

Rokhlin and his organisation — whose membership list reads like a who's who of recycled military and political extremists — reject President Yeltsin's new plans for low-cost military reform and call for dramatic increases in military spending.

The much-publicised founding congress on 20 September was attended by more than 1,000 people. Formally confirmed as its leader, Rokhlin declared as the movement's primary goal the ousting of the president and the government. Plotting their timetable, Rokhlin stated that this should happen no later than May 1998. Rokhlin has since mentioned 23 February as a date when the organisation will congregate and demonstrate its strength.

Ever since Rokhlin took the first steps to set up his organisation and gave it its less-than-magnetic name — the All-Russian Movement in Support of the Army, the Defence Industry and Military Science (*Dvizhenie v podderzhku armii, oboronnay promyshlennosti i voennoy nauki*, or DPA) — he has attracted a significant number of political opposition actors from a wide range of parties. Clearly, they have been striving to get onto a promising political vehicle.

Holding up Chernomyrdin's house

Lev Semenovich Rokhlin (50) was reluctantly drawn into politics shortly before the December 1995 Duma elections as he agreed to be one of the top three candidates for Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin's party, Our Home is Russia (NDR). In light of the trials the armed forces were undergoing, the ascent of general-turned-politician Aleksandr Lebed, and extreme nationalist-populist Vladimir Zhirinovsky's success in the 1993 elections — he gained almost a quarter of the party list votes in general, and two or three times more in some military circles — just about all major parties ended up with an officer among their top candidates. In the end, more than 350 military candidates were participating, including more than 120 officers on a separate, last-minute list assembled by the MoD. Among the names on the Communist Party (KPRF) list were such irreconcilable generals as Albert Makashov and Valentin Varennikov. Prominent General Boris Gromov, deputy foreign minister at the time, headed his own party, My Fatherland. Even Yegor Gaydar's Democratic Choice of Russia (DVR) fronted with a general: Eduard Vorobev, who gained fame for refusing to take command in the assault on Grozny in the first month of the Chechen War.

And finally, there was Lev Rokhlin. Like Vorobev, he had risen to public prominence during the Chechen War. However, Rokhlin played a different role here. Basically, the



◆ Lev Rokhlin, pictured marshalling his forces in the Duma in October 1997.

Rokhlin enters the political fray

The barriers keeping Russian officers out of politics are being challenged with increasing fervour. Most recently, Lev Rokhlin, a key general and chairman of the parliament's Committee for Military Affairs, has set up a movement aiming to topple the Yeltsin regime through mass military protest. **Sven Gunnar Simonsen** reports.

benevolent image of Rokhlin's role during the war is that of a commander who was professional along several dimensions: prior to the war he had kept his troops at a higher level of combat readiness than other commanders; he maintained high morale and made every effort to minimise losses; and he followed the orders of the Supreme Commander, the president, although he at least later made it clear that he considered Yeltsin to be incompetent and his orders criminal. He won further respect by refusing to receive the decoration of 'Hero of Russia' from Yeltsin.

Before Rokhlin commanded the Eastern grouping of federal forces in the bloody, but ultimately successful, assault on Grozny in the beginning of 1995, he was not widely known in Russia. Joining the army in 1970, Rokhlin rose quietly in rank, changing place of service as much as 23 times. One of his first assignments was in Germany. In the mid-1980s, he served in Afghanistan. In 1993, he graduated from the Academy of the General Staff. In 1993-94, he served as commander of the 8th Guards Army Corps of the North Caucasus Military District, which had been redeployed from Germany.

Ironically, one of the most enthusiastic articles published on Rokhlin shortly before the Duma elections appeared in the govern-

ment-sponsored *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*. The newspaper told the story of how, during his tenure in Volgograd, Rokhlin became known as a tyrant among his troops for his harsh temperament and the tough demands he put on them. During the Chechen War, however, the same men ended up referring to the general as 'Papa'. The *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* reporter, himself an officer, ended the article by saying it was no surprise to him that Rokhlin was now part of the Our Home is Russia top trio: "Such people, like Atlases, are capable of holding up a house."

When the Duma convened in early 1996, only a modest total of 22 officers had been elected. Defence Minister Pavel Grachev had hoped to see 35 of his hand-picked officers get elected and subsequently form their own faction in the Duma; in the end, only three of them were installed.

From his safe place on the NDR list, Lev Rokhlin was elected. Indicative of his limited political ambitions at the time, the NDR leadership had to put Rokhlin under pressure to make him assume his deputy seat. Later, when control over committees

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was distributed, the party secured Rokhlin's election as chairman of the Committee for Military Affairs.

