

# 'Arc of instability' engulfs borders of former Soviet Union

by Konstantin George

An "arc of instability" far more dangerous than the "arc of crisis" defined by former U.S. National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski in the 1970s, has emerged along the western and southern borders of the former U.S.S.R., from the Baltic to Central Asia, and including the nearby Balkans, where present and future conflicts could trigger a global war during the 1990s. Wars are already raging in Moldova, sandwiched between Romania and Ukraine; in the Transcaucasus, between Armenia and Azerbaijan; and in the Georgian region of South Ossetia, bordering the Russian Federation. In Central Asia, the republic of Tajikistan is, according to a June 30 Russian television report, "on the verge of civil war." Potential civil war conditions exist in Georgia and in various parts of the Russian North Caucasus, and tensions between Russia and the Baltic states are rising.

## Over 2 million refugees

By July 1, the human toll in this "arc of instability" rivaled that in the former Yugoslavia. Figures released on June 30 by Tatyana Regent, head of the Russian Immigration Authority, reveal that during 1991 some 500,000 Russian refugees fled from non-Russian republics to Russia because of conflicts or in the anticipation of war or violence, and that at least 600,000 more Russians will arrive this year. These statistics include only ethnic Russians. She added that, since Jan. 1, 1991, another 200,000 people belonging to non-Russian ethnic groups, such as Ossetians, had fled into the Russian Federation. If one adds the Armenians and Azerbaijanis who have fled to their native republics, the stream of Georgians from South Ossetia into the rest of Georgia, and the Slavs from Moldova's Dniestr region into Ukraine, there are some 2 million refugees, more than the number displaced by the Serbian-caused war in Croatia and Bosnia.

Thousands have been killed. Several thousand have died so far in the Armenia-Azerbaijan war. In South Ossetia, nearly 1,000 have been killed, and in Moldova, over 1,000 have died, mostly the result of the shelling by Romanian-supported Moldovan forces on June 19-22 of Bendery and other Russian-Ukrainian inhabited cities in the Dniestr region. The Bendery slaughter provoked the first application of the "Grachev Doctrine," named after Russian Defense Minister Gen. Pavel Grachev, where Russian forces have been deployed to protect ethnic Russians in other republics.

## Fighting fueled by economic breakdown

A sharp warning on this situation was contained in a commentary in the mid-June, No. 24 edition of the Russian weekly *New Times* by Dmitry Volsky. Entitled "The Dniestr Region in the 'Arc of Instability,'" he stated:

"No great imagination is required to see that a chain of conflicts clutching at one another . . . is being formed along the . . . frontier of the former U.S.S.R. and the former Warsaw Pact countries. They form a new 'arc of instability' . . . along the periphery of the civilized world [which] goes through its most sensitive point, nerve knots, where wars broke out more than once—from the Caucasus and Sarajevo, through the Dniestr region and Transylvania to the Baltic coast."

Volsky correctly portrayed the conflict in Moldova as one that "threatens to become the most dangerous" because "it is directly connected with the situation formed in the important and potentially unstable regions of eastern and central Europe." Sooner or later, the West is "going to feel the scorching breath of this conflict," he warned.

Volsky failed to cite the fact that the enforcement of International Monetary Fund (IMF) shock therapy policies on the East forms the underlying causality for the instability. The broad acceptance of IMF policies, except for rearguard actions by the Russian government such as its rejection of further energy price hikes for now, has meant the sabotage of large-scale Eurasian development of infrastructure and comprehensive modernization of the industrial and agricultural production cycles. An endless spiral of economic collapse and impoverishment of the population has been the result, making it relatively easy for Anglo-American interests and Russian imperial-minded circles to incite conflicts. The direct connection between economic collapse and the resulting destabilizations and conflicts can be seen in case after case.

The conflict in Moldova, for example, before the Romanian-backed Moldovan massacres of Slavs during May and June, could have been amicably settled on the basis of two provisions. The first would have created a confederation, giving the Slavs of the Dniestr region self-rule, an arrangement which would have remained so long as Moldova remained an independent republic. The second provision would be that, should Moldova's ethnic Romanian majority

decide to become part of Romania, as it had been (except for the Dniestr region) between 1918 and 1940, then the Slavs of the Dniestr region, which Stalin arbitrarily detached from Ukraine in 1940 and made part of the new "Republic of Moldova," could vote to rejoin Ukraine.

