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Zoltan Barany: Democratic Breakdown and the Decline of the Russian Military

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INTRODUCTION

The fifteen years since the founding of the new, post-Communist Russian Army have been marked by the unprecedented deterioration of the once-proud Soviet military. Unprecedented, that is, because there is no similar case in world history of a dominant armed force so rapidly and so thoroughly deteriorating without being defeated in battle. As a perceptive 2001 article noted, “Russia’s fall from military superpower Number Two to a country whose army can be neutralized by bands of irregulars fighting with little more than the weapons on their backs” was one of the most spectacular elements of the Soviet Union’s collapse.¹ The army’s decline had actually begun during the late-Brezhnev era in the early 1980s and then had gathered momentum in the late 1980s under President Mikhail Gorbachev. The rule of Russia’s first president, Boris Yeltsin, however, was synonymous with a virtual free-fall of the military’s effectiveness and overall standards.

A plethora of articles and books published in Russia and abroad have depicted the shocking conditions in the armed forces brought about by the years of neglect, financial constraints, and competing priorities for state attention. In the 1990s officers left the service in droves to escape poor pay, lack of adequate housing, insufficient training, and plummeting social prestige. Soldiers were often compelled to feed themselves by foraging in forests and fields, their commanders rented them out as laborers, and the physical abuse they were subjected to by fellow conscripts and commanders alike frequently drove them to desertion or suicide. In the meantime, a seemingly endless string of major accidents and defeat at the hands of a ragtag guerrilla force added to the army’s public humiliation.

In some respects—particularly regarding the armed forces’ material conditions—matters have improved since the ascension of Vladimir Putin to the presidency in 2000. Most important, defense expenditures have been steadily and significantly boosted under his tenure for two reasons. First, the president apparently recognized the magnitude of the army’s problems, particularly after the tragedy of the *Kursk* nuclear submarine in August 2000. Second, owing to the substantial and long-term increases in the world market price of Russia’s main sources of export, crude oil and natural gas, more money has become available for defense spending. Nonetheless, many of the underlying causes of the armed forces’ predicament have not been seriously addressed let alone eliminated, and the military has not undergone the fundamental reforms it needs. To be sure, radically transforming a huge organization like the Soviet military establishment is anything but easy. Still, I contend, little has been done and much of whatever *has* been done has been often ill-conceived and in many ways seemingly directed at re-creating the Soviet Army. That fighting force was appropriate to counter the challenges of the 1970s and even 1980s but not those of the early twenty-first century.

Why has meaningful defense reform been absent in Russia fifteen years after the USSR’s demise? After all, the Kremlin—particularly since the emergence of Putin—has clamored for a leadership role in world affairs, it has been the beneficiary of a financial boon owing to increasing world commodity prices, and it has a long and proud military tradition upheld by millions of veterans who demand a rapid reversal of their army’s fading fortunes. Pursuing this puzzle points to the very essence of Russia’s increasingly authoritarian political system, and it can be largely explained by two major and closely interrelated factors.

First, since the mid 1980s Soviet-Russian military elites have gradually acquired a political presence that is unacceptable even by the most generous definition of democratic civil-military relations, which is, in itself, an important indicator of the degree of democratization. In recent years, as Michael McFaul and his colleagues note in a fresh appraisal of the contemporary Russian polity, the “military’s influence on political decisions has grown significantly.”² This is all the more surprising because the increasing political role of Russian generals has occurred simultaneously with the remarkable decline of the strength and effectiveness of their forces. The most detrimental way in which the top brass have exploited their political clout has been their steadfast and successful opposition to

substantive defense reform, which they view as a threat to their own interests. Although efforts to transform the military in line with shifting political and strategic realities originated in the mid 1980s, other than a significant reduction of manpower in the 1990s and the introduction of contract service in recent years, no radical changes have taken place. As a result, the Russian army remains out of tune with the times and, if current reform concepts survive, will remain so in the foreseeable future. Its standards in practically all important respects have fallen far behind those of even middle-rank European military powers, not to mention those of the United States or Great Britain.

