

## ARMED FORCES AND THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE SOVIET UNION

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Despite the Armed Forces' actual political influence on taking political decisions was relatively limited in the mid-1980s, it still represented one of the most reliable mainstays of the Soviet regime. That is why it was important for the appointment of Mikhail Gorbachev as the Secretary General of the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in March 1985, that the military accepted the change in the country's leadership affirmatively, which strengthened Gorbachev's position. Gorbachev's positive acceptance by the military also occurred due to his policy aimed at overcoming the economic stagnation and speeding up modernisation of the Soviet economy, as it was declared at the plenary session of CC CPSU in April 1985. A sustainable technical progress offered by Gorbachev was to ensure gradual modernisation for the Armed Forces as well. It was absolutely necessary, because, in the 1980s, the military's function began to be limited plainly to a mere consumption of human and material resources. Huge funds were spent on maintaining the Armed Forces, which inappropriately impaired on Soviet economy, totally regardless of the deepening economic and social crisis.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, effectiveness of military expenditures was very disputable in

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<sup>1</sup> In extensive publication "Sovětskaja vojennaja mošč ot Stalina do Gorbačova" (Izdatělskij dom "Vojennyj parad", Moscow, 1999) were published the following data on defence expenditures in the USSR during 1960–1990 period (Chapter 3, "Planirovanije i finansirovanije vojennoj promyšlennosti v SSSR", p. 105):

many instances and, for example, the military-industrial complex frequently supplied to the Armed Forces low-quality military hardware. The military leadership, represented in the second half of the 1980s by Chief of General Staff Akhromeyev, did not oppose certain reduction of the expenditures initially, which was to be one of the factors of economic sti-

	1960	1970	1980	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
GDP (billion roubles) National Budget	203.1	397.6	661.9	777.0	798.6	825.0	863.3	924.1	963.0
Expenditures (billion roubles)	73.1	154.6	294.6	386.5	417.1	430.9	459.5	481.4	510.1
Defence Expenditures * (billion roubles)	15.3	29.2	48.9	63.4	67.7	72.7	76.9	77.3	71.0
Share of the Defence expenditures to national budget expenditures (%)	20.9	18.9	16.6	16.4	16.2	16.9	16.7	16.1	13.9
Defence expenditures ratio to GDP (%)	7.5	7.3	7.4	8.3	8.4	8.8	8.9	8.4	7.5

\* The authors of Chapter 3 J. D. Maslyukov and J. S. Glubokov claim these data were published for the very first time. It includes expenditures for procurement of weapons and military hardware, scientific, research and engineering works and expenditures of other branches intended for the defence. The overall data on defence expenditures were top secret until 1988. Only a limited group of people was aware of the data (leadership of the National Planning Committee and selected members of Central Bureau of CC CPSU). The data were not permitted to be type-written and were added to the documents by authorised personnel in hand-writing.

The stated data on defence expenditures in the 1987–1990 period generally match the data published in Russian version of annual report of the Stockholm Institute for Peace Research Internationally. (See Yezhegodnik SIPRI 1998. Vooruženije, rozoruženije i međunarodnaja bezopasnost /Russian version/, Nauka, Moscow, 1998, p. 258.)

Year	Military Expenditures (billion roubles in current prices)	Gross Domestic Product (Billion roubles in current prices)	Military Expenditure (percentage in GDP)	Military Expenditures (Percentage in the overall national budget)
1987	69.4	825	8.4	16.1
1988	72.8	875	8.3	15.8
1989	76.9	943	8.2	15.9
1990	70.7	1000	7.1	13.8

mulation, which could furnish a more extensive modernisation in turn. However, confronted with considerably crisis-like condition of the Soviet economy, Gorbachev was forced at last to opt for a policy of military expenditures cuts, because it was the expenditure, which constituted the significantly hampering factor undermining the possibilities of Soviet economy development. In this respect, the problem also consisted in an uneven orientation to heavy and more particularly armaments industry, which drew off basically the whole technologic, science and research potential<sup>2</sup>. In the whole complex, this put a considerable obstacle to the effort to carry out essential economic reforms. Therefore, Gorbachev, together with the “progressive” section of the new political leadership represented especially by Minister of Foreign Affairs Shevardnadze and CC CPSU Secretary Yakovlev, endeavoured to put through and implement in the practice the process of military expenditures reduction<sup>3</sup>, downsizing of military personnel numbers and conversion of armaments industry<sup>4</sup>, the bottom line of which was to acquire greater aid from abroad as well as investments critical for modernisation of the Soviet economy. Simultaneously, Gorbachev and his reform colleagues decided to put fundamental doctrine issues under a review. This meant chiefly abandoning the offensive posture withheld so far, on which the Soviet military strategy was based, and to replace with the principle of “defensive sufficiency”, i.e. maintaining the military on the levels posing a maximum risk to an enemy possibly attacking the USSR<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> For instance according to Valentin Pavlov, Soviet Prime Minister in 1991 and one of the leaders of the coup d'état attempt in August, approximately 25 billion roubles were allocated yearly to science and development in the USSR's national budget, but roundabout 20 billion out of that were allocated to institutes and factories of the military-industrial complex. (See Pavlov, V., *Av gust iznutri. Gorbačov – putč.*, Moscow, 1993, p. 15.)

<sup>3</sup> The defence expenditures in real calculation in the 1980s reached its peak in 1987 (16.9% share in the USSR's budget). Since that year the amount of defence expenditures began to drop. The expenditures were lower by 2.2% in 1990 (see chart in the note No. 1 above). Real data on defence expenditures in the last year of USSR's existence (1991) are not available, according to the said SIPRI Annual Report due to very unstable economic situation of the time.

<sup>4</sup> The goal of the conversion was to achieve a transfer of military-industrial complex's extensive capabilities in favour of the civilian production, which was, inter alia, to help to secure bigger supplies of consumer goods to the market. However, this goal was not achieved in the conditions of central planning.

<sup>5</sup> Frequently the term “Non-offensive defence” is used as an equivalent to the 0 “Defensive sufficiency”.

