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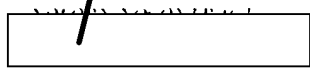
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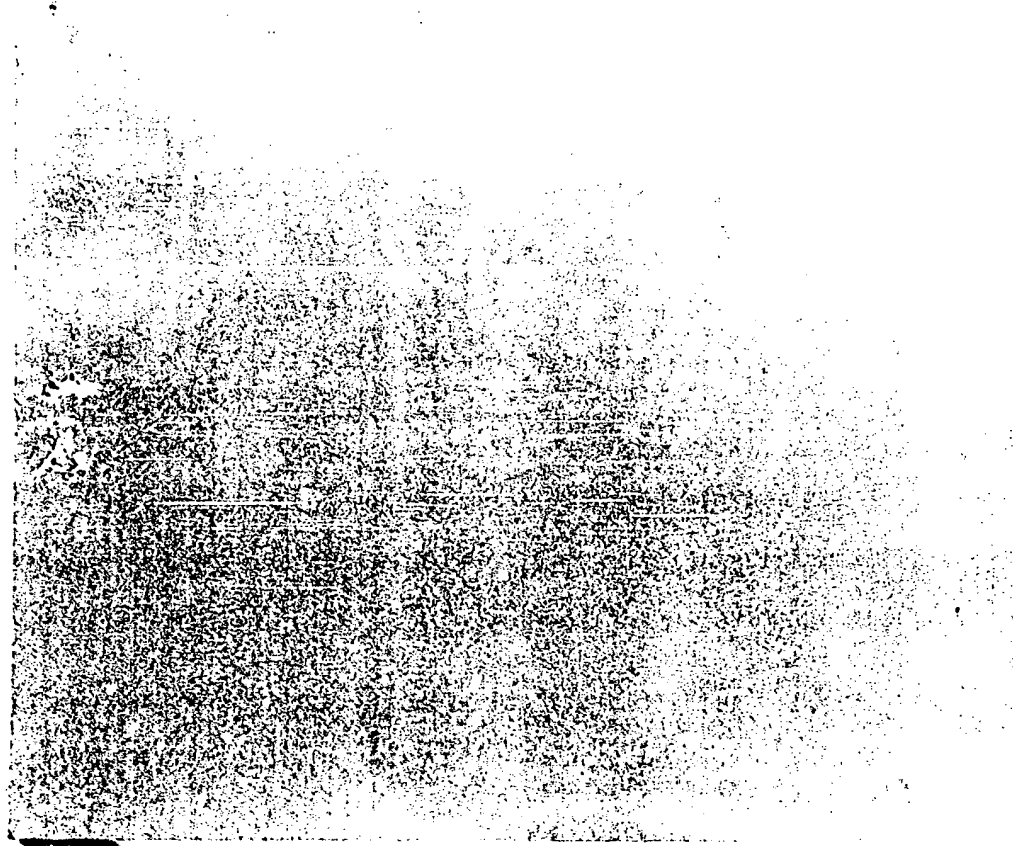


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# USSR Monthly Review

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## Outlook for Soviet Military Manpower in a Decade of Shortage

Until recently, both the economy and the military benefited from an expanding Soviet manpower supply. The 1980s, however, pose a demographic dilemma for the military—a decline in the number of young men available for either service as conscripts or training to become officers. This dilemma is further complicated by a rising proportion of ethnic minorities among these young men. To gain the flexibility necessary to deal with both the shortage and the ethnic aspects, the Soviets may increase the term of service for conscripts by six months or more. Their solution for the officer corps is less clear-cut. Whatever measures are adopted, the costs to the civilian economy will be relatively small.

### *Background*

An expanding manpower supply during the early Brezhnev years facilitated the growth of the military by 1.8 million men to its current level of 5.9 million, as shown in figure 1. Of these, 4.4 million are in the national security forces, performing tasks analogous to those of the US military, and 1.5 million are in noncombat service in the Construction, Railroad, and Internal Security Troops. The noncombat services (of which the United States has no counterpart) carry out tasks that are critical in the Soviet Union: maintaining internal order and assisting the chronically backlogged construction sector.

Only 30 percent of the military are career personnel; the rest are conscripts serving a two-year term (three years in seagoing units). Conscripts have no choice in their service assignment. The Strategic Rocket Forces and the Air Forces take the best educated, while the noncombat services are left with the least educated, the politically suspect, or the least physically fit.



