



**TRANSFORMATION IN RUSSIAN AND
SOVIET MILITARY HISTORY: Proceedings of
the Twelfth Military History Symposium USAF
Academy 1986**

Office of Air Force History, U.S. Air Force

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Russian history and culture has long fascinated Westerners, but only in the twentieth century has Russia had an impact on people everywhere. Why is this true? Why is the Soviet period of Russian history extraordinary in Russia's millennium-long existence? Several reasons come to mind. In the twentieth century Russia has served as a dramatic example of the challenges encountered by all late modernizing societies. For a time, the Soviet Union seemed to incorporate the dreams of both Marxism and nationalism. It offered an unprecedented developmental path to modernization while maintaining both political and economic independence. Many Soviet citizens and some foreign observers correspondingly escalated their view and understanding of Russia's historical experience to universal levels, seeing the Soviet Union as embodying the sufferings and humanitarian aspirations of people everywhere, in all cultures and in all places. Within this broad context, other factors have also made the Soviet period of Russian history extraordinary. Among them is the special concern of this book-Russian experience with modern war. War is arguably the central fact of modern Russian history. Encounters with modern warfare have certainly transformed Russia in the twentieth century. In particular the Soviet period of Russian history has been uniquely shaped, possibly distorted, by the devastating results of global war. One outcome has been that Russia's influence has been extended globally, even into space itself. To date, however, the centrality of war in the Russian historical experience has not been well integrated into the general understanding of Russian history in the West. Several factors have contributed to this, not the least of which has been the emotionalism engendered by the extravagant mutual hostility of Communists and anti-Communists. Unrealistic optimism concerning the impending demise of capitalism on the one hand, or of socialism on the other, colored interpretations and obscured evidence. Only occasionally were partisans on both sides forced to accommodate themselves to the stubbornness of historical data.

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