

EIR Special Report

Soviet military creates a wartime High Command

by Konstantin George and Clifford Gaddy

The Soviet military newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* (*Red Star*), in the obituaries and condolences for Defense Minister and Politburo member Dmitrii Ustinov published on Dec. 22, 1984, dropped an intelligence bombshell. Unofficially, yet unmistakably, the paper confirmed that four wartime High Commands had been created during the latter half of 1984, covering every "Strategic Direction" of the Soviet Armed Forces, and representing the general strategic axes of advance by the Red Army in military contingencies ranging from all-out war to regional and local conflagrations. The intelligence picture which we present below was pieced together by *EIR* researchers, while Moscow correspondents of the Western news media were busy spinning yarns about the demise of Konstantin Chernenko and the alleged likelihood of a Geneva arms deal.

In confirming that these wartime commands are fully operational, *Krasnaya Zvezda* served notice on the West that the Soviet Union considers itself in a pre-war situation, if not in the initial phase of war.

The four new commands are: 1) the High Command of the Western Strategic Direction, by far the most important, headed by Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov; 2) the High Command of the Southwestern Strategic Direction, headquartered in Kiev and commanded by General of the Army Ivan Gerasimov; 3) the High Command of the Southern Strategic Direction, headquartered in Tashkent and commanded by General of the Army Yuri Maksimov; and 4) the Far East High Command, headquartered in Chita and commanded by General of the Army Ivan Tretyak.

All four commanders in chief were appointed during the latter half of 1984, in a restructuring unparalleled in the postwar history of the Soviet armed forces. The Soviet command structure has undergone more changes in the past six months, from the Military District commander level on up, than normally occur in a decade. In 1984 no fewer than 11 of the 16 Military Districts and four "Groups of Forces" (as troops stationed in East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary are called) received new commanders in chief, while an approximately equal number of Military Districts and Groups of Forces received new deputy commanders in chief and new Chief Political Officers. In 1983, by contrast, only one Military District commander in chief was replaced.



NSIPS/Uwe Parpart

Unnoticed by the Western news media, the Soviet military is undergoing the most significant reorganization in the postwar period. Shown here are Red Army trucks in Moscow, with the domes of St. Basil's cathedral in the background.

The ordering of signatures under Ustinov's obituary in *Krasnaya Zvezda* included the names and titles of Ogarkov, Gerasimov, Maksimov, and Tretyak, along with the Chief Political Officers appointed to each of the High Commands: Lt. Gen. B.P. Utkin, Col. Gen. V.S. Rodin, Lt. Gen. A.I. Shirinkin, Col. Gen. Mikhail Druzhunin. The listing further confirmed that the most important of these four commands—the Western High Command—is commanded by Marshal Ogarkov, who was chief of the Soviet General Staff until Sept. 6, 1984. The pattern of Ogarkov's appearances since that date—tracked by *EIR* from East German and Soviet media, and from sightings reported by Western intelligence sources—completely coheres with what can be discerned from the Dec. 22 *Krasnaya Zvezda*.

Ogarkov's shift is most reminiscent of the career of Georgii Zhukov, the Soviet Union's star World War II commander. Zhukov, at the time of the Nazi invasion of Russia in 1941, was chief of the General Staff, as was Ogarkov until September. In early July 1941, Zhukov was promoted to "Representative of the Stavka," or wartime High Command—from which post he took direct charge of war-fighting. If war breaks out today, it will be waged and decided on German territory by the troops commanded by Ogarkov, as today's equivalent of the "Stavka Representative." Ogarkov's own writings always stress the historical role of the Stavka, of the institution of "Stavka Representative," and of Zhukov personally.

Ogarkov in East Germany

The latest sighting of Ogarkov, though not officially reported in the East bloc media, occurred in early February,

when he oversaw Warsaw Pact military maneuvers in East Germany staged under harsh winter weather conditions by units of the Soviet and East German armed forces, plus one token unit of battalion strength of the Polish Army. The latter unit was flown in to the Soviet military airfield at the armored troop base and sprawling maneuver grounds at Jueterbog, south of Berlin. The Warsaw Pact forces proceeded westward toward the Magdeburg area, then staged a crossing of the Elbe River north of Magdeburg, with the exercise culminating in the huge Colbitz-Letzlinger Heide maneuver grounds situated between the Elbe and the West German border.

The maneuvers involved a total of 12-15,000 troops, and were also observed by the Soviet commander in chief of the Warsaw Pact forces, Marshal Viktor Kulikov, the commander of the Soviet forces stationed in East Germany ("Group of Soviet Forces in Germany"—GSFG), Army General Mikhail Zaitsev, and the defense ministers of East Germany and Poland, Gen. Heinz Hoffmann and Gen. Florian Siwicki.

Ogarkov's presence, which was confirmed to *EIR* by Western defense-related sources, marked the fourth confirmed time that he has been sighted since his removal on Sept. 6 from the post of chief of the General Staff and his promotion to the wartime post of commander of military actions against U.S.-NATO forces in the strategically decisive theater of Central Europe.

