

RUSSIAN POLITICAL HISTORY

Contents

Part I : Government

Part II : Military

GOVERNMENT

Overview Beginning with the first Kievan state, and following the transition from paganism to Eastern Orthodoxy adopted from Byzantium, Vladimir I began to unite the fragmented small states into one state, with one religion and one language, abandoning the earlier system of rule, and adopted the Byzantine system of government. Vladimir I's successors followed in his footsteps, eventually creating an autocratic monarchy that continued until the early 20th century. However, the problems and dissatisfaction created by this form of government accumulated, leading to the Bolshevik revolution in the second decade of the 20th century. While the new Soviet regime resolved some of the problems of the autocratic monarchy, its totalitarian nature and state-controlled economy created its own set of problems. Gorbachev's attempts to reform the Soviet system in the 1980s set off a chain of events that the regime was unable to control and which resulted in the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the creation of the Russian Federation.

ANCIENT PERIOD

Prehistory All prehistoric nomadic tribes lacked a formal government, remaining tribal in structure. They were initially ruled by their chieftains and later by kings.

Initially, early people were organized in tribal groups, but these tribal groups were not ethnic in character. Not until the Neolithic period does it appear that tribal groups united to form larger units that would become the basis for later ethnic groups.

In addition, these prehistoric communities were composed of autonomous groups and villages, and did not organized themselves into any form complex enough to be regarded as a state. However, the formation of sedentary groups resulted in social organization at the level of chiefdoms with a fair degree of social stratification.

Scythians By the time of the Scythians, social organization was far more complex. Although pastoralists, the Scythians created alliances formed from a large number of tribes, and had their own armies made up primarily of pastoral nomads. Scythian ruling dynasties were above the tribes, giving them the ability take advantage of the resources - military and economic - of many small groups, and to coordinated their activities. Over time, as the Scythians adopted a more sedentary lifestyle and became more assimilated into local agricultural populations, their system of government became more established. Despite these developments, the Scythian dynasties lacked the permanence or the bureaucratic traditions of a true state. These strong, homogenous tribal alliances were comprised of Thracians and Proto-Slavs in the West, Finnish tribes in the north-east, and the ancestors of the Adyghe people. This was the earliest class state system ruled by an aristocracy and divided into regions where the inhabitants were engaged in agriculture and cattle breeding.

Sarmatians As for the later Sarmatians, they were organized not on the basis of individual ethnic tribes, but rather on the basis of tribal confederations. This was a result of their assimilation of various other ethnic groups in the process of their long movement to the west.

Slavs Regarding the early Slavs, there is no scholarly consensus on either the way in which the Proto-Slavs lived or how they were ruled. Some claim that they were sedentary, living in the forests and swamps of eastern Europe, while others state that they were nomadic. As for how they ruled themselves the theories range from monarchy to primitive democracy.

POST CLASSICAL PERIOD

Rurikid Dynasty:

Kievan State: . In its earliest stage it was the Varangians (Vikings) who acted as catalysts for the political development of the dispersed, warring East Slavic tribes by establishing tribal unions. It was the Rurikovichi (of Varangian origin) who established the first Russian dynasty, and the Rus princes and high ecclesiastical officials of separate principalities exercised their authority in a central aristocratic, administrative district.

It was Vladimir I who chose Orthodox Christianity as Russia's official religion, a decision that had a decisive influence on the development of the political structure of the Russian state. A political system had evolved in Kievan Russia by the 11th century in which Kiev was the center of princely authority, legitimate rulers were those who descended from the Rurikid dynasty, and succession was based on seniority.

The Kievan political system was authoritarian, but many institutions had democratic characteristics. The office of Prince was Kiev's major political institution. The Prince, in addition to his military leadership, provided justice, headed the Orthodox Church, and administered the government via the *druzhina* (retinue). The *veche* was a popular assembly, the highest legislative and judicial authority to resolve major issues.

Mongol Period: During the first century of the Mongol conquest (1240), the Rus principalities served as effective tax collectors. By collecting tribute from other Russian princes, the central state strengthened its political position.

Moscow (Muscovite) State: Moscow had increased its power and prestige by establishing good relations with the Mongols, proving that they were reliable tribute payers and upholders of order in order to obtain a *yarlyk* that authorized their rule. The Mongol Khans ruled Russian territory via Russian princes, and sent their envoys to supervise the collection of tribute.

The Moscow Grand Prince, to rule his principality, summoned his boyars to periodical gatherings (Boyar Duma) when important decisions needed to be taken. Concentrating power and gaining the consensus of the other princes and boyars became the paramount priority for the Grand Princes. Up until the late 15th century, Moscow still had a nominal overlord, the Khan of the Great Horde. This ended when disunity came to an end and all the principalities were integrated into a single patrimony, that is into the Moscow state. The Russian Orthodox church also emancipated itself from Byzantium, and Moscow became the ecclesiastical center.

Oprichnina and Zemshchina: During the reign of Ivan the Terrible, in order to demonstrate that he was the undisputed ruler of Rus, and that the princes and boyars were his subjects, the tsar adopted the title of Tsar of all Russia. Ivan the Terrible's unhealthy life increased his paranoia and brutality, and in order to reduce the Chosen Council's (advisory council) power, dominated by the boyars, he threatened that he would abdicate to the Council. He left Moscow and began to live in Alexandrovskaya Sloboda, agreeing to return only if the boyars granted him absolute power and placed no obstacles to his absolute rule. He then divided his realm into two separate states. He organized a loyal militia, the *oprichnina*, in the lands that constituted his personal domain and which he administered as he wished. The rest of Russia was ruled by the *zemshchina*, the Boyar Duma. In his domain, he exiled the boyars and appanage princes sent them to their new territories, and gave their ancestral lands to his servitors, the *oprichniki*. The 6,000 *oprichniki*, who dressed in black and carried a dog's head and broom on their horses to symbolize their mission of hunting down and sweeping away the tsar's enemies, began to arrest, torture, imprison and execute all traitors.