Such policy obviously meant further diminishing of military's influence in the whole complex of the domestic and foreign policy. The military's leadership accepted these Gorbachev's steps with distrust and attempted to deal with them, *inter alia*, by repeatedly emphasising that the changes taking place cannot be implemented at the expense of the Soviet Union's military security. In this context, the top military leadership tried to interpret the "defensive sufficiency" principle themselves. They came up with a thesis, that there is no big discrepancy between the defensive doctrine and maintaining of a large offensive force. But Gorbachev largely disrupted this conclusion through a range of disarmament measures, which obviously contradicted the vision of military leaders. Critical steps in this direction was signing of the Treaty on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces between the USSR and the USA in December 1987, which placed an obligation on the Soviet Union to withdraw approx. 1,500 already deployed SS-20<sup>6</sup> missiles as well as Gorbachev's initiative of December 1988, when he announced in a speech given on the UN ground a unilateral personnel downsizing of the military by 500 thousand members. This step, of which the top military leaders were virtually uninformed, probably affected the relationship of the military or the whole military-industrial complex vis-a-vis Gorbachev most negatively. Nevertheless, this inimical position, until the August 1991 coup attempt, did not go on into an open confrontation with the Armed Forces commanders.

Why it was not the case, is determined by the fact that such a confrontation in the prevailing system was not possible in a way. On the one hand, Gorbachev was aware of fact that the military's leadership opposed him and the reforms he pushed through in the domestic and foreign policy, on the other hand he realised though, that the military represents a major power in the society. To fall out with them completely, under circumstances, when he needed to keep the situation in the country under control, was not an interest of his. The military itself was strongly brought up over the decades of the existence of the Soviet regime towards an absolute loyalty and subordination to the Communist party. Any attempt by the military to interfere with the loyalty could end up very badly for the Armed Forces' leadership and they knew it. However, Gorbachev committed two serious mistakes in personnel policy, for which he had to pay final-

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<sup>6</sup> The Agreement eliminated a significant disproportion vis-a-vis the US in this category, which is confirmed by the fact that the American party was to withdraw only 350 missiles.

ly during the coup attempt in August 1991. Upon the “Rust Affair”<sup>7</sup> in 1987, he appointed Marshall Dmitriy Yazov as the Minister of Defence and, after Marshall Akhromeyev resigned of the post of the Chief of General Staff (he resigned in a protest to Gorbachev’s initiative concerning the above-mentioned reduction of Armed Forces members by 500 thousand) he appointed Colonel-General Mikhail Moiseyev as the new Chief of General Staff. Thus, strongly conservative military officials assumed high posts in the Armed Forces, who basically entirely opposed Gorbachev’s policy. It is a markedly big paradox that the only actual ally of Gorbachev’s, Marshall Akhromeyev, who was second to none in realising the crisis of the Soviet system, and tried to attain a favourable position for the Soviet Union during a number of disarmament negotiations, critical for implementation of political and economic reforms, left the military’s leadership<sup>8</sup>.

Nevertheless, Gorbachev’s personnel affairs measures could also be a signal that regardless of his absolute power he did not know exactly how big resistance prevailed within the military against his reforms, which was due to the military self-containment vis-a-vis the community. Gorbachev attempted, admittedly scoring some success, to initiate a public discussion on a variety of issues connected with the role and existence of the military. Thus, the military found themselves under a strong pressure of the society, which the leadership of the military of the time referred to as “a massive anti-military campaign”. Obviously, this was a completely extraordinary happening throughout the whole existence of the Soviet Union. The range of the discussion was very broad, and various entities joined it. Officials of major scientific institutes – especially the Institute of Global Economy and International Relations, Institute of the United States and Canada and Institute of the Global Socialism’s Economy presented their positions on the issues of the USSR’s security policy and on the need for reforms. For instance, in September 1988, popular magazine “Viek XX i Mir” came up with a radical reform aimed at restructuring the

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<sup>7</sup> In June 1987, young German pilot Matthias Rust flew through the Soviet airspace with a sport aircraft and landed undisturbed in Moscow centre near the Red Square. The affair resulted in recalling the Commander of Air Defence General Koldunov and retiring of then Minister of Defence Marshall Sokolov.

<sup>8</sup> Upon leaving the post of the Chief of General Staff, Marshall Akhromeyev became a military advisor to M. Gorbachev. In the time of the coup attempt in August 1991, he committed suicide.

Armed Forces. The plan was based on conclusions that the military was not to consist of career soldiers and conscripts, but rather made up of local territorial units – armed and trained for defence purposes and of a central small-size all-professional mobile body<sup>9</sup>. Even notwithstanding the improbability of implementing such a reform, that was probably the very first alternative proposal of military reform available to the general public during the whole period of the USSR existence. Media played an important role in the discussion, conveying an open debate of the condition of the military as well as possible changes within. The public was struck by information on actual state of the situation in Afghanistan and release of frequently outrageous instances of conscripts' bad position. As the military was gradually losing its privileged position and dismantling of bureaucratic structures took place in the community, a broader social movement occurred in the Armed Forces as well as its immediate social environment. Movements having vocational and political nature came into being, within which mostly career soldiers were associated, but also citizens in relation to the military. For instance the Association for social protection of armed forces members and their families (for which "Stit" abbreviation is used), lead by Lieutenant-Colonel Viktor Ourazhtsev, which focused on providing social security to the career soldiers, especially to those who found themselves homeless after their units were withdrawn from the Central and Eastern Europe. Another organisation was the Military Mothers Committee (these days acting under the name "Association of Russia's Committees of Military Mothers"), which chiefly concentrated on protection of interests of conscripts currently in the army, who were often confronted to inhuman conditions of the military service. In November 1989, "Officers' assemblies" were re-established, which had been a traditional military institute in the Tsar army. Apparently, the social movement in the military of the time was largely hampered by the Party's monopoly in the Armed Forces. The Head Political Administration and the subordinated authorities gradually lost control of the situation in the military, which indicated a step-by-step disintegration of the Soviet power structures. In addition to that, Article 6 of the Soviet Constitution laying down the Party's leading role was abolished at the 3rd assembly of Peoples Deputies in March 1990. Nevertheless, the political bodies, although with a limited authority, remained active within the military, which

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<sup>9</sup> See *Viek XX i Mir*, No. 9/1988.

was permitted, inter alia, by the fact that the Party's leading role was abolished by President's directive in June 1991 only. That is why the Head Political Administration could be re-organised into the Army-wide Party Committee after the XXVIII CPSU assembly in July 1990.

