Russian Military Reform

A failed exercise in defence decision making

Carolina Vendil Pallin

Routledge Contemporary Russia and Eastern Europe Series

Russian Military Reform

This book examines reform of the Russian military since the end of the Cold War. It explores the legacy of the Soviet era, explaining why – at the time of the fall of the Soviet Union – radical reform was long overdue in the wake of changing military technology, new economic and political realities, and the emergence of new threats and challenges. It discusses the problems encountered by Gorbachev in his attempts to promote military reform in the late 1980s, and goes on to analyse in detail the mixed fortunes of the policies of his successors, Yeltsin and Putin. It describes how the onset of war in Chechnya in 1994 provided clear evidence of the weaknesses of the Russian military in modern conflicts, and shows that although the Chechnya debacle did provide some impetus for reforms in the Armed Forces in 1997–98, the momentum was not continued under the Putin government. It argues that Putin's policies of bolstering central control over all aspects of decision making has left untouched many key problems facing the Russian military, including infighting between different force structures, lack of transparency and independent scrutiny over defence spending, and absence of consensus on the main threats to Russia and optimum force posture. Moreover, it argues that in his attempts to concentrate all means of control in a corrupt and inefficient Kremlin bureaucracy, Putin has deprived himself of all alternative channels of independent scrutiny, control and oversight, thus exacerbating the problems that continue to plague the Russian military.

Carolina Vendil Pallin is a research fellow at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs and has authored a number of publications on Russian domestic, security and military policy. She was previously deputy research director at the Swedish Defence Research Establishment.

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Preface

This book started in 2002 as a short paper on explanations as to why military reform was failing in Russia. As so often is the case, the more I studied the question, the more absorbing it became as the different facets of military reform and decision making on defence forced their way into the analysis. Gradually, the paper grew into a more comprehensive study where the link between decision making and the progress of military reform was at the centre of the analysis. The first draft was written while I was deputy research director at the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), which carries out analyses on commission from the Swedish Ministry of Defence.

A note of gratitude is due to the ministry, and especially to Jörgen Cederberg, for granting me the opportunity to develop this study and for kindly allowing me to rewrite it into a monograph. It could not have been written without the in-depth knowledge of Russian military affairs of my colleagues at FOI (formerly FOA, the Swedish National Defence Research Establishment), from which I have profited greatly. This is reflected, not least, in the frequent references to the biannual FOI reports on Russian military capability. Regrettably, these reports (published in May 1999, November 2000, February 2003 and 2005) are only available in Swedish. Short English summaries of the 1999, 2003 and 2005 reports were published in 1999, 2003 and 2005, respectively. The 1999 summary was also translated into Russian in *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*.[1] In a way, therefore, this book contributes to making some of these reports' findings available in English. A number of other FOI reports and publications, for example, on the Russian military–industrial complex, also provided important background for the present book. I joined the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (SIIA) in June 2006 and my new employer has been as forthcoming as FOI in providing encouragement and material support in the writing of this book.

I have benefited greatly from a number of colleagues' comments on the text as well as from their analyses of individual areas of reform. They include Jan Leijonhielm, Jakob Hedenskog, Dr Ingemar Dörfer, Dr Jan Knoph, Robert Larsson, Ingmar Oldberg and Wilhelm Unge, and Fredrik Westerlund, to mention but a few. Per-Olof Nilsson was a main source of

reference on early Russian military reform. Outside FOI, a number of people generously shared their expertise and delivered incisive and helpful comments on drafts of the book. Professor Stephen Blank pointed out, among other things, the need to take account of the strategic aspects throughout the book. Dr Anna Jonsson provided advice on the judicial aspects of defence decision making. In addition, Dr Maria Hedvall, Ulf Thorsson, Dr Lena Jonson and Dr Gudrun Persson and Professor Steven Rosefielde all contributed comments that I have incorporated into the text. Finally, I was in the fortunate position of having the opportunity to discuss military reform with three authorities on the development of the Russian military – Aleksandr Golts, Vitaly Shlykov and Professor Dmitri Trenin – as a result of which my thinking on the topic developed considerably.