For seven years Ivan IV carried out this oppression against his own people. Thousands of boyars lost their lands and their lives. Many innocent people died, especially in towns that were thought to be sheltering traitors. In Novgorod alone, in just five weeks in 1570, the *oprichnini* killed an estimated 40,000 people. Two years later, in 1572 Ivan IV abolished the *oprichnina*, and executed most of the leaders of the *oprichniki*.

Ivan the Terrible, by killing his son and heir in a fit of rage and leaving only a sickly son, Fedor, as his successor, brought an end to the Rurikid dynasty. Moscow descended into civil war, a period known as the *Time of Troubles*.

EARLY MODERN PERIOD

The Time of Troubles (Smutnoe vremya): During the *Time of Troubles* which followed the death of Boris Godunov in 1603, pretenders appeared, and rival boyars created a weak government and autocracy. The Rurikid dynasty had come to an end, leaving the Empire without leadership.

Russia faced dynastic struggles, famine, uprisings, and invasion by Polish and Swedish armies. This chaotic period ended in 1613 with the appearance of a new dynasty, the Romanovs.

The Romanovs:

In the 17th century, Russia's autocratic form of government, while cruel and oppressive by European standards, enabled Moscow to control its vast domains. The royal family, the court, and the administrative bodies preserved their essential nature in that they provided central coordination to mobilize people and distribute resources in the provinces. *Mestnichestvo*, an elite lineage hierarchy, determined entry into the administrative bodies, but afterwards promotion was based on merit. The Boyar Duma and *Zemskii Sobor* (Town Council) were not that powerful, and uninstitutionalized, but they sometimes played a very important role in the formation of state policy.

One of the institutions that was neglected for centuries was serfdom. By the middle of the 17th century, Russian serfdom, which had developed gradually over a period of about 150 years beginning in the late 15th century, developed into an increasingly harsh system.

Westernization: When Peter the Great ascended to the throne, he began his reign with the modernization of the Russian government based on techniques used in Europe. By creating the modern Russian state, he introduced significant changes in important institutions, founded the modern Russian army, built Russia's first major industrial base, and forced the country's elite to adopt certain Western customs and habits.

Peter I's most important administrative reforms were financial, which were designed to collect more revenue from the Russians to finance his wars. He taxed everything, and even introduced a head tax (soul tax) from every male peasant. Anyone who resisted his orders were punished by a political police known as the *Preobrazhensky Prikaz*.

Those who suffered the most from the Peter's policies were the peasants. Peter paid for his expensive projects by raising their taxes drastically, and serfdom was strengthened and made even more oppressive.

Despite his reforms, he came from an autocratic political tradition, believing that autocracy alone could establish and guarantee the power and greatness of Russia. Thus, he believed that the nobility should serve the state and that his subjects should accept without question the state's demands and restrictions. He wanted to create what he called a 'regular state', adopting European patterns of government, with Sweden and England as his preferred models.

Peter replaced founded colleges to replace the old chanceries, with responsibilities for specific areas such as foreign affairs, the army, the navy, and state revenue, and wanted to ensure that professional, qualified officials ran the colleges and the government. Nobles were required to have training and skill to work for the state, and promotions were based on merit and experience. His *Table of Ranks* was created for military,

civilian, and court service in 1722, and introduced a promotion system based on personal ability and performance instead of birth and genealogy. However, none of these measures worked as planned, since Russia lacked trained officials to run the bureaucracy.

Peter also instituted church reform by abolishing the Patriarchate and replacing it with an administrative board called the *Holy Synod*, where senior bishops were appointed by the Emperor. As a result, the church became a constituent component of the state.

The Enlightenment: Catherine attempted to change the social and cultural structure of the monarchy to give it a legal foundation similar to the 18th century European legal monarchy. She corresponded with leading thinkers of Europe's Enlightenment such as the French philosophers Montesquieu, Voltaire and Diderot, and issued her *Nakaz (Instruction)* in the hope that it would be a major Enlightenment achievement. Her *Nakaz* was compiled to be used as a guide for an elected Legislative Commission she created to write a new law code, but she never gave the Commission the right to limit her power. Although Catherine the Great was a proponent of Enlightenment principles, she firmly believed that Russia required autocratic rule, and left serfdom, an institution condemned by the Enlightenment, untouched. Instead, she extended and strengthened serfdom, and left serfs with no legal protection against abuse.

In order to prevent rebellions and recognizing the danger at the provincial level, Catherine II decided to create new local government institutions, provinces and districts, in which the nobility would play a major role. This decision was promulgated in the Statute on Provincial Administration in 1775 and the Law on Provincial Police in 1782. The reforms abolished the huge provinces and divided Russia into 41 (later 50) smaller provinces, each headed by an appointed governor. Each province was further sub-divided into 10 districts.

She also issued the Charter to the Nobility (1785) in provinces, districts and cities which granted them the rights to keep their property, exempted them from corporal punishment, and allowed them to set up their own assemblies and appoint local officials. This form of local government in the provinces, districts and cities lasted until 1917.

Her son Paul reintroduced government centralization by restoring some of the central departments abolished by Catherine the Great. The Senate remained the supreme judicial authority. He reversed the policy for nobles enshrined in the *Charter of the Nobility* that was introduced by his mother by abolishing most of their privileges. He also increased taxes on noble estates, insisted on much tighter discipline in the army and included the section that made nobles immune from corporal punishment. By issuing a decree that restored the serfs' right to petition the Tsar, reducing their work load during weekdays, and prohibiting the sale of serfs without land he made powerful enemies. In 1797, he introduced a decree affecting the territories belonging to the state, and the village.

