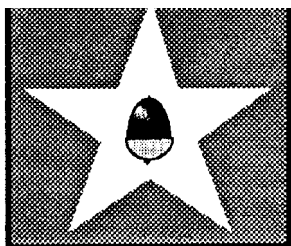


**Conflict Studies Research Centre**

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**Manpower Problems  
of The Russian Armed Forces**

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# Manpower Problems of The Russian Armed Forces

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## Introduction

On 15 January Lt Gen Vasiliy Smirnov, deputy head of the main organization-mobilization directorate of the Russian general staff, announced the preliminary results of the autumn 2001 conscription period.

"The plan of the autumn call-up as laid down in the Russian Federation's President's decree No. 148 has been carried out. Between October and December 2001 more than 194,000 Russian citizens, aged from 18 to 27, were sent to the army and fleet ... (T)he quality of the conscript contingent is getting worse. Out of every 100 potential conscripts last year the military commissariats were only able to draft 12 young men; the remainder had legal reasons for being excused military service. Today in Russia every third potential conscript proves unfit for service on health grounds ... more than 50% of the conscripts sent to the forces have health limitations on their fitness for service."<sup>1</sup>

Such statements emerge from the organization-mobilization department twice a year, as a sort of ritual bringing the conscription campaign to a close. Each time the decreed quantity of recruits has been found and each time their quality has declined. Within these standardized announcements there is no suggestion that the whole system for recruiting the Russian armed forces is steadily collapsing. Last autumn, however, there were indications that, at long last, the Russian government has accepted that the system must be changed. Programmes to phase out conscription are being considered although it is not clear that the general staff has accepted that a professional army is desirable or practical. Indeed, some of the options apparently being proposed by the general staff are likely to lead to serious social and political unrest and would not serve the real strategic needs of the Russian Federation in the twenty-first century.

## A Decade of Decline

The root of the present problem is that the Russian armed forces are trying to run a system designed for the Soviet Union. During the Cold War Soviet strategic plans made conscription essential in order to provide a powerful ready force and a massive mobilization capacity. The system was directly descended from that copied from the Prussian Army by most European powers during the nineteenth century and employed in the two world wars of the twentieth century. There were snags in the Soviet system: military preparedness was reduced twice a year by the need to absorb a new class of conscripts and the repetitive training cycle did not produce soldiers to match the skills of professional soldiers. However, "Never mind the quality, feel the width!" With five million men under arms, no one could doubt the USSR's super-power status.

The system was under stress even before the USSR collapsed. Demographic problems meant that the conscript intake was increasingly drawn from non-Russian ethnic groups and rising nationalism reduced public support for the Soviet state and its armed forces. Independence for Central Asia and the Caucasus meant the loss of 40-50% of the pool of 18-year old men and it is not surprising that by the end of 1992 the Russian armed forces as a whole were about 50% undermanned at NCO and private levels. In the ground forces the manning level was even worse, at somewhere between 30 and 40% of the other ranks establishment.<sup>2</sup>

The situation was made worse by the unpopularity of military service in Russian society. Demands for the abolition of conscription were rejected but the Yeltsin government agreed to reduce the length of service from two years to 18 months and increased the grounds for exemption from service. In 1993, in response to public pressure, a provision for alternative civilian service was written into the constitution. Resistance by the ministry of defence and the ineffectiveness of the Russian parliament have ensured that this provision has still not been translated into a functioning system of alternative service. (Current proposals are discussed later in this article.)

It was obvious that the change to an 18-month term of service would lead to the simultaneous release of two conscript classes (320,000 men) in 1993. Only half were replaced by new recruits and under-manning became chronic. In response a form of professional manning was introduced in November 1992. It was known as 'contract service' and it was planned that 100,000 contract servicemen would be recruited by the end of 1993 (10% of the other rank strength). During 1994-95 the proportion of contract servicemen would increase to 30% and to 50% by 2000. At this time the ministry of defence was attempting to maintain a force of 1.7 million men, approximately half the number it had commanded in the Soviet era. This figure was never reached. In mid-1995 the armed forces were 384,000 men under establishment and draft evasion had grown as a result of the Chechen War. Manpower shortages were so serious that in some garrisons officers were doing soldiers' guard duties. It is well-known that a major reason for the poor tactical performance of the Russian army in Chechnya was the use of so-called 'composite units' formed from several under-strength units. In response the government ordered a return to a two-year conscription period which would raise manning levels to 85%.<sup>3</sup>

Although contract manning was proving successful (at least in numerical terms) the cash-strapped ministry of defence was forced to cut the number of contracts by two-thirds. For the ground forces this meant the loss of 80,000 men. In the circumstances President Yeltsin's decree of 16 May 1996, ordering a fully-voluntary manning system by the spring of 2000, was greeted with stark disbelief in the ministry's corridors. No warning had been given, but a presidential election was due and conscription was extremely unpopular with Russian families. Once he was re-elected, however, Yeltsin lost interest in a professional army and the abolition of conscription was abandoned long before the spring 2000 deadline.<sup>4</sup>

After the appointment of General Igor Sergeev as minister of defence in 1997, the overall size of the Russian armed forces was reduced from 1.7 to 1.2 million men. Even this drastic cut did not solve the manpower problem and units remained understrength. This was largely because the pool of recruitable men continued to decrease but the outbreak of the Second Chechen War in 1999 also saw a sharp increase in draft dodging. During 2000 the armed forces were 20-25% undermanned and although another force reduction was announced in September (to

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850,000 men by 2003) it was still expected that the number of conscripts would be inadequate. By 2005 a "demographic pit" could not be avoided.<sup>5</sup>

