

## CHAPTER 12

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### **From *Combat Zone to Strategic Hub*: The Transformation of the Conception of Warfare in the German High Command in the Early 1990s**

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The recent redeployment of the last German military personnel from Afghanistan on 29 June 2021 concluded the longest foreign operation of the Bundeswehr. In the past 25 years, while the German armed forces focussed on missions within the framework of international crisis management, the command and control of major formations and the operational thinking of the “Cold War” played a minor role at most. The slogan “Be able to fight so you won’t have to fight” seemed obsolete. This changed suddenly with the unlawful annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the threat to the eastern flank of NATO by the Russian Federation.<sup>1</sup> The resulting paradigm shift – under similar circumstances – now places the Bundeswehr and NATO in a transformation process with enormous challenges, just as the one experienced in the early 1990s.

During the second plenary discussion of the “Talks at the Memorial” (*Gespräche am Ehrenmal*) format on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact on 1 July 2021, the acting Chief of the German Army, Lieutenant General Alfons Mais, clearly stated: “Those who fail to appear within days at the external borders with combat-ready, i.e. cohesive, flexible units capable of escalating and war-fighting, to face an opponent who operates on interior lines and freely chooses where to mount aggression, might be too late to respond and will fail to achieve the security policy objective”.<sup>2</sup>

NATO defence planning unmistakably shows what is expected of Germany, stressed the Chief of the Army. What is expected are land forces with a “cold-start

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<sup>1</sup> Jarowinsky, Hanna, Podiumsdebatte: Bundeswehr muss wieder „kaltstartfähig“ werden, 08.07.2021. URL: <<https://www.bmvg.de/de/aktuelles/podiumsdebatte-bundeswehr-muss-wieder-kaltstartfaehig-werden-5103566>> (last accessed on 13 July 2021).

<sup>2</sup> BMVg, Mediathek, Gespräche am Ehrenmal am 01.07.2021, Audio lecture by Lieutenant General Alfons Mais. URL: <<https://www.bmvg.de/de/mediathek/audio-vortrag-von-generalleutnant-alfons-mais-5104158>> (last accessed on 13 July 2021).

capability” that can be used at the external borders of NATO territory in a state of crisis within a few days, and Germany as rear area of operation functioning as “hub” to provide support in deploying, receiving and moving forward follow-on forces.<sup>3</sup>

Although the subject is highly topical, it is not new. Even after the end of the “East-West conflict”, the Bundeswehr was at the beginning of an operational reorientation. The conceptions of forward defence that had grown over decades and the scenarios associated with them had become obsolete.<sup>4</sup> When asked about the new “front” in a fundamentally changed, more complex world, the former Chief of Defence Admiral Dieter Wellershoff replied: “the front is where my territory, the territory of my friends or my interests are attacked. The aggressor determines where the front is”.<sup>5</sup>

But what did the Bundeswehr’s conception of warfare look like in the new “front” and what operational ideas shaped it? This essay attempts to reflect on these questions. It is part of a dissertation project to be developed by the author on the conception of warfare in the Bundeswehr in the 1990s. The focus of the article is on the operational-tactical level with regard to possible aggression from the east and thus does not fully cover the conception of warfare at the time. The politico-strategic level was not examined. It must also be pointed out that not all files relevant to the contribution have yet been released for public use due to the classified archival period of 30 years. Therefore, the source analysis still had to be carried out very selectively. This applies in particular to NATO documents, whose classified status can only be revoked with the consent of all member states. The content of many NATO documents is reproduced in national documents, some of which have already been evaluated by the author.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Bürgener, “GDP ade”, p. 38.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

## **1. Remaining strategic options of the Soviet Union from the perspective of the Armed Forces Staff in 1990**

For more than 40 years, the “East-West conflict” was the defining feature of world politics. It was characterised by the power-political rivalry between the USA and the USSR. The “Iron Curtain”, the dividing line between the two systems, ran across Europe and divided Germany into the former German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany. The Berlin Wall became a symbol of this division. Its fall on November 9, 1989 marked the end of the bloc confrontation and made German reunification possible a year later. But it was still a long way to complete sovereignty. Around 360,000 Russian soldiers of the Western Group of Forces (WGF) were still stationed in Germany.

The drastic changes in the military political situation resulted in a fundamental reassessment of the offensive capability of the Warsaw Pact. In particular, the fact that the non-Soviet Warsaw Pact states increasingly questioned their participation in military operational planning that simply supported Soviet hegemony in the Warsaw Pact, in addition to the future reductions called for under the arms control agreements, surely had a crucial influence on the operational and strategic planning concepts of the Soviet Union. Against this backdrop, in May 1990 the planners at the Armed Forces Staff<sup>6</sup> were of the opinion that from the mid-1990s ad-hoc surprise attacks into the Central Region would no longer be a valid option for the Soviet Union. Comprehensive attack operations were only feasible with a redeployment of forces stationed east of the Ural Mountains after a preparation time of several months. Attack operations with limited strategic objectives continued to be possible with an appropriate concentration of forces in one strategic direction. However, as a consequence of the notably reduced armed forces this could not be achieved in echelon formations in width and depth with the previously assumed intensity.<sup>7</sup>

But what did this threat look like in detail and what military options were available to the Soviet armed forces in the estimation of the Armed Forces

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<sup>6</sup> The Armed Forces Staff was the working staff of the Chief of Defence of the Bundeswehr in the Federal Ministry of Defence.

<sup>7</sup> BArch-MA, BW 2/53903, Annex to Fü S VI 3, Tgb.Nr. 279/90 VS-Vertr., 1. Entwurf Untersuchungsbericht zur Harmonisierung der FOFA Munitionsplanung, 03.05.1990, pp. 3-4.

Staff? Tasked by the Vice Chief of Staff of the Bundeswehr, the Armed Forces Staff Division III prepared a position paper on “military political, strategic and operational principles for the planning of the Bundeswehr in a unified Germany with due consideration of the conditions for the transition period until the withdrawal of the Soviet forces” for the meeting with Minister of Defence Gerhard Stoltenberg in the Chiefs of Staff Council on 1 August 1990.<sup>8</sup>

This blueprint submitted to the minister provided not only the principles for the build-up of the Bundeswehr in the New Federal States and the resulting operational defence concept for all Germany, it also shed light on the ideas of the operation experts with regard to the remaining options of the Soviet Union. For the analysis of future strategic and operational options for Central Europe, the blueprint is divided into three phases, and would serve as a guide from a “transitional period” to a “state after the transition”.

Phase I ends with the ratification of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe I<sup>9</sup> and the implementation of the unity of the German State (time perspective 1990/91). It is already characterised by a considerable improvement of the situation. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union had a wide range of options available reaching from the defence along its borders to the strategic offensive against NATO’s European member states. Nevertheless, the prerequisites had already changed to such an extent that the extreme option of a simultaneous strategic intervention of all Europe at a range from the Arctic to Turkey and in depth to the Atlantic after a short preparation time had become impossible.<sup>10</sup>

A residual risk remained, however, since the Soviet Union had a sufficiently superior potential at its disposal that would allow it to launch a strategic offensive, albeit with a very long preparation time. The prospects of success were considered doubtful. Nevertheless, this potential-oriented assessment of the option—“strategic offensive after a long preparation time”—was considered the

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<sup>8</sup> BArch-MA, BW 2/53282, Auftrag stv. Generalinspekteur an Cds Fü S, Planungsüberlegungen über die Anteile der künftigen Bundeswehr auf dem Territorium der heutigen DDR, 24.07.1990, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> The ratification of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe took place on 19 November 1990.