The Moldova conflict has been provoked by the Romanian regime of President Ion Iliescu, whose irredentist policy is to annex Moldova, including the Dniestr region. With the exception of 1941-44, when the Romanian Antonescu regime, an ally of Hitler, annexed the Transdnestr region of Ukraine, the Dniestr region never belonged to Romania. The "Greater Romania" policy of Iliescu, a dictator of the Gorbachov era, has been launched to distract attention from the domestic economic ruin caused by application of IMF-dictated austerity. With Romanian assistance—Romanian helicopters and aircraft have covertly taken part in military operations in Moldova—the Moldovan slaughter of Slavs along the Dniestr has, by design, accelerated the partition of Moldova. This, in turn, has aided Romania's intended annexation of Moldova up to the Dniestr River because Moldova cannot exist economically without the Dniestr region, which is the republic's source of electricity and home for almost all its industry.

This same chauvinist policy has been directed against Romania's large Hungarian minority in the Transylvania region, which is creating the potential for a Romanian-Hungarian conflict. Similarly, the main cause of the rupture of Czechoslovakia has been the rape of Slovakia through the IMF policies of Czech economic "czar" Vaclav Klaus. More broadly, the shock therapy-induced breakdown of trade among all the nations in this "arc" has created a matrix for continual conflicts.

### **'Arc of instability' widens**

By the end of June, a decisive Russian policy shift along the lines of the "Grachev Doctrine" was in place. On June 27, Russian President Boris Yeltsin, agreeing to a request by Defense Minister Grachev, appointed General Major Lebed as the new commander of the Russian 14th Army based in Moldova. Lebed, like Grachev, is a career Airborne officer and combat veteran of the war in Afghanistan. He had served as deputy commander of Airborne Forces under Grachev from December 1990 through August 1991. The three generals in command of combat forces who played the decisive role in smashing the August coup and leading the Yeltsin "counter-coup" were Grachev, Lebed (then in charge of defense of the Yeltsin "White House"), and Army Gen. Boris Gromov, who pulled the Interior Ministry MVD troops into the Yeltsin camp. On June 27, Yeltsin appointed Gromov, an exponent of the "Grachev Doctrine," as deputy defense minister of Russia.

From his headquarters in Tiraspol in the Dniestr region on June 29, General Lebed stated the new 14th Army policy should Moldovan forces attempt a repeat of the slaughter of

June 19-22: "In future this will be a different neutrality, an armed neutrality. We are a Russian Army, and it does not correspond to the traditions and character of Russians to look on indifferently as peaceful inhabitants are killed before their eyes, wounded, or made into cripples. . . . A genocide such as occurred between June 19 and June 22 will never be tolerated again."

Such policies are necessary to stop the killing. However, military toughness alone cannot solve the underlying source of conflict. At best, it can buy time until policies centered on mutually beneficial economic development are begun. Otherwise, the "arc" continues to widen and the crisis intensifies.

The latest example of this is in the Baltic. On June 28, Estonia held a referendum, with voting limited to ethnic Estonians, on extending voting rights to non-Estonian residents, meaning the 40% Russian minority. The result, which denied Estonia's Russians the right to vote, is a disaster. No one can deny that under Bolshevism, Moscow practiced a policy whose aim was to extinguish Estonia through mass killings, deportations, and Russification, and that Estonians paid a horrendous price living under this slavery. The vote disenfranchising the republic's Russians, however, established an extremely dangerous, immoral doctrine of Russian "collective guilt."

A wiser policy would have distinguished between the Russians who are chauvinist subversives and who form only a tiny minority of the Russian population in Estonia, and the great majority, mostly second- and third-generation Russians, who voted for Estonian independence and who wish to live in peace in Estonia. Those who promote a doctrine of "collective guilt" are themselves guilty of collective stupidity, where emotions caused by the sufferings of the Estonian people, understandable as these emotions may be, have prevailed over reason. Taking revenge on pro-Estonian independence Russians is stupidity. The referendum played into the hands of the diehard enemies of Estonia, namely, the Russian imperial chauvinists. A wise policy must be predicated on never giving these evil types the chance to develop a mass following.

The Baltic states have enough problems with Moscow; for example, Moscow's adamant refusal to pull out its troops from their territory. In fact, the Russian Defense Ministry declared, even before the Estonia referendum, that it would not begin to pull troops out until 1994, after withdrawals are completed from Germany and Poland. That date appeared in another context, when the Russian government announced on June 30 that it expects industrial production to continue to fall through 1992-93, with no chance for a rise until 1994. That prognosis will stick, unless IMF-dictated policies are overthrown. If this reversal, which is in the national interest of all the new independent states, does not occur, then the arc of instability will become explosive, a price the world cannot afford to pay.