

Threat to Europe: biggest Soviet maneuvers ever

by Konstantin George

On July 5, the biggest Soviet—and exclusively Soviet—military exercises since the end of the Second World War, both in terms of geographical scope and armies participating, came to an “official” end. The exercises, with no name, officially begun on June 28, were the culmination of a series of recent Soviet and Warsaw Pact exercises which have been testing—and perfecting—the Soviet-Warsaw Pact ability to launch a *blitzkrieg* surprise attack against West Germany, smash NATO Forward Defense, and send massed armored formations deep into West Germany, to the Ruhr, Rhine, and beyond, at the fastest possible rate.

These exercises follow close on the heels of the extensive early 1984 reorganization and heavy strengthening of the five Soviet armies that comprise the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany (GSFG), as the Soviets call their armies in East Germany. This reorganization, the biggest undertaken by the Soviet leadership for forces stationed outside Russia since the end of World War II, could have but one purpose: to upgrade the five GSFG armies to attack-readiness should the Kremlin give the *blitzkrieg* order.

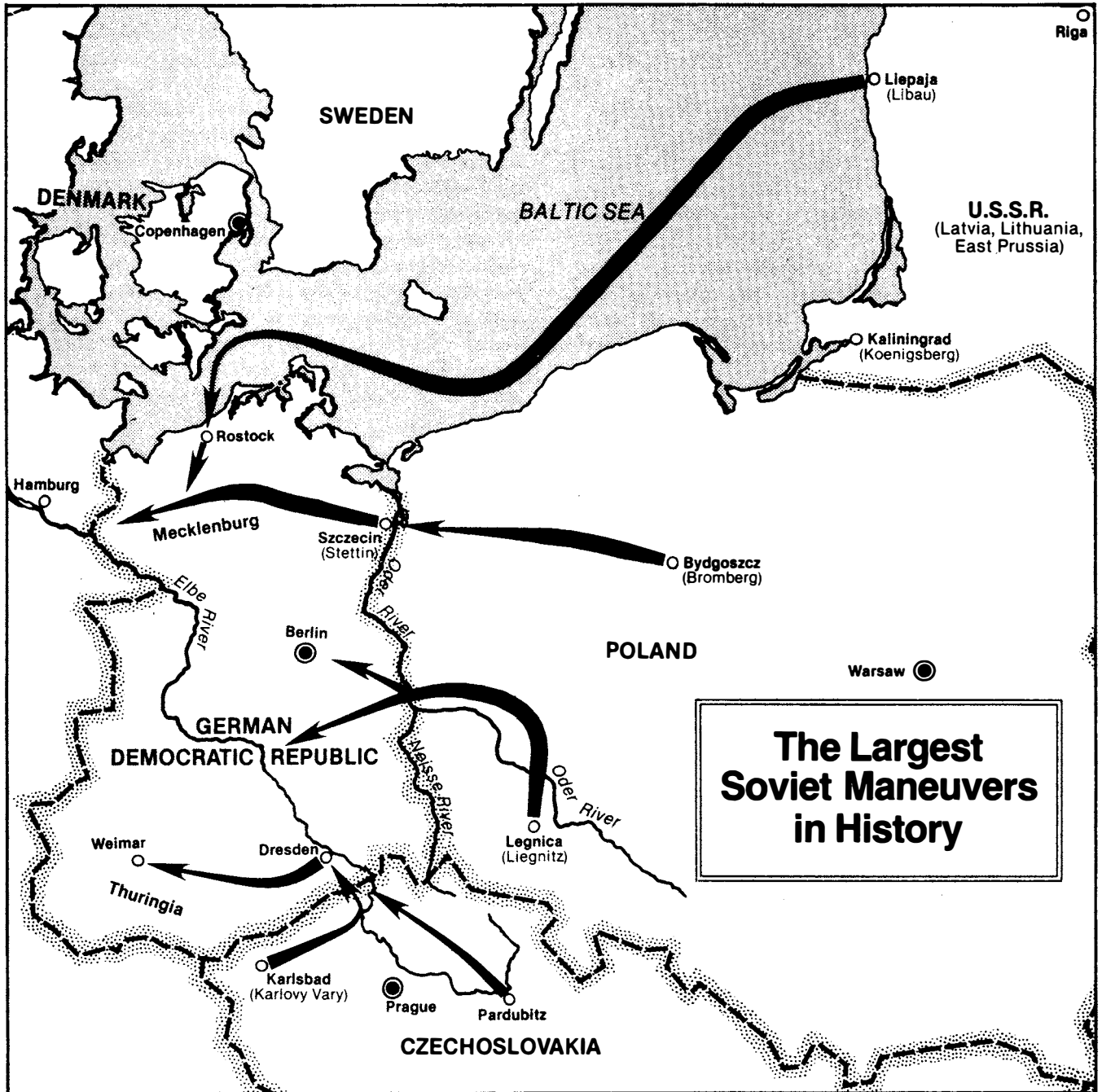
Size and scope as never before

Taking part in the maneuvers, in terms of troop movements and staff exercises, were nearly 800,000 Soviet troops “officially” and upwards of 900,000 Soviet ground troops in reality. On top of this must be added the officially listed participation of the entire Baltic Fleet, and large combat and transport units of the Soviet Air Force. For the first time in

history, three of the four Groups of Soviet Forces, the Soviet forces stationed in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, officially took part together in a military exercise. Yet, in reality, this record-breaking exercise is even more ominous, as the Fourth Soviet “Group” outside Soviet territory, the Soviet forces in Hungary, were on parallel maneuvers called “Danube ’84,” which in fact were fully integrated with the mammoth ones.

Thus, for the first time in history, *all four* Soviet Groups of Forces stationed outside the Soviet Union have been on the move together—culminating on July 4 and July 5, as we shall see, with intimidating armored troop concentrations all along the West German and Austrian borders. The unprecedented roster of Soviet armies participating in the maneuvers (including Danube ’84) includes:

- 1) The five Soviet armies of the GSFG in East Germany—20 divisions: 380,000 troops.