<sup>10</sup> BArch-MA, BM 1/15804, GenInsp. Tgb.Nr. 1000/90 geh., part A, Fü S III 2, Skizze der militärpolitischen, militärstrategischen und operativen Grundlagen für die Planung künftiger deutscher Streitkräfte (Planungsskizze), 3.08.1990, p. 10.

most dangerous one.<sup>11</sup>

Phase II followed the ratification of the CFE Treaty I and the completed unification and ended with the conclusion of the implementation of CFE I and the complete withdrawal of the WGF from the acceding territories (time perspective 1991 to 1994). The conclusion was that the gradual reduction of the strategic armed forces stationed in East Germany and the implementation of the CFE Treaty would considerably improve the situation in both the Central Regions and the flanks, since the range and extent of the remaining offensive options available to the Soviet Union would continue to decline. The option of a theatre-wide strategic offensive after a long preparation time and limited strategic offensives in Central and Western Europe after a short preparation time was no longer feasible. The analysts therefore concluded that a transition to strategic defence would necessarily be made.<sup>12</sup>

In particular due to the Northern Group of Forces (NGF) stationed in Poland and the ground and air forces not yet withdrawn from Germany, the Soviet Union still had residual options for offensive action with limited strategic objects albeit only after a longer preparation time. At any time, the Soviet Union would have been able to use the forces still present in Germany to occupy key territories and facilities in the acceding territories against the will of the German government. The forces remaining in Poland, according to the assessment of the Armed Forces Staff, would secure the LOCs (Lines of Communication) and force Poland with forward-moved main forces to at least accept the conflict or participate passively. The strategic armed forces stationed in Germany and Poland would cover the rapid build-up and advance of the main body of the manoeuvre forces from the Soviet Union and immediately conduct a joint offensive with limited strategic objectives. This offensive could consist in rapidly dividing the two NATO army groups, and striking them separately in the Central Region, according to the

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<sup>11</sup> BArch-MA, BW 2/53282, Annex 1 to Fü S III 2 part A of July 1990, Fü S III 6, Überlegungen zu künftigen operativen Rahmenbedingungen, July 1990, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> BArch-MA, BM 1/15804, GenInsp, Tgb.Nr. 1000/90 geh., part A, Fü S III 2, Skizze der militärpolitischen, militärstrategischen und operativen Grundlagen für die Planung künftiger deutscher Streitkräfte (Planungsskizze), 3.08.1990, pp. 10-11; BArch-MA, BW 2/53282, Fü S III 6, Annex 1 to Fü S III 2 part A of July 1990, Überlegungen zu künftigen operativen Rahmenbedingungen, July 1990, pp. 3-6.

evaluation. An offensive counter-air operation would neutralise the combat air assets of NATO. In this scenario, the primary focus of the Soviet Union would be to concentrate superior forces in the decisive area, both in the build-up and in the creation of a point of main effort, in order to win the race for time against NATO. Further, it would have had to retain the initiative throughout and concentrate superior forces at key points to pre-empt a counter concentration of NATO forces. Overall, the Soviet Union could have been keen to neutralise the military assets of NATO in this manner in order to create favourable conditions according to its own interests. The described scenario also constitutes the most dangerous case.<sup>13</sup>

It was concluded that the more probable option would be to use the remaining strategic armed forces of the WGF in Germany as delaying and observation forces to cover the timely occupation of an advanced forward defence of the Soviet Union at the Elbe or Oder-Neiße or, more probable at the Vistula or Bug rivers in a conflict.<sup>14</sup>

In summary, the conclusion is that both options posed serious problems for the defence of the Central Region as well as for the military stability in Central Europe, and raised a number of questions and problems for operational planning. This is particularly true given that in this phase Germany, Denmark and the Benelux as well as the flank states continued to be completely within the operational range of offensive options of the Soviet Union. The former intermediate objectives of a strategic offensive like the Rhine and the Baltic exits would become final targets of the attack operations. Over time, such an approach was assessed by the Armed Forces Staff to be extremely unlikely and very dangerous.<sup>15</sup>

Phase III follows the complete withdrawal of the WGF from Germany and comprises the period until the redeployment of all Soviet stationing forces in Europe to the territory of the Soviet Union—unless already done—and the transition to a concept of defence of the USSR at its borders (time perspective from 1995). Also in this phase, the Soviet Union had only limited options for

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<sup>13</sup> BArch-MA, BW 2/53282, Annex 1 to part A Fü S III 2 of July 1990, Fü S III 6, Überlegungen zu künftigen operativen Rahmenbedingungen, July 1990, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> BArch-MA, BM 1/15804, GenInsp, Tgb.Nr. 1000/90 geh., part A, Fü S III 2, Skizze der militärpolitischen, militärstrategischen und operativen Grundlagen für die Planung künftiger deutscher Streitkräfte (Planungsskizze), 3.08.1990, p. 11.

attack on the European theatre. The most dangerous case would be the option to re-establish the old structure oriented towards offensive capability. This would require one or two years of preparation time, however. As long as NATO retained its capability to re-increase its armed forces if necessary, it would be able to cope with this danger.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, the planning considerations provide a brief assessment of the strategic options of the Soviet Union in other regions. Operations experts of the Armed Forces Staff reached the conclusion that the northern flank region would always be within the range of Soviet offensive options. An increase of dangers in this region was not to be expected, however. In contrast, the southern flank could develop a greater potential for instability. It was to be expected that the instability of the Middle East in the southern flank region would affect both NATO and the Soviet Union, which could cause the Soviet Union to seek a stronger military presence on its southern flank than previously. For the foreseeable future, the Soviet Union would also use the Atlantic for the protection of its strategic submarine second-strike capability and of its mother country. In all phases, it would retain the general possibility of severing NATO sea lines of communication and of concentrating sea-based attack assets against Europe in the entire northern flank region as offensive options.<sup>17</sup>

## **2. Operational concepts by the Army Staff in the early 1990s**

The beginning of the 1990s saw a radical change in the conception of warfare of NATO and the Bundeswehr. The former General Defence Plan-related and almost inflexible “NATO layer cake”<sup>18</sup> along the intra-German border was abandoned in favour of a mobile conduct of operations with reduced force levels. As early as at the London NATO Summit in June 1990, the heads of state and government agreed that in the future the alliance should rely more strongly on the capability

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>18</sup> Until 1990, NATO’s General Defence Plan provided for the defence of the inner-German border by the various national corps stationed in the Federal Republic of Germany, which in the event of a defence would have been deployed like a layer of cake from the Baltic Sea to the Alps.

“...of setting up armed forces again only when they become necessary”.<sup>19</sup> Given the impending German unity, an increased presence of allied armed forces on German soil was no longer a military and operational necessity. According to NATO the much longer warning and preparation time would have allowed an allied deployment in the Central Region<sup>20</sup> in time, if required.

Since force reductions made the overall cohesive defence from the defence sectors of the NATO corps in parallel impossible, the protection of the expanded alliance area, which had grown to include the eastern acceding territories, required not only more mobile and flexible armed forces but also a military concept adapted to the new situation. This had far-reaching consequences for strategy, armed forces structures and operational thinking. Henceforth, forces, time and space stood in a completely different relation to one another. As a result of the decreasing armed forces in the future, space was to become more important strategically.<sup>21</sup> As the strongest military power in Europe, the Soviet Union and its successor Russian Federation initially continued to be the crucial benchmarks for planning defence operations in Central Europe.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. BArch-MA, BW 2/32476, Planungsstab BMVg, Annex 2, Richtlinien für die militärpolitische Einbindung deutscher Streitkräfte in Bündnis, no date, p. 3.

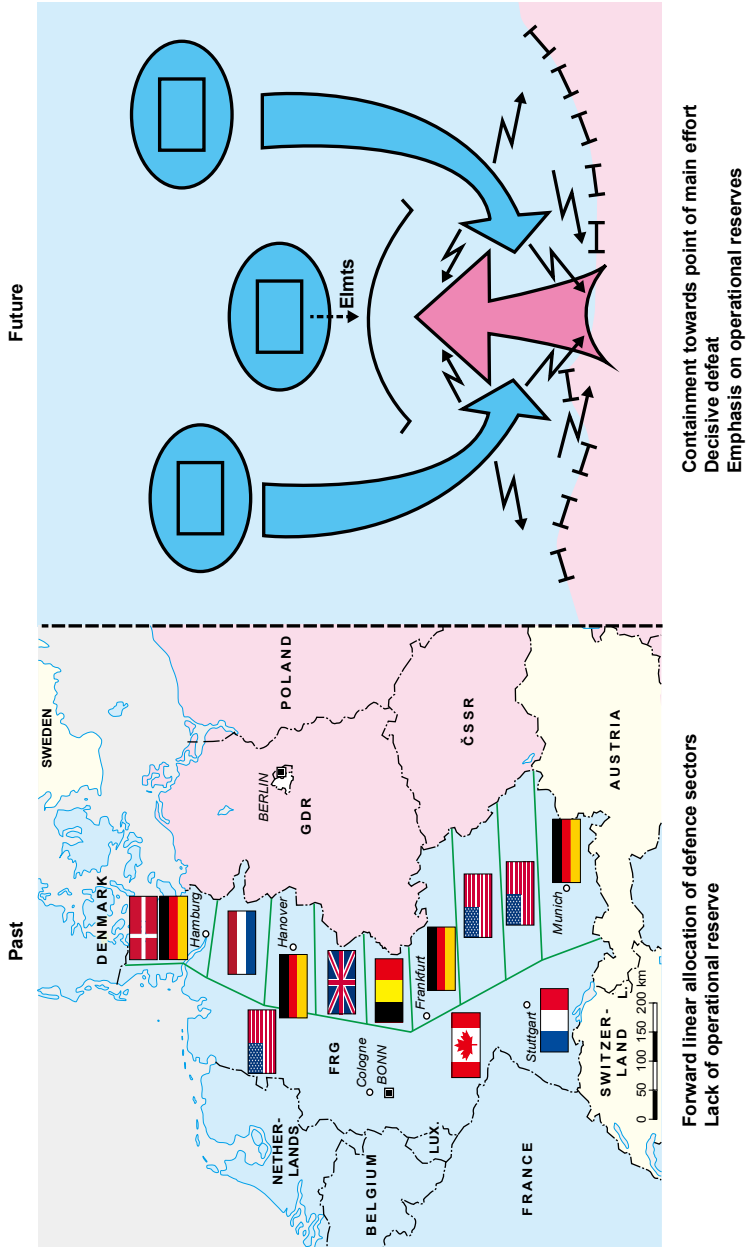
<sup>20</sup> In the military context of NATO, the Central Region comprised the strategic area of Western Europe from south of the Elbe River in the north to the Alps in the south.

