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NIO/GPF

EDWARD A. JACKSON

247-266

Employment of Warsaw Pact Forces Against NATO

Interagency Intelligence Memorandum

Top Secret

NI.IIM 83-10002

July 1983

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Next 4 Page(s) In Document Denied

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EMPLOYMENT OF WARSAW PACT
FORCES AGAINST NATO

Information available as of 1 April 1983 was
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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
PREFACE.....	1
SUMMARY.....	3

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Page Denied

Next 3 Page(s) In Document Denied

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PREFACE

This Interagency Intelligence Memorandum was commissioned by the Director of Central Intelligence. It was drafted originally as a third volume to NIE 11-14-81, *Warsaw Pact Forces Opposite NATO*, and was intended to elaborate on the assessment in volume II of the estimate of Warsaw Pact theater operations against NATO. Because the discussion incorporates new evidence and assessments of Soviet concepts for frontal operations, it is being issued as an Interagency Intelligence Memorandum. [Redacted]

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This Memorandum provides a detailed discussion of general Soviet concepts for front-level operations and Soviet planning for theater nuclear operations. It also discusses Warsaw Pact options for campaigns against NATO in the Western, Southwestern, and Northwestern Theaters of Military Operations and their associated naval campaigns. This Memorandum reviews a spectrum of options for the structuring and employment of Pact forces [Redacted]. It recognizes, however, that actual choices made would be governed largely by the circumstances leading to war, the condition and readiness of NATO and Pact theater forces, and other scenario-related factors [Redacted].

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This Memorandum was produced under the auspices of the National Intelligence Officer for General Purpose Forces. It was drafted by [Redacted] Directorate of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, and was coordinated within the Central Intelligence Agency; the Defense Intelligence Agency; the National Security Agency; the Bureau of Intelligence Research, Department of State; and the intelligence components of the military services. [Redacted]

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SUMMARY

EMPLOYMENT OF WARSAW PACT FORCES AGAINST NATO

The USSR's geographic position as a major continental power in Europe and Asia and the Soviet perception that hostile neighbors confront the USSR and its allies on virtually every side have led the Warsaw Pact to develop contingency plans for military operations on all its land and maritime frontiers. The Soviets clearly expect Central Europe to be the decisive arena in a war with NATO and assign it the highest priority in the allocation of military manpower and equipment.

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The Soviets also have plans for offensive action in other NATO regions flanking Central Europe, but we have little direct evidence on the Pact's view of the timing of these flank offensives in relation to an offensive in Central Europe. Nonetheless, even if they did not begin major ground offensives immediately in some flank areas, the Pact would conduct secondary offensives to keep NATO from shifting forces to Central Europe, to compel commitment of NATO reserves, and to weaken NATO forces on the flanks in anticipation of further operations.

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The Pact's success in achieving its wartime objectives would depend on the Soviets' ability to control and coordinate multinational, joint-service operations of great complexity. All Pact member nations have command and control elements intended to help extend the Soviets' wartime control structure. These organs could be integrated easily into a Pact command structure. In a NATO-Warsaw Pact conflict, the Soviet Supreme High Command (*Verkhovnoye Glavnokomandovaniye*—VGK) would function, in effect, as the Supreme High Command of the Combined Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact. This wartime command would provide the military-strategic leadership for all Pact military operations against NATO.

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We believe that, should a war occur between the Warsaw Pact and NATO, intermediate commands would be established in Europe between the General Staff in Moscow and most operating forces (fronts and fleets). These commands would exercise direct operational control

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over Soviet and Non-Soviet Warsaw Pact (NSWP) forces and at least would coordinate the operations of those strategic assets allocated to support operations in a specific area. The Soviets refer to these headquarters as High Commands of Forces in a designated area or strategic axis. Two such commands, the High Command of Forces in the Western Theater of Military Operation (*teatr voyennykh deystviy*—TVD) and the High Command of Forces in the Southwestern TVD [redacted]

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[redacted] since the late 1970s. We believe that these high commands would be established in the event of a NATO-Warsaw Pact war. [redacted]

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Soviet strategists envision at least five European TVDs in which military operations against NATO would be undertaken:

