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# Warsaw Pact Commentary on NATO Concepts for War in Central Europe

An Intelligence Assessment

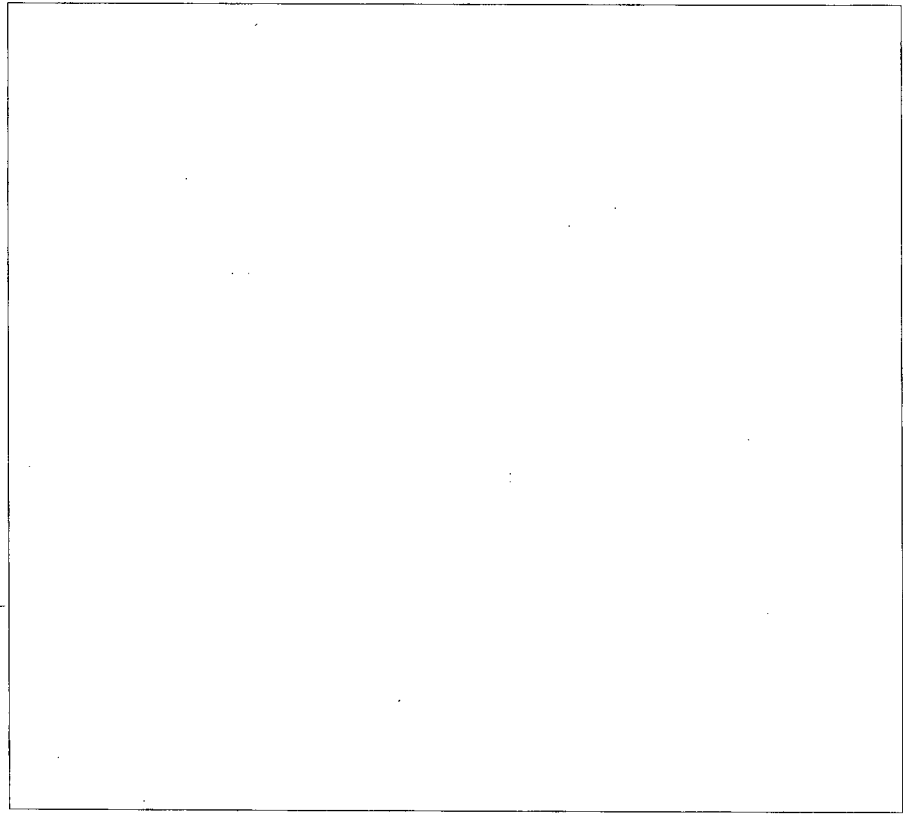
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## Warsaw Pact Commentary on NATO Concepts for War in Central Europe

Central Intelligence Agency  
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### *Key Judgments*

Warsaw Pact commentaries have presented differing views of NATO concepts for war in Central Europe, both over time and to varying audiences. In the early sixties, Soviet military spokesmen stressed a massive NATO "nuclear offensive" by strategic and theater forces at the start of fighting, and highly classified writings depicted NATO operations extending deep into the USSR.

Since the mid-sixties, most Pact analysts have envisaged a massive nonnuclear air attack by NATO at the start of fighting. Several Pact writings and exercises also have depicted a NATO ground offensive to reunify Germany and occupy Eastern Europe, to satisfy West German aims. But most Soviet classified writings discount the likelihood of a NATO conventional ground offensive.

Both Pact and Soviet commentaries, however, maintain that NATO would soon resort to limited, and later massive, nuclear strikes in the face of the Pact's superiority in conventional forces. Some writers claim NATO then plans a rapid advance through Eastern Europe into the USSR.

Recent commentaries have reasserted the probable escalation of a NATO-Pact conflict to global nuclear war. This facet had been played down in the late sixties.

In discussing these general themes, Pact commentaries describe the following concepts for NATO operations:

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- NATO would begin preparations several weeks before a conflict to bring its forward-based forces to full strength and mobilize added units, but it also would set up an improvised defense with little warning.
- In a nonnuclear conflict, NATO tactical air would try to "punch through" Pact defenses along narrow corridors to attack forward Pact air and ground forces first and rear targets later.
- If NATO should launch a nonnuclear ground attack, its forces would seek local superiority in breakthrough sectors by massing armor and artillery with airborne/airmobile support.
- NATO naval operations would aim to supplement air strikes against land targets, contain Pact navies in the Baltic Sea, and land amphibious units in the Pact rear.
- In a defense against larger Pact forces, NATO leaders have little confidence that limited nuclear strikes would halt a Pact advance. They intend massive nuclear (mainly air) strikes to achieve a decisive advantage over Pact forces, regardless of NATO's losses.
- Following its main nuclear attacks, NATO would conduct prolonged, low-intensity operations to crush Pact resistance.

