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Warsaw Pact Military Perceptions of NATO Nuclear Initiation

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An Intelligence Assessment

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SOV 86-10029.IX

June 1986

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Warsaw Pact Military Perceptions of NATO Nuclear Initiation

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by [redacted] Office
of Soviet Analysis. Comments and queries are
welcome and may be directed to the Chief,

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[redacted] SOVA, [redacted]
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Warsaw Pact Military Perceptions of NATO Nuclear Initiation

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 1 April 1986
was used in this report.*

The key tenet of Soviet doctrine for nuclear war holds that delivery of the *first* massed strike provides a decisive, potentially war-winning advantage. Consequently, Soviet military doctrine is preeminently concerned with first use and has a strong bias for preemption on a massive scale. A decision by the Soviets to preempt in a European war would depend upon their perceptions and observations of NATO activities and their predictions of the circumstances under which NATO would use nuclear weapons.

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the Soviets lack confidence in their ability to detect preparations for NATO's imminent use of nuclear weapons. Hence, we judge that the Soviets' perceptions of the catalysts and conditions for NATO first use would be critical to their decision to preempt.

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Analysis of authoritative writings leads us to conclude that the Warsaw Pact assesses the conventional "correlation of forces" as being in its favor, especially in ground forces. The Pact believes that, barring the unforeseen, victory in a war is possible without first use of nuclear weapons. We judge that Soviet leaders would approve the first use of nuclear weapons for only two reasons: to preempt NATO's large-scale use or to prevent general defeat. Only the first reason receives serious attention from Pact theorists because the second is seen only as a remote possibility.

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The Soviet General Staff's perception of why NATO might initiate nuclear warfare, as echoed throughout the Warsaw Pact military, varies significantly in some ways from Western plans and intentions.

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Drawing upon their analyses of NATO's doctrine, exercises, nuclear decisionmaking, and defense plans, Pact strategists have refined their estimates of the cause and timing of NATO nuclear initiation into four major cases:

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- *NATO strikes early and massively.* Such a strike typically would occur on the first day of the war, followed by NATO thrusts into Eastern Europe. This is seen by the Pact as an attempt to initiate a decisive surprise attack and is described [] as the worst case.
- *NATO strikes to support its first main defense line.* Such an attack typically would occur when Pact forces threaten to breach NATO defense lines along the Weser River.
- *NATO strikes to hold its final defense line along the Rhine River.* Pact planners assume that nuclear use is virtually certain as their forces reach and attempt to cross the Rhine.
- *No nuclear strikes.* In recent years, Pact writings have begun to give more attention to the possibility of a protracted conventional war.

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Although the Pact devotes considerable effort to prepare against the worst case scenario, it expects to avert it and may see a chance to escape nuclear attack at NATO's first main defense line as well. []

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[] A number of recent major exercises have portrayed Pact forces penetrating NATO's first main defense line without a NATO nuclear response. []

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Sensitive Pact writings stress how critical the Rhine would be in support of a last-ditch defense of West Germany by NATO. No major Pact exercise has simulated an advance beyond the Rhine without nuclear initiation. Several major nonnuclear exercises have ended with a suggestion of imminent nuclear initiation as Pact forces reach and attempt to breach NATO's defenses along the Rhine River. []

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Soviet theorists recognize the paradox in their expectation that the very success of Pact conventional forces would be likely to trigger NATO nuclear strikes to stave off defeat. They further believe that initial limited nuclear strikes by NATO would be ineffective, motivating it to launch larger nuclear strikes. Because Soviet doctrine calls for launching a preemptive, massed nuclear strike once NATO's intention to use nuclear weapons on a large scale is detected, Pact theater successes could lead directly to a general nuclear war. []

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To resolve this paradox, the Soviets have undertaken peacetime and wartime initiatives to weaken NATO's will and capability to use nuclear weapons in a war. They seek to make it difficult for NATO to use nuclear weapons effectively, to demonstrate the futility of their use, and to highlight the risks of preemptive or retaliatory Pact nuclear strikes.

The Soviets' responses to their perception of the probability of NATO nuclear use and the requirement to launch a preemptive massed strike when ordered could, ironically, provide another motivation for Pact first use in a war. Soviet planners and commanders explicitly trade off resources required for the conventional campaign to support the transition to nuclear war. The withholding of additional forces for possible nuclear strikes would reduce the availability of conventional fire support from air and missile units at times when they would be needed to support the Pact assault on NATO defense lines. This is precisely the same time when NATO first use is seen as increasingly likely.

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We believe that the Soviet threshold for nuclear preemption would be lowered significantly at NATO's first main line of defense and especially at the Rhine. Confusion and the Soviets' lack of confidence in their ability to correctly interpret NATO defensive measures heighten the risks of miscalculation. The Soviets believe that NATO plans and prepares for nuclear initiation at these times. The General Staff's recommendations to the Supreme High Command would be made in the context of the staff's own sense of vulnerability to a massive NATO nuclear strike. Regardless of the Supreme High Command's decision, Pact forces would be at maximum readiness to carry out a nuclear strike at these times.

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Warsaw Pact Military Perceptions of NATO Nuclear Initiation

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Introduction

Warsaw Pact analyses of NATO's nuclear doctrine, plans, and exercises help shape Soviet military perceptions of why, when, and how NATO would initiate the use of nuclear weapons in Europe. These perceptions provide a context for monitoring indications of and predicting the first use of nuclear weapons by NATO. Because Pact reconnaissance and intelligence systems would be under severe stress in a crisis and unable to produce conclusive evidence of NATO nuclear preparations,¹ Soviet perceptions of the catalysts and conditions for NATO first use are likely to play a key role in advising the Supreme High Command whether to order a preemptive Pact strike.

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Our evidence indicates that the Soviets have made a concerted effort to understand and predict NATO's behavior. For Soviet theorists and planners, war is a problem amenable to study using the "scientific" principles of Marxism-Leninism. War and human behavior are believed to be predictable when subjected to rigorous, systematic study. Consequently, Soviet military leaders can be expected to give more credence to "scientific forecasts" of enemy behavior than would be the case in Western armies.

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This paper focuses upon Pact perceptions of NATO nuclear initiation. NATO nuclear responses to initial Pact use and the interplay between limited NATO and Pact nuclear strikes also evoke discussion and analysis in Pact military writings. But the key tenet of Soviet nuclear doctrine holds that the side that delivers the first massed strike gains a decisive, potentially war-winning advantage. Thus we observe a preeminent Soviet, and hence Pact-wide, concern over first use, as well as a strong bias toward preemption on a massive scale.

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² For the role played by exercises in the formulation of Soviet military doctrine, see DI Research Paper SOV 86-10014JX (Top Secret April 1986, *The Soviet General Staff: Managing Change in Military Doctrine*).

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¹ These issues are addressed in DI Research Paper SOV 85-10107CX (Top Secret June 1985, *Warsaw Pact Tactical Forces: Capabilities and Readiness for Nuclear War*).

