

**Lecture 6: The Soviet Union II -- Transition, Attempted Coup, and the post-Soviet Military**

**Week 6 Reading Summaries**

A. Meyer, Stephen, "How the Threat (and the coup) Collapsed: The Politicization of the Soviet Military", *International Security* Vol. 16 (3) (Winter 1991/92): pp. 5-38.

Politicization of the Soviet military in the 80s was the reason for fractionalization and failure of the coup (much of the army didn't support or actively opposed) of August 1991. Politicization enabled by [glasnost](#), collapse of the communist party, rise of semi-democratic legislatures with officers running in elections. This was motivated by a rise of anti-military (Afghanistan), decrease in the officers' standard of living, nationalism and an increase in power of republics, and a threat of dissolution of union. Solutions that were proposed include: volunteer army, a ban on politics in the army, or a reliance on nuclear weapons. Good point on generation gap in the military. Old officers were communist while the junior officers were with the democratic opposition in the 1989 election.

B. Holloway, David, "State, Society, and the Military under Gorbachev" *International Security* (Winter 1989/90) 14 (3) (Winter 1989/90): pp. 5-24.

Post analysis focused on the MPA. Now, there's a rising importance on public opinion → demilitarization under Gorbachev vs. Brezhnev build-up. Examples: deferment granted to students in 1989, talk of military reform in 1988, Baltic republics passed a law limiting the deployment of their recruits (in reaction to hazing), budget overview.

C. Mendeloff, David, "Explaining Russian Military Quiescence: The 'Paradox of Disintegration' and the Myth of a Military Coup," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 27, no. 3 (1994): 225-246.

Paradox of disintegration: because of the decline in military discipline and organization, the military underestimated its capacity to conduct a coup even though 1991-1993. Russia/ USSR had the textbook preconditions. Argument based on Russian officer opinion surveys.

D. Lepingwell, John, "Soviet Civil-Military Relations and the August Coup," *World Politics* 44 (1992): 539-72.

Huntington (objective control) vs. Kolkowicz (subjective control). Objective control implies common values and no reaction in times of power transition. Subjective control implies divergent values and the military is dangerous during times of transition. Lepingwell argues that the objective model is closer to the late Soviet situation. In the years before the collapse of the military, it was split by politicization, a requirement to keep ethnic order, and incentives to intervention versus professionalism. In the presidential election, the military gave a lot of support for conservative [Nikolai Ryzhkov](#) (vs. Yeltsin) but not for ultra-conservative. Later, coup supporters Makashov and Zhinirovsky. A decline in Gorbachev's authority paved the way for a coup, but its orchestrators underestimated Yeltsin's popularity and commitment to democracy within the military.

The motive was probably national unity and professional autonomy then signing of union treaty. Support for the coup among top military leaders was mixed. The junior officers seemed more neutral (like elections). MPA actually not against the coup. MPA became identified with military professional interesting. The objective model is closer to junior officer stance. At first, ambivalent, eventually rallied against it. Post-coup: failure of CIS and creation of national militaries (Russia 1992). Russia needs a strong civilian government and party system to control its military.

F. Blank, Stephen, "The Great Exception: Russian Civil-Military Relations," *World Affairs* 165 (2002): 91-105.

Russia failed to reform the military. Yeltsin let the military be autonomous and have subjective control, the Soviet professionalism was gone after years of decline. The state needs to lead the reform and the military can't do it internally.

## Lecture

Aug. 1991      Coup, military intervention  
Dec. 1991      End of USSR. Military no intervention, sides with end  
Oct. 1993      Red-Brown coalition of communists and nationalist against Yeltsin policies took over parliament (White House). Military intervenes on Yeltsin's side to end crisis.

(Parliament had been elected in a semi-open election before the end of the USSR.

We got views across time frames from the reading:

Pre 1991      Desch  
                 Holloway – '88-'89  
1991 Coup    Meyer-'91  
                 Lepingwell-'91  
Post-'91      Desch  
                 Lepingwell-'94  
                 Mendeloff-'94  
                 Blank- 2002

Desch coding: during the Cold War, the external threat increased, Perestroika both high. (Sides with Colton). Indeterminate during perestroika. Desch sees the military and the civil on the same page, and need for reform of the military to be scientific/technological revolution.

Holloway, p. 22, reaction of military to perestroika as appearing in soviet military history journal.

Compare Ricks book on the US:

Huntington-the subjective parallels structures, eg: MPA. Objective=professionalism to deal with the civil-military divergence separation. Ethos arguments.  
Janowitz=military-civil convergence.

On Holloway: republics passing laws is not de-militarization, it is militarization of republics. Excerpt from military journal may just indicate that the military can now criticize in public, good old days may be a myth due to censorship.

### **Coup (Aug. '91)**

Useful to go hour by hour in analyzing them. The Union treaty is going to be signed, will change the relationship between the center and republics. Decentralization in terms of tax and education, Baltic states and Armenia wouldn't sign the treaty, Lithuania had already declared independent. Gorbachev on vacation in Crimea, leader is isolated.

Aug. 18, 5pm

Gorbachev's Chief of Staff, Defense Minister (General), and Deputy Head of the KGB lead the coup. These people had been hand-picked by Gorbachev (Soviet loyalists). State committee for state of emergency. <-- typical buzz word, coup makers like salvation language.

