

~~SECRET~~

29233

HR70-14

OFFICE OF STRATEGIC RESEARCH

CIA/OSR/MEMO

740301

1 March 1974

APPROVED FOR
RELEASE -
HISTORICAL
COLLECTION
DIVISION HR70-14
DATE: 07-18-2012

MEMORANDUM

The Withdrawal of a GSFG Tank Army

The withdrawal of a Soviet tank army from the NGA is the centerpiece of the Western framework proposal for reductions by the Warsaw Pact. This memorandum defines the composition of a tank army and briefly examines the Soviet concepts for the use of a tank army in general and for the two tank armies in NGA in particular. It also considers the impact of the withdrawal of a tank army on Soviet capabilities in Central Europe and possible Soviet measures to compensate for the withdrawal. Lastly, it treats briefly the effects of a reduction of a combined arms army as compared to tank army.

Soviet Concepts of Armies and Their Mission

Soviet ground force armies are operational, tactical field commands, comparable to US corps, consisting mainly of line divisions and combat

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~ [REDACTED]

support elements with minimal logistic and service support. Typically, an army consists of 3-5 divisions and such combat support units as field artillery, surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles, and combat engineer bridging and assault crossing units. There are two types of armies--combined arms armies which have a preponderance of motorized rifle divisions or an even composition of divisions, and tank armies which are comprised mainly of tank divisions. The army is a flexible command and support structure, however, in which divisions and combat support elements may be readily transferred from one army to another as the tactical situation requires.

Logistically the army serves primarily as a transport pipeline between the front and the divisions, but retains smaller stocks than either. The front, which is the highest echelon of wartime field command, provides the main service support comparable to the US field army.

Soviet planning for theater ground campaigns is based on fronts and armies. A primary theater strategic objective and axis of advance is assigned to

~~SECRET~~ [REDACTED]

SECRET

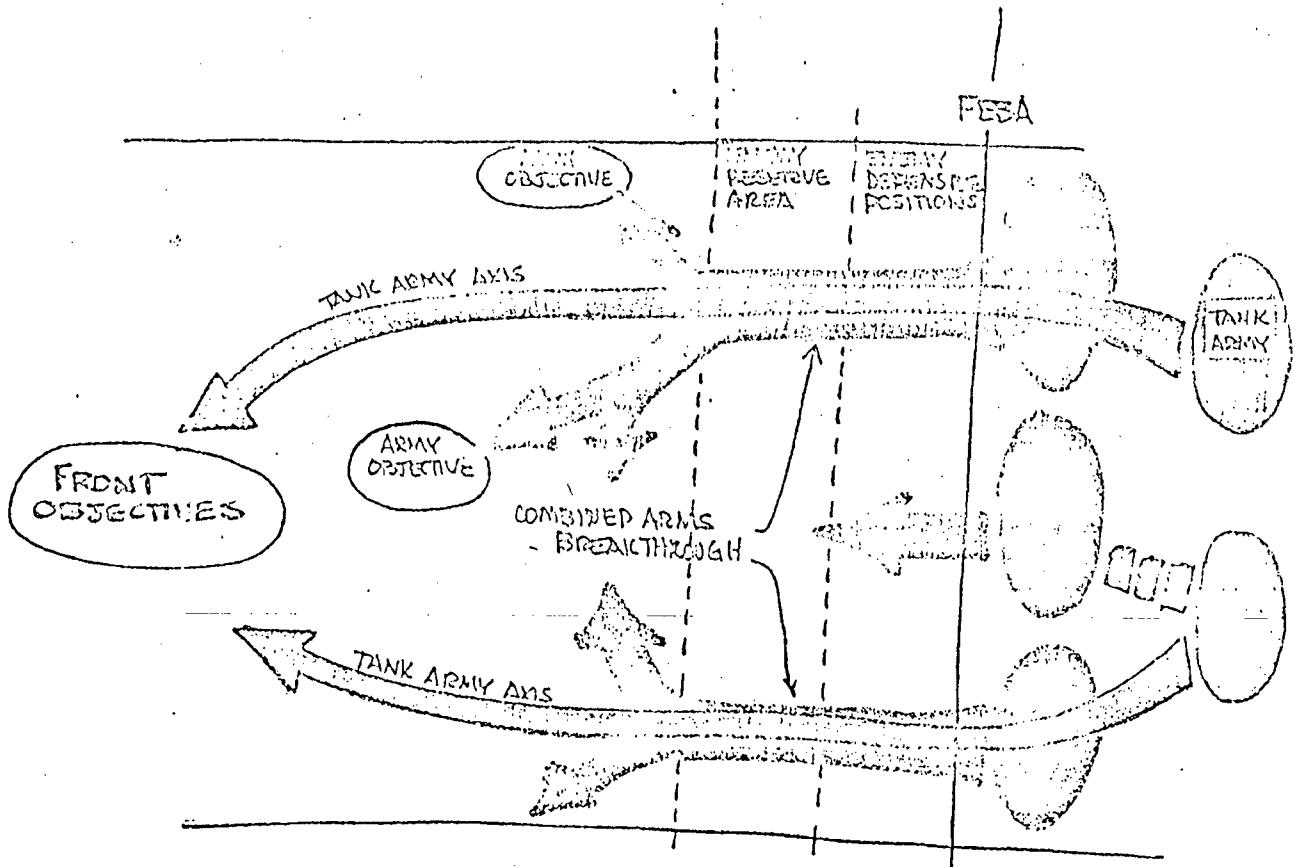
the front. Main tactical objectives and axes within the frontal zone of operations are assigned to the armies. The mission of an army is assigned by the front commander in support of overall front objectives. The strength and composition of the army are determined by the missions assigned and the strength of the opposing enemy force. The missions of the armies, therefore, are scenario dependent.

