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Soviet Plans for Warsaw Pact Theater Commands Opposite NATO

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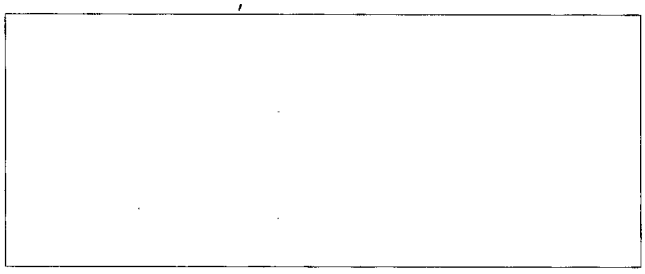

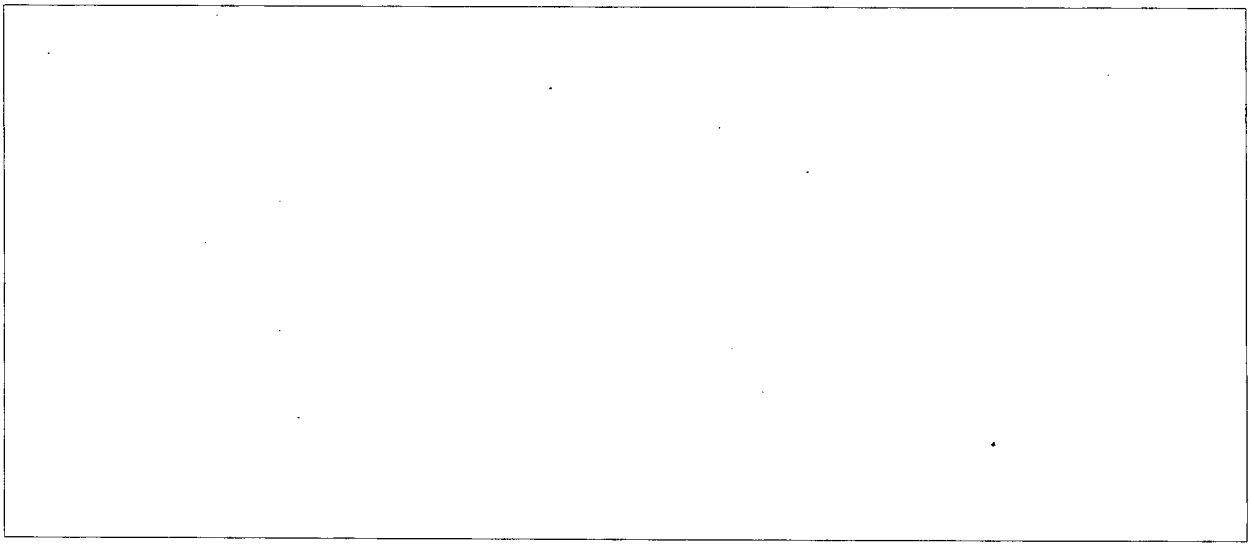

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Soviet Plans for Warsaw Pact Theater Commands Opposite NATO

An Intelligence Assessment

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Comments and queries are
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Key Judgments

The Warsaw Pact has no permanent multinational command system like that of NATO, and each member nation controls its own forces in peacetime. We have assumed that in wartime the Pact forces would come under the ultimate control of the USSR but have been uncertain about how the transition would be accomplished and what command structure would be activated. The Pact itself apparently did not seriously consider arrangements for wartime control until the late 1960s.

Parts of the necessary control structure already exist: the Headquarters of the Combined Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact is in Moscow, and headquarters for fronts[1] were formed in the late 1960s. In their military planning, the Soviets and their Pact allies have long considered that the geographic area where military operations would take place should be divided into distinct sectors, which they label theaters of war (TVs) and theaters of military operations (TVDs).

We now have evidence that Pact planning provides for establishing in wartime two TVD commands oriented against NATO. They would be subordinate to the Pact commander in chief (who in turn would be under the control of the Soviet Supreme High Command), and each TVD would control several fronts. The use of theater-level commands would increase the Pact's wartime effectiveness by reducing the number of commands directly controlled by higher authorities and by relieving the fronts of some of the burden of coordination. They would significantly improve the Pact's ability to control multinational theater forces and to coordinate their action with the strategic forces. A statute is currently being drafted that will define the TVD wartime structure, but it may not deal with the politically sensitive question of when and how the commands are to be formed.

