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Controversy Over the Role of the Soviet General Staff: Indications and Issues

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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RESEARCH PAPER

Controversy Over the Role of the Soviet General Staff: Indications and Issues

Summary

Two recent articles in the Soviet press by Army General V. G. Kulikov, chief of the General Staff, contain strong hints of an ongoing controversy over the role of the General Staff in the USSR's strategic leadership. The controversy may be related to changes in the responsibilities of the General Staff, to its relationship to other elements of the armed forces, and to its influence in the high-level military decision-making process.

The principal theme of the articles--published in *Pravda* and the *Military Historical Journal*--is that control of the armed forces should remain centralized in the General Staff. These articles emphatically restate propositions which seemed to have become accepted in recent years, implying that some are still a source of contention within the armed forces. For example, Kulikov stresses the importance of establishing a system of strategic leadership before a war, even though other evidence suggests that a supreme command was formalized in the late sixties.

Kulikov's assessment of the relationship of the General Staff and the supreme command may reflect some institutional tension generated by the creation of a supreme command and the expansion of the General Staff's

25X1 *Comments and queries regarding this publication are welcome. They may be directed to* [redacted] *of the Strategic Evaluation Center, Office of Strategic Research,* [redacted] *or to* [redacted] *of the Soviet Strategic Forces Division, Office of Strategic Research,* [redacted]

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responsibilities. He appears to be reminding doubters that the General Staff is indeed the central executive for operational planning and control.

His treatment of the General Staff's responsibilities indicates that its role in relation to nonoperational matters may also have been altered. The creation of two new directorates in the Ministry of Defense--one for weapons procurement and another reportedly for resource allocation and force planning--points in this direction. Nevertheless, the General Staff retains some influence in those matters and, in spite of the impact the new directorates may eventually have on SALT matters, the General Staff clearly remains the principal focus for SALT within the armed forces.

Finally, Kulikov's advocacy of the General Staff's central role may reflect personal rivalries over who will be the next Minister of Defense. Such rivalries could be one incentive behind Kulikov's attempts to publicize the importance of the General Staff's responsibilities and, implicitly, his own role in the country's strategic leadership.

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