

Rokhlin builds Russian opposition movement

by Konstantin George

Gen. Lev Rokhlin, chairman of the Defense Committee of the Russian State Duma (parliament), has created a new movement to support the Armed Forces and the defense industry, in the face of the regime's monetarist policies which are in the process of demolishing both national institutions. The extent of institutional breakdown has become so grave that, as Rokhlin and others have been pointing out during the spring and summer, it is threatening to endanger the very existence of the Russian state.

The Russian Armed Forces, with the partial exception of the strategic nuclear forces, are in a shambles. Starting with the issue that usually makes the headlines in the Western media: The average arrears in back wages owed to soldiers and officers is running at five months. This alone, given its debilitating and demoralizing effect on troops of all ranks, would define a crisis of the first degree in the Armed Forces. Added to this, is the cumulative (since the imposition of International Monetary Fund policies in 1992) vast underfunding of every other vital category of military expenditure. Because of this, even if all back wages were to be paid during September, as the regime has promised, the Armed Forces would still be in a shambles.

In a statement on Aug. 11, Rokhlin said that his movement will join with other opposition parties to "lead the people out into the streets and stay there until the President and the government resign." The demand is doubly notable, because Rokhlin is a member of the Duma faction of the Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin government's "Our Home is Russia" party. In his statement, Rokhlin said he would discuss cooperation with the factions in the Duma of the Communist Party (CPRF, led by Gennadi Zyuganov and in the Duma by Gennadi Seleznyov), Yabloko (led by Grigori Yavlinsky), and Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (Vladimir Zhirinovsky).

During July and August, Rokhlin has been on tour throughout Russia, building the new movement. In his Aug. 11 statement, he said that the new movement already has 35 regional branches, and he set a goal to form 35 more by September.

Rokhlin launched his campaign in June against the regime's policies toward the Armed Forces. He delivered a

blistering, and accurate, attack on President Boris Yeltsin personally, and on the government for its austerity fiscal policies. The final straw for Rokhlin was the May purge of Defense Minister Gen. Igor Rodionov and General Staff head General Samsonov. Both had repeatedly gone on record opposing the so-called "reform," or massive planned downsizing of the Armed Forces. The outcome of that purge revealed the depths of officer corps rage against regime policies. President Yeltsin was forced to go outside the ranks of Ground Forces (Army) generals to find a successor to Rodionov; he chose Gen. Col. Igor Sergeyev as the new defense minister. Sergeyev had been commander-in-chief of the Strategic Rocket Forces, and, in contrast to previous heads of the Strategic Rocket Forces, had spent his entire military career in that branch of the Armed Forces. Sergeyev, out of pure parochialism, has tended to support the so-called "reforms," because despite the cuts, the Strategic Rocket Forces have been relatively better maintained, at the expense of the other four branches—Ground Forces, Air Force, Air Defense, and Navy.

'No other recourse'

Rokhlin's decision to create the new movement came after months of incessant efforts on his part, and that of others, to try and talk sense to the President and government, to go through channels to arrive at a mutually agreed-upon solution that would rectify the glaring threat to national security. It was all to no avail. This process, which led to no recourse but open opposition, is graphically stated in the text of Rokhlin's "Army Support Movement Appeal," as printed in *Sovetskaya Rossiya* on Aug. 14:

"The reason for my first famous appeal to the supreme commander-in-chief [Yeltsin] and servicemen, and for the decision to create a movement, was the impasse in which I found myself when trying to tackle the country's defense and security problems. During our 18 months' work on the State Duma Defense Committee, we, the members of the committee, repeatedly arranged for issues concerning the state of the Army and the country's security to be considered at parliamentary hearings, to which we invited the country's leaders and famous scientists and designers. With their help we evolved proposals to solve the Army's problems and submitted them to the government and to the President. Unfortunately, nobody made use of our proposals. Indeed, they pretended not to notice them.

"A year ago, in June 1996, we asked the government for a short- and long-term forecast of the country's economic development to enable us to evolve a blueprint for the country's security on the basis of a realistic assessment of the economic and financial conditions in which military reform will have to take place, and of what we can expect. To this day, we have not received a reply. Meanwhile, the situation has been developing as follows: The only forces which now

guarantee our country's security—the strategic nuclear forces—have followed all the other forces and begun to collapse. Our current missiles and their support systems are nearing the end of their warranty period. Their wholesale decommissioning will start in 2005 and be completed by 2009-10. But the missile rearmament program is three years behind schedule, and the chances of implementing it are decreasing by the day.”

