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# Soviet Military Development: General Staff Planning for the 1990s

*An Intelligence Assessment*

CIA/SOV 91-10009

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SOV 91-10009  
March 1991

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# Soviet Military Development: General Staff Planning for the 1990s

*An Intelligence Assessment*

This paper was prepared by Office of  
Soviet Analysis

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SOV 91-10009  
March 1991

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### Soviet Military Development: General Staff Planning for the 1990s

#### Key Judgments

*Information available  
as of 31 January 1991  
was used in this report.*

The Soviet General Staff is preparing plans for the development of the armed forces under tumultuous conditions. It must grapple with the deterioration of the Soviet economy, including growing disarray in the defense-industrial base. It must accommodate sweeping changes in threats, as military confrontation with the West recedes, internal strife increases, and regional threats loom on the horizon. It also must learn to operate in a new policymaking environment, as new government agencies, the Supreme Soviet, republic officials, and public opinion all seek to influence defense policy. Chief of the General Staff Moiseyev has indicated, nevertheless, that the Staff is preparing development plans for the armed forces to the year 2000.

[ the military's reform agenda, doctrinal statements, force development patterns, and the shape of arms control agreements all indicate that the Soviet military will be smaller and more defensively structured and postured. The Staff probably anticipates little, if any, real growth in Soviet defense spending. Although contingencies are under study, [ ] baseline plans still draw on the material and manpower resources of all 15 republics and assume the mission of defending the Soviet Union as presently configured

Under these conditions, we believe the General Staff will adjust missions, seeking to:

- Ensure that strategic offensive forces can continue to meet existing mission objectives under most conditions of conflict.
- Concentrate strategic defensive forces on ensuring the integrity of Soviet airspace, degrading major attacks, and protecting key facilities.
- Maintain general purpose forces capable of defeating enemy attack, restoring and defending Soviet borders, and controlling adjacent waters.

It will deemphasize:

- Large-scale offensive operations in continental theaters to gain and secure territory.
- Projection of military power to distant continental and maritime theaters.
- Large-scale programs to defend against ballistic missile attack.

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The Staff will attempt to maintain capabilities by emphasizing quality—developing critical military technologies, fielding improved weapons, and fostering high proficiency in military personnel.

We believe these changing objectives are affecting General Staff planning for all strategic and general purpose force components:

- Smaller and increasingly mobile strategic offensive forces would be able to meet most current damage goals, given improvements in weapon lethality. More drastic cuts associated with a START II treaty would still permit counterforce targeting but probably not comprehensive targeting of other military and government facilities.
- Smaller strategic defensive forces, even if further modernized, would only moderate damage from a large-scale strategic attack. The loss of defensive depth, especially in the west, will degrade Soviet ability to defeat an air attack.
- Smaller, restructured theater ground and air forces deployed on Soviet territory will concentrate on achieving a deeply echeloned defense of the homeland. A large portion of the most capable ground and air force units will be deployed along the western borders, while ground units better configured for static defense will probably be deployed in larger numbers along the southern border. The Staff probably anticipates that Soviet forces would be able to defeat any conventional attack on the Soviet homeland.
- Smaller general purpose naval forces would further concentrate on the protection of the SSBN force and defense of the homeland. The Staff probably expects that these changes will sustain the Navy's current ability to protect the SSBN force but will erode its limited ability to conduct operations in distant waters.

Although the General Staff probably accepts that the likelihood of general war has declined, it probably still concludes that it must prepare for at least the same array of military contingencies as before and, because of regional and internal instabilities, probably more. It will work to retain the ability to apply decisive force quickly to internal or regional conflicts and probably is more confident that such conflicts would not escalate. By contrast, Soviet sources indicate that USSR force withdrawals, reductions in Eastern Europe, and loss of Warsaw Pact allies would make war with a powerful adversary—like NATO—more difficult, possibly involving loss of Soviet territory before an attack were halted. The Staff probably concludes that the prospect of intercontinental nuclear conflict has declined as a

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consequence of the decreasing likelihood of a NATO-Pact conflict, but there is no indication that the Staff has modified its view of the low likelihood of limiting nuclear war with the United States once the threshold had been crossed, or with respect to how strategic strikes would be executed. Overall, although the Staff is probably experiencing pain over the downsizing and defensive reorientation of Soviet forces, it probably is confident that the forces it is counting on would be able to generally execute the new, less demanding guidance.

The General Staff, nevertheless, appreciates that a variety of developments could undermine this planning. Escalating economic problems and internal political instability would wreck the anticipated modernization and manning of even diminished Soviet forces. Disintegration of the union would further orient Staff planning toward internal and regional conflicts, would undermine planning to mount a conventional defense in the west, and could drastically degrade Soviet strategic defense capabilities. If radical military reformers gained the upper hand, they could force the Staff to effectively adopt a minimum deterrence posture, consolidate the combat services, and rely on a small volunteer force

Under any scenario, the General Staff is on the defensive. It has strong motivation to slow the decline in military power by influencing the Soviet political process, and it probably will point to demonstrated Western technological and operational prowess in Operation Desert Storm as justification for nurturing Soviet military power. Even a new leadership more favorably disposed to the military, however, would be hard pressed to reverse the underlying socioeconomic deterioration that is driving the decline.

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