Second, in the final analysis, the blame for the absence of major defense reform and the growing political presence of the military should be laid at the doorstep of the Russian president. Since 1993 Russia has become a state characterized by “superpresidentialism,” a term that depicts inordinately extensive executive powers. A parallel development has been the declining importance of the Russian legislature and judiciary as independent institutions. By definition, democratic civilian control over the armed forces is balanced between the executive and legislative branches of the state. In Russia—as in many other authoritarian states—however, civilian oversight has become synonymous with presidential domination. In essence, as long as the president does not feel compelled to rein in the armed forces, the latter will be able to promote their corporate interests though they may counteract those of the nation.

The Russian armed forces and their relationship to the post-Communist state and society is an important subject for several reasons. First, Russia remains a pivotal state, a major player in contemporary world politics keenly interested in the restoration of its great power status even if the United States alone can claim to be a superpower or, as former French foreign minister Hubert Vedrine would have it, “hyperpower.” Second, Russia does control massive stockpiles of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. The security of those weapons—which depends primarily on the military—is an important concern to both Russians and others in the world around them. Third, in Washington, at least, Moscow is viewed as America’s partner in the fight against international terrorism and nuclear proliferation, it has been the recipient of substantial Western security-strategic aid, and its military bases are located in some instances only miles away from U.S. installations in the Caucasus and Central Asia. The evolution of Russia’s army is, therefore, something U.S. policy makers, defense professionals, and the American public should be concerned

with. Finally, as I noted above, because the state of civil-military relations is a gauge of democratization, Russian military politics ought to provide a telling commentary about the country's fifteen-year-long post-Communist path.

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The main purpose of this book is to explain three related phenomena and their causes in the post-Communist Russian context: the elusive nature of major defense reform, the political role of generals and senior officers, and the institutional arrangements of civilian control over the armed forces. I will make three interrelated arguments:

The fundamental reason for the absence of substantial defense reform is the military elites' opposition to it. The armed forces leadership is against the sort of reform Russia needs—the army's transformation to a more mobile, flexible, and smaller force with a higher proportion of professional soldiers rather than draftees—because it directly contradicts its interests in several respects. Cuts in manpower would require reducing the bloated Russian officer corps. Decreasing the ratio of conscripts—let alone abolishing the draft—would rob officers of the easily intimidated labor force they have been able to exploit for their own purposes. Moreover, many generals continue to believe that the army should prepare for a large-scale war and, therefore, it must be capable of mobilizing hundreds of thousands or even millions of soldiers, which would necessitate the retention—and given Russia's demographic predicament, even extension—of the conscription system.

Russian military elites have acquired a political role that is incompatible with democratic politics. Although the army was politically influential in the Communist period, its *independent* political role was very limited. This has changed in the past fifteen years. Hundreds of active-duty officers have run for political office because there are no legal regulations that forbid it. During the Yeltsin era leading generals often publicly criticized the state and its policies, thwarted policy implementation, and refused to carry out orders, more or less with impunity. Under Putin the frequency of such behavior has drastically declined, owing to increasing state strength and more direct executive supervision—principally through Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov. Still, although the political participation of

the armed forces leadership has appreciably diminished, Putin has actually reinforced the notion of the military's legitimate political presence by appointing generals—along with many more security services personnel—to influential political positions.

The ultimate explanation for the military's political role and the absence of meaningful defense reform points to the Russian polity, in which, since 1993, power has gradually shifted toward the executive branch, more precisely, to the president. As a result, in contemporary Russia the legislature is nearly as powerless as it was in late-Soviet times. Civilian control over the armed forces, far from a balance of oversight responsibilities between the legislature and the executive, has come to mean, in practice, presidential authority. It would be irrational for the president to prohibit the political activities of military personnel or to aggressively push defense reform. In fact, he has a stake in appointing more officers to powerful political posts because they—and, more generally, the military-security establishment—have comprised an unwavering support base for him. There are a number of other equally important and rational grounds for Putin's reluctance to consider defense reform a top priority: political consensus about the nature of reform is lacking, there are several competing and arguably more pressing items on his agenda, financial resources remain finite, and many in the political establishment still think of defense spending as a “non-productive expenditure” particularly when the country's nuclear arsenal provides a sturdy deterrent to large-scale foreign aggression.