Much of this commentary appears intended to propagandize the Pact's forces and justify Soviet control over Eastern Europe, but it may also reflect genuine concern over NATO, especially West German, intentions.

~~ii~~

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## PREFACE

This paper describes the Warsaw Pact's commentaries on what it purports to believe are NATO concepts for operations against Pact forces in Central Europe, which would be the main theater of a NATO-Pact conflict. Our evidence is derived from Pact exercises, classified statements, and widely circulated military writings. It aggregates evidence on the following aspects: (1) the evolution of commentary on NATO doctrine since the early sixties, (2) descriptions of a supposed NATO campaign in Central Europe, and (3) statements regarding NATO's operational planning.

Soviet commentary on NATO's concepts for war probably reaches a variety of audiences and serves several purposes. Most of the writings used in this paper were restricted to Soviet and other Pact officers; in several cases circulation was limited to senior officers. Written to bolster the fighting spirit and solidarity of Pact forces under Soviet direction, the materials are not available to the general public or aimed at influencing non-Pact readers. They contain a large amount of propaganda material, and portions may have been discounted by some readers, but their consistency suggests that the basic themes are widely shared and deeply ingrained. As such, they probably influence Soviet perceptions of NATO doctrine.

iii

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## Warsaw Pact Commentary on NATO Concepts for War in Central Europe

*This paper examines Soviet and East European commentary in classified and widely circulated military writings regarding NATO concepts for war in Central Europe. Readers are cautioned that many of these writings serve propaganda as well as other purposes and may not accurately reflect Soviet or East European beliefs about possible NATO actions. They can, however, provide insights into Soviet perceptions of NATO doctrine. In several cases, Soviet military writers have engaged in "mirror-imaging," ascribing Soviet tactics and objectives to NATO. This suggests that the Soviets may see many elements of NATO thinking as similar to their own, but it may also mean that they lack clear evidence of NATO intentions, particularly as regards a purported "offensive." Thus, this is only a partial view of Pact assessments of NATO doctrine.*

### Differing Views of NATO Concepts

Soviet and East European commentaries have presented significantly differing views over the past 15 years on NATO concepts for war in Central Europe. In the early sixties, senior Soviet military spokesmen, writing in highly classified publications, placed greater emphasis on the allegedly aggressive nature of NATO's aims and operations than did less senior analysts in other classified reports. By contrast, since the mid-sixties the main stress on NATO offensive planning in available writings has been in statements intended either for wide circulation in the Soviet military or for Pact military staffs. Classified writings restricted to senior Soviet officers have focused primarily on offensive operations by their own forces in which NATO was the defender.

Consequently, much of Pact commentary over the past decade appears intended either to stimulate Pact readiness and morale or to resolve problems that NATO might pose for a Pact attack. Nonetheless, references in highly

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restricted commentaries to "aggressive planning" by NATO suggest that Soviet military leaders do not exclude the possibility of a NATO offensive.

### **Soviet and Pact Commentary**

#### *Early 1960s*

During the late fifties and early sixties, Soviet commentators claimed that NATO leaders regarded a massive, theater-wide nuclear offensive against Pact forces and territory as a central part of a US-Soviet nuclear war. These military writers envisaged NATO plans to mount a large-scale surprise attack, either without mobilization or following major exercises. In this view, US and British strategic forces would strike Long Range Aviation and Strategic Rocket Forces bases in the USSR, together with principal nuclear storage sites, command and communication centers, and industrial facilities. NATO tactical and carrier-based aircraft would support these strikes by attacking Pact air and nuclear forces, reserves, lines of communication, and urban-industrial centers in Eastern Europe and the western USSR. Although Soviet analysts estimated that NATO's first strike would be its most important, they envisaged NATO's general nuclear offensive as extending through the first week of combat.

