

Commentary on *Soyuz-75* and *Shchit-88* Military Exercise Documents¹

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The Soviet armed forces took part in more than a thousand bilateral and multilateral military exercises with the East European armed forces from 1961 through 1990. These activities ranged from minor staff exercises without troops to major combined-arms maneuvers involving more than 100,000 soldiers. The two sets of documents posted here by the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) pertain to two of the many exercises conducted by the Soviet Union and Poland: *Soyuz-75*, held in Poland in March 1975, and *Shchit-88*, held in Poland in June 1988. The documents come from a large collection of files transferred by the Polish Ministry of National Defense (*Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej*, or MON) to Poland's Institute of National Remembrance (*Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*, or IPN) in early 2006. Plans for the transfer were first announced on 10 November 2005 by the then-Polish prime minister, Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, who told the Polish Sejm that Warsaw Pact-related documents held by the MON were going to be released to the IPN.² This announcement marked an abrupt change of Polish policy. Until then, the Polish government (unlike most of the other former Warsaw Pact governments) had refused to make available any of its materials concerning the Warsaw Pact. The official explanation for this policy was that when the foreign and defense ministers of Poland and the other Warsaw Pact countries met on 25 February 1991 to sign a four-point protocol on the dissolution of the alliance, the third of the four points (which was included at the Soviet Union's behest) stipulated that Warsaw Pact "documents are not to be transmitted to third parties or disseminated."³ After the USSR disintegrated at the end of 1991, the other East European governments concluded that the ban on disclosing materials was no longer in force. Only in Poland did the government continue to insist that it was still legally obligated to withhold Warsaw Pact documents.

Two weeks after Marcinkiewicz's speech to the Sejm, the then-national defense minister of Poland, Radek Sikorski (who is now foreign minister), held a news conference announcing that the

¹ In Polish these exercises were known as *Sojusz-75* and *Tarcza-88*, but because the exercise documents (like most other documents for Soviet-East European military exercises) are exclusively in Russian, it is more appropriate to use the Soviet (Russian-language) designations of the two exercises.

² In his address to the Sejm, Marcinkiewicz said: "Przekażemy IPN archiwalia okresu PRL oraz byłego Układu Warszawskiego" (We will transfer to the IPN archival materials from the time of the Polish People's Republic and also of the former Warsaw Pact). Quoted from "Expose Premiera Kazimierza Marcinkiewicza," *Rzeczpospolita* (Warsaw), 11 November 2005, p. 3. This pledge was repeated in the government's program published that same day. See *Program działania rządu premiera Kazimierza Marcinkiewicza "Solidarne Państwo"* (Warsaw, Polish Press Agency, 10 November 2005), Part 17.10.

³ "Protokol o prekrashchenii deistviya voennykh soglashenii, zaklyuchennykh v ramkakh Varshavskogo Dogovora, i uprazhnenii ego voennykh organov i struktur," text and signatures reproduced in A. I. Gribkov, *Sud'ba Varshavskogo Dogovora: Vospominaniya, dokumenty, fakty* (Moscow: Russkaya kniga, 1998), pp. 198–200.

transfer of some 1,700 files of Warsaw Pact documents to the IPN would soon begin and that he had signed a directive authorizing the declassification of the files.⁴ “Nearly all of the files will be declassified,” Sikorski promised. At the news conference, he displayed a selection of documents, including maps from a 1979 Warsaw Pact exercise outlining Soviet/Warsaw Pact nuclear strikes against targets in Western Europe as well as possible nuclear strikes by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) against Poland’s 43 largest cities. If this scenario had ever been carried out in real life, Sikorski argued, at least 2 million Polish citizens would have been killed. (Actually, depending on wind patterns and the progress of the fighting, the number killed in Poland might have been much higher, perhaps up to 10 million.)

The transfer of documents, including several dozen files in addition to those originally covered by the directive, was completed in 2006. IPN archivists then set to work on the formidable task of processing and cataloguing the materials. Because most of the files had not been properly organized during the Communist era, the processing took many months. Although a small number of Warsaw Pact files have not been declassified, the vast majority of the collection is now available to researchers. The items stored at the IPN include documents prepared for joint military exercises, secret statutes governing wartime command-and-control, arrangements for military deployments, materials concerning the August 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, transcripts and detailed notes from meetings of Warsaw Pact military and political organs, and other documents relating to Soviet-Polish military ties and Poland’s role in the Warsaw Pact.

The two sets of documents pertaining to the *Soyuz-75* and *Shchit-88* military exercises were supplied to the CWIHP by the IPN under an agreement signed in 2009. The initial batch of documents provided under this agreement consisted of directives and assessments from the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. The *Soyuz-75* and *Shchit-88* materials are the first in what, one hopes, will become a large CWIHP collection of photocopied MON materials regarding Warsaw Pact and bilateral Soviet-Polish military exercises. Such items will be a valuable complement to the multitude of documents concerning Warsaw Pact and bilateral military exercises that have become available since 1989 from the former East German, Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian archives. The East German, Czechoslovak, and Hungarian materials have given scholars keen insights into the Warsaw Pact’s military training and preparations.⁵ Also valuable are the post-exercise assessments one can find in declassified copies of the

⁴ Paweł Wroński, “Planowano nuklearną zagładę Polski,” *Gazeta wyborcza* (Warsaw), 26 November 2005, p. 1.

⁵ See, for example, Mark Kramer, “Warsaw Pact Military Planning in Central Europe: Revelations from the East German Archives,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 2 (Fall 1992), pp. 1, 13-19; Beatrice Heuser, “Warsaw Pact Military Doctrines in the 70s and 80s: Findings in the East German Archives,” *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (October-December 1993), pp. 437-457; Petr Luňák, *Plánování nemyslitelného: Československé válečné plány 1950-1990* (Prague: Dokořán, 2007); Vojtech Mastny, Sven G. Holtsmark, and

Soviet General Staff's in-house journal, *Voennaya mysl'* (Military Thought), including assessments of *Soyuz-75* and *Shchit-88*.⁶ (Analogous journals put out by the armed forces in the other Warsaw Pact countries are also now available, and these, too, contain assessments of military exercises involving the relevant countries.) Further declassified items pertaining to Warsaw Pact exercises can be found in the formerly top-secret *Informatsionnyi sbornik* (Informational Digest) compiled by the Staff of the Pact's Joint Command.⁷

Among the military exercise documents stored at the IPN that I would be especially interested in seeing are those pertaining to *Otechestvo-73* (*Kraj-73* in Polish), held in April 1973. The documents from the *Otechestvo-73* exercise, which were widely reported in the Polish press in January 2010, show that the exercise featured a detailed scenario for the imposition of martial law in Poland, including the immediate detention of some 8,700 people (8,300 Poles and 400 foreigners).⁸ Documents from exercises held in 1980-1981 would also be illuminating. I certainly hope that the IPN will provide these materials soon.

The IPN's rationale for starting with *Soyuz-75* and *Shchit-88* is not entirely clear. Neither of these exercises was of great military significance. *Soyuz-75* was an operational command-staff exercise with some troops taking part from both Poland and the USSR, but it was not a major exercise and was noticeably smaller than the Soviet-Polish and multilateral Warsaw Pact combined-arms maneuvers of a few years earlier (e.g., *Shchit-72*), which included more than 100,000 soldiers. Several of the other Soviet-East European military exercises held in 1974-1976, including two with Polish participation (*Leto-74* and *Shchit-76*) were more important than *Soyuz-75*.⁹ It is very useful to have the *Soyuz-75* materials, but their main value is in confirming and enriching what we already knew from other sources (especially

Andreas Wenger, eds., *War Plans and Alliances in the Cold War: Threat Perceptions in the East and West* (London: Routledge, 2006); and numerous documents and commentaries posted on the website of the Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security (<http://www.php.isn.ethz.ch>).

⁶ Until the end of the 1980s, when *Voennaya mysl'* became available for subscription, it was published only in classified (Secret and Top Secret) form. A full set of microfiche copies of *Voennaya mysl'* from 1937 through 1989 are available in the Cold War Studies archive at Harvard University.

⁷ *Informatsionnyi sbornik Shtaba Ob "edinennykh vooruzhennykh sil gosudarstv-uchastnikov Varshavskogo dogovora*, published once or twice a year. Declassified hard copies of all issues of this publication are available at Harvard's Cold War Studies archive.

⁸ See, for example, "Stan wojenny przeciwczono 8 lat wcześniej," *Rzeczpospolita* (Warsaw), 10 January 2010, p. 1.

⁹ For evidence of this, see Army-General S. Shtemenko, "Shtab Ob "edinennykh vooruzhennykh sil i ego deyatelnost'," *Informatsionnyi sbornik Shtaba Ob "edinennykh vooruzhennykh sil gosudarstv-uchastnikov Varshavskogo dogovora* (Secret), No. 9 (1975), pp. 52-64, esp. 59; Army-General E. Molezyk, "Dvatsat' let bratskogo sotrudnichestva," *Informatsionnyi sbornik Shtaba Ob "edinennykh vooruzhennykh sil gosudarstv-uchastnikov Varshavskogo dogovora* (Secret), No. 9 (1975), pp. 84-91; and Lieutenant-General F. Streletz, "Iz opyta provedeniya sovmetnykh uchenii," *Informatsionnyi sbornik Shtaba Ob "edinennykh vooruzhennykh sil gosudarstv-uchastnikov Varshavskogo dogovora* (Secret), No. 10 (1975), pp. 45-50.

from the East German military exercise documents) about the way Soviet and Warsaw Pact military commanders were training their forces in the mid-1970s for a possible war against NATO. The lack of serious attention in *Soyuz-75* to defensive operations, the emphasis on rapid offensive thrusts, and the large-scale use of nuclear strikes are all consistent with scenarios laid out for other Warsaw Pact military exercises at around this time. The salient role given to electronic warfare, which the Soviet Army used with great success during the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, was also typical of Warsaw Pact exercises in the 1970s.¹⁰

A cautionary point worth stressing here is that these documents and other items prepared for Soviet-East European military exercises are not war plans and should not be described as such. They are merely exercise scenarios. Unfortunately, some scholars in recent years have mistakenly characterized exercise scenarios as “war plans.”¹¹ The reality is that Soviet war plans intended for the Warsaw Pact were not given to the other Warsaw Pact countries. Those plans were kept exclusively in Moscow, and if a war had broken out, the Soviet High Command would have issued operational directives to the other East-bloc countries. This is the procedure that was followed on the one occasion when the Soviet and East European armed forces undertook a joint military operation, in 1968, and it is also the procedure that would have been used in a war with NATO. Exercise scenarios, of course, had to be similar to Soviet war plans, or else the exercises would have been pointless and even counterproductive. Soldiers have to be trained for the type of war they are likely to fight. But the exercise materials are not the same as war plans. The scenarios and assessments tell you a considerable amount about the war plans, but they are not war plans.

The five very brief documents provided to the CWIHP about *Shchit-88* — two “Summaries of Operations” (*operativnaya svodka*) compiled by the Polish General Staff, two “Intelligence Summaries” (*razvedyvatel'naya svodka*) compiled by the military intelligence service of the Polish General Staff, and an “Informational Summary” (*informatsionnaya svodka*) compiled by the Main Political Directorate of the Polish Army — are skimpy and must be used with caution. *Shchit-88*, a front-level command-post exercise, encompassed maneuvers by Soviet, Polish, Czechoslovak, and East German forces at the large military training ground near Drawsko Pomorskie in northwestern Poland in June 1988. The maneuvers were held in conjunction with the second stage of *Druzhba-88*, which took place in East Germany and

¹⁰ For a detailed overview of the Soviet Army’s extensive use of electronic warfare and jamming during the invasion, see U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, *DIA Intelligence Supplement: Soviet Electronic Countermeasures during Invasion of Czechoslovakia*, DIAIS UP-275-68 (Secret—No Foreign Dissemination), 1 October 1968, declassified October 2002, in Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, National Security File, Europe and USSR, Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovakia Memos, Vol. IV: 9/68-1/69.

¹¹ This is a problem, for example, with Luňák, *Plánování nemyslitelného* and with some of the essays in Mastny, Holtmark, and Wenger, eds., *War Plans and Alliances in the Cold War*.

Poland from 25 May to 2 June. (The first stage of *Druzhba-88*, in January-February 1988 on Hungarian territory, was geared toward training Soviet, Hungarian, and Czechoslovak military forces for defensive operations.)¹²

Shchit-88 was strikingly different from *Soyuz-75* in its purpose, orientation, and consequences. The Soviet Union was still holding sizable numbers of military exercises with the East European countries in the late 1980s — 25 in 1987, 21 in 1988, and 14 in 1989 — but the trend was gradually downward, and most of the exercises were smaller than in the past.¹³ Soviet military exercises in general were being pared back in the latter half of the 1980s — including a 50-percent cut in the number of exercises of Soviet strategic nuclear forces—and this pattern inevitably affected joint military activities within the Warsaw Pact. *Shchit-88* was not as important as some other Soviet-East European maneuvers in 1988 (notably *Soyuz-88* and *Granit-88*), but it offered a good indication of the sweeping changes under way in Soviet national security policy that ultimately transformed the Warsaw Pact and caused it to come unraveled.

The materials supplied by the IPN reveal some important characteristics of *Shchit-88* but fail to cover numerous other things. The documents are valuable in highlighting the detailed political dimension of the exercise, a dimension shaped by and reflecting many of the foreign policy issues facing the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev. None of this was present in exercise scenarios before the Gorbachev era. The account of events leading to dangerous tension between “Red” (the Soviet bloc) and “Blue” (NATO), the persistent efforts by the “Red” side to prevent war, the initially positive response from political leaders on the “Blue” side who were willing to engage in “constructive negotiations [with ‘Red’] to reduce tensions and strengthen the means of mutual trust,” the reversal caused by belligerent military commanders on the “Blue” side who opposed any relaxation of tensions and took steps to provoke a confrontation, and the descriptions of internal conditions in “Red” countries (unrest, draft resistance, etc.) that hindered military readiness — all of these elements were in line with the changing political calculus in Moscow. None would have been included in documents for Warsaw Pact military exercises before the late 1980s.

In the documents provided by the IPN, *Shchit-88* reaches its culmination when both sides have gone to “full combat readiness,” tensions are dangerously high, and “leading officials” from the “Red” side make one final plea for a peaceful settlement. Unfortunately, the documents do not cover what

¹² For a detailed assessment of the conjunction of these exercises, see Colonel G. A. Abrosimov, “Ob opyte podgotovki i provedeniya sovmestnykh operativno-takticheskikh uchenii soyuznykh armii ‘Druzhba’,” *Informatsionnyi sbornik Shtaba Ob”edinennykh vooruzhennykh sil gosudarstv-uchastnikov Varshavskogo dogovora* (Secret), No. 36 (1988), pp. 122-128.

¹³ “NATO, Warsaw Pact Military Exercises Compared,” TASS, 5 August 1990, p. 52; and U.S. Department of Defense, *Soviet Military Power, 1990* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, September 1990), p. 29.

happened after that. We know from other declassified sources that *Shchit-88* continued and that the exercise was designed to test the “preparation and implementation of defensive operations along the front by a coalition [of ‘Red’ armies] during the initial period of a war.”¹⁴ (The implication was that as the war progressed, “Red” forces would embark on a counteroffensive against “Blue” forces.) East European military commanders who took part in *Shchit-88* were distinctly positive in their classified assessments of the exercise’s contribution to the Warsaw Pact’s military posture. Lieutenant-General Bruno Petroschka of the East German National People’s Army argued that *Shchit-88* had facilitated “the use of new methods and modes of secretly bringing troops and command staffs to the highest degree of combat readiness, of planning, and of organizing and carrying out modern operations and warfare.”¹⁵ Lieutenant-General Ladislav Stach of the Czechoslovak People’s Army likewise praised the exercise for underscoring the importance of flexible military communications for the “command of troops on the march and also for links among allied formations and units.”¹⁶ An especially laudatory assessment was voiced by the chief of the Polish General Staff, Army General Józef Uzycki, who wrote that “the recently completed *Shchit-88* joint exercises were a shining testament” to the value of exercises “involving the participation of troops and staffs of all the allied armies” in jointly “accomplishing all operational combat goals.”¹⁷

By contrast, the main Soviet commander of *Shchit-88*, Colonel-General Vladimir Verevkin-Rakhal’skii, who was deputy chief of staff of the Warsaw Pact’s Joint Command, reported afterward that the exercise had revealed “shortcomings in the deployment and preparation of command organs and in the organization and work methods of commanders and staffs.” He complained that “ways of carrying out assignments in operations [during *Shchit-88*] were not always worked out fully” and that “commanders and staffs” tended to be “formalistic, harried, and careless in making decisions and planning combat operations.” Verevkin-Rakhal’skii warned that “these shortcomings ultimately are taking their toll on the quality and effectiveness of command and control.”¹⁸ The contrast between his critical assessment of the

¹⁴ “Wesentlicher Inhalt der Ausführungen,” Briefing Summary (Top Secret), 14 June 1988, in Militärarchiv Potsdam, VA-Strausberg/32661, Seiten 130-131.

