

Russia adopts new interventionist posture in 'Grachev Doctrine'

by Konstantin George

The failure of the West to provide credits and technology transfers to stabilize the physical economies of Russia, Ukraine, and the other new republics created from the dissolved Soviet Union, is leading to the revival of a Moscow imperial thrust, now directed against the non-Russian former Soviet republics. Western insistence that Russia accept the humiliating conditions of International Monetary Fund (IMF) shock therapy policies has abetted the worst tendencies associated with sections of the Muscovite elite.

The very shock therapy which has devastated the society at large, has reinforced the privileged financial status and power of the old *nomenklatura*. The Russian regime, with western connivance, is compensating for Russia's losses by doing to the other republics what the IMF is doing to it; namely, using its economic and other powers to keep them weak and unstable, and thus create the conditions for renewed Russian domination in the future.

The resurrection of a Moscow imperial tendency has become a fact of life to all the European non-Russian republics, above all in Ukraine and the Baltic states. In the words of Gen. Lt. Ivan Vasilyevich Bizhian, first deputy defense minister of Ukraine, a Ukrainian patriot who spent 31 years in the Soviet Army, and with whom this writer had the pleasure to chat in the Netherlands on June 9: "The problem we face is that Russia wants to have all the former Soviet Union again under its control. It is doing everything possible to prevent us from building our own independent nation. We see this in my own area, namely the military, as an example. They are making it as hard as possible for us to build our own Armed Forces, even though our right to do so was stipulated in the CIS [Community of Independent States] agreements signed in Minsk and Alma Ata. We always discuss this problem with western governments, but somehow they do not seem to understand it."

Konstantin Grishenko, head of the arms control department of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry who accompanied Bizhian, added the following insight: "All the republics are successor states to the dissolved Soviet Union. The problem is that Russia does not see itself as simply one of the successor states, but as the continuity of the Soviet Union. They are like Serbia, which sees itself as the continuity of Yugoslavia, and, like Serbia, reserve for themselves the so-called 'right'

to intervene on behalf of their nationality on another nation's territory."

The 'right' to intervene

These are no abstract concerns. Russia has officially announced as policy the "right" to militarily intervene in any of the former Soviet republics on behalf of ethnic Russians. The policy was proclaimed on June 5 on Russian television by Russian Defense Minister Gen. Pavel Grachev, and is known informally throughout the former U.S.S.R. as the "Grachev Doctrine."

I asked General Bizhian to comment on the "Grachev Doctrine," and the general replied: "I was waiting for you, in fact hoping for you to ask that question. That is exactly the problem. The Russian defense minister, Grachev, appeared on Russian television, so everyone could hear it, and said that Russia can intervene militarily outside its territory to protect the rights of Russians living on the territory of another nation."

General Bizhian stressed that Russia insists on pursuing its territorial claims against Ukraine, beginning with the Crimea. The Crimean case shows the hypocrisy of talk in Moscow about the "rights" of Russians being allegedly "infringed on." The Crimea, where ethnic Russians make up nearly 70% of the population, has complete special autonomy and its own parliament and administration, a status ratified by the Ukrainian Parliament in Kiev. In fact, autonomy has gone so far toward accommodating the ethnic Russians, that the absurd situation exists where the 30% Ukrainian population of the Crimean region of the Ukrainian nation do not have a single school where classes are in the Ukrainian language.

Provoked by NATO

There are two sides to the "Grachev Doctrine." One, the interventionist side, is an impermissible violation of international law. The other is an admonition that Russia will not tolerate any other foreign military presence or interference on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

This second aspect ought not to be ignored in the West since, contrary to the "Cold War is over" slogan, it hints at the potential for armed conflicts within and among the independent countries where the U.S.S.R. used to rule, to

explode into global ones. Grachev was provoked, in this regard, by the NATO MC-400 document, ratified by the NATO defense ministers at the beginning of June, which envisions the territorial scope of future NATO interventions to include not only the entire Mediterranean, Suez Canal, and Near East as "out of area" deployments, but the "Black Sea region" and "the former Soviet Union" as well. Grachev made sure to state his views to a western visitor, when he met with former U.S. President Richard Nixon on June 5.

Turning to the Russian prerogatives that Grachev asserts vis-à-vis other independent countries, Grachev told Nixon, "If the honor or integrity of the Russian population in any region of the CIS is infringed upon, and not only in Chechnya, I will undertake decisive measures, up to and including sending troops to not allow discrimination, attacks, and rowdy-like behavior against Russians."