- 2) The two Soviet armies of the Central Group of Soviet Forces in Czechoslovakia—six divisions: 80,000-100,000 troops.
- 3) The Soviet Northern Group of Forces in Western Poland—three Divisions: 45,000 troops.
- 4) The Soviet Southern Group of Forces in Hungary—five divisions, one airborne division: 80,000 troops.
- 5) The Soviet Baltic Military District, comprising the 11th Guards Tank Army in East Prussia—six divisions, two artillery divisions—and four divisions, one airborne division in the Baltic republics: 250,000-300,000 troops.



6) The Soviet "Red Banner" Baltic Fleet, including the marines.

7) Soviet tactical air, air transport, and air defense units in the area covered by the maneuvers.

Of this total, well over 100,000 Soviet ground combat troops were physically on the move at one time or another during the course of the maneuvers. At the peak of the maneuvers on July 4 and 5, a total of 15-16 Soviet divisions (11 in East Germany, 2-3 in Czechoslovakia, 2 in Hungary) were

out of their barracks and in pre-offensive concentrations near the West German and Austrian borders.

The Carrington curtain of silence

Almost as alarming as the maneuvers themselves and what they portend, has been the curtain of silence blanketing the Western European and American press and media from June 28 to the present regarding coverage of the Soviet maneuvers. The single courageous exception in the Federal Re-

public of Germany has been the radio station Deutschlandfunk, which from the outset correctly labeled the maneuvers “the largest Soviet maneuvers since the end of the Second World War.” Otherwise, West German radio and television have not said a word, pretending nothing is going on.

With the sole exception of a decent article in *Die Welt* on July 6—finally, the day after the official conclusion—whatever articles appeared were so patently ludicrous that silence would have been preferable. *Die Welt* normally does better: A day earlier, having clearly received disinformation, it declared to the West German public that “the exercises are only occurring on paper”—on *the day* that 13 or more Soviet divisions were maneuvering in pre-offensive mode very close to the West German border.

The official line put out by the Bonn defense ministry is no less “Alice in Wonderland” than that of the media. In a silly show of business-as-usual public relations, officials of the Bonn defense ministry will tell inquirers, “officially speaking,” that the Soviet maneuvers are “pure staff maneuvers.”

