The Russian Understanding of Soldier Morale

Essentials of key ideas from the 1990s to 2022

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Bild: TT Nyhetsbyrån – Reuters. A Russian soldier smoking a cigarette near Grozny in Chechnya in early January 2000.

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This version of the report has been slightly edited for clarity; and a commentary to the new version has been added.

Since the publication of the Swedish-language version, I have added a surname: Kurki.

Pär Gustafsson Kurki

Stockholm, Sweden, October 2023.

Sammanfattning

Syftet med rapporten är att begripliggöra och tillgängliggöra det ryska idégodset om stridsmoral. Vilka idéer om stridsmoralbegreppet uttrycks i ryska militäranalytikers texter? I rapporten presenteras en förenkling av ryska militäranalytikers idégods i form av en modell, den ryska modellen för stridsmoral. Det framkommer bl.a. att rysk andlighet, *duchovnost*, är ett unikt drag i den ryska modellen, och att tvångsmakt är en gemensam nämnare för ryska och västliga militäranalytikers texter. Rapporten ställer också frågan: Vad betyder dessa idéer i praktiken? Ett icke uttömmande empiriskt resonemang utmynnar i slutsatsen att den ryska modellen saknar till stor del kontakt med verkligheten. Detta kan orsaka problem för den ryska sidan, då ryssar som accepterar den ideologiserade modellen för stridsmoral inte kommer att förstå den egna sidans reella styrkor och svagheter. Men det kan också leda till problem för den västliga sidan, om militäranalytiker okritiskt anammar den ryska modellen för stridsmoral och tror att den är mer optimal för den ryska sidan än den är i själva verket. Risken är då att modellen tillskrivs en relevans och militär effektivitet som inte motsvarar verkligheten.

Summary

The purpose of the report is to make sense of Russian thought on soldier morale, spanning thirty years. What ideas about the concept of soldier morale are expressed in texts by Russian military analysts? The report presents a simplified model, called the Russian model of soldier morale. A key aspect is the role of Russian spirituality, *dukhovnost*, which is a unique feature of the model, compared to Western equivalents. On the other hand, the model's inclusion of the role of coercive power corresponds well to the concept of coercive power in texts by Western military analysts. The report also asks: What do these ideas mean in practice? A non-exhaustive empirical argument concludes that the Russian model is not entirely in touch with reality. This can cause problems for the Russian and Westerner, alike. If applied, for Russians, their own highly ideologised model impedes their appreciation of their side's true strengths and weaknesses. But, for the Western side, this can also lead to problems if their military analysts uncritically accept the Russian model of soldier morale and believe it is more optimal for the Russian side than it actually is. There is a real risk that the model will be assumed to be bolstering Russia's military effectiveness, while, in fact, it probably is not.

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1 Introduction

Soldier morale as a topic of research has had a revival, a revival for sound reasons. This battlefield phenomenon and the terminology used for understanding it are key to making sense of the full-scale war of aggression that Russia has been waging against Ukraine since 2022. As Ukraine's fierce resistance and counter-offensives in the first year of the war showed, it's not the size of the dog in the fight that matters, it is the size of the fight in the dog.

Broadly speaking, the *phenomenon* of soldier morale consists of the psychological and social processes on the battlefield that affect the solders' effectiveness on operational and tactical levels of combat. Soldier morale as a *concept* is a label that can mean several things, as this study shows. Soldier morale is a decisive factor in war, since military hardware alone is not the same as a country's military capability at war. Simply put, there is a non-quantifiable factor, that is, soldier morale, which affects both the troops' efficiency and effectiveness. On the individual level, soldier morale might be defined as the level of enthusiasm for the task. When soldier morale is becoming weaker, it may mean that unwanted behaviours emerge within the troops. Such unwanted behaviours may be the intentional destruction of equipment and weaponry in order to avoid being sent into battle, disordered retreats, and even the killing of one's own officers. These are actual examples from the Russian side of the conflict, during the first six months of war (Berggren Wiklund, 2022; Osborn, 2022; National Interest, 2022; Reuters, 2022).

The purpose of this report is to make sense of, and make accessible to a wider audience, the ideas and thinking about soldier morale expressed by Russian military analysts. To achieve this aim, a systematic literature review has been conducted.

Russian soldier morale, as a concept, is a tricky thing to examine, for several reasons. One is that soldier morale (the concept) is multilayered, because the phenomena (the psychological and social processes on the battlefield) are, to begin with, as slippery as soap, no matter which country and conflict we are talking about.[1] An example is that morale is sometimes theorised on the individual level and sometimes on the group level, and at other times on both levels at once. But also since the topic, like other social-scientific topics in today's Russia, is potentially a part of a jumbled narrative that suits the current Russian political leadership. To this, one may add the need for in-depth cultural knowledge about Russia, in

[1] See, e.g., the RAND report, *Will to Fight*, from 2018, for a study based on expert interviews with a large number of American researchers, about how they think and do research about soldier morale. Based on these data, the RAND authors draw the conclusion that "...there are no commonly accepted definitions or explanations of some of the key terms associated with will to fight, including morale, cohesion, and discipline" (Connable, et al., 2018) A British researcher, Anthony King, arrives at a similar conclusion regarding the concept of "cohesion" (King, 2013).

order to facilitate an accurate interpretation that can be efficiently presented to a wider audience.

For the above-mentioned reasons, the explicit purpose of the report is to simplify the relevant Russian ideas and develop an efficient model that makes sense of the Russian view of soldier morale. This model is based, effectively, on a narrative about a purportedly unique Russian quality of soldier morale; to prevent it from remaining unquestioned, I have included, towards the end of the report, an empirical test of its major implications.

1.1 Research Questions

The following questions have guided the research process:

1. Which ideas about the concept of soldier morale are expressed in texts by Russian military analysts?
2. What do these ideas mean in practice?

In this study, "military analysts" means military officers, war scientists, historians, psychologists, philosophers, and so on, who do research on soldier morale. The first question is answered by a literature review of texts by Russian military analysts. The main outcome is the description of the Russian model of soldier morale. The second question is answered by a limited empirical test of some important features of the Russian model. The purpose of the test is to indicate whether the Russian model works in practice, as intended by Russian military analysts. In other words, does the Russian model say something about how Russian soldier morale actually works on the battlefield? Or does the model have limited practical relevance for the real world?

1.2 Outline

The next section is a description of the research design, of which the literature review is key. Thereafter follows a description of the source material, that is, the texts written by Russian military analysts, and an overview of the process used to select them. Before the transition to the sections that provide the results , I describe the Russian flora of labels, or descriptions, for the phenomenon of soldier morale. When I write "label," I mean the concept of soldier morale, rather than the empirical phenomenon itself.[2] An everyday clarification of this is that the label (i.e., the concept) is glued to the outside of the jar of jam, but is not the same as the jam itself (i.e., the phenomenon) inside the jar. In other words, the same jar of jam can be labelled, or described, in many different ways.

[2] The reason for using two identical terms is linguistical. It makes it easier for the author to describe and discuss soldier morale.

In the following section, the main result of the literature study is presented, the so-called Russian model of soldier morale. In the subsequent section, the Russian model is discussed in the light of Western military-morale research. A key finding is that Russian spirituality, *dukhovnost*, is a unique feature of the Russian model, while coercion is a common denominator in Russian and Western military analysts' views of soldier morale.

After that discussion, the question of *dukhovnost's* practical relevance in the Russian model is put forth. In conclusion, an empirical assessment around this issue is presented.

1.3 Research Design

The core of this study is the results from a review of literature that is comprised of the ideas of Russian military analysts. The texts examined are research, or other types, of articles that contain implicit or explicit definitions of the phenomenon of soldier morale. Soldier morale, as mentioned above, is the social and psychological processes, on the battlefield, which tend to either support or undermine the troops' effectiveness and efficiency in combat. Therefore, it is possible to talk about strong or weak morale among the troops.

