East European Military Reliability

An Émigré-Based Assessment

Alexander Alexiev and A. Ross Johnson
With the assistance of Barbara Kliszewski
The RAND Publication Series: The Report is the principal publication documenting and transmitting RAND's major research findings and final research results. The RAND Note reports other outputs of sponsored research for general distribution. Publications of The RAND Corporation do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the sponsors of RAND research.

Published by The RAND Corporation
1700 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90406-2138
East European Military Reliability

An Émigré-Based Assessment

Alexander Alexiev and A. Ross Johnson
With the assistance of Barbara Kliszewski

October 1986

RAND
PREFACE

This report presents the results of a RAND study directed by A. Ross Johnson on the prospective wartime reliability for the Soviet Union of the East European armies incorporated in the Warsaw Pact. It focuses on specific factors that would enhance or detract from reliability and whether and how they have changed over time. It is based on RAND interviews with former East European servicemen now in the West.

Overall appraisals of the value of the East European armies to the USSR must take into consideration many factors and many kinds of information. Such analyses must consider East European military institutions, Soviet control mechanisms, combat skills, quantity and quality of armaments, and military art. They must also consider broader East European political, economic, and social issues bearing on the stability and viability of the Soviet bloc as a whole. The present study of military reliability should be read not as a substitute for, but as one important component of, a general appraisal of East European armies as a part of the Soviet military power confronting NATO.
SUMMARY

The combat potential of any military organization is a composite of many factors: leadership, organization, training, equipment, discipline, relationships with allies, commitment, reliability, and so on. This study examines the reliability of East European armies, primarily those of Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia. It thus considers the “trustworthiness” and “dependability” of the national armies, more particularly their officers and enlisted men, to carry out military missions directed by the national Communist leaderships and by the USSR. The emphasis of the study is on assessing reliability in the East-West context, i.e., how reliably the non-Soviet Warsaw Pact (NSWP) armies would fight alongside the Soviets against NATO. Given the important role of NSWP forces in Soviet military planning, assessment of East European military reliability is an important step in assessing the Soviet military threat in Europe.

The study also examines domestic reliability, e.g., how reliable the Polish army would be for suppressing domestic violence. The stagnation of the Communist systems in Eastern Europe, resulting in martial law in Poland and a potentially key political role for the military in post-Ceausescu Romania, has increased the importance of appraisals of the domestic political reliability of the East European armies, which in the future are likely to play a greater role in their countries’ Communist systems than in the past.

In contrast to the few earlier studies of NSWP military reliability, which are based on general assessments or on logic-of-the-situation criteria, this study has created and utilized an empirical basis for reliability assessment, with data obtained from in-depth interviews with former East European servicemen—officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and enlisted men—about their own experiences that bear on reliability and about their own appraisals of reliability.

One crucial element of the overall military reliability of an armed force is the reliability of its officer corps; this is especially important in Communist armies, because officers perform many functions carried out by NCOs in Western armies and because of the non-democratic character of Communist systems and the resulting potential for large-scale unrest. The East European regimes seek to ensure the reliability of their officer corps by careful recruitment, involving political selection, pre-military training, and substantial material incentives. Political indoctrination is strongly emphasized during officer education and
subsequently. There is constant monitoring of officer loyalty through one of the most elaborate control systems ever devised for a professional group, with supervision by the army's political officer network, by party cells throughout the military, and by the internal security service within the military that utilizes soldier-informers to check on line and political officers alike.

While this elaborate control system is intended to ensure total officer reliability, its very redundancy and continued existence forty years after the creation of supposedly loyal Communist armies suggest continued regime doubts on this score. Our interviews indicate that these doubts are not unfounded. The ideological commitment and political loyalty of officers are not what the regime would like them to be. Officers' views of NATO and East-West relations generally are shaped by the political system they serve and the political indoctrination they receive, but today few can be considered to be convinced Communists in the sense that they believe in the ideals and prescriptions of Marxism-Leninism. The intensive indoctrination effort is frequently counterproductive. There is pervasive distrust among fellow officers. Some tension continues to exist between political and line officers, even though political officers now receive better military training than in the past and both types of officers have a mutual interest in a smooth relationship. There is considerable interest in alternative, Western information sources. In some cases, morale has been lowered by an increase in popular opprobrium.

The East European regimes must also be concerned with the reliability of their conscripts and non-commissioned term officers who, being "citizens on loan," cannot be assumed to share regime values to the extent that officers co-opted into the elite—for material and career if not ideological reasons—may. In contrast to the mix of incentives and sanctions employed to maximize officer reliability, the measures used to secure the reliability of a potentially disloyal conscript corps are entirely coercive. Efforts are made during the conscription process to isolate in special construction or other units soldiers who are particularly suspect of political disloyalty. Political indoctrination is intensive but often ineffective; more important is the effort to isolate conscripts from other sources of information. This is facilitated by stationing soldiers far from their homes, a practice followed primarily in an effort to increase reliability in domestic contingencies. The political and security service control networks instill an atmosphere of general distrust.

These mechanisms contain but do not eliminate sources of conscript discontent. Indeed, they sometimes enhance such discontent. Interview data suggest that relations between conscript and term NCOs are
generally good, but relations between officers and professional NCOs, on the one hand, and term NCOs and soldiers, on the other hand, are often strained. Most NCOs are term soldiers who have much in common with conscripts. The soldiers tap alternative domestic and Western sources of information extensively, even while they are on duty. Involvement in internal policing duties is always unsettling and sometimes traumatic. Alcohol abuse plays a significant role during peacetime.

General military reliability can be enhanced by organizational and operational incentives and by alliance constraints. These alliance constraints are particularly strong within the Soviet-dominated Warsaw Pact. Soviet reliance on East European military forces seems to be predicated on several factors examined in earlier studies: (1) coincidence of the interests of top East European political and military leaderships with those of the USSR, ultimately for their very survival; (2) Soviet oversight of all East European armies, through advisers and liaison personnel operating within the mechanisms of the Warsaw Pact; (3) Soviet military operational concepts, which are designed to leave East European armies and thus the servicemen within them no alternative to early commitment under Soviet command in a massive blitzkrieg attack against Western Europe; (4) strict military discipline; and (5) intensive efforts to commit East European officer corps to Soviet purposes. The USSR trains high-ranking East European officers in Moscow and seeks to assure their loyalty.

Yet even this strong Soviet control system has its limits, as indicated by our interviews. The coincidence of East European leaders' interests with Moscow could disappear in the event of a war with NATO. As with the officer control system in individual NSWP armies, the very complexity and redundancy of the Soviet control system are testimony to continued Soviet distrust of East European officers and doubts about their reliability. This distrust is readily perceived by East European officers and feeds the cycle of mutual suspicion. Indeed, Moscow fears contamination of its own army by its supposedly loyal “socialist allies.” Apart from carefully structured and limited professional contacts for training and exercise purposes and for propaganda demonstrations, Moscow generally spurns rather than promotes normal contacts among Soviet and East European servicemen—soldiers and officers alike. At the level of personal interactions, Warsaw Pact “brotherhood in arms” is a sham. In a potential showdown, Moscow has no hesitation in granting that this is true, as shown by its intimidation of Czechoslovak officers in mid-1968 and in its threatening of Polish officers for assumed disloyalty during the Solidarity period.
General military reliability is also a function of some degree of belief that the national military mission that officers and conscripts serve is necessary and legitimate. The absence of nationally legitimate military missions for the East European military establishments (except the Romanian) would seem to diminish the reliability of those military establishments correspondingly, for there is an understanding in those armies that NSWP forces will be utilized offensively against Western Europe, with very large losses.

Our interviews suggest several factors that may partly compensate for this lack of a legitimate national military mission. Many East European servicemen appear to perceive some "NATO threat," due to constant indoctrination, ignorance of NATO capabilities and doctrines, ignorance of Soviet and other NSWP capabilities, and the professional military calculation that, however hostilities might start, NATO could not afford to spare East European territory in a conflict with the USSR. The lack of a legitimate national military mission may be further compensated for by other factors, including residual belief in defense of national values (e.g., defending Poland within its present borders against a "German threat"), widespread lack of knowledge by lower levels of NSWP armies of Soviet offensive operational concepts, cynicism within NSWP officer corps that allows officers to dismiss even antinational Soviet concepts as irrelevant to their personal goal of living better than their fellow countrymen and retiring on a decent pension, and military professionalism, strengthened at higher command levels by the fact that Soviet coalition warfare doctrine has envisaged significant military tasks for East European forces organized and commanded nationally up to the army level.

These factors provide a rationale for inclusion in Soviet coalition warfare beyond that of Soviet coercion and military discipline alone—factors often neglected in Western appraisals of East European military reliability. This rationale, however, is limited and partial and is constantly challenged by the actual situation of the NSWP armies, particularly by the unequal nature of relationships with the Soviet military and the often negative content of personal interactions with Soviet military personnel. In times of domestic turmoil or crises, repressed East European military reservations about incorporation in coalition warfare can become dominant, as was the case in the Czechoslovak army in the mid-1960s.

