units	7.7	3.3	44.6	38.2
other difficulties	14.0	12.0	6.2	3.8

TABLE 5 - 1984 v. 2004: Comparison of Attitudes Towards Military Service Among Grade School and College Students

Source: V. V. Shevtsov, "School and College Students' Attitudes Toward Military Service, 3.

Other reasons that Shevtsov provides for such high instances of negative attitudes among the Russian youth include, in order of relevance, a decline in prestige associated with service, the knowledge of instances of harassment (*dedovshchina*) that occur among military ranks, and the reality of having to participate in local armed conflicts.¹⁸⁵ Furthermore, to fast-forward four years to 2008, the numbers show that of the 400,000 to 600,000 men who were drafted annually, approximately 30,000 to 40,000 evade the draft.¹⁸⁶ These numbers do not include medical deferments that account for 60% of evasion by eligible men.¹⁸⁷ Additionally, approximately three times more college students evade service compared to grade school students.¹⁸⁸ Thus, in light of the definition of loyalty as previously explained, there is an increasing trend of servicemen and potential servicemen (i.e. the youth) who abandoned service for self-serving reasons in the early 2000s. This lack of commitment is further harmful to the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the military as a whole.¹⁸⁹

V.V. Shevtsov's analysis further involves a more detailed assessment looking into various categories of attitudes towards military service and levels of preparedness by grade school and college students (see TABLE 6, below). As evidenced by this table, 12.2% of grade school students, 35.7% of college students, and 16.8% of college students already in military departments claimed that they are unwilling to serve and will try to evade service by any means possible. Additionally, 46.7% of grade school students, 55.8% of college students, and 35.2% of college students in military departments responded that

¹⁸⁵ V. V. Shevtsov, "School and College Students' Attitudes Toward Military Service", 5.

¹⁸⁶ Jason P. Gresh, "The Realities of Russian Military Conscription", 27.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ V. V. Shevtsov, "School and College Students' Attitudes Toward Military Service", 4.

¹⁸⁹ Amitai Etzioni, *Comparative Analysis of Complex Organizations*, 196.

they do not want to serve “but will have to.” In contrast to the honor and prestige associated with the duty to serve during Soviet times, the markedly low positive responses by grade school and college students for the category of acquiring a military training specialty (0% and 3.3%, respectively) further emphasizes the negative attitudes the youth holds towards the military institution. Overall, this is especially troubling because this age group consists of young adults who Russia relies on to comprise the armed forces in the near future and thereby keep it relevant.

Finally, a very interesting fact found by Shevtsov was that a common factor present in both types of students’ responses was the *fear* of conscript service in general.¹⁹⁰ Whether this fear was a product of being ‘brainwashed’ by the media about harassment cases, poor health and living conditions, bad food, reports of suicides and killings among unit men (which qualifies as a disloyal act in itself), there was an overall substantial increase in negative attitudes towards military service in the twenty year period being assessed.¹⁹¹ One can go on to conclude that this inherent fear is a self-serving reason behind potential servicemen’s desire to evade service, showing an overall weak sense of loyalty towards the military that further impairs capabilities.

¹⁹⁰ V. V. Shevtsov, “School and College Students’ Attitudes Toward Military Service”, 6.

¹⁹¹ V. V. Shevtsov, “School and College Students’ Attitudes Toward Military Service”, 7.

Comparative Assessment of Indicators of School Students' and College Students' Attitudes Toward Military Service (% of respondents in 2004)

Indicators	School students	College students	College students in military departments
<i>Attitudes toward military service</i>			
I want (I intend) to serve my time as a conscript in military service	26.7	1.9	37.5
I intend to serve on a contractual basis	3.3	4.8	8.4
I am thinking of enrolling in a military educational institution	7.8	1.8	2.1
I have chosen my branch and arm of military service	15.6	29.8	66.6
I do not want to serve but I will have to	46.7	55.8	35.2
I do not want to serve and I will try to get out of the draft by any means	12.2	35.7	16.8
I will choose alternative service	3.3	0.9	0
<i>Actions to prepare for military service</i>			
I do not do anything	26.7	64.4	0
I am engaging in physical training	28.2	16.3	41.7
I am taking classes in fundamentals of life safety and primary military training	19.8	—	—
I am acquiring a military training specialty	0	3.3	100.0
I like to watch movies and videos on military subjects	12.2	7.4	16.6
I like to read works of military memoirs	6.6	4.8	5.0
I have gone through training in a sports defense camp	3.3	3.8	16.6
I am enrolled in a profile class or group to prepare for military service	3.3	—	—

