

1976

The Soviet Soldier: Soviet Military Management at the Troop Level

William F. Long Jr.
U.S. Army (Ret.)

Herbert Goldhamer

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Long, William F. Jr. and Goldhamer, Herbert (1976) "The Soviet Soldier: Soviet Military Management at the Troop Level," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 29 : No. 2 , Article 13.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol29/iss2/13>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

the Pentagon does its business: "A wretched policy for the United States may be perfectly understandable as a superb compromise among competing interests" (p. 153). Gallucci describes and judges the policies that resulted, in essence, from the competition between "bureaucratic actors" (call them presidential advisors who came from a particular agency and tended to advance that agency's interests) over the initial shaping of the Vietnam commitment, the decision to initiate Rolling Thunder, the myriad of decisions to expand the bombing of the North between 1965 and 1967, and the overall strategy to be pursued on the ground. For the reader who cannot take the time to plough through the volumes of the *Pentagon Papers* dealing with these issues, Gallucci presents a faithful and competent rendering of the substance and thrust of the analyses there.

The task force assigned to reorganize the NSC in November 1976 should probably read the concluding pages of this book. While conscious that far too many wrong lessons have been already drawn from the Vietnam experience, Gallucci does suggest two concrete ways the decisionmaking and information processing functions of the NSC system could be changed to reduce the effects of interservice rivalry and the imperative of bureaucratic compromise. These, again, owe much to Allison's work, and if implemented would go far towards institutionalizing the debating and decisionmaking forum that Robert Kennedy idealized so long ago in *Thirteen Days*.

ALLAN E. GOODMAN
Central Intelligence Agency

Goldhamer, Herbert. *The Soviet Soldier: Soviet Military Management at the Troop Level*. New York: Crane, Russack, 1975. 352pp.

Dr. Goldhamer is a faculty sociologist at Rand Corporation, and the pur-

pose of his work is best expressed by its terminal sentence, "We wish only to caution the readers against accepting uncritically some current images of the Soviet soldier [10' tall syndrome] and the Soviet military and to provide him with some considerations that both explain observable deficiencies and suggest possible existence of others that are not so readily discernible." Where did the author get his information? From the Russians: he made a study of unclassified military journals—as if a Russian had searched out U.S. Navy policies, practices, concerns, accomplishments, tensions, problems, and complaints by reading the *Navy Times Naval Institute Proceedings*, *Naval War College Review*, *Shipmate*, et cetera. Using this methodology, he looks at Soviet military manpower policies, training, discipline, morale, political indoctrination, and the unique interface between the Communist Party and the military. Good organization and straightforward style enhance this sophisticated work which has enough new material and perceptive handling of established concepts to reward professional readers without being a book for the cult of the "devil watchers" only.

Among the things uncovered are familiar vexations (specialist-leadership conflicts, NCO shortages and downgrading of NCO's, lack of professionalism in the officer corps, indifferent reservists, manipulation of statistics, "hippie" youth problems, et cetera). Also familiar is the Russian desire to turn sociological and psychological techniques into military manpower assets and, with it, the inherent implication that traditional responses are somewhat defective. There may also be significance as well as amusement in the insistence by higher commanders that military service—not just war—must be seen as "romantic" and "heroic" and the exhortation to officers and their wives to be "elegant." There are also some unique institutions described for

102 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

handling military problems, e.g., elected officer "courts of honor" for minor offenses against military honor or Communist ethics and "letters to the editor" of military publications, which, by Soviet law, must be dealt with in 15 days and are investigated by party representatives—with much the same force as a congressional inquiry in the U.S. military. Then there is the organization for which there is no U.S. counterpart, DOSAAF (The All Union Voluntary Society for Assistance to the Army, Air Force and Navy). DOSAAF reaches down to 9- and 10-year-olds and is the key organization in supplying the armed forces with military-oriented personnel, including already trained specialists such as radio operators, parachutists, and even pilots.