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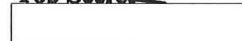
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The Influence of NATO Exercises on the Warsaw Pact

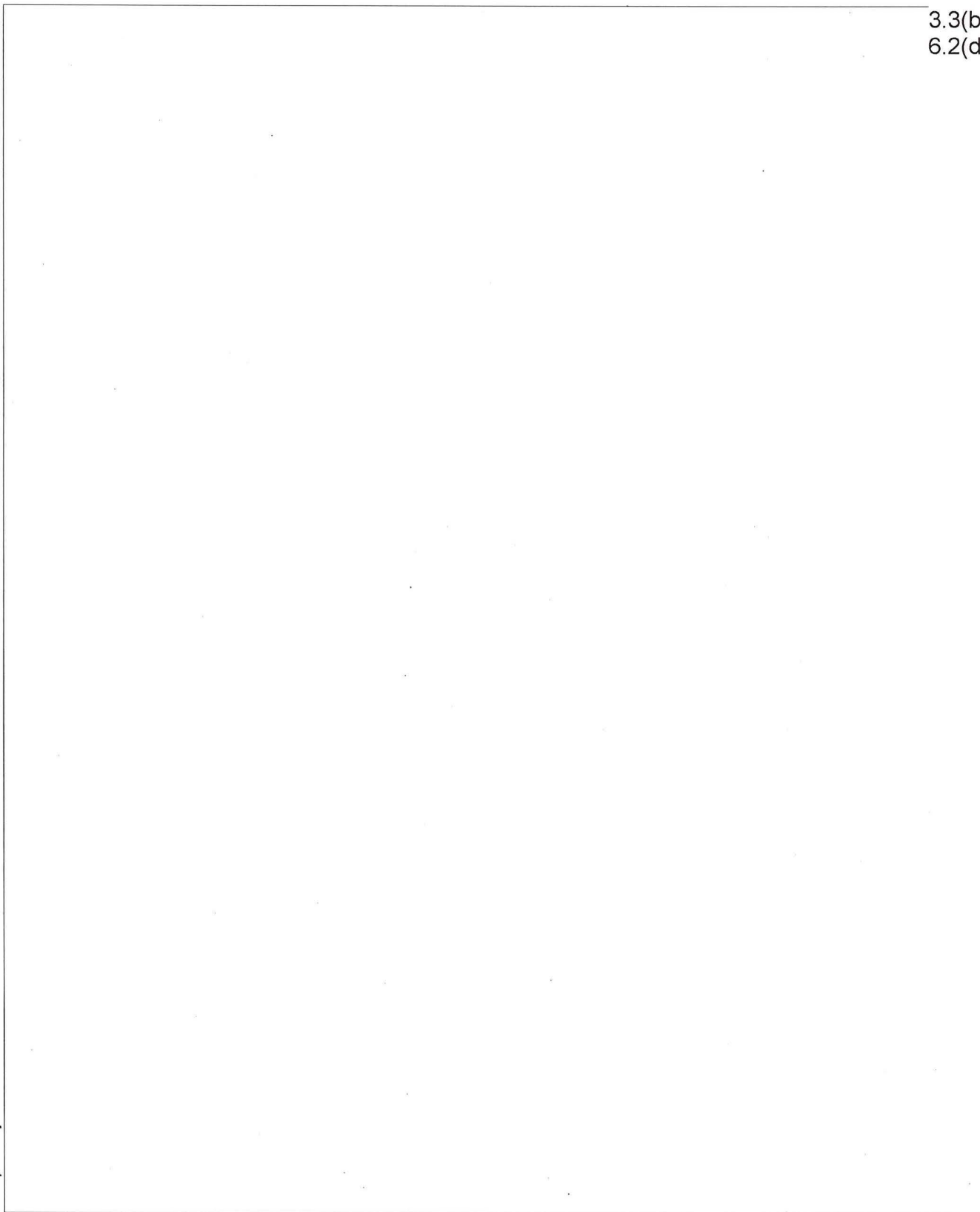
<p>3.3(b)(1) 6.2(d)</p> <p><i>Sensitive Pact military writings</i> [redacted] show that the Pact devotes considerable effort to monitoring NATO exercises and is influenced by its observations. ^a The Pact writes specifically that large, multinational exercises are a primary vehicle for NATO to work out its contingencies and plans for a future war in Europe. The influence of NATO exercises on Pact perceptions and thus indirectly on doctrine can be seen in the following examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NATO and the Pact both foresee longer periods of conventional combat before nuclear employment. On the basis of NATO exercises, the Pact perceives that NATO sees a trend toward longer periods of conventional combat before nuclear weapons are employed. Whereas NATO exercises in the early 1960s went only one or a few days before nuclear weapons were introduced, by the mid-1970s the conventional period lasted four or five days, and by the late 1970s it stretched to about a week. [redacted] <p>3.3(b)(1) 6.2(d)</p>	<p>[redacted]</p>	<p>3.3(b)(1) 6.2(d)</p>
<p>3.3(b)(1) 6.2(d)</p> <p>[redacted]</p>	<p>[redacted] In recent years, Pact exercises depicting NATO first use are even more common. The depiction in Pact exercises of NATO as bearing the onus for initiating nuclear use fulfills both training and propaganda purposes. Nevertheless, the reason for NATO's initial use of nuclear weapons conforms to the Soviets' assessments and appears to reflect their perceptions of NATO nuclear planning and intent.</p> <p>[redacted] 6.2(d)</p>	

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Finally, the language of the discussion helps determine the intellectual framework of Soviet and NSWP writings about war in general and nuclear war in particular. Appendix A provides a lexicon of major Soviet terms concerning nuclear war. [redacted]

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Misperceptions of NATO Nuclear Policies

In describing NATO nuclear policies, Warsaw Pact military writers reveal perceptions that sometimes vary significantly from NATO's actual plans and intentions (see inset on pages 2 and 3). These misperceptions cannot be explained simply by a lack of information. To the contrary, [redacted]

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[redacted] the Soviets, and to a lesser degree the NSWP countries, have gathered extensive information about NATO's nuclear capabilities, doctrine, and plans. They expend considerable resources monitoring NATO exercises and incorporate their observations into their own exercises and doctrine. [redacted]

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We believe most Warsaw Pact misperceptions result from projecting Soviet doctrine, command arrangements, and intentions onto NATO. This mirror imaging is most apparent in Pact descriptions of NATO decisionmaking and the military reasons for NATO nuclear initiation. On the other hand, Pact writers discuss NATO defense plans and the most likely form of NATO first use without major distortions. [redacted]

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Distorted Pact perceptions do not skew its threat assessments in a single direction. Some appear to diminish NATO's nuclear threat, but most enhance it. It is ironic that the Pact could hardly face a more obstinate and challenging foe in the nuclear arena than its own mirror image. [redacted]

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Perceptions of NATO Nuclear Decisionmaking

In its military writings, the Pact generally portrays NATO's nuclear decisionmaking structure as monolithic and highly responsive, although individual national pressures could argue for use at different times. The Supreme Allied Commander in Europe (SACEUR)—always an American in practice if not by treaty provision—is generally depicted as the individual who would request permission for specific nuclear employment from the NATO Council. The NATO Council, according to Pact writers, would grant permission on a case-by-case basis, at least in

the early stages of nuclear use. These sources state that the final authorization for nuclear use must be given by the President of the United States. [redacted]

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The Soviets, as well as the NSWP, do not distinguish among the different national nuclear forces' political control or reasons for initial independent use (see inset on pages 6 and 7). [redacted]

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6.2(d)**Perceptions of NATO Defense Plans**

Warsaw Pact perceptions of NATO's defense plans are for the most part realistic and accurate appraisals derived from Pact analyses of NATO exercises

In any case, Pact leaders clearly expect to force NATO onto the defensive, whatever NATO's initial intentions

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The appraisals show a strong bias toward the Central European Theater of Military Operations (TMO) and toward the northern half of West Germany in particular. This probably reflects the dominant role of that region in Pact plans and presumes NATO interest there

The basic features of NATO document MC 14/3, NATO's flexible-response doctrine (see inset), as well as NATO's command structure and layout of corps sectors, have been portrayed in Pact writings for nearly two decades. Unclassified official NATO documents and statements, which the Pact would have access to, do *not* indicate clearly what geographic features its covering force area and main battle area would rest upon, nor what rear defense lines might be occupied as necessary. Pact estimates of these features and lines are revealing, both for what they indicate about Pact intelligence and analysis and because of the role Pact planners believe these defense lines are likely to play in triggering NATO nuclear use and shaping Pact operations

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Still, we should not totally discount Pact concerns about a NATO offensive. Soviet Marxist-Leninist theory holds that one of the major missions of the armed forces is to deter, and if necessary punish, those capitalist states that resist "the inevitable triumph of socialism." Resistance is commonly portrayed in the future when the dying capitalist oligarchy lashes out against the "triumphant, progressive forces of socialism." Pact military strategists analyze potential conflict in Europe within this context and their doctrinal requirement to examine all military-technical possibilities. It is not the role of the military strategists to judge whether NATO political leaders would order an offensive, but they are charged with investigating NATO's capabilities for offensive action and taking measures to counter identified threats

NATO's Cover Zone and Forward Defense Zone.