Life as a conscript is notoriously harsh, and few reenlist. The limited time available for training conscripts means that career personnel do all the jobs that require special skills. The usual conscript jobs are extremely narrow and specialized. Nearly all the career military are officers, who are educated in the Soviet Union's 135 four- and five-year military colleges.

### *Impact of Demographic Trends on the Military Manpower Shortage.*

One of the demographic effects of World War II was a decline in the size of the draft-age cohort in the early 1960s.<sup>3</sup> For instance, in 1963 the number of males reaching draft age was only 40 percent of what it had been five years earlier. In the 1980s a second demographic effect is beginning to appear as the children of the small cohort born during the war themselves reach draft age. This dip will be shallower than that of the 1960s (the 1985 level will be 80 percent of the 1980 level), but it will mark a permanent turning point. The mid-1960s saw a quick return to manpower abundance, but the 1980s will not. Thus, even though the impending shortage will be less severe in the short run, its long-run effects will be more serious.

In the past the Soviet military appears to have subordinated its demand for conscripts to the changing manpower supply (see figure 2). Troop reductions in the late 1950s preceded the dramatic decline in the number of available males, and the increased conscription of the late 1960s closely followed the rapid recovery in the relevant age cohort. If the Soviets make no changes in conscription policy to accommodate the flagging supply of the 1980s, by mid-decade military manpower will have to be cut by 1.1 million men. We do not believe Moscow will permit this to happen.

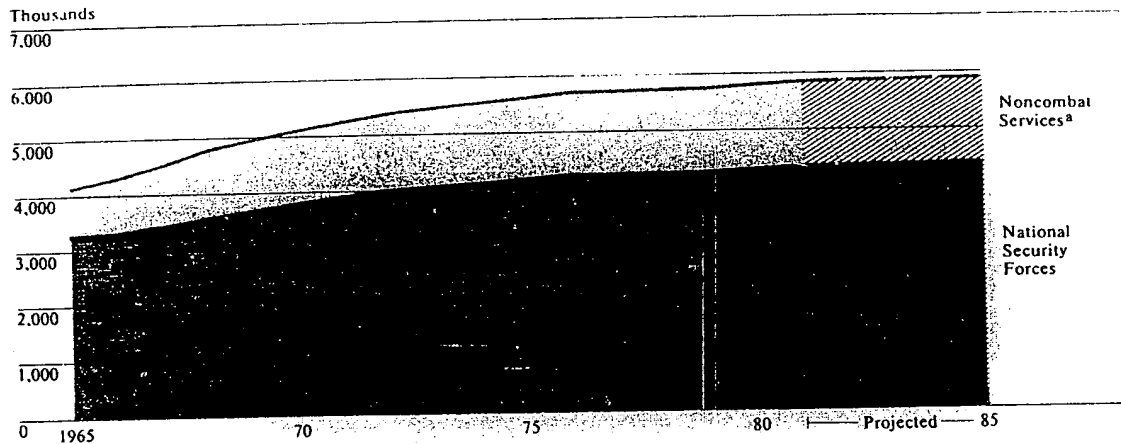
<sup>2</sup> Approximately 19 percent of armed forces personnel are officers, while 7 percent are warrant officers or career NCOs. In the US military, career NCOs (E6-9) and warrant officers are 19 percent of the armed forces.

<sup>3</sup> A cohort is the number of Soviet males who reach draft age each year. In 1968 the draft age was lowered from 19 to 18.

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Figure 1

### Soviet Military Manpower



<sup>a</sup>The Construction, Railroad, Civil Defense, and Internal Security Troops are not considered to have national security roles.

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Evidence of an official reaction to the pending manpower shortage is beginning to appear: early in 1982 the Soviets substantially reduced the number of educational deferments at many universities and institutes. As a result, many university-bound students probably will be conscripted before they complete (or even before they start) their higher education. This action will improve the quality of conscripts only marginally and will have a number of other effects:

- It will interrupt the education and delay entry into the labor force of the civilian economy's best educated workers.
- If every conscripted college student now serves the entire two years, the civilian economy will lose an additional six months' work. In the past, those who had completed higher education later served only a short tour of duty—18 months at most.\*