*NATO Ground Operations.* During this period, Soviet writers stated that NATO ground forces would use nuclear weapons for both defensive and offensive operations. Some commentators asserted that NATO commanders would use nuclear strikes to weaken the Pact's superior frontline forces and would advance through gaps in these forces into the Pact rear, which would already have been disrupted by air strikes. In this view, NATO would try to continue this offensive to prevent additional Pact mobilization and reinforcement.

Other Soviet commentators portrayed NATO ground forces as adopting an initial defensive posture in an attempt to contain advancing Pact forces until massive nuclear strikes could be carried out. NATO's defensive operations would be temporary, pending the impact of its nuclear strikes and the deployment of its strategic reserves. NATO would then try to mount a counteroffensive deep into Pact territory.

*Soviet Assessment of NATO Campaign.* Soviet analysts in this period concluded that NATO had little prospect of achieving the aims they ascribed to it. They held that even if NATO delivered a surprise nuclear strike, its forces would not be able to destroy Pact armies and reserves. Despite their losses, Pact forces would launch a counteroffensive and defeat a NATO ground attack.

Nonetheless, the Soviets gave priority to detecting NATO preparations for nuclear attack and preempting it. Soviet senior military commentators split sharply on the probable extent of NATO prewar actions and on the Soviet ability to determine their meaning. As a result, most spokesmen left open the possibility that NATO might conduct a surprise attack to seriously reduce the Pact's combat capabilities.

*Since the Mid-1960s*

More recently, Soviet commentators have described NATO doctrine as incorporating initial conventional operations as well as the possibility of a surprise massive nuclear strike. If war began with a nuclear attack, Pact commentators maintain, NATO's concept of its operations would differ little from that of the early sixties. As before, in their view, NATO would conduct large-scale air strikes both on deployed forces and on strategic targets in the USSR, and it would attempt to follow these strikes with a ground offensive. Although this possibility continues to receive prominent attention in Pact open and restricted writings, Soviet classified writings in the past decade have treated it as considerably less likely.

*Conventional Operations.* Pact commentators contend that, if a NATO-Pact conflict began without the use of nuclear weapons, initial NATO air strikes would be directed primarily against Pact air and nuclear forces in Eastern Europe. According to some views, NATO ground forces would then commence an attack, concentrating on narrow axes and employing tactical surprise to offset the Pact's overall superiority in troops and equipment. Some Soviets commentators, however, particularly in classified writings, maintain that NATO ground forces would conduct only defensive operations during a conventional phase and would launch a counteroffensive with nuclear strikes only after Pact forces had penetrated the main NATO defenses.

*Nuclear Operations.* [redacted]

[redacted] several Soviet writers argue that NATO might forgo a resort to nuclear weapons indefinitely. Pact commentators generally believe, however, that NATO sees its forces as too weak for prolonged conventional fighting. In their view, it would attempt to use limited and then massive nuclear strikes to offset the Pact's conventional superiority. These writers conclude that as in the early sixties, NATO would try to exploit a massive nuclear strike by a rapid penetration to the Pact rear.

*Soviet Assessment of a NATO Campaign.* As before, the Soviets appear confident that NATO's campaign would fail. The Soviets count on the Pact's



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overall conventional superiority to halt any NATO attack and penetrate NATO's forward defenses. Once the Soviets succeeded in putting NATO on the defensive, they believe it could not hold its positions for more than a brief period without large-scale use of nuclear weapons.

Pact commentaries contain differing views of the ability to preempt NATO's massive nuclear strike. Some statements indicate a high confidence in detecting NATO preparations, but others express doubt regarding timely warning of last-minute measures. Pact exercises depict both contingencies.

Whether or not the Pact successfully preempted such a strike, its spokesmen apparently believe that the Pact's forces could rapidly exploit breaches in the NATO defenses regardless of their own losses. Soviet concepts continue to call for Pact forces to cross Western Europe in two to three weeks, before substantial NATO reinforcements could be mobilized or brought from overseas.

#### **NATO's War Aims**

During the early sixties, Soviet military writers saw a NATO-Pact conflict as part of a nuclear world war. In their view, NATO nuclear strikes would supplement a US surprise attack on the Soviet Union and its allies. Senior generals asserted that NATO planned to occupy Eastern Europe and much of the western USSR during its main operations, perhaps followed by a further drive in a subsequent phase.

