

The Military in Soviet Politics

By Raymond L. Garthoff

THE LATEST KREMLIN COUP has unleashed a wave of speculations about the role of "the Army", "the military", "the Marshals", and of Marshal Zhukov personally, in Soviet politics. At this time of writing (November 1), the facts are not yet sufficiently clear to permit an analysis of the factors involved in Zhukov's sudden removal as Defense Minister. It may be useful, however, to examine some aspects of the underlying problem: What is the institutional position of the "Army" in Soviet society; how has that position changed in the past four years; and what have been the evidences of its changing political role? Further, does the military leadership represent a cohesive political force, and if so what conditions its political viewpoint? Finally, what appears to be the course ahead in view of the breakdown of the Khrushchev-Zhukov political alliance?

The Soviet military establishment or Army (this term will be used below to cover the whole defense organization of ground, sea and air forces) differs little in its general institutional features from those of other countries. It is technically an arm of the executive branch of the government, specifically of the Defense Ministry. It commands the weapons of national defense, which at the same time constitute the regime's ultimate "persuader" for enforcing its will internally. It is composed of a permanent caste of officers and an annually changing slice of the population over which the leadership caste exercises powerful rights of discipline and control.

These features admittedly are not peculiar to the Soviet Army, but in a totalitarian society their political impact is quite different from what it is under a democratic system. In a democracy political power is exercised by a government responsible to the electorate or its freely-chosen legislative representatives, and the armed forces, fully controlled by the government, are not, as such, a contender for political supremacy. In a totalitarian society, on the other hand, the locus of political power is determined, not by fixed and orderly procedures, but by a continuing struggle for supremacy in which the upper hand, and hence controlling power, may shift from one man

or group of men or from one competing institution to another. The relative strength, cohesiveness and élan of an institution, be it the party, secret police, government bureaucracy or army, thus are vital factors in the power struggle and tend to have a decisive impact whenever the struggle becomes particularly acute. This is why, with the rivalry for Stalin's succession still in full swing, the Soviet Army's characteristic features have thrust it inevitably into a position of major importance in the struggle for political supremacy.

ONE SUCH FEATURE is adherence to its own traditions, many of which antedate the Soviet regime. Past Russian military achievements, whether under the Tsars or since the Revolution, are held in high regard by the officer corps and inspire in it a particular sense of national patriotism. This patriotic feeling within the Army is reflected in the view of the Army held by the people at large. It is genuinely popular among them in a way that the officially supreme institution, the party, is not.

Even Stalin, who sought to keep the Army subservient to his autocratic control, found it expedient on occasion to acknowledge and cater to the Army's pride in its own military and patriotic traditions. His wartime invocation of the deeds of Tsarist military heroes such as Suvorov—certainly incongruous from the standpoint of party ideology—is a case in point. Stalin made other concessions to military *esprit de corps*. The epaulettes proudly worn by Soviet officers were originally proposed by Marshal Tukhachevsky, and though Stalin liquidated Tukhachevsky, he later adopted this and other practices favored by the professional officers.

A relatively marked degree of cultural and social in-breeding has also contributed toward building up in the officer corps a sense of cohesiveness and group solidarity. Members of the military caste even tend to marry within the group: for example, Marshal Zhukov's two daughters are married to Marshal Vasilevsky's son and the nephew of Marshal Voroshilov.

The marked elevation of the Army's relative standing in national affairs has been brought about primarily by the great changes that have occurred in the political balance of Soviet institutions in the last four years. The death of Stalin was, of course, the first and most far-reaching of these changes, for with the disappearance of the all-

Mr. Garthoff is a specialist in Soviet military affairs and author of Soviet Military Doctrine, The Free Press (Glencoe, Illinois), 1953. His next book, Soviet Strategy in the Nuclear Age, is scheduled for publication by Frederick A. Praeger (New York) in 1958.

powerful autocrat, all other major Soviet institutions automatically gained greater significance, at the same time becoming participants in the ensuing struggle for political dominance.