Sensitive Pact writings claim that NATO will deploy 60 to 70 percent of its forces in its cover zone and forward defense lines. These sources usually describe the depth of NATO's cover zone as 15 to 50 kilometers (km) and depict its forward defense zone beginning just beyond (to the west of) its cover zone (see figure 3). These and other Pact writings consistently locate the leading (eastern) edge of NATO's forward defense zone as running through West Germany from Lubeck, Luneberg, and Uelzen, to Braunschweig. South of Braunschweig, this forward defense line is less clear but appears to link the cities of Munden and Passau in a gentle arc around the inner German border

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NATO's Main Defense Lines. Pact writers claim that if NATO forces were pushed from their forward defense zone, they would fall back on a series of main defense lines that stretch the length of West Germany, ceding each in turn to occupy that to its rear. These lines are approximately 40 to 60 km apart. Because the battle for Germany may proceed at different rates in the north and south, NATO could

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Soviet military doctrine also emphasizes readiness to defeat a NATO offensive and to seize the initiative with a vigorous Pact counteroffensive.

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The French Nuclear Forces: An Unrecognized Wildcard?

We have no convincing evidence that the Soviets view French nuclear forces as separate from or likely to be engaged under different conditions than other NATO nuclear systems. The creation of the French Rapid Action Force, the growing French theater and strategic nuclear capabilities, and the convergence of Paris and Bonn on many security issues may, however, focus Soviet attention on French nuclear capabilities and nuclear doctrine in the future.

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Currently, French main forces are located within French borders or relatively deep in NATO's rear areas (the II Corps in Baden-Baden), although there is one brigade stationed in West Berlin. The Soviets might therefore expect the French to feel no pressing need to employ theater nuclear weapons to rescue major French forces early in a war (see figure 2). French Army nuclear systems—some 30 Pluton surface-to-surface missile launchers—are positioned too deep to be used very near or beyond the eastern FRG border (given their 120-km range) without considerable forward deployment. On the other hand, French tactical nuclear-capable aircraft could reach East European territory rapidly with relative certainty.

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We expect the Soviets to reconsider the French nuclear threat as France increases its theater and strategic nuclear capabilities by acquisitions of the 350-km-range Hades missile, additional nuclear-capable strike aircraft, new air-to-surface nuclear missiles, additional and more capable nuclear submarines armed with newer missiles, and perhaps enhanced radiation warheads for the Hades.^a These capabilities must be seen in light of:

- *Increasing French Army capabilities to intervene quickly with significant forces in the battle for West Germany, both with the formation of the Rapid Action Force and the reorientation of the III Corps of the First Army.*



French Pluton SSMs

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- *Planned organizational changes to subordinate all French theater nuclear forces to a command controlled directly by the Joint Staff Command. The French nuclear release procedure is arguably already highly responsive and will most likely be further streamlined with this organizational change.*
- *The deliberate effort to link the theater nuclear force to the more threatening and rapidly growing French strategic forces.*

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The French view their theater nuclear force in war as a means to serve as a "final warning" to the Soviets that they must cease aggression or suffer a French strategic nuclear strike against cities in the USSR. To reinforce the linkage, the French have none too subtly renamed their theater nuclear forces "prestrategic" nuclear forces.

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Soviet failure to recognize independent French first use or escalation in a war could draw the Soviets and non-French NATO countries into a nuclear exchange. The same possibility could result from independent British nuclear strikes, although the British decision-making system is relatively more integrated into the formal NATO structure.

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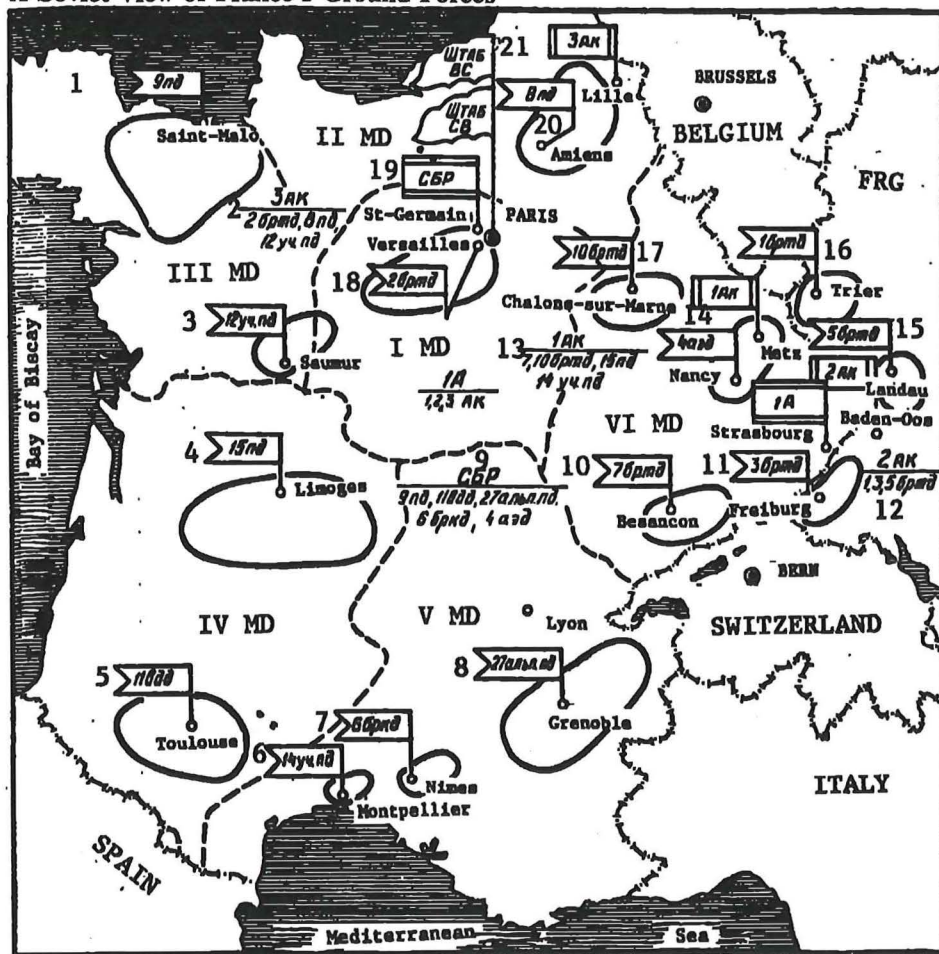
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Figure 2
A Soviet View of France's Ground Forces



Key: 1A/1, 2, 3 AK—1st Army; I, II, III Army Corps

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1. 9th Infantry Division | 10. 7th Armored Division |
| 2. III Army Corps: | 11. 3rd Armored Division |
| 2nd Armored Division | 12. II Army Corps: |
| 8th Infantry Division | 1st, 3rd, 5th Armored Divisions |
| 12th Infantry Training Division | 13. I Army Corps: |
| 3. 12th Infantry Training Division | 7th, 10th Armored Divisions |
| 4. 15th Infantry Division | 15th Infantry Division |
| 5. 11th Airborne Division | 14th Infantry Training Division |
| 6. 14th Infantry Training Division | 14. I Army Corps, 4th Airmobile Division |
| 7. 7th Armored Cavalry Division | 15. II Army Corps, 5th Armored Division |
| 8. 27th Alpine Infantry Division | 16. 1st Armored Division |
| 9. Rapid Action Force: | 17. 10th Armored Division |
| 9th Infantry Division | 18. 2nd Armored Division |
| 11th Armored Division | 19. FAR (Rapid Action Force) |
| 27th Alpine Infantry Division | 20. III Army Corps, 8th Infantry Division |
| 6th Armored Cavalry Division | 21. HQ Armed Forces, HQ Ground Forces |
| 4th Airmobile Division | |