The 1990s had seen a steady decline in the manpower situation of the Russian armed forces but the basic system continued without significant reform. However during 2001 it was increasingly obvious that the system was being strained to breaking point. The ministry of defence was campaigning against educational deferments. The police in major cities such as Moscow launched a series of document checks when any young man who could not produce an exemption certificate was likely to be delivered to a military commissariat and drafted. Complaints about the recruitment of medically-unfit youths increased. In one case a blind youth had to go to law to avoid conscription and another young man was actually drafted although he had no fingers on his right hand.<sup>6</sup> Civilian impatience with the failure to implement the constitutional provision for alternative service came to a head in October 2001 when the mayor of Nizhniy Novgorod allowed a number of recruits to volunteer for three years' service in a local hospital rather than military service. A local court upheld his decision in January 2002 but was not supported by a higher court in February, leaving the young men who had begun their alternative service in an anomalous position.<sup>7</sup>

Demands for the abolition of conscription were heard more frequently and although the new civilian minister of defence, Sergei Ivanov, at first maintained the generals' traditional arguments against a professional army, the ground was cut from under his feet in November when President Putin ordered the ministry of defence to prepare a plan for transition to fully professional armed forces. (On 19 November Ivanov said that "It is still too early to speak about the cancellation of the call-up for military service. One should not take such radical steps, especially when the national security is at stake." By 21 November he thought that hiring servicemen "is a historic choice and there is no alternative to this".<sup>8</sup>) At last it was being admitted that the mixed conscription and contract service system could not meet Russia's strategic requirements and radical change was being considered. However a new programme will only succeed if it begins from an understanding of the real reasons for the failure of the existing system.

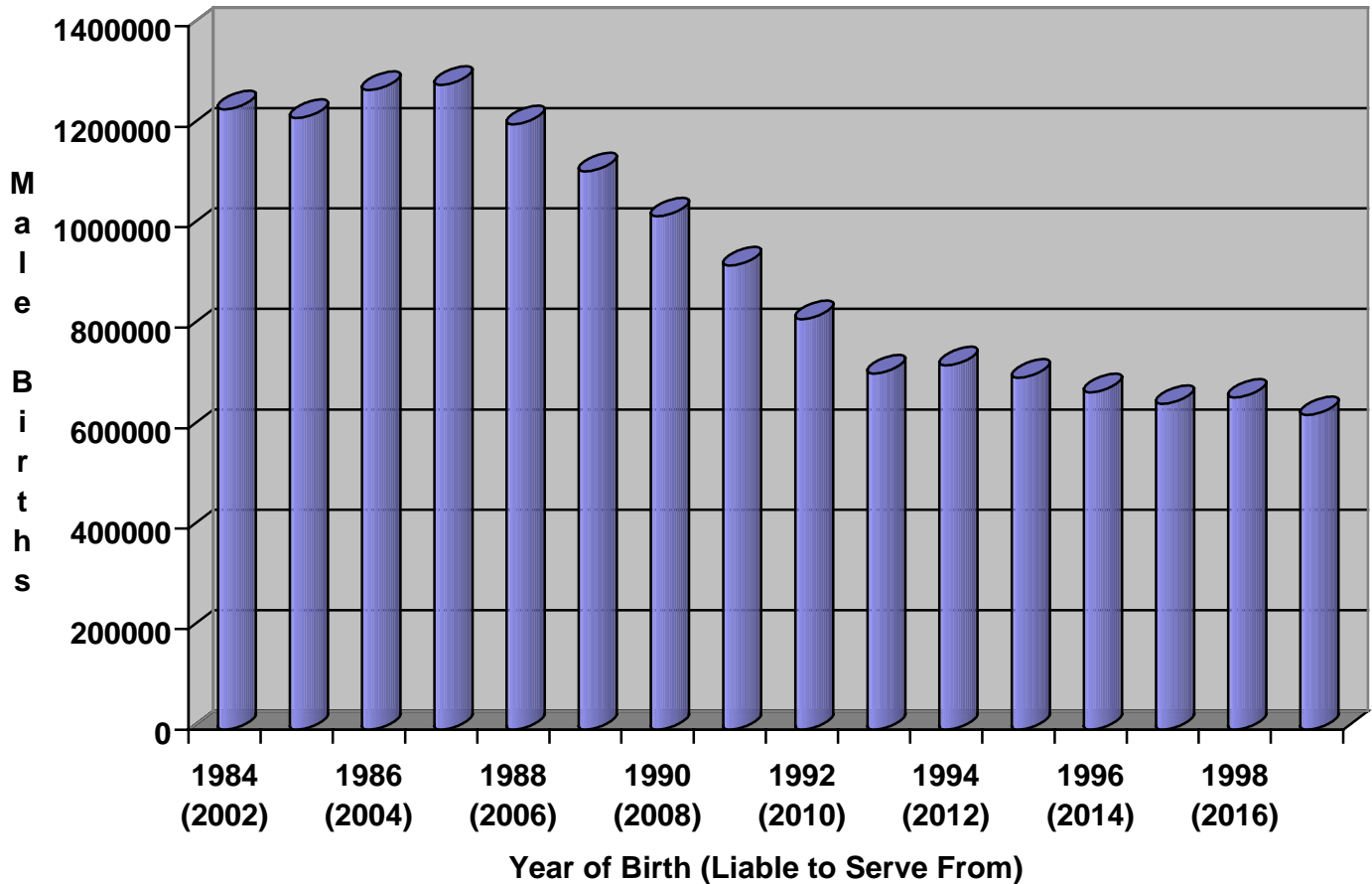
## Why Conscription Does Not Work

The problems of the Russian conscription system can be considered under three headings; demographic, political and strategic. The Russian debate has tended to concentrate on the first two aspects but there are good reasons for believing that the military imperatives which led to the development of systems of universal military service no longer apply.