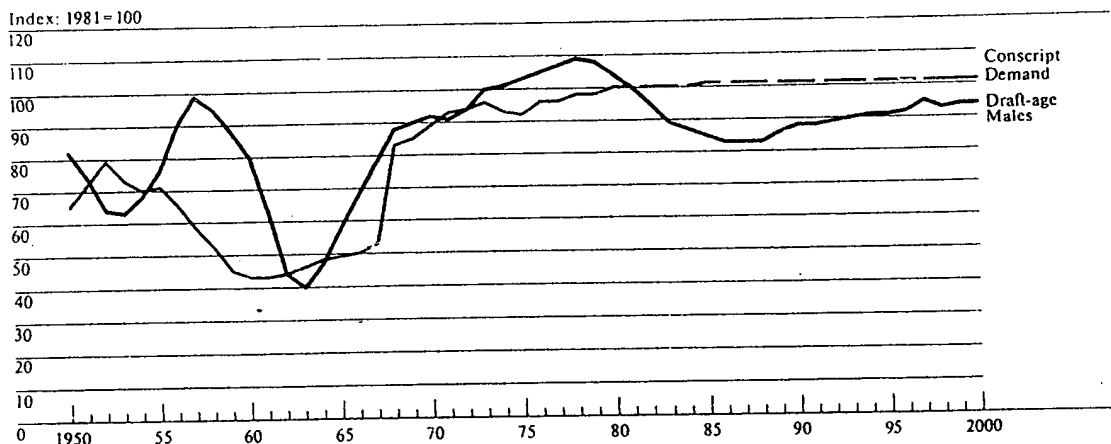
\* However, full-time college students make up only about 10 percent of a draft cohort.

*Ethnic Composition: Conscripts.* Figure 3 shows the CIA estimate of the changing ethnic composition of the draft-age (18-year-old) population. Until 1970 the ethnic shares had been stable for many years, with Slavs at about three-quarters and non-Slavs at one-quarter. By 1980, however, non-Slavs had risen to one-third of the draft-age population, and for the first time Russians were no longer in the majority. By the end of this decade, nearly 40 percent of 18-year-olds will be non-Slavic; the Slavic advantage will have slipped from 2.8 to 1 to 1.6 to 1.

The issue of ethnic "quality" is not new to the Soviet military. The Soviets already have a mechanism for absorbing ethnic minorities. Estimates of the size and ethnic makeup of the noncombat services demonstrate that they serve the purpose of an ethnic "sponge," exposing minorities to political indoctrination and military discipline while preserving Slavic dominance of the national security forces.

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Figure 2  
Conscript Demand and Draft-Age Males



Note: Conscript demand after 1985 is assumed to be constant.

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In 1982 the noncombatant services will absorb the majority of all non-Slavic conscripts. The share of non-Slavs in the national security forces is currently about one-seventh, even though they are one-third of the draft-age population. If the Soviets keep the proportion of non-Slavs in the noncombat services the same as it is now and if overall manning levels remain constant, the proportion of non-Slavic conscripts in the national security forces will rise from one-seventh to one-fourth. This will still be less than their percentage in the draft-age population, but it will be a significant change in the composition of the forces.

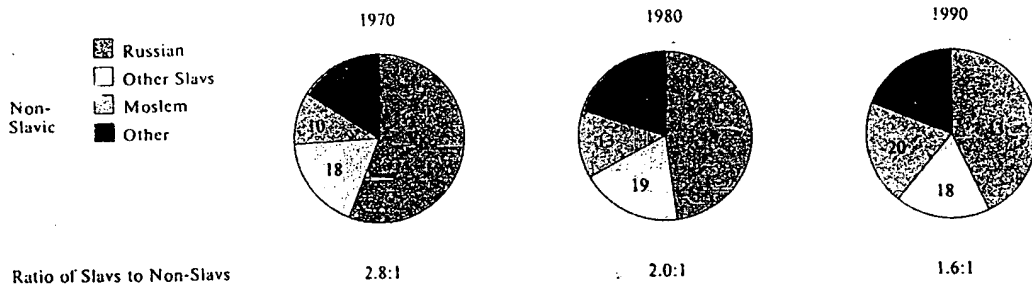
**Ethnic Composition: Officers.** Although the ethnic makeup of conscripts has been changing, the officer corps has remained a largely Russian preserve. Probably 80 percent of officers are Russian, 5 to 10 percent are non-Slavic, and the rest are of non-Russian Slavic origin. There are no official ethnic barriers to admission to the national system of military colleges, but a candidate must pass difficult

exams, including one in Russian literature. Minorities are typically at a disadvantage. In addition, the strenuous efforts that raised the proportion of college-educated officers from 41 percent in 1973 to 68 percent in 1980 probably increased the ethnic homogeneity of the officer corps.

