NATO study: Estimate of the relative strength and capabilities of NATO and Soviet Bloc Forces at present and in the immediate future (23 November 1951)

Caption: On 23 November 1951, a confidential North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) document sets out the military capabilities of the Soviet bloc countries if they should attack the NATO countries.

Source: International Staff, Bruxelles. NATO Archives. C8-D/4. M. C. 33. Etude sur forces du bloc de l'Est.

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URL:
http://www.cvce.eu/obj/nato_study_estimate_of_the_relative_strength_and_capabilities_of_nato_and_soviet_bloc_forces_at_present_and_in_the_immediate_future_23_november_1951-en-4268372f-e0b1-4204-8f3e-592f0608cfec.html

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Soviet divisions will remain at approximately the present level through 1954, but that the armament, mobility and capability of these forces for sustained combat will have improved. A significant increase in numbers and capabilities of the European Satellite forces has occurred since 1950, and by 1954 it is estimated that with Soviet assistance and equipment the present Satellite divisions could be substantially increased in number. In addition to numerical growth, it is estimated that the capabilities of the European Satellites will have increased by 1954 to a point where they would possess significant offensive capabilities, without support of Soviet tactical forces, although sustained combat would require major Soviet logistical support, and all operations would probably be under Soviet direction and supervision.

NAVAL FORCES

45. The Soviet Navy at present comprises 3 old battleships, 16-19 cruisers, 155 destroyers, over 300 submarines and large numbers of coastal craft, minesweepers, etc. The Naval Aviation consists of about 3,000 aircraft. Cruisers, destroyers and submarines are being built in large numbers, partly as reinforcements and partly as replacements for obsolete vessels. The total personnel strength at present is about 685,000 of which about 275,000 are Marines and Coast Defense personnel, and 85,000 are in the Naval Air Arm. It is estimated that by 1954 the Soviet Navy will have substantially increased its surface and submarine strength, particularly in ocean-going submarines.

46. The present distribution of ocean-going and coastal submarines is as shown below. The ocean-going submarines have a radius of action which varies according to class from 1,000 to 3,500 miles and carry 10 to 20 torpedoes or double that number of mines. Some can carry both weapons. The coastal submarines have a radius of action of about 500 miles and carry from two to four torpedoes or from four to eight mines. It is therefore clear that the former could not operate with air support from present Soviet bases.

47. The Naval Forces of the Soviet Satellites are not included in this report as they contain only small craft suitable for local defense operations.

AIR FORCES

48. The Soviet Air Forces, which include the Air Forces of the Soviet Army, Fighter Aviation of Air Defense, Long Range Aviation, Naval Aviation, and a small airborne force, comprise a total strength of about 20,000 operational aircraft. In addition, the European Satellite air forces have an estimated strength of at least 1,200 aircraft. While the number of aircraft in operational units is not expected to be increased, it is expected that by 1954 virtually all the fighter strength and a considerable proportion of the light and a small proportion of medium bombers will be jet-engined types and that combat efficiency will be significantly increased.

STATUS OF SUPPLY

49. It is estimated that the Soviet Army at present has a considerable stockpile of weapons, ammunitions, supplies and equipment sufficient to sustain its present ground forces and those readily mobilizable in combat for an extended period. There are adequate supplies of oil, food, etc., to service the Soviet Baltic, Northern and Black Sea fleets. The aircraft industry and associated industries are providing the Soviet Air Forces with a steady supply of new and modern aircraft and equipment. This supply will probably be large enough to allow the maintenance of a large war reserve. During the period under review, the over-all status of supply of the Soviet Armed Forces will have improved.

MILITARY MOBILIZATION

GENERAL

50. The Armed Forces of the Soviet Union (including security troops) include a total of about 4,200,000-

5,000,000 men. In addition there are about 20,000,000-25,000,000 men of military age of whom about 10,000,000 have served in the Armed Forces, many of the remainder have had some degree of military training. The major problem of mobilization will be the allocation of technicians and individuals with mechanical skills among the three Military Services and the war economy. The Armed Forces of the European Satellites (including security troops but excluding East German forces) include a total of about 1,200,000 to 1,600,000 men with about 4,500,000 additional fit males who have had varying degrees of training but most of whom would require additional training.

GROUND FORCES

51. It is estimated that the Soviet Army is capable of expanding during the first 30 days of mobilization to a personnel strength of about 8,000,000 men, organized into 320 line divisions. Further mobilization after that period would permit the formation of additional divisions. While the European Satellites could provide substantial forces in addition to the present strengths, equipment and not manpower will be the factor limiting the number of ground force units that could be ultimately mobilized. The availability of equipment from either Soviet or indigenous sources cannot be estimated at this time.

