

The overlooked Soviet war buildup in the Far East

by Konstantin George

The year 1984 has witnessed an unprecedented Soviet and North Korean military buildup in the Northeast Asian theater, facing Japan and South Korea, the two most important U.S. allies in Asia. The buildup is to be viewed in light of the massive and ongoing destabilization of the Marcos regime in the Philippines, threatening to close down the U.S. Pacific Fleet logistics and naval base at Subic Bay and the equally important Clark Air Force Base.

More alarming than the size of the buildup in ground, air, and naval forces, is the change in the qualitative composition of the Soviet forces in the Far East Military District. Beginning in 1983, and especially since January 1984, the Russians have established the capability to launch a surprise-attack against Japan proper, at any time of Moscow's choosing. This shift to an effective posture was certified by the stationing of three air assault brigades—special elite heliborne commando troops with the mission to seize and neutralize key enemy military installations before or during the first minutes of fighting—in the Vladivostok region, in addition to the 6th Guards Airborne Division assigned to the Far East Military District.

In the same time frame, Soviet marine infantry strength at Vladivostok has been increased, while in the Kurile Islands and Sakhalin Island, territory at some points only a few score miles distant from the northernmost of the four home islands of Japan, Hokkaido, the following tell-tale, offensive-posture military moves were recorded by U.S. and Japanese intelligence:

- During 1984, Soviet marine infantry numbering 8,000 have been stationed in the Kuriles, divided evenly among three islands of the chain, Etorofu, Shikotan, and Kunashir,

and on southern Sakhalin Island, all only a stone's throw away from Hokkaido—in the case of Kunashir, hardly more than swimming distance. Prior to moving in the marines, the strength of Soviet army ground troops in the Kuriles had been doubled from 5,000 to full division strength of 10,000.

- Immediately after the KAL-007 shootdown in September 1983, twenty MiG-23 fighters were stationed on Etorofu in the Kuriles for the first time. In the spring of 1984, the number of MiG-23s was doubled to 40. In the spring and summer of this year, MiG-31s, the most advanced MiG fighter in the Soviet inventory, were stationed on Southern Sakhalin. Not coincidentally, the Soviets began delivering MiG-23s to the North Korean Air Force this year.

- On Sept. 23, 1984, Japan was given its second big shock by the Soviets after the KAL atrocity. A formation of 20 Soviet TU-22M "Backfire" long-range bombers, which generally fly exercises with nuclear weapons, approached to within 170 miles west of Hokkaido, causing 16 Japanese air-force fighters to scramble in haste. In the 1980s, the Soviets have built up "Backfire" bomber strength to over 80 in the Far East, while also completing three air bases with five runways on the Kurile islands of Etorofu and Kunashir for TU-16 "Badger" and TU-95 "Bear" long-range bombers.

These Soviet bomber bases in the Kuriles are "across the bay" (in the case of Kunashir) from Japanese territory, mere minutes' flying time from targets in Japan.

The biggest shock the Soviets have delivered to Japan occurred on Aug. 15 of this year, when all Soviet forces under the Far East Military Command headquartered in Chita, Siberia (including the Far East, Trans-Baikal, and Siberian Military Districts and the Pacific Fleet) were placed on a war alert for a full 30 minutes, with Soviet troops and sailors

told they were “going to war with the United States.” Japanese units were immediately put into a state of high alert in response.

The news of the Soviet war alert was leaked through the Japanese newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun on Oct. 1. And that same day, South Korean President Chun issued a warning on the grave peril of war on the Korean Peninsula due to North Korea’s menacing buildup of offensive power, particularly in the Kaesong region just above the 38th Parallel in the Western end of the Peninsula—directly opposite the 1950 invasion corridor to Seoul, the South Korean capital.

