CHAPTER II

PARTY - MILITARY RELATIONSHIP
Introduction:

The Military in any country is the backbone of the nation's strength. A strong military is, therefore, imperative for the security and well-being of a country. Soviet Union, too relied on its strong military. Soviet military was unique in many respects - not only because of its numerical strength or its organisational structure, but also because of its apparent role in the determination of Soviet domestic and foreign policies. Albeit, Soviet military never usurped political power from the civilian authorities in the unique 'Communist' set up of Soviet Union (not withstanding the alleged attempt by military hardliners to oust Gorbachev in a coup d'etat in 1991) it nevertheless played important political roles in Soviet Union. There is no doubt of the fact that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was the all-pervading force in Soviet Union, yet the Soviet military was also not a puppet in the hands of the Party. Hence, it is important to understand the relationship between the Party and the military. As has been seen in the previous Chapter, the party and the military played the vital role in formulating Soviet strategic posture. This Chapter attempts to understand the institutional relationship between the Party and the military. Hence, it is also incumbent to study as to how far the military as an 'interest group' was able to influence the formulation of the Soviet strategic doctrine.
Political Control of the Military:

From its very inception the Soviet State depended largely on a powerful standing professional army for its defence and security. Immediately after assuming power the Bolshevik party passed a decree to demobilize the Russian (Imperial) Army.¹ In its place Soviet Union under the leadership of Lenin established the Red Army - the Workers and Peasants Red Army (Roboche-Krest' yanska Krasnaya Armiya or RKKA) on January 28, 1918.² Subsequently, on May 8, 1918, the Bolsheviks established the All-Russian Main Staff, which was given the "responsibility for the formation and training of the Red Army, as well as the elaboration of regulations, instructions, and directions."³ A Field Staff was also created for the overall command of the Armed Forces on July 8, 1918, which was headed by a Commander-in-Chief.⁴ Further, the Revolutionary Military


² Ibid., p.38. The "officially celebrated date" of the foundation of Red Army (RKKA) was February 23 because it was on this day that some 'Red Guards' and other volunteers were believed "to have temporarily checked the advance of a German column near Pskov". See Michael J.Deane, Political Control of Soviet Armed Forces (London, 1977), pp.12-13; Edgar O'Ballance, The Red Army: A Short History (New York, 1964), p. 23.


⁴ Idem.
Council (Revvoensovet) was established in September, 1918, with Trotsky as the Chairman. In this way a highly motivated and centrally controlled Red Army was created, which subsequently became a formidable and disciplined force for the defence of the 'Socialist fatherland.'

Soviet Union made extraordinary efforts to increase its military strength for fulfilling its political objections. The formidable military power of Soviet Union had the concern of the West, especially the United States. Indeed, the Western analysts while questioning the military programmes of Soviet Union believed that there was an institutional conflict between the Party and the military. As Roman Kolkowicz argued,

The history of Party-Military relations presents a study in conflict created by a certain incompatibility between the sole holder of power in the State and one of the main instruments of that power...the military appears to the Party as a potential challenger, who must be controlled and manipulated at all times to prevent any power-seeking elements from threatening the Party's monopoly.

As discussed in the previous Chapter, the Soviet Military had a very important voice in the formulation of Soviet strategic doctrine, besides the Party. In such a situation, it is important to understand the relationship of the Party and the military. It is a well-known fact that the Communist Party of Soviet Union (CPSU) was the guiding force behind all activities in the country and, hence, it played the most prominent role in the details of military strategy and doctrine. Therefore, it is beyond doubt that there existed a sort of political control by the Party of military. In this connection the office of the Political Commissar can be seen as the beginning of political control of military by the Party. First defined in April 1918 by the Bolshevik government, the office was "considered the immediate political arm" of the Party in the Red Army.  

According to the 5th Congress of the Soviets (July 10, 1918),

------------------------
...Continued...

