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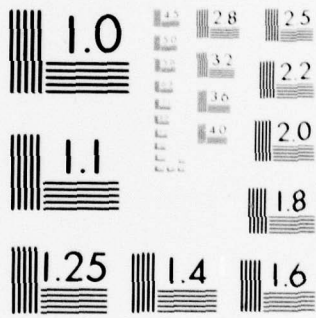
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STUDENT RESEARCH REPORT

MAJ. DENNIS A. DEENY
For IMPLICATIONS
OF THE SOVIET MILITARY
OF THE POPULATION EXPLOSION IN
CENTRAL ASIA
-1979-

GARMISCH, GERMANY

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DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
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F O R E W O R D

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6 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SOVIET MILITARY
OF THE POPULATION EXPLOSION IN
CENTRAL ASIA

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SUMMARY

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For many years the Soviet military has sought to solve nationality problems within its ranks by populating the armed forces with mostly Slavic recruits and attempting to Russify non-Russian soldiers. Furthermore it has relegated recruits from "unreliable" nationalities, particularly Central Asians, to non-sensitive units. Ethno-demographic trends, the increasing Central Asian birth rate accompanied by a declining birth rate in the European sector of the USSR, will eventually require the military to rely more heavily on non-Slavic, especially Central Asian, manpower. This, coupled with a resurgence of self-affirmation among Soviet nationalities, will pose significant problems for Soviet military planners. The growing technological requirements of the armed forces will necessitate a greater proportion of highly skilled soldiers. However, by the 1990's, the available draft pool will consist of a growing number of poorly educated technologically unsophisticated individuals with an acute sense of national self-awareness. As a result, ethnic friction will become more widespread throughout the military and command, control and communication problems will increase. There will be an overall decline in the reliability and combat effectiveness of the armed forces. ↙

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INTRODUCTION

The Soviet Union is a multi-national empire comprising over one hundred nationalities which, according to official rhetoric, live in harmony and peace. As a reflection of society, Soviet military units are multi-national. It is a frequent Soviet theme that ethnic diversity does not negatively affect national security but, on the contrary, is a source of strength. In reality the Soviet leadership has experienced a great deal of trouble reconciling the various national, linguistic and religious differences which exist within the society. These divisions have acted and continue to act as centrifugal forces constantly tugging at the fabric of the state and making the goal of a truly unified nation always elusive. Although the regime has made special efforts to insulate the armed forces from these diverging tendencies, national divisions do exist within military units and their manifestations prove inimical to military effectiveness.

There are indications that changes are occurring in the orientation of the Soviet population which will exacerbate these national divisions and cause serious problems for Soviet policy makers in the coming decades. In recent years there has been a resurgence of self-affirmation and self-assertion on the part of the nationalities of the USSR. This phenomenon is especially important in light of the demographic problem facing Moscow in the near future. The birth rate of the country's European section (the Baltic and Slavic republics) is on the decline, while in Central Asia and Kazakhstan the birth rate is extremely high. It is possible that by the year 2000 the Muslims of Central Asia may comprise as much as one-third of the manpower pool available for military service. Furthermore, it seems likely that the growing technological requirements of the armed forces will necessitate the recruitment of a greater percentage of highly skilled soldiers. The available draft pool, however, will consist of a growing number of poorly educated, technologically unsophisticated individuals whose national self-awareness could cause increased ethnic friction in military units. The purpose of this paper is to point out the implications of these problems for the Soviet military.

Nationality Policies in the Soviet Armed Forces

The constitution of the USSR grants full equality to all nations and nationalities of the Soviet Union in all aspects of life and activity, and as such assures equality in the military sphere.¹ Theoretically, this guarantees that no one will place restrictions on individuals because of national origin, and that equal opportunities exist for all in job selection, training, and appointment to leadership positions. In reality, however, this is not the case. Distinctions are made on the basis of national origin to insure that the Slavic nationalities predominate throughout the military structure, and efforts are made to break down national loyalties and promote Russification of non-Russian nationalities in the armed forces.