Firstly though, it is certain that, military theory aside, Russia will not be able to maintain a mass army during the twenty first century. It is well known that the Russian population is declining. From 148.3 million in the mid-1990s it is reducing at a rate of 800,000 to a million a year. By 2015 the population will be no more than 138.4 million and may be as low as 131 million. Credible projections make the Russian population as few as 80 million by 2050. Within this overall decline it is remarkable that during the last decade the number of adolescents has actually been increasing. There are now 22.5 million Russians aged between 15 and 24 (15% of the population). But there are only 14.6 million (10% of the population) under 9. In other words the age group from which conscripts would be drawn after 2010 will be two-thirds its present size (see Diagram 1). If a boom in the numbers

of adolescents during the last decade has been accompanied by decline in the number of available conscripts, what are the prospects when the longer-term decline in population makes itself felt? There were 20 births per thousand of population in 1987 and only 8 in 1999 and 9 in 2000.<sup>9</sup>

**Diagram 1: Male births in Russia 1984-1999**



The crisis is worsened by Russia's declining public health. In 1987 92.7% of young men were rated as medically fit for service; by 1995 71.1% were fit and by 1998 65.7%. The reduction in the proportion of fully fit young men has forced the armed forces to accept an increasing number of conscripts with some medical limitation on where they can serve. In 1996 up to 15% of conscripts had such a limitation but by 1999 57.6% fell into this category. This has been a particularly serious problem for the airborne and special forces who can only take the fittest recruits. This is the "demographic pit" which is worrying the general staff. According to general Putilin, head of the main organization-mobilization directorate, the general staff realised 2 years ago that Russia's demographic situation would force a switch from conscript manning. In fact the figures must have been obvious some years earlier and one might also remark that Putilin and his colleagues have kept their deductions very quiet for the last two years.<sup>10</sup>

Another reason for the decline in the number of conscripts has been the increase in the numbers obtaining deferments for educational or family reasons. Over 60% of potential conscripts are now excused service on these grounds. As the better educated avoid service the educational standard of the average conscript has

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inevitably declined. No more than 2% have higher education; 30% failed to complete secondary education and 6% have never progressed beyond primary education and are barely literate. The Russian army, however, cannot pick or choose, even if an increasing number of its soldiers would be unable to master a weapon system more complicated than a bayonet.<sup>11</sup>

The grounds for deferment were increased during the Yeltsin years from 11 to 26. (As a result only 12% of each year group can legally be conscripted, compared to 27% in 1994.)<sup>12</sup> The government was responding to pressure from families who did not want their sons to serve in the armed forces. The flourishing trade in medical certificates also reflected this new social reality. The end of the Cold War made the threat of a new world war unconvincing and there was a greater awareness of the harshness of a conscript's life. Once families knew about 'dedovshchina', the bullying which is institutionalized in Russian barracks, they looked for ways for their sons to avoid it. The First Chechen War was deeply unpopular and even if the Second War received more public support there was an increase in draft-dodging and the search for more legal ways of avoiding service. Russian generals have complained loudly about the increasing numbers who avoid military service. They have tried to reinstate the preliminary military training programme in schools which perished with the USSR, in order to improve the "military-patriotic training" of Russian youth. In January 2002 it was announced that Moscow city council had allocated R724 million for such a programme in 2002-04 and in February it was reported that "patriotic education" was once again to become a compulsory part of the national school syllabus.<sup>13</sup>

But the generals have not realized that most families do not trust the army and more propaganda is not the answer. Even now, although the President has announced the phasing-out of conscription, the ministry of defence is trying to reduce the grounds for educational exemption and to cut the number of institutions whose students qualify.<sup>14</sup> It appears that the generals do not realise the political folly of such moves. Conscription is so unpopular that increasing the chances that young men will have to serve will only increase the political pressure from families for its abolition. Table 1 shows the results of a public opinion survey in February 2002 in which 72% of respondents did not want a relative to serve in the armed forces and 64% wished to see a contract service system introduced. Yeltsin used the abolition of conscription to help his chances of being re-elected in 1996. It is unlikely that Putin will weaken his prospects in the 2004 election by allowing the armed forces to recruit more voters' sons.

The general staff claim to understand the demographic reasons why conscription must be abandoned, even if, as already noted, they refused to face the facts for many years. But they are still committed to military doctrines which depend on conscription. There are many reasons why universal military service was introduced in nineteenth century Europe. In part, it was to develop socially cohesive nation-states but there was an underlying military justification. This was the era of total war, when victory went to the side which could best exploit its economic and human resources. Universal military service was intended to provide a pool of trained manpower which could be mobilized in time of war.<sup>15</sup>

**Table 1 - Attitudes to Military Service<sup>16</sup>**

<i>Question:</i> <b>Would you want your son, brother, husband or other close relative to serve in the Army?</b> (percentage)			
	<b>1998</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2002</b>
Yes	13	19	22
No	84	75	72

<i>Question:</i> <b>Why don't you want a relative to serve in the Army?</b> (possible to choose more than 1 factor)			
1. Possibility of death or wounds in Chechen-style conflict	30	48	44
2. Barrack room bullying and violence in the Army	40	34	35
3. Difficult conditions, bad food and danger to health	21	27	23
4. Army's decay and authorities' indifference to the Army	25	21	20
5. Humiliation of Russian servicemen	20	18	19
6. Morale decay, hard drinking and drug-addiction in the Army	19	15	16
7. Criminalization of the Army	15	12	10
8. Years spent in Army are lost	11	8	8
9. Other reasons	3	2	1
10. Don't know etc	10	12	11