Thomas W. Wolfe, on the other hand, believed that, "Rather than a sharp dichotomy between the two groups, however, there seems to be considerable crossing of lines between them, with like-minded factions on both sides of the house tending to cooperate with each other on particular issues." See Wolfe, "Military Power and Soviet Power," in William E. Griffith (eds.), The Soviet Empire : Expansion and Detente (Lexington, Mass., 1976), p. 156.

The military commissars are the guardians of the close and inviolable inner bond between the Red Army and the Workers' and Peasants' regime as a whole. Only irreproachable revolutionaries, staunch champions of the proletariat and the village poor, should be appointed to the posts of military commissars, to whom is handed over the fate of the Army.\textsuperscript{8}

It seems the newly formed Bolshevik government was keen to establish a regime of order and discipline among the military so that the latter do not go out of hand or become a mob of unruly soldiers. Moreover, at that point of time the Bolsheviks had to appoint a large number of former imperial officers and soldiers not only because of the on-going War but also because of the necessity to build up a professional and trained army. The nascent government had hardly any time to go in for new recruits. As Lenin observed in a speech on Red Officers' Day (November 24, 1918) it became necessary to appoint political commissars in the military because "only Red Officers will have any respect among the soldiers and be able to strengthen socialism in our army."\textsuperscript{9} Over the course of time the political control of the military was made more centralized. During the Stalin era the stronghold of the Party over the military became more prominent than before.

\textsuperscript{8} Cited in \textit{ibid}, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Ibid}, pp. 16-17.
The Politburo and Central Committee members started playing a very prominent part in the Higher Military Council and Stalin was credited with the achievements of the Soviet army during the World War II. Large-scale purge of military personnel by Stalin not only established more firmly the stranglehold of the Party over the military but also to a large extent demoralized the latter.\textsuperscript{10}

**The Main Political Administration:** The Main Political Administration (MPA), the name given to the political administration in 1946,\textsuperscript{11} mainly operated "as an independent body within the Ministry of Defence."\textsuperscript{12} As an organization, it functioned as a part of Party's Central Committee.\textsuperscript{13} The MPA which was "accountable for its activities to the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Defence Council" was entrusted with the most important responsibility of transmitting political ideology to the military personnel, that is, in other words, educating the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} For an in-depth analysis of political control of the military during the Stalin era see, for example, Zbigniew Brzezinski (ed.), *Political Controls in the Soviet Army* (New York, 1954); Littleton B. Alkinson, *Dual Command in the Red Army, 1918-1942* (Montgomery, Ala., 1950); Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* (New York, 1968); Louis B. Ely, *The Red Army Today* (Harrisbury, Pa., 1949).
\item \textsuperscript{11} Deane, n. 2, p. 52.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Kolkowicz, n. 1, p. 84.
\item \textsuperscript{13} *Idem*.
\end{itemize}
military with ideological "values and attitudes". The MPA was headed by a Chief (nachal'nik) and actively assisted by a "collegial bureau". Its extensive network covered "the Ministry of Defence including political organs in the central apparatus of the Ministry in Moscow, the military educational and research institutions and all of the services down to such basic military elements as companies, squadrons, and ship." Thus, it is obvious that the sway of the MPA over the activities of the military was not only extensive but also to a great extent overbearing. The importance of the MPA can be gauged from the fact that it was the MPA which was responsible for coordinating all "Party-Political activities in the military" beside reporting to the Central Committee of the CPSU regarding the status of the "political morale of the military personnel, the military readiness of units, and the political activities in the armed forces."