The Army was even more directly affected by the second major change in the institutional balance of power, the purge of Beria. In the wake of Stalin's death Beria attempted to use the secret police as a direct instrument to further his own political ambitions. His elimination as a result of a successful political combination against him was followed by a drastic reduction of the powers of the secret police, and hence of its importance as a political institution. The Army naturally was a principal beneficiary of the downgrading of its only rival with tools of violence at its command.

THE THIRD development was the emergence, during Malenkov's two-year premiership, of a contest for supremacy between the government and party bureaucracies. Malenkov's attempt to bolster the power of the government bureaucracy (including the entire economic administration) at the expense of the party apparatus may have been an expedient to counteract his loss of the key post of party secretary in mid-March 1953, although there are also grounds for believing (as this writer does) that he would have acted in the same way even if he had retained simultaneous control of the party apparatus. In any event, it appears essentially true, as his accusers charged at the time of his ouster from the premiership in February 1955, that Malenkov sought to place the government over the party; hence, his defeat necessarily meant a weakening of the government apparatus and a reaffirmation of party supremacy. In late 1956 and early 1957, there were signs of a resurgence of the Malenkov forces and of a new attempt by them to secure a strengthening of the government economic bureaucracy. The adoption of Khrushchev's decentralization plan last May, however, signalled the crushing of this attempt, and the victory of the party forces was further underlined and consolidated by Khrushchev's *coup* in June 1957.

The party, of course, was not only a contender in these political struggles and readjustments, but also the arena of conflict. The figures who "represented" the contending institutions—Beria, Malenkov, Khrushchev and Zhukov—were all members of the party leadership, and the formation and shifts of factional alignments within the party organs, particularly in the Presidium and Central Committee, were the key maneuvers in the battle. The inevitable result of this combined institutional and intra-party struggle was that the opposing forces sought to swing the balance, each in its own favor, by enlisting the aid of the most important outside element, the Army, which thus found itself propelled—whether voluntarily or involuntarily—into a position of steadily mounting political influence.

The Army's increasing importance as a political factor was evident from the part it played in each of the three earlier major political crises since Stalin's death—the overthrow of Beria, the deposition of Malenkov, and Khrushchev's smashing of the Malenkov-Molotov forces in the dramatic Central Committee showdown last June. While

the exact details of the role played by the military in Beria's elimination are not known, all the available evidence indicates that it was decisive. Some reports credit Marshals Zhukov and Konev with personally carrying out Beria's arrest. Be this as it may, it is a known fact that Army units were moved into Moscow from outside military districts on the night of the arrest. Furthermore, immediately after Beria's fall, the military received a number of conspicuous rewards, including the first high-level promotions granted since the end of the war.

The Army's hand was equally apparent in the deposition of Malenkov. In this instance, the military leaders took direct political action by casting their votes against Malenkov at the January 1955 Plenum of the Central Committee—the first time that this organ had played a politically significant role since 1934. But the crucial importance of the Army's role was even more convincingly, if indirectly, demonstrated by the prompt action of the succeeding Khrushchev-Bulganin leadership to satisfy military demands for the maintenance of defense appropriations, military industry and the stockpiling of reserves—all which had been slighted by Malenkov. The Army was also given a new series of high-level promotions, as well as direct control of the Defense Ministry, through the appointment of Marshal Zhukov as Defense Minister.

In the June 1957 crisis, which culminated in the destruction of the anti-Khrushchev alliance, the Army again was instrumental. Marshal Zhukov is known to have given strong support to Khrushchev's insistence upon carrying the fight from the Presidium, where the opposition forces were in the majority, to the Central Committee, controlled by Khrushchev. Not only was Zhukov's voice a powerful influence in the plenary Central Committee proceedings, but in subsequent public statements "on behalf of the Armed Forces" he pledged continued support to the party leadership, meaning the present leadership under Khrushchev's strengthened personal grip.

