

Moscow prepares the great terror as KGB sparks Uzbekistan riots

by Konstantin George

Evidence is mounting that the Soviet leadership, confronted with spreading unrest among its imperial domains, is preparing a modern-day sequel to the post-1934 Great Terror launched by Josef Stalin. The only question is, will Gorbachov himself be designated to play Stalin's role, or will someone else emerge, in the midst of the turmoil engulfing the Soviet Empire, to carry out the same policies?

The ugly change in the making is clearly evident in the way the Soviet leadership and media have been treating the ongoing riots in Uzbekistan. Even though it was the Soviet KGB which played a major role in staging the unrest, Moscow is speaking of a "plot," with Soviet TV, radio, and press speaking of "well-organized armed bands," many in convoys of cars and trucks, roaming through the region. Some specifics:

- U.S.S.R. Interior Minister Vadim Bakatin, on Soviet TV, June 6: "This outburst has been provoked by somebody. *So far*, I can't say by whom. But it's clear that some evil forces are involved who think that the worse things are, the better."

- Gen. Col. Yuri Shatalin, chief of Interior Ministry Troops, on Soviet TV, June 9: "We saw a large number of automatic rifles, pistols, and other firearms in the hands of the attackers."

- General Nechayev, deputy chief of Interior Ministry Troops, quoted in the June 11 military newspaper, *Krasnaya Zvezda*: "We believe the actions of extremists are being directed by leaders with vested interests, who are using malicious means to achieve their selfish goals."

This came in the context of emergency Soviet leadership meetings on June 11-12. Immediately following those meetings, five Politburo members were brought to Moscow airport. Three—Gorbachov, propaganda department chief Alexander Yakovlev, and Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze—took off for Bonn, West Germany, for consultations that had been scaled way down from the original plans; the other two—internal security czar Viktor Chebrikov and Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov, took off minutes later for Uzbekistan.

On June 15, hours before Gorbachov's return from Bonn, Ryzhkov announced what their on-the-spot investigation had

"uncovered." Local "party and government officials" were behind the Uzbekistan riots, having "encouraged" the violence, by handing out fuel, transport, and vodka to the rioters. "Severe punishment" was pledged for those who had "stained the party's prestige."

Famine threat in Uzbekistan

The real cause behind the Uzbek riots is far different than the picture being portrayed by Moscow. The economy of Uzbekistan is a Soviet-dictated cotton monoculture, where the great bulk of the republic's largely rural population, including those in the Fergana Valley, the scene of the riots, are very poorly paid wage slaves, working cotton plantations. Because nearly all arable land is devoted to cotton, Uzbekistan, which otherwise would resume its historical role as the granary of Central Asia, cannot survive without mass imports of grain and food from the rest of the U.S.S.R. Under conditions of the Soviet-wide food crisis, this flow has been drastically reduced, plunging the region's rural population into a hunger diet. In fact, the food crisis in Uzbekistan, which with 20 million people is the third most populous Soviet republic, is the worst in all of the U.S.S.R.

On top of the food shortage, Uzbek youth unemployment is on a par with that prevailing in American black ghettos. It was this level of desperation which drove masses of Uzbeks to readily join in the rioting, which was actually triggered by the KGB. The KGB was able to act through a ready-made local organizing force: the thousands of Uzbek party and government cadres who have recently lost their privileged status through the deep cuts which Moscow has made in the region's party and government bureaucracy in the past year, and the additional cuts made earlier this year in the dissolution and merger of some of Uzbekistan's regions. It is a fact of Soviet life, that in a time of coming famine, being or not being a privileged bureaucrat can make the difference between one's family surviving or not.

These factors shaped the specific character of the rioting. The crowds and gangs were bent on, in most cases, plunder and not killing. The homes of the Meskhetian minority were plundered, and for every case of a Meskhetian being killed, there were dozens where the seized victims were let go, after

being stripped of all their possessions—in some cases, right down to the clothing they wore. The other main targets of the mobs were warehouses and homes of relatively well-to-do party and government figures.

