

Post-Gorbachov succession fight has now begun

by Konstantin George

The inside story of what is going on behind the Kremlin walls has been revealed through the recent events in the Soviet Transcaucasus republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia. On Feb. 26, Mikhail Gorbachov issued a dramatic appeal, in his own name as General Secretary, for a return to "calm" and "order" in the Transcaucasus. The announcement was a setup by the Politburo, which had met the day before and had refused to say a word about the situation in Armenia. Gorbachov was made to go out on a limb, placing both the prestige of his office and his neck on the line.

Gorbachov lost out. The next day, Deputy Chief State Prosecutor Alexander Katusev, clearly holding a set of orders diametrically opposed to the goals of Gorbachov's appeal, broadcast into Azerbaijan on Baku Radio, the names and ages of two Azeris who had been murdered by Armenians. That night, a massacre of Armenian women, children, and old people began in the Azerbaijan city of Sumgait. In the next 48 hours, Shi'ite extremist bands controlled by the KGB went on a rampage that killed up to 2,000 Armenians, with *no* interference by the police, according to eyewitness accounts. The Azerbaijan party leadership, backed by powerful forces in Moscow, above all the KGB, was responsible for the outrage.

The total failure of Gorbachov's appeal to end the disorders in Armenia and Azerbaijan was the final confirmation that the Soviet General Secretary no longer holds the reins of power; if he actually held the power, his appeal would have succeeded. Since Gorbachov has now been exposed wearing "the Czar's new suit of clothes," the post-Gorbachov suc-

cession fight has begun in earnest.

A March 9 meeting of Central Committee members to discuss the situation in Armenia and Azerbaijan announced that the Politburo had "entrusted" the Central Committee Secretariat (the group of Central Committee Secretaries) with drafting proposals to solve the crisis in the Transcaucasus. As Politburo and Secretariat member Yegor Ligachov had told the world in a Dec. 4, 1987 *Le Monde* interview, he directs the powerful CC Secretariat. In short, signaling the succession fight's commencement, the Transcaucasus "solution" has been taken away from the hapless General Secretary and delegated to the Politburo's "king-maker," Ligachov.

The succession fight arose, because Gorbachov failed to do what counts most over the longer term: getting the economy on track and maintaining order in the colonies and satrapies of the Muscovite Empire. The economic failures over the past two years necessitated a sharp increase in Russian looting of the East European satellites, where the imposition of austerity and rationing programs is comparable to the misery of the immediate postwar years. A similar pattern which affects the Turkic regions of Soviet Central Asia, features a policy of disinvestment and abandonment of vital infrastructure projects over the last several years.

These policies have brought Eastern Europe close to the point of explosion, with particular flash points in Poland and Hungary. In March alone:

- Poland was hit by mass student demonstrations and almost daily isolated strikes, protesting price increases and

shortages of basic necessities.

- On March 7, roughly 10,000 Czechoslovak Catholics staged a mass protest for religious freedom in Prague. The demonstration was the largest since the 1968 "Prague Spring" period under party chief Dubcek.

- On March 15, over 10,000 Hungarians marched through the streets of Budapest, demanding freedom of the press, speech, and assembly. This was the largest protest in Hungary since the 1956 Revolution.

Besides eruptions in Eastern Europe, at any time pro-independence protests could occur in the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, while the next wave of mass protests in Armenia and tumult in Azerbaijan is only a matter of time.

The interregnum

However, Gorbachov will, for at least the near future, continue in office as General Secretary, for two reasons. The first is that the Muscovite "game-masters" of Russia's *nomenklatura* will hold onto him at least through the May summit with President Reagan. The "Gorbachov magic" has worked too well in the West to dispense with it just yet. In all probability, the "magic" will be worked once again to attempt to extract new concessions from Washington to the INF "Munich II" treaty, in the realm of the SDI, strategic weapons, U.S. troop cuts in Europe, and various regional issues.