My objective in this book is to explain and support these arguments. What theoretical approaches can be summoned to enrich, complement, and illuminate the story and explain the Russian military's political influence? Although the civil-military relations literature is an obvious candidate to help us out, we can use some of the key ideas of the new institutionalism approach even more profitably.

INSTITUTIONALISM AND INSTITUTIONAL DECAY

The various strands of new institutionalism have not produced a universally accepted definition of institutions, but the one provided by Douglass North—institutions as “a set of rules, compliance procedures, and moral and ethical behavioral norms designed to constrain the behavior of individuals in the interest of maximizing the wealth or utility of principals”—is a common point of reference and, for the purposes at hand, a good

starting point.³ Institutional approaches tend to focus on the “regularities in repetitive interactions, . . . customs and rules that provide a set of incentives and disincentives for individuals.”⁴ The chief end-function of institutions, after all, is “to regularize the behavior of the individuals who operate within them.”⁵

Indeed, institutional approaches are at their strongest when called on to explain the workings of institutions in a stable environment. They are less successful in dealing with institutions in flux. Writing about rational choice institutionalism, Robert Bates and his coauthors acknowledge that “political transitions seem to defy rational forms of analysis.”⁶ There is broad agreement, however, that once institutions get established they tend to perpetuate themselves and become resistant to change, especially sudden change. Institutional change, “a shift in the rules and enforcement procedures so that different behaviors are constrained or encouraged,” is ordinarily incremental.⁷ Still, as North argues, “Wars, revolutions, conquest, and natural disasters are sources of discontinuous institutional change,” that is, radical change in the formal rules of the game.⁸

For institutionalists—especially historical institutionalists—change is path dependent, that is, when a policy is being formulated or an institution is established, certain choices are made that are usually self-perpetuating. As Margaret Weir has argued, “Decisions at one point in time can restrict future possibilities by sending policy off onto particular tracks, along which ideas and interests develop and institutions and strategies adapt.”⁹ In other words, events at Time A set institutions on a particular historical or political trajectory that becomes difficult to reverse at Time B because the costs of change outweigh the benefits. The importance of path dependence is that it focuses our attention on the “formative moments” or “critical junctures” for institutions and organizations when the path is set, confirmed, or changed.¹⁰ As North put it, “Path dependence means that history matters.”¹¹ I concur with Paul Pierson, who argues that there is institutional change even after path dependence sets the course. Nonetheless, his strong emphasis on “self-reinforcing or positive feedback processes in the political system”¹² seems to prevent him from considering even the potentiality of *negative* institutional change. In this study I demonstrate that this is a mistake: protracted negative institutional change—a phenomenon I call “institutional decay”—once a path is settled on is an equally possible outcome, although the new institutionalism approach has not provided a helpful way of accounting for it.

Students of comparative politics have utilized the concept of institutional decay in various ways. For example, Minxin Pei notes that contemporary Chinese political institutions deteriorate for many reasons (including “the weakening ideological appeal of a political doctrine” that defines an institution’s missions and upholds its norms) and that decay may take several forms (e.g., massive abuse of power by the ruling elite and deterioration of organizational cohesion). This sort of decay in turn leads to declining organizational effectiveness.¹³ In his study of Soviet rural transformation Neil Melvin argues that broadening the participation of policy debates to include specialists and professionals in the 1980s led to the decay and eventual fragmentation of policy-making institutions.¹⁴ Neither scholar, however, define institutional decay, and their usage for the concept of institutions is limited to formal structures. In his work on Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, Neil Devotta does provide a definition for the concept—“institutional decay, especially in a poly-ethnic setting, ensues whenever the state’s rule-making, -applying, -adjudicating, and -enforcing institutions eschew dispassionate interactions with all constituencies and groups and instead resort to particularistic interventions”¹⁵—but this is far too imprecise and context driven to be of more general utility.