But there existed also strong conservative powers in the military refusing both political and economic changes. Particular understanding of such powers' activities can be gained through the acting of the Assembly of the Peoples Deputies – Russia's new top representation body since 1989, which was elected with a substantially greater scope of democracy than the previous Soviet parliaments<sup>10</sup>. Precisely in the time of the venue of the 2nd Assembly of Peoples Deputies in December 1989, a group of deputies called Soyuz (Union) was established. Initiator of the group's establishment was Colonel Viktor Alskins<sup>11</sup>, a Lithuanian, who was a tough adversary to Gorbachev's policy. At the end of 1990, Soyuz was supported by approximately seven hundred and thus became the greatest group of the Assembly. The political programme of Soyuz stemmed from the idea that a democratisation of the society was unacceptable, because it undermined the strength of the Soviet Union and that is why it was important to do away with those pushing through democracy. Soyuz also refused any reform of integrated federal union state and larger independence of the union republics. At the same time, a strong pro-Russia nationalism was perceptible in the Soyuz's programme. Definitely, the influence of this grouping was not insignificant, which was confirmed e.g. by the fact that, under the pressure of Soyuz, close Gorbachev's colleagues resigned from their posts – Minister of Interior Bakatin and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze. At the same time, Alskins openly admitted during the assembly venue what was his creed:

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<sup>10</sup> Assembly of Peoples Deputies totalled 2250 members – members of parliament. Its venue was to take place once or twice a year. Election of deputies was conducted on the basis of dividing them into three categories – in the first category 750 MPs were elected in the so-called national area districts, in the second one 750 MPs in republic districts and in the third category 750 MPs were elected from social institutions (also from CPSU and the Komsomol). The assembly then elected a 542-member Highest Soviet of two chambers – a Parliament in permanent session. The first and simultaneously the last elections of the Assembly of USSR Peoples Deputies took place in March 1989.

<sup>11</sup> Alskins' curriculum vitae is definitely worth mentioning. His grandfather was Commander of Soviet Air Force during the period of J. V. Stalin's government. In 1937, he fell victim to Stalin's repression. Therefore, Alskins' father grew up in an orphanage, but regardless of that he became an orthodox communist. Viktor Alskins became a member of CPSU in 1973 and was elected peoples deputy in Military Institute in Vilnius.

“Of course, I am a reactionary. I am a reactionary and an imperialist”<sup>12</sup>. It was not surprising then that people started to refer to Alskins under a nickname “Black Colonel”. It does not come as a surprise, that Soyuz enjoyed a support of the military’s “hard core”, which included a number of top officers and generals of the Soviet Army. The military leadership dissociated themselves from extremist positions of Soyuz, but did not prevent it to act function within the military in any way.

The existence and activities of Soyuz thus markedly strongly signalled the fact the military is rather discontent with the situation in the country. But it was also evident from the party of the military’s leadership, which began to realise the major danger – gradual termination of the power and ideological monopoly of CPSU, which immediately entailed a threat of the USSR disintegration and thereby also of the Soviet Army. Ever more present was the frustration spawned by the lapse of superpower position of the Soviet Union, which especially linked to the loss of positions in the Central and Eastern Europe. The military’s leadership responded to the situation in two levels – by a return to Russian nationalism ideology (which was not overly difficult, in a situation when the overwhelming majority of the military’s commanding corps was of a Russian origin) and by attempting to preserve the existence of the USSR especially through all possible political influence, but also utilising power tools available to the military.

Many top military officials concluded that the influence of the Communist ideology started to disappear and that the ideology cannot represent a means that would agglutinate the military from the viewpoint of ideology. They responded to the situation by deciding to re-new the notion the traditions of the Tsarist Russia and Tsarist army. In a specialised periodical of the Ministry of Defence *Voyenno-istoricheskiy* journal, many articles started to be featured, in which the military was eulogised as the backbone of the nation and a sacred institution with a thousand-year history, which is professed to save the country from a decline. The military did not present itself as the bulwark of Marxism-Leninism, but appealed to the security and fame of the Russian state. Consequently, the trend was followed by all military magazines and newspapers, which started to publish articles on the Tsar period on a broader scale and in a more positive light as well. The curricula of political

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<sup>12</sup> Murray, D., „Demokracie despotů“, G PLUS G Publishing House, Prague, 1997, p. 82.



training no longer included Marxism-Leninism, and, instead of that, lessons were held on Tsar Army in the classes<sup>13</sup>. However, this “new” Russian nationalism became a warning signal for those Soviet federal republics, which began to strive for achieving of national independence in the second half of 1980s.

Naturally, the military’s leadership was aware of such effort, because it was in direct relation with the military. “Separatism” of some republics, especially on the periphery of the USSR, firstly began to make itself felt in performance of conscription. Chiefly the patriotic parts of republics’ political representations, whose influence increased gradually, refused the existing Soviet practice of sending recruits for conscription beyond their home territory. This effort was led by Estonia, whose top legislation authority passed a resolution in 1989 on claiming the rights of Estonian citizens in Estonia only. Some other republics followed the process next year after. Gradually, the Soviet Army recruit system started to disintegrate into individual republics, which was also connected with the growing number of recruits who dodged the drafting<sup>14</sup>. At last, several republics completely abolished recruitment to the Soviet Army on their territories – Estonia in April, Armenia in May, Lithuania in August and Moldova in September 1990. The Ukraine went even further – in July, the Ukrainian Parliament passed a resolution stipulating that Ukrainian troops cannot be deployed out of the republic into locations of ethnic conflicts. Likewise, it was very disconcerting for military leadership that a process of establishing domestic armed forces already started in some countries that were most striving for achievement of independence. For instance, the Georgi-

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<sup>13</sup> During the existence of the USSR, official “rehabilitation” of Tsarist Russia and its army took place for the first time in the years of the Great National Liberation War in 1941-1945. In that period, Stalin replaced the Marxism-Leninism ideology with ideology of democratic anti-fascist fight. The reign of Nicholas II was not to be referred to as a sanguine police regime, Ivan Grozny became hero again, which was also supported by a grand movie shot regardless of the tough years of the war. Other legendary of the Russian history were brought back – Alexandr Nievsky, Dimitriy Donsky, Kuzma Minin, Dimitriy Pozharskiy, Alexandr Suvorov and Mikhail Kutuzov. Based on Stalin’s decision, military decorations of Suvorov, Kutuzov, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, Alexandr Nievsky, Nachimov and Ushakov were introduced. Stalin realised that necessary to support Russians’ pride in their history in the war situation, which was to be done also through publications on excellent generals distributed to the servicemen in the front lines. The return to the traditions of the Tsarist Army also appeared through the fact, that shoulder straps of Tsarist Army (so-called “pogon” returned onto the uniforms.

