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The Soviet General Staff: A Command Structure for Military Planning and Operations

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A Research Paper

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The Soviet General Staff: A Command Structure for Military Planning and Operations



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A Research Paper

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This paper was prepared by 
Theater Forces Division, Office of Soviet Analysis.
Comments and queries are welcome and may be
addressed to the Chief, Theater Forces Division, Office
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This paper was coordinated with the National
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**The Soviet General Staff:
A Command Structure
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Overview

The General Staff is second only to the party leadership in Soviet national security decisionmaking. When it was formed in the mid-1920s it was intended to be the national organization for military planning, but since then it has also acquired authority for operational control of all Soviet armed forces.

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During peacetime the General Staff is the executive agent of the Defense Council (a deliberative body with both civilian and military members, presided over by the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet and charged with advising the Politburo on major defense policy issues). As such, the General Staff converts Politburo and Defense Council policy decisions into defense plans and orders. It also briefs the Council on national security matters, and thus is in a position to influence the decisionmaking process.

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In wartime the national command authority is the Supreme High Command (VGK). The makeup of the VGK is not published, but it probably would include the chiefs of the services and other military figures, and it would be headed by the General Secretary of the Communist Party (currently L. I. Brezhnev), with the title of Supreme High Commander. The General Staff would be the VGK's agent for strategic planning and its executive agent for operational control of all forces.

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Unlike US staff officers, who have no command authority, Soviet staff officers are the executive agents of the commander at each echelon of the military hierarchy. Throughout the Soviet Armed Forces, for example, the chief of staff is second only to the commander in authority and importance and is the only officer authorized to issue orders in the commander's name. The chief of staff directs the work of the operational staff (operations, intelligence, organization, and communications); coordinates the work of the arms and technical staffs (such as air and air defense, rocket and artillery troops, and logistics); and oversees the work of operational staffs at the next lower echelon.

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The Soviet General Staff is organized along functional and geographic lines. At its heart is the Main Operations Directorate, responsible for all aspects of defense planning at the national level. (It would order the use of nuclear weapons by operational units, after appropriate political authorization.) The Main Organization-Mobilization Directorate is the next most influential element; besides managing conscription, mobilization, and



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combat training, it determines the organization and equipment levels of all the services. The General Staff draws up the annual and five-year defense plans and works with civilian planners to ensure that the overall economic plan meets defense needs. Other elements of the General Staff specialize in areas such as intelligence, foreign military relations, and military science.

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General Staff personnel form an elite service at the center of the Soviet command and staff system. They are selected by the staff's Cadres Directorate and the Administrative Organs Department of the CPSU Central Committee. The selecting officers examine professional and political qualifications to choose the most promising candidates from all branches of service. The political requirement is not pro forma—all members of the General Staff service are active party members. Indeed, political activity is one of the prerequisites to an officer's selection to the service. A large majority of General Staff personnel are ground force combined-arms officers. This is partly because of tradition but also because the Ground Forces are the largest service.

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Throughout the armed forces, members of the General Staff service occupy the key positions in the main staffs and the key command and senior staff positions down to about the army level. Because the number of full members is limited, candidate members of the General Staff service usually fill the top command and staff positions at the corps and division levels. The net result is that commanders at each echelon in every service reflect General Staff training, traditions, military values, and operating procedures.

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The General Staff system has both advantages and disadvantages as a mechanism of military command and control. It gives the Soviet political leaders centralized operational authority over all major field commands, using unified and well-rehearsed command and operating procedures. On orders from the Defense Council, the Soviet military leaders would probably be able to direct the rapid transition of their forces from a peacetime to a wartime footing and then to conduct extended military operations without interruption. The chief disadvantage is that as the elite system draws the most capable officers to itself it drains them from the rank-and-file officer corps.

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**The Soviet General Staff:
A Command Structure
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Introduction


The General Staff is a part of the Soviet Ministry of Defense, and its chief is a First Deputy Minister of Defense; its central position within the Ministry is shown in figure 1. The General Staff has three basic mandates:

- To provide a centralized mechanism of troop control throughout the military establishment.
- To be the top military planning agency for national security affairs.
- To be the executive organ of the national command authority for the entire armed forces of the USSR (and the Warsaw Pact). 


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The General Staff as we know it today emerged in 1935—amid much resistance from various military and party leaders who had reservations about this concentration of power. Since that time, articles have appeared from time to time in the Soviet press explaining aspects of the operational role of the General Staff in peace and war. The articles usually discuss questions of the staff's responsibilities, its relationship to other elements of the armed forces, and its influence in the high-level military decision-making process. This may indicate a continuing sensitivity to the need for periodic official reaffirmation of one General Staff's role. 


Evolution of the General Staff

The concept, organization, and operating principles of the Soviet General Staff system have evolved from three separate traditions. The Imperial Russian General Staff was the origin of many of its current organizational and operational concepts. The concept that it should be a highly educated professional officer corps was imported largely from the German General Staff. Finally, the concept of an elite, highly centralized leadership organ closely tied to the party and state leadership derives from the Bolshevik tradition. 

In 1921 the staff of the Workers and Peasants Red Army (RKKA) was formed to unify command and control of the armed forces of the new Soviet state. Many of its personnel were former members of the Imperial General Staff. The military reform of 1924-25 tied the staff even more closely to the party and government leaders. At that time Stalin and other party leaders (who would not have permitted any central power structure not completely under their control) viewed the General Staff primarily as a planning organ. M. V. Frunze, generally considered the person most responsible for its founding, wrote:

The functions of this staff must include resolution of problems connected with the overall tasks of state defense: mobilization and operational plans. 

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During the next decade the Soviet armed forces cooperated with and learned from the German Army of the Weimar Republic, which was training covertly in the Soviet Union. The staff of the RKKA steadily increased its operational role and became closely identified with the young, technically trained element that was developing within the officer corps. These developments apparently led to much suspicion of the RKKA staff within both the party and the military. 

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In the mid-1930s Hitler renounced the Treaty of Versailles and reestablished the German General Staff—and shortly thereafter the RKKA staff added "General" to its name. A General Staff Academy was organized and enrolled its first class. These measures added to the concern of those who preferred to see operational authority kept in the individual services. These opponents were sufficiently influential at the time to limit the staff's role mainly to defense planning and to downgrade its main directorates to directorates and its directorates to departments. Decision-making within the Commissariat of Defense was

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specifically reserved for the Commissar and other party leaders, leaving senior military leaders—including the Chief of the General Staff—with little real authority. [] 25X1

Khrushchev were in frequent conflict, exacerbated by the Cuban missile crisis and the Penkovskiy affair. Some of the General Staff's leaders were replaced, and its prestige and authority declined. [] 25X1

The growing German military threat by the end of the 1930s convinced the Soviet leaders that the professional military leadership should have the authority (as well as the expertise) to organize the country's defenses to meet the coming threat. As a result, the Soviets in January 1941 began a reorganization of the General Staff. Its directorates and departments were upgraded to their previous status and new graduates of the academy were added to the staff. []

With the ouster of Khrushchev in October 1964, however, the General Staff once again began to improve its position in the defense establishment. A few weeks later Marshal Biryuzov, whom Khrushchev had appointed, was killed in a plane crash and M. V. Zakharov, who had been ousted in 1963, was returned to the position of General Staff Chief. Since then the General Staff has steadily increased its operational authority and its position within the national security apparatus. This increase has been enhanced by technical advances in command, control, and communications systems, which have allowed it to assume a constantly expanding operational role in force control. [] 25X1

When Germany invaded in June 1941, the General Staff was in position to assume overall control of the Soviet armed forces, and its role and authority continued to expand as it gained Stalin's confidence. By war's end, the Soviet leadership evidently was making no major military decisions without first hearing from the General Staff. [] 25X1

The evolution of the General Staff is shown graphically in figure 9 (appendix C). The names of its chiefs since 1921 are listed in table 2. [] 25X1

After the war, the General Staff retained its authority for planning, training, and general preparedness but lost some of its operational authority to main staffs newly created for the individual military services. One reason for this may have been a general feeling that the command, control, and communications systems available at the time were inadequate to permit any responsive centralized control over the large and widely deployed Soviet forces. []

Today, the General Staff is organized into functional directorates headed by deputy chiefs of staff, as shown in figure 2 (the names of the current incumbents are shown in table 1). The functions of the General Staff range from operational matters such as command and control, planning, training and readiness, tactics, intelligence, and topographic studies to military policy matters such as national security planning, foreign military assistance, arms control, and censorship. It is also directly concerned with issues involving the diverse aspects of weapons acquisition, logistics, military science, and mobilization. [] 25X1

The Soviet Navy had a main staff before World War II, and shortly after the war the Air Force staff was upgraded to a main staff, while a Ground Forces main staff was created; the National Air Defense Forces became a separate branch of the armed forces in 1949, with its own main staff. The creation of the Strategic Rocket Forces in late 1959, with yet another main staff, led the military leadership to press for a command organ with centralized operational authority over all the armed forces. At that time, however, the General Staff and the political leadership under

The General Staff has more influence on Soviet military policy today than ever before. Its current chief, Marshal N. V. Ogarkov, has considerable experience and prestige and plays a more prominent role in political-military decisionmaking than any of his predecessors over the past two decades. [] 25X1

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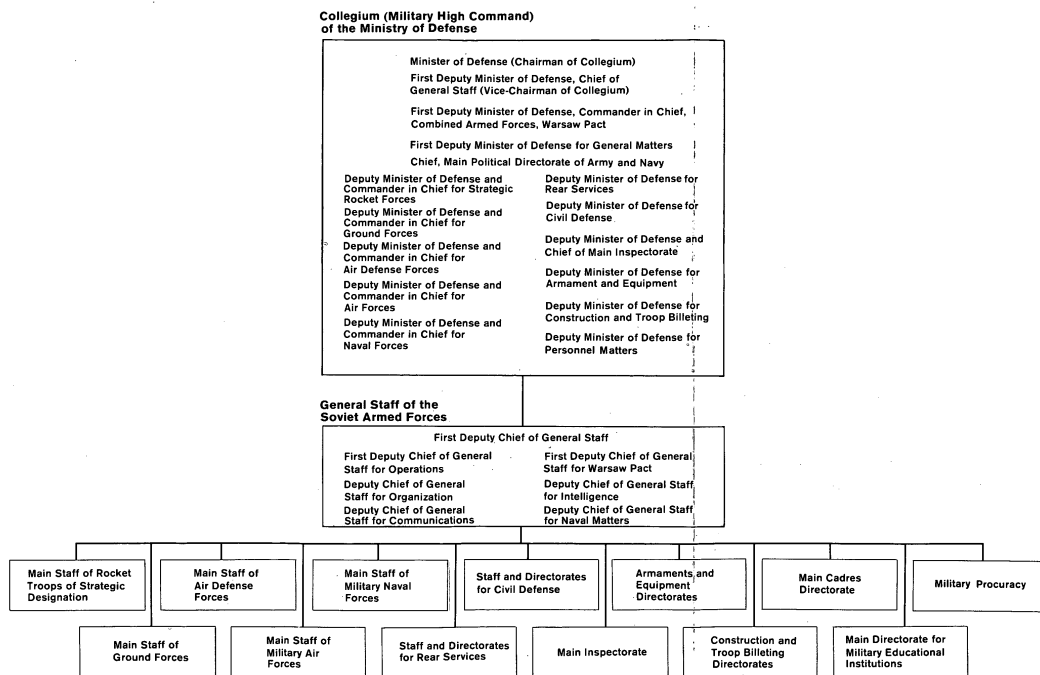
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Figure 1
Ministry of Defense



