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Direzione, Via Bosco degli Arvali 24, 00148 Roma

Contatti: direzione@nam-sigm.org ; virgilio.ilari@gmail.com

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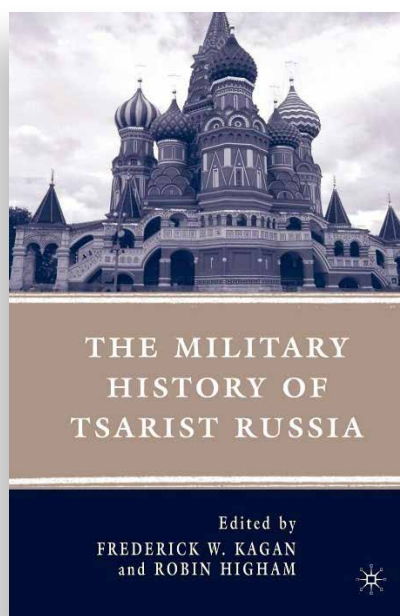


Estandart Reyau d'a Cheneralísma, prencipal bandera carlista d'a primera guerra bordada por María Francisca de Braganza em 1833 Royal Standard of the General in Chief, main Carlist flag of the First War embroidered by Maria Francisca de Braganza in 1833). Wikimedia Commons

FREDERICK W. KAGAN AND ROBIN HIGHAM (EDS.),

The Military History of Tsarist Russia

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 266



The objective of the volume is clearly set in Chapter 1, “Introduction,” authored by the editors. It is to track the development of the Russian warfare system in the interaction of its geopolitical, technological, and organisational dimensions. (p. 3). It is the accent produced by the expertise of the editors. Frederick W. Kagan focuses on the Russian military in the second quarter of the 19th century¹ that lacked grand campaigns but was packed with the technological, organisational, and strategic changes. Robin Higham attends air power, a

¹ Frederick W. Kagan, *The military reforms of Nicholas I: the origins of the modern Russian army*. St. Martin’s Press. 1999.

pivot of the military technological development in the 20th century.² At the same time, they both are military analysts in a broad sense, authoring influential works on present and future warfare.

The authors of the volume are a rare combination of academic historians and military scientists working in military education and think tanks. One might expect of this volume not only historical insight but also the broader discourse on warfare, some conclusions for the acting military practitioners, and educational materials for the military leaders.

The volume opens with Chapter 2 by Brian L. Davies, “The Foundations of Muscovite Military Power, 1453–1613,” embracing the period when the Russian state and its military, a subject of the volume, were created. Davies is a leading expert on the early modern Russian military. The current volume was published before most of his books came to press, and the chapter looks like a guide to some of them.³ It contains his principal ideas on the Russian military development in interaction with other power centres in the Baltic–Black Sea super-region comprising Eastern, East-Central, and Southeastern Europe, Asia Minor, and the Transcaucasia. Some of his ideas are emphasised in the chapter more sharply than in the later publications.

For example, Brian Davies makes important conclusion about the early development of the Russian military; he tracks the conversion of the Muscovite grand prince’s social court into the military organisation and the emergence of other feature structures of the Muscovite military to the civil war in the second third of the 15th century. (pp. 12–13) Davies also emphasises the close interaction of the Muscovite military development with political and military evolution, which is a pattern of his general research and many case studies. He points out such special details as the influence of the Byzantine military ideal on the weapons and tactics of the Muscovite forces. (p. 19) The periodisation of the early Moscovite military development is a strong side of his work. He does not divide it into the ranges

2 Robin Higham, *Two Roads to War: The French and British Air Arms from Versailles to Dunkirk*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 2012.

3 Brian L. Davies, *State Power and Community in Early Modern Russia. The Case of Kozlov, 1635–1649*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; idem, *Warfare, State and Society on the Black Sea Steppe, 1500–1700*, Routledge, 2007; idem, *Empire and Military Revolution in Eastern Europe. Russia’s Turkish Wars in the Eighteenth Century*, Continuum, 2011; idem (ed.), *Warfare in Eastern Europe, 1500–1800*, Brill, 2012.

from one ruler to another but explores the cycles consisting of an accumulation of a new practice, sharp fast reform, and a longer span of employing its results. It was the case with the army of the grand princes that shaped the Muscovite state-building from the second half of the 15th to the first half of the 16th centuries and the army of the Muscovite Tsardom in the following period.