A special note of gratitude is due to Professor Pavel Baev who kindly agreed to read a first version of the manuscript and to present his critique at a seminar at FOI in May 2005. The text profited greatly from his suggestions and scrutiny. As a direct result of his critique and encouraging comments, the structure of the text changed drastically. Needless to say, neither Pavel nor anyone else should in no way be criticized for any mistakes or transgressions that still remain in the text. Eve Johansson tidied up the language of the text and the footnotes. Deeply felt thanks for this effort. Finally, I dedicate this book to my husband who in the first place encouraged me to 'make a proper study' rather than just a paper. He provided advice on military terminology and endured the at times towering presence of this book during what has been a very happy but often demanding time in our life together, since our children were born between 2003 and 2007. Thank you for your support and advice, Krister.

A note on spelling and Russian terminology

Throughout the book Russian words and names have been transliterated using the Library of Congress system. However signs for the Russian ь and ъ have been omitted. Exceptions have also been made in the main text for names that begin with e, ë, й, ÿ or ý. The letter 'y' then starts the name as in the case of Yeltsin (rather than 'Eltsin'). Likewise, in the case of geographical and personal names such as Chechnya (rather than Chechnia) and Tolstoy (rather than Tolstoi) I have adopted the spelling most commonly used.

I have endeavoured to keep the number of abbreviations to a minimum. However, it proved impractical to use the full name of institutions and organizations, especially those with long, cumbersome names that are referred to frequently. I have, in the main, opted for the Russian abbreviations of the different institutions that are discussed in the text. However, in certain cases – such as MoD for the Ministry of Defence, CIS for the Commonwealth of Independent States and MIC for the military–industrial complex – I have opted for the established and easily recognizable English abbreviations rather than the Russian MO (Ministerstvo oborony), SNG (Sodruzhestvo Nezavisimykh Gosudarstv) and VPK (*voenno-promyshlennyi kompleks*).[2] All abbreviations are explained the first time they are used and a list of all abbreviations is provided below after this note.

In the main, the NATO–Russia glossary has been used for the translation of military terms such as 'formation' (*soedinenie*) and 'services of the Armed Forces' (*vidy Vooruzhennykh Sil*).[3] Certain words and expressions proved central for the understanding of the Russian framework for military reform. A word that occurs frequently in Russian sources on military reform is *stroitelstsvo*, here normally translated into 'development' (or more rarely 'development and deployment'). In a Russian–English dictionary, the translation is 'building, construction' or figuratively 'organization, structuring'.[4] However, further discussion of the term is called for when it is used abstractly as, for example, in *voennoe stroitelstvo* or *stroitelstvo vooruzhennykh sil*. It is clear from the way the term is used that it may refer to a state or condition of the Armed Forces (for example, the organization and deployment of the Armed Forces) as well as a process (the development of the Armed Forces). Consequently, *stroitelstvo* has been intermittently translated

as, for example, 'developing and structuring forces', 'military development' and 'military organization'.[5] A Russian military dictionary specifies the development of the Armed Forces as the most important constituent of *military* development. 'Military development [*voennoe stroitelstvo*], a system of economic, social-political, strictly military and other measures undertaken by the state in order to strengthen its military capability.'[6]

Another word that often causes certain confusion is 'professionalization' or the 'creation of professional Armed Forces'. Usually, this designates the Russian efforts to switch from a conscript army to one manned by soldiers recruited on a voluntary or contract basis. The word 'professionalization' (or 'professional army') has been avoided for two reasons. First, the word suggests that the Russian military was not professional before, which is hardly true. Its officers were far from amateurs. Second, the term 'professional soldier' is closely connected to Huntington's theory on civil–military relations and refers to something other than simply the way soldiers are recruited and appointed.[7] In Huntington's terminology a 'professional army' could definitely include conscripts in its ranks. For these two reasons, this study designates the Russian attempts to move away from a conscript army as moving towards 'recruitment on a voluntary basis' or 'on a contract basis', thus avoiding the word 'professional' in this connection (except, of course, in direct quotations).