Soviet doctrine calls for the decisive blow in a ground campaign--defensive or offensive, conventional or nuclear--to be struck by tank armies. There are, however, certain conditions which must be met before tank armies can be committed to the offensive. These conditions are to be created by combined arms armies or nuclear strikes. In a non-nuclear offensive, combined arms armies reinforced with front artillery attack prepared defensive positions on a narrow frontage and create a breakthrough of the defensive zone--including defeating or engaging its mobile reserves--to be exploited by tank armies which have been held in reserve. (See Diagram p. 4) These units advance rapidly through the breach

SECRET

SECRET

CONCEPTUAL FRONT-ARMY OPERATIONS



SECRET

~~SECRET~~ [REDACTED]

to destroy other enemy reserves, pursue retreating units, destroy logistics support and seize strategic points to the depth of the front's zone of operations, as far as several hundred kilometers to the rear. After the breakthrough is accomplished, combined arms armies would mop up enemy pockets bypassed by the tank armies and attack on parallel axes, providing some cohesion between the advancing tank columns.

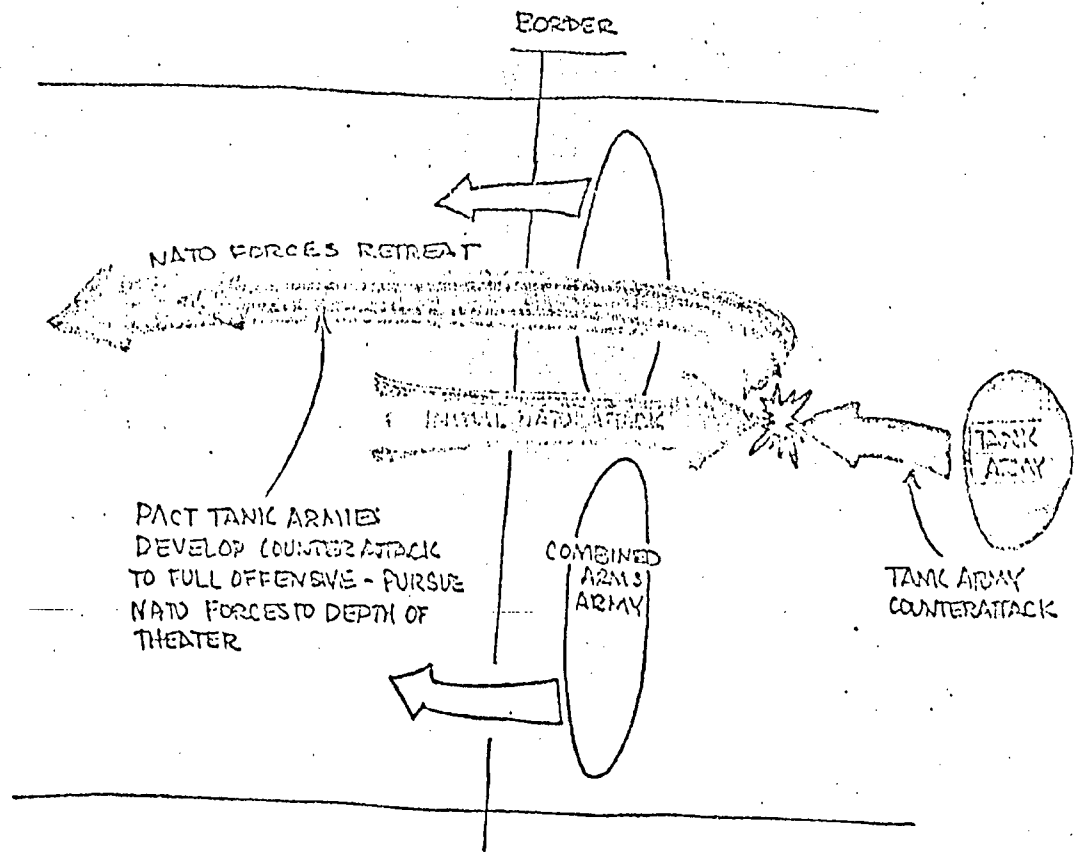
In a nuclear war scenario, tank armies would be in the first echelon of an attack. Assuming gaps in enemy defenses could be created by nuclear strikes, exploitation and pursuit could begin immediately with the tank armies in the vanguard. Nuclear weapons would then be used along the intended axes of advance to prevent the enemy from establishing an effective defense.

If NATO attacked first [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] the Pact counterattack would be conducted by tank armies held back from the border. (See Diagram p. 6) In a nuclear war, Pact nuclear strikes would be intended to blunt the NATO attack after which the tank armies would counterattack.