<sup>14</sup> In this context, Georgia can stand as an example, where 94% of recruits appeared for recruitment procedure in 1989, whereas in the following year 1990 only 11% of them turned up.

an Parliament decided in December 1990 to develop Georgian National Guard and, in January 1990, passed a resolution introducing compulsory conscription. Peoples Fronts in the Baltic republics, which constituted major political platform of independence there, put forward a position, that the Soviet Army, whose troops were located in the Baltic region, is an army of occupation.

The military leadership's reaction to those tokens of separatism was naturally very sharp. Chief military officials realised that trends were occurring, which could result in a split of multi-national Soviet Army. They expressed their fears frequently in the public too. During 1990, a number of articles of these officials warning against disintegration of the military and the USSR appeared in nation-wide daily papers - especially in those in a way opposing reforms in the Soviet Union. Defence Minister Yazov did so on the pages of CPSU's nation-wide "Pravda" newspaper in June 1990, when he condemned nationalists' endeavour to establish domestic armed forces as a "backward step leading to elimination of the military's combat readiness and the defence capabilities of the country"<sup>15</sup>. From the side of military, appeals were increasingly raised to the state power and especially to president Gorbachev, who was called upon to clamp down on separatist tendencies more intensively. But Gorbachev refused to proceed in that way. He also had a rational reason for that, consisting in his attempts focused on pushing through a new model of Soviet Union functioning, the existence of which would follow a new Union Agreement<sup>16</sup>. The Union Agreement presumed there would be a centralised state with a limited division of power between the centre and union republics in areas such as economic and social policy. The centre would retain control over tax policy and natural resources. The Union Agreement denied the republics to have any competence in areas such as defence and foreign policy. Of course, some republics striving after independence did not accept it and insisted on having full control over the defence matters. Yet, the new draft of the Union Agreement included possibility of republics' independent decision-making in matters related to recruitment and stationing of units on their territory.

There were doubts of the contents of the new Union Agreement among military leadership and officers' corps. Nevertheless the top military officials supported conducting of a referendum, which was to survey whether

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<sup>15</sup> Otvěťstvennost' za mošč rodiny, Pravda, 27 June 1990, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> See new Union Agreement draft, Pravda 24 November 1990, p. 3.

the citizenry agrees to preserve the Soviet Union as a federation of sovereign republics. However, the legitimacy of the referendum was partially impeached through the fact that it was to take place in 9 federal republics only. Five republics refused the referendum to be carried out<sup>17</sup>. The results of this “limited” referendum showed a relative support of the “renewed federation” project – out of 80% eligible voters, 76% voted for it. In the military, 90% of its members voted for “renewed federation”<sup>18</sup>. Such an answer indicated, that Gorbachev could rely on the military altogether, regardless of the military leadership’s critical position on his policy.

In a way, there were two factors for such a support – first, the logic of military’s nature, which was really an international community united by history, traditions and the manner of military service in the Soviet period and second, the current response to the fact that Gorbachev probably strongly realised, especially in the second half of the year 1990, the significance of the military as a certain stabilising element to the Soviet society. After five years of conducting reform policy, he found himself in a political vacuum. Political and economic reforms were not entirely successful, rather powerful fronts of opponents to his policy developed, both from the left and the right. The main power instrument, which he headed, the CPSU, was gradually falling apart. Two institutions remained, on which could rely and through which he could exercise government – the military and the security agencies. When the situation in the Soviet Union got into a critical point in the turn of 1990–1991, the side effects of which were economic disruption, national conflicts and everincreasing endeavour of some republics to achieve independence, Gorbachev as the top official of the country and supreme commander of the armed forces decided to make use of the institutions. In a way he reacted affirmatively to continuous appeals of the power structures telling him to do so. This is confirmed by e. g. open letter of the Chief of General Staff Moyseyev, Deputy Defence Minister Varennikov and Commander of Navy Tsherniavin, published in December 1990, through which Gorbachev was urged to use his presidential authority, which could stop separatism in some of the Soviet republics<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> This was the question of Armenia, Georgia, Estonia, Lithuania and Moldova.

<sup>18</sup> For referendum results see Pravda 27 March 1991, p. 1–2.

<sup>19</sup> See *S naděždoj i věroj: Obraščeniye k tov. Gorbačevu M. S., Sovětskaja Rossija*, 22 December 1990, p. 1.

However, the alliance with power structures, which Gorbachev might have possibly perceived as a certain tactical maneuver, represented a great risk to him. It can be concluded that during the past period of the Soviet Union's existence, he was not able to fully control what was happening within these structures. Such an assumption is completely legitimate when we consider the fact that their leading representatives opposed Gorbachev's policy – Minister of Defense Yazov, Minister of the Interior Pugo and KGB Chief Kryuchkov (all of them then became the main leaders of the coup in August 1991). The evidence of it was the events of the so-called January Baltic crisis. The military, Ministry of the Interior and KGB attempted, making use of force, to regain the central control over the developments in those Baltic states, where supporters of the independence were becoming ever politically influential. Such situation was most obvious in Lithuania, which had declared its independence already in March 1990. Of course, the central leadership, including Gorbachev, did not recognize the independence and started making decisions that were to discourage the Lithuanian Government from following such a political course. In the moment when a dispute erupted within the Lithuanian political leadership, particularly between President Landsbergis and Prime Minister Prunskienova, concerning an increase in prices, Gorbachev thought he could take advantage of the situation to “definitely” restore order. Therefore, on January 10 he issued a Presidential Decree ordering the Lithuanian Government to renew the validity of the Constitution of the USSR. Immediately after that, Gorbachev was informed by Minister of Defense Yazov, Minister of the Interior Pugo and KGB Chief Kryuchkov on measures to be taken in case the situation in Vilnius would become complicated. However, Gorbachev did not receive precise information on the plans to use force against the independence supporters. Based on the information provided by the aforementioned ministers heading power agencies, he expected only a certain demonstration of power to support the importance of the issued Presidential Decree. Instead, military, interior and KGB units were deployed to occupy TV and radio buildings, which resulted in many casualties and injuries among civilians, who defended the buildings<sup>20</sup>. Later on, Gorbachev admitted this event had occurred outside his control. “It was a political provocation aimed at discrediting the “perestroyka” and

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<sup>20</sup> During the attack to TV and radio centre in Vilnius, 14 persons were killed and hundreds were injured.

the President personally in the eyes of the local people as well as abroad.”<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the events in Vilnius were followed by other actions taken by the power structures in the Latvian city of Riga. In March 1991, he decided, based on KGB Chief Kryuchkov’s initiative, to deploy 50,000 military and militia members to suppress an announced demonstration of Yeltsin’s supporters. However, he met with such a crushing disagreement expressed by almost all political authorities and forces that he had to retract the decision. This clash represented a great memento to Gorbachev, which was reflected in his confession that “after that, all the following efforts – and there were many – to make me use force had no effect”.<sup>22</sup> This Gorbachev’s position certainly induced the conservative forces to make a final decision on the necessity to execute a coup followed by a declaration of a state of emergency, even though such an act had been in preparation for a considerably long time.

