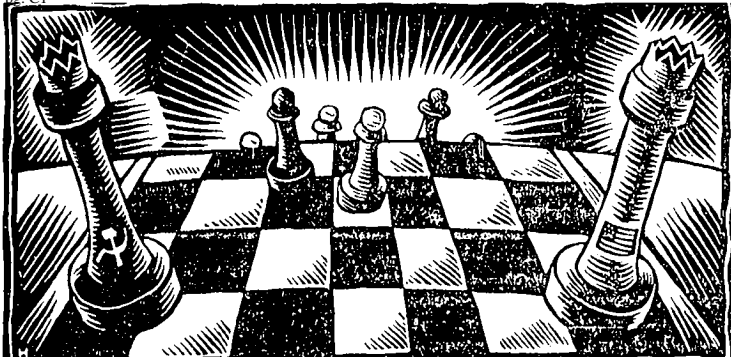


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PETER HOEY—THE WASHINGTON POST

# Warsaw Pact—Endgame

*In Eastern Europe, the Military Alliance Is Dead*

By R. Jeffrey Smith

**V**IENNA—A preview of the future Europe—a continent in which some members of the East and West blocs are loosely confederated and most are politically neutral—was on display last month at an extraordinary gathering here for military leaders from 35 nations.

In a wing of the baroque Hofburg Palace, site of the 1815 Congress that divided up Europe after Napoleon's defeat, newly-appointed chiefs of staff from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Romania chatted amiably with their counterparts from Britain, France and Norway. The delegations from East and West Germany, who initially sat in adjacent groupings, soon became friendly and sat together in one large group.

The U.S. and Soviet chiefs of staff were reduced to working the crowded ballroom

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like politicians. Their arrival and departure amidst the sea of uniforms left barely a ripple.

No one observing this event could fail to conclude that the era in which officials from Moscow and Washington form a receiving line for allies is clearly finished. Officials on both sides of what used to be called the Iron Curtain have enunciated nationalistic military doctrines and cooperative political strategies that raise questions about the future viability of the Eastern and Western alliances.

Emerging in their place is a new European order in which the superpowers will likely be supplicants, not kings, reduced to moving through the continent in search of a smile and a vote.

One stunning sign of the times: West German Defense Minister Gerhard Stoltenberg announced last week that East German military personnel who pass through the Berlin Wall could serve in the West Ger-

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WARSAW PACT, From C1

man army, the *Bundeswehr*. Applications are said to be streaming in, and U.S. analysts say the move is the first step toward a combined German military force.

The tumultuous political reforms that unseated six East European governments in the past five months mark only the start of what promises to be a revolutionary decade. Many top U.S. and European officials confidently predict that Soviet troops will be forced to withdraw entirely from Eastern Europe within a few years; that German reunification may occur by 1995; that Hungary and perhaps Czechoslovakia may formally withdraw from the Warsaw Pact.

These prospects, hardly foreseeable even six months ago, are ruining defense policies in both Moscow and Washington, leaving both sides bereft of sound military strategy and long-range plans. Indeed, both superpowers continue to focus their strategic planning on a war scenario that begins at the inter-German border.

But the shopworn, bipolar concept of Europe no longer interests military leaders of the Eastern bloc, many of whom have been swept into power within the past two months. In their circle, the prospect of a militarily neutral Eastern Europe, or even one with a web of economic and military ties to the West, is suddenly a hot topic of discussion.

"Everything is possible in today's world," says Lt. Gen. Laszlo Borsits, the Hungarian chief of staff for the past six weeks and an officer at the vanguard of new thinking among Warsaw Pact forces.

Borsits, whose government wants Soviet troops to leave within two years, said in a recent interview that his nation's military

forces may eventually want to train many of their officers in the West or even to buy some Western armaments, previously unthinkable ideas for a Pact member.

"We are redeploying some troops away from the Western border" and moving them toward the East, Borsits remarked, adding with a tight smile that "we will be prepared to defend ourselves whenever we receive some aggression from any direction."

The idea of an entire nation defecting from the Warsaw Pact is hardly surprising, given that the alliance has already ceased to function substantively. Its ruling committee of Communist Party leaders is now an empty body, following the collapse of communist governments in every nation but Bulgaria and the Soviet Union. Pact members are now deciding military policy unilaterally, trimming forces, and forswearing joint military offensives against the West.

"It is essential that we no longer have an image of the enemy, formulated on an ideological basis," Borsits told a Hungarian newspaper recently.

In most Pact countries, Communist Party affiliations are no longer tolerated among top military personnel; once they were required. Czechoslovakia recently banned soldiers' reference to each other as "comrades."

Compulsory military service and instruction are also under increasing attack, with students announcing boycotts of classes and soldiers forming independent unions to bargain for better housing and food.