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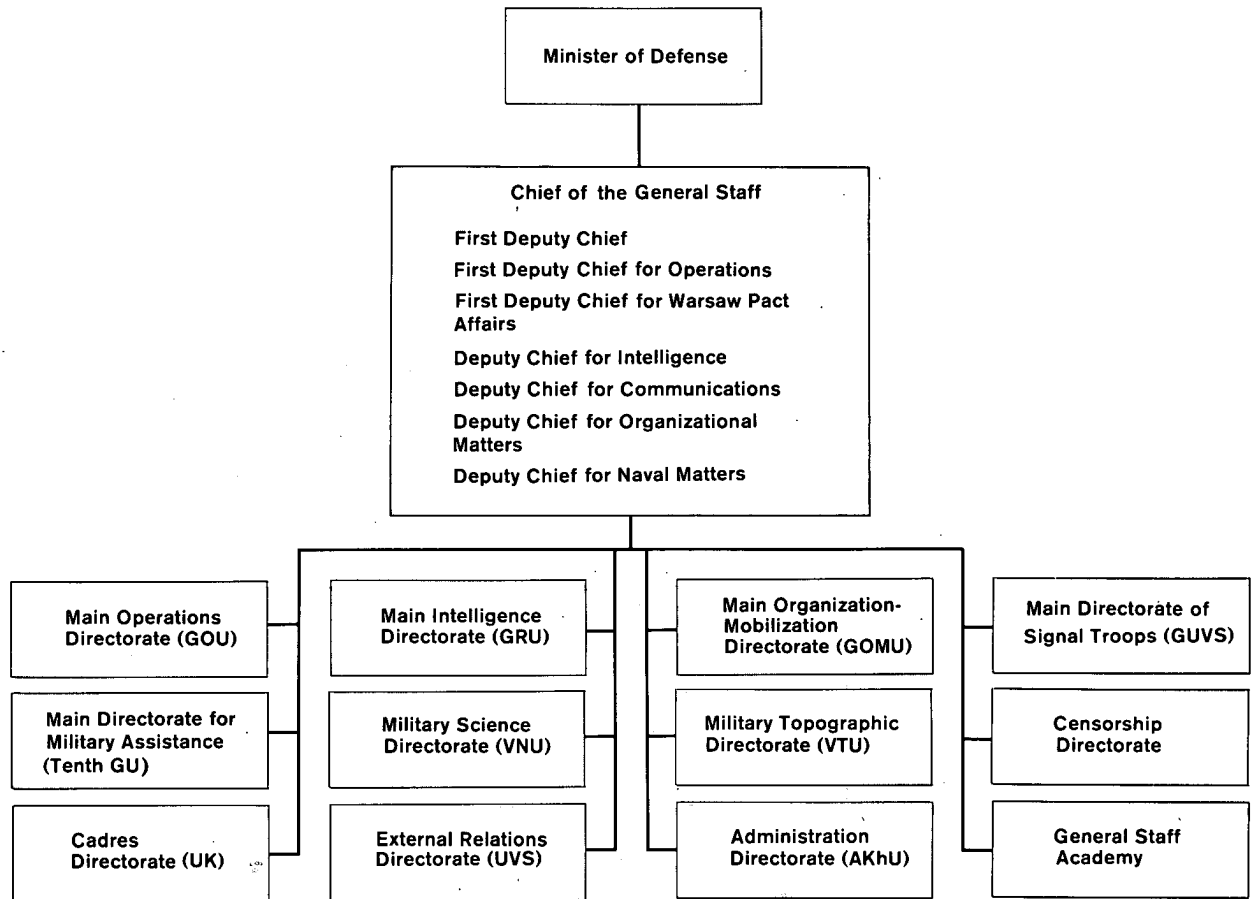
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Figure 2

General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces



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Top Secret**Table 1****Current Leadership of the General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces**

Position	Incumbent, March 1982
Chief of the General Staff and First Deputy Minister of Defense	Marshal of the Soviet Union N. V. Ogarkov
First Deputy Chief of the General Staff	General of the Army S. F. Akhromeyev
First Deputy Chief of the General Staff for Operations	General of the Army V. I. Varennikov
First Deputy Chief of the General Staff and Chief of Staff for the Combined Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact	General of the Army I. A. Gribkov
Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence	General of the Army P. Ivashutin
Deputy Chief of Staff for Organizational Matters	General of the Army V. Ya. Abolins
Deputy Chief of Staff for Communications	Marshal of Signal Troops A. I. Belov
Deputy Chief of Staff for Naval Matters	Admiral Amel'ko
Directorate chiefs	
Main Operations Directorate	General of the Army V. I. Varennikov
Main Intelligence Directorate	General of the Army P. Ivashutin
Main Organization-Mobilization Directorate	General of the Army V. Ya. Abolins
Main Directorate of Signal Troops	Marshal of Signal Troops A. I. Belov
Tenth Main Directorate	General of the Army Zotov
Military Science Directorate	General-Lieutenant Gareyev
Military Topographic Directorate	General-Lieutenant Byzov
Military Negotiations Directorate	General-Colonel Chervov
Censorship Directorate	General-Lieutenant Kozlov
External Relations Directorate	General-Major Borisov
Administration Directorate	General-Lieutenant Chuvakhin
Academy of the General Staff <i>imeni</i> Voroshilov	General of the Army M. M. Kozlov

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The General Staff and National Security Planning

The General Staff is the hub of the Soviet national security planning process, playing a role in both the formulation and the implementation of policy decisions. In performing these duties it has formed organizational relationships with party and state leaders, and these relationships have enhanced its influence at the highest levels. [redacted]

Interaction With the Political Leadership

Ultimate authority for all decisions of national security importance, including defense planning and the use of military forces, rests in peace or war with the

Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The Politburo establishes military policy and makes the fundamental decisions regarding the development and structuring of the military forces. It exercises its responsibilities either directly or through the Defense Council. This is the peacetime pattern evolved since World War II. There may be some other process designed for wartime, but the command structure as it now stands seems adequate for either peace or war. [redacted]

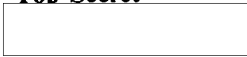
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As the principal executive organ of the Defense Council, the General Staff provides both administrative and operational support. The Main Operations Directorate¹ of the General Staff serves as the secretariat of the Defense Council, setting its agendas, arranging briefings, and coordinating decisions. The Staff translates the Council's force structure decisions into defense development plans and works directly with the Council during the economic planning cycle.

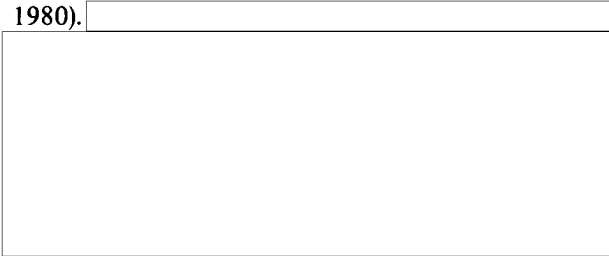


the military department of the State Planning Committee (Gosplan) and to the Military-Industrial Commission (VPK), the two most important state organizations for economic and defense-industrial planning and management.

- Officers who report to the General Staff's 10th Main Directorate (charged with overseeing the Soviet military assistance program) are assigned to the State Committee for Foreign Economic Relations. 25X1 25X1



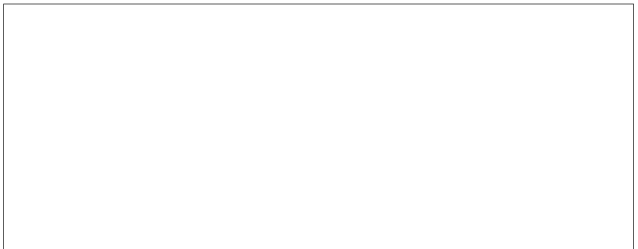
The Minister of Defense is a member of the Defense Council, and Marshal Ustinov, the current Minister, is also a Politburo member. The principal First Deputy Minister is the Chief of the General Staff, a post that also carries membership in the Defense Council. Marshal Ogarkov, the current chief, is not a member of the Politburo, but he attends some of its meetings, presumably to brief the members on defense matters. The Staff Chief is also empowered to act as Defense Minister (as Ogarkov did during Ustinov's illness in 1980).



War Planning

The General Staff's Main Operations Directorate is responsible for drafting the national war plans, which establish guidelines for Soviet responses to potential threats. These plans cover not only the operations of military and security forces but the contributions required from the civilian sector as well. 25X1 25X1


For any given threat to the USSR, the national war plans include variants designed to meet various possible circumstances. Thus, a plan for war against the People's Republic of China would include one variant for conflict with Chinese forces alone and others for the entry of potential Chinese supporters into the struggle, with estimates of the forces likely to be involved. Additional variants would be designed for both conventional and nuclear war. 25X1 25X1



Role in the State Apparatus

The General Staff is a part of the Defense Ministry, a government organ staffed almost entirely by active duty military officers. The staff discharges its responsibilities in the government apparatus through military advisers who serve on various committees and commissions of the Council of Ministers. For example:

- Officers who report to the General Staff's Material Planning Directorate (a subcomponent of the Organization-Mobilization Directorate) are assigned to

¹ Key subcomponents of the General Staff are discussed in detail in appendix A. 

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[Redacted]

The civil defense plan has provisions for shelter and evacuation, but also has major portions intended to support the long-range war effort by:

- Ensuring the protection of economic leaders.
- Securing the continued operation of defense industries.
- Converting civilian industries to support the war effort.

Presumably the mobilization plan calls for an arrangement similar to that of World War II, in which the defense industries were directly subordinate to the State Defense Committee. [Redacted]

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Mobilization Planning

The General Staff's national mobilization plan is a composite of specific plans for marshaling Soviet material and human resources in defense of the state. The mobilization plan is prepared in the Main Organization-Mobilization Directorate. [Redacted]

A key part of this plan is a complete inventory of the material resources of the Soviet state—from livestock to heavy metals reserves.² The inventory is adjusted at least every five years, and sometimes annually, to reflect economic changes. The national census serves as the plan's decennial inventory of human resources. In preparing and maintaining these inventories, the General Staff works closely with Gosplan, as well as with the State Committee for Material Reserves and the State Committee for Material-Technical Supply. It is likely that only the General Staff has access to the total inventory, however. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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The inventories prepared for the mobilization plan form the material base for virtually all military and economic planning in the USSR. [Redacted]

[Redacted] the mobilization plan was the basis of the first five-year state economic plan (adopted in 1929) and that the people associated with mobilization planning during 1925-33 were deeply involved in the first two five-year plans. [Redacted]

Five-Year Defense Plan

The General Staff initiates preparation of a five-year defense plan.³ The Strategic Planning Directorate of the Main Operations Directorate drafts guidelines for the five-year plan and for the 15-year perspective plan and orders all staffs of the armed forces and all directorates of the Ministry of Defense to project their activities for the plan period. It establishes the planning calendar for the annual and five-year plans and identifies the general responsibilities (such as training, procurement, research, logistics, and military assistance) for each service. On this basis, the service begins preparing its input to the defense plan, sending out instructions to its subordinate echelons and asking for their projections. [Redacted]

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Another key part of the national mobilization plan specifies the procedures for mobilizing the human and material reserves. It has two parts, military and civilian. The military mobilization plan provides for:

- The rapid mobilization of reserve forces.
- The conscription of new troops.
- The provision of the state military material reserves for the immediate support of the war effort.

