

SECRET

15 October 1979

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Brezhnev's Announcement of Unilateral Troop Reductions: An Interpretation

1. There is a body of intelligence evidence which in our view suggests that Brezhnev's offer of a unilateral withdrawal of troops from GSFG may represent political capitalization of an opportunity afforded by ongoing modifications to their force structure in Central Europe. Moreover, the withdrawal of 20,000 men may not result in any reduction below the level the Soviets had in Central Europe at the beginning of the MBFR talks. [ ]

Growing Structural Size of Soviet Divisions\*

2. For the past several years the Soviets have been gradually increasing the T/O strength of their divisions.

-- The artillery battery (6 guns) of motorized rifle regiments has been increased to a battalion (18 guns).

\* The term "structural size" used here refers to the number of T/O manpower slots, as differentiated from the number of men actually assigned to the divisions. For example, the addition of a battalion to a regiment creates additional T/O slots, but does not mean that there necessarily are more men. The latter is a question of manning percentages, which could be reduced as the T/O grows in order to maintain a given level of peacetime active duty manpower.

NOTE: This memorandum was prepared in the [ ] Division, Office of Strategic Research, but has not been coordinated outside this office. Comments and queries may be addressed to Craig Chellis, 351-4051 or Douglas J. MacEachin, 605-0021.

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- A motorized rifle company has been added to the tank regiment of tank divisions.
- Mortar units have been added to at least some motorized rifle regiments.
- There is also evidence that the Soviets plan to further increase the divisional T/O by adding an artillery battalion to divisional tank regiments.
- These increases in the T/O of the combat regiments of Soviet divisions probably have necessitated some increase in the T/O slots of divisional support elements such as the maintenance battalion. (c)

### Soviet Willingness to Reduce the Number of Divisions Based in Central Europe

3. In June 1978, Eastern negotiators at the MBFR talks in Vienna formally proposed a first-step agreement that would include reduction of 30,000 Soviet troops and 1,000 Soviet tanks in return for US withdrawals of 14,000 men and 1,000 nuclear warheads. The Soviets explicitly stated that two-thirds of their troops--about 20,000 men--would be withdrawn in the form of two complete divisions, with the remainder of withdrawals to be made up of various units whose aggregate strength would be comparable to a third division. The Soviets also specified that the US should take two-thirds of its withdrawals in the form of complete units, and clearly indicated that they envisaged that these units would be brigades. Finally, the Soviet negotiators explicitly stated that the units specified for withdrawal would be limited at their residual number after reductions.

4. In effect, the Soviets made their proposal bearing in mind that if the US accepted the terms the Soviets would have been forced to accept a limit on the number of their divisions in Central Europe that was two less than the number there at present. It is not

likely that the Soviet military authorities would have agreed to this kind of constraint on their force structure if they did not have it worked into an overall force structure program of their own planning, for example, an increase in the size of divisions.

Brezhnev Offer an Outgrowth of the June 1978 Eastern Proposal

5. The 20,000 troops that Brezhnev said the USSR would withdraw would be equivalent to two tank divisions, according to what at least until now has been the normal strength of a tank division. It seems likely that the 20,000 figure he gave refers to the same 20,000 that Soviet MBFR negotiators said they would reduce in the form of complete divisions as part of their June 1978 proposal.

6. Furthermore, it is also likely that if the Soviets intend to follow through on their announced withdrawals, they will want to reap maximum political benefit by ensuring that there is no basis for dispute over the fact that "significant" reductions have been carried out. This suggests that they will ensure that the withdrawals are carried out in a way that can be readily verified by US national technical means. This in turn suggests that the Soviets envisage that the withdrawals would be taken in complete units. Withdrawal of complete units is further indicated by the fact that Brezhnev stated "a certain amount of other equipment" would be withdrawn in addition to the men and tanks. We do not discount the possibility that the withdrawals may be made up of smaller units such as independent regiments and battalions, or training units. On balance, however, we believe that the reduction is likely to take place in the form of divisions.

Creeping Growth of Soviet Manpower in Central Europe Since Early Seventies

7. Brezhnev stated, as he has in several previous public statements, that for the past several years the USSR has not increased the numerical strength of its

forces in Central Europe. We do not have direct evidence of the total number of Soviet troops in Central Europe and must derive our manpower estimates by indirect methods. Our information does show conclusively, however, that the Soviets have been gradually increasing the *structural size* of their forces in Central Europe, both through adding subunits to their existing divisions as described above and through the addition of new non-divisional units, especially helicopter forces. If there has been no offsetting reductions in the manning of other units--and we have no evidence of this--we estimate that the net increase since 1973 in the number of Soviet soldiers in Central Europe as a result of these changes has been about 20,000.

8. It may be that Soviet military authorities have planned all along to implement their programmed changes in divisional structure without increasing the numerical strength of their overall manpower. This would fit with the evidence suggesting that they may have undertaken to enlarge their divisions but reduce the number. If so, incremental growth in the overall numerical manpower strength over the past several years may be viewed by Soviet military planners as a temporary "overage" which would be eliminated when the program was completed. Thus, in Brezhnev's numerous public statements to the effect that the Soviets have not increased their military manpower in Central Europe and have no intent to do so--the latter clause having been a part of most of his earlier statements but not his latest--he may have been referring to *programmed* strength. Nevertheless, they may have seen an opportunity to reap maximum political gain from the reduction needed to complete their program.