

Russian maneuvers biggest since 1984

by Konstantin George

By early September, the Soviet Union will be conducting the biggest military exercises on the border with the Federal Republic of Germany since the mammoth Russian military maneuvers of late June/early July 1984. In those exclusively Russian maneuvers, the largest ever conducted in the postwar history of the Soviet Union—and embracing East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and the Baltic Sea and the Western Military Districts of the Soviet Union—the Russian Armed Forces simulated a surprise invasion of the Federal Republic.

At the peak of the exercises, the three Russian armies in East Germany stationed near the border with West Germany, launched a coordinated simulated invasion of the Federal Republic by deploying nearly all their divisions to the West, stopping just short of the border.

The 1984 maneuvers were commanded by Soviet Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, at the time Chief of the Soviet General Staff, and soon—in September 1984—to acquire three crucial responsibilities in the new wartime high command system that he set up: the Soviet Union's overall wartime commander in chief of the Armed Forces; commander in chief of the Soviet forces committed to fighting and defeating the United States and NATO in a general war; and commander in chief of the Western Theater of War, responsible for any limited wars or surgical strikes in Central Europe against the Federal Republic.

Marshal Ogarkov in his latter two capacities spends much of his time in East Germany, supervising the perfecting of the surprise attack offensive capabilities of the nearly 500,000 Soviet spearhead invasion troops stationed there. For example, Ogarkov was in East Germany during April when Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov spent a full week in East Berlin for the Socialist Unity Party Congress, and held secret meetings with Gorbachov and the Soviet military leadership. Sources emphasize that whether or not it "leaks" into the public, Ogarkov will be the de facto commander in chief of the upcoming huge maneuvers.

The news of the upcoming maneuvers was conveyed on Aug. 18, when the Soviet Union announced that its forces stationed in East Germany, the "Group of Forces in Germany," GSFG, will conduct large-scale military exercises on Sept. 8-13. The announcement stressed that the exercises, which will have a minimum "official" troop strength of 50,000, will be exclusively Russian—as in the famous 1984 maneuvers. The East German National Peoples Army will not participate.

Since the end of July, the GSFG has had a new commander in chief, Army Gen. Valeri A. Belikov. Before this, Belikov, a tank general, had commanded the Carpathian Military District since the end of 1979, and before that—from 1976 to 1979—commanded the North Caucasian Military District, where he was on the regional military council with one Mikhail Gorbachov. Belikov's predecessor as GSFG commander in chief, Army Gen. Pyotr Lushev, departed for Moscow on July 19, to become, in one of the biggest promotions in Soviet military history, first deputy defense minister.

Behind the terse official Soviet maneuver announcement is unfolding a Russian military maneuver of alarming dimensions. The "official" figure of 50,000 troops is a deliberate misrepresentation, referring only to the active component of combat units drawn from the GSFG. The real dimensions of the purely Russian military exercise will be either double or triple that figure.

On the same day on which the Russian maneuvers begin, Sept. 8, the officially announced Warsaw Pact "Druzha '86" ("Friendship '86") maneuvers involving the Soviet "Central Group of Forces" stationed in Czechoslovakia, the Czech and Hungarian Armed Forces, will also begin, lasting until Sept. 13. Thus, for the first time since June/July 1984, there will be simultaneous, coordinated Russian surprise-attack rehearsals conducted along the entire length of the Federal Republic's border with the Warsaw Pact.

The first half of September will see large-scale Soviet naval and air maneuvers—probably also including naval infantry—in and over the Baltic Sea. According to military sources, the Soviet Baltic Fleet, since July under a new commander, Vice-Admiral Ivanov, has now gathered at its headquarters and major naval base at Baltisk (Pillau) in Soviet-occupied East Prussia, undergoing preparations for major naval exercises.

Experts are warning that one should expect "surprises" in the coming weeks, including the incorporation of the massive Soviet military forces based in the Military Districts of the Soviet Union into the purely Russian maneuvers—as was done in 1984.

The 1984 maneuvers were purely Russian for military and political reasons. Under conditions of Russian decisive strategic superiority, the Soviet Union could well attempt to grab West Germany by military intimidation. One very possible "scenario" preceding a Soviet surgical strike seizure of the Federal Republic would be Russia invoking its "rights" as a World War II victor, under the 1945 Potsdam Agreements, to intervene militarily anywhere in Germany, to prevent a recurrence of "fascism." To maintain the legal fiction for such a case, the military intervention must be purely Russian. In this context, it was no coincidence that the 1984 Russian maneuvers were followed by a Soviet government demarche, addressed to the Bonn government, charging West Germany with violating the 1945 Potsdam Agreements.