

One Army, one Church, and the Soviet rehabilitation of Stalin

by Konstantin George

A crucial signal article reflecting the policy views of the Soviet military leadership has appeared in the Soviet press. It was timed to intersect both the Feb. 23 celebrations of Soviet Armed Forces Day and the "Swan Song" appearance of a Konstantin Chernenko on television on Feb. 24, the day of the Supreme Soviet elections.

The article, written for the latest issue of the journal *Kommunist* by Chief of the General Staff Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, contains the most extensive and unrestrained panegyric to Josef Stalin—the symbol of authoritarian rule and Russian Empire expansionism—to be written since soon after the dictator's death in 1953.

Akhromeyev hails Stalin for his "personal leadership" in wartime, calling this "a key component of the superiority of Soviet military science." He writes: "One of the major features that characterized Soviet military art during the Great Patriotic War was the firm and creative management of the strategic activities of our Army and Navy by the Supreme HQ, and by the commander in chief, Josef Stalin, in person."

At the mammoth Soviet celebrations of V-E Day on May 8, the rehabilitation of Stalin will proceed apace. The Volgograd War Veterans' Association has petitioned the Central Committee of the Communist Party to pass a resolution changing the name of the city on the Volga, where the turning-point battle of the war was fought, back to Stalingrad. The chances are better than even that the Central Committee will "approve" the petition.

Akhromeyev emphasizes the current military-political context for the boosting of Stalin: Moscow's determination to force a U.S. global strategic backdown, and to prevent the implementation of President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative. Denouncing the SDI, Akhromeyev warns, "Whatever weapons the United States produces, including space weapons, the Soviet Union can create too."

Following the theme of the article, the speeches by Politburo members during the Supreme Soviet "election campaign" this year were dominated by military chauvinism and talk of war preparations, although this was barely mentioned by the Western media. Grigori Romanov, one of the younger contenders for the Kremlin's top leadership post, spoke in Leningrad, "assuring" the Soviet population that the buildup of the armed forces will continue. Romanov hailed the Red Army's defeat of Nazi Germany, which he called "a stern warning to the current pretenders to world hegemony [the

U.S.A.]. . . . In the last 10 years the United States has brought humanity close to the abyss of nuclear catastrophe. And, if the worst did not happen, it is thanks only to our great fatherland."

Radio Moscow's coverage of Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko's "election" speech, the lead news item all day long on Feb. 20, showed a no less bellicose tone: "Andrei Gromyko emphatically warned that a new threat to humanity is arising with Washington's 'Star Wars' plan, which greatly increases the danger of nuclear war." This was coupled with a new Gromyko ultimatum to the United States to halt the SDI, or else: "Nothing but banning space militarization can guarantee peace."

The Soviet ultimatum on the SDI was repeated in a statement issued by the foreign ministry on Feb. 27: "Washington can hardly fail to understand that carrying out the program of a large-scale ABM system with space-based elements would inevitably result in an uncontrolled arms race in every direction. It would make limitations, let alone reductions, in strategic offensive arms impossible, and would dramatically heighten the risk of nuclear war."

The military in control

Akhromeyev became chief of the General Staff on Sept. 6, 1984, succeeding Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, after having served as first deputy chief of the General Staff. Ogarkov was promoted to the crucial post of commander in chief of the High Command—Strategic Direction West. This promotion of Ogarkov is analogous to the July 1941 transfer of Marshal Georgii Zhukov from the position of chief of the General Staff to "representative of the Stavka"—the Soviet Wartime High Command headed by Stalin—from which post he took direct charge of war-fighting. If the Soviets choose to launch war today, Ogarkov would run the decisive military campaign in the European theater—the *Blitzkrieg* offensive-breakthrough driving across Germany, the Low Countries, and France to the Atlantic Coast.

The publication of Akhromeyev's article in the Communist Party journal *Kommunist* shows how fully the military command is calling the shots: Since Jan. 1, top-ranking Army figures, distinguished for their careers and offensive orientation, including wartime combat commanders, have been promoted, in an unparalleled reorganization of the military command (see *EIR*, March 5, "Soviet military creates a war-

time High Command"). The restructuring is of a type associated with either immediate pre-war or wartime circumstances, and provides the clearest evidence of the mindset of the Kremlin leadership and the dominance of the military.