NINETEENTH CENTURY

In the 19th century, the country was still ruled by autocratic monarchs who referred to themselves as 'Emperor and Autocrat of all Russia'. Alexander I created functional ministries, permitted the senate to have some supervisory powers over the government bureaucracy and judicial powers to issue decrees subject to the Tsar's veto. He also reaffirmed his autocracy by making it clear that his autocratic powers would remain unchallenged and unquestioned. His advisor, Mikhail Speransky compiled a comprehensive administrative law designed to change arbitrary autocratic government, and to establish the Russian state on the rule of law as steps toward a genuine constitutional regime. He also promoted the idea of merit in state service through compulsory exams. However, many of the nobility resented his egalitarian approach to the system, and Alexander I also showed no interest in Speransky's restructuring, fearing that his power would be limited by legislature, and dismissed him in 1812. One of the positive developments during Alexander I's reign was a law he passed in 1803 that encouraged landowners to free their serfs.

Decembrist Revolt and State Measures:

The Decembrist revolt was the first revolutionary attempt carried out by educated members of the Russian elite who wanted political and social change. They had committed themselves to Enlightenment values and

had formed secret political societies to overthrow Alexander I. The revolt was launched after Alexander I's unexpected death in 1825, on the day Alexander I's brother Nicholas I was to ascend to the throne.

Nicholas I, traumatized by this event, decided to change the existing administrative system. He personally scrutinized his brother's administrative reforms and the demands of the Decembrists, and then made some modest improvements in the administration. The legislative, judicial and executive bodies in the government were to be separated. In 1826 Nicholas I established a private bureaucracy with several sections: his Majesty's Own Imperial Chancery; the Second Section of the Chancery which was dominated by Speransky who compiled a 48-volume compilation of Russian law, the laws dealing with government and social structure in 1833; and the Third Section which symbolized Nicholas' whole regime. The Third Section administered a new political police who gathered information about the opponents of the regime, watched state institutions and political prisons, handled censorship, and arrested and exiled the revolutionaries. The government also introduced strict control on education, limiting lower-class children to elementary-level education and reducing the autonomy of universities. Incompetent, poorly educated and poorly paid officials could not implement the laws properly and began to take bribes to support their families. A reform of local government was instituted in 1837. Considerable power was granted to the governors, and the local police were strengthened. In 1838 a network of local *Provincial Messengers* were established in the provinces. The most important of his reforms was to set up a committee to deal with serfdom, and lay the groundwork for limited emancipation.

Abolition of Serfdom: After Nicholas I's death, tsar Alexander II, the liberator, attempted to carry out some political reforms. The first was the idea of liberating the serfs. The Tsar, retaining his full autocratic powers, well-educated and well-prepared, recognized the need for land reform and the abolition of serfdom "from above" before it abolished itself "from below". The emancipation edict issued in 1861 freed the serfs from personal slavery, but did not make a free grant of land - serfs had to pay for any land they received. Therefore, the peasants felt cheated by the whole system.

His reforms also included local government reforms, approved in 1864, which permitted each district to set up a *Zemstvo* (local council). These councils provided local education, health, transportation and taught new agricultural techniques. However, the right to elect members to these councils was restricted to the privileged classes. Although the central government lacked both the human resources or the will to fully carry out this reform, the reform still improved conditions in rural Russia considerably. Alexander II also carried out a series of judicial and military reforms despite powerful opposition.

After Alexander II's assassination by a revolutionary, the assassins were ruthlessly hunted down and executed, and his son, Alexander III sought to limit local autonomy. He instituted a series of strict measures that eliminated many of his father's reforms. Alexander III, influenced by his personal tutor, the procurator of Holy Synod, Konstantin Pobedonostsev who rejected parliamentary democracy, defended the old alliance between Tsarism and Orthodoxy.

TWENTIETH CENTURY

October Manifesto and Creation of Duma Monarchy: The Bloody Sunday movement and the first revolution of 1905, both of which took place in the aftermath of the disastrous Russo-Japanese War, led to the tsarist government making significant changes to the existing system of government. In the revolution of 1905 masses of workers and peasants led by intellectuals revolted against the autocracy and demanded the rule of law and a constituent assembly. Despite the failure of the revolution of 1905, when combined with strikes, demonstrations, economic problems, famine, military defeat and high casualties in the war tsar Nicholas II was pressured to initiate some reforms and make some serious concessions to his people. He issued his *October Manifesto*, drafted by his minister of finance Sergei Witte, which announced the creation of a *State Duma*. The Manifesto promised the people of the empire basic civil rights. Later, the freedoms granted in the manifesto were canceled. The tsar still made executive decisions when the Duma was not in session, had the right to dissolve it anytime, and veto any legislation. The First Duma was dissolved because they demanded radical land reform, and the Second Duma suffered a similar fate. Russia had a real parliament, but the country continued to experience revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence.

Stolypin's Agrarian Reforms: After the Duma's dissolution, the minister of the interior Peter Stolypin introduced a plan to create a prosperous landowning class. Stolypin's agrarian reforms also gave the peasants opportunities to leave their village to set up separate farms. This reform allowed peasants to purchase land through the Peasant Bank and to migrate to Siberia and Russian Central Asia from overpopulated provinces. By 1916 about half of all peasant households had left their communes and owned their land privately.

However, Russia went through a famine in 1906-1907, in 1911 discontent in factories and universities resurfaced, and new problems appeared as industrial politics became increasingly important.

World War I: During WWI Nicholas II took the command of the army in 1915 and left control of the government to the tsarina and Rasputin, a self-proclaimed holy man. Rasputin and the tsarina shifted ministers without reason, did not know how to exercise governmental power, and the Duma and the government were left without national leadership. The Duma immediately formed a *Progressive Bloc* led by the Kadets and Octobrists parties which advocated a government capable of winning public confidence, demanded political amnesty, religious freedom, and freedom for trade unions. Premier Goremykin rejected this attempt to limit the autocrat's power, and in 1916 the relations between the Duma and the executive organ worsened when Duma deputies accused the government and the tsarina of conspiring with the Germans.