I define institutional decay as *a process marked by the erosion and breakdown of previously accepted and observed rules and norms governing organizational behavior*. Along with institutionalists, I consider rules as formal institutions that are codified (such as laws and regulations). Norms, on the other hand, are informal institutions that are culturally based and accepted behavioral standards or customs reflected and reinforced by the organization’s history. Ordinarily, institutional breakdown has much to do with the erosion of norms that, in fact, support rules. Institutional decay usually begins with the wearing away of previously robust informal institutions due to destabilizing influences that then provoke degenerative changes in formal institutions. For instance, behaviors that were initially considered objectionable and illegal may be accommodated by changing legal regulations. In some instances, however, the reverse can also occur, meaning, that the revision of formal institutions (rules) can lead to and advance the decay of informal institutions (norms).

Let me relate the concepts of institutional decay and path dependence to Russian civil-military relations and show how they help us account for the Russian army’s changing political role. For decades, firm and clearly defined institutional standards and procedures had regulated and were integral characteristics of Soviet civil-military relations. These basic rules

(formal institutions) included the army's protection and promotion of the party-state's interests, its obedience to military superiors and civilian authorities, and its careful management of state assets. Among the essential norms (informal institutions) were the officers' unquestioned loyalty to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), their avoidance of active political interference and criticism of politicians, and their rejection of using subordinates for private gain. Soviet officers were thoroughly indoctrinated with these norms and socialized to accept them unquestioningly. Few experts would dispute that these rules and norms no longer define contemporary Russian civil-military relations though they may still exert some influence on the military establishment. The concepts of path dependence and institutional decay help to explain why.

I contend that there are three formative moments or critical junctures that have determined the course of Soviet and then Russian civil-military relations in the past two decades. These three moments have reinforced the institutional decay, which, in turn, is manifested in the political presence of Russian military elites. They are (1) Gorbachev's *invitation* to officers to actively participate in politics; (2) Yeltsin's *acquiescence* to a new institutional environment that did not deny the military's political role; and (3) Putin's *confirmation* of this role through the appointment of generals to important political posts and his reluctance to enforce the implementation of state policies (such as radical defense reform) in the armed forces.

These formative moments have been critical to the specific path and institutional decay of civil-military relations. The end result of this negative change has been that the active political presence of generals has gradually become an acceptable feature of Russian politics. The three Soviet-Russian presidents share the primary responsibility for this outcome because their actions defined these critical junctures. Gorbachev's action set into motion precisely the kind of "revolution" North identified, a drastic change in the rules of the game as it was theretofore played. He set civil-military relations on a new path that his successors in the Kremlin further strengthened as they expanded their own powers. In contemporary Russia the president enjoys virtually unbridled political authority to initiate policy and enforce its implementation without any authentic legislative or judicial opposition. Instead of establishing civilian control over the military shared by the president, the government, and the parliament, Yeltsin and Putin equated civilian control with presidential oversight. They not only failed to promote legal instruments that barred soldiers and officers

from holding elected positions but passively allowed (Yeltsin) or actively encouraged (Putin) their political participation.

There are also some notable differences between Russia's two presidents. Yeltsin's state was relatively weak and competing priorities and lacking interest prevented him from rerouting civil-military relations onto a democratic course, which would have been a thankless political task in any case. His neglect of the military not only practically ensured the army's failure to obtain desperately needed resources from the state, but it also allowed military elites to increase their autonomy and to continue to get away with unacceptable behavior as long as they did not directly challenge Yeltsin's prerogatives. Under Putin, by way of contrast, the security-military apparatus has become the regime's essential support base. At the same time, owing in part to Putin's vigorous restoration of state power and to better treatment from the Kremlin, army leaders have moderated their overt opposition to state policy. To be sure, at no time have Russian presidents been impotent appeasers of the army. Rather, the point is that, for a number of reasons, establishing democratic civil-military relations in an increasingly authoritarian polity not only has not been a priority, it has not been an objective.

This sort of executive role, in turn, has fostered the institutional decay in Russian civil-military relations. The key markers of this decay have been military officers' independent participation in elections and in elected political bodies; open encouragement of their subordinates to run for elected office; the existence of often unpunished acts of insubordination; public criticism of and/or opposition to state officials and/or state policy; threat of resignation to elicit policy modification; willingness to purposefully mislead politicians and withhold information from them; and spread of large-scale corruption and criminal behavior that includes the mistreatment and neglect of subordinates and materials under their supervision. The most important outcome of the top brass' increased political role has been its spirited, long-term, and ultimately successful opposition to radical defense reform.

