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SOVIET TROOP WITHDRAWALS FROM EASTERN EUROPE AND
DEPLOYMENT ALONG THE SINO-SOVIET BORDER, 1967.
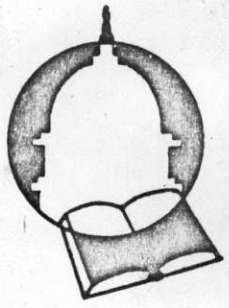
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SOVIET TROOP WITHDRAWALS FROM EASTERN EUROPE AND
DEPLOYMENT ALONG THE SINO-SOVIET BORDER

It is very difficult to find reliable and accurate estimates of
Communist military strength. Kenneth R. Whiting, a specialist on
Soviet military affairs at the United States Air Forces' Air University,
wrote that debate of the so-called "missile gap" in 1960 ought to be
sufficient evidence to demonstrate that "estimates of Soviet military
strength tend to vary considerably." In the case of the East European
States, he went on, "the lack of 'hard' figures is equally notorious.
About all the observer can do is to hope that his estimates are a
reasonable approximation of reality."[1]

During 1966, various estimates of Soviet military strength in
Eastern Europe were published. A report on the Warsaw Pact in the
New York Times of May 22, 1966 included a map of the Soviet bloc
states giving the following figures of Soviet troop strength: East
Germany, 360,000; Poland, 20,000; and Hungary, 75,000. The total
figure was, 455,000.[2]

A press report from Washington on November 6, 1966, stated that
the Soviet Union and its allies in East Europe maintained a total
striking force in East Europe of about 85 divisions, backed by about

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[1] Whiting, Kenneth R. The development of the Soviet armed forces,
1917-1966. Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, Air University,
1966. p. 93.

[2] Grose, Peter. The Warsaw Pact shows its age. The New York Times,
May 22, 1966. p. E3.

3,000 tactical jet aircraft -- 1,200 Soviet and 1,800 East European.
Twenty Soviet divisions were said to be deployed in East Germany.
The Soviet garrison in East Germany was said to consist of 10 tank
divisions of roughly 8,000 men each plus 10 motorized rifle divisions
of about 10,000 men each. Two Soviet divisions were said to be in
Poland and four more in Hungary. [1] The report of the Institute for
Strategic Studies on "The military balance, 1966-67" corroborated other
estimates that the Soviets maintained 26 divisions in Eastern Europe. [2]

A press report from Berlin on February 10, 1967 indicated that
the Soviet Union maintained 22 heavily armed divisions in East Germany,
well over 300,000 troops. These troops were said to represent the
bulk of Soviet forces stationed outside of the Soviet Union in Central
and Eastern Europe. Hungary and Poland, the only other East European
bloc countries where Soviet forces were stationed, were said to have
only small Soviet contingents. [3]

Another February press report stated that Soviet troops based
in East European countries were estimated by military specialists
at 500,000, most of whom were stationed in East Germany with smaller
detachments in Hungary and Poland. The East European states themselves
were said to have 300,000 men under arms. [4]

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[1] Welles, Benjamin. New Soviet arms viewed as increasing military threat
to West Europe. The New York Times, November 6, 1966.

[2] The Institute for Strategic Studies. The military balance, 1966-
67. London, 1966. p. 2. This source gives a detailed breakdown
of Soviet and East European military strength. The total regular
Soviet military forces are estimated at about 3,165,000 men.

[3] The New York Times, February 10, 1967, p. 1.

[4] The Washington Post, February 3, 1967, p. A16.

In late 1966 and early 1967 there were various published accounts declaring that the Soviet Union was reducing its forces in East Europe and deploying them along the Sino-Soviet border. These reports coincided with a visible heightening of tensions in the Sino-Soviet dispute and with reports of improved weapons in the Soviet arsenal and improved "airlift" techniques for rapid troop deployment.