Meanwhile, by early 1917 there were 7 million dead, wounded, captured and missing in the Russian army, and Moscow and St. Petersburg were desperately short of food. Strikes were widespread and Nicholas II did nothing to stop them; in March 1917, revolutionaries brought down the autocracy, the Romanov Dynasty. The country fell into the hands of liberal and moderate elites who quickly organized the Provisional Government, ending three hundred years of Romanov autocracy.

Provisional Government and Petrograd Soviet: The Provisional Government was to exercise authority until a democratically elected Constituent Assembly could establish a permanent regime. The Government granted full freedom of speech, press, assembly, and religion, and equality to all citizens. Provincial governors were abolished and local governmental officials were elected. Restrictions on minority groups were lifted. However, the Provisional Government's intention to remain in the war, unreliable concessions, and weakness led to the formation of an alternate center of power, the Petrograd Soviet, a proletarian organ. The Petrograd Soviet, unlike the Provisional Government, demanded an immediate end to the war; confiscation of private land; the destruction of the bureaucracy, the army and the police; and the cession of all state power to the workers' soviets. The Provisional Government began to lose the battle in the factories, in the countryside and in the army. The Bolsheviks gained control in most of the urban soviets, and expelled the Provisional Government. However, when the Bolsheviks failed to win a majority of seats in elections for the Constituent Assembly and Lenin forcibly dissolved the assembly, indicating that their intention was one-man, one-party rule, they found themselves at war with their various opponents.

In 1922 the Bolsheviks proclaimed the formation of the Soviet Union which was organized into a type of ethnic federal system, and Lenin urged all of the 15 republics to create a system of national republics, equal in status, and allowed them limited autonomy. But during Stalin's rule these republics were subject to the authoritarian control of the central government.

Totalitarian System: During Stalin the government was highly centralized, and all other parties and cultural organizations were all closed. The political system was run by the Communist Party, the Politburo and the government ministries. The monolithic state supervised and controlled the lives of all of its citizens; any opposition was significantly diminished and via purges Soviet citizens disappeared or were eliminated. The legal basis of the Soviet political system was the Constitution of 1936, but it meant little in practice. The central government retained full power, and all nationalities had their territories and cultural institutions, but the All Union Communist Party, dominated by the Russians, ran everything. The government exercised an intense Russification and assimilation policy, and forced collectivization and industrialization.

De-Stalinization: After Stalin's death in 1953 none of his successors gained his arbitrary power. Khrushchev preserved the main features of the Soviet system, but denounced Stalin's crimes, loosened

control over Soviet satellites, and urged a return to Leninism and collective leadership. He increased the party's authority over the technocrats. He reduced political control in all spheres of life to encourage the citizens to have a stronger commitment to socialism through greater participation in the system. Despite his efforts, he earned the enmity of other Party members, and the Presidium demanded his resignation.

Gerontocracy: Andropov and Chernenko maintained the old Soviet system by relying on their past experience, and advocate no reforms. However, this policy produced no beneficial results for the Soviet Union, because conditions within the country had changed and it needed to be reformed.

Gorbachev's Democratization: Mikhail Gorbachev became the General Secretary in 1985, and introduced a series of political and economic reforms to improve the stalled Soviet economy, and bring more flexibility to the government. In order to revive the economy, Gorbachev introduced *perestroika*, meaning restructuring. *Perestroika* allowed more freedoms in the market economy, but also allowed opposition groups to speak out against government policy. However, Gorbachev's democratization and liberalization set a series of events into motion that, in some ways, played an important role in the fall of communism, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the calls for independence from the Soviet republics.

Discussion/Questions

- 1- How did Russia recover from the *Time of Troubles*? Why did Russia find itself in the middle of two wars during the time of recovery?
- 2- What were the outcomes of Peter the Great's reforms? How did the the state structure change under his Westernization process? What was the relationship between the church and the state?
- 3-How was Russian society affected by Enlightenment ideas?
- 4-Why was Catherine the Great unsuccessful in applying Enlightenment principles to the Russian administration?
- 5- What were the impacts and long-term consequences of the Decembrist Revolt in the history of Russia?
- 6- Why was a reformist tsar, Alexander II, assassinated by a revolutionary?
- 7- How did the Age of Enlightenment affect Russian intellectuals?
- 8- What was the social impact of revolutionary ideas in Russia?
- 9- Which political movements that evolved in the early 19th century affected Russian society?
- 10-Why did the Provisional Government fail against the Petrograd Soviets?
- 11- What were the political impacts of Gorbachev's democratization?

Reading

- 1- Vernadsky, G., "On Feudalism in Kievan Russia", *The American Slavic and East European Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Feb., 1948), pp. 3-14.
- 2-Dunning, C.S.L., *Russia's First Civil War*, Pennsylvania State University, 2001.
- 3- Kizenko, N., *The Church Schism and Old Belief*, A Companion to Russian History, edited by Abbott Gleason, Blackwell Publishing, 2009, p. 145-163.
- 4-Marshall, P., *The Central Government and Its Institutions*, *The Cambridge History of Russia*, edited by Maureen Perrie, 2006, Vol. 1, p. 435-463.
- 5- Davies, B., *Local Government and Administration*, *The Cambridge History of Russia*, edited by Maureen Perrie, 2006, Vol. 1, p. 464-485.
- 6- Evtuhov, C., Goldfrank, D., Hughes, L., Stites, R., *Peter the Great: Carving Out the New Russia, 1703-1725*, in *A History of Russia, Peoples, Legends, Events, Forces*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York, 2004, p. 225-245.
- 7- Evtuhov, C., Goldfrank, D., Hughes, L., Stites, R., *Catherine the Great: In Pursuit of Enlightenment and Empire, 1762-1796*, in *A History of Russia, Peoples, Legends, Events, Forces*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York, 2004, p.267-289.
- 8- MacKenzie, D., and Curran, M.W., *A History of Russia, the Soviet Union and Beyond*, Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2002.
- 9-*The Cambridge History of Russia*, Vol. II, Edited by Dominic Lieven, Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- 10- *The Cambridge History of Russia*, Vol. I, Edited by Maureen Perrie, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