In the following months, Russian politics were dominated by the campaigns before the June presidential elections. With General Lebed clearly being a man to beat, the armed forces were still seen as an important electorate. At this point, Yeltsin could no longer afford to be seen as one who neglected the military. He therefore went public in promising various new measures, including a fresh start to military reform, payment of wage arrears and most extravagantly, the abolition of universal military conscription by the year 2000.

Although Defence Minister Pavel Grachev supported Yeltsin on every stage, the minister's dismissal seemed imminent. Grachev was seen as a spineless ally of the president, unable or unwilling to seriously reform the forces. He was stuck with the nickname awarded him by the newspaper *Moskovskiy Komsomolets* – 'Pasha Mercedes' – over alleged corruption, and even suspected of having been involved in the murder of one of that newspaper's journalists.

In the end, Grachev fell victim to Yeltsin's manoeuvring between the first and second election rounds. Within 24 hours of the first round on 16 June, Yeltsin had embraced Lebed as his successor in the year 2000 and appointed him secretary of the Security Council and national security advisor. Simultaneously, Lebed's enemy Grachev and his closest men were kicked out. In mid-July, General Igor Rodionov, the head of the General Staff Academy, was named as the new defence minister.

While being Lebed's choice, Rodionov was well received by a great majority of officers in the General Staff and just about all political camps, and Rokhlin had played a very active role in having him appointed. Timed to influence Yeltsin's decision, in early July Rokhlin delivered a sensational report which he himself later admitted had been aimed at weakening another strong candidate: General Konstantin Kobets, the army's inspector general. In the report, Rokhlin alleged that Grachev was "up to his ears in corruption" and had "surrounded himself with spongers and thieves". He put forward serious, specific accusations of corruption not only against Kobets, but also against General Vasily Vorobev, the army's former finance chief, and General Vyacheslav Zherebtsov, ex-head of the General Staff's mobilisation department.

Parallel roles

One may say that Rodionov's and Rokhlin's public roles developed in parallel in the year that followed. While Rokhlin increas-

ingly became an opposition figure within the government's party, Rodionov played the same role within the government itself. These processes took place as the two generals became more and more frustrated over the state of affairs in the armed forces and felt the pressure mounting from their fellow officers, who were angry about the deterioration yet fearful of radical reform should it finally come about.

At this early stage, too, the two generals were sounding warning bells, but they made sure not to be too hard on their superiors publicly. When Rokhlin warned that the situation in Russia's armed forces was "extremely volatile", he went no further than to state that the situation required "resolute intervention on the part of President Boris Yeltsin, the government, and society as a whole". His own proposals included an increase in defence spending to at least 5.1 per cent of GDP. In a closed session in the Duma in May 1996, Rokhlin was already much less compromising. Here, the general claimed that Soviet President Gorbachev on one occasion had lost track of his 'nuclear attaché case' for several days, and he directed the stinging follow-up question to US observers: "If a non-drinking president could lose that case, what could be expected of a drinking president?"

Rodionov, who at the outset had pointed to the necessity of having armed forces within the country's means, became clearly radicalised during his tenure. He came to play the role in government of a defender of the status quo, paralysed by the magnitude of the tasks before him. In his position paper presented to the government in September 1996, Rodionov requested an unthinkable US\$48 billion – 25 per cent of the entire national budget – and received Rokhlin's backing. However, the Finance Ministry slashed that figure by some two thirds. In terms of force cuts, Rodionov's proposals were modest: he promised to cut the army from the official 1.7 million to 1.5 million during the course of 1997 – on the condition that more money be allocated.

In late May 1997, Yeltsin sacked Rodionov along with the chief of General Staff, Viktor Samsonov. The way it was done – at a televised meeting of the Defence Council in which Rodionov was lambasted for not initiating reform during his 10 months in office – maximised his humiliation.

In Rodionov's place, Yeltsin immediately appointed Igor Sergeyev (59), the commander of Russia's Strategic Rocket Forces. As chief of the General Staff Yeltsin appointed the commander of the Far East Military District, Viktor Chechvatov. Yeltsin's people then worked around the clock to produce plans for radical reforms in stark contrast to

those advocated by Rodionov and Rokhlin. Not only did both generals find Rodionov's dismissal deeply unfair; they felt the new reform initiative looked set to cause the final breakdown of the armed forces.