NAVAL FORCES

52. Assuming that the personnel strength of the Soviet Navy at the beginning of mobilization remains substantially the same as at the present, it is estimated that the Soviet Navy can mobilize by M [no less than] 30 days to a strength of 885,000 men. Since the Soviet Navy does not maintain a reserve fleet, but maintains its fleets in operational readiness, the mobilization of the Navy would not be a major problem.

AIR FORCES

53. It is estimated that the personnel strength of Soviet Air Forces is at least 600,000 and will have increased to approximately 800,000 by 1954. It is believed that the Soviets could mobilize a total strength of 1,200,000 in all components of military aviation, including naval, shortly after M-Day. It is estimated that at present 45,000 men are assigned to the European Satellite air forces. Their mobilization potential depends in considerable measure on the degree of dependability of the reserve personnel, and it is not possible to determine what number might be considered reliable by the Soviets.

MILITARY CAPABILITIES IN THE EVENT OF WAR

GENERAL

54. A vital factor necessary for the fulfillment of the Soviet political aims is the maintenance of a predominance of military strength and military potential over the aggregate forces of the anti-Soviet Bloc.

55. The Soviet Bloc forces, possessing the advantage of unity of command, concentration of force on interior lines, and the ability to exercise the initiative, are so disposed, organized and equipped that they possess the capability of initiating a surprise attack (i.e., attack without warning) by forward deployed forces at any time.

56. There can be no assurance of an advance warning even of a more deliberate attack, but should the Soviet Union decide to build up its forces substantially in Europe, West of the Oder-Neisse line or to make major naval or air preparations foreshortened in time, it should be possible to obtain indications of an impending attack.

CAMPAIGNS

57. It is estimated that the Soviet Bloc has sufficient armed forces to initiate, and after mobilization to sustain, all of the operations listed below, and still retain a reserve.

a. Although the Soviet Union is capable of launching these campaigns simultaneously, such action must be considered as the worst case and the strength of forces given below cannot be reached until after a measure of mobilization.

(1) A campaign against Western Europe progressively building up to 75-120 line divisions, and up to 5,000 tactical aircraft, supported by units of the Baltic Fleet.

(2) An attack against Scandinavia with up to 17 line divisions (9 of which could be taken from those used elsewhere in Western Europe), and at least 800 tactical aircraft, supported by units of the Northern and Baltic Fleets.

(3) An aerial bombardment by the Long Range Aviation against the British Isles and selected strategic targets on the Continent, with at least 350 medium bombers plus light bombers.

(4) A campaign against the Balkans, including European Turkey, with up to 60 line divisions, and at least 2,000 tactical aircraft, supported by units of the Black Sea Fleet.

(5) After Austria and/or Northern Yugoslavia have been over-run, campaigns against Italy with initially 15-20 line divisions, possibly all Soviet, and up to 800 tactical aircraft (taken from those initially used in the Balkan campaigns).

(6) Campaigns against the Near and Middle East including Asiatic Turkey with about 30 line divisions (10 of which would be taken from those used in European Turkey), and up to 1,600 tactical aircraft, supported by units of the Black Sea Fleet.

(7) Attacks against Canada and the United States, including Alaska and the Aleutians. Attacks could include mining, amphibious and airborne operations within range limitations, and aerial attack (conventional and atomic) against Canada and most of the United States.

(8) A sea and air offensive against Allied sea communications.

(9) Subversive activities and sabotage against Allied interests in all parts of the world.

(10) Defense of the Soviet Union against hostile attack.

(11) The Soviet Union is also capable of undertaking campaigns in the Far East, but these are outside the scope of this paper.

The reference to mining, amphibious and airborne operations only in paragraph 57 a. (7) above does not imply that these may not also form part of some of the other campaigns.

b. If successful in the occupation of the Channel Port areas, a full-scale sea and air offensive designed to neutralize the British Isles, followed by an attempted invasion.

c. If successful in over-running the intermediate areas:

(1) A campaign against the Iberian Peninsula.

(2) Air attacks against other areas vital to Western defense.

58. It is considered at present that the above land campaigns would be carried out principally by Soviet forces, with the exception of the Balkan campaign. However, by 1954, more Satellite divisions could be used in addition to the Soviet forces, depending upon logistical considerations. Some Satellite forces are already fit for combat, and the Satellite contributions will gradually increase.

ATOMIC WEAPONS

59. The Soviet atomic stockpile will continue to increase, but it is considered that the advantage in numbers of atomic weapons possessed by the United States will not be reduced.

60. The Soviet Union has and will have sufficient aircraft, trained crews, and suitable bases to warrant an attempt to deliver in the United States, in the United Kingdom, and in the Continent, the full stockpile of atomic bombs that are now, and will become available. The Soviet Union has the capability for clandestine atomic explosions in ports and in selected inland areas.

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