The Army, the Church, the Empire

The Army-launched total rehabilitation of Stalin, the wartime leader, signifies a lot more than just Stalin leading Mother Russia to military victory. Stalin concluded the 1943 state agreement with the Moscow Patriarchate which granted the Russian Orthodox Church the widest powers and privileges it had ever enjoyed during the era of Soviet rule. Institutionally, the Church and the Army—the historical bastions of Great Russian Empire chauvinism, were at a zenith of power and influence. By “rehabilitating” the Muscovite and Imperial Russian past, Stalin allied with the Church and the Army to shift the U.S.S.R. from a Soviet belief structure to a Great Russian one. Note in this context the rehabilitation

Playing up Stalin, the wartime leader, is synonymous with the demand for strong-man rule for the Russian Empire. The Orthodox Church is backing this to the hilt, and is fully promoting the war preparations of the Soviet military leadership.

of Imperial Czarist military heroes and emperors and the 1946 celebrations of the 800th anniversary of the city of Moscow, which Stalin personally conducted.

Playing up Stalin, the wartime leader, is synonymous with the demand for strong-man rule for a Moscow-centered Russian Empire. The Russian Orthodox Church is backing this to the hilt, and is fully promoting the war preparations of the Soviet military leadership.

On Feb. 21, right before the Armed Forces Day festivities and timed with the appearance of Marshal Akhromeyev's *Kommunist* article, Metropolitan Juvenalii, one of the leaders of the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church, dropped an ecclesiastical H-bomb. In an interview with the Catholic information agency, Kathpress, of Austria, he saluted the Red Army in language not heard since the Second World War and the days of Stalin.

Said Juvenalii: “The sacred duty of our Armed Forces is to safeguard the frontiers of our country. It is their duty to repel the aggressor. Should the Church tell our Armed Forces to neglect our sacred duty? Should the Church tell our Armed

Forces not to protect our borders? Under no circumstances would we do so.”

The flip side of the coin in the campaign which has now revived Stalin and brought the Army and Church, arm in arm, to the fore, is the deliberate humiliation of the old, powerless, and terminally ill Chernenko. This humiliation is part of the program to prepare the Russian population for a younger leader—if not very soon, then not too far off—who would not only be long-term and thus stable, but also lead the Empire to world domination in the years ahead, to the 1,000th anniversary of the conversion of Russia to Christianity in 1988, the year by which the Russian leaders hope to fulfill the age-old dream of making Moscow the seat of the “Third and Final Roman Empire.”

Chernenko's age and deteriorating health are not the issue. He never had power of his own; he was always someone's proxy and tool, being first appointed a full Central Committee member at the age of 60. This is not the kind of biography one finds with Kremlin figures who actually wield power and influence. What is important is that the very facts that he has no power and is on his death-bed, are being conveyed to the Russian public in “The Emperor's New Clothes” fashion by the Soviet media. There have been old and dying Kremlin leaders before, with rivals and enemies, but the “rule of the game” was never broken, never to make them look ridiculous before they died, or were, as in the case of Nikita Khrushchev, officially removed.

That the armed forces are in the thick of this operation is clear from many signs. Chernenko's name was omitted from the statements and hoopla surrounding Armed Forces Day. The next day, Feb. 24, the Soviet press for the first time “neglected” to mention his title as a member of the Supreme Defense Council.

Chernenko himself had not been seen publicly since Dec. 27, until he suddenly appeared in a one-minute clip on Soviet television on the morning of Feb. 24, ostensibly to cast his vote in the Supreme Soviet election. When that one minute had elapsed, every person in the Soviet Union knew that Chernenko had no power and “one foot in the grave.” The film first showed him in a small room seated at a table. He is then escorted across the room to the ballot box by Politburo member Viktor Grishin, the head of the Moscow Party since June 1967. Grishin holds Chernenko with both hands for support. Chernenko faces the TV audience and manages all of two words: “Happy Holiday.” The film clip is clearly interrupted during this sequence and later as well. Then, Chernenko, held up by two people from behind, drops his ballot into the box, and says through his death-mask face: “Good.”

The contrast shown to the Soviet population between Akhromeyev's portrayal of Stalin as the ideal wartime leader, and the graphic image of Chernenko, the non-leader approaching death, is intended to further increase the longing for a wartime leader on the Stalin model.