~~SECRET~~ [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

~~SECRET~~

CONCEPTUAL PACT OFFENSIVE FOLLOWING INITIAL NATO ATTACK



~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~ [redacted]

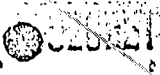
They would then continue the attack to the depth of the theater, forming the first echelon of the Pact's overall counter offensive. If NATO attacked with conventional weapons only, tank and combined arms units would attrite and canalize an enemy attack before the tank armies--operating as a mobile reserve--counterattacked the enemy penetrations and carried the attack forward as part of the counter offensive.

Soviet Tank Armies in East Germany

Insofar as can be determined [redacted] missions of the two Soviet tank armies in East Germany are consistent with Soviet offensive doctrine. These armies are not intended to exploit immediate breakthroughs in NATO defenses by surrounding NATO troop concentrations, but to advance rapidly to the rear to prevent NATO forces from establishing a viable defense and to seal off forces in the FRG and Benelux area from retreat, resupply, or reinforcement.

During peacetime, the locations of the Soviet divisions in East Germany--10 tank and 10 motorized rifle--generally reflect the defensive posture of

~~SECRET~~ [redacted]



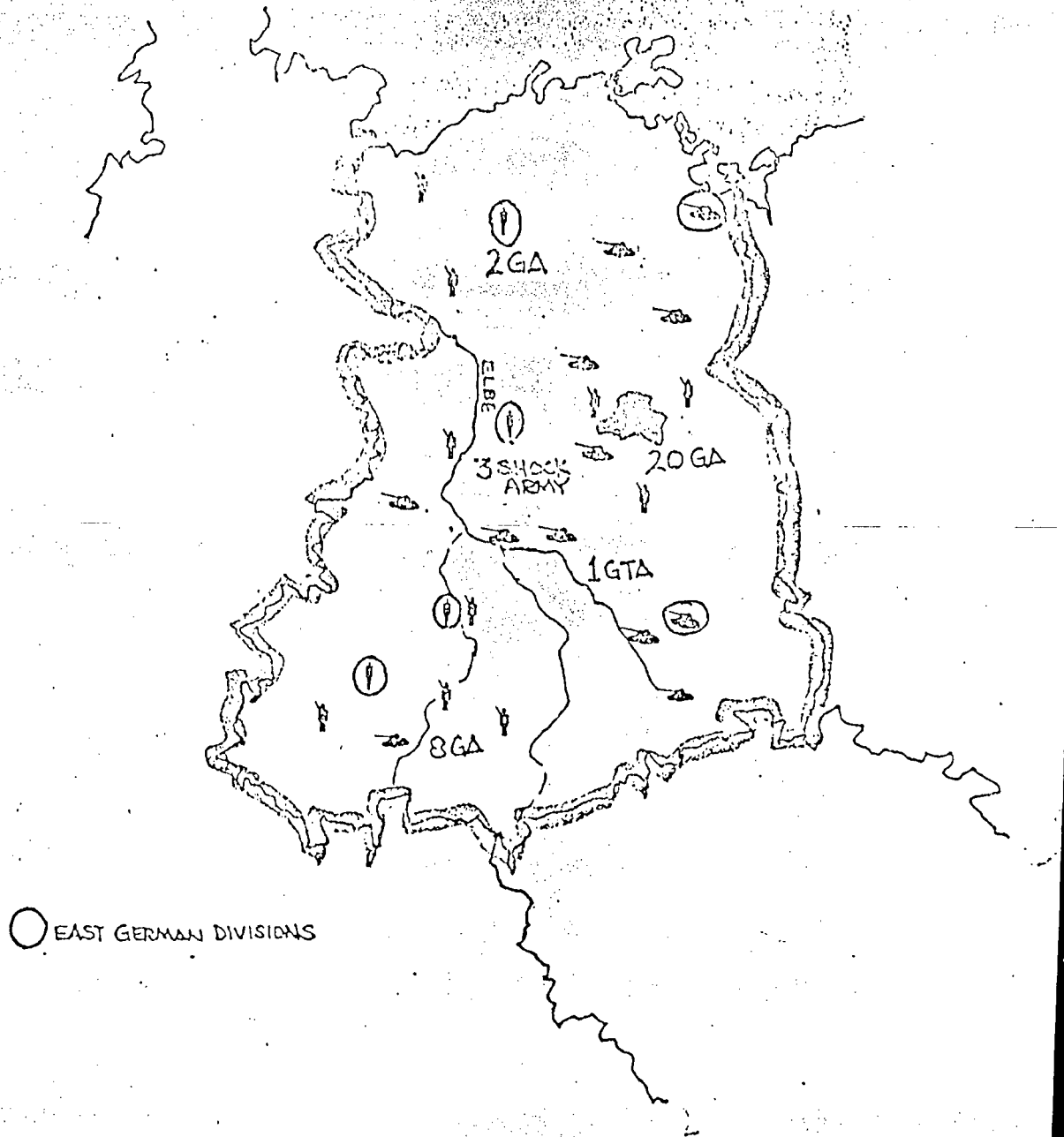
the force--as well as consideration for the caserne space available. Soviet dispositions in East Germany cannot be treated in isolation, however, as the six East German divisions--two tank and four motorized rifle divisions--play a part in both offensive and defensive planning and almost certainly would be included, all or in part, with a Soviet front there. (See Map p. 9)

Most of the forces in East Germany are located behind the primary defense line formed by the Elbe and other rivers and lakes and mountains near the border. Less than a third of the divisions are west of the line, and only one--a Soviet division astride the Berlin Autobahn--is a tank division. The remaining eleven Soviet and East German tank divisions, seven of which are subordinate to the two peacetime Soviet tank armies, are located further east to be used as a mobile counterattack force.