<i>Question:</i> <b>Should Russia preserve conscription or create a professional army of contract servicemen?</b>			
Keep universal conscription	35	30	27
Go over to contract army	53	63	64
Don't know	12	7	9

<i>Question:</i> <b>When do you think Russia might go over to a contract army?</b>			
In 1-2 years	6	3	5
In 5 years	15	16	18
In 10 years	15	14	19
More than 10 years	17	16	19
Probably won't happen	24	31	21
Don't know	24	20	18

This model could still be applied at the start of the Cold War but the introduction of nuclear weapons challenged its validity. The Revolution in Military Affairs which is now underway is altering the balance between man and weapon system even more radically. The feudal armies of the Middle Ages gave way to professional armies in the Military Revolution of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Those armies were replaced by the mass armies of the total war period and just as inexorably mass armies are passing into history, everywhere but in Russian military academies. Senior officers have not abandoned the image of a political and military threat from NATO and the model of the Great Patriotic War as the basis of military planning. This model of

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'large-scale war' requires Russia to maintain a mobilization capacity and therefore a conscript army. In 1996 the military newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* argued that, "as military historians testify, in the last 100-150 years, not a single army manned exclusively by volunteers has succeeded in carrying out major military missions with its own forces alone. Specialists calculate that in a large-scale war a peacetime professional army would last no more than 2-3 weeks." In pursuit of this model the organization-mobilization directorate continues its audit of Russia's military assets. In November 2001 it was insisting that all Russian-made 4-wheel drive vehicles should be registered with military commissariats, so that they could be taken up as military transport in wartime. For good measure it was still necessary to register horses and carts for the same reason. (What sort of war might Russia fight, in which the deployment of animal transport could prove a decisive factor?)<sup>17</sup>

Conscription is intended to create a reserve of militarily-trained men. But the training of this reserve must be kept up-to-date. In the Soviet-era mobilization exercises were a regular feature of Russian life and military actions such as the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Afghanistan in 1979 were preceded by the call-up of reserves. The Russian ministry of defence has tried to maintain this system. For example a mobilization exercise was held in the Leningrad Military District in 2000 and in April 2001 the Moscow Military District called up nearly 1,500 reservists for an exercise with 166 Motor Rifle Brigade, normally a cadre formation. In January 2002 President Putin signed a decree by which any reservist might be mobilized for up to two months this year. But in December 2001 the Russian Audit Chamber had concluded that mobilization training was ineffective. Because of a lack of funds over the last decade (in 2001 only R50 million was allocated, instead of the R416 million which was required) reservists' skills have lapsed so much that they would require extra training on mobilization, delaying its progress by up to 30 days. The Chamber concluded that even if adequate funds were made available from 2002 it would take several years to restore an effective trained reserve. As there is no evidence that more funds will be made available for reserve training, is there any point in maintaining the fiction that conscription gives Russia the capacity to fight a prolonged general war?<sup>18</sup>

## What is Wrong With Contract Service?

The Russian armed forces began to recruit volunteers for 'contract service' in 1992. This was not as part of any programme of transition to professional manning; it was a short term solution to the problems caused by President Yeltsin's reduction in conscript service from 2 years to 18 months and the impending release of two intakes at the same time. Those who volunteered were more likely to have signed a contract out of desperation than from patriotic motives or a desire for a military career. They tended to pick and choose where they would serve, preferring storekeepers' jobs near home to more dangerous postings in the "hot spots". The army found that many had drink or other social problems and many contract servicemen soon became disillusioned with their pay and conditions. In 1993 15.8% of contracts were cancelled and during 1994 one in four contracts was ended prematurely. This turbulence continued; for example in the first two months of 1997 2,755 contract servicemen were recruited but 5,942 left the armed forces. Women contract servicemen were more likely to stay in the service; they were usually the wives or daughters of officers with no other prospect of employment in some remote garrison and in early 2002 they made up 40% of the 157,000 contract servicemen.<sup>19</sup>



The two Chechen wars have severely tested the contract service system. In the first war some generals were scathing about the "kontraktniki" and their marauding habits. In the present war the airborne forces had to get rid of 80% of those recruited for service in Chechnya, according to Lt Gen Staskov, their chief of staff. "Their professional skills and morale turned out to be absolutely unsatisfactory."<sup>20</sup> The high rates of combat pay offered for service in Chechnya initially attracted many volunteers but they often found it difficult to draw their full entitlement at the end of their tours of service. Cuts in pay rates when operations became less intensive did not help retention rates either. 42 Motor Rifle Division was supposed to be entirely contract-manned as a permanent garrison for Chechnya and turned over 30-40% of its personnel in its first year of existence. It is now 20% under establishment. 201 Motor Rifle Division in Tajikistan has been contract-manned for even longer but at the end of 2001 it had to accept conscripts because of the shortage of contract servicemen.<sup>21</sup>

It can hardly be sufficiently stressed that Russia's contract servicemen are not professional soldiers as the word is understood in other volunteer armies. They have no real career structure. After or during conscript service they sign a contract. In many cases there is a considerable gap between service as a conscript and signing a contract and it is common for contract servicemen to serve in a totally different branch to that in which they were trained as conscripts. For example, it is not unusual for ex-seamen to join infantry units. Local military commissariats are responsible for recruiting contract servicemen and they are supposed to check on a candidate's military skills and physical and mental health. However, the contract is not confirmed until the volunteer has been approved by his commanding officer. Thus contracts are really with units, rather than the armed forces as a whole. There seems to be no system of professional training, preparation for promotion or career development generally. Resettlement training is not mentioned for other ranks. Although the armed forces would like contracts to last for two or three years, terms as short as six months are more usual. Soldiers seem to move between units by signing a new contract rather than as a planned sequence of postings.