The primary source of planning factors are the normal operational requirements of the peacetime armed forces. Mobilization specifications are another source—new or altered mobilization plans will include adjusted requirements for everything from manpower

² In peacetime the General Staff controls a network of military mobilization reserves consisting largely of weapons, other equipment, and military consumables. At the onset of war the General Staff also would gain control of a major portion of state reserves. [Redacted]

³ The full title is "Five-Year Plan for the Development of the Armed Forces of the USSR. [Redacted]

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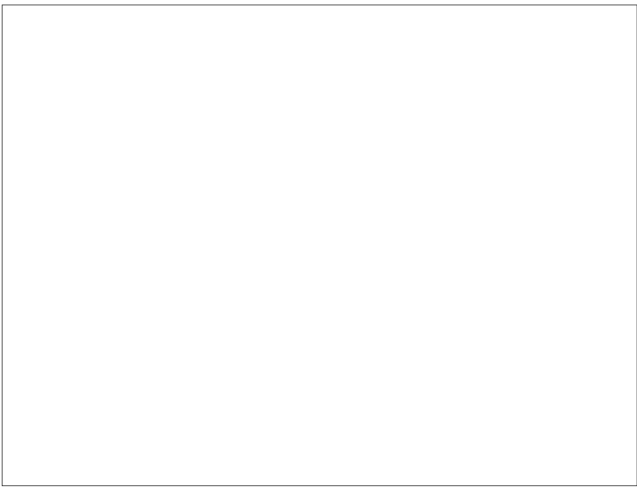
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and equipment to training. Unforeseeable developments can change or add to planning requirements. Provisions are built into the defense plans so that inputs such as new technology or unique service requirements can be accommodated in the planning cycle. [Redacted]

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During the planning process each Ministry directorate, each institute and academy, and each army-level staff in the armed forces develops its contribution to the various parts of the defense plan. These are coordinated, approved, and aggregated at each echelon. Throughout this process the General Staff is called upon to clarify its instructions or settle disputes. [Redacted]

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The appropriate General Staff directorates are responsible for substantive coordination and approval of the various components of the defense plan. The Navy's military science research plan, for example, must be coordinated and approved by the General Staff's Military Science Directorate. Table of organization and equipment (TO&E) requirements are determined finally by the General Staff's Main Organization-Mobilization Directorate, while operational training plans are reviewed and approved by the Operational Readiness Directorate within the Main Operations Directorate. Until plans are approved by the appropriate General Staff directorate, no action can be taken to integrate them into the defense budget. [Redacted]

Eventually the parts of the plan are forwarded to the Material Planning Directorate (within the Main Organization-Mobilization Directorate) to be incorporated into the prospective five-year defense plan.⁴ This Directorate, staffed by officers who are economists, engineers, and accountants, prepares both the annual and the five-year prospective plans under the overall guidance of the Strategic Planning Directorate. The core of this effort appears to be the resource estimate, which includes the projected overall military resource requirements for manpower; research, development, testing, and evaluation (RDT&E); procurement; operations; and maintenance. [Redacted]

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[Redacted]

It appears that the personnel of the Material Planning Directorate arrive at the resources estimate by compiling the requirements of the various services. They apparently coordinate priorities, resource availability, production, and transportation capabilities through General Staff officers serving with Gosplan and other commissions and committees of the Council of Ministers. The Material Planning Directorate works closely with the Gosplan, which appears to generate the overall national estimates of resource requirements.⁵ [Redacted]

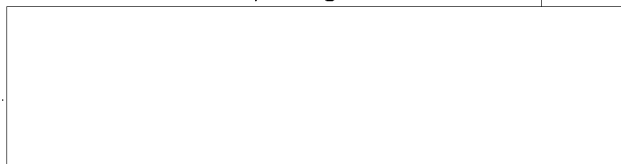
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When the prospective five-year defense plan is complete and is approved by the leaders of the General Staff and by the Minister of Defense, it is scheduled for presentation to the party leaders. The pattern followed at this stage does not seem to have changed significantly since the planning cycles of the 1930s. The prospective defense plan is presented in detail to the Defense Council, acting for the Politburo. [Redacted]

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⁴ This plan is called "prospective" until it has been approved by the party leaders. [Redacted]

⁵ Because of the planning sequence and the early development of the armed forces' requirements, it appears that the Soviet economic planning process is oriented toward the physical resource allocation process, rather than budgeting. [Redacted]

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The General Staff and Operational Control of the Armed Forces ⁶

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The defense plan approved by the Defense Council, plus these specific instructions (which are drafted by the General Staff), forms the basis for the work of Gosplan's military department. This department reviews the ongoing economic planning by all departments of Gosplan to ensure that the needs of the defense plan are being met within the context of the overall economic plan. It attempts to reconcile apparent conflicts of priorities and reports to the General Staff those it cannot reconcile. Most problems appear to be solved within Gosplan without appeal to the General Staff or other authority. [Redacted]

It is evident that few Soviet military leaders anticipated the role the General Staff was to play in World War II as an instrument of operational control. During the 1930s debate on the relative merits of a single staff or a set of service general staffs, most military authors favored the founding of the General Staff, stressing the value of centralized planning. Only opponents mentioned—as a danger—that such a staff might come to dominate operations. Postwar literature continued this approach, generally characterizing the staff's operational role as a wartime phenomenon. By the early 1960s, however, the writings began to reflect events: the General Staff's role in controlling the forces was increasing in peacetime. [Redacted]

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Opportunities To Influence the Planning

Thus, in its planning role, the General Staff has access to and control over the most comprehensive economic and defense data bases in the entire USSR. In formulating policy direction in the area of national security, the party leadership must depend on the Staff for reliable, detailed information. This allows the General Staff to select data and to time its reports so as to generate support for its policy views. [Redacted]

The principle underlying the Soviet General Staff System is the integration of commands and staffs at all echelons. Instead of being an adviser to the commander, outside the chain of command, the chief of staff at any echelon is second only to the commander in authority and importance and is automatically a first deputy commander. He countersigns all orders issued by the commander and is the only officer at each echelon authorized to issue orders in the name of the commander. The chief of staff has direct control of an operational staff—the element within a command that is responsible for operations, intelligence, organization, and communications. Moreover, the chief of staff coordinates the work of the arms and technical staffs (such as air and air defense, rocket and artillery troops, and logistics) and oversees the work of operational staffs at the next lower echelon. [Redacted]

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Even after the political leadership has set the guidelines, the General Staff can manipulate the overall planning process in subtle ways:

- As the organization that drafts the five-year defense plan, it can construct a display of options that favors the program it prefers.
- Through its authority to review and approve the subcomponents of the defense plan, it can resolve to its own advantage any interservice rivalries and any difference in views between itself and a service.
- Because it establishes the planning calendar for the armed forces and determines the frame of reference for submissions, it can keep the services off balance in their advocacy of certain programs.
- Because it reviews Gosplan's prospective five-year state economic plan before its formal submission to the Politburo, the General Staff has an opportunity to focus its own lobbying efforts in the crucial, final stages of the decision process. [Redacted]

Chains of Command

Early in World War II the Supreme High Command (VGK)—made up of the highest military leaders—delegated to the General Staff the authority to control the operational commands in the armed forces. This authority has never been withdrawn. Its exercise during the war and early postwar years was usually confined to ground operations. To control the operational commands of other services, the General Staff appeared to work through the staffs of those services. [Redacted]

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⁶ For details on the General Staff's nonoperational responsibilities, see appendix B. [Redacted]

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The chain of command remained relatively unchanged until the early 1960s. Since then, however, the configuration has changed significantly, so that today the General Staff exerts its central control through different, but overlapping, mechanisms for different purposes.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Administrative Affairs. General Staff administrative control of the Soviet Armed Forces is exercised through the main staffs of the branches and arms of service and can cross service boundaries. For example, the Soviet Air Force Main Staff procures aircraft and equipment for all strategic and tactical air units. The Main Staff of the Soviet Air Defense Forces (Voyska PVO) procures all equipment for ground-based air defense, and its schools provide the technical training for all air defense forces. Personnel assignments for enlisted men and regular officers of each service are administered through the main staff of that service. In effect, all the day-to-day administrative activities of the forces pass up the chain of command through the respective service main staffs to the General Staff.

[Redacted]

For specific strategic operations the General Staff has occasionally created strategic groups of theater air or naval assets under the main staffs of the services. For example, a strategic air operation controlled by the General Staff through the Air Forces (VVS) Main Staff may include not only strategic but also tactical aviation detached from a front or theater command. The General Staff used special combinations of strategic and tactical forces in World War II.

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Implementing General Staff Control

[Redacted]

Planning for Operations

The top officers of a front draft the front's operation plan, with several variants specified by the General Staff on the basis of the national war plan. When the General Staff has approved it, the front's final operation plan becomes part of the national war plans.

The variants include offensive and defensive plans and conventional and nuclear subsets. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Personal Presence. The General Staff also participates in operational planning in the various commands. During the Manchurian campaign of 1945 the General Staff selected not only the commanders of the three fronts involved in the operation but also those commanders' senior staff personnel. It brought them to Moscow to participate in the operations planning (under the supervision of General Staff officers in the Far Eastern Directorate) and sent them to the Far East with instructions to follow the plan.