Rokhlin said that he and the Defense Committee had gotten the support of Federation Council Chairman Yegor Stroyev and State Duma Chairman Gennadi Seleznyov, to sign a joint “appeal to the President, proposing to conduct parliamentary hearings on this highly important problem of the country's security. The President made no response to the Speakers' appeal. And this was the last straw, which convinced us of the executive's unwillingness to consider highly important state problems.” It was at this point, Rokhlin said, that “we started to create our movement. The power of public opinion is the only remaining source of support to which we can turn. And we have already found such support. More than 60 national organizations have responded to our initiative and declared that they were joining the movement. Only two weeks later, 300 of their representatives gathered for a conference and set up the organizing committee. Then, the members of the organizing committee began to tour the country to acquire a more detailed knowledge of the situation in the provinces and to set up regional branches of the movement.”

A ‘parallel structure’

Writing in the daily *Segodnya* on Aug. 12, military analyst Pavel Felgengauer stated that Rokhlin's movement was designed as a “nationwide parallel system of control” for Russia's military, in case existing command structures lost control during a crisis. He warned of “mass disobedience” in the Armed Forces, if the government fails to pay wage arrears by Sept. 1, as repeatedly promised. Putting off the wage payments any further indeed threatens unpredictable eruptions within the military. Regime acknowledgement of this danger was reflected in the tour during the second week of August of the Far East Military District by Defense Minister Sergeyev. The defense minister visited units and bases and promised early payment of back wages and overdue benefits for officers and their families. The Far East district is one of many hotbeds of discontent. Its soldiers and officers are at least five months behind in payment of wages and “benefits,” i.e., reimbursement for moving and setting up new family quarters are as much as three years behind.

In the Aug. 11-17 issue of the weekly *St. Petersburg Times*, Felgengauer spelled out the so-called “best possible scenario” for the Armed Forces, under existing monetarist policies. His conclusion: “The recent successful privatization auctions may have provided enough money to fulfill Yeltsin's

main promise—to pay wage arrears on the military's basic pay” by Sept. 1, but “all other announced ‘reforms’ have meant in effect a re-allocation of resources to maintain the strategic missile nuclear forces at the expense of the other services.”

‘Zaire-ization’ of the Armed Forces

Whether the back wages are paid (and, because of the comprador regime's “fire brigade” policy of paying off just moments before social eruptions occur, wages may in fact be paid in September), the demolition of the Armed Forces will continue. In a discussion with *EIR* on Aug. 13, Felgengauer said that the Russian Army is going through a process of “Zaire-ization,” and will soon lack the capability to field more than 200,000-500,000 men, if current policy trends continue. His term “Zaire-ization” is more than apt. For years now, Russians have been bitterly speaking about the “Africanization” of their economy and society, and “Africanization” has now caught up with the military.

Felgengauer cited a warning issued the day before by Gen. Pyotr Deinekin, commander-in-chief of the Air Force, that only one-half of Russian military aircraft are capable of flying. Under current trends, Russia will be lucky if it can field 300 combat aircraft by the year 2000. Felgengauer said, “The whole situation is a terrible mess. We are spending the equivalent of one-third of the British defense budget, for a military of 1.2 million men. . . . What you buy is what you get, and if we keep spending at this level, we should, by the logic of things, cut the Armed Forces to 200,000 men, or at most a half-million.”

He added that, just as “the Zairean Army began to disintegrate before Kabila came along,” the Russian Army is going through the same process. The Army is “getting weaker all the time,” and there is a growing danger of a “privatized” and “feudalized” Army, with “private armies and groups” sprouting up across the country. Disintegration is the lawful outcome of years of triage, of non-funding or vast underfunding of training, maneuvers, operations and maintenance, and of military procurement. Rokhlin is in a race against time to have an alternative, “all-Russian command structure in place, that could take over the military . . . if the Army goes into revolt and the General Staff loses control,” Felgengauer said.

Anyone in the West who is sanguine or happy about the collapse of the Russian Army, is living in a world of very dangerous delusions. It is imperative for the West that the Russian Army's disintegration process be stopped and the military be rebuilt, in an orderly fashion. The alternative will be a “post-disintegration” revival, under the cultural axioms of across-the-board rage against “Western” colonialist dictates, by an anti-Western officer corps. Out of that process could arise something which now doesn't exist: a renewed Russian security threat to the West.