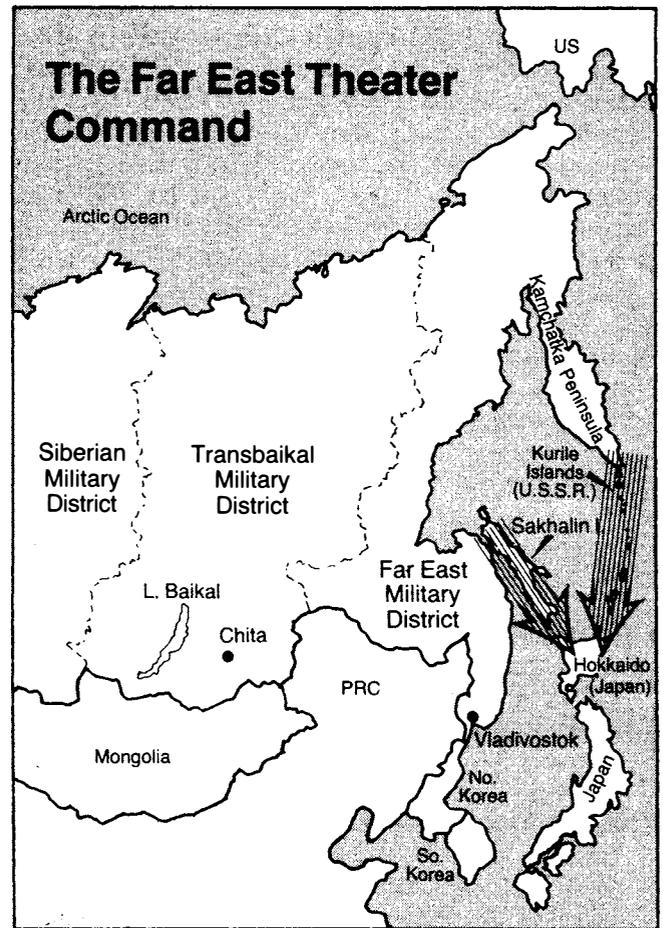
Chun, speaking on Korean Armed Forces Day, declared: “The Cold War between the superpowers has made the military confrontation around us more acute, threatening war in this region at any time. . . . Lately, moreover, there have been unusual movements in the North, as they have deployed in the forward areas along the truce line and intensified training of their 100,000 commando troops.” One week earlier on Sept. 23, the Japanese newspaper *Sankei Shimbun* reported that North Korea has deployed three new armored corps near the DMZ around the town of Kaesong—the biggest armored buildup opposite the Seoul invasion corridor since the Korean War.

Reorganization for war

The Soviet preparations for warfare in both Europe and Asia have included a massive command restructuring during Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov’s tenure as chief of the Soviet general staff, with Ogarkov himself recently promoted to head what is called the Western Theater of War, making him commander of all wartime operations undertaken against the United States and NATO.

In the same time frame, late summer 1984, Ogarkov’s wartime counterpart for the Eastern Theater of War, responsible for leading all wartime operations mounted against any combination of the Soviet Union’s adversaries in the Asian-Pacific Theater, including the United States, Japan, South Korea, China, Thailand, and the Philippines, was also named: the first deputy defense minister, Marshal Sergei L. Sokolov. It is certain in retrospect that Sokolov was fulfilling the duties of his wartime command position before the chilling wartime alert declared by the Soviet Far Eastern Command on Aug. 15.

The naming of Sokolov as Asia-Pacific wartime commander occurred in the context of wide-ranging changes in the Far East Command structure during the course of the summer of 1984. In late June, Gen. Vladimir Govorov, commander of the Soviet High Command Far East (HQ in Chita), who achieved infamy for his role in ordering the shooting down of the KAL-007 airliner killing 269 civilians, was promoted to deputy defense minister. Clearly, in the context of Sokolov’s wartime post, Govorov now works de facto directly under Sokolov in the command structure of the Eastern Theater of War. Govorov’s successor as commander of the Soviet High Command Far East was Gen. Ivan Tretyak,



Soviet military strength in the Kurile Islands, concentrated between the Kamchatka Peninsula and Japan’s northern island of Hokkaido, was doubled during 1983, from 5,000 to 10,000 ground troops; 20 MiG-23 fighters were produced. Then, during 1984, eight thousand marine infantry were moved onto three islands in the chain, and the number of MiG-23s was doubled to 40. At three airbases with five runways on the islands, TU-16 Badger and TU-95 Bear long-range bombers are also stationed, just minutes from Japanese targets.

the commander of the Far East Military District in Vladivostok until the summer of 1984.

Along with Sokolov and Govorov, there is another top-level Far East veteran in Moscow, Marshal Petrov, commander of Soviet land forces. Before this appointment, he was commander of the Far East High Command.

