

NATO Autumn Forge exercises: victim of Vienna conventional forces talks?

by Dean Andromidas and Chris Lewis

NATO recently completed its annual Autumn Forge series of military exercises, the smallest in over a decade. The contrast to previous years was dramatic:

- The United States canceled Reforger, an exercise that for the last 10 years demonstrated U.S. commitment to reinforce Western Europe.

- In 1989, only a little more than 200,000 troops took part in the Autumn Forge exercises. In 1988, over 280,000 soldiers participated.

- NATO's Air Forces Cold Fire Exercise, which exercises air support for NATO ground forces, was cut in half, conducting 400 sorties a day this year, down from 800 sorties a day last year.

- Both the West German and U.S. field training exercise lasted only one week, down from two weeks last year.

- Citing concern over possible damage to the environment, the American exercises employed only 50% of the vehicles normally deployed for such maneuvers.

The cutbacks must be seen in the context of ongoing negotiations between Washington and Moscow, which could very well lead to an American strategic withdrawal from Western Europe. The Conventional Forces in Europe talks being held in Vienna are going into their second year. On the table are American proposals for parity between NATO and Warsaw Pact troop and air forces at a level 15% below current NATO levels. This would leave 20,000 tanks, 16,500 artillery pieces, 28,000 armored personnel carriers, and 5,700 combat aircraft. The proposals also call for U.S. and Soviet troops stationed outside their national territory in Europe not to exceed 275,000 each. Although this would entail deep cuts by the Warsaw Pact, it would also mean withdrawing 30,000 American soldiers, or a 25% cut in the fighting strength of American ground forces in West Germany. A withdrawal of U.S. troops would extend 6,000 kilometers back to American territory, whereas Soviet troops need only withdraw 600 kilometers to reach Soviet territory.

Proposals are being made both without regard to military strategy or doctrine, and without consulting the relevant military commands.

One such proposal was reported by the U.S. Armed Forces daily paper *Stars and Stripes*. On Sept. 8, the Bush admin-

istration notified British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that, under an agreement that could emerge from the Vienna talks, the United States would pull out of four Air Force facilities based in the United Kingdom. According to the report, the U.S. Defense Department expressed "incredulity" about such a proposal, and a spokesman for the Third Air Force stated that its command was never notified of it. Over 32,000 servicemen and their dependents are based at the facilities, and one of these is the headquarters of the Third Air Force. Another is the home base for six squadrons of A-10 aircraft that are the backbone of American ground support fighter capability for two U.S. Army Corps based in West Germany. Still others have important logistics functions for both U.S. and NATO capabilities. Nonetheless a State Department source is quoted saying the bases were definitely on the cutback list, because they "are just excess real estate!"

Although, officially, NATO cites environmental and political reasons for the scaling down of the exercises, their smaller size conforms with proposals the United States presented to the Vienna conference in September. One proposal was to limit exercises to 40,000 soldiers and 800 tanks, which coheres precisely with the size of the American Fifth Corps maneuver, Caravan Guard '89. The West German national exercise "Offenes Visier," was also held below the 40,000 soldier count.

Soviet threat still visible

Perestroika and *glasnost* may have lessened the "perceived" threat, but not the real threat. The Soviet arms control initiatives are coordinated with an ongoing reorganization of Soviet armed forces coherent with a new, evolving Soviet military doctrine (see *EIR*, No. 42, Oct. 13, 1989). This much-touted "defensive military doctrine" is, in fact, a war-winning strategy based on a "leaner, meaner" force structure. Furthermore, equipment modernization programs continue unabated, with growing numbers of modern T-72 and T-80 tanks as well as even more modern tanks coming on line. Many thousands of TOWed artillery pieces are being replaced with new and more capable, tank-like self-propelled artillery, such as the 122 millimeter 2S1 and the 152 millimeter 2S3 self-propelled howitzers, and the 240 millimeter self-pro-

pelled mortars. Many of these are nuclear-capable. While the number of Soviet tanks in Soviet regiments has decreased, the number of armored personnel carriers is increasing. This conforms with putting even greater emphasis on *spetsnaz* (special forces) and airborne assault forces armed with post-nuclear weapons, such as radio-frequency devices and hand-held nuclear devices for deployment deep into NATO's rear areas. The military responsibilities of East Germany and Czechoslovakia have been dramatically upgraded, with these forces receiving more T-72 and T-80 tanks, and SS-21 rocket launchers. Their air forces have also been upgraded with MiG-29s, the Soviets' most modern fighters.

