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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

DD/I RESEARCH STAFF

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

CIA/

20 March 1963
OCI No. 1132/63

SUBJECT: Some Observations on the Size and Combat Readiness
of Soviet Ground Forces

1. This brief memorandum has been prepared as a research aid for analysts currently engaged in the difficult task of reevaluating U.S. national estimates on the size and strength of Soviet ground forces. Set forth here are some findings gleaned from the latest available classified Soviet military documents (IRONBARK) that may shed light on the question of force size and composition. It will come as a surprise to no one that the classified Soviet materials do not answer the hardest questions which the intelligence community is obliged to deal with. The IRONBARK collection is remarkably free of numerical order-of-battle data on Soviet forces. Yet, the collection does provide some useful insights into Soviet military organization, offering some rough indexes for gauging the size and combat readiness of extant Soviet ground divisions. Not having been used, apparently, in the process of arriving at the established U.S. estimates of Soviet ground strength, the information drawn from the classified doctrinal materials may be a valuable input in the process of validating the estimates.

2. Caveat: The present exercise should be regarded as an indication of the kind of information that patient research can extract from the IRONBARK materials. It does not represent an exhaustive research effort on the subject at hand--being a by-product of the writer's research on problems of military thought and doctrine--and should not replace further efforts to extract order-of-battle intelligence directly from the classified documents.

3. The main findings of this report--based on evidence dated as late as May-June 1962--are as follows:

(a) There will not be a major reorganization of the ground troops in the near future--at least insofar as the Soviet military hierarchy is concerned.

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(b) TO&E's of existing divisions may be subject to further paring down in the interest of promoting their combat mobility.

(c) To compare Soviet divisions with U.S. divisions is to compare apples with oranges.

(d) With some possible exceptions, the only ground divisions that are maintained at combat ready strength are those composing the Groups of Soviet Forces in East Germany, Hungary and Poland, and the border military districts of the USSR.

(e) As to exceptions to the rule, some divisions in the border district forces are said to be under strength, while some divisions located in the depth of the USSR may be combat ready.

(f) One source indicates that the Warsaw Pact Forces are capable of fielding some three hundred divisions by M plus 60.

3. No major reorganization in sight: Marshal Malinovsky made it clear, in an article in the first issue for 1962 of the Top Secret version of MILITARY THOUGHT, that the existing organization of the ground troops meets modern requirements, and that a "fundamental change in the organization of the ground troops in the near future will not be necessary." Malinovsky's article resolved a debate over whether the Soviet tank army should be abolished, but his conclusions obviously have more far-reaching policy implications for Soviet ground forces.

4. More paring of divisions planned: While the basic structure of the Soviet ground forces will remain in tact, Malinovsky said in the same article, streamlining of the divisions will continue. He noted that in recent years the number of personnel in divisions has been "sharply reduced" and that the number of rear services units and establishments in divisions and armies has also been "reduced." But in this respect, not enough has been done, the Defense Minister said: "We must find ways to lighten the divisions further" as well as new means of meeting the various logistical needs of the divisions. This recommendation is in keeping with the march of Soviet military thinking in recent years: cut down the baggage train in the interest of mobility and build up fire-power of combat units. But the proposal may also be made in the interest of cutting costs.

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5. Soviet and U.S. divisions compared:*

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(a) The Soviet tank division, according to Malinovsky, has about the same number of tanks organic to its U.S. counterpart (340); its personnel complement varies from one-third to one-half that of the U.S. counterpart (which numbers 14,617); and it has one third to one-half the number of motor vehicles organic to the U.S. armored division. The fact that the U.S. armored division has more infantry and artillery than the Soviet, Malinovsky says, makes it more cumbersome and less maneuverable. Claiming also that the Soviet tanks are heavier and of a better quality than the tanks in the U.S. armored division, Malinovsky concluded that the Soviet tank division is superior both in strike force and mobility to a U.S. armored division.

(b) The Soviet motorized rifle division, Malinovsky said, has from one-half to two-thirds the number of personnel in a U.S. infantry division (13,748, Pentomic); one-half to two-thirds the number of motor transport vehicles; "more" tanks than in the U.S. infantry division and ^{more} guided anti-tank missiles but "less" artillery. The U.S. infantry division TO&E calls for 125 tanks and 64 artillery pieces; no figure is available here on guided anti-tank missiles in the U.S. division.

(c) The Soviet combined arms armies slated for operations in the Western Theater have many fewer personnel and rear service units and installations as well as fewer divisions than the U.S. field armies, and are said to be "slightly inferior" to them in firepower and strike force. Also, the Soviet combined arms army has no corps control element. And unlike the NATO forces, the Soviet Ground Troops have tank armies.