Since the study focusses on the ideas of Russian military analysts, it also uses Western sources as a point of reference. The purpose is to avoid the risk of simply and uncritically accepting the Russian views as "true." In addition, the uniqueness of the Russian ideas is easier to spot when they are seen in the light of something else, that is, in the light of similarly focussed studies conducted in the Western community of values. This is not, strictly speaking, a meticulous comparative approach, in which data point after data point are compared to similar counterparts. Rather, it is a simpler form of comparison, as a basis for discussion. The inferences that become possible thanks to this approach can be expected to be more reliable than inferences drawn without a point of reference, or comparison (King, Keohane, & Verba, 2021).

The most important contribution that this study makes to the research field is its highlighting of the uniqueness of some Russian ideas and definitions in the area of military-morale research. Hopefully, the study can constitute a starting point and inspiration for further research in both academia and the policy-research world.

1.4 The Source Material of the Literature Study

The source material is a selection, not the total population. The selection criteria used included the following: texts (by Russian military analysts) that explicitly or implicitly describe, or are relevant for, the psychological and social processes that

support the troops' effectiveness in battle, which we may call soldier morale. This means that both empirical and non-empirical studies were selected, but the latter dominate the sample. In other words, most of the texts can be labelled as examples of social philosophy, rather than social science. They are constructions of ideas about a social phenomenon, but without the support of primary data. The time period under scrutiny is the 1990s to 2022.

A discovery made in the early stages of the research process was that a popular Russian expression for soldier morale, *boyevoy dukh*, does not appear very often in scientific texts. Searches in the electronic archive of the Russian Ministry of Defence's own journal, *Military Thought* (*Voyennaya mysl*), initially gave poor results. This led me to conduct additional searches in the *Journal of Military Thought* archive, using a wider range of Russian keywords that, eventually, produced a body of source material, of which an overview is presented in Table 1 (below). The keywords used in the searches were, apart from *boyevoy dukh*, for instance, *dukhovny potentsial* (spiritual potential) and *dukhovny sostavlyayushi* (spiritual component).[3] The searches were carried out stepwise; that is, when themes in the column, "Soldier morale is," began to emerge, the searches were directed towards sources in the emerging themes. This is a type of strategic, rather than randomised, method of selection.

[3] The keywords were chosen by the author, with the support of colleagues in FOI's Russian-studies team.

Table 1. Source material: The Russian military analysts' texts[4]

No.	Military analyst(s)	Year	Type of publication	Soldier morale is…
1	Rukavishnikov, A.V.; Artyomov, A.A.; Kashcheyeva, A.B.	2018	Academic journal	**Spiritual power (religious)**
2	Golubyov, A.Yu.	2004	Military academic journal	**Spiritual power (religious)**
3	Chuvardyrova, G.S.	1996	Academic journal	**Spiritual power (secular)**
4	Ilin, Yu.D.;, Uryupin, V.N.	2022	Military academic journal	**Spiritual power (patriotism)**
5	Kruglov, VV.	2015	Military online journal	**Culture**
6	Grebenkov, V.N.	2009	Academic journal	**Culture**
7	Danilchenko, S.A.; Grishina, E.C.	2022	Military academic journal	**Culture**
8	Danilchenko, S.A.	1998	Academic journal	**Culture (patriotism)**
9	Kondrashova, O.A.; Kazaryan, A.K.	2012	Academic journal	**Emotionality-based communality**
10	Artamonov, V.A.	2002	Academic journal	**Emotionality-based communality**
11	Zharov, V.L.	2021	Military academic journal	Obedience

A great number of the Russian military analysts' texts that were selected (Nos. 2, 4, 7, 11 – four of eleven articles) were published by the *Journal of Military Thought*, which suggests that the ideas contained in them can be perceived, to a degree, as establishment views. The same is true, to a (lesser) degree, of the texts published by various civilian publications, or online military journals, since the authors in many cases have military ties. In sum, the selected texts offers a slice of the Russian military analysts' world of ideas. A detailed run-through of Table 1 follows below.

[4] An explanation of the listing is provided at the end of section 1.4.

No. 1 is a meta-study, a review article, about Russian psychological research on the topic of soldier morale. No. 2 is an article by a colonel who writes about the spiritual fostering of the Russian army. No. 3 is a psychological study, about stimulation of soldier morale. No. 4 is an article by two colonels in the reserve and concerns patriotic spirituality as a base for Russian security policy. No. 5 is an article about the concept of military culture, co-authored by a major-general (in the reserve), an academic and a professor. No. 6 is an article by a historian, who evaluates the concept of military culture. No. 7 is an article about the military-culture concept, co-authored by a colonel (in the reserve) and an academic. No. 8 is an article by a colonel and a researcher, about the concept of tradition as a base for military power. No. 9 is an article about military music as a method of raising the soldier morale in the troops, co-authored by a researcher and a budding officer. No. 10 is a historical article, about soldier morale in the Russian armed forces, from the 15th to the 20th centuries. No. 11 is an article by a major-general, about soldier discipline as a foundation of military service.

Most of the articles have a military tie, either through their authors or target audience. Nos. 2, 4, 7 and 11 are primarily geared towards military officers in the armed forces. No. 5 is aimed at the military, as well as the interested layperson. Nos. 1, 3, 6, 8, 9 and 10 are geared towards the civilian academic. It should be noted that several of the military analysts in the last category are either officers in the reserve, or on active duty.

In order to clarify the central themes in the source material, the texts in Table 1 are grouped according to their explicit, or implicit, message about what soldier morale is. Nos. 1 to 4 stress that soldier morale is a spiritual force, either secular, or religious. Nos. 5–8 stress that soldier morale springs from a culture. Nos. 9 and 10 stress that soldier morale is obedience. No. 11 strongly, but implicitly, stresses that soldier morale is a sense of emotional belonging. The notion that obedience and discipline are foundational factors can also be traced in most of the sources. All these themes are dealt with, below, in the literature study, where the contents are presented and examined.

The remaining sources used, for instance, the Anglo-Saxon sources in a separate section, are used as points of reference, contextualisation and contrast.

1.5 Russian Concepts of Soldier Morale (Labels)

This section considers the concepts (or labels) that are used by Russian military analysts for discussing the phenomenon of soldier morale. In Russian media, the most common label is *"boyevoy dukh"* (which literally means "combat spirit," in English), but Russian professional military analysts use a wide range of labels for

the same thing. The following examples of labels were listed in an article published in 2002, in the *Military-historical Anthropological Yearbook*[5] (Artamonov, 2002):

- the Army's psychological (spiritual) strength (*psikhicheskaya [dukhovnaya] sila armii*);
- spiritual (moral) tension (*dukhovnoye [moralnoye] napryazheniye*);
- spiritual-military potential (*dukhovno-voyenny potential*);
- combat-moral condition (*moralno-boyevoye sostoyaniye*);
- excited moral spirit (*vozbuzhdyonny nravstvenny dukh*);
- electrification of hearts (*elektrifikatsiya serdets*);
- energy of nerves (*energiya nervov*):
- will to victory (*volya k pobede*);
- moral pressure (impulse) (*nravstvennoye davleniye [impuls]*).

Most of the labels in the bullet list tend towards an abstract, collective level of consciousness. In 2018, a research review that focussed on the concept of soldier morale (here: *boyevoy dukh*), detected no use of the concept in the field of psychological research, but did detect it in War Science research and popular-science articles. The review's authors also pointed out that the military-morale concept *"boyevoy dukh"* tends not to be used by Russian militaries, neither in theory, nor in practice. Rather, they use the term, "moral-psychological condition" (*moralno-psikhologicheskoye sostoyaniye*) and similar concepts (Rukavishnikov, et al., 2018, p. 341).

[5] Note that the term "moral" (rather than morale) mentioned in the bullet list is not, in this case, a mistranslation from the Russian language.