It is a constant Soviet propaganda theme that they have successfully solved the nationality problem which plagued Russia before the Revolution. It is asserted that socialism has "eliminated social and national oppression", insured "defacto equality among peoples" and "eliminated from the lives of the different races and nationalities their mutual hostility and enmity".² In fact, the Soviet Union today, especially where the nationality question is concerned, is a continuation of the Tsarist empire. It is dominated by the Great Russian people and to a lesser extent by other Slavs, such as the Ukrainians and Belorussians, and its leadership manifests many of the same fears and prejudices exhibited by the Tsars. This is why the author of the above glowing assurances of national equality feels compelled to add in the very same article that even in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics "national prejudice and the exaggerated or distorted manifestation of national feelings are, as is well known, an extraordinarily tenacious phenomenon which has taken a firm hold in people of insufficient political maturity".³

Since the armed forces are the ultimate guarantor of the survivability of the Soviet Union, the Soviet leadership is particularly sensitive to how the nationality problem affects military preparedness. It has become evident through refugee accounts that within the armed forces opportunities for training, selection for command positions and access to specific units seems highly dependent on how reliable any particular nationality is perceived to be by the political elite. This outlook was heavily influenced by the experiences of the Second World War which indicated just how willing various national groups were to support either the Soviet regime or the Russian motherland. There has consequently developed a sort of hierarchal view of the major nationalities in terms of their loyalty and effectiveness as members of the armed forces.⁴ The Slavs, in particular the Great Russians, stand at the top of the scale. Next in line are the Belorussions and the Ukrainians (excluding the Western Ukrainians who clearly demonstrated their dislike for both the Soviet Union and Mother Russia during World War II). These national groupings make up the backbone of the Soviet military.

They comprise a substantial percentage of all elite units and occupy most of the leadership positions. On the next level down are the Georgians and Armenians. While they occupy substantially fewer leadership positions than the Slavs, their military service seems otherwise to be restricted only in that they are rarely allowed to serve in borderguard units. The least trustworthy among the major Soviet national groups seems to be the Baltic nationalities, the Moldavians, the Azerbaidzhanians, with the Central Asians at the bottom of the hierarchy.⁵ Consequently, the political elite, in its efforts to establish a loyal and effective military force, ensures that the military elite contains a preponderance of Slavs, especially Great Russians, and that those elements of the country's population thought to be unreliable are relegated to non-essential positions and to non-sensitive units. Additionally, efforts are made to break down national cultural bonds through stationing of recruits outside of their home republic, and Russification of non-Russian national groups is promoted through the mandatory use of Russian as the official language of the armed forces.

Slavic domination of the military can be inferred from the fact that Slavic nationalities dominate the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), which in turn controls all facets of Soviet society. Although Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians comprise only 53.3 percent of the population,⁶ 80.1 percent of all Party members are Slavs⁷ and the majority of the Communist Youth League (Komsomol) are also Slavs.⁸ Party and Komsomol membership in the armed forces represent over 90 percent of all military personnel.⁹ The extent of Slavic control becomes even more evident if one looks at the national origins of those who occupy the highest military leadership positions and of those who represent the military in the highest organs of the Party and government. One report states that among those appointed as general officers between 1940 and 1976, 91 percent were of Slavic origin, and of that number 80 percent were Russian or Ukrainian. Among the generals who were elected to the Supreme Soviet, 95 percent were Slavs, and 80 percent of those were Russian. Between 1952 and 1956, 101 generals were elected to the Central Committee of the CPSU of which 97 were of Slavic origin, including 78 Russians.¹⁰ According to emigre reports, in the lower echelons of the officer corps the situation is little different. It seems that there are far fewer officers from minority nationalities than their country-wide population percentages might warrant.¹¹ The political elite has thus ensured that there is a substantial bloc of faithful Slavic brethren which permeate the officer corps at all levels, giving them considerable confidence in the loyalty of the armed forces.

In a further attempt to reduce the effect that non-reliable national groups can have on the armed forces, the leadership currently assigns only a few token members of these minority groups to high-priority military units. These elite units include not only the strategic rocket forces (SRF) and the antiaircraft defense

(PVO) units but also air force, armored, artillery and motorized rifle units. This is particularly true of the Central Asian minorities which are generally relegated to construction, supply, and rear service units.¹² Furthermore, those few Central Asians who end up in elite or combat units, almost without exception, serve in non-technical jobs and perform for the most part, menial tasks.¹³

In addition, the leadership attempts to combat minority particularism and break those bonds which link individuals to their national culture by having military recruits routinely serve their military obligation outside of their native republic. There is an attempt to instill in these soldiers a sense of pride in being part of a new historical community of people, the Soviet people. They are encouraged to foster a "pan-national Soviet pride".¹⁴ However, the Soviet culture to which these recruits are encouraged to transfer their allegiance is decidedly Russian in content. The Russian language has been converted into an "international language", the language "most convenient" for intercourse among Soviet citizens and considered by the leadership the one language of the Soviet Union which is an "inexhaustable spiritual storehouse".¹⁵ Consequently, Russian is the sole written and spoken language permitted in instruction and command in the armed forces. Beyond that, military colleges providing higher military education leading to a commissioned rank in the armed forces require all candidates to pass an entrance examination in Russian language and literature.¹⁶ This not only makes it difficult for minorities, especially Central Asians, to enter the leadership ranks of the military, but also ensures that those minorities who have attained fluency in the Russian language have also steeped themselves in Russian culture. This allows the Soviet elite to use the armed forces as a vehicle for Russification of the national minority groups of the Soviet Union.