Reliability of conscript armies for domestic repression is inherently difficult to ensure in any system, because the bulk of the army is made up of youth who are a cross-section of the population. East European leaderships seem generally to have had low confidence in the reliability of their armies for this purpose. Use of the army for domestic policing
functions in Poland has intensified strains within the officer corps and has lowered morale among the conscripts. The East European regimes have created specialized internal security units for various kinds of domestic repression, e.g., the Polish ZOMO, utilized to suppress demonstrations, and the East German border guards, used to prevent mass emigration. Such units usually include conscripts—an indicator that they cannot be staffed on a voluntary basis. The regimes resort to extraordinary selection procedures, controls, and incentives to ensure the loyalty of such conscripts. Yet the wave of defections from the East German border guards indicates substantial continued unreliability. (We lack sufficient information to judge the extent of the same phenomenon within ZOMO and other East European internal security units.)

We assembled considerable data on the past use of the Polish military in domestic crises (Poland is the only East European country with such a record). These cases enable us to judge the degree of actual reliability of the army in specific circumstances. The data highlight the disruptive effects within the Polish military of its use in suppressing strikers in Gdansk in 1970. They illuminate both the strengths and limitations of the Polish military in imposing martial law. Propaganda, professional military perceptions of a potential security threat due to Poland’s weakness, and Soviet pressure evidently persuaded most officers of the necessity for some martial-law-like solution. But the officers remained ignorant of concrete plans, and thus surprise and discipline, along with the factors enumerated above, ensured reliability in the imposition of martial law. Nonetheless, reliability was not absolute; there were cases of officer disobedience (the magnitude is uncertain). Conscript reliability was enhanced through discipline, isolation from the population, and careful employment in a passive, supporting, rather than confrontational mode (assigned to ZOMO), often without ammunition. Shirking of duty and cases of outright insubordination nonetheless occurred. These premises of reliability in the imposition of martial law are simultaneously constraints on reliable use of the military in other, more violently confrontational internal situations.

As the above analysis indicates, our respondents’ experiences provide a mixed picture of the factors that appear to foster reliability and unreliability, respectively, in East European armies. Many key elements of the NSWP armies seem to have changed little in the past twenty-five years, which suggests continuity in terms of the relative degree of reliability. These elements include politically directed recruitment of officers, an elaborate political control system, continuing political indoctrination, special units for conscripts whose loyalties are particularly suspect, and strong coercive discipline. Continuity is
also indicated by the extended Soviet control system in which the upper echelons of the NSWP armies function, which is designed to control those armies while isolating them from undesired contact with the Soviet armed forces, but also serves to constantly remind NSWP military professionals that their loyalty remains suspect in Soviet eyes. Soviet military operational planning attempts to leave the NSWP armies with no alternative to early commitment under Soviet command in an attack on Western Europe. NSWP officers perceive a (perhaps enhanced) “NATO threat.” These constant features of the NSWP militaries would seem to suggest a considerable degree of reliability. But this reliability is fragile, for it rests in part on the containment and suppression of group and individual dissatisfactions which are likely to reemerge in times of political turmoil or crisis.

Yet there have been changes in the NSWP armies over the past twenty years, and the thrust of these changes is in the direction of reducing rather than enhancing reliability. The changes are related to the evolution of Eastern Europe generally in a direction counter to Soviet interests. The Communist commitment that once motivated East European military officers, like other elites, is practically dead. Officers are recruited and motivated by material rewards and (as their careers progress) self-identification with the ruling regimes rather than ideology. (This factor may not decrease reliability, but does provide a different motivation for it.) At the same time, the social gap between senior officers and their fellow countrymen has increased, a consequence of a widening divergence between regime and societies in Eastern Europe and of increasing popular opprobrium of the military, especially in Poland. Involvement of the Polish military in domestic policing functions has increased dissatisfactions within the armed forces. Officers and soldiers alike seem to have greater interest in and access to alternative information sources, especially Western media. Conscripts and term NCOs have never shared regime values, but today many recruits (in Hungary, East Germany, and especially Poland) enter the armed forces having been exposed to alternative political thinking and activities. Although we lack conclusive evidence, it appears that tensions within the militaries (primarily between officers, on the one hand, and conscripts and term NCOs, on the other hand) are on the rise. Sociological research on this topic within the East German army was stopped in the early 1980s precisely because it demonstrated growing intramilitary tensions for which there were no evident solutions. Fears of national enemies (while still stronger than might be expected, especially with regard to Polish apprehensions about a German threat) have declined.
When we polled our respondents on their own estimates of reliability, we found that (generalizing from many diverse views) they tended to stress reliability more than unreliability in a standard scenario of a short-warning Warsaw Pact attack against NATO. Yet they also offered important refinements and qualifications of their estimates. Moreover, it is important to note that respondents with more recent military experience and/or more junior rank tended to place more emphasis on potential unreliability: NSWP servicemen will fight because they have to, but they will not necessarily fight well, and many will desist or desert should the opportunity arise. Most respondents felt there were strong limits on reliability should a Soviet offensive against Western Europe falter or be reversed. Likewise, most respondents judged the reliability of the NSWP armies for violent domestic repression to be low. They foresaw greater reliability in a scenario in which NSWP armies perceived their mission as that of defending national territory against a Western incursion.

With respect to external reliability in a Warsaw Pact-NATO conflict, most respondents noted the importance of the particular circumstances and scenarios under which a conflict would be initiated and develop. Under conditions of quick initiation of conflict and initial Warsaw Pact successes—the standard NATO threat analysis—most respondents predicted reliability. Former East European officers told us that Soviet controls and strict centralization within the military structure are greater determinants of military performance than individual preferences. Respondents acknowledge differences in the attitudes and motivation of the East European and Soviet militaries (which could result in armed conflict in the event of Soviet intervention in an internal conflict in Eastern Europe), but they question whether this would necessarily affect external reliability. They think that most officers will lead their troops into battle against the West as part of a Soviet blitzkrieg offensive that is initially successful, because they have a stake in the system, because some may believe in the Soviet cause, because they have been trained to do this, and because of the penalties that await them if they do not. Some respondents question the reliability of junior officers but generally believe that it, like the reliability of soldiers, rests primarily on disciplinary sanctions. Respondents think that soldiers will fight because they have no alternative, but that their reliability is likely to be higher against perceived traditional enemies and lower against non-traditional enemies and in the wake of domestic turmoil.

There are additional important caveats. Respondents assert that the reliability of the East European armies could be dramatically and negatively affected by a military stalemate or Soviet military reverses.
Officer-conscript tensions would reduce unit cohesion, and in adverse military circumstances, many soldiers would desert. The respondents’ testimony suggests that NSWP forces are likely to be less reliable in a conflict preceded by a relatively longer warning period and mobilization. Information about the nature of the conflict is also highly relevant to expected reliability. Most of our respondents assumed that wide knowledge of the aggressive nature of a Warsaw Pact campaign in Europe would severely undermine morale and reliability, not only among the conscripts but in the officer corps as well. This finding has important implications for Western policy in a crisis situation. Respondents generally maintain that reliability is reduced by Soviet interventions and by domestic social ferment.

With respect to domestic reliability, respondents testified that the issue of killing fellow citizens troubles most soldiers. They think the officer corps would be divided; some would carry out orders to shoot civilians, while others would not. The consensus among the respondents is that most soldiers would refuse to execute such orders unless they faced immediate and extreme penalties themselves.

This study thus provides empirical support for earlier studies concluding that the USSR can rely on NSWP forces—but very conditionally. Our analysis of our respondents’ experiences relevant to reliability and their own estimates suggest a brittle NSWP military reliability in the event of a conflict with NATO. Their testimony suggests that the Soviet-imposed institutional structure, coercive military discipline, information controls, and the exigencies of Soviet-style military conflict could contain the impact of the influences noted above that promote unreliability. This system succeeds in blurring what in other countries and contexts would be a legitimate distinction between “external offensive” and “external defensive” military reliability. In brief, the USSR has succeeded in fostering a somewhat higher level of NSWP reliability than the multiple and increasing Soviet-East European tensions, within and outside the armed forces, would suggest. In this sense, the Soviet General Staff can perhaps expect performance from the NSWP militaries at least as good as the Wehrmacht General Staff obtained from the Italian, Romanian, and Hungarian armies in World War II. Reliability need not rest on close identification between the national interests of the NSWP states and the USSR, but can be created on other bases.

Yet the quality of NSWP reliability that emerges from our respondents’ testimony is brittle and fragile. It is vulnerable to numerous adverse (from the Soviet viewpoint) influences. It rests on a containment of tensions and coercive control mechanisms that impose their own costs; and if those controls break down, Moscow may be
confronted with very serious unreliability problems. Military reversals or protracted conflict would subject the control mechanisms to severe challenges. The implication is that NSWP reliability could quickly dissipate in combat, for the Soviet-imposed military system in Eastern Europe has demonstrated little basis for anticipating resiliency in the face of challenge. Moreover, there are increasing peacetime challenges to NSWP reliability.

Earlier studies of NSWP armies have commonly assumed that the USSR understands the potential challenges to NSWP reliability and has taken corresponding preventive measures. But our émigré-based analysis suggests the utility of another careful look at the role ascribed to NSWP forces in Soviet strategy and the mechanisms by which Moscow seeks to insure itself against NSWP unreliability.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors are indebted to Barbara Kliszewski, who helped arrange the interview effort and who organized the large database that resulted; this study could not have been conducted without her contribution. Sergei Zamascikov skillfully helped with the interviewing. Horst Mendershausen and George K. Tanham provided useful criticisms of an earlier draft. Guenther Wagenlehner provided valuable counsel and assistance. Janet DeLand edited the manuscript, and Hester Palmquist processed many versions of the text.

