

Russia draws the line against strategic insanity

by Jonathan Tennenbaum

The upcoming Dec. 19 elections for the Russian State Duma (Parliament) could mark a watershed in the political future of the country. Like the world as a whole, but even more intensely so, Russia finds itself in a turbulent “boundary layer” where, in the words of one Russian observer, “sudden and unexpected developments are to be expected.” Just as certain is the fact—the implications of which are still hysterically denied in Washington and some other Western quarters—that the entire political geometry of Russia has already radically changed from what it was a mere three or four months ago.

The drastic shift in public attitudes toward overwhelming support for the military operation in Chechnya, and the sudden recognition and authority accorded to the Russian Armed Forces and its generals after a decade of decline and disgrace, are among the more obvious manifestations of a profound reorientation occurring in Russian society: a culturally- and historically-conditioned closing of ranks in the face of a perceived threat to the very existence of Russia.

Lyndon LaRouche characterized that change in a drastic but precise manner, with reference to the Soviet Union’s response to Hitler’s “Operation Barbarossa” (see “Germany as Tragedy Revisited,” *EIR*, Dec. 3, 1999). The reference is anything but far-fetched. First, as Russian economist Sergei Glazhev demonstrated in his book *Genocide: Russia and the New World Order* (see p. 11), the losses in population and physical destruction of wealth of the country, which have occurred as a result of the imposition of shock therapy on Russia, exceed that inflicted on the country by Hitler and Stalin. Second, as *EIR* has documented (see “Brzezinski Plays Britain’s ‘Great Game’ in Central Asia,” *EIR*, Sept. 10, 1999,

pp. 14-53), the NATO eastward thrust into the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, hand-in-hand with the London-based orchestration of so-called Muslim fundamentalist terrorism in these regions, reflects the commitment of the British-American-Commonwealth forces to a total dismemberment of Russia. Chechnya, Dagestan, and the loss of a thousand civilian lives in a few days of terrorist bombings of Russian cities, catalyzed a broad consciousness of the fact, that Russia must fight for its life.

The closing of the ranks is reflected on many institutional levels. One manifestation is the adoption of a new Russian military doctrine providing for “first use” of nuclear weapons and the creation of new forms of such weapons (see Rachel Douglas, “Russian ‘Doctrine’: The Posture of a Big Military Power, Under Attack,” *EIR*, Oct. 29, 1999). Another is the reestablishment of close cooperation between the Armed Forces and intelligence services, the lack of which was a major factor in the disasters of the 1994-96 Chechnya war. Likewise the sudden consensus of the Russian government and business circles, to push forward the Blue Stream gas pipeline project to Turkey, and to step up strategic cooperation with Iran, in response to the Anglo-American geopolitical games around the Trans-Caspian pipeline agreement, which excluded Russia. Still another sign is the remarkably self-assured behavior of former Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov during a recent visit to France, where he spoke and behaved as if he were head of state or high-level representative of the Russian government, even though he is officially now a private person and in a sense represents an opposition force. All these, and more, reflect institutional responses evolving simultaneously with the intensifying power struggle between



Former Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov, whose government was the first to slow the disintegration of the Russian economy since the imposition of “shock therapy” by the West. His return to power is one option Russian patriots have for changing the direction of policymaking.

patriotic forces, the corrupt Yeltsin “Family,” and the so-called “Russian oligarchs” inside the institutions themselves.

Dangerous times

“The general mood in the country has drastically changed,” said a leading policy expert from the Russian Academy of Sciences. “Nearly everyone now sees the struggle over Chechnya as a matter of the survival of Russia itself. People who would have voiced very different opinions just a few months ago, now all agree that some Western countries have been deliberately working to entrap and bleed Russia.” Another high-placed commentator put it this way: “If we do not draw the line now, Russia is finished.”