2 The Russian Model of Soldier Morale

For the purpose of clarifying, for a wider audience, how Russian military analysts think about soldier morale, I have distilled the results of the literature study into a model, the Russian model of soldier morale, which is presented here. This model, which is the result of close reading and interpretation (with the support of the author's knowledge of Russian culture and language) of numerous meaning-bearing elements found in the literature described above, consists of three themes:

1. Russian spirituality (*dukhovnost*);
2. emotionality-based communality;
3. coercion.

This is my assessment of how the Russian ideas and streams of thought on soldier morale should be understood, here refined into three simple points, which are briefly described below.

According to some Russian military analysts, ***dukhovnost*** is a quality of the Russian soldier that exceeds the importance of high-technological weaponry. ***Emotionality-based communities***, that is, those that arise when a greater value is placed on the collective than on the individual soldier's integrity, is a central point of the Russian model. ***Coercion*** is the basis of any country's military organisation (and therefore the most basic feature of soldier morale). Russia is no exception. In military organisations, coercion is a power that is wielded by the state over the individual, here with a Russian touch.

2.1 Spirituality (*dukhovnost*)

At the core of *dukhovnost*, the Russian spirituality, is eternity's supremacy over matter, the earthly existence, which also explains why the words, *dukhovnost*, *dukh* (spirit) and *voyennaya dukh* (combat spirit, or soldier morale) are explicitly linked together by Russian military analysts. As an example, the military analysts, A.V. Rukavishnikov, A.A. Artyomov, and A.V. Kasheyeva write that "Soldier morale is linked to spirituality. Soldier morale and spirituality are homogenous concepts with a single origin" (Rukavishnikov, et al., 2018, p. 341).

Although it is possible to understand *dukhovnost* as a secular concept, it does not correspond entirely to the English-language concept of spirituality. While "spirituality" may or may not be of a religious kind, in the texts by Russian military analysts, *dukhovnost* is set apart by its relatively strong association to, in particular,

the ecclesiastical.[6] That is, Russian spirituality often implies, especially in the version of Russian military analysts, a dimension of churchliness, in other words, religiosity. This link can also be found in colloquial Russians. When Russians talk about *dukhovnaya vlast*, which literally means the "spiritual power," or "spirit power," they mean what in English is called ecclesiastical power.

In the Russian model of soldier morale, there are several examples of both secular and religious interpretations of *dukhovnost*. The texts from the period after the millennium tend to use *dukhovnost* as an (explicit) religious term. The basis of the spiritual fostering of the soldiers, according to the military analyst, A.Yu. Golubyov, are the "Armed Forces' traditions." Golubyov emphasises religion, the Russian-Orthodox faith, as the highest traditional value (Golubyov, 2004, p. 72).[7] He is not the only military analyst with this kind of view of the relation between Russian spirituality and soldier morale.

In the Russian military analysts' texts from the post-Soviet epoch, the concept of "spirituality" (dukhovnost) was at first used as a secular term, which, probably, is a heritage from Soviet atheism. See, for instance, G.S. Chuvardyrova's article, from 1996, about psychological stimuli of soldier morale in Russian interior-ministry troops, in combat zones. In the article, in which the author refers to "spirituality" as a secular term meaning "moral condition," the main features of a mental exercise are described for ex-combatants. It is reproduced in its entirety, here, due to its remarkableness:

> Imagine that your *I* is hovering about your body and is victorious against anxiety and enemies. You should repeat: "My *I* is eternal and cannot be destroyed" and imagine being invincible, unreachable by evil and other damaging influences. In this way, you stepwise create a sense of power, strength, conviction and calm, an ability to fearlessly perceive ongoing events, put yourself above the unpleasantness and easily defeat it. In addition, you should remind yourself how much happiness and joy your surroundings will feel thanks to this, that is, your close relatives and friends who are protected from the war (Chuvardyrova, 1996, p. 71).[8]

It might be possible to understand the sentence, "My *I* is eternal and cannot be destroyed" ("Moyo ya vechno i ne mozhet byt unichtozheno") as a secular thought, a moral condition, but it can also, with minimal alteration,[9] be understood as part of the core of the Christian faith. If Chuvardyrova, in the 1990s, took the trouble to call her argument secular, a number of other Russian military analysts have not

[6] Military analysts do not represent the entire Russian society. For a discussion about *dukhovnost* and Russian Orthodoxy in Russian politics 1995–2000, see Irina Papkova's essay from 2006. In Papkova's example, *dukhovnost* is often secular, even if exceptions to the rule exist.

[7] It is important to note that the Russian laws favour the Russian-Orthodox Church which is close to the regime and its policies. There are religious minorities in Russia, but they experience in varying degree obstacles to their missionary work. In particular, if they have foreign ties.

[8] The quote is translated liberally from the Russian language by the author. Unless otherwise mentioned, all block quotations in this report are the author's translations of the original texts.

[9] Replace "I" with "soul" and the quote represents the Christian belief in eternal life.

done so, post-Millenium. An example of this is Golubyov, who, in an article from 2004, *On the spiritual fostering in the Russian Army*, proposes that Russian ideology, in which religion is the highest value, is not expressed in any governmental documents, since "everything […] is already written in the Holy Book [i.e., the Christian *Bible*, translator's remark]" (Golubyov, 2004, p. 73). Golubyov expresses the same core idea as Chuvardyrova, but does not try to maintain that it is secular. Russian spirituality, *dukhovnost*, builds on "the supremacy of the eternal above the mortal, spirit over matter," and "no weapon can replace the soldier morale" (Golubyov, 2004, p. 72). In a remarkable passage, Golubyov holds that religion is the highest value and that "war," as a phenomenon, that is, of comrades-in-arms in lethal danger, develops a belief in God, which is a good thing, according to him. Golubyov means that the Russian soldier derives his "spiritual power" from the national idea of a Great Russia (*Velikaya Rus*); this is a a supra-national idea, that is, an imperial idea (Golubyov, 2004, p. 70).

The notion that soldier morale ought to be seen as a backdrop to spirituality is a notion that can also be found in recent psychological research from Russia. In an article from 2018, three military analysts describe the concept of "soldier morale" (*boyevoy dukh*), based not only on the results of their review of psychological research, but also on their interviews with *spetsnaz*[10] soldiers, about how they understood the concept.

In the 2018 article, the authors cite psychological research that claims that "spirituality" is the highest value and "the most advanced stage of personal development" in a human being, and the "highest level of human self-regulation." Other researchers mean that spirituality is a principle of "self-development" and "self-actualisation." N.V. Maryasova means that "self-actualisation" starts when the individual realizes the need for a definition of the "universal spiritual values, Truth, Good, Beauty." I. M. Ilcheva believes that "spirituality" is linked to "the quest for meaning of life, self-actualisation and responsibility" (Rukavishnikov, Artyomov & Kashcheyeva, 2018). Here, it is not a given that the spirituality is religious, but there is, on the other hand, nothing in the text that makes a secular interpretation self-evident.

The Russian model stresses that spirituality ought to be understood in the light of the idea that soldier morale is linked to an emotionality-based communality within the Armed forces. An example of this is when the military analyst, V.V. Kruglov (below) identifies religion as the highest value in the so-called "military culture."

[10] The term *spetsnaz* is an abbreviation of *otdelenie spetsialnogo naznacheniya* or special purpose unit. In terms of military quality they have been compared to light infantry forces such as the U.S. 75th Ranger Regiment, but some units are more similar to the U.S. Green Berets and other special forces units. The term is also used for law-enforcement and emergency service units.

2.2 Communality

A majority of the concepts in the bullet list in Section 1.5, about the concepts of Russian soldier morale (derived from Rukavishnikov et al., 2018, p. 341), are almost exclusively used to denote the emotionality-based communality found in small groups, or collective entitites, such as the units in the army. Concepts that include words such as "hearts," "nerves," "will" and, perhaps, "moral impulse," allude to a subject, but, notwithstanding that, those concepts are exceptions to the rule that Russian thinking about soldier morale tends to focus on military collectives. Military collectives can mean troops, companies, battalions, and so on, sometimes even the entire army.