In a defensive situation, the 3rd Shock Army--made up in peacetime of 4 tank divisions and one motorized rifle division--and an East German division located in its area would be responsible for the defense of the autobahn approach to Berlin.

SECRET

SOVIET ARMOIES IN EAST GERMANY



○ EAST GERMAN DIVISIONS

SECRET

~~SECRET~~

Two tank divisions of the army would also be available to counter a NATO thrust from the northern area of Germany toward Berlin. Depending on the direction and strength of the NATO advances, divisions from other armies could reinforce the 3rd Shock Army.

The other tank army in East Germany, the Soviet 1st Guards Tank Army, also with four tank and one rifle division, is disposed in an arc from south of Berlin to the Dresden area. The army is primarily responsible for the border area between the Harz Mountains and Eisenach, but the divisions are generally located well back from the border behind two East German motorized rifle divisions and a Soviet combined arms army defending southern East Germany. On the defensive, this army would provide the mobile defense and counterattack force in its primary area of responsibility and could support the combined arms army opposite the US Seventh Army. The two northernmost tank divisions of the 1st Guards Tank Army are in a position to reinforce a counterattack west of Berlin as well.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Plans

apparently call for the northernmost GSFG army to deploy to central East Germany and the Polish front to take up positions north of Berlin prior to an offensive. There is also some evidence of plans to augment forces in East Germany with the two Soviet tank divisions and army-level support elements based in Poland. East German divisions may be included in the Soviet armies or operate as independent armies.

[REDACTED]

The Soviet tank

armies in East Germany, possibly augmented by East German divisions, apparently are responsible for two primary axes of advance. (See Map p.12)

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

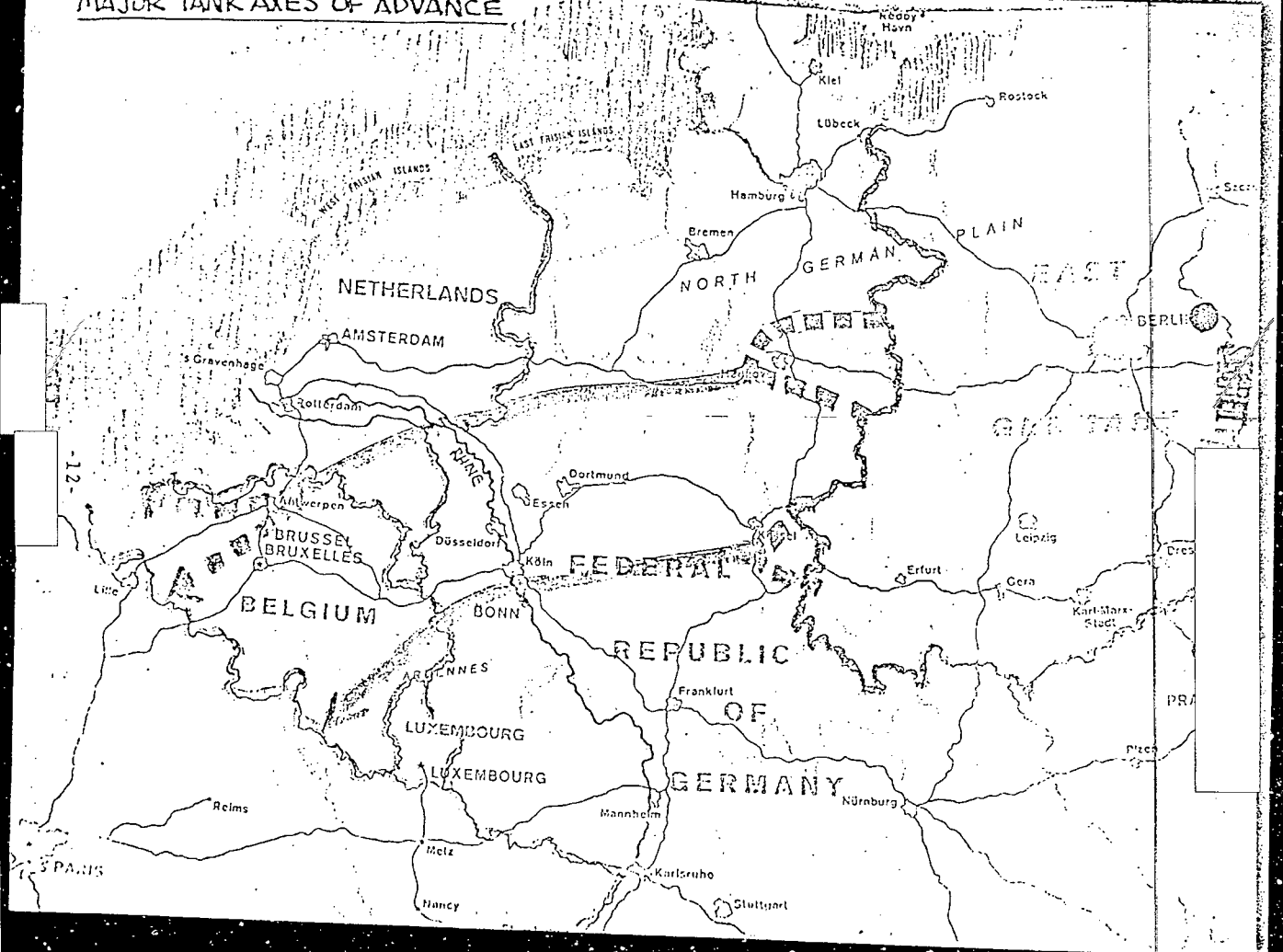
Because these

~~SECRET~~

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

MAJOR TANK AXES OF ADVANCE



~~SECRET~~

advances always occur after NATO attacks, however, they usually postulate a Pact breakthrough of NATO forces occurring as a result of Pact counterattacks. If the war began without nuclear weapons or a NATO attack, the tank armies would not be committed until the initial NATO defenses and any natural defense barriers such as major rivers had been overcome by combined arms forces.

The most consistent feature [redacted]

[redacted] is the role of the northernmost Soviet tank army which enters West Germany between Wolfsburg and the Harz Mountains to cross the Rhine north of Essen near the Netherlands border. It is apparently planned that this army would then attack through Belgium toward the channel ports or the French border. The route of the other tank army [redacted]

[redacted] may be more scenario dependent.

Usually, [redacted] this army crossing the border between Nordhausen and Eisenach, advancing southwest to cross the Rhine in the Koblenz area and moving through the Ardennes and Luxemburg to the French border. These northern and central tank axes

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~ [redacted]

will probably be assigned to the 3rd Shock Army and 1st Guards Tank Army respectively.

[redacted] under some circumstances the armies within GSFG are intended to be restructured prior to hostilities. [redacted]

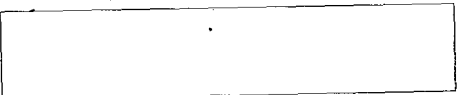
[redacted] usually precedes the Pact offensive thrust, and therefore, neither of the primary tank axes of advance can be firmly attributed to either of these armies as they now stand.

Reductions and Reactions

There are several forms that a tank army reduction could take. This could vary from withdrawal of either the 3rd Shock Army or the 1st Guards Tank Army intact as they are now composed, to withdrawal of

~~SECRET~~ [redacted]

~~SECRET~~

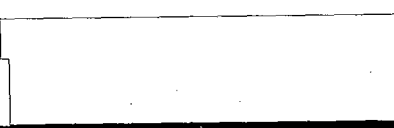
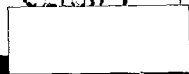


their equivalent in terms of divisions and support elements.

The form of a reduction would determine Soviet compensatory measures. Withdrawal of an army intact or its divisions would leave a critical gap in the Soviet defensive posture in East Germany. This would be the case particularly in central East Germany where the withdrawal of the 3rd Shock Army would leave the road to Berlin virtually undefended. In the south, withdrawal of the 1st Guards Tank Army would not expose great sections of the frontier but would deprive the Pact of its primary mobile reserve and counterattack force in that area. In any case, if one or another of these armies were withdrawn, the Soviets would almost certainly insist on relocating elements of the remaining force into the vacuum to ensure their defense.

Further, they probably would still see a need for two mobile armored forces for counterattacks, as well as for offensive purposes. It is almost certain, therefore, that the Soviets would align their forces so that--at the outbreak of hostilities--they would

~~SECRET~~





~~SECRET~~



have two tank armies for these roles. The number of tank divisions in the tank armies might be reduced and/or more of the combined arms armies would not have a tank division. It should be noted, however, that with the increase in tanks in motorized rifle divisions, the difference between these and tank divisions already is being reduced to as few as 75 or so tanks--250 vs. 325. Unless otherwise constrained, the Soviets might also further increase the number of tanks in the motorized rifle divisions.

A manpower ceiling would force the Soviets to make some tradeoffs, however, if additional tanks and their crews and support were added to the motorized rifle divisions. The Soviet force planner would, therefore, be faced with some difficult decisions. Reductions of infantry or artillery in favor of tanks would reduce the flexibility of the force, particularly in a conventional war. Reductions in logistics or support forces to generate manpower for the addition of tank units would aggravate what already appears to be an austere overall logistics and combat support capability.

~~SECRET~~



~~SECRET~~

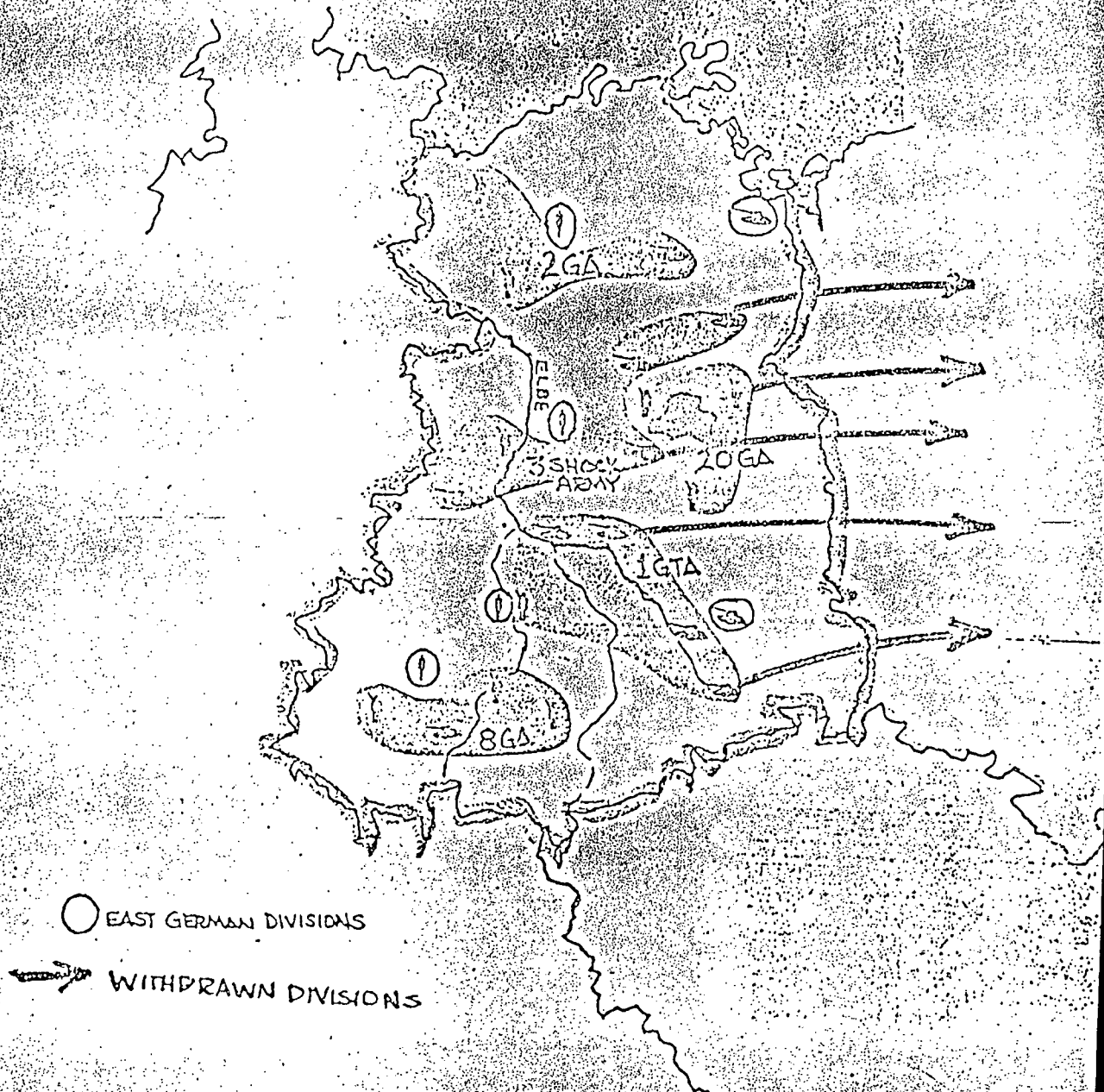
Agreement by the Soviets to accept the withdrawal of a tank army equivalent from East Germany probably would be easier to negotiate. Under this option, an equivalent number of specified divisions--with or without their army level support--would be withdrawn. By selecting from divisions in the eastern half of the country, a major relocation of remaining forces to fill the defensive void would be unnecessary. (See Map p.18)

If, for example, the 1st Guards Tank Army were withdrawn, the Soviets might choose to move two tank divisions from the 3rd Shock Army from their present garrisons southwest and north of Berlin into the vacated area. A motorized rifle division of the 20th Guards Army could also be moved south. (See map p.19) The Soviets might compensate for the withdrawal of the 3rd Shock Army by a shift of two of the 1st Guards Tank Army tank divisions and the relocation of one of the motorized rifle divisions from east of Berlin to a position nearer the border. (See map p.20) All of these moves could be accomplished using existing casernes.