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NATO's Flexible Response Strategy

The strategy of flexible response approved by the Allies in 1967 and set forth in the NATO document MC 14/3 is intended to provide a full range of military responses to potential aggression.^a It reflects the judgment that a credible deterrent requires a full range of conventional, tactical nuclear, and strategic nuclear forces; together these forces compose the so-called NATO triad. According to this concept, Alliance forces should be capable of responding to a Pact attack at three levels:

- *Direct defense at the border area: Initial reaction would involve the movement of NATO forces from their peacetime garrisons to their assigned general defense positions in one of the eight national corps sectors upon receipt of warning. The primary objective of NATO's forces would be to meet enemy forces at the intra-German and Czechoslovak borders and limit their advance. The main geographic areas involved in this forward defense are the covering force area (extending from the border westward approximately 20 kilometers) and the main battle area (extending to approximately 50*

kilometers farther west) where the decisive battles to stop the enemy advance would take place. An effective forward defense is one that could defeat a Pact attack before enemy formations could breach the main battle area.

- *Deliberate escalation: If faced with the likelihood of a massive conventional breakthrough by Pact forces, NATO commanders may request approval from Alliance political authorities to employ tactical nuclear weapons. Use of these weapons would be intended primarily to restore deterrence by signaling NATO's resolve to escalate the level of hostilities if deemed necessary to halt the enemy's advance. The timing of deliberate escalation decisions is intentionally left ambiguous to maximize uncertainty in the mind of the adversary.*
- *NATO's ultimate deterrent is provided by the option of a general nuclear response, employing long-range strategic systems against targets in the Soviet homeland.*

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^a For a recent interpretation, see Bob Furlong and Macha Levinson, "SACEUR Calls for Research on a European ABM System," International Defense Review, No. 2, February 1986.

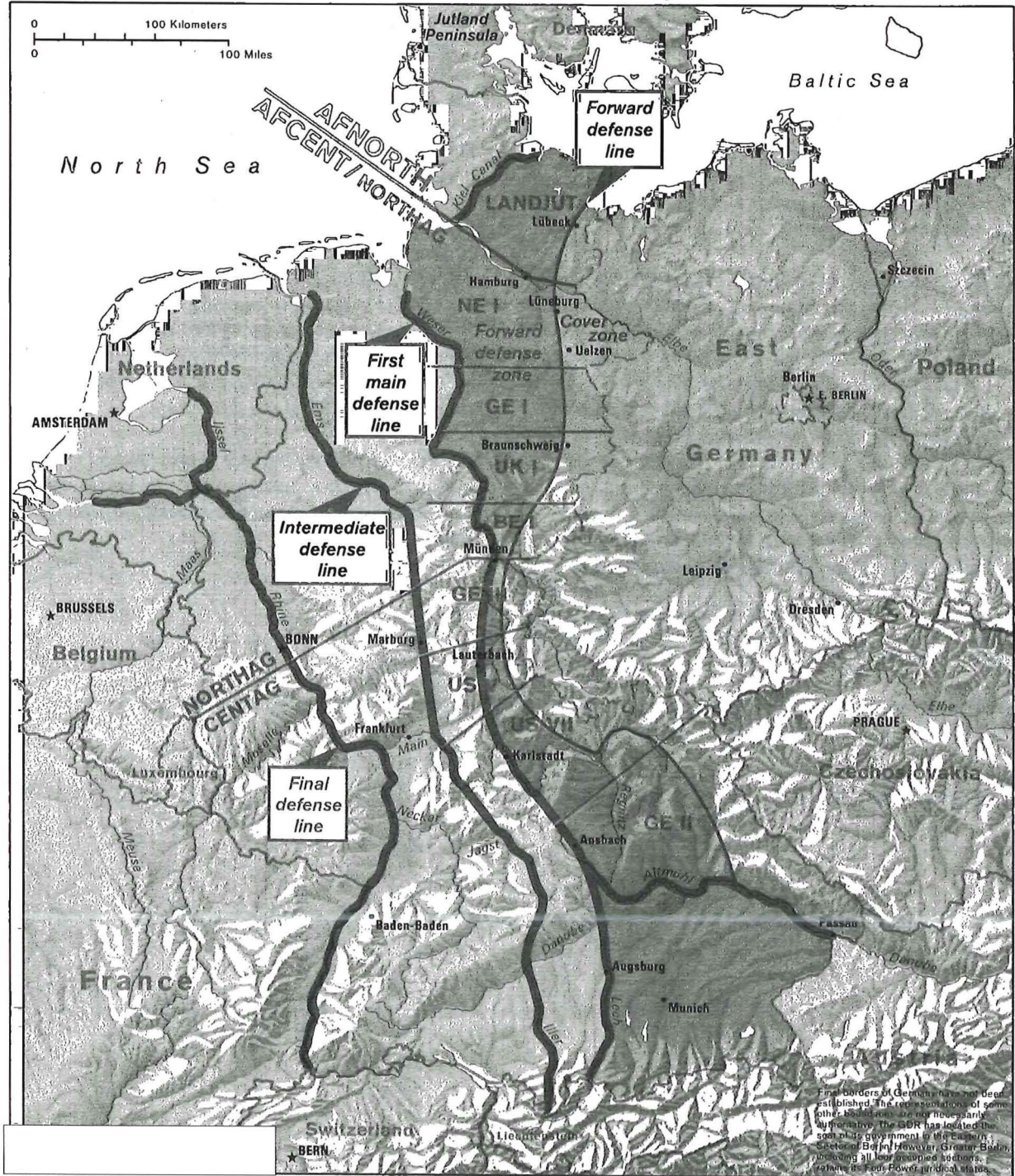
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Figure 3
Warsaw Pact Perceptions of NATO Defense Lines in West Germany



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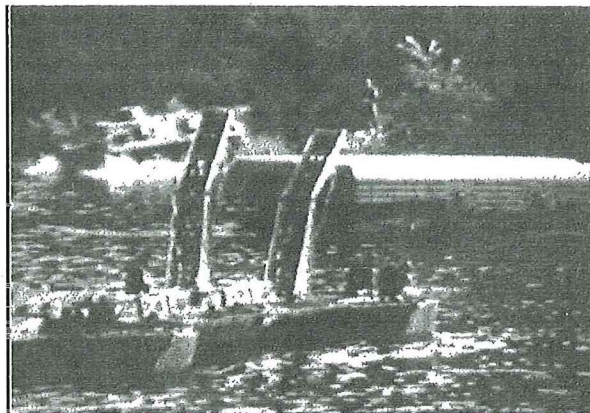
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link the northern half of one defense line with the southern half of another. This appears to be reflected in some Pact exercises in which NATO's defense line bows dramatically before breaking, although in most writings this bending effect is not discussed.



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NATO's first main defense line, which serves as the backbone of its forward defense zone, is linked in Pact writings with the Weser River and a southern extension that, alternatively, connects the cities of Lauterbach, Karlstadt, Ansbach, and Augsburg to the Lech River, or swings eastward from Karlstadt along the Main to the Regnitz or Altmühl Rivers, to the Danube. Although a northern extension of the Weser line into the Jutland peninsula would be noncontiguous, NATO's defense of the Kiel Canal may be associated with it. The distance of the first main defense line to the inner German border varies from over 100 km at its northern and southern extremities, to less than 50 km in the German III and US V corps sectors. These distances conform to Pact estimates of the depth of NATO's corps sectors.