Russia experienced a number of political crises and power struggles during the 1990s. This frequently resulted in changes of names of political institutions such as the parliament and the security services which succeeded the KGB. The names and abbreviations of the different 'power ministries', as well as a definition of this elusive term, are provided in Chapter 3. A short explanation is also called for when it comes to the names of the Russian parliament during the 1990s. Two parliaments, which existed in early 1991, are mentioned in this book since the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (the RSFSR) had a Congress of People's Deputies (of the RSFSR) at the same time as there was a Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union. Out of these congresses, which were the highest decision making organs at the republican and federal level respectively, smaller working parliaments were elected – the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR and the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union. As the Soviet Union crumbled, so did its parliament. The Russian Congress of People's Deputies and its Supreme Soviet, however, lived on until September 1993, when Yeltsin decided to dissolve the parliament. In December 1993, a new constitution was adopted at the same time as a new parliamentary assembly was elected. According to the Russian constitution of 1993, the Russian parliament, the Federal Assembly, consists of two chambers – the State Duma, the deputies of which were directly elected, and the Federation Council, formed by the constituent parts of the Russian Federation. The reader should find that all the other institutions as well as the twists and turns in Russia's political life are explained in the text.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ABM	Anti-ballistic missiles
AFV	Armoured fighting vehicles
AVN	Akademiia voennykh nauk (Academy of Military Science)
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CFE	Conventional Forces in Europe
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
DPA	Dvizhenie v podderzhku armii (Movement in Support of the Army)
EU	European Union
FAPSI	Federalnoe agenstvo pravitelstvennoi sviazi i informatsii pri Prezidente RF (Federal Agency for the Protection of Government Communications)
FOA	Swedish National Defence Research Establishment
FOI	Swedish Defence Research Agency
FPS	Federalnaia pogranichnaia sluzhba (Federal Border Service)
FSB	Federalnaia sluzhba bezopasnosti (Federal Security Service)
FSK	Federalnaia sluzhba kontrrazvedki (Federal Counter-intelligence Service)
FSO	Federalnaia sluzhba okhrany (Federal Guard Service)
GKO	Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony (State Committee for Defence)
Glavpur	Glavnoe politicheskoe upravlenie (Main Political Administration)
GNP	Gross national product
GOSPLAN	Gosudarstvennyi planovyi komitet (State Planning Commission)
GOSSNAB	Gosudarstvennyi komitet po materialno-tekhnicheskomy snabzheniiu (State Supply Committee)
GRU	Glavnoe razvedyvatelnoe upravlenie (Generalnogo shtaba Voennykh Sil) (Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces)

GUMVS	Glavnoe upravlenie mezhdunarodnogo voennogo sotrudnichestva (Main Directorate of International Military Cooperation (of the Ministry of Defence))
GUO	Glavnoe upravlenie okhrany (Main Guard Directorate)
GUSP	Glavnoe upravlenie spetsialnykh programm Prezidenta Rossii (Main Directorate for Special Programmes)
ICBM	Intercontinental ballistic missile
INF	Intermediate nuclear forces
KGB	Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti (Committee of State Security)
KPRF	Kommunisticheskaia Partiia Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Communist Party of the Russian Federation)
LRA	Long range aviation
MChS	Ministerstvo Rossiiskoi Federatsii po delam grazhdanskoi oborony, chrezvychainym situatsiiam i likvidatsii posledstvii stikhiinykh bedstvii (Ministry of Civil Defence, Emergency Situations and Liquidating the Consequences of Natural Disasters)
MD	Military district
MIC	Military–industrial complex
MID	Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MVD	Ministerstvo Vnutrennykh Del (Ministry of Internal Affairs)
NAK	Natsionalnyi antiterroristicheskii komitet (National Anti-Terrorist Committee)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	Non-commissioned officer
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PONARS	Program on New Approaches to Russian Security (Center for Strategic and International Studies
PVO	Protivo-vozdushnaia oborona (Air Defence Forces)
R&D	Research and development
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
RKO	Raketno-kosmicheskaia oborona (Missile Space Defence Troops)
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
RVSN	Raketnye voiska strategicheskogo naznacheniia (Strategic Rocket Forces)
SLBM	Submarine-launched ballistic missile
SORT	Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reductions
SVOP	Sovet po vneshnei i oboronnoi politike (Council on Foreign and Defence Policy)
SVR	Sluzhba vneshnei razvedki (Foreign Intelligence Service)
UN	United Nations

