

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW

Subject: Colonel Petr M. Lapunov

Position: A director of a department for force analysis, Center for Operational-Strategic Research (TsOSI) General Staff, Russian Federation

Location: Moscow

Interviewer: John G. Hines

Date/Time: May 5, 1991, 10:00 a.m.

Duration: 3.5 hours

Language: Russian

Prepared by: John G. Hines, based on notes

“Purpose of Interview”

- To review with the interview subject his expectations about the course of military reform from the perspective of the General Staff.
- To discuss the influence of the development of new weaponry on future force structure.
- To solicit his views on the likely outcome of the struggle for control over force development and procurement between the Defense Ministry and the Military Industries/Design Bureaus.
- To discuss the political-military games and role playing planned for the June 1991 Joint Simulation conference to be held in Garmisch, Germany.

“Military Reform”

Contrary to comments by others I interviewed in April and May, the interviewee said with considerable conviction and authority that the military reform plan receiving primary attention within the General Staff did not differ substantially from the one published by *Military Thought* [Voennaia mysl'] in November of last year. The principles on which the work is based remained unchanged. These include:

- One Army—The Soviet Armed Forces must function as an integrated organization at the federal level.
- Mixed conscript and professional (contract) force—The General Staff reform plan does not even hold out as a goal eventual total professionalization of the Army. According to the General Staff plan, conscription will be preserved as one of the chief means for manning the Soviet Armed Forces “over the next 10 to 15 years.”

- The Armed Forces must be adequate to counter, but not to exceed, the scale of the threat to the Soviet Union.
- There must be a reasonable balance between research and development and force procurement (overcoming previous excesses on the side of procurement).

The issue of conscription is key for military planners. The interviewee conveyed to me the dominant General Staff justification for retention, indefinitely, of a conscription system on some scale. The Soviet Union, he explained, is surrounded by potentially hostile states that individually or collectively could some day threaten the USSR. As a consequence, the Soviets could be forced into a war at a time and on a scale not of their choosing. To hedge against this unfortunate possibility, the Soviet Armed Forces must maintain a reserve mobilization base on which to expand the Armed Forces in the event of a national emergency. In contrast, according to the General Staff argument, the U.S. sits behind two oceans and very secure land borders that virtually assure war will not come to the U.S. The U.S. can choose the wars in which it wants to become involved in on terms that do not seriously threaten the basic security of the state.

Conscription, in turn, is closely tied to the relative level of centralization of the future Soviet Armed Forces. According to the interviewee, the nine republics (all except Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Georgia, Moldova, and Armenia) that signed a preliminary agreement on the nature of the future union with the Center on April 23, agreed to the concept of "one (central) army" and continuation of conscription. The republics would retain police forces appropriate for maintenance of security within each republic. The key determinant of the nature of republic-level forces would be the capabilities of the weapons and equipment assigned. Republic-level forces would be restricted in their equipment to armored troop transport vehicles (BTRs and modified BMPs) with heavy machine guns. No republic would be allowed artillery, tanks, combat helicopters, or high-performance combat aircraft.

The key concession the republics have gained from the center thus far, according to the interview subject, is the right of each republic to determine how it will generate the conscripts levied by the Center. Laws on exemptions, age limits, etc., governing each citizen's vulnerability to conscription would be determined at the republic level. The interviewee indicated that concessions would not be made on extraterritoriality since insistence that each soldier must be allowed to serve in his native republic would eliminate, in effect, the possibility of truly centralized, unified Armed Forces.

The interview subject indicated that the size and structure of the Armed Forces would be responsive to any new arms control or general political agreements reached by the Soviet Union and other major powers such as the U.S. At the same time, he indicated that considerations beyond arms control were tending to strongly influence future force planning. For example, internally imposed budget and force sizing constraints led him to predict that the Soviet Ground Forces west of the Urals would be limited to 52 divisions (with an upper limit of 58 divisions). Included in the 52 divisions would be 16 to 18 tank divisions and "several" machine-gun artillery divisions. The machine-gun artillery divisions were considered to be limited in their operational mobility and would be assigned to locations where relatively static defense was expected. The interviewee identified mountainous regions of the Transcaucasia, the Far North, and Far East as probable deployment sites for such divisions. He commented that differences between tank and combined-arms divisions would be maintained but that the difference in the number of tanks in each type division would be relatively small.

“The Military-Industrial Complex (VPK), the Ministry of Defense, and the General Staff”

The interviewee confirmed that the Ministry of Defense is fighting for control of the entire military budget to include military procurement. He stated that to date the MoD has controlled what he called the artificial budget of approximately R20 billion representing salary, quarters, and “housekeeping” expenses for the Armed Forces. The MoD is now striving to wrest control over military research and development and procurement from the military-industrial complex.

To make clear the significance of MoD’s current struggle, the interviewee explained how the weapons procurement process has worked in the past. Force development was carried out within the military-industrial complex (VPK), specifically the major design bureaus, in a process that operated essentially independently from the Defense Ministry. The MoD, moreover, had relatively little control over either the R&D or production processes. The VPK system was optimized for continuity of production rather than for innovation or force rationalization based on operational requirements. The design bureaus and military industries were rewarded for plan fulfillment and production stability rather than for conformance to operational demands generated by the General Staff or even the services. There were absolutely no incentives for the VPK to explore radically new designs or technological departures that involved high risk of failure or production delays, which were to be avoided at all costs. The military (MoD, General Staff, Services) were unable to exert any significant pressure to counter this extremely conservative, self-serving military production complex.

The interviewee cited several indicators to bolster his argument. He claimed that the Ground Forces, the service with which he has the most experience, has been forced over the years to take 1,000s of tanks that were neither ordered nor required. Moreover, the Ground Forces were issued three to four variants of various weapons rather than a single, carefully designed and produced weapon of each type because each design bureau produced its own variant to ensure continuity of production regardless of the needs of the service for which it was nominally produced. He added, angrily and resentfully by way of example, that the Soviet system couldn’t produce an “MX” tank in which designers disappeared for a decade and began with a “blank sheet” to produce a tank that captured the most advanced technologies available. The Soviet ground forces, in contrast, received large numbers of marginally improved, unnecessary different tanks with essentially the same capabilities.

“Joint Simulation Political-Military Games Conducted by the European Center for International Security”

I mentioned to the interview subject Albrecht von Muller’s interest in having the “red” side work out in some detail its estimates of probable “blue” threat assessments after completion of CFE implementation. The interviewee reacted by rejecting the idea of even continuing to consider scenarios built upon the assumption of possible conflict in Central Europe. He advocated moving on to other types of considerations of common security requirements and abandonment of such “useless” exercises.