The authors are grateful also to a number of individuals who assisted in arranging interviews but who wish to remain anonymous. They are indebted above all to the former East European servicemen who, in the interest of contributing to a better objective understanding of the situation within the East European armies, were willing to share their experiences and judgments.
CONTENTS

PREFACE .................................................. iii
SUMMARY ................................................. v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .......................... xv
GLOSSARY ................................................ xix

Section

I. INTRODUCTION .............................. 1
   The Importance of Assessments of the Warsaw Pact  1
   The Significance of Non-Soviet Warsaw Pact Forces  3
   Western Studies of East European Reliability ..... 5
   Approach of this Study .......................... 8

II. THE OFFICER CORPS ....................... 13
   Recruitment ................................... 13
   Political Indoctrination and Control .......... 17
   Factors Influencing Officer Reliability ...... 23
   Implications ................................. 28

III. NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS AND
     CONSCRIPTS ............................... 29
   Recruitment and Stationing ................ 29
   Indoctrination and Control .................. 32
   Factors Affecting Conscript Reliability ..... 35
   Implications ............................... 43

IV. RELIABILITY IN COALITION WARFARE .. 44
   East European Military Perceptions of
     Coalition Warfare ........................ 44
   Impact of Soviet Ties ...................... 53
   Implications ............................... 64

V. RELIABILITY IN DOMESTIC CONTINGENCIES 66
   The Military's Domestic Function: Case Studies 66
   Internal Security Forces .................. 75
   Implications ............................... 79
VI. EXTERNAL AND DOMESTIC RELIABILITY: WHAT
EAST EUROPEAN SERVICEMEN SAY .......... 80
External Reliability Against NATO ................. 80
Reliability Against the Soviet Army ............... 93
Domestic Contingencies ......................... 94
Implications .................................. 98

VII. CONCLUSIONS .............................. 100
GLOSSARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>Czechoslovak People's Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDJ</td>
<td>Free German Youth (East Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRG</td>
<td>Federal Republic of Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDR</td>
<td>German Democratic Republic (East Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSFG</td>
<td>Group of Soviet Forces in Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GST</td>
<td>Society for Sport and Technology (East Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IISS</td>
<td>International Institute for Strategic Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KGB</td>
<td>Committee for State Security (USSR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOK</td>
<td>League of National Defense (Poland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCO</td>
<td>Non-commissioned officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPA</td>
<td>National People's Army (East Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSWP</td>
<td>Non-Soviet Warsaw Pact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPK</td>
<td>Air Defense Units (Poland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPA</td>
<td>Polish People's Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PVO</td>
<td>Air Defense Forces (USSR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSM</td>
<td>Union of Socialist Czechoslovak Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STB</td>
<td>Czechoslovak internal security service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SVAZARM</td>
<td>Association for Cooperation with the Army (Czechoslovakia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOA</td>
<td>Voice of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSW</td>
<td>Military Security Service (Poland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZOMO</td>
<td>Motorized Detachments of the Citizens' Militia (Poland)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZSMP</td>
<td>Union of Socialist Polish Youth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I. INTRODUCTION

THE IMPORTANCE OF ASSESSMENTS OF THE WARSAW PACT

1986 marks the thirty-first anniversary of the founding of the Warsaw Pact and the transformation of NATO into a full-fledged defense alliance. Throughout this period, the two alliances, facing each other across a divided Europe, have maintained peace and the territorial and political status quo established in the aftermath of World War II. But during this period, there has been considerable change, both within the two alliances and in terms of the balance of power between them.

At the time of NATO's formation, Western Europe, economically destitute and militarily weak, yet facing a formidable security challenge from the Soviet army, welcomed the idea of collective defense and U.S. security guarantees backed by American nuclear superiority. Initial efforts to provide for a credible conventional defense, as exemplified in the 1952 Lisbon recommendations for the deployment of 96 NATO divisions, were soon forgotten, and the alliance's security continued to rest with the American nuclear umbrella.

On the Warsaw Pact side, the monolithic nature of the Soviet hegemonic system established in Eastern Europe soon proved subject to serious tensions, with the dramatic events in Hungary and Poland in 1956. This led to a relative emancipation of the East European countries from rigid Stalinist controls, and their gradual emergence from the status of obedient satellites to something akin to junior partners—a development reflected in the military sphere as well.

Throughout this period, the Soviet bloc continued to be characterized by both intrastate and interstate conflict and tensions that occasionally boiled over, as in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Poland in 1980. It was also marked by an unyielding Soviet determination to maintain control. The one constant in these three decades, along with increasing signs of a serious failure of the Soviet economic model, has been a steady and seemingly inexorable growth in the military power of the Warsaw Pact.

A different trend was observable in NATO. As Western Europe became politically stable and more prosperous, the alliance began to experience increasing difficulties in maintaining adequate defense capabilities. This trend, coupled with the disappearance of U.S. nuclear
superiority in the mid-1970s, has led to growing power disequilibrium in the European theater that could result in serious security and political instability, even in the absence of a direct military threat.

Despite the fact that the combined economic potential of the Soviet bloc is only about 20 percent of that of the West, the Warsaw Pact has been able to establish troubling margins of superiority in Central Europe in some key indicators of military power. For instance, the Warsaw Pact deploys 30 divisions more than NATO in the key Northern European theater and has approximately two and a half times as many tanks, three and a half times as many artillery pieces, four and a half times as many surface-to-surface launchers, and more than six times as many SAM launchers.\footnote{The Military Balance 1985-1986, The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), London, 1985, p. 186.} In the air, the Pact enjoys a superiority of more than two to one in fighters and four to one in interceptors. These numerical disadvantages are compounded by the fact that NATO has, by and large, lost its qualitative edge over the East, which for years was assumed to neutralize the Pact's quantitative superiority.

This is not to say that NATO would necessarily lose a war with the Warsaw Pact, or that these military asymmetries are by themselves likely to encourage aggressive behavior. But it does mean, as noted in a recent issue of The Military Balance, that "there is sufficient danger to require remedies in the Atlantic Alliance."\footnote{Ibid., p. 188.} Yet sufficient and timely corrective measures have not been forthcoming. The alliance, with the exception of the United States, has generally failed to meet its 1978 commitment to a 3 percent per annum increase of defense expenditures in real terms. West Germany, for example, is committed to a growth of 3.8 percent over the next few years which, given a similar inflation figure, could mean very little or no real increase. Great Britain envisages no growth after 1986, and some of the smaller NATO partners are actually experiencing declining military expenditures.

It is the ineluctable nature of the difficulties facing NATO in its efforts to maintain a balance with the Warsaw Pact, reflecting the general inability of democratic societies to compete with Communist regimes in military spending in peacetime, that encourages Western efforts to examine alternative ways to minimize or neutralize Warsaw Pact military superiority. For while the nature of the Communist system makes it an extremely tough competitor in the military realm, it also creates a number of inherent weaknesses, which, under certain circumstances, could prejudice the Pact's military efforts. There is, of course, no guarantee that such weaknesses will become real
vulnerabilities that are militarily significant and exploitable. To that extent, vulnerability analysis and potential exploitation strategies cannot be a substitute for an adequate Western force posture and military preparedness. Nonetheless, the potential impact of such systemic weaknesses on Warsaw Pact war-fighting capabilities is significant enough to warrant a rigorous analytical assessment by Western analysts.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NON-SOVIEF WARSAW PACT FORCES

There is considerable agreement about the importance of Communist Eastern Europe to the success of Soviet military operations against Western Europe. East European territory provides for forward basing of Soviet first-echelon strike forces and associated logistics, communications, and intelligence facilities. Eastern Europe would play a crucial logistics role in support of a Soviet offensive in Western Europe. East European military forces constitute a significant slice of the total Soviet/Warsaw Pact capabilities that would be utilized in a conflict with NATO. Indeed, under the assumptions about the role of non-Soviet Warsaw Pact (NSWP) forces generally accepted in the Western analytical community in the 1970s, effective employment of NSWP forces is probably crucial to the success of any short-warning Warsaw Pact attack against NATO. Limited performance by NSWP forces would degrade any Soviet offensive.

Numerous Western calculations indicate the major role of NSWP forces in Soviet military planning for European warfare. For example, the IISS calculates that 43 percent of the Warsaw Pact’s in-place divisions in Northern and Central Europe are non-Soviet. A former Polish general staff officer calculates that (in Soviet categories) NSWP forces account for 39 percent of first-strategic-echelon divisions and 32 percent of total Warsaw Pact European divisions.

The stagnation and crisis of the Communist systems in Eastern Europe in the 1980s have also reemphasized the importance of the

---

3There has been a tendency on the part of some analysts to grossly exaggerate potential Warsaw Pact vulnerabilities in order to belittle or deny Soviet offensive capabilities and thus any real Soviet threat to the West. A recent example is Andreas von Buelow, *Alptraume West gegen Alptraume Ost: Ein Beitrag zur Bedrohungsanalyse* [Nightmares of the West vs. Nightmares of the East: A Contribution to Threat Analysis], monograph published by the West German Social-Democratic Party, Bonn, 1984.

4The following two sections are based in part on work in progress by Alexander Alexier, The RAND Corporation.

