

New Soviet command reorganization crafted by Marshal Ogarkov

by Konstantin George and Luba George

Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, the architect of the Soviet Armed Forces command structure, turns 71 on Oct. 30. Far from retiring into inactivity, Ogarkov is presiding over a new reorganization of the Soviet High Command, under way since early September at the latest. The new changes extend deeper in the Soviet Defense Ministry, and throughout the Warsaw Pact, than the transformation of the Soviet command structure Ogarkov effected in September 1984, when he created wartime headquarters and theater high commands in four theaters of military action (known by the Russian acronym, TVD).

Both reorganizations, the one in September 1984 and the one that is going on as of September 1988, featured a transfer, and promotion, of Marshal Ogarkov from one post to another. In September 1984, when Ogarkov vacated his position as chief of the General Staff, the Western world was inundated with disinformation from the Kremlin, to the effect that Ogarkov had been "demoted." By the end of September 1988, some of the same Western European newspapers which retailed that story four years ago, whose editors seem never to learn from their mistakes, proclaimed the news that Ogarkov had been transferred to Moscow, and was now "retired."

This new disinformation balloon burst on Oct. 12, when the Soviet Defense Ministry daily, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, reported that sitting on the dais at a Moscow Garrison celebration of the Polish Armed Forces the previous day was Marshal N.V. Ogarkov, alongside Main Political Directorate Chief Gen. A.D. Lizichev and Gen. Col. V.N. Lobov, the first deputy chief of the General Staff. In other words, Ogarkov was listed among those generals who are active in extremely high positions.

The secret reorganization

Indications of a big, still secret command shift, involving forces in the Warsaw Pact, appeared at the beginning of September. On Sept. 1, the Czechoslovak news agency CTK reported that "Marshal N. V. Ogarkov" was in Prague, accompanied by "General of the Army S.I. Postnikov." It has been standard practice for news bulletins to identify Ogarkov by name and rank alone, with no post cited, since his September 1984 promotion to command the Western TVD. When CTK treated Postnikov in the same format, with his post not named, it meant his promotion to a more senior position,

related to or within the wartime theater commands. Since March 1987, Postnikov had been first deputy commander of Soviet Ground Forces.

The promotion of Gen. Stanislav Postnikov was the first wisp of smoke. During September and into October, it emerged that other key Soviet officers, in particular certain deputy defense ministers closely linked to Ogarkov, each with extensive theater command experience, have been given new, expanded, pre-war responsibilities. In some cases, a new post is listed for the officer, while the expanded functions of others are revealed by their deployments. The commanders so identified, to date, are:

- On a Sept. 8 visit to East Germany, General of the Army Ivan **Tretyak**, was identified by the East German news service, ADN, as "deputy commander in chief of the Warsaw Pact," alongside his known post as Soviet air defense chief. Tretyak's career, before becoming a deputy defense minister in July 1986 and commander of Air Defense Forces one year later, included his selection by Ogarkov as commander in chief of High Command Far East, during the 1984 reorganization. Tretyak remains a deputy defense minister, as confirmed in *Krasnaya Zvezda* of Oct. 12.

- On Oct. 5, General of the Army Vladimir **Govorov**, the deputy defense minister heading Soviet Civil Defense, arrived in East Germany. According to ADN, Govorov was briefed on the activities of East German Civil Defense against natural disasters and "other instances of damages," i. e., sabotage. The functions of Govorov, Tretyak's predecessor as Far East commander in chief, have been expanded to cover the entire Warsaw Pact, and to include anti-sabotage measures.

- Budapest, Oct. 2-5: For the first time in history, a Soviet delegation to a Warsaw Pact Military Council meeting was led by the Chief of the Main Inspectorate, General of the Army Mikhail **Sorokin**. Radio Budapest Oct. 2 termed this "an important meeting on military policy." The functions of General Sorokin have clearly been upgraded. Sorokin has a background in airborne operations, having been deputy commander of Soviet Airborne Forces, 1964-69. He was one of the never publicly identified commanders of Soviet forces in Afghanistan, and then, from September 1984 through June 1987, was first deputy commander in chief of the Western TVD, under Marshal Ogarkov.

Eastern European preparations

The High Command restructuring occurs against the backdrop of Soviet military moves, all vectored toward potential action in the Balkans. These Soviet and Warsaw Pact force actions came during the same time period as the signs of a command reorganization:

- A large array of Western TVD, Southwestern TVD, and Warsaw Pact military maneuvers was epitomized by the Sept. 15-23 "Autumn '88" maneuvers "on the territory of the Ukraine, Moldavia and the Black Sea," commanded by Soviet Defense Minister, General of the Army Dmitri Yazov. These maneuvers, in which reservists were called up, rehearsed precisely the combination of airborne and amphibious offensive operations that would be crucial in undertaking a lightning invasion and occupation of Romania. They marked the first time that an exercise, *de facto* embracing the entire Warsaw Pact, was commanded by a Soviet defense minister. During the exercises, all Warsaw Pact defense ministers were present, and held days of secret meetings with Yazov and other Soviet military leaders.

