

# Return of the old Soviet Guard

By J. Michael Waller

Having named one of the masterminds of Soviet support for Middle Eastern terrorism and the paymaster of CIA traitor Aldrich Ames to be foreign minister of Russia, Russian President Boris Yeltsin has sent another signal that things are getting worse.

Press reports announcing Mr. Primakov's appointment characterize him as a noted journalist, scholar and reader of poetry and detective stories who, despite a less-than-progressive world view, is thankfully a "pragmatist." In reality, Mr. Primakov represents the worst of the surviving Soviet old guard and an unbroken continuity with Russia's terrible foreign policy past.

A "journalist" in the Middle East for the Communist Party's Pravda mouthpiece in the late 1960s and a longtime KGB asset, Mr. Primakov was part of the "Zionism is racism" chorus in support of the destruction of Israel. His knowledge, contacts and political savvy led him to become a key part of the Brezhnev regime's foreign policy machinery.

Mr. Primakov was a principal force behind the Soviet strategy of propping up radical anti-Western states in the Middle East and employment them, along with militant Palestinian groups, as surrogates for terrorism against Israel and her allies, particularly the United States. He justified the Palestine Liberation Organization's terrorist violence as a necessary part of the "general popular struggle... for the liberation of occupied territory." For him, the PLO was important because of the "anti-imperialist" — that is, anti-American — nature of its war; he intervened personally to patch up splits within the organization. Likewise, he opposed the Iran-Iraq war because, "It diverts the forces of Iran and Iraq from the struggle against imperialism. It promotes the strengthening of certain trends which are needed by the United States in the region as a whole, and so forth, and is needed, naturally, by Israel."

His more conciliatory glasnost-era rhetoric had limits. At one point, he said Moscow sought to cooperate with the United States in fighting international terrorism, but opposed the idea of sanctions against regimes such as that of Moammar Gadhafi in Libya. He

even opposed leveraging Soviet aid to discourage terrorism. Noting continued Soviet weapons shipments to Mr. Gadhafi, he said, "We don't make any conditions for the use of these arms and we're not going to trade off some conditions with Libya."

Mr. Primakov was Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's main patron in the Soviet government. After Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, Mr. Primakov tried to undermine then-Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's attempts to bring the Soviet Union into the U.S.-led

Desert Shield coalition, then tried to prevent the military offensive against Saddam by offering a phony last-minute "peace" proposal. A non-voting member of the Soviet Politburo, he was named head of the KGB First Chief Directorate — the foreign espionage apparatus — after the 1991 coup attempt, and remained in charge when it was transferred from the Soviet government to the Russian Federation and renamed the External Intelligence Service (SVR). He remained loyal to the Communist Party until the very end, "suspending" his membership on becoming intelligence chief to appear apolitical, but not publicly resigning.

Lamenting the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mr. Primakov has been pushing for the re-integration of former Soviet republics under Kremlin control. In September 1994, he announced the inevitability of a Moscow-dominated empire and challenged the West to defy it. (To the contrary, the Clinton administration has gone along.) He repeated the point just as forcefully in a major interview three weeks ago.

Russia's new foreign minister has the practical experience to underscore his seriousness. Six years ago, as the Soviet Union was unraveling, Moscow staged a vicious campaign to keep the pro-Western Popular Front from winning presidential elections in Azerbaijan. As a result, 130 civilians were killed and 700 injured. An investigation by the Azerbaijani parliament concluded the Mr. Primakov was the "main organizer and inspiration" of the violence.

Just as he did when becoming

KGB intelligence chief, Mr. Primakov continues to speak of cooperation with the West in the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime. The facts reveal his insincerity. His real view on terrorism speaks for itself; last year, he began to train Iranian intelligence officers. Russia's anti-drug cooperation with the United States has been riddled with duplicity, thanks to Mr. Primakov's SVR; one of the top CIA officials working on counternarcotics in the Black Sea region was Aldrich Ames.

The new foreign minister's stated commitment to fight organized crime is also questionable. When a Russian parliamentary commission led by Lev Ponomarev found that the foreign intelligence service helped run a multibillion-dollar money-laundering operation between 1989 and 1991, lawmakers sought Mr. Primakov's help to recover the funds to finance economic reform. Commission investigator Alexei Surkov said in his report to parliament, "[W]e had to get help... primarily from Yevgeny Maksimovich Primakov and his service. He should have all this in his archives, where all this is scrupulously recorded." But Mr. Primakov would not help. Instead, he persuaded parliamentary leaders to terminate the investigation and disband the commission, and rebuffed similar information requests from the state prosecutor. The money was never recovered. Western aid helped make up the difference.

The Clinton administration, cheerfully yielding to Moscow's every push, is ill-equipped to face Foreign Minister Primakov. This coldest of the communist Cold Warriors seems poised to wrest what is left of American leadership in the world for an increasingly bellicose and unstable Russia. No wonder ultranationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy praised Mr. Primakov as the "best possible candidate" for the job.

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*J. Michael Waller is vice president of the American Foreign Policy Council, and author of "Secret Empire: The KGB in Russia Today" (Westview, 1994).*

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