
NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE COUNCIL NOTE

Subject | **Relocation and Resubordination of Soviet
Ground Equipment: Motives and Significance**

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In anticipation of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty coming into effect, the Soviets have moved 40,000 to 50,000 pieces of treaty-limited equipment (TLE) east of the Urals; within the ATTU zone, they have resubordinated three divisions to the Navy and one to the KGB, thereby exempting their TLE from the CFE counting rules. This Note assesses the military significance of those actions. It does not address any issues of legality. It is based on discussions at a meeting of senior Soviet theater-force analysts from CIA, DLA, Army, and the NIC held under the auspices of the National Intelligence Officer for General Purpose Forces.

Key Points

The Soviet General Staff probably views the transfers of treaty-limited equipment (TLE) out of the ATTU zone as a way of ensuring a capability for robust defense of Soviet borders in the mid-1990s.

The moves will increase Soviet offensive capabilities but not enough to give the General Staff confidence in its ability to prosecute deep offensive operations against NATO. An overall assessment of the threat will depend, in part, on NATO's future force structure and force generation potential.

The resubordination of four divisions to the Navy and the KGB does not have great military significance—so long as it is not used as a loophole for future additions of TLE.

Although these moves increase Soviet capabilities over those they would possess if the equipment was destroyed, the threat in the mid-1990s will still be substantially lower than it would be without a CFE Treaty.

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**The main motive—
buying insurance**

The Soviet moves were taken by the military at a time when the military was increasingly assertive and assuming a stronger domestic political position than it had in several years.

We believe—particularly in the case of the transfers of equipment outside the ATTU zone—that the moves should be viewed as an effort by Soviet military leaders to build up “insurance” against an uncertain future and to come closer to the post-CFE position they anticipated before the collapse of the Warsaw Pact. In addition, the moves reflect instinctive military opposition to the destruction of relatively modern equipment, particularly when the military expects weapons procurement to decline.

Signs of these concerns were evident as early as the Mandate discussions in mid-1988 when Soviet sources noted the requirement to keep a strategic reserve to offset the US potential to reinforce Europe. At that time, the Soviet strategic reserve was west of the Urals—subject to the CFE negotiations—and the Soviets clearly perceived a need to relocate it outside the ATTU zone. In addition, by early 1990 the General Staff had become very concerned about the demise of the Warsaw Pact and the impact that would have on post-CFE parity. The General Staff then decided to remove as much equipment from the ATTU zone as possible prior to signing a CFE Treaty in order to preserve the potential to regenerate substantial forces.

Soviet motives for resubordinating maneuver divisions to the Navy and KGB are less clear. The Soviets have said they require additional naval forces to redress overall US naval superiority. We believe the transfer to the KGB is tied to the USSR’s growing need for internal security forces. In any event the Soviets are using the resubordinations to attempt to keep in the zone TLE that is not liable to destruction.

We do not believe the transfer of equipment and resubordinations were designed to fundamentally alter the post-CFE military balance and result in militarily significant superiority for the Soviets in Europe.

**TLE transfers
designed to
ensure a
robust defense**

We believe these transfers should be measured against the dramatic change in the way that Soviet leaders think about the military component of their security policy. In the past, the Soviet Union sought to deter a NATO attack and maintain forces capable of a decisive offensive deep into Western Europe. Soviet CFE proposals (which assumed continued East European participation in the Warsaw Pact), on the other hand, reflected an acceptance of parity and

mutual security with NATO-equal risk and equal security for both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. We believe the events in Eastern Europe led the General Staff to conclude that without transferring equipment east of the Urals, Soviet forces could only barely defend Soviet borders.

It is in light of this stark contrast – the Soviets' pre-1988 view that they could "hold NATO at risk militarily" as opposed to a fear that they "would be barely able to defend Soviet borders" – that Community analysts believe the significance of the equipment transfers should be assessed. We believe the equipment transfers are intended to assure a robust strategic defense – to guarantee the defense of Soviet borders rather than to give Moscow the capability to mount offensive operations deep into NATO territory.

Nevertheless, the latent force generation potential of the equipment east of the Urals substantially increases Soviet offensive and counteroffensive capabilities over what they would be if the equipment was destroyed. The General Staff, for example, would certainly continue to have confidence in its ability to mount an offensive into Poland. However, it could not be confident that the Soviet military could continue beyond Poland and prosecute offensive operations against NATO with a high likelihood of success.

**Resubordination
of minimal
military
significance**

The resubordination of the four divisions increases Soviet holdings of TLE by about 10 percent. By itself, that does not significantly enhance Soviet military capabilities. Our principal concern is that the Soviets might use resubordination as a loophole to allow the entry or preservation of unlimited quantities of TLE. To alleviate that concern, the Soviets have suggested a politically binding declaration that any additional resubordinations would count against CFE totals.

**Threat remains
lower than
without treaty**

We believe that, even though the transfer of equipment East of the Urals increases both force generation potential and the capability for offensive operations, the Soviet moves do not portend restoration of the deep offensive threat that NATO faced during the 1970s and 1980s. The overall threat will depend, in part, on NATO's future force structure and force generation potential. Whatever increased military threat the stocks pose, it is significantly less than it would be without a Treaty. Assuming the "resubordination" loophole is closed, as a result of the Treaty the overall threat in the ATTU zone is codified at a substantially lower level, is located much farther away than would otherwise be the case, and is subject to unprecedented levels of onsite inspection.