<sup>21</sup> Bürgener, “GDP ade”, pp. 38-39.

<sup>22</sup> BArch-MA, BH 7-2/ 1306, Annex B to Fü H VI 2 Az 09-10-80 of 02.12.1991, Fü S III 2/ Fü S III 1, Militärpolitische und -strategische Vorgaben und konzeptionelle Folgerungen für die Bundeswehr, 21.11.1991, pp. 6-7.

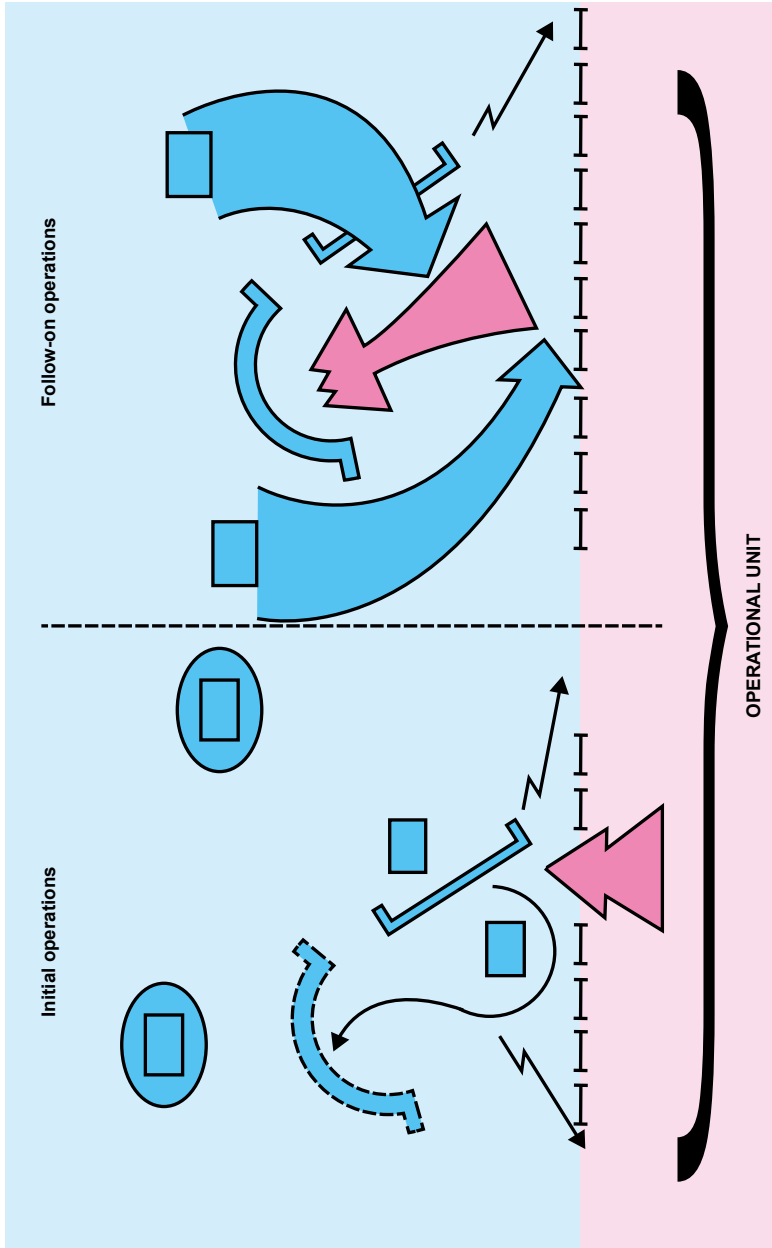


**Figure 1: Defence operations**



Source: BArch-MA, BH 1/30108, Fü H III 1 - Vortrag Ref.-Leiter an FüAkBw 21.1.91 - „Begriff und Wesen operativer Führung von Landstreikkräften“.

Figure 2: Operational tasks in defence operations (1991)



Source: BArch-MA, BH 1/30108, Fü H III 1 - Vortrag Ref.-Leiter an FüAKBw 21.1.91 „Begriff und Wesen operativer Führung von Landstreitkräften“.

According to the ideas of Army Staff<sup>23</sup> Division III,<sup>24</sup> in the event of an operation in the Central Region, the German Army would have key tasks: 1. temporary defence close to the border in the main attack sections of the adversary; 2. extensive surveillance of less threatened areas outside points of main operational efforts; and 3. securing operations and maintaining freedom of operation.<sup>25</sup> For the immediate protection of the overall territory, operations were to begin as soon as possible and—drawing on the principles of the former forward defence—be conducted in due regard to damage limitation and with the objective of a speedy resolution of the conflict. In accordance with the initial deliberations considering military strategic and operational principles of the Armed Forces Staff of July 1990,<sup>26</sup> operations experts of the Army Staff proceeded on the assumption that only one or two main or secondary thrusts with limited operational width would be required and not an attack along the whole front. The time schedule included initial and follow-on operations.

Initial operations were generally understood as defensive operations close to the border. The initial disposition of forces would provide for only small contingents to be employed at the front to initially just monitor wide sectors to subsequently allow for a concentration of strong forces in places where the enemy would eventually attack. Thus, it would not be necessary to employ combat troops all along the line from the onset. Hostile attacking forces were to be reconnoitred at an early stage and worn down with fire, and their movements were to be channelled and contained in order to ultimately defeat them in a suitable area and regain lost territories. By creating a point of main effort in the main areas of attack, their employment was to be the basis for decision-making. If necessary, attack operations would have been conducted with purely German forces at first. Most of the formations would have been retained in rear areas in depth

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<sup>23</sup> The Army Staff was the top administrative command of the army and one of the five staffs at the Federal Ministry of Defence.

<sup>24</sup> Staff Division III in the Army Staff was responsible for introducing national ideas into the planning of NATO at the respective level and monitoring whether these were taken into account in the concrete planning.

<sup>25</sup> Bürgener, “GDP ade”, p. 39.