As the number of college entrants and the share of Russians among them decline in the 1980s, it will be difficult to maintain both the high educational standards and the ethnic exclusivity of the officer corps. We estimate that in 1960 less than one-tenth of all male Russian college graduates became active (as opposed to reserve) officers. In 1980 this was about one-fifth, and by 1990 it probably will be one-third. Competition between the military and civilian sectors for the highly educated Russians is bound to intensify.

**Figure 3**  
**Ethnic Composition of 18-Year-Olds in the Soviet Union**

Percent



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**Soviet Options: Conscripts**

**Force Reduction.** Only a permanent reduction of roughly 1 million in the size of the armed forces would be sufficient to overcome the shortage in the mid-to-late 1980s. Such a decline would have a one-time economic value, representing a 20-percent increment to the net growth of the civilian labor force expected during the decade.<sup>3</sup> Of course, draft-age youths are largely unskilled and inexperienced, and their value in terms of income in civilian pursuits is relatively low. Most would make only minimum wage, recently raised to 80 rubles per month, while the average civilian wage is 170 rubles per month.

From a political and military viewpoint, the disadvantages of force reduction are enormous. It would:

- Require a dramatic shift in defense philosophy and foreign policy.
- Disrupt costly operating and procurement processes.

<sup>3</sup> See SOV 82-10017 (Confidential), February 1982, *The Soviet Labor Market in the 1980s*.

- Rapidly increase the proportion of minorities in the national security force, unless conscription concentrated on Russians.

We believe force reductions are not an option currently under serious consideration by Soviet leaders, even though they did adopt this solution in the late 1950s.

**Limited Deferments.** In a country already practicing universal conscription, there is little slack to be found in deferments, and not nearly enough to offset the manpower shortage. We estimate that under previous Soviet standards, between 10 and 15 percent of the members of a draft cohort avoided service altogether by reason of education, family hardship, or health. As noted, educational deferments have been recently tightened, and further major gains from tightening are not practical.

*Service Term Extension.* We estimate that a six-month extension of the current two-year term of service would maintain military manpower at its present level. Conscript rates would still be near the maximum feasible, but within historical levels. A six-month extension would incur economic costs: it would delay entry into the labor force and cause all the costs of the declining 18-year-old cohorts to be borne by the civilian economy. The main advantage of an extension would be that military manpower levels would remain constant. In addition, by allowing the noncombat "sponge" to remain its present size, an extension of service time provides flexibility for dealing with ethnic shifts in the draft-age population.

*Soviet Options: Officers*

Unlike conscript service, the choice of a military career is voluntary. This sharply limits the Soviet leaders' options for maintaining the ethnic and educational standards of the officer corps. The tight labor market of the 1980s will offer college graduates a wider choice among civilian occupations, and the military may be forced to accept officer candidates with less schooling.

Half measures to relieve the problem might include encouraging officers to stay on active duty longer, creating slots for more retired or reserve officers, and further encouraging military "spirit" in high school youth. These half measures are unlikely to be effective. There are, however, three longstanding policies which might be pursued more vigorously, though they also have weaknesses.

*Intensified Ethnic Assimilation.* The Soviets might step up their efforts to promote ethnic assimilation via Russian language instruction in school. This longstanding policy has achieved some gains, but there is widespread agreement that it has failed to erase ethnicity as a fundamental cleavage in Soviet society.

*Increased Prestige.* The Soviets could also continue trying to raise the prestige of a military career. As the demand for better educated officers has grown, so too have efforts to appeal to a more sophisticated youth.

Nevertheless, surveys of occupational prestige in the Soviet Union suggest that while officers enjoy considerable prestige generally, young people do not see a military career as especially attractive. Minorities are likely to be particularly resistant to increased recruitment efforts. They are reluctant to relocate from their home republics; they have been less likely to choose college majors in technical fields of interest to the military; and in many cases they are all too familiar with ethnic prejudice in the services, from the military experience of friends and relatives.

*Increased Pay and Privileges.* Finally, the Soviets may consider increasing officer pay or perquisites. Two factors weaken a potential monetary incentive effect, however: military pay scales are classified information and are not widely known in the Soviet Union; and in any case, consumer purchasing power already far exceeds the availability of consumer goods. More appealing to a Soviet civilian would be the perquisites, particularly the guaranteed access to scarce housing. However, such benefits are not the exclusive preserve of officers. For example, a youth wary of the hardships of military life could obtain the same benefits as a civilian party member.