Closer examination of who’s giving out the “see no Russians, hear no Russians” guidelines which Bonn is merely mouthing, places the blame and the heart of the problem at the doorstep of the new NATO secretary-general and Henry Kissinger’s controller, Lord Peter Carrington. Calls to various NATO offices have elicited the confirmation that there are Carrington-imposed “guidelines” to play down the maneuvers, and as one chap expressed it, “not to provoke the Russians.”

General Bernard Rogers, the NATO Supreme Commander, was recently reported to have complained about this problem in another context, the lax way in which most Western European governments handled the recent NATO “Hilex ’84” crisis-management exercises, which dealt with how NATO would counter a hypothetical Soviet move into Iran and/or Yugoslavia, and intimidating military moves against Western Europe. Sources, leaking to several Western newspapers, reported that Rogers was particularly incensed at the British government, and at the Carrington axis in British policymaking circles above all. These Carrington-connected networks didn’t want “to provoke the Soviets” by running Hilex effectively and “realistically.”

These are the political straight-jackets imposed on defense and military professionals, political constraints imposed by the Carrington-Kissinger axis which cause these devoted patriots no end of nightmares when Russian troops are on the move. In continuous discussion which this writer had with such people over the week of the maneuvers, this “nightmare” sense was expressed. On July 3, for example: “No one here among the politicians thinks they will attack. Right now, they’re on the move, moving very close to the border. If the exercise doesn’t stop by Friday or Saturday, an

attack cannot be ruled out. And you know what? If they attack, *politically* they will achieve complete surprise, because no one believes they would attack.”

So it has been in recent history. Surprise attacks have rarely succeeded as military surprises as such. The stunning surprise attacks of the Wehrmacht in the Second World War, *Fall Gelb* (*Case Yellow*: the 1940 attack on France and the Low Countries), *Weseruebung* (*Weser Exercise*: the 1940 storming of Denmark and Norway) and *Operation Barbarossa*, the blitzkrieg launched against the Soviet Union, all succeeded as surprise attacks because the victim of the attack politically refused to believe that an attack would come when it did.

‘20th Armored Division has crossed the Oder’

The overriding importance that the Soviets attached to the maneuvers was indicated from the beginning through the dispatch of Soviet Defense Minister, Marshal Dmitrii Ustinov, personally, to East Germany to conduct the maneuvers. He was joined by Soviet Chief of Staff, Gen. Nikolai Ogarkov; Warsaw Pact Commander in Chief, Gen. Viktor Kulikov; and the First Deputy Head of the Main Political Administration of the Soviet Armed Forces, Admiral Sorokin, the deputy to General Yepishev.

During the course of the exercises, Ustinov was joined by three other Warsaw Pact defense ministers, Gen. Heinz Hoffmann of East Germany, Gen. Florian Sawicki of Poland, and Gen. Martin Dzur of Czechoslovakia.

Phase one of the exercises began on Friday, June 29, when the main units of the Soviet Baltic Fleet sailed from their bases at Kronstadt, near Leningrad, and Estonian and Latvian ports. Over the weekend, the fleet assembled between the Kurland Coast of Latvia and the Swedish island of Gotland, then hooked up with other units from the naval base at Pillau (Baltisk) in the Soviet part of East Prussia, including Soviet marine infantry, and then moved westwards through the Baltic.

Also on Friday, June 29, Soviet divisions in Czechoslovakia formed concentrations, predominantly north and west of Prague. But the most dramatic move that day on the ground involved a Soviet armored division based in northwest Poland, in Pommerania, not far from the East German border.

That evening, I received a call from a very well-informed source who said; “The Soviet 20th Armored Division left its base at Grossborn [in Pommerania, Poland] and crossed the Oder between Stettin and Frankfurt/Oder. It was done solely with pontoon bridges under wartime conditions.” There were two points to this move: 1) moving the divisions stationed in Poland to join and augment the offensive power of the five armies of the GSFG, and 2) the continual, relentless practicing by the Soviets of crossing, “off the march” without pause, even the widest of river obstacles.

This was a forte of the Red Army during the Second World War, as witnessed by their forcing “off the march” the Dnieper, the Dniester, the Prut, Bug, and Vistula, to cite some of the major examples. These techniques have been rehearsed with growing intensity in recent months. In any offensive operations on West German territory, massed armored formations will have to rapidly force—and drive beyond—rivers such as the Weser, Rhine, and so forth.

