

# Britain joins US in secret nuclear exercises

From Michael White in Washington

The United States and Britain have been conducting secret exercises in both countries to reduce the risk of an accidental or deliberate nuclear weapons explosion, a newly declassified Pentagon document reveals.

In an effort to improve military nuclear safety, the Reagan administration has introduced new procedures and devices. The issue was made a priority programme within Nato at ministerial nuclear planning group level, which the administration believes is an improvement.

"Our allies in Europe are more involved in nuclear issues, are more sensitive to nuclear-related problems, and are working more actively to provide the most safe and secure environment possible," says the report.

"There have been US observers at most United Kingdom nuclear weapon accident exercises in the Sharp Foil, Senator and Franchise Series."

Details of the exercises are revealed in a secret report to President Reagan from the Pentagon and the Department of Energy.

Entitled Nuclear Weapon Surety, it primarily concerns the year 1984, though official US assessments are said to have remained largely unchanged since then and other exercises have taken place.

Among the exercises listed are "a field test of the United Kingdom diagnostic capabilities against an improvised nuclear device."

The four-day exercise involved simulating a nuclear weapons accident at an unspecified location in England.

The report implies that Nato allies which house nuclear weapons are at greater risk of accident or other disaster.

"Through the year 1990 exercise programmes and other initiatives underway are designed to achieve a uniformly capable and efficient response posture worldwide."

There have been no known nuclear weapons accidents in the US since September 1980 when a Titan II missile exploded in its silo in Damascus, Arkansas. But civil programmes have been under immense criticism and there is constant pressure for greater reassurance about the huge US stockpile—around 25,000 warheads—both at home and abroad.

During 1984 there were six threats involving improvised nuclear devices, but none was "deemed credible enough" to warrant deployment of the US nuclear emergency search team

Tass yesterday denounced Nato's "Autumn Forge-86" military manoeuvres in Western Europe as provocative and a factor complicating East-West dialogue on arms control.

## Exercises

Guaranteed  
22.8.86

### Nato exercise

A three-week long military exercise, codenamed "Northern Wedding 86", starting on Aug 29 to test the alliance's ability to respond to a Soviet naval challenge to vital sea routes in an East-West crisis, was announced by Nato yesterday. —Reuter.

### DAILY TELEGRAPH

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## EXERCISE TO TEST AIR DEFENCES

By Our Air Correspondent

Britain's air defences will be tested by the air forces of eight nations next week in an intensive three-day exercise, starting on Monday.

The RAF's latest fighter, the Tornado F2, will try out its Foxhunter intercept radar operationally for the first time. F2s from the Operational Conversion Unit at RAF Coningsby will join Phantom, Lightning and United Kingdom-based United States Air Force fighters in long range interceptions of "enemy" aircraft.

Aircraft operating from bases throughout northern Europe will mount more than 1,000 attacks on RAF airfields, missile sites, radar stations and naval vessels. Most overland activity will be over east and north-east England.

—as happened in Reno, Nevada, in 1981 over what turned out to be non-nuclear explosives. A similar team was established in West Germany in 1982 to cover Europe and one in Guam in 1984 to cover the Pacific.

The refinement of warhead safety has been advanced by the administration as a reason for refusing to join the Soviet nuclear test moratorium, now due to end as soon as Washington holds its first 1987 test in Nevada on February 6.

Though the report makes no direct criticism of British procedures, which are far more closely guarded by secrecy-obsessed Whitehall, it is accepted in Washington that cash restraints alone will make Britain's arrangements less advanced.

The US report was obtained under the Freedom of Information Act by Mr William Arkin,

From Harry Joyce in Burdofoss, Norway  
Some 2,000 US marines are scheduled to attend a memorial service aboard the USS Saipan today after eight of their fellow troops died when their helicopter crashed into the sea off northern Norway.  
The accident, which happened on Friday evening, not affected Nato's largest maritime exercises since 1978, but has cast a shadow over what was intended to be a display of Nato strength in the Norwegian sea, where the Soviet navy has become increasingly active.  
Military officials aboard the Saipan, a helicopter carrier, said yesterday that the Chironok was taking off from the ship flight deck when it crashed into a stationary helicopter.  
The helicopter caught fire,

crashed into the sea alongside the deck and exploded. Of the 17 marines and four crew on board, two bodies were recovered, six went down with the helicopter and 13 were rescued. Two of the survivors were seriously injured.  
The marines are among 35,000 troops taking part in Northern Wedding 86, involving 150 ships from nine Nato nations over a three-week period of manoeuvres.  
Marines are today due to launch mass landings by helicopter on the beaches of this north Norwegian fjord village—much to the consternation of villagers—in exercises aimed at proving Nato forces could rush to the defence of its northern flank in wartime.  
Nato officers refuse to acknowledge any doubts but the Norwegian media have been quick to point out that Nato's

last major exercises here ended in disaster in March when 17 Norwegian soldiers were killed in an avalanche.  
The Nato force includes some of the cream of its navy, the newly commissioned Ark Royal aircraft carrier from Britain, America's largest carrier, the Nimitz, and the huge warship Iowa.  
After tomorrow's landing, Nato's Atlantic strike fleet will regroup and sail to southern Norway and Denmark, where similar landings will be held.  
The Soviet Union has monitored the exercise closely and Royal's anti-submarine warfare experts yesterday proudly displayed a photograph they had taken of a Vic-class submarine that British surveillance experts had tracked for 15 hours.  
The submarine eventually surfaced, to find itself the subject of considerable attention

a nuclear weapons specialist at the Radical Institute for Policy Studies in Washington.

Commenting yesterday on the Pentagon report, the Ministry of Defence emphasised its ability to cope with a nuclear accident.