<sup>26</sup> BArch-MA, BM 1/15804, GenInsp, Tgb.Nr. 1000/90 geh., part A, FÜ S III 2, Skizze der militärpolitischen, militärstrategischen und operativen Grundlagen für die Planung künftiger deutscher Streitkräfte (Planungsskizze), 3.08.1990.

as a powerful assault-capable operational reserve to be employed in follow-on operations against hostile forces concentrated in the area of main effort with the purpose of forcing a decision.<sup>27</sup>

Highly mobile, flexible, sustainable and robust mechanised brigades were to be employed as core elements of the army and pillars of the operation in both initial and follow-on operations. Capable of engaging in combined arms combat, they were also intended for operations outside the Central Region. Airmobile formations were to provide support for mechanised forces and special operations.<sup>28</sup>

The task of wide-area surveillance of less threatened front sections would be continued simultaneously, *inter alia* to cover the deep flanks in the course of follow-on operations. In this context, wide-area surveillance does not mean the observation of sections between two positions, over a width of five to six kilometres; rather it is to be understood at an operational scale, in dimensions comparable to the former army corps sectors. The German armed forces needed a completely new approach to this task since the integrated forward defence with combat sectors for corps excluded this. It was intended to employ reconnaissance systems that could have reached deep into enemy territory. Drones, air force capabilities and space-based sensors, if required, were to detect enemy groups located throughout the area of interest. High-mobility light ground reconnaissance in close cooperation with helicopter reconnaissance would supplement the surveillance system.<sup>29</sup>

All planning and command and control processes focussed on the cooperation with the air forces to achieve common operational objectives. The joint position paper of the army and air force staffs on the Principles for Ground and Air War in Central Europe explicate this. The territorial forces were responsible for securing the operations. They were to ensure security throughout the territory of the German state by providing area and point defence, keeping lines of communication on the ground open and ensuring the personnel and material readiness of the armed

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<sup>27</sup> Bürgener, "GDP ade", p. 40; BArch-MA, BH 1/30108, StAL FÜ H III, Vortrag vor der Clausewitz-Gesellschaft in Ulm am 14. November 1990 zu „Grundzüge zukünftiger operativer Führung“, Bonn 9.11.1990, pp. 11-16.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 22-23.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-18.

forces.<sup>30</sup>

By adhering to the political principle of never being the first to use military force, the initiative would at first always be with the enemy. Accordingly, all operational considerations focussed on the idea that it was necessary to regain the initiative as early as possible. Retaking the initiative was, therefore, the core of all future action.<sup>31</sup>

### **3. Operational considerations by the I (GE) Army Corps for the 1990s**

Since the late 1980s, various staff studies and seminars on operational thinking in the changing security environment were conducted not only at the level of command echelons but also at the Bundeswehr Command and Staff College and at corps headquarters. Several of them have been retained among the files at the Federal Archives-Military Archives in Freiburg.

A typical example is the I (GE) Army Corps where detailed ideas on the operational and tactical concept for the 1990s were developed as early as June 1990. The considerations in the I (GE) Corps are based on ideas according to which the military-strategic principle of deterrence and defence capability towards the Soviet Union continued to exist. The “classic” pre-nuclear conventional deterrence was to grow in relevance once again whereas the nuclear component in the short range and battlefield sectors would become insignificant. Conventional deterrence required defence-capable armed forces. In the event of a Soviet attack, considerations assumed an enemy whose offensive capability would be highly concentrated and echeloned in depth. Accordingly, NATO would need to be in a position to concentrate its own ground and air forces over large distances in points of main effort rapidly in order to launch an attack and defeat the enemy in a counterattack. The operational mobility of NATO’s own formations was of paramount importance.<sup>32</sup> For the mobilisation, deployment and redeployment of

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<sup>30</sup> Bürgener, “GDP ade”, p. 40.

<sup>31</sup> BArch-MA, BH 1/30108, StAL Fü H III, Vortrag vor der Clausewitz-Gesellschaft in Ulm am 14. November 1990 zu „Grundzüge zukünftiger operativer Führung“, Bonn 9.11.1990, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> BArch-MA, BH 1/14725, Annex 2 to G3 I. Korps, Erste Überlegungen zum operativ-taktischen Konzept der 90er Jahre, 12.06.1990, p. 1.

the Soviet forces, the planners of the I (GE) Corps expected a warning time of 30 days for military preparations in June 1990.<sup>33</sup>

The operational and tactical concept derived from these considerations provided for a flexible, mobile defence in depth, which can best be described as “containment”. For this purpose: 1. at an early stage present reconnaissance forces of the corps would reconnoitre the enemy in a depth of up to 150 kilometres; 2. screening forces would monitor the attacker on a broad front, and—reinforced by multinational air mobile forces—contain them in depth, where necessary; and 3. mechanised formations would delay enemy forces in the point of main effort by abandoning ground while retaining suitable terrain areas as cornerstones in order to destroy the attack forces in decisive counterattacks with deeply echeloned thrusts into the enemy flank with reserves brought up from the depth with a high degree of flank protection and support from air forces. American and French army formations would form the core of the reserves.<sup>34</sup>

As the considerations of the I (GE) Corps show, the military leadership continued on the assumption that a military conflict would be the result of a large-scale conventional aggression from the East. Considering that according to information of the Armed Forces Staff Division II<sup>35</sup> in December 1990 the Soviet forces stationed in Central Europe comprised 464,000 military personnel with 373,900 of them belonging to the ground forces,<sup>36</sup> these plans were not without cause.

A letter of the Commanding General of the I (GE) Corps, Lieutenant General

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<sup>33</sup> Initial situation according to the plans of the I (GE) Corps in extracts: “X-30 mobilisation of Soviet forces of categories B and C, beginning of moving forces forward into the western military districts; X-10 beginning of moving Soviet forces forward (2 armies of category A) through Poland, deployment at ODER [river] or NEISSE [river]; X-3 mobilised covering forces begin march through Poland. Soviet troops in the GDR in assembly areas close to the border; X-0 Soviet Union marches with covering forces into the former GDR and moves them north and south of Berlin forward to the former inner-German border. Berlin is not touched, 2 attack armies (2nd echelon) still remain east of the ODER. No combat action yet, this includes border forces”. The Soviet Union names the action, “Reinforcing present forces”. Cf. BArch-MA, BH 1/14725, Annex 1 to G3 I. Korps, Erste Überlegungen zum operativ-taktischen Konzept der 90er Jahre, 12.06.1990, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> BArch-MA, BH 1/14725, Annex 2 to G3 I. Korps, Erste Überlegungen zum operativ-taktischen Konzept der 90er Jahre, 12.06.1990, pp. 1-2, 4.

<sup>35</sup> The Staff Division II is responsible for military intelligence.

<sup>36</sup> BArch-MA, BW 2/32476, Annex Personaldaten Sowjetunion to Fü S III 6, Streitkräfteumfänge der Bündnispartner, 15.11.1991.

Klaus Naumann, to the Chief of Staff, Army, General Henning von Ondarza reveals the rough draft of operations planning. General Naumann proceeded on the assumption that in the event of an aggression against the Federal Republic of Germany, his corps would be situated with an operational focus of defence and seek a decision with consolidated forces in a counter concentration east of the Lübeck-Leipzig line.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4. NATO's new Strategic Concept from 1991

With the formal dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation on 1 July 1991, NATO had lost its powerful opponent of old. The huge military potential of the former Soviet Union, however, had not disappeared and continued to pose a serious threat to transatlantic security.<sup>38</sup> The NATO strategy at the time, which until November 1991 was still based on MC 14/3 *Flexible Response* of 1968, no longer met the military and political requirements. In view of shrinking resources of the Alliance, as well as of restrictive arms control agreements, a fundamental reform of the Alliance was necessary to ensure a militarily and politically credible and reasonable collective defence capability.

This reform process, which began as early as July 1990 at the London NATO Summit and continued in the NATO Summit in Rome, was to provide a wide legal basis for the Alliance in its new security political role. The required adaptation of mission and structure was clearly reflected in the new *Strategic Concept* adopted by the heads of state and government of the NATO member nations on 8 November 1991. The strategic concept that was defined in a published umbrella document strongly emphasises the main purpose: the collective defence of these members. Security for Europe was to be improved and expanded through partnership and cooperation with the former member states of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation.<sup>39</sup>

In December 1991, the documents MC 400 (*Directive for Military*

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<sup>37</sup> BArch-MA, BH 1/14725, letter Commanding General I. (GE) Corps Lieutenant General Naumann to Chief of Staff Army Lieutenant General von Ondarza, 12.06.1991, pp. 1-2.

<sup>38</sup> BMVg, Verteidigungspolitische Richtlinien (VPR - (Defence Policy Guidelines)), p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> Meiers, *Zu neuen Ufern?*, pp. 177-178; Rühle, *Das neue Strategische Konzept*, pp. 2-3; BArch-MA, BW 2/53281, Generalmajor Naumann, Beitrag für den Mittler-Brief: „Erwartungen an die neue Strategie der NATO“, 18.03.1991, pp. 1-2.