In Chapter 3, “The Romanov Transformation, 1613–1725,” Paul Bushkovitch observes the military history of tsarist Muscovy after the Time of Troubles and early imperial Russia until the death of Peter I. He switches to a perspective different from the technological, organisational, and social focus of Brian Davies. Bushkovitch views the Russian military development as an interplay of the international challenges that came with the Russian ambitions in Eastern Europe and domestic politics, determined by the struggle of the elite clans of which he is an expert.⁴

The technical and tactical development of the Russian military in the period looks to him like “the slow adoption of Western methods and equipment.” (p. 35) It is a weaker side of the work that partly contradicts its stronger discourse on the interaction of the military changes and international challenges. The Ukrainian revolt under Bohdan Khmel’nyts’kyi was the first of the challenges that was succeeded by the confrontation with the Ottoman Empire. They pushed to create the “new formation” bulk of the Russian army trained in the in the Dutch pike-and-shot tactic. Bushkovitch does not pay attention to its difference with the West European pattern from which it was allegedly copied. He omits the battlefield details that might throw a light on its reasons and results.

At the same time, entering his favourite Petrine period, Bushkovitch tracks the gradual transformation of Peter I’s troops from ill-formed improvisation at Narva in November 1700 (p. 37) to the experienced regular force in 1704 and the well-drilled professional army in 1709. He concludes that “Peter’s army was central to Russian society in ensuing decades,” shaping the structure and ideology of the nobility and the political constitution of Russia.

Bruce W. Menning, an author of Chapter 4, “The Imperial Russian Army,

4 Paul Bushkovitch, *Religion and Society in Russia: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Oxford University Press, 1992; *Peter the Great. The Struggle for Power, 1671–1725*, Cambridge University Press, 2004; *A Concise History of Russia*, Cambridge University Press, 2011.

1725–1796,” and Chapter 5, “Paul I and Catherine II’s Military Legacy, 1762–1801,” is a prolific expert on the Russian army in the 18th and 19th centuries.⁵ Menning’s concept of his chapters is to observe how the Russian army grew up to become a “Behemoth” with the “omnivorous demands” to which no segment of the Russian society was immune. (p. 47).

Menning divides the period under his exploration into two parts: before the Seven Years War and until the death of Emperor Paul I. The Prussian military tradition, brought in by the German party at the Russian imperial court, prevailed in the first part, and the Russian native military tradition took over the lead in the second one. Menning applies this simplification as a model to define and compare alternatives of the Russian military development and explain why the second one became more effective.

The Prussian model, which Empress Anna Ioannovna and her favourite military reformer, B. Kh. Minnikh, implemented in the 1730s, looked on the troops as “an engine for delivering firepower.” The linear formation exposing the maximum frontal firepower was its principal array. (p. 50) Empress Elizabeth Petrovna gave way to a slow return to the late Petrine military principles by the mid–1850s. They shifted focus from infantry firepower to cold steel for decisive attack, reintroduced the bayonet columns, and stressed field artillery. (p. 52) Menning compares two systems in conflict, namely, the War of the Polish Succession and the Russo-Turkish War in the 1730s, and the Russo-Turkish Wars and the “Polish Insurrectionary Wars” from the late 1760s to the early 1790s. The Seven Years’ War in the 1750s was a transitional interface between two systems.

The Prussian system was not able to produce the decisive results due to an absence of the necessary “tactical acumen,” while the native Russian model produced them at last on the tactical level. It contributed to a grandiose strategic reorganisation of Eastern Europe in the Russo-Turkish Wars. Menning confirms his point of view with descriptions of the military reforms and campaigns of Peter Rumiantsev, Grigorii Potemkin, and Aleksandr Suvorov in the reign of Empress Catherine II.