11- *The Cambridge History of Russia*, Vol. I, Edited by Ronald Grigor Suny, Cambridge University Press, 2006

MILITARY

Overview It was not until the formation of the first Russian state, the Kievan state, that we can speak of a formal, organized military of East Slavic tribes. From its beginnings, Russia has been a society prepared for war. Starting with the first state that was established in the south, the main concerns of the rulers were to build a strong army to defend their territory against intradynastic warfare. Therefore, they invited mercenaries from Scandinavia, and learned their military tactics to put an end to this disunity. But, at the same time, this army was necessary for the survival of the state, and to repulse the nomads threatening the southern borders of Rus', and against their enemies in the North. By being a war-torn society, open to the raids of the steppe warriors, and struggling with succession conflicts for centuries, the Russian rulers realized the need to modernize their backward armies, and to do that they needed to learn modern techniques from the European countries that already had technologically advanced armies. It was with Peter the Great that the Russian military *gained* unprecedented influence in the region with its powerful army and navy so that it began to threaten neighboring countries. With its powerful military, Russia was transformed into a great power and was able to compete with the major powers of the world. During the Bolshevik Revolution, militarization reached to the point that the Soviets became a major political actor directing world politics.

ANCIENT PERIOD

Cimmerians In the south of Rus' land, there were kingdoms that occupied the north of the Black Sea for centuries. The earliest people of southern Rus' land were the Cimmerians, ancient mounted nomads of Indo-European origin. While they remained at the tribal level their hit-and-run tactics and lack of military organization presented no significant threat to more highly organized, settled societies.

Scythians It was the Scythians who were also Indo-European origin, came from the east and had formed confederative nomadic tribal unions. Although they were of nomadic origin like the Cimmerians, the Scythians gained a reputation for innovative tactics and extreme courage. Like other nomadic pastoralists of the Eurasian steppes, Scythian armies consisted almost entirely of mounted archers. Their combination of mobile, guerrilla tactics and scorched earth policy proved a highly effective combination.

Sarmatians After the Scythians, the Pontic steppes were dominated by the Sarmatians, another nation of mounted nomadic warriors whose lifestyle was similar to that of the Scythians. Like the Scythians, the Sarmatians used light, mounted archers in their armies, but they also used spears and swords for closing with the enemy. In addition, they made extensive use of cataphracts, heavy armored cavalry.

Slavs During the middle centuries of the first millennium CE the Eastern Slavic tribes began to settle in the lands of Rus'. Militarily, these tribes were at the level of the neighboring tribal peoples. In this period, the Slavic tribes are not credited with any military innovations, and the size of their armies was only in the hundreds. However, the small size of these armies was well suited for rapid attack on and retreat from enemy territory. When the Slavs began wars of conquest to expand their territories, more sophisticated tactics and forces were needed. The use of flanking assaults, ambushes, guerrilla tactics and rapid mobility was combined with the coordinated use of infantry, archers and cavalry in these conflicts.

POST CLASSICAL PERIOD

Fragmented Society and Varangian Mercenaries: Early Rus' was a fragmented society that lacked a strong central government. Each principality was ruled by a prince and each prince ruled his own territory independent of other rulers, but there was no unity among them. As a result, struggles for power among the princes were endemic. Each prince had his own military forces, but also brought in supplementary warriors. Therefore, the princes, to put an end their internal struggles, looked for assistance from Scandinavian mercenaries (Varangians-Vikings), and these people were later included into the princes

'retinue'. Initially, these mercenaries were invited to end the internal struggles, and bring peace to the fragmented society, but later, the ones who stayed in Rus' land were assimilated into the Eastern Slavs by the late 11th century and became part of that society.

Early Russian armies included a few hundred men who could use combined arms tactics, ambushes, flanking assaults and guerilla tactics. After they had learned how to make fortified cities, they came in contact with nomadic tribes from the steppes, such as the Scythians, Sarmatians and Huns, and later the Bulgars, Antes, Khazars and Mongols, and gained much of their military skill from them. From the Scandinavian mercenaries they learned to build ships to gain dominance in the Baltic Sea and raid the Scandinavian territories. Each prince had his own *druzhina* (military), outfitted with a helmet, armor and shield for protection and armed with a sword and a spear.

Kievan State: Around 880, the Kievan state was established, and this powerful state began to control major trade routes that ran from Varangians to the Greeks, and from Kiev frequently laid siege to Constantinople. However, after the Mongol conquest once powerful state lost its influence in the region to the expanding Mongol Empire in the 1240 and became a Mongol vassal state.

Devastating raids by Turkic nomads, the Pechenegs and Kipchaks (Polovtsy), forced the Rurikid rulers, who at the same time were engaged in their own intradynastic conflicts, to combine their forces, and secure the trade route linking Kiev and Constantinople. However, this unity did not last long, and disagreements over succession to the throne of Kiev provoked intradynastic warfare lasting for decades.

EARLY MODERN PERIOD

It was the Mongols who contributed to the collapse of the Kievan state in the late 15th century, and the subsequent development of the new Russian state, known as the Muscovite state. When the Mongols conquered Kievan Rus', they introduced many new ideas customs, and most importantly the idea of complete and absolute power, and militarism. At the military level, the Russians not only adopted Mongol tactics, but also began to organize their own armies according to Mongol models to the point that almost all Russian military institutions in the 14th century could be traced back to the Mongols.