5Michael Sadykiewicz, from a study in progress, The RAND Corporation.
domestic political role of the East European armies. The Communist army supplanted the civilian party apparatus in Poland and has assumed greater domestic importance in Romania. "Military Communism" may become more pronounced in Eastern Europe.

While the USSR has envisaged a major role for NSWP forces in a European conflict, the actual utility of NSWP forces to the USSR in a NATO-Warsaw Pact war would depend on many factors. These include relatively "hard" factors, such as the combat capability of NSWP forces (in turn involving structure, training, equipment, and readiness) and the alliance command and coordination mechanisms.\(^6\) They also include a number of "soft" factors relating to the reliability of NSWP forces, i.e., their "trustworthiness" and "dependability"—the subject of this study.

These "soft" factors imply several potential liabilities specific to the coercive character of the Warsaw Pact that are of particular relevance to Warsaw Pact military performance in a putative East-West conflict in Europe. Among them are

- **Reliability**: whether or not East European military forces will carry out Soviet-assigned operational tasks in an effective and disciplined manner and provide a contribution to the Soviet-led war effort commensurate with their size.
- **Availability**: whether, even where reliability is presumed, there might not be circumstances in which an East European national leadership would want to opt out of a war, and what factors are likely to facilitate or derail such an attempt.
- **Instability**: the theoretically possible situation of having a high degree of reliability and availability of a fighting force in Eastern Europe and still having a Soviet-sponsored military action seriously prejudiced by internal instability and conflict in the region. The interdependence between internal stability and Warsaw Pact military performance in a conflict is a key variable.
- **Perceptions**: the Soviet decision to use or not to use East European armies in an East-West military confrontation, which in turn will influence the decision to go or not to go to war, depends importantly on Soviet perceptions of their reliability and availability, as well as their combat capability. Soviet perceptions of East European reliability and associated variables

may not necessarily reflect the actual situation. Changes in Soviet perceptions about East European unreliability could have a strong deterrent effect.

These potential problem areas are, by their very nature, difficult to measure and analyze. Even when identified, they have rarely been subjected to rigorous analysis, and informed discussion about their impact has often remained unfocused and theoretical.

This study examines, on the basis of a body of heretofore largely unavailable data, the issue of reliability as a key factor in Soviet calculations of Warsaw Pact military potential. Before we detail the specific areas of investigation on which our study focuses and the research methodology used, we shall briefly review previous efforts to address Warsaw Pact reliability in Western analyses.

WESTERN STUDIES OF EAST EUROPEAN RELIABILITY

A few Western studies of the Warsaw Pact have focused on NSWP reliability as a key determining factor of Pact military effectiveness. There has been general agreement that failure to assure reliable East European participation in a Warsaw Pact-initiated war in the Central European theater, particularly a forces-in-being surprise attack, would decisively prejudice the chances of success of such an attack. This basic assumption aside, however, there is little consensus among Western analysts on how to define, measure, or predict East European reliability or on factors that enhance or decrease it.

Recent studies that have explicitly attempted to deal with reliability provide examples of the methodological and analytical problems of research on this subject. In what remains the most significant and perceptive effort to date, Dale Herspring and Ivan Volgyes examined the historical experience of the East European military establishments and their likely behavior in a variety of scenarios ranging from a Warsaw Pact attack on NATO to the suppression of an internal antiregime rebellion. Herspring and Volgyes divide reliability into four categories—internal offensive, external offensive, external defensive, and internal defensive—and they discuss the likely reactions of the individual East European armies in different types of putative conflicts. According to their analysis, for instance, in a Warsaw Pact attack on NATO, the reliability of the Polish army would be "medium-low" and that of the East German and Bulgarian armies would be "medium," while the rest of the Pact members are expected to
be of "very low" reliability.\textsuperscript{7} To reach these conclusions, however, the authors, as they themselves note, are forced to rely on highly subjective factors such as "national character" and "traditional enemies." Such factors are, by their very nature, not subject to reliable measurement, and thus the assessment of the individual countries' reliability obtained in this otherwise insightful study is based largely on conjecture.\textsuperscript{8}

A recent study directed by Daniel Nelson aims to "provide empirical guidance for Western assessments of Warsaw Treaty Organization reliability" and attempts to construct a "reliability model" based on several presumably measurable variables. These include scenarios of hostility, duration of engagement, systemic integration, domestic socioeconomic conditions, domestic political conditions, and military preparedness.\textsuperscript{9} Based on his "model," Nelson concludes that Bulgaria and East Germany are the most reliable Warsaw Pact members, though only in specific favorable circumstances. His more general conclusion is that the Warsaw Pact is more a symbol of Soviet weakness than a Soviet asset. There is little in the study that provides solid empirical substantiation for its conclusions. Most of Nelson's variables are not measurable in any empirically sound way, and as a result, the "measurements" obtained are for the most part judgmental in nature.

A study of Warsaw Pact cohesion directed by Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone examines reliability within the framework of efforts at integration of the East Europeans within the Warsaw Pact. It distinguishes between "attitudinal" integration (defined as "the internalization of the official value system and political loyalty to the Soviet or East European communist parties and the Warsaw Pact Alliance system") and "functional" integration (defined as "conformity to the official norms and obedience to the policy directives of the ruling parties and Warsaw Pact command structures"). The study concludes that the


degree of “functional” integration achieved is “adequate for the purposes of military reliability in a conflict with NATO,” though no “attitudinal” integration has been achieved except for senior cadres. Rakowska-Harmstone’s overall conclusion, however, is that “the Warsaw Pact will prove reliable as long as the Soviet Armed Forces (SAF) remain reliable and that the SAF will prove reliable as long as their Russian and Russified core remains loyal to the Soviet regime,” thus implicitly suggesting that the reliability of the East Europeans depends or that of the Russians themselves and is therefore of little consequence independently. In another section of the study, Rakowska-Harmstone’s principal co-author, Christopher Jones, argues that the Soviets’ principal method of maximizing the reliability of Pact members in the event of a conflict is “enmeshing each of them in a network of bilateral military-political ties with the Soviet army.”

A recent doctoral dissertation by Edmund Walendowski represents the only extant empirical study of the reliability of an East European military force. The study examines three components of “combat motivation” in the Polish army: (1) small-unit cohesion, (2) ideological commitment, and (3) discipline, based on a written questionnaire completed anonymously by 108 former Polish servicemen. The respondents rated the first two factors as low; only the third factor (discipline) was viewed as high, and that in a coercive and thus totally negative sense. The study concludes: “The evidence indicates that while the Polish soldier may fight, he will do so under duress. This may prove effective for a limited period, but should a war continue longer than anticipated, the combat motivation of the Polish armed forces could deteriorate even further.” Elements of Polish military reliability are examined in a historical and comparative context. Like the present study, Walendowski attempts to marshal and analyze the personal experiences of East European servicemen. His study contains suggestive analysis and conclusions which we draw on in this report. His

---


12 Three-fourths of the respondents in the Walendowski study ranked comradeship among Polish enlisted men as good or average, but only half thought there was any loyalty up or down the chain of command. Three-fourths of those surveyed would not trust their officers in combat. Only 4 percent thought Marxist ideology had any positive impact on combat morale. Eighty percent thought military discipline was strong, and 60 percent thought their units would have fought well against Germans, while only 10 percent thought they would fight well against Americans.
written questionnaire permitted the uniform polling of respondents, but the anonymity of the respondents to the investigator and the absence of respondent-interviewer dialogue limit the results.

APPROACH OF THIS STUDY

The present study does not claim to provide definitive answers to the question of East European reliability, but attempts to contribute new insights into this important issue by tapping a reservoir of relevant knowledge that has, with the one exception noted above, been little utilized in reliability studies: the direct experience and judgments of former members of the East European military establishments.

The emigration of East Europeans to the West has long provided the Western analyst with a window on East European life. Many studies of Eastern Europe have utilized émigré information, either as a principal source of data or as a supplement and corrective to information contained in the regime-controlled media. This study applies the émigré interview method to the study of an important East European military issue, that of reliability.\(^{13}\)

We were able to interview 59 East European servicemen, Soviet servicemen with East European experience, and other East Europeans with first-hand knowledge of military affairs living outside of the Soviet bloc. The profile of our interview sample is as follows:

Total interviews: 59

Nationality:
- Poles: 41
- East Germans: 8
- Czechoslovaks: 6
- Soviets: 3
- Hungarians: 1

Period of emigration:
- 1980s: 49
- Prior to 1980s: 10

Period of active military service:\(^{14}\)
- Over 10 years: 14


\(^{14}\)Six of the interviewees who had active military service also served in the active reserve.
3–10 years: 7
1–2 years: 30
No active service: 8

Military Service:\textsuperscript{16}
Ground forces: 35
Air force and air defense: 8
Navy: 4
Border troops: 9

Military rank:
Enlisted men: 18\textsuperscript{17}
NCOs: 19 (5 career NCOs and 14 term NCOs who served less than four years)
Officers: 18

Military specialities represented:
Staff officer
Line officer
Political officer
Administration
Chemical warfare
Communications
Border patrol
Territorial defense force
Logistics
Training
Construction
Military journalism
Recruitment
Maintenance
Paratroops
Medical corps

In addition, we were able to use the results of five earlier RAND interviews with Soviet servicemen, numerous earlier West German

\textsuperscript{16}Includes three reserve officer candidates, one recruit who emigrated before final induction, two Solidarity officials who dealt with military people, and two Interior Ministry officials who dealt with the Polish army.