The erroneous Western assessment that Gorbachov is in danger has produced hysteria in the West, where the entire "strategy" has been based on the blind, wishful thinking about making deals with Gorbachov. The hysteria was clinically evident at the recent NATO summit, with its chorus to "back Gorbachov at all costs." Moscow will profit from such delusions in the coming weeks, all the while preparing the post-Gorbachov era.

The emerging combination

We are now in the phase of the succession fight where the *nomenklatura* has decided who it *does not* want, namely Mikhail Gorbachov; and the process is now under way to decide *who* shall replace Gorbachov, and what combination of *institutional* forces will reign in the post-Gorbachov period. At least for the time being, the personality issues will remain very murky. However, the grave crisis defined by widespread unrest among the non-Russian nationalities and the East European captive nations, coupled with a bloc-wide economic crisis, provides us with the institutional insights into the question.

These crisis phenomena ensure, as all past severe crises faced by the Muscovite Empire have proven, that institutions of the military, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the mass-based Russian chauvinist Pamyat Society, which embody a core Russian chauvinist outlook, will rise in power and prom-

inence during the post-Gorbachov succession fight. A period that promotes the power of these institutions is essential if the required goal of reviving the Russian "Master Race" to rejuvenate the Muscovite Empire is to be accomplished.

The requirements of the post-Gorbachov period thus bring to a head a *triple* succession fight. First is, of course, the question of who will succeed Gorbachov. Second, not necessarily immediate, is who will succeed the 70-year-old Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov as the military's leader in the *nomenklatura* in his capacity as deputy head of the all-powerful National Defense Council. Third, which is fairly immediate, concerns who will replace the 75-year-old and ailing Moscow Patriarch Pimen.

The role of the military has already increased dramatically through the staged crisis in the Transcaucasus. Most of Azerbaijan and Armenia are under martial law, and the Army is patrolling the Azerbaijan cities of Sumgait, Kirovabad, and Shamchor, as well as the Armenian-inhabited Azerbaijan region of Nagorno-Karabakh. In addition, heavy troop concentrations are in Armenia, including outside of the capital city of Yerevan.

The growth of Pamyat's power and influence has been in evidence throughout 1987. For the Russian Orthodox Church, the profound crisis of the Muscovite Empire coincides very nicely with 1988, when large Russian nationalist celebrations are expected to mark the millennium of the Christianization of Kievan Rus.

A Russian-centered nomenklatura

The new combination emerging will be a Russian-centered Pan-Slavic and Pan-Orthodox Church *nomenklatura*. This explains why the crisis was staged to begin in the Transcaucasus. Had the goal merely been to expose Gorbachov as helpless, other options were available.

Broadly speaking, the Transcaucasus is inhabited by three main ethnic groups: Christian Armenians who belong to the independent Armenian Apostolic Church; Christian Georgians who belong to the Georgian Orthodox Church; and the Turkic Azeris, who, contrary to the rule among Turks, are Shi'ite, not Sunni, Muslims.

The Russian *nomenklatura* consciously had KGB Shi'ite networks in Azerbaijan carry out the massacre of Christian Armenians to cause new, virulent anti-Turkic reactions, and recreate the myth of the "Russian protector" of "Christian brethren" threatened by the Turks. By doing so, they can force a coalescence of the various Christian elites in the U.S.S.R. around and *under* Muscovy, as the powers of the coming "period." Given the historical background of the 1915 Ottoman genocide against Armenia, the operation was child's play to stage.

The massacre was designed to trigger a similar effect in Georgia, where, unlike homogeneous Armenia, 20% of the population are Turkic Muslims.

The other purpose was to set the stage for brutal and bloody purges and slaughter against what Moscow considers to be "overpopulated" Turkic regions of Soviet Central Asia, and to prepare the way for military operations against Iran, and at a later point, against Turkey.

