

Ogarkov uses Cessna shock to shake up defense ministry

by Konstantin George

On Saturday, May 30, the Soviet Politburo held an extraordinary meeting, as TASS reported, to "hear a report from the defense ministry on the violation of Soviet airspace." The Politburo meeting, using 19-year-old Matthias Rust's May 28 Cessna flight from Helsinki to Red Square as the pretext, forced the resignation of the nearly 76-year-old defense minister, Marshal Sergei Sokolov, and the dismissal of Soviet Air Defense Forces commander-in-chief, 64-year-old Air Marshal Aleksandr Koldunov.

That the incident was only a pretext is clear. When the Cessna landed in Red Square, Marshal Sokolov was not even in the U.S.S.R., but in East Berlin, sitting next to Mikhail Gorbachov at the Warsaw Pact summit. Either Sokolov knew nothing about what happened, or if he did, his "wrong decision" was taken in consultation and agreement with Comrade Gorbachov. So, if Sokolov were "guilty" of anything, Gorbachov was equally guilty, and should also have submitted his resignation to the Politburo!

The sensational incident, which created global headlines and shock waves inside the Soviet Union, has ushered in a selective purge of the Soviet military leadership which fits Soviet pre-war requirements. The intent is to restructure the Soviet military leadership, as well as command and control, to conform to the dictates of Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, Russia's wartime commander in chief, deputy chairman of the National Defense Council, and architect of the Soviet war plan and the current *perestroika* (restructuring) sweeping the Soviet economy and institutions.

The victims thus far, Sokolov and Koldunov, were due to be removed in any case. With the Cessna affair, the timetable was moved up. Marshal Sokolov, who became defense minister in December 1984 after the death of Dmitri Ustinov, was always seen as a transitional figure. Koldunov, who

headed the Air Defense Forces, one of the five services of the Soviet military, since 1978, was the only one of the five whose appointment predated late 1984. That was when Marshal Ogarkov directed the reorganization of the Soviet Armed Forces into a structure of wartime High Commands, and subordinate Theater of War commands.

Moscow's use of the affair should not, however, lead one to conclude that the affair itself was staged by Moscow. As one European-based watcher of Soviet affairs stressed to *EIR*, the Russians would "never arrange anything that involves such a tremendous loss of face to themselves, or do anything to make themselves into the laughingstock of the world."

A defense minister in the Ogarkov mold

The new defense minister named by the Politburo, the 64-year-old Army General Dmitri Timofeyevich Yazov, is in the mold of Ogarkov, whose guiding hand is evident throughout Yazov's career.

Under Ogarkov's 1984 reorganization, only the best of Soviet generals received important posts. The High Command Far East was created in March 1979, as a precursor to the wholesale reorganization of 1984, when an overall wartime High Command was established, together with High Command West, High Command South, and High Command Southwest. The High Command Far East's new boss was Army General Ivan Moiseyevich Tretyak, a World War II combat hero. Yazov, who himself joined the Red Army in 1941 and saw over three years of combat in the war, was transferred in mid-1984 to serve under Tretyak as commander of the all-important Far East Military District.

The Soviet Union contains 16 military districts, and four "groups of forces" exist, as the Soviet troops stationed in East

Germany and Eastern Europe are called. The mainland part of the Far East Military District faces Manchuria, China, while Sakhalin Island and the Kurile Islands are but a stone's throw from the northernmost Japanese island of Hokkaido. This military district has wartime responsibilities against Japan and/or China. Only the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany (i.e., East Germany) disposes of more combat divisions, tanks, and combat aircraft than the Far East Military District.

The careers of Yazov and Tretyak have been closely intertwined during the past 11 years, a time-frame beginning with Marshal Ogarkov's last months as first deputy chief of staff of the Soviet Armed Forces in 1976, before his rise to chief of the general staff in January 1977. As we will now see, Ogarkov had handpicked Yazov by no later than February 1976 as a Soviet general destined for high-level responsibilities.