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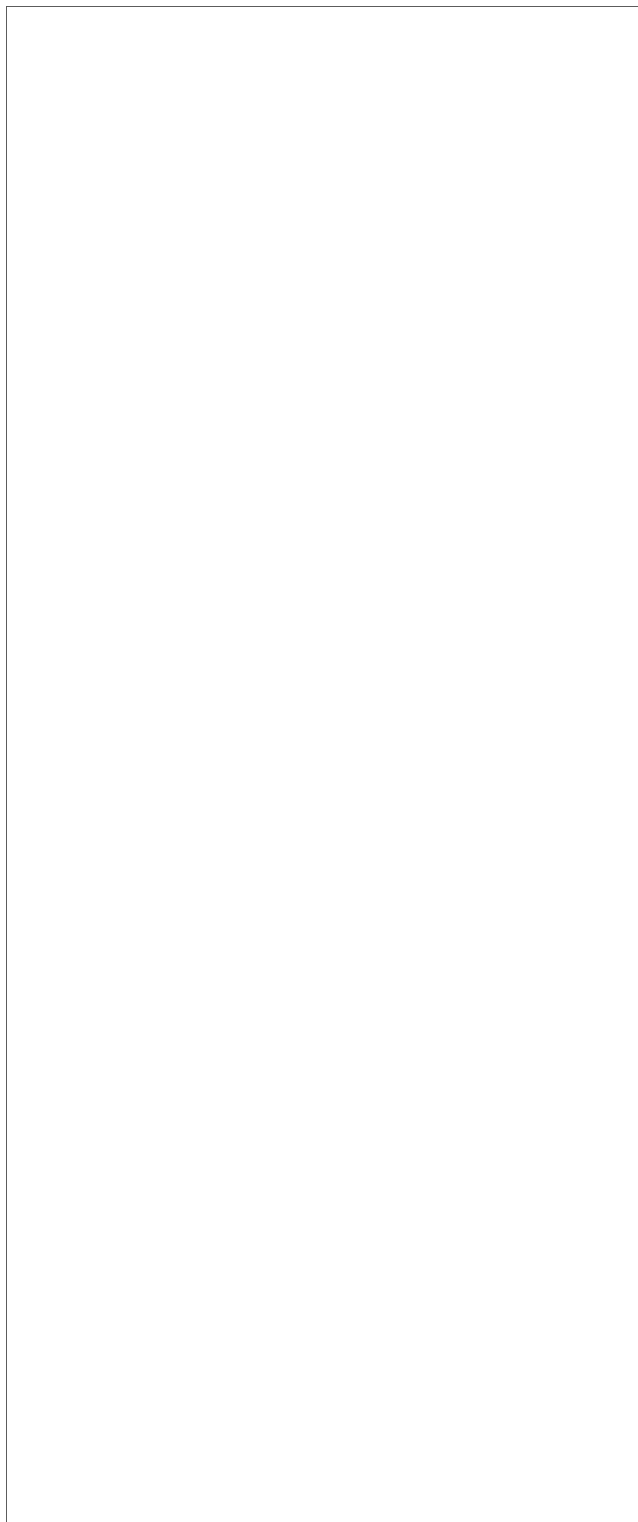
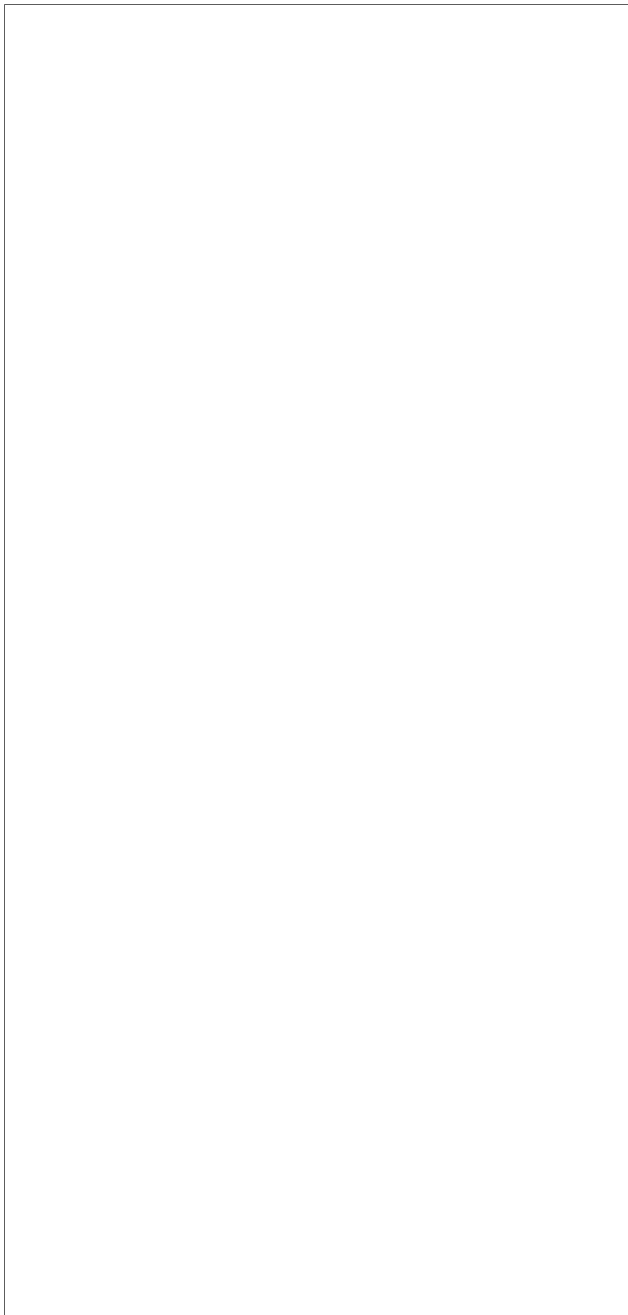
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The officers for the TVD command were chosen from members of the General Staff's Far East Directorate, and the officer appointed as commander in chief was the Chief of the General Staff. The General Staff presence is seldom this pervasive, but the pattern has not changed to the present.¹⁰



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also ensures that strategic and operational commanders at all echelons have similar views on the proper relationship of commander and staff. As a result, the military leadership at all levels tends to reflect the General Staff in values, functions, and structure. [Redacted]

The General Staff Service

Personnel of the General Staff organization constitute an elite cadre of the Soviet command and staff system. This "General Staff service" is composed of officers chosen from all of the armed forces. Members of this service hold all the officer positions in the General Staff and all military attache posts, as well as a "troop service" element made up of officers who serve in specific positions with the main staffs and down to the division level. The troop service positions are:

◦ Main staff or front level:

- commander
- chief of staff
- chief of operations
- chief of intelligence
- chief of signals
- chief of organization
- other senior officers

◦ Army or corps level:

- commander
- chief of staff
- chief of operations
- chief of intelligence
- chief of signals

◦ Division level:

- commander
- chief of staff [Redacted]

In advocating the establishment of the General Staff, M. V. Frunze described it as the military brain of the Soviet state, and in this sense, the General Staff service may be described as the central nervous system of the military. It links the various arms and branches of the armed forces to the center and provides the channels for conveying plans and directions and for resolving problems and complaints. It

The Cadres Directorate of the General Staff serves as an office of personnel for the General Staff service.¹¹ It administers the process of selecting officers for service on the General Staff, maintains their records, and prepares and processes documents related to their assignments, training, education, promotions, and awards. All its personnel proposals concerning officers of the General Staff service are sent to the Administrative Organs Department of the CPSU Central Committee, which reviews them along with the officers' political dossiers, supplied by the Main Political Directorate of the Soviet army and Navy (MPA).¹² This review process ensures that both the professional and the political records of General Staff service officers are checked regularly.¹³ [Redacted]

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The process of formal selection to the General Staff service begins when senior officers judge that a junior demonstrates the capacity to assume the duties of division commander or chief of staff. The officer usually is appointed to the Frunze Military Academy to study combined-arms warfare, and his dossier is passed from the Ministry's Main Cadres Directorate to the General Staff Cadres Directorate. If this

¹¹ This directorate is completely separate from the Main Cadres Directorate of the Ministry of Defense, which is the office of personnel management for the Soviet officer corps exclusive of the General Staff service. [Redacted]

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¹² The Main Political Directorate of the Soviet army and Navy (MPA) is an armed forces administrative organization that enjoys the added distinction of having all the rights and perquisites of a department of the CPSU Central Committee. Its chief has the status (though not the title) of a First Deputy Minister of Defense. The primary responsibility of the MPA is to conduct the obligatory political education classes and the various propaganda programs designed by the party for the military as a whole. It also maintains the political dossiers of the Soviet officer corps. The MPA is separate from the party apparatus within the armed forces. The cells and their members are subordinate directly to the party. It is the MPA, however, that provides administrative support to these cells. [Redacted]

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¹³ The review affects all Soviet officers, because the Central Committee's Administrative Organs Department also supervises the Main Cadres Directorate of the Ministry of Defense. [Redacted]

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directorate and the Central Committee's Administrative Organs Department approve, his nomination is sent to the Chief of the General Staff. With his okay, the nominee becomes a candidate member of the General Staff service, and his dossier remains with the Cadres Directorate.¹⁴ As his career progresses, he will eventually attend the General Staff Academy and upon graduation will become a full member of the General Staff service, eligible for command and senior staff assignments at the army, front, and main staff levels or with the General Staff itself. [Redacted]

The General Staff is not responsible for the day-to-day administration of military procurement programs, but it is the central authority for their coordination. Moreover, the staff's role as a central organ for planning has enabled the defense sector to maintain a high priority in the allocation of national resources.

[Redacted]

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Although dominated by Ground Forces officers, the General Staff service includes officers from all services as well as the specialized arms and branches of the armed forces. Within the services, the operations officers have a favored position in gaining appointments to the General Staff service. Some officers who rise to two- or three-star rank within their arm or branch of service—specialists like signal officers, for example—enroll in the Frunze Military Academy for combined-arms training and thus become eligible for selection into the General Staff service. [Redacted]

It is clear, however, that some aspects of the staff system could be drawbacks in a war. To the extent that the staff draws the most capable officers into its service, it deprives the rank-and-file officer corps of exceptional leaders—particularly at lower echelons. A promising brigade commander may move to the General Staff track, train at Frunze, hold several staff positions, train at the General Staff Academy, and then be in a position of great command responsibility—with precious little field experience. Thus, the General Staff's direct role in controlling the subordinate commands and its priority in recruitment may combine to reduce the authority, initiative, and proficiency of field commands. [Redacted] 25X1 25X1

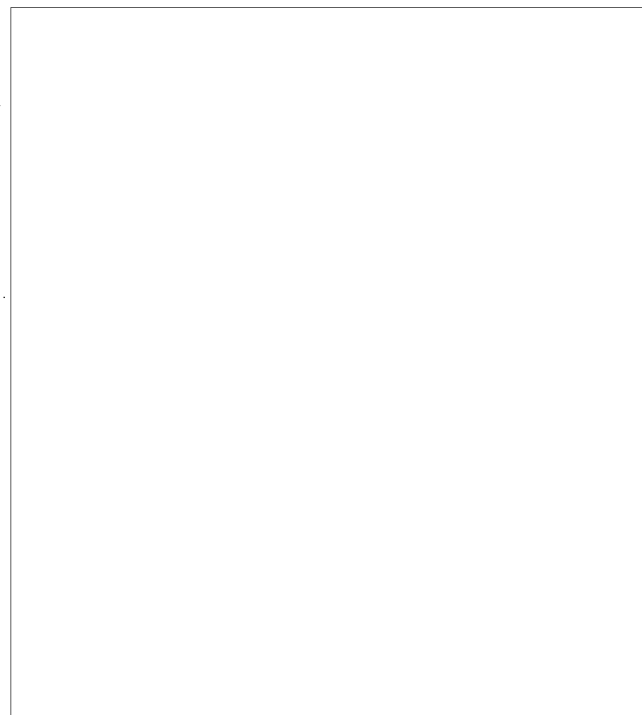
A less formal variant of the selection process also exists: a young officer may bypass the normal process by being recommended by a General Staff officer to the Chief of the General Staff, the Cadres Directorate, or a senior officer of the General Staff. There is some evidence that this process was a factor in the early selection of Marshal Ogarkov for service on the General Staff. [Redacted]

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Conclusions

The Soviet General Staff leadership and decision-making process provide the Soviet political leaders with a centralized mechanism that has brought all major field commands under direct operational authority. The staff has developed command and communications systems and facilities to try to ensure uninterrupted control during war. [Redacted]

¹⁴ Because there is usually a shortage of fully qualified officers, most General Staff positions at the division, corps, and army levels are filled by candidate members. [Redacted]



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Although the General Staff's role in national security has its planning advantages for the military, it is not without cost. Because there is no other ministerial voice in a position to challenge effectively the Defense Ministry's use of the large body of economic information to which it alone has access, political leaders may make final decisions in favor of defense programs with little idea of their consequences for the overall economic plan. Even if problems arise, the central position of defense programs in the overall plan means that major adjustments would demand so many ramifying revisions that they usually are delayed until the next annual plan—or even longer, although minimal changes are made if necessary. [redacted]

The position of the General Staff belies the traditional Western view that the interests of the party and of the military are fundamentally different. In the USSR they are very closely linked. On the one hand, the party controls the careers of all officers, with particular attention to General Staff officers. On the other hand, the structure of policymaking in the Soviet state provides a key role to the military through the General Staff. This process helps ensure the assignment of high priority to military requirements and the close collaboration of political and military leaders.