*Implementation of the Alliance's Strategic Concept*) and MC 317 (*NATO's Force Structure for the Mid Nineties and Beyond*) were brought into force to accompany the concept. With regard to the radically changed military situation, the MC 317 met the requirement for reduced overall sizes, reduced levels of operational readiness, high flexibility and mobility.<sup>40</sup> Based on the London Declaration, the Alliance's new armed forces structure was restructured into three separate areas: *Reaction Forces* (RF),<sup>41</sup> *Main Defence Forces* (MDF)<sup>42</sup> and *Augmentation Forces*. Their national subordination was defined already in peacetime, but it would only take effect in an actual operation based on national and international decisions.<sup>43</sup> MC 317 defined the overall need of the armed forces for the defence of the Central Region to be about 40 divisions.<sup>44</sup>

The new *Strategic Concept* of the Alliance for Central Europe changed from static near-border forward defence (MC 14/3) to a concept of area defence with counter concentration. The military strategic principle of counter concentration runs through all key documents of NATO at the time<sup>45</sup> and is defined in MC 400 as follows: "Counter concentration is the massing of significant military force at a particular time and place with sufficient capability to counter an aggressor's force concentration".<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Summit Guide, Lisbon Summit, 19-20.11.2010, p. 17; BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, Annex 1 to Fü H VI 2, Ableitung des V-Umfangs des Heeres, 25.11.1993, p. 4; Rühle, *Das neue Strategische Konzept*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>41</sup> Reaction forces are fully available NATO-assigned response forces for NATO-wide employment that are modularly assembled in accordance with operational requirements. They are divided into Immediate Reaction Forces and Rapid Reaction Forces. In addition to their task of extended national defence within the framework of alliances, they were to contribute to contain existing conflicts outside of Europe. BArch-MA, BW 2/32476, Fü S III 6, Gedanken zum Aspekt Multinationalität anhand des Beispiels multinationaler Streitkräfte, 19.04.1993, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Main Defence Forces were primarily intended for the protection of national territory. They consisted of various national division-strength formations under the command and control of a corps. Main Defence Forces were subject to strong cadreing and thus dependent on mobilisation. In order to ensure the sustainability and survivability of the initially employed multinational reaction forces in long-term conflicts, contingents of the Main Defence Forces were to be used to reinforce, support or replace the reaction forces. BArch-MA, BW 2/32476, Fü S III 6, Gedanken zum Aspekt Multinationalität anhand des Beispiels multinationaler Streitkräfte, 19.04.1993, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> BArch-MA, BW 2/32476, Fü S III 6, Gedanken zum Aspekt Multinationalität anhand des Beispiels multinationaler Streitkräfte, 19.04.1993, pp. 2-3, 5-6, 9.

<sup>44</sup> BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, Annex 1 to Fü H VI 2, Ableitung des V-Umfangs des Heeres, 25.11.1993, p. 12.

<sup>45</sup> Millotat, "Die operative Dimension", p. 103.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *ibid.*



In military strategic counter concentration one's own forces would be concentrated in the region of the Alliance where a threat was expected to develop. The MDF stationed in the threatened region formed the core of the defence forces. Since they needed several weeks or months to establish operational readiness, it was intended to use RF for immediate operations since they were able to operate in the relevant crisis region within one or two weeks and were to ensure the build-up of the MDF as so-called shield forces. MDF from neighbouring regions could be used as reinforcements.<sup>47</sup>

Both the MC 400 and the MC 317 formed the basis for the future German defence concept of the 1990s and determined the size of the required armed forces. The German contribution consisted mainly of operational forces, at a strength of about eight divisions that were available for the purpose of national defence within the context of the Alliance.<sup>48</sup> The employment of German armed forces in a state of defence remained under NATO command.<sup>49</sup>

## **5. Soviet/Russian occupation forces in Central Europe**

Equipped with the most advanced military technology, the 360,000 strong<sup>50</sup> Western Group of Forces (WGF) was considered an elite formation. Although there was no expectation of an indirect aggression, until their complete withdrawal the WGF continued to be a German security hazard since it was essentially still capable of strategic offensives against Western Europe during the first years of its redeployment.<sup>51</sup> No later than in June 1991,<sup>52</sup> the WGF had stored nuclear warheads for surface-to-surface missiles and nuclear artillery munition of the ground forces<sup>53</sup> at more than 20 sites. In addition to extensive nuclear weaponry,

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 104-105.

<sup>48</sup> BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, Annex 1 to Fü H VI 2, Ableitung des V-Umfangs des Heeres, 25.11.1993, pp. 4-5, 9.

<sup>49</sup> BArch-MA, BH 1/28328, Fü H IV 1, Az 10-30-03, Die Führungsorganisation des Heeres, Grundsatzvortrag zur Informationsveranstaltung KdoBeh/Stäbe, 30.08.1993, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> In December 1990, the armed forces of the WGF comprised the following: ground forces 295,600; air forces/air defence forces 46,000; naval forces 300; central military agencies 18,100. BArch-MA, BW 2/32476, Annex Personaldaten Sowjetunion to Fü S III 6 of 15.11.1991, Streitkräfteumfänge der Bündnispartner.

<sup>51</sup> BMVg, Verteidigungspolitische Richtlinien (VPR - (Defence Policy Guidelines)), p. 13.

<sup>52</sup> Gunold, "Schüsse in Altengrabow 1991", p. 17; Bange, *Sicherheit und Staat*, pp. 491-494.

<sup>53</sup> Gunold, "Bilder vom sowjetischen Nuklearwaffenlager", p. 28.

according to Russian sources, they also had more than 4,209 tanks, 3,692 artillery systems, 8,209 armoured vehicles, 691 aircraft, 683 transport and combat helicopters as well as 677,032 tons of munition at their disposal. The units were fully motorised and of high operational mobility.<sup>54</sup>

Although the WGF was no longer permitted to conduct large-scale exercises and manoeuvres like during the Warsaw Pact period,<sup>55</sup> until September 1993, intensive combat training with fully manned and equipped units took place at the numerous training areas. In addition, the WGF air forces made an average of some 2,300 sorties with combat aircraft and combat helicopters per day, at peak days even up to 4,500. In addition to airspace intensive training units, they also held flight exercises at very low altitudes. Due to a lack of personnel and supply, from 1992 full strength exercises were conducted only below division level. Exercises involving more than 13,000 troops were prohibited. Nevertheless, the WGF intensified staff exercises at higher command echelons, which served to further train the senior leadership corps.<sup>56</sup> The downsizing of the WGF Air Forces was accompanied by a marked reduction of its exercise and training activities. In early 1993, flight operations had already decreased to below 100 sorties per day. Flight exercises at very low altitudes and airspace intensive training units were transferred to the Russian Federation.<sup>57</sup>

The downsizing of the WGF forces was carried out in accordance with operational principles. The withdrawn formations were originally intended to establish a new “western bloc” with the point of main effort in Ukraine and Belarus.<sup>58</sup> The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the resulting conflicts regarding national affiliation and disagreements on the new stationing of the formations resulted in a temporary delay in the withdrawal. On 4 March 1992, Russian President Yeltsin issued a decree to place the armed forces of the WFG

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<sup>54</sup> Foertsch, “Der Abzug der russischen Streitkräfte”, p. 466.

<sup>55</sup> “In the treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the USSR on Conditions for the Temporary Stay in and Modalities for the Phased Withdrawal of Soviet Forces from Germany”. In: *Aussenpolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Dok.-Nr. 246, p. 734.

<sup>56</sup> Foertsch, “Der Abzug der russischen Streitkräfte”, p. 469; Panian, “Sie gehen als Freunde”, p. 324.

<sup>57</sup> Klein, “Dokumentation des Zeitzeugenforums”, p. 234, 236; Panian, “Sie gehen als Freunde”, p. 324.

<sup>58</sup> Foertsch, “Der Abzug der russischen Streitkräfte”, p. 465.

under his direct authority,<sup>59</sup> and redeployed them to the Russian Federation to reinforce the Moscow Military District in particular. According to the overall withdrawal plan of the WGF, the formations stationed in the southern region were the first to leave the former GDR; they were followed by the forces from the northern region. The units on the line Magdeburg-Berlin-Frankfurt/Oder would withdraw in the last phase.<sup>60</sup>

The Central Group of Forces (CGF) was stationed in Czechoslovakia with 73,500 Soviet military personnel. It comprised in June 1990 a tank division (1,220 tanks) as well as three motorised rifle divisions, one artillery brigade, two tactical rocket brigades, one airborne battalion, a combat helicopter regiment and 70 combat aircraft of the air force.<sup>61</sup> The last joint tactical exercise of the allied troops in Czechoslovakia with the participation from the CGF took place from 1 to 4 March 1990. Due to the rapidly changing political framework, it had already lost its actual sense.<sup>62</sup> Based on the Agreement of 26 February 1990 on the withdrawal of the Soviet armed forces, the last troops left Czechoslovakian territory for good on 27 June 1991.<sup>63</sup>

As a result of the withdrawal of the CGF the danger of a possible direct advance of troops stationed there through the Bavarian Forest or the Austrian Alps into Southern Germany evaporated.<sup>64</sup> The Soviet threat to the II (GE) Army Corps had vanished. From an operational perspective, the withdrawal of Russian armed forces from Czechoslovakia opened the left flank of the armed forces of the WGF remaining on the territory of the former GDR; their formations now found themselves in an exposed curve.