The Armenian population clearly has no knowledge of how their national aspirations are being manipulated by Moscow. In May 1987—timed with the activation of the Armenian petition campaign to reincorporate Nagorno-Karabakh into Armenia—the KGB's Middle East expert, Igor Belyaev, authored an article in the weekly *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, which proclaimed Khomeini's Iran and Muslim fundamentalism as a major security threat to the Turkic "republics" of the Soviet Union. The same theme was repeated by Belyaev in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* Jan. 13, 1988, shortly before all hell broke loose in the Transcaucasus. Now, a bare two months later, there are heavy Soviet troop concentrations near the Iranian border with Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Bulgaria vs. the Turks

The evidence that confirms there is a design for an anti-Turkic resurgence is provided by the simultaneous launching in March of a massive Pan-Slavic and anti-Turkish campaign in Bulgaria, the only satellite in Eastern Europe which has been culturally and historically pro-Russian.

On March 3 and 4, all Bulgarians were given two days off from work to celebrate the 110th anniversary of the 1878 Treaty of San Stefano, which ended the 1877-78 Russo-Turkish War and created modern Bulgaria. The event was extraordinary to begin with, because two-day holidays are unknown in the East bloc. Moreover, since there were no great festivities for the 100th anniversary, in 1978 why, suddenly are they taking place for the 110th anniversary?

The answer lies in the themes that were highlighted. Banner headlines and speeches praised the "Liberation from the Ottoman Yoke," the "great" San Stefano Treaty "of Peace," and proclaimed the "Russians" as "liberators" and "protectors." Left unsaid was any reminder that the treaty which created the first modern-day version of "Greater Bulgaria," was dictated by Moscow. For the last three years, Bulgaria has been engaged in its own campaign to extinguish its Turkish minority and last autumn, opened an exhibition in Sofia on the "Ottoman genocide against the Armenians."

More light is shed on the succession fight in progress in Moscow in a backhanded manner by the situation in Hungary. Timed with the eruptions in the Transcaucasus, the Hungarian Communist Party announced that its party conference scheduled for May, which was supposed to resolve the question of who will succeed the 75-year-old Janos Kadar, has been postponed, at least till June. Rumors are flooding Budapest that it will probably be put off until the autumn. The Hungarian leadership in this sense are not fools. They will wait until the smoke clears in Moscow before taking any plunges of their own.

Reagan prepares a intervention against

by Gretchen Small

At 10 p.m. on March 16, White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater announced that four battalions of U.S. troops were being deployed to Honduras, for "an emergency deployment readiness exercise" of unspecified duration, allegedly initiated at the request of Honduran President José Azcona. That reason for the deployment met with increasing skepticism, as the reports came in on how it took U.S. Ambassador Everitt Briggs 90 minutes to convince Azcona to issue the request—after the U.S. Interagency Policy Review Group had met to plan the operation.

Fitzwater himself left open the possibility that the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua is not the primary target of the deployment. "This exercise is intended also as a signal to the governments and peoples of Central America of the seriousness with which the United States government views the current situation in the region," he said.

From Panama to Great Britain, strategic analysts drew the obvious conclusion: The target of this "readiness exercise" is Panama, only 45 minutes by jet from the U.S. bases in Honduras.

The deployment brings the total of U.S. troops based in Honduras to 6,000, and joins a steady build-up of U.S. military force in Panama. On March 1, the U.S. announced that National Guard maneuvers, named "Total Warrior," would be held in the former Canal Zone from March 12 to April 12, despite Panamanian objections. Shortly thereafter, U.S. warships appeared off both coasts of Panama. On March 5, one hundred Marine and Air Force Special Forces trained in anti-terrorist operations, were sent in, bringing the number of security specialists in Panama to 700. Then, on March 16, as the 3,200 soldiers readied themselves for Honduras, the alert status for the 10-12,000 American soldiers regularly based in Panama was upgraded to "Charlie" status.

Voices close to the administration named Panama as the likely purpose of the "readiness exercise." Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R-N.Y.), a leader in the campaign to oust Panama's Defense Forces Commander Gen. Manuel Noriega, told the Senate on March 17 that "the fact is, we very well may need to utilize the capabilities of these troops as it relates to guarding our own interests, the Panama Canal and the lives and property of our citizens in Panama. . . . [The troops] demonstrate . . . that we do have strength. . . . There's the