

Scope of Soviet naval maneuvers 'astounds' NATO officials

by Konstantin George

The Soviet Union has just concluded the largest naval and air exercises it has ever held in the North Atlantic. During the peak phase of the exercises, from July 20-22, more than 100 ships, including over 40 surface warships and landing ships with Marine Infantry, at least 39 submarines, and a number of supply ships, were involved. Naval units drawn from the Soviet Northern Fleet, the Baltic Fleet, and the Black Sea Fleet, took part. They were joined by numerous long-range naval aviation Badger bombers with long-range As-15 cruise missiles, and long-range Bear reconnaissance aircraft.

The exercises occurred in the midst of a large-scale command and control reorganization in the Soviet armed forces, whose elements themselves bear witness to the fact that another milestone has been laid on the road to war.

The command reorganization began in the spring, with Moscow giving renewed prominence to Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, the Soviet wartime military commander-in-chief. In the latest round of wartime command changes, which is still under way, Ogarkov has been named First Deputy Defense Minister and commander in chief of all Warsaw Pact military forces. General of the Army Mikhail Zaitsev, who, since December 1980, has run the 470,000 Soviet troops stationed in East Germany, left that post on July 13, and is now assumed to be wartime commander-in-chief of the Western Theater of War—the Soviet first and second echelons of invasion troops, based in Eastern Europe and the western Soviet Union.

After Ogarkov assumed that Western Theater wartime command in September 1984, training for the hundreds of thousands of troops earmarked for the invasion of Western Europe, was hastily revamped during the autumn and winter, so as to become as realistic as possible in preparation for nuclear warfare. The Soviet military newspaper, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, has graphically illustrated the shifts since Ogarkov began personally overseeing the first and second echelons, quoting Afghanistan war veteran officers, serving in an artillery regiment based in the Byelorussian Military District. Minsk, Byelorussia is headquarters for the Western Theater. One Captain N. Lavrenchuk comments:

"When I arrived in this regiment from Afghanistan, to

tell the truth, I wasn't all that excited—the same old training grounds, the same old maneuver areas—why, you can fire and hit the target with your eyes closed. But starting last winter, everything here has changed radically. Suddenly, you were woken up in the middle of the night, and it went on all night long. Ammunition loads like in a real situation. Somebody shows you a point on a map, and says, 'Get moving'; and all personnel outfitted for ABC warfare. Obstacles on the road, and then an ambush . . . take position at top speed, fire 3-4 rounds at the target, break and rush on to a new position marked on the map. Everything just like in real combat."

Maksimov, Lizichev promoted

On July 26, *Krasnaya Zvezda* provided confirmation of yet another key promotion, involving the commander-in-chief of one of the Soviet wartime high commands. General of the Army Yuri P. Maksimov, head of the Southern High Command since September 1984, headquartered in Tashkent, was suddenly listed as having been promoted to Deputy Minister of Defense. Simultaneously, Maksimov is replacing Marshal Vladimir Tolubko as head of the Strategic Rocket Forces. *Krasnaya Zvezda's* latest listing of the heads of the service branches, for the Navy Day ceremonies, has Maksimov in the slot traditionally reserved for the head of the Strategic Rocket Forces.

Maksimov, unlike Tolubko or previous commanders of the Rocket Forces, is a Ground Forces commander, and personally directed the Soviet Union's butchery of Afghanistan.

A July 25 press conference in Moscow given by Col.-Gen. Nikolai Chervov of the general staff, confirmed some of these recent changes. Chervov also announced that Marshal of Artillery Vladimir Tolubko, 70, the head of the Strategic Rocket Forces since 1972, had retired, and that Gen. Aleksei Lizichev, the political commander under Zaitsev in East Germany, had leapfrogged over many more senior political officers, to become the new head of the Main Political Directorate. Lizichev replaces Gen. Aleksei Yepishev, who has run the Political Directorate of the Armed Forces since 1962.

That same day, *Krasnaya Zvezda* was already describing Lizichev as head of the Main Political Directorate, in its reportage of his meeting with a visiting Syrian military delegation.

Surprise attack and naval supremacy

The July 1985 naval maneuvers are the latest phase of a program, begun in earnest with the huge spring 1984 naval maneuvers in the North Atlantic, to enable the Soviet Navy to perfect the role assigned to it, in the case of an all-out Soviet nuclear assault on the United States. The mission of the Soviet Navy, deployed into the North Atlantic and Norwegian Sea, is to achieve naval supremacy in the North Atlantic, so it can execute the function of protecting the concentration of nuclear ballistic missile submarines in the Barents Sea, and to eliminate U.S. and NATO naval task forces operating in the Atlantic.