It is not clear why the ministry of defence has never tried to develop the contract service system to create a professional backbone for the armed forces. The Russian armed forces desperately need a NCO corps, as the former defence minister, general Igor Rodionov, recognised.<sup>22</sup> But contract service has not been used to produce long-service NCOs. Nor has there been any real attempt to work out the relationship between contract service and conscription. Contract service remains a short term expedient, a patch over the holes in the conscription system. There are plenty of models of professional service for the Russian general staff to examine and many countries have been changing from compulsory to voluntary military service since the end of the Cold War. But it appears that so far this experience has been ignored and Moscow's view of professional armies does not seem to have progressed since Soviet days. In particular, little distinction is drawn between professional soldiers and mercenaries. In Soviet propaganda of course there was no difference, and by ignoring the distinction the Russians have imported many of the worst features of mercenary armies into their armed forces. Their confused thinking was expressed in an article in the newspaper *Novaya Gazeta* in September 2000:

"... a professional army in a poor country means an armed gang ... mercenary armies are formed in order to wage colonial wars and carry out punitive expeditions; but to protect the Fatherland the state is always forced to form a conscript army.

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"... a compromise has been reached - while formally preserving universal conscription, the Defence Ministry has made it possible for children of well-to-do families to dodge the draft through various legitimate and illegitimate methods and filled the resulting vacancies with contract servicemen - not professional soldiers but those who have nowhere to go except for the army. And here we have it - a semi-mercenary, semi-army."<sup>23</sup>

### Programmes for a Professional Army

Will President Putin's November decree begin the reform of the "semi-mercenary, semi-army" or will it be as ineffective as Yeltsin's decree of 1996, by which conscription should have ended in 2000? There are some grounds for believing that real change may be on the way. Putin seems more determined to get his own way, rather than appease as many interest groups as possible. Reform of the manning system may also begin as a result of the "9/11 Effect". Since September 2001 there have been indications of a more realistic assessment of Russia's relationship with the USA and NATO and of Russia's strategic needs and capabilities. The closing of the Lourdes monitoring base in Cuba and the naval base at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam are examples of this. If President Putin believes that Russia does not need to prepare for a Third World War against NATO then he can surely see that a mass army is an expensive luxury. He may also think that a really professional army would be more useful in the counter-insurgency and peacekeeping operations which Russia has undertaken in the last decade and is likely to face in the future. There is resistance to such a dramatic change in Russia's defence planning but a debate is beginning. The general staff and its fellow-travellers in the Duma and the media are being challenged by alternative views.

From some slightly confusing statements in November 2001 it appears that there is a timetable for developing a reform programme. An outline proposal is to be drawn up by a working group of various ministries and government agencies headed by Col Gen Putilin, head of the Main Organization-Mobilization Directorate. This is to be submitted in March and approved by the Security Council by 1 July 2001. A detailed programme should be approved by April 2003 and there will be an experiment with the professional manning of 76 Airborne Division in Pskov for 18 months in 2003 and 2004. If that is successful the transition to full professional manning will begin and be completed by 2010.<sup>24</sup>

The timetable has been challenged by the Union of Right Forces and Yabloko political parties, who have argued for a much shorter transition.<sup>25</sup> They propose that the change could begin in 2003 and that Russia could have combat-capable professional armed forces of 850,000 men by 2005. Retired Col Gen Vorobev, the URF's main military spokesman, argues that the conscription system will be in a critical state by 2005 and by 2007 will only be capable of providing half the present force. A survey for the URF suggests that a basic monthly salary of R3,500-4,000 would attract up to 2 million volunteers, allowing the armed forces to select the best quality recruits. Boris Nemtsov of the URF has pointed out the dangers of a longer timetable:

"Our generals deceived the president and slipped him a scheme that won't be submitted for years. A programme that runs until 2010, like this one, won't be implemented because Putin won't be president by that time."<sup>26</sup>

There are of course those who oppose any move to voluntary service. Their fears were voiced in November by Col Gen Leonid Ivashov, formerly head of the Main Directorate for International Military Co-operation and a well-established member of the dinosaur tendency:

"Looking at the last few years we can see that the people who join either because their heart tells them to, or out of some sense of duty, will become fewer and fewer. Whereas there will be more and more people who will look to the army as a source of income or a source of material prosperity. This is a lightweight approach which changes whichever way the political winds blow and is not appropriate, does not accord with Russian history."<sup>27</sup>

However Putin's sacking of Ivashov in July 2001 was an important indicator that change was possible. It appears that there is a broad consensus between the ministry of defence and elements such as the URF about the future structure of the armed forces, even if they disagree about the timetable. The system proposed in March will probably not entail the total abolition of conscription. A much shorter universal service obligation would be retained, perhaps for 6 or 8 months. This would create a mobilization reserve of 5-6 million men who would be liable to periods of refresher training. The active army would consist of volunteers who continue to serve after their conscription period is completed.