FROM ALL THIS it was clear that the Army, as an institution, had become an increasingly important factor in Soviet political life. But the Army operates in politics only through its leaders. It is therefore necessary to examine these leaders—"the Marshals"—both as a group and, to the extent that may be relevant, as individual political figures.

Although the Army command is a typically hierarchic structure embracing thousands of officers, the real political leadership resides in a small coterie numbering, in all, only about a dozen men: the Defense Minister, his principal deputies, and a few other senior marshals who wield important authority by reason either of their official positions or of high personal influence. These leaders show a general cohesiveness of viewpoint, based largely on their common professional experience, associations and interests. They have made their careers in the Army and long been identified with it. They have also developed long and close associations with one another in the military service. Their common self-interest as professional soldiers is a particularly strong factor tending to produce a unified political viewpoint, especially in regard to issues affecting military security.

This cohesiveness, of course, is also subject to some

limitations. The Army is not immune from factionalism, and there are personal rivalries among the Marshals—some already known and doubtless others which are hidden from view. Some of the leaders appear to be more politically and party-minded, while others are inclined more toward an apolitical and purely professional line of conduct. There have been, in recent years, a few instances in which conflicting currents within the top echelons of the Army became quite evident. Most notably, in 1953, when the military leaders generally backed Malenkov in the move to eliminate Beria, Colonel General Artemev, then commandant of the Moscow Military District, and at least two other generals were accused of being in league with the secret police head and suffered the same fate that he did. In the subsequent 1954 conflict between the Malenkov and Khrushchev factions, the Army leadership was evidently united in supporting the latter; but, after Malenkov's deposition, there again were signs of an incipient divergence of views. While the majority of the leaders, including Marshal Zhukov, sought to stand aloof from intra-party factional alignments, a minority group, most prominently Marshals Konev and Moskalenko, manifested a tendency to go further in support of Khrushchev. (For example, Konev backed Khrushchev's efforts to have the history of the war rewritten to give greater prominence to the latter's wartime military record.)¹ The danger of a new factional split receded in 1956, however, as Marshal Zhukov was again drawn into an active role in support of Khrushchev and emerged as the unquestioned leader and spokesman of a temporarily united Army leadership.

MEMBERSHIP on the Central Committee of the party is an important index of the political standing of senior military officers, and it has also become practically more significant because of the recent tendency toward greater Central Committee participation in political decision-making. The membership, as elected in 1956, included six full members and twelve candidate members from the military (one additional full member may have been added, though this is not certain). The full members were Marshals Zhukov, Konev, Sokolovsky, Vasilevsky, Malinovsky, Moskalenko (and possibly Rokossovsky). All except Moskalenko² were "natural" selections by virtue of their military positions—Zhukov as Defense Minister and the others as his first deputies. The twelve candidate members were all senior officers from the next lower level of the High Command, but they included several who previously were associated with Khrushchev and presumably were "acceptable" to him.

A striking feature of the 1956-57 military representation on the Central Committee was that, for the first time, it included no senior officers from the Army Political Admin-

istration, which had undergone a steady decline in importance since 1951, but especially since Stalin's death.³ The effect of this was to make the Army's voice in the Central Committee more representative of the strictly military point of view, and while the military representation is not large, the number of votes it wielded was hardly indicative of its actual influence in a system where numerical voting strength is conspicuously misleading.

THE RISE OF THE ARMY as an institutional force in Soviet politics had, until Zhukov's dismissal, been paralleled by his own personal rise. Zhukov was raised to the rank of first deputy minister (one of three) immediately after Stalin's death and in 1953, at the same Central Committee session which decided Beria's expulsion and arrest, was elected to fill the latter's seat on the committee. After Malenkov's deposition he became, as Defense Minister, the Army's administrative chief and top political representative. After the Twentieth CPSU Congress he became a candidate member of the party's highest organ, the Central Committee Presidium, and finally won full membership in the shake-up of last June. Zhukov was the first genuine professional military officer ever accorded a regular seat on the Presidium.