A far more unpredictable danger is the growing economic and political instability of the entire East bloc. A deep concern about lowering NATO's profile in this climate was expressed during Autumn Forge by Lt. Gen. Sir Peter Inge, Commander of the First British Corps in Germany. Quoted in the British press, the British commander declared, "I agree that in the present climate of East-West relations the threat of war seems far less likely. But we simply don't know if Mr. Gorbachov will overcome the horrendous problems he faces. . . . In the meantime we could be moving into a period of great instability.

"As a military commander I must deal with realities, not wishful thinking. History has shown us that it takes a long time to build up economic and military capabilities—but intentions can change overnight."

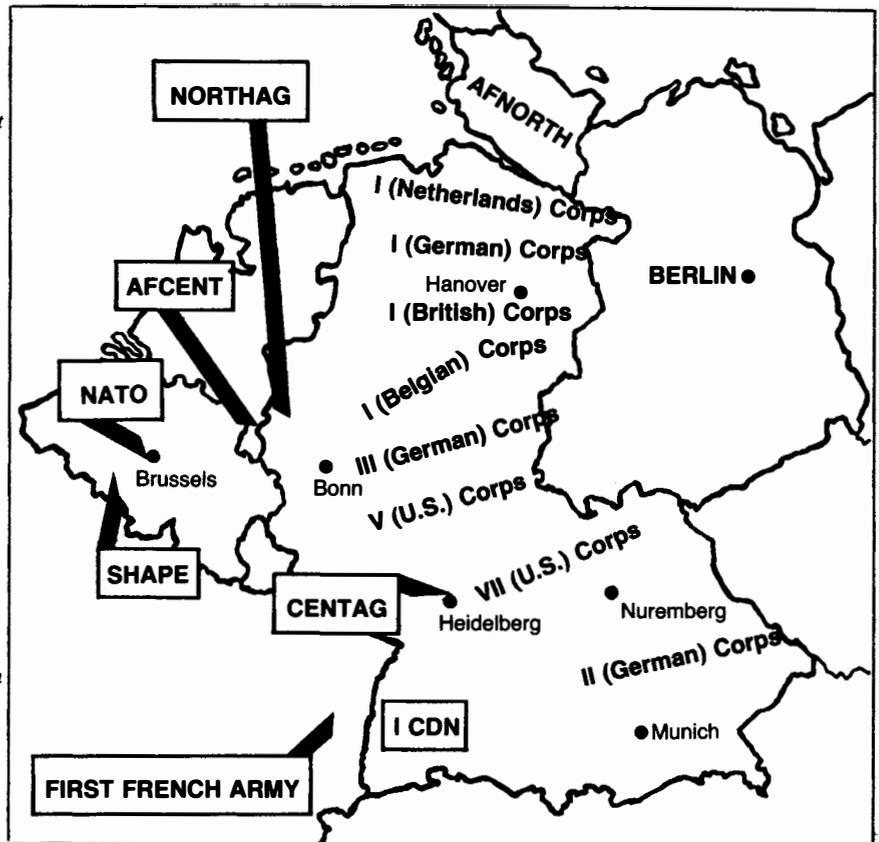
Defending NATO's Central Front

The purpose of Autumn Forge is to deter war through accomplishing three missions: 1) *Training NATO's ground forces*. These exercises are a cornerstone of training the common soldier, giving him an opportunity to exercise in large formations on the same territory he might one day have to defend. 2) *Providing a vital example of alliance cooperation in large-scale joint exercises*, which only occurs during Autumn Forge. One of NATO's greatest assets is its determination to fight as a multinational force. 3) *Politically demonstrating alliance cohesion* by showing that all 16 nations of NATO are committed to the common defense of Western Europe and Turkey.

This year's Autumn Forge provided some very important and innovative training. One of the most outstanding exercises was the Franco-German Champagne '89 Exercise, which, although not formally part of the Autumn Forge series, witnessed an "invasion" of France by German tanks, simulating

NATO forces in Central Europe

NATO's central region—the Federal Republic of Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, and Great Britain—is the keystone to the defense of Western Europe. The basic operational formation on the Central Front is the corps, comprised of 2-4 divisions. Each nation deploys 1 or more corps along the German-German and West German-Czech borders. The U.S. deploys 2 corps and the Canadians maintain 1 brigade. While each corps is under its respective national command, in wartime they come under the command of higher multinational NATO Army Groups, the Army Group North, (NORTHAG) based in Munchengladbach and the Central Army (CENTAG) group based in Heidelberg. These are, in turn, integrated into the Allied Forces Central Europe Command, a multinational command based in Brusseum, Netherlands. Although France is outside of NATO's intergrated military command, in wartime, France would almost automatically reintegrate itself. It maintains its own corps on German soil, under the Allied Powers occupation rights. NATO's air forces are organized along a parallel command structure, with the mission to defend the Central Region's airspace as well as to provide air support to the ground forces.



a Soviet invasion, attesting to the growing Franco-German cooperation of the last few years.

