

# Gorbachov courts Soviet military as pillar of stability for the empire

by Konstantin George

On May 9, under the approving eye of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov, who stood on the Lenin Mausoleum reviewing stand while Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov, newly promoted to Marshal of the Soviet Union, stood on his right, a military parade spectacle was staged in Moscow's Red Square. The parade commemorated the 45th anniversary of the Soviet Union's victory over Nazi Germany, and was the first Moscow May 9 military parade held in five years. The parade featured a mix of World War II military hardware, including columns of T-34 tanks and BM-13 multi-barrel rocket launchers, the famous "Stalin Organs," followed by a display of modern weaponry. This included the strictly offensive weapon, the SS-21 short-range nuclear missile, and two types of hardware never before put on public display: The most modern version of the T-80 tank, and the SA-10 anti-aircraft missile.

The event and the speeches delivered by Gorbachov and Yazov provided the final piece in a chain of evidence since March 15, ridiculing the well-cultivated disinformation myth of "tensions" and "conflict" between Gorbachov and the military command widespread in the Western media on the eve of the May 30 Bush-Gorbachov Washington summit.

Every step taken by Gorbachov leading up to May 9, has been to accommodate political demands by the military. This began with the Moscow parade itself, which the military had demanded, and which Gorbachov had authorized through a presidential decree to symbolize the Army's role as the "savior" and sole pillar of Great Russian institutional stability, along with military parades in the capitals of all 14 non-Russian republics. These too, were held on May 9 with Soviet occupation troops, missiles, tanks, and artillery parading in the Baltic capitals of Vilnius (Lithuania), Riga (Latvia), and Tallinn (Estonia), in the Transcaucasus capitals of Tbilisi (Georgia), Yerevan (Armenia), and Baku (Azerbaijan), and in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev, as reminders that Moscow has no intention of releasing its hold over the Captive Nations.

Yazov, in his May 9 speech, began by praising Gorbachov, citing the "positive changes in world politics" which have occurred "under the influence of the policy of perestroika." Though these changes "are not yet irreversible," and therefore, "the danger of war continues to exist . . . in these circumstances," it is necessary to keep "defensive strength"

at "sufficient strength."

The evening before, Gorbachov delivered a televised address for the 45th anniversary celebration which repeatedly stressed that the Soviet wartime victory was due to the "unity" and "sacrifices" of the entire population which rallied to support the soldiers at the front. He called the war "a genuine People's War," where "everyone" contributed to victory, from the soldier at the front, to those working "in the rear," down to "the slandered and innocent, unjustly convicted camp inmates in the mines of Vorkuta and Magadan." Gorbachov then said: "Today, we are again at the crossroads," and called for the same wartime qualities of "unity" and "sacrifices" to overcome the present crisis.

## Gorbachov echoes military attack on Stalin

Gorbachov's speech was one that could have been given by any Soviet military leader, especially when he blasted the pre-war "blunders" and crimes of Josef Stalin. The attack on Stalin has been reported in the Western media, but not the detailed formulations, which were identical to the attacks of the Soviet military command over the past two years. Gorbachov declared that Stalin had made "the most flagrant strategic blunders . . . which in the opening phase of the war, cost millions of lives." He listed the blunders, singling out precisely those which have been most stressed by Soviet military figures, including the former chief of the Soviet General Staff, Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov: 1) The pre-war terror purges killed or imprisoned "40,000 officers," which caused "the decapitation" of the military command. 2) Stalin had blundered by overruling the military and not accelerating the pre-war buildup of the most modern tanks and aircraft. 3) What Stalin had gained through the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact—time to prepare for war, and territorial gains—"at the price of enormous political and moral cost," was "lost" through his blunders in ignoring the intelligence provided by the U.S.S.R.'s intelligence services (including military intelligence, or GRU), who had informed him of the coming invasion.

Gorbachov's speech is of extreme importance. The Soviet President was declaring on television to the nation that the common denominator of Stalin's blunders and crimes was that Stalin had decimated the officers' corps, repeatedly refused to listen to the military, ignored their advice and warn-

ings, and refused to give them a say in determining policy. The message could not be clearer. He, Gorbachov, *will* listen to the military, *will* grant them a say on policy, and *will* grant their demands in the interest of Russia.

Since his March 15 election to the U.S.S.R. presidency giving him dictatorial powers, Gorbachov has gone out of his way to cultivate a close, high-publicity relationship with the Soviet military leadership. The post-March 15 record of events has been, for the most part, meticulously censored by Western media to create the grounds for the Bush administration's "we must save the endangered Gorbachov" pre-summit appeasement stance.