Since the mid-sixties, Pact commentators have expressed changing views of NATO's war aims. At least during nonnuclear operations, most spokesmen have seen these aims as limited primarily to Eastern Europe, although with preparations for an attack on Soviet territory. They claim that West German military leaders have largely determined the alleged NATO objectives of achieving German reunification and seizing Poland, Czechoslovakia, and a portion of the Baltic USSR.

The commentators have not speculated on how escalation to theater-wide nuclear operations would affect NATO objectives. Commentary in the late sixties played down previous statements that a NATO-Pact conflict would almost certainly escalate to global war, but more recent Pact writings and exercise scenarios indicate that the Soviets regard escalation as highly probable.

4  
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Pact and Soviet commentary on NATO war aims probably serves largely propaganda purposes. East European statements and Pact exercise scenarios stressing West German "revanchist" ambitions revive wartime memories of German conquest and promote Pact unity under Soviet control. They may also be intended to counteract the impact of Bonn's policies aimed at improved relations with its eastern neighbors.

### **Prewar Actions**

#### *Preparations for a Campaign*

Pact commentaries since the early sixties have contained varying estimates of the nature and extent of NATO preparations for a war in Central Europe. Most exercise scenarios and surveys envisage covert prewar actions lasting several weeks, with force deployments during the final week. Many of these statements depict NATO efforts to disguise these measures as exercises and routine procedures, but the writers claim that Pact intelligence would detect major NATO movements and would provide at least several days for counterpreparations—a theme reflected in Pact exercises.

Pact military analysts also assert that NATO might launch an attack without preparation. In nearly all cases, they see this as a massive initial strike by all available nuclear forces. In their view, NATO leaders might regard the advantage of surprise as outweighing the limited forces available to exploit the results of the strike. Some military theorists argue that NATO plans a conventional attack without mobilization, but this view is not reflected in most Pact commentary.

Pact classified writings depict NATO forces as capable of mounting a conventional defense with little preparation. A recent survey credits NATO as being able to commit initial units within hours and to bring its main forces to bear in one or two days. Citing NATO exercises, a senior Soviet analyst concluded that NATO planned to conduct an aggressive defense without any appreciable expansion of its peacetime strength. Pact analysts estimate that, at increased readiness, about half of available NATO aircraft could take off within 15 minutes and that naval forces could deploy to operational areas in less than a day.

#### *Levels of Strength*

Recent Pact estimates credit NATO with a capability for sizable expansion over several weeks of mobilization. In their view, only about half of

~~5  
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NATO's 23 peacetime divisions in Central Europe are close to wartime strength; the others would require two weeks to a month to reach this level. The number of divisions could rise to about 35 after 10 days and to around 39 after a month.

Pact analysts credit the US with an excellent capability for sea and air reinforcement. They calculate that NATO tactical air strength could rise by one-third after 10 days and almost double after about three weeks. In their view, NATO naval forces could amass nearly 1,000 combat ships for European operations.

Even reinforced, however, NATO's conventional forces are inferior to the Pact's and are unable to conduct sustained operations, according to Pact commentaries. They note that NATO exercise scenarios typically depict NATO forces as heavily outnumbered. Some Pact scenarios show the two sides equal in manpower but credit the Pact with a significant superiority in major weapons (such as tanks and artillery). Moreover, these scenarios exaggerate the Pact's estimates of available NATO forces.

#### *Clandestine Warfare*

Perhaps the most bizarre aspect of Pact classified commentary concerns the possible use of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons by NATO special forces teams prior to large-scale combat. According to a few Soviet writings in the mid- to late-sixties, NATO would attempt to infiltrate large numbers of these teams into the Pact rear to conduct reconnaissance, lead dissident groups, and disrupt mobilization.

#### *Conventional Campaign*

*Air Offensive.* Soviet and East European commentaries state that NATO would begin a nonnuclear campaign with a large-scale air attack. Pact analysts estimate that only a small portion of NATO's tactical aircraft would be withheld from this strike as a nuclear-armed reserve.

Pact statements conflict as to NATO's priorities among the missions of air superiority, interdiction, and ground support. In general, Pact commentators conclude that most initial strikes would be against Pact tactical air and major ground forces (especially nuclear systems), and that later strikes would attack primarily rear forces, facilities, and lines of communication.