TABLE 6 – Military Attitudes and Preparedness Assessment: Grade School vs. College Students

Source: V. V. Shevtsov, "School and College Students' Attitudes Toward Military Service, 4.

6.4 THE CASE OF KOMSOMOLK-NA-AMURE

Moreover, this was not only the case for Russian youth, but also for older generations and workers involved in the Military Industrial Complex (MIC) as described by scholar Allison Evans. A particularly notable example of the low morale and discontent among military workers and particularly those involved in the Military Industrial Complex (MIC) can be drawn from the protests that occurred in Russian company towns in the 1990s. In particular, Evans writes about the protests that arose in Komsomolsk-na-Amure, a company town whose economy is heavily dependent on two major factories that contribute to the defense industry – one dedicated to producing aircrafts and the other dedicated to manufacturing ships.¹⁹² The 136 protests of angry workers that began in Komsomolsk-na-Amure were of a larger scale than those that occurred in other places, and even involved episodes of long-term hunger strikes that caught the attention of the international media.¹⁹³ What factors, then, sparked such opposition?

According to Evans, the source of discontent stemmed from the federal government's weak economic capacity to pay for completed defense contracts and to create new orders that would give workers more tasks.¹⁹⁴ As a result, workers were faced with a multitude of issues including low wages, unfulfilled promises of benefits and pension arrears, and others related to poor working conditions.¹⁹⁵ To add more fuel to the fire, elites in this town joined the workers in opposition because these demonstrations and

¹⁹² Allison D. Evans, "Protest Patterns in Provincial Russia: A Paired Comparison of Company Towns", *Studies in Comparative International Development* (2015), 9.

¹⁹³ Allison D. Evans, "Protest Patterns in Provincial Russia", 10.

¹⁹⁴ Allison D. Evans, "Protest Patterns in Provincial Russia", 11.

¹⁹⁵ Allison D. Evans, "Protest Patterns in Provincial Russia", 10.

financial setbacks also negatively impacted the upper class.¹⁹⁶ Thus, extreme protests resulted on a local level in this company town as well as in others that were dealing with similar conditions, which undoubtedly evidences the severe uneasiness and negative attitudes workers had towards the MIC and the defense industry. To make matters worse, the defense industry was greatly lagging behind as a result of its huge debt, which further resonated through the channels of the local economy.¹⁹⁷

Overall, the example of Komsomolsk-na-Amure illustrates that MIC workers were severely strained and dissatisfied with their living and working conditions to the extent that they protested against the regime and drew elites into the opposition movement as well. In turn, the defense industry, already weak, took an intense hit to their manufacturing outputs, which further set Russia back in terms of military capabilities and capacity to satisfy those who serve the military industry.

6.5 ASSESSING CURRENT ATTITUDES

Given the more recent modernization initiatives driven by President Putin, it is interesting to see how Russian attitudes and loyalty towards the military and towards the duty to serve have changed. Jason Gresh, a scholar and U.S. Army Official writing for the *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, published a study in 2011 assessing recent Russian attitudes towards military service and the institution of the army in general. In his overall conclusion, Gresh claims that the culture of the army is still in need of some change because the main deterrents of soldiers' willingness to serve are harsh living conditions and the

¹⁹⁶ Allison D. Evans, "Protest Patterns in Provincial Russia", 11.