\textsuperscript{17}One respondent served in two services.

\textsuperscript{17}Includes a recruit who emigrated before final induction and a reserve officer candidate who failed to complete his course.
interviews with East German servicemen, and published interviews conducted by others.\(^\text{18}\)

Each interview was customized to the specific experience of the interviewee. A broad range of issues was covered, including:

- Premilitary training
- Recruitment
- Basic training
- Officer training
- Service experience
- Daily military life
- Reserves
- Internal security forces
- Soviet connections
- Perceptions of the NATO "enemy"
- Warsaw Pact military roles
- Reliability and effectiveness

As this list of issues indicates, we took a two-pronged approach to the issue of reliability. We solicited the personal military experience of interviewees on issues bearing on reliability, such as officer morale and service in domestic crises. We also polled respondents' explicit views on the reliability of their own units or services.

Most interviews were conducted by one or both of the coauthors. The remaining interviews were conducted by RAND consultant Sergei Zamascikov. The interviews ranged from 1–1/2 to 10 hours in length and were usually conducted in the native language of the interviewee. All respondent quotations in this study are translated literally from interview transcripts; we have endeavored to make the English readable but have not improved style at the cost of substantive editing. Additionally, we have occasionally changed references to autobiographical specifics that would violate our assurances of anonymity for the respondents.

There are many methodological issues associated with surrogate elite interviewing and survey research on closed societies.\(^\text{19}\) We make no

---

\(^{18}\)Published interviews include "When So Ordered," Radio Free Europe Research, March 8, 1985 (an interview with two Poles who served in the army during martial law, initially published in the Polish underground journal Karta, No. 2, June 1984); "Interview with a Soviet Deserter," Radio Free Europe Research, August 27, 1985 (an interview conducted by Radio Free Europe with a Soviet deserter who had served in Poland); and a series of programs by Emil Utrata based on interviews with former Polish soldiers broadcast by Radio Free Europe's Polish Service on July 21, 22, 25, and 26, 1984.

\(^{19}\)Some of these are discussed in Lilita Dzirkala, Thane Gustafson, and A. Ross Johnson, The Media and Intra-Elite Communication in the USSR, R-2869, The RAND Corporation, September 1982, pp. 89ff; Walendowski, op. cit., Chap. 1; Richard A. Gabriel,
claim that our respondents constitute a scientific sample of the militaries in which they served or the societies from which they come. As emigrants, they may have felt more dissatisfaction with their societies and institutions than their fellow countrymen. Moreover, human memory is imperfect, and subjects of a study may have a natural propensity to provide the "right" answers. But while there are no absolute safeguards against bias in studies such as this, it can be minimized. To this end, we interviewed respondents from five countries, with a wide variety of backgrounds, both in and outside the military. We sought respondents with recent experience—the great majority emigrated since 1980. We interviewed respondents who emigrated for many reasons other than political dissatisfaction: economic and professional grievances, avoidance of interpersonal conflicts, and simple opportunity of the moment. We solicited primarily personal experiences (e.g., "How was NATO presented in political education courses?"), rather than opinion, although we did also poll our respondents for their judgments about military reliability. We compared individual respondents' testimony with that of other respondents and with other available information. We developed this testimony in oral interviews-cum-dialogue, in which the interviewer attempted to avoid suggesting "right" answers and challenged evident misstatements and vagueness. This interview method, we believe, provides an important control mechanism that avoids some of the pitfalls of written survey instruments administered autonomously to émigrés. However carefully obtained, émigré interview testimony is suggestive rather than conclusive—but certainly no more so than other data available to analysts of Communist systems and other closed societies.

The interview data we obtained have allowed us to address and illuminate the following areas of reliability that are unresolvable by other methods.

**Warsaw Pact Personnel Reliability.** Cognizant of the fact that the military effectiveness of an armed force ultimately depends on the motivation and reliability of its personnel, we examine in detail in Sections II and III key factors influencing the motivation and presumed loyalty of NSWP officers, NCOs, and conscripts, as seen by East European servicemen. In particular, we detail the content of regime efforts at political indoctrination and the real-world functioning of the elaborate control system designed to enhance reliability.

Alliance Reliability. Section IV examines two major reliability-related issues. The first issue deals with East European perceptions of the roles and missions of East European armies in Soviet-style coalition warfare and the extent to which East European servicemen can identify with these roles and missions on national, ideological, or other grounds. The second issue is the nature of Soviet-East European military ties as experienced by East European servicemen, and the impact of these ties on combat motivation.

Domestic Reliability. Section V examines factors and circumstances determining the likely utility, from a regime point of view, of the East European military in a domestic conflict. Alternative means of suppressing violent forms of domestic discontent available to the regime, i.e., internal security forces, are also discussed in this context. The analysis in this section benefits from an examination of several specific cases of East European domestic instability.

Section VI analyzes respondents' own estimates of both external and domestic reliability. Section VII contains our conclusions; these are expanded in the Summary at the front of the report.
II. THE OFFICER CORPS

The combat effectiveness and reliability of any armed force is determined to a considerable degree by the quality and dedication of its officer corps. This is true to an even greater extent in Communist armies, because of the non-representative character of the Communist political system and the possibility of large-scale discontent with regime policies. An additional factor reinforcing the importance of the officer corps in Communist systems is the ever-present possibility that the military may be used in an internal policing function to deal with a serious challenge to the regime. Moreover, in Soviet-style armies, officers perform many of the functions carried out by NCOs in other armed forces. A number of Western studies in recent years have examined various aspects of the officer profession in Eastern Europe.\footnote{See Dale R. Herspring, *East German Civil-Military Relations: The Impact of Technology*, Praeger, New York, 1978; Dale R. Herspring, “Technology and the Changing Political Officer in the Armed Forces: The Polish and East German Cases,” *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. X, No. 4, Winter 1977; Condoleezza Rice, *The Soviet Union and the Czechoslovak Army, 1948–1983*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984; Condoleezza Rice, “The Problem of Military Elite Cohesion in Eastern Europe: The Case of Czechoslovakia,” *Air University Review*, January–February 1982; and Johnson et al., *East European Military Establishments*, op. cit.}

The present analysis focuses on officer reliability in the NSWP, as a key concern to East European regimes and the Soviet Union, and various factors that affect such reliability.

Securing and maintaining the political loyalty of the officer corps vis-à-vis the party has always been of singular importance to Communist regimes. In the pursuit of this paramount objective, the East European regimes follow, with only minor deviations, the elaborate model of recruitment, training, and political control developed in the Red Army. An examination of the key characteristics and methods of implementation of this model in Eastern Europe is essential to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the East European military establishments.

RECRUITMENT

The staffing of NSWP armies with officers is generally accomplished in two ways. Professional officers are recruited directly from secondary schools and trained at military academies for periods of three to four years before being commissioned. Term officers are
usually trained at civilian universities with military departments and serve one or two years upon completion of their studies before being sent into the reserves.

There are, however, some considerable national deviations from this general scheme. In East Germany, high school graduates are required to serve before going on to a university. In Czechoslovakia, one- and two-year officer schools were established in the early 1970s to alleviate the serious shortage of officers caused by the 1968 crisis. A novel approach has also been observed in Poland, where several military high schools were opened in late 1985 to prepare officer candidates, evidently in view of declining applications for officer schools.

Potential officer candidates, as a rule, are subjected to recruitment efforts long before graduation from high school. A program designed to inculcate in the youth and even in children a sense of respect for the military profession begins at an early age in organizations such as the Young Pioneers and the Communist Youth in all East European countries.

The process of imparting military skills and cultivating military virtues becomes particularly intensive in high school and other secondary schools, where military education is usually a mandatory subject. Particularly important in the selection and preparation of future cadres are paramilitary organizations such as GST (East Germany), SVAZARM (Czechoslovakia), and LOK (Poland). These organizations are especially popular because they offer the only possibility for young people to practice sports and hobbies such as sky diving, marksmanship, amateur radio, martial arts, and motorcycle and car driving.

It is usually in high school that promising candidates, whose personal files have been carefully checked beforehand, are approached by representatives of the military recruitment board, who explain the advantages of a career in the military. Regular contact is maintained with all who express an interest, until they are called up. In the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and perhaps elsewhere, potential recruits are immediately organized in special “officer candidate collectives” (Offizier Bewerbekollektive) which, according to one former member, “make[s] it very difficult for one to change his mind about becoming an officer.”

Young people from politically active families and those who have profiled themselves as activists in the Communist Youth are strongly encouraged to pursue a career as political officers. A clean political

---

2 For details, see Johnson et al., East European Military Establishments, op. cit., pp. 134-135.
background and a lack of family blemishes, i.e., relatives in the West, are also required for service in some sensitive areas such as the East German border troops.

To attract promising candidates to the officer ranks, however, the East European regimes rely on material incentives much more than on ideological motivation. To this end, the military profession has been made one of the most lucrative careers in East European society. Not only are officers' salaries much higher than those of civilians with comparable education and skill levels, but the military also enjoys a plethora of privileges and perquisites that set them apart from other professionals. As a Polish career NCO put it, “Most officers join up to have a better life.”

