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Civil Defense in the Soviet Union

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Introduction.

The USSR is conducting an increasingly active civil defense program. The Soviet civil defense system embraces the maintenance of a professional staff, the use of air raid shelters, and widespread training of the population. It is probable that special civil defense troops similar to disaster relief units in Denmark and the UK are being organized and trained. Some evacuation of cities is planned, but evidently such a step would be limited to the removal of children and other non-workers and would be predicated on adequate warning time.

The leading Moscow newspaper, Pravda, stated in August 1954 that priority must be given to the preparation of all the population for "modern" air and chemical defense. Later, leading Soviet military figures called attention to the present day need for effective defense of rear areas and endorsed the necessity for civil defense preparations. Since 1954, the Soviet civil defense staff has been given increasing stature; a new six-year training program for the population was inaugurated; and a large volume of civil defense literature has been published, including manuals, posters, and articles in specialized newspapers and magazines.

Soviet Civil Defense Experience.

During World War II air raid shelters were constructed in the USSR under government buildings; basements, tunnels and the Moscow subway were adapted for shelter use; and it was claimed that 98,000,000 people were given civil defense training. Although not severely tried by the German air attacks, the people of the Soviet Union stood the test well. The USSR can of course use strong persuasion, if not compulsion to ensure that the individual citizen participates in civil defense activity. During World War II, a law was passed which required civil defense service from everyone in the USSR between the ages of sixteen and sixty with few exceptions. The structure of the totalitarian state obviously lends itself to enforcing cooperation between governmental administrative agencies, economic enterprises, and public societies, especially in a matter which concerns national defense.

Present Concepts.

The mission of Soviet civil defense today is stated to include (1) warning the population, (2) furnishing maximum protection for

personnel and property, (3) giving medical assistance to casualties, and (4) rapidly eliminating damage after attack. To achieve these ends the USSR relies in a large measure on existing state structures such as the police and fire-fighting and medical services. In organizing the civil defense of individual localities, the Soviets plan to use locally available material resources, such as heavy engineering equipment and motor vehicles.

Although Soviet leaders are well aware of the hazards of modern warfare, the people of the USSR are not fully informed of the effects of present day nuclear weapons. They are given only limited information largely in terms of the Hiroshima type atomic bomb (20,000 tons of TNT equivalent). The high level and persistency of radiation hazards which are discussed openly in the American press are not made known to the average Soviet citizen. Rather, civil defense publicity seeks to reassure the citizen that defense is possible against modern weapons.

This control of information to the Soviet public has a parallel in the limited amount of information available to foreigners. It is evident that many aspects of civil defense preparation are regarded as secret in the USSR. Thus, while the training program for the average citizen is publicized, the planning activity of the civil defense staff, preparation of operative units for cities and areas, and the level of civil defense supplies is not.

Organization.

The Soviet civil defense system is organized under the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), which also controls the regular uniformed police and the fire-fighting forces. Civil defense staffs have been identified from the national to the city level. At the local level, responsibility for civil defense preparations is shared between the civilian authorities and the MVD civil defense staff. Local authorities are obliged to comply with directives sent down from higher MVD headquarters.

According to Soviet publications, cities and districts organize a number of "services" (with their operational units) responsible for fire defense, rescue and repair, medical aid, order and security, decontamination, warning, shelter, blackout, and the care of farm animals. Generally the key personnel responsible for these services are drawn from the organizations having similar functions in peace time. For example, the fire department is the nucleus of the fire defense service;

the police department that of the "order and security" service, and so forth. Where needed, civilian auxiliaries are planned.

Besides these services and their operative units, there are services for transportation, for trade and food and "self-defense groups" -- organized principally for dwelling units but also for small factories, office buildings and the like. In general, a self defense unit is formed for every 500 people, consisting of four to seven man "teams" for maintenance of order, fire defense, rescue, medical aid, shelter, and chemical defense. On State and collective farms a veterinary unit is added. Large factories may have a special civil defense staff and services similar to those for a city.

Training.

Two large public societies relieve the Soviet civil defense staff of much of the work in training the Soviet population in civil defense. These are the DOSAAF (Society for Assistance to the Army, Air Force and Navy) and the Soviet Red Cross.*

The Red Cross is primarily responsible for medical defense training; DOSAAF and the Red Cross are jointly responsible for training the population in proper conduct during air alerts, first aid, the use of gas masks and shelters, conduct in the presence of chemical or nuclear contamination, decontamination methods, rescue, fire-fighting, and the like.