¹⁹⁷ Allison D. Evans, "Protest Patterns in Provincial Russia", 20.

criminal climate within army units.¹⁹⁸ In order to get to this conclusion, Gresh first provides insight into the time period during the 2008 Georgian War, claiming that an overarching favorable attitude existed among the Russian people with regard to the military itself.¹⁹⁹ In a 2008 survey conducted by The All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion (also referred to as VTsIOM), shown in TABLE 7 below, most people felt either pride or respect for the armed forces. As further demonstrated by TABLE 7, there is a 12% level of trust and a 7% level of distrust present among those surveyed. The majority of this distrust comes from the youth (ages 18-24), which is again a major concern as they will be the ones serving in the future. Therefore, if the predominant attitude of the Russian youth is rooted in distrust and negativity, their future loyalty to service will most likely also suffer. Moreover, the 12% level of trust among all respondents is very low, again indicating a weak bond towards the military industry overall that correlates with weaker capabilities.

	All respondents	Ages 18–24	Ages 25–34	Ages 35–44	Ages 45–59	60 and older
Admiration	6	10	6	3	6	5
Pride	30	30	27	30	29	33
Respect	29	31	28	32	25	32
Disillusionment	12	12	11	14	13	11
Hope	25	15	29	24	27	25
Distrust	7	12	7	5	7	5
Conviction	3	4	3	2	3	2
Trust	12	12	11	12	13	12
Skepticism	3	3	4	3	3	3
Indifference	4	5	5	3	2	3
Hard to Answer	5	5	6	6	5	5

TABLE 7 - What Do You Feel When People Speak of the Russian Armed Forces (% of All Respondents, by Age Group); N=1,600

Source: The All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion (VTsIOM), August 22, 2008.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Jason P. Gresh, "The Realities of Russian Military Conscription", 2.

¹⁹⁹ Jason P. Gresh, "The Realities of Russian Military Conscription", 5.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

These results are further reflected in the 2011 Levada Center poll (see FIGURE 4, below). This poll demonstrates that despite the pride and respect that the Russian population felt towards the military in 2008, 54% of respondents said that they do not want their sons to serve in the military, and 44% of these people said that it was due to reports of *dedovschina*, or harassment.²⁰¹ In FIGURE 4 below, the third (right-most) pie chart under the heading (translated) “Do Russia’s Want Their Close Ones to Serve in the Army?” shows that 54% say “no” (“нет” in green) and 36% say “yes” (“да” in grey).