This would be an improvement on the present system because initial military training would be separated from active units. At present the combat readiness of field units is reduced by the need to run a twice-yearly basic training cycle for recruits. This is not only boring and repetitive, but impedes advanced training for longer-serving soldiers. In addition, soldiers cannot be posted to areas of active operations such as Chechnya until they have served for at least six months, which reduces the size and effectiveness of deploying units. Detailed discussion of the new programme will obviously have to wait until it appears in March (if it is published then). But there are some points which can be noted beforehand and questions which will have to be answered.

### **Universal Military Service**

How universal will this be? In particular will the current educational deferments still apply? It is to be expected that the general staff will want to maximize the intake and it is supporting new laws limiting educational deferments. These propose that, except for students at institutes training specialists for state service, educational deferments will only be available for two years, until the age of twenty, and would include those who have not completed secondary school by the age of 18. Will a more universal short period of service be acceptable to young men and their families, especially those who now work the system to gain exemptions? Or has the army lost so much prestige that the average Russian is not prepared to wear a uniform even for six months? One young man, interviewed on television, made his feelings clear:

"I have never in my life met a single person who sincerely wanted to serve in the army. There are such people, but mostly in remote provinces, where the standard of living is so low that they have no option. I do - I have no complaints against my life and I would not like to spoil it so soon."<sup>28</sup>

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His view appears to be the rule rather than the exception; as *Novyye Izvestiya* put it:

“No one wants to serve in the Army. This is an axiom in Russia.”<sup>29</sup>

If Russian society as a whole does not accept the new scheme, corruption and draft dodging will increase as young men ensure that they avoid service and local authorities may prove increasingly unwilling to enforce the system. In October 2001 66% of Russians favoured the abolition of conscription (and no doubt the proportion was higher among those due to serve and their families).<sup>30</sup>

### Alternative Civilian Service

If conscription is retained, will the constitutional right to alternative civilian service be recognised and what form will alternative service take? The military want to ensure that it is not seen as a soft option so that the military intake is significantly reduced, but families will not accept an overlong or degrading form of alternative service for their sons. In January 2002 three proposals were circulating in the Duma. The general staff presented a draft law to the council of ministers at the end of the month but it was rejected. One minister said that it would be easier to serve a prison sentence than the general staff's version of alternative military service. Apparently it offered three years in barracks serving unarmed in construction battalions, logistic units or military farms or four years working in institutions such as hospitals, old people's homes or homes for the disabled. Those who opted for alternative service would have to prove their conscientious objection to the draft board and would have no choice of where they served. A compromise bill was presented to the government on 14 February by the Labour Minister, Aleksandr Pochinok, and sent for consideration by the Duma on 26 February. In outline the proposals are:

- The term of alternative civilian service has not been decided but it will be the equivalent of 1.5 or 2 terms of military service, which would mean a 3 or 4 year term at present.
- Service in uniformed units is excluded but it would be possible to opt for service in a military farm or other ministry of defence organization which would be for a shorter term.
- The government is to prepare a list of jobs which qualify as alternative service, which will probably include fire-fighting & emergency rescue work and working in old people's homes and orphanages.
- Alternative service can take place in home regions, will be paid work and it will be possible to attend night schools and take college exams while undertaking alternative service.
- Candidates will have to provide evidence to support their conscientious objection to military service but will have a right of appeal to a civil court.

If approved, the law will come into effect in 2004 but there is likely to be considerable debate before the bill becomes law. A four year period of service will have an unfavourable impact of a young man's chances of finding a job or beginning higher education and is unlikely to reduce the temptation for Russian youth to dodge military service. However if alternative service is introduced courts will be less likely to accept draft dodgers' excuses. At presents civilian courts will often not punish a draft evader who pleads that he cannot exercise his constitutional right to alternative service. The general staff expect (or hope) that there will only be 2,000 applications a year for alternative service but have not produced the grounds for

their estimate. The determination with which the general staff have fought the alternative service battle suggests that they are willing to fight even harder to retain conscription.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Mobilization Reserve**

There is a legitimate military query about the usefulness of a mobilization reserve. Other states, such as the United States or Britain, have not felt the need to retain a mass mobilization capability, although some form of reserve is obviously necessary. Putting such reservations aside, can Russia afford to maintain a reserve of millions? It is not merely the administrative costs and the expense of refresher training sessions; equipment will have to be stockpiled to arm this reserve. The Russian ministry of defence currently has a stockpile of increasingly obsolete and poorly-maintained equipment. Its wartime value is questionable, though apparently a lot of ammunition dating back to the Great Patriotic War has been fired in Chechnya. In ten years' time the existing stockpile will be almost useless, but it seems that the Russian procurement budget will hardly be able to provide modern equipment for the front line, let alone the reserve.<sup>32</sup>

### **The Professional Army**

How big a professional army will Russia try to maintain? A figure around 800,000 has been suggested, but that was the proposed size of the conscript army by 2010. It will be necessary to balance strategic and economic predictions of Russia's future. Given their track record, we must expect the ministry of defence and general staff to peddle worst case estimates of Russia's defence needs which would hardly be funded by the most optimistic projections for the Russian economy. At the moment the general staff calculates that a contract serviceman costs R42,000 a year and a conscript R16,000 but it is obvious that pay and conditions will have to improve to attract the quality of professional recruit required by the new schemes. If the general staff have to stop calculating the ideal size of the Russian armed forces in terms of a proportion of the population or in relation to the length of the border and base their figures on what Russia can afford, the establishment will fall dramatically.<sup>33</sup> Armed forces of half a million (as proposed by the Union of Right Forces) might well be beyond Russia's pocket, if they are properly paid, accommodated, equipped and trained.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Human Factor**