15. Ibid., p. 116.
17. Idem.
Among the instruments of political control that were most conspicuous by their presence were the political organs, the military chain of command, local party organs and the secret police and the prokuratura. Through these organs the Soviet state expected to control the activities of the military and also at the same time check any anti-Party dealings of the military.\textsuperscript{19} Albeit the Communist Party wanted to keep the military under its strict control (in which it was successful to a great extent as is evident from the credits accorded to Stalin and the Party for the victories in World War II) the latter also at the same time looked for avenues to express their independent role. Indeed the appointments of Marshal Zhukov as the Minister of Defence in 1955 after the resignation of Malenkov, and Marshal Bulganin as Premier was a shot in the arm of the military.\textsuperscript{20} Both the Marshals clearly resented the political interference in the military affairs of the State. Zhukov brought about substantial changes in the role of political administration. Not only he redefined the role and reduced the "effectiveness" of the political administration, he also simultaneously "recreated under his supervision the political administrations for the Ground Forces, Air Force, Navy and

\textsuperscript{19} See \textit{ibid.}, pp. 87-89.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 113.
National Air Defence in April 1955" and "prohibited the political administration from retaining direct control with the Party Central Committee."\(^{21}\) Soviet military was now able to free itself from the shackles of ideology. Indeed, it was no more compulsory to study ideology or party history. An air of freedom and independence of thought and action (within acceptable limits) pervaded the military.

According to Kolkowicz, to decrease the role of Party in the military, Zhukov initiated measures to remove three main obstacles:

(a) the Party's corrosive political controls under which the Commanders were forced to share authority with political officers and collective bodies in the units;

(b) the *rigor mortis* hold of Stalinist military dogma and strategic doctrine, which was impeding urgently needed modernization, and

(c) the Stalinist heritage in Soviet historiography and popular legend, which deflated the role of the military and assigned the credit for many victories and for military and political wisdom and foresight to the dead dictator and the Party.\(^{22}\)

\(^{21}\) Deane, n. 2, p. 59.

\(^{22}\) Kolkowicz, n. 1, p. 116.
The arrival of Zhukov in a position of power meant that the military not only started to assert itself, but also that the de-Stalinization campaign and the rehabilitation of Stalin's military victims started in the right earnest.\textsuperscript{23} It was during this time that Khrushchev also unleashed his de-Stalinization campaign which culminated in his famous secret speech to the 20th Party Congress, where he castigated Stalin without mincing words. Khrushchev asserted that it was due to the mistakes of Stalin that many soldiers lost their lives during World War II, which "changed only when the Generals were able to take firmer control" of the military affairs.\textsuperscript{24} It is obvious that Khrushchev was trying to enlist the support of the military for his own personal advantage, while at the same time downgrading Stalinism. Zhukov was appointed a candidate member of the Party's Central Committee Presidium, which is regarded to be the first instance of a professional soldier achieving this position in the Party hierarchy.\textsuperscript{25} It provided Zhukov with an opportunity to increase the role of the military in Soviet politics and assert their role in the Soviet decision-making process.


\textsuperscript{24} Deane, n. 2, p. 61.

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 62.
Urging the political officers in the military to put primacy to the 'military work', he said,

The task of propaganda consists not only in explaining the theory of Marxism-Leninism, but also in contributing to its practical implementation. The theoretical side of propaganda work must give more space to the problems...connected with practical tasks of the troops....A political officer who does not know his military duty cannot cope with the tasks which are (before) him.26

Indeed, the rise of Zhukov in the Party's highest decision-making body signalled the increase in debates and discussions on the primary role and function of political officers in the military. It is interesting to note that the discussions on this topic was not only intense but also underscored the differential perceptions of the two interest groups -- the Party and the military. As a result of this deliberations, a new thesis -- 'Instructions to the CPSU Organizations in the Soviet Army and Navy' -- was put forward in 1957 which provided the general guidelines for Party-Political Organizations in the armed forces. According to the 1957 Instructions,

In the Soviet Army the Commander guides all combat and political preparations and education of his personnel. Political Organs and Party Organizations must actively support the orders of

Commanders, to protect the authority of the Commander, train personnel to obey and execute orders. The Party Central Committee points out in the instructions: 'At Party meetings, criticisms of orders and decrees of Commanders is not permitted.' It is necessary to execute strictly these demands of the instructions and to conduct a struggle with those who attempt to undermine the firmness of orders and decrees of a Commander.27