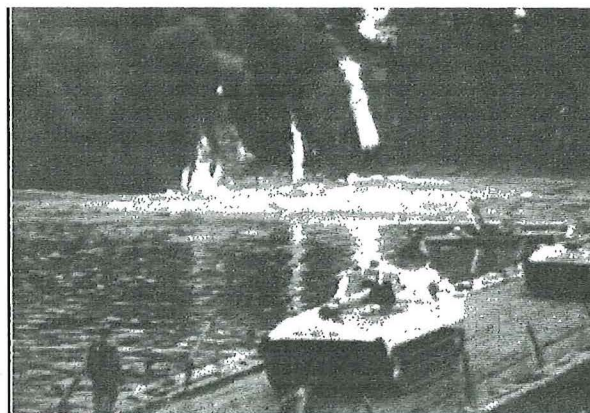


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Soviet experience in World War II helped establish a fixation on the role of rivers as defensive obstacles. For example, Col. A. A. Sidorenko's *The Offensive* devotes an entire chapter to forcing water obstacles³ and associates the use of nuclear weapons in defense of river lines explicitly. Pact writings name the rivers that NATO would defend, indicate the engineering resources needed to cross them, and note that major crossings would be army and front-level operations. Their planners believe that river-crossing operations would be especially attractive targets for NATO nuclear strikes.

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In keeping with this emphasis on river lines, a main defense line described as intermediate in Pact writings is formed by the Ems River, connected through Marburg with sections of the Main, Jagst, and Iller



East German River Crossing
Scenes from Warsaw Pact exercise

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³ Forcing river obstacles continues to be given prominence in Soviet military writings including the authoritative *Taktika* by V. G. Reznichenko (1984) and A. I. Radziyevskiy's *Army Operations* (1977), translated in JPRS-UMA-85-016-L, 16 July 1985.

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Rivers. Defenses in the nearly 200-km gap between the Ems and Main Rivers would be supported by the rough terrain that dominates this area [redacted]

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NATO defenses along the Rhine River, and possibly its extension along the IJssel or Maas, are described [redacted] variously as NATO's strategic, rear, or last main defense line in West Germany. Rivers to the west of the Rhine are seldom described in Pact writings as potential NATO defense lines. Those mentioned—the Moselle and Maas, for example—are most likely modifications of the Rhine line. The Rhine River is 150 to 350 km from the inner German border—a distance that coincides with that given in Pact writings for the depth of NATO's army groups. It is difficult to overstate the importance attached to the Rhine in Pact analyses and exercises. The reasons are clear:

- Its breach would threaten the last naturally bounded enclave NATO might attempt to hold in the FRG.
- Most of NATO's main airbases, including the majority of nuclear-capable airfields, are just beyond the Rhine.
- Seizure of Rhine crossings would allow Pact forces to advance to the North Sea or the English Channel, splitting NATO in two.
- Reaching the Rhine Valley would mean that the Pact had control of most of West Germany and its population and economic assets. [redacted]

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Perceptions of NATO's Nuclear Doctrine

Pact discussions of NATO's nuclear doctrine emphasize the threat of massive nuclear strikes—NATO's general nuclear response. Such strikes, as depicted in Pact writings [redacted] are virtual mirror images of massed Pact strikes. They are on the same scale as the Pact's, employing several hundred nuclear weapons per NATO army group (roughly the equivalent of a Pact front) and sequenced in the same manner. The targets for such NATO strikes are indistinguishable in type and priority from those commonly given for massed Pact strikes:

- Means of nuclear attack.
- Airfields.
- Troop groupings.
- Air defense systems.
- Command posts.

- Nuclear munitions depots.
- Important rear service installations.
- State administration centers.
- Political and economic centers. [redacted]

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This worst case threat does not dominate Pact analysis and planning: In fact, most sensitive Pact military writings indicate that initial NATO nuclear strikes are most likely to be:

- Limited or selective, rather than massive.
- Used in support of defensive operations.
- Restricted to areas near the forward line of troops.
- Directed against the immediate Pact military threat. [redacted]

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[redacted] Pact planners believe NATO would conduct limited nuclear strikes in defensive operations against the combat and support elements of the most threatening Pact maneuver forces. In those cases where NATO forces employed a static defense, nuclear strikes would be used primarily to support forward defense forces. When NATO relied on a mobile defense, a larger allocation would be made for strikes to support counterattacks. The most common features of limited NATO nuclear operations found [redacted] are:

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- *Size of limited or selective strikes.* [redacted]

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[redacted] Pact writings assert that NATO doctrine calls for five or six warheads to be used against an attacking Pact division. Pact descriptions of massive NATO nuclear strikes typically include several hundred warheads.

- *Range of use.* In a period of limited nuclear war, NATO is described as using tactical and operational-tactical weapons. The former consists mainly of artillery; the latter includes SSMs—the Pershing Ia, Lance, and Pluton—and tactical aircraft that could strike up to about a 1,000-km range, or to the Soviet-Polish border. No nuclear strikes against targets in the Soviet homeland are

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anticipated before the initial massed NATO nuclear strike. Moreover, most Pact discussions note that NATO limited use would probably be confined, at least initially, to about 30 km from the forward line of troops (FLOT). This is the approximate range of NATO's nuclear artillery and is also the approximate depth of attacking first-echelon Pact divisions.⁴

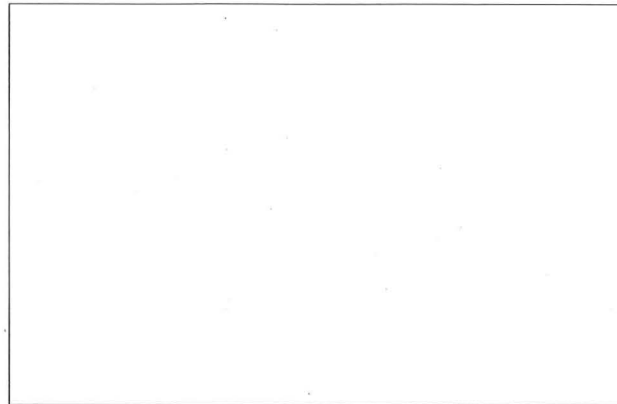
- *Weapon systems employed.* Atomic demolition munitions and nuclear-tipped antiaircraft missiles (for example, the Nike Hercules) were often considered the most likely candidates for initial NATO use in Pact writings and exercises, but both are being phased out of NATO nuclear planning. NATO nuclear artillery would be most commonly used, though nuclear SSMs such as the Lance, with its 115-km range, could also be used selectively for strikes on or near the battlefield. A recurring point in sensitive Pact writings is that NATO aircraft would have a negligible nuclear delivery role in limited nuclear operations. The Pact believes that NATO would employ aircraft extensively in this period for conventional operations. Aircraft would assume their dominant role among NATO nuclear delivery systems only with escalation to massed strikes.

- *Targets for NATO limited use.* The most likely targets for limited NATO nuclear strikes would be nuclear-capable systems, maneuver units, and command elements. The scale and range of weapons that the Pact believes NATO would use initially would not support effective interdiction of the Soviet second strategic echelon or counterair operations. Although counternuclear operations would also appear to offer poor payoffs, the Pact believes its nuclear-capable systems would be high-priority candidates for limited NATO nuclear strikes.

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⁴ In past years, 30 km was also the range of the Honest John rocket—a system now used only by Greece for nuclear delivery. See appendix B for Soviet distinctions among systems by range as well as some of the effects of NATO's INF decision on Pact perceptions.

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Consistent throughout Pact writings and exercises is the belief that, once nuclear weapons are employed, an escalation of their use will almost certainly follow. The Pact believes that NATO nuclear use on a limited scale would prove ineffective and be quickly recognized as such by NATO leaders. Faced with the threat of defeat from the Pact's conventional theater offensive, NATO decisionmakers would, in the Pact view, order massed strikes. Fear of Pact preemption and NATO's need to alter fundamentally the correlation of forces in the theater would drive the West's leaders toward the use of nuclear weapons on a massive scale.

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a limited nuclear war could be terminated before escalation to massed strikes occurs. These writers note that several major NATO exercises in the late 1970s witnessed no such escalation, breaking a pattern that had been in place for decades. Still, the majority of Pact writings from the same period have concentrated on the earlier trend in NATO exercises, in which the period of limited nuclear war lasted typically one to three days before massed strikes were launched. NATO exercises that did not escalate to massive use represent NATO victories or exercise scenarios that stopped short of decisive operations. In the Pact view, the former are implausible and the latter incomplete.

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**Perceptions of Specific Circumstances
for NATO First Use**

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[redacted] the timing and form of NATO's first use will be driven by its assessment of the correlation of forces and particularly by the progress of the conventional campaign. According to Pact military writings [redacted] NATO might choose to use nuclear weapons, at least theoretically, for any of the following reasons

- *To prevent an impending Pact breakthrough of NATO defensive lines* This threat is cited in most Pact sources as the dominant motivation for NATO nuclear use in defensive operations.

- *To support a NATO offensive or counteroffensive* The Pact often portrays NATO as executing nuclear strikes to support combined-arms thrusts into Eastern Europe early in a war or, in less favorable circumstances, as conducting nuclear strikes later in a war to support counteroffensives on West German territory. To many Pact officers, the ratio of forces is so unfavorable that NATO could not undertake an offensive without supporting nuclear strikes to alter the ratio and upset Pact plans and dispositions

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- *To slow (or destroy) Warsaw Pact forces before they reach or can affect the main battle area* Pact writings [redacted] show that Pact theorists believe NATO may use nuclear weapons in its attempt to isolate the battlefield. This can take the form of interdiction strikes against critical lines of communication and direct attacks on forces in transit or in assembly areas to delay or prevent their arrival.

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- *To prevent the collapse of NATO forces in one or more sectors following a Warsaw Pact breakthrough* NATO is described [redacted] as using nuclear strikes to cover its withdrawal from one defense line to another

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- *To prevent the loss of key political, economic, or strategic areas* [redacted] NATO's nuclear use is intended to stun the Pact and allow NATO time to reorganize its defense

- *To demonstrate NATO's determination to escalate the war if the Warsaw Pact continues to threaten vital NATO interests* Political and military writings show that the Pact is well versed in NATO's debate over nuclear signaling to show resolve but appears to place little credence in the likelihood of a purely demonstrative nuclear "shot across the bow." Pact writers note that NATO would be inhibited from such use by fear that it would prompt a preemptive massed nuclear strike by the Pact. According to Pact writers, at a minimum such a move by NATO would cause the Pact to take preventive measures that would render follow-on NATO strikes less effective [redacted]

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Each of these reasons could lead to NATO nuclear initiation at different times. In response to this ambiguous threat, many Pact military writings state that the time of first use is indeterminate, and consequently Pact forces must be constantly prepared for it. At the operational-tactical level, Pact analysts recognize that the threat is not so open-ended. Drawing upon their analyses of NATO doctrine, exercises, nuclear decisionmaking structure and process, and defense plans, Pact theorists have refined their estimates of the cause and timing of initial NATO nuclear use into four major cases.

- *NATO strikes early and massively* Sensitive Pact writings state clearly that scenarios with early massive NATO nuclear strikes represent worst case planning assumptions. The Soviets believe that such assumptions should constitute the basis for planning. For example, a recent authoritative writing states "in preparing the nation and armed forces for war, one must proceed not from a possible favorable confluence of circumstances but rather place the main bet on the extended, fierce, and protracted nature of future military clashes and make all one's strategic plans precisely proceeding from this."⁵ Consistent with this approach, the Pact exercised simulated massive NATO strikes on the first day of the war as late as 1979—although initial use that early had not appeared in NATO exercises analyzed by the Pact since 1962.

⁵ See M. A. Gareyev, M. V. Frunze, *Military Theorist*, JPRS-UMA-85-027-L, 7 November 1985 [redacted]

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- *NATO strikes to support its first main defense line.* Pact writings state explicitly that NATO might resort to nuclear strikes to prevent a major Pact penetration of the first main defense line. Penetration by substantial Pact forces, especially in the British or Belgian corps sectors, probably would unhinge NATO's defense of northern Germany in the absence of mobile NATO reserves or prepared and occupied intermediate defense lines.

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- *NATO strikes to hold its final defense line along the Rhine River.* Even if NATO forces were able to maintain a credible conventional defense for several days or even weeks, trading space for time and attrition, Pact planners believe NATO would choose to employ nuclear weapons to prevent loss of the Rhine defense line.

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- *No nuclear strikes.* Sensitive Pact writings note that war may be terminated before initiation of nuclear employment.

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Scenarios that resemble each of these four major cases are considered plausible by Pact planners

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We believe the following indicate how the Pact assesses the probability of these scenarios:

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- exercises confirm heightened Soviet concern for avoiding the effects of a surprise or sudden attack (see inset). In these exercises, sudden attacks on the first day of the war have been only conventional and have featured hundreds of aircraft, a large portion of which are described as nuclear capable, as well as cruise missiles. Significantly, even in the face of this threat, Pact forces have never been detected responding with a preemptive nuclear strike.

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- A large number of recent major exercises have simulated penetration of NATO's first main defense line by Pact forces without triggering NATO nuclear use.

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- No major Pact exercise has simulated an advance beyond the Rhine without nuclear initiation by NATO, or by the Pact as a preemptive act. Several of the major nonnuclear Pact exercises end with a suggestion of imminent nuclear use as Pact forces reach and attempt to breach NATO's defenses along the Rhine River

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Pact perceptions of NATO's nuclear decisionmaking process would contribute to its hope of delaying NATO nuclear initiation. Pact military writings note that the West Germans have preferred the prompt use of tactical nuclear weapons to raise the specter of nuclear escalation quickly and thus preserve as much of their territory as possible. It is probable that the Pact is aware of the British preference for using nuclear weapons quickly to ensure the survival of the British Army on the Rhine (BAOR). Pact planners believe, however, that the United States would be reluctant to begin a nuclear war in Europe and that,

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The Soviet "War Scare": 1981-85

The Soviet "war scare" of 1981 to 1985 focused on the threat of a surprise or sudden nuclear missile attack on the Soviet Union by the United States, with or without the cooperation of its NATO allies. The Soviets perceived changes in US nuclear capabilities and strategy, illustrated by the deployment of the Pershing II to Europe, as lowering the threshold at which the United States would employ nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union.

nor to what degree it represented a real fear of imminent nuclear war.

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Beginning in 1984 the "war scare" started to wither. The factors that contributed to its decline are uncertain but probably included:

- *A realization that the threat was not as great as initially feared.*
- *The death in February 1984 of Yuriy Andropov, who may have been one of its early promoters.*
- *The increased concern about US technological advances, especially as applied to new weapons, and the consequent possibility of drastic changes in the correlation of forces in the future.*

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We do not know to what extent the "war scare" was created or used by different elements of the Soviet national security apparatus to further their own ends,

6.2(d) ultimately, the President, not the Europeans, would control NATO's nuclear decisionmaking process. The threat of escalation to massive use and strikes on US territory would, in the Pact view, strongly argue against American nuclear release

On the basis of our evidence and analysis of how the Pact perceives NATO nuclear decisionmaking, doctrine, and defense plans, we judge that the Pact and, specifically, the Soviet military believe that:

- An early, massive NATO nuclear strike is unlikely.
- NATO's decision to use nuclear weapons would be driven by the progress of the campaign in Central Europe and US preferences for timing of escalation

to nuclear war. Although first use may occur in one of the peripheral theaters, as simulated in a major Pact exercise use in Central Europe would occur at the same time or follow rapidly.

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- They have some chance of penetrating NATO's first and intermediate main defense lines without triggering NATO nuclear strikes.
- There is little if any chance that NATO decision-makers would forgo nuclear use to hold positions along the Rhine.

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- NATO's initial nuclear use would probably be limited (though not purely demonstrative), ineffective, and would escalate to large-scale use quickly.
- There is a small chance that a war would end without the use of nuclear weapons or before it could escalate from limited to massed use.

