

Russians Reply to Provocations By Warning of Nuclear War

by Nancy Spannaus

Gen. Yuri Baluyevsky, Chief of Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, issued a direct warning to Western governments on Jan. 19, that Russia reserves the right to conduct preventive war, including the use of nuclear weapons, if the sovereignty of Russia or its allies is under immediate threat. Speaking at a Military Academy conference in Moscow, he declared, “We have no plans to attack anyone, but we consider it necessary for all our partners in the world community to clearly understand . . . that to defend the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia and its allies, military forces will be used, including preventively, including with the use of nuclear weapons.”

The General’s sharp words came on the eve of Presidential elections in Serbia; the threat of a unilateral declaration of independence by the Serbian province of Kosovo poses an immediate threat to Russian relations with Europe and the United States. But the Kosovo provocation is only one of a series of aggressive efforts by Western nations, led by Great Britain, to “cut Russia down to size,” if not destroy the re-emergent nation. Among the provocations to which Baluyevsky was responding—in addition to the eastward expansion of NATO, the plans for Ballistic Missile Defense deployment in Poland and the Czech Republic, and meddling in Russia’s internal affairs—was a new self-styled “Grand Strategy” initiative, promoted under the auspices of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), among others. This document calls for revamping NATO doctrine to include a pre-emptive nuclear strike option.

The Russian daily *Izvestia* reported Jan. 23 on comments by Gen. Leonid Ivashov, formerly head of the International Department of the Russian Ministry of Defense, on the “Grand Strategy” initiative (see accompanying article). *Izvestia* quoted Ivashov saying that the project “is aimed at preparing a

precedent for the USA to make first use of a nuclear strike against countries it doesn’t like.”

Ivashov, whose views often reflect the thinking in broader Russian military layers, continued: “I personally know all of the signatories to this report, and I am certain that the idea for it, as well as the content and the decision to publicize it, do not belong to them, but rather to the ‘hawkish wing’ of the U.S. Administration. Most likely the authority of these officers is being exploited for the purpose of preparing a precedent for the USA to make first use of nuclear weapons against countries that refuse to submit to their hegemony, Iran first and foremost. Since it won’t be possible to keep these nations obedient and subservient by ordinary means, the question is being raised once again, of reining them in by using tactical nuclear weapons.”

Putin’s Extraordinary Offer

Russia under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin has gone to great lengths to try to avoid being drawn into the confrontation which the British-Cheney forces desire. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has outlined the perspective several times, most recently in his official summary of Russian foreign policy in 2007. In that statement, issued Jan. 3 and posted on the Foreign Ministry website, Lavrov warned that 2008 could see “breakdowns in world affairs . . . which might be provoked by unilateral actions of some states, or groups of states, and their attempts to operate outside international law, in violation of the principle of equal security.”

Vowing that Russia will not be dragged into such confrontations, Lavrov cited recent remarks by Putin. “What President Vladimir Putin called a moment of truth in European and global politics is almost ripe. The current stage of world his-



Presidential Press Service

Russian President Putin (left) and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Russian leaders are warning about the possibility of a “breakdown in world affairs” or even the use of nuclear weapons, while Gen. Leonid Ivashov (ret.) (right) denounces a CSIS “Grand Strategy” report on how the U.S. should use nuclear weapons first.



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tory is in the nature of a watershed, and this will largely determine the challenges facing Russian diplomacy in 2008.” Lavrov reminded readers of President Putin’s speech at the Munich security conference in February 2007 (*EIR*, Feb. 23, 2007). Noting recent frictions in trans-Atlantic relations, Lavrov wrote, “This is why President Putin, speaking in Munich, called on our international partners to engage in open and honest discussions, in order to reach a common understanding of present-day realities and coordinated principles of international cooperation.”

Lavrov addressed the controversy surrounding the deployment of missile defense systems in Central Europe: “Moreover, Russia has made unprecedented steps in the spirit of strategic openness, by proposing collective monitoring of and joint responses against potential missile threats to the European continent (with the participation of interested European countries). We were compelled to reinforce our words with deeds, by announcing a moratorium on the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE).”

While Lavrov did not discuss the onrushing global financial collapse in any depth, he did cite “the inseparability of security and development in a globalized world.” The foreign minister’s warning about “breakdowns in world affairs” in 2008 clearly reflects Russian concerns about the potential spread of chaos across Eurasia and around the world.