We have evidence that the Soviets are proposing the establishment in peacetime of headquarters for the two TVDs. Permanent commands at this level could guide the preparation for war and could improve the Pact's ability to control initial combat operations. They could also facilitate Soviet peacetime efforts to shape the structure, development, and operations of all Pact forces.

Creating permanent control organs for the Pact is a politically sensitive issue for the East European members of the Pact, who have traditionally resisted Soviet attempts to gain control of their forces in peacetime. Any Soviet attempt to give theater commands widespread direct control over East European national forces in peacetime would meet resistance. For limited purposes and under specific circumstances, most of the East Europeans may be prepared to cede certain national prerogatives to the theater commands—although the Romanians are expected to balk at even limited peacetime concessions of authority.

[1] A front is a joint forces command, roughly analogous to the US army group, consisting of ground and air forces, combat support elements, and sometimes naval forces. Although front command and control elements exist fronts are formally activated as commands only in wartime.

Contents

Chronology

Milestones in the Development of Theater Commands

Early 1960s	Requirements for theater forces command and control systems are defined.
Late 1960s	The modernization of Soviet tactical communications equipment begins to make significant improvements in the command and control capabilities of fronts and armies.
1968	staffs for fronts probably are established on a permanent basis; a large-scale construction program is begun to build command and communications centers for fronts and theater commands.
1969	The Pact agrees to revitalize its headquarters in Moscow, and East Europeans begin to play a larger role—the apparent beginning of serious efforts to establish a viable command and control system for the Pact.
1971	The Soviets begin to experiment with theater echelons of command.
1974	The Pact adopts a standard command and control doctrine which states the need for establishing control organs in peacetime and defines the desired communications interconnectivity among Pact command posts, including TVDs.
1975	Army General Kulikov (Chief of the Soviet General Staff at the time) acknowledges the usefulness of theater commands to modern warfare; this is regarded as marking the official Soviet adoption of the theater command concept.
1977	Exercise Zapad-77 is controlled by the TVD headquarters.
1978	Warsaw Pact headquarters is expanded and reorganized to include staff elements that correspond to TVD areas.

Soviet Plans for Warsaw Pact Theater Commands Opposite NATO

Development of Theater Command Concept

The concept of theater commands for the Warsaw Pact forces is relatively new, although the Soviets occasionally used such commands in World War II. The Warsaw Pact Treaty was signed in 1955, but to this day the organization has no permanent multinational command system similar to that adopted by NATO, and each member nation has continued to control its own forces. The Headquarters of the Combined Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact exists in Moscow, but it has not been used to exercise control over Pact forces, and uncertainty has surrounded the extent and nature of the role it would play in the event of a war with NATO. Indeed, it was only in 1969 that the Political Consultative Committee, the Pact's supreme political organ, began to develop the organization's military command structure.

The Soviets and their Pact allies have long considered the conduct of military operations by their theater forces to occur within distinct geographic areas which they label theaters of war (TVs) and theaters of military operations (TVDs).[1] The Soviet efforts to deal with the increasing need for theater commands began in the late 1960s (see chronology). Since about 1971 the Soviets have been experimenting with a command structure for the control of forces operating in the TVs and TVDs.

In 1977 the East Europeans began to participate in this command structure and these commands began to function more as separate command entities.

The complexity of modern combat and the increased role being given to East European forces within the Pact reinforce the need for a system capable of directing large-scale, multinational operations. The theater command concept has emerged as a means of developing such a capability.

There is a consensus in the Pact in favor of a comprehensive statute, currently being drafted, that will formally establish a wartime TVD command structure. This Soviet-inspired statute begins to translate the planning of the 1970s into action. It will give the commander of each TVD full wartime operational control of all assigned forces. The statute may not touch on the questions—more sensitive politically—of how and when the shift from national to multinational control will take place.

[1] The Soviets define a theater of war *(teatr voyny)* as the territory of any one continent, together with the sea areas adjoining it and the air space above it, on which hostilities may develop (for example, the European theater of war). A theater of war usually includes several theaters of [military] operations.