It is difficult to judge the effects of these policies since references in the official press to nationality problems as they affect the military are rare. Nevertheless, there have been hints that the problem exists in references to "nationalistic conceit" causing problems¹⁷ and warning that the "slightest hostility" among national groups in units can impair combat readiness.¹⁸ Moreover, emigres have reported that friction among national groups has been a continuing problem and has from time to time caused a polarization of troops along national lines and often led to disciplinary problems.¹⁹ Nevertheless, there is no proof to suggest that these problems have been of consequence or have in any significant way affected the overall reliability or combat effectiveness of the armed forces. In fact, the policy of assigning only a few non-Slavs to high priority and combat units may have averted serious problems for Soviet commanders. This is, however, a luxury Soviet military force planners will not have in the future. The demographic changes now taking place in the USSR, the decline in

the population growth rate of European Russia and the increase in the rate of the non-European sector, will deny the Soviet leadership the possibility of populating their armed forces with mostly Slavic recruits. They will increasingly have to rely on non-Slavic, especially Central Asian, recruits which will pose some difficult problems in the near future.

Ethnodemographic Trends

Research on Soviet population and manpower trends indicates that the population of the USSR, as a whole, is growing at an ever decreasing rate and that by the end of the century that rate will stand at about 0.6 percent annual growth or about one-third that of the middle of this century. This trend, however, does not hold true for each individual Soviet republic. Soviet census data points to a persistent disparity between the population growth rates of the European portion of the USSR as compared to the non-European section. As can be seen from Table 1,²¹ population growth between 1959 and 1970 for the non-European nationalities far exceeded that of the European national groups. Soviet Sources indicate that for the same period the annual average growth rate of the peoples of Central Asia was 3 percent or better while the growth rate of the Slavic nationalities was substantially less.²² At the same time, as indicated in Table 2,²³ the non-Europeans, especially the Central Asians, increased their percentage of the total Soviet population while the Europeans, particularly the Slavs, registered a decline. Research conducted by the US demographer, Murray Feshback, shows that these trends will continue and that an increasing share of the net population growth for the USSR will occur in Central Asia and Kazakhstan. His findings demonstrate that by the year 2000 the population growth rate for Kazakhstan will be two-and-one-half times the national rate, and that for Central Asia will be five times the rate for the USSR as a whole.²⁴

There is ample evidence that the Soviets view this disparity in the population growth rate with mounting concern. This is apparent from the regime's decision to create a special high-level Scientific Council on Nationality Problems under the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences.²⁵ Furthermore, Brezhnev himself called for the formulation of an official demographic policy that would take into account "a number of population problems which have lately been exacerbated".²⁶ Accordingly, there has been a great deal of discussion at scientific conferences, in professional journals and the Soviet press in general concerning the declining Soviet birth rate and methods for achieving a more even distribution of population growth.

Heightened Soviet interest in the demographic trends of the

TABLE 1
Increase in Population by Nationality 1959-1970

Major "European" Groups	Major "Non-European" Groups
20-30%	over 50%
Moldavian	Tadzhik
	Uzbek
10-15%	Turkmen
Russian	45-50%
Belorussian	Kirgiz
Lithuanian	Azerbaidzhanian
9.4%	Kazakh
Ukrainian	20-30%
1.9-2.2%	Georgian
Latvian	
Estonian	

TABLE 2
National Composition of the Soviet Population

Nationality	Percentage of Total Population		Percentage Point Change
	1959	1970	
Major "European"	79.6	77.2	-2.4
Russian	54.6	53.4	-1.2
Ukrainian	17.8	16.9	-0.9
Belorussian	3.8	3.7	-0.1
Moldavian	1.1	1.1	0.0
Latvian	0.7	0.6	-0.1
Lithuanian	1.1	1.1	0.0
Estonian	0.4	0.4	0.0
Major "Non-European"	12.6	15.2	+2.6
Uzbek	2.9	3.8	+0.9
Tartar	2.4	2.4	0.0
Kazakh	1.7	2.2	+0.5
Azeri	1.4	1.8	+0.4
Armenian	1.3	1.5	+0.2
Georgian	1.3	1.3	0.0
Tadzhik	0.7	0.9	+0.2
Turkmen	0.5	0.6	+0.1
Kirgiz	0.5	0.6	+0.1