~~6~~

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According to Pact classified statements, NATO aircraft would attempt to reduce their losses by concentrating attacks on narrow corridors, flying at low altitudes, and using extensive electronic countermeasures. In the late sixties, Soviet analysts calculated that NATO aircraft could evade the majority of Pact SAMs by using these tactics. Pact interceptors could engage the attackers, but they would be vulnerable to NATO preemption. These writers credited NATO with the ability to neutralize large numbers of Pact air defense radars and control systems on the main axes of the attack.

*Air Defense.* Since at least the mid-sixties, Soviet writers have described NATO's air defenses as formidable and deeply echeloned, consisting of large numbers of fighters and SAMs with nuclear warheads. Recent statements report NATO plans to substantially increase its antiaircraft artillery forces for use against low-flying aircraft. NATO leaders are said to regard air defense as essential both to air supremacy and to successful ground operations. Pact spokesmen have concluded that it would be difficult to reduce greatly the overall effectiveness of these defenses in conventional operations.

*Ground Operations.* Pact commentaries present two different views of NATO nonnuclear ground operations. One view, contained in Soviet classified writings, concentrates on NATO's defense against a Pact offensive and generally discounts a NATO ground attack, although it does not exclude it. The other view, advanced in East European statements and in widely circulated Soviet military writings, pays greater attention to purported NATO planning for offensive operations. This difference suggests that top Soviet military leaders receive a relatively straightforward picture of NATO concepts for ground combat, whereas other Soviet and Pact officers are given a highly distorted description.

*Offensive Tactics.* Those Pact commentaries that describe a NATO conventional offensive claim that NATO forces would attempt to concentrate superior firepower against the defenders while seeking to minimize losses from possible nuclear strikes. They state that NATO forces would assemble beyond the range of Pact tactical systems, moving to the front along dispersed routes during air and artillery preparation. NATO commanders would bring up artillery reserves to provide massive fire against Pact nuclear and armored forces.

7  
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These writers assert that NATO would rely heavily on its armored forces for the breakthrough of Pact defenses and subsequent exploitation. In their view, NATO divisions would mass along narrow sectors of the front, employing most of their armor in the first attack. After achieving a breakthrough, NATO armored forces would advance rapidly to prevent Pact units from organizing a defense. Some Soviet writers hold that NATO plans to increase its armored strength, especially by equipping its infantry with more combat vehicles.

Several Pact commentaries note an important role for NATO airborne and, more recently, airmobile forces in an offensive. According to these writings, NATO units could land several battalion-size units in the Pact tactical rear to disrupt defenses, conduct commando raids, capture important areas, and blunt Pact counterattacks. One military writer claimed these forces provide NATO with the capability for a highly mobile, intense offensive.

*Defense Strategy.* According to some Pact statements, NATO ground forces would go onto the defensive if their nonnuclear offensive failed or were preempted. Classified Soviet writings, however, citing NATO exercises, have held that defense would be the main form of NATO conventional ground operations, owing to Pact superiority.

Soviet commentators describe initial and main NATO defenses as centered around antitank forces that would be clustered along the most probable Pact advance routes. NATO's initial defenses would consist of armored forces and strongpoints manned by infantry and intended to slow a Pact advance. Main forces, located behind these units, would seek to contain the Pact attack as far forward as possible, delivering concentrated strikes to throw Pact forces off balance and seize the initiative. Soviet writers hold that the absence of strong NATO reserves greatly weakens NATO's ability to conduct a sustained defense.

*Naval Operations.* Since the mid-sixties, Soviet military writers have characterized NATO naval operations during a conventional phase as aimed at supporting land operations and neutralizing the Pact's naval forces in the Baltic. Pact analysts estimated in the late sixties that NATO-allotted aircraft carriers could commit about 200 conventionally armed aircraft against Pact targets in the rear. More recent reports contend that NATO naval forces would move into position prior to a conflict to prevent Pact forces from

8

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transiting the Danish Straits and interdicting NATO sea communications. In addition, these commentaries claim, NATO plans to conduct division-size landings along the Baltic coast (including the USSR). They note that NATO's naval forces also provide a substantial reinforcement capability.