A theater of military operations *(teatr voyennykh deystviy)* is defined as a particular territory, together with the associated air space and sea areas, including islands (archipelagos), within whose limits a known part of the armed forces of the country (or coalition) operates in wartime, engaged in strategic missions which ensue from the war plan. A theater of operations may be ground, maritime, or intercontinental. According to their military-political and economic importance, theaters of operations are classified as main or secondary.

Warsaw Pact Command Structure for War

Supreme High Command

Ultimate control over all Soviet and Warsaw Pact military operations is vested in the Soviet Supreme High Command (VGK), which is composed of the top military leaders and one or two civilians—including General Secretary Brezhnev, who is the Supreme High Commander in Chief.[4] Marshal of the Soviet Union Viktor Kulikov, Commander in Chief of the Combined Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact, is almost certainly a member of the VGK. The Soviet General Staff is the executive agent for the VGK and would control both Soviet and Pact armed forces in wartime (see chart).

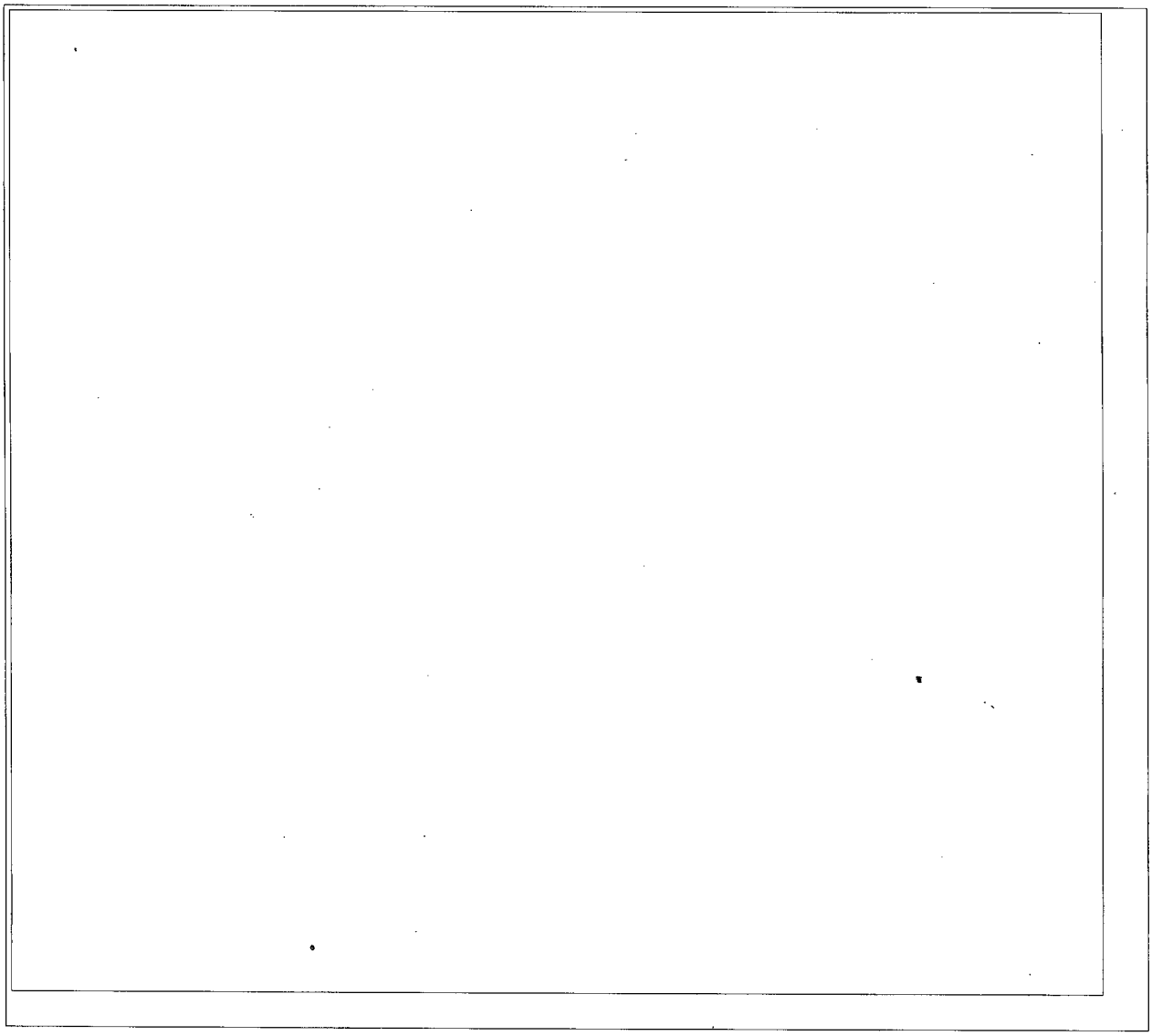
Warsaw Pact High Command

The Warsaw Pact High Command, with Kulikov as its commander in chief, would control two subordinate commands in wartime. Its staff would probably be composed of personnel from the Soviet General Staff, major elements of the present Warsaw Pact combined staff, and other key Soviet and East European staffs. When created, it would assume operational control over all Pact forces, and it could also control the Soviet strategic forces allocated to support Pact operations in the Western TV. The Pact commander in chief might have the additional role of commander in chief of this TV, if such a command were set up.

We are uncertain whether the commander in chief of the Warsaw Pact Combined Armed Forces would exercise his control in the Western TV as a representative of the Soviet General Staff or as head of a separate and distinct command entity. We believe, however, that in wartime he, his Pact Combined Staff, and some elements of the Soviet General Staff would form a separate headquarters and move from Moscow—perhaps to the L'vov area—to establish a command for the control of the subordinate TVDs.[5]

TVD Commands

Pact planning further provides for the establishment in wartime of two TVD commands—the Western (for operations against NATO's Central Region) and the Southwestern (for operations against NATO's Southern Region).[6] This is already reflected at the highest level: since he assumed command in 1977, Kulikov has reorganized the Pact headquarters to include "West" and "Southwest" staff components. Evidence of the past year gives us high confidence that the Soviets would activate such commands in wartime and place them under the control of the Pact High Command.



