

# Vilnius under siege by Moscow

*Writing from Wiesbaden, Germany on Jan. 17, Hartmut Cramer reports on the news from inside the Lithuanian capital.*

The Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, the political center of the Baltic independence struggle which began with such high hopes about 10 months ago, is now under siege, since Moscow began to move additional, elite troops into Lithuania on Jan. 8. The tactic of the courageous Lithuanians, who share many similarities with Indians—not only in their national language, which is close to the old Sanskrit—was to employ the principle of non-violence, used by the great Indian patriot Mahatma Gandhi so effectively to gain India's independence after a long struggle against the British empire, an empire equally as evil and powerful as the one Lithuanians and their brothers and sisters in Latvia and Estonia face today.

The tension could be already felt, physically, in early December, after Moscow's "liberal" Internal Affairs Minister Bakatin was suddenly fired and replaced by hardliner Boris Pugo, especially feared by the Baltic people for his brutality since his days as KGB boss of Latvia. Hence the Lithuanians, though firmly adhering to their more than justified right to national sovereignty and independence, carefully avoided anything the Russians could use as a pretext to start a bloody crackdown.

The bloodbath has now begun in Lithuania, and there is more than one sign that it will quickly spread to Latvia and Estonia, as well to other republics. From a brutal communist regime—such as Gorbachov's, despite Western illusions never shared by the Soviet population—one couldn't possibly expect anything different in the current strategic situation, which for the Russian generals is an invitation delivered on a silver platter with silk handkerchiefs.

Even *after* the crackdown had started, and after Gorbachov could no longer publicly deny that he was responsible for it, the governments in Washington, London, Bonn, and Paris, ever eloquent in defense of "human dignity," "freedom," and "justice," continued to defend Gorbachov as a "reformer," and, incredibly, blamed the massacre on the courageous Baltic leaders, above all Lithuania's President Vytautas Landsbergis, one of the finest politicians imaginable, ranking way above the "realpolitiking" dwarfs who dominate the Western states.

Therefore, it is more than needful that the ugly facts about this crackdown be told, so that no responsible politician can pretend he or she didn't know.

## **The storming of the TV tower**

The Lithuanians had made it clear to everyone that they would *not* use force, and yet they were attacked bloodily. On Friday Jan. 9, the officers' school in Kaunas was taken over. As residents nearby reported, 30 cadets were arrested and subsequently disappeared. Their fate is unknown. The next day, the Russian troops, elite paratroopers flown into Vilnius on the pretext of "rounding up the Lithuanian deserters and bringing them to the Red Army," shot their way into the press building, wounding people, and smashing everything inside, from bookshelves to typewriters to telex machines. One older witness, a university professor, who had helped in the attempt to protect the building, describe their behavior as "barbarian."

Next, the site of the independent Lithuanian TV, on Jan. 12, was surrounded by tanks whose commanders first tried to deter the many people protecting the tower with their bodies by driving directly at them and quickly swinging their downward directed cannon in all directions. After realizing that the people wouldn't leave, they moved during the night, opening fire on the crowd and simply running over them with the tanks, killing at least 13 on the spot, and wounding more than 160, according to first reports. On Jan. 16, Lithuanian parliamentarian Antanas Racas stated in a declaration to all the parliamentarians of the world the official figures of 14 dead, 358 wounded, among them 27 seriously and 3 in danger of dying.

Once inside the TV tower, the paratroopers caused more casualties. When the night was over, 64 people failed to show up at their homes. People who lived near the TV tower in Vilnius could see during the next two days, that from time to time, "heavy sacks," ostensibly bodybags, were thrown out of the tower's windows, immediately picked up by Russian soldiers and then quickly carried away in military trucks. Speculation was that the paratroopers, who stubbornly denied Lithuanian doctors entrance to the TV tower, simply let the wounded die and "disappeared" them this way; how many they killed outright, is unknown.

It could be as much as 63, since Lithuanian Health Minister Oleka, a young specialist in microsurgery, found *no* wounded or dead in the tower, when he was finally allowed to enter together with some aides on Jan. 16, after long negotiations with the Russian military leaders. Another young surgeon, working in the Red Cross Hospital of Vilni-

us, reported that most of the wounded there were shot in the legs and had broken bones, with no adequate medicine—especially no antibiotics—to treat them.

The use of dum-dum bullets, outlawed by the Geneva Convention, is proven by the fact that a 24-year old was killed by a bullet which was shot into his upper leg, but was found in his stomach. Many wounded Lithuanians were taken out of the hospitals in Vilnius by the Russian troops in order to “substantiate” the later claim, that “no atrocity had occurred.”