Muscovite state: At the beginning of the 16th century, after the demise of the Kievan state, the rulers of the Muscovite state saw the need to expand their army that consisted of a cavalry of seasonal landholding élite, infantry, artillery, engineers, and a logistics corps. Russian princes also used friendly Mongols and Cossacks on different occasions. The landholding élite was required to provide all the training and military supplies. It was during the reign of Ivan III that the military transformation was realized with the inclusion of servitor-landlords, *pomeshchiki*, who were compensated with land in conditional tenure, *pomest'e*, in return for their service in the military. To expand the army, the state also recruited infantry militias from the peasants, but they needed to be trained.

Streltsy: To improve the Russian army's capacity and to catch up with the developments of the European militaries, Russia began to create special regiments of artillery and musketeers (*streltsy*) in 1550. By the end of the 16th century there were about 30,000 cavalry, and around 20,000 musketeers, and the number of artillery pieces reached 3,500; in addition to the growing artillery numbers, fortifications became progressively stronger with the replacement of wood with stone.

Oprichniki: Ivan, to protect himself and his new territory the *oprichnina* against the boyars' attacks also created a private army of enforcers and executioners called *oprichniki* to hunt down his opponents.

Muscovy did not have a standing army. Instead, its military forces were built around gentry cavalymen who did part-time service for life, mustering for service when called to campaigns or to defend the realm. In order to stop the abuse of the system of *Precedence* (Mestnichestvo), a seniority system based on ancestry, Ivan the Terrible issued a decree that the precedence of the gentry did not apply during military campaigns.

European Style Regiments and Foreign Mercenaries: It was during the time of the Romanovs that Moscow's army was upgraded and to bring the Russian military up to Western standards new-style regiments were created along European lines. They adopted Western norms of organization and equipment, and brought thousands of foreign mercenaries and officers from western and central Europe, and as an alternative to the noble levies and musketeers, created new-style regiments. These units were permanently established only in the 1640s, at the end of the *Thirteen Years' War*. Under Aleksei Romanov, the new-style regiments reached nearly 100,000 soldiers, and Russia's first Western-style warships were constructed. New infantry units were armed with more modern weapons, such as flintlock muskets and handguns.

Peter the Great consolidated the military reforms of his predecessors, but did not follow the old order completely. His military reforms had a devastating impact on the Russian population through the creation of a set of institutions to recruit, train, equip, finance and administer the military.

He carried out a complete modernization of the Russian army, and founded the Russian navy to wage war against the Ottomans in the south and the Swedes in the north. With Peter the Great, Russia had a professional army, like the Preobrazhenskii and Semenovskii Regiments, and navy that could compete with any European power. He used military technology and organization based on European norms, creating a hybrid military system with predominantly Russian characteristics.

New system of Conscription: When Peter the Great decided to expand his army promises of increased pay were initially used to attract more recruits. However, in 1705 Peter the Great introduced a new system of conscription by dividing the country into blocks of twenty peasant households, every year demanding each household to supply a man who would be drafted for life into the army's ranks. The selection was made by the serf owner, but sometimes peasant communities were allowed to make the decision. However, sometimes Peter the Great arbitrarily raised the numbers of draftees in response to the progress of a war. This system resulted in creating an army of 300,000 that was much heavier on cavalry than the Europeans. Compared with previous eras, there had been dramatic improvements in the equipping, organizing and training of the army. With the new recruitment system, the Russian army did not include part-time soldiers, they were all conscripts, unlike many European armies that included large proportion of foreign mercenaries. The Russian army was homogenous by having the great majority of the soldiers of Great Russian and Orthodox background, and divisions based on class had been reduced - at least a third of the officer corps was of non-aristocratic background by 1720.

As he had done with the land forces, Peter the Great also expanded Russia's naval capability. In particular, he established a Baltic fleet that was comprised of nearly 800 support vessels and 50 warships, and ordered the construction of Kronstadt, a naval base on Kotlin Island.

Peter the Great melted church bells for artillery pieces. To finance his army, Peter the Great raised taxes, added new ones, he even taxed beards, and introduced a soul (poll or head) tax that required every male peasant and the male residents living in cities and towns to pay an annual tax to the state. The Russian military required weapons, therefore he actively promoted Russian industry by opening metal factories.

Table of Ranks: He set up the *Table of Ranks* in 1722 which lasted until the Bolshevik Revolution, copying Danish, Prussian, and Swedish models. This rank system was based on civil and military service, that rewarded people according to their ability and merit within the Table of Ranks, and not their privilege or birth. He enforced his order that nobles serve in the military and ensured that this obligation was lifelong and universal. But, the Russian nobility lacked a sufficient number of educated and trained men to handle modern warfare, therefore he had to rely on foreign expertise in command of regiments and other subunits during campaigns. The *Table of Ranks* allowed any military officer to be raised to the status of a noble, a privilege that was not obtained in civilian ranks until rank 8.

In 1775 Catherine the Great changed the conscription policy and introduced a new system that recruited one male from a block of 500 peasants per year during peace, but as many as five in wartime. The basic concept of the Petrine draft remained in place. This system worked well enough to provide the Russian army with more than 2 million soldiers toward the end of the 18th century.

NINETEENTH CENTURY

The Crimean War not only destroyed the credibility of the Russian military system but also confidence in the Empire's entire political, social and economic structures. Russia's inadequate industrial sector could not manufacture the new ordnance, rifles and munitions on a large scale.