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Appendix A

Main Directorates of the General Staff

This appendix pieces together available information on the main directorates of the Soviet General Staff. These form the staff's working nucleus, and their activities demonstrate how the Soviet General Staff system functions.¹⁵ Some of the following details are contained in the main body of this study but are repeated here in the interest of completeness. [Redacted]

Main Operations Directorate

The Main Operations Directorate (GOU) is the core of the General Staff. It was formerly known as the First Main Directorate. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

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National war plans are drafted by the GOU's Strategic Planning Directorate and Operational Planning Directorate. The latter is composed of geographic sectors, each of which is responsible for a region of the world that roughly corresponds to a theater of military operations. On the basis of estimates from the Main Intelligence Directorate, these sectors identify current and potential threats to the USSR and devise responses to them. The resulting war plans lead to the identification of requirements for new weapon systems, equipment, manpower, and material reserves as well as plans for mobilization, exercises, and training. The personnel of the geographic sectors then oversee the operational planning by the main staffs of the services, fronts, fleets, and army-level commands to assure that plans at these levels fit the national war plans. [Redacted]

¹⁵ The General Staff has other directorates that specialize in supporting activities; these are discussed in appendix B. [Redacted]

In addition, the geographic sectors:

- Exercise operational control over the armed forces at the national level and supervise the commands' implementation of the operations plans.
- Oversee and coordinate special operations (an extended air operation, for example) through the service main staffs. 25X1
- Control the formations assigned to the Reserves of the Supreme High Command (RVGK).
- Provide additional personnel to man front- and theater-level reserve command posts during war-time. [Redacted] 25X1

There is a group of functional directorates within the GOU that deal with such subjects as nuclear weapons, space systems, and concealment and deception. They handle such special problems as strategic camouflage, nuclear targeting, and technological threat analyses, all of which become inputs to the national war plans and to lower level operations plans. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

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[Redacted]

[Redacted]

The activities and responsibilities of the GRU are highly compartmented and separated from those of the other components of the General Staff; it is in another building. Its head is the only deputy chief who reports directly to the Chief of the General Staff rather than through a first deputy chief. Known as the Second Main Directorate for years, the GRU is considered to be second only to the GOU in status. Even so, the GRU has only limited access to the GOU's war plans and supporting data.

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The GOU coordinates and directs the training of the Soviet armed forces through its Operational Readiness Directorate. This directorate prepares and updates annual and five-year training plans to reflect the needs of the national war plans. It provides some of the umpires for exercises conducted by the General Staff and works closely with the Main Inspectorate of the Ministry of Defense in overseeing small-unit exercises and combat training. In the event of war, it provides additional officers to the operational commands.

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The GOU contains several sections that assure the General Staff liaison with the five branches of the armed forces and with the specialized service arms. Requests for information from anywhere in the armed forces pass through these sections, which also disseminate General Staff instructions and information.

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Main Intelligence Directorate

The Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) is the apparatus through which the Deputy Chief of the General Staff for Intelligence supervises the acquisition, processing, and analysis of intelligence on foreign defense matters. It manages the collection of human and technical intelligence by the Soviet armed forces, analyzes this information, and produces and disseminates finished intelligence to the military and political leaders.

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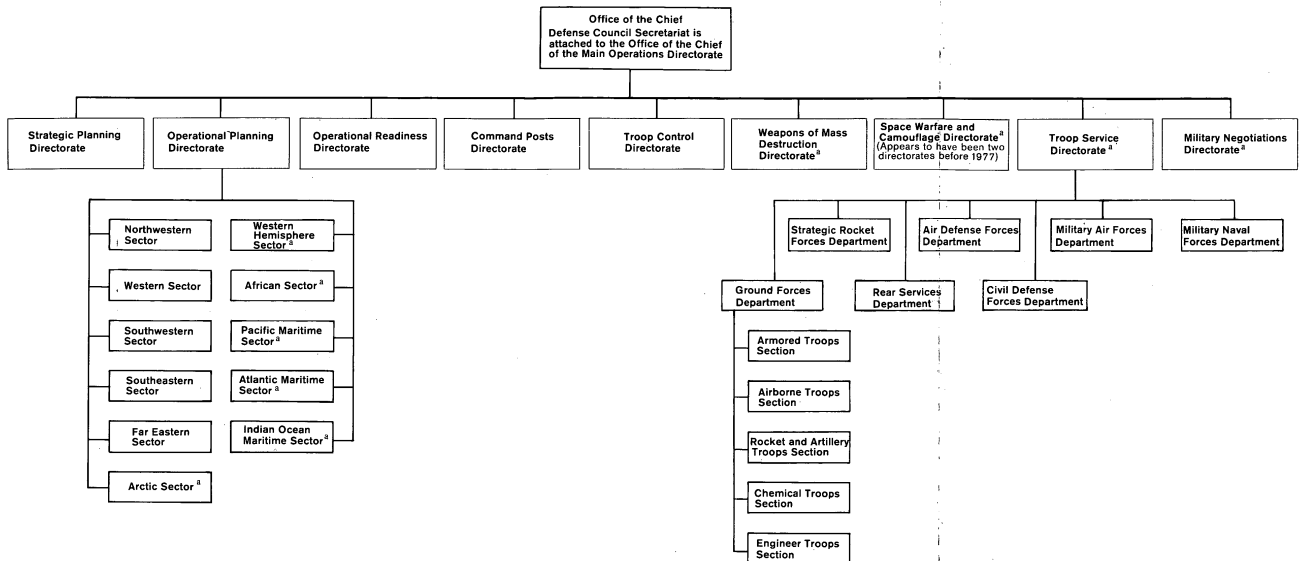
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Figure 3
Main Operations Directorate (GOU)
(Glavnoye Operativnoye Upravleniye)



^a Denotes titles that may not be official
Note: Directorate=Upravleniye; Department=Otdel;
Sector= Napravleniye; Section= Otdeleniye

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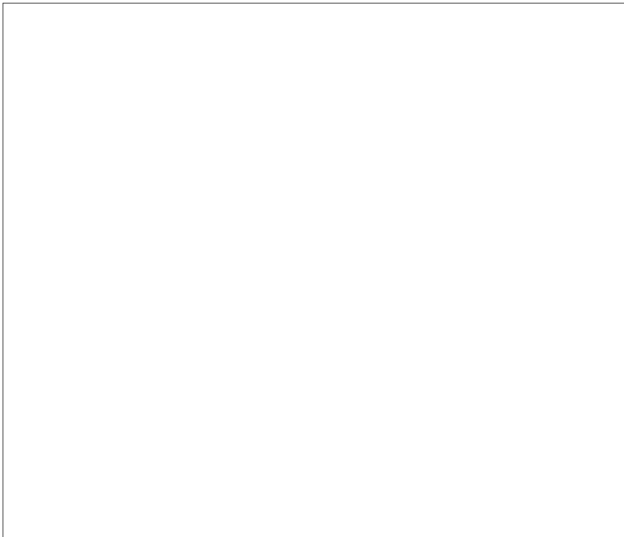
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Main Organization-Mobilization Directorate

The Main Organization-Mobilization Directorate (GOMU) has been restructured more often over the years than any other component of the General Staff, but its functions have stayed about the same. When the General Staff was first formed, it had two separate directorates for organization and mobilization matters. Both were abolished at the onset of World War II, and most of their duties and resources were transferred within the Defense Ministry to a newly created Main Directorate for Organization and Manning of the Forces (Glavupraform). This arrangement was found to be inefficient, and by 1942 the Organization Directorate had been re-created within the General Staff to handle everything except mobilization. Shortly after the war the Glavupraform was abolished and the Mobilization Directorate was restored as a component of the General Staff. By 1950, the two had been merged into a single main directorate again, the current GOMU.  25X1


The Organization Directorate, one of four primary elements of the GOMU, establishes the TO&E requirements for all the service arms and branches of the Soviet armed forces in accordance with the requirements of the national war plans. It then supervises the services' TO&E arrangements for their formations. This directorate also:


- Plans for the transfer of units and introduces new units into higher echelon formations.
- Authorizes changes in levels of manpower and equipment.

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- Calculates manpower, equipment, and supply requirements to support operational plans.

The structure of the Organization Directorate parallels that of the Main Operations Directorate in corresponding to the branches of service and the primary field commands of the armed forces. The field-command departments (called geographic departments) are apparently responsible for operational planning within the Organization Directorate.¹⁸  25X1


The Mobilization Directorate drafts and oversees the implementation of the national mobilization plans for the military and civilian sectors. These plans are basic inputs to Soviet national economic planning. (The General Staff's mobilization plans, for instance, served as a model for the first national five-year economic plan, adopted in 1929.) This directorate administers the conscription program, as well as the premilitary and reserve training programs, through the nationwide military commissariat (voenkamat) system. Finally, the Mobilization Directorate supervises the planning of military transportation and logistic support to the armed forces and coordinates this support through elements of the Staff of the Rear of the Armed Forces.  25X1

The Replacements Directorate (Directorate of Records and Control Over Nominal Strength and Reinforcements) is the central personnel and troop service organ of the General Staff. It is often referred to as the manning or personnel directorate. This unit:

- Oversees the personnel directorates of the service main staffs, which maintain the enlisted personnel records for all the armed forces.
- Supervises the assignment and employment of civilian support services for the armed forces.

