

Russia at high level of battle readiness

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The Soviet Union and other communist countries appear to be accelerating the upgrading of the level of combat readiness of their armed forces, particularly in Europe, according to Defense Department sources.

"The Soviets are moving into a higher and higher state of readiness," according to one official. "They are increasing their ability to begin a conventional war from a standing start. They have reduced their preparatory time to a very few days," he said.

The Soviet Union's increased readiness was the subject of a confidential report sent by CIA Director William Casey to President Reagan and other top government officials recently.

The report, which has triggered concern within the administration, detailed a substantial number of

steps, particularly during the past few months, that have been taken to heighten the combat readiness of communist forces, especially in Europe.

A significant indicator of the new situation, according to defense analysts, is that military vehicles have been withdrawn from their normal use as support vehicles for the harvest.

Because there are insufficient civilian vehicles to handle wheat and other harvests, the Soviet army has customarily provided vehicles of its own to assist with the crops.

In 1968, however, the Soviet government abruptly halted this use of military vehicles. Shortly afterwards, the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia.

In succeeding years the military again helped with the harvests. In March of this year, however, a governmental directive again halted military support for the harvest.

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In view of food shortages within the Soviet Union and the country's partial dependence of imports, this move was seen as a setback in a critical economic area. The Soviet — or military — leaders clearly felt that their military plans now had priority over the needs of the population.

The stopping of the utilization of military vehicles for crop use has been one of the steps taken to increase the readiness level of communist forces. Other moves that the analysts point to are:

- A portion of the Soviet nuclear forces in Eastern Europe have been placed on quick-alert. This appears to be the first time this has occurred in recent years.

- Increased numbers of elite Soviet SPETNAZ troops have been brought into Hungary and Czechoslovakia. These Special Forces-type soldiers are used for sabotage, terror and other activities behind enemy lines.

- In Hungary, a recall of an undetermined number of reservists was begun in May of this year. In Czechoslovakia, the term of service for draftees with missile

experience has apparently been extended from two to three years. In East Germany, it has been reported, men up to 35 years of age have been drafted without consideration of their professions or difficulties to their families.

- The Soviets have increased the periods during which troops are rotated on railroads.

Such movements interfere with the normal transportation of civilians and economic materials. On occasion trains have brought in more troops than they later took out. To prevent observation of troop movements at the Weimar freight station in East Germany, State Security has occupied homes in the area.

- In a highly unusual civil defense exercise held at Omsk in March, 800 people walked some 40 miles. The Soviet government and press maintain high interest in civil defense.

- The role of the Soviet intelligence agencies, the KGB and the GRU, as well as of satellite services has been upgraded. This has often been done at the expense of career diplomats in the various foreign services who have been replaced by or placed under intelligence personnel.

- There has been a reduction in production of commercial aircraft

in favor of military transport. Commercial aircraft production dropped significantly in 1983. Soviet airlines are not adding new planes to their fleets; in fact, they are buying back old aircraft from East European airlines.

- At least two tractor factories have been converted to manufacture military tanks or parts. One of these plants, at Chelyabinsk, is making tank chassis for the first time since World War II.

- The first new nuclear weapons storage facility to be built in a decade is under construction at Komсомolsk.

- Floor space for ammunition and explosive plants is being expanded throughout the Soviet Union. The ammunition plant at Luebben in East Germany has been placed on full 24-hour production and has more than doubled its production.

- The Soviet government is pressing hard to have industrial plants increase their production. At the same time, Soviet assistance to the economies of the satellite countries has been cut back. In Czechoslovakia, state-owned trucking companies have been affected by fuel shortages, and in Poland factories which had been producing civilian goods report-

edly have been converted to the production of military supplies for the Soviet Union.

Against this backdrop of war-related readiness measures, the Soviets have continued their belligerent mood against the United States. Soviet media have continually emphasized the theme that relations between the Soviet Union and the United States are bad and dangerous.

These relations have been compared to those between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany prior to World War II, and the Soviet press reiterates that the Soviet Union will not again be caught by a surprise attack.

The Soviets and their allies have also tried to restrict the movements of Western military personnel so they cannot witness communist military moves. In Russia, military attaches have been denied permission to travel to Leningrad this year, an area previously open.

In Poland the surveillance of foreign attaches in the southwest of the country has intensified. There have been three recent incidents in Poland in which NATO attaches have been detained and then forced to drive through military restricted areas so photos of them violating the restrictions could be taken.