In 1978 the Pact Combined Staff the concept of TVD commands and outlined the authority proposed for their commanders. have indicated that the TVD commander had operational control over all forces assigned to him, that proposal was the first explicit delineation of his responsibilities. They include:

- Supervising the planning and conduct of combat operations (presumably under the guidance of the Soviet Supreme High Command, the Soviet General Staff, and the Pact headquarters).

- Determining how TVD forces will be organized for combat on the various axes of advance.

- Assigning combat orders to subordinate fronts, separate armies, and supporting forces allocated to TVD operations.

- Coordinating front- and army-level operations with strategic operations.

- Coordinating national air defense forces support of tactical air defense forces.

- Coordinating the employment of air force operations in the theater and exercising direct control of air operations.

- Organizing the coordination and employment of naval forces in support of TVD operations.

- Organizing and planning logistical support for TVD operations.

- Coordinating training activity with national commands that have forces assigned to the TVD

Soviet Proposal for Peacetime Theater Commands

The Pact allies have been concerned for many years about their ability to facilitate war preparations, and Pact doctrine states the principle that an effective structure should exist in peacetime. Currently the actual peacetime structure differs from the proposed wartime structure, and there is no accepted procedure for transition from one to the other.

Forming ad hoc TVD commands when mobilizing for war would cause confusion that could limit the Pact's initial war-fighting capabilities—we estimate, for example, that about a week would be required to establish a theater-level command and communications structure. Permanently established TVD control organs could eliminate much of this delay and thus could improve the Pact's ability to control initial combat operations.[9] Only a day or two would be required to deploy command and communications systems for the fronts adjacent to NATO borders. (Providing similar support to fronts located in the Soviet interior would take somewhat longer.)

Despite their potential military value, the establishment of permanent TVDs is perhaps being delayed by the question of their authority over national forces. Senior Soviet officers assigned to the Pact headquarters in Moscow have proposed their formation. After exercise Zapad-77, for example, Marshal Kulikov stated that TVD staffs must assume control of forces during the period of worsening tensions leading to war. We believe that the 1978 Pact Combined Staff of the responsibilities of TVD commanders reflected an official decision by the Soviets to advocate the peacetime establishment of the TVDs. The Combined Staff proposals that the TVD commander should coordinate training activity with national commands as a peacetime activity indicates that the Soviets envision at least some type of peacetime authority for the TVD control organs.