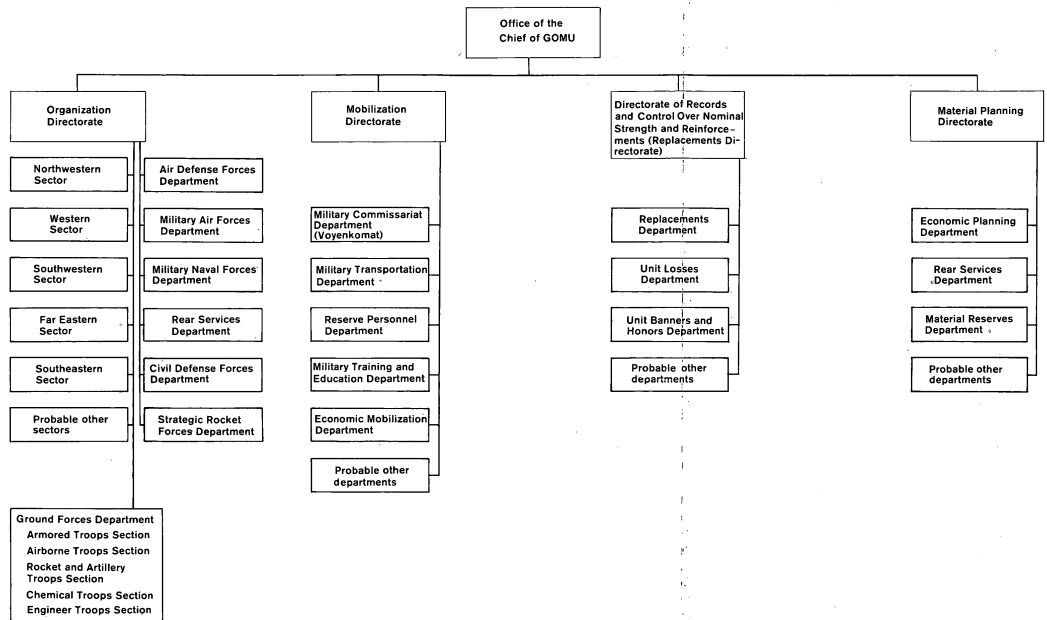


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¹⁸ These GOMU field-command departments are not competing with the General Staff's Main Operations Directorate in their operational planning. General Shtemenko summed up the situation by saying that the GOU decides what will be done, and the GOMU decides what it will be done with. 

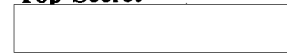
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Figure 5
Main Organization-Mobilization Directorate (GOMU)
(Glavnoye Orgshtatno-Mobilizatsionnoye Upravleniye)



Note: Directorate=Upravleniye;
Department=Otdel; Sector=Napravleniye; Section=Otdeleniye

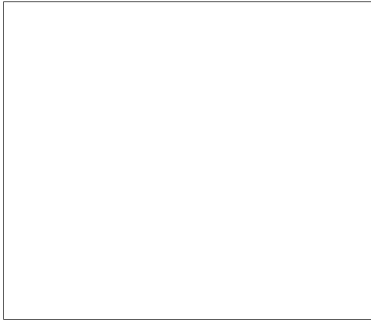
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The GOMU's Material Planning Directorate coordinates the preparation of the annual and five-year defense plans and drafts the final defense contribution to the national economic plans.



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Main Directorate for Military Assistance

Responsibility for the overall execution of the Soviet military assistance program is vested in the General Staff's Main Directorate for Military Assistance. This unit is commonly known as the 10th Main Directorate of the General Staff. It was originally part of the GRU but was made a separate directorate in 1954 and a main directorate in 1960.

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The 10th Main Directorate is organized into two directorates and three support elements. One of the directorates has an individual department for each country of the socialist bloc, and the other is structured into geographical departments that deal with Third World regions where the Soviets conduct or plan military aid programs. The support elements are a cadre department, a financial department, and an institute of foreign languages. The cadre department is responsible for the administrative needs and records of Soviet officers who are assigned to the 10th Main Directorate as aid advisers and of foreign military personnel who are training in the Soviet Union.

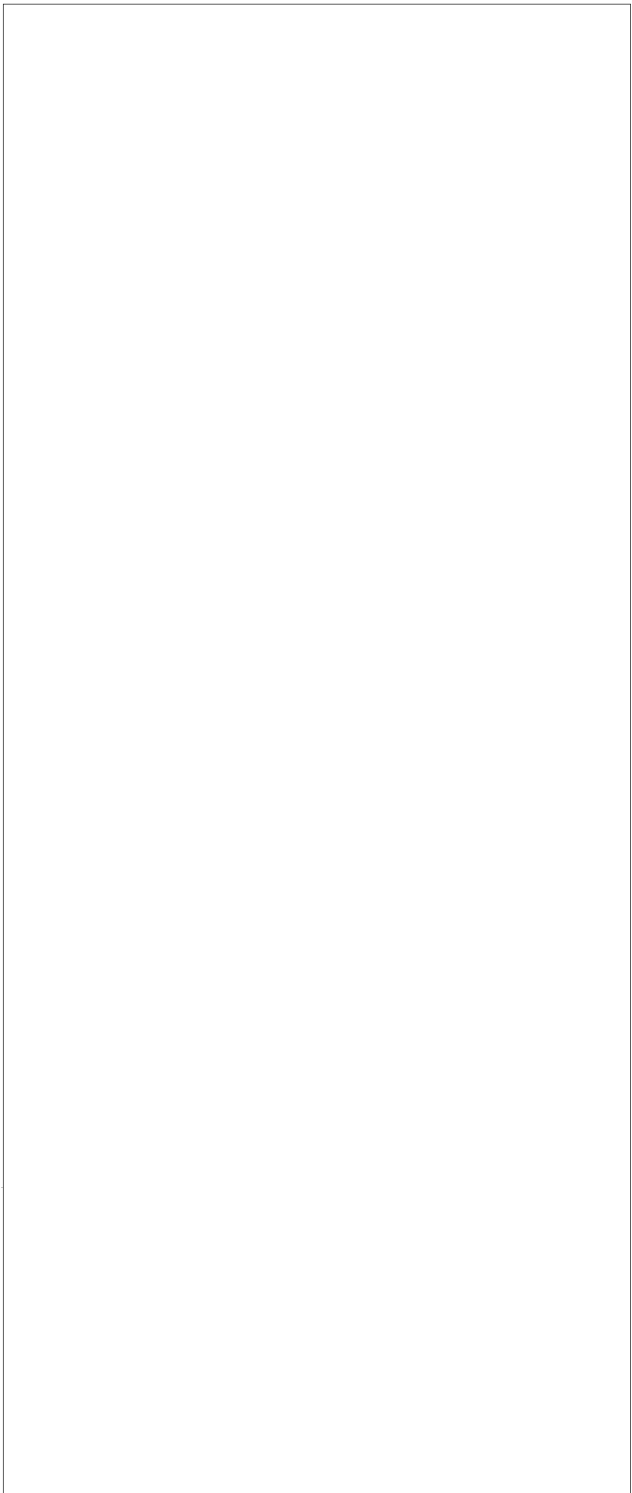


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Directorate Responsibilities in Military Assistance

The 10th Main Directorate is responsible for the planning, administration, and review of military assistance programs. Its planners pull together:

- Studies of clients' military aid requirements.
- Annual and five-year military aid plans, which become part of the annual and five-year defense plans.
- Military aid studies for Soviet leaders.



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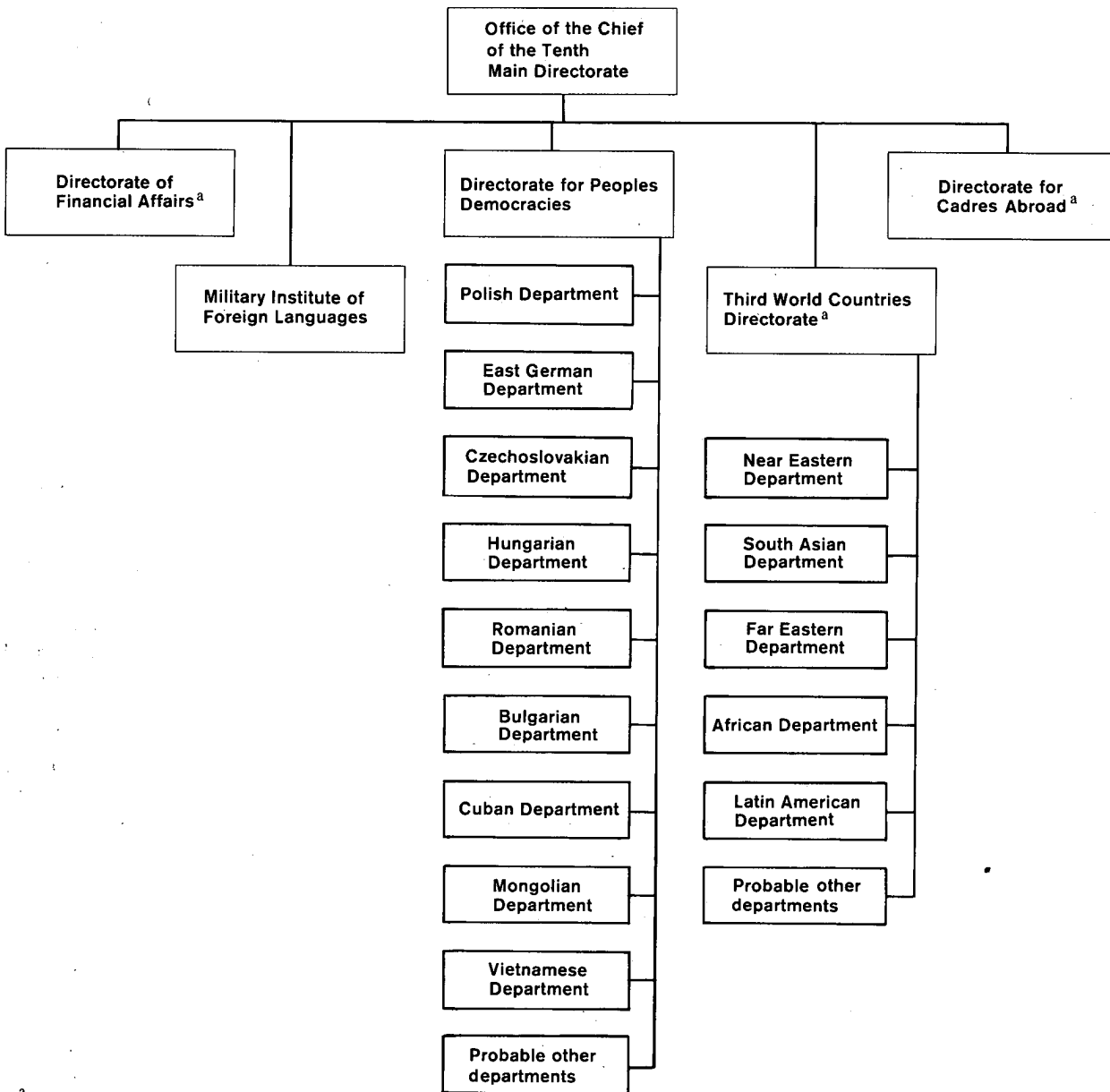


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Figure 6
Main Directorate for Military Assistance (Tenth Main Directorate)
(Desyatoye Glavnoye Upravleniye)



^a Denotes titles that may not be official.
 Note: Directorate=Upravleniye;
 Department=Otdel; Sector=
 Napravleniye; Section= Otdeleniye