Officers are also guaranteed high-paying jobs in party or security work, with full pension benefits after retiring from the service. Since the mandatory term of service does not exceed 25 years, even officers who have mediocre careers can look forward to a full pension and another attractive job while still in their mid-forties. The prospects for party/political work are particularly good, due to the fact that every officer rank has a party position equivalent. A young lieutenant just graduated from the military academy and holding the position of a squad commander in the East German National People's Army (NPA), for example, is also considered qualified to be a party district secretary.

When there is a shortage of officers, as has been the case in Czechoslovakia since the Soviet invasion and in Poland after the suppression of Solidarity, the authorities are evidently willing to go to considerable lengths to recruit candidates by means of material incentives. A former serviceman in the Czechoslovak People's Army (CPA) recalls that in 1984 the authorities were offering 25,000 crowns and an apartment to high school graduates and 50,000 crowns and an apartment to university graduates who were willing to commit themselves to a five-year tour of duty in the officer corps. Similar offers of housing and cash awards were reported by our respondents to be widely used in Poland and even in the GDR, where a shortage of junior officers is said to be a problem in the border troops.

A variety of perquisites are bestowed on officers already in the service. Both in Poland and the GDR, military commissaries are said to be stocked with imported goods and other scarce items not available to the rest of the population. A less conventional privilege for Polish officers was recalled by a former officer who claimed that in the last decade the Chief of Staff of the Polish People’s Army (PPA) issued between twenty and thirty permits every month to senior officers to travel to the West.
According to many of our émigré interviewees, such material incentives were the decisive factor in most candidates' decisions to join the officer corps. The following remarks of three respondents are typical:

Most of the career officers in the Polish armed forces join because they can get an apartment, higher pay, and generally a higher standard of living. There are always some who join out of idealism, to defend the country against invasion, but for the most part, people become officers in order to have a better life.

My company commander told me that he had graduated from a higher military-political school only for material reasons. This entitled him to extra pay, and he could work his way up easier. He was later thrown out because of alcoholism.

Czech officers are dumb and they are cowards. They join because they don't have much of a chance outside the military.

Once recruited and embarked upon a military career, however, it is extremely difficult to leave the officer ranks, or even military school, prior to completion of the full term of service. Exceptions are made only for medical reasons, suspected political unreliability, and gross and persistent violation of military discipline. Several such cases were brought to our attention by interviewees. In one case, the respondent, a Polish officer, succeeded in obtaining an honorable discharge only after fraudulently securing a medical certificate. Another interviewee told of a friend's efforts to leave the Polish military:

My friend, who was a naval officer from S, had tried for years to get out of the service. His requests were repeatedly turned down. Finally he asked to be released from the service so that he could go to Israel because in his opinion Israel was right and he wanted to fight for them. He was summoned to the Ministry of Defense, where they tried to dissuade him on the grounds that he was not Jewish. But he insisted that the Jews were being mistreated and he wanted to fight for them. By the time he returned to S from Warsaw, he had already been discharged, but he had nothing but problems after that.

Another incident involved a Polish officer who had become disillusioned with the military after the events of the summer of 1980. He requested to be released from the service but was told that he had an obligation to serve for 12 years after completing a staff academy, despite the fact that he had already served nearly 30 years.

*For instance, the parents of officer cadets who want to leave the service in Poland are required to repay all educational expenses incurred by their sons before the sons can be discharged—usually an exorbitant sum.*
POLITICAL INDOCTRINATION AND CONTROL

While the military draft boards and other organizations assisting in the selection and recruitment process are responsible for the initial political screening of officer candidates, it is in the military academies and units that political indoctrination, alongside a pervasive system of control, becomes the major party instrument of insuring the political loyalty of the officer corps.

All of our respondents agreed that political indoctrination is a major subject in the curriculum of military educational institutions. There are, however, some observable national differences in this respect, with indoctrination subjects taking a lesser percentage of total time in Polish military schools than in either Czechoslovak or East German schools. The emphasis on indoctrination is most pronounced in the GDR, where as much as 40 percent of the students' time may be spent on subjects such as Marxism-Leninism, party history, and political economy. This was the case, for instance, in the East German border troops' officer school, according to a former student. Such indoctrination is, of course, even more intense in the specialized schools for political officers.

An integral part of political indoctrination is the cultivation of a strongly negative image of the enemy (Feindbild), a process known in Communist armies as "hatred education" (Hasserziehung) and considered of paramount importance for the political motivation of officers and soldiers alike. This is emphasized most of all in East Germany (where the term "hate education" is part of the official vocabulary of political education). 5

The Political Apparatus

The political apparatus is the best known and perhaps the most effective instrument of party control in the NSWP militaries. Built on the Soviet model, it constitutes a separate hierarchical structure, parallel to the military chain of command, that extends from the Main Political Administration to the company level. This political apparatus has been well described in previous studies. 6 Here, we examine aspects

5For example, Oberst Dr.phil. A. Loose, "Werte des Sozialismus und Verteidigungsbereitschaft," Militärwesen, September 1984, pp. 17-18, praises the inculcation of "hate of the imperialist confrontationalist politicians" as a fundamental principle of socialism.

of the actual operations of that political apparatus that affect officer reliability.

The linchpin of the political apparatus is the political officer, who is always a deputy commander of the unit. The political officer is responsible for indoctrination and the political-ideological climate in the unit as a whole. Structurally, he is subordinated to the unit commander, but functionally, he reports only to his superior in the political apparatus chain of command.

In addition to his responsibilities for cultivating the proper political outlook among the enlisted personnel (discussed in detail in Section III), the political officer is also charged with reporting on the political attitudes and performance of fellow officers. An East German political officer reports that he was required to attend special workshops directed by the Main Political Administration every three months. In these workshops (as well as in regular reporting), the participants were required to provide a detailed evaluation of the military and political situation in their units. Any shortcomings or transgressions against service regulations, particularly on the part of professional soldiers, were treated as "extraordinary political incidents." In the course of the seminars, the political officers were also acquainted with confidential party information on serious incidents in the army and a realistic assessment of the socioeconomic situation of the country. One respondent recalled, for instance, being told of attempts to flee the country by armed members of the NPA, of mounting difficulties besetting the economy, and of growing numbers of emigration applications in the early 1980s. Such information was not available to line officers, and the political officers were not to divulge it to their colleagues.

In certain circumstances, the political apparatus is charged with influencing officer attitudes in the direction desired by the party through the dissemination of disinformation and rumors. In the period leading to the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Polish officers were told at special meetings that the intelligence service had discovered a West German invasion plan, which had to be preempted by the Warsaw Pact forces. In 1980–81, the political apparatus sought to influence the officer corps against Solidarity:

The political apparatus began to spread stories of workers' debasement of the officer cadre, of attacks on officers, of cases of harassment, beating, and poisoning of officers by Solidarity members. Ten to twenty such reports a month were sent to the unit with orders that they be disseminated to the whole cadre. These reports were

The East European political apparatuses are described in the works cited in footnote 1 of this section.
confidential in nature, marked "for the information of the cadre" and
not for public consumption.

Another officer recalled rumors being spread by the political organs
to the effect that many of the Solidarity activists had been Nazi col-
laborators. According to him, another method used to achieve the
desired political effect was to have top party officials give talks to the
officers, supposedly divulging some very sensitive information to
explain the need for unpopular actions. In East Germany, following
the defection of a border guards officer, the political apparatus sought
to downplay the significance of his action by explaining to the person-
nel of his company that he had fled because he suffered from a ven-
ereal disease.⁷

Given the nature of the political officer's assignment, which includes
tacit political supervision of line officers, it is logical to assume a
degree of conflict between political and line officers. This expectation
is reinforced by the fact that the political officer is invariably of a more
junior rank than the commander and often than other officers in the
unit as well.

Indeed, the political apparatus in NSWP armies was often staffed in
the past by party hacks with few or no military qualifications. As late
as the late 1960s, according to a Czech officer, conflicts with the politi-
cal officers were serious and endemic in his regiment. Some mutual
distrust and antagonism evidently continue to persist in all East Euro-
pean armies to this day. Line officers are said to consider political
officers less qualified professionally, and are envious of their less
demanding jobs. The continuing ideological surveillance also remains
an annoyance. The latent conflicts between line officers and political
officers have reportedly been exacerbated in periods of political tension
and instability, including 1967–68 in Czechoslovakia and 1980–81 in
Poland.

⁷The official reaction to the defection was described to us by an NCO:

When it was 100 percent clear that he was gone, the platoon was pulled out of
border duty and we did not go to the border for five or six days. Then there
was an investigation of the incident and the entire unit by the Border Com-
mand. These were big guns, and we were covered in sweat. And then we were
given the reasons for his defection. We were told that he was suffering from
venereal disease and that he was so ashamed and afraid of being discovered
that he went astray. But in principle, when you look deeper, he was an enemy
of the GDR. Everybody said he was a good officer and almost everyone had
good relations with him, but still he was an enemy of the GDR and had always
concealed it. It was said that he had been passive at party meetings and this
had been a sign. I remember the following words from General B: “This man
runs away, this traitor. He grew up in this country, he went to school in this
socialist motherland and he runs away... to a country where neo-Nazis gad
about, where young people are unemployed, that’s the kind of country he went
to.”
By and large, however, our respondents reported that the conflict between political and line officers is limited. They believe that the antagonism has been alleviated in part by the fact that gross political interference in the prerogatives of the commander is no longer tolerated, and the political officers themselves are much better educated than were those in the past. There also appears to be a growing tendency to prepare officers to perform the duties of both line commander and political officer. For instance, in Poland and East Germany, officers on a field grade track were reportedly required to serve a one- or two-year tour as political officers at the regimental or divisional level.