Breaking with the regime

Rokhlin's decisive move in breaking with the regime came in late June 1997 when he made public an open letter addressed to the president and to the servicemen of Russia's army. In this seven-page, extraordinarily bitter address – printed only in the radical opposition newspapers *Sovetskaya Rossiya* and *Pravda-5* – Rokhlin was very explicit about Boris Yeltsin's personal responsibility for the state of the military. "You bear a personal responsibility for unleashing the war in Chechnya," Rokhlin wrote. "You fooled the nation and the military, failing to fulfil your pre-election promises." Turning to his main audience, he called on officers to organise themselves to prevent further deprivation of the forces.

The appeal was immediately condemned by Defence Minister Sergeyev as "provocative by nature" and a breach of the laws prohibiting political agitation in the armed forces, but to no avail: Rokhlin proceeded at high speed to set up an organising committee for the new movement he intended to establish. In early July, this committee congregated and elected him as its chairman. Rodionov was elected his first deputy, despite the fact that he and Rokhlin, according to the latter, had had several disagreements and had not met for months. (Rodionov kept this position after the September founding congress.)

The new plans for military reform were finally decreed by Yeltsin in mid-July. They included a reduction of the army from the 1997 official level of 1.7 million to 1.2 million in 1998; limiting defence spending to 3.5 per cent of GDP (the official figure for 1996), a reduction by one third in the size of the dozen or so other armed forces (Interior Troops, railway troops, etc, not funded by the defence budget), which currently have some 1.2 million personnel; and a 50 per cent cut in the bureaucracy of the MoD. In the longer term, the military is to be reconfigured into a triad of forces: a combined land-sea conventional force, a strategic nuclear force and the air force. Additionally, conscription is to be abolished by 2005 and the number of generals and admirals is to be significantly cut. Purchases for the military will to a greater extent be made on a competitive basis.

These plans clearly implied reforms at a much lower cost than Rodionov and Rokhlin thought possible and served to drive them further away from the regime. In a

joint appearance in late August, Rokhlin and Rodionov stated that they had united to get the current army reform changed. Among their harsh statements on that occasion, they rejected the idea of creating a professional army on the grounds that a society should always be ready for war.

Rokhlin continued to labour for his brainchild, the DPA, and by the time of the September founding congress he set up close to 50 local branches of the movement. The attention paid to the congress by both politicians and media added to the increasingly widespread belief that the DPA could serve to deepen significantly the politicisation of the Russian armed forces.

Current platform

Rokhlin's political platform should be seen as an expression of the opposition to rapid change that tends to characterise military leaders across political systems. In Rokhlin's case, the setting is the main successor state of a military superpower in which no effort or investment was spared to add to military capabilities. To him, as to most Russian officers, it is hard to break out of old modes and imagine Russia with a significantly reduced army. Typically, Rokhlin argues that he favours reform but that all talk of military reform is pointless for the simple reason that no financial backing is being provided. While it is obviously true that disbanding units in the short run costs more than maintaining them, and that Sergeyev and Yeltsin may be underestimating the problems, this point in reality often serves those who reject all attempts at serious reform.

A major element in Rokhlin's political agitation naturally concerns the funding allocated to the armed forces. As for his specific economic proposals, Rokhlin's support for Rodionov's call for a dramatic increase in the 1997 defence budget has already been noted. In December 1996, Rokhlin stated that the 80,000 billion roubles allocated for defence was not sufficient "even for meeting the minimal needs" of the forces. He announced draft amendments from his committee that envisaged an increase in defence spending of twice that amount — 160,000 billion roubles — plus the payment of debts to the MoD of another 40,000 billion roubles.

The DPA is clearly an interest organisation aiming to improve the conditions for the military — and for those associated with military production and research. Still, it is clearly important to consider Rokhlin's and thereby the movement's ideology in a wider perspective, in so far as the DPA could end up having an influence on Russia's foreign policy, for example.

By virtue of his activities in the Chechen War, Rokhlin has been asked several times to comment on developments in Chechnya and the North Caucasus. As mentioned, the general turned down the decoration bestowed upon him for his achievements in Chechnya, later confirming that he did so because he was opposed to the war and considered that it should never have been started. However, Rokhlin has maintained a tough stand on the Chechen rebels. He was critical of the peace treaty that Lebed negotiated with Aslan Maskhadov in August 1996. At that time, Rokhlin predicted that if Chechnya was granted full sovereignty, the republic would try to expand its territory to include all lands between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea, including the Trans-Caucasus, Stavropol and Krasnodar. In January 1997, Rokhlin called for the arming of Cossacks in Stavropol who were undergoing a "genocide" at the hands of criminal groups from Chechnya. Armed Cossacks were bound to be efficient, he said, because they would be defending their homes and families and not just a stretch of border. On the same occasion, he reflected that the Soviet Army would have pacified Chechnya within days and with little bloodshed.