USSR seems to have resulted from the analysis of 1970 census data which indicated a substantial and persistent disparity in population growth among the various republics. Since then a great deal of effort has gone into examining the problem and developing solutions. At least twice in the last few years, in 1975 and 1978, an All-Union Conference has been convened whose main theme revolved around the demographic trends now confronting the USSR, with particular emphasis on the high birthrate in Central Asia and the reverse trends in other areas of the Soviet Union.²⁷ Regional conferences have also taken place. In January 1978, a conference on Central Asian population planning was held in Tashkent,²⁸ and professional social-science organizations have held inter-republic meetings and symposiums to discuss practical measures to alleviate the problem.²⁹

Since changes in the ethnic balance of the Soviet population have been recognized as a source of possible problems, demographic policy has become a subject of importance. As a result, there has been considerable public discussion of the legal, economic, and sociological implications of current demographic trends and the directions Soviet demographic policy should take. The debate concerns such questions as the uneven birth rate among the republics, the aging of the population, and population outflow from areas with manpower shortages.³⁰ Most of the participants in the debate agree on the need to do all possible to control the spontaneous processes which are causing the disparity in population growth. However, there is a difference of opinion as to whether national demographic policies should be uniform throughout the whole country, or applied selectively according to republic or region. Soviet demographer, V. Ts. Uralis, represents the selective approach. He views the Soviet Union as a "large country with considerable variations in geographical conditions". As such demographic policy should not be identical in all parts of the country. "Because of this, the stimulation of the birth rate in each part of our country should be approached in a different way."³¹ While it seems that no final decision on policy has been reached, there appears to be official support for the selective approach. According to the Director of the USSR Academy Sciences Institute of Sociological Research, T. V. Ryabushkin, demographic policy cannot be separated from economic or political goals, and thus it must have the goal of "expanded reproduction of the population especially in republics of low birthrates".³²

Practical measures that have been proposed to increase the birthrate in those regions where it is low include: publicly encouraging each family to have two or three children and, at the same time, extending and increasing the size of child benefits starting with the second child; lowering the high divorce rate by making divorces harder to obtain, and training more family education specialists for jobs in marriage counseling;³³ instituting lighter work schedules for nursing mothers and mothers with young children;

improving housing conditions as the number of children increases; cutting prices on merchandise for children;³⁴ and setting up "get-acquainted services" for potential marriage partners.³⁵ It has even been suggested that pensions be made contingent on the fulfillment of parental as well as occupational obligations.³⁶

Changing or controlling those factors which determine the birth-rate of the various Soviet republics will be a complicated and lengthy process. Consequently, no matter what demographic policies are adopted, or how well they are implemented, it seems inconceivable that the Soviet regime will be able to rapidly alter the trends displayed in Table 2. This means that within the next decade or two the USSR will face serious manpower problems directly connected with the population growth. The disparity in population growth will cause a shortfall in the country's European manpower pool which has traditionally provided large-scale reinforcements for the industrial work force. Soviet labor economist, V. Kostakov, has reported that during the fifteen year period from 1981-1995 the growth in the population of working age individuals will increase by less than during the period 1976 to 1980. In regard to manpower growth, the situation is so serious that Kostakov asserts, "never in any peacetime period has our country encountered such an unfavorable...situation".³⁷ The labor shortage will be aggravated by the fact that an ever increasing number of men and women will reach retirement age in the 1980's and 1990's.³⁸ In central Asia, however, the reverse will be true. This region currently has a labor surplus which will increase because of demographic trends. Manpower growth there is expected to account for more than 80 percent of that for the USSR as a whole.³⁹ The problem is that migration patterns for residents of Central Asia indicate that they are extremely reluctant to leave the region and, in all probability, will continue to be so in the future.⁴⁰ Soviet Muslims will constitute the only future, readily available labor pool, but they will not be physically located where the demand for manpower exists. While industry in the European section will barely be able to replace workers that retire, other areas such as the European Northwest and Siberia will experience tremendous labor shortages.⁴¹ Under such conditions the competition for skilled manpower will be keen.

The Ethnopolitical Factors

Coinciding with, and closely connected to, the population explosion in Central Asia is the phenomenon of Muslim nationalism, which can only serve to complicate problems to be faced by future Soviet leaders. The Muslims of Central Asia have always set themselves apart from Russian society. Even after 61 years of Soviet rule, Muslim nationalism remains a significant force in Central Asia.

These deep-seated national feelings have continuously frustrated the Soviet leadership in its efforts to Russify the Muslims, to assimilate them into the new Russian-led, Russian-speaking, and Russian-oriented Soviet nation. The demographic trends cited above will only serve to aggravate the problem.

