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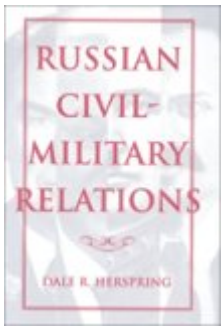
Dale R. Herspring. *Russian Civil-Military Relations.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996. xxiv + 230 pp. $35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-253-33225-7.



Reviewed by David R. Stone

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Dale Herspring, noted authority on Soviet-bloc militaries, tries in *Russian Civil-Military Relations* to lay the foundations for a new conception of the relation between the Russian army and state by undermining the old models that have dominated scholarly discourse on the Soviet military. Herspring's goal is to evaluate the three chief interpretations of Soviet civil-military relations by testing their explanatory power in three periods of profound change: the 1920s, the Gorbachev years, and the post-Soviet Russian army. By surveying their insights, or lack thereof, Herspring hopes to clear the air for a new understanding of military politics.

The three models Herspring tests are those of Roman Kolkowicz, William Odom, and Timothy Colton. Briefly summarized, Kolkowicz emphasizes continual struggle between party and army both over military policy and the military's autonomy from political interference. Given this constant tension, Kolkowicz sees the central institution of Soviet civil-military relations as the network of political officers and organs permeating the Soviet army from top to bottom and ensuring military subservience.

Odom's model, on the other hand, denies this opposition between party and army. The dividing line between them, he argues, is not clear. The two groups were instead united by a joint adherence to the principles of Marxism-Leninism. Whether soldier or civilian, Bolshevik elites shared a common ideology that cut across the civil-military barrier.

Colton, finally, draws a much more complex picture of varying degrees of military autonomy and participation in separate sectors of Soviet society. Put crudely, however, his argument holds that the party-state controlled its military by buying it off, providing the military with conscripts and large budgetary allocations while giving officers both prestige and a comfortable standard of living.

Herspring's central achievement is to demonstrate conclusively that all three models, while powerful and incisive at particular times over particular issues, cannot be generalized to cover the entire history of the Soviet army without be-

ing twisted beyond recognition. His point is a simple one, but bears emphasis. The Soviet army was constantly confronted by fundamental change. No model, Herspring argues, can do full justice to such a complex story. All the same, in his conclusion Herspring argues that there are recurring themes in Soviet civil-military relations. In a nod to Odom, he does find that value consensus aids immeasurably in easing conflict and ensuring smooth military politics. Additionally, he concludes, the most potent generator of conflict is change.

In making his argument that no single theory is adequate, Herspring structures his book around four issues and three periods of time. He first identifies and examines four salient questions for the early Red Army: doctrine, force structure (i.e. militia or regular army), national formations for ethnic minorities, and personnel policy. These issues all resurfaced in the late 1980s, and Herspring traces them through Gorbachev's term and into the post-Soviet period.

For the 1920s, Herspring finds no models completely satisfactory. Odom's ideological consensus is nowhere to be found in debates over doctrine or force structure, though the increasing homogenization of the Soviet officer corps in the late 1920s shows the mechanism by which consensus might form. Colton's emphasis on institutional participation has little relevance to the fluid and chaotic Soviet military in the Civil War and after, and the poor material state of the Red Army makes it hopeless to see the military as bought off by the Bolshevik regime. Of all models, Herspring finds Kolkowicz's best in its depiction of the bitter debates over doctrine. Even here, however, Herspring finds that army and party could reach consensus on the need establish formations made up of national minorities and a territorial militia to economize on the expense of a standing army.

In his discussion of the 1920s, Herspring's attempt to critique existing theories suffers from not going far enough in questioning assumptions about the way the interwar Soviet army worked. In effect, while disavowing the models of Kolkowicz, Odom, and Colton, Herspring employs an implicit assumption of his own: namely, that the fundamental fact about the early Red Army was the split between military specialists (tsarist officers in the service of the Soviet state) and Red commanders (Bolsheviks serving by necessity as military officers).

The question is whether such a division is the correct paradigm for understanding the interwar Red Army. To take only the most prominent example, Mikhail Tukhachevskii was a tsarist officer, but became a prototypical Red Commander; the foremost spokesman for military professionalism in Herspring's book is Trotsky, a professional revolutionary. In Herspring's coverage of doctrinal debates Svechin, the exemplar of the military specialist, argues "the front would have to be united with the rear" in any future war (p. 17). This picture of total mobilization of society, and even the phraseology, comes from Mikhail Frunze, Old Bolshevik, professional revolutionary, and accidental soldier.