6. Divisions at different levels of readiness: In addition to revealing the optimum strengths and some variant strengths of two principal types of Soviet ground divisions, the classified materials also provide an index, albeit a crude one, to the levels of readiness designated for various categories

*All comparisons are with U.S. Pentomic, not ROAD divisions.
The relative strength of the Soviet airborne division is not given.

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of Soviet military forces. The materials make it clear that the strengths of Soviet ground divisions vary according to their mission. Generally, those divisions that are expected to participate in the opening operations of the war are kept at full strength; the remainder--mostly the internal military district forces--are not.

(a) In his article in the first issue for 1962 of the Top Secret MILITARY THOUGHT, Major General Kh. Dzhelaukhov* identified as units which are kept at "constant combat readiness"--i.e., wartime TO&E strength--"the regular large units of the strategic missile troops, groups of forces /in East Germany, Poland, and Hungary/, border military districts and naval forces, and the anti-air defense troops (PVO Strany)."

** The author indicated, however, that not all border military district troops are combat ready: "Some large units" /divisions/ of the border military districts will "need to complete their mobilization" in the event of war. The possibility that some ground divisions in internal military districts are also kept at combat ready strength cannot be ruled out. Dzhelaukhov may have had certain ground divisions as well as PVO Strany and missile forces in mind when he alluded to the "other regular formations in the /depth of the/ country which are ready for immediate operations."

*A military science specialist in the General Staff Academy.

**Col. Gen. Pavlovsky, onetime Deputy Chief of the General Staff, defined "combat readiness" in an article published in a 1961 issuance of the Top Secret version of MILITARY THOUGHT. He wrote:

The fundamentals of combat readiness include a high degree of field training of the troops; having combat equipment in excellent condition and being able to use it; well-organized control of troops and their readiness for rapid assembly; the presence of stocks of the material and technical supplies necessary for the supply of the troops in case they are alerted; and, as regards the internal military districts, readiness to mobilize and to be transported or to carry out marches over long distances.

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(b) Confirming the Dzhelaukhov account, Colonel V. V. Larinov*--in an article in the Secret version of MILITARY THOUGHT released in spring 1962--explained the mixed state of readiness of the Soviet military establishment in terms of economic constraints: "It is quite obvious that it is impossible to maintain all the armed forces in a high degree of constant combat readiness in peacetime. This would be to the detriment of the state budget." Therefore only certain forces and weapons are selected to be kept in a high state of combat readiness (i.e., full strength): These are the "missile large units and units, bomber and fighter aviation large units, weapons of the PVO Strany, and a certain part of the ground forces and forces of the fleets."

(c) A similar line of reasoning was advanced in the overt Soviet Ministry of Defense book "Military Strategy," which was also published in spring 1962. A chapter of the book identified with the "radical" theorist Col. Gen. Gastilovich included the following passage: "Taking into account the threat of a surprise attack by an enemy using present-day means of massive assault and the resulting difficulties in mobilization, it would seem advisable to have peacetime armed forces set up so that the main aims of the initial phase of the war can be attained without additional mobilization. However, to keep the armed forces in such a state is economically impossible for even the strongest country. Therefore it is necessary to keep in a state of constant readiness only the strategic forces and weapons...the air defense system of the country, and certain of the other types of armed forces: ground troops, naval forces, the air force, and civil-defense forces. The composition of these latter types of forces is, as a rule, increased at the outset of a war by mobilization." The author then went on to delineate three categories of readiness and mobilization among the ground troops: "Some of the ground troop units intended to carry out the first operations and deployed in the border regions are kept in peacetime at a strength which will ensure the carrying out of the main tasks of the initial phase of the war. Another group has a short mobilization period, thereby

*An occasional writer on military doctrine, Larionov prepared the Soviet Defense Ministry book "Military Strategy" for publication.

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enabling it to participate in the first operations of the war. Finally, a certain group is kept at reduced strength in peacetime." The author went on to say that the combat-ready ground troops must be "much stronger" than cover forces were in past wars.

7. Mobilization potential: From a statement in the Larionov article in MILITARY THOUGHT, it appears that the Soviets calculate that they can mobilize as many as three hundred divisions in the European theater by M plus 60. According to Larionov, "The NATO commanders intend to concentrate up to 100 divisions by the end of the second month of the war in the European theater of military operations. But the readiness of the armed forces of the Warsaw Pact countries in this theater is several times higher." Larionov's calculation, to be sure, does not take into account "the irreplaceable losses in personnel and armament" that he says earlier in the article may be inflicted on Soviet bloc forces at the very start of the war.

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