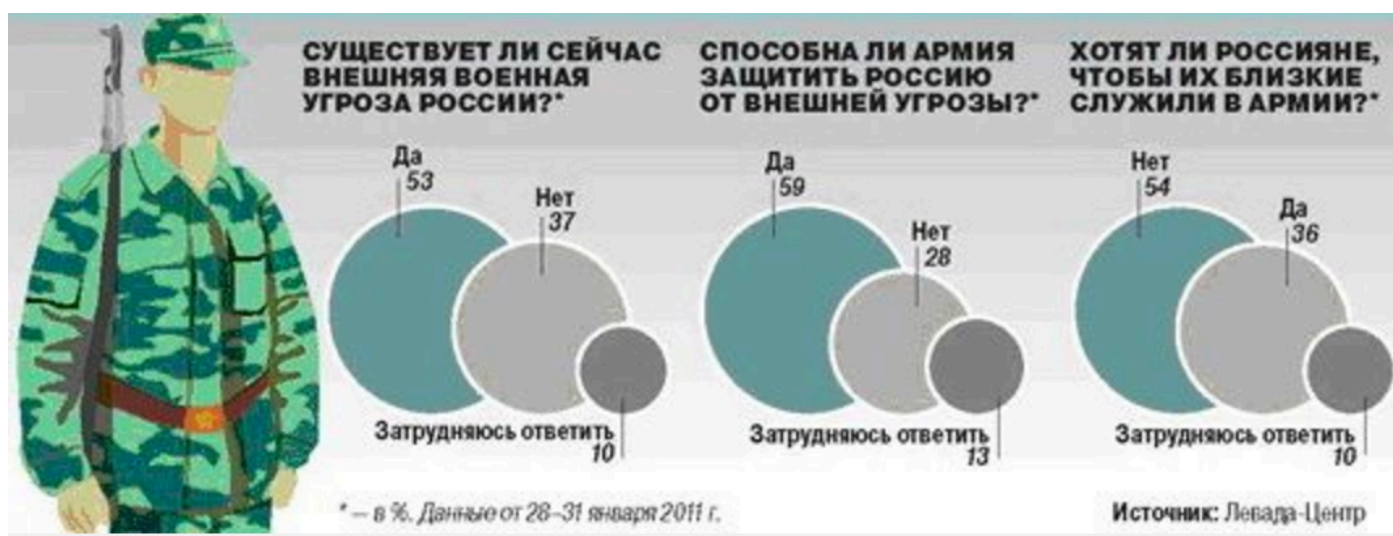


FIGURE 4 – Levada Center 2011 Poll Military Attitudes (% Respondents)
Source: The Levada Center

Similarly, an article published even more recently in 2014 with the title, “2/3 Russians Don’t Want Their Sons to Fight in Ukraine, Levada Center Poll Finds” shows that a negative trend in attitudes towards military service has persisted among the Russian

²⁰¹ Jason P. Gresh, "The Realities of Russian Military Conscription", 6.

population.²⁰² Accordingly, there has been a major attitude shift since the height of the 2008 Georgia war, during which there was more compliance and respect towards the military establishment overall.²⁰³

Moving on, in a follow-up study by VTsIOM asking Russian citizens what ideals in life are important to them, only 34% of respondents claimed that “participation in public and political institutions” was “very important.”²⁰⁴ Higher up in degree of importance was family relations and quality of life. Therefore, it is evident that a weak commitment exists towards one’s duty to serve and the military industry altogether, again impacting Russia’s overall military capabilities as both compliance and reliability of personnel are harmed.

Something worthy of discussion and important to keep in mind is that, upon assessing all of the data that has been gathered by these polls, a “heavy hand and restrictive environment surrounding those who oppose the political establishment certainly plays a crucial factor in public opinion.”²⁰⁵ In other words, anyone who is at least somewhat familiar with Russian attitudes towards outwardly expressing their opinion about political establishments and institutions, including the military, knows that there is an engrained fear of speaking out against these said institutions due to potential consequences on one’s quality of life and safety. In terms of the concept of loyalty that is being assessed by this study in particular, many of those surveyed who fear this “heavy hand” will not be reflected in the percentages of those who hold negative attitudes towards military service and the establishment. Thus, the numbers that are published surrounding indicators that suggest a

²⁰² Paul Goble, "Two-Thirds of Russians Don't Want Their Sons to Fight in Ukraine, Levada Center Poll Finds", *The Interpreter* (Nov. 11 2014), <http://www.interpretermag.com/two-thirds-of-russians-dont-want-their-sons-to-fight-in-ukraine-levada-center-poll-finds/>.

²⁰³ Jason P. Gresh, "The Realities of Russian Military Conscription", 6.

²⁰⁴ Jason P. Gresh, "The Realities of Russian Military Conscription", 9.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

negative public opinion may actually hold among more people than the numbers portray due to a fear of expressing such sentiments publicly. Additionally, some citizens may still feel a historical bond to Russia's military legacy, resulting in opinion poll responses that reflect a more favorable position towards the military and service duty. However, if in fact asked to actively serve (i.e. act in correspondence to their response), the historical militarism ideals that feed such positive responses may fade.²⁰⁶

In summary, many factors have led to the current attitudes felt by Russian citizens with regard to their duty to serve and the loyalty and favoritism expressed towards the military institution itself. These factors include reports of *dedovshchina* and harassment, unfulfilled promises of health and educational benefits for veterans and their families, increasing numbers of draft evasion cases, low pay, and overall poor living conditions.²⁰⁷ In addition, the rise of violent crimes among army units in 2011 has also sparked a trend in decreased positive attitudes towards military service despite reforms and initiatives to improve the quality of life for personnel on the whole.²⁰⁸ All of this, inevitably, points to a harmed bond of loyalty among Russian citizens and servicemen towards the armed forces. Moreover, it is uncontested that uprisings of civil grassroots organizations, such as the Union of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia, whose purpose is to increase awareness of the poor conditions and harassment that their sons and husbands face on a regular basis, truly emphasizes this deteriorating trust and loyalty towards the military establishment that resonates among the Russian people.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Jason P. Gresh, "The Realities of Russian Military Conscription", 9.