The question arises to what extent Zhukov's rise reflected the growing political importance of the Army as an institution, and to what extent it was due to his own reputation and influence as a popular war hero and the deliberate pursuit of personal political ambitions. Undoubtedly the latter played an important part, but in the author's view Zhukov achieved his temporary preeminence primarily as representative and spokesman of "the military" as a group. Indicative of this is the fact that the other military leaders and the Army generally were accorded more favorable status with each successive step upward in Zhukov's career. Zhukov, as the Army's leader had both benefited from its heightened importance and at the same acted primarily with a view to satisfying its needs and desires.

There is no incontrovertible indication that the Army's rise was spurred by a deliberate desire on the part of Zhukov and his colleagues to seek political power for its own sake. They have been concerned, above all, with assuring the military security of the Soviet Union, for which they are personally responsible. But this seemingly non-political concern for security requirements and the military posture of the Soviet state is precisely what has led the Army leadership to endorse certain policies and oppose others, and thus to become involved in factional political struggles. As noted earlier, it was Malenkov's attempt to benefit Soviet consumers at the expense of heavy and defense industry and of strategic stockpiling that impelled the military to enter the political arena in support of Khrushchev. Similarly, the Army's influence probably was a decisive factor both in the Soviet decision to intervene in Hungary in October-November 1956, and in Moscow's continuing resistance to any reasonable disarmament proposals

¹ This campaign started early in 1955 with increasing public mention of Khrushchev (a military commissar with the rank of lieutenant general during the war) and a few other selected party figures as having served "at the front". Konev even changed the usual alphabetical listing of these names to place Khrushchev ahead of the others. There was also an effort to credit Khrushchev with an important role in the Battle of Stalingrad.

² Moskalenko, a virtually unknown colonel general in 1952, became commandant of the Moscow Military District following Beria's arrest and the removal of Artemev, and still holds this post. He was promoted in rank in 1953 and again in 1955, and became a Central Committee member in 1956. He is known as a Khrushchev supporter.

³ In 1951 the authority of political officers was weakened by a secret decree reemphasizing unified command. In late 1955, political officers were abolished at company level, and there have been indications that the practice of having "deputy commanders" from the Political Administration at higher levels may also be discontinued. The previous Central Committee, elected in 1952, included three military members from the Political Administration.

from the West. It may well prove to be a policy issue, as yet unrevealed, which led Khrushchev to purge Zhukov.

Thus, even though the Marshals do not appear to be motivated by political ambition *per se*, they are clearly conscious of their ability to wield political power when their interests demand it. Had this power not been brought to bear on his behalf, Khrushchev might very well have failed to achieve his most decisive victory in the June showdown against the Malenkov-Molotov majority in the party Presidium.

WHAT EFFECT IS Zhukov's removal likely to have on the Army's future role in Soviet politics? For one thing, the military have learned that the exercise of political power entails risks and pitfalls as well as advantages. Zhukov's ouster as Defense Minister, followed by his expulsion from the party Central Committee and the top-level CC Presidium, seems to foreshadow a new status for the Army in which it will no longer be given the opportunity to act as a cohesive, powerful political force rivaling the party. To be sure, it will not cease to exert considerable influence in matters directly bearing on national security and will continue to be at least a potential force of great importance in Soviet politics. For the time being, however, it cannot hope to play the same decisive role in the power struggle and in the determination of policy that it attained under Zhukov's leadership.

