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AIR BRIEF - RUSSIAN REGROUPINGS IN
THE BALKANS AND WESTERN EUROPE

Air Intelligence Division Study No. 68
6 June 1946

Assistant Chief of Air Staff-2 and Office of Naval Intelligence

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AIR BRIEF

RUSSIAN REGROUPINGS IN THE BALKANS AND WESTERN EUROPE

The current large scale regroupings of Russian forces in the occupied portions of Europe are discussed herein in order to bring them into focus rather than to nominate them as a significant trend.

Soviet strategic doctrine requires the maintenance of strong forces well forward in critical areas, so as to allow for equal offensive and defensive action at all times. Soviet air power, in conformance with this doctrine, also is concentrated in critical areas. Therefore, any troop changes in critical areas result in large scale regroupings.

The current regroupings on the whole have been caused by the commencement of the third stage in the Soviet Demobilization Plan. It is believed that the Soviet armed forces will, by September 1946, be reduced to a figure between 4,500,000 and 4,800,000.

During this stage of demobilization Soviet forces in occupied Europe will be reduced from a January figure of 1,900,000 to a total of 1,100,000, or a cut of about 45%.

The Soviet strength in the north European plain, Germany and Poland, will probably suffer the least net reduction because of the strategic importance of this area to the Soviets. However, it is estimated that movements of Corps and Division units into Germany will continue in order that the caliber and balance of the Soviet forces occupying Germany may be improved qualitatively although the total troop count decreases.

DISCUSSION

RUMANIA:

From a January figure of 615,000, Soviet occupation troops in Rumania have been reduced to a currently estimated 400,000. That further reductions may be expected is indicated by a recent 45% cut in the Soviet supply requisitions on the Rumanian Government. Sizable reductions can still be made by the Soviets without jeopardizing their effective control of Rumania.

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BULGARIA:

No important reductions in Soviet garrison of Bulgaria are in evidence. Large troop movements into and out of Bulgaria are nearly in balance. The current estimate of Soviet strength in Bulgaria is 145,000 troops. Turkish sources tend to estimate a slightly lower total while the British hold to a slightly higher figure than the U.S. estimate. A 50% reduction in the Soviet forces in Bulgaria would still leave sufficient Russian troops to enable thorough Soviet control of the Bulgarian Government.

YUGOSLAVIA:

Although Tito's 300,000 troops are strongly influenced by the Russian Government there are only some 5,000 Russian technicians and advisers in the Soviet Mission in Yugoslavia.

HUNGARY:

During the past three months U.S.S.R. troop strength in Hungary has been reduced by 100,000 to a present garrison of 250,000. Russian troops have been concentrated in northwest Hungary for an announced move across Czechoslovakia into Germany. One report says that 100,000 troops from the Hungarian garrison will be moved to Germany. This figure is believed to be high.

AUSTRIA:

The present Soviet strength in Austria is estimated at 140,000 troops. There are numerous reports of Soviet intention to move up to 100,000 of these troops out of Austria. Part of Marshal Konev's headquarters has already moved from Baden near Vienna to Budapest. A division of the XXI Guards Rifle Corps has moved east into Hungary. Movement of the Third Guards Tank Army and the 17th Artillery Division from Austria across Czechoslovakia into Germany is reported. This alone would reduce the garrison in Austria by 55,000 troops. Soviet prestige in Austria would be raised by decreasing the occupation drain on the severely critical Austrian food stocks by such a large scale evacuation from Austria.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA:

Only an estimated 1,000 Russian troops remain in Czechoslovakia in guard detachments.

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GERMANY:

Since February Soviet strength in Germany has been reduced from a 730,000 total to a currently estimated 628,000 troops. This reduction continues to be accompanied by a qualitative improvement in the units of the more technical arms with the Soviet forces in Germany.

It is believed that the current and projected moves of Soviet troops across Czechoslovakia are occasioned by the Soviet desire to cushion the effects of the third stage of demobilization on the Soviet forces in Germany and possibly in Poland.

The reasons behind any Soviet decision to hold strong forces in the northern plain are apparent. The Soviet zone of Germany is the most troublesome potentially of any of the Soviet occupied areas. There can be no question but that in Germany there will occur the greatest agitation for revision of World War II's basic decisions. Cognizance need only be taken of the large numbers of people expelled from Silesia and Pomerania to indicate the magnitude of the future resentment with the Soviet zone after the initial shocks of defeat have been absorbed.

Furthermore, in Germany the U.S.S.R. meets for the first time at close quarters the major western powers. The maintenance of strong Soviet forces for diplomatic as well as military purposes is a necessity.

Economically also the Soviets have much at stake in north Germany. Integration of Soviet and Germany economies means much more to the U.S.S.R. than exploitation of the entire Danubian Basin.

POLAND:

Russian strength in Poland is estimated at 350,000 men. There have been no reductions. The concentration of Soviet airpower in Poland is particularly impressive. There she maintains over 3,000 aircraft in operational units.

In Poland far more than elsewhere it is only Soviet bayonets that keep the present government in power. The Russian lines of communication to Germany, and the Russian hold on the north European plain require continued strong forces in Poland.

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CONCLUSIONS

During the past year the presence of strong Soviet force in all occupied areas was considered the best means of quickly and effectively imposing Russian political and economic controls upon the occupied areas. These controls are now formed and established so the maintenance of large troop garrisons is no longer so universally required.

This third stage of the demobilization is certainly an additional and probably the final concession to civilian needs.

As pointed out in Air Intelligence Division (AC/AS-2 - C.N.I.) Study No. 2, dated 3 December 1945, it is believed that the Soviet Government does not desire to precipitate a major war at this time. It is believed she is desirous of prosecuting to the full the re-establishment of her industrial and agricultural economy.

Notwithstanding this Russian desire for economic rehabilitation and advance she will insist upon maintaining powerful and immediately effective armed forces now and throughout the foreseeable future. These forces are and will continue to be balanced forces incorporating overwhelming masses of tactical air forces. These armed forces are capable now and will continue to be capable of overrunning all of Western Europe, Turkey, the Middle East, and any other areas which the Soviet High Command deems it profitable to overrun at any given moment. It is not unlikely that the moment chosen, if the choice is left to the Soviets, will be postponed until her present, hard-driving program to catch up with the western powers in strategic air potential and scientific development comes to bear fruit.

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