The Central Asians' awareness of their own Muslim culture can be seen in the revival of interest in their Islamic heritage and their extreme reluctance to accept Russian as either a primary or secondary language. Throngs of Central Asians are continuously making pilgrimages to ancient Muslim shrines such as the Samarkand's Guir-Emir Mosque where Tamerlane is buried, and the necropolis of Shah-i-zinda. It has been reported that traffic jams are not an infrequent occurrence on weekends at the latter shrine.⁴² It is also interesting to note that shortly after the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution, Samarkand celebrated its 2500th anniversary, as if to emphasize a heritage 50 times older.⁴³ An essential part of that heritage is language. The Central Asians are profoundly attached to their own language. The 1970 census revealed that 98 percent of the Central Asian Muslims claimed the language of their nationality as their mother tongue, and only 14 to 19 percent of Uzbeks, Tadzhiks, Turkmen, and Kirghiz claimed to have a good command of Russian.⁴⁴

Muslim self-awareness exhibits itself to the greatest extent in religious activity, and the Soviet press occasionally acknowledges and condemns the power and influence which the clergy exert over the Muslim population. John Soper reports that the Kirghiz-language journal Kommunist recently indicated that many people who call themselves mullahs were illegally and fairly openly conducting many religious rites and ceremonies.⁴⁵ The Urgur-language inter-republic newspaper Kommunizm Tughi also not long ago ran a series of similar articles. It stated that illegal mullahs were taking advantage of their enormous prestige in the community to obtain money through conducting such ceremonies as weddings, funerals, mourning ceremonies, recitations of the Koran and circumcision rites.⁴⁶ It complained that in Alma-Ata, the capital of Kazakhstan, these mullahs have acquired such influence that if someone failed to support their activities, he could expect a bad reputation and even face ostracism.⁴⁷ It further pointed out that the problem has been growing worse in recent years, that ten or fifteen years ago ceremonies of the various national customs and traditions were conducted without mullahs, but as the population has grown the number of mullahs has greatly increased.⁴⁸

Moreover, there are hints that nationalist attitudes have led to secret anti-Soviet nationalist Muslim activities. Islamic writings have been disseminated in the form of "samizdat" and clandestine contact has reportedly been made with kindred national elements in the neighboring states of Iran, Pakistan and Turkey, with Saudi Arabia providing aid for these activities.⁴⁹

The Soviet leadership has acknowledged that it is aware of these contacts. At a 1976 All-Union Congress devoted to nationality policy and problems, the summary of the proceedings condemned the Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turkic movements because they have become weapons in the hands of rightist circles in Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia.⁵⁰ In an effort to counteract Muslim nationalism, the Soviet leadership has conducted periodic campaigns designed to eradicate Islamic customs. The official propaganda points out the areas of conflict between science and the Islamic religion and details claims of inhuman practices carried out in the name of Islam.⁵¹ Efforts have been made to introduce Russian customs into traditional Islamic ceremonies in an attempt to "overcome the reactionary customs and rituals of Islam".⁵² This will hardly be sufficient to stem the growing tide of Muslim nationalism. As the Central Asians become more aware of their growing numerical strength, and as the educated native intelligentsia increase, the peoples of Central Asia will probably experience a deepening feeling of Muslim identity, a growing appreciation of their own historical past, and of their own culture.

Another factor which may have a significant impact on Soviet society and serve to even further polarize the country along national lines is Russian nationalism. The dominant national group in Soviet society, the Great Russians, has also not been immune to the growing national self-awareness which has manifested itself in other groups of the society. In recent years there has been a resurgence of Russian chauvinism. This has been partially manifested in objections to the official policy of the "coming closer together" (sblizheniye) and the eventual "merging" (sliyaniye) into a new Soviet people. For many Russians the final formula of this process means racial assimilation, or more marriages between Russians and darker skinned, non-Russians, ultimately leading to a "yellowing" of Russian society with the implication that this will lead to the biological degradation of the Russian nation. This racial theme has even gotten into the official press. One Russian scholar has argued that the essence which distinguishes ethnic groups one from the other is biologically determined. Therefore, mixed marriages eventually lead to genetic deterioration, and ultimately to a decline in political and social institutions. From this the author concludes that assimilation equals national suicide.⁵³ There is also a growing feeling that the Russians have wasted a great deal of their wealth supporting the economically less self-sufficient republics, and that many minorities are ungrateful for these Russian sacrifices, which have enabled them to raise their standards of living, and are deserving of no further expenditures.⁵⁴ While it is true that the regime has not supported the extreme demands of Russian nationalists, they have promoted the Russification of other nationalities and made the concept of a Soviet nation basically Russian in nature.

