

Councils barred from defence exercise

By JIM ARNISON

NORTH-WEST local authorities have been banned from observing a covert two-day civil defence exercise on the transition to a state of war which begins in Manchester tomorrow.

Exercise Table Top takes place in the Sunley buildings in Quay Street, Manchester.

Among those taking part will be civil servants from the Department of Employment, the DHSS, the Departments of Transport and Agriculture, the regional health authority and the police.

Representatives of eight North-West local authorities have lodged a strong objection to their exclusion from the exercise as observers.

They have told the chairman of the Regional Emergency Committee, Mr. Frank Kendall of a government statement some time ago that local authorities could participate "if they wish" in civil defence exercises.

A Manchester councillor, Arnold Spencer, chairman of the city's nuclear free zone committee said: "The government has gone back on its word and denied us observers so it can keep local authorities in the dark over its transition to war plans."

In response to questions from the local authorities Mr. Kendall confirmed that the exercise would look at the problems of resource allocations caused by the requisitioning of supplies by the US military as their troops mobilised throughout Britain.

Neither the fire service nor the water authority have been invited to take part in the exercise.

Councillor Spencer said: "What good is a civil defence exercise without an input from those responsible for rescue services and firefighting?"

Exercises

High-flown fights of fancy

IAN MATHER ■ Defence Correspondent

HIGH above the North Sea last week, it was as though World War III had broken out.

The pilots of the US Air Force's 527th Squadron, known as 'Aggressors', were taking advantage of the clear blue skies, which provided ideal conditions for their activities.

The 'Aggressor' squadron is composed of American warplanes painted to look like Soviet planes and flown by US pilots who fly like Soviet pilots. Eighteen of these 'Russian' aircraft are based at Alconbury air force base, Cambridgeshire, from where they take off to engage American and other NATO warplanes in mock dog fights.

'Our mission is to provide US and allied pilots with air combat training against dissimilar aircraft, by which I mean those belonging to all Communist air forces, since they all use the same tactics,' said Colonel 'Doc' Burroughs, the squadron's commanding officer.

'We give our pilots the opportunity to see what it's like to fight a MiG.'

Last week, it was the turn of Schiphol airport, Amsterdam, to come under threat, with the 'Aggressors' playing

the role of the first wave of a Soviet air attack from bases in East Germany.

So that the combatants could fly at supersonic speeds, the scene had to be shifted to a block of air space above the North Sea that is barred to civilian air traffic. American fighters from an air base in the Netherlands were the defenders.

'In a real air attack on Schiphol, we would expect a first sweep of around 18 aircraft,' said Capt Dave Brackett, one of the 'Russian' pilots, who sported a red star on the front of his flying helmet. 'Five to 10 minutes behind them would be a bunch of strikers with bombs. So the aim of the first guys would be to draw defending aircraft into a combat way up high, so the other guys could go in real low and drop their bombs.'

'In this exercise, we are supposed to be going out of our territory, East Germany, so we can shoot anything we see. But the other guys will be in a friendly area, so they will have to identify us before they can shoot.'

The 'Aggressor' concept grew out of the Vietnam war. During the Korean war, the Americans had a 15 to one 'kill ratio' in their favour, which they regarded as highly satisfactory. In Vietnam, however, the ratio dropped to three to one, because the North Vietnamese pilots were more experienced.

The theory is that, if US pilots can be given experience against aircraft which look like and follow the known tactics of Warsaw Pact pilots, their chances of winning in a real war will be greater.

Accordingly, the 'Aggressor' aircraft are small single-seaters which have a performance similar to that of MiG 21s, an older type of Soviet aircraft. They are flown by very experienced pilots, transferred from other units for three years. Last month they flew more than 500 sorties from Alconbury. They also have ground controllers who follow Warsaw Pact fighting tactics and direct the aircraft to a greater extent than is usual in the West.

To add verisimilitude to their role, the 'Aggressors' surround themselves with Communist symbols. Their badge is a snarling bear with a red star behind it and a circle around its head, indicating the target area. Underneath is the motto: 'Let the Bear Beware.'

Red stars are a favourite symbol. There is a large one on the door of each 'Aggressor' pilot's locker. There are red stars on their uniforms and on the planes. The biggest exercises of the year are called 'Red Star.'

The corridor walls in the squadron's headquarters are draped with the flags of all the Warsaw Pact countries. Fixed to one wall is a flat, tree-shaped piece of wood on which are pinned photographs of the squadron members and their families, posing in front of a Soviet flag.

'To simulate the fact that the Warsaw Pact aircraft would come in larger numbers, we have the ability to come alive again after 30 seconds, if we are hit, and pretend to be another aircraft,' Capt. Brackett said, 'however, if one of their guys dies, it's permanent.'