~~SECRET~~

SECRET

WITHDRAWAL OF A TANK ARMY EQUIVALENT



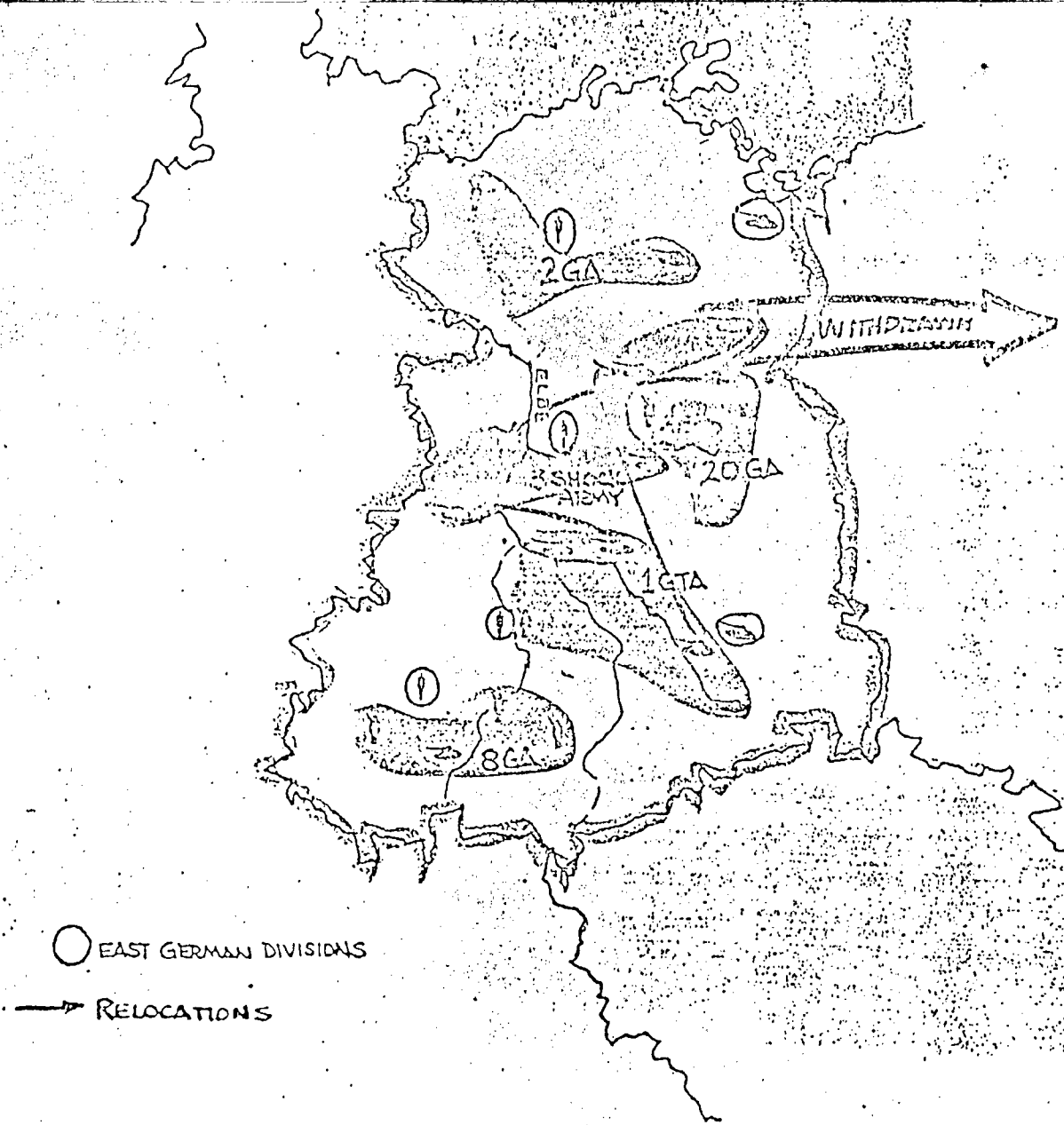
○ EAST GERMAN DIVISIONS

➔ WITHDRAWN DIVISIONS

SECRET

SECRET

WITHDRAWAL OF 3RD SHOCK ARMY



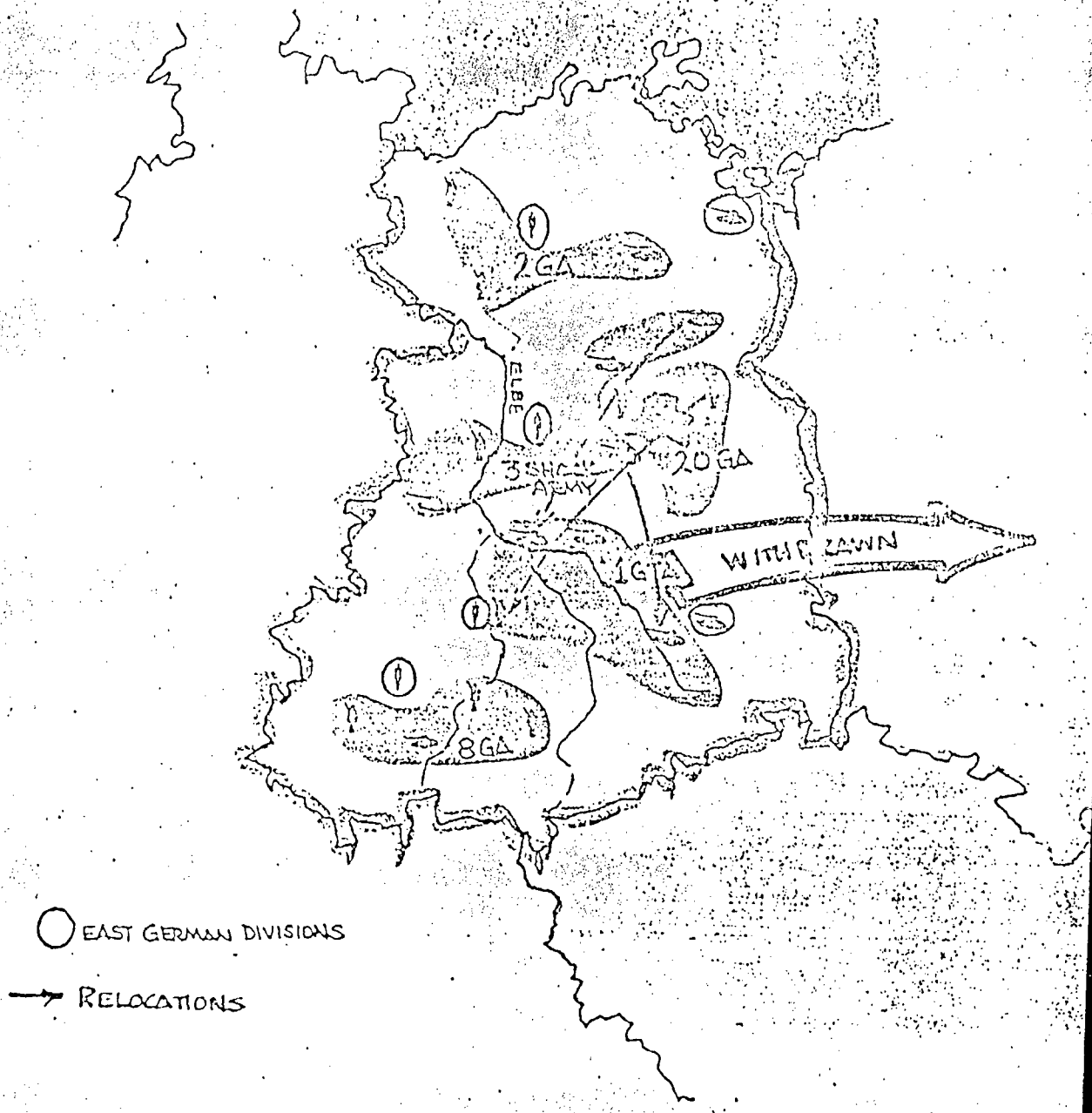
○ EAST GERMAN DIVISIONS

→ RELOCATIONS

SECRET

SECRET

WITHDRAWAL OF 1ST GUARDS TANK ARMY



SECRET

SECRET [REDACTED]

Soviet resistance to the withdrawal of a tank army could hinge more on the loss of the army-level headquarters and its associated support structure than on the loss of the subordinate divisions. The Soviets' twenty division force in East Germany could be controlled by four, five, or six army headquarters in keeping with their concept of having from three to five divisions in an army. The five army structures presently in GSFSG, however, appear to reflect geographic defensive responsibilities and contingencies for tactical objectives rather than only the size of the force in terms of manpower and divisions.

The Soviets almost certainly would prefer to retain all five army-level structures for reasons of support as well as geography. Retention of five armies would increase proportionally the transport and support capabilities of the residual force and would provide an in-place structure which could be rapidly augmented by East German or additional Soviet divisions should hostilities appear imminent.

~~SECRET~~



Alternative Reductions

In NATO negotiating strategy, both political and military considerations have dictated a focus on the Soviet tank threat. This objective is driven by numerical comparisons which show the Pact to have nearly a 3:1 advantage in numbers of tanks in the NGA. With reductions in the number of Soviet tanks as a primary MBFR objective, and because reductions by units are most easily verified, attention has fixed on tank armies.