- There was a chain of major Soviet military exercises starting simultaneously with "Autumn '88." On Sept. 17-22, there were maneuvers in the Belorussian Military District, bordering on Poland. Then, in the last days of September, major exercises were staged by the Soviet Central Group of Forces in Czechoslovakia and the Northern Group of Forces in Poland. In the first week of October, as the Warsaw Pact Military Council met in Budapest, major military exercises were held in the Carpathian Military District, bordering on Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland.

- The restructuring of Soviet and Warsaw Pact Ground Forces into a more powerful offensive structure of corps and brigades continued. Its epicenter has been the Soviet theater forces of High Command Southwest and the Warsaw Pact forces falling under the Southwestern TVD, namely, Hungary and Bulgaria.

- A frantic pace of deployments by Soviet and Warsaw Pact military leaders beginning with the "Autumn '88" maneuvers, and extending through the Sept. 30 Soviet Central Committee Plenum, into October.

The Sept. 30 Plenum of the Soviet Communist Party's Central Committee, where the top leadership was consolidated under the political heirs of former KGB chief Yuri Andropov, lasted only four hours, ending by the early afternoon. No sooner was it concluded, than the second crucial event of that day began in Moscow—a meeting of all leading political officers of the Main Political Directorate (MPD). Never had such a meeting been held on the same day as a Central Committee Plenum. A pressing, urgent need concerning political preparations in the military was at hand. The speakers were General of the Army **Lizichev**, the MPD boss, and none other than Vadim **Medvedev**, the Central Committee Secretary in charge of Eastern Europe, whom the plenum had elevated to full membership on the Politburo and put in

charge of the Central Committee's Ideology Commission.

Next came an accelerated agenda of military contact in Eastern Europe: **Oct. 2-5**, the above-mentioned Budapest meeting of the Warsaw Pact Military Council; **Oct. 10-13**, Defense Minister Yazov was in Bulgaria, making statements clearly interpretable as threats against Romania; **Oct. 13**, the day Yazov returned, Moscow announced a meeting of Warsaw Pact defense ministers, which convened in Prague on Oct. 17.

Balkan preparations

Since the autumn of 1987, Moscow has increased pressure on Romania to abandon its refusal to allow Warsaw Pact and/or joint Soviet-Romanian exercises on Romanian territory. Moscow requires a troop presence, or permission for one, on Romanian soil, in order to be able to intervene militarily into Yugoslavia, should it decide to. With the Yugoslav crisis exploding, Moscow's patience over Romania's refusal is wearing thin.

Russia's future intentions toward Yugoslavia were revealed by its Hungarian satellite. In a late summer Radio Budapest interview, Hungary's defense minister, Gen. Col. Ferenc Karpati, stressed, "Hungary . . . and its armed forces" have a "responsibility" concerning the "events . . . in Yugoslavia," and could not remain indifferent to "what happens in Yugoslavia." Sources who read the Radio Budapest transcript, termed it a "proclamation of a Brezhnev Doctrine for Yugoslavia," i.e., the Warsaw Pact giving itself the "right" to intervene militarily in that country, as the Soviets did in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

During his visit to Bulgaria, General Yazov implied the same "right" concerning Romania and Yugoslavia, albeit in more careful language. In Oct. 12 meetings with Bulgarian Defense Minister Dzhurov and party leader Todor Zhivkov, Yazov declared, "Today, we are witnessing the strengthening of union of the brotherly socialist countries, the expansion and renewal of forms of their cooperation, and ever-deeper *combined national-international interests*. . . . Dynamic growth is taking place in cooperation based on the defensive [sic] military doctrine of the Warsaw Pact member countries."

Krasnaya Zvezda reported that Yazov had visited a Bulgarian "tank brigade," which terminology confirmed that Bulgarian Ground Forces have been reorganized into the corps/brigade structure of enhanced firepower and mobility. The same reorganization was carried out in the Hungarian armed forces and with the Soviet Southern Group of Forces in Hungary, during 1987, and then extended into the three Soviet military districts, located in the Ukraine and Moldavia, that also come under the Southwestern TVD.

On Oct. 15, Soviet and Hungarian ground and air forces, totaling 17,000 men, began six days of maneuvers, not far from the Yugoslav border. The Hot Autumn in the Balkans, under the reorganized Soviet command, has just begun.