



RAD Background Report/37
(Military Affairs)
13 February 1989

A NEW COMMANDER IN CHIEF FOR THE WARSAW PACT

by Douglas Clarke

Summary: There is a new Commander in Chief of the Warsaw Pact. This position is often equated with NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in Europe. In fact, there are few similarities.

* * *

It has been announced in Moscow that Marshal Viktor Kulikov is stepping down as the Commander in Chief of the Joint Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact, to be replaced by General of the Army Petr Lushch. Lushch will become only the fifth Commander in Chief in the thirty-four-year history of the Warsaw Pact. While his position is sometimes likened to that of the NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, there are far more differences than similarities between these two jobs.

No Wartime Role For Lushch. Neither can be considered an operational military commander, at least in peacetime. Other than having control of air defense forces, neither has direct command over significant numbers of troops from day to day. The big difference is that this would change dramatically for the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe once war broke out, but probably not for Lushch. Most Western analysts believe that the Joint Command that Lushch now heads is a peacetime organization only. On the Soviet side, a war in Europe would be fought by different headquarters and staffs, principally the shadowy High Command of the Western Theater of Military Operations (TVD), believed to be located in Legnica, Poland.

Soviet Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov headed this staff after his replacement as Chief of the General Staff. He has since been succeeded by General Stanislaw Postnikov. Officers commanding the various TVDs all but drop off the face of the earth as far as the public is concerned. Even in this age of glasnost, their names seldom appear in the press, and never in a way that would identify their position. Ogarkov, who was a prolific author when Chief of Staff, was effectively buried as Commander in Chief of the Western TVD.

while the Joint Command would not be used in wartime, many of the forces that comprise the Combined Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact would, of course, be used--especially the various Groups of Soviet Forces and many of the units of the non-Soviet members of the Warsaw Pact. These forces, however, would be under direct Soviet command, using channels outside the formal Joint Command structure. Colonel Wyszard Moklinski, who formerly headed the Operations Directorate of the Polish General Staff, has revealed that the Soviet Union has virtual control over the Polish Army. In wartime, the Polish armed forces would be placed under the command of the Soviet Western TVD.²

Originally a Paper Command. The Joint Command that Lushov now heads is as old as the Warsaw Pact Treaty itself (both were founded on 14 May 1955), but for almost the entire first decade it was very much only a paper organization. The Soviet Union was, and remains, so militarily and politically preponderant in Eastern Europe that it could dictate to its allies what was expected of them in military terms. Even the paper structure of the military wing of the alliance crudely reflected this Soviet supremacy: the Defense Ministers of the non-Soviet partners in the alliance reported to a Soviet Commander in Chief, who was himself but only Deputy Minister of Defense in his own government.

The first challenge faced by the Warsaw Pact was an internal one: the Hungarian uprising in 1956. There was no involvement of the Joint Command--sometimes also referred to as the Combined Command--in the steps taken by the Soviet Union to crush this rebellion. It was not until 1961 that Warsaw Pact armies held their first combined exercises. These exercises increased in both size and frequency and became an important means of molding the East European armed forces and their military doctrine into the Soviet image. They were also used to impress potential foes--NATO--and to put pressure on wayward allies.

Czechoslovakia 1968. As the Prague Spring unfolded, the Soviet Union utilized combined military exercises to put pressure on the Czechoslovak authorities. Ten joint exercises were held in 1968, either in areas of East Germany and Poland adjacent to the CSER or in Czechoslovakia itself. Yet, when the invasion finally took place, the Joint Command was neither involved in the planning nor the execution, despite the participation of troops from all Warsaw Pact countries other than Romania. Likewise, the Warsaw Pact's formal political and military structure played no direct role during the Polish crisis of 1980-1981. One Western study of the Warsaw Pact points out, however, that, of the 103 combined exercises conducted between 1968 and 1983, approximately 40% were used to exert political pressure on Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Poland.³

In the last two decades the Soviet Union has sought to increase at least the semblance of allied participation in security decisions. In 1969 the Combined Command was reorganized so that allied Deputy Defense Ministers, rather than the ministers themselves, became nominal deputy commanders of the Joint Armed Forces. This at least corrected the original oversight in protocol. A permanent Combined Staff was also created that provided for some allied participation, although not at the highest level.

Only Soviets at the Top. Even today, all the top positions in the Joint Command hierarchy are held by Soviet officers. While the American Supreme Allied Commander in Europe has both a German and a British four-star officer as his deputies and the major staff department heads are divided evenly between the nations, all the key positions in the Warsaw Pact Combined Command staff are, without exception, filled by Soviet officers.¹

There are also no combined Warsaw Pact commands at lower levels. The Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, for example, has three major subordinate commanders in Europe, each with a combined staff and each responsible for defending a geographic region in Western Europe. One of these commanders is British, one American, and one German. These major commanders, in turn, have subordinate headquarters that are often also multinational. None of this integration exists in the Warsaw Pact.

All this is not to say that Lushch will not have plenty to do in his new position. The position of Commander in Chief of the Warsaw Pact is a very visible one. In his 12 years of tenure in the job, Bulikov made an average of one visit a month to a non-Soviet Warsaw Pact country. The formal structure of the Eastern alliance has fallen into the same regular pattern as NATO, with frequent meetings of Defense Ministers, Foreign Ministers, and lower level coordinating and consultative bodies. Most of these include the Commander in Chief. Like the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, he must also often cajole reluctant allied leaders to do more for the common defense. One sign of the changing times could be that he will probably no longer be too successful in this regard.

* * *

1. Some people believe that at least the Soviet elements in the Joint Command would have a wartime role, perhaps as the basis of a higher command level placed between the TVOs and by the Staffs of the Soviet Supreme High Command. The Joint Command could command a European Theater of War that would guide the efforts of the three European TVOs. See Michael Sadykiewicz, *The Warsaw Pact Command Structure in Peace and War*, RAND Report R-1058-NC (Santa Monica: RAND, September 1968), pp. 34-39.

- 2 See Natalie Gross, *Eastern Europe and Soviet Conditional Warfare: Elements of Analysis* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Soviet Army Studies Office, September, 1967), p. 18.
- 3 Jeffrey Sison, *Warsaw Pact Forces: Problems of Command and Control* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1965), p. 136.
- 4 Sedukhin, op. cit., p. 7.

- end -