Universal Military Service Statute: In order to modernize Russian military forces in the most economic fashion possible, Alexander II initiated a series of military reforms that resulted in the Universal Military Service Statute of 1874. Continued territorial expansion resulted in extensive borders that required a military presence to protect them, but such protection came at a cost. Alexander II's war minister, Miliutin, attempted to make the army more efficient through structural reorganization, and improving the education and training of both the officer corps and the enlistees. Reform of the military justice system and abolition of abusive practices were measures that were taken to improve morale. By the middle of the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution was having a major influence on Russia's military industry. However, Russia remained a backward country and did not invest in the latest weaponry, because of rapidly changing armaments and high costs.

Reduction of Mandatory Service: Miliutin embarked on other reforms that were designed to reduce expenses by the 1870s, including the creation of a large, well-trained reserve force, the extension of railways in order to mobilize forces, and a reduction in the period of mandatory service in the regular army under certain conditions. Graduates of universities had their period of mandatory service reduced to six months, and volunteers were also given a reduction in their period of service. One other far-reaching reform was elimination of class distinction in the military draft. All men, regardless of class, were now subject to the draft at the age of twenty if their names were selected in the national draft lottery, ending the aristocracy's previous exemption.

There were still problems with logistics, outdated equipment, lack of funding and manpower. The victories gained in the campaigns in the Caucasus, in the major war with the Ottomans that erupted in 1877, and during imperialist campaigns in Central Asia were counterbalanced by defeats in other theaters that were the result of the vestiges of the old military system.

TWENTIETH CENTURY

Interest in the Far East: Russia had never abandoned its imperialistic and expansionist policy, particularly in the Far East, that aimed at creating a sphere of influence in the region. It attempted to unite its dissatisfied and oppressed citizens through a "small victorious war" with Japan without considering the potential cost of the war. When Japan launched a surprise attack on Port Arthur in Manchuria in 1904, the Russian army was caught by surprise. The Russian army was not prepared to fight against the technologically superior Japanese army. The poorly planned war with Japan ended disastrously, with almost all of the Russian fleet was destroyed or captured. This war showed that Russian army was still backward, the troops were led by inept generals unable to foresee how the war could develop, and untrained troops drawn into this *battle* could not fight without adequate arms or ammunition. Nicholas II and his leading generals also did not consider the distance they had to cover to reach the Far East, having to cross thousands of miles to reach the front. In addition, the economy was very weak, and the territory being fought over was not very important to Russia. As a result, the Russian people did not support Russian involvement in the war.

First Revolution of 1905: In 1905, there were revolutionary movements across Russia, mass strikes, famine, and military mutinies in which soldiers defied the orders of their officers and issued economic and political demands. After the event known as Bloody Sunday on 22 January 1905 and the successive waves of mass strikes, Nicholas II had to seek a negotiated end to the war.

World War I: Under the unimproved political and economic conditions the demoralized army had no time to recover, and the Russian society and the army were not ready for a total war, World War I in 1914. World War I proved that both the Russian army and the empire were insufficiently modernized to wage a major war with the European great powers. Although by 1914 the active army numbered 1.4 million men, the overwhelming majority of young men in the empire never received any military training at all. As the number

of casualties increased in the World War I, the Empire experienced difficulties in finding men to fill the ranks. Therefore, the non-Russian minorities were drafted into the army, but ethnic minorities met with considerable discrimination within the army.

The Russian army was also exhausted by the Russo-Japanese War and 1905 Revolution, and the high number of casualties, economic distress, inadequate infrastructure, arms and ammunition, and neglected social problems that had accumulated for centuries increased discontent to the level that the soldiers began to disobey the orders of their officers. It was this army that had helped the Empire to survive, but, now it was the same army that would bring it down. Participation in World War I was the final stage of this discontent, and was the time that the Russian army abandoned their Holy Father, the Tsar. Vladimir Lenin opposed World War I calling it an imperialistic war, encouraged proletariat soldiers not to take any order from their officers, and instead, to fight against the enemies of the revolution at home. *The Russian military* mutinied, the *troops deserted* soon afterward, demoralized army troops joined the strikers, and Nicholas II was forced to abdicate causing the Empire to collapse.

Provisional Government verses Petrograd Soviet: Unlike the Bolsheviks, the Provisional Government had decided to keep the Russian army in the war. However, the Petrograd Soviet forbade soldiers and workers to obey the Provisional Government unless the Soviets agreed. The Petrograd Soviet released Order #1, demanding that military units establish soldier committees, and announcing that the Soviets could veto the directives of the Provisional Government. Although this was a direct challenge to the Provisional Government's authority, the Provisional Government did nothing to stop the power of the Petrograd Soviet creating an alternate power. The Provisional Government set up death squads to execute army deserters, but this treatment increased rage against the government. When there was a pro-Tsar coup led by General Kornilov in 1917, the Provisional Government could not suppress the riot and had to call in the Bolsheviks to help it. This weakened the Provisional Government, but strengthened the Bolsheviks.

The Establishment of the Red Army: The establishment of the world's first revolutionary army, the Red army, was announced on January 28, 1918 by Lenin in a decree, with Leon Trotsky founding the army and becoming the first commissar for war. Trotsky recruited 50,000 experienced former Imperial Army officers to command the Red Army. The Red army served the world's first communist state and it was created not only to defend this state against counterrevolutionaries inside, but also against the capitalist, bourgeois states outside. In addition, it served as the political instrument of the revolution, and was also closely supervised by the Communist Party by having a political leader (*politruk*) in each unit who was appointed by the Bolsheviks to monitor the troops and the officers. To an extent that over 90% of all officers and personnel in the army were the members of the Communist Party or Komsomol. Unlike Western armies, the Bolshevik army did not serve a general national interest, it served class struggle and world revolution. Lenin's goal was to spread the revolution abroad and to expand Soviet influence throughout the world. The Comintern, established in March 1919, functioned as an organ to promote international revolution, and to establish Soviet control over countries in the West by using all available means, including military force, to overthrow existing capitalist regimes; however, the world revolution never materialized.