In other words, the image of the individual solder pales in the texts of the Russian military analysts. Their ideas are, to a considerable extent, about the emotionality-based communality (or the "moral condition," in Russian terminology) within the collective, rather than about the integrity of the individual. "The collective cannot itself act without some cooperation from the individual. In Russia, such co-operation often takes the form of sacrifice, suffering, or humiliation," writes a Western Russia specialist about the Russian perspective (Rancour-Laferrier, 1995, p. 202). The Russian model of soldier morale emphasises a spirit of cooperation, the emotionality-based communality, which must exist (in the military collective) for the model to function in the heat of battle.

The view that emotionality-based communality is imperative is illustrated by the idea that military music and songs contribute to an increase in soldier morale (Rukavishnikov, et al., 2018). For example, this idea is put forth by the military analysts, O.A. Kondrashova and A.K. Kazaryan (2012). Kondrashova and Kazaryan maintain that singing is necessary in "hard times" and that the soldier remembers the song that made the greatest impression on him. They offer the following example:

> During the first Chechen War [1994–1996, author's remark] soldiers of the Krasnodar Brigade encountered a roadblock in a firefight with Chechens who, when they felt the proximity of death, began to sing religious hymns. The Krasnodar soldiers felt that they, too, needed to sing and started singing the song that to them was most important, Victory Day.

Victory Day[11] (*Den Pobedy*) was written thirty years after the end of the Second World War and in Russia remains, to this day, a popular song about the so-called Great Patriotic War.

In a number of texts by Russian military analysts from the post-Soviet years, the focus is on the large collectives, but this tendency is not only post-Soviet. An exile-Soviet example is N.N. Golovin, who, in 1939, while in exile in Paris, in *Thoughts*

[11] Composer: David Tukhmanov; lyrics: Vladimir Kharitonov, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2Fea3b_K0Y

on the construction of the Russian armed forces of the future, discusses the "quality of the force" and exclusively talks about "the spirit of the force" (*dukh voysk*; Golovin, 1939).

A clear sign, in recent years, that this figure of thought exists in the minds of Russian military analysts is the concept of "military culture." This concept should be understood in the light of the turbulent 1990s, when many Russians experienced that the country's economy, politics and culture, fell apart. The military analyst, S.A. Danilchenko (1998), believed that the "culture" of the army disintegrated and that its true strength lay in its "traditions." Military culture is a relatively new concept, but, in 2009, the military analyst, V.N. Grebenkov, pointed out the following:

> Without using the given definition of military culture, the [well-known] historians, S.M. Solovyov, H.M. Karamzin, and V.O. Klyuchevsky conduct de facto investigations of the military culture of the Russian people. Karamzin pays particular attention to military culture in his *History of the Russian state*. In sixteen of the eighty-seven chapters in his twenty-volume masterpiece, he offers the characteristics of the emergence of military affairs in Russia during a period of nine-hundred years (Grebenkov, 2009, p. 87).[12]

Grebenkov's paper is an example of the fact that the ideas about military culture are also thriving, to some extent, in the civilian research departments, even if it is among the military that it has been met with greatest enthusiasm.

Military culture has been defined in various ways, but the common denominator among the definitions is the collectivistic notion that the individual soldier's morale (that is, his, or her "military culture") stands not only in relation to both the society's and the state's military cultures, but also to the national culture in Russia. In other words, the civilian population is included in this view, which stresses that the military aspects of Russia are of great importance to the evolution of its people. In 2022, the military analysts, S.A. Danilchenko and Ye.S. Grishina, maintained that there were four levels of military culture in Russia (Danilchenko & Grishina, 2022):

1. the military culture of the society (*Voyennaya kultura obshchestva*);
2. the military culture of the state (*Voyennaya kultura gosudarstva*);
3. the military culture of the armed forces (*Voyennaya kultura Vooruzhennykh sil*);
4. the personal military culture of the soldier (*Voyennaya kultura lichnosti voina*).

[12] S.M. Solovyov (1820-1897) argued that Russia is the embattled outpost of Christianity. The historian, V.O. Klyuchevsky (1841-1911) is famous for his argument in support of the idea that the Russian empire naturally expands towards the oceans. In other words, he offered a recipe for expansionism and inclusion of other ethnicities into the Russian empire. N.M. Karamzin (1766-1826) was Alexander I's state historian and is sometimes regarded as the father of Russian conservatism.

Among these four levels, which ranges from the general to the specific, only the fourth deals with the individual, that is, the soldier, and his psychological and social characteristics. The model presupposes that the soldier is enmeshed in the other cultures and thereby is part of a larger collective that, evidently, is the priority. According to this view, soldier morale is a function of culture, rather than psychological processes within the soldier. It should be noted that Russian research in the field of psychology on the topic of soldier morale seems to be an exception to this rule.[13] The psychological research tends to be published in civilian academic journals, but the military-culture concept is foremost discussed in articles published by the Ministry of Defence's own journal, *Journal of Military Thought.*

A defining feature of the military-culture concept is its grandiloquence. Military culture is often painted in sweeping strokes of the brush: centuries and peoples and entire categories of soldiers are paraded in front of the reader. See, for instance, the version of the military-culture concept presented by the military analyst V. V. Kruglov, in his article in the *Independent Military Observer* (*Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*) (Kruglov, 2015). Kruglov's approach is broad and he argues that "the cultural level of the personnel" is a decisive factor for a military force's degree of success at war. Once again, military culture is equalled to culture. Kruglov also emphasises that military culture is a defining feature that stems from Russia's national, civilian culture. When the national culture's "achievements" are absorbed, the armed forces can "give birth to a specific and unique type of culture." All of this is clearly evident in "military history," according to Kruglov.

It is implicit that "military culture" is a concept that not only can be applied to Russia and the Russian armed forces. It can also be used to understand Russia's adversaries, such as Sweden and the members of the Western military alliance, NATO. Therefore, the Russian side tends to believe in a military-morale advantage over a purportedly decadent West that has abandoned its spirituality and religiosity and relies solely on technologically advanced weapon systems, rather than on soldier morale.

In Kruglov's view, the military-culture concept has four dimensions that do not entirely overlap with Danilchenko and Grishina's four levels:

1. political culture
2. command & control culture
3. disciplinary culture
4. staff and military-technological culture

The political culture, according to Kruglov, includes "elements of faithfulness towards some ideals and concrete aims that the army, its soldiers, officers and generals, are ready to go to battle for." The ideals, in Kruglov's view, are concentrated around "the

[13] The literature study in the above-mentioned article offers a definition of "soldier morale" that contains eight dimensions, on top of spirituality (Rukavishnikov, Artyomov, & Kashcheyeva, 2018).

national and patriotic consciousness." They may belong to the entire society, or some societal categories. Kruglov, as have other military analysts after the turn of the millenium, maintains that religion is the most important source of higher ideals and values. (In this section, only Kruglov's points that have the most relevance for the communality theme are discussed. Other points, such as those on disciplinary culture, are addressed in the following section, on coercion).

If *dukhovnost* is the core, and the emotionality-based communality in military collectives is the substance, then they are framed and developed within the military coercive power system, which is the root of soldiering, routines, processes and discipline.

2.3 Coercion

An aspect of soldier morale that frequently surfaces in the Russian military analysts' texts involves the explicit and implicit references to the legally grounded military coercive power system, which denotes that soldiers of higher rank can issue binding orders to soldiers of lower rank. This is the basis of soldiering and discipline. Soldiers can be ordered to put themselves in mortal danger or even to kill, which is an expression of the state's monopoly on violence.

Russian military analysts emphasise military coercive power more than they stress the importance of the individual soldier's personal will and motivation. An example of this is their view of military orders, commands, and instructions.

