

Report on the Soviet armed forces (1954)

Caption: In the midst of the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) draws up a report on the development of the Soviet armed forces between 1947 and 1954 and highlights the threat of these forces to Western Europe.

Source: LORD ISMAY, Hastings Lionel. NATO, The First Five Years. Brussels: NATO, 1954. 280 p. p. 112-113.

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/report_on_the_soviet_armed_forces_1954-en-6780bfba-7db9-446a-8754-d2ec2ae2c6ff.html

Last updated: 02/07/2015

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Since 1947, the numerical strength of the Soviet ground forces has remained fairly constant at 175 divisions: but their mobility and fire-power have been greatly increased by mechanisation and modernisation of equipment. There are now 65 tank and mechanised divisions: the rifle divisions have been motorised and equipped with tanks and additional artillery. The Soviet potential in airborne troops has been considerably increased since World War II.

The number of satellite divisions has almost doubled since 1947, bringing their total to about 80 divisions.

The USSR, Eastern Germany and the East European satellites today have an aggregate of over six million men under arms. Approximately 4½ million of these are in the ground forces. A high state of preparedness is maintained by a rigorous training programme.

The USSR has a ready-made spearhead for a rapid advance into Western Europe. This is composed of 22 Soviet divisions in Eastern Germany. The bulk of these are armoured divisions with nearly a complete complement of tanks and self-propelled guns. Behind this spearhead there are an additional 60 Soviet divisions located in the Eastern European satellite countries and Western USSR. (This does not take into account satellite divisions).

The Soviet mobilisation system is tested periodically. It is estimated that, 30 days after mobilisation, the Soviet and satellite ground forces could number 400 divisions.

The numerical strength of the Soviet air forces in recent years has been constant at about 20,000 aircraft; but very considerable modernisation has taken place. In 1951, about 20 per cent of their fighters were jet types: by early 1954, almost all of their fighters were jet types. In early 1951, jet light bombers had not been introduced into operational units: by 1954, well over two-thirds of their light bomber force were jets. In the medium bomber category, the Soviets have, since 1951, doubled the number of Tu-4s (similar to the US B-29) in operational units. Still newer types of jet fighters have recently appeared. Newer types of medium and heavy bombers, including jet models, have also been observed.

The development of a comprehensive aviation training programme has substantially enhanced the capability of Soviet air power.

Up to 1951, the combat value of the satellite air forces was insignificant, and their aircraft were obsolete. By 1954, not only had their numerical strength been doubled, but nearly half of their fighters were jets. In addition their facilities have been improved, and training has reached a fairly satisfactory standard.

In the past three years the Soviets have about tripled the number of major airfields in Eastern Europe which will accommodate jet fighters. This construction is still proceeding, especial attention being directed to the provision of very long runways.

The growing complex of airfields throughout Eastern Europe, the aircraft control and warning systems and anti-aircraft artillery dispositions of the Soviet bloc are rapidly becoming capable of providing an effective air defence belt along the western perimeter of the USSR.

The Soviet navy has over 300 submarines in service, of which about half are large or medium ocean-going types. The current large-scale naval construction programme lays emphasis on the continued production of large ocean-going submarines. Moreover, the surface forces include three battleships, 24 cruisers and 150 destroyers.

There are large stock-piles of sea mines, and the Soviet have considerable power of minelaying both by sea and air.

There have been remarkable developments in the fields of atomic, chemical and biological warfare, and of

guided missiles.

The Soviet economy has maintained a level of military production which has proved sufficient not only to provide equipment and supplies for the Soviet and satellite forces, but also to increase their stockpiles. They have, for example, more than enough tanks, mortars, and anti-tank guns for some 300-odd Soviet divisions, and their stockpile of field artillery and anti-aircraft artillery is several times that required to supply those divisions. Production of these items is continuing apace.