

Konstantin Chernenko: a figurehead for the Soviet Union's military leadership

by Clifford Gaddy

The Feb. 13 appointment of Konstantin Chernenko to the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union marked a new phase in the strategic deception program directed by the High Command of the Soviet military since August 1983, when former CP boss Yuri Andropov definitively disappeared from the scene. After six months of lying about Andropov's being "temporarily incapacitated" by a "cold," the disinformation specialists of the U.S.S.R. are now touting the Chernenko succession as a new opportunity for improved East-West relations. Meanwhile, the military junta continues its countdown to a global showdown.

The role of Ogarkov

None of the events that have occurred in the Soviet Union since the disappearance of Andropov during August 1983 can be understood without taking into account the role of Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, the Soviet Chief of General Staff. In the present context, the single most important fact about Ogarkov is his background as the head of the Soviet General Staff's strategic deception ("*maskirovka*") operations as a means of waging psychological warfare preparatory to and parallel to "real" war. As special consultant to the Soviet delegation at the SALT arms control talks in the 1970s, Ogarkov was responsible for concealing the Soviets' massive arms buildup at that time—while the United States, under the influence of Henry Kissinger, disarmed itself.

The timing of the announcement of Yuri Andropov's death was an essential deception element in Ogarkov's strategic showdown plan. It may never be determined when Andropov actually died, but medical evidence presently available indicates that it may have been as early as last August. In any event, the course of events since mid-January of this year allows us to reconstruct part of the timetable according to which the Soviet military has been working.

Planning the succession

Beginning at the latest in November-December of 1983, the real power center of the Soviet Union, the Supreme Defense Council (SDC), went into the intensive final phase of preparations for the "succession." The key task to solve was the exact timing of the announcement of Andropov's death. The date was apparently narrowed down to sometime between late January and early March.

The appearance of one of the senior SDC members, Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, at the Stockholm Security Conference on Jan. 16, following several months of intensive work inside the party apparatus in Moscow, signaled that most of the essential details concerning the succession had been settled.

Gromyko's five-hour meeting in Stockholm on Jan. 17 with U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz, as well as a reported secret meeting with Henry Kissinger (in Stockholm at the time, ostensibly on behalf of Kissinger Associates, Inc.), began the countdown to the Feb. 11 announcement of Andropov's death. Between the two dates, the definitive accession of Margaret Thatcher as the leading appeaser of the West had been marked by her unprecedented visit to the East bloc. By the first week of February, the final humiliation of the United States in Lebanon seemed certain.

The announcement of Andropov's death guaranteed that Moscow at the beginning of the past week would be the scene of the biggest summit meeting of world leaders in years and, most important of all, world leaders who without exception would be ready to make any compromise with the Soviet leadership.

A man of the 'Russian Party'

The man who was actually selected by the Supreme Defense Council as the nominal new head of the Soviet Union, Konstantin Chernenko, is a figurehead. Chernenko has been put in "power" precisely because he has no strength, politically or physically. The 72-year old Chernenko suffers from both a heart ailment and the irreversible lung disease of emphysema. Medical experts think he may not last more than a few months.

Politically, he is even weaker than he is physically. The 15 months since the death of Leonid Brezhnev saw the biggest purges in the Soviet Union since the Stalin era. These purges left Chernenko as a man without any base which could permit him to take independent action—precisely the type of person whom the military need at this crucial point. Indeed, Chernenko has already made it clear that to the extent he will be talking about Soviet policy, he will be closely adhering to the wishes of the military. In his very first speech, for instance, Chernenko issued stern orders for Communist Party officials to keep their hands off questions of economic man-

agement. The policy of non-interference by the Party in vital economic matters has been one of the main demands of the military.

Figurehead as he remains, Chernenko is in one respect an important choice. Perhaps no other candidate exemplifies more clearly the nature of the ruling current in the present Soviet leadership, the extreme national-chauvinist faction that goes under the name of the "Russian Party." According to an exposé published in the Spanish *El Diario* Feb. 14, Chernenko is one of the chief sponsors of the new wave of anti-Semitic propaganda in the Soviet Union. It was he, for instance, who boosted the publications of the leading anti-Semitic writer in the U.S.S.R. right now, Lev Korneyev. Chernenko also pushed for the recent rehabilitation of the top secret police official Ignatiev, the man responsible for coordinating the infamous "Doctors' Plot," the last anti-Semitic purge of the Stalin era.

