

2016/3/5: The secret plans of the National Volksarmee

The secret plans of the National Volksarmee of the German Democratic Republic in the 1980ies

Siegfried Lautsch

In the last decade of the Cold War, western experts assessed the fighting strength of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation (WVO), especially that of the National Volksarmee (NVA), in different ways. On the one hand, training, battle readiness and mobilization readiness were recognized, on the other hand, fighting technique, armament and equipment were perceived contemptuously. Even today, the NVA seems to be a mystery for the interested reader. Up to the present time, ignorance, misunderstandings and misjudgements determine the opinions on the effectiveness of the NVA concerning its interoperation with the Soviet armies of the 1st Front. The following essay gives an insight into the turn of the evident war plans of the 1980ies – exemplified by the 5th Army – and illustrates what was hidden for the western as well as the eastern reader in the course of the East-West Conflict. The NVA was an integrated component of the military organisation of the Warsaw Treaty, contributing to the maintenance of the defence readiness of the alliance according to the principle of minimum sufficiency in the defence alliance. The centralized strategic high command of the 1st Front guaranteed the timely movement and unfolding of the armies of the 1st Front at the German-German border according to the plans of the high command in Moscow. The pooled and simultaneous efforts of the armies mandated to the 1st Front warranted advantageous conditions for both strategic and operational objective targets. The advantages of coordinated procedures were the capability of guaranteeing close coordination of operations as to objective, space and time, due to the dimensions of the operation area, the close interoperation of the components, the deployment of missile troops, artillery, air forces, and services. Given the author's experiences as head of the Operational Division in the Command of the Military District V as well as head of the Subdivision Training in the Ministry of National defence (MfNV), within the war organisation deployed in the Operational Group of the MfNV in the High Command of the 1st Front, I come to the assessment that the Soviet command structure both guaranteed a coordinated system of operational planning and warranted preparation as well as prosecution of operations, together with the enforcement of war objectives, by means of centralized command from the general staff down to the operational formations. With the declaration of the WVO in its Military Doctrine of 1987 never and under no circumstances to take military measures against any state or alliance, and never to be the first to use nuclear weapons, the system of nuclear deterrence was actually not cancelled, but the danger of a rapid nuclear escalation in Central Europe was reduced. Obviously the Soviet military – as opposed to the NATO strategists – had perceived the risk of the previous nuclear planning and wanted to relinquish any first use of nuclear weapons with its latest military doctrine. The end of the East-West-Conflict was expressed in the Charta of Paris in 1990. This Charta records the end of the confrontation of the post-war era as well as the end of the cleavage of Europe, or, at least, this was its intention.