UVKR	Upravlenie voennoi kontrrazvedki FSB (Directorate of Military Counter-intelligence of the Federal Security Service)
VDV	Vozdushno-desantnye voiska (Airborne Troops)
VPK	Voennaia promyshlennaia kommissiia (Military–Industrial Commission)

1 The Kremlin and military reform

The political development in the Soviet Union and Russia from the late 1980s and onwards has been nothing short of breathtaking. An empire crumbled and fell, bringing fifteen independent states into existence. Russia in particular went from being the centre of an authoritarian, socialist Soviet Union to building a new Russian state and introducing democracy and a market economy. All these changes could not but lead to momentous changes within the Russian military establishment. The Russian military found itself within an entirely new strategic environment. For example, the country had fourteen new neighbouring states and had lost most of its military allies that were tied to the Soviet Union through the Warsaw Pact. Meanwhile, innovations in the field of military technology and warfare had long pointed to the need for military reform. This was brought home to the Russian military not least after the Gulf War in 1991.

Relations between the military and society underwent change as well. The Soviet military officer had been a respected member of an elite that enjoyed much sought-after privileges. He was the outpost against aggressive Western imperialism and warmongering. The heavy burden that the Soviet military imposed on society was seldom, if ever, questioned. This state of affairs changed drastically with the fall of the Soviet Union. Starting under Gorbachev and accelerating in the 1990s, there was less consensus on the need to prioritize military spending in the way it had been prioritized throughout most of the Soviet era. The West was no longer the enemy it had been. Instead, the lifestyle of the West was increasingly seen as something to aspire to. Living a good life, *zhit normalno*, became the main concern of most Russians at the same time as the prestige and authority once enjoyed by the Russian military rapidly eroded. Russian military personnel were left with a feeling of having been bitterly abandoned and let down by an ungrateful society and political leadership. It was thus hardly surprising that the changes that Russian society underwent, starting in the late 1980s, would lead to tensions between the military and civilian sectors of society.

The challenges that resulted from these changes would have to be met by the political leadership. It would have to provide a new list of threats that the

Russian military was to prepare to meet. No less important, the political leadership had to decide in no uncertain terms which threats were no longer relevant. Moreover, the Kremlin had to provide the guidelines for how to meet these threats, and this involved difficult questions such as which force posture Russia should have, which threats were to be handled by the military as opposed to the police, what would be the role of the strategic nuclear forces compared to conventional forces, and so on. In other words, military know-how was of the essence if political circles were to be able to decide these questions. Finally, the political leadership needed to hammer out a new place for the military organization within a rapidly changing Russian society. This was by no means an easy task, but was essential if questions of manning and financing were to be resolved in the long term.

Why another study of Russian military reform?

The volume of books and articles on Russian military reform is daunting. The question whether another study of Russian military reform is really needed is therefore a real one. There are at least three justifications for approaching the subject again.

First, coming to grips with reforming the military system is an essential challenge to Russian policy makers. It plays a central role in the development of Russian politics as a whole. Russia's military reform raises fundamental questions about how civil–military relations should be organized. It is not the much-discussed question of whether or not the generals will be involved in a military coup that is at the centre of attention here; rather it is the question within the field of civil–military relations that has come to the fore in recent years – of how to impose political will on a military system.[1] This has proved urgent not only for Russia but for other post-communist countries as well. In the Russian case, a precondition for the reform was that the monopoly over defence spending and planning was wrested from the military. As will be evident below, this proved to be a prolonged and arduous process that may not come to fruition for another ten years. This study will add to the existing literature in these fields.

Second, even a cursory glance at the problems faced by the Russian political leadership reveals that many of the dilemmas it faced and the experiences it gained were far from unique to Russia. The fall of the Soviet Union and the drastic changes of international society that it brought about more or less coincided with major changes in military technology and doctrine. Together these changes prompted radical reforms of most, if not all, Western armed forces – reforms that often met with considerable resistance. The Russian experience, with all its specific preconditions and problems, provides an interesting backdrop for other studies on military reform. It is worth pointing out, though, that the Russian case has a number of unique specifics – an ongoing war within its own borders in the republic of Chechnya, Russia's possession of nuclear weapons, and a national identity crisis, to

mention but a few. Certainly, the magnitude of the tasks ahead for anyone wishing to reform the Russian military was impressive.

