

Putin Defends Russia From West's Moves to Dismember It

by Roman Bessonov and Rachel Douglas

In a Sept. 4 address to the nation, after the bloody school hostage-taking in Beslan, North Ossetia, Russian President Vladimir Putin promised to introduce measures “to strengthen the integrity of the Russian Federation,” and to upgrade the system of national security, in the framework of constitutional law.

Moscow's political establishment stood by, awaiting some major personnel changes, perhaps dismissal of the Minister of Internal Affairs or the Director of the Federal Security Service (FSB). Putin's presentation to an expanded Cabinet meeting on Sept. 13, did not, however, include any reference to personnel rotation in these ministries—although, two days earlier, he did discharge North Ossetian Internal Affairs Minister Kazbek Dzantiyev and the republic's FSB director, Valeri Andreyev. Instead, the President introduced significant changes in Russia's political and administrative system. These promptly became the subject of editorial denunciations and government statements of concern, about the erosion of democratic values and the onset of authoritarianism in Russia, in western Europe and the United States.

There should be no surprise, for anyone who listened to what Putin had said in the Sept. 4 address, and how he elaborated that message to a group of foreign analysts and journalists he met with two days later: Russia is under attack by powerful circles within the Cold War-era adversaries of the Soviet Union, in whose hands “terrorism” is an instrument, wielded for the purpose of breaking up the country.

Lyndon LaRouche observed: “This is a characteristic Russian reaction. When an existential threat to the existence of Russia is perceived, Russians, in whatever circumstance, *will unite*, in the great majority, and with great anger, and great force, against the known attacker.

“The implication of the speech by Putin, is pointing di-

rectly the finger at President Bush and Cheney, and people around them. Putin is going to be cautious in that respect; but he is going to get the message across, in words which people should not misunderstand. If we do not get rid of the Bush-Cheney Administration, now, we are headed for a form of World War III, beyond the imagination of most.” (LaRouche's warning and Putin's Sept. 4 speech are in the Sept. 17 *EIR*.)

Another element of Putin's most recent discussions of national security, could become the basis for momentous policy shifts. In speaking with the Western analysts and journalists, he questioned in the most explicit terms yet, the liberal economic doctrine, which was imposed in Russia during the 1990s and which continues to serve as the basis of many of his own government's economic decisions—most recently, the across-the-board slashing of living standards, through pension and benefits “reform.”

Government and Governors

President Putin's Sept. 13 speech was delivered to an unusual, expanded session of the Cabinet, including the leaders of all the regions of the Russian Federation, in addition to government members. “This unusual meeting,” Putin said, “is prompted by the special circumstances, which have made such an impression on our entire country, and . . . the entire world. . . . In the situation after the act of terrorism in Beslan, I find it necessary to discuss with you . . . the problems I raised in my address to the people of Russia on Sept. 4: ensuring the unity of the country, strengthening government institutions and confidence in government, and creation of an effective internal security system.”

Putin decreed the formation of a special commission to coordinate federal government activity in the North Cauca-

sus, which will be headed by the Presidential Representative for the Southern Federal District. He named his close associate Dmitri Kozak, who has been chief of staff for the government since its reorganization last Spring, to that post, and filled out the commission with representatives from several ministries and the FSB. Putin devoted a good deal of his speech to the need to ameliorate the region's huge unemployment and underdevelopment.

Former St. Petersburg governor Vladimir Yakovlev, who recently has been the Presidential Representative in the Southern District, was named as the new federal Minister of Regional Development. Putin said that this represents the re-establishment of a ministry "responsible for questions of regional and nationalities' policy." (As governor of St. Petersburg, Yakovlev had already developed close connections with the Daghestani and Chechen communities in northwest Russia.)

Putin motivated all of his measures as necessary to protect the territorial and political integrity of the Russian Federation. "In the current situation," he said, "I believe that the Executive branch in our country should not merely be adapted to work during crises, but must be fundamentally restructured—restructured for the purpose of reinforcing the unity of the country and preventing crises from arising. We have no right to forget, that the inspirers, organizers, and executors of the acts of terror, in their far-reaching plans, strive to disintegrate the country and . . . to achieve the break-up, the collapse of Russia. I am convinced that the unity of the country is the main condition for victory over terrorism, and that it is impossible to achieve that goal without unity."

From that standpoint, Putin announced he would be submitting legislation to make the following three changes (which were obviously not proposed just in the previous ten days):

- Governors of the "constituent territories of the Russian Federation" (provinces, territories, large cities) would no longer be elected by popular vote in their regions, but confirmed by regional legislatures based on Presidential appointment. Putin said this reform is aimed to achieve "unity of the system of executive power in the country."

Pundits hastened to compare this change to the 1993-95 period, when regional governors were appointed by President Boris Yeltsin. But, during the past three years of discussion about such a revision of the selection procedure for regional leaders, one of the most convincing arguments has been reference to the experience of the Russian Empire, where governors were appointed by the Czar.



President Vladimir Putin addresses an expanded Cabinet meeting on Sept. 13, announcing far-reaching measures to bolster the integrity of the state.

- Voting for the State Duma (Parliament) would be entirely by party slate, rather than half by slate and half in individual districts. This would cut independent candidates and smaller political alliances out of the Duma. Putin called the strengthening of national political parties, which is supposed to follow from this change, one way to "ensure a real dialogue and interaction between the public and the government in the struggle against terror."