Russian military analysts tend to describe military orders, commands, and instructtions as something sacred. The expectation is that subordinates must display a will to sacrifice and, if necessary, execute orders unto death. For example, the military analyst, V.V. Kruglov, argues that "all militaries believe in the axiom that a given order shall be carried out," but, at the same time, that "the issuing of orders shall be characterised by a high degree of trust, and hope, on the officer's part, that the subordinates really will do their outmost to execute the order." But also that the given order "shall not leave any freedom of choice not to execute it," which suggests that the ability to coerce subordinates to display a certain behaviour is highly regarded (Kruglov, 2015).

To fail to execute an order, writes Kruglov, is "dishonouring," or a "shame," and "better death than dishonour!" (*Luchshe smert, chem pozor!*), which again points towards the expectation that the soldier shall rather die than fail to carry out an order (Kruglov, 2015). Russian military analysts value, in other words, the individual soldier's will to sacrifice. This, however, primarily applies to the private soldiers, who, in contrast to the officers, are not expected to express personal willpower. On the other hand, the officer corps is perceived to be characterised by strong willpower. They are the decisive bearers of the traditions of the Russian armed forces. This idea is also shared by Golubyov (2004, p. 72).

The orders given by officers result, among other things, in formal rules for soldiers, in both war and peace. In one of the few Russian empirical studies, the military analyst, V.L. Zharov, reports on an experimental programme, in the Southern Military District, which involved the parents of soldiers who committed rule transgressions in the investigative process. Disciplinary offences (rule transgressions) include everything from disobedience to destruction of equipment and deserting. These are deviations from the norm that every military organisation tries to supress, since they undermine the type of soldiering that contributes to success on the battlefield. Soldiering, or "soldier discipline," according to Zharov, is defined as conformity to rules and execution of orders, not a question of the personal willpower, or motivation, of the soldier. In his article, *Soldier discipline as a foundation of military service: Problems and opportunities*, Zharov argues, with the support of empirical evidence, that parental involvement in the investigative process creates further pressure on the soldier to conform to the rules and, consequently, diminish the frequency of rule transgressions (Zharov, 2021). The above-mentioned results show that coercion, that is, parental pressure on the soldier, is more highly regarded by Russian military analysts than the soldier's personal will to do the right thing. Instead of trying to motivate the individual, the view expressed is that the officer corps should exert pressure downward, in order to force the individual to adapt his or her behaviour.

Finally, it is possible to describe the Russian military analysts' view on coercion and orders as follows: the solder should love to execute the order, but, at the same time, be forced to do it. This notion is closely linked to the well-known Russian expression, "Show trust, but verify!" (*Doveryai, no proveryai!*).[14] The remark by the Supreme Commander, Vladimir Putin, before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, in 2022, about the fact that Ukraine's President Zelensky did not accept a particular paragraph in the Minsk accord, "Whether you like it or not, darling, you are going to have to endure it!" (*Nravitsya, ne nravitsya – terpi, moya krasavitsa!*) can also be viewed as an example of the value put on coercion in Russian culture.[15]

[14] This expression has achieved fame even outside Russia. See, e.g., the movie in which US President Ronald Reagan uses this expression in a press conference, together with the Soviet Secretary-General, Mikhail Gorbachev: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=As6y5eI01XE.

[15] In Russian, the expression rhymes, and is perceived by many as a referene to rape (Berdy, 2022).

3 Points of Reference: The Russian Model's Uniqueness in the Light of Western Research

The preceding section describes the parts of the Russian model that relate to soldier morale, that is, the Russian spirituality called *dukhovnost*, the emotionality-based communality, and the role of coercion.

This section discusses the Russian model in the light of a selection of themes that recur in the texts of Western military analysts. It should be noted, however, that these Western military analysts work in a completely different political and societal context than the Russian analysts discussed above, since Russia, after the wave of democratisation in the 1990s, has slidden back into authoritarianism, towards the totalitarianism of the present day. Thus, it is necessary to take into account that the Russian military analysts, clearly, are trapped within the wider project of the Russian political leadership. At the same time, it can be assumed that the Western analysts are less constrained in their assessments.

In order to avoid having the Russian narratives stand alone in the limelight, this report uses the Western analysts' texts as a point of reference; a point of reference from the values derived from the family of democracies, of which Sweden is a member.

The following observations sum up the overall picture:

1. In the Western sources, there is no apparent equivalent to the idea of Russian spirituality.
2. The Western sources tend to be more centred upon the individual soldier.
3. When Western military analysts talk about military culture, they limit their discussion to military organisations.
4. Many of the Russian sources are more similar to social philosophy (rather than empirical studies) and are taxonomically imprecise in a way that is uncommon for Western analysts' texts.
5. Coercion, on the other hand, is a theme that unites the thinking of both Russian and Western military analysts.

3.1 Russian Spirituality Without Equivalent

It is difficult to illustrate the absence of equivalents to the Russian spirituality, *dukhovnost*, in the Western military analysts' texts. At least, in the Anglo-Saxon texts examined for this report, there is a void, which probably is a sign of widespread

agnosticism and the partition of state and church.[16] The Russian-Orthodox Church, on the other hand, is closely associated with the Russian regime and is a key part of their ideological project, which is characterised by so-called traditional values.

3.2 Russian Emphasis on Communality

An emotionality-based communality in military collectives can be traced, to a degree, in fact, in Western military analysts' texts about soldier morale, but it is much more salient that they tend to focus on the individual soldier; some even stress that the individual soldier may have a self-interest in relation to his or her brothers-in-arms (rather than a mythical male-type friendship). An example of the latter is Charles Moskos' argument, from 1975, about soldier morale among US soldiers in Vietnam, which builds on the observation that their platoons were characterised by self-interested relations, rather than an eternal and mythical male friendship. Moskos emphasises, in particular, a pattern in written correspondence, letter-writing, as a litmus test of the type of friendship. Interestingly, he found that platoon members who returned to the United States rarely wrote to those who were still on the frontline. In most cases, the frontliners heard nothing from those who had left and, rarely, if ever, tried to initiate correspondence with former platoon members. In fact, the discontinuation of communication was mutual, in spite of declarations of "life-long friendship due to share combat experience" (Moskos, 1975, p. 29).

The military analyst, Anthony King, poses a similar argument in his book from 2013. He concludes that military personnel who are "functionally dependent" on one another "learn" how to like each other, "no matter their initial disposition." Although soldiers must be motivated to go into battle, this motivation does not by necessity come from social ties of mutual attraction. It can be caused by "functional interdependence" (King, 2013, p. 34). Moskos and King's lines of thought and conclusions do not have apparent equivalents in the Russian military analysts' texts that were examined for this report.

3.3 Russian Fusion of Civilian and Military Sectors

Whenever Russian military analysts talk about military culture, they extend their theoretical constructs towards the civilian population, while their Western counterparts appear to limit the concept of military culture to military organisations. One example of the latter is the military analyst, Chiara Ruffa, who, in 2018, defined military culture as a cluster of beliefs, attitudes and values that through

[16] Historically, Western societies have also been characterised by a high degree of spirituality and there is very much variation among them, even today.

socialisation processes become deeply embedded in an armed force. According to Ruffa, it provides guidelines for how to interpret tactical and operational goals and how to adapt to new circumstances (Ruffa, 2018). This definition is far from as far-reaching as the Russian definitions that include both hundreds of years of history and not only the military, but the civilian population.

3.4 Russian Social Philosophy

Many of the Russian texts examined in this study are more like social philosophy than empirical research; they are also more conceptually imprecise in a way that is atypical for Western studies. For an example of a Western study, see Connable et al. (2018). Here follows a few examples of imprecise terms that were found in the Russian texts in the source material. A concept that, according to Russian military analysts, is linked to spirituality is patriotism (*patriotizm*). Just like soldier morale, patriotism, as a concept, is linked to both micro and macro levels, which makes it imprecise. For an example, see Illin and Uryupin's article, from 2022, in which they define "patriotism" as a phenomenon in not only the individual, "the personality," but also in "groups, categories, professions, peoples" (Illin & Uryupin, 2022, p. 49). Compare with the results of a meta-analysis of Russian psychological research on the military-morale concept: "Soldier morale can be individual, but is summed up in groups and collectives" (Rukavishnikov, et al., 2018, p. 342). It should be noted that Russian empirical studies of soldier morale tend to be found in the field of psychology.