Herspring's own discussion of the transition to a mixed system of regular units and territorial reserves concedes that "the battle lines were not clearly drawn" between party and army (p. 36), as even Lenin had reservations about the militia system pushed by some party activists. Herspring's discussion of national formations (units made up of a particular non-Russian nationality employing native officers and native language of command) posits that regular officers saw national units as useless, while the Bolsheviks encouraged them as a tool for nation-building (p. 37). Unfortunately, the only opposition to national units that Herspring cites comes from the Kremlin, which opposed formations outside Russian units in the early days of the Civil War, and Stalin himself who abolished them in 1938.

The one place where Herspring unequivocally demonstrates a split between military special-

ists and Red commanders is exactly where we would most expect it: the question of unity of command. Would military specialists be able to function without commissars to guarantee loyalty? Naturally, military specialists desired autonomy just as the Red Army's political officers fought for their own prerogatives. Even here, the lines between specialist and communist are not clear: Smilga and Trotsky, professional revolutionaries both, spoke out in favor of limited unity of command as early as 1918 (p. 62).

When Herspring moves to the Gorbachev and post-Gorbachev period, he is on much firmer ground, both because of his own expertise and because the very openness Gorbachev promoted makes the job of the scholar simpler. His chapter on doctrine is particularly insightful. It is quite amusing to watch Soviet generals attempting to deal with Gorbachev's encroachment on their competencies with his proclamation of "reasonable sufficiency" as the standard for Soviet defense. While the Soviet military was naturally puzzled by what such a concept might precisely mean, the Soviet officer corps correctly perceived that whatever it meant, their budgets would be cut. Their attempts to avoid conceding "reasonable sufficiency" bespeak considerable creativity--Marshal Sergei Akhromeev preferred to speak of "approximate military parity," echoed by theorist General Makhmut Gareev's "military parity," while Defense Minister Dmitrii Yazov used "defensive sufficiency," briefly switching to "reliable sufficiency." General Vladimir Lobov adopted "adequate defense" as his term of choice.

Ironically, while generals and civilians debated theory, the structure they discussed was crumbling around them. Russians grew increasingly averse to serving in the Soviet military; they were surpassed in this only by non-Russians. Not surprisingly, those two categories exhausted the Soviet manpower base. Herspring discusses in two chapters what was basically one issue: no one wanted to serve in the Soviet army far from home. The call in non-Russian republics for national units and service only within home territories came from the same source as the Russian call for a militia-based army. The proposed alternative of a professional army never managed to get around the issue of cost. The Soviet (and Imperial Russian) practice of paying conscripts the merest pittance, whatever its opportunity cost to society and conscripts, was at least not a burden on the state budget. With the Soviet economy disintegrating, a professional military was simply not a viable alternative. Gorbachev's attempt to reorient Soviet society towards a state-based rather than a party-based system only made matters worse by removing one of the key props of the army's stability.

Herspring's source base consists almost entirely of published materials, with a scattering of references to personal conversations. This has several consequences. First, as mentioned above, Herspring is prevented from talking much about the long period from the 1930s through the mid-1980s where published documentation is scarce. This is unfortunate, for Stalin's revolution-from-above had profound implications for civil-military relations. Recent work by Roger Reese on collectivization and Lennart Samuelson and this author on industrialization demonstrates the enormous strains the societal upheavals of Stalinism placed on the fabric of civil-military relations. For the Gorbachev and post-Gorbachev period, Herspring's focus on newspaper articles, essays from military journals, and public statements means that his account is replete with decrees, exhortations, and policy declarations, but short on policy implementation. This is not necessarily a handicap; given the institutional disintegration of the Russian military over the last decade, it is a just depiction of the true state of affairs.

In sum, Herspring has done an excellent job of pointing out the shortcomings of existing theories of Soviet civil-military relations. Along the way, he ably surveys the travails of the Soviet

army in the Gorbachev years and after, while offering a less insightful portrait of the 1920s. He ends by endorsing the continuing utility of models in conceptualizing complex phenomena, while refraining from proposing his own model of post-Soviet civil-military relations. Until chaos and turmoil subside, the model-builder can only wait and watch.

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