Perhaps the most important factor limiting this conflict is the strong common interest on the part of both types of officers in a smooth relationship. The career prospects of both depend on good military and political performance by their unit, and any negative developments or conflict, regardless of origin, impacts detrimentally on both. As a result, despite the generally tense relations among officers, cooperation and mutual compromise is the rule rather than the exception, and existing conflicts are resolved at the unit level whenever possible. Whether this problem avoidance mechanism will continue to function in a crisis situation is, however, very uncertain. When the Czechoslovak army began to reform in the 1960s, line commanders' long-standing resentment of political officers surfaced, and many political officers were fired by commanders, with their slots left vacant. At one regimental meeting:

The chief divisional political officer was attacked in a way which would have been unthinkable before. He was called a common liar. He was warned against ever showing his face in the unit again if he valued his life. He was very subdued, left the unit, and did not return until August 23, 1968.

The Party Organization

Next to the political apparatus—the network of political officers—the most important ideological watchdog is the party organization in the military. Party cells are organized (separately from the political officers and, at higher levels, political administrations) in all units down to the company level. These basic party cells, however, are not incorporated into the party along territorial administrative lines, as all

---

8This trend is examined in detail in Herspring, "Technology and the Changing Political Officer," op. cit.
other cells are; rather, they are a part of an independent party organization in the military.

All members and candidate members of the party are registered in the cell, without regard to rank or function, but in practice the vast majority of members are officers, since they are much more likely to be party members than are soldiers or NCOs. As a result, the party organization exercises a control function primarily vis-à-vis the officer corps.

The political officer of the unit is usually just a regular member of the cell and not a member of its leadership. Nonetheless, he exerts tremendous influence on the work of the cell in his capacity as the party's de facto senior representative in the unit.

Cell meetings, which are normally convened once a month, not only deal with political issues, but also address professional performance and conduct. This mechanism allows the party to take line officers (almost all of whom are party members) to task for inadequate professional performance and, in serious cases, to mete out political punishment for professional shortcomings. One former political officer recalled instituting party proceedings against a squad commander of the East German border guards for several transgressions against military regulations and poor performance during an exercise.

The Security Service

The third pillar of the control system, and the one most feared, is the security service organization in the military. Like the political apparatus and the party organization, it is patterned on the Soviet model and is present at the regimental and, in some cases, lower levels in all NSWP armies. In most East European countries and in the Soviet Union, it is staffed with representatives of the respective state security service, though in Poland, the military counterintelligence serves this function.

The security service officer functions in complete independence from the party, political, and military jurisdictions in the army and reports only to his own chain of command. His task is to gauge the political attitudes of the unit personnel, including the officers, and investigate any instances of actual or potential antiregime behavior. Most of our respondents reported that the security officer was feared by both the line commanders and the political officers. Thus a Polish respondent

---

found his political officer willing to discuss a sensitive issue, but only outside of his office, because he was afraid that it was bugged by the security people.

In the pursuit of his duties, the security officer relies primarily on his own resources, which include detailed files on all personnel under his jurisdiction and a network of informers. A Czech interlocutor described this system as follows:

At the independent battalion or regimental level, there is one military counterintelligence officer, but the higher you go, the more people are involved. These officers are subordinated to their superior officers in the chain of command of military intelligence attached to the STB. They are looked after by the army, they wear military uniforms, but they are promoted and appointed by special order. They are on special payrolls and are not subordinated to the commander of the unit in which they serve. They have separate offices, run a separate mail system, and access to them is only by advance appointment. They are asked to keep track of the political mood of the unit, and to do that they recruit informers from the ranks of both conscripts and officers, whom they are entitled to pay for reports.

The network of informers known to exist in every unit invariably produces an atmosphere of distrust among all personnel, regardless of rank or position, and serves as an effective deterrent to organized opposition. According to our respondents, it is difficult to decline cooperation with the security officer because this could be considered an antiregime gesture and may have negative career consequences. A former East German serviceman described his own experience with the security service official:

He was an officer. Naturally he had his people, who were not known. These people are informers and they are among the soldiers, the NCOs, and the officers. I was also approached and asked to do it and I did sign something to undertake certain duties. Nobody was supposed to see me leaving his office. It was all done very quietly.

The security officers, evidently, also have the right to demand reports on the situation in the unit or the behavior of individual servicemen from the respective commanders. An East German officer related that the squad commanders in his border guards company were required to write individual assessments of all their subordinates and report to the security officer once a month. The security officer also can and often does investigate the civilian background of personnel in particularly sensitive positions.

The security officer's military rank in the unit is always lower than that of the commander and some of the other officers, but he invariably has both a higher rank in the security service and immeasurably
more power, which explains his inordinate influence. Explained one interviewee:

The security officer was only a first lieutenant, but one had the impression that he could tell the company commander to do things. His relationship to him was that of a superior.

The system of informers, most of whom are conscripts run by the security officer, brings about a seemingly incongruous situation where all officers, including political officers, are ultimately subject to political surveillance by soldiers. This completes the circle of perhaps the most elaborate system of loyalty control over a professional group ever devised.

FACTORS INFLUENCING OFFICER RELIABILITY

Comprehensive as the control system is, there are reasons to believe that it falls short of achieving its main objective, the unquestioned loyalty of all officers to the regime. Indeed, the very complexity and redundancy of the control system are themselves testimony to continuing regime doubts about the officer corps. There is considerable historical evidence that East European officers have, at times, behaved in ways hardly consonant with the interests of the party or the USSR. Examples of less than totally loyal behavior have been documented in Hungary and Poland in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and, more recently, the Solidarity period in Poland.

More significantly, there are signs of continued insufficient ideological motivation, political apathy, and even outright rejection of the system by East European officers even in noncrisis times. Nearly two decades after the Soviet invasion of 1968, the Czech military has still not been able to attract sufficient numbers of officers to its ranks, as became clear from our interviews, while even the most politicized of the NSWP officer corps—the East German—continues to be plagued by defections to the West.10

To the extent that any existing political misgivings among NSWP military professionals could become potential vulnerabilities in a crisis or wartime situation, it is important to gain a better understanding of the factors motivating them. Our respondents provided us with some interesting insights in this respect.

---

10According to knowledgeable West German sources, some fifty GDR officers have defected in the past fifteen years. By way of historical comparison, there are only a handful of documented cases of defections for political reasons by Wehrmacht officers during World War II.
Our interview data confirm that the intensive ideological indoctrination described above is much less effective than intended. In fact, in some cases it seems to be counterproductive. The following explanation by a junior East German officer is fairly typical:

Yes, that is one reason why some people reject it. It is because they are fed up with the propaganda that is constantly pressed on them. This is a counterreaction. Perhaps in a longer term they could have convinced people. But this intense pressure that never lets up caused a significant backlash.

Others expressed the opinion that many officers do not believe in the propaganda but go through the motions of the ideological exercise they consider a part of their service duties. Said another officer:

Actually nobody took the propaganda seriously. Maybe there were two or three in our unit who were convinced and were taking it in. Most of the rest, however, simply looked on it as an obligation, and that’s how they treated it.

Overall, there seemed to be a consensus that only a minority of the officers, virtually all of whom are party members, could be characterized as true believers in the Communist ideology. This is particularly the case among younger officers. Here are two views by respondents who were themselves party members:

I would say that only 20 or 30 percent were convinced Communists. The rest of us saw it simply as part of our profession, of the job we had to do.

Among the young professional cadres, many of whom were platoon commanders, there were few hardened Communists. There were a few S.O.B.s, but as a rule not very many. In fact, there were even some conversations that if something were to happen, they [the hardened Communists] would be the first to get it.

Apart from the relentless indoctrination efforts, much disaffection is caused by inordinate pressures exerted by superior officers, tension and distrust in relations with colleagues, and the awareness of being under constant surveillance. This is particularly pronounced among the junior officer ranks. At times, such pressures evidently become unbearable. One junior officer from the GDR explained the reasons for his defection to the West as follows:

One of the reasons was that I was at the border. But that was not the only one. In my case the most important reason was really my relationship with my superiors, where I was constantly under pressure and yet had I said what I thought, had I resisted the pressure,
then my chances to go to the university after the service would have been close to zero. It was in order to save my future that I defected.

Similar strongly felt frustrations were experienced by a squad commander:

Yes, it was frustrating because one had the impression that all the pressure exerted at the top flows down to the bottom. The division commanders will pass the buck to the regimental commanders, who in turn pressure their company commanders, and at the very bottom sits the squad commander. And he can’t delegate it further down, or only with great difficulties. And so it happens that he has to take on responsibilities that are not his at all, and then he ends up neglecting his own duties and gets in serious trouble with the company commander. This often happened to me.