In the sphere of international relations, Rokhlin reveals his share of the paranoia that is widespread in Russian political, not to mention military, circles. He has several times spoken of ominous forces undermining the Russian state and its armed forces. In November 1996 — in an address calling on the president and prime minister to accelerate military reform — he told the Duma: "It cannot be excluded that someone has in mind the disintegration of the armed forces as a top goal. Otherwise, how does one explain the IMF recommendations to the Russian leadership to sharply reduce defence spending to 3.3 per cent of GDP?"

A few months later, he concluded that, as for external threats, they "existed, exist and will continue to exist". Most developed countries are running out of natural resources, and "we have such a rich and large territory here". Among Russia's greedy neighbours, he explicitly pointed to China, Turkey and NATO. In a worst-case scenario, he described how Russia's poorer regions would start seeking "sponsors" abroad, from Finland to Japan. In the end, multinational forces might be introduced onto Russian territory.

Like the majority in the Duma, Rokhlin has supported the decision to postpone the ratification of the START-2 treaty indefinitely. While agreeing that it would be to Russia's advantage to reduce its nuclear potential, Rokhlin would not want to see his country do so before a START-3 had been

negotiated. START-2 in its current form, he said last spring, "is absolutely not to our advantage". In his reasoning, Russia would spend \$50 billion to reduce the stockpile of weapons to 2,300 missiles and then build itself up again to the treaty's ceiling of 3,000 missiles. Instead, he contended, the ceiling should be lowered to something like 2,400 missiles so that Russia would not have to rearm. Half a year earlier, he stated that the START-2 treaty would "throw Russia back to the level of developing countries, which are unable to defend their territories and their natural resources".

Rokhlin's methods

How far would Rokhlin go to promote his cause? Working within the NDR gave the general both opportunities and constraints. After having broken with that party (he was formally expelled in early September), he has maintained the major opportunities — being a deputy and a committee chairman — while freeing himself from the constraints. Rokhlin has become clearly radicalised. Depending on how things develop around the DPA, this process could go further. For instance, one moderating factor could disappear if Rodionov were to leave the organisation, which is clearly a possibility. Rodionov has expressed his worries about Rokhlin's radical allies and his disagreement with Rokhlin over the issue of the military 'marching on Moscow'.

Already, Rokhlin's assurances that the DPA will work only within the law and the constitution seem rather hollow. In July, Rokhlin reportedly stated that if army officers "rise in rebellion and march to Moscow", he would be among them. Since then, he has suggested that the DPA might submit to the Duma a proposal to impeach the president and change the government (which would be legal but hardly effective), and he has, above all, promised to concentrate the DPA's energies into a joint opposition thrust at the regime: "We shall lead the people out into the streets and stay there until the president and government resign."

In October, at the founding meeting of a DPA branch in Solnechnogorsk near Moscow, Rokhlin reportedly called for the overthrow of the "hated ruling regime". The general later backpedalled on these statements, but the news agency Interfax insisted that it had a recording of Rokhlin's speech and quoted him as saying that the movement intended to accomplish its mission and "shake down the hated regime" by the spring of 1998.

A brief look at the people Rokhlin surrounds himself with in the DPA also adds to doubts about how long he will keep his motivation to operate within the con-

fines of the law. According to Rokhlin, as many as 63 Duma deputies had registered to participate at the DPA's founding congress in Moscow in September. Among these were Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov, Viktor Anpilov (a communist who considers Zyuganov to be bourgeois), Zhirinovsky, generals Aleksandr Korzhakov (former head of President Yeltsin's bodyguard) and Albert Makashov, and 1991 coup plotters Valentin Varennikov and Vladimir Kryuchkov. Other infamous officers included Vladimir Achalov (participant both in 1991 and 1993); and the leader of the militant Officers' Union, Stanislav Terekhov. In the foyer, participants were welcomed by the usual assortment of outlandish groups that circle around radical political gatherings in Russia, rabid anti-Semites, Stalinists and neo-Nazis among them. This is, in fact, worth noting, given that Rokhlin himself is Jewish. In light of later observations, it seems correct to point out that the organisers did not opt to expel the most radical fringe groups; it has been reported that Rokhlin, on his numerous journeys to garner support for the DPA, has encouraged a diversity of extremist groups to join him, including the young activists led by people like Anpilov and Zhirinovsky.