As of this moment, we do not know the precise reasons for Zhukov's ouster, even though their general character is clear enough. We may never know all the causes. So far, the principal charge levelled at Zhukov—not without some basis—is that he attempted to place the Army outside the party's control by curbing the work of the Political Administration and of the party organizations in the Army. It is unlikely, however, that this alone would have impelled Khrushchev to darken the fortieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution by yet another revelation of disunity at the highest level of the Soviet leadership. Zhukov's efforts to restrict party interference in Army affairs furnished Khrushchev with his most

convenient and plausible justification for acting against the Army leader. But it remains to be seen whether later disclosures will not lay bare other important conflicts.

One can safely surmise that an underlying motive behind Khrushchev's action was his wariness concerning Marshal Zhukov's rising personal power and popularity. When Zhukov brought his "heavy artillery" to the support of Khrushchev in the June 1957 political crisis, it was not hard for the party chief to imagine a future crisis in which the same guns might be turned against him. Dependence on Zhukov seriously hampered his freedom of action,⁴ hence it was logical for Khrushchev to seek an end to this dependence. What better way to achieve this than to separate Zhukov from his base of power in the Army?

The selection of Marshal Malinovsky to replace Zhukov suggests some interesting hypotheses concerning Khrushchev's tactics. Had Khrushchev selected a Marshal already identified as his close political supporter, such as Marshal Konev, or especially Marshal Moskalenko—the rest of the military leadership might have taken it as a sign of an impending general purge of their ranks, and might have been tempted to rally more solidly to the support of Zhukov. By choosing the relatively uncommitted Malinovsky (third-ranking military chief under Zhukov) Khrushchev probably hoped to minimize this danger. If this was indeed the case, Khrushchev's very action implied his recognition of the increased importance of the military and his assurance that he does not seek to deny the Army its "proper" influence. How this influence will express itself in the future remains to be seen, but there is little doubt that it will be less weighty and less powerful than it was during Zhukov's short-lived tenure as head and spokesman of the Soviet armed forces.

⁴ It is significant that Khrushchev's economic decentralization plan, as finally adopted, made a conspicuous exception of defense industry, administration of which has been still further centralized in the Ministry of Defense Industry. This exception was not contained in Khrushchev's original proposal.

Cults of Personalities and the Soviet Cinema

Let us take, for instance, our historical and military films . . . they make us feel sick . . . Let us recall the film, "The Fall of Berlin." Here only Stalin acts; he issues orders in the hall in which there are many empty chairs. . . . And where is the military command? Where is the Political Bureau? Where is the Government? What are they doing and with what are they engaged? There is nothing about them in the film. Stalin acts for everybody; he does not reckon with anyone; he asks no one for advice. Everything is shown to the nation in this false light. Why? In order to surround Stalin with glory, contrary to the facts and contrary to historical truth.

—From Khrushchev's speech at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, February 25, 1956.

Comrade Zhukov had a hand also in the script of the film "The Stalingrad Battle." In the new version of this film . . . everything related to the Stalin cult has been removed, but Zhukov occupies an utterly undeserved place. In the text of the film . . . appear words, personally introduced by Zhukov, that the planning and preparation of the Stalingrad offensive operation were directed by the Deputy Supreme Commander, Army General Zhukov, and also the representative of Headquarters, Colonel General Vasilevsky. Scenes picturing Zhukov in battles near Moscow and Berlin were included in this film artificially and without any connection with events.

—From a statement by Marshal Ivan S. Konev published in Pravda, November 3, 1957.

East Germany's Intellectuals—A Note

By F. L. Carsten

THE SOVIET ZONE of Germany has been noticeably less affected by post-Stalin liberalization trends than any other country in the Soviet orbit. Walter Ulbricht, who was brought back from Moscow in a Soviet plane following the Nazi collapse, has remained firmly in the political saddle ever since he became secretary of the Communist "Socialist Unity Party" (SED) in 1950, and his power has been newly reaffirmed by the kiss bestowed on him by Khrushchev during the latter's recent visit to East Berlin. There could be no more obedient servant of Soviet interests, no one more willing to trim his sails to the slightest breeze blowing from Moscow. His blind imitation of everything Soviet, his narrow-minded and authoritarian attitude even toward his own collaborators and subordinates, and his complete ignorance and contempt for anything intellectual have had a particularly blighting effect on all aspects of East German life. These traits were apparent long ago. In the period of the popular front against Nazi terror, the prominent German left-wing writer, Heinrich Mann, remarked with regard to Ulbricht that it was impossible to deal with a man who would declare a table to be a duck-pond and demand that others subscribe to his assertion.