There is, of course, also no American counterpart to the party. The ambivalence resulting from the conflict between party control and the military "one man command" idea is omnipresent and appears in many forms, e.g., the party's desire for "creativity" (for effective military leadership in war—particularly nuclear war) and "exactingness" (absolute observance of Soviet laws, military regulations, and orders of commanders). A recent development in this conflict is found in the reinstatement, but in a less offensive form, of the "commissar" at the company level and a program which will produce 15,000 graduates of a new 4-year company political officers course. But while the party is supreme at the top, the party treats the political deputy in the military in much the same fashion as U.S. advisers to Vietnamese units were treated: they are held responsible for the acts and failures of their commanders but they are not given the requisite authority or clear-cut control. However, the author shows how the Soviets manage this and other conflicts by avoiding decisions and insisting that everything is equally important—and obtainable. They establish unreasonable

goals in major programs without providing necessary resources; yet, over time, enormously complex efforts such as preinduction training and civil defense (which industrial managers, for example, are to carry out without any decrease in production) do come together into some kind of amorphous accomplishment. This phenomenon may be Russian rather than Communist if one recalls Homer Lea's observation in 1912 that, "In the development of the Russian Empire man has more nearly approached those characteristics that mark the unhurried growth of nature. . . . Like a glacier, its movement is only apparent by periods of time."

Whether it is Russian or Soviet, the ideal for a military leader reported by Dr. Goldhamer is one who is calm, businesslike, and quietly forceful—and an astute observer, Ambassador George Kennan, has remarked in admiration on this type of Russian commander. But the admonition that Soviet subordinates should "love the commander" reminds us of the Marquis DeCustine's remark in 1839 that "the Russians refined fear lending it the mask of love." The author also discusses the manifestations of the many kinds of Communist surveillance of military personnel without imputing to it the larger motivation seen by Custine—

The Russians with their continual surveillance of themselves seem to me the most pitiful people on earth. But, what is the purpose of this trickery? This essentially aggressive nation . . . lives in a state of submissiveness so degrading that it seems to be expiating in advance its hopes of exercising tyranny over others.

This is a powerful book because it treats with the Soviet approach to a basic aspect of the world power struggle—military manpower. Regardless of lesser similarities and differences, the single decisive difference between the United States and the U.S.S.R. is the

official national policy toward military service. Our country is buying volunteers and talking peace, and the Russians are propagandizing and rationalizing a conscripted nation in arms. Each has its special problems, but the long-term results seem predictable. In any event, Dr. Goldhamer has given us a tool with which to assess the Soviet military system from the troop level, and we are left to ponder, *inter alia*, the Russian conscript who gets 5 rubles a month pay and our volunteer who is paid 50 times as much. This is a legitimate concern for, no matter how ineptly led or poorly motivated politically, history bears abundant testimony to the endurance and courage of the Russian soldier.

WILLIAM F. LONG, JR.
Colonel, U.S. Army (Ret.)

Kohn, Richard H. *Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment in America, 1783-1802*. New York: The Free Press, 1975. 443pp.

When Richard Kohn set out to write this book, he sought to find out how and why the American Military Establishment took form in the immediate decades following the Revolutionary War. That task led him to answer yet another question: "Why would a nation that began in 1783 with patent anti-military traditions, with the almost universally held belief that standing armies posed an unacceptable danger to liberty and republican government... begin to create a national army and actually possess a complete military establishment within twenty years of independence?" To be sure, the latter question is more difficult given deep-seated American fears of militarism that extended far back into English history, fears that even surfaced now and then in the Revolution. While sensitive Europeans feared standing armies in peacetime, complained Washington, Americans were equally

prejudiced against their own army in wartime. Dr. Benjamin Rush expressed alarm that Washington himself might use the Continental Army to assume an American throne as George I, successor to George III.

In some new nations—in the Third World, for instance—the army has had a continuing role to play after the winning of independence. The reason is that such states have lacked a tradition of civilian politics and self-government. Consequently, the military has served as a kind of bureaucracy; its officers, often graduates of St. Cyr and Sandhurst, have had professional training in organization and administration that are frequently absent in societies not much above the primitive level. Such an explanation, however, is not helpful for America, where well-educated civilian leaders were able to use their considerable political experience to overcome stumbling blocks inherent in any transition from colonialism to independence.

Kohn's explanation, in essence, is that the postwar military system came into existence in piecemeal fashion, each part being added as a result of national crises and emergencies, beginning with Indian problems in the Confederation period and continuing through the quasi-war with France in 1798. Even though it took nearly two decades to build a military system that would exist with relatively little change until the Root reforms of 1903, Kohn convincingly argues that the blueprint of that system was laid down as early as 1783 by Washington, Hamilton, Pickering, Knox, and others. These men were generally committed to a stronger form of government than the one that existed under the Articles of Confederation. As nationalists in the 1780's and as leaders of the Federalist Party in the 1790's, they worked to expand the power of the central government in the military sector as well as in other areas.

Were the Federalists militarists in the 18th century meaning of that term? Did