In late June, 24 Soviet ballistic missile and nuclear attack submarines armed with cruise missiles, stationed off the U.S. coasts, participated in a large-scale rehearsal of a nuclear "pin-down" barrage against U.S. land-based missile bases, and a simultaneous "strategic decapitation" barrage of Washington, D.C. and key U.S. command and control centers. Such a barrage would constitute the first phase of a Soviet thermonuclear surprise attack against the United States.

The size and scope of the July 1985 exercises surpassed even the naval maneuvers held in the North Atlantic from March 27 to April 4, 1984. Those exercises, in turn, were bigger than the Atlantic component of the Okean-75 global naval exercises. Already, during the spring of 1984, the size, scope, and speed with which Soviet warships reached their Atlantic battle stations, had triggered alarm in NATO quarters.

The just concluded maneuvers have caused no less alarm in the NATO military leadership. Only part of NATO's deep concern has been caused by the mammoth size of the exercises. As the Bonn-based editor of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Alexander Szandar, verified on Friday, July 26, NATO was "astounded" at "the high level of readiness" demonstrated by the Soviet fleet. Echoing the West German Navy's evaluation of the maneuvers, Szandar stressed that never before had the Soviets rehearsed "the destruction of NATO forces stationed on the Northern Flank, and the attempt . . . to achieve naval supremacy."

Massive NATO surveillance

NATO's surveillance and shadowing of Soviet fleet and air movements in the Atlantic, were likewise the greatest ever. Nearly 50 NATO warships were involved, and many hundreds of sorties were flown by reconnaissance aircraft based in the United Kingdom, U.S. AWACS surveillance aircraft based at Geilenkirchen, West Germany, West German naval aviation long-range Breguet-Atlantic reconnais-

sance aircraft, and reconnaissance Tornado aircraft flown out of Schleswig-Holstein.

The Soviet surface warships fielded a task force from their Northern Fleet, led by the ASW carrier Kiev and the nuclear-powered 28,000 ton battle cruiser, Kirov, whose anti-ship missiles have an effective combat range of 500 km. Other large warships from the Northern Fleet which participated included: three Kresta-class cruisers, two Sovremenny-class destroyers, two Udaloi-class ASW destroyers, and two Krivak-class ASW guided missile frigates.

During the peak phase of the maneuvers, the Northern Fleet, operating in the GIUK gap (the sea passages between Scotland, Iceland, and Greenland) "fought" off "attacks" mounted by a surface warship task force, led by the Baltic Fleet Kynda-class guided missile cruiser Grozny.

As part of the exercises, a "barrier" of some 32 submarines was formed between the Norwegian and Barents seas, as an underwater line of defense against any U.S. nuclear attack submarines whose wartime mission would be to penetrate the Barents Sea, seek out and destroy Russian ballistic missile submarines. An additional underwater "barrier," composed of the seven conventionally powered submarines from the Baltic Fleet which joined the exercises, was formed across the North Sea, between the Skaggerak (southern Norway) and the Faroe Islands.

Soviet naval aviation participated, according to defense sources, in "very large numbers." Long-range bombers not only flew missions over the Norwegian Sea, North Sea, and North Atlantic, but also flew down the English Channel over the Bay of Biscay, as far south as the French and Spanish coasts.

This was the second huge exercise by Soviet naval aviation bombers conducted within six weeks. On June 4, for the first time in postwar history, there was a one-day exercise involving hundreds of Soviet naval aviation bombers and reconnaissance aircraft, which flew over the Baltic and East Germany.

The June 4 exercises and the ones just concluded also demonstrated that the Soviets are perfecting plans for a major component of their war plan—the seizure of the Northern Flank. Directly after the culmination of the high seas phase of the maneuvers, a Soviet Baltic Fleet task force led by the cruiser Grozny, with four Krivak-class guided missile frigates and one modernized Kashin-class destroyer, escorted four landing ships (LSTs) with Marines and armored vehicles, up the Norwegian coast. The ships rounded the North Cape, and proceeded eastwards through the Barents Sea. They then landed several thousand marine infantry on the coast of the Soviet Kola Peninsula, not far from Norway.

Amphibious landings on the coast of northern Norway would be one of the components of Soviet military operations on NATO's Northern Flank to seize Scandinavia before any possible help could arrive.