What sort of people will serve in a reformed Russian army? If a notionally professional army is introduced and its soldiers are indistinguishable from today's contract servicemen, the reform will have failed. Like other armies the Russian army will have to recruit a cross-section of the society it defends. It must hope to get its share of the best talent and exclude the worst elements. It needs a system which makes the most of its human resources and trains them to deserve the respect of their fellow citizens and the rest of the world. This article has concentrated on the problems of ordinary soldiers but the Russian armed forces need professional NCOs and officers too. Russia has not had a professional NCO corps in living memory and officers have only learnt to command conscripts. There is no point in looking to Russian history for useful experience. If Russia manages to create a professional army, everyone in it, from private to general, will be working without an indigenous model to guide them. Leadership is one of the biggest question marks over a professional Russian army. Can today's leaders cope with a new sort of soldier and can they train their successors to lead such troops?<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

A hundred years or fifty years ago no one would have believed that a shortage of men would be a major problem for the Russian armed forces. Seemingly inexhaustible reserves of manpower have always been a major element in Russian military power. However the previous sections should have made it clear that the Russian manning system must change even if the difficulties are almost overwhelming. The present system wastes money every day. Conscripts spend their time guarding depots full of equipment bought for a war which never happened and never will. (It is said that there are enough old-pattern greatcoats in the warehouses for every man of military age in Russia, but the ministry of defence cannot afford to buy modern uniforms for the serving army). Other conscripts service airfields from which pilots are lucky to fly for 15 or 20 hours a year. Sailors occupy berths on ships which hardly ever go to sea. There are immense savings to be made, but there is still no way that a professional army can be bought cheaply. But can the defence budget be increased when so many other elements of the Russian infrastructure, such as education and health also desperately need more funds?

In addition, is the military hierarchy, and Russian society more generally, capable of the radical mental *perestroyka* that is required? It is remarkable that, while the United States sees the development and deployment of unmanned battlefield systems as crucial for its armed forces in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Russian general staff should be devoting so much effort to preserving its capability to raise a 20<sup>th</sup> century mass army. Current evidence suggests that the military leadership is not ready to change its world view and hopes to persuade the president that voluntary manning is too expensive. In February President Putin said that "...military might is determined not so much by the number of weapons as by the professionalism of army personnel" but at the same time defence minister Ivanov was arguing that "Contract service is not a panacea and requires considerable investment. The state does not yet have such funds, so it is premature to talk about abolition of conscription." Sergey Mironov, speaker of the Federation Council, simply said that "...a contract army is not permissible".<sup>36</sup> However unless Russia transforms the way in which it mans its armed forces military reform will not happen. Frankly, ten years have already been wasted and in the next ten years the Russian armed forces must either reform or disintegrate. The appearance of the blueprint for a new manning system in March will be the first indication of whether reform is going to start. We should probably expect the first draft to be a compromise weighted in favour of conservative military thinking but there will be an opportunity for more radical measures to be proposed. It will be a real test of President Putin's leadership to select and impose measures which avert disaster and initiate reform. It is difficult to predict whether real change will be introduced but it may be significant that the opinion poll in Table 1 shows that although the overwhelming majority of Russians oppose conscription, they are not convinced that it will be abolished in the near future, if at all.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> AVN Military News Agency, 15 January 2002.
- <sup>2</sup> V Mukhin, *The Danger of Professionalization of the Russian Armed Forces*, NVO, 22 August 1996, p4. To avoid excessive footnotes, this and the following notes group ?????? by paragraph.
- <sup>3</sup> Mukhin, op cit; ITAR-TASS report of 29 October 1995 in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB), SU/24/24 S1/2 3/10/95.
- <sup>4</sup> ITAR-TASS, 16 May 1996 in SWB SU/2615 B/1, 18 May 1996; Nezavisimaya Gazeta, hereafter NG, 18 May 1996, p1; Kommersant Daily, 18 May 1996 in SWB SU/2616 S1/3 of 20 May 1996.
- <sup>5</sup> Russian Public TV, 21 January 2001, (SWB); V Mukhin & N Baranov, *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, hereafter NVO, 38/00, p1; A Dokuchayev *To Secure Russia's Defence Capabilities*, KZ, 6 October 2001 (internet version); P Titov *Counting By Autumns*, NVO, 26 January 2002 (internet version); M Andreyev *A Five Year Transition To A Professional Army Is Announced*, NG, 28 January 2002 (internet version).
- <sup>6</sup> Y Serenka *The Army Recruits Everyone, Including Invalids*, *Novyye Izvestiya*, 16 November 2001; Y Lariya *A Hunt for Young Recruits*, *Novyye Izvestiya*, 21 December 2001, p5; RIA News Agency, 21 December 2001.
- <sup>7</sup> N Trefiliva *The City Administration of Nizhniy Novgorod Has Started An Experiment on Recruits*, *Parlamentskaya Gazeta* 15 December 2001, p3; NTV Mir, 16 January 2002 (SWB internet version); E Larina *Alternatively Speaking*, *The Russia Journal*, 22-28 February 2002 (internet version).
- <sup>8</sup> ITAR-TASS, 19 November 2001; Interfax, 21 November 2001.
- <sup>9</sup> ITAR-TASS, 9 November 2001; See T Karasik *Do Russian Federation Health and Demography Matter in the Revolution in Military Affairs?* in M H Crutcher (ed), *The Russian Armed Forces at the Dawn of the Millennium*, US Army War College, Carlisle Pa, 2000 for a more detailed discussion.
- <sup>10</sup> Interview with Col-Gen V Putilin *Russia Needs A Strong Army*, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 16 February 2000, p1; V Putilin *Who Will Stand under the Battle Flags*, *ibid*, 31 March 2000, p1; interview with Col-Gen V Putilin *Towards Military Service By Vocation*, *ibid* 29 November 2001 (internet version).
- <sup>11</sup> Russia TV, 27 January 2002 (SWB internet version).
- <sup>12</sup> AVN, 30 March 2001.
- <sup>13</sup> *Vremya MN*, 25 January 2002 (SWB internet version); *Ekho Moskvyy*, 15 February 2002.
- <sup>14</sup> NTV Mir, 21 January 2002 (SWB internet version); P Titov, op cit; O Odnokolenko *What Does a Profi Cost?*, *Itogi*, 22 January 2002, p3.
- <sup>15</sup> For further discussion of this development, see M J Orr *Russia and Warfare in the Post-Industrial Age* in G Jenson & A Wiest *War in the Age of Technology*, New York University Press, 2001.
- <sup>16</sup> *Vremya Novostei*, 22 February 1992 (internet version).
- <sup>17</sup> G Miranovich *Interior For "Profis"*, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 16 July 1996, p2; Russia TV, 24 November 2001 (SWB internet version).
- <sup>18</sup> For mobilization exercises, see reports in *Kommersant*, 17 April 2001 & 18 April 2001; For Putin's decree see AVN, 14 January 2002 (SWB internet version); for Audit Chamber Report see AVN, 21 December 2001 (SWB internet version).
- <sup>19</sup> RIA, 5 March 1994 (SWB SU/1944 S1/1, 12 March 1994); V Kozhukhovskiy *Solo For Volunteer*, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 17 August 1994, p2; A Rozen *Who Serves in the Russian Army & How*, NG, 27 February 1998, p7.
- <sup>20</sup> AVN, 22 November 2001.
- <sup>21</sup> M Khodarenko *Contract Instead Of Conscripton*, NVO, 30 November 2001 (internet version); Ye Mirzoyev *Declining Urge To Serve*, NVO, 19 February 2002 (internet version); M J Orr *The Russian Garrison in Tajikistan; 201st Gatchina Twice Red Banner Motor Rifle Division*, CSRC Occasional Brief 85, 2001.
- <sup>22</sup> I Rodionov *That Worrying 'Sergeant Question'*, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 4 April 1995, p2.
- <sup>23</sup> B Kagarlitskiy *Firing On The Enemy Within*, *Novaya Gazeta*, No 45, 9/02, p3.
- <sup>24</sup> ITAR-TASS, 29 November 2001 & 1 December 2001; *Military News Bulletin* 12 January 2001, p18.