3.5 Coercion is a Common Denominator

Coercion, as a concept and phenomenon in military organisations, is a theme that unites the Russian and Western military analysts' thinking, which can be explained by the prosaic fact that military organisations are always based on hierarchy, discipline, and the state's power to coerce. In democratic societies, military organisations are islands of exception, as at their core they employ authoritarian coercion of the individual (although this is within the framework of democratic political governance). The individual chooses (professional armies), or is forced (conscript armies), to enter a military organisation, but the type of recruitment process makes no difference to the fundamental premise of military organisations, that is, the coercion of the individual.

Consequently, there is no apparent good reason to believe that coercion is contrary to a high degree of soldier morale. Rather, coercion should be seen as the necessary framework for the soldier's morale. In order to clarify, the "functional inter-dependence" among soldiers in a platoon, about which King discusses (above), is a consequence of an ordered division of labour in military service. That is, at its core it is a result of military orders and coercion (King, 2013). Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that coercion frames and enables the emergence of soldier

morale, no matter which model of recruitment is used in which type of political system. This argument is refined and supported by the sources discussed below.

A sense of duty, as maintained by the U.S. military analyst, James A. Ulio, is something developed in childhood and adolescence, and further evolved after recruitment and basic training through the soldier's self-discipline. This is soldiering that is taught through orders, indoctrination, routines and coercion, during the first few weeks after arrival at boot camp. When soldiering has been taught, argues Ulio, the result is "pride" and "courage" in the soldier, which leads towards "soldier morale" (Ulio, 1941). Coercion, which is only implicit in Ulios article, and its subsequent obedience, which is explicit, are pivotal for Ulio's understanding of soldier morale. This is because soldiering is taught through discipline and obedience within the framework of the military hierarchy.

The military analyst, Mikaela Sundberg, in her book about the French Foreign Legion, also discusses the role of obedience in the military hierarchy, as a central component in the unit's cohesion. This is true in both war and peace (Sundberg, 2015). Since the members of the Legion come from a variety of countries, it is not possible to rely on a common cultural background as a glue for unit cohesion, maintains Sundberg. Under such conditions, the military order becomes almost sacred, since every act of disobedience, or even an attempt to scrutinise the merits of a given order, becomes a threat to the entire unit's existence as a social organism.

Ulio and Sundberg are not the only military analysts who express these ideas that interpret the role of obedience and coercion as instrumental to soldier morale. Jonathan Fennel asserts, for instance, that "morale" is the "willingness" to act in a way that is requested by an authority or institution (Fennel, 2014, p. 823). Even if Fennel emphasises the "willingness" of the soldier, in contrast to his Russian counterparts, it is a willingness in relation to authorities who represent the state's coercive power, its monopoly on legitimate violence. Without coercive power, the institution that recruits the soldier would not exist. This is even more clear when Fennel argues that if "morale" is to be linked to "motivation," it must be noted that motivation does not mean that the individual, or the team, must hold a favourable view of the task. Soldiers may very well be "highly motivated" to carry out tasks they do not believe in, just because they are "disciplined," or even "forced to act" (Fennel, 2014, p. 805). In other words, as I state above, there is no inherent contradiction between a high degree of soldier morale and coercion.

4 What Does *dukhovnost* Mean in Practice for the Russian model?

A number of Russian military analysts emphasise that Russian spirituality, *dukhovnost*, is at the core of soldier morale and is the purpose that motivates soldiers and officers to go into battle. The military analyst Golubyov, writing in the Russian Ministry of Defence's *Journal of Military Thought*, cited above, is a telling example. He even claims that no weapon system can replace soldier morale, as a factor for success in war. He also claims that participation in battle leads to the emergence of faith (theism). If we uncritically accept this Russian narrative, we run the risk of falling into the trap of believing that the Russian model is as supreme as Russian military analysts claim. In order to avoid this fate (i.e., the belief that Russian soldier morale is qualitatively better than the Western version), it is vital to rely on a fact-based argument. Below, such an argument is developed, for the purpose of testing the central implications of the Russian model.

If *dukhovnost* is the Russian model's defining feature, its importance should also be manifested in, e.g., investment in military chaplains. Let us begin with the claim of Russian military analysts (such as Golubyov), that the Russian form of spirituality, *dukhovnost*, correlates to a degree with churchliness.

Are the Russians churchly?

Table 2. Russian citizens' degree of churchliness

Question: Indicate how important religion is in your life	
	Russia (%)
Very important + Rather important	50
Not so important + Not at all important	47
Don't know + No answer	3

Haerpfer, C., Inglehart, R., Moreno, A., Welzel, C., Kizilova, K., Diez-Medrano J., M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen (eds.). 2022. World Values Survey: Round Seven – 2017–2022, https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSOnline.jsp.

Table 2 shows that every other Russian citizen believes that *dukhovnost*, that is, spirituality, in the meaning of churchliness, or religiosity, is important. In 2008 and 2009, on the initiative of the Russian Orthodox Church, an attitudinal survey conducted among military servicemen showed that 70 percent of the respondents claimed to believe in God. A survey in 2012 confirmed this finding: 70 percent of the officers and 75 percent of the junior officers and rank-and-file soldiers reported that they believe in God (*Vzglyad – Delovaya Gazeta*, 2012).[17] The Russian political leadership is well aware of this. In fact, the previous president, Dmitry Medvedev decided on 21 July 2009 to re-instate the so-called military clergy (*voyennoye dukhovstvo*), which had been abolished in 1918, after the Bolshevik coup (Granovsky, 2015). So far, the Russian political leadership seems to act in accordance with the official ideological position on "traditional values" and even with the Russian model of soldier morale. But, what is the real impact of the decision that the Minister of Defence was tasked to carry out?

To what extent has this churchliness (*dukhovnost*) been mirrored in military investments?

A journalistic investigation into the military clergy from 2014, published in the spiritual-cultural journal, *Pravmir*, states that "the greatest problem is the question of manning. Simply put, there are not enouch chaplains…" The goal is to have one chaplain per brigade, but this target has not been met (Solonin, 2014).[18] It is unclear exactly how many chaplains the Russian armed forces planned to hire, but according to a military journal, *Military observer*, 242 chaplains should have been hired in January 2010, but, by 2015, only 132 vacancies had been filled (Granovsky, 2015). Is this a lot or a little?

If we make a moderate assumption that in 2012 the Russian armed forces had about 650,000[19] uniformed personnel, it means that the planned number of positions (242) is one chaplain per about 2700 uniformed personnel. This would probably mean a pretty good supply of religious ministry support and religious ceremonies. The real number of chaplains in the Russian armed forces in 2012 was twenty-one. Of these, twenty were Russian-Orthodox priests and one an Muslim imam. If we make the same assumptions as above, it means that there was one chaplain per about 31,000 uniformed personnel. This is, of course, a completely unsatisfactory supply of religious ministry support and religious ceremonies, by any account, which does not go well with the "traditional values" that Russia's political

[17] *Vzglyad – Delovaya Gazeta* published the survey results referred to by a representative of the Ministry of Defence, interviewed by *Interfaks.*

[18] Note that military chaplains means specially trained and ordained priests who can follow the military units into battle, and not civilian priests on short-term contracts for work in peacetime barracks.

[19] This assessment was made through discussions in the Russia team, at the Swedish Defence Research Agency.

leadership claims to uphold, nor with the model of soldier morale as it is portrayed by Russian military analysts.