The obvious competing explanation for the absence of substantial defense reform is that its cause has been not the military's opposition and, ultimately, the polity dominated by executive power that tolerates that opposition, but the resource-poor environment in which the Russian armed forces have existed since their inception. This argument does not stand up under scrutiny for several reasons. First, Russian governments, particularly Putin's, have been able to push through and allocate money

for high-priority projects such as the new tax and land codes. Second, not all aspects of military reforms would cost money, moreover, the reforms that are needed to establish the kind of armed forces that Russia needs might well save money even in the short term. Third, since 2000 the Russian state has been the beneficiary of a spectacular windfall, owing to significant increases in oil revenue, yet that has made little difference in the realization of substantive defense reform. Finally, the real cost of defense reform is not financial but political in terms of political capital and the cost of not paying attention to higher-priority issues.

THE CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS APPROACH

Although the institutionalist approach provides the most useful theoretical handle for our puzzle, we should not overlook some key insights of the civil-military relations literature that will strengthen our explanation. The field of civil-military relations has not produced a grand theory that can account for divergent cases and patterns.¹⁶ There is a notable theoretical literature on the timing, strategy, planning, and execution of coups, for instance, and on the conditions that motivate military personnel to overthrow their governments.¹⁷ But the armed forces' political activism can take much more nuanced forms than coups d'état or the lack thereof and ought to be viewed as taking place along a continuum of multiple factors such as scale, means, and organizational prerogatives. "Military influence," the range of institutional behavior that falls somewhere between the extremes of violent coup d'état and the army's full compliance with its civilian masters, has proven more difficult to theorize about, even though it is perhaps the most important concern of civil-military relations scholars. One of the key problems is that accurately measuring the gradations between the two end-points of the coup/no-coup spectrum is extraordinarily difficult given the complexity of cases, the number of potential explanations, and their varying importance relative to one another. Having said that, what contributions to the civil-military literature are *useful* for our inquiry?

Two scholars, in particular, succeeded in shedding light on the progressive stages of military influence. Timothy Colton identified four broad policy domains in which military elites are generally interested in expressing their preferences (internal, institutional, intermediate, and societal) and four methods they use to exert their influence (official prerogative,

expert advice, political bargaining, and force).¹⁸ Alfred Stepan, on the other hand, listed eleven “military prerogatives,” spheres—such as the army’s constitutionally sanctioned role in the political system; its relationship to the chief executive, the government, and the legislature; and its role in intelligence, police, state enterprises, and the legal system—where the military as an institution assumes the right, formal or informal, to exercise control over its own internal governance and to play a role in extramilitary jurisdictions within the state apparatus that are germane to its interests.¹⁹ Though these tools are imperfect—Colton’s construct would be hard pressed to account for behind-the-scenes influence and Stepan’s “low-moderate-high” gauge does not permit the accurate appraisal of military influence—they are helpful in thinking analytically about military participation in politics in general and, more specifically, in pinpointing the changes in the political presence of the Soviet-Russian military elites through time.²⁰

Understanding the concept of military influence in contemporary Russia is especially important because coup theories provide no useful guide to this case where generals have not staged a successful coup d’état in over two centuries. The absence of coups is in itself perplexing in view of Russia’s tumultuous history. Brian Taylor contends that organizational culture theory offers the most persuasive explanation to this conundrum because it emphasizes “the unique experiences in the life of an organization as an explanation for subsequent behavior.”²¹ Studying the Russian army from the organizational culture perspective accentuates the officer corps’ view that armed intervention against the country’s civilian leaders is fundamentally wrong. Organizational culture theory goes far in explaining the absence of military coups but not the lack of balanced civilian control over, nor even more important, the political role of, Russian military elites.