In 1990–1991, the power structures were undergoing many organizational changes, which indicated their efforts to prepare for a possible use of force against the reform supporters. This included augmentation of internal troops falling under the responsibilities of the Ministry of the Interior and commanded directly by Colonel-General Boris Gromov, who became the First Deputy Minister of the Interior. The internal troops were augmented also by several armed forces divisions. In September 1990, a part of the airborne troops were moved to Moscow in full combat readiness. It consequently turned out that this was an exercise to deploy troops in emergency situations – i.e. deployment after declaring state of emergency<sup>23</sup>. In January 1991, combined patrols consisting of soldiers and police officers started patrolling in largest Soviet cities. This all indicated the conservative forces’ effort to involve the military further in coping with problems in internal security.

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<sup>21</sup> Gorbachev, M., Mlynář, Z., “Reformátoři nebývají šťastní”, Victoria Publishing, Prague, 1995, p. 108.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 108. Gorbachev also wrote in the book that the “Prerestroyka opponents did not succeed to corner me, harness me. They wanted to bind me with blood, according to bandit law, when the man does not have a chance to escape then. I was to be faced with a definite fact of such situation, but they did not achieve that.” (p. 109)

<sup>23</sup> In the autumn 1990, the Main Operation Administration of the General Staff started to prepare updating of “Blizzard” (“Metiel”) operation, which consisted in a plan for introduction of state of emergency. The plan was developed in 1970s for management of possible large-scale public unrest.

Nevertheless, in this respect the armed forces already had their own experience, because since the second half of the 1980s they had been deployed, based on the decisions by the political leadership, in operations in the “separatist” republics or in the regions where there was necessary to deal with ethnic violence. The number of places, where this occurred, was not low: Kazakhstan (Alma Ata, December 1986), Azerbaijan (Sumgait, Nagorno Karabakh, February 1988, Baku, Fizuli, Kirovabad, November-December 1988, Baku, January 1990), Armenia (Yerevan, Kirovakan, Leninkan, February-March 1988), Georgia (Tbilisi, April 1989), Tajikistan (Dushanbe, February 1990), Kyrgyzstan (Osh, Uzgen, Kara – Suu, June 1990)<sup>24</sup>. Military units directly participated in all of these interventions, which claimed a considerable death toll. Participation of the Soviet Army in the conflicts ranged from enforcement of interest of a party to the conflict to endeavour to manage violence by separation of fighting factions. In that time, this was a relatively new role for the military, because after 1945 it was called to manage domestic disturbances within the Soviet Union in two instances only<sup>25</sup>. Obviously, the consequence of armed forces’ extensive engagement in ethnic conflicts in the second half 1980s and in the beginning of 1990s were very negative for soldiers themselves as well as for military’s position within the society. Chiefly a long-time developed myth of the military as the chief defender of “content and quiet life of the Soviet citizens” was collapsing – it was hard to further maintain the myth in circumstances when Soviet citizens were killed in these conflicts by precisely those Soviet troops. Internationalism that was reaffirmed for many years, disrupted by the war in Afghanistan already, sustained another blow due to the ethnic conflicts. Their victims were especially the members of national minorities, which, of course, invoked disaffection with those mem-

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<sup>24</sup> In two instances the case was that, with respect to the length of military units interventions, in the beginning the units were of the Soviet Army, but later on, due to disintegration of the USSR, the units consequently became a part of the newly established Russian Army. In particular, this was the question of Georgia (Southern Osetia, January 1991 – June 1992) and Moldova (Dniestr region, August 1991 – July 1992).

<sup>25</sup> In particular this was the question of interventions against rioting citizens in Novochoerkask in 1962 and, ten years later in 1972, in Lithuanian city of Kaunas. In Novochoerkask, a strike of the local workers, who protested at difficulties in foodstuff supplies and against prices growth. Employment of the military against the strikers claimed an extensive death toll. In Kaunas, a demonstration of several thousand young people broke out on the day of burial of nineteen-year old student Romas Kalanta, who burned himself to death. The protesting people shouted out: “Freedom for Lithuania”. Military airborne units were employed to disperse the demonstration. Approximately 500 persons were apprehended.

bers of the armed forces, who belonged to the national minorities in question. In the beginning of the 1990s, this disaffection even began to disrupt combat readiness of many military units. For the military, this brought another, considerable effect. Part of the officers' corps began to realise that the Soviet Union cannot continue to exist in the standing shape. That is why they started to connect their future not with the centre, but with republics – they started to engage in political life of the republics, especially through their active participation in the activities of the legislation authorities. Likewise, first claims for establishment of independent armed formations in some of the republics started to arise.

In the mid 1991, the military – and especially its leadership – became an ever more active participant in the politics. The political program of the military's leadership was clear – to preserve a centralised union and thereby also an independent multi-national armed forces. However, this contrasted with Mikhail Gorbachev's plan to enter into the new Union Agreement, which he was negotiating with the representatives of nine federal republics<sup>26</sup> since the end of April till August 1991. In August, rather complicated negotiations were completed by adoption of a preliminary draft of new Union Agreement. It particularly implied that the Soviet Union would transform into a real federation, within which individual federal republics would be largely autonomous, and the centre would have more of a co-ordinating role. The military leadership viewed it as posing a direct threat to the existence of integrated armed forces, and therefore they attempted to mobilise the public opinion against the Union Agreement. This was demonstrated most significantly on 23 July 1991, by publishing an appeal titled "A Word to the Peoples"<sup>27</sup>, which was initiated, inter alia, by Deputy Defence Minister and Soviet Army Ground Forces Commander Colonel-General Varennikov and the first Deputy Minister of Interior Gromov. The appeal openly stated that it is essential to establish a patriotic movement in order to save the homeland and to declare a state of emergency. Thus, according to the signatories to the appeal, "chain reaction was to be stopped, which threatens to disintegrate the country". This especially referred to signing the new Union Agreement, which was to take

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<sup>26</sup> This was the question of talks in 9 + 1 format (9 federal republics + centre). Apart from Gorbachev and other representatives of the central Soviet power also the leaders of Azerbaijan, Belorussia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tadjikistan, the Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

<sup>27</sup> See Slovo k narodu, Sovětskaja Rossija, 23 July 1991, p. 1.

place on 20 August. But it was not the case due to the coup d'état, which was commenced on 19 August, with a large military participation.

