



## **'The Expansion Process Has Begun' Russia's imperial ambitions are alive and well**

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"Transnistria's integration into Russia will proceed in several phases, and it may take 5 to 7 years," said the break-away Moldovan region's foreign minister, Valery Litskai, to Russia's Interfax news agency earlier this month. "Russian society is now ready to expand beyond the . . . borders it has been forced into," he added. "The expansion process has begun." About the only phrases missing from this sinister declaration were the German "we need Lebensraum" of the 1930s, or the "you will be assimilated" threat of the Borg, the fictional half-human/half-machine alien race of the TV-series *Star Trek*.

There are many ways of trying to enlarge one's national territory--or to reclaim territory lost through the dissolution of an empire. The one tactic that has worked well in Europe's recent past is some version of the Sudetenland card used by the Third Reich to annex the German-

speaking regions of Czechoslovakia. The playbook is simple enough. Agitate for the rights of a minority through PR campaigns led by a very vocal political movement within the territory's borders that has ties to (and surreptitious financing from) the nation seeking to annex the territory. This movement then engineers a "national" referendum calling for the territory to rejoin its motherland.

In the case of Russia's effort to assimilate the Transnistria region of the former Soviet Republic of Moldova, now an independent nation, the Kremlin has followed this well-worn script to the letter. On September 19, the slightly more than half-million residents of this region bordering Ukraine and Moldova (several hundred miles from the nearest Russian territory) voted to declare independence from Moldova with an eye towards an eventual union with Russia. Only about a third of Transnistria's po-

pulation are Russian-speaking. Another third are ethnic Ukrainian, with the remainder a collection of Moldovan and other Balkan nationalities.

The legitimacy of this referendum was not recognized by the E.U. (or any other government), and has been denounced by the Moldovan government. But in Moscow the vote was heralded as the first step of a multi-staged effort for Russian reacquisition of territories lost after the fall of the Soviet Union. Moscow continues to maintain a military force of some 1,300 personnel in Transnistria.

Transnistria is not the only place where Russia and its political bed fellows are seeking to destabilize an existing government in order to regain Moscow's imperial holdings. Already there are plans in the works for similar referendums in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia. Russia has been trying to fan the flames of nationalism in some areas neighboring Kazakhstan, where there are large Russian-speaking populations.

But by far the biggest target of these destabilizing efforts is Ukraine. Russian national sensitivities have chafed for decades over the fact that in 1954, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev (who was Ukrainian by birth), moved the borders between the Russian and Ukrainian Soviet Republics, giving the Crimean peninsula to Ukraine to celebrate what he called at the time "300 years of pan-Slavic brotherhood."

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, calls for Crimea to be "returned" to Russia have never ceased. Their tempo increased after the election in early 2005 of a pro-Western president of Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko. Moscow has tried numerous ploys--including a threat this past January to cut off all natural gas

flows to Ukraine--to weaken Yushchenko's hold on power.

Not surprisingly, Viktor Yanukovich, head of Ukraine's pro-Russian Party of the Regions and now the prime minister, has used the issue of the Russian-speaking diaspora in Crimea to his own (as well as Moscow's) political purposes. During this spring's parliamentary elections, Yanukovich, who was Yushchenko's rival in the 2004 presidential race, promised to make Russian the official second language of Ukraine and to strengthen ties with Russia. Not surprisingly, his first foreign trip after becoming prime minister again this August was the one hour and forty-minute flight to Moscow.

What most concerns leaders in Ukraine and other former Soviet republics is that efforts by Russia to subvert their governments are not limited to these public campaigns by local demagogues and visible strong-arm tactics like threatening to turn the gas off. Russia, they say, is secretly planting operatives within the armed forces of these newly independent nations.

Government intelligence sources in the former Soviet republics bordering Russia have provided The Weekly Standard a list of military officers from Transnistria who were issued false military service passports by the Russian Ministry of Defense. These documents, they say, fraudulently identify the officers as personnel of the 31482 Unit of the Operational Group of the Russian Army in the Transnistrian Region of the Moldova Republic. Russian authorities then transport these personnel to be put through the elite Russian officer training courses called "Vystrel," conducted in the city of Solnechnogorsk at the Russian combined arms training center. According to the documents provided by these sources, 15 or more Transnis-

trian officers were trained there in 2005 and another 30 were to be trained by the end of 2006. The training program is two to four months in length, and produces officers for all command levels and areas of specialization.

Military and intelligence sources in former Soviet republics with knowledge of this secret officer training program worry that this is a sign that Russia--now flush with oil wealth and intent on flexing its muscles in the international arena--is ratcheting up its efforts to intimidate, Finlandize, and otherwise assert control over the Russian-speaking areas of its former republics.

"You do not try to cover up a training program of this size unless you are someday planning on using these people to overthrow or otherwise take control of a sovereign government," said an intelligence officer in a former Soviet republic. "The facility at Solnech-

nogorsk is used by Russia to train numerous non-Russian military personnel openly and legally for peacekeeping and other joint operations. If then, in parallel, you are training officers from these disputed regions--officers that are pretending to be Russian personnel and carrying bogus paperwork--then it does not take an enormous leap of faith to assume that Moscow is up to no good on this one."

Russia is well known for the outrageous behavior of its ultra-nationalist politicians, and the world therefore tends to dismiss threats of Russian expansionism as clownish. But there is nothing circus-like about secret military training. And there is no guarantee that Transnistria is the only region where it is taking place.