Suddenly, major Russian media, which had heaped abuse on the Russian Army in the first Chechnya war and spread cynicism and defeatism, now applaud the heroism of the Russian forces and the virtues of patriotism! Yet, whoever speculates on the swings in Russian public opinion at this moment, is playing with fire. The much-touted rise in popularity polls of the colorless Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, eclipsing Primakov for the time being as the most popular Presidential prospect, is purely a by-product of Putin’s association with

“drawing the line” on Chechnya. Putin could easily be dropped and replaced by a completely different figure, as one of an array of possible pathways of events in the near future. The closing of ranks might be channeled in a positive direction, but might also be the instrument of a “Pinochet option” that could ultimately lead to World War III. Such an option might also be accelerated, rather than hindered, in the event that the “springing of the Chechnya trap” leads to massive losses among the Russian forces. Dangerous times!

A winning coalition?

Against this backdrop, the upcoming Duma elections constitute a branching point. The Communist Party of the Russian Federation under Gennadi Zyuganov, which is by far the largest single electoral force in the country, can expect a strong showing, perhaps significantly better than in 1995. This would assure the CPRF again the most influential posts in the new Parliament. Much will also depend on the outcome of the Duma election for the Otechestvo-Vsya Rossiya (Fatherland-All Russia, or OVR) bloc led by Primakov, the second-largest grouping. A broad “center-left” alliance based on the CPRF and OVR, as natural partners, could gain sufficient strength to push through a change of government after the Duma election. This prospect is already playing a major role in the power struggle behind the scenes.

It should be remembered that Primakov himself became Prime Minister in September 1998 as a result of a Communist-dominated Duma’s refusal to approve Al Gore’s favorite, Viktor Chernomyrdin, and that CPRF members such as the highly respected industrial organizer Yuri Maslyukov had prominent positions in Primakov’s government. The relative success of that government—the first to significantly slow, and partly reverse the “free fall” of Russia toward chaos—rested, above all, on the personal role of Primakov as a figure capable of bringing together many disparate forces in the country. Whatever his pragmatic weaknesses, Primakov’s period in office was the first time since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, that a sense of nation-state government (as opposed to a semi-colonial agency of foreign financial interests and corrupt Russian oligarchs) began to develop. This is doubtless the reason for raving mass-media attacks against Primakov at the time, whose sudden removal by Yeltsin was prominently predicted and applauded, before the fact, by the British press in particular.

Economics is key

In fact, apart from the extreme wing of the CPRF, there is principled agreement among the forces led by Zyuganov and Primakov concerning a core of policies required to bring Russia back on its feet. Both are united in rejection of the neo-liberal “free market” model, and often cite the example of Franklin Roosevelt’s policies for overcoming the Great Depression of the 1930s. While opposing a revival of the Soviet

command economy, both stress the indispensable role of state intervention into the economy, of certain regulatory and protectionist measures and state investments in the real economy, and promotion of scientific research and selected high-technology sectors of industry.

The base of agreement has surely broadened, thanks to the work of the prominent young economist Sergei Glazyev in reshaping the programmatic material of the CPRF. Most recently, on Dec. 1, Glazyev called for Russia to decline to accept any further credits from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), on the grounds that each dollar of credits accepted, cost the Russian economy \$15 in capital flight and other losses, caused by IMF conditionalities. Glazyev, whose views are broadly coherent with Lyndon LaRouche's notion of physical economy, is running as a non-member of the party, on the CPRF slate.

In a commentary in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* on Nov. 30, Russian political analyst Andrei Fyodorov noted that Glazyev's input had contributed to the steadily improving election position of the CPRF, which has experienced a significant expansion of its voter base as the crisis year 1998 brought further proof of the disastrous effects of neo-liberal "reforms." Exploiting its nation-wide infrastructure, the CPRF has successfully concentrated on building a mass base in the regions. On its side, the OVR has significant support within Russia's institutions and industry, in the regional structures of government, as well as a certain mass base of its own.