The coup in August 1991 clearly showed that the existing major power structures, including the Communist Party, are in such a state of decomposition, which precluded the coup being successful. As it showed later during investigation of the coup's circumstances, there was no integrated plan how to carry out the coup. The so-called National Emergency Committee (Gosudarstvienniy Komitet Tkhrezvychaynovo Polozheniya - GKCP), consisting of eight officials of key Soviet institutions<sup>28</sup>, improvised extensively virtually from the very beginning of the coup. Measures carried out within the coup's framework were limited to the capital and narrowed down further to several buildings and locations. No force was applied to the powers of "democratic opposition", no censorship was introduced to the media. By leaving the "democratic opposition" intact, the rebels let them to have two symbols of legitimacy - Russian President Boris Yeltsin and the Russian Parliament. And of course Yeltsin took advantage of that appropriately, not only did he become the leader of anti-coup powers, but also, in the longer run, the foremost political representative of the disintegrating USSR. Failure of the coup was also caused by the fact, that its leaders did not offer to the society any fundamental alternative of further political and economic development in the country. GKCP statement of 19 August included only ideas on the necessity of resurrecting the USSR's super-power status, restore justice, law and order as well as phrases of support efforts of reforms, which would lead to economic and social prosperity<sup>29</sup>. Nevertheless, this would be very little for them to expect a more substantial support from the society. The society awaited concrete steps instead, in order to improve the ever-deteriorating social-economic position – and GKCP was not able to offer that. Actually there was no real significant political and social power that would be able to push through the GKCP's "ideology". Apart from that, the coup was topical basically only to Moscow. It did not occur markedly

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<sup>28</sup> The members of National Emergency Committee were Gennadiy Yanayev, USSR vice-president, Valentin Pavlov, Chairman of USSR Ministers' Council, Vladimir Kryuchkov, KGB Chairman, Boris Pugo, Minister of Interior, Marshall Dmitriy Yazov, Minister of Defence, Oleg Baklanov, First Deputy Minister of Chairman of the Security Council, Vasilij Starodoubtsev, Chairman of Farmer Trade Union, Alexandr Tizyakov, Chairman of State Enterprises Association.

<sup>29</sup> For GKCP's statement see Krasnaja zvezda, 20 August 1991, p. 1.



in other parts of Russia and, in the periphery, contrarily to initiators' expectations, it just accelerated the process of federal republics becoming sovereign<sup>30</sup>.

The military played a very important role in the coup, even though its activities in the concerned period can be described by two absolutely contradictory conclusions – through initiation of a major part of its leadership, the military prepared themselves for conducting the coup and supported it, but, at the same time, it also contributed to its defeat. This seemingly contradictory statement reflects the situation prevailing in the military in that time. Preparations for military's engagement in the coup were being made long time before and were known to all main officials of the armed forces. Defence Minister Yazov himself belonged to a close circle of coup leaders and also became a member to GKCP. Military units also fulfilled Defence Minister's order and moved to Moscow and deployed in pre-planned positions. But it was the maximum the military did. From the moment when the GKCP had started to lose control of the situation gradually, the military was not willing to act in any particular way in order to possibly support the coup's success. Employment of force by the military to coup opponents in the atmosphere, which prevailed in Moscow in that time, was excluded. Yazov realised this very well and refused to issue any orders providing for it<sup>31</sup>. A strong limit of possible military's more intensive participation was posed by the fact that the armed forces were in a way internally weakened and its employment in an event of violent nature bore

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<sup>30</sup> Already in the time of the August coup and in the following four months, an avalanche-like declarations of independence occurred in the former federal republics in the following manner: Estonia on 20 Aug 1991, the Ukraine on 24 Aug 1991, Belorussia on 27 Aug 1991, Moldova on 27 Aug 1991, Azerbaijan on 30 Aug 1991, Uzbekistan on 31 Aug 1991, Kyrgyzstan on 31 Aug 1991, Tadjikistan on 9 Sept 1991, Armenia on 23 Sept 1991, Turkmenistan on 27 October 1991, Kazakhstan on 16 Dec 1991. Three of the former federal republics declared their independence even prior to the August 1991 coup – Lithuania on 11 Mar 1990, Latvia on 4 May 1990 and Georgia on 9 April 1991. It is interesting that independence of Russia was never declared officially.

<sup>31</sup> In this context it is worth mentioning that a surprisingly new view of the issue of violence employment in the time of the coup was brought by former high officer of the General Staff of the Soviet Army Viktor Baraniec in his book "Lost Army". He wrote that the objective of the military operation in support of the coup was defined at the general staff so that it was necessary to "preserve the political power in a big city with dense estate with support of military units, without shooting at an unarmed enemy." (Baraniec, V., *Potërjannaja Armija, Soveršenno sekretno*, Moscow, 1998, p. 122).

a risk of its fragmentation. This was also confirmed by opinion of a considerable part of officers' corps and conscripts, who did not show much willingness to support GKCP when deployed to Moscow. There was no unanimous position among the military leaders themselves on the coup and the related measures, which significantly undermined leadership's integrity and ability of action. In the moment, when majority of top military officials found out that the coup is to suffer a total defeat, they changed sides to Yeltsin. But the key players in the military – Air Force Commander Marshall Shaposhnikov and Airborne Forces Commander Lieutenant-General Grachov were doubtful of the coup's feasibility even before. As it was discovered later, Grachov was in contact with Yeltsin during the coup and directly consulted with him the course of action of the subordinated units during the coup. Nevertheless, the rather contradictory image can be complemented by the fact, that Grachov also fulfilled tasks set by GKPC<sup>32</sup>. The decisive moment of the defeat was disapproval of several top military commanders (apart from Shaposhnikov and Grachov, also of Deputy Minister of Interior Gromov) to possible Yazov's order to attack the seat of the Russian Parliament – the White House – on 20 August. It was the main reason why Yazov decided on the following day to withdraw all military units from Moscow. Thus the coup was defeated once for all and the military got on the side of its winners. After Grachov refused, Marshall Shaposhnikov became the new Minister of Defence.