²⁰⁷ Jason P. Gresh, "The Realities of Russian Military Conscription", 27.

²⁰⁸ Jason P. Gresh, "The Realities of Russian Military Conscription", 28.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

Finally, the most recent Levada Center polls that were available for the purposes of this study contest to the very nature of claims made despite the reforms implemented under President Putin. TABLE 7 below shows that even in 2012, there has been a consistent 39% response among 1,600 people surveyed signifying that they would try to find a way to help their family member avoid military service if drafted. This is still a statistically significant number. Furthermore, TABLE 8 below shows that 29% of respondents are “definitely against” increasing the military service term from one to one and a half years, with 29% answering as “rather against.” This mere half-year increase in term period, something that in relation to the definition of loyalty again points to a quicker disruption of the bond among servicemen and their peers, demonstrates that loyalty is not very strong. Together (29% and 29%, respectively), these responses account for over half (58%), or the majority, of people who feel this way. Last, TABLE 9 below reflects a similar sentiment as has persisted over the years regarding attitudes against one’s son, brother, or close relative serving mainly due to the potential of harm, death, and hazing or harassment. The intention here, if the servicemen do in fact evade their duty to serve, is for personal reasons (i.e. “self serving” reasons), thereby again indicating a lack of loyalty and compliance. Thus, attitudes of weak loyalty to military service and the armed forces have not shown significant improvement over the years despite all of the reforms that have occurred, especially reforms seeking to cut personnel in order to improve their conditions. Interestingly enough, Lenin’s old adage, “Better fewer, but better” has not yet seemed to take hold, but has the potential to in the near future if reforms that improve conditions for personnel increase their loyalty and compliance towards the military, and thereby contribute to Russia’s improving military capabilities overall.

**If someone from your family were to be drafted to the army,
what would you prefer?**

	2005	2006	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012
	II	II	X	III	I	I	I
Would prefer him to serve in the army	52	34	45	50	46	46	46
Would try to find a way to avoid military service	39	53	42	35	42	41	39
Difficult to answer	9	13	13	15	12	13	15

N=1600

TABLE 8 – If someone from your family were to be drafted to the army, what would you prefer?

Source: Zorkaya, N. et al., "From Opinion Toward Understanding: Russian Public Opinion 2012-2013."

**Would you be in favour or against increasing the military service term from one
to one and a half years?**

Definitely in favour	14
Rather in favour	19
Rather against	29
Definitely against	29
Difficult to answer	8

2012, November; N=1600

TABLE 9 – Would you be in favor or against increasing the military service term from one to one and a half years?

Source: Zorkaya, N. et al., "From Opinion Toward Understanding: Russian Public Opinion 2012-2013."

Would you like your son, brother, another close relative to serve in the army now? If negative, why?

	1998	2000	2001	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2010	2011	2012
	II	I	II	I	I	I	II	II	II	I	I	I
Yes, I would...	13	19	26	22	20	28	24	34	36	34	36	36
No, I would not because (of)...												
Possible death, wound in Chechen-type conflicts	30	48	38	44	42	33	32	27	21	23	23	21
«Dedovshina» (hazing), violence	40	34	30	35	42	36	49	42	34	27	29	32
Lawlessness and humiliation of servicemen	20	18	13	19	23	19	24	17	15	13	15	16
Difficult living conditions, bad food, danger for the health	21	27	18	23	24	18	14	12	10	11	14	13
Moral degradation, drinking and drug-abuse	19	15	10	16	13	12	16	10	10	10	10	10
Chaos in the army, the government's irresponsible military policy	25	21	13	20	21	18	16	10	6	8	10	10
Criminalization of the army, servicemen's involvement in criminal offences	15	12	5	10	10	9	10	6	5	7	7	8
The years spent in the army is time wasted	11	8	6	8	9	9	8	7	6	7	5	2
Would not, but cannot give the reason	7	6	4	5	4	6	2	4	4	5	3	5
Difficult to answer	3	6	5	6	3	5	5	6	11	9	10	10

N=1600

TABLE 10 - Would you like your son, brother, another close relative to serve in the army now? If negative, why?