With such a man at the helm, it is not surprising that the regime's policies *vis-a-vis* intellectuals are at once uncompromisingly Stalinist and reminiscent of the equally oppressive attitudes of nazism. This is best illustrated in the literary field by the fact that an almost total unknown named Kurt Barthel (who uses the pseudonym of Kuba) was made secretary general of the Writers' Association and honored with a "national prize" for his ode to the executed Communist leader, Ernst Thaelmann, ending in the words:

**Thaelmann und Thaelmann vor allen,
Deutschlands unsterblicher Sohn,
Thaelmann ist niemals gefallen,
Stimme und Faust der Nation.**

(Thaelmann and Thaelmann before all others, Germany's immortal son, Thaelmann did not die but lives on, the voice and fist of the nation.)

But it is not only in its officially-sponsored "poetry" that the Communist regime has revived the spirit of the Nazis' Horst Wessel. When unrest broke out among the students of Berlin University in response to the Polish and Hungarian revolts of late 1956, Kurt Hager, a secretary of the SED Central Committee, threatened before the assembled senate

of the university that he would mobilize the party's combat groups and have the students "knocked to pieces"—tantamount to a re-enactment of the terrorism of Hitler's "brown-shirts."¹ Such threats, however, have only served to fan the smoldering fires of protest among students and intellectuals—the latter including some leading Communist scholars—against the regime's ignorant intolerance and attempts to suppress all critical discussion.

THE SPECTACULAR repudiation of Stalinism by the Twentieth CPSU Congress had inspired fresh hopes in intellectual circles for a relaxation and for a change in the policy and leadership of the SED. The shattering of these hopes was profoundly disillusioning, and the ferment in the student and intellectual ranks reached new heights under the impact of events in Poland and Hungary. There were close contacts between some German writers and the Petöfi Club in Budapest, as well as between German and Polish intellectuals. At the universities students were demanding fewer lectures on Marxism-Leninism, an end to the compulsory teaching of Russian (as in Hungary), reestablishment of independent student associations, and termination of the organizational monopoly enjoyed by the Communist Free German Youth. Soviet suppression of the revolt in Hungary evoked widespread expressions of sympathy for the Hungarian people; numerous meetings took place at which silence was observed in honor of the Hungarian dead; students at Halle printed leaflets supporting the Hungarian fight for freedom and destroyed portraits of Ulbricht; Dresden high-school students distributed handbills urging workers to strike in sympathy with Hungary; and in Berlin itself meetings were organized to voice student demands.

There were other developments of still greater significance. Within the SED dissident elements formed an opposition group aiming at replacement of the Stalinist party leadership and seeking to establish contact with similarly-inclined Communist groups in other countries of the Soviet bloc. By wresting control away from Stalinists of the Ulbricht type, the oppositionists hoped to pave the way for a far-reaching reform of the party from the inside. They adhered to Marxism-Leninism as their point of departure but wanted to broaden this theoretical base by absorbing in it some of the concepts of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Kautsky, of Trotsky and Bukharin; they also favored borrowing from the experience of Yugoslavia, particularly in regard to workers' councils, and from Polish and Chinese discussions

Mr. Carsten is a lecturer in modern history at the University of London and author of *The Origins of Prussia* (Oxford University Press, London, 1954).

¹ Hager's declaration is quoted in an article by Alfred Kantorowicz, "Warum Ich Ging" (Why I Left), *Die Zeit* (West Berlin), September 19, 1957.