Frederick W. Kagan, the editor of the volume, devotes his Chapters 6, “Rus-

5 Bruce W. Menning, “Russian Military Innovation in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century,” *War & Society* V.2 (1984): 23–42; idem, *Bayonets Before Bullets: The Imperial Russian Army, 1861–1914*, Indiana University Press, 1992.

sia's Wars with Napoleon, 1801–1815,” and Chapter 7, “Russia's Small Wars, 1805–1861,” to returning the volume's focus from fighting details to its central commitment, the interplay of the geopolitical, technological, and organisational dimensions. Both periods are complicated for the analysis because the first one is a big myth and the second one is a big lacuna.

Kagan announces his geopolitical concept right in the first paragraph: “Russia's primary security focus would be to the west, with the threats to north and south either removed or relegated to a secondary role. This reorientation had profound implications for the size, structure, and deployment of the Russian armed forces, and for the organisation of the Russian state to support war.” (p. 107). Kagan uses his deep knowledge of the Napoleonic upheaval⁶ to support his thesis of the transformation of the traditional Russian opportunistic searching for gains in European troubles into the concept of the European power balance as “a critical element of Russia's security.” (p. 109) The particular character of the war against Napoleonic France as a threat to Russia's territorial integrity and existence, unseen in the 18th century, was an impulse for this strategic rethinking. Kagan demonstrates how the Russian army and military potential were rearranged as a whole during and in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. Establishing the war ministry, shaping the acting army, and creating the permanent corps and divisions with their staffs were the fundamental reforms executed by Emperor Alexander I. (pp. 114–15, 120) “The Russian Army that emerged from the wars against Napoleon was a fundamentally different creature from the army that had entered them.”

At the same time, Kagan points out the principal shortcoming of Alexander I's military reforms. It did not change the nature of recruitment in favour of a cadre-and-reserve system, the move to which required abolition of serfdom.

He traces an absence of the trained manpower reserve as a principal problem of Russian fighting capability up to the last third of the 19th century. Kagan depicts the following four decades of the Russian military development as the period of “small wars” when it was directed not by the large-scale fighting but by the perception of the threats. He discusses the pivotal trends in the military organisation, such as a choice of focus on either the administrative efficiency of the

6 Frederick W. Kagan, *The End of the Old Order: Napoleon and Europe, 1801–1805*, Da Capo Press, 2006.

military structure or the fighting capability of the troops. (pp. 128–130).

Approaching the subject of the Crimean War from 1853 to 1856, Kagan addresses Russia's military balance with the neighbour states and its balance with Britain in the geopolitical seapower–landpower equation. (p. 132) He demonstrates how in the period of the fast technological development of warfare in the middle of the 19th century, the cumbersome size of the Russian army hindered its adoption of the new means of war, for example, rifled handguns.

Kagan interprets the Crimean War as one of the typical Russian small wars that suddenly aggravated to become a strategic disaster due to the intervention of the West European powers, Britain and France. (p. 133) Kagan finds that contradictions between the permanent war preparedness against the large European armies and the everyday necessity to fight Caucasian insurgents and Polish and Hungarian rebels became a dilemma that the Russian rulers and generals were unable to solve. They addressed both challenges simultaneously and lost the big European War, the Crimean War, and narrowly prevailed in the Caucasian War from 1801 to 1864. (pp. 133–35) Kagan's analysis is highly educative since it instructs the military analysts to look at the security challenges in the relatively peaceful years not as a mess of minor events but as projection of the major dilemmas behind them.

Chapter 8 by Robert F. Baumann, "The Russian Army, 1853–1881," addresses the complicated question of the Russian military reforms following the Crimean War. He traces their roots not only in the defeat but also in the hard fighting in the Caucasian War against mountaineer insurgents. It is a productive perspective, and at the same time maybe a crack in the structure of the volume because the Crimean War fell between two chapters, the current and preceding ones. Its course remains unrevealed, and its seminal lessons for the military reforms hang in the air.

The principal Russian reformer, War Minister Dmitrii Miliutin trained waging the war in the Caucasus on which Baumann is an expert.⁷ However, Baumann underlines Miliutin's ability to learn others' lessons. The Austro-Prussian War in 1866 and the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 provided him inspiration and receipts for the Russian military reform consisting not only of the introduction of conscription and manpower reserve but also of the rethinking of the strategic

⁷ Robert F. Baumann, *Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia & Afghanistan*, US Government Printing Office, 1993.

priorities. The new Russian strategic concept included not only the army, military stock, and fortifications but also railways and industry.