The overall impression today is that Rokhlin's movement is leaning heavily toward the left, represented above all by Zyuganov's KPRF. As early as 1996, Rokhlin began voting with increasing frequency with the communists and against the position of his own party.

Many of the DPA's founders are members of the communist leader's most recent extra-partisan support group, the People's Patriotic Union. It should also be noted that Rokhlin on one occasion last summer said that he was "prepared to go under a red banner". More recently, on the 80th Revolution Day anniversary in Moscow, he did: addressing nostalgic Muscovites together with Zyuganov and others, Rokhlin once again urged: "Overthrow the hated regime – the sooner the better."

By any standard, it is very difficult to see that Rokhlin is implementing the pledge he made several times last summer; that the DPA would not welcome "extremists, populists, opportunists, or people laying claim to the presidency."

Zyuganov publicly promised to support Rokhlin's movement, stating that Yeltsin's reforms were leading to the destruction of the army. In order to effect military reform, Russia should in Zyuganov's opinion spend "at least 5-7 per cent of GDP". Openly challenging the current legislation,

Zyuganov embraced the establishment of officers' assemblies, "in accordance with the old Russian tradition. . . Officers have every right to get together and discuss the state of the army".

The sympathy for Rokhlin among leftist parties also became evident in late September last year when the Duma voted down a proposal from the NDR to remove Rokhlin from the post of committee chairman. The proposal was defeated with the votes of the KPRF, the Agrarian Party and Nikolay Ryzhkov's People's Power.



◆ President Yeltsin with his latest defence minister, Igor Sergeyev, whose sense of job security has at least been aided by his promotion to the rank of marshal – the first such promotion since the demise of the USSR.

On the other hand, Rokhlin's relations with another politically ambitious general, Lebed, are not great. Last June Lebed said that on the whole he supported Rokhlin's address on military reform. A few months later, however, it was clear that the political battlefield was not big enough for two generals: Lebed's nationalities advisor published an article claiming that Lebed had categorically turned down all offers to enter into a union with Rokhlin's forces because of Rokhlin's "irresponsible demagogic". Rokhlin on his part has said of Lebed that "[we] specially asked him to stay away from our movement". Whoever's telling the truth, Rokhlin, who at one time was striving to become an ally of Lebed, is currently the one who needs the other the least.

Prospects

By virtue of the public attention it has caught, Rokhlin's DPA already outperforms earlier attempts at organising a Russian military opposition. Still, that alone does not mean we will be seeing a major increase

in the political influence of the military. There are several factors that will decide the fate of the DPA.

At present, the most important factor here is the progress of Yeltsin's and Sergeyev's low-budget military reform. The fate of earlier reform plans makes it difficult to be very optimistic about the new ones. The political implications of the reforms will depend on which elements of the plans end up being implemented.

As for the DPA, it will be important whatever political colour the organisation ends up having. Today's situation, where several political camps are courting the movement, will end as soon as Rokhlin almost by necessity moves closer to some than to others. When he does, the universality of his appeal will suffer. At present, Rokhlin's preferred choice for a special partner appears to be Zyuganov. The Communist leader also is no stranger to the military extremists himself, so he would not oblige Rokhlin to jettison the Terekhovs and Achalovs. If the general's concern is to gain wider support, however, he should.

On a more strictly organisational level, the DPA may face serious obstacles if it is pronounced illegal by a court of justice. This may very well happen; the office of the Chief Military Procurator is already considering the aims of the organisation. Political agitation in the armed forces, and military officials' use of their position for political gain, is prohibited. If the Procurator finds that the DPA has political aims – which shouldn't be too difficult – it will be in a position to outlaw the organisation. Not only would that scare away some servicemen who might otherwise have supported it; the DPA would also lose immediate access to the military infrastructure it has used for its own purposes.

Looking from a longer perspective, some observers might be inspired to see Rokhlin as a potential candidate for the presidential elections due in 2000. At the moment, this is rather far-fetched. Politically, Rokhlin is even more a one-trick pony than Lebed: whereas he makes a major point out of identifying Russia's fate with that of its army, the audience he is targeting comprises those associated with the army. Most other citizens – notwithstanding their dislike of generals and sympathy for the ordinary serviceman – are no more likely to take to the streets for the army than they are for their immediate personal interests. And even the military men themselves at the most recent parliamentary elections threw their votes along much more complex patterns than those Rokhlin is betting on. ●