Civil War: During the Civil War, the Red Army fought the White armies, the opponents of the Bolshevik regime, as well as foreign interventionists, and also Russia's former allies such as the Britain and France which decided to eradicate *the Bolshevik* regime in order to prevent the spread of communism westward.

After the Bolsheviks won the Civil War, the Red Army became a professional military organization, and was transformed into a small regular force; territorial militias were created for wartime mobilization. The Bolsheviks opened military schools to alleviate the shortages of professional military personnel in the Soviet military.

Industrialization and the Soviet Army: During Joseph Stalin's rule, industrialization required a modernized army. Stalin began by changing the name of the Red Army to the Soviet Army, and increasing military expenditures and the capacity of the army. He introduced the old ranking system, and the rank of Marshal became the highest rank in the Soviet army. The Soviet Army was predominantly Russian in national composition. Stalin dissolve national military formations, and turned them into ethnically integrated units, and the territorial militias were abolished and replaced by a regular army in 1935. The class

restrictions on military service were lifted through the constitution of 1936. All citizens became subject to military service, and serve in ethnically mixed units; however, the potential disloyalty of ethnic groups was a major concern in the conscription of the Soviet army.

In 1937 Stalin came to see the military as a threat to his authority, removed rivals who opposed his high military spending and rapid industrialization policy, and executed thousands of Red Army officers, severely reducing the capacity of the army in the process. The killing of more than 700,000 shook the foundations of the Soviet Army.

World War II: Germany's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 caught Soviet forces unprepared. At the beginning of World War II the Red Army had 5 million men, and but this number reached 30 million towards the end of the war. The Soviets even conscripted women and used them in combat as pilots and snipers. The conscription of large numbers of young men was the greatest constraint on the Soviet economy as it created labor and food shortages. Rations fell in urban areas, and the millions of prisoners in Gulag labor camps were starving, boosting their death rate. Stalin felt that prisoners of war and minorities could not be trusted, and deportations began. First, the German population of the Soviet Union was deported to Siberia and Central Asia; later Stalin, accusing the Chechens of collaborating with the Germans, deported the entire Chechen nation to Central Asia in February 1944. Others followed.

During the war, the majority of Soviet equipment was obsolete and inferior to that of the Germans. But, their Rattenkrieg (War of the Rats), scorched earth and Maskirovka tactics, and the ice helped them to cut off enemy supplies, and force them to surrender.

Many of the Soviet forces who helped to liberate the countries of Eastern Europe from German occupation remained in the region even after Germany's surrender in 1945. This was done to establish satellite states to create a buffer zone between Germany and the Soviet Union, and to spread the Soviet's political and economic influence in the region.

Cold War: After the war ended, however, the Cold War emerged out of a conflict between Stalin and Harry S. Truman over the future of the seven Eastern European communist states during the Potsdam Conference in 1945.

The defeat of the Germans cost the lives of over seven million soldiers and twenty-seven million civilians. By the end of World War II, the Soviet army had been reduced to 13 million men. After the war ended, the Soviets realized that they needed advanced weaponry, and to create more modernized and mobile armed forces. Accordingly, they reduced the number of army personnel to five million, introduced new weapons like the AK-47 and vehicles like the BMP-1, the first infantry fighting vehicle.

Nuclear Weapons: The Soviet Union tested their first atomic bomb *First Lightning* (also RDS-1 or Izdeliye 501) on 29 August 1949, after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and continued to develop nuclear weapons in full force. It was not until 1963 that the Soviets and the US signed a treaty to ban nuclear proliferation in Antarctica, and nuclear weapons testing in the atmosphere, underwater, and in space.

Warsaw Pact: During the Cold War, in 1955 the Soviets created the Warsaw Pact, a mutual defense organization, to counterbalance the NATO alliance, and used this alliance to invade Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 to suppress the disturbances, and keep these countries within the Warsaw Pact.

In 1968 Brezhnev officially asserted the Soviet Union's right to intervene in other nation's internal affairs in order to defend socialist regimes against any intervention of the capitalist countries. The Brezhnev doctrine was also used to justify the invasion, and the creation of an *Afghan* satellite state in 1979. Ten years of war ended when Gorbachev ordered the Soviet troops to withdraw in early 1989; it had cost approximately 20 billion dollars a year, and resulted in 15,000 Soviet casualties.

Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty: A brief warming of relations with the US began in 1972, when Brezhnev and Richard Nixon signed the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT), freezing certain US and Soviet weapons systems. However, this period known as *détente* was short-lived; relations again became strained when Soviets troops invaded Afghanistan in 1979 during the presidency of the stringently anti-communist Ronald Reagan. A second SALT agreement was signed in June 1979 in Vienna, but never ratified by the United States Senate due to the breakdown of *détente* in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Soviet Defense Industry: In the 1980s, the Soviets dedicated a quarter of their total state budget to the defense industry. The Soviet Union maintained the largest nuclear weapons stockpile in the world. It was estimated by the Natural Resources Defense Council that in 1986 the number of Soviet nuclear warheads reached their highest number, approximately 45,000. The Soviet Union built 50,000 T-54/55 tanks between 1954 and 1980. Even after the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Russian defense industry remained the largest in the world, larger than even those of the United States, China, Britain and France.

Discussion/Questions

1. What factors led the Soviets to invade and fight in Afghanistan?
2. Why was the Imperial Russian military unable to compete technologically with the European militaries?
3. What were the main points of Soviet military doctrine?

Readings

- 1- Stone, D., *A Military History of Russia: From Ivan the Terrible to the War in Chechnya*, Praeger Security International, 2006.
- 2- *Russia, A History*, edited by Gregory L. Freeze, Oxford University Press, 2009.
- 3- Fuller, W.C., "Imperial Army", in *The Cambridge History of Russia, Imperial Russia 1689-1917, Vol.2*, Edited by Dominic Lieven, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 530-553.