While it is quite conceivable that Primakov will indeed become President of Russia, he is not the only option being considered by what might be characterized as the "patriotic faction" in the country — including by Primakov himself. Primakov and his circles are leaving options open, out of overriding concern that a transition to a post-Yeltsin era be accomplished lawfully and without an outbreak of violence which would greatly damage the prospects for an early recovery in the country. Several Russian media have carried reports on negotiations between Primakov, his electoral partner Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, and Prime Minister Putin, concerning a possible arrangement whereby, in the interest of the country as a whole, the first two might support a Putin Presidency. According to reports, the conditions would include the granting of leading posts to Primakov and Luzhkov, and the political demise of oligarch and financial manipulator Boris Berezovsky. So far, there are no indications that such a compromise has actually been reached. As is the case for many figures in the Russian political situation, the ultimate allegiance of Putin, who was installed to replace Primakov following the latter's sudden removal by Yeltsin, is at best questionable.

Battle against the 'oligarchs'

There is a real possibility that the Duma elections will pave the way to the consolidation of a government oriented

toward the real national interests of Russia, against the so-called "oligarchs" and the degenerate "Family" around Yeltsin, and aligned internationally with the tendencies LaRouche has referred to as the Survivors' Club.

The battle is long from having been won, however. The power of oligarchs, such as Primakov's arch-enemy Berezovsky, however precarious in some respects, remains unbroken. There remains the wild card, represented by the unpredictable, labile Yeltsin. Nothing, perhaps, symptomizes the dangers more clearly, than the recent, ominous resurfacing of the free-market lunatic Anatoli Chubais on the Russian political scene. Chubais represents the most dangerous British-centered oligarchical forces internationally.

Probably the most hated man in Russia, because of his orchestration of the mass privatization swindle and other so-called "reforms," Chubais has kept a relatively low political profile, while holding a highly sensitive, strategic position as head of the Russian's United Energy Company. But in recent weeks, this person, infamous for having handed Russia's financial and economic sovereignty over to the IMF on behalf of foreign interests, has been profiling himself as a radical nationalist! So, for example, Chubais loudly denounced Yabloko Party leader Grigori Yavlinsky to the press as a "traitor," for proposing a negotiated settlement in Chechnya. Most ominous are reports, that Chubais is already a key member of a team working behind the scenes to make Putin the next President, as the oligarchy's "solution" to the succession to Yeltsin. Discussed in the press, among other variants, is a modified "Pinochet" scenario in which Putin, who has been profiled as close to the generals, would emerge on top of an open or behind-the-scenes military coup.

Regardless of this or that scenario, Chubais has openly spoken in favor of an anti-constitutional "coup from the top." Russian legal expert Valeri Gladko warned in a Nov. 27 article, of the "tragic dimensions" of developments that could "eliminate any prospect of a democratic development in Russia." Gladko wrote: "The great 'democrat' and 'reformist,' propagator of the 'American way of life' Anatoli Chubais, declared in a public interview to the *B-Daily* that Putin has some additional options for becoming President. They will depend on the outcome of the Duma elections 'in case of a victory of the Communists and in case of a victory of the OVR.' Assuming that the future Duma might remove the Putin government, this true follower of everything from the West, forgetting that Russia is not America, declared in the best sense of 'Democracy,' that there are 'legal tricks, which would permit the head of government to stay in power even without the support of Parliament' "!

Self-styled "oligarch" Berezovsky was also unabashed in endorsing a "Putin option" against a Primakov-Luzhkov-Zyuganov alliance. In an interview in November with the business newspaper *Kommersant* (which he recently bought), Berezovsky referred to the increased popularity of Putin, and

said: "We remember quite well that four or five months ago, our choice was quite limited—among those who did not believe that the situation could be altered. This was a choice between the Communists and Luzhkov-Primakov. Both are bad. But, as no other choice was seen, most of society was choosing one or the other of them. . . . I'll not tell you a secret if I tell you that in 1996, not all the oligarchs chose Yeltsin immediately. This happened after a lengthy discussion among ourselves. Today, only half a year after the situation I've described, there is certainly a clear understanding that Putin is a person who should be supported both by society and by the oligarchs."