Ogarkov, who named was chief of the General Staff in 1977, has personally been the driving force behind the reorganization of the Soviet armed forces onto a war footing. British intelligence sources were saying in 1983 that the Ogarkov reorganization was scheduled for completion by 1985. The first phase of the reorganization occurred during

1978-81, when the Soviet Air Defense (PVO Strany) structure was revised, consolidating the 10 PVO Air Defense armies into 5 PVO armies, corresponding to five geographical "Theaters of Military Action" (TVDs), with all ground and air forces under one unified command in each Theater. These Theaters are: the Northwest, the Western, the Southwestern (the three taken together form the Western Theater of War), the Southern, and the Far Eastern.

Ogarkov also created the High Commands, for war-fighting purposes. The first move in this direction occurred in late 1978, with the recreation of the Far East High Command, which had ceased functioning in 1953 after the Korean War had ended, and with it the immediate possibility of Soviet involvement in a war in the Far East. The recreation of the Far East High Command coincided with a significant shift by the Soviet Union toward a much more threatening posture toward Japan (see *EIR*, Nov. 13, 1984, "The overlooked Soviet war buildup in the Far East"). That year marked the beginning of a major Soviet military buildup, which in 1984 was considerably accelerated, on Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands, near Japan.

The man first chosen to head the Far Eastern High Command in December 1978 was Gen. Vasili Petrov (commander of the Far East Military District from 1972 to 1976), who

later, in the context of a far-reaching armed forces reorganization conducted by Ogarkov in December 1980, became commander of the Soviet Ground Forces. Petrov held that post until Feb. 2, 1985, when *Krasnaya Zvezda* characterized him as first deputy defense minister, replacing Marshal Sergei Sokolov, who moved up to become defense minister upon the death of Ustinov.

After his Sept. 6 "disappearance," widely described as a "demotion" in the Western media, Ogarkov first publicly resurfaced on Oct. 13 in East Berlin (see *EIR*, Oct. 30, 1984, "Ogarkov surfaces in Soviet pre-war mobilization"), where he was received with full state honors by East German Party head Erich Honecker, and held working meetings with the commander of the Soviet troops in East Germany, Gen. Mikhail Zaitsev, and with East German military leaders. The meetings were prominently covered by the East German news agency ADN, though—reflecting Soviet policy to accord no publicity to Ogarkov as a wartime command figure—they were blacked out of the Soviet media. The ADN dispatches mentioned no arrival ceremonies or receptions, indicating that Ogarkov met Honecker after having already been in East Germany or elsewhere in Eastern Europe, working with the Soviet forces stationed there. Ogarkov may have been coming from Czechoslovakia, where on Oct. 9, TASS and the

New commanders for 11 military districts

New appointments are seldom officially announced, so the following up-to-date roster of changes was compiled by EIR through cross-gridding of Soviet military publications.

Kiev—Former commander: General of the Army I. A. Gerasimov. New commander: Lt. Gen. V. V. Osipov. Previous post: first deputy commander of the Byelorussian district.

Far East—Former commander: General of the Army I. M. Tretyak. New commander: General of the Army D. T. Yazov. Previous post: commander of the Central Asian district, 1980-84.

Trans-Baikal—Former commander: General of the Army G. I. Salmanov. New commander: Col. Gen. S. I. Postnikov. Previous post: commander of the Baltic district, 1980-84.

Baltic—Former commander: Col. Gen. S. I. Postni-

kov. New commander: Col. Gen. A. V. Betekhtin.

North Caucasus—Former commander: Col. Gen. V. K. Meretskoy. New commander: Col. Gen. V. V. Skokov.

Siberia—Former commander: Col. Gen. N. I. Popov. New commander: Col. Gen. V. A. Vostrov. Previous post: first deputy commander of the Far East district.

Central Asia—Former commander: General of the Army D. T. Yazov. New commander: Col. Gen. Lobov. Previous post: first deputy commander of the Leningrad district (1981-84).

Turkestan—Former commander: General of the Army Yuri P. Maksimov. New commander: Col. Gen. N. I. Popov. Previous post: commander of Siberian district (1981-84).

Ural—Former commander: Col. Gen. I. Gashkov. New commander: Lt. Gen. N. F. Grachev. Previous post: chief of staff, Carpathian district.

Central Group of Forces—Former commander: Col. Gen. G. G. Borisov. New commander: Col. Gen. Viktor F. Yermakov. Previous post: head of the Military Engineering Command School.

Northern Group of Forces—Former commander: Col. Gen. Yuri F. Zarudin. New commander: Lt. Gen. A. V. Kovtunov. Previous post: chief of staff, Central Asian district.

Czech news agency Ceteka, announced that Colonel General Borisov, commander of the Central Group of Soviet Forces, was being "transferred" out of Czechoslovakia. With Ogarkov's first reappearance, came also the first authoritative Soviet confirmation that he had been promoted to a crucial position.