Nationalist feelings exhibited either by the Russians or the Central Asian Muslims, coupled with current demographic trends, can only aggravate problems faced by the Soviet leadership. This will

be particularly true of the military leadership who will face difficult decisions as the Central Asian Muslims become a significant portion of the available manpower pool.

The Military Implications

Soviet military planners must view the possible consequences of current ethnodemographic trends and ethnopolitical factors with some concern. The predicted labor shortfall may lead to competition between the military and industry for suitable manpower, a situation which could tempt the political leadership to reduce the size of the armed forces. The substantial increase in the proportion of Central Asians who will be part of the draft pool will affect the quality of troops coming on active duty. Moreover, as the percentage of Central Asian Muslims in the military grows, nationalistic sentiments may become a greater source of friction among Soviet soldiers, reducing the reliability and combat effectiveness of some units. This section will examine the probable impact of these problems on the Soviet armed forces and attempt to point out the most likely courses of action to be followed by Soviet decision-makers in dealing with them.

The post-war Soviet Union has registered considerable economic growth. However, the vast majority of the increase in industrial output cannot be attributed to growth in per capita labor productivity. Rather, increased industrial output was accomplished through expansion of the work force, particularly in the nation's European sector.⁵⁵ The current participation rate of able-bodied manpower in the Soviet labor force is very high (about 95 percent) and no significant untapped source of labor resources can be drawn on for future needs.⁵⁶ Therefore, the Soviet Union is emphasizing the need to increase per capita labor productivity. Attempts to accomplish this are being made through mechanization of manual labor processes, encouraging the continued employment of retirement-aged people, and by making more efficient use of existing manpower.

So far the Soviets have had little success with these efforts. They themselves admit that these programs have failed to sufficiently increase labor productivity.⁵⁸ Murray Feshbach estimates that unless labor productivity in the USSR rises to three times that of the present level, the Soviets will not be able to offset the projected manpower shortage.⁵⁹ Past experience, as well as the failure of current attempts at increasing labor productivity, indicate that it is unlikely that the Soviet Union will achieve necessary increases in labor productivity. Thus, by the late 1980's there will not be enough European entrants into the nation's manpower pool to replace European retirees. The only sizable reserve of manpower resources will consist of Central Asians. This will cause

a manpower crisis in the traditionally industrial areas of the Soviet Union and a possible conflict between industry and the military for manpower resources. It has been argued that as the number of eighteen-year-old males available in the manpower pool becomes insufficient to supply the needs of a growing civilian economy while maintaining the current level of the armed forces, the regime will be faced with the choice of either cutting the size of the armed forces in order to staff the many new enterprises on which it has staked much of its prestige, or enduring drastic cuts in economic growth.⁶⁰

In spite of this, it seems unlikely that the Soviet leadership will decrease the size of the armed forces even in the face of possible manpower drains on civilian industry. Statements by Soviet leaders indicate that they will continue to attempt to increase per capita labor productivity despite indications of little success.⁶¹ Current defense needs and likely foreign policy goals reinforce the regime's desire to maintain current force levels. The Mutual Balanced Force Reduction talks (MBFR) in Vienna are stalled with no breakthrough in sight, a Soviet military presence in Eastern Europe will continue to be an essential factor in insuring the loyalty of Eastern Europe, and China will become an ever more credible threat to Soviet security over the next few years. In addition, Moscow's aggressive policies in the Middle East and Africa require that it maintain forces not tied down with occupation or defense missions for possible use in the Third World. All this argues very strongly against a decision by the Kremlin leadership to cut the size of the armed forces. Faced with the choice of degrading the nation's defense posture or failing to meet economic goals, the Kremlin leadership will opt for continuing high defense levels, while managing as best it can on the economic front.

At a time when the USSR will be experiencing an over all shortage of available manpower, certain non-European sectors of the country (the Transcaucasus, Kazakhstan and Central Asia) will actually have a manpower surplus. Under such circumstances, the armed forces will be faced with manpower shortages among those nationalities which have traditionally provided the bulk of the draftees. If current force levels are to be maintained, the military will have to rely more heavily on the non-European nationalities to fill its ranks. Feshbach has estimated that between 1970 and 2000 the number of those draft age individuals from Central Asia and Kazakhstan available for service will double.⁶² Conservative estimates indicate that by the end of the century 26.6 percent of the prime age draft pool will consist of manpower from Central Asia (including Kazakhstan). That figure jumps to 32.2 percent if the Transcaucasus is included.⁶³ Manpower constraints will thus force the military to increase the proportion of non-Europeans, especially Central Asians, in its ranks.