[9] Such a reduction could significantly affect NATO's warning capabilities; currently NATO considers the creation of the Pact's wartime command system to be a major indicator of war. If the Soviet proposal is implemented, the upper echelons of this system will be established prior to the warning period.

The Pact command and control doctrine, formalized in 1974 (see chronology), established guidelines for creating a communications system to serve forces within the TVDs—including the TVD command posts—in peacetime. Consequently, an integrated communications system is being developed which by the mid-1980s will begin to provide the interoperability and channel capacity needed to support Pact military operations. When completed in 1990, it will be the principal means of communication between major fixed command centers. Mobile signal units, which will access this system via entry points at selected repeater stations, will link all echelons of command, including tactical units deployed in the field.

East European Sensitivities

The proposal to establish permanent TVD commands appears to be in itself politically sensitive, involving decisions as to what power they would be given. Any proposals by the Soviets to give them widespread and direct control over national forces in peacetime would meet various degrees of resistance from the East Europeans.

The Romanians—unlike the other East Europeans—presumably would balk at even limited infringements of national command authority. Their opposition to such changes almost certainly surfaced at the Pact's Political Consultative Committee meeting held in Moscow during November 1978. Romanian President Ceausescu has implied publicly that at the meeting he defied Soviet pressure to change the Pact command structure. (Although he was not specific, he probably was referring to the Soviet proposal on establishing TVD high commands in peacetime.)

On the other hand, some East Europeans may accept Soviet arguments that:

- At least nucleus TVD staffs should exist in peacetime to assure maximum Pact military preparedness.

- TVD staffs operating during peacetime would assist in unifying the alliance as a whole.

- TVDs would offer individual Pact members a larger voice in planning and decisions regarding the use of their national forces.

We have no evidence that the Soviets are in fact using these arguments in discussions with their East European colleagues, but it would be logical for them to do so.

Perhaps the most sensitive questions for all East Europeans are how and when control of the national forces would be transferred to the multinational TVD commands during the "threatening period" before the outbreak of war. They would insist, in particular, that the transfer of authority or commitment of national forces to war can be ordered only by the nations concerned and not by the Pact High Command on its own initiative. For limited purposes and under specific circumstances, however, the East Europeans (except the Romanians) are probably prepared to cede certain national command prerogatives to the Pact command in peacetime.

The Soviets and the East Europeans have already agreed on measures that favor a more genuinely multinational control within the Pact and a greater East European contribution to Soviet plans for using the forces opposite NATO. One such measure has been to expand both the size and functions of the Pact's combined staff; it also appears that this staff now has a wartime role in controlling TVD operations. Furthermore, the Pact has already developed much of the command structure needed for war; the command and control elements for Soviet fronts apparently were created in the late 1960s, and the Poles, Czechoslovaks, Bulgarians, and Romanians now have their own national fronts.

Under the existing plan, non-Soviet members retain control over their own forces during peacetime, but the Pact High Command—under the ultimate leadership of the Soviets—and the TVDs would control all of the forces in wartime. The East Europeans may be reluctant to grant this control in peacetime, however—even though their officers would serve on the proposed

TVD staffs and despite their 1974 approval of the Pact standard command and control doctrine. If they give up full control of their own armed forces in peacetime, they will lose much of their ability to influence the decision on whether or not to go to war. In addition, Soviet officers would command each TVD, dominate the staffs (as they do the combined staff in Moscow), and probably exert even more direct peacetime influence than they do now on the structure, development, and operations of the Pact forces.

In view of these concerns, compromises will have to be worked out between the Soviets and the East Europeans if the Soviet proposal for permanent TVD commands is to be implemented. Possible types of TVD staffs to be formed in peacetime include:

- A fully manned TVD high command with some control over all national forces. The Soviet military would presumably prefer this type of staff because it could readily assume wartime control functions.

- A fully manned permanent staff that exercises no control over national forces in peacetime but plays an important role in organizing, conducting, and evaluating TVD exercises and in planning and preparing TVD forces for war.

