

**Democratization's Influence on CW Demilitarization:  
The Case of Russia**

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### Introduction

Culture, values and ideals. Chemical weapons. The subjective as opposed to the tangible, but the two areas are not mutually exclusive. The normative influences the practical. Our realities are influenced, effected, affected and developed partly as a result of the political culture in which they are based.

Such a discussion is most often left to sociologists researching individual behavioural patterns, but even official policies and programmes, seemingly developed as a result of and in response to practical problems, are influenced by non-objective factors such as the culture and values underlying them.

The demilitarization programme in Russia is a case in point. On the surface, chemical weapons (CW) demilitarization is the practical process for disabling and destroying chemical weapons. Such an understanding, however, fails to explain or even include the many social, political and economic factors affecting the demilitarization process. These factors, particularly those made evident by democratization, must be considered in order to comprehend the current state of CW demilitarization in Russia and to adequately prepare for its successful continuation.

### Democratization

The process of transition to democracy, democratization, which began after the demise of the Soviet Union, has significantly influenced CW demilitarization, as it is a process effecting political, economic and social change. True democratization is not only intended to shape political organs and create the workings of a democratic government; it also alters the collective mindset of a community, setting into motion successive societal changes. Even economic norms undergo transition, further destabilizing the foundations of the state and society experiencing democratization.

Democratization's influence in Russia is fundamental in understanding demilitarization because of the changes it is spawning in the political (and military) culture of Russia. Political culture refers to the norms, forms and practices of the political realm of a society. Similarly, the military culture indicates the norms, forms and practices of the military realm. In most states it is within these areas in which governmental and national security decisions are taken, certainly, but more importantly,

these are the areas in which the collective mindset and the ideology supporting it are formulated. In order to comprehend the decisions of political and military bodies, therefore, one must understand the intentions and ideas behind them.

Socialization under the Soviet system created political and military cultures reflecting the ideology and control of the Communist Party. Democratization's influence has begun to affect the basis of the value system supporting Soviet political and military cultures; the new political culture that is evolving will necessarily be uniquely Russian, however – evidencing its rich centuries-old heritage and culture and its experiences during the Soviet period, as well as its adoption of contemporary, Western and international ideals. This lesson must be heeded, as some academics and political advisors focus upon the legacy of the Soviet regime and conclude that the socialization of Russians during that time precludes the development of a society promulgating democratic norms and values. Moreover, others try to assess the attitudes and opinions of Russians in order to determine whether democratic values are present and what such results may indicate for the future of democracy in Russia. Though well-intentioned perhaps, many such views are based upon an adherence to Western values as well as an understanding of reform according to Western standards. Indeed, various proposals for transition and reform assistance seem to assume that Russia and the other republics' paths in democratization should proceed according to Western standards. The 'democratic values' and the means of reform that are promoted are those of the West; though suitable within a Western context, these values are not necessarily those of Russia and these reform mechanisms are not necessarily appropriate for Russian political culture. The difficulties in reform experienced within the Russian context will not be remedied by one-size-fits-all democracy or by a standard template for transition. In essence, Russia's individual political culture must be taken into account in order to achieve a successful democratization.

### Demilitarization

Without democratization, demilitarization would barely be possible. The liberalization of the state and society has extended to aspects of national security as the superpower façade has crumbled away. The shift away from utilizing an outwardly strong military in order to evidence the strength and might of the state through pomp, circumstance and missiles demonstrates the practical effects of democratization on the priorities valued by both the governmental authorities and society. These new priorities, however, are not yet deeply rooted in the new political and military cultures. The transition is by no means complete,

and various threads from the past still bind the present to Soviet-inspired ideas and ideals, at times threatening the headway made by the gradual elements of reform. The potential success is fragile. A retrenchment of democratization and/or demilitarization due to inappropriate or incompatible policies could jeopardize not only the limited benefits thus far attained, but also the stability of Russia as a nation. Thus, success, though fragile, is crucial - in both democratization and demilitarization.

This success must be the result of a culturally appropriate, Russian-formulated plan of action. This is especially important for demilitarization in Russia, as its domestic impacts on the political, economic and social spheres are intertwined with other pressing issues, such as the political instability, the economic crisis and social welfare. In addition, demilitarization, like democratization, must be understood within the context of Russian political and military cultures. Just as the impetus for much general reform within Russia has been predicated upon Western ideas, the external push for domestic demilitarization in Russia tends to view Western solutions as the demilitarization path to follow.

To emphasize once again, however, successful demilitarization, including foreign assistance for Russian CW destruction, must consider the situation from a Russian point of view. One difficulty in this has been the motivation (on the part of the West) of removing a possible Russian military or security threat by encouraging demilitarization, and consequently political and economic stability, modelled on a Western scheme. This motivation for the provision of CW destruction assistance is another influence of democratization upon demilitarization.

Democratization has broadened the scope of demilitarization. Demilitarization should not be conceptualized as only a technical issue, as only a non-normative procedure for eliminating weapons or rendering them ineffective. Destruction of CW, whether in the United States or in Russia, is an issue which is grounded in certain value judgements and beliefs. These values and beliefs, whether held by the general populace, policy makers or both, have their basis in that nation's political and military cultures. However, when speaking of destruction in a specific national context, one must recognize that domestic concerns are intertwined with international perceptions. In other words, the domestic political culture may be influenced by outside ideological beliefs, which is true in Russia as a result of the democratization process. Depending upon the society, these beliefs may be in accord with the original domestic political culture or they may be fundamentally different. In the case of Russia, many of the beliefs are incongruent. Should, as in Russia, the external and internal political cultures diverge, instability is the result. The particular issue under consideration, the CW demilitarization programme,

thus fails to progress as a result of diverging priorities and perspectives rooted in cultural differences.

