

# 'Surge' capability for war is now the Soviets' top economic priority

by Laurent Murawiec

On Feb. 21, the Soviet Armed Forces daily *Red Star* published a piece by Warsaw Pact Chief of Staff Marshal Viktor Kulikov calling for a new, powerful wave of conventional military build-up, and declaring that the economy must meet the requirements of the mobilization. He was echoing Defense Minister Marshal Ustinov, who had announced a few months before in *Pravda* on Nov. 21, 1983, new "sizable resource allocations" to the defense sector "because of the gravity of the threat caused by the military build-up undertaken by the United States. . . ."

But Moscow knows perfectly well that for the past 20 years at least, the United States has not had an *offensive* military doctrine, nor the strategy, the equipment, the training, or the hardware demanded by such a military doctrine. Soviet propaganda is covering up for a decisive change in the Soviet economy, from a society and an economy "appended" to a military machine into an actual war-fighting mode. Or, in Soviet terminology, into generating a "military surge production capability" that immediately precedes the use of accumulated military hardware. A useful comparison would be with Nazi Germany's Four-Year Military Plan of 1934-38.

In his April 29 speech, Chernenko came closer than any other Soviet official to acknowledging that the Soviets are pouring resources into the development of beam weapons for anti-missile defense, the policy for which Moscow denounces the United States. As long as the United States engages in aggressive designs, "we will keep our powder dry," so that "any aggressor will receive immediate retribution." And there will be "new defense technologies," which "will make it possible to defend our country."

## Short-term moves

A series of short-term measures and decisions also points to the acceleration of the military build-up:

- **Forced labor:** On April 29, Communist Party secretary-general Chernenko, "in response to letters from many workers," announced an overwhelming desire on the part of workers to "contribute" to the economy in the form of "voluntary hours"—unpaid, of course. The proceeds will go to a

National Defense Fund, such as existed during World War II. In December 1983, the Central Committee had approved a return to three shifts in Soviet industry. Even though the populations's consumption has been consistently *lowered* over the last decade, while its mortality rate has significantly *increased* over that period because of massive cuts in the health budget, Chernenko's implied threat was that unpaid work will be made compulsory if volunteers do not flock into the factories.

In March, the "workers" who built the Baikal-Amur Railroad "volunteered" in their socialist ardor to complete this railway, which doubles the Europe-Siberia transportation capability, in one year instead of two. Granted that many of these "workers" are simply slave laborers of the Gulag, the Bratsk-Sovietskaya rail link will play a crucial role in the wartime autonomous-survival potential and the operational capacity of the Far East military districts, which are supposed to be able to become a second national command.

- **Mobilization of child labor:** A school reform was announced on Jan. 4, was set into motion by Yuri Andropov in June 1983. The emphasis is on "vocational training" and an early start of technical specialization, rather than on scientific education, and the graduation age has been lowered by one year. From the fifth grade, children will "produce uncomplicated products on orders of factories." From the eighth grade, pupils will have to work "as pre-apprentices in production combines and in workshops." In the 10th and 11th grades, one day a week will be spent "learning the job at the point of production." Summer holidays will be shortened. Senior officials of the education ministry who briefed Western journalists on the subject last March "thought it necessary, without being asked, to bring up the theme of 'child labor,' in order to dispel any suspicion that the reform meant its re-introduction," according to the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

- **Propaganda push for economic militarization and resource conservation:** The Russian war mobilization was the theme of this year's celebration of Lenin's birthday on April 22. Vladimir Dolgikh, a Central Committee Secretary with responsibility for heavy industry and energy, chose to highlight Lenin's economic writings from the brutal period

of "war communism," during the Russian Civil War of 1918-21. *Red Star*, in a long April 20 article by economist V. Kushlin, stressed the importance of technologies like lasers and flexible-application automated machine tools, which are important for the integration of the whole Soviet economy into the defense sector. Both Chernenko and *Red Star* admonished the population to conserve resources strictly. The reason given by Chernenko was to save fossil fuels for future generations, but the immediate purpose is the military drive.