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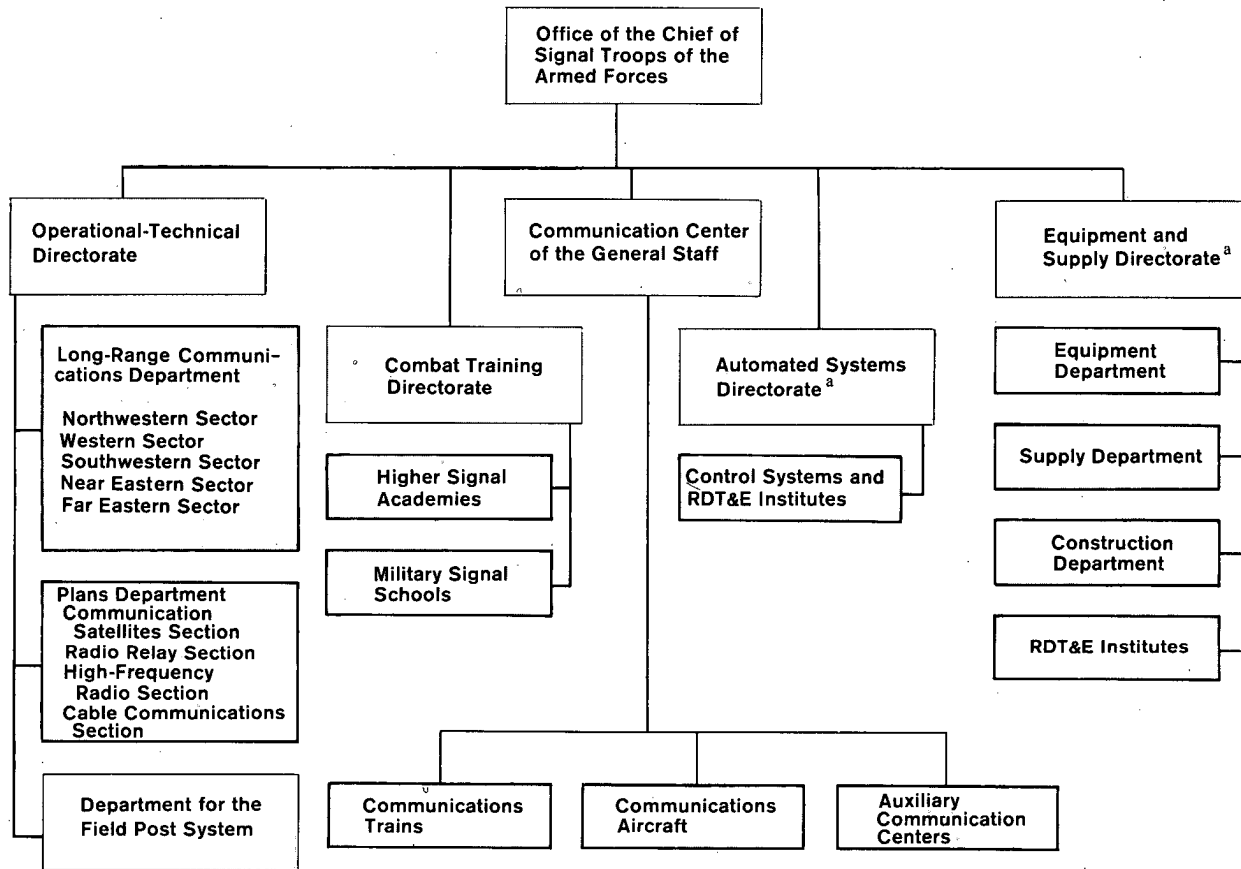
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Figure 7
Main Directorate of Signal Troops (GUVS)^b
(Glavnoye Upravleniye Voysk Svyazi)



^a Denotes titles that may not be official.

Note: Directorate=Upravleniye;
Department=Otdel; Sector=
Napravleniye; Section=Otdeleniye

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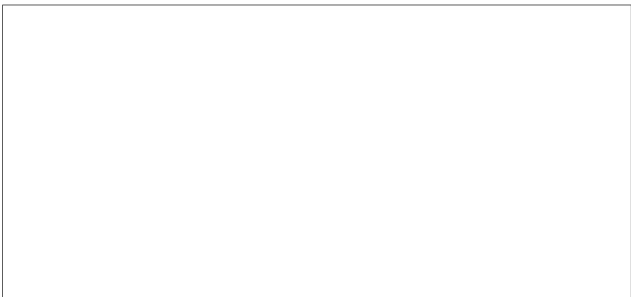
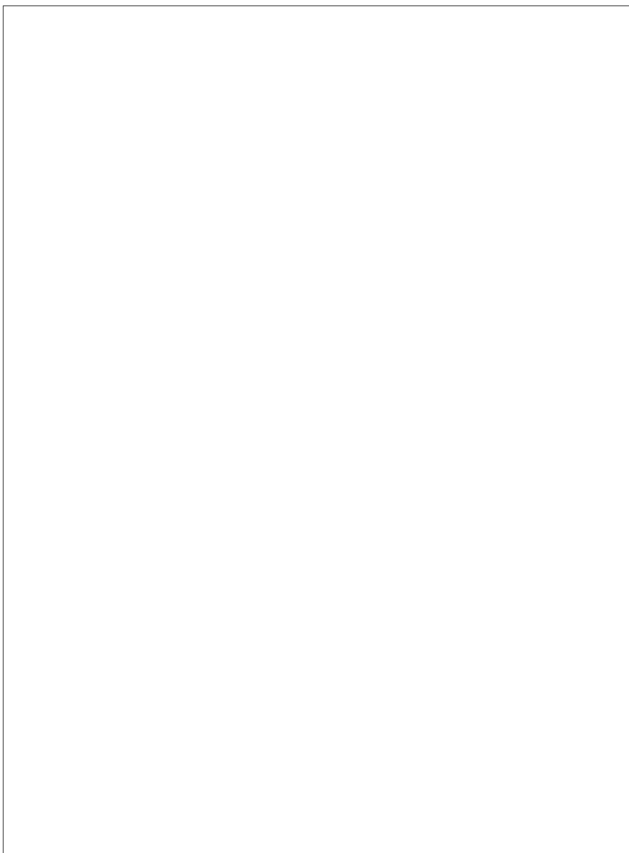
Appendix B

Routine Functions of the General Staff



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Daily Operations

The General Staff's routine activity closely relates to the day-to-day operations of the armed forces and the maintenance of their operational readiness. For example, the use of military units to assist in harvesting is closely supervised by the General Staff and follows plans and instructions from the Main Organization-Mobilization Directorate. This organ oversees the entire military induction and basic training apparatus in the USSR and allocates new conscripts among the services, the KGB Border Guards, and the MVD Internal Troops. It also oversees the logistics system throughout the USSR and aims to ensure that the prescribed unit strengths and equipment holdings are being maintained.  25X1





Intelligence

The collection and dissemination of intelligence is another routine responsibility of the General Staff. The Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) regularly assigns tasks to various collection resources and provides daily briefings to the military and political leadership. Its central command post maintains current situation reporting on all strategic threats to the USSR. The GRU trains intelligence officers and supervises their espionage activities worldwide. Military attaches are trained in its Military Diplomatic Academy and are under GRU operational control.  25X1  25X1



Weapons Acquisition

The Defense Ministry's Main Armaments Directorate has the principal administrative responsibility for weapons development and acquisition within the military establishment. It was removed from the General Staff in 1970. At that time the staff's other responsibilities were being enlarged, and it was felt that the complexity of weapon technologies, the magnitude of the development effort, and the volume of interaction with the defense industry was an excessive burden. 

Although much of the routine work has been shifted, the General Staff still coordinates and approves budget and arms procurement requests from the services and initiates weapons developments and  25X1

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modifications. General Staff officers, principally from the Main Organization-Mobilization Directorate, are involved in a wide variety of armament decisions— from coordinating basic research to scheduling tank production. An article in the Soviet Military Encyclopedia focuses on directorates concerned with weapons procurement and finances and notes that they organize their work according to directives of the General Staff, orders of the Ministry of Defense, and resolutions of the party and government. [Redacted]

Censorship

The General Staff reviews all articles proposed for publication in military magazines and newspapers. Its censorship role spills over into the civilian sector as well, where the open publication of a wide array of material must be reviewed and approved. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

Military Aid

The 10th Main Directorate of the General Staff oversees the Soviet military assistance program, both in the Third World and in the Warsaw Pact.²¹ It also coordinates Soviet military aid to Third World clients with that from other Warsaw Pact members. It prepares the General Staff's recommendations to the political leadership on military aid requests from Third World countries. In certain cases, the Soviet Ambassador to the country may be asked to comment on the request, but there is no evidence that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has a formal role in the military aid process. The Foreign Ministry limits itself to submitting a general statement of USSR relations with the prospective aid recipient. [Redacted]

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Foreign Relations

The entire realm of official foreign contact with the Soviet military is directed and controlled by the General Staff's External Relations Directorate (UVS).²⁰ Foreign military attaches and visitors to the USSR must go through the UVS in all their dealings with Soviet military personnel. [Redacted]

[Redacted]

Finally, this directorate serves as the press and public relations office of the General Staff. It has issued official Ministry of Defense positions on subjects ranging from the health of an important general to the destruction of the Cosmos 954 satellite over North America. [Redacted]

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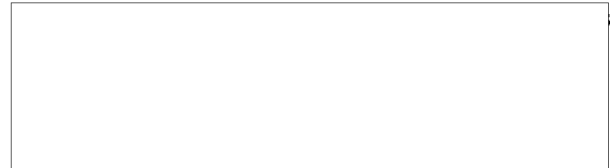
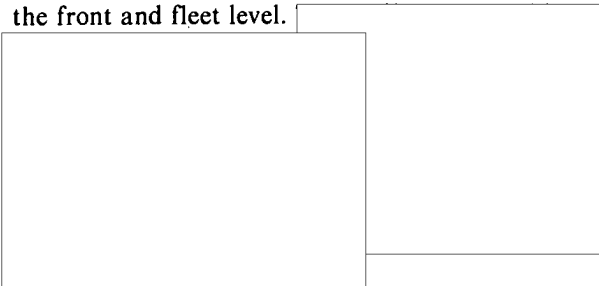
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Maintaining Readiness

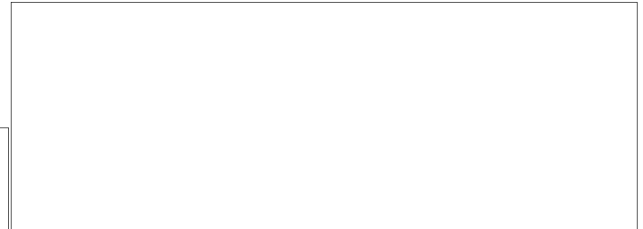
A primary peacetime function of the General Staff is the maintenance of sufficient readiness of the Soviet armed forces, including all command posts down to the front and fleet level.



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Military Science

Major developments in Soviet military doctrine during the 1960s and 1970s have been tested and retested in General Staff-controlled exercises and war games.



