

Soviets reorganize military, not to prepare for 'peace'

by Konstantin George

As was widely reported in the U.S. media during the first week of August, some members of the House Armed Services Committee began to question the legitimacy of Soviet "unilateral withdrawals" from Eastern Europe, after their tour of Soviet military units in East Germany. The congressmen had come belatedly to the conclusion that Moscow's withdrawal numbers did not add up, since the equipment and personnel that remained, after tanks and their crews departed, were being reassigned to units still in place on East German soil.

Their suspicion was confirmed beforehand in: 1) a TASS interview July 21, given by General of the Army Boris Snetkov, commander-in-chief of the Western Group of Forces, as the Soviet forces in East Germany are now called, which reported the total number of troops and equipment that would be withdrawn, and 2) a statement to TASS July 31 by Gen. Col. Bronislav Omelichev, first deputy chief of the Soviet General Staff and head of its planning nerve center, the Operations Main Directorate. Omelichev listed total Soviet withdrawals by Aug. 15 for Eastern Europe as a whole, and for Mongolia, where, as part of the political pact with the Red Chinese, a real withdrawal is taking place.

We present these data in **Table 1**, which shows the enormous discrepancy in the ratio of troops to tanks and vehicles withdrawn, between East Germany and Eastern Europe on the one hand, and Mongolia on the other. As these figures prove, what is leaving East Germany and Eastern Europe are not integral Soviet *units*, but *equipment*, and those troops most directly linked to the equipment in

question. The other troops—motorized infantry, artillery, anti-tank, and anti-aircraft—who had belonged to the withdrawn and dissolved tank divisions, have not been withdrawn at all, but have been reassigned *within* the Soviet Groups of Forces in Eastern Europe, beefing up their regiments to de facto brigades.

Through this reorganization, the basic unit in the Groups of Forces has become a brigade, both in numerical strength and in the ensuing qualitative *combined arms* increase, effected by the additional artillery, anti-tank, and anti-aircraft units.

The emergence of the enhanced combined arms brigade as the basic unit of the Soviet Army is one component of a vast reorganization of the Armed Forces under way this year. The brigade restructuring at the lower rungs has been

TABLE 1
Soviet 'unilateral withdrawals'

	East Germany	Eastern Europe	Mongolia
Troops	11,000	21,000	7,325
Tanks	2,100	3,100	404
Artillery systems	150	383	307
Vehicles	2,000	ca. 3,000	ca. 400
Approx. troop to tank and vehicle ratio	2.5:1	3:1	9:1

accompanied by a revolution at the top of the command and control structure. Some 1989 highlights:

- The early April appointment of Gen. Col. Yuri Yashin, 59, a Doctor of Technical Sciences and 30-year veteran of the Strategic Forces as a deputy defense minister without formal portfolio. The only precedent for such an extraordinary development was the 1974-77 tenure of Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov as deputy defense minister without portfolio. Ogarkov went on to become the father of the currently operational Soviet war plan. Yashin's new functions are to oversee the implementation of the Soviet military's top priority program of perfecting, within the next three years, a modern wartime command, control, and communications system, and to direct the introduction of new post-nuclear technologies for the Soviet military.

- The quiet April revolution in the Soviet Air Force command. Well before retirement age, the Air Force first deputy commander-in-chief, Gen. Col. of Aviation B.F. Korolkov, and Air Force chief of the Main Staff, Gen. Col. of Aviation V. Ye. Pankin, were removed, and replaced by, respectively, Gen. Lt. of Aviation Yevgeni I. Shaposhnikov and Gen. Lt. of Aviation P.I. Belonozhko, who had formerly served under Pankin as first deputy chief of the Air Force's Main Staff. This latter pair now de facto commands the Soviet Air Force, leaving the Air Force's commander-in-chief, the 66-year-old Marshal of Aviation A.N. Yefimov, a titular figure. The changes in the Air Force are more sweeping than those that occurred in the Air Defense Forces in the aftermath of the May 1987 penetration of Soviet air space—and landing in Red Square—by a West German teenager flying a Cessna plane.