● **Looting the East bloc:** The Comecon satellites have been squeezed in an unprecedented fashion in the last few years, a trend that may be aggravated by decisions announced at the upcoming Moscow Economic Summit of the CMEA. Relative to 1980, a recent report estimates that net investment by 1982 had fallen 32.4% in Poland, 26.3% in Romania, 24.4% in Czechoslovakia, 22.6% in East Germany, and 20.7% in Hungary. On top of the effects of the world depression and Eastern Europe's debt burden, the Soviets are exacting further primitive accumulation of capital from the rest of the bloc. Only in Bulgaria, which is often called the 16th Soviet Republic, did investment rise, with special help from the Soviet Union. Economic expert Jan Vanous, who released the study, explained that unrealistically low depreciation rates and the failure to take hidden inflation into account were in fact "seriously overstating the rate of investment," but that the fundamental cause of this astounding collapse was "a rise in spending in military hardware . . . and thus an even greater fall in civilian expenditure."

Mortgaging the future of Soviet workers' productivity and Comecon output means either extraordinary stupidity, or the conviction that such problems as are being created do not really matter on a strategic scale since they will be solved either by war, or by the political and economic results of a successful threat to go to war.

## Infrastructure

Soviet military doctrine prescribes that strategic requirements must order every decision taken in the economy. In a book written for the General Staff in 1981 by expert Posharov, *The Economic Foundations of the Defense Might of the Soviet Union*, the idea was developed that further expansion and construction of large cities was to be avoided, and small-to medium-sized cities preferred, with labor distribution and a rationalized transportation system aligned on these criteria. All recent major decisions in the Soviet economy meet these requirements.

The great projects of river diversion in Siberia, aimed at bringing the waters of Siberian rivers, which flow south-north into the Arctic basin, down to arid Soviet Central Asia, have been abandoned. The environmentalist doctrine that the Holy Body of Mother Russia must not be touched has influenced such decisions. But it is precisely the military leadership which is most strongly defending such doctrines. These projects would represent an immense investment—of the

kind not undertaken when the slogan is war preparation. They would also represent a tremendous productivity boost for abysmally unproductive Soviet agriculture. But the ordering of priorities has been altered.

## The energy question

The most important question mark regarding the Soviet economy is energy policy. Despite all official speeches to the contrary, the ambitious nuclear energy development program appears to be hobbled. The targets of the 11th Five-Year Plan will be missed by an extraordinary margin of 50%. An increment of 50 gigawatts in installed capacity was called for, but only 25 GW will be reached at best. Only *one* nuclear power plant was connected to the national grid in the course of 1983. The Soviet fast-breeder program, off to a promising start with the already functioning Chevchenko reactor in the Ukraine, has reportedly been postponed by approximately 10 years, to 1996.

The ministry which oversees the giant Atomash project on the Caspian Sea, designed to churn out nuclear stations like an assembly plant, was put under military control last year after a scandal which caused the demise of a number of ministers—the officially announced charge was that the project was built on swampy sands. Long delays in materials delivery and severe quality failures are also said to have occurred. The military has also taken over the ministry that controls the Soviet power grid.

Under the military junta, Soviet research in controlled thermonuclear fusion, which, until 1975, repeatedly presented vanguard results at international fusion conferences, has been put under wraps. The Soviets are trying to give the impression that the programs have been killed. Visitors to the Kurchatov Institute of Moscow, the former center of fusion work, describe it as a virtual ghost town.

The overriding conception is the one developed in 1981 by Chief of General Staff Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov, calling for "a constant effort to make enterprises which produce the basic types of weapons more autonomous with respect to energy and water supplies, to provide them with necessary stocks and to create an equipment and material reserve. . . ." Given this "energy autonomy" mandate for military enterprises, in a country where the military economy represents upwards of one-third of national income, does there exist a "secondary" grid, or energy-generating capability with its own power plants, which solely serves the needs of the military economy? According to figures released at a recent NATO conference on the Soviet economy, extraordinary distortions in investment patterns result from huge funding of the energy sector. Might there also be a full-fledged "third energy grid," in the form of a strategic-equipment reserve, on-the-shelf power plants, and so forth, ready to be deployed in wartime? The answers to these questions may betray the scope of the Soviet war mobilization and prove to be of vital importance to Western security.