Another first was a series of exercises conducted by the British Army of the Rhine whose purpose was to test the transport of a British brigade and other reinforcements from the United Kingdom to the continent.

But the most interesting of this series was Exercise Key Flight, which included participation from the new 24th Air Mobile Brigade, which was created to counter Soviet airborne tactics. Key Flight demonstrated how Soviet methods of combined airborne and armored warfare tactics could be countered. During the exercise an enemy tank column was destroyed while attempting to link up with a group dropped by air in the British rear area.

The 24th Air Brigade itself is quite an impressive operation and this exercise enabled its commander, Brig. George Kennedy, to really determine what was needed to move the entire brigade and deploy it into fighting positions: It took 40 Army helicopters, 12 Royal Air Force Pumas, and 10 Chinook helicopters. Despite the great success of the maneuver, the future of the brigade is up against a lack of resources because the British government is pressing for cuts in the defense budget.

EIR had the opportunity to directly observe the American V Corps' Caravan Guard '89. The original plan was to include troops brought over to Germany as part of Reforger '89, which was canceled.

Caravan Guard is the V Corps' annual field training exercise; this year the Corps' Third Armored Division squared off against the Eighth Infantry Division. The Corps' Eleventh Armored Cavalry Regiment took time off from its full-time mission of patrolling the German-German border, which other units took over for the duration of the exercise. Also involved were the Fifth German Grenadier Brigade and the Fourth Canadian Brigade.

The exercise saw sharp reductions in men and equipment deployed in the field. Only 40,000 troops, 12,000 wheeled vehicles, and 600 tracked vehicles participated. This is a fraction of the number of tanks and armored personnel carriers for such exercises, which usually exceeds 3,000.

The sharp reductions appeared to be a concessions to the environmentalists. They were the result of the so-called "Train Smart—Manuever Smart" concept handed down by NATO Commander Gen. John R. Galvin, aimed at limiting damage to the environment by tank and armored personnel carriers. The reductions were accomplished through combining what are called "command post exercises" and "command field exercises" with field training exercises. The interface was provided by the Joint Exercise Simulation System (JESS), which employs military computer-driven simulators, where the simulators replace real men, vehicles, and even entire regiments in the field. Everything from firepower and attrition rates, to the logistical requirements such as refueling and even dinner breaks, is programmed in. The simula-



Welcome guests: NATO tanks in autumn 1989 maneuvers in West Germany.

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tion is interfaced with the "real" action in the field.

Although the U.S. commanders were very confident of the success of the "Train Smart—Manuever Smart" concept, this confidence was apparently not shared by other national commanders. Lt. Gen. Sir Peter Inge, Commander of the British Army of the Rhine, was quoted in the British press as saying, "I have a lot of sympathy with the need to protect our environment, and I am equally conscious that some of our exercises considerably inconvenience the population and can damage the environment. . . . But I have to live in the real world. Soldiers have to train, because, if they failed to do so, they would not only be wasting taxpayers' money, but also failing to provide NATO with effective military force.

"People say that we can use computer simulators to replace our field exercises—but this is not so. Simulation has a very important part to play—but in the end, all you are doing is playing against a computer, and you know you are. You can never replace the divisional commander and his staff having all the nightmares of having to actually move thousands of men and vehicles in the middle of the night when the men and the commanders are tired and cold and wet."

The success or failure of using computer simulators will have to measure up to how well they succeed in accomplishing the training goals for the common soldier.

Traveling out to the field, *EIR* did not experience any hostility from local inhabitants toward the maneuvers. In fact, as is the case in all these maneuvers, their biggest supporters appeared to be the children who would take every opportunity to view if not climb all over the huge tanks and armored personnel carriers rumbling through their neighborhoods and surrounding countryside. From among many of the older farmers, we could often overhear, "better American than Russian." The most important participants are the soldiers themselves, whose predominant mood is enthusiasm for their mission, and the conviction that the most serious danger to the environment is the Warsaw Pact and not their Abrams tank or their Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle.