Commentary

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In 2006 then Polish Minister of Defense Radek Sikorski ordered the transfer of Polish military records on the Warsaw Pact to the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) and declassification of the vast majority. Many of these Polish records are in Russian, the linqua Franca of the Warsaw Pact. The two documents published here were provided by IPN to CWIHP for translation into English so that they would be available to a wide circle of historians and other researchers.

Many Warsaw Pact multilateral field exercises were political theater, simulating multinational small-unit integration never contemplated for warfighting by Soviet military planners. Warsaw Pact multilateral command-staff and communications exercises, on the other hand, were serious training efforts intended to improve the war-fighting capabilities of the Soviet Union and its East European military allies. The Polish materials on Soyuz-75 and Shchit-88 (albeit not Soviet war plans) thus help document how the Warsaw Pact planned to go to war in Europe.

Soyuz-75 was representative of many such exercises from the late 1960s to the late 1970s.[1] These exercises assumed the rapid advance of Warsaw Pact military forces into Western Europe, employing tactical nuclear weapons to supplement conventional forces, and with East European forces assigned important break-through offensive missions under the doctrine of "coalition warfare." The appendices prepared for Soyuz-75 present detailed presumed order of battle of both NATO and Warsaw Pact forces, including nuclear-capable artillery, and the location and yields of envisaged nuclear strikes. This Polish documentation on Soyuz-75 includes a Polish-commanded Pomeranian or Maritime Front to which the Polish Fourth Army and other Armies, as well as the GDR 7th Army, are subordinated.[2] While this "Polish Front" variant was doubtless welcome to

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[1] A Czechoslovak document on the "Soyuz-77" exercise is published in the Parallel History Project documentary collection:
http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/collections/colltopic.cfm?lng=en&id=21203&navinfo=15697

[2] In Soviet practice, a theater headquarters commanded Fronts, comprised of Armies, which were in turn comprised of divisions and other large military units.

the Polish military, and is assumed in retrospective Polish military literature,[3] other variants were also exercised, and it may be questioned whether actual Soviet war plans ever assumed anything other than Soviet-commanded Fronts in the event of war in Europe.[4]

By the early 1980s, "coalition warfare" terminology had almost disappeared from Soviet military writings – one of a number of indicators of reduced reliance in Soviet military planning on East European forces that lacked the operational capabilities of Soviet forces for rapid advances with high-technology conventional weaponry under new concepts first advocated by Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov. Growing economic problems and social unrest in Eastern Europe and the weariness of its ruling elites made East European armed forces a less attractive even junior partner to the Soviet military and implied greater Soviet control.[5] Acknowledgment of domestic vulnerabilities is strikingly reflected in the Shchit-88 pre-war scenario. The exercise (limited to mobilization, not warfighting) is notable for the subordination of Polish forces (in this case the Eighth Army) to a Soviet-dominated Front and to more emphasis on operational defense, reflecting the challenge to traditional Soviet military doctrine of Gorbachev's "new thinking" on security. Shchit-88 was one indicator that "In the second half of the 1980s there was a fundamental reappraisal of [military] plans … The Front had to conduct defensive operations in the second strategic-operational echelon, while being ready to counterattack." [6]

Credible scenarios of war initiation in Europe were the bane of war gamers West and East during the Cold War; most scenario writers limited themselves to formulaic assertions of accidental outbreak of conflict or a spread of conflagration from "the Balkans" or a more distant region, or in the case of the Warsaw Pact (as with Soyuz-75) an unprovoked Western attack. Shchit-88, in contrast, utilizes a detailed and essentially defeatist scenario that can be read as striking acknowledgment by the Polish military leadership of the degree of demoralization of Polish society and its susceptibility to Western media and other influences by that time. Was this scenario an implicit acknowledgment that the game was up? Was it a coded warning that unreconstructed Soviet generals might defy Gorbachev? It is not too late to ask former Polish officers who were involved what in fact they were thinking.
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[3] E.G., Tadeusz Pacecki, Franciszek Puchala, Jan Szostak, eds. *Stab Generalny (Glowny) Wojska Polskiego, 1918-2003 [The General (Main) Staff of the Polish Army, 1918-2003]*. Warsaw, Bellona, 2003, pp. 286 ff.
[4] A. Ross Johnson. *East European Armed Forces and Soviet Military Planning; Factors of Change*. Santa Monica, RAND Corporation, 1989. Note N-2856-AF, declassified and released in October 2006. Pp. 9-10.
[5] Ibid. .
[6] *[The General (Main) Staff of the Polish Army, 1918-2003]*, p. 292.

New Warsaw Pact documents continue to become available. The Parallel History Project is translating additional Warsaw Pact materials. The CIA continues to release in translation Warsaw Pact documents obtained clandestinely and originally circulated as intelligence reports. It has just released Soviet General Staff (Voroshilov) Academy lectures from the late 1970s on military planning that correspond to the assumptions of Soyuz-75.
(http://www.foia.cia.gov/search.asp?pageNumber=1&freqReqRecord=WarsawPact2.txt)
The new Polish documents published here, and the many others at IPN, are an important addition to this growing body of Cold War literature.