In spite of that, the military had to tackle the syndrome of its co-participation in the coup's preparation and conduct. Immediately upon the coup, on 22 August, the Collegium of the Defence Minister attempted to interpret the coup as a matter of Yazov and several isolated individuals, who acted virtually on their own, without support of other main military officials<sup>33</sup>. This version was consistent with apprehension of

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<sup>32</sup> Since the beginning of August, General Grachov, based on an order of the Defence Minister Yazov examined possible consequence of introducing state of emergency in the country, together with other MOD and KGB staff. On 19 August, he alerted the Kursk Airborne Division with the order to approach Moscow. He also issued an order to bring all his subordinated airborne troops to full combat alert in the whole territory of the USSR.

<sup>33</sup> Collegium of Minister of Defence denied that they had approved of Yazov's membership in GKCP. The members of Collegium reaffirmed they were not even informed of this decision of Yazov's. (See report of the Collegium of Minister of Defence session, Krasnaja zvezda, 23 August 1991, p. 3.)

Marshall Yazov and Colonel-General Varennikov on 21 August, i.e. on the day the coup was definitely defeated. However they were the only soldiers to be arrested on the grounds of their participation in the coup. On 23 August, the newly appointed Defence Minister Marshall Shaposhnikov, regardless of Defence Minister Collegium's decision of 22 August, conducted a far-reaching "personnel cleansing" in the armed forces control structures – he recalled Chief of General Staff Moysyev, eight Deputy Defence Ministers, nine chiefs of the head divisions of the Ministry and seven commanders of military districts. More than 300 generals had to leave the armed forces in the months following August 1991 and the "cleansing" also hit commanders on lower echelons. Within a year – until August 1992, over 65,000 officers were dismissed, out of which 80% were former political instructors<sup>34</sup>.

On the other hand, a number of top military officials were not recalled, although they very much engaged in the preparation and conduct of the coup. It did not happen even after investigation of individual top military officials' activities during the coup, which was done by Presidential Commission headed by General Volkogonov<sup>35</sup>. The investigation was carried out in the Ministry of Defence and the General Staff in the course of August and September 1991. Neither were any officials recalled after investigation conducted by the Russian General Prosecutor's Office. Apart from mentioned Grachov, they were for instance Deputy Defence Minister General Achalov, Commander of Moscow Military District General Kalinyin, Commander of Leningrad Military District General Samsonov, Commander of Siberian Military District General Pyankov and Deputy Minister of Interior General Gromov<sup>36</sup>. Not only were these generals not dismissed or held liable, but they were even gradually appointed at very high posts – immediately after the coup in the

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<sup>34</sup> See Baraniec, V., *Potěrjannaja armija*, p. 161.

<sup>35</sup> Certainly it remains a historical paradox that Colonel-General Volkogonov acted as the Deputy Chief of the Head Political Administration of the Soviet Army and Navy. He was reckoned as the "chief ideologist" of the military. After 1991, he became an advisor to president Yeltsin.

<sup>36</sup> General Achalov was present at a conspiracy session of GKCP members on 17 August, where a decision was taken on seizing the power in the country. He was immediately involved in controlling the coup. He engaged in preparation of the White House attack. After the coup, he remained a Peoples Deputy of the Highest Soviet (Parliament) of Russia. Request of the Russian General Prosecutor's Office for handing him over was rejected by the Highest Soviet of the Russian Federation.

Soviet Army yet and consequently in the independent Russian Army or in the Command of Armed Forces of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). For example Grachov became a Russian Minister of Defence for a long period, general Samsonov assumed the post of the Chief of General Staff, General Pyankov became Deputy Defence Minister and General Gromov was the First Deputy Commander of Land Forces. In this connection, it is certainly very important to ask why that happened? Perhaps it is likely that there existed limits to a full “cleansing” in the top commanders corps, which the most influential statesman of the time, Russian president Boris Yeltsin, might not wished. Extensive discharging could largely destabilise situation among the military leaders, which could be disadvantageous to Yeltsin. In the period to come, he needed the military on his side for implementation of his plans for dissolution of the USSR and declaring of Russia’s full sovereignty. He also realised that in the given moment it was possible, through certain “tolerant” and even accommodating attitude to a part of armed forces leadership, to gain their full loyalty.

On the other hand, the coup, to the failure of which the military contributed, accelerated the process, which the military had strongly opposed in the previous years – dissolution of integrated Soviet Union. The military leaders were confronted to the situation of quick disinte-

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General Kalinyin was appointed, in the time of the coup, as the military commander of Moscow pursuant to an order by Defence Minister Yazov. After the coup had failed, he resigned from the post of Moscow military commander and was appointed as the Chief of the Armoured Troops Academy. Nevertheless, he never began his function at the post. General Samsonov fulfilled GKCP’s orders on declaring a state of emergency in Leningrad and announced measures implied by its introduction in the local TV and radio station, which also pertained to limitation of media’s activities.

General Pyankov sent a crypto-telegram to GKCP members on 19 August 1991, in which it is also stated, that “the military council of the district expresses its disapproval of low-efficiency activities in relation to Russia’s leadership, which continues to deceive the peoples, which is called upon not to fulfil GKCP’s decisions. Majority of the working peoples want decisive deeds. The military council supports the requirements of the working peoples”.

General Gromov fulfilled the orders of General Varennikov in the course of the coup. On 20 August, Gromov along with General Varennikov, Achalov and Grachov participated in a session, which was to assess the cooperation of units of the military, KGB and the troops of the Ministry of Interior during attack on the White House as well as apprehension of president Yeltsin and other top officials of Russia.

(For more information on activities of some top commanders in the course of the coup see Pravda 20 August 1991, p. 3, Sovětskaja Rossija 20 August 1991, p. 2, Geněraly ně v čem vinovaty..., Novoje Vremja No. 10/1992, p. 6–7, Něvzorov, A., Avgust 1991, Zavtra No. 28/1994, p. 2.)

gration of the federal state. Gorbachev did not succeed in implementing the new Union Agreement, which shipwrecked due to two factors – through the effort of the second most important federal republic of the Ukraine aimed at achieving independence and policy of Yeltsin, who realised that in order to acquire an absolute political power it was necessary to do away with the Soviet central government and thereby also the USSR. He managed to attain this goal on 8 December 1991, when, together with Ukrainian top official Kravtchuk and Belorussia's top official Shushkevich, he signed a treaty formalising dissolution of the USSR, instead of that establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States. Consequently, eight other republics entered into the agreement at the Summit in Alma Ata on 21 December<sup>37</sup>.