This outlook is coherent with the recent emergence of a "grassroots" movement for a Holy Mother Russia based on a concordat between the Orthodox Church and the Soviet State. This movement, according to one British source, "has the potential to unite the Solzhenitsyns and the Ogarkovs of Russia." The publications of this movement insist that America and the West are victims of a fearful "Jewish-masonic-plutocratic" conspiracy—a construct very close to that of the Nazis and National Bolsheviks.

Moreover, Chernenko has been exposed in European newspapers as a product of the same bloody secret police institutions as his predecessor, Andropov. During the 1930s, Chernenko served as a member of the "NKVD border troops," the SS-like arrest-and-execution commandos active during the Great Purges of the 1930s. According to the West German daily *Die Welt*, there are survivors of those purges—in which 2.8 million people were butchered in 1936-39 alone—who have testified that Chernenko personally took part in executions of political prisoners.

Following proposals made by Ogarkov in a 1982 book, the Soviet leadership is launching a militarization of the entire Russian school system. Chernenko headed the commission which designed the new program, which, according to Col. S. Konobeyev, deputy head of the Defense Ministry's military training program, will include the following provisions:

- 1) Every school in the U.S.S.R. will establish a post of vice-principal in charge of military training of students. The time devoted to elementary military training in the schools should be increased by 50 per cent.
- 2) Every 9th- and 10th-grade pupil will undergo six full days of compulsory field exercises each year as part of his or her elementary military training.
- 3) "Defense sports camps" will be established for youngsters over the age of 15.
- 4) School military instructors will receive 30 per cent raises in salary.
- 5) Every Soviet school will have its own armory, firing range, drilling grounds and other facilities, preferably to be built by the students themselves.

Soviet build-up for

by George Gregory

The number two man at the West German Defense Ministry in Bonn, State Secretary Dr. Lothar Rühl, recently insisted that the design of Soviet force-structures and operational doctrine in Europe is aimed at a "surprise attack" against Western Europe (see *EIR*, Feb. 14). The evaluation in Bonn of the Soviet buildup of its combined conventional and nuclear-chemical missile forces over the course of the second half of the 1970s, and accelerating particularly in 1983, is that possible Soviet options range from a full scale surprise assault to the militarily more limited, but politically devastating, "smash and grab" option, or a "surgical strike." The area viewed as the most sensitive and likely target for a Soviet-Warsaw Pact "surgical strike" is the northernmost state of Schleswig-Holstein.

Since Dr. Rühl's public comments in late January, a virtual chorus of assertions that Soviet forces and political activities along especially the NATO Northern and Central fronts represent "no danger at all."

The chief of the Danish section of the Pugwash conference claims that any talk of a Soviet "surprise attack" is "complete nonsense, utterly absurd, and only certain German circles are talking about it." Similarly, attendees of the recent Aspen Institute meeting in Berlin insist that no acute danger of this sort exists.

On the official political side, even West German Defense Minister Manfred Wörner told the annual Commanders Meeting in the Schleswig-Holstein town of Travemuende bordering on East Germany that "Peace in Europe is secure. There is no threat of war, neither intentional war, nor war by accident . . . therefore the fear of war going around is unfounded." Likewise, Bonn Foreign Ministry State Secretary Alois Mertes told the military-elite Wehrkunde meeting in Munich that "the danger of war is nearly nil."

In the case of the Pugwash/Aspen chorus, the normal observer, unaware of why they were chiming in so loudly, might well suspect that "where there's smoke, there's fire." In the case of Defense Minister Wörner, who knows the development of the Soviet forces in "Strategic Direction West" from the inside, his comments are perhaps based on the evaluation that Soviet activities are "merely psychological warfare," requiring merely that "we do not lose our nerve," as some in Bonn suggest.