



Director of
Central
Intelligence

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Warning of War in Europe: Changing Warsaw Pact Planning and Forces

National Intelligence Estimate
Memorandum to Holders

*This Memorandum to Holders represents
the views of the Director of Central Intelligence
with the advice and assistance of the
US Intelligence Community.*

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NIE 4-1-84
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*Information available as of 28 September 1989 was used
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in the preparation of this Memorandum:*

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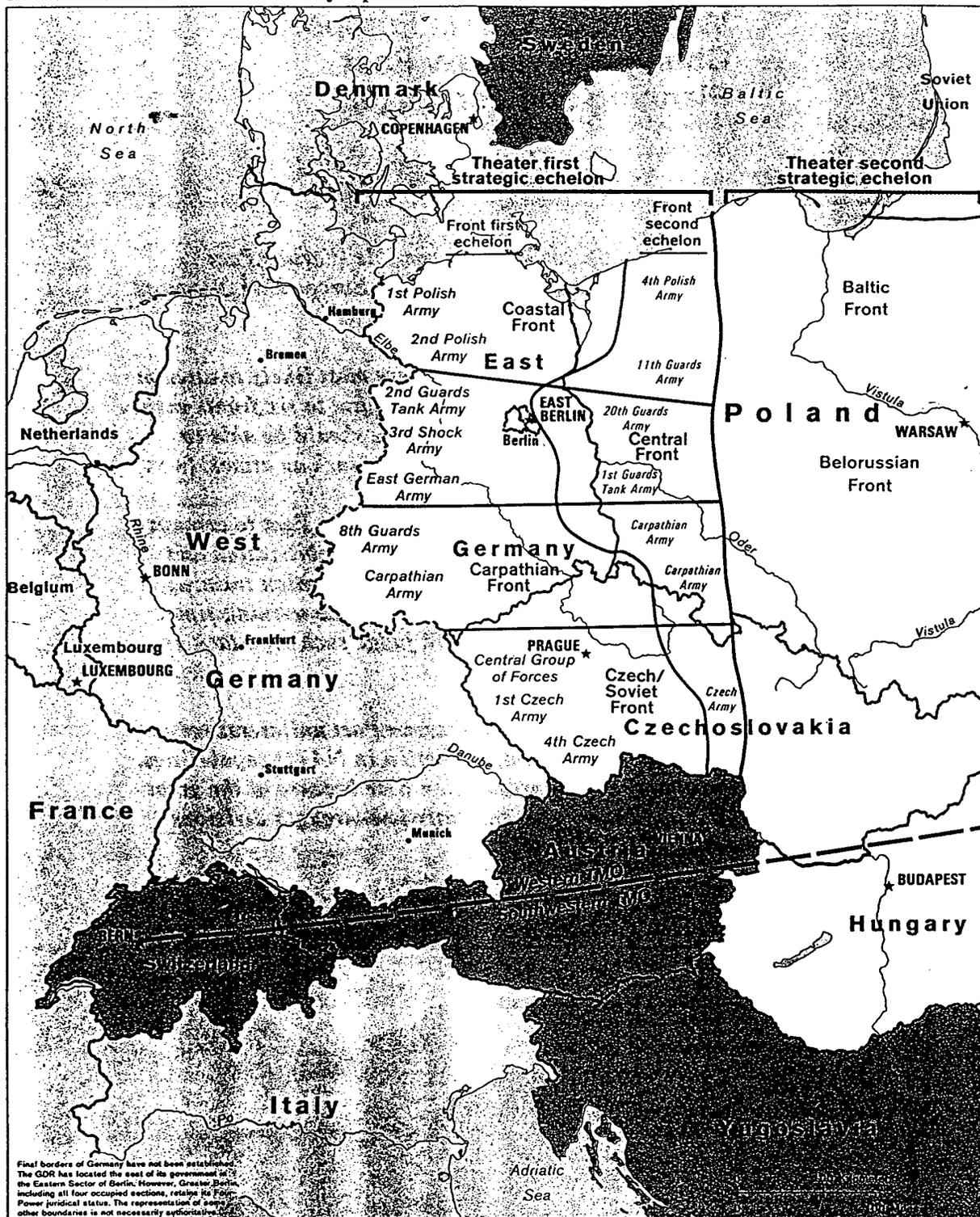
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Warning of War in Europe: Changing Warsaw Pact Planning and Forces