The Instructions of 1957, thus, decreased the authority or political organs in the armed forces. It is obvious that the Party leader, Khrushchev, was trying to enlist the support of the military and, therefore, made it compulsory for the political officers to work in tandem with the Commanders of the Armed Forces. Indeed, it can be seen as an emergency step to eliminate any grievance against the political leadership of the day. In this connection it is important to highlight that in 1957 Khrushchev was facing problems from some of his own partymen who tried unsuccessfully to remove him in June 1957.28 At this hour of crisis it was Zhukov who came to the rescue of Khrushchev. Zhukov forcefully stated that "the army would not allow Khrushchev's removal", during a full Central Committee meeting of the Party convened by


Khrushchev. 29 This salvaged the position of Khrushchev, who expelled his rivals from the Central Committee. But political machinations of Khrushchev ensured that Zhukov was eased out of his position as Minister of Defence. 30 It is clear that Khrushchev wanted to stabilize his role as the undisputed leader and, therefore, found Zhukov to be a probable rival. This incident is instructive of the fact that the political leadership wanted to forcefully put across the message that it was supreme in Soviet Union.

The removal of Zhukov was followed by an increased activity to assert the political influence in the military affairs. The Party accused Zhukov of having "lost the Communist modesty which Lenin taught." 31 Incidentally, some of the opponents of Zhukov in the military supported the stand taken by Khrushchev, while at the same time some elements in the Party were not particularly happy with the removal of Zhukov. Thus, this episode cannot be termed as a Party-military conflict. Rather there was an element of consonance and dissonance in this action, which was the ironical hallmark of the Party-military relationship. Obviously in this light the basics of the relationship was at variance with the 'institutional conflict model', the

29. Ibid., p. 63.
30. Ibid., p. 64.
31. Ibid., p. 65.
term that was used by Colton\textsuperscript{32} to focus on the thesis of Kolkowicz\textsuperscript{33}

II

Consonance and Dissonance in Relationship:

The basic problem that underlined the relationship between the Party and the military was that the former always believed that it was its sole prerogative to formulate all policy-decisions in the country, including that of the armed forces. This always pinched the professional military which feared losing whatever independent voice it had.

The emergence of a new military doctrine by the end of 1959, which was necessitated by the advent of nuclear revolution in armaments, decreased the role of ground forces and even the conventional weapons started having less important role. It enabled Khrushchev to go in for a massive troop reduction. He believed that,

\ldots the arms we now possess are formidable; and these which are, so to speak about to appear, are even more perfect, even more formidable. The arms being designed and, so to speak, in the portfolios of scientists and designers are incredible arms.

\textsuperscript{32}Colton, n. 6, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{33}See Kolkowicz, n. 1.
The proposed (troop) reduction will in no way weaken the firepower of our armed forces, and this is the main point.\textsuperscript{34}

Though the reduction of troops was supported by the Minister of Defence, R.Y. Malinovsky,\textsuperscript{35} there was an element of opposition to it which, in the main, came from Marshals Sokolovskiy and Konev, who were subsequently removed from their positions.\textsuperscript{36} This was followed by the intensification of political activity in the military which mostly centered around the steps to increase the combat effectiveness of troops and their discipline.

But it seems Khrushchev was too confident of getting the support of the military in his other programmes which affected the armed forces. For example, his willingness in 1961 to shift the emphasis of the Soviet economy from heavy industry production to consumer goods industry and agriculture, which was a desirable economic stratagem at that time, received heavy opposition from the military. The military, in the words of Marshal Yakubovskiy, felt that heavy industry was "the leading factor in the economy

\textsuperscript{34} N.S. Khrushchev, \textit{On the Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union, 1960} (Moscow, 1961), pp. 36-37.

