

# Soviets out to force conventional cuts

by Luba George

One of the main purposes of the April 4-6 visit to Moscow of West German Social Democratic leaders Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr is to coordinate a plan—to accompany the INF treaty—for reductions in conventional military forces in Europe. This was signaled one week earlier, March 29, when the Soviet government newspaper *Izvestia* quoted West German Social Democratic Party (SPD) defense policy spokesman Andreas von Buelow, speaking in Parliament: “NATO has not taken the views of the Soviet government into account.”

The Brandt-Bahr visit was preceded by a year of little-publicized Soviet-German back-channel discussions on the subject. In May 1986, Andreas von Buelow, head of the Social Democratic Party's *Arbeitsgruppe über Alternative Sicherheit* (Working Group on Alternative Security Policy) discussed an SPD proposal for creating a largely demilitarized zone in Central Europe with Col. Gen. Nikolai Chervov, chief of a general staff directorate.

In May of last year, the Soviet Committee for Security and Cooperation in Europe sponsored the first international conference on the theme of “non-provocative defense,” or as the Russians call it, “non-attack defense.” The Soviets invited von Buelow, U.S. analyst von Hippel, and others to Moscow to discuss this. Under the rubric, “our common European home,” the “non-provocative defense” theme has become fashionable in West Germany, often brought up in parliamentary debates by the opposition to the Kohl government—the Green Party and the Social Democrats.

Activity escalated on the eve of the Brandt-Bahr visit. “Alternative defense” strategies were featured at a March 31 meeting in Hamburg of Soviet and West German generals, diplomats, et al. According to the Soviet news agency TASS, they met “to compare the military doctrines of the Warsaw Treaty Organization and NATO . . . and to discuss ways of lowering military potentials to the level sufficient for defense and precluding the capability for a sudden attack and offensive operations.”

At the time of the Hamburg conference, Walter Stuetzle, the new director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), was in Moscow to discuss “non-provocative defense.” In an interview with *Izvestia* March 29, he revealed that SIPRI and Warsaw Pact experts, together with Swedish and West German defense analysts, are working on the idea.

A Feb. 8 *Pravda* article by Soviet Defense Minister Dmi-

tri Yazov set the mood for these debates. His purpose was very simple: intimidation. Yazov declared that a post-INF conventional war in Europe would be fought with “conventional weapons developed on principally new frontiers,” a reference to radio-frequency and related “emerging technologies.” Conventional force reductions are necessary because of the “dangerous military confrontation in Europe . . . where NATO and the Warsaw Pact face each other.” He then cited the “growth of non-nuclear potential,” where “conventional means have become, on the practical level, comparable to the consequences of nuclear war.”

Yazov had the subtlety one expects of a Russian. “War, using conventional forces, should it break out, can be deadly for Europe” with its high population density, and a conventional war would include “targeting centers of nuclear power plants, chemical industry complexes, hydroelectric and other energy complexes,” posing “great danger to the lives of people.”

## The Chernobyl treatment for the West

The Soviet defense minister's threat was echoed by Soviet military analyst V. Chernishev in the military paper *Krasnaya Zvezda*, on March 15 and March 29. “Wrote Chernishev, under the title, “Conventional War in Europe?” (March 29), the “consequences of conventional warfare” would be “catastrophic” “In order to demolish one atomic reactor, just a few artillery shells suffice,” and as for the after-effects of radioactive leakage, “It can be compared to an atomic bomb explosion.” Destroying a single 1,000-megawatt nuclear reactor would inflict loss of life and damages “equivalent to a one-megaton bomb explosion”; in terms of the long-term effects of radioactivity, “It's equal to an explosion in the 10-megaton range.”

“The tragedy of Chernobyl should serve as a reminder of that danger. . . . The bombing and shelling of such energy complexes in Europe would amount to over 150 atomic bombs.” At no loss for scary images, he also wrote about the Bhopal poison-gas leak in India which killed, poisoned, crippled tens of thousands of inhabitants; this should serve as “a lesson for those who want to fight a conventional war on the European continent.”

West Germany, one of the most densely populated countries of Europe, would be target number one. “In the city of Düsseldorf alone, there are 15 chemical plants and factories” producing lethal substances, including sodium cyanide, of which “just 15 milligrams are enough to kill a human being.” Other potential targets mentioned by Chernishev included the plutonium-producing “Alkem” plant in Hanau in the state of Hessen.

The same threat was voiced by the U.S.S.R.'s West German expert, V. Falin, at a recent West German-Soviet “round table” discussion. He said that with the high-density of nuclear power stations, “Chernobyl can happen in West Germany.”