Source: Zorkaya, N. et al., "From Opinion Toward Understanding: Russian Public Opinion 2012-2013."

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND IMPLICATIONS:

This section summarizes some of the major findings of this study related to Russia's progression of military reforms and the parallel changes in capabilities that have occurred. The importance of approaching this from a historical perspective is emphasized. Additionally, the improving yet still weak loyalty and commitment present among servicemen and potential servicemen towards their military duty serves as an obstacle to improvements in military effectiveness from the part of personnel. This section ends with a discussion of the implications associated with improvements in technology and how the international dynamic will change if the technological playing field evens out. Moreover, projections about personnel becoming obsolete and the 'stalemate' that may result if nations eventually level off in their technological capabilities are made.

The abundance of scholarship that focuses on obtaining a better understanding of Russia's actions and motives frequently treats Russia as a mysterious and confusing international actor – one with an aggressive military objective and a strong desire for power. As a result, a significant portion of literature is quick to label Russia as imperialist or expansionary in nature, without taking a deeper look into its military legacy from a historical perspective. As discussed in this study, a nation's military structure, its progression (or lack thereof) of reforms related to technological innovations and personnel, and deeply rooted societal attitudes towards the military establishment speaks volumes of a nation's actual capacity to perform in addition to the nation's underlying objectives. In an attempt to better understand Russia's role as a current military superpower, one that the West and NATO now have to keep a closer eye on, a historical

analysis of its military legacy was thereby necessary. As noted in this work, the defining characteristics of Russia's current military prowess did not always exist in this way. Russia lagged behind in its military capacity compared to expectations during the later years of the Soviet era and the early years after the collapse of the USSR while reforms were underway.

Additionally, a historical take on this matter further helps scholars and experts in the field better internalize Russia's current actions in Syria without adding such an immediate element of surprise to newly introduced systems and tactics. Knowing the history of Russia's military capabilities and the reforms that have taken a long time to occur help those analyzing Russia's actions to logically piece together what is occurring now (i.e. the game of technological 'catch up' has finally taken hold and been expedited). Thus, Russia must be treated as a rational actor in its current demonstration of military superiority. Furthermore, by being mindful of Soviet and Russian attitudes towards the military institution and associated fluctuations overtime, this study serves as an important addition to existing literature which assumes that Russian society, throughout all levels, demonstrate a hard-headed patriotism for the military industry and its policies. In reality, as evidenced by this study, conflicts and outcomes of the past play a significant role in dictating the beliefs and feelings surrounding the current duty to serve, and these attitudes limit the improvement in Russia's military capabilities overall. In essence, a lack of loyalty and commitment translates to a limitation in enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of the military overall.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that, overtime, the technological playing field will eventually even out. It is inevitable that there will be lower barriers to entry (i.e. lower development costs, time, etc.) to creating the newest and most efficient military systems and equipment, and that many more nations will gradually begin to have and to use whatever is considered the 'latest tech' in the military industry. What, then, does all of this mean in the bigger picture? For starters, certain technological innovations that correlate to a nation's military might may no longer give a significant marginal advantage to those who have it. In other words, the marginal benefits of superiority and power associated with new systems will decrease as technology continues to improve and more and more nations begin to own these systems. This leveling of the playing field may pose a new dynamic to the international system, one of multi-power stalemate perhaps, or of great threat and fear as each nation will become a military superpower capable of severe damage to its opponents. In this type of world, military personnel will be obsolete because machines will operate machines and conflicts will be fought without human-to-human contact. Loyalty towards one's duty to serve will similarly no longer be a factor, and the large conventional armies of Peter the Great will become large conventional armies of various computers and systems. Although a somewhat scary concept to grasp, we can only hope that it will do more to promote peace if everyone is on the same level of military capabilities, and therefore no one nation will desire to be an aggressor towards another, equally powerful nation. Time will be the one to tell, as there is much more history yet to be written. Even so, the history that has led to the present must not be forgotten, and it is our job to interpret current events and findings that emerge from this lens of understanding.

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