Finally, there exists a purely selfish motive for studying military reform: to anyone interested in security policy decision making, studying the Russian military reform process presents an irresistible challenge. It spans several security policy areas and engages key institutions within the executive, the legislative and the judicial sphere. Moreover, there are few studies that focus on Russian defence decision making and military reform, and especially on the institutional framework.[2] The present study aims to fill this gap.

Argument and structure

This book was born out of an interest in security decision making – and when it comes to Russian security decision making, few decisions (or the lack thereof) have sparked more interest and debate than the military reform. The very way in which military reform has been managed by fits and starts, with intense activity one month only to be followed by long periods of inertia, cannot but arouse interest. This is therefore not a systematic comparison with military reform in other countries or previous centuries. Nor will the reader who is interested in order-of-battle descriptions in chronological order find this book satisfying. Rather, the focus is on defence decision making and its relationship to the progress (or lack thereof) of military reform.

Only the Russian political leadership could decide and provide the military organization with the guidelines for military reform. When the Russian Armed Forces were created in 1992, a significant perception gap had opened up between society at large and the Russian military. The military needed to change its outlook on the world to become more in tune with the society it was supposed to serve. Even more importantly, the politicians had to assert authority over military policy. This required both political courage and a good grasp of military matters. In a longer perspective, the political leadership also needed to develop an effective institutional framework for defence decision making. This book traces the evidence of, first, the politicians' determination to change the military system; second, the dissemination of military know-how outside the military sphere; and, finally, the development of a framework of efficient institutions through which to carry out reform.

It should be clear to most people by now that the Russian military organization will not be comparable with, for example, that of the USA in the foreseeable future. This book proceeds from Russian definitions of military reform and evaluates progress primarily against these definitions. This is then combined with Western theory on defence decision making and civil–military relations in order to provide guidelines for analysis of the political level and the decision-making framework. The underlying argument is that when political will and know-how were present, as well as an institutional framework for defence policy making, there was some progress in military reform

as well. However, the main tendency was for energetic policy making to peter out after a short, intensive period of activity. The Kremlin lacked perseverance in pushing through the much-needed military reform. Instead, its reform proposals became bogged down by bureaucratic resistance the minute the political leadership wavered in its determination.

Many of the problems in conducting a military reform in Russia were precisely those that one might expect. Money was scarce and the military bureaucracy was reluctant to implement reform. However, a strong political leadership with a clear vision of why and how it wanted to conduct a military reform would have overcome such difficulties. Instead, Russia's political leadership tended to get embroiled in political turf wars. It never made the strategic analysis that was necessary if it was to develop a goal and a plan for military reform. Nor did it build the necessary defence decision-making machinery and recruit the experts who could have acted on its behalf when other policy issues took precedence over military reform in the Kremlin. Military reform in Russia was hindered by the lack of political will, decision-making structures and know-how on the political level. This is true of both the Yeltsin and the Putin era, contrary to the impression that Putin pushed military reform forward significantly.

Chapter 2 starts with an account of the different explanations that have been advanced as to why military reform has been so slow in materializing in Russia. Most of them can be divided into three main categories: economic explanations; explanations that focus on threat perceptions; and explanations that identify the absence of political leadership as critical. Although all three reflect important factors, the chapter concludes that there is a good argument to be made for exploring further the third, which centres on the dearth of political leadership in military affairs. Chapter 3 examines defence decision making in general. It then goes on to explore the Soviet legacy that Moscow was left with. The different Russian institutions for defence decision making are described and an 'ideal' structure for Russian defence decision making is suggested. This chapter can be read as part of the overall study, but also separately as an overview of Russian defence policy making.

Chapter 4 goes on to explore the Russian definition of military reform and the reasons for conducting a reform in 1991. In Russia, military reform embraces not only the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. A number of other armed troops are also included in Russia's military organization. The chapter thus discusses and defines what should be regarded as the military organization of the Russian Federation. Finally, it defines the political leadership that was responsible for military reform.