- The January appointment of 43-year-old Gen. Lt. Vladislav Achalov, as commander of the Soviet Airborne Forces. Achalov epitomizes the phenomenon of striking promotions granted to young officers who have excelled in Afghanistan and in their post-Afghanistan assignments. More than that, it exemplifies a side to the promotion of Afghanistan veterans not generally cited in the West: dramatic promotions for those who excelled in leading *staff* functions during the war and in post-Afghanistan assignments. As chief of staff of the Leningrad Military District during 1988, when that district pioneered airborne/*spetsnaz* commando offensive exercises in accordance with the new Soviet offensive doctrine, Achalov played the key role in planning these exercises. His new post provides the most stunning confirmation that this new doctrine is moving into an advanced operational stage.

- Beginning in January, the creation of a new wartime command structure, centered on the General Staff and the Theater Commands. Starting last autumn, the old interim leaderships of the Theater Commands were replaced by a new generation of commanders, between 55 and 61 years of age. They now have total control over all forces—land, sea, air, and air defense—based in the military districts and Groups of Forces under their jurisdiction.

Until this year, the Theater Commands had existed as a transitional institution, alongside a peacetime structure of

U.S.S.R. military districts and Groups of Forces in Eastern Europe. The Groups of Forces are on their way toward merger into a single Western Group of Forces, and the military districts are being either abolished, merged, or relegated to mere training functions.

Cutting the fat

The Soviet Union is experiencing in 1989-90 the most sweeping reduction of high-ranking officers since the wholesale cuts imposed by Nikita Khrushchov on the armed forces in 1960, and since Stalin slaughtered the officer corps in 1937. What is occurring now, however, is no purge in the traditional Soviet sense, where a mass action was conducted against the military. The current purge has been drafted and is being implemented *by* the military, *for* the military. It is a crucial component of a thorough reorganization program, worked out under the direction of the General Staff leadership, and based on detailed plans drafted by the General Staff.

The reason for this elimination of high-ranking officers? It is a necessity, if the Soviet military, in accordance with its war plan, is to achieve full war readiness within two years. The mass early retirement of older and, above all, less-qualified officers, is fully consistent with the following program:

The Soviet Union, under the cover of its military "unilateral cuts" program, is in the midst of transforming its military command structure from a peacetime territorial table of organization, based on cumbersome, top-heavy military districts, into a much "leaner and meaner" wartime command and control structure, streamlined around an upgraded General Staff, operating through the wartime Theater Commands—West, Southwest, South, and Far East. This reorganization, scheduled to be completed in the next 18-24 months, is coupled with accelerated efforts to achieve a breakout in developing and deploying a first generation of radio frequency and related new post-nuclear technology weapons of mass destruction.

This deadly combination of reorganization into wartime formations and striving for a military-technological breakout, is occurring in the midst of a systemic crisis in the Soviet Empire, as manifested in the strikes and ethnic explosions of the past year. That turmoil will increasingly tempt the Soviet leadership to exercise military options as the "solution."

The old inefficient, indeed absurd, command structure hung like an albatross on the Soviet Army, impeding the achievement of a war-ready command and control system. Inside the Soviet Union, the Army had been organized on the basis of 16 military districts, each containing its own redundant complement of dozens of officers of general rank and many more colonels. A similar top-heavy, unwieldy structure governed the four Soviet Groups of Forces, stationed in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary. A leading British specialist on the Soviet military once told *EIR* that "once war breaks out, the whole structure of Groups of Forces and military districts goes out the window; once war starts, it all disappears." Moscow is not waiting for war to start, but, under a policy of fully preparing now

The gathering storm

Hungarian Communist Party leader Rezso Nyers warned in an Aug. 14 interview with Austrian television, that because of "the considerable insecurity" the East bloc and Soviet internal crisis has caused in the Soviet leadership, "a major political turn in the Soviet Union" is probable.