When looking for additional insights to advance our understanding of civil-military relations in democratizing states, it is necessary to distinguish postpraetorian (such as numerous Iberian and Latin American polities) from post-Communist regimes. In the former, where generals were the de facto state rulers, the *demilitarization of politics* was the objective of prodemocracy reformers. In the latter, where the military was an institutional servant of the Communist Party, the goal has been the *depoliticization of the military*.²² Democratization theorists tend to agree that civil-military relations is one area in which the post-Communist past is beneficial rather than detrimental for democratizing states.²³ In the ancien

rgime, the reasoning goes, the armed forces were under firm civilian (i.e., Communist Party) oversight and kept in check by the internal security forces and other control mechanisms. In short, there were no major problems that endangered civilian oversight, and this fact, as conventional wisdom would have it, must bode well for the democratic era. This argument is entirely sensible when related to post-Communist regimes in general but its validity for the post-Soviet case is negated by two important qualifications.

The first qualification relates directly to what Thomas Nichols has called the “constitutional complication,” the notion that although legal regulations governing civil-military relations in the USSR (and in other Communist states) existed, they meant little owing to the predominant position of the CPSU over state institutions, including the judiciary.²⁴ This complication is significant because, given that constitutional and legal norms were more or less inconsequential, the shifting power dynamics in the late 1980s allowed different interpretations of loyalty. Put more concretely, a very real dilemma was bound to arise: should officers be loyal to the party tenets they had been indoctrinated with or should they try to follow the unpredictable political signals emanating from Gorbachev’s Kremlin?

The second qualification has to do with the fundamental changes that took place in civil-military relations at the end of the Soviet era. Gorbachev encouraged internal debate not only in the Communist Party but also in the ranks of the military by, as I mentioned above, actually *inviting* serving officers to voice their views and otherwise participate in politics. Officers turned out to be most responsive: they soon began to publicly criticize Gorbachev and his policies and stood for election to the Supreme Soviet (the legislature). In sum, the USSR’s last president expunged the positive influence Communist-era civil-military relations might have had in the post-Soviet era by reversing the solid control of civilians over the armed forces.

All in all, theoretical contributions to the civil-military relations field help explain the areas and stages of the Russian generals’ political influence and their aversion to toppling the regime. In addition, empirical and normative contributions to the literature shed light on the gap between the ideals of democratic consolidation and the actual conditions in contemporary Russia.²⁵ They are especially useful in evaluating the issue of civilian control when complemented by recent works that describe the

evolution of the Russian polity's presidential domination.²⁶ But these insights are secondary to understanding the puzzle of the Russian generals' enlarged political role: they merely complement the robust explanation provided by the institutionalist approach.

CONCEPTS AND CAVEATS

To appreciate the broader context in which I view Russian civil-military relations requires some understanding of three key basic concepts: defense reform, military strategy, and military doctrine. I include "defense reform" among the concepts to be explained because "reform" is often taken to suggest simply change. I take "reform" to mean "to amend or improve by change of form or removal of faults or abuses"²⁷ and understand "defense reform" as change that *improves* the armed forces in *substantive, meaningful* ways. Although this book is about neither military strategy nor doctrine, it is not possible to appreciate the necessity of defense reform if one does not know the given country's needs based on its strategy and doctrine. In other words, we cannot know the type of army Russia ought to have if we do not know the tasks assigned to it in the military doctrine. Like other basic social science concepts (such as institutions, civil society, nationalism, and empire) there is not one universally accepted definition of strategy or doctrine; in fact, at times they are confused with one another.²⁸ Therefore, it seems useful to explain the way I employ them.

The word *strategy* comes from the Greek "strategia" which essentially means "generalship." Consequently, it does have a particular military denotation—specifically the deploying of forces before the enemy is engaged—although "strategy" is extensively used in other areas, notably in the business world. In security and military affairs "strategy" has been used to describe two different notions, one indicating a narrower concept pertaining to military techniques and the other referring to a significantly broader idea closer to the contemporary conception of "national security." An example of the first usage is the critical study by the eminent international relations scholar, B. H. Liddell Hart, of the two classical Prussian strategic thinkers, Carl von Clausewitz and Helmuth von Moltke. Liddell Hart defined strategy as "the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy."²⁹ The alternative,

best described by the term “grand strategy,” is ordinarily used to encompass the management of the resources of the entire state in the conduct of warfare. Barry Posen defined it as the “collection of military, economic, and political means and ends with which a state attempts to achieve security.”³⁰ Unless otherwise noted, in this book “strategy” is used in this second, “grand strategy” sense.