The Russian warfare system had to respond to the geopolitical challenge of impending war with a united Europe over the Eastern Question. A menace of the Austro-German alliance looking for dominance in Eastern and Central Europe was another challenge that required reshaping of the Russian military doctrine. (p.141) The ideological perspective on the imagined confrontation of pan-Slavist Eastern Europe, led by Russia, and Teutonic Western Europe, led by Germany, shaped the military reform.

Paying attention to the organisational and social aspects of the military reform, Baumann keeps in focus the principal characteristic of the Russian army, its fighting capability. His description of a dispute between adepts of technology and firepower on the one hand and fighting spirit and bayonet charge on the other hand is important to understand the Russian army's performance in the Russo-Turkish War from 1877 to 1878 and campaigns in Central Asia, on which Baumann makes due accent. He presents the Russian army as at once fighting tool and an agent of empire state-building, which became a combination explaining many of its virtues and defects.

Chapter 9, "The Imperial Russian Navy, 1696–1900: The Ambiguous Legacy of Peter's "Second Arm," by Jacob W. Kipp, presents the Russian navy in "the dominant geostrategic reality of Imperial Russia, a land power that came to rule over much of Eurasia." (p.151) Kipp is an expert in two fields that overlap on the Russian navy: Russian and Soviet strategy and operational art and the geopolitical dimension of the military.⁸

Kipp considers that the Russian navy "had far more influence than its modest size and marginal role would suggest." He is concerned with three points: "the role of the navy in national strategy ... the relationship between the navy and the process of technological modernisation ... and the issue of the professionalisation of the officer corps." (p. 152) Kipp describes the subordinated strategic role of the Russian navy to the land army and its commitment to amphibious and joint operations as the army's auxiliary branch.

8 Jacob W. Kipp, *Mass, Mobility, and the Red Army's Road to Operational Art, 1918–1936*, Verdun Press, 2015; idem, *Central European Security Concerns: Bridge, Buffer, or Barrier?* Routledge, 1993.

At the same time, he points out the rare but significant burst of the navy to the strategically decisive status it had in the late 18th century when the navy established dominance on the Black Sea and Baltic. His detailed examination of the Russian naval administration and personnel from the early 18th to the late 19th centuries presents a contest between the utilitarian approach and conceptual strategic vision as the driver of the navy's evolution. It seems that the Russian navy was able to execute its best performance in the decisive moments due to its association with the most educated and imaginative strata of the Russian military and wider society.

David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, an author of Chapter 10, "The Russo-Japanese War," is a leading expert on the Russian imperial expansion to East Eurasia, including its military, ideological, and political components.⁹ With his wider horizon, van der Oye starts with a comparison of the Russo-Japanese War and the Crimean War, from the geopolitical and operational point of view, and WWI, from the socio-political point of view. These lines dominate his narrative of the Russo-Japanese War.

Similar to many historians who counterpose the Russian lack of railways to the Crimea and the transportation capacity of the British fleet in the Crimean War, van der Oye counterposes the Japanese sea dominance and poor Russian communications between its European power base and the Far East. Van der Oye demonstrates how important the struggle over sea domination was for the course and outcome of the war. His rundown of the events from the Japanese torpedo attack on the Russian naval base of Port Arthur in February of 1904 to the battle of Mukden in February of 1905 is captivating and convincing. He also coordinates them with the social unrest and revolutionary activity that started in late 1904.