The concern for the Soviet tank armies, while valid, has obscured, however, the roles and relative weights of other elements in Soviet ground forces. If the Pact side were to counter with a proposal to reduce by the equivalent of a combined arms army, the offer should not be dismissed out of hand. Of the tanks in active combat units in GSFG, about half are in the three combined arms armies. Moreover, a combined arms army that has five divisions has nearly twice as many APC-mounted infantry as a tank army, 10 percent more artillery, twice as many mortars, twice

~~SECRET~~



~~SECRET~~

as many major antitank weapons, and four times as many infantry combat vehicles (BMPs). With the increases in their firepower and mobility over the past several years, combined arms armies now have a greater capability to exploit, as well as create, a breakthrough. In addition, there is some evidence of plans to deploy self-propelled artillery with motorized rifle regiments which would further enhance their capability.

Withdrawal of a combined arms army, as opposed to a tank army, would, therefore, deprive the Soviets of more firepower--as it is now measured--and of a greater degree of operational flexibility, particularly in a conventional war scenario. As noted earlier, the highly mobile offensive envisioned in Soviet writings is preceded by a WWII-type attack by massed artillery and combined arms units. Failure of this initial attack could prevent tank units from breaking into the NATO rear. If the Soviets were forced to commit portions of the tank armies as well to the initial assault, their effectiveness in subsequent exploitation operations could be significantly reduced.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~ [REDACTED]

In addition, the combined arms army has a greater capability to seize and hold ground than does a tank army. This capability would be of greater value to Pact planners if a thrust into West Germany were halted by the defense or had limited objectives and the Pact chose to try to hold their ground in anticipation of a negotiated end to hostilities.

~~SECRET~~ [REDACTED]