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Implications for Soviet Planning and Doctrine

The preservation of the Soviet state is the preeminent objective and constraint of Soviet security policy. To this end, Soviet leaders want to limit the damage to the USSR in any future conflict. They believe that any use of nuclear weapons in Europe would increase the likelihood of nuclear attacks on the Soviet homeland, as well as the uncertainties inherent in a major war. The Soviets are taking costly steps to increase their capabilities to wage a successful conventional campaign in Central Europe should war come about and to increase the likelihood that a war could be won without escalation to nuclear use.

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Soviet theorists recognize that their nuclear doctrine and NATO's nuclear doctrine as they understand it lead to a paradox. They see the very success of Pact conventional forces as likely to trigger NATO nuclear strikes to stave off rapid defeat, threatening the Pact with unacceptable costs. They also believe that initial limited NATO nuclear strikes would prove ineffective, motivating NATO to launch larger strikes. Soviet nuclear doctrine, however, calls for launching preemptive massed nuclear strikes once it is detected that NATO intends to use nuclear weapons on a large scale. Thus, Pact theater successes could lead directly to what the Soviets see as the catastrophe of general nuclear war.

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The foremost implication of this paradox for Soviet planning is that whatever the Soviet preference for conventional over nuclear war, Pact combat forces, their supporting structure, and elements crucial to the survival and functioning of the Soviet state must be configured and employed for eventual NATO nuclear use on a massive scale. Reconstitution of these assets following massive NATO nuclear strikes is a constant theme in Pact exercises and sensitive writings, and the Soviets' initiatives and investments confirm their belief in this requirement.

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Soviet planners, however, appear to believe that NATO is not structured to fight a nuclear war effectively and that it does not possess the will and means to win. The Soviets believe NATO leaders would realize that a massive nuclear strike would guarantee terrible retaliation and deny NATO victory. Consequently, the Soviets probably believe NATO's ultimate capability is, for NATO, a means of deterrence and, failing that, punishment and denial.

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The Soviets have undertaken and will continue to pursue initiatives to weaken NATO's will and capability to use nuclear weapons in a war. Peacetime initiatives include arms control agreements that would eliminate portions of NATO's nuclear capabilities and promotion and support of Western antinuclear movements to hamper NATO deployment and modernization efforts.

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The Soviets are exploring means to postpone, limit, or ideally avert NATO's first use of nuclear weapons. The Soviets hope to take full advantage of periods of conventional and limited nuclear use to blunt NATO's nuclear forces and exploit the Pact's conventional superiority. These efforts do not indicate that the Soviets have renounced massed strikes or preemption or that they believe they can unilaterally control nuclear initiation or escalation. Rather, this approach demonstrates pragmatic consideration of other less threatening scenarios.

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In war, the Soviets plan to:

- Monitor the nuclear activities of NATO to warn of its readiness and preparations for imminent use and to provide targeting data for conventional and nuclear strikes against NATO's weapons and command and control systems.^a

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^a See DI Research Paper SOV 85-10107CX (Top Secret) June 1985, *Warsaw Pact Tactical Forces: Capabilities and Readiness for Nuclear War*.

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- Attack NATO's nuclear forces, including command, control, communications, and intelligence support, with conventional as well as improved conventional munitions.⁹
- Provide disincentives for Western nuclear use by closing rapidly with NATO forces to complicate NATO targeting, operating on NATO territory to increase the collateral costs of NATO use, and engaging in costly engineering efforts to protect forces from the full effects of nuclear attacks. For example, six hours of preparatory engineering work is expected to reduce troop losses by one-half to two-thirds.
- Strike NATO nuclear systems preemptively with a massed nuclear attack if large-scale NATO nuclear use is believed imminent or unavoidable.¹⁰

6.2(d)

In the event of limited NATO nuclear strikes—or the conviction that imminent NATO strikes would be limited—Soviet leaders might forgo launching massed nuclear strikes to prolong the period of war dominated by their own superior conventional arms. We believe these circumstances could arise if Soviet leaders expected their objectives could be achieved without extensive nuclear fire support and were confident that NATO could not or would not massively employ nuclear weapons in the immediate future. Under such restrictive and indeed unlikely conditions, the Soviets could respond to limited NATO nuclear use with their own limited nuclear strikes or forgo nuclear use entirely. By the combination of measures noted above, retaliatory threats, and demonstrating the futility of NATO nuclear use, Soviet strategists hope to resolve the paradox that their own conventional superiority has generated.

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⁹ See DI Intelligence Assessment SOV 85-10001CX (Top Secret January 1985, *Warsaw Pact Air Forces: Support of Strategic Operations in Central Europe*)

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Still, on the basis of their perceptions of the probability of NATO nuclear use and the requirement to launch a preemptive massed strike when so ordered by the Supreme High Command, Soviet planners must make force employment decisions that affect conventional operations and the transition to nuclear war. Their practices, exercises, and writings reveal their concerns that:

- *Nuclear strike units cannot be kept at high states of readiness over extended periods without suffering degradation.* In their exercises, Pact commanders regularly maintain only a portion of devoted nuclear strike assets at the highest levels of readiness—even after conventional combat begins—until escalation to nuclear warfare is considered imminent.

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There was an apparent appreciation that keeping nuclear forces “cocked” over an extended period would lower their true readiness—their ability to carry out their mission effectively in a timely manner. This would be critical in the event of protracted conventional operations prior to nuclear initiation.

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- *Dual-purpose forces withheld for contingent nuclear use weaken conventional firepower.* Aircraft withheld for contingent nuclear use, as well as tactical missile forces and artillery, deprive Soviet commanders of longer range heavy firepower.

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[redacted]

The attrition of dual-capable aircraft and SSMs during conventional operations would increase the percentages withheld for nuclear contingencies.

- *Reconnaissance would be overstretched throughout a war, and the priority task of monitoring NATO's nuclear forces would draw down resources initially intended to support conventional operations.* Pact writings demonstrate concern over a shortfall in reconnaissance capabilities because of the number, character, and dispersal of targets that must be covered. Reconnaissance aircraft tasked to search out NATO SSMs to update contingency plans for the initial massed nuclear strike would suffer significant attrition. Other assets would almost certainly be drawn off to support this priority task, leaving fewer reconnaissance assets to support conventional operations. [redacted]

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Soviet planners and commanders explicitly trade off capabilities that support conventional operations for those that support the transition to nuclear war. When NATO nuclear initiation is seen as increasingly likely, Soviet planners intend to shift resources to support the transition to nuclear operations, most probably by increasing the ability to launch a preemptive massed strike. Soviet commanders almost certainly would strive for maximum readiness in theater and possibly strategic nuclear systems as they attempt to breach NATO's first main defense line and when they approach and attack the Rhine. Ironically, resources shifted to prepare for nuclear operations would be most sorely needed by field commanders conducting the conventional campaign precisely at those times they are shifted. [redacted]

6.2(d)

We believe that the Soviet threshold for nuclear preemption would be lowered significantly at these critical points because of:

- Confusion and ambiguity in detecting a NATO decision to launch a nuclear strike.
- Perceptions that NATO plans and prepares for nuclear initiation at such times.
- Predictions of vulnerability to a massive NATO nuclear strike. [redacted]

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Appendix A

Soviet Definitions of Nuclear Use

Warsaw Pact writings are confusing and appear contradictory to Western readers, in part because Pact writers think and write about NATO doctrine and practices using, for the most part, terms and concepts native to Soviet military theory. Soviet terms and concepts of nuclear employment are presented below as a reference and to provide insight as to how they approach NATO nuclear employment.¹¹

"mass" or "massive" strikes) are composed of many single and group nuclear strikes carried out against different targets.