However, the whole process was not accepted unambiguously in the military. It was possible to note with a part of army leaders and officers' corps certain discontentment with the fact of definite disintegration of the USSR; some even reckoned the policy, which led to it, as treachery<sup>38</sup>. The armed forces leadership faced two alternatives: either to refuse Union's disintegration, while considering options how to achieve its preservation. In the practice, this would require support of Gorbachev, who strove after it (and even regarded the military as his ally)<sup>39</sup>, and to assume a stand against Yeltsin. Or, contrarily, to fully support Yeltsin, and thus assist Union's disintegration and establishment of a new commonwealth. At last, the military leadership opted for the second alternative. The key reasons for that were probably the following:

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<sup>37</sup> This was the question of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Georgia joined CIS in September 1993.

<sup>38</sup> For more information on military's positions on agreements on dissolving the USSR and establishment of the CIS see Makarov, D., *Armija meždu prošlym i buduščim, Argumenty i fakty*, No. 44/ 1993, p. 8–9.

<sup>39</sup> In the beginning of November, Marshall Shaposhnikov met with Gorbachev, who was seeking an ally in that period for pushing through the new Union Agreement, thereby preventing total disintegration of the USSR (but also postponing the end of his own political career). Gorbachev said to him here, inter alia, that himself and Shaposhnikov must consider all "alternatives to avoid the crisis" (i.e. split of the USSR), at the same time regarding the best possible alternative to do so the following: "Yourselves, the military, must take over the power, to install yourselves-controlled government, stabilise the situation and then fall back." "Into the prison perhaps, while singing a song", replied Shaposhnikov and added: "Isn't it something similar to August?" "What'd you think, Zhenia", said Gorbachev. "I do not propose to you nothing, I simply outline alternatives, thinking aloud". (Shaposhnikov, J., *Vybor, PIK*, Moscow, 1995, p. 137–138.)

2. In the process of federal republics becoming sovereign, the Soviet centre lost control of finance resources, which would, in case of military's orientation to the centre, would mean armed forces dependence on support by all signatories to the Agreement – i.e. all new independent republics.

The military viewed the establishment of CIS in the planned shape as a possible step towards creating a new (and perhaps more vital) centre. Indeed this was confirmed by the agreement on establishing the commonwealth, which reckoned with keeping uniform armed forces. Here, the main role would be played by Russia, which, *inter alia*, stemmed from the fact that the Soviet Union would cease to exist, but the Soviet Ministry of Defence would remain in the practice. It was assumed, that it would only transform into a control structure of CIS member states' armed forces. Feasibility of such vision in that time was confirmed by the fact, that, at the summit in Alma Ata, the last Soviet Minister of Defence Marshall Shaposhnikov was, following his nomination by Yeltsin, approved by all leaders of states of the newly established CIS, as the commander of CIS armed forces. At the same time, the Commonwealth countries agreed to preserve an integrated control of the nuclear potential including the fact that the Russian president took over the responsibility for codes and communication systems necessary for usage of nuclear weapons<sup>40</sup>.

Visions of possible functioning of CIS uniform armed forces were almost immediately disrupted by the Ukraine, which decided, already in the beginning of January, to nationalise the troops of the former Soviet Army in the Ukraine's territory to include its possessions, which they had available. This applied, *inter alia*, to the Black Sea Fleet, which Russia regarded as a part of CIS armed forces. Ukrainian Minister of Defence Morozov ordered disconnection of direct communication links between military units stationed in the Ukraine and the General Staff in Moscow. The then Ukrainian president Kravtchuk appointed a group of officers, whose task was to start developing independent Ukrainian armed forces. It was also announced that all soldiers serving in the territory of the Ukraine

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<sup>40</sup> Leaders of Belorussia, the Ukraine and Kazakhstan pushed through at the Alma Ata summit, that Yeltsin would have to consult with them possible utilisation of nuclear weapons. This stemmed from the fact, that a substantial potential of nuclear weapons was located on the territory of those countries.

(except of strategic mission units), would be obliged to sign a new oath of allegiance to the Ukraine. Majority of officers serving in Kiev, Odessa and Carpathian military district did so and Ukraine subsequently took over the full control of the concerned military districts located on its territory. The Ukraine's action showed in practice that the idea of preserving uniform armed forces was not well-founded. The steps of the second biggest CIS state, which were clearly aimed at establishment of domestic national armed forces, had influence on the CIS member states, which gradually began to develop their own armed forces.

Such development of situation has met, in the military command, which, if it can be put aptly, lost its state, with a negative reaction. This is confirmed by the data of public opinion poll conducted with members of All-Russia Officers Assembly of 17 January 1992, when 71% of them stated they were in favour of re-establishment of the former USSR. On top of that, 79% expressed an opinion (which could arise considerable concerns in that time), that the military should have a decisive influence on determination of its future<sup>41</sup>. However, the aforesaid opinions did not ever project into practical action of the military. This was determined by several factors. The armed forces leadership were disoriented after the defeat of the August coup by the newly arisen political situation and had to make extensive efforts in order to overcome criticism of the military's activities during the coup, which was expressed from the side of some media and the general public. Naturally, this rather constrained the opportunities for armed forces' influence on political happening in the country. At the same time, there was quite a strong loyalty of the armed forces leadership vis-à-vis Yeltsin, who assured them that all Union integrated military structures were to be preserved even upon disintegration of the USSR. The top military officials were not able to orient themselves sufficiently in the rapidly progressing political development of the time and therefore did not contemplate much on feasibility of developing a model, where the military would exist without its country. In such a situation, it was unlikely that the armed forces could come out as an independent political power against disintegration of the USSR. "Armed forces without a country" at last did not come out against Yeltsin and the new political representation neither in the spring 1992, when it was absolutely clear that uniform armed forces could not exist. Through issuing of Presidential Decree

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<sup>41</sup> See Nėzavisimaja gazeta 5 February 1992, p. 2.

on “Development of Armed Forces of Russian Federation” of 7 May 1992<sup>42</sup>, nearly seventy-five year’s history of Soviet Army existence was brought to an end definitely. British military expert Richard Sakwa commented on this step aptly, that “Finally, Russia forced itself simply to re-name the Soviet Army to Russian Army, thus taking over the worst as well as the best of the old tradition”<sup>43</sup>. Nevertheless, the fact remains that a split of such a gigantic military machinery, which the Soviet Army constituted, took place, as well as the disintegration of the USSR, without any greater shocks, which were, to an extent, expected in the neighbouring world with fears. That was not, in the then not overly stabilised situation at the end of the Cold War, a little achievement.

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<sup>42</sup> See Krasnaja zvezda 9 May 1992, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Sakwa, R., “Russian Politics and Society”, Routledge, London & New York, 1993, p. 311.