- The Western TVD, which would include Soviet and NSWP forces in East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia and Soviet forces in the western USSR as well as the Combined Baltic Fleet.
- The Southwestern TVD, which would include Soviet forces in Hungary and the southwestern USSR; Bulgarian, Romanian, and Hungarian forces; and the Combined Black Sea Fleet.
- The Northwestern TVD, which would include Soviet forces in the Leningrad Military District and elements of the Soviet Northern Fleet.
- The Atlantic and Arctic TVDs, which would encompass the North Atlantic and the Norwegian Sea and would include forces primarily from the Soviet Northern Fleet [redacted]

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Frontal Operations

Within a land TVD, the largest field force would be a front. Although not directly comparable to any Western organization, a front would be similar to a NATO army group and its associated air forces in size, level of command, and function. There is no standard organization for a front. It usually is composed of three to five ground armies, each including three to five tank or motorized rifle divisions, and air forces with as many as several hundred tactical aircraft. A front operating in a maritime sector also might include those naval elements that were chiefly devoted to that front's mission, that is, for protection of the front's sea lines of communication and for amphibious landings. [redacted]


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The front is the basic combat force and level of command below the commander of forces in a TVD. The front commander controls the ground armies and supporting air forces that will fight the war. The main focus of the front is on the offensive; the defense is seen as only a temporary phase and not an end in itself. 

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The Pact's main attacks probably would be directed into sectors where NATO was perceived to be relatively weak and extended. The Pact would prefer to attack on several axes rather than across a broad front—moving to penetrate through gaps, weak points, and open flanks—and to rely on speed and maneuver. In areas where the Pact was confronted by strong, continuous NATO defenses, however, it would attempt to achieve a breakthrough. 

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An element  since the late 1970s has been the operational maneuver group: an armor-heavy combined-arms force—from corps (two divisions) to army (three to four divisions) size—that would operate separately from the main force. Its mission would be to advance rapidly into the NATO rear area—avoiding combat with main forces—to seize or destroy key military-geographic objectives such as airfields, river crossings, nuclear depots, and nuclear delivery units and possibly to disrupt command and control and lines of communication and to interfere with mobilization and the movement of reserves. 

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The Soviets are paying increasing attention to—and enhancing their capability for mounting—large-scale airmobile and air assault operations in support of the ground campaign. Airborne, airmobile, and air assault operations of varying scale would have an important role in Soviet efforts to disrupt the operations of NATO formations and to seize river-crossing sites and other targets deeper in the theater in the later stages of the offensive. 

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Another unique force operating in support of the front would be Soviet SPETSNAZ or special purpose forces, which have a behind-the-lines mission of reconnoitering and reporting on NATO nuclear storage sites, nuclear weapons delivery locations, airbases housing nuclear-capable aircraft, and command and control facilities. The Intelligence Community is divided over the question of whether these forces also have a direct combat mission—such as sabotage—against these targets.



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Theater Nuclear Operations

The Soviets clearly believe a war with NATO eventually could escalate to nuclear war, and [redacted] generally [redacted] the introduction of nuclear weapons [redacted] precipitated by NATO.

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[redacted] Despite a move toward more flexible, selective nuclear options, [redacted] almost always [redacted] a massed nuclear exchange at some point, regardless of how the use of nuclear weapons is initiated [redacted]

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A priority mission of Pact nuclear-capable forces (the bulk of which are Soviet) would be to destroy NATO nuclear assets in order to gain and hold nuclear superiority. The following points highlight key factors in Pact frontal nuclear operations:

- Nuclear targets generally would be divided by a line of demarcation between those to be struck by strategic assets and those by front-level assets.
- Detailed front-level nuclear strike plans, based at least initially on peacetime NATO force deployments, almost certainly have been prepared and could be ready for execution with minimal preparation.
- An energetic nuclear target reconnaissance effort would be initiated during a period of tension and would be continued or intensified during a nonnuclear combat phase to provide continual updating of the nuclear strike plans. Once nuclear weapons employment had begun, follow-on strikes would be made as suitable targets were located.
- With two days' preparation, probably taking place during the prehostilities phase, a front's nuclear strike assets could achieve states of readiness that would permit the launching of a maximum number of strikes [redacted] in a minimum amount of time [redacted] after receiving the order.
- Striking NATO's nuclear delivery systems would have first priority. Other targets of high value, for example, maneuver divisions, also would be struck on a major scale.
- Planning and execution of the fire plan would stress destruction of targets of military significance, with little apparent concern for collateral damage. Important West European cities, however, probably also would be struck.