### Parliament under attack

Now, since virtually all of Lithuania is under siege and almost all the major buildings, like the police and militia headquarters, the airport, the press building, the radio stations, and the TV tower are occupied, the main target will be the parliament, which has become a “fortress.”

“It really looks like at the time of the French revolution,” a secretary reported, speaking from within the besieged building. “People are building up a thick wall around our building, they dig trenches, and they put up barricades with everything they can get. It is a shame that something like this has to be done in our times.”

“People from all over Lithuania are streaming into Vilnius,” a spokeswoman of the foreign policy committee of the parliament reported. “They all want to protect our parliament and with it our freedom and independence with their bodies alone. They are very courageous. In the first days about 200,000 Lithuanians had guarded the parliamentary building, despite bitter cold.” Now the number has decreased, since President Landsbergis, after talks with the military commanders on Jan. 14, told them to go home during the night. “But still a large crowd, up to 50,000 people, are here during the day in order to protect the parliament; with several thousand also holding out during the night.”

“People are warming themselves up with little fires,” a prominent Lithuanian musician, who like many of his colleagues serves daily shifts in front of the parliament, explained. “Hot tea and bread is handed out free to those standing in the cold by many housewives who prepare these things at home and pass by the parliament to deliver it.” This musician described the situation in Vilnius as “almost hopeless,” but stressed the will of the Lithuanians to resist. “We have to make clear to the world, that notions like *freedom, human dignity, sovereignty, and independence* are not just empty words, but that they are *real*; and that we are ready to die for them, rather than to give in like slaves. I fear, unfortunately, that a lot of our people will have to die in the next days, unless a miracle happens. And it is all the fault of the West.”

### The funeral

Refuting the lies maliciously propagated by Gorbachov and the communist press in Moscow and perpetrated for some time in the last weeks by Western media, which claimed that President Landsbergis was “too nationalist,” “too arrogant,” and got

*Call by Antanas Racas, deputy of the Supreme Council of Lithuania and member of its foreign policy committee, released in Vilnius, Jan. 16, 1991 to the parliamentarians of the world:*

Dear deputies,

Lithuania, its parliament, its deputies, and the unarmed people, who came to the parliament building in order to protect the freedom of Lithuania, are all in grave danger.

We are threatened by a new attack of the Soviet Army. Heavy tanks smashed unarmed people, while the Soviet leaders are trying to put the entire blame on those who wanted to stop the occupants with their mere bodies.

We urgently need your support. Each hour can be decisive for us! Your political actions can help us a lot!

“isolated from the Lithuanian people,” about *half a million* Lithuanians traveled into Vilnius to attend the Jan. 16 funeral of those who had died in the bloody attack on the TV tower.

“The entirety of Lithuania is on its feet; they come from all the parts of Lithuania,” reported a deputy who belonged to the small group of people who had to remain in the parliament building that morning. “The entire government and almost all my colleagues are there. Right now, the mass is going on in our cathedral, and afterwards there will be a huge political meeting with all the many people who came.”

Despite bitter weather, hundreds of thousands of people holding candles in their freezing hands stood on the sidewalks as the coffins covered with the national flag passed by. A whole sea of Lithuanian flags was to be seen, and literally tens of thousands of wreaths and flowers were carried, as well as the pictures of the dead, some of them very young. The youngest victim was a 13-year-old girl, run over by a Russian tank.

Moscow had tried to prevent this demonstration with the usual tricks. The military commander had ordered a curfew overnight, knowing that with the miserable infrastructure and the lack of cars, Lithuanians from the countryside couldn't make it in time for the funeral if they left on the same morning. In long negotiations President Landsbergis had convinced the Russian military commanders, who justify their presence in Lithuania by pretending to “guarantee law and order,” with the argument that “chaos and civil war will indeed break out, if you try to stop the many hundred thousand people who are already on their way to Vilnius from attending the funeral; they, being Christians, will never let that happen.”

Having lost the battle on this level, the military tried another trick. All of a sudden, reports emerged in the morning hours of Jan. 16, that a group of well-trained “athletes” from Moscow had arrived at Vilnius airport. Everybody understood immediately that these people were part of a KGB

## Soviet 'devil's plan' has only just begun

The Soviet troops who massacred 14 Lithuanians on Jan. 12-13 were brought in to Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, following ultimata by Mikhail Gorbachov and Baltic Military District Commander Gen. Col. Fyodor Kuzmin. They demanded that Lithuania renounce its March 1990 declaration of independence by Jan. 13. The massacre came within hours of the U.S. Congress giving its approval for Bush to use force against Iraq.