As a leader of the Uzbek movement against the cotton monoculture told Western journalists by telephone from the republic's capital of Tashkent: "People in the villages are living on the edge of poverty and subsisting on bread and water because of the monopoly on cotton. There are 1.5 million unemployed in Uzbekistan. The real reason for this unthinkable slaughter is the economic, political, and cultural frustration of the people."

'Crisis ministry'

Back in Moscow, the Stalin-style crackdown preparations were well-advanced even before Gorbachov's departure for Bonn. Nikolai Ryzhkov, reelected as Soviet prime minister, addressed the Congress of People's Deputies on June 10 to outline a vast purge and reorganization of the Soviet government, to be completed before the end of June. Had the ultra-Stalinist content of that speech alone been honestly covered and commented on in the Western media, "Gorbomania" would already belong to the past. The measures he announced include:

- The creation of a new "crisis ministry" is being created, called the "State Committee for Extraordinary Situations," with extraordinary powers to deal with "unrest, disasters, and accidents."

- The reduction of the currently more than 100 U.S.S.R. ministers and chairmen of state committees, to only 10, with roughly half the changes involving transfers, and the other half outright dismissals.

- The reduction of the number of members of the U.S.S.R. Ministries and State Committee 112 to 57; the number of ministries for branches of the economy goes from 52 down to 32.

- The vast purge will not touch the ministers and ministries concerned with internal security. The ten ministers who will stay on at their posts prominently include Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov, KGB Chairman Vladimir Kryuchkov, and Interior Minister Vadim Bakatin.

Huge as it is, what is presented here is merely the known, confirmed dimensions of the huge purge that will be ratified when the Central Committee convenes June 26, for the third extraordinary, formerly unscheduled, plenum within a mere five weeks. This dynamic alone, totally without any precedent, underscores what sort of extraordinary, and nasty, shocks, jolts, and eruptions, one can expect from the Soviet Union very soon.

The purge will go much further, and perhaps even before the month of June ends. Many leading Soviet figures are bound to become casualties, but the biggest casualty of all will be the global condominium, already mortally wounded, and the disease it spawned—"Gorbomania."

Turkey squeezed by external crises

by Thierry Lalevée

Since the May 1 demonstrations which led to riots in Istanbul and elsewhere, there has been no respite on Turkey's internal political scene. But this agitation pales in the face of the international political crises hitting the easternmost NATO nation, reinforcing its sense of isolation and confirming the Turks' fears about European stubbornness in rejecting their application for membership in the European Community.

A case in point is the outcry over the tens of thousands of Iraqi Kurdish refugees whom Turkey took in last year, after they fled the chemical weapons onslaught of the Iraqi Army. While Iraq was much denounced then, concrete efforts to resettle these refugees by financing the building of new villages have not been forthcoming. Most European countries have blocked Kurdish refugees from their territory; recently Britain required visas for Kurdish refugees and Turkish citizens alike, after some 1,000 Kurds had reached England.

Things came to a head after a visit by Danielle Mitterrand, the French First Lady, to Turkey last month. The fact that the visit was organized by the new French ambassador, Eric Rouleau, should have aroused suspicions in Ankara. Rouleau had to leave his first and last diplomatic posting, Tunis, much earlier than planned, amid reports that he was plotting against the prime minister, Mohammed M'zali. Anyhow, as soon as Mrs. Mitterrand was safely back in Paris from her private and humanitarian visit to Turkey, she held a high-profile press conference denouncing Turkish human rights violations against the Kurds. While a diplomatic crisis was narrowly averted when she stressed in subsequent interviews that these were her private views and not those of the President, the case was made.

When in the first week of June, hundreds of Kurds had to be hospitalized for what looked like systematic food poisoning—of which many died—the finger was pointed at Ankara. Officially, Iraqi intelligence services were blamed for the operation, but, British media and others implied, Ankara was guilty by association and failure to prevent it. The BBC gave heavy publicity to the charges against Turkey aired from Damascus by Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani. Then, the new successor to Khomeini as Iran's spiritual leader, Ali Khamenei, made a much publicized defense of the Iraqi Kurds in the fight against Baghdad. All heads turned toward Ankara.

But while the Kurds and Mrs. Mitterrand made it to the