
Military Strategy

'Team B' thinks the Soviet Union lost World War II

by Susan Welsh

Richard A. Gabriel, *The New Red Legions: An Attitudinal Portrait of the Soviet Soldier* (Vol. I, \$22.50) and *A Survey Data Source Book* (Vol. II, \$40.00). Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press. Publication date: August 1980.

"In this century the Russian Army has collapsed seriously on two occasions," writes Robert E. Bartos, Intelligence Division Chief of the U.S. Army in his *Foreword* to Richard Gabriel's forthcoming two-volume study. "In the context of the World War I debacle, historians have generally pointed to the ineptitude of Tsarist leadership. In the second instance, the collapse of the Soviet Army against German forces in World War II, the collapse has been broadly attributed to Stalin's leadership failures. ... Dr. Gabriel has reminded us that the Soviet soldier is by no means a 'man of steel.' Thanks to this pioneering effort, Western analysts can now legitimately speculate whether the man of steel has entrails of straw and whether there are unseen fissures in the Soviet Army that would compel it to collapse under pressure—for the third time in this century."

Wait a minute! the reader wonders. The Soviet Union won in World War II ... didn't it?

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When Prof. Gabriel informed me that he would soon be coming out with the first-ever western sociological study of the Soviet Army based on interviews with Soviet soldiers, I was indeed amazed. Is the Soviet government allowing an American intelligence reserve officer to profile its troops? Imagine my surprise when the books arrived, and it turned out that the 156-item questionnaire was administered to Soviet Jewish emigres living in the United States, Canada and Italy, individuals who had served at one time in the Soviet armed forces!



Soviet troops raise the flag in Berlin, 1945. Were Gabriel right about the Red Army, it wouldn't have happened.

Gabriel claims that his sample of 134 former soldiers who returned their questionnaires (out of 1059 mailed out) is broadly representative of the Soviet population as a whole, since Soviet Jews are quite well assimilated, and the emigres did not leave the Soviet Union because of religious discrimination or "vitriolic hatred" of the regime, but rather to find "better opportunities" abroad. Gabriel asserts that "the desire to emigrate has been largely a result of the availability of the opportunity to do so," and the only group that has been allowed to emigrate recently have been Jews: nobody stays in the Soviet Union because they want to.

Based on this sample, Gabriel depicts the Soviet Army as corrupt and bureaucratic, plagued by alcoholism and desertion, harsh living conditions, ethnic antagonisms, and with relations among soldiers and officers remote and uncaring.

The reason it is even worth considering a study whose methodological basis is as shaky as this one, is that Gabriel's books sharply reflect the dangerous misestimation of the Soviet armed forces that is now prevalent in U.S. military and intelligence circles. This misestimation is upheld in various forms by both the hawkish "Team B" crew that Gabriel represents, and by the fruitier types of the self-proclaimed "Aquarian Conspiracy," who are spending taxpayers' money presenting the Joint Chiefs of Staff with daily readings on Marshal Ustinov's horoscope. The failure to understand what makes the Red Army tick will lead this country blunderingly into a third world war, which it will assuredly lose.

Richard Gabriel has no idea what motivates a Soviet soldier to fight. Instead, he has shamelessly rewritten history (particularly the history of 1942-45) to convince the rest of us that the Soviet soldier *will not* fight.

"Usually what the Soviet soldier has historically seemed to lack is not military technique, but what might be called the 'will to fight,'" he writes. Omitting to

mention that famous World War II Battle of Stalingrad which broke the back of the Nazi Wehrmacht, *Gabriel uses the analogy of Stalingrad to show how the U.S.S.R. can be defeated in a future war:*