Military doctrine, in principle, exists to support military strategy. Doctrine may be thought of as a form of military planning that is between the more general strategy and the more specific (often unit-level) tactics. Military doctrine offers a way of thinking about military problems, issues, and challenges but not a means of how to solve them. Doctrine should be considered as a guide—rooted in a broadly accepted way of thinking—rather than a direction. It certainly does not prescribe specific steps to be taken by commanders in any given contingency. Military doctrines may be shared by various branch services of a national defense force and even by different states (often belonging to the same alliance). Substantively, the military doctrine appears in doctrinal documents that ordinarily outline a nation’s (or service branch’s or alliance’s) military objectives; its overall mission; a general plan of how it should achieve its objectives; various concerns it should be aware of while carrying out its mission; and occasionally even historical examples. Military doctrine changes along with the evolving nature of warfare and the shifts in the threat environments in which the nation or armed service exists.

Although the focus of this study is the Russian armed forces proper, I shall be careful not to lump the military together with the various security forces. The leaders of the latter are more closely allied with Putin and the security agencies, most of them originating from the KGB where he had spent much of his career. The relationship between these structures—whose weight in the state bureaucracy began to increase under Yeltsin—and the contemporary Russian presidency is closer than between the armed forces and the executive branch. Clearly, the security services constitute the first-line of Putin’s support, their chiefs are the type of individuals the president knows best and trusts most.

A few words need to be said about terminology to prevent potential confusion. Throughout the book I use the term *Russian army* to denote the entire armed forces (including army, navy, air force, strategic rocket forces) unless otherwise specified. For stylistic reasons, I shall use “army,” “armed forces” and “military” interchangeably and “the top brass,” “the generals,” the “military elites,” and “the armed forces leadership” in a

similar manner. Furthermore, by “general” or “the generals,” unless otherwise specified, I mean individuals in the armed forces proper and not in the employ of any of the numerous security services and armed formations under the aegis of the fourteen militarized ministries (themselves often referred to as “power ministries” and their personnel as the “men of power” or *siloviki*). Finally, in keeping with the vocabulary of the institutionalist approach, I take “institutions” to denote behavioral roles and norms rather than conventional organizations.

To avoid potential misunderstandings, I want to lay out clearly what this book is and is not about. At the risk of repeating myself, the focus of this study is the evolution of civil-military relations in post-Communist Russia and the way it explains the continued lack of substantial defense reform. I am particularly interested in understanding why the relationship between the armed forces and the state leaves so much to be desired from the perspective of democratic standards. I contend that Russia gradually turned away from its democratization experiment beginning in 1993, following the bloody conflict between the president and the legislature. This, in my mind, was *the* major turning point in both Russia’s democratization experiment and in the executive’s relationship to the armed forces. The move toward authoritarianism gained momentum and accelerated in 2000, however, once Putin moved to the helm. I suggest that the changes in Russia’s civil-military relations reflect the steady breakdown in its democratization process.

This book does not offer a detailed analysis of Russian foreign policy and addresses the Commonwealth of Independent States and other former Soviet republics only from the viewpoint of civil-military relations and defense reform. Neither do I intend to provide a blow-by-blow account of the Chechen Wars. Many scholars and journalists have already done so, and I see no need to duplicate their efforts here. I will devote close attention to the Russian army’s performance in the Caucasus and to aspects of that conflict directly germane to civil-military relations, however. Furthermore, this book does not deal with Russia’s defense industries and their conversion, and it does not offer technical analyses of the country’s new or existing weapons systems. I do not offer an exhaustive survey of Russia’s nuclear arsenal or analyze Moscow’s policies regarding nuclear proliferation. I do, nonetheless, engage the issue of nuclear weapons in connection with Moscow’s military doctrine and insofar as the safety of those arms concerns the world beyond Russia and, especially, the United States.