In the period shortly after World War II the civil defense program aimed at training about 5,000,000 persons per year. Until 1954, the training was oriented toward protection against high explosive bombs and the more common war gases. Since 1955, the training goals have been broadened radically and courses now include instructions for protection from biological, nuclear and chemical weapons, including nerve gases; and reportedly there is a program to give three courses of civil defense instruction to everyone in the Soviet Union during the period 1955-1960. If this is only intended to cover persons sixteen to sixty, 50,000,000 citizens would be scheduled to take training courses each year. The first of the three courses, 10 hours instruction in atomic defense, was announced 85.5 percent complete in 1958. No official figures have been announced for the completion of the 22-hour second course which included instruction material on biological and chemical warfare. The third course, apparently involves practical experience with equipment, and testing. Subjects on which the trainee is to be examined include: (1) methods of air attack

* Red Crescent in Moslem areas of the USSR.

and effects, (2) the use of gas masks, (3) the use of air raid shelters, (4) fire prevention and fire-fighting, (5) rules for conduct during air alerts, (6) first aid and medical defense, (7) methods of decontamination, and (8) in rural areas, veterinary aid. For the training of instructors, the DOSAAF operates a network of air defense schools.

These courses have been troublesome since their inception. Publicity in the specialized press gives praise to some areas of the USSR and criticizes others for failing to fulfill the training goal. In general, the larger cities and factories claim the most success. Difficulties with the program stem from public apathy, disinterested officials, lack of qualified instructors and shortages of training material. Despite these difficulties, insistent pressure is evident in civil defense publicity which stresses the importance of completing the program on time.

Construction.

Soviet civil defense publications contain drawings illustrating a variety of air raid shelters. These include above and below ground bunkers, "galleries," subways, basement shelters, and covered trenches. Little is said as to how many of the various types are available.

Soviet subways such as those in Moscow, Leningrad, and Kiev are apparently designed in part for use as air raid shelters. Portions of these subways are constructed at great depth and current civil defense publications picture them in use as shelters. As many as 750,000 people are said to have taken refuge in the Moscow "Metro" during World War II and it has been expanded since then.

It is logical to assume that the Soviet leaders and government have specially prepared quarters for use in any future war. Part of the government was evacuated from Moscow during World War II. For those remaining, there were special shelters such as those under the Kremlin and the Foreign Commissariat. A new governmental refuge contained in a large bunker some 400 miles from Moscow was described in the Western press last year and several news stories have relayed reports of new shelters for the Soviet hierarchy in and around Moscow.

For the general Soviet population, however, civil defense literature has stressed the value of basement shelter facilities. For example, a 1956 manual states, "The shelters providing mass protection in cities and enterprises A. e., factories, etc. are those which are located in the cellars of buildings... Cellar shelters... also provide reliable protection against atomic weapons."

It is known that civil defense authorities have had a voice in the approval of construction plans since at least 1941, and it has been reported that all new buildings (presumably those of masonry) must contain air raid shelters. While it is clear that not all new construction complies with this reported directive it is believed that substantial numbers of new buildings do have basement shelter areas or areas which could be readily adopted as shelters.

As designed, Soviet apartment basements generally have a concrete ceiling six or seven inches thick. Such basements, if fitted as shelters, would give limited protection from blast effects, but would have reduced radiation levels due to the concrete ceiling and several floors above.

The complete basement shelter is illustrated in civil defense manuals to include double, air-tight steel doors, lavatory facilities, and filtered ventilation.

For those living in older housing, or in rural areas, Soviet civil defense instructions contain information on how to construct covered earth trenches. Sites for these, in parks or open areas, are said to be preselected by civil defense authorities. Essentially, such shelters are to be wood-lined trenches, roofed, and covered over with about a yard of earth.

Evacuation.

Little has been said about the evacuation of cities in the USSR. All known Soviet civil defense instructions have advised the population to remain in place making use of the nearest available shelter. In 1958, however, published literature indicated that some evacuation might take place but that the people involved would be children, invalids, and other non-workers. Village authorities are required to plan to provide food and shelter for evacuees. From Soviet literature it appears that evacuation is contingent upon sufficient warning.

Satellite Countries.

Following the lead of the USSR, civil defense preparations are being made in other Communist countries. "Anti-atomic" training programs for the population are publicized in most Eastern European Satellites.

The Polish press has stated that there are "many" air raid shelters built and more planned for Poland. In Hungary, a "representative" battalion of civil defense troops paraded in public for the first time this spring.

Several cities and factories in Czechoslovakia have held practice air raid exercises.

Summary.

In summary the Soviets have a sizeable program of civil defense and it is believed that significant progress is being achieved in its implementation.