This conclusion is supported by the Russian side's own assessments. According to Dimitry Smirnov, the Russian-Orthodox church's representative in ecclesiastic-military questions, "at least 1000 ordained" are needed *(BBC News Russkaya sluzhba*, 2011). The assessment of the need for "at least 1000" chaplains was as late as 2022 and, by and large, is in 2023 not even close to being satisfied. In an interview, in 2022, chaplain Mikhail Maksimenko reported that the new military clergy "is instituted at a very slow pace, there are brigades with not even a single chaplain" (Ishmuzina, 2022).

To sum up, a reasonable conclusion must be that there *are* genuine spiritual values, perhaps a belief in God, in half of the Russian population and, to an even higher degree, among military personnel. When the Russian political leadership understood this, they were quick in opportunistically re-instating the military clergy, since it would resonate well with the "traditional values" that have been exploited ideologically, for the purpose of uniting the sprawling Russian Federation.

Did military chaplains play a significant role in the successful military operations in Chechnya (1999–2009) or Syria (2015–2018)?

There are several possible objections to the conclusion that spirituality is vital (expressed via investments in military clergy) for soldier morale in Russia. The most obvious objection is that the successful Second Chechen Campaign, from 1999 to 2009, was fought entirely without the support of a military clergy. Nor was the campaign, widely considered successful, in Syria, from 2015 to 2018, supported by a comprehensive military clergy. In addition, there are even doubts on the Russian side about how to measure the effect of the re-instated military clergy. In the *Newsletter of the Russian Orthodox Church* (*Tserkovny vestnik*), the question is taken to its extreme: "What factor can be used as a criteria of effectiveness [of the work of the chaplains]? A diminishing number of disciplinary transgressions? Fewer instances of hazing and other abuse [so-called *dedovshchina*]? Increasing motivation to enter military service? All these tasks are a part of the officer corps' competence profile" (Murzin, 2012). Thus, it is the officer corps, those representatives of the state who have the right to command the use of force, which seems to be the key player in the management of soldier morale. Since the officer corps is tasked with the management of discipline, motivation and, by extension, soldier morale – and they are a much larger body of personnel and have more extensive secular power – it is reasonable to assume that the foundational factor for soldier morale is the officer's power to coerce, and not the chaplain's piety. Even the representative of the Russian Orthodox Church seems to believe so.

Can signs of insufficient soldier morale among Russian units in Ukraine be explained by material factors (or is it necessary to bring the low number of chaplains, that is, *dukhovnost*, into the analysis?)

Of the possible material candidates for an explanation of an insufficiency of Russian soldier morale in the first months of the invasion, the star of logistics perhaps shines brightest.

Military logistics deals with ensuring that, during the war, combat units have a continual provision of, for example, ammunition, supplies, repair capacity, and so on. Ekström argues that, in the context of the Russian invasion, "logistics functions as a precondition for a successful operation, but logistics is also a limitation for the type of operation possible, how it can be planned and conducted" (Ekström, 2022).

According to Ekström, objections to foreseeable logistic difficulties may have been "withheld out of fear of superiors' reactions" in the planning phase. This seems to indicate a co-variation of the problems of governance and logistics. A telling example of both has been reported by international media. For instance, one story was that the Russian armed forces sent field rations that had passed their expiry dates to some units, while sending too few field rations, or trucks with perishable goods that were rotting within only a few days, to others. Russian officers have been reported stealing care packages with food and items sent to soldiers by their next of kin. Russian units have left the bodies of fallen soldiers on the battlefield (Massicot, 2022). Many of these rather horrible situations are linked to the failure of logistics operations, but also to governance of the units, not to a lack of chaplains. There is no apparent reason, in other words, to mix in the low number of chaplains, that is, *dukhovnost*, in our explanation, as long as the material factors above seem to be doing the job well.

4.1 A Potemkin Village

There are several different reasons for believing that the Russian fixation with spirituality is an ideological product, a type of Potemkin village. In 1939, in Paris, the pre-revolutionary military analyst and major-general, N.N. Golovin, argued that "The last war [WWI, author's remark] showed once again the enormous significance of the spiritual factors for victory. In order to be able to hold out until the very end, one must first of all have a strong spirit," but complained that it had become a mere "formality" to talk well about it. Militaries paid only lip-service to the significance of spiritual factors in soldier morale. It is noteworthy that this regarded the years before 1918, when the Tsarist military clergy had not yet been disbanded by the Bolsheviks. Golovin continued, calling for a proven, European recipe of soldier morale; territorial recruitment, he wrote "…when countrymen are kept together, when every parish, every town can get to know 'their own heroes' and can rally around them, but also show contempt for their cowards," then this contributes to a high degree of soldier morale (Golovin, 1939, p. 22). In today's

Russia, ever since the so-called reform of humanisation, there have been signs of de facto territorial recruitment. See, for instance, the interview in *The Moscow Comsomolite* (*Moskovsky Komsomolets*), with the military commissar and major-general, Viktor Shchtepilov, about the spring draft of 2021 (Bozheva, 2021). On paper, it is a reform to humanise the military service (in the Soviet Union they sent recruits far away from their home towns, on principle, which contributed to negative views of military service), but, in practice, Golovin's requested method of creating soldier morale is applied. In total, the emerging picture shows that ideological products, such as spirituality, can be much less important than institutional factors, such as coercion, territorial recruitment, logistics and governance.

4.2 An Ideological Product

If the chaplains' influence over soldier morale is limited, despite the claim that they exist to bolster the Russian model of soldier morale, what function do they really fulfil? There are at least two possible ideological functions of the military clergy.

1. to associate the militarisation of Russia to a value that a majority of the servicemen believe is true; and
2. thereby, to try to silence and crowd out voices of pacifism.

These claims are, of course, hypotheses in need of additional research. To this, one might wish to add that the military clergy also sometimes functions as an instrument of diplomacy. The now sunken cruiser, *Moskva*, to take an example, had a chapel and the vessel's chaplains participated in ceremonies during visits to foreign states.

5 Conclusions

In this final section, the answers to the report's research questions are summarised. The literature study of Russian military analysts' texts was guided by the following question: Which ideas about the concept of soldier morale are expressed in texts by Russian military analysts?

The literature study shows that Russian military analysts use a wide range of labels for the military-morale phenomenon, which at first glance makes it seem that the material is difficult to grapple with. The author, for the purpose of clarifying and simplifying the Russian ideas about the elusive military-morale phenomenon, has identified three central themes. These themes make up the core of the so-called Russian model of soldier morale. They are:

- spirituality;
- communality;
- coercion.

Thereafter, the literature study's results were scrutinised from a chosen vantage point: How unique is the Russian model from a Western perspective? The Russian model has a unique feature, Russian spirituality, or *dukhovnost*, which seems to have no apparent Western equivalent. But there is also a common denominator: coercion as a factor in military organisations is, by and large, the same, no matter what country we are talking about. The author argues that coercion is, in fact, a foundational factor for soldier morale, rather than in opposition to it.

The Russian model of soldier morale raises yet another question: What do these ideas mean in practice? Assuming that the Russian model builds on the notion of Russian spirituality, with a strong religious tendency, is it true, as some Russian military analysts argue, that this model is superior to Western models of soldier morale? In order to examine the question of Russian spirituality, *dukhovnost*, and what it means in practice, the author uses a detective-like manner of inquiry, where the answer to one question leads to another question. Not all of these questions are repeated here, but the result is the following.

About every other Russian citizen, and about two-thirds of the servicemen, put a high value on *dukhovnost*, that is, Russian spirituality, which tends towards religiosity and faith in God. This fact has only partially been reflected in military investments in the past decade. The Russian side recreated the military clergy in 2009, but, as late as 2022, the supply of chaplains was very poor. This led to the conclusion, in the light of successful military operations in Chechnya and Syria, when chaplains were largely absent, that the military clergy did not have a decisive effect on soldier morale. Rather, the key factor seems to have been material, such as the application of coercion, in military organisations, and territorial recruitment (see section 4.1). Finally, the analysis points to signs of weak soldier morale among the Russian troops in the war against Ukraine, which can be explained

parsimoniously with reference to material factors, such as logistics and governance. Governance falls under the Russian model's theme concerning coercion. Signs of insufficient soldier morale should, therefore, be understood in terms of ineffective use of coercion, discipline, and routines. The way of functioning inherent to the Russian model (that is, Russian military analysts' views about how soldier morale is achieved in practice) does not, in fact, seem to have worked in Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Russian spirituality as a factor for soldier morale, therefore, appears to be an illusion.