Here Berezovsky's rantings cover up the reality, that the Russian "oligarchs" do not represent any real independent power in themselves. From the very beginning, Berezovsky et al. have existed only at the pleasure of forces outside Russia, first of all London. Indeed, it was the Anglo-American circles, typified by the role of the "Prince of Thieves" Robert Strauss, the former U.S. Ambassador to Moscow, and the Bush-Thatcher combination, who set up the whole shock therapy gambit by which Berezovsky and other petty thieves were able to accumulate their vast wealth in the first place. And even today—whatever Berezovsky might imagine in his megalomaniacal fantasies—he could easily end up like British publisher and wheeler-dealer Robert Maxwell, who was found floating face down in the water near his yacht in 1991, at the moment his London masters found him no longer useful.

Hence, the resumed outbreak of open war between Berezovsky and Primakov, and the intense attacks against Luzhkov in the Russian mass media, are ultimately expressions of a battle for the national sovereignty of Russia. That includes the key British role in orchestrating the whole conflict scenario in the Caucasus and Central Asia, as part of a plan for the total dismemberment of Russia. Unfortunately, Primakov and others have so far failed to identify the British enemy in a clear and forceful manner.

The Survivors' Club

A most interesting singularity, however, is the extraordinary visit by Primakov to Paris on Nov. 27-28, following on earlier visits by Primakov and Zyuganov to Germany. The latest visit fell in the middle of revolt in continental Europe against the multiple insanity represented by the Blair government in Britain and the Brzezinskite geopolitics of U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Secretary of Defense William Cohen, et al. in the United States (see "Europe Takes Steps Toward the Survivors' Club," *EIR*, Nov. 19, 1999). In fact, the explicit rejection of Blair's neoliberal "Third Way," in favor of a return to the dirigistic economic policies which guided the postwar reconstruction of Western Europe, on the part of French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin and Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine, and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's dirigistic interven-

tion to save the Holzmann company, are entirely coherent with the orientation of Primakov and his allies in Russia. The enthusiastic reception given to Zyuganov in Germany, somewhat earlier, is also indicative.

Arriving in France as a private citizen, Primakov was greeted at the airport by the Presidential Guard, in honors normally granted only to heads of state. After a one-hour meeting with French President Jacques Chirac, Primakov declared that Chirac had shown himself "a true friend of Russia." "I informed the French President about the battle against terrorism in Chechnya, stressing the necessity of military measures to annihilate the potential of the terrorists, as well as the fact, that these measures enjoy the full support of the Russian society," Primakov said in a Paris press conference after the meeting. "Everyone asks: Why aren't you negotiating? But I ask them, Whom should we speak to? Please name them, help us. No one can. . . . In Chechnya there are no sound forces with whom one can sit around a negotiating table and talk about the future of Chechnya."

At the same time, Primakov had spoken of the attempts by "anti-Russian forces abroad, to use the Chechnya problem as a pretext for surrounding Russia with a new 'Iron Curtain.'" Clearly referring to Berezovsky, Primakov remarked that "certain forces inside Russia" were working in the same direction; forces constituted by "people who have become *personae non grata* in the West" by virtue of the "shady sources of their wealth." Russian television reports indicated that Primakov had sought the cooperation of the French in actions to neutralize Berezovsky and other unsavory "Russian oligarchs."

There may also be a link between Primakov's visit and certain indications, that patriotic circles in Russia have been sounding out the possibility of arranging safe asylum and immunity guarantees for the Yeltsin "Family" outside Russia, in exchange for their acquiescence to a peaceful transfer of power.

Shortly after his return from France, Primakov held for the first time ever an Internet press conference, in which he responded to questions posed jointly by a Russian and American audience. This event, which was webcasted in the United States by the Internet company MSNBC, obviously represented an attempt by Primakov to reach out to the United States. In keeping with the request of the program sponsors, Primakov kept his answers all too short, never approaching the intellectual depth of LaRouche's recent, pioneering webcasts. Nevertheless, Primakov showed himself as a world statesman of a quality far above LaRouche's competitors in the Democratic and Republican parties.

Particularly impressive was Primakov's insistence that a new Cold War can and must be prevented. The line to be drawn, is not between East and West, but rather between sanity and the kinds of insane policies which are plunging the whole world into a dark age.