Parallel war preparations

There is a striking, indeed, eerie methodical symmetry to the phases of both Soviet war preparations and the command restructuring in both the European and the Asian theaters.

The first phase in both cases is marked by a singular and far-reaching command restructuring which occurred in December 1980, immediately following Reagan’s presidential election victory.

General Zaitsev was named commander of the five Soviet

active armies (20 divisions) stationed in East Germany, known as the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany (GSFG), where he directed a five-year program of modernizing and heavily strengthening the offensive power of the GSFG (especially in armor, missiles, and aircraft/helicopters), and brought in a new stable of "blitzkrieg" generals as army and major-unit commanders (see *EIR* July 17, Aug. 7, and Oct. 30). In the same month, December 1980, Gen. Vladimir Govorov, until then commander of the Moscow Military District, was named commander of the Far East High Command at Chita, and Gen. Ivan Tretyak was named commander of the Far East Military District, whose areas of responsibility include the Vladivostok region, the Kuriles, and Sakhalin Island. The previous commander of the Far East High Command at Chita,

Who is Marshal Sergei Sokolov?

Marshal Sergei L. Sokolov, now reported to be Commander of the Eastern Theater of War, and so, the counterpart to Soviet Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, Commander of the Western Theater of War, is a tank officer with eight years of actual combat experience. Appropriately enough, his combat experience began in the Far East, in 1938, where as a young tank officer (Bttn.Ex.O), he participated in the Soviet armored counterattacks which smashed the Japanese in heavy border fighting in which tens of thousands were killed. He next appeared as a tank officer in the 1939 Soviet invasion of Finland, and served most of the war as a tank officer on the Karelian Front, 1941-1944.

The Commander of the Karelian Front was Marshal K. A. Meretskov, whose son, until September 1984, was commander of the North Caucasus Military District, being named deputy to Warsaw Pact Commander Kulikov in the function of Soviet liaison to the East German armed forces. In 1945, Meretskov commanded the First Manchurian Front and co-led the August 1945 blitzkrieg which overran Manchuria within weeks. Most tank officers and units were transferred with their commander from the Karelian Front—after the separate peace with Finland in late 1944—to the Manchurian Theater. It is very probable that Sokolov ended his wartime service in the Far East.

Sokolov, a career tank officer, is, as one would expect, totally offensive oriented in his thinking. The longevity of his tenure as first deputy defense minister is also very significant. He received the post in April 1967 when Marshal Andrei Grechko became defense minister, and has kept this post throughout the tenure of Ustinov, Grechko's successor.

General Petrov, was summoned to Moscow to become head of the land forces—the post he still holds.

Thus, while Zaitsev prepared the GSFG for all forms of warfare, from a limited "surgical strike" into part of West Germany to an all-out offensive across Europe, Govorov and Tretyak accomplished parallel tasks concerning military operations against Japan and South Korea. The parallels reach down to the not insignificant detail that, in a clear statement of offensive intentions, in 1983 and 1984 for the first time in both East Germany and the Far East, the Soviets stationed a minimum of three air assault brigades in each location.

The "symmetry" extends further to the case of Germany and Korea, the two nations which share the tragic postwar "distinction" of being divided. Both now face the threat of a Soviet invasion, or, in the case of Korea, an invasion by the largest Soviet surrogate military power in the world, North Korea. Since the extensive tour of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe undertaken this past spring by North Korean leader Kim Il Sung, and his extensive consultations with the Kremlin, the Soviets have repeatedly and publicly been stressing their commitment to the "reunification of Korea," and their full support for North Korea's efforts to achieve it.

The fact is that on the soil of East Germany and North Korea, facing West Germany and South Korea, respectively, the following two events occurred in early 1984: The Soviet Armed Forces stationed in East Germany underwent their biggest strengthening and restructuring since the end of World War II, and, across the world in that other divided country, the North Korean Armed Forces undertook their biggest buildup of offensive power and restructuring since the end of the Korean War.