In February 1976, major Soviet military maneuvers under conditions of winter mountain warfare, were held in the Transcaucasus Military District, embracing Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The exercises were reviewed on the scene by then-Defense Minister Andrei Grechko, and then-First Deputy Chief of the General Staff Nikolai Ogarkov. *EIR* reported in its July 1985 "Global Showdown" special report, in a sub-section titled, "The Blitzkrieg Commanders—A Profile," how Ogarkov, impressed by the brilliance exhibited in the maneuvers by Motorized Rifle Division commander Boris Pyankov, selected Pyankov for immediate posting to the General Staff Academy. Later, Pyankov distinguished himself in Afghanistan, and in 1983 was named commander of the crack, spearhead Third Shock Army at Magdeburg in East Germany.

In the February 1976 Transcaucasus maneuvers, the brilliance of another commanding officer caught the eye of Ogarkov, then General-Major Dmitri Yazov, who commanded an Army during the maneuvers. Shortly thereafter, in 1976, Yazov was promoted to general-lieutenant, and appointed first deputy commander of the Far East Military District, serving under the district's new commander, Tretyak. As we saw earlier, Ogarkov, in 1984, was to choose the same Tretyak-Yazov combination as the key combat forces' commanders for the Far East.

Command changes under Gorbachov

The process of purging the Soviet military by forced retirement, to reorganize it in conformity with the dictates of the Ogarkov War Plan, began in late 1984-early 1985, when the Gorbachov succession was assured. The scope of the personnel changes is staggering. The dismissals of Sokolov and Koldunov, are but the final pre-war phase of command changes and reorganization of command and control.

From late 1984 to the present, changes at the commander level have occurred in 13 of the 20 military districts and groups of forces; in all four Soviet fleets, the Northern, Baltic, Black Sea, and Pacific; in 8 of the 11 deputy defense

minister slots (two yet to be named: the successors to Koldunov and Yazov), including all five heads of military services; in one of the three and Yazov), including all five heads of military services; in one of the three first deputy defense minister spots, and now, there is a new defense minister.

We will focus on the changes to date in the defense ministry. The appointees who come from the Ground Forces, five of the eight new deputy defense ministers (now four given Yazov's promotion), the first deputy defense minister, and Defense Minister Yazov all share a common background: years of front-line combat experience as NCOs and junior officers in World War II. All have recently held important field command positions, such as commander in chief of the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany, or commander in chief of Ogarkov's wartime high commands. Deputy defense ministers belonging to this category include:

Army General Vladimir Govorov. 1980-1984, commander in chief of the High Command Far East: since late 1984, a deputy defense minister; since July 1986, deputy defense minister in charge of civil defense.

Army General Yuri Maksimov. Late 1984-July 1985, commander in chief of the wartime High Command South; since July 1985, deputy defense minister and commander in chief of the Strategic Rocket Forces.

Army General Ivan Tretyak. Late 1984-July 1986, commander in chief of the High Command Far East; since July 1986, deputy defense minister, officially in charge of the Main Inspectorate, but, among other things, has a special role at the defense ministry for Soviet operations in Afghanistan, South Asia, and the Middle East.

Both **Army General Yevgeni Ivanovsky**, commander in chief of the Ground Forces since January 1985, and **Army General Pyotr Lushev**, first deputy defense minister since July 1986, had served as commander in chief of the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany (GSFG).

Since mid-1986, the signs of a coming transformation of the defense ministry were evident in a resurfacing of the Tretyak-Yazov combination. In July 1986, Tretyak was transferred to Moscow to become a deputy defense minister, and in February 1987, Yazov was also called from the Far East, to become deputy defense minister in charge of personnel. Technically speaking, either one would have served Ogarkov's purpose as defense minister, but here, *racial* considerations entered the picture. Ivan Moiseyevich Tretyak, a Ukrainian with some Jewish ancestry, could never become defense minister in the Russian-dominated Soviet empire.

One can add here that there has been a singular pattern, since mid-1986, of transferring officers of army general rank from field commands under the High Command Far East, to high posts in the defense ministry. Besides the cases of Tretyak and Yazov, recently, the commander of the Trans-baikal Military District, **Stanislav Postnikov**, who was promoted to army general on Nov. 4, 1986, was brought to Moscow and named first deputy commander in chief of the Soviet Ground Forces.