¹⁵ Lieutenant-General B. Petroschka, “Podgotovka v provedenii sobmestnykh komandno-shtabnykh uchenii soyuznykh voisk,” *Informatsionnyi sbornik Shtaba Ob”edinennykh vooruzhennykh sil gosudarstv-uchastnikov Varshavskogo dogovora* (Secret), No. 35 (1988), pp. 127-132.

¹⁶ Lieutenant-General L. Stach, “Opyt organizatsii i obespechenii svyazi na sovместnykh ucheniyakh soyuznykh voisk,” *Informatsionnyi sbornik Shtaba Ob”edinennykh vooruzhennykh sil gosudarstv-uchastnikov Varshavskogo dogovora* (Secret), No. 36 (1988), pp. 129-133.

¹⁷ Army-General Józef Uzycki, “Oboronitel’naya doktrina Pol’skoi Narodnoi Respubliki,” *Voennaya mysl’* (Secret), No. 11 (November 1988), pp. 72-80.

¹⁸ Colonel-General V. N. Verevkin-Rakhal’skii, “O sovershenstvovanii podgotovki komanduyushchikh i shtabov po upravleniyu voiskami (silami) v sovremennykh operatsiyakh,” *Informatsionnyi sbornik Shtaba Ob”edinennykh vooruzhennykh sil gosudarstv-uchastnikov Varshavskogo dogovora* (Secret), No. 37 (1989), pp. 41-47.

exercise's proceedings and the glowing appraisals offered by the East European commanders underscores why we need to learn more about the combat maneuvers that followed the preliminary scenario in *Shchit-88*.

Even though the *Shchit-88* documents provided by the IPN are incomplete, they are very useful in revealing the impact that Gorbachev's "new thinking in foreign policy" was having on Soviet/Warsaw Pact military affairs. *Shchit-88* was held at a time when major choices had to be made about the future direction of Soviet and Warsaw Pact military policies.¹⁹ The leaders of the Warsaw Pact countries had proclaimed in May 1987 that they would be embracing a purely defensive military strategy. Some of the highest Soviet military commanders, including the commander-in-chief of the Warsaw Pact Joint Command, Marshal Viktor Kulikov, and the Soviet Defense Minister, Army-General Dmitrii Yazov, tried to avoid any drastic changes in their military planning and strategy, but even they by the spring of 1988 were not about to pursue anything like the combined-arms exercises that were held in Poland in the 1960s and 1970s, with tens of thousands of heavily-armed troops and dozens of simulated nuclear strikes. Even in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, those sorts of exercises were mostly a thing of the past by this point. In Poland, which had been wracked by crippling strikes in April 1988, the notion of hosting a highly conspicuous Warsaw Pact exercise was a non-starter, especially in light of Gorbachev's plans to travel to Warsaw in early July 1988 to meet with the Polish leader Wojciech Jaruzelski. For all of these reasons, the low-key nature of *Shchit-88* and the priority given to training for defensive operations are not surprising.

What *is* surprising is the preliminary scenario laid out in the *Shchit-88* documents. The language and substance are such a major departure from the manner of presentation in earlier documents for Soviet/Warsaw Pact military exercises that they underscore how much political pressure the Soviet military was coming under. In May 1988 one of Gorbachev's chief aides on foreign policy, Georgii Shakhnazarov, had warned him that top officials in the Soviet Defense Ministry were resisting a shift to a genuinely defensive military posture and strategy.²⁰ Gorbachev decided to push for bolder changes in Warsaw Pact military strategy, even if he had to ruffle feathers in the Soviet High Command. The materials provided by the IPN about *Shchit-88* are valuable evidence that he was able to achieve prompt results.

¹⁹ I discuss this point in my forthcoming article, "The Warsaw Pact Alliance, 1985-1991: Reform, Adaptation, and Collapse."

²⁰ Ibid.