Intimidation of Japan

The parallels in the Soviet political intimidation campaign against both West Germany and Japan are as striking as the military "hardware" parallels in terms of troop buildups, weaponry, and command changes. Since the spring of 1984, in an echo of the vitriolics employed on an almost daily basis against West Germany since December 1983, the Soviet Union has mounted and intensified a propaganda campaign against an alleged rebirth of "revanchism" in Japan. As in the case of West Germany, the Soviet litany of charges portray the Japanese leadership, and, above all, the armed forces, as infested with schemes and desires to plot the recovery of territory lost in 1945. The Japanese are allegedly plotting to seize the Kuriles and the southern half of Sakhalin, which were taken by the Soviets in 1945. How non-nuclear West Germany and Japan could ever militarily attack the Soviet Union is never explained to the Russian worker, peasant, or soldier.

That the attacks are nonsensical is self-evident. They are, however, significant, as in the case of Germany, because they create the climate and pretext for launching of either a "surgical-strike," limited-incursion seizure of territory, or all-out invasion of Japan. The area of West Germany most



The North Koreans have moved their 100,000 commando troops up to forward positions along the Demilitarized Zone, and stationed three new armored corps around the town of Kaesong, opposite the 1950 Seoul invasion route (arrow).

weakly defended and most often cited as a prime candidate for such a Soviet surgical strike is Schleswig-Holstein, the northernmost state of West Germany. The prime candidate in Japan for a Soviet surgical strike is the island of Hokkaido, the Japanese "Schleswig-Holstein," and, as with Schleswig-Holstein, the northernmost part of the country.

'Asiamissiles'

The latest escalation in the Soviet intimidation campaign against Japan and Korea is signified by the introduction of a new term to the Moscow propaganda lexicon, "Asiamissiles." This term was seen in the latest issue of the Soviet publication *New Times* in its "Observer" column, attacking

an alleged U.S. IRBM and ICBM deployment on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, labeling these "Asiamissiles" which have now joined the "Euromissiles" in "threatening the Soviet Union." The Soviet media has also been replete with articles charging the United States with "plans" to station Pershing and cruise missiles in South Korea and Japan. Of late, the Soviet media has been declaring that the "United States, Japan, and South Korea . . . form a NATO-like alliance in the Far East" (Radio Moscow).

The "Euromissiles" outcry by the Soviets was the pretext to equip all their armies in Eastern Europe and the western Soviet Union with the SS-21, SS-23, and SS-22 precision short- and medium-range nuclear missiles. The forward stationing of these missiles in Eastern Europe immediately after the Soviet announcement that such stationing would occur proved that all the required missile and launcher production, unit-equipping, and crew training had occurred well before the announcement. The same pattern will repeat itself in the Far East, when, at an appropriate point in the denunciation of the "Asiamissiles," Moscow will announce the "necessity" to station the new missiles, SS-21, SS-23, and SS-22, in the Far East (or in the case of Diego Garcia, forward-based in Afghanistan), and within weeks the Soviet armies in the Far East will be so equipped.

The 'decoupling' process

Such intimidation only works because of the "decoupling" process now ongoing between Asia and the United States, as between Europe and the United States. Most diplomatic attention has been focused on the efforts of Henry Kissinger's circles to get the United States to desert Europe—and Kissinger's circle has been pushing military adventures in the Caribbean region to provide a pretext for such a desertion of the European allies. And, for at least a year, Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and their State Department crowd has also been talking about turning away from "decadent" Western Europe and setting its sights on Asia—adding an "Asia turn" as pretext for handing Europe to the Russians.

The Asia turn is a hoax. Just as Soviet agent-of-influence Kissinger's "China Card" policy of the early 1970s functioned as a cover for the earlier phases of the strategic withdrawal of the United States from Asia, so the "Asia turn" proposal now, while covering for withdrawal from Europe, also covers for U.S. withdrawal from Asia. To believe that under the "New Yalta" plan, the United States will be permitted to retain its influence in the Pacific is the height of absurdity, and firmly refuted by Marshal Sokolovskii's massive buildup in the region. It is not Washington that has been reasserting its influence in the Pacific region, but Moscow.

This is the key danger in current efforts to destabilize the Philippines. If the United States is thrown out of the Philippines, the basis will be created for the major Eastern Establishment media in the United States to launch a "Let's leave Asia to the Asians" campaign for isolationism, paving the way for Soviet hegemony without a shot fired.