Who is Dmitri Timofeyevich Yazov?

Born: Nov. 8, 1923

Entered the Soviet military after the Nazi invasion in 1941. Saw over three years of combat in World War II as a platoon and company commander.

1956: Graduated from the Frunze Military Academy.

1967: Graduated from the General Staff Academy.

1967-72: Commanded a regiment, and later a motorized rifle division, in the Leningrad Military District.

1972-76: Commanded an army in the Transcaucasus Military District.

1976-79: First deputy commander of the Far East Military District.

1979-80: Commander of the Central Group of Forces, the Soviet armed forces in Czechoslovakia.

December 1980 to mid-1984: Commander of the Central Asian Military District.

Mid-1984 to early 1987: Commander of the Far East Military District.

February 1987-May 29, 1987: deputy defense minister in charge of personnel.

May 30, 1987: Named defense minister.

A half-page laudatory feature on Yazov's battle-command abilities printed in the military daily *Krasnaya Zvezda* (*Red Star*), on April 13, 1985, described him:

"Army General Yazov can still recite by heart many articles of the regulations, especially those concerning the duties of a company commander. Perhaps they were remembered so well, because they were not picked up on the fly, but suffered and assimilated in the trenches, in that time that smelled of gunpowder, when carrying out or failing to carry out a regulation meant victory or defeat, life or death."

Command and control reorganization

What's on the agenda now? Some of the answers are provided by the May 30 extraordinary Politburo meeting. As TASS reported that day, "The Politburo adopted a resolution to strengthen the leadership of the defense ministry," and, "underlined anew, the cardinal significance of the task of decisively raising the level of combat readiness and discipline in the Armed Forces [and] . . . of leading the troops in a qualified manner."

In short, there will be quite a shake-up occurring in the Soviet defense ministry.

There will also be quite a shake-up in the Soviet Air Defense Forces. The Politburo denounced the "unpardonable carelessness and indecisiveness" shown by the Air Defense Forces, citing the "lack of military deployments to protect the country's air space," and a "lack of vigilance and discipline." The Politburo declared that the Soviet Armed Forces must always be in a position to repulse "any type of attack upon the sovereignty of the Soviet state." It announced that Soviet state prosecutors had begun an investigation of all the circumstances surrounding the "violation of Soviet air space," including the "conduct by those persons responsible in this situation."

The intriguing flight route of the Cessna

The Cessna's flight pattern provides some clues to the investigation and potential changes in command and control. The young Hamburg pilot Rust entered Soviet airspace over the Estonian coast, close to the Estonian border with the Russian Republic, and for the first leg of the flight overland, more or less "hugged" the Estonian-Russian republic border.

Estonia is part of the Baltic Military District, and the Russian territory bordering it is part of the Leningrad Military District. In the 1981 reorganization of the Soviet Air Defense Forces, the Air Defense Forces of the military districts of the Western U.S.S.R. (including the Baltic and Leningrad Military Districts) were removed from the Air Defense Forces and reassigned to the military district commands.

Here we come to the interesting command and control questions. We know that Soviet radar picked up the Cessna crossing the Estonian coast. We can assume here that the information was promptly transmitted to Baltic Military District headquarters. But, did the Baltic Military District HQ then inform the Leningrad Military District HQ, and/or the Air Defense Command in Moscow? If so, what was the time lag? While the Cessna was "hugging" the Military District boundary, how good was the coordination between the Baltic and Leningrad HQs, and between both and Moscow?

Once the Cessna made it safely past the Baltic and Leningrad district hurdles, given the lack of Soviet low-altitude radar inland until the general area around Moscow, how long was the plane lost to Soviet observation and tracking? How did the defense ministry function during this time-frame? Many, many more questions like this could be posed.

What is clear is that "snafus" were exhibited in the chain of command. What is equally clear is that Western electronic monitoring facilities now have a rich harvest of intercepted Soviet military command communications to sift through and analyze.

And, we can certainly expect a lot more changes in Russia as the Ogarkov's *perestroika* evolves, with ever-increasing momentum.