Chechnya, an autonomous republic of the Russian Federation in the North Caucasus, was the site of a coup last autumn by ethnic Chechen General Dudayev, who then seceded from the Russian Federation, declaring an "independent Republic of Chechnya." Announcing the withdrawal of the Russian garrison from Chechnya's capital, Grozny, together with all arms and equipment, Grachev said that any sign of Chechen interference would lead to the sending of Russian air-borne forces.

Grachev has also drawn a line in the months-long conflict in Moldova, a former Soviet republic that nestles between Ukraine and Romania. He warned the Moldovan leadership that if Moldovan attacks do not cease against the Slavic-inhabited Dniestr region which, because it has never belonged to Romania, refuses to stay with a Moldova that intends to become part of Romania, the Russian 14th Army based in the Dniestr region will openly side with the Slavic forces.

The growing dominance of the policies associated with the "Grachev Doctrine," consigning the former Soviet republics to a Russian sphere of influence, has been reflected in the Yeltsin appointments to senior positions in the Russian Defense Ministry on June 8, and in Yeltsin decrees and Russian policy statements issued before his departure for Washington.

Three of his five top Defense Ministry appointees are generals who have advocated keeping, for as long as possible, a large Russian military presence in the Baltic, Central Asia, and other regions outside the Russian Federation. They are: Gen. Col. Viktor Dubinin, now first deputy defense minister and chief of the Russian General Staff, formerly commander of the Northern Group of Forces in Poland; Gen. Col. Valery Mironov, now deputy defense minister, who had commanded the Northwest Group of Forces, as the Russian troops in the Baltic are called; and Gen. Col. Georgi Konratyev, also a deputy defense minister, who had commanded the Turkestan Military District in Central Asia.

The "Grachev Doctrine" has been endorsed by the Russian government, and forms part of the hidden agenda of the

American-Russian summit meeting. The signal to this effect was given by Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, in an interview with the Paris daily *Le Monde* on June 6, before his departure for pre-summit meetings in Washington. He declared that "exchanges of territory" between Russia and other republics "cannot be excluded," singling out Crimea and the Dniestr region of Moldova as examples.

The Caucasus conflict

While Russia will escalate pressure on Ukraine to cede Crimea, neither Russians nor Ukrainians foresee an armed conflict between the two largest Slavic nations.

The first application of the "Grachev Doctrine" will, in all likelihood, occur in the Caucasus. The ground for this was laid in a June 15 declaration by Russian Parliament President Ruslan Khasbulatov, who warned Georgia that Russia would send troops and occupy the Georgian region of South Ossetia, unless Georgia stopped its military operations there against the Ossetians who want to leave Georgia and join Russia. South Ossetia borders on North Ossetia, an autonomous republic of the Russian Federation, and the parliaments of both regions have passed resolutions for a united Ossetian homeland within the Russian Federation. Khasbulatov said that "the situation in South Ossetia already qualifies as genocide, with the mass expulsion of Ossetians from their historic homeland." The statement added a corollary to the "Grachev Doctrine," by embracing military intervention outside Russia's borders on behalf of any national grouping enjoying autonomous status within the Russian Federation.

The Khasbulatov declaration was clearly coordinated with President Yeltsin, who, on the same day, issued a decree restoring the pre-1917, czarist-era rights and position of the Cossacks, including their local self-government and land-owning status. The decree restored the Cossacks' traditional role as defenders of the Russian state borders, above all in the volatile Caucasus. Yeltsin's decree instructed the Russian Defense Ministry to draft proposals for deploying Cossack units in the Russian Armed Forces "for the protection of state borders and maintenance of public peace."

The Khasbulatov declaration also came after a six-day stay in Ankara, Turkey, where the hidden agenda of that visit was to refine the "understanding" of Russo-Turkish spheres of influence concerning the Caucasus.

Any move into South Ossetia would create a precedent for future moves against other republics, and against Georgia itself. South Ossetia is one of two Georgian "autonomous" regions bordering on Russia. The other, Abkhazia, lies on the Black Sea coast, and includes the port of Sukhumi, where Russians are the largest ethnic group, and the Georgians are a minority. The "made in Moscow" Crimea conflict will be either soon defused or enter a new Russian-provoked escalation. The test will come on June 23, when the postponed summit between Yeltsin and Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk finally occurs.