

# The Ogarkov shift: the height of Soviet strategic deception?

by Rachel Douglas and Clifford Gaddy

The Sept. 6 notice that Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov has been replaced as Chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces by his deputy, Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, is at the center of a Soviet disinformation campaign. The objective is to dupe the West into believing that the "hard-line radical," Ogarkov, has been ousted by a more pragmatic group. The Ogarkov removal will be used by the arms-control mafia in the United States to call for "taking the unique opportunity" for comprehensive arms-control negotiations, having a ban on space weapons as their main objective.

While the Soviets are making a massive show of force on NATO's frontier and demonstrating strategically momentous advances in the ability to detect U.S. nuclear-armed submarines, the hired pens of Henry Kissinger and his associates hasten to explain the sudden disappearance of the Soviet military's most visible, most authoritative officer as proof that the time is ripe for agreeing on "rules of conduct" with the U.S.S.R. Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, whom Western commentators for months have called a stony cold-warrior who would beat back every attempt at an East-West thaw, is suddenly Mr. Détente, "a realist," now that he deigns to meet President Reagan on Sept. 28. On Sept. 13, the *New York Times'* Bernard Gwertzman unveiled a solution to the Ogarkov enigma (made available by "a senior Soviet diplomat," no less), namely that the Chief of Staff had exhibited "unpartylike tendencies" and therefore been axed.

There is good reason to suspect, however, that Ogarkov is not being demoted at all, but will assume a new, behind-the-scenes post. One possibility is that he will head up a new, special operational command for all Warsaw Pact forces. Another hypothesis under discussion in the United States is that Ogarkov will take charge of an entirely new office: a combined aerospace/beam-weapons command.

A role for Ogarkov in charge of Soviet space-related military capabilities or at another high command post is not yet confirmed, since the Soviet announcement did not specify the "other work" to which it said he was transferred. But Ogarkov's background and recent writings provide support

for the hypothesis. Most important of all is the fact that from 1968-74, during the SALT talks, Nikolai Ogarkov himself was the man at the Soviet General Staff in charge of the Office of Strategic Deception, what the Russians call *maskirovka*.

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The word of Ogarkov's removal came within 48 hours of other announcements, evidently designed to mystify the West. On Sept. 4, Soviet leader Konstantin Chernenko became visible by means of a televised appearance, after seven weeks of absence from public view. Both Ogarkov's disappearance and the re-emergence of the infirm Chernenko stirred storms of speculation in Western government circles about who is really in charge in Moscow.

On Sept. 5, East German leader Erich Honecker announced he would not make his scheduled trip to West Germany in September, thus ending weeks of an on-again/off-again charade. Here, too, with the prolonged farce of a "Honecker vs. Moscow" dispute, the goal of producing maximum confusion in the West was achieved.

If *maskirovka* is also the explanation for Ogarkov's dramatic step-down, it would be yet another case in which present-day Soviet policy has taken a cue from Russia's Byzantine past: In 1564, Czar Ivan Grozny ("The Great") made a

show of “abdication” and withdrew to the town of Aleksandrov outside Moscow. He demoted himself to “Prince of Moscow,” while setting up a puppet “Czar of All Russia,” to whom he pretended to render homage. Meanwhile, from his fortified palace in Aleksandrov, Ivan built up his power to unprecedented heights.

Sources in those Western circles that are collaborating with the Russians in preparing a “New Yalta” delineation of global spheres of influence, a plan that would among other things sharply reduce American influence in Europe, explain the Soviet command shift as the result of intense factional differences in the High Command. Two key centers of such “New Yalta” circles West are Switzerland and Great Britain.

A Geneva-based figure linked to the Pugwash movement of arms controllers stated that Ogarkov’s policy of a crash program for beam weapons in the U.S.S.R. had encountered massive opposition from “traditionalist” layers in the Soviet economic and political leadership. The “establishment,” he alleged, regarded Ogarkov as a “military man intruding into areas outside his domain.” Therefore, they removed him to replace him with someone more to their liking, the source concluded.

British sources stressed that Ogarkov had repeatedly clashed with other military commanders over the issue of whether to continue a “traditional” arms build-up (including nuclear) or to concentrate on high-technology conventional systems. Ogarkov, they say, wanted to give priority to the latter. He thus found himself in opposition to such figures as Marshal Vladimir Tolubko of the missile forces and Marshal Viktor Kulikov, the Warsaw Pact commander.

### **The Defense Council of the U.S.S.R.**

These analyses contain a grain of truth. Marshal Ogarkov indeed called for radical changes in the Soviet armed forces and in the Soviet economy. In so doing, he undoubtedly came into conflict with vested interests in Soviet society. But the important thing to realize is that in his plans for restructuring, Ogarkov had the full support of the real power center of the U.S.S.R., the Defense Council. Ogarkov has been not only a loyal member, but one of the heads, of this body that provides the continuity to all Soviet policy. There is nothing to show that this has changed.

Through the Defense Council, Ogarkov launched the program to transform the Soviet Armed Forces, beginning with his 1977 appointment as Chief of Staff. In a major 1981 article in the Communist Party journal, *Kommunist*, and in a pamphlet a year later, Ogarkov called for radical reorganization to essentially put the Soviet union on a war footing even in peacetime. The main points in his program were the following:

1) A centralized war economy: Ogarkov wrote that “it is more necessary than ever that the mobilization of the Armed Forces be coordinated with the national economy as a whole,

especially in the use of manpower, transportation, communications, and energy, and in ensuring the reliability and survivability of the entire vast economic mechanism of the country.” Ogarkov stipulated that there had to be “centralized leadership of the country and the Armed Forces” and named the Defense Council as the appropriate body to ensure that leadership.

2) Development of new weapons systems “based on new physical principles”—the term he used to refer to beam-weapon anti-missile defense systems: Ogarkov’s career at the General Staff has been intimately connected with beam weapons. In the late 1960s, he participated in the arms-control talks leading up to the ABM Treaty which blocked U.S. work on beam weapons. At the same time, he has been the foremost advocate of Soviet development of those systems. Most recently, he urged in an interview in the military newspaper *Red Star* on May 9 that the Soviet military command could tolerate no foot-dragging in developing the new weapons—and in blocking U.S. efforts in that direction. “Their creation,” he wrote, “will be a reality in the very near future, and to ignore this fact already at this point would be a serious error.”

3) The reorganization of the Soviet command: Ogarkov has been involved since 1977 in building up a totally new level of command of the armed forces based on the concept of the “theater of military actions.” This is a level of command higher than that of the present 20 military districts and groups of Soviet forces abroad, but subordinate to the Moscow High Command. There are to be five such theater commands, each able to function more or less independently in the event of war.

The model for the theater commands is the Far East High Command in the south Siberian city of Chita, a separate headquarters for all Soviet forces (more than 50 divisions) in the eastern part of the U.S.S.R. and the troops in Mongolia. Chita was originally set up by the Red Army in 1945 in preparation for war with Japan. Since then, it has been developed into a separate command center, designed to function even under conditions of nuclear war when all contact with Moscow might be broken off.

Marshal Ogarkov was directly involved in building up the Chita headquarters. From 1948 to 1959, he was a top staff member there.

In short, the most important economic and military changes in the Soviet Union have been done under the guidance of Ogarkov. It is unlikely that he would be demoted just at the point that the reorganization process is to be completed.

By omitting to publicly state the real nature of Ogarkov’s new appointment, the Soviets please themselves to create confusion in the West about a possible “leadership crisis.” For anyone with knowledge about Russian use of strategic deception in critical periods—both ancient and more recent—the best approach is to maintain high alert.