British Take the Lead

While the naive might see the emerging confrontation between Russia and NATO as strictly the result of U.S. actions, leading circles in Russia have expressed a dawning awareness

that the initiative comes from Great Britain—with respect not only to British-Russian bilateral tensions, but also broader imperial scheming. Exemplary was Putin’s statement on July 24, 2007, in which he scathingly denounced Britain for demonstrating “obvious vestiges of colonial thinking” in its demands toward Russia.

The open British offensive against Russia has included accusations on the murder of former KGB agent Alexander Litvinenko, and the insistence on maintaining offices of the British Council cultural organization throughout Russia, despite Russian insistence that these be shut down for violations of Russian law. Nor is it to be ignored that Great Britain provides a base of support for a number of individuals Russia has accused of being responsible for terrorism, and refuses to respond to requests for extradition. The first days of 2008 saw the publication, and international circulation through Johnson’s Russia List and other Internet venues, of a British plan to cut Russia down to size. Titled “Russia & the West: A Reassessment,” Shrivenham Paper #6 of the Defence Academy of the U.K. was written by James Sherr, a British military analyst of Russia since the late Soviet period. While a disclaimer says that the content may not “reflect the views of the Ministry of Defence or Her Majesty’s Government,” the report dramatizes the hostility to Russia on the part of leading circles in Britain. Sherr writes: “A powerful Russia is once again a fact of life. . . . They have recovered pride in their own traditions and are determined to advance their own interests. . . . The post-Cold War partnership, founded at a time of Russian disorientation and weakness, is over. . . . Although Russia is not a global threat, it seeks to be both enabler and spoiler.”

Above all, Sherr berates Western leaders for having “underestimated” the Russian leadership’s assumption that it should have “equal say” with other nations, concerning security issues in Europe. The British analyst proceeds to catalogue weaknesses of the current Russian system, which could contribute to cutting Russia down to size. He expresses particular interest in the potential for internecine strife in the Russian intelligence and law enforcement community, to undercut Putin’s authority while he is still in office, or to disrupt an orderly succession. In the economic field, Sherr points to vulnerabilities in Russia’s energy sector, which “is seen by many in the Kremlin as a foundation of the country’s power and an engine of economic growth and modernization.”

Sherr concludes that “Russia is underestimating its own shortcomings and our potential leverage,” and opines, “We should not.”

A Kosovo Trigger?

When all is said and done, the Kosovo situation is the most likely trigger for a sharper confrontation between Russia and NATO countries. A new Kosovo government was elected in early January, and is headed by Hashim Thaci, who promises an early declaration of independence.

The first round of the Serbian Presidential elections, held Jan. 20, set the stage for a Feb. 3 run-off between incumbent President Boris Tadic and Serbian Radical Party leader Tomislav Nikolic, the top vote-getter in the first round. A staunch opponent of Kosovo independence, Nikolic voices confidence in Russian support for his stand. (And Moscow has not failed to exploit Serbia’s need for support: On Jan. 22, Russia’s Gazprom acquired a majority stake in NIS, the Serbian national oil company, in a deal with no competitive bidding, which some Serbian officials denounced as a politically motivated “humiliation” for Belgrade.)

On Jan. 17, Lyndon LaRouche called on U.S. officials to order Richard Holbrooke to shut his mouth. The former top State Department official has been a leading provocateur on the Kosovo issue, promoting its unilateral independence from the Serbian Republic, and pushing for both U.S. and European Union endorsement of it. Thaci himself was a virtual protégé of Holbrooke’s Wellsian cohort, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

Lavrov put a sharp point on the crisis, specifying that a declaration of independence by Kosovo, backed by NATO powers in circumvention of the United Nations, would be one of the threatened global “breakdowns” he talks about—a “red line,” as he has also called it. *Vremya Novostei* of Dec. 21 quoted Lavrov: “If NATO and the EU now state, after ignoring all legitimate legal mechanisms that exist in the United Nations, that they will decide on how to divide Serbia, how to bite Kosovo off from it, and how to prevent Serbs who live in Kosovo from expressing their opinion on the matter, they will put themselves above international law.” Lavrov added that such a “dangerous game” would mean that these Western

countries no longer respect the UN, and intend to decide major matters outside of it.

Speaking on Vesti-24 TV Dec. 21, Lavrov warned once again that—though he said it is not Russia’s policy to promote this—independence for Kosovo will be taken as a precedent by the administrations of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, autonomous regions within the Republic of Georgia that are “in fact functioning on their own” already.

Rachel Douglas contributed to this article.