Chapter 5 looks into the early record of Russian military reform during the Yeltsin era. It finds that very little was done and that the defence decision-making structures hardly evolved at all during this period. Meanwhile, the political leadership showed little or no interest in military reform since it was busy consolidating its own position of power. Some of the main problems facing the Armed Forces and the military organization are discussed.

The war in Chechnya was a vivid reminder to Moscow that the need for military reform was extremely urgent. This is illustrated at the end of Chapter 5, since there was a flurry of political activity on military reform following the defeat in Chechnya. However, this intense defence decision-making activity petered out before some of the most significant challenges to the Russian military organization had been met.

Chapter 6 deals with the advent of Putin to power and examines whether his commitment to creating a strong Russia has resulted in military reform. The chapter explores Putin's so-called power vertical against the record of reform. The conclusion is that this decision-making structure will do little to address the basic problems within the military organization.

The closing chapter concludes that military reform in Russia has still moved forward relatively little. Although a number of decisions have been made that affect the Armed Forces, there is little evidence that Russia's military organization as a whole has made great strides in meeting its military policy challenges – even in the long-term future. Putin's power vertical appears to give him more power, but in practice makes him hostage to his circle of closest advisers and to bureaucratic politics. Instead of a system of checks and balances, Putin has created a fragile structure where all levers of power are concentrated in the Kremlin.

2 The debate on Russian military reform

Military reform is a process where goals and means change over time rather than a set of fixed end goals to be reached at a given point in time. It is in the very nature of a major reform project that adjustments are called for along the way as domestic and international conditions change. Perhaps this sense of longevity and moving targets helps to explain the intensity of the debate on Russian military reform. Different Russian actors blame each other and enumerate a multitude of reasons for the failure of military reform. Outside observers, mainly in the West, have provided equally long lists of impediments to reform and of culprits who either willingly or by their sheer incompetence undermined the reform process. Nor is there any consensus on where military reform ought to be heading. Most analyses tend to converge on one conclusion, though: Russia's military reform record has been dismal and the future seems to hold few promises of radical improvement.

One way of explaining the poor record of the military reform could be simply to point to the Soviet legacy as crippling and effectively preventing radical reform measures. However, the Soviet legacy explains close to nothing unless one goes on to pinpoint which aspects of it are the problems. All reform processes must build on a legacy of some kind, and in the Russian case it had to be of Soviet descent. In addition, an explanation that roughly says that Russian military reform failed because it is impossible to reform the Soviet/Russian legacy is tautological. Nor should the main reason why Russian military reform has been slow in coming be sought in pre-Soviet legacies such as the Mongol yoke, tsarist authoritarian practices or, as has been suggested, the fact that Russian officers have read Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.[1] While these kinds of historical analogies and comparisons are certainly useful in putting the present situation in perspective, they provide less convincing explanations of progress (or lack of progress).

The different explanations that have been suggested as to why Russian military reform has proved an insurmountable task can be roughly divided into three categories. In the first are the explanations that concentrate on economic factors – particularly the poor state of the Russian economy in general in the 1990s and the degree to which the Russian economy was

militarized during the Soviet era. The second category contains explanations that centre on old threat evaluations that lived on within the military sphere. The focus is on the reluctance Russian generals have shown to abandon old conceptions of what Russia's place in the world is and the tendency to continue to regard NATO as the main enemy. Finally, the third category focuses on the lack of political leadership and the inability to control and scrutinize the Russian military. This last category is also the main focus of this study. Evidently, most explanations tie into and reinforce each other and most of the writing on Russian military reform refers to more than one explanation, as will be evident below.

Economic obstacles

The start of Russian military reform coincided with a sharp downturn in the Russian economy in general. From independence and throughout the 1990s, Russia struggled with a severe budget deficit. The economy showed few signs of growth and the positive signs that were visible in 1996–97 disappeared from sight as Russia tumbled into a deep economic crisis in August 1998. These economic problems could not but affect the Russian defence budget and, thus, the funding of an intended military reform since even simply downsizing usually proves expensive.[2] A military reform would require either significant increases of the defence budget as a whole or a radical redistribution of funds within it. Neither of these occurred in Russia, and military reform was stalled almost immediately by lack of funds.[3] In addition, evidence suggests that the political leadership seriously underestimated the costs associated with military reform. In other words, the economic assumptions were flawed from the very start.