The 4th of July crescendo

In typical Soviet fashion, they chose the 4th of July, American Independence Day, for the greatest display of maneuver fireworks. On this one day, the following military moves (minimally) occurred, setting off alarm bells among the professionals:

- 1) All four Soviet divisions belonging to the Second Guards Tank Army which faces West Germany from the Baltic to the Mittellandkanal in the Hanover region, left their barracks and moved close to the border.
- 2) Three of the four Soviet armored divisions comprising the Third Shock Army, facing the Hanover area of West Germany, were moving to positions near the border.
- 3) All four Soviet divisions of the Eighth Guards Army in Thuringia took up positions in close proximity to the Hesen frontier opposite Fulda.
- 4) Soviet forces concentrated in the Western part of Czechoslovakia, west of Pilsen, and west of Prague.
- 5) 60,000 Soviet, Hungarian, and Czech troops remained in the Sopron region of Hungary, along the Austrian border, two days after the official July 2 “termination” of the Danube '84 exercises; 16,000 of the 60,000 troops are Soviet, and the exercises involved Soviet MiG-24 “HIND” helicopter gunship units, with MiG-23 fighter escorts.
- 6) The Soviet Seventh Airborne Division, based at Kaunas, Lithuania, was airlifted into East Germany.
- 7) Soviet marines landed on the Lithuanian coast north of Memel (Klaipeda).

Reorganizing for a blitzkrieg

In early 1984, all five armies of the GSFG, the armies in East Germany, were reorganized to prepare them for the contingency of offensive operations. It is the biggest and most intimidating military reorganization ever conducted against NATO and West Germany, and, like the maneuvers, has been studiously “ignored” and papered over by the media, to say nothing of the “asleep at the switch” behavior of West-ern governments.

The most salient features of the reorganization, which speak for themselves in the danger represented, are:

- 1) The Soviet Second Guards Tank Army, traditionally based between the Baltic and the Elbe, extended its front west of the Elbe for the first time, giving it responsibility for

seizing all of North Germany on both sides of the Elbe, including Hamburg, Bremen, and Bremerhaven. Through the addition of three independent tank regiments and one tank battalion per motorized division, its tank strength has grown from 720 tanks to 1,140 tanks.

2) The elite breakthrough army, the Third Shock Army (HQ at Magdeburg) opposite Hannover, now consists exclusively of armored divisions, four of them now concentrated on a much narrower front, with at least 1,230 tanks.

3) The 20th Guards Army, based north, east, and south of Berlin and the immediate back-up to the Second Guards Tank Army and Third Shock Army, changed composition from three motorized divisions to two armored and two motorized divisions. Tank strength was increased from 270 to 720, nearly three-fold.

The reorganization followed shortly after the late-1983 stationing for the first time in East Germany of elite Soviet air assault brigades, elite commando units, with the mission of dropping deep behind enemy lines to seize and destroy or capture critical enemy missile, command, and communications installations, bridges, etc. One of the brigades is based at Rathenow, west of Berlin, and the other in the Cottbus area in the southeast part of East Germany.

The pretext required

What has not been lost sight of by some observers here is the all-Russian nature of the maneuvers, a first regarding maneuvers of this scope since the war. These observers see a definite linkage between this singular phenomenon and the bristling Soviet media campaign in full swing since December 1983—and directly preceding the implementation of the reorganization of the GSFG—fraudulently charging a “neo-Nazi revival in West Germany.” This has been aimed with particular lying venom at the West German government and military, the Bundeswehr. The campaign has been waged with even heavier intensity in the military press like *Red Star*.

Besides using such a campaign to whip the peasant Ivans in the Red Army into a frenzy at the image of “those Germans” coming again to invade Mother Russia, the press barrage, in the style and manner of Josef Goebbels in the art of “justifying” planned aggressions, is building the legal fictions required to move into West Germany militarily, under the Soviet Union’s “Potsdam Accord obligations” as a World War II victor-power, to stamp out any revival of Nazism in Germany.

Were the Soviets to march into West Germany citing their Potsdam obligations to “crush Nazism,” they would cross the frontier as the Soviet Army, and not as the Warsaw Pact. Right before they cross the frontier, they would leave their barracks and take up jumping-off positions very close to the West German border—exactly as they did in the “exercises” on the 4th of July.