Want Union treaty not to be signed, Gorbachev resigned and suspended democracy. **At 7:30:** plotters leave—probably believed that Gorbachev would go along—political misjudgment.

Those in Moscow, Kryuchkov (KGB head), Boris Pugo (Interior Ministry head), Yanayev (Vice-President of USSR), Pavlov (Prime Minister of USSR), and Yazov (Defense ministry head). This is civilian led. Kryuchkov and Pugo were key.

Yeltsin, in Moscow suburb, is not arrested. Second mistake.

First defection at night, general head of paratroops made head of the Soviet Military after the coup—there's a payoff, if you guess right—but then had to go into Chechnya. Order to KGB special unit to arrest Yeltsin either failed or ignored (this was claimed post-facto).

Opposing sides maintain contact within institutions.

Russia Supreme Soviet convenes, 10 demands to emergency committee, release Gorbachev, and allow press to circulate.

Yeltsin officially condemns. Military cuts off communications to Baltic (resistance expected), tanks in Moscow.

**Aug 19, noon:** Yeltsin climbs on to a tank and declares the Committee unlawful, requires return to constitution. Major issue in coups: Coups are unconstitutional but some claim country was down the drain.

[Today Djindjic was assassinated. He claimed fall of Milosevic was a revolution and legal procedures didn't have to be followed to extradite him or make reforms. Considered democratic by West vs. Kostanica who insisted on legal procedure.]

Issue in federal systems: Russian sec and civil leadership was at odds with Soviet. "not a hand will be raised against constitution and elected president of Russia." 7,500 person crowd, first defection of 10 tanks, many younger people rush to government building.

Most newspapers operating. KGB colonel resigns. Coup plotters convene. Debate storming White House (Russian parliament).

Karpukhin and Lebed (paratroops) claim there will be a KGM special unit, unacceptable casualties in such an operation. Cost of failure: treason. Conscript army→ threat of defection most from Moscow.

Standoff, people giving flowers to soldiers (images of US-Vietnam war). In the evening, barricades were raised—resistors wanted to raise cost of storming. Yanayev places Moscow under a state of emergency and in a press conference said, “We are facing situation of multiple rule. There’s no other alternative must restore law and order and launch war against criminal underworld.”

Reports had no fear, asked questions with parallel to Pinochet. Hedging his bets, deputy chairman of TV defied Interior Minister Leningrad forbids entrance of troops. A lot of defections, KGB offices tip off people to avoid arrest.

**Aug. 20:** barricades around White House set up communication network and fax machines in case TV would be taken over.

Leningrad navy base and paratrooper academy defect. Third battalion KGB special forces, sub commander in East. Threat of civil war. Yazov withdraws paratroops as unreliable. “deploy but don’t shoot, order” because can’t identify defectors. Yeltsin calls strikes but not followed. No massive support for either. In Lithuania, population rushed to parliament building. In regions some support, but by the third day, most go to Yeltsin.

200,000 rally with Yeltsin and Shevardnadze. Coup plotters break up in hospital. Only international support from Cuba, Liberia, Iraq, and North Korea. Bush supports Yeltsin in a press conference. Heard of air force, tells Yazov to back off, Yazov fears air force will attack the army. Air force and paratrooper leaders decline not to use force. Yanayev decides it is futile to attack.

**Wed, Aug 21:** 3 civilians were killed in an accident. They were run over by tanks. 1am-5am, expect attack on the White House and then the Defense Board meets and decides to withdraw troops from Moscow. Conspirators go to meet with Gorbachev, and he refuses to meet with them. Super Soviet and Communist party declare the committee illegal. Gorbachev assigns one of the plotters as head of military because he doesn’t know who was in the plot. Yeltsin in charge, tears down statue of KGB founder. Forces Gorbachev to read on TV about the coup plotters—all his appointees.

Late on Saturday, Gorbachev quits the party after he tried to salvage it. Yeltsin had a 74% approval rating and 4% for Gorbachev.

Meyer interpretation: politicization before lead to the divisions→failure of coup. Generational split vs. US Southern influence.

Lepingwell objective model is closer but doesn’t recognize the difference between generations. Senior in favor of conservative leadership and the junior members were in favor of democratization. Not an inherently interventionist military. Not a *sui generis* case, similar to other coups.

Post ‘91

Desch codes low-low. Fudged coding because otherwise would need to have coup by his theory?

Mendeloff: Think the military can't do much about the threat to their organization because they don't think they have the capabilities. Thinks politicization a bit overblown and failure of the '91 coup is a historical barrier for future coups. Situation only worse post '91 in terms of army unity, military resources, and military unity, etc.

Lepingwell: p. 117 and summary.

We discuss: what has prevented another coup post '91? Janowitz: probably society looks like military. Society poor, conscription army, no gain or incentive to take over the state to improve your situation. New York Times Russia thought to eliminate draft. Good or bad idea? Comparing it Brazil, Brazil is a large country with GDP/capita similar to that of Russia. Will Russia have coups like Brazil if it goes professional?

Assessment: Was the MPA important? Didn't seem so in the end. Is the USSR a special case because of communism?

Student: Now Putin is in power, doesn't look very different from what the military would want. Put military in charge of large areas on the same page as civil-military.