This change in the ethnic makeup of the armed forces will serve to increase the magnitude of the problems currently encountered with regard to non-Russian nationalities. A problem of primary concern

is the lack of fluency in the Russian language exhibited by the vast majority of Central Asian recruits. The Soviet campaign to teach the Central Asians the Russian language has been ineffective even though the teaching of Russian is mandatory in all schools throughout the republics of the USSR. In the non-Russian rural areas, particularly in Central Asia, "the teaching standards are poor" and students leave school at age 17 "with a poor command of the Russian language".⁶⁴ Soviet sources even report that some "students intending to become Russian language teachers can't speak the language, never having had an opportunity to do so in all their 17 years."⁶⁵ It poses serious problems in maintaining combat efficiency and morale when such people enter the military service. As an editorial in Krasnaya Zvezda put it:

With the development of military science and the growing complexity of military technology, the importance of the Russian language in the life of the army is growing. Nowadays military operations develop exceedingly fast... In a battle situation the very minimum of time can be allowed for explaining assignments and orders. There is no time for anyone to translate a command mentally from one language into another: he must understand it and proceed to carry it out instantaneously. And this can be done only by a soldier with a fluent knowledge of Russian.⁶⁶

Furthermore, the existence of a language barrier in the armed forces tends to isolate the various nationalities and promote the growth of ethnic and national consciousness with adverse effects on relations between nationalities.⁶⁷

The special need to enhance the Russian language ability of Central Asians entering the military has been recognized by the authorities. The Uzbek Central Committee in 1975 recommended that short Russian language courses be organized for those of pre-draft age.⁶⁸ Additionally, the Ministry of Defense has taken steps to alleviate the problem by publishing a Russian primer "for soldiers with very little knowledge of Russian".⁶⁹ This has the aim of providing the minimum needed to understand commands, orders and expressions most commonly used in military life. Russian classes have also been organized in units for those having difficulty with the language.⁷⁰

To judge from an article by R. A. Abuzyarov of the Uralsk State Pedagogical Institute, these efforts have not proven very successful. Questionnaires filled out by army officers and military officials, and results of language comprehension tests administered to draftees from rural Kazakhstan after various periods of service indicated that their command of Russian upon entry into the service was rudimentary at best and improved little, if at all, while on

active duty. The recruits frequently were unable to name simple, elementary military terms such a "rank" or "column" in Russian and, having learned certain articles of regulations by heart, did not comprehend them.⁷¹

This confirms the seriousness of the current problem and forecasts increased troubles in the future since the proportion of non-Russian speaking recruits will rise. In spite of efforts to increase the number of Russian-speaking people from Central Asia, the percentage of Muslims entering the service with usable Russian skills will probably remain extremely low. Ethnic national consciousness among the Central Asians will promote continued resistance to the learning of Russian. Even with the efforts being made to upgrade the quality of Russian teachers in rural areas, enormous obstacles remain to be overcome.⁷² The lack of any desire to learn Russian may well turn into open hostility towards the enforced study of this foreign language. There seems little reason to believe that the regime will have any more success in the future in teaching Russian to Central Asian Muslims than in the past. The outlook as far as the military is concerned is for a greater quantity of recruits with insufficient knowledge of Russian.

Another problem facing military planners concerns the educational level of future recruits. The general educational level of the average Central Asian recruit is inferior to that of his European counterpart. Soviet sources admit that the quality of education is far lower in rural areas than in cities, and the vast majority of Central Asians live in rural areas, whereas, most recruits from the European sector are city dwellers.⁷³ Furthermore, it is widely recognized that the Muslim population is severely lacking in technical skills. The percentage of those young people between the ages of sixteen and eighteen enrolled in vocational-technical schools in the Central Asian republics is seven to eight percent or only half that of the Slavic republics.⁷⁴ In at least one area, efforts are being made to increase the technical competence of those with a secondary education. The Uzbek Central Committee has endorsed a plan for turning one standard school in each town and region into a secondary vocational-technical school.⁷⁵ However, given the long-standing nature of the problem, the difficulty in obtaining qualified instructors and necessary equipment, it is hard to say how and when results will be achieved. Even if the project proves relatively successful, the graduates are all slated to fill Uzbekistan's own severe needs for trained technical people.⁷⁶ These graduates are not likely to find their way into the armed forces. In fact, the leadership of these underdeveloped republics will probably encourage the recruitment of the unskilled, poorly educated, non-Russian speaking population in the hopes that the armed forces will educate and provide these individuals with usable skills. Thus, barring a massive educational breakthrough, those Central Asians entering the military in the next decade or two will still be graduates of second and third rate schools and will possess little

technical competence.