\textsuperscript{35} R.Y. Malinovsky succeeded Zhukov as the Minister of Defence in October 1957.

and the basis for the strengthening of the defence capability in our country." Though, Khrushchev retraced his steps, the military as an interest group was largely unable to assert themselves properly although there was a section of partymen who were equally opposed to the shift from the heavy industries. Nevertheless, it was the beginning of series of rifts between the political leadership and the military which ultimately led to the ouster of Khrushchev in October 1964. Indeed, a curious role of the MPA was evident all through the crisis leading to the downfall of Khrushchev. MPA (the spokesman for the Party and also for the military) implicitly denounced the troop reductions by Khrushchev and called for 'mass-army concept' which was obliquely supported by A.A. Yepishev, the Marshall of the Soviet Union. The MPA 'double speak' was evident from the fact that it also supported at the same time the thesis that the Party should be the 'guiding force' in the military affairs.

---------------------
37. Cited in Deane, n. 2, p. 76.
39. For details on the crisis leading to the ouster of Khrushchev in October 1964, see "Political - Military Rifts in the Period Leading to the Ouster of Khrushchev" in Deane, n. 2, pp. 95-127. For a perspective on the military factor leading to the downfall of Khrushchev, see Kolkowicz, n.1, pp. 289-300. Interestingly, William E. Odom believed that there was "great uncertainty as to the military's role" in the ouster of Khrushchev in 1964. See Odom, n.6, p. 46.
According to Kolkowicz, following the ouster of Khrushchev (which created temporary political flux at the center) the military "began to reassert itself" by taking recourse to a "familiar pattern":

It included presenting the international scene as one of tensions and dangers rather than of political relaxation and military detente; stressing the importance of giving high priority to defence needs in economic planning, demanding a large measure of institutional and professional autonomy along with freedom from strong Party controls, and trying to create a more positive social image of the military profession.\textsuperscript{40}

At the same it needs to be stated that the 'Collective Leadership,' which replaced Khrushchev at the helm of affairs, certainly did not try to create ill-will with the military. Rather Kosygin "assured the professional military that measures necessary to strengthen the country's defence potential would be carried out."\textsuperscript{41} Albeit, it is difficult to find evidence regarding the 'demand' for "freedom from strong Party Controls", it is evident that the military itself was divided "with regard to Soviet military power." Sokolovskiy, on the one hand, argued that Soviet Union had 'more than enough nuclear means to rout any aggressor', Chuykov, on the other hand,

\textsuperscript{40} Kolkowicz, n.1, pp. 300-301.

\textsuperscript{41} Deane, n. 2, p. 136.
maintained that Soviet military power should be further developed to increase "our capability of taming an aggressor,.....(so as to ensure) a prolonged peace on earth."42

The delicate Party-military relationship ensured the gradual increase in the political domination of the military, which was implicit in the statement of Brezhnev made in 1965:

One-man command in the Soviet army is built on a party basis. This means that the Commander must in his work constantly rely upon party and Komsomol organizations and make use in full measure of their mobilizing forces and authority and their creative activity far raising the combat readiness of units and ships. Party-political work is an important inherent part of the activity of the Soviet officer.43

The above assertion makes it clear the Party was considered to be the supreme power and, implicitly, ideological education was considered to be of utmost importance in the development and training of the Soviet forces. Indeed, it could be said that the Party leadership firmly believed that weapons alone were not sufficient in winning a war and that, political work was also necessary to face the enemy.

-------------
42. See Ibid., p. 144.
43. Ibid., p. 150 (emphasis added)
In other words, reliance was not only to be on the technical side (that is, development of weapons and weapons technology) but also, more importantly, on the political side of military training. Such comparable thesis cannot be envisaged in the West.

One of the strongest articles on the political supremacy in military was written by Major General V. Zemskov who asserted that "both World War I and World War II demonstrated that the leadership of an armed struggle could not be left in the hands of the military Command alone." 44 Coming from a professional militaryman, this assertion drives home the point that there was an important section of the armed forces which believed that political control was necessary. It is clear that Zemskov did not rule away the leadership of the military during war, but subtly underscored that though the operational tactics in an armed conflict, that is in a war, could be left to be decided by military commanders, the military strategy (and, the course of war) should not be totally decided by the military. After all, war was regarded to be an extension of politics by 'other means'. This was forcefully put forward by Clausewitz and reiterated by Marx, Engels and Lenin. All of them believed, and rightly so, that there are "no purely 'military purposes' that are not political

purposes. There are 'military means'. 'Means' and 'ends' are logically different categories: Yet 'means' have a rationale, i.e., make sense, only in the context of 'ends', "which is military 'ends'."\textsuperscript{45}