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- High priority would be placed on resuming the offensive rapidly following the initial massive nuclear strikes. [redacted]

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Initial Campaign in the Western TVD

Soviet planning calls for a massive and coordinated effort by air, ground, and naval forces to seize the initiative in Central Europe. It envisions a rapid ground offensive into NATO territory—supported by a large-scale air operation to destroy NATO's air forces and nuclear delivery capability—to defeat NATO nuclear and conventional forces, disrupt mobilization, seize or destroy ports and airfields, prevent reinforcement, and prevent a prolonged positional war. First-echelon forces would be organized into three fronts, made up of forces stationed in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland and, time permitting, reinforced by fronts or elements of fronts stationed in the western USSR. About half of the first echelon would be composed of East European forces:

- **The Soviet-East German Front** would be the largest and would carry out the main effort. It would have the task of attacking NATO forces in central West Germany—engaging as many as six of NATO's eight corps areas—between Hannover in the north and Mannheim in the south. It could be made up of five to six armies formed from Soviet forces in East Germany and Poland and two armies formed from East Germany's ground force divisions. Major reinforcements would be provided by the Soviet Belorussian Front.
- **The Polish Front** [redacted] in the northern part of West Germany. [redacted] [redacted] however, Polish armies have been used as exploitation forces in the central part of West Germany. In its more common role, this front most likely would consist at least of two—and probably three—Polish armies plus an East German army. It would be responsible for moving along the northern coast, up the Jutland Peninsula, and west toward the Netherlands. This front most likely would be reinforced by the Soviet Baltic Front.
- **The Czechoslovak-Soviet Front** would conduct operations on the southern flank of the Soviet-East German Front and would

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have the mission of attacking NATO forces in the southern part of West Germany. It would consist at least of an army made up of the five Soviet divisions in Czechoslovakia and two Czechoslovak armies (eight divisions). The Soviet-Carpathian Front would reinforce this front for operations in West Germany and then into southern France. [redacted]

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The Air Operation in Central Europe

Pact planners regard NATO's tactical air forces in Central Europe as a formidable threat. They believe that airpower would be NATO's principal means for delivering nuclear strikes. Thus, they consider air superiority critical to the success of their European campaign. The Pact plans to achieve air superiority and neutralize much of NATO's nuclear delivery capability by conducting a large-scale, theaterwide nonnuclear air operation during the first several days of hostilities. This air offensive would be characterized by a series of massed airstrikes, designed to achieve tactical surprise, penetrating through corridors in Western air defenses. [redacted]

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Of the 3,100 tactical aircraft and 400 medium bombers available for use in Central Europe, the Pact would commit between 1,200 and 2,700 tactical aircraft and some 350 bombers for the air operation. The remaining aircraft would be used, along with the interceptor forces, to defend Pact territory and to provide direct support to the ground forces. [redacted]

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Operations in the North Sea and Baltic

Operations in the North Sea and Baltic would be designed to destroy NATO naval and maritime targets, especially carrier and amphibious forces. Principal objectives would be to deny the area as a launch point for carrier aircraft against the Soviet-East German Front, to prevent naval reinforcements from entering the Baltic, and to sever lines of communication through the North Sea to the European Continent. The Combined Baltic Fleet also would support amphibious assault operations in support of ground force operations against Denmark and West Germany. [redacted]

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Initial Campaign in the Southwestern TVD

The Southwestern TVD would include Pact forces in Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria; the Odessa Military District (MD) in the USSR;

8

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and naval forces in the Black and Mediterranean Seas. [redacted] Soviet forces from the North Caucasus and Transcaucasus also operate in this TVD, although some forces from these districts would be likely to support thrusts on a major axis in the Southeastern or Southern TVD oriented against Iran and the Persian Gulf if operations were undertaken in that TVD [redacted]