Lithuania's President Vytautas Landsbergis described the Soviet crackdown as the "devil's plan," timed to proceed while the "world's attention is directed at the Gulf crisis." Landsbergis appealed to Bush and other Western leaders not to go to war. He warned that starting a war in the Gulf means that the West will "fall into a Russian trap," because "Russia will use the war as a cover to come down on Lithuania." In a press conference in London on Jan. 15, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Algirdas Saudargas underlined that "the Second World War between East and West is still going on in Lithuania. You cannot begin a third world war between North and South without finishing the Second World War."

Landsbergis, Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin, and others have pointed to the grim 20th-century precedents for the Soviet action: 1) June 1940, when Moscow invaded and annexed the three Baltic republics while Hitler was conquering France; 2) the 1956 parallel between the Suez Crisis, the Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt to occupy the Suez Canal, and the deployment of the Red Army to crush the Hungarian Revolution; 3) the 1968 Red Army march into Prague, while America was immersed in the quagmire of Vietnam.

### Gorbachov's war cabinet

The crackdown in the Baltic republics, which *EIR* has long forecast, is the result of the consolidation of power in the Soviet Union by a hardline policy grouping that we have identified as the "Third Rome" faction, a post-

Bolshevik Russian-chauvinist tendency that sees Moscow as becoming the capital of a new "Roman Empire."

This tendency can also be seen in Gorbachov's Jan. 14 appointment of key figures in his new presidential cabinet government. The most senior cabinet members after Prime Minister Valentin Pavlov, formerly U.S.S.R. finance minister, are the two new first deputy prime ministers, Vitali Dogushiyev and Vladimir Velichko. Both are members of the Soviet Union's arms industry leadership. Velichko was Minister for Heavy Machine Building. The new deputy prime minister with special responsibility for the defense industry, is Yuri Maslyukov, for many years a leading figure in the military-industrial complex, and till now head of Gosplan, the state planning agency.

On Jan. 15, the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet confirmed Gorbachov's appointment of Aleksandr Bessmertnykh, the Soviet ambassador to Washington, as new foreign minister, replacing Eduard Shevardnadze. This choice suggests that Gorbachov expects to continue armed repression "in sync" with the U.S. government, as George Bush puts it.

On Jan. 15, Gorbachov broke his silence on the Baltic situation to blame the Baltic leaders for the crisis, accusing the Baltic leaders of being "dictators," and blaming Landsbergis, with his "hasty proclamation of independence," for the "events in Vilnius." Echoing his Defense Minister Yazov and Interior Minister Boris Pugo, Gorbachov repeated the lie that the Lithuanians had "fired first," with the Soviet Army "returning the fire." One recalled in this the infamous broadcast by the Nazis, Sept. 1, 1939, when Hitler invaded Poland: "Starting at 5:45 our troops returned the fire."

Then, Gorbachov turned his invective against Russia's President, Boris Yeltsin. Yeltsin had condemned the Red Army intervention in Lithuania, and issued a call for Russia to have its own army and for no Russian soldiers to fight against the governments of other republics. Gorbachov accused Yeltsin of a "deliberate provocation and gross violation of the U.S.S.R. Constitution," representing a "challenge not only to the supreme federal authorities, [which] also heightens confrontation in the already explosive situation in the country."

### Repression set to go

As of Jan. 16, in at least five of the six non-Slavic Christian republics of the U.S.S.R., the situation was poised at razor's edge. In the three Baltic republics (Estonia,

special unit, flown in as provocateurs. Either the crowd of 500,000 was too big for them to handle, or the organizers of the funeral found ways to neutralize this threat; no provocations occurred that day.

Now, as of Jan. 17, Vilnius is calm—"the calm before the storm," the inhabitants say. They had gotten credible

reports of even an air attack against the parliament, by helicopters and paratroopers stationed in Minsk, the capital of nearby Belorussia. An air or tank attack on the Lithuanian parliament is thought imminent. "Since the Americans started the war in the Gulf last night, there is not much hope left; the Russians will not miss this chance which the stupid and

Latvia, Lithuania), the republic of Moldavia bordering on Romania, and the republic of Georgia in the Transcaucasus, the deadlines set by Moscow for using the Army to crush the republics, had passed. Each of the republic governments had been issued an ultimatum to submit to the Red Army a "detailed list" of draft evaders, with their whereabouts.