Instead the defence budget decreased while the Russian Ministry of Defence (MoD) proved reluctant to make the redistribution of funds that would have been necessary.[4] Russian military participants in the debate usually overlooked the need for a reallocation of the available resources and concentrated their critique on the political leadership's failure to understand that reforms cost money. In short, they called for an increase in the defence budget.[5] This view existed already in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev when the military – far from accepting the need for reduced spending on defence – demanded increased funding.[6] In the late 1990s, the chairman of the Duma Committee on Defence and former head of the Federal Border Service, Andrei Nikolaev, lamented that instead of focusing on improving the defence and security of Russia, the political leadership was concentrating only on bringing the size of the military into line with the financial resources available. In his view, military reform demanded more spending rather than the reverse.[7] He reiterated this point in 2001: 'Our leaders and many politicians hold, ever since the Soviet times, the mistaken idea that the military should be getting less money once military reform has been launched.'[8]

The root of these officers' view on how much military spending Russian society was able to carry is to be found in the degree to which Soviet society was militarized. As Russia became independent in 1991, it inherited an economy and society where military needs had always taken precedence over private consumption and even over achieving overall economic growth.[9] The size of the Russian defence budget was notoriously hard to estimate throughout the 1990s. This was due in part to the difficulty of establishing the size of the Russian national budget overall. However, in the case of the defence budget, the difficulty of estimating its size was compounded by the fact that it was impossible to determine the share of the economy that directly or indirectly produced for the military.[10] This legacy from the Soviet era, a 'structural militarization', permeated not least the industrial sector and hindered conversion that could have freed resources and yielded increased welfare for the rest of Russian society.[11]

In the 1990s the military found itself in a position of having to pay for things that it had previously received for a price that did not reflect the market value. On top of this, contractors no longer prioritized military orders in the way they had done in the Soviet era. The financial difficulties were aggravated by the fact that the Armed Forces had to provide housing and other benefits to their personnel. Since there was a chronic shortage of housing, the Ministry of Defence was rarely able to do this. Still more pressing was the obligation to provide housing to those officers who were dismissed from the Armed Forces. This obligation overrode that of housing the remaining personnel. Consequently, this provided little incentive for the MoD to reduce its forces, since reducing the Armed Forces could prove more expensive than keeping them at the existing level.[12]

Meanwhile, on a personal level, Russian military personnel struggled to make ends meet, especially those with a family to support. The military was one of many categories of state personnel who were forced to wait for months on end for their wages. This was probably one of the reasons why the level of corruption increased within the Armed Forces.[13] Indeed, as officers found themselves compelled to increase their incomes by means other than regular wages, the situation approached a point where profitable corruption within the military made many officers reluctant to see changes in the system.[14] In this connection it is worth mentioning that, although the war in Chechnya cost the Russian state considerable sums, it is equally true that it has proved a valuable source of income to a number of officers there.[15] In other words, in certain cases the level of corruption removed the incentives for getting reform under way.

Considering the magnitude of Russia's economic and financial difficulties, it is natural that many observers regard the economic situation and the unrealistic defence budget as the main reason why Russian military reform was poorly implemented during the 1990s. Indeed, the economic factors ought not to be disregarded; but it is important to remember that the struggle between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Defence over the

size of the defence budget is far from unique to Russia.[16] Nor is a situation where diminished national financial resources put limits on defence budgets unique. Other states have struggled with difficult economic constraints while restructuring their armed forces. The difference in scale and the magnitude of the problem faced is considerable, and this makes comparisons between Russia and other countries difficult. However, in the Russian case it was the need to strike a balance between economic goals and defence goals that was the critical factor rather than budgetary constraints as such. Deciding this balance was always first and foremost a political decision.