This is an apparent problem for the Russian side, since those Russians who accept their own (heavily ideologised) model, hook, line and sinker, run the risk of not understanding their own institutions' true strengths and weaknesses. For the Russian side, this may hamper efforts to reform and rebuild the military's capabilities in the years to come.

In addition, the Russian model has the potential to deceive Western military analysts, if they uncritically accept Russian ideas and concepts in their research; these include the notion that Russian spirituality lends the Russian side a significant qualitative advantage over the Western alliance. The undesirable consequence of this is that Western analysts unintentionally overestimate the Russian model's advantages. To Western analysts, the Russian model may, in the worst case, seem more effective and more optimal for the Russian side than it is, and it thereby might be ascribed a deterrence potential not supported by data.

5.1 Ideas for Further Research

This report's results should be seen as a starting point for research on soldier morale. The easiest low-hanging fruit would be if research on soldier morale focussed even more on empirical studies, rather than conceptual research. However, the problem of access to empirical data on Russian soldiers' beliefs and attitudes might be prohibiting. Four suggestions for further research, resulting from the work done in the present report, are as follows:

- carry out social-scientific research into the role of military chaplains in secular, Western countries, perhaps with international comparisons;
- conduct an interview study of Russian soldiers, after the end of the war, about their experiences, which can be examined in the light of the Russian model of soldier morale;
- pursue historical studies that ask: How does the Russian model of soldier morale work for understanding soldier morale in other time periods, such as the Second World War, Afghan War, the Chechen Wars and so on?
- apply the analytical framework developed by William Darryl Henderson, in *Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat*, to Russia (Henderson, 1985).

This call for new research on Russian soldier morale is directed towards policy researchers within government and NGO think tanks, as well as academics in universities.

6 Author's Commentary: one year after the first edition

The first edition of this report was researched and written in the six months following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, on 24 February 2022. The 2022 invasion followed upon eight years of low-intensity conflict, which began after the invasion of 2014, which led to the de facto Russian control of the Donbass and illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. The report outlines the conceptual foundations used by the Russian side in the past 25 years and will, unless there is a radical and profound change in Russian thinking, remain relevant for years to come. As a consequence, the report may shed some light on issues and events that have arisen since the report's publication in fall 2022. Here, my intention is to pose some pertinent questions, perhaps as a stimulus to further in-depth research elsewhere, and discuss them briefly.

With the warfighting between Russia and Ukraine in 2022 and spring 2023 as a backdrop, it is highly relevant to ask:

Does the model seem to correspond to the battlefield reality for the Russian side?

So, so; to some extent, yes. In the first year of the war, the Russian war machine kept slogging on, in spite of disastrous setbacks. Given the disasters of the battle for Kyiv and the loss of conquered territories around Kharkiv and Kherson, in the spring, it is a testimony to a rudimentarily working model of soldier morale that the Russian armed forces, by and large, did not disintegrate. It remains a potent adversary, albeit, one with a degraded pool of equipment and personnel.

Thus, I conclude that the primary element of Russian-style coercion is working to keep the force together. And the focal point of Russian spirituality fulfils its ideological function, as a means for keeping the soldiers from voicing dissent with the war. Recent survey data, from the Levada Centre, in May 2023, show that 70 percent of the Russian population states that religion plays a role in their lives. This means that the use of religious symbols in the armed forces may have a role in manufacturing consent for the war. However, since the military clergy, as this report shows, is weak, the most important mechanism to keep soldiers focussed on fighting is probably the factor of coercion, a factor that does not clearly distinguish the Russian armed forces from other military organisations elsewhere.

There is, however, a pattern of breakdown of morale that taints the above picture. Spectacular events, such as disordered retreats, destruction of equipment (in order to avoid being sent into battle) and killings of officers, suggest that all is not well (even if the war machine keeps trudging on). The current processes on the battlefield suggest that the Russian model of soldier morale is inefficient, even if the soldiers themselves reveal a degree of effectiveness, as discussed above.

So, if the actual workings of Russian soldier morale are inefficient, do the Russians have the ability to change it?

As a Soviet politician, Leon Trotsky famously proposed: "The army is a copy of society and suffers from all its diseases**,** usually at a higher temperature."[20]

What is it about today's Russian society that resurfaces as maladies in the Russian armed forces? All such factors, and more, are reflected in the preconditions for Russian military morale on the battlefield.

The Russian society of today has three critical aspects:

- dictatorship blighted by a problem of legitimacy;
- corruption;
- double-speak/double-standards.

The current ruler of Russia is an autocrat who has clung to power for over twenty years, thanks to rigged elections and systematic promotion of cronies from previous phases of his life. The social contract between the government and the population has been based on the tacit agreement that 'If you remain apathetic regarding politics, we provide you with physical security and the opportunity to participate in a semi-market economy.'

A considerable reason for why this deal could be maintained is the collective memory of the chaotic 1990s, a period few Russians miss. When younger generations, who do not remember the 1990s, grow up, the government is increasingly faced with a renewed problem of legitimacy. In fact, the strongest remaining collective point of agreement among the Russian population is that the victory over the Third Reich in the Great Patriotic War 1941–45 is a matter of pride. This is why militarism and military adventurism has grown in importance in Russia, which points to the current militaristic gamble: if the population's positive attitudes towards the 1945 victory can be turned into a passion for defending the Motherland today, in a perceived victorious war over Ukraine, then the regime will have gained legitimacy for decades to come. On the other hand, if the war is perceived as a looming full-scale disaster, then the entire Russian house may fall apart.

To the above should be added that the illegitimate rule is dictatorial and personalised and that another potential remaining source of legitimacy is the pursuit of policies based on so-called "traditional values," such as the Russian-Orthodox religious values that are superficially promoted by the regime today. Since the regime is not grounded in voter power, appeals to such Russian spirituality remain one of the last alternatives, second only to the narrative about the victory of 1945 and Russia's so-called "great" role in history, as a "civilising"

[20] Leon Trotsky (1936) The Revolution Betrayed: What is the Soviet Union and where is it going? London: Pathfinder Books.

force, in general. To a considerable degree, this is an escape from harsh reality, into a perceived glorious imperial history.

The dictatorial, or authoritarian, aspect of the rule should be seen as a response to the regime's fear of its 'unruly' people and the occurrence of corruption in the state, a phenomenon inefficiently addressed by increasing the level of top-down control.

In this context, corruption is the flipside of the emotionality-based communality in Russian culture. When the focus is on the maintenance of a set of horizontal social relations, rather than adhering to the written law, the result may be the de facto acceptance of corruption, pilfering, or theft. This was the case in the Soviet planned economy; it is the case in today's semi-market economy. Corruption activities tend towards the erection of rhetorical facades, or double-speak, in order to protect the illicit gains.

All the above societal factors are reflected in the sub-optimal performance of the Russian armed forces in the war against Ukraine. Perhaps, most notably, the corruption in the military ranks hollowed out much of the military potential as it looked on paper. The habit of rhetorical facades – outright lies, to be blunt – to conceal the real conditions from people higher up in the ranks, is a reflection of the Russian cultural inclination towards horizontal informal networks, rather than trust in vertical relationships of power.

What really remains of the Russian model of soldier morale is the reliance on the use of coercion, rather than trust and true intrinsic motivation, for a war of conquest. And the ability to change it is in all likelihood weak, since the actual workings of soldier morale are tied closely to societal phenomena that must be dealt with by (highly unlikely) legal and political reforms and a new atmosphere of trust in Russian society.

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