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Intelligence Memorandum

Soviets Overhaul Military Service Law

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
9 February 1968

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Soviets Overhaul Military Service Law

Summary

The Soviet Union has reduced the term of service for conscripted military personnel by one year, and introduced compulsory retirement for some top-ranking officers.

Army and air force conscripts will now serve two years and navy conscripts three. The size of the forces is expected to remain about the same. The quantity of available reservists will increase but the level of experience and proficiency will probably decline.

The already mushrooming requirements for highly trained technical personnel will now become more critical as a result of the reduction in the term of useful service. This may cause some degradation in Soviet military capabilities, particularly in the operation of technically advanced equipment.

The sociological advantages of giving a larger proportion of the male population military indoctrination at age 18 to 20 appear to have outweighed the military disadvantages and may have been the major reason for the new law.

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Strategic Research and coordinated with the Offices of Current Intelligence, Economic Research, and National Estimates.

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Compulsory retirement at age 60 for officers in many of the highest military positions will hasten the promotion of younger, technically trained officers to the top posts. The regime's hand in the field of military policy may be strengthened by the advancement of officers who will owe their allegiance to the present leaders.

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1. The new universal military service law announced in October is the first major revision in the military obligations of Soviet citizens since 1939. Its most important features are a one-year reduction in the term of service for conscripts, the introduction of compulsory military training in secondary schools, the lowering of the call-up age from 19 to 18, and compulsory retirement for top-grade officers at age 60.

Term Reduction and Strength Levels

2. The draft law reduces the length of service in the army and air force from three years to two, and in the navy from four years to three. There are many indications that this measure stems more from socio-political than from purely military considerations. Its main effect will be to extend the "universality" of military service for male Soviet citizens.

3. The number of men available for military service far exceeds the recent requirements of the armed forces. Under the 1939 law only about one million of about 1.5 million Soviet youths becoming eligible each year received active military training. This disparity has been aggravated since 1962 by the effects of the sharp increase in birth rates which followed World War II.

4. By reducing the conscript turnover rate essentially to two years instead of three, the new law will require an increased call-up of about 50 percent per year to maintain the present size of the armed forces.

Call-up Changes

5. The new law reduces the call-up age from 19 to 18 and schedules call-ups twice a year instead of the previous annual draft in November and December.

6. With the age reduction secondary school graduates will no longer spend a year waiting to be called. This provision, along with the reduced term of service, will enable young men to begin their civilian careers two years earlier.

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7. The scheduling of two call-ups a year, in May-June and November-December, will tend to smooth the flow of manpower in and out of the armed forces and the national economy.

Compulsory Pre-Military Training

8. While the reduction in the term of service is expected to have little effect on the size of the armed forces, it will almost certainly lower their level of technical proficiency. Certain features of the new law are apparently intended to partially compensate for the one-year loss of training for conscripts.

9. Compulsory pre-call-up military training in all secondary schools will ensure that all Soviet youth, even those young men who will subsequently be deferred, have at least some military training. Basic training carried out in secondary schools presumably will permit more intensive technical training at the beginning of the active service term. The new law also provides for specialized training of selected youths. This training will be given to 17-year-olds in Dosaaf training organizations and in schools of the vocational and technical education system.

10. That the new measure is also inspired by government concern over the social attitudes of youth is suggested by the marked increase in emphasis on patriotic themes in education during the past two years. The leadership has publicly deplored the fact that Soviet youth have not had the benefits of the "school of revolutionary struggle." Brezhnev and others have asserted that "military-patriotic education"--the effort to develop moral responsibility and political loyalty in the younger generation--must be intensified.

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Effects on Technical Proficiency

11. The armed forces are probably seeking to maintain trained cadres of professional experts by raising incentives for re-enlistment through increased pay, benefits, and training.

12. These measures will partially compensate for the reduced term of service, but the technical training of the increasing number of specialists, particularly those manning advanced weapons systems, must generally still be done during the active duty period. While these soldiers formerly were fully useful for perhaps two years of the three-year term, this usefulness has been effectively cut in half by the new law.

13. To maintain a force of the same size and competence will necessitate an enlargement of the technical training base. Even so, the resulting overall reduction in experience level will probably cause some degradation in the operation of technically sophisticated weapons systems.

14. The new law carries another threat to technical competence--at the professional research and engineering level--by limiting the obligation of scientists and technicians. Under the old law the Ministry of Defense was authorized to call up such personnel, who were given officer rank and served an indefinite term at the discretion of the ministry. The new law limits this type of service to 2 or 3 years. It is not clear how seriously the Soviets regard this special problem or what remedies may be required.

Forced Retirement for Higher Officers

15. A provision of the new law--with far-reaching implications for Soviet military-political relations--sets a compulsory retirement age for officers in the two grade levels below Marshal of the Soviet Union. Colonel generals, marshals of arms, and full admirals

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will for the first time be required to retire at age 60, except in cases when the Council of Ministers grants a five-year extension. Compulsory retirement for officers in grades below this level has been in effect since 1939.

16. Large numbers of officers among the top personnel of the Ministry of Defense, the General Staff, and senior command staffs thus seem to be faced with the prospect of early retirement. This includes the officers who won their spurs in World War II, who earned their promotions during the years of force reductions and stormy doctrinal controversies, and who have acquired the habits, mental outlook, and sense of professional identity that make the military establishment a force to be reckoned with in Soviet internal politics.

17. Recent promotions suggest that the five-year extension will be applied liberally. One example was the recent promotion of Colonel General A. Kh. Babadzhanyan to the rank of Marshal of Armored Troops at age 62. Since he was also appointed chief of the Armored Academy at the same time, it seems unlikely that his early retirement is anticipated.

18. The compulsory retirement measure nevertheless indicates that the regime recognizes a need to encourage the advancement of younger officers to responsible positions in the High Command. The regime may feel that it can strengthen its hand in the field of military policy by staffing the top posts of the military establishment with officers who will owe their allegiance to the present leaders.

19. Whether the younger, technically trained officers who stand to benefit by the new promotion opportunities will prove, in fact, to be more pliable than their predecessors remains to be seen. The expertise that they will bring to bear to support their advice on policy issues could prove a more potent political asset than the more purely personal authority that their elders enjoyed.

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