### **Nuclear Transition**

Pact commentators conclude that NATO's inferiority to the Pact in conventional forces would compel its leaders to use nuclear weapons after a relatively brief period of fighting. They cite NATO exercises to show that this is NATO's view as well. Some Pact writings and exercises depict initial nuclear strikes by NATO if its ground attack were threatened, but most Soviet classified statements hold that NATO would begin nuclear strikes when advancing Pact forces had penetrated its main defenses. Most Pact commentaries portray such strikes on about the third to fifth day of fighting, but some Soviet analysts warn against setting an arbitrary limit on the duration of nonnuclear combat. They stress that escalation is a function of the operational situation, not of time.

Since the mid-sixties, Pact writers have estimated that NATO probably would limit its initial nuclear strikes. Some writings and exercises have portrayed the use of low-yield nuclear land mines and SAMs on NATO territory prior to tactical air and missile attacks. They claim that the subkiloton nuclear weapons which the US reportedly plans to mass-produce would further increase NATO's flexibility. Pact analysts hold that, whatever their form, these strikes would have only localized effects and would mainly signal the threat of escalation if a Pact advance continued.

One Soviet commentator, in a classified writing in the mid-1960s, speculated that NATO might warn Pact commanders before a strike in order to encourage restraint. But Pact commentators conclude that NATO has little confidence that limited strikes would halt an offensive. Citing NATO exercises, they portray NATO's use of massive nuclear strikes after a brief period.

### **Massive Nuclear Operations**

*Preparations.* Pact commentaries present differing views of NATO's preparations to deliver massive nuclear strikes and of the Pact's ability to preempt them. Pact reports cite measures such as movement of nuclear weapons and deployment of delivery systems as indications of NATO intent.

~~9~~  
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But some classified statements maintain that NATO probably would take most of these steps long before a mass strike, and that last-minute preparations would be few, hard to detect, and too late to permit preemption. Accordingly, one Soviet analyst has suggested reliance on agent reports of NATO nuclear decisionmaking.

*Air Operations.* Pact commentaries maintain that NATO would conduct a nuclear air offensive to achieve a decisive advantage over Pact forces during the first days of large-scale nuclear operations. In this view, NATO's main strikes would be against Pact nuclear and air forces and strategic reserves in order to gain superiority and weaken the Pact's reinforcement capability. As in conventional air operations, Pact commentators estimate that NATO would attempt to break through air defenses on several axes, using high-density raids at low altitudes with widespread electronic countermeasures.

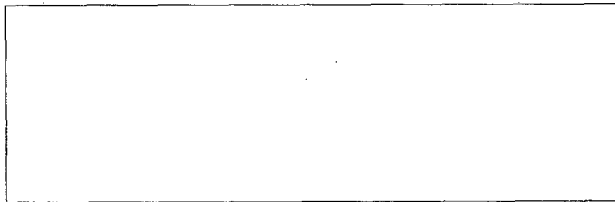
Pact analysts note NATO estimates of heavy losses during these strikes and stress the vulnerability of tactical aircraft to Pact preemption because of NATO's reliance on only a few permanent airfields. These analysts calculate that Pact air attacks with nuclear weapons could rapidly degrade NATO's air defenses.

*Ground Operations.* Pact military spokesmen hold that NATO ground forces would participate in the first massive nuclear strike with all available systems. This strike would aim at destroying the main Pact forward forces, permitting NATO's armored units to stage a high-speed attack. As in conventional operations, airborne troops would support the attack. Pact analysts see this plan as the same, regardless of whether NATO ground forces had previously been conducting an offensive or a defense. They report the belief of NATO leaders that these strikes would enable a rapid advance across Pact territory, and they estimate that the strikes might produce high losses, especially among the Pact's tactical nuclear forces.

*Naval Operations.* Pact commentaries envisage that NATO naval forces would play an important part in nuclear combat. They state that naval aircraft would conduct nuclear strikes against targets in the Soviet rear and against Pact naval and coastal defense forces. They also estimate that NATO's antisubmarine forces would become increasingly active, in an attempt to prevent Pact disruption of NATO sea transport and the operations of NATO aircraft carriers.

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*Concluding Operations.* Since at least the mid-1960s, several Pact commentators have described NATO plans for "subsequent operations" following the defeat of Pact main forces. In their view, surviving NATO forces and reinforcements would conduct prolonged, low-intensity operations to crush Pact resistance and establish control over occupied territory. Because nearly all NATO nuclear weapons would be exhausted, NATO, according to some Pact writers, would airlift nuclear systems for use against Pact remnants and newly mobilized forces.





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