On Polish territory, there was the Northern Group of Forces (NGF) of the former Soviet armed forces at a strength of 56,000 military personnel. In 1991, it comprised a mechanised rifle as well as a tank division (600 tanks), 90,000 tons of ammunition as well as tactical missiles for launching nuclear warheads. In

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<sup>59</sup> Hoffmann/Stoff, *Sowjetische Truppen in Deutschland*, p. 287.

<sup>60</sup> Foertsch, "Der Abzug der russischen Streitkräfte", p. 465.

<sup>61</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance 1990-1991*, p. 39; Range, "Neue Töne von der Moldau", p. 40.

<sup>62</sup> Tomek, *Gemeinsame Übungen*, p. 117.

<sup>63</sup> Pejčoch, "Kernwaffenträger in der tschechoslowakischen Armee", pp. 153-154; Range, "Neue Töne von der Moldau", p. 40; Sieber, "Die Tschechoslowakische Volksarmee", p. 78.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Hammerich, "Die geplante Verteidigung der bayrischen Alpen", pp. 252-260.

addition, the forces of the NGF had an air army with 200 aircraft and a helicopter regiment at their disposal.<sup>65</sup> Originally, the full and final withdrawal was to be completed by 15 November 1992,<sup>66</sup> but was delayed by the Russian military leadership such that 20,000 NGF military personnel were still in Poland in June 1992.<sup>67</sup> The last Russian armed forces left Poland on 17 September 1993, exactly 54 years after the Red Army had invaded the Polish eastern territories at the beginning of World War II.<sup>68</sup>

The three Baltic States as well as the territory of the Russian enclave around Kaliningrad formed the North-western Group of Forces (NWGF). The district of Kaliningrad itself posed a not inconsiderable threat to European security. In 1992, two tank, two mechanised rifle and an artillery divisions as well as an airborne and an air defence brigades, two brigades with tactical missiles for launching nuclear warheads, a combat helicopter regiment and the headquarters of the Baltic Fleet were stationed there.<sup>69</sup> In addition, elements of Russian formations withdrawing from Germany, Poland and the Baltic states were redeployed to Kaliningrad, thus further increasing the military presence in the region.<sup>70</sup> Lithuania and Poland, in particular, were afraid of the military presence of Russians in the immediate vicinity<sup>71</sup> to which Peter Scholl-Latour referred as the “iron Russian fist in the neck”. In 1992, about half a million military personnel were deployed around the former Königsberg.<sup>72</sup>

With the ongoing withdrawal of Russian armed forces from the states of Central Europe, the conception of warfare changed considerably. The military threat to the existence of the Federal Republic and Western Europe through superior conventional armed forces oriented towards offensive action and seizure of land no longer existed. The stationing of additional troops in the Kaliningrad military district, however, created an increasing threat to the security in the strategic

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<sup>65</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance 1990-1991*, p. 39; “Der Tag an dem die Sowjets Polen verließen”. *Deutsche Welle* of 17 Sep 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Gießmann, “Aufbruch zu alten Mythen?”, p. 197.

<sup>67</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance 1992-1993*, p. 98.

<sup>68</sup> “Der Tag an dem die Sowjets Polen verließen”. *Deutsche Welle* of 17 Sep 2018.

<sup>69</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance 1992-1993*, p. 96, 98.

<sup>70</sup> Krohn, *Eine neue Sicherheitspolitik*, p. 94; Range, “Zwischen Memel und Masuren”, p. 108.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Scholl-Latour, *Eine Welt in Auflösung*, p. 265.

environment. The increase in military presence along the new eastern border gave rise to security concerns, in particular for Poland.<sup>73</sup> Polish Prime Minister Jan Olszewski declared in an interview on 29 January 1992, “Our Eastern border gives rise to particular concern”.<sup>74</sup> During a visit of former Minister of Defence Stoltenberg to Warsaw from 22 to 24 March 1992, the Polish ministry of defence demanded equipment aid in view of the “dramatic danger from the East”.<sup>75</sup> At the joint press conference, Poland’s Minister of Defence Jan Pary announced that Poland counted on support from Germany in the event that “it was threatened by unrest in the former Soviet Union” and expected that “in a difficult case some kind of cooperation would be possible”.<sup>76</sup> A reasonable request in light of Russian agitation within its western sphere of interest.

## **6. Stable instability – Russia’s foreign policy in Central and Eastern Europe<sup>77</sup>**

After the disintegration of the USSR, the preservation and consolidation of power in the Eastern and Central European region continued to be a prime objective of Russian foreign policy. Russia considered the Western “near foreign countries” its sphere of interest, a strategic glacis, and was willing to enforce its own security at the external borders of this zone.<sup>78</sup> With the exception of the Baltic States, all former Soviet Republics of Eastern Europe joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in December 1991. In order to prevent the new democratic countries, which pursued their own political interests (e.g. accession to NATO and EU), from drifting off to Western spheres of interest, Russia tried to tie the CIS states more strongly to itself in terms of security policy.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Gießmann, “Aufbruch zu alten Mythen?”, p. 197.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> “Polen rechnet auf deutschen Schutz”. *Neues Deutschland* of 25 March 1992.

<sup>77</sup> Central Europe also includes the Baltic States, which depending on the definition classify as both Central and Eastern Europe.

<sup>78</sup> It is unclear in what borders the Western “near foreign countries” were included in the zone of Russian influence.

<sup>79</sup> Rahr, “Russland in Europa”, pp. 122, 128-131; Wettig, “Rußland/GUS”, p. 66, 69.

The 25 million ethnic Russians<sup>80</sup> who lived as minorities on the territory of Western neighbours were another political instrument for Russia to exert foreign influence. This became an increasingly difficult domestic problem for the new states as Russia felt responsible for the security of its compatriots beyond the new borders, and tried to force regulations on these countries that would grant the Russians living abroad citizenship of the Russian Federation in addition to the respective national citizenship. As a result, Russia would feel justified to intervene in favour of its citizens in those countries at any time. President Yeltsin declared the protection of Russians abroad to be the most important task of Russian foreign policy.<sup>81</sup> The fact that Russia had been willing to emphasise this point with military means is confirmed in an extract from the Russian daily newspaper *Izvestiya* of 5 June 1992 in which Russian Minister of Defence Pawel Grachev cautioned: “I would answer any infringement upon the honour and dignity of the Russian population in any region [...] with the most resolute measures, right up to the dispatch of armed units [...]”.<sup>82</sup> The draft of the military doctrine of May 1992, which grants the Russian armed forces the general right to intervene in order to protect the rights of minorities wherever those are infringed upon in any part of the former USSR, proves that Grachev’s threat was not simple rhetoric. Although this provision was removed from later versions, the high mobility and rapid operational capability of the Russian formations were important criteria for this kind of operation as before.<sup>83</sup>

As another leverage measure to demonstrate military power and to reverse territorial losses, Russia took sides in intra-state conflicts as the example of the Transnistria conflict in the summer of 1992 shows. The interference of the Russian 14 Guards Army under the command of General Alexander Lebed in support of the Russian minority resulted in the secession of the Dniester region from Moldova. Whether Lebed acted independently or by order of Moscow is a controversial issue given that Russian commanders were often willing to act on their own.

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<sup>80</sup> The number of 25 million Russians living outside Russian territory refers to the entire territory of the CIS in the early 1990s and not exclusively to Central and Eastern European states.