#### **Fifth Column?**

Transnistrian Officers Trained at Solnechnogorsk.

| <b>Name and Position</b>  | <b>Year Trained</b> |
|---|---------------------|
| <b>Lukianenko, Col. Aleksandr</b> , Motorized Rifle Brigade Commander   | 2005                |
| <b>Shavelev, Lt. Col. Vyacheslav</b> , Motorized Rifle Battalion Commander                                      | 2005                |
| <b>Ponomariiev, Lt. Col. Fyodor</b> , Chief of Section, F-3, No. 1 Military Unit 60386                          | 2005                |
| <b>Gromovik, Lt. Col. Gennadiy</b> , Chief of Brigade Artillery Staff, No. 078 Military Unit 10524              | 2005                |
| <b>Ostrovskiy, Maj. Sergei</b> , Dept. Commander, SF Detachment   | 2005                |
| <b>Gamartsa, Capt. Vasily</b> , CO, 2nd Motorized Rifle Battalion, 40896 Military Unit                          | 2005                |
| <b>Lupol, Capt. Sergei</b> , CO, 1st Motorized Rifle Company, 1st Motorized Rifle Battalion 40896 Military Unit | 2005                |
| <b>Paulesko, Sr. Lt. Ruslan</b> , CO, 2nd Special Company   | 2005                |
| <b>Batyr, Sr. Lt. Oleg</b> , Deputy CO, Mortar-Artillery Division, 30652 Military Unit                          | 2005                |
| <b>Ischuk, Sr. Lt. Sergei</b> , CO, Antitank Artillery Division, 60387 Military Unit                            | 2005                |

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| <b>Lichakov, Maj. Aleksandr</b> , Chief of Staff, Motorized Rifle Battalion  | 2005 |
| <b>Krutovskiy, Sr. Lt. Denis</b> , Intelligence Company Commander  | 2005 |
| <b>Polianskiy, Sr. Lt. Vladimir</b> , Security Company Commander   | 2005 |
| <b>Shilov, Maj. Vladimir</b> , Motorized Rifle Battalion Commander, No. 050 Military Unit 20365  | 2005 |
| <b>Krasnianchuk, Maj. Aleksandr</b> , Motorized Rifle Battalion Commander, No. 087 Military Unit 30652                                     | 2005 |
| <b>Kuznetsov, Capt. Yuri</b> , Motorized Rifle Battalion Commander, No. 040 Military Unit 10524  | 2005 |
| <b>Shevchuk, Capt. Yuri</b> , Motorized Rifle Company Leader, No. 7, 1st Motorized Rifle   | 2005 |
| <b>Sprynchan, Capt. Yuri</b> , Communications Battalion Chief of Staff, No. 040, Military Unit 10673                                       | 2005 |
| <b>Dziadul, Sr. Lt. Gennadiy</b> , Motorized Rifle Company Leader, No. 020, 3rd Motorized Rifle  | 2005 |
| <b>Lavrik, Sr. Lt. Andrei</b> , Senior Officer on Social-Psychological Issues, Educational Section, No. 040, Military Unit 00111           | 2005 |
| <b>Baranov, Sr. Lt. Evgeniy</b> , Deputy Commander of Training Company No. 068   | 2005 |
| <b>Dovgulich, Col. I. A.</b> , Operational Section Chief   | 2006 |
| <b>Tekhneriadnev, Capt. E. N.</b> , Chief of Missiles/Artillery Armament Service, 1st Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade                     | 2006 |
| <b>Kolesnik, Sr. Lt. I. N.</b> , Chief of Engineering Company  | 2006 |
| <b>Marinov, Sr. Lt. E. M.</b> , Chief of Staff, Artillery Division   | 2006 |
| <b>Angan, Lt. A.A.</b> , Recon Company Leader  | 2006 |
| <b>Orlov, Sr. Lt. R.A.</b> , Deputy CO for Educational Issues, 1st Motorized Rifle Battalion   | 2006 |
| <b>Kulachinskiy, Sr. Lt. V.S.</b> , Deputy CO for Educational Issues, 2nd Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade Mortar Battery                  | 2006 |
| <b>Levchenko, Sr. Lt. S.I.</b> , 2nd Motorized Rifle Company Leader  | 2006 |
| <b>Marchenko, Sr. Lt. S.G.</b> , 3rd Motorized Rifle Company Leader  | 2006 |
| <b>Babiy, Lt. A.O.</b> , CO, Mortar Battery  | 2006 |
| <b>Tushevskiy, Sr. Lt.</b> , Recon Company Leader  | 2006 |
| <b>Donnikov, Capt.</b> , Deputy CO for Educational Issues, 4th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade's 2nd Motorized Rifle Battalion            | 2006 |
| <b>Isayenko, Sr. Lt. A.A.</b> , Deputy CO for Educational Issues, Mortar Artillery Division of 1st Separate Antiaircraft Artillery Brigade | 2006 |
| <b>Komashko, Lt. V.P.</b> , Electronic Warfare Company of 1st Separate Intelligence Company  | 2006 |
| <b>Sheremeta, Capt. V.A.</b> , 3rd Motorized Rifle Company Leader of 1st Mo-   | 2006 |

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| torized Rifle Battalion Medical Service   |      |
| <b>Nikolaev, Sr. Lt. L.I.</b> , Entanglement Company Leader of 1st Separate Engineering Battalion | 2006 |

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