In addition, the deadline set by a Gorbachov decree, ordering all Georgian militia to vacate the South Ossetian region of that republic, had also expired on Jan. 15. Georgia, which, like the Baltic states is seeking complete independence, rejected the ultimatum, and battles between Georgian militia and the Red Army airborne units and special Black Beret units of Soviet Interior Troops in South Ossetia, could break out at any time.

In each of the Baltic states, and in Moldavia, Moscow-orchestrated tensions, provocations, and ominous troop deployments, have been escalating on a daily basis.

**Lithuania:** Following the Vilnius massacre, where Soviet troops seized the TV and Radio Center, Lithuania has become an occupied country. Soviet troops have occupied auxiliary radio broadcasting facilities, the airports, ports, rail, and communication lines. The storming of the Lithuanian Parliament is expected soon. The command for this next escalation has been in place since Jan. 14, when two Soviet deputy defense ministers arrived in Lithuania: Gen. Valentin Varennikov, commander in chief of the Soviet Ground Forces, and Gen. Col. Vladislav Achalov, named Dec. 28 as the 13th deputy defense minister, to a new post, responsible for all deployments of Soviet Armed Forces. Achalov was, and is believed to still be, simultaneously the commander of all Soviet Airborne Forces.

**Latvia and Estonia:** In both republics, beginning Jan. 15, there have been mass demonstrations by the Red Army-controlled Interfront, the Russian chauvinist front for the Russian minorities which make up 40% of Estonia's population, and about 50% of Latvia's. The demonstrators demanded the immediate resignation of the Latvian and Estonian governments. Barricades have gone up in the Latvian capital of Riga and the Estonian capital of Tallinn, to try and protect the Parliament and government buildings in the center of the cities from Army attack. On Jan. 13, Gen. Col. Grigori Krivosheyev, the deputy chief of the U.S.S.R. General Staff in charge of manpower and mobilization, arrived in Estonia, to try to force compli-

ance with the Jan. 15 deadline.

**Moldavia:** In a Jan. 14 radio broadcast, Gen. Col. Ivan Morozov, commander of the Odessa Military District, which includes Moldavia, thundered that "the Soviet Army will do all it can to prevent Moldavia from leaving the Soviet Union." Morozov used the radio facilities in the city of Tiraspol, located on the Dniestr River, and "capital" of the ethnic Russian "Dniestr Republic" which was proclaimed by Moldavia's ethnic Russians on Oct. 28, when they, with covert Army backing, de facto seceded from Moldavia. The Odessa Military District command had given Moldavian authorities a "help us round up the draft evaders" deadline of Jan. 16, which has now passed. Quietly, over the Jan. 12-13 weekend, Soviet troops near the Moldavian capital of Kishineov were reinforced by at least one battalion, and the airborne division based with the Odessa Military District is ready to intervene as soon as orders are given.

### **U.S. strategic stupidity**

As the Moscow shows its iron fist more by the day, the U.S. war buildup in the Gulf has stripped Germany, the key to the defense of Europe, of any credible military force. Gone are over half of the U.S. Army ground forces combat units, a much higher percentage of armor, an incredible three-quarters of all combat aircraft, leaving a mere two divisions and a handful of squadrons. One year ago, the Federal Republic had four-plus U.S. divisions and no Russian troops on its soil; today, the two remaining American divisions "coexist" in united Germany with 376,000 Russian troops.

The Soviet blackmail capability extends beyond military means. War in the Gulf means at least partial disruption of Europe's oil supplies, and a potential explosion in oil prices overnight to \$60-75 a barrel. Europe's only alternative source for oil is—in exchange for a high political price—the Soviet Union.

Moreover, the Muslim republics of Azerbaidzhan and Central Asia have been exempted from any armed suppression by Moscow. There are tens of thousands of draft evaders in every Muslim republic, yet no ultimata have been presented to them. Given that the entire Islamic world is about to turn anti-American in response to Bush's attack on Iraq, the leaders in Moscow cannot help but realize that they stand to benefit from this anti-American wave.

—Konstantin George

immoral governments of the West have given them."

This is not only the opinion of the politicians in the besieged parliament in Vilnius and their colleagues in the other Baltic republics, who had warned the Western politicians time and again in the last months not to overlook the crucial indifference of the free world, which had sealed the destiny

of the Baltic republics already in 1940, as well as the fate of Hungary in 1956. That is also being said by the proverbial "man in the street" in Vilnius, who constantly puts the simple, but painstaking question to Western visitors: "When will the Western politicians and populations finally wake up? Only when it's too late, also for them?"