For example, the increases in the American defence budget in 2003 took place under conditions when the USA was experiencing an economic downturn. One criticism levelled against this increased spending was that simply providing more financial resources would not force the military sector to prioritize, innovate and reform.[17] Indeed, the main problem for the Russian military was not the cuts that were made in its annual budget. Rather it was the fact that the military continued to wear a costume that was much too large for its present needs and out of proportion to the available resources that proved central. The Ministry of Defence failed to draw the inevitable conclusions from the new situation it found itself in. The Soviet military had gradually gained a position where defence policy had become the preserve of military officers and the political leadership lacked the necessary skills to provide guidelines and goals, let alone ensure that these were fulfilled. This made it possible for the MoD and other power ministries to ignore the exhortations to make drastic structural changes of the military system. Reductions were forced on the military by the political leadership, but without providing clear goals for the military reform process. In other words, it was the lack of political guidelines and vision, coupled with an inability to enforce political decisions upon the military, that resulted in the economic crisis within the military organization rather than lack of money per se.

Old threat perceptions dominated military planning

The Russian Armed Forces were created in the midst of great confusion. There were, for example, few clear signs as to where the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was heading as an organization. Initially, Russia had championed the transfer of the armed forces of the Soviet Union to a joint CIS command. Only when all the other CIS states had formed their own armed forces or announced their intention of doing so did Russia create its own Russian Armed Forces, in May 1992.[18] Russia also found itself having to bring home troops from the former Warsaw Pact states and the Baltic states – something that impaired the implementation of military reform.[19] This complicated the process of building new national armed forces.

At the same time, Russia found itself within entirely new borders and with a new set of neighbouring states. Quite apart from the practical problems that this created when it came to organizing border controls and so on, there

was a lingering confusion as to whether these were indeed the proper borders of Russia. Although the Kremlin never advanced revisionist claims regarding its borders with the former Soviet states, this policy line was not always consistent with public sentiment.[20] Certainly, within the military there was a growing consensus that the former Soviet republics should constitute Russia's sphere of influence. For example, in 1993 Colonel-General Andrei Nikolaev claimed that Russia's declining defence potential was the reason why 'many of its neighbours feel free to encroach on its national interests and infringe the rights of its citizens'.[21] The conclusion was that Russia should have a strong military in order to be able to exert pressure on its neighbouring states. In 2003, Igor Rodionov, former minister of defence, echoed a similar concern when it came to NATO enlargement, which had seriously limited Russia's 'independence in making domestic and foreign policy'.[22]

Russia also displayed a certain degree of ambiguity as to who were its enemies and what represented the main threats to Russia. During the first few years after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Kremlin experienced something of a honeymoon with the USA. Yeltsin and the minister of foreign affairs, Andrei Kozyrev, were the main proponents of this line. At the same time, local conflicts erupted within several of the newly independent CIS states. For example, the Russian Fourteenth Army in Moldova became embroiled in the conflict between the Russian-speaking minority in Transnistria and the Moldovan authorities in Chisinau. Later, Russia became involved in the conflict between the secessionist republic of Abkhazia and the Georgian authorities in Tbilisi, and in the civil war in Tajikistan. This list of conflicts within the CIS is far from exhaustive, but it suggests that local conflicts ought to have become important focal points when the Kremlin constructed its new armed forces. In other words, local and perhaps regional wars (or limited wars) rather than total war was the kind of conflict that Russia's military system was most likely to become embroiled in.[23] Preparing for a large-scale NATO attack under these circumstances stretched the scarce resources available to breaking point.

Nevertheless, it was clear that many within the defence and foreign policy bureaucracy retained the view that the USA and NATO remained Russia's main enemies. That threat perceptions are hard to change overnight is hardly surprising (or, for that matter, unique to Russia). Ideological education had featured as a regular part of all officers' education and, partly proceeding from this base, the Soviet military had always put stress on military superiority and on preparing for worst-case scenarios.[24] Although Russian military education no longer included lessons in Marxism-Leninism, many aspects of it remained unchanged in the 1990s.[25] Closely connected was the view that Russia must remain a great power. Thus, in 1993 vice president and former military officer Aleksandr Rutskoi warned against Russia losing its 'historic role':

> In order for Russia to fulfil her historic role to ensure peace on Earth and to retain a fitting position in world civilization and the status of a