- *The warning times we associate with possible Warsaw Pact preparations for war with NATO in Central Europe have increased significantly from those set forth in 1984.*
- *Pact military planners would prefer and are most likely to attempt to conduct a well-prepared attack involving five to six fronts with four fronts in the first strategic echelon. We should be able to provide about four to five weeks of warning of such an attack.*
- *We recognize that circumstances could cause the Pact to commit its forces to an attack after the completion of mobilization and movement, but before completing the postmobilization training necessary for minimum offensive proficiency. The warning times would be shorter, but the Soviets would judge such an attack as highly risky.*
- *Announced Soviet and non-Soviet Warsaw Pact unilateral reductions, if completed, and given no reduction in NATO capabilities, should significantly extend preparation time because of the greater need in the first echelon for currently low-strength divisions from the western USSR.*

Figure 1
Projected Warsaw Pact Echelons
in the Western Theater of Military Operations (TMO)—Four-Front Attack



Key Judgments

The warning times we associate with possible Warsaw Pact preparations for war with NATO in Central Europe have increased significantly from those set forth in NIE 4-1-84. These changes are a direct consequence of Soviet assessments of improved NATO military capability, our improved understanding of the Soviet process of transitioning to war, and changes in Soviet peacetime readiness. Accordingly, before unilateral force reductions, we assess that:

- Pact military planners would prefer and are most likely to attempt to conduct a well-prepared attack involving five to six fronts with four fronts in the first strategic echelon. We should be able to provide about four to five weeks of warning of such an attack. The increased time needed to prepare this attack option results from increased reliance in the first echelon on "not ready" divisions from the western USSR.
- An attack with three fronts in the first echelon remains a possibility in some circumstances. We should be able to provide about two to three weeks of warning of such an attack. Our assessment of the increased time needed to prepare these fronts for sustained offensive operations results from new judgments about the time required to prepare Soviet forces based in Eastern Europe.
- We recognize that circumstances could cause the Pact to commit its forces to an attack after the completion of mobilization and movement but before completing postmobilization training necessary for minimum proficiency for offensive operations. If so, we could provide at least two weeks of warning of a four-front attack or at least one week warning of a less likely three-front attack. We believe, however, the Soviets would judge attacks before completion of postmobilization training as highly risky because of the reliance on reserves lacking such training.

Figure 2
Announced Warsaw Pact Unilateral Force Reductions
in the Western Theater of Military Operations



Announced Soviet and non-Soviet Warsaw Pact unilateral force reductions, if completed, should significantly extend preparation time because of the greater need in the first echelon for currently low-strength divisions from the western USSR. Warning of our assessed most likely attack option—four fronts in the first echelon—would increase by about two weeks. If the Soviets elected to attack after only mobilization and movement, warning times would increase by almost a week.

These preparation and warning times after unilateral reductions assume that NATO capabilities remain at current levels. Unilateral NATO reductions could diminish Pact perception of their requirements for success and, therefore, reduce warning time.

The ongoing Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Talks are likely to result in an agreement establishing numerical parity between NATO and Warsaw Pact forces below current NATO levels within the Atlantic-to-the-Urals zone. From peacetime parity, the Soviets would have to reestablish major forces in order to generate the capability to attack successfully and sustain the offensive to the depth of the theater. This requirement would increase preparation time considerably over what we have assessed in this Memorandum. Alternatively, the Soviets could increase the readiness and combat power of residual forces through higher manning levels and acquisition of modern equipment. This would require reinvesting the savings achieved by reducing their forces under CFE into defense and restructuring their forces and redistributing their equipment. These smaller forces would be capable of launching attacks for limited objectives with warning times more like we are accustomed to today. We do not believe such attacks for limited objectives would be attractive to Pact planners because the risks, to include escalation to nuclear war, would far outweigh any potential short-term gains.

We are confident that for the period of this Estimate we will be able to detect and report significant disruptions or a reversal of present political, social, and economic trends in the Warsaw Pact countries. Although these indicators will remain ambiguous with regard to actual national war preparations, they will continue to signal that the potential for a crisis had increased.

~~*This information is Secret.*~~

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