Therefore, it is increasingly obvious that the military cannot be completely independent of political interferences. It was certainly not independent of Party influences in the erstwhile Soviet Union just as the American military cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be regarded to be free of political interferences. Though Western analysts have always been critical of the Communist Party's domination of the military, they overlooked the fact that the Soviet Military was "an administrative arm of the Party, not something separate from and competing with it."\textsuperscript{46} Indeed, a comparable situation can be sited from the Western democratic countries--that is, the military in the West, while might be having differences with their Governments, cannot be considered to be an extra-constitutional authority which does not work in tandem with their Government during emergencies. Obviously, therefore, the military in the West also closely follows the dictates of the Government of the day, whether be it in appointments or other matters.

\textsuperscript{45} Odom., n. 6, p. 49.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 41.
It is no doubt that in Soviet Union the political control of the military was more than in the West. But then Soviet Union had a monolithic political structure. This, of course, does not mean that debate and discussions on military matters were completely discouraged or banned. Nothing of that sort actually happened, except during the Stalin era when Stalin's word was regarded to be the ultimate 'wisdom' and military-theoretical discussions were actively discouraged. Another important point to be noted is that Soviet military was regarded to be basically conservative in nature. This proved a hindrance at times for the political leadership. For example, in the late-1960s and early 1970s, there was vehement criticisms of the political leadership by the military on the issue of arms control and disarmament. The military argued that the Soviet political leaders should seek to improve Soviet military potential even further instead of talking with the West to control the arms race.\textsuperscript{47} Hence, there was a concerted attempt to curtail the influence of the military, though not completely to eliminate the same. This was reflected in the appointment of a non-military personnel -

\textsuperscript{47} See Deane, n. 2, pp. 193-218. The opposition of the Soviet military provided Brezhnev with the much needed opportunity to check the influence of the professional military and political-military leadership. These groups were united in their arguments against the initiation of arms control regime, since they believed that such steps would hinder the development of Soviet military power.
D.F. Ustinov -- as the new Defence Minister (in April 1976). The appointment of the first civilian Defence Minister in twenty-one years gave a clear message, that is, the domination of Party in the military affairs. Significantly, in May 1976, a Supreme Soviet decree resolved to award the military rank of Marshal of the Soviet Union to the Chairman of the USSR Defence Council, Leonid I. Brezhnev. Thus, Brezhnev formally became one of the highest-ranking militarymen in Soviet Union. It was a clear sign that Brezhnev became the Supreme Commander of the Soviet armed forces and also the supreme state authority over other 'non-military war-related matters'. In one swift stroke Brezhnev demonstrated his personal supremacy (and implicitly of Party's supremacy) over the military. The process thus started by Brezhnev put a stop forever to the concept of so-called 'professional autonomy' of the Soviet military. Gorbachev, after becoming the General Secretary of the CPSU in 1985, completed the process of Party's control of the military which, will be discussed in Chapter V of the present study.

III

CONCLUSION:

The above discussion makes it clear that in the institutional relationship between the Party and the military, the supremacy of the former over the latter was doubtless. Rifts were visible between these two institutional players but the relationship was not wholly based on 'eternal conflict', as Kolkowicz believed. There were times when the military supported the political leadership. As seen above, they did so during the crisis in 1957, when Khrushchev was on the verge of being ousted. The military, it seems, participated on an equal footing during the formulation of military strategy. As the study conclusively shows the military had, at times, differences within their own ranks. Consequently, it can be said that the Party-military relationship was one that involved debates and discussions. Both institutions used 'pressure' and 'politics' to promote their perception of security, and to preserve themselves in positions of power and privilege.