### **Showering gifts on military**

Gorbachov's very first act as President was to meet on the same day he was elected, March 15, with the more than 100 military officers, including nearly every top Russian military official and commander, who are deputies in the U.S.S.R. Congress of People's Deputies. That event was given wide publicity in the Soviet media, with a well-chosen photo in the Soviet press showing a beaming Gorbachov standing next to Gen. Col. Boris Gromov, the last Soviet military commander in Afghanistan.

On March 18, Gorbachov did what nearly every Western Kremlinologist said he would never do: He appointed a military man, Defense Minister Yazov, to the U.S.S.R. Presidential Council—what used to be called "Politburo" status, as the Presidential Council has replaced the party Politburo as the U.S.S.R.'s ruling institution. In filling the Presidential Council, Gorbachov created a second slot, via the back door, for the military through the appointment of Interior Minister Vadim Bakatin. The Interior Ministry controls the 350,000 Interior Troops, whose elite units composed of Army Airborne and spetsnaz veterans have been notorious in the suppression of national freedom movements in the Russian empire. Bakatin is a civilian, but "his" Interior Troops are under the command of Army Gen. Col. Yuri Shatalin. Legal fictions aside, the Interior Troops form a de facto extension of the Army.

Gorbachov's next move came on March 20, when the institution of political organs and political officers for the Interior Ministry and Interior Troops was abolished. The action foreshadows a parallel move expected later this year concerning the structure of political officers in the Armed Forces. Gorbachov had thus taken the first step towards a goal that no other Soviet leader had even dared to contemplate—freeing the military, for the first time in Soviet history, from the system of party control so hated by the military commanders. By this move alone, he had signaled his support for the military to attain its prime demand—real political power in its own right to co-determine Soviet policy.

Gorbachov accelerated the political upgrading of the military on April 29, when he issued a presidential decree promoting Defense Minister Yazov from General of the Army

to Marshal of the Soviet Union. This was the first promotion to Marshal of the Soviet Union by Gorbachov, and the first since March 1983 when four generals, including then-chief of the U.S.S.R. General Staff, Nikolai Ogarkov, were promoted to that rank by the late Yuri Andropov. Another Kremlinologist dogma, that Gorbachov would never promote a general to Marshal of the Soviet Union, had been shattered.

The Yazov promotion accompanied two others decreed by Gorbachov. Singled out for promotion to General of the Army was Gen. Col. Mahmoud Gareyev, a deputy chief of the General Staff, leading protégé of Marshal Ogarkov, and the General Staff author behind the Soviet post-nuclear, high-tech weapons new offensive doctrine featuring the use of Airborne and spetsnaz forces. Adm. K.V. Makarov, the chief of the Navy's Main Staff, was also promoted to Admiral of the Fleet, the highest rank in the Navy. Consistent with the promotion of Gareyev, the Airborne and spetsnaz forces themselves were granted a special honor when Gorbachov presented, from among all military commanders, the award "In Service to the Motherland and Armed Forces of the U.S.S.R." to Gen. Col. V.A. Achalov, the commander of the Soviet Airborne Forces.

All these Gorbachov decrees were covered front page in the Defense Ministry daily *Krasnaya Zvezda* on May 1, but received no coverage in any Western media.

### **Gorbachov stands with Ogarkov**

On May 7, Gorbachov, standing next to Marshal Ogarkov and Defense Minister Yazov, addressed the All-Union Council of War and Labor Veterans' organization, opening the 45th anniversary media spectacle. The retired Ogarkov was present in his new capacity as chairman of that organization, a position he was given on March 16 after Gorbachov became President, and a position which has returned him to public prominence. This occasion was the first time ever that Gorbachov had appeared alongside Ogarkov. Again, Gorbachov said what the military wanted to hear. He launched a fierce attack against "separatism," and the "abuse" of "glasnost" for "nationalist-extremist ends." Gorbachov denounced the "extreme slogans" of the May Day demonstration, claiming that they were "proof" that "the inspirers themselves" see that "their time is running out." Gorbachov went out of his way to praise the military and the way the entire nation united to win the war: "The Soviet people admire the feat carried out by the soldiers at the front and those who worked in the rear in those difficult years." Returning to the present, Gorbachov declared that "the time has come" to adopt "major decisions" on the economy, and on "inter-ethnic relations."

Gorbachov's adaptation to the military will continue. Both for reasons of preserving his own power and to build up the military as the only pillar of stability possible in the dissolution confronting "Czar" Gorbachov's empire, the Kremlin leader has no other recourse, and he knows it.