<sup>81</sup> Rahr, “Russland in Europa”, p. 123, 131; Wettig, “Rußland/GUS”, pp. 51-52.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Holden, “Ein gespanntes Verhältnis”, p. 144.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Such ambiguities suited the operational concept of the Russian leadership quite well as it allowed them to use such developments in their favour or even support them while maintaining plausible deniability.<sup>84</sup> This perspective was reflected in the draft of the Russian doctrine that had been published a few weeks before Lebed's intervention and included the "protection of the rights and interests of Russian citizens or people ethnically or culturally linked to Russia even outside its borders"<sup>85</sup> among the tasks of the armed forces. The subterfuge that the troops there served as protection force for the endangered Russian minority allowed Russia to realise its own objectives. General Lebed's intervention in violation of international law prevented not only the option of a unification with Romania it also led to Moldova's re-entering CIS.<sup>86</sup>

The border disputes between Russia and its Western neighbours after the end of the USSR were equally problematic and conflict-laden. One example were the disputes between Russia and Ukraine that held significant potential for an armed conflict or for the disintegration of Ukraine. Inflamed by Russian efforts to reverse the border, there was a real danger that the population in the east and south of the country, which consisted of a majority of ethnic Russians, could fall away from Ukraine and, supported by Moscow, seek an affiliation to Russia. Secession efforts of this kind would not only have destabilised large areas of the country and shaken the state order of Ukraine but probably also triggered an armed conflict. Since Russia refused to fully recognise the borders of Ukraine, the danger continued to exist. In addition, strong political forces in Russia made claims to the Crimean Peninsula and supported local efforts for an affiliation with the "mother country". There is no doubt that the conflict with Ukraine involved another case of international destabilisation in Eastern Europe, the effects of which could not be foreseen in the early 1990s.<sup>87</sup>

The unbundling of the former Soviet armed forces was also a very delicate matter in defence policy in 1992/1993 and even thereafter. The conflict between Russia and the successor states broke out over the stationing, command and power

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<sup>84</sup> Wettig, "Rußland/GUS", p. 52; Gießmann/Schlichting, "Schwierige Nachbarschaft", p. 130.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Hagen, "Russische Streitkräfte", p. 675.

<sup>86</sup> Wettig, "Rußland/GUS", p. 52.

<sup>87</sup> Wettig, "Rußland/GUS", p. 52, 56, 52; Gießmann/Schlichting, "Schwierige Nachbarschaft", p. 125.

of control of the strategic nuclear weapons as well as over the distribution of the conventional armed forces of the former Soviet Union.<sup>88</sup> The Russian-Ukrainian conflict over the division of the Black Sea Fleet is once again exemplary of this. Ukraine claimed a share of the ships that were not equipped with nuclear weapons. In order to defuse the conflict and prevent an escalation, both sides agreed at first in June 1992 only to put the fleet under a joint command and postponed the definite division to 1995. In the long term, Ukraine adhered to its demands.<sup>89</sup>

The disposition of the strategic nuclear weapons was just as problematic and dangerous. Their withdrawal from Ukraine and Belarus to Russian territory had originally been intended to be completed by the end of 1994. However, due to ambiguities in the founding documents of CIS, it was unclear to whom the weapon(s) belonged in the meantime. Both states pursued different courses. Belarus recognised that the nuclear weapons stationed on its territory belonged to Russia. Ukraine, however, insisted on having strategic control of the weapons stationed on its territory and used the issue of nuclear weapons to obtain loans and extensive security guarantees from both the West and Russia in the event of Russian territorial claims, extortions or an attack.<sup>90</sup>

Against the backdrop of Russian agitation and aggression, it is understandable that especially Ukraine as a new sovereign state was interested in building autonomous armed forces, and put all units stationed in the country under its command with the objective of establishing a national force after the disintegration of the Soviet Union.<sup>91</sup> In the other successor states, the build-up of national armed forces proceeded much more slowly in 1992/93. This is primarily due to the status of Russian armed forces stationed outside of Russia and their actions (Moldova and the Baltic States) within those states.<sup>92</sup>

In the early 1990s, the relations between Russia and the Baltic states of Estonia and Latvia were also marked by severe tensions. They broke out over

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<sup>88</sup> *Die Sowjetunion 1953-1991*, p. 36.

<sup>89</sup> Gießmann/Schlichting, "Schwierige Nachbarschaft", p. 125; Wettig, "Rußland/GUS", p. 63; Holden, "Ein gespanntes Verhältnis", p. 142.

<sup>90</sup> Holden, "Ein gespanntes Verhältnis", p. 142.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138; Wettig, "Rußland/GUS", p. 50; Manilow, "Nationale oder kollektive Sicherheit?", pp. 91-92.

<sup>92</sup> Holden, "Ein gespanntes Verhältnis", p. 143.



border disputes and the demand for a rapid withdrawal of Russian forces, which had originally been promised to begin in December 1991; however, because of disputes with Russia, they even came to a halt for a time. In order to emphasise the situation the two governments turned to the United Nations. Unlike Lithuania, however, Estonia and Latvia did not have a binding withdrawal agreement. Russia, in turn, linked the withdrawal of its armed forces by decree to requirements for the Russian minority living there<sup>93</sup> and threatened to delay the redeployment of the troops for seven to eight years if the two states failed to meet those requirements. In addition, military activities of the Russian armed forces aggravated the conflict in the Baltic States. Alone in 1992, up to 392 violations of Latvian airspace were reported to have taken place.<sup>94</sup>

In the first half of the 1990s, Russian great-power politics at its Western border provided new challenges to the European community and as a consequence also posed risks to German security policy. Not only the young states of Central and Eastern Europe, but also the Federal Republic felt increasingly threatened by Russian great-power rhetoric, the intervention in domestic affairs of former USSR republics and the ambivalent Russian policy of intervention. The Federal Republic of Germany was very concerned about the armed conflicts on the territory of the former Soviet Union (in the Caucasus as well as in Moldova) including the use of heavy weapons. The eastward enlargement of NATO, therefore, became one of the most pressing issues in restructuring the European security architecture.<sup>95</sup>

## 7. Germany as strategic hub for NATO

Based on MC 317, there were two general options for the Alliance's integrated defence of the Central Region. One of these was a defence against a direct

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<sup>93</sup> In 1993, approximately 40 percent of the Estonian and 48 percent of the Latvian population were of different nationalities, the majority of them ethnic Russians. Gießmann/Schlichting, "Schwierige Nachbarschaft", p. 133.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.; Gießmann, "Aufbruch zu alten Mythen?", pp. 201-202; Cf. Range, "Hansische Hoffnungen", pp. 63-64, 66-67.

<sup>95</sup> Rahr, Alexander, "Russland in Europa", p. 129; Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung: Bulletin Nr. 83, p. 806; BArch-MA, BH 7-2/ 1306, Annex B to Fü H VI 2 Az 09-10-80 of 02.12.1991, Fü S III 2/ Fü S III 1, Militärpolitische und -strategische Vorgaben und konzeptionelle Folgerungen für die Bundeswehr, 21.11.1991, pp. 6-7.

strategic attack and all-out war against German territory—with Germany as the “combat zone”. Depending on geographic factors, this would require ten divisions both north and south of the Thuringian Forest as well as another five to ten as operational reserves. Thus depending on the point of main effort of the hostile attack, up to 30 divisions would be employed in mobile warfare.<sup>96</sup>

The defence of Germany would (only?) be necessary however in the event of a strategic seizure of land with high war intensity. In view of the changed security situation, the Bundeswehr leadership estimated in the summer of 1992 that the risk of a military aggression against the Central Region no longer existed for the time being.<sup>97</sup> An operation was only feasible after an advanced warning time, estimated to be probably more than one year.<sup>98</sup> The stabilisation of the strategic environment, however, remained an unresolved issue<sup>99</sup> until deep into the 1990s; and this was accompanied by the latent danger of an aggression directed against the Central East European states. In the opinion of the Chief of Staff, Bundeswehr Naumann, the Russian highly mobile response force of 100,000 troops, which could be ready within seven days and was well suited for operations in the bordering Russian Federation, was a direct, albeit not acute, risk for Europe.<sup>100</sup>

For ensuring comprehensive defence capabilities of Central Europe, the second quite realistic option of MC 317 considered the request of the eastern neighbouring Visegrád states to include their defence into the Alliance. Although under these conditions, Germany would not have become the primary target of combat actions, as *strategic hub* it would have made a significant contribution to the deployment and transit of the mass of the allied armed forces as well as to their supply through wartime host nation support and host nation support. Military movement control, water crossing, transportation, ensuring freedom

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<sup>96</sup> BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, Annex 1 to Fü H VI 2, Ableitung des V-Umfangs des Heeres, 25.11.1993, p. 2, 10-11; BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, Fü H III 1, LVE InspH „Reduzierung V-Umfang Heer“ on 06 December 1993, Reduzierung V-Umfang aus militärpolitischer Sicht, 30.11.1993, p. 7.