The military's problems in Eastern Europe go far beyond ideological changes. Gen. Manfred Gratz, the new East German chief of staff, describes mounting morale problems, contributing to the massive exodus of draft-age youths and even some servicemen to West Berlin. The military's image has also been harmed by the arrest of the former East German defense minister, Heinz Kessler, on charges of abusing his office to commit criminal acts.

Broken is the secret command-and-control structure that allowed Moscow to dictate orders directly to its allies' military officers in a crisis, bypassing political leaders. East European officials say the use of military force must now be authorized by their newly emboldened, elected parliaments.

The discord between Moscow and its allies has been such that Gen. Mikhail Moiseyev, chief of the Soviet general staff, felt obliged to seek a renewed pledge of fealty from his Pact counterparts at a special, private meeting during the Vienna gathering last month. Although no military leader broke rank, several of those present said later that they are hatching proposals aimed at sharply reducing Moscow's authority within the group. Czech officers have suggested a plan to rotate the top military responsibility among different nations and to move the Pact's headquarters outside Moscow.

Ideological splits between Moscow and allied capitals are evident on key military issues, including the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons and the existence of Eastern and Western military alliances.

Military officials from several East European countries, including Czechoslovakia, have said they would like to see tactical nuclear weapons eliminated, as Moscow once fervently sought; the East German Communist Party has demanded the withdrawal of both chemical and nuclear weapons from German territory by 1991. Officials of other Pact members, such as Czechoslovakia and Poland, have endorsed Moscow's longstanding call to disband both alliances.

Moscow's surprise at the swiftness of the East European reforms is evident in its new positions on these issues: Soviet military officials in Vienna spoke approvingly of the Western concept of a "minimal lower level" of tactical nuclear weapons—rather than their abolition. And the idea of disbanding both alliances has given way in Moscow's rhetoric to pursuit of a reinvigorated, politically oriented Pact organization that is NATO's match.

Many military officials predict that this

idea will flop in the face of East European resentment over years of Soviet domination. They say that current Pact members would prefer cooperative arrangements with each other, or with the West, that need not be approved or coordinated in Moscow.

For example, Gen. Gratz said in an interview after meeting his West German counterpart, Adm. Dieter Wellershoff, that a future, bilateral disarmament agreement is possible if it does not conflict with either side's "international obligations."

Meanwhile, Hungary's new leaders recently joined with French officials to propose East-West cooperation in military instruction and wider military-to-military contacts; they also arranged for an exchange of visits with U.S. military personnel.

In a striking demonstration of how democratic reforms are propagating throughout the region, Hungarian military officers said they assisted in overthrowing the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaucescu last December by informing Army leaders about the whereabouts of key Securitate members, which they gleaned from electronic intelligence-gathering.

During a recent visit to Warsaw, Czechoslovakian President Vaclav Havel urged that such cooperation be given a formal structure, which would inevitably be antagonistic to the interests of the current military alliances. "We have a chance to change Central Europe . . . into a political phenomenon," he said of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, by banding together to create a continent "which does not need the protection of superpowers because it is capable of defending itself, and capable of building its own security system."

This ambition calls into question many aspects of current U.S. military policy that have not yet been confronted by the Bush administration.

Does it make sense to continue spending 5 percent of the gross national product for defense when the threat responsible for more than half of the total military budget—a joint Warsaw Pact offensive—has been eliminated? How will West Germans feel about the presence of U.S. troops after

all Soviet troops have been withdrawn to Soviet territory?

Does the United States need to maintain an ambitious military research and development effort, when the Warsaw Pact is already far behind in weapons technology and likely to slip further because of unilateral budget cuts? Does the prevailing Western military strategy, involving precision strikes against second echelon Soviet forces in Eastern Europe, still make any sense?

U.S. officials say completion of a new conventional forces accord would produce a military balance that affords the United States at least six months' notice of a Soviet attack. So why does the United States still need a costly fleet of planes to airlift men and materiel to Europe?

What about the NATO strategy of "flexible response"—the euphemism for keeping nuclear weapons in Europe in preparation for a preemptive strike against the East's superior conventional forces?

"It is time to start rethinking the role of nuclear weapons in NATO defense strategy," says Phillip A. Karber, a top Pentagon consultant who has generally defended the Bush administration's approach to arms control. Other experts now say "why not" to policies such as a "no first use" pledge on nuclear weapons or a complete ban on tactical nuclear arms, both of which have long been anathema to the West.

But the U.S. military budget presented last Monday seems to reflect the past more than it does the future. It maintains full production of the costly Bradley Fighting Vehicle and the Blackhawk helicopter, both used to transport troops in conventional combat operations.

It also contains what many legislators consider anachronistic schemes to produce a nuclear-tipped artillery shell and a short-range, nuclear-tipped missile for deployment in West Germany, which doesn't want them. The artillery could only hit the East Germans, while the missile would be targeted on Lech Walesa and his non-communist colleagues in Poland. And to a growing number of strategists and legislators, that doesn't make sense.