## Manpower Problems of the Russian Armed Forces

<sup>25</sup> The Academy of Military Science under retired army general M Gareyev seem to have had a significant input in developing the URF programme. M Andreyev op cit.

<sup>26</sup> AVN, 30 November 2001; V Myasnikov *The Union of Right Forces On Conscription*, Vremya MN, 30 November 2001, p3; F Weir *Russia Debates A Military of the Future*, Christian Science Monitor, 30 November 2001.

<sup>27</sup> NTV, Moscow, 21 November 2001.

<sup>28</sup> NTV Mir, 21 February 2002; Russian TV, 27 January 2002; RIA, 25 January 2002.

<sup>29</sup> V Urban *Defence Ministry Proposes To Cut Numbers of Institutes Which Grant Military Service Deferments To Students*, Novyye Izvestiya, 30 January 2002, p1.

<sup>30</sup> F Weir, op cit.

<sup>31</sup> Ekho Moskv, 29 February 2002; NTV Mir, 29 February 2002; M Vinogradov *The Cabinet and the Duma Rejected A Bill on Alternative Service ...*, Izvestiya, 31 January 2002, p1; D Safonov *Anatoliy Kvashnin, Chief of the General Staff Tried to Submit his Own Version of the Law on Alternative Service*, Izvestiya, 4 February 2002, p1; NTV Mir, 9 February 2002; D Kamyshev *Draft Law "On Alternative Civilian Service" Endorsed*, Kommersant, 11 February 2002, p3; Ekho Moskv, 14 February 2002; E Larina op cit; S. Suleymanov *The Alternative Service Law is Not Ideal* NVO 25/2/02 (internet version).

<sup>32</sup> D Safonov *Right Down To The Triangular Bayonet*, Izvestiya, 25 January 2002 (internet version).

<sup>33</sup> It has often been claimed by Russian military leaders that armed forces which number 1% of a state's population is the international norm, so Russia needs at least 1.2 million men under arms; others compare the number of soldiers and the length of national borders in various states. For examples, see Lt Gen Mazurkevich, addressing a working group of the Russian Federal Assembly & NATO Parliamentary Assembly, as quoted by AVN 22 November 2001; Col Gen V Zherebtsov *If You Wish to Be Handsome, Serve Russia*, Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 7 October 1995, p8; Army General A Kvashnin said Russia "has the least number of soldiers manning each kilometre of border - 16 instead of no less than 50 in other countries" CDI Russia Weekly, 1 February 2002.

<sup>34</sup> Interfax, 19 February 2002. The URF plan, presented to president Putin in mid-February 2002 calls for a regular army of 400,000 men and a conscript force of 160,000 serving for 6 months.

<sup>35</sup> E Vorob'yev *We Are Good At Dismissing Servicemen But Bad At Reforming The Army*, Versty, 30 November 2000, p2.

<sup>36</sup> A Golts *General Staff Strikes Back*, The Russia Journal, 1-7 February 2002 (internet version); Interfax 22/2/02; Strana.Ru web site 23/2/02; Ekho Moskv 24/2/02.



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