A ROADMAP TO THE BOOK

The bulk of this book is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 1 sets the scene with a case study of the August 2000 tragedy of the nuclear submarine *Kursk* that focused worldwide attention on the problems of the Russian armed forces and the country's democratization process. I portray the accident as a metaphor for the many problems of Russia's armed forces, civil-military relations, and "façade-democracy." Starting with a brief description of the accident, I examine the reaction of the military leadership, the government, the legislature, and the president to the tragedy. How did they manage the crisis? Who took responsibility for the mistakes that were made? What did their actions say about the admirals and the political leaders? Then I look at the investigation and its findings, the causes of the accident and its treatment by the media, and what they reveal about the state of Russia's armed forces and its democratization process. Finally, I entertain the question of what lessons have been learned by Russian politicians and military leaders from this tragedy.

The concept of "decay" possesses an important temporal element, and we can only appreciate the magnitude of decay if we view it in its proper chronological framework. The purpose of chapter 2 is to lay the groundwork and offer the reader an assessment of the Soviet/Russian military's decline through a structured comparison of some key security-defense issues approximately two decades apart: around 1985—the year Gorbachev took office—and at present (September 2006), approximately at the middle of Putin's second presidential term. The key issues to be contrasted are (a) strategy and doctrine; (b) the state of the armed forces (budget, manpower, training, and equipment); (c) social issues such as prestige, privileges, and the life of ordinary officers and soldiers. In the final section of the chapter, I will briefly compare the performance of the Soviet/Russian army on the battlefields of Afghanistan and Chechnya. To be sure, given major contextual differences, this is not an exercise from which far-reaching generalizations could be extracted. Still, such a comparison will help pinpoint the actual strengths and weaknesses of the armed forces.

Chapter 3 is primarily concerned with explaining the biggest change in post-Communist civil-military relations: the growing political activism of the military elite. The underlying argument here is that in the new Russia the army was "departified" rather than "depoliticized." In fact, the officer corps has become more politicized in the post-Soviet era, a phenomenon

that is, in itself, a manifestation of the failure of Russia's democratization project. The top brass' active political presence is a significant issue from at least two important angles. First, it goes directly against the fundamental principles of democratic civil-military relations. Second, the military's political clout is crucial when the government weighs its traditional concerns, such as foreign affairs, as well as social issues and financial matters germane to the defense and security establishments. The chapter is divided into three sections, which focus on the electoral participation of armed forces personnel, the political careers of a group of influential generals, and the public opposition of some high-ranking officers to state policy. I relate these substantive issues to the three formative moments that set the path of Russian civil-military relations.

No other policy domain illustrates the state of current Russian civil-military relations more accurately than that of defense reform. More than fifteen years after the proclamation of the new Russian state, several formidable obstacles, from inadequate resources to poorly prepared conscripts, continue to hinder substantive reform. The most important impediment, however, is neither economic nor social but political, rooted in the army's opposition to the reform and the president's reluctance to enforce its implementation. The main objective of chapter 4 is to explain why. After an appraisal of the military reforms that *have* been implemented I outline the type of defense reform Russia actually needs to successfully face current geostrategic challenges. I evaluate the reform proposals of political parties and the Ministry of Defense and then explain why Russian presidents have not forced the top brass to implement necessary defense reform. The last section briefly chronicles the long-standing feud between the Defense Ministry and the General Staff and its implications to the army's reform.

Chapter 5 highlights the "civil" part of the civil-military relations equation. There *is* civilian control of the armed forces in Russia, and my goal here is to show how the military is overseen and managed in a superpresidential and increasingly authoritarian system. First, I look at the methods through which Yeltsin could maintain the military on a shoestring budget and still sustain the support of its leaders. Next I turn to the "power ministries" and their role in Russian politics and civil-military relations. I continue by examining the legislature as an agent of civilian oversight and assess its progressively weakening impact on the armed forces as a law-making and budget-passing body. In the rest of this chapter the focus shifts

to Putin and his record of leadership pertaining to military-security matters, his rapport with the top brass, and his approach to defense reform.

In the Conclusion I address two major issues. First, I consider Russia's democratization experience and look at how civil-military relations fit into the country's broad political framework. Second, I briefly examine the relationship between Russia on the one hand and NATO and the United States on the other, with special attention to nuclear weapons, NATO's ongoing expansion, and the conflicting interests of Moscow and Washington in the post-Soviet world. I end with a few words about U.S. policy toward Russia.