

The drawdown continues in both aircraft and manpower. There is no end in sight to the budget crisis.

Profiles in By Benjamin S. Lambeth Russian Airpower

DoD photo by R. D. Ward



RUSSIA's military aerospace establishment—comprising the Air Force, Air Defense Forces, and Naval Aviation—is a beleaguered institution that has lost much effectiveness and prestige. Military leaders understand the problems and are working hard to correct them, but the fate of the three air services will be determined by economic and political factors that lie almost completely beyond the military leadership's control.

During the past four years, the air arm underwent a massive drawdown.

A severe budget crisis not only postpones improvements but also steadily reduces the inventory of available aircraft.

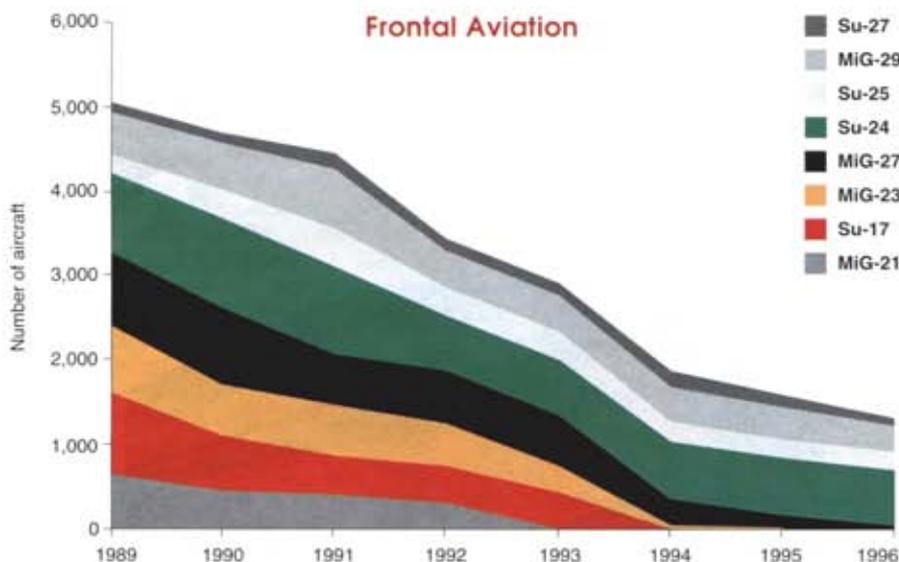
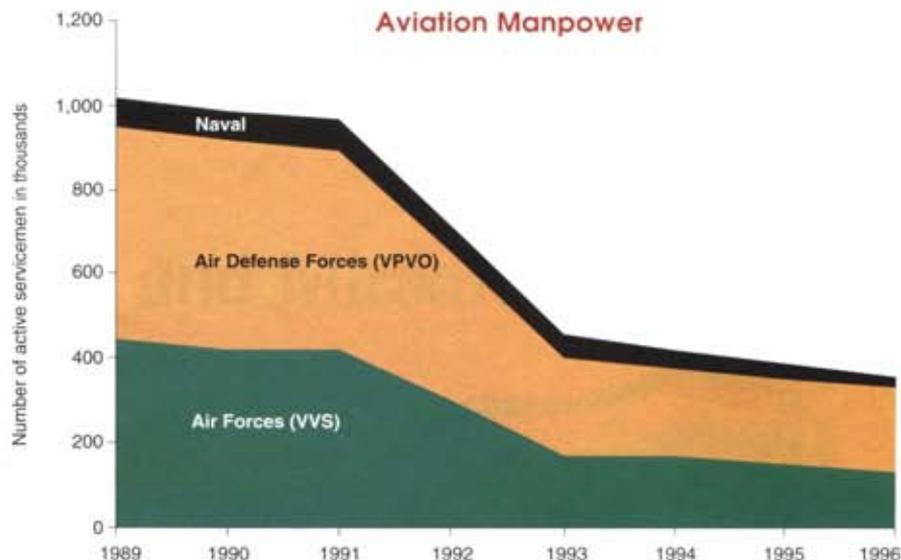
Sufficient funding will not be available until Russia emerges from its current fiscal crisis. For now, Russia can do little more than tighten its belt and set the stage for recovery whenever political and fiscal realities will allow it to take place.

—From *Russia's Airpower at the Crossroads*, RAND Corp., 1996, by Benjamin S. Lambeth. Used by permission.

Workers at Engels Heavy Bomber Base, Russia, cut apart wings and fuselage sections of a Tu-95 "Bear" bomber. Russia's Long-Range Aviation now has fewer than 300 bombers and tankers all told.

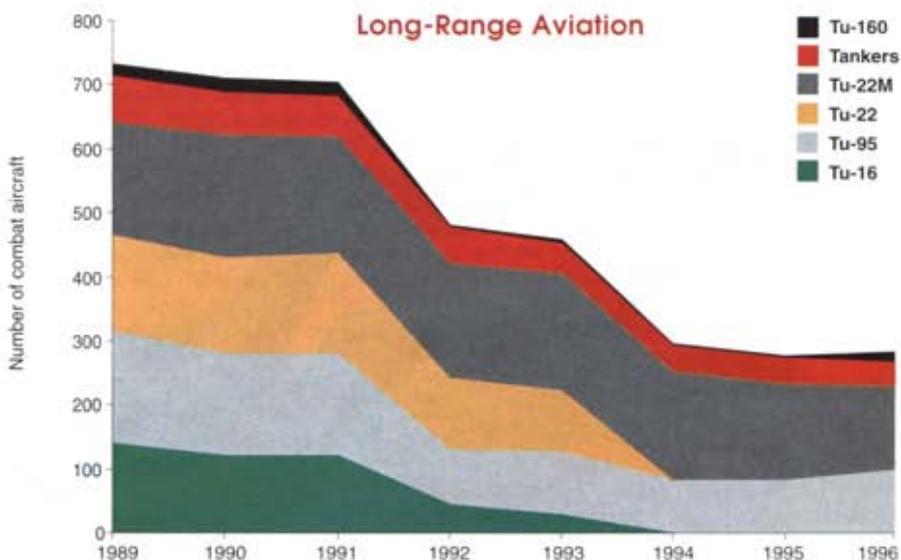
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Russia's aviation manpower has undergone a significant decline in strength from its former Soviet level. From a total of a little more than a million troops in 1989, the combined number for the three air arms today is down to fewer than 400,000. Moreover, because of the failure of conscription, the three services have become abnormally top heavy with officers.