- A predesignated staff activated only during exercises or preparations for war. Such a staff would be some improvement over the existing ad hoc arrangement, though it would not meet the 1974 doctrinal requirement for peacetime command and control organs. It would be less objectionable to the East Europeans than a permanently manned staff because it would not appreciably reduce their control of their own forces.

- A cadre staff for planning and for coordinating preparations for war. It would provide some continuity of command, could be augmented if a threat of war were perceived, and could exert some influence on the peacetime activities of East European forces. It would be slower than a fully manned staff in moving to a full wartime footing. A cadre staff might be the best compromise between what the Soviets desire and what the East Europeans will accept.

Marshal Kulikov could help win East European acceptance of TVD commands. He seems to be a more effective leader than his predecessor, Marshal Yakubovskiy, who was reputed to be abrasive. Yakubovskiy's domineering conduct during Pact exercises at times drew sharp criticism from senior East European leaders, who already were sensitive to Soviet domination. The more diplomatic Kulikov is likely to stress military reasons for a change rather than to try to force the change.

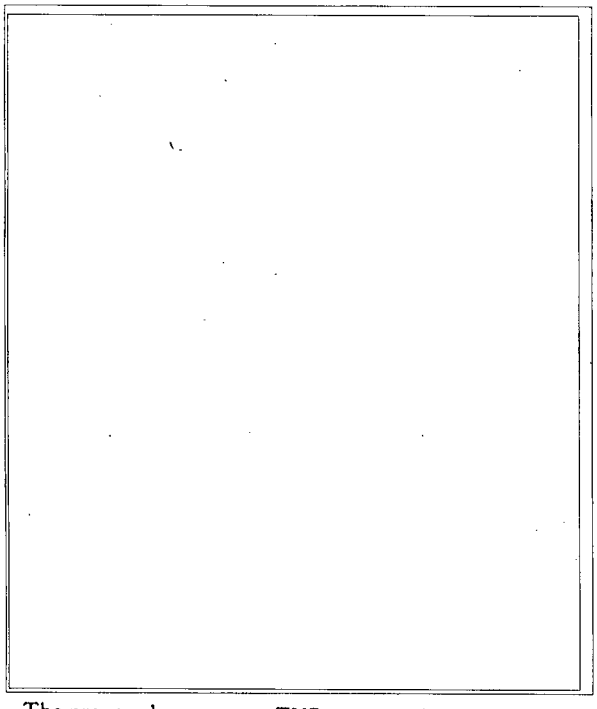
Kulikov made progress in this direction when he obtained East European approval for creating "West" and "Southwest" staff components in the Pact's headquarters in Moscow. Moreover, he has pointed to the performance of the ad hoc TVD commands in exercises to show that this command structure would improve the Pact's war-fighting capability. This argument may be a difficult one for East European military leaders to counter.

Military Implications

Modern combat—in particular, a multinational operation on the scale envisioned by the Pact—requires a high degree of coordination and integration of forces, which a TVD command could provide. The transitions from peacetime to war and from conventional to nuclear warfare also require an effective and responsive command and control system. Moreover, the use of Soviet strategic weapon systems to support operations within a specific theater could be better controlled by a TVD command than by Moscow.

the Soviets have considered the possibility of having to fight against NATO and China simultaneously. The need to control multiple-front operations in two widely separated areas—both remote from Moscow—could be another factor favoring the establishment of theater-level commands.[1] In addition, such commands could reduce the number of elements (currently around 450) that report directly to the Soviet General Staff.

[1] The creation in peacetime of a high command for a theater command in the Far East has been proposed by a senior military commander in that region.



The proposed permanent TVD commands, if fully implemented, would significantly improve the Pact's ability to assume operational control over all of its theater forces and to integrate their actions with those of the Soviet strategic forces allocated to support Pact theater operations. Specifically, permanent TVD commands (with their staffs and communications) would improve the Pact's ability in peacetime to:

- Plan for large-scale combat operations.
- Develop the infrastructure needed to support theater operations.
- Alert the forces in response to changing situations.
- Mobilize and move forward large-sized reinforcements.

In wartime, these commands would:

- Control initial combat operations.
- Control and coordinate combat operations of all fronts during both conventional and nuclear warfare.
- Allocate combat and support resources for frontal operations.
- Coordinate and expedite logistical support for theater operations.