Bruce W. Menning's discourse in Chapter 11, "Mukden to Tannenberg: Defeat to Defeat, 1905–1914" interpret differently the key Mukden battle of the Russo-Japanese War in February of 1905. The Russian defeat was caused not by over-caution of the commander of the Russian army, Aleksei Kuropatkin, but by some general default of the Russian warfare system, and it was not an orderly withdraw-

9 David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration*, Yale University Press, 2008; idem and co-authors, *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective, World War Zero (Volumes 1–2)*, Brill, 2007.

wal but a catastrophe. It seems Menning intentionally aggravates the situation to generalise the battle of Mukden and the battle of Tannenberg in Eastern Prussia in August of 1914. He disassembles the Russian military into details to analyse why its components, some of which functioned decently, do not compose an efficient military machine. (p. 206) Menning finds a reason for the failure of many visionary reforms in the “interest group politics run amok.” (p. 211) However, with the appointment of Vladimir Sukhomlinov, some of the sound changes were introduced, and Menning presents them in detail. (p. 214) Promotion of the innovative minds to the key positions was one of them. At the same time, Menning shows their discussion on static and manoeuvre warfare as a severe misreading of the Russo-Japanese War’s lessons that misguided the Russian preparations for WWI. (pp. 217–18) Miscalculation of the timing of war, particularly the dynamics of the German invasion of France, was another error that led to a reckless advance into Eastern Prussia that resulted in the catastrophe at Tannenberg in August of 1914. A momentum of success in Austrian Galicia was lost due to the unfinished mobilisation. (p. 220) Thus, imperfect military reform after the Russo-Japanese War and misreading of its lessons caused Russian calamities in WWI.

In Chapter 12, “The Imperial Army in World War I, 1914–1917,” David R. Jones¹⁰ stresses the adaptability of the Russian warfare system in its later periods. The periodisation of WWI on its eastern front is the strong side of Jones’s chapter, considering the different performance of the Russian army and its different fighting results that need explanation. Unlike Menning, Jones considers that the entering battles of WWI demonstrated some good results of the Russian military reforms carried out after the Russo-Japanese War.

The second period of fighting, the Great Retreat from April to September of 1915, was characterised not only by the defeats but also by the slow consolidation of the industry and supply system capable of providing sufficient weaponry and manpower to the front, which was the main challenge for all belligerents of WWI. It opened the third period, the Imperial Army’s recovery from September 1915 to February 1917. The Russian armies managed to take over the initiative and carry out the major offensive operations, of which the advance under Aleksei Brusilov in Galicia became proverbially successful. It confirmed an ability of the Russian

10 David R. Jones (ed.), *The Military-Naval Encyclopaedia of Russia and the Soviet Union* (Volumes 1–8), Academic International Press, 1978.

military to learn the lessons of ongoing fighting and introduce the corrections of organisation and tactics fast. (p. 240)

Jones emphasises that the fast degradation of the Russian warfighting system resulted not from the military defeats or wider collapse of the system of military mobilisation, armament, and supply but from the social and political reasons. It was caused by the reckless struggle of the political factions that opened the Fourth Period: Revolution and Disintegration of the Imperial Army, from February to December 1917. “Despite their final collapse, both the Imperial Russian regime and its army deserve greater credit for their real wartime achievements than is usually accorded.” (p. 245)

The extensive scope of the volume provides a ground for major conclusions to one of its editors, Frederick W. Kagan, in Chapter 13, “Russia’s Geopolitical Dilemma and the Question of Backwardness.” Between three prioritised dimensions of the volume—geopolitical, technological, and organisational—he chooses the first one to be the pivot. “Changes in Russia’s nature and position” interact with “the several transformations in the nature of warfare itself” to produce Russia’s military dynamics. But the first factor, “change in the strategic environment,” became “the most important and consequential for Russia’s military.” (p. 250) Kagan outlines the Russian geopolitical priorities and explains how Russia answered to the relevant “sets of challenges” by military means. Kagan is especially attentive to the nineteenth century, when the issue of the muchdiscussed Russian military “backwardness” emerged, and Kagan, while sweeping aside “various theories—racial, geographical, sociocultural, political,” explains it by the impact of “the Industrial Revolution” on the Russian security dilemma “to cover all vital threatened areas or maintain armed forces far in excess of what [Russian] budget could actually support.” Probably, it is the dilemma of all overextended empires in the epoch of the sharp technological changes. It is the reason why Russian military history must be attentively studied. The current volume is a good foundation to do it.

VLADIMIR SHIROGOROV



William Balfour Ker (1877-1918), *Knights of Columbus*, 1917 / Poster showing a priest looking heavenward and raising a crucifix, blessing kneeling soldiers. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA. Reproduction Number: LC-USZC4-10131
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