- A civic forum called the Public Chamber would be created to listen to proposals from the citizenry, promoting interaction between the population and law enforcement agencies, in particular. Putin did *not* incorporate certain other proposals for public involvement in the fight against terrorism, such as Stavropol Territory Governor Alexander Chernogorov's idea of having Cossack irregular units conduct counterinsurgency in the North Caucasus. The President is likely well briefed on the Cossack organizations' involvement in organized crime, as well as their ambiguous and mostly destructive role in regional policy during the 1990s.

Lastly, Putin said that Russia must have "an anti-crisis system of management, designed for the conditions of the terrorist war being waged against Russia." It must include measures to "repulse terror in any form." He said that the national security system must be able "not only to stop acts of terror in progress and deal with their consequences, but also to prevent terrorist attacks, acts of sabotage, and man-made catastrophes. It should be capable of preempting and destroying the criminals, as the saying goes, in their lairs. We must be able to fetch them from abroad, if necessary." Putin also called for stiffening sanctions against corruption within law enforcement, such as the illegal issuance of a passport or the use of official documents in acts of terrorism.

The Threat to Russia

That part of Putin's Sept. 4 address to the nation that signalled a change in Moscow's perception of its adversary, was this: "Some people would like to tear off a juicy morsel from us, others are helping them do it. Helping, on the assumption that Russia, as a major nuclear power, is still a threat to them. And therefore this threat should be removed. Terrorism, of course, is only an instrument for achieving such goals."

In his session with Western analysts and journalists on Sept. 6, the Russian President made clear that this had been no one-time shift of emphasis. He expounded with some precision, how he sees covert operations against Russia, coming from Western intelligence circles—including ones based within members of the so-called "anti-terrorist coalition"—working within "international terrorism." Thus, what such networks *do*, may be at odds with what heads of state *say*.

This passage was omitted from most published write-ups of the Sept. 6 meeting, but it was reported initially in the French *Le Monde*, and then emerged with clarity in a rough transcript, made available by the London *Guardian*. Putin said, "I will start from the time when we were two blocs and those two blocs were fighting each other until death. That was the time when the U.S.A. went to Vietnam and Russia stepped into Afghanistan. We have let too many genies out of the bottles, . . . so international terrorism is just one of those genies. . . . Very recently, in my talks with the King of Jordan, he said that for 50 years they had been fighting with fundamentalism. It was also used by some militant groups who used it in Afghanistan, against the Soviet Union, and we all know who was behind those groups then."

Shamil Basayev, the Chechen warlord who has claimed responsibility for the Beslan attack and recent bombings, has boasted of his mid-1990s trip to Afghanistan for training in the camps of the "Afghansi" mujaheddin—financed and cultivated by the United States since the late 1970s, under the scheme of Zbigniew Brzezinski and others to weaken the Soviet southern flank.

Putin knows that these operations never died. He told his Western guests: "I think that still somewhere in the military circles and in the circles of special services there still exist these tendencies to fight this former common enemy, including with the use of the means of terror. Also in the political circles. Well, you know, if some people would entertain the idea that one might use it as a tool for Russia, to rock it a little bit, to tear it apart somewhat, to make it more focussed and concerned with its internal problems, . . . that's erroneous and a complete blunder on their part."

Putin likened such thinking to ancient Rome's fixation on the destruction of Carthage, asking: "Has anyone who entertains such ideas given a thought as to what repercussions it might bring about, if Russia were to be eliminated, and not only for the entire world, but for himself personally? Some-

times it's difficult for the people out there to compute what the consequences would be concerning Iraq for one month and a half, let alone such possibilities regarding the global evolution under such a scenario.

"I'd like to stress the point, no matter what the secret fight is going to be, we will not allow a Chechen revolution of that kind. Since you understand what that might mean for the millions of citizens of the Russian Federation.

"We are sincere champions of collaboration in the international fight against international terrorism; we are open and predictable partners here. But what we register and detect the case is: When Western special services establish contacts with [those] whom they refer to as rebels, and when very specific cases are identified and demonstrated to them, they say yes, that's just a separate occasion and will not be repeated, and they will send out an official letter stating they have a right to communicate with whatever political forces they deem necessary. We regard that as not being as reliable a partner as the Russian Federation happens to be.

"We have facts, and they are true facts, and we even name names to our partners identifying those individuals who, as official members of the security community in those countries, still maintain contact with the people who fight with arms in their hands against us, and that has been the case with regards to the situation in Spain, France, the U.K., and concerning Iraq. Just give it a thought, what would have been the case if we were to do that with regard to the aforementioned nations and individuals from al-Qaeda?"

Economic Destabilization

Putin told his Cabinet that persistent poverty in the North Caucasus, where "unemployment is several times higher" than elsewhere in Russia, has helped create a pool of people, from which terrorist groups recruit. In his Sept. 6 discussion, Putin made only an allusion to something that is the focus of intense discussion among Russian economists: the fact that patchwork programs to mitigate poverty in the region won't work.

The need, rather, for a thorough-going change in Russian economic policy was hinted—but, only hinted—by the Russian President: "Nobody takes issue nowadays with the fact that the free world, liberal economy turns out to be more efficient than planned economy. However, mechanical transplantation of those ideas onto the soil of Russia turned sour, in the economic and social sphere. And, in the mind of the population, it [has] almost discarded the idea *per se*. . . . Reagan and Thatcher carried out . . . those reforms under the conditions of an effective state. . . . And even there and then, the Thatcher government was also almost brought to the verge of collapse, and had it not been for the Falklands war, they would have not been kept in office. In the context of the destroyed government of the early '90s in Russia, there were ideas which basically turned Russia very similar to the route of oligarchic development in Latin America."