<sup>97</sup> BArch-MA, BW 2/28203, Fü S VI 3, Az 09-10-00, Konzeptioneller Grundkurs (Entwurf), 30.06.1992, p. 6.

<sup>98</sup> BArch-MA, BM 1/15804, Fü S VI 3, Az 09-10-10, Planungsleitlinie 1994 für die Erstellung der Planungsvorschläge und des Bundeswehrplans 1994, 17.09.1992, p. 17; BArch-MA, BW 2/28202, Fü S V 1, Az 32-12-00, Unterrichtung MFR durch StAL Fü S V, 09.09.1992, p. 1.

<sup>99</sup> BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, Annex 1 to Fü H VI 2, Ableitung des V-Umfangs des Heeres, 25.11.1993, p. 2.

<sup>100</sup> “Planerisch nicht mehr zu steuern”. *Rheinischer Merkur* of 02 July 1993.

of operation and protection were other tasks in providing support for the allies. At the same time, far-reaching territorial tasks under national command like maintaining freedom of operations, area and object protection, protection of rear areas, sensitive installations and means of communication, military police tasks and wartime deployment would have to be ensured.<sup>101</sup>

In the opinion of the then Chief of Staff, Army, Lieutenant General Helge Hansen, in late 1993 the Russian Federation had basically three options: 1. stability through balance of the armed services; 2. capability of operational action against its neighbours—an *operational option*; as well as 3. capability of land seizure in a strategic framework—a *strategic option*. The Russian armed forces were incapable of a strategic seizure of land given the situation at the time.<sup>102</sup> The risk assessment of Armed Forces Staff Division II of November 1993 also confirms that Russia commanded armed forces that were capable only of “limited options against all immediate neighbours and neighbouring regions”.<sup>103</sup> In their opinion, offensive options of strategic dimensions would only be available to Russia after a new build-up of relevant groupings of forces. This process would take several years and require resources that were not available.<sup>104</sup> According to General Hansen, the most probable option of Russian action was the operational option. In his opinion, in this case it was necessary to have a defence structure in place for the build-up of armed forces which was adequate to contemporary and future threats and would offer enough time for reconstitution in the most

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<sup>101</sup> BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, Annex 1 to Fü H VI 2, Ableitung des V-Umfanges des Heeres, 25.11.1993, p. 2, 4, 11-12; BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, Fü H III 1, LVE InspH „Reduzierung V-Umfang Heer“ on 06 December 1993, Reduzierung V-Umfang aus militärpolitischer Sicht, 30.11.1993, p. 7; BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, Fü H III 3, Ableitung des V-Umfanges, Erarbeitung konzeptioneller Überlegungen, 02.12.1993, p. 2; BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, Annex 2 to Fü H III 3, Eintrittswahrscheinlichkeit bestimmter Lagen, 02.12.1993, p. 1; BArch-MA, BH 1/28328, Fü H III 3, Az 10-28-00, Wahrnehmung nationaler Aufgaben im Heer, Informationsveranstaltung KdoBeh/Stäbe on 08. September 1993, 31.09.1993, p. 2.

<sup>102</sup> BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, Fü H VI 3, Az 09-10-00, Durch InspH gebilligtes Protokoll des LVE V-Umfang am 06.12.1993, Reduzierung V-Umfang Heer in der Heeresstruktur 5 (N), 23.12.1993, p. 3.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, Fü H III 1, LVE InspH „Reduzierung V-Umfang Heer“ on 06 December 1993, Reduzierung V-Umfang aus militärpolitischer Sicht, 30.11.1993, p. 8.

<sup>104</sup> BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, Fü H III 1, LVE InspH „Reduzierung V-Umfang Heer“ on 06 December 1993, Reduzierung V-Umfang aus militärpolitischer Sicht, 30.11.1993, p. 8; BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, Fü H III 2, Ableitung des V-Umfanges, 05.12.1993, p. 2.

dangerous event, the development from the operational to the strategic option.<sup>105</sup>

Due to this the crucial tasks for the German army were the obligatory task of protecting the territorial integrity of the State (or restoring national sovereignty), as well as contributing to the Alliance defence of the Central Region with operational forces that could be employed outside the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany and, in the event of a Russian aggression against its neighbours (operational option) to serve as deployment area of the allies including support tasks in the point of main effort.<sup>106</sup> Armed Forces Staff Division II also concludes that the contemporary national defence was able to restrict itself primarily to securing the “strategic hub Germany” because currently and in the coming years it did not envisage a “strategic offensive capability of the Russian armed forces which threatens German territory”.<sup>107</sup>

In the event of Germany as a rear area of operation, Army Staff Division III rated the deployment of the 25 to 30 divisions via the poor infrastructure, in particular in the new eastern federal states, and possibly the few Oder River crossings as critical. Since a simultaneous deployment of all divisions was impossible, the coordination of the deploying formations constituted a challenge that was not to be underestimated. A densely occupied rear area would therefore be of considerable military interest to an opponent and would probably have to be protected against hostile attacks from the air with missiles as well as on the ground against command operations or terrorist harassing actions. Should all eight German divisions become involved in an extended national defence operation, the limited forces of the military district commands would have been left as the only operational army forces available to repel air and naval landings to protect German territory.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, FÜ H VI 3, Az 09-10-00, Durch InspH gebilligtes Protokoll des LVE V-Umfang on 06 December 1993, Reduzierung V-Umfang Heer in der Heeresstruktur 5 (N), 23.12.1993, p. 3.

<sup>106</sup> BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, FÜ H III 1, LVE InspH „Reduzierung V-Umfang Heer“ on 06 December 1993, Reduzierung V-Umfang aus militärpolitischer Sicht, 30.11.1993, p. 8.

<sup>107</sup> BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, FÜ H III 2, Ableitung des V-Umfanges, 05.12.1993, p. 2; BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, FÜ H III 1, LVE InspH „Reduzierung V-Umfang Heer“ on 06 December 1993, Reduzierung V-Umfang aus militärpolitischer Sicht, 30.11.1993, p. 8; BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, Annex 1 to FÜ H III 3, Eintrittswahrscheinlichkeit bestimmter Lagen, 02.12.1993, p. 2.

<sup>108</sup> BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, FÜ H III 3, Ableitung des V-Umfanges, Erarbeitung konzeptioneller Überlegungen, 02.12.1993, p. 3, 5.

Due to an improved overall security situation in Europe, the extent of MC 317 was once again reviewed in late 1993. The adapted MC 317 “ACE Force Structure Review” provided for just 30 to 35 divisions for the defence of the Central Region after 1995. The territory of the Federal Republic continued to be vital as a strategic hub for NATO.<sup>109</sup>

## 8. Conclusions

With the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the ongoing withdrawal of the occupying forces from Central Europe, the strategic and operational options gradually disappeared. Since mid-1992, the remaining Russian troops no longer posed an existential threat to German security. Outside the range of a strategic seizure of land, Germany was no longer considered as a combat zone. New risks in the strategic environment emerged in connection with the hegemonic ambitions of Russia within its western sphere of influence; the implications for security policy continue to be relevant to this day. In some circumstances, NATO might have been drawn into the defence of the eastern glacis as early as in the 1990s. In such an event, Germany would have acted as a strategic hub for the deployment of the Alliance. This can be regarded as the point of intersection with the current security policy.

During the panel discussion on 1 July, the participants discussed to what degree the operational thinking and self-image of the Bundeswehr of the 1980s differ from those of today. The Chief of the Army indicated clear divergences.<sup>110</sup> Looking at the threat situation in the early 1990s, it turns out that this view of war has considerably more strategic parallels. The operational factors of forces, space and time are comparable as well.

This paper is intended to encourage a stronger inclusion of the conceptualization of war of the Bundeswehr of the 1990s into the considerations of alliance defence. It is not the analysis of “contained” operations of a static defence close to the

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<sup>109</sup> BArch-MA, BH 1/27987, Annex 1 to Fü H VI 2, Ableitung des V-Umfangs des Heeres, 25.11.1993, pp. 12-14.

<sup>110</sup> BMVg, Mediathek, Gespräche am Ehrenmal am 01 Jul 2021, Audio lecture by Lieutenant General Alfons Mais. URL: <<https://www.bmvg.de/de/mediathek/audio-vortrag-von-generalleutnant-alfons-mais-5104158>> (last accessed on 13 July 2021).

border of the 1980s but the idea of freedom of operation in the concept of area defence with counter concentration of the 1990s that give impetus to the conduct of operations of today. So far, an academic reappraisal of the topic from a historian's perspective has yet to be made.

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