Victorious armies do not come apart, they do not lose coherence, and they do not desert. If Soviet plans are successful in the initial stages of confrontation, or even carried out in rough approximation to their expected schedules, Soviet units can be expected to fight well. All victorious armies do. But, as in Central Europe, if their plans, schedules, and timetables can be derailed, expectations frustrated, and, most importantly, the level and tenor of battle stress increased as a situation of *rattenkrieg* [rats' war—ed.] develops with all the fury of the Stalingrad variety of house-to-house urban fighting in which high casualties are taken and the full horrors of conventional war are brought home to the troops, then the stress on the few supports that contribute to the cohesion of Soviet troops will so increase that they will no longer stand. Under these conditions, it is reasonable to expect that Soviet units will crack far more easily than heretofore expected. Consequently, the key to defeating the Soviets might be to delay them, increase battle stress, and let the major systemic failures of the sociology of the Soviet small unit work their inevitable way. Under these conditions, Soviet units cannot be expected to remain highly cohesive or fight effectively.

Gabriel believes that small-group interactions are the key to an army's fighting spirit. This is the conclusion of thirty years of profiling conducted by Britain's Tavistock Institute and its American affiliates; it is emphatically rejected by the Soviets, however, as detracting from what they call the "ideological" basis of morale. Gabriel asserts that Soviet soldiers do not consider ideology an important motivating factor, and that therefore Soviet efforts to maintain unit cohesion on this basis are a failure.

But "ideological training" does not mean that the Soviet conscript is expected to charge into battle reciting Karl Marx's Law of the Falling Rate of Profit! It means a combination of patriotism and cultural and political maturity, or, as a Soviet publication cited by Gabriel puts it: "Courage, bravery, and heroism can be displayed by soldiers on a mass scale and can become a standard for behavior only if they are linked with noble ideals, with the conviction that the purpose of the army and its war aims correspond to the interest of the people and the genuine interest of the country." (It is interesting to note that Gabriel's study provides no information on the specific content of Soviet military "ideological training" sessions.)

The chief factor that modern armies have used to bribe. In one question, he asked the former soldiers which of five motivations is most important in getting a soldier to fight well (ties to one's comrades, belief in ideology, etc.)—yet no choice reflecting patriotic motives was provided. A sample of individuals who have emigrated from their homeland would naturally be expected to be less patriotic than their compatriots who remained behind. Nevertheless, several of his emigre respondents who had served during World War II chose to "write in" a 6th response: that with the country at war there was no alternative: one either killed or was killed. "Clearly," Gabriel comments, "these respondents misunderstood Russian history and the history of other Western armies. In combat, there are clear alternatives, one of which is flight!" That the Red Army did not take this option in World War II does not seem to cross Gabriel's mind.

The Soviet "will to fight" is by its very nature not particularly evident during peacetime. The problems which Gabriel's study reveals—harsh living conditions, alcoholism, bureaucratism, lack of initiative—do certainly exist in the Soviet army, as in the country at large. They have existed in Russia for 200 years, and continue in the difficult and constricted environment of the U.S.S.R. today.

But the Soviet Union with all its problems remains committed to principles of industrial scientific and technological progress for the benefit of the population. This national purpose has won the allegiance of the majority of that population, despite grumbling at the continuing hardships.

Gabriel admits, with greater honesty than displayed elsewhere throughout his work, that the Soviet Union has rejected the western concept of a "postindustrial society," with its attendant emphases on "quality of life," "small-group interactions," systems analysis, zero growth, and "new organizational forms" in the armed forces. No "consciousness-raising," sessions or computer-simulated "limited nuclear war" scenarios in the Red Army! The traditionalist Soviet army—which Gabriel calls "an anachronism"—reflects the continuing industrial development of Soviet society at large. "Stressing as it does control and ideology, it must inevitably resist any movement toward postindustrialism ... [It is] highly unlikely that the Soviets will move toward a postindustrial era in the next decade, or even by the turn of the century."

Gabriel asserts that the failure of the Soviet Army to adopt "postindustrial" norms and particularly cohesive "small-group relations" will lead to its disintegration on the battlefield. Until, that is, he looks at the Red Army's most likely opponent: the United States Army. Then he panics! As he admitted to a colleague recently, "the quality of the soldier, man for man, has no comparison between us and the Soviets. Put 16 of their soldiers in a room with 16 of ours, and they'll beat the shit out of us."