

# Future role for NATO under debate

by Dean Andromidas

NATO defense ministers meeting in Brussels at the end of May backed the creation of a Rapid Reaction Force, as part of a revamped NATO military structure. According to press reports, the creation of the corps would be part of a plan that would reduce NATO troop levels by half and American troop levels by over two-thirds, from 300,000 to as low as 70,000. The Rapid Reaction Force can be seen as a concession to U.S. Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney's pressure for deployment outside NATO's treaty-defined area, although it is not yet clear whether the RRF will have the authority to deploy out of area under NATO auspices at this time.

The defense ministers' decision was part of a reorganization of NATO's military structure, in light of the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the unification of Germany. The NATO meeting and other recent security conferences held under the auspices of the North Atlantic Assembly and North Atlantic Commission served to point up underlying and fundamental conflict between the Anglo-Americans and the continent. The former are demanding that NATO prepare for North-South conflicts, modeled on the war against Iraq. This view was expressed by NATO Commander Gen. John Galvin, who told the *Wall Street Journal* May 13 that he could envision NATO and Soviet cooperation in wars against the developing sector, "where we all are faced with the same threat from the South." In contrast, the countries of Central Europe, including Germany and particularly the former Warsaw Pact nations of Eastern and Central Europe, see the real source of threats to world security as the economic crisis engulfing their own nations, the Soviet Union, and the developing sector.

## The British run the show

The Brussels meeting decided on a new NATO structure with three levels: Reaction Forces, Main Defense Forces, and Augmentation Forces (reserves). The Main Defense Forces will include seven corps, totaling 16 divisions. The Rapid Reaction Force, which will be under the command of a British general, will comprise 50-70,000 men and include one British armored division and one British air mobile infantry division, plus a third division comprising British, German, Dutch, and Belgian brigades, and a fourth division comprising an Italian brigade and other units drawn from Greece and Turkey. The United States will provide Air Force elements to the corps and perhaps a division, if necessary. The force's mission is officially to back



U.S. forces practice a river-crossing during NATO maneuvers in Germany in 1988.

Presestap Speyer

the Main Defense Force.

Publicly, it is claimed that the Rapid Reaction Force will only be deployable in the NATO area. The current debate around whether such a force should be under NATO or Western European Union control is misleading. The consensus among the Anglo-American policymakers is that an out-of-area role backed by NATO is unrealistic, since it requires unanimous agreement by all NATO member nations. The Gulf war demonstrated that such backing is not actually necessary, since the United States, Great Britain, as well as other NATO countries were able to deploy to the Gulf with NATO forces and backed by the NATO logistical base without any formal agreement, but simply under the "consultation" clauses of the NATO charter.

Therefore, the Rapid Reaction Force, comprised of primarily British troops and under British command, while created under NATO supervision and NATO logistical and financial support, could in reality be deployed by the British government anywhere in the world as a British national force, simply following "consultation" with other NATO nations, whose agreement or disagreement would have limited if any influence on a decision which would ultimately be made in London.

## A snub by the United States

Washington and London are all but ignoring the economic crisis in Central and Eastern Europe, relegating these countries to the status of "buffer states." This was underscored at a conference in The Hague just a few days before the NATO meeting. The May 22-23 meeting on Parliamentary Democracy and International Security Policy, sponsored by Netherlands Foreign Minister Henri Van den Broek and the Netherlands Atlantic Commission, gathered parliamentarians and experts from Western and Eastern Europe, as well as the Soviet Union. Although U.S. Secretary of State James Baker, Sen. Robert Dole (R-Kan.), and Rep. Charles Rose (D-N.C.) were invited, all three canceled out. Only U.S. Ambassador to NATO William Howard Taft IV attended, giving a speech that conspicuously avoided any hint of U.S. policy concerning the vital question on the agenda.

The Americans' absence was the more striking, considering the support the Dutch foreign minister has given the Bush administration during the Gulf crisis and the current security debate in Europe. The other imperialist powers which have joined the United States in forcing an "out-of-area" role for NATO on a reluctant continental Europe—Great Britain and France—were also absent.

The economic crisis facing Europe was underscored by the Eastern and Central European spokesmen on hand. Professor Brucan, a former Romanian ambassador to Washington, charged that Western aid to Eastern Europe has been a "big hoax." He warned that the economic crisis in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union is the major threat to European security. Warning against turning the border between Eastern and Western Europe into a "Mexican border," with all its social, political, and economic implications, he declared that with a combined foreign debt of \$150 billion, Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union are paying \$10 billion annually in interest payments alone. This is while "Western aid and capital inflow can be only counted in the millions." He added, "NATO is not equipped to deal with this current threat."

Brucan's appeal was backed by Hungary's state secretary of the Foreign Ministry, Tamas Katona, who said that "every effort should be made to avoid a new Iron Curtain falling, this time dividing our continent along the welfare line. . . . There should be no place for a buffer zone in the new European security architecture, as the indivisibility of security should not remain a noble slogan, but kept in mind as an idea guiding our thinking."

Speaking privately, senior Dutch representatives bitterly told *EIR*, "If the Americans are deliberately snubbing us, it seems the only ones we can trust these days to be honest with us are the Germans." Rita Süßmuth, Speaker of the German Parliament, in open debate chastised those who saw the U.S.-led intervention into the Gulf as a great success for the alliance, since "it is not yet clear whether this Iraq war has benefited anyone as of yet."

## Will Argentine military accept 'Condor' demise?

by Cynthia R. Rush

The Buenos Aires daily *Clarín* reported on May 29 that like, the legendary Incan King Tupac Amaru, "the Condor II missile will be drawn and quartered." The paper was referring to the announcement one day earlier by Defense Minister Erman González that all of the elements in the Argentine Air Force's controversial missile project must be "deactivated, dismantled, reconverted and/or rendered unusable, as per the possibilities of use in peaceful applications."

After months of pressure from the United States, and despite strong resistance from within the Armed Forces, the Menem government made the final decision to destroy the intermediate-range Condor II missile, initiated in 1985 in conjunction with the governments of Egypt and Iraq. The Bush administration has made the missile project's elimination a condition of "improved" relations with Argentina. To comply, Menem approved taking the Condor project out of the hands of the Air Force, where it was run through the National Space Research Commission, and placing it under the jurisdiction of the presidency and its new entity, the National Space Affairs Commission. As *Clarín* pointed out on May 26, "the change has clear political significance: placing the missile in civilian hands is a guarantee that the orders for destruction will be carried out." What's involved here is not just a change of name, the paper continued, but "an operation with political aims [which are] both internal and external."

Will the Air Force, and its backers in other branches of the Armed Forces, go along with the policy? This remains to be seen. The crisis within the institution is acute, as a result of International Monetary Fund (IMF) policy which mandates reducing the defense budget, as well as the size of the Armed Forces. On the same day that he announced the killing of the Condor II, Erman González also announced that the military and its civilian support personnel would be cut by more than 20,000. Currently there are 70,000 men in uniform.

The defense minister added that Argentina would shortly be signing the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the international treaty arrangement set up in 1987 to limit the development and transfer of missile technology,