Destruction is therefore not only a concern of technical specialists and the military. It does not only affect weapons and army depots. It affects people, their neighbourhoods and the environment. Moreover, the way destruction is carried out affects people's perceptions of the government and military – and it impacts upon the trust and confidence society holds for the state. Thus, people and their communities, the basic units of society, are the key to successful demilitarization, from Kizner to Anniston and Pochep to Tooele. Bringing people into the decision-making process will ensure that culturally relevant factors of the society are considered. The power of the people is not to be underestimated.

#### From the general public to elites

The importance of the role of the general public in CW destruction is also a result of the democratization process in Russia. The role of the people is the one factor of democratization that is necessary in every political culture. The truly significant aspect of democracy overall is that citizens must be able to voice their opinions and express their interests through a variety of mechanisms, some directly political, some more associational, but all such processes and channels afford citizens a competitive outlet that is crucial in the functioning of modern democracy. Thus, a primary aim of democratization is to promote the role of the general public. As explained above, the public is also the needed link in demilitarization. The success of outreach offices in stockpile sites in both Russia and the United States highlights the importance of public awareness in the destruction process. Knowledge and understanding generate trust, which in turn assists in maintaining stability within the nation as a whole.

The role of elites in the transition to democracy and within the destruction process is more clearly defined than that of the mass public. Elites make the policies, craft the procedures and implement the rules. They are responsible for building the institutions of democracy and the destruction facilities, the tangible, visible symbols of the type of government and its policies. The elite side is the procedural side, the element emphasizing democratic 'crafting'. The mass public, on the other hand, is responsible for something deeper and less tangible; it is responsible for the values which legitimize

democracy and support demilitarization. Values which are not embodied in political institutions will not necessarily endure. Even more, institutions which are not backed by a deeper philosophy or commitment are empty and will not survive. This can be termed the state-society nexus, the root needed for democratization to grow, and the soil required for demilitarization to succeed.

### Demilitarization and trust

Now is the time to continue the focus of demilitarization with an increased emphasis upon the general public, for it is the nature of society which guides the fundamental success of any transition. The progress of demilitarization in Russia has been limited to date, but that is not to discourage its future progress. To emphasize once again, much importance was placed on the elite level in terms of political and economic organization and logistical arrangements – but future success depends upon increased support of the general population.

Russian society today contains many competing groups, and indications exist that democratic institutions are sometimes viewed as ends in and of themselves to balance conflict among these groups. There is a danger, however that without the proper education and involvement of the general public, democratic institutions as well as the social infrastructure surrounding the demilitarization programme could be viewed as a *means to an end, not ends in and of themselves*.

In addition, democratic institutions and procedures are often viewed as mechanisms for economic regeneration and successful capitalism. There is concern that some of the infrastructure assistance requested for foreign assistance to Russia's CW destruction programme may be utilized for short-term economic gains, rather than for long-term social needs. Proper education of local people living in the stockpile regions as well as improved information for the population of the nation as a whole serves to expand the mindset of the community, emphasizing the importance of community involvement in local decision-making on a long-term basis. The task of informing the public is primarily being undertaken on the local level by Green Cross Russia, a non-governmental organization. In some of the stockpile sites the Ministry of Defence also operates outreach offices. This approach avoids quick and easy public relations campaigns, and instead focuses on public outreach as the offices are staffed with

knowledgeable local people and are open to the public during business hours. By being permitted an outlet for participation and for voicing concerns, the populace learns about environmental safety, the value of participation, the need for local involvement in decision-making and, most importantly, the value of trust in one another and in authority. If local people trust the authorities to carry out CW destruction responsibly and recognize the necessity of a comprehensive destruction programme, a fundamental potential obstacle in implementing the programme has been overcome. Moreover, trust generates trust. Trust resulting from an effective CW destruction programme will generate popular trust in other governmental policies. And this trust is beginning at the level most difficult to reach – the general public.

### Conclusion

A nation's history, its political culture, shapes the way its citizens view government and its policies as a whole. Russia is no exception. Understanding political culture in the Russian and post-Soviet context assists in understanding what democratization and demilitarization mean to Russia. A problem in democratization has been that the Western view has not adequately considered Russia's political culture and past in prescribing transition mechanisms for its government. Western assistance for demilitarization programmes also shares this tendency. Billions of dollars, Swedish crowns, Dutch guilders and German marks have been allocated and given to ridding Russia of dangerous armaments, but at times without regard to Russia's infrastructure (or lack of one) and in ignorance of social conditions and general living standards. Similar problems exist with other types of economic remediation programmes.

CW destruction assistance must begin at the local level, for the general populace, for the local community is the key to successful demilitarization. An appropriate programme should be undertaken from a Russian perspective, taking into account its political and military cultures; by starting at the local level, needs of ordinary citizens must be considered within a cultural context. By providing them with a voice to participate in local decisions and with comprehensive information about the issue of demilitarization, citizens will grow to trust authority and value the ability to effect change, however small. Building trust at this fundamental level will allow it to expand and be channelled into other directions which facilitate greater democratization and, eventually, a stable system of government.

Without proper consideration of Russia's political culture, the democratization process will be impeded by an incongruity of values and priorities. Without adequate emphasis upon the importance of the local populations in CW destruction, the resistance of ordinary citizens will hinder the demilitarization process. Democratization, demilitarization and stability in Russia cannot be achieved by uninformed assistance, however well intentioned. Dollars must be combined with sense. The sensible and successful way to demilitarization in Russia is to proceed incrementally, beginning at the local level, encouraging and building trust from communication and an understanding of the Russian political culture, and allowing Russia to prioritize its needs. Success will not come easily, but difficulty is not a reason for not trying, only a reason for trying harder.