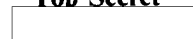
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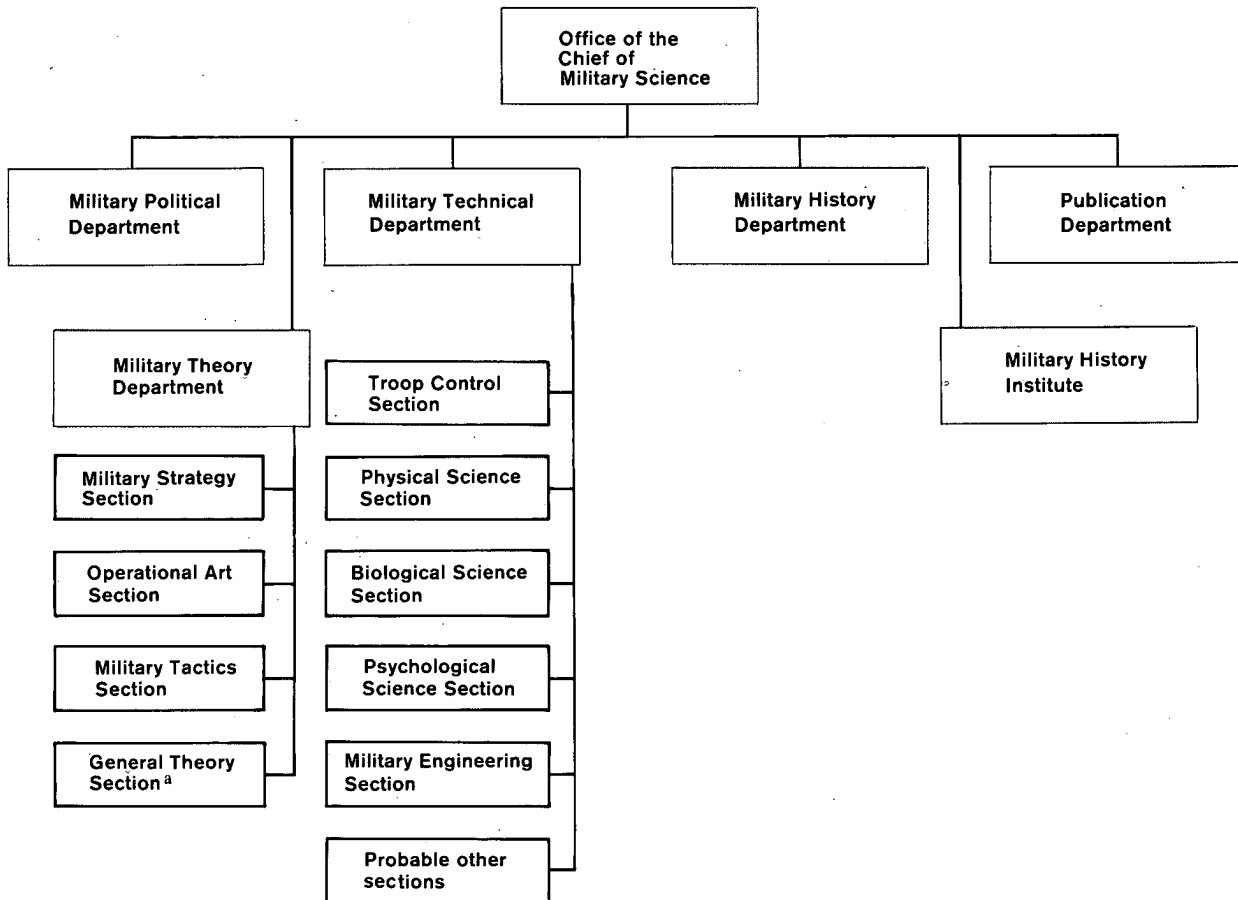


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Figure 8
Military-Science Directorate (VNU)
(Voyennoye Nauchnoye Upravleniye)



^a Denotes titles that may not be official.

Note: Directorate=Upravleniye;
Department=Otdel; Sector=
Napravleniye; Section=Otdeleniye

Note: Some evidence suggests that this directorate may be
a subcomponent of the Main Operations Directorate.

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Appendix C**Evolution of the General Staff**

Figure 9 shows how the organization of the Soviet General Staff has changed over time. Table 2 lists the names of its chiefs. [redacted]

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Table 2**Chiefs of the Soviet General Staff Since 1921****Staff of the Workers and Peasants Red Army (RKKA)**

P. P. Lebedev	Feb 1921–Mar 1924
M. V. Frunze	Apr 1924–Jan 1925
S. S. Kamenev	Jan 1925–Nov 1925
M. N. Tukhachevskiy	Nov 1925–May 1928
B. M. Shaposhnikov	May 1928–Apr 1931
A. I. Yegorov	Apr 1931–Sep 1935

General Staff of the Soviet Armed Forces

A. I. Yegorov	Sep 1935–Jun 1937
B. M. Shaposhnikov	Jun 1937–Aug 1940
K. A. Meretskov	Aug 1940–Jan 1941
G. K. Zhukov	Jan 1941–Jul 1941
B. M. Shaposhnikov	Jul 1941–May 1942
A. M. Vasilevskiy	May 1942–Feb 1945
A. I. Antonov	Feb 1945–Mar 1946
A. M. Vasilevskiy	Mar 1946–Nov 1948
S. M. Shtemenko	Nov 1948–Jun 1952
V. D. Sokolovskiy	Jun 1952–Apr 1960
M. V. Zakharov	Apr 1960–Mar 1963
S. S. Biryuzov	Mar 1963–Oct 1964
M. V. Zakharov	Oct 1964–Sep 1971
V. G. Kulikov	Sep 1971–Jan 1977
N. V. Ogarkov	Jan 1977–present

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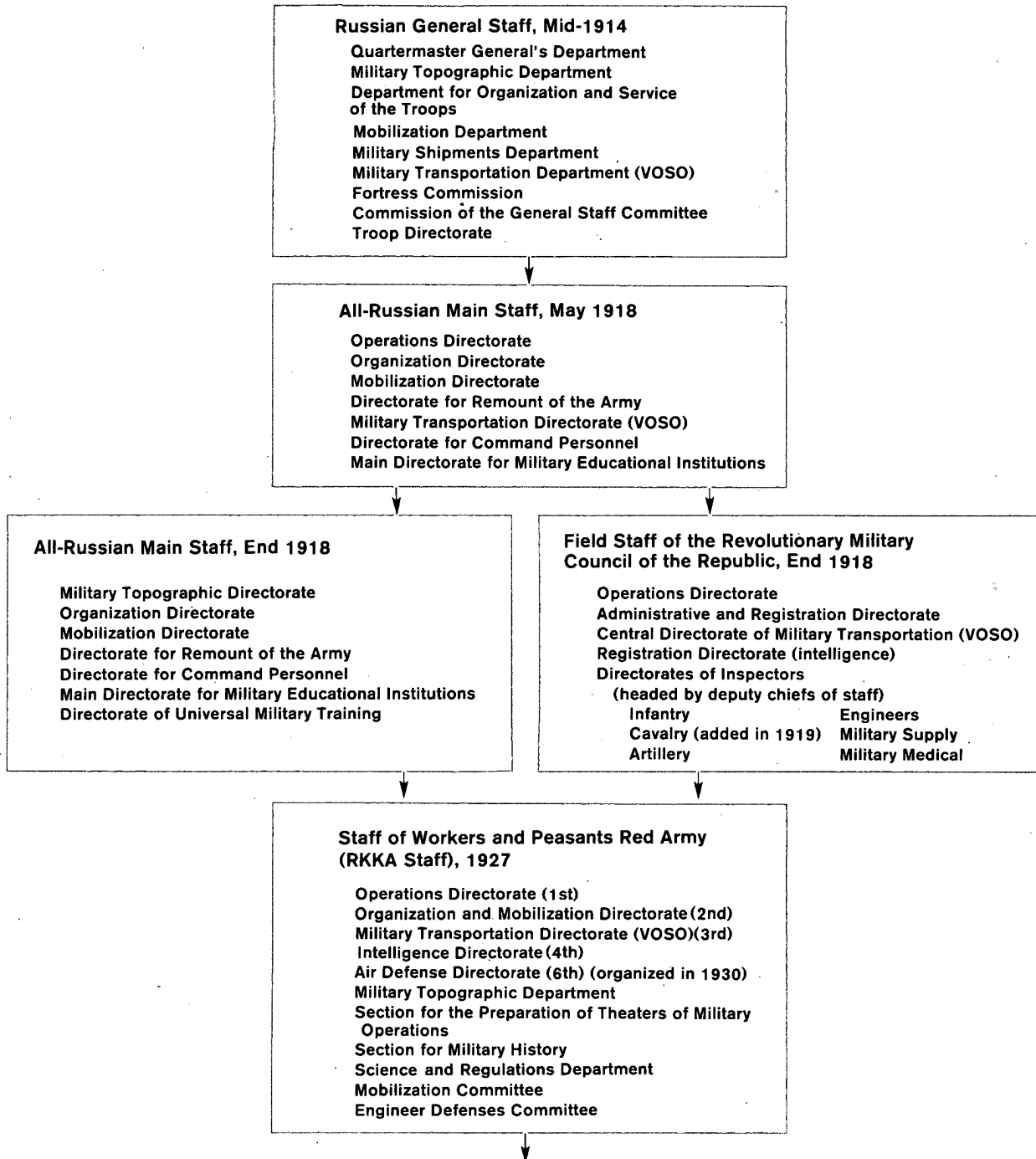
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Figure 9

History of the Soviet General Staff



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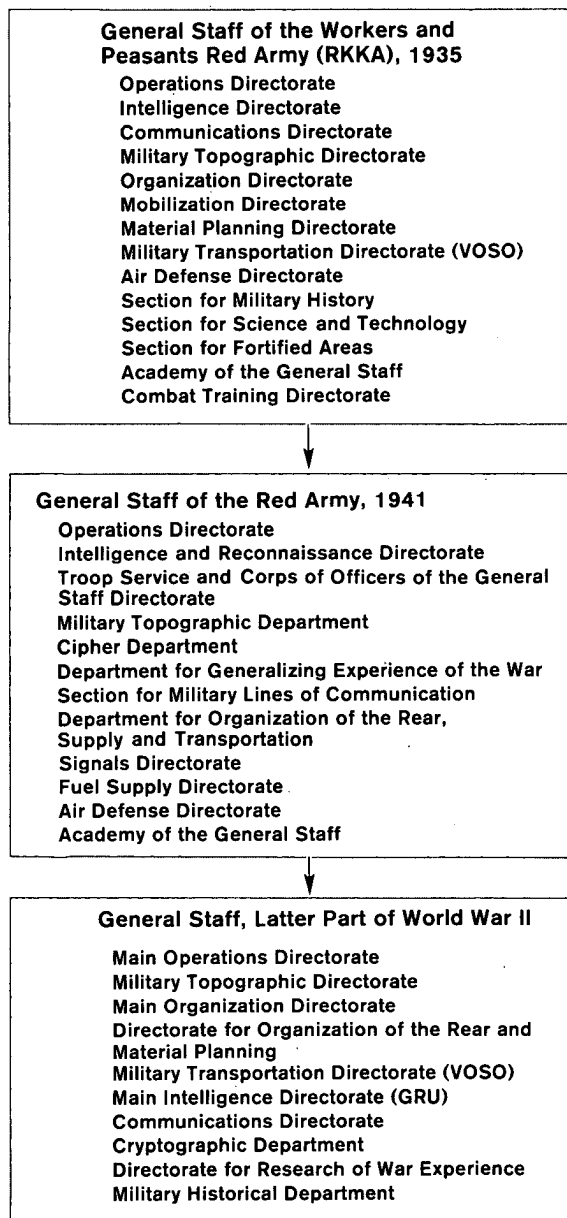
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Figure 9 (Cont.)



This chart shows the organization of the Tsarist General Staff in 1914, of the early Soviet top-level military staffs, and of the Soviet General Staff as it had evolved by the latter part of World War II. The information is based on authoritative Soviet sources and is believed to be comprehensive and accurate.

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