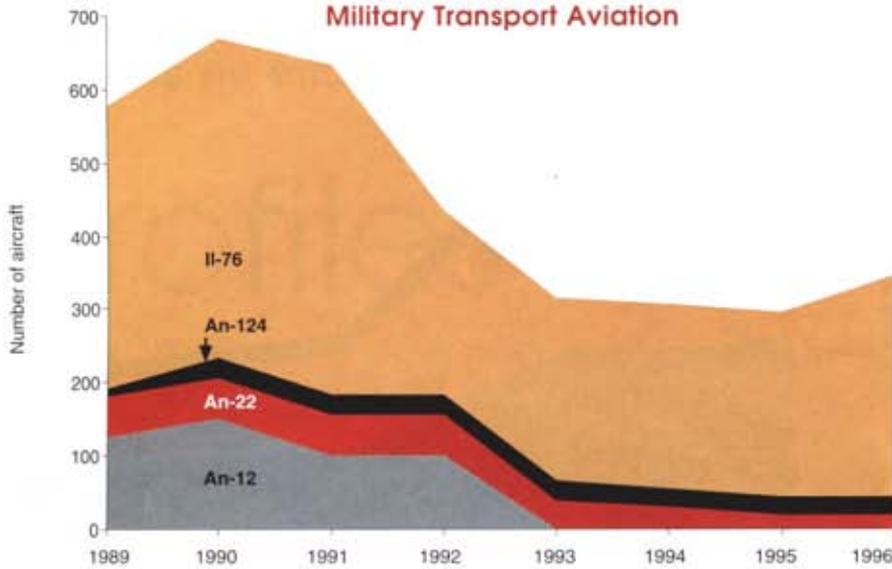


Frontal Aviation has shrunk from a high of more than 5,000 combat aircraft in 1989 to little more than a quarter of that number today. Around a third of these are fourth-generation MiG-29s and Su-27s. The remainder are older aircraft slated to be retired before the end of the decade.

Long-Range Aviation shed much of its intercontinental nuclear attack role and embraced a new mission of providing strategic reach in support of Russia's regional power-projection needs. LRA experienced a significant drawdown since the late 1980s. Its total number of aircraft has dropped from more than 700 to fewer than 300, and many of its most modern bombers have been lost to the newly independent states.



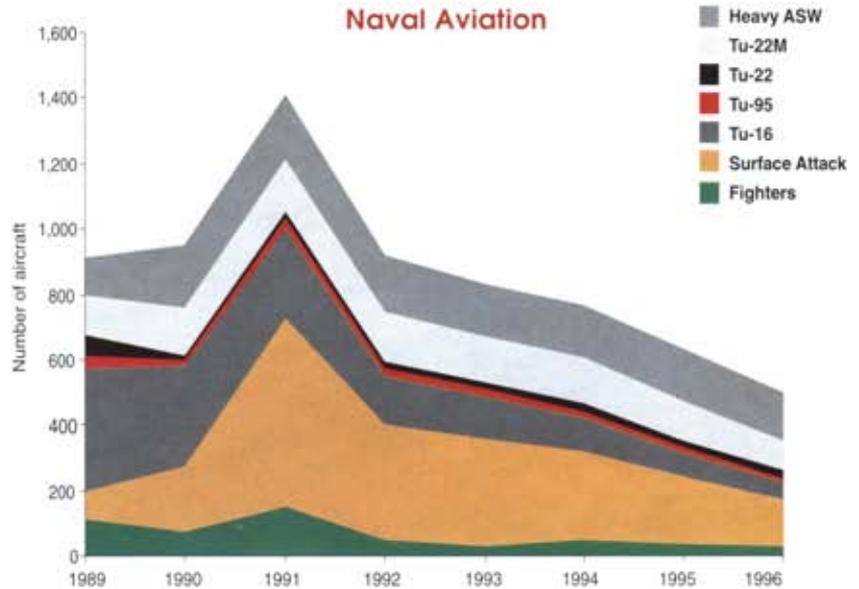
Military Transport Aviation



A painful post-Soviet loss was registered in Military Transport Aviation, which provides airlift. A large portion of its Il-76 jet transports (200 out of the 450 possessed by the USSR) was based in Ukraine, which claimed possession. Moscow viewed this as an especially acute loss in light of Russia's new regional peacekeeping challenges.

Naval aviators are afflicted by post-Soviet constraints no less severe than those that have beset the other air arms. From a level of about 1,000 during the Soviet era, the number of naval aircraft has declined dramatically to about 500 of all types today. The outlook for carrier-based fighter aviation is grim.

Naval Aviation



Russia's Air Defense Forces have experienced a sharp rate of decline, dropping from a Soviet-era high of about 2,300 interceptors on the eve of the USSR's collapse to fewer than 900 today. ■

Air Defense Forces