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A Warsaw Pact campaign in the Southwestern TVD would be secondary to an offensive against Central Europe and would focus primarily on securing the Turkish straits and blocking NATO access to the Black Sea. Forces also would operate in Austria and northern Italy to secure the southern flank of the forces in Central Europe and to prevent pressure by Italian forces on Pact flanks in Austria. Movement of forces into Greece and western Turkey would give the Pact access to ports on the northern Aegean Sea. An offensive against eastern Turkey would prevent Turkish forces from being shifted to the straits and could open the way to movement by Soviet forces to the eastern Mediterranean through Syria or to the Persian Gulf through Iraq. A move into Iran in the context of a NATO-Pact war would be possible but could absorb resources needed to combat NATO forces. We do not believe the Soviets would have the resources to launch a major campaign into eastern Turkey and into Syria, Iraq, or Iran at the same time the Pact was engaged against NATO in Europe. [redacted]

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It is not clear what role Romanian forces would have in wartime. Generally, the Romanians have balked at any participation [redacted] other than homeland defense. [redacted]

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[redacted] The role depicted for Romanian forces [redacted] is that of a second-echelon front responsible for rear area security behind the Soviet and Bulgarian fronts that would prosecute the major offensive [redacted]

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Naval Operations

The Soviets probably would view American carrier battle groups in the Mediterranean as the primary naval threat to the southwestern USSR, and anticarrier warfare probably would be highest priority mission for the Black Sea Fleet. The nature of any surface ship augmentation from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean would depend on such factors as: the size of the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron when tension began to build, the nature of the Western naval presence—particularly carrier battle groups—and the degree of emphasis placed by the Soviets on a covert transition to a war footing. [redacted]

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Initial Campaign in the Northwestern TVD

This TVD would encompass the Scandinavian Peninsula and immediately adjacent waters. Forces in this TVD would come primarily from the Leningrad MD in the USSR, with reinforcements likely to be drawn from the Moscow, Ural, or, possibly, Baltic MDs. A principal ground objective would be to protect the flanks of the Soviet Northern Fleet while it was attempting to achieve control over the Norwegian and Barents Seas. These forces also would have the mission of denying NATO use of its bases in northern Norway. To accomplish these missions, Soviet forces could be expected to attempt to seize the bases along the northern coast of Norway either by direct assault across the Soviet-Norwegian border or through Finland. Amphibious or airborne landings also could be anticipated. In the southern part of the TVD, the Soviets would defend the Leningrad and Vyborg areas. Attacks into southern Finland toward Helsinki would be conducted if necessary to meet or preclude NATO advances in this region. Air operations would consist primarily of flights in support of ground operations in northern Norway or Finland and in southern Finland. Counterair flights, primarily over Soviet territory, would be flown by air defense interceptor units. [redacted]

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Initial Operations in the North Atlantic and Arctic Oceans

The Soviet Northern Fleet is the most powerful of the Soviet fleets and would carry out the major part of combat operations against NATO naval forces. Its initial tasks would be to achieve control in the Barents, Kara, and northern Greenland and Norwegian Seas in order to protect the Soviet SSBN force and to prevent NATO from staging attacks against the Soviet homeland from those areas. The Soviets probably would establish successive lines of defense in this region with the intention of destroying NATO forces before they approached SSBN operating areas and were within range of Soviet territory. The main functions of Northern Fleet forces in their operating areas would be antisubmarine and antiship warfare as well as amphibious warfare, mine warfare, and coastal defense. [redacted]

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Next 117 Page(s) In Document Denied

Figure IV-3

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Free borders of Germany have not been established. The representation of the border between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Union is based on the 1945 borders. The Soviet border with the Federal Republic of Germany is shown as a dashed line. The Soviet border with the German Democratic Republic is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Poland is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Czechoslovakia is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Hungary is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Yugoslavia is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Italy is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Switzerland is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with France is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Belgium is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with the Netherlands is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Luxembourg is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Germany is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Poland is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Czechoslovakia is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Austria is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Hungary is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Yugoslavia is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Italy is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Switzerland is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with France is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Belgium is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with the Netherlands is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Luxembourg is shown as a solid line. The Soviet border with Germany is shown as a solid line.

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