Growing Central Asian representation in the armed forces will also magnify ethnopolitical problems for the Soviet military leadership. While ultra-sensitive units such as the Strategic Rocket Forces and the Borderguards will probably remain overwhelmingly Slavic in composition, the regime will be forced to abandon its policy of assigning only a token number of Central Asians to other priority military organizations. While the make-up of airforce, armored, artillery and motorized rifle units will remain predominantly European, they will receive increasing numbers of Muslim recruits as a matter of course. Central Asian resistance to official Russification policies is likely to continue and ethnic strife between Central Asians and Russians in the military will probably become more widespread. This situation will lend itself to exploitation by foreign powers. While there seems to be little love lost between the Chinese and the people of Central Asia, Peking will find that its propaganda, which plays on the cleavage between the European Russians and the Asiatic Muslims, will fall on ever more fertile soil, and the leadership's ability to rely on Muslim troops will become increasingly more problematic.⁷⁷

The Soviet regime must also face the possibility of a large contingent of its forces being affected by pan-Islamic or pan-Turkish movements. As recent events in Iran and Afghanistan have demonstrated, such a movement can be a powerful force for change. The Iranian situation will serve to highlight for Moscow the dangers they face from Muslim nationalism and make the regime even more distrustful of Central Asian loyalties. Therefore, the current policy of denying leadership positions to all but a few Central Asians will persist. Since the regime's concern over the dependability of the Muslim population will increase, the political elite will feel it even more necessary to maintain the more reliable Slavs in leadership and command positions, especially since Central Asians will then represent a substantial percentage of combat units.

It has been argued that if the regime completely follows the dictates of economic realities, the military will become an almost entirely non-European institution. By drafting mostly Central Asians, the best qualified contingent of the manpower pool would be available for service in the civilian economy, and the military would provide the less qualified portion of the population with new skills readily transferable to the civilian economy after discharge.⁷⁸ However, given the regime's distrust of Central Asians, and the effect such a policy would have on the capability and reliability of the armed forces, it is highly unlikely that the Kremlin would choose such a course.

It has also been suggested that the Kremlin leadership might alleviate some of these problems by reinstatement of national military formations. These were the norm until 1936 and were selectively rehabilitated during World War II.⁷⁹ Such units would enhance

attempts to foster a closer identity between national pride and Soviet patriotism, and could lead to more efficient and effective civil-military cooperation at the local level. Moreover, it would greatly improve command, control and communication at the subunit level by eliminating language problems.⁸⁰ These advantages are probably not sufficient, however, to offset the fears such units evoke in the regime. There is always the possibility that these units would provide tacit or open military support to nationalist challenges to central authority. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that the leadership will sanction a return to such units. The fact that the new constitution dropped the article in the 1936 Stalin constitution which allowed republic level military formations suggests the idea of reinstating national units has been abandoned.⁸¹

Conclusions

perceived

Soviet defense needs over the next few decades will become more demanding. While the threat from NATO will continue, the menace posed by China will grow significantly. This coupled with foreign policy objectives, particularly in Africa and the Third world, and the need to prop up Eastern European regimes with Soviet forces will dictate that the Kremlin reject the option to cut the size in its armed forces, even in the face of a manpower crisis in civilian industry. While the size of the military will probably remain constant, its composition will undergo significant change. The demographic trends will require that increasing numbers of Central Asians be recruited to replace the dwindling numbers of recruits available from the European sectors of the Soviet Union, which in turn will lead to a degradation in unit combat effectiveness.

In spite of current efforts to upgrade the educational level of Central Asians, the Muslim recruits entering the armed forces in the 1980's and 1990's will remain inferior to the average recruit of the 1970's, because they will be more poorly educated, technologically unsophisticated, and have, at best, a poor command of the Russian language, the lingua franca of the armed forces. Training of these recruits will be difficult and results will be marginal. These problems will be exaggerated by the growing technological level of weapons and equipment which will require even more highly skilled soldiers than those of today. As the proportion of these recruits approaches one-third, as expected by the year 2000, the level of efficiency in units will drop and training and command, control and communication difficulties will rise.

National pride and self-assertiveness among the Central Asians will cause resistance to political indoctrination calling for allegiance to the Russian-dominated Soviet nation to become more widespread. Friction between the Asians and Europeans will grow, resulting in increased problems with morale and discipline. The loyalty of

Central Asians to the central authority will be less certain than ever, and the reliability and combat effectiveness of the armed forces will suffer a corresponding decline.

Footnotes

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12. Ibid., p. 15.

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23. Narodnoye Khozyaystvo SSSR v 1975 godu, pp. 32-35.
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