

Bolshevik era ends in Russia as nationalist institutions re-emerge

by Konstantin George

The shattering of the Soviet coup nominally executed by an eight-man "State Emergency Committee," is a defeat for Mikhail Gorbachov, and not, as time will show, any sort of victory for the Soviet President, who is a discredited relic in the eyes of the people of Russia and the other republics. The coup, attempted by the core members of Gorbachov's own Presidential Security Council, was foiled by the combined and well-organized resistance of the Russian people, Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin, the Russian Parliament, and the Army and the Church, which, shedding their last links to bolshevism, are again coming into their own as national institutions.

The ringleaders of the coup—KGB chairman Vladimir Kryuchkov, Interior Minister Boris Pugo, Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov, and Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov—were all core members of the Security Council. The other plotter, Oleg Baklanov, was vice chairman of the Defense Council.

The coup-makers made two miscalculations. They had counted on Russian apathy and willingness to accept authority. They thought popular resistance would vanish at the sight of tanks, and that the plotters would command the loyalty of the Army units deployed against citizens. The plotters got the shock of their lives. A big percentage of the Russians in the urban centers of Moscow and Leningrad, inspired by the revolutions in eastern Europe, had tasted freedom, become politicized, and ceased being afraid. As seen earlier in eastern Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, Russians were ready to die to prevent any return to the Stalinist past.

Ultimately it was the Army, working together with the mass resistance in Moscow and Leningrad, which emerged in support of Yeltsin and the rebirth of Russia, and staged the Russian national coup against the coup.

Entire military districts 'went over'

The General Staff and the Army unit commanders had first obeyed the troop movement orders they had been issued. The Army units assigned to seize Moscow reached their objectives, all seemingly according to plan. Then, the Army and the Yeltsin camp set off their counteroperation. This was arranged through Yeltsin's vice president, Col. Aleksandr Rutskoi, a pilot, an Afghan War veteran, and Hero of the Soviet Union; the pro-Yeltsin leadership of the "Shield" or-

ganization, a network of 25,000 officers and former officers of the Soviet Armed Forces; and, last but not least, General Kobets, the head of the Russian Federation Defense Council.

Under this plan, on Aug. 19-20, not just Army units, as the western press has reported, but entire military districts and force branches of the Army and Navy went over to the Yeltsin camp, or to be more precise, to the camp fighting for the rebirth of Russia and its venerable institutions, the Army and the Russian Orthodox Church. In the two days, the Army sprang one shock after another on the plotters. The elite Airborne Forces bolted from the coup forces, Airborne Forces commander Gen. Lt. P. Grachev. Then his deputy, General Major Lebed, announced that no airborne unit would fire on civilians, i.e., the civilians defending the Russian Parliament. Two elite Army divisions, including the Taman Guards Motor Rifle Division, openly joined Yeltsin. These actions settled the battle for Moscow. In Leningrad, the staff of the Military District headquarters and the Leningrad Naval Base sided with Leningrad Mayor Anatoli Sobchak against the coup, and all orders for troops to march on Leningrad were countermanded.

Numerous other statements of support for Yeltsin came from military commanders across the country, including from Gen. Col. Albert Makashov, commander of the Volga-Urals Military District, who had been a Russian presidential election opponent of Yeltsin.

The post-bolshevik era has begun in the U.S.S.R. The drama, scope, and pace of events of the coming transformation can be expected to rival those during Aug. 19-21. What has already started is an orderly process leading to independence in the near future for the three Baltic republics and real sovereignty for Ukraine.

Had the coup achieved any success at all, the worst nightmare—bloody repression in the Baltic, Moldavia, Ukraine, and other republics, and a protracted civil war process across the territory of Russia—would have ensued.

Gorbachov's culpability

While many important facts concerning the Aug. 19 coup remain deep secrets, enough evidence had emerged by Aug. 22 to prove that: 1) A coup for late August had been plotted by the eight men who formed the "State Emergency Committee"

who launched the coup, and the coup itself may well have been co-scripted with Gorbachov. 2) The coup contained at least a ninth high-ranking plotter, Anatoli Lukyanov, president of the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet, and a years-long close friend of Mikhail Gorbachov. 3) The Kiev speech by George Bush in mid-July, where he bluntly told Ukraine and other republics to sign the New Union Treaty on Gorbachov's terms, or else, was seen by many in the republics of the Soviet Union as a "green light" for a coup by hardline forces in Moscow Center.