That same day, Soviet Politburo member Grigorii Romanov, on a visit to Finland, told Western journalists in Helsinki that "Marshal Ogarkov commands the Soviet Union's largest Western forces." Ogarkov then appeared among the obituary signatories for Defense Minister Ustinov in the "coded message" in *Krasnaya Zvezda* of Dec. 22. The next official mention of him was in *Krasnaya Zvezda* on Jan. 25, which reported that he had delivered a speech before the Komsomol (communist youth organization) of the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany, at the Soviet military headquarters in Zossen-Wüensdorf. In that address, broadcast only in excerpted form on the Soviet military station Radio Volga, he discussed the imminence of war. "The situation today is comparable in all respects to that which existed at the end of the 1930s," he said. "The danger from the military threat is growing," with the "Reagan administration . . . making material preparations for war," compelling Russia to enter into negotiations in order to buy time to modernize its armed forces.

Since then, *EIR* has learned from very reliable Western intelligence sources that Ogarkov was spotted in Czechoslovakia soon after the Zossen-Wuensdorf speech.

The war machine under Ogarkov

The concentration of forces now under Ogarkov's High Command shows the Soviet leadership's decision to pour in troops, equipment, and munitions—throughout 1983-84—to bring the forces that would spearhead the invasion of West Germany up to actual war-fighting inventory levels.

Ogarkov's High Command of the Western Strategic Direction is the most important of the four commands, and contains the largest number of troops, aircraft, tactical and medium-range missiles of any "Strategic Direction." He is, minimally, the wartime commander of all Soviet military forces in East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Byelorussia, the Soviet-occupied part of East Prussia, sandwiched between Poland and Lithuania, and the Baltic Fleet and Marine Infantry.

Under his command are 26 Armored Divisions, 20 Motorized Rifle Divisions, 4 Heliborne-Commando Air Assault Brigades stationed in East Germany, 1 Airborne Division, and 3 Artillery Divisions—a total of at least 50 divisions plus at least 4 Air Assault Brigades. All of these are in "Category I" readiness—fully combat-ready—unlike the normal situation in any other "Strategic Direction." The figure of 50 divisions actually understates the strength of both combat troops and firepower. The norm in categories such as tanks, self-propelled guns, and artillery strength among, for example, the Soviet forces in East Germany, vastly exceeds the

strength existing in the average Category I division elsewhere.

To portray this war buildup in very concrete terms: In contrast to the normal Soviet Armored Division's 270 tanks, the 10 Armored Divisions in East Germany now have at least 415 tanks each, meaning an additional tank regiment has been quietly added during 1984 to each division! Each of the nine Motorized Rifle Divisions of the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany has been beefed up with an additional tank battalion (at least 45 tanks per battalion). In addition, the Soviet Second Guards Tank Army, facing north Germany and Schleswig-Holstein, was strengthened in 1984 with three additional Independent Tank Regiments (an additional 405 tanks) and a tank battalion was added to each of the Army's three Motorized Rifle Divisions (135 tanks).

Under Ogarkov's on-the-scene direction, the tank strength of the two Soviet armies facing north and central West Germany, the Second Guards Tank Army and the Third Shock Army, headquartered at Magdeburg, has risen to at least 1,405 tanks and 1,660 tanks, respectively. Western intelligence sources have recently revised upward their estimates of GSFG tank strength to between 6,400 and 7,000. In addition, there are 1,000 tanks pre-positioned in East Germany, which can also go into immediate action following an airlift of tank crews and troops. Other 1984 firepower increases included large increases in self-propelled-gun strength, and the artillery regiment of each of the 19 Soviet divisions now contains 4 artillery battalions, totaling 72 artillery pieces per division (half of them 152mm and half 122mm). The 122mm multi-barrel rocket-launchers are now being replaced with 240mm "Stalin Organs."

But the increases are not only quantitative. Beginning in late December, the Soviet Union began replacing older tanks among the troops of the GSFG with the T-80, the most modern tank in the Russian inventory. The First Guards Tank Army headquartered in Dresden, and the Eighth Guards Army in Nohra, just outside Weimar in Thuringia, now have the T-80. The Soviets' program to modernize their armies with the T-80 began in late October with the armies of the Far Eastern Military District, opposite Manchuria and Japan. Then in early December, they began equipping the armies of the Byelorussian and Turkestan Military Districts with T-80s (the former constitutes one of the two major army concentrations for the Soviets' second echelon in any attack on West Germany; the latter district faces Afghanistan and Iran).

Nuclear firepower was also massively increased in 1984. By October, 72 SS-22 precision missile-launchers (range: 625 miles) were stationed in East Germany, and 36 more in Czechoslovakia. While this fact was publicized in the West German media, ironically, the parallel deployment of at least 72 SS-22 launchers (probably well over 100) among the two Soviet artillery divisions in Soviet East Prussia, which are preponderantly targeted on West Germany, was not. Also targeting primarily West Germany and the Low Countries are no fewer than 90 SS-23 launchers (300 mile range) in East Germany, stationed there during 1984.