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General Versus Limited Nuclear War

The Soviets also differentiate between *general* nuclear war and *limited* nuclear war. The former entails the unlimited use of nuclear weapons and includes inter-continental strikes. The latter is restricted to a given geographic area and can vary in scope and intensity. It may feature small- or large-scale use of nuclear weapons throughout an entire theater or in part of it.

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Single, Group, and Massed Strikes

According to the Soviets, nuclear weapons can be employed in the form of single, group, and massed nuclear strikes. They define¹² these as:

- *Single nuclear strike*—"A strike delivered against an objective with one nuclear weapon. It is used in those cases when the yield of a nuclear weapon ensures that the required damage will be inflicted on the target."
- *Group nuclear strikes*—"Strikes delivered simultaneously by means of several nuclear devices. A group [or 'grouped'] nuclear strike is used when the desired degree of damage to the target cannot be achieved with a single nuclear device or when the situation precludes the use of a single, more powerful nuclear device."
- *Massed nuclear strike*—"A strike made by a large number of nuclear munitions, delivered simultaneously or in quick succession. The purpose of a massed nuclear strike is to annihilate enemy means of nuclear attack that have been spotted, to inflict damage on the main enemy troop groupings, and to disorganize the enemy rear areas, his economy, troop control, and state administration." Massed nuclear strikes (also occasionally referred to as

The Soviets' commentaries on and descriptions of limited nuclear war offer tantalizingly incomplete insights into their thinking about an area that has dominated Western debate off and on for years. Evidence in Pact writings and exercises from the late 1960s and early 1970s indicates that the limited nuclear option was controversial and generated considerable debate. Although a consensus was reached by the mid-1970s, Soviet views might undergo further debate and evolution as a result of NATO INF deployments (see appendix B), evolving improved conventional munitions, and other changes in factors that influence Soviet nuclear doctrine. We have not seen further debate or evolution to date.

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The consensus Soviet view of limited nuclear war holds that, if it occurs at all, it will be brief and lead with near certainty to general nuclear war. Its basic instability results from the potentially decisive advantages that would accrue to the side that launches massed nuclear strikes first. Pact writers note that both sides would enhance the readiness of their nuclear forces in a crisis and during the conventional period of war and that indications of likely nuclear use by an opponent would be delayed, limited, uncertain, and contradictory. Hence, both sides would be trigger happy and prone to launch preemptive massed strikes to limit the damage they might otherwise suffer

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¹¹ For more details on Soviet nuclear doctrine, see the Intelligence Assessment referenced in footnote 10.

¹² These definitions are taken from the Soviet *Dictionary of Basic Military Terms*, which is translated under the auspices of the US Air Force. They are consistent with definitions found in the *Military Encyclopedic Dictionary*, the *Soviet Military Encyclopedia*, and sensitive Pact military writings.

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The consensus Soviet view holds that limited nuclear war is self-contradictory as well. By definition, in limited nuclear war limited means are employed to achieve limited objectives. The result is that it becomes more difficult to achieve those objectives quickly, raising the risk of eventual escalation. Furthermore, the defeated side can always choose to escalate to general nuclear war rather than accept defeat. The "diplomatic" aspect of limited nuclear war—threatening one's opponent with escalation to more destructive levels—is seen as essentially a denial of the limited character of limited nuclear war.

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Finally, limited nuclear war implies a need for negotiations, perhaps conducted during pauses in the fighting, to bring about its end. This contradicts the consistent Soviet line that war between NATO and the Pact would be the decisive armed conflict between the opposing capitalist and socialist camps and fought at a rapid tempo for decisive rather than finely negotiated ends.

We detect an additional, complementary view in the Soviets' sensitive writings and exercises that holds that limited nuclear war may be forced upon them but could offer significant advantages over general nuclear war. Massive nuclear strikes against the Soviet homeland are seen as the greatest political and military threat presented by NATO. Consequently, limited nuclear war could offer the possibility of excluding homeland exchanges between the United States and the USSR.

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None of the writings associated with this view advocate it as a choice among various options. They only imply a willingness to consider a possible situation that may be pressed upon the Pact in a conflict and to explore its implications. Pact exercises that include a period of limited nuclear war help train commands and staffs to operate within the constraints of such a war and probably have a major effect upon the evolution of Soviet doctrine in this area.

6.2(d)

Massed Versus Limited or Selective Strikes

Soviet writings and exercises distinguish between massed strikes and *limited* or *selective* nuclear strikes. Massed strikes are consistent with general rather than limited war. Although, in theory, massed strikes could be restricted to non-Soviet Europe, Soviet writers are pessimistic about exchanging massed strikes with NATO while avoiding strikes on the USSR.

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We believe that the Soviets have adopted NATO's terms for limited (*ogranichenny*) nuclear strikes and selective use (*vyborochnoye primeneniye*) without defining them precisely. Single and group strikes are operational military terms that focus on weapon allocation for different target clusters. They do not account for the political dimension of limited or selective strikes—the need to signal the limited intentions of nuclear use—while still achieving military effect.

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Soviet writings enumerate and discuss NATO's delimitations for limited or selective nuclear strikes—including types and locations of targets and numbers, yields, and types of warheads—but do not appear to have adopted them. Sensitive Soviet writings dating from 1970 indicate that the Soviets may restrict their use of delivery systems to those under a 1,000-km range in a limited nuclear war.

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Limited strikes would probably be directed against forces in the field, command posts, and supporting elements—especially those that would support nuclear operations.

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Appendix B**NATO's INF and Pact
Military Perceptions**

NATO decisions in 1978 and 1979 have affected Warsaw Pact military perceptions. The planned deployment of 108 Pershing II SSMs and 464 ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs)—the NATO Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force (INF)—is correctly seen by the Pact as central to NATO's long-term plan to modernize its theater nuclear capabilities. Pact military planners quickly focused on the potential threat posed by these systems and began taking steps to familiarize Pact officers with the nature of the threat and methods to counter it years before the weapons were fielded.

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Pact military writings note that INF demands especially vigorous countermeasures because:

- INF represents a significant growth in the total numbers of forward-based nuclear systems available to NATO in the European theater of war.
- The Pershing II can deliver nuclear strikes to a strategic depth within seven to eight minutes of launch.
- The proportion of SSMs is expected to grow to more than 40 percent of NATO's theater nuclear capability, assuring NATO of more rapid and certain strike capabilities.
- The Pershing II is assessed to be virtually immune to interception after launch.
- Although the GLCM is potentially more vulnerable to in-flight interception, it has a small radar cross section and thermal image, is capable of flying at very low altitudes, can be employed in massed attacks to saturate defending forces, and can be directed to fly toward its target from different directions.
- The widespread geographic distribution of theater nuclear capabilities from England to Sicily will make detection of launch preparations, disruption by conventional strikes, and nuclear preemption extremely difficult.

- The accuracy of the Pershing II and the GLCM are assessed at approximately 30 meters.

- The warhead on the Pershing II is capable of penetrating underground before exploding, thus threatening hardened positions.

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Although Pact planners have noted that INF increases NATO's capability to carry out selective nuclear strikes, they have concentrated upon the threat it poses as a means of conducting a massive disarming first strike. A massive NATO strike could employ:

- The Pershing II to destroy Soviet command and control by "decapitating" the Soviet leadership in a crisis before they could enter deep underground shelters.
- The Pershing II, GLCM, and aircraft to strike into the Pact's strategic and operational-strategic depth.
- The Pershing Ia, Lance, Pluton, and aircraft to attack the Pact's operational-tactical depth.
- The Honest John and artillery to attack the Pact's tactical depth.

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In Pact worst case planning, INF appears to give NATO's forward-based systems not merely devastating theater nuclear capabilities, but even strategic, potentially war-winning capabilities. Pact strategists state that, because the gap between theater and strategic nuclear capabilities has narrowed, the gap between theater nuclear war and strategic nuclear war has narrowed.

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the Pact has interpreted NATO's enhanced theater nuclear capabilities as providing an additional incentive to launch a preemptive massed nuclear strike when NATO nuclear use is assessed as imminent.

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