The first disclosure hinting that Gorbachov may have been complicit in the coup came from former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze. On Aug. 20, he told French television that he hoped that Gorbachov was "the victim and not the instigator" of the coup. Then former Gorbachov adviser Vyacheslav Dashchichev, in an interview Aug. 21 with the German national news program "Heute Journal," citing "absolutely reliable" sources in "the Yeltsin camp," revealed that Gorbachov had planned along with the other conspirators to stage a coup on "Aug. 20, immediately after the signing of the New Union Treaty," but for reasons unknown the coup began one day earlier.

The question of Gorbachov's guilt was raised by several deputies of the Russian Parliament during a morning session on Aug. 22, a session carried live on the second channel of Soviet television to tens of millions of Soviet viewers. To great applause, the deputies demanded that Gorbachov "be questioned" to determine his role in the coup. The Parliament resolved that the Russian Federation will conduct its own investigation independent of any investigation by Moscow Center. In two speeches that morning, one to the Parliament and one to several hundred thousand people assembled outside, President Yeltsin castigated Gorbachov crony Anatoli Lukyanov as the "main string-puller" and "spiritual leader" of the plotters. "Gorbygate" has begun.

As Yeltsin and the Russian Federation leadership stressed in speech after speech, all the key plotters were members of the Security Council and Defense Council hand-picked by Gorbachov. At his Moscow press conference, Gorbachov was asked over and over by Russian journalists to come clean and tell the world why he picked this team. He evaded the questions. Toward the end of the press conference, asked point blank to respond to the Shevardnadze charge that he, Gorbachov, might be the "instigator," Gorbachov could only say: "I leave that to his conscience," and as he paused, his press spokesman Vitali Ignatenko cut him off, saying, "I now call on the *Stern* correspondent." Gorbachov, near the end of the press conference, even defended KGB chairman Vladimir Kryuchkov: "I don't have evidence he's implicated in any of these murky doings."

Gorbachov admitted that he had held discussions with the plotters on the question of imposing a state of emergency, and had recommended ("I told the plotters, let's discuss this at the session of the Congress of People's Deputies") that the

action be taken after a Congress endorsement.

Not the reappearance of Mikhail Gorbachov in Moscow, but the statements and actions of Russian President Boris Yeltsin, the Russian Federation leadership, and their allies in the Army command, will shape the course of events now unfolding. Whatever Gorbachov says or tries to do, Yeltsin will seize the aftermath of the victory against the coup to enforce his July decree banning all Communist Party organizations in the Russian state apparatus and in all enterprises on Russian Federation territory.

The power struggle

In his Aug. 22 speech to the Russian Parliament, Yeltsin announced that Russia has formed a "National Guard," and its own territorial army, commanded by his Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi. Yeltsin also demanded that General Kobets, the military head of the Russian Federation Defense Council under him, be made simultaneously the new U.S.S.R. defense minister, replacing the arrested Yazov. Yeltsin had earlier proclaimed himself the new commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, a move which, if carried out, spells the end of Mikhail Gorbachov as anything but a figurehead. Yeltsin also demanded that Russian Federation cabinet members simultaneously hold "other" non-specified key U.S.S.R. cabinet posts, presumably KGB and Interior Ministry posts.

Should Yeltsin formally supplant Gorbachov as Armed Forces commander-in-chief, or secure the same power by installing General Kobets as defense minister, the net effect is the same. A rearguard action by Gorbachov stopping or stalling this is certainly to be expected, though Gorbachov is in a very weak position. Although Gorbachov appointed on Aug. 22 Gen. Col. Vasili Trushin as interior minister, and Leonid Shebardin as Kryuchkov's replacement to head the KGB, he was forced to specify that these were only "temporary" appointments.

Once the euphoria subsides, the new Russian state will find itself confronted with the same economic crisis and problems of forging an economic reconstruction program that existed prior to Aug. 19. Russia and the other republics will have to make life-and-death decisions.

Yeltsin has often gone on record saying that he would institute the radical free market economy plan of economist Stanislav Shatalin, a variant of the catastrophic "Polish model." If he does so, then Russia will soon face new upheavals and a return of the nightmares unleashed by the Aug. 19 coup attempt. The Army and the military industrial complex, which have emerged greatly strengthened, could, however, respond to a different economic program offered from the West, one that actually meets the patriotic aspirations of Russian nationalists for real economic development. So far, the only such program on the table is the one authored by Lyndon LaRouche—the American, whom Gorbachov's friend George Bush keeps as a political prisoner.