In November, "well-informed" Polish sources stated that one of the main objectives of a visit to Poland in October by two Soviet military leaders, Marshal Skripko and Marshal Sudets, was to determine what Soviet units in the Warsaw Pact area could be withdrawn to the east to meet the Chinese threat without weakening the Soviet defensive and offensive capability. In December 1966, Marshal Chen Yi, China's Vice Premier and Foreign Minister, was reported as having told J. G. dos Santos, a Brazilian lawyer who had just returned from China, that, "The Soviet has 13 divisions on the Chinese frontier, moved there from Eastern Europe." 1/

According to a report from Warsaw on February 2, 1967, diplomatic sources said that the Soviet Union had informed its Warsaw Pact allies of plans to withdraw about 50,000, or about 10 percent, of its troops from Eastern Europe to bolster Soviet defenses along the Chinese border. Reports were circulating in Warsaw that west-to-east Soviet troop movements across Poland had increased, but there was no confirmation. 2/

1/   The New York Times, December 11, 1966. p. 3.
2/   The Washington Post, February 3, 1967. p. A16.

A press despatch from Berlin on February 9, 1967, reiterated that
the Soviets were planning to withdraw several army divisions from
East Germany. These accounts, based on evaluations of intelligence
findings, indicated that the Soviets were about to pull back 3 to 5 divi-
sions from Central Europe. The loss in manpower was reportedly to be
compensated by the stationing of additional rockets and other weapons
in East Germany. Eastern bloc sources indicated that similar reports
of Soviet troop withdrawals were circulated in Warsaw earlier in
February. Polish sources stated that the Soviets were said to be
planning a withdrawal of 50,000 troops, a figure that could represent
three divisions at full strength or 4 to 5 divisions at less than full
strength. It was not immediately clear whether the Russians intended
to use the troops to augment their defense lines along the Sino-Soviet
border. The reports of Soviet plans were said to have emanated from
reliable German and East European sources. Allied officials declined
to confirm these reports, but indicated that they could have been
deliberately circulated to give a signal to the West.

Soviet plans of troop withdrawals had been linked with a visit
to East Germany a few weeks before by Marshal Andrei A. Grechko, the
Soviet commander of the Warsaw Pact. It was believed that Grechko
sought to allay fears voiced by Walter Ulbricht and other East German
leaders that a troop withdrawal by the Russians would weaken the
regime's position vis-a-vis the West. Marshal Grechko was reported to

have told the East Germans that Soviet firepower would not be weakened

by the deployment but would be built up through the stationing of

additional rocket units. [1]

The Washington Post of February 12, 1967, referred to these earlier

reports of Soviet withdrawals of troops from East Germany which were

said to be deployed along portions of the 5000-mile Sino-Soviet border.

Western sources, it said, did not confirm these reports. Some sources

estimated that the Soviets deployed as many as 400,000 men along the

border, but again there had been no Western confirmation of the figures. [2]

A report by Dennis Bloodworth of the London Observer from Singapore

published in the Washington Post on February 19, reiterated the previous

assertions in December by Chen Yi that the Soviets transferred 13 more

divisions from Eastern Europe to the Chinese border. This account

claimed that "the pickings of military intelligence from Washington to

Tokyo are poor and ill-matched, but the most reliable reports indicate

that the Russians may now have between 17 and 22 divisions in the Soviet

Far East alone, and nearly 40 altogether in territories opposite the

Chinese frontier, while the Chinese have deployed between 50 and 60

divisions -- more than 600,000 men -- on their side." [3]

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[1] The New York Times, February 10, 1967. p. 1.
[2] The Washington Post, February 12, 1967. p. A16.
[3] Bloodworth, Dennis. Flashpoint nearing along Sino-Soviet border.
The Washington Post, February 19, 1967. p. E2.

While the above reports, that are officially unconfirmed, indicate Soviet troop deployment from Eastern Europe to the Sino-Soviet border, there is always the possibility that Soviet troops along the Sino-Soviet border might have been drawn not from Europe but from garrisons stationed in the Soviet interior.