Baltic: August is the anniversary month of the infamous 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact which led to Russia's annexation of the Baltic republics in 1940. Expecting unrest, Moscow is exploiting the large Russian populations who were settled there after the war for provocations which can be used to bring the "liberalization" gambit there to a quick end. In Estonia, Russians and other Slavs comprise 40% of the population, and in neighboring Latvia they are the majority. Since last year's rise of Baltic nationalism and the formation of Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian Popular Fronts, the ethnic Russians of these republics were organized, with military and KGB support, into the mass Russian-chauvinist group, Interfront.

On Aug. 9, Interfront began a political strike in Estonia, which has shut down over 40 industrial plants and much of the region's rail freight traffic, to protest a new Estonian electoral law, labeled "discriminatory" by the

Russian minority. Soviet Justice Minister Venyamin Yakovlev and *Pravda* editorials called the Interfront strikes "justified," and labeled the Estonian law, which is not yet formally enacted, "against the Constitution" and a "violation of international law" on "human rights" for minorities.

Transcaucasus: Bloody armed clashes between Armenians and Azeris in the predominantly Armenian-inhabited region of Karabakh were admitted by TASS on Aug. 15, which disclosed that "the loss of life and the casualties among the population are steadily growing," and reported attempts in Karabakh to set up "alternative governments."

In Muslim Azerbaijan, on Aug. 13 over 100,000 Azeris, led by their Popular Front, demonstrated for economic and political autonomy. A one-day general strike for Aug. 15 in Baku, called by the Popular Front, was successful, and a demonstration that evening in Baku turned out over 150,000 people. On Sept. 1, a general strike begins in Azerbaijan, which, among other things, will shut down the vital oil producing, refining, and petrochemical industries.

Moldavia: The "autonomy" movement has scheduled a demonstration, with an expected turnout of about 500,000, for Aug. 27 in the capital of Kishinyov. Counter-demonstrations by the republic's large Russian minority are also planned.

for future military operations, the peacetime structure is already going out the window.

There was some logic to this structure before the 1987-89 overhaul of the Soviet Union's Interior Troops into an elite force to handle internal unrest (see article, page 28). The reorganization of the Interior Troops removed the last barrier to scrapping the military district structure.

The scope of the Soviet military's own purge to rid itself of excess baggage was revealed by Defense Minister Dmitri Yazov, in a July 22 speech before political section chiefs of Soviet divisions. Yazov disclosed that over the past two years, "many generals" and other officers had been retired, and "almost 1,400 posts of general and 11,000 posts of colonel have been abolished." What he did not say, was that this was only the beginning. Many more such posts will disappear, as the ongoing elimination and consolidation of military districts and Groups of Forces takes effect.

One military district has already been officially dissolved. On June 2, TASS quoted Gen. Lt. Yuri V. Petrov, a newly appointed deputy chief of the General Staff, that, effective June 1, the Central Asian Military District had been merged into the Turkestan MD. In one stroke, all Soviet troops in Central Asia were placed under one commander,

the Afghanistan veteran Gen. Lt. Ivan Fuzhenko, who in turn is directly subordinated to the Southern Theater Command in Baku.

Other military districts, including the Siberian MD and the Volga MD, exist now only on paper, having been merged into the Transbaikal and Ural Military Districts, respectively.

The end of June announcement by the Soviet Defense Ministry that the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany had been renamed the Western Group of Forces, marked the formal initiation of a process, whereby in the next 12-18 months, three Soviet Groups of Forces—the Western, the Central (in Czechoslovakia), and the Northern (in Poland)—will be merged into one, the Western Group of Forces. This means the pre-war creation of a functional wartime command and control system for military operations against Western Europe. With this reorganization, all Soviet forces in Central and Eastern Europe, opposite NATO's Central Front, will be under one unified command, which in turn is directly subordinated to the Western Theater Command. These are not the type of command and control reorganizations conducted by an empire looking ahead to "peace" and "détente." Quite the contrary.