

the present situation of Soviet soldiers and officers and the soldier-internationalists [*Afgantsi*] bravely and unselfishly fulfilling their military and civilian duty." Speakers one by one denounced "Western colonization of Russia," saying, "True patriotism is when men would rather starve for three years than have Russia [(*Rossiya*)] handed over to foreigners. They called for "an ecological and demographic renaissance of the Russian people." Participants at the founding conference included Gen. B.P. Ivanov, a Hero of the Soviet Union and spokesman for the veterans of the Soviet Armed Forces.

Otechestvo's assistant chairman is Aleksandr Ruskoi, an Afghan war veteran and Hero of the Soviet Union. A little more than six months ago, on Jan. 8, 1989, Ruskoi's picture appeared on the front page of the Soviet Defense Ministry's daily, *Krasnaya Zvezda*. The caption to Ruskoi's picture, accompanying the article, lavishly praised Ruskoi, a pilot, for his "400 combat missions" and bravery in the Afghan war. He was twice wounded in combat, captured by the Afghan resistance forces, and eventually handed over to the Soviet representatives in Islamabad, Pakistan. A party member, Ruskoi is currently studying at the Voroshilov Military Academy of the U.S.S.R. Armed Forces' General Staff.

This past spring Ruskoi ran for the Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow's Kontsevsky electoral district. Although he didn't win, Ruskoi's notorious campaign—attacking "russophobes," the Democratic Union, and the cooperatives as "legalized speculation"—attracted much attention in the U.S.S.R. and abroad. Ruskoi's candidacy, reported the unofficial newsletter *Ezhedennaya glasnost*, was supported by the Soviet army, by Pamyat, and by the Russian

Orthodox Church. Dissident Orthodox priest Gleb Yakunin, in *Ruskaya Mysl* May 19, 1989, denounced Ruskoi's candidacy saying that his victory would mean "the path towards a military dictatorship."

Furthermore, the *Afgantsi* are not confined to the leading figures of such groups. They are well represented in the new parliament, the Congress of People's Deputies. One of these deputies is Gen. Col. Igor Rodionov, who as commander of the Transcaucasus Military District was co-responsible for the April 9 massacre of women and children in Georgia.

Rodionov delivered one impassioned speech during the May session of the People's Deputies. The speech, which was televised across the U.S.S.R., marked the state's granting of a mass audience for undiluted Russian chauvinism. Rodionov denounced the April Georgian demonstrations as "anti-Russian." His speech received a standing ovation from the assembled, mostly Russian, deputies. Similar, televised, standing ovations were to occur in later sessions as Afghan veterans stood up to denounce Andrei Sakharov for having "insulted" and "slandered" the Soviet Army's conduct in Afghanistan.

The *Afgantsi* have moved to center stage in the Soviet arena. The *Afgantsi* combination of the MVD elite troops, their Army counterparts, and the increasing *Afgantsi* acquisition of top military command posts, has created not only a Praetorian Guard, but the institutional framework for a coup option, should the systemic crisis get out of control. Whether or not matters go that far, what is certain is that the Praetorian Guard will be decisive in shaping the brutal Soviet policy shifts to come.

The Soviet view of 'defensive' doctrine

In an Aug. 2 interview with the Communist Party daily *Pravda*, Gen. Lt. Vladislav Alekseyevich Achalov, 43, Commander of Airborne Troops since January of this year, was asked how airborne troops which "probably preach a defensive doctrine least of all" and, which "are mobile and are always primed for the order, 'Advance!' " reflect the "new defensive military doctrine" of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. General Achalov replied, "Yes, the airborne troops are mobile and, as you said, are always primed for the order, 'advance.' But why should defense be passive? No, it should be active."

General Achalov continued, "As long as there are no guarantees of the irreversibility of the present positive processes in the world, Soviet people demand that we consolidate the country's defenses. Proceeding from this assumption, we are upgrading airborne troops." He allowed that the so-called "new thinking" was making headway in the world, but added, "However, by all appearances, it will be a long time before we can run our bayonets into the ground. Our partners in disarmament talks continue to modernize their weapons. . . . Representatives of U.S. ruling circles again make statements about the possibility of winning a nuclear war. Along with actively pursuing a peaceful foreign policy . . . we servicemen should think about the country's defenses and the combat preparedness of those who protect it. This is our principal mission."

The Soviet news agency TASS put out a dispatch summarizing Achalov's remarks, but three hours later instructed its subscribers to kill the item.