The effectiveness of political indoctrination is also reduced by the inability of the party to effectively isolate officers from alternative sources of information and from interaction with less ideologically motivated sectors of the public. In virtually all East European countries, Western sources of information are relatively easy to access, even by military personnel, despite strenuous efforts by the regime to prevent such access.\(^{11}\)

According to our interviewees, Western radio and television (the latter can be received in most of East Germany and parts of Hungary and Czechoslovakia) are popular among military personnel and are often tuned in. Generally, it is much easier for the officers to listen to the Western media than for the enlisted men, since many of the officers live in private housing off base. Indeed, one of the main attractions of living in a private apartment, we were told, is the possibility of listening to Western programs. One of our respondents, an NPA political officer, told us that he watched the news on West German television every night after indoctrinating the troops during the day. Another preferred to live far from the base and pay high rent rather than live inexpensively in an officers’ housing project where tuning in the Western media would have been risky. Many East German officers—including political officers—also receive consumer goods from West Germany, even though such contacts with the West are supposedly strictly forbidden. One East German NCO described his officers’ Western connections:

\(^{11}\)Our findings thus correct accounts arguing that East European servicemen are effectively isolated from Western radio and television broadcasts (e.g., Michal Mars, “Need for Protection Against ‘Ideological Poison’; GDR Soldiers Are Forbidden to Tune in West German Broadcasts”, *Der Tagesspiegel*, West Berlin, April 2, 1985; translation in JPRS-EEFS-85-060, May 24, 1985).
Our platoon commander, a 1st lieutenant ... had to move into an apartment which was designated for officers, and which was located quite close to the barracks. And apparently he was not at all happy about this because anyone going by his door could hear when he was watching Western TV programs or listening to Western music, Western radio and cassettes. I had three officers— one lieutenant, one 1st lieutenant, and one captain, the political officer. And each one was really tuned in to the West. They received packages from the West. I asked [the squad commander] where he got them from. He said, "I had to have them sent from the West by my grandmother." There was this materialistic side which every officer had. And even the political officer, ... when I got a glimpse of his private life, I realized how much he was influenced by the West. ... [W]hen Brezhnev died he addressed the company and he really almost had tears in his eyes ... but do you think he shaved with an East German shaver? There were always Western products in his kitchen.

A Polish officer maintained that all senior officers he knew, including himself, listened to Western broadcasts, despite problems with jamming, but seldom discussed them. The most popular stations were said to be Radio Free Europe, the Voice of America, and the BBC; in East Germany, the Berlin station RIAS and various West German stations were most listened to.

Not everybody sought access to Western information on political subjects, however. For some, watching Western television was simply a means of escaping temporarily from the drab reality of their daily life. One officer knew of a colleague who was addicted to Dallas but had no interest in political programs. Still others were not interested at all. Explained one officer:

Naturally I had the opportunity to receive Western media, since I was allowed to have a private television set and a radio in my room. It would have been no problem to do that, but I was not interested and also had very little time.

A further factor that undoubtedly influences officer views and mitigates official indoctrination, though it is difficult to say to what extent, is the attitude of the population toward the military. This was most relevant in Poland where the military-led suppression of Solidarity did tangible and perhaps irreversible damage to the reputation of the military as a national institution and resulted in serious military morale problems. (For details, see Section V.) One Polish respondent who served during the Solidarity period put it as follows:

Even before the declaration of martial law, the Polish military was not held in very high esteem by Polish society, on the whole. After martial law, this esteem sank even lower and anything that represented Communist power, the military, the militia became a
target of society’s hatred. People treat the Polish military with as much distaste as they displayed and still display toward the Soviets. And this affects officers and NCOs alike.

The most serious problem for the Polish officers from a morale point of view is the loss of the military establishment’s legitimacy as a traditional defender of national interests. Said the same respondent:

Now, in the nation’s opinion, the military has a different function. It is seen as an element of pressure on society and as the enforcer of the will of the rulers, of their decisions. And as is well known, the rulers have lost their popularity.

Problems resulting from societal opprobrium are evidently not limited to Poland. The Czechoslovak officer corps experienced a similar drop in morale in the wake of the Soviet invasion and still does not appear to have recovered completely. In Hungary, the military profession also does not enjoy high prestige—arguably a lasting consequence of the disintegration and virtual dismantling of the Hungarian army in 1856. In the words of a Hungarian respondent:

Becoming an officer in Hungary amounts for many people to becoming Russified, and most people do not like the Russians.

Even in the GDR there seems to be a strong undercurrent of distaste for the military (especially the border guards). All of our border guards interviewees reported cases of open hostility toward them on the part of the civilian population. They recalled insults such as “green SS” and “bounty hunters” (Kopfgeld Jaeger) being hurled at them in public places. Most of them avoided visiting bars and taverns in uniform because of frequent conflicts and fights with the locals. They and other respondents had been aware of the antimilitarism fostered by a part of the Protestant Church in East Germany.

While all of our respondents acknowledged existing and potential problems with officer motivation and reliability, there was no consensus on how those problems might affect combat performance in a conflict with the West. Many believed that other factors—especially officers’ military discipline—would override these potential weaknesses and assure reliable East European participation. This testimony is examined in Section VI. Generally, the younger officers among our respondents were more skeptical about the loyalty of their former colleagues than were the older officers who had served in earlier periods.
IMPLICATIONS

The information provided by our respondents confirms the assertion that assuring the loyalty of the officer corps is a primary concern of the East European Communist regimes. An elaborate recruitment system, combined with generous material incentives, is designed to attract and retain a loyal cadre with a vested interest in the system. Once recruited and trained, the officers become subject to one of the most pervasive indoctrination and control systems ever designed. They are subject to strict military discipline and, at upper levels, Soviet controls.

Yet the system is not foolproof, and a number of factors are likely to affect negatively the attitudes of NSWP officers and thus their reliability in a crisis. Indeed, the very nature of the control system is testimony to continued regime doubts about military professionals. Officer attitudes are affected negatively by the pervasive distrust signified by the control system, by counterproductive propaganda, by exposure to alternative sources of information, by the declining social status of the military profession throughout Eastern Europe, and by domestic political instability that may cast the military in an internal policing role.
III. NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS
AND CONSCRIPTS

Even a completely reliable officer corps does not by itself guarantee a loyal and motivated armed force. Ultimately, the reliability and combatworthiness of an army are only as good as those of its soldiers. The significance of this fact is magnified in Communist societies, where there is no political consensus and significant sectors of the public resent the political system imposed on them. And soldiers, being essentially "civilians on loan," are both more representative of the attitudes of the population at large and less amenable to cooptation in party-held values. For the regime, therefore, the imperative to indoctrinate, motivate, and control this core group in the army is no less urgent than in the case of the officer corps.

It is necessary to explain why two seemingly quite different groups, NCOs and conscripts, are treated together in this section. In NSWP military establishments, the similarities between these two groups are, in fact, much greater than the differences. Most NCOs serve for limited terms; many are actually conscripts who have undergone a longer period of training and serve a little longer. The number of professional NCOs is relatively small. Further, the professional, social, and attitudinal gulf between the officers and the NCOs is incomparably greater than that between NCOs and conscripts.\footnote{NSWP armies are composed of an officer corps, an NCO corps, and conscripts. There are (with significant national variations) three types of NCOs: (1) The vast majority are soldiers who attain the rank of corporal and may serve a year or two longer than the conscription period. These are called, for example, \textit{podoficer} in the PPA and \textit{Unteroffizier auf Zeit} in the NPA. We term this category "term NCOs." (2) Term NCOs may remain in the service, attain sergeant rank, and become professional NCOs. They may also begin military service in this capacity, having attended an NCO school. They are called \textit{podoficer zawody} in the PPA and \textit{Berufsunteroffizier} in the NPA. (3) Beginning in the 1960s, a separate warrant officer corps was introduced in NSWP armies, staffed by career NCOs who advance and graduates of warrant officer schools. These are called \textit{chorzy} in the PPA and \textit{Faehnrich} in the NPA. We term the latter two categories "career NCOs," although for some purposes warrant officers, who usually have specialized military skills, should be considered separately.}

RECRUITMENT AND STATIONING

With universal conscription the rule in all East European armies, it is virtually impossible for the authorities to institute an effective sys-
tem for screening out individuals of questionable loyalty to the regime. Nonetheless, an effort is made to separate those considered potentially disloyal as a group from the regular army units.

Apart from the few individuals of draft age who have already profiled themselves as opponents of the regime, there are two main groups considered unfit for service in the regular army because of suspected unreliability: people of strong religious conviction and minorities. Most of the conscripts belonging to these groups serve in special construction battalions where they undergo little or no military training.

Our respondents were generally aware of this situation; several had concrete information. According to an East German officer, the construction units were introduced in the GDR to deal with conscientious objectors, since the regime could not act as harshly against believers as it did against dissidents, without risking a conflict with the church. The problem has become increasingly severe; the number of conscientious objectors reached an estimated 10,000 in 1984. The problem of conscientious objection seems to be less serious in Czechoslovakia, though we were told that some members of religious sects, especially Jehovah's Witnesses, have refused to serve. A Czech reserve officer who had served in a construction battalion recalled that the majority of the soldiers were minorities (Gypsies and Hungarians) or believers. Another former Czechoslovak serviceman in another unit confirmed this policy:

In the unit in M, there were Hungarian minorities and other people from Slovakia, and we had seminary students and even some priests. They, of course, did not have any weapons.

Service in these units, we were told, effectively precludes higher education and a successful career. The regime, apparently fearing ideological contamination, tries to isolate the construction units and keep them as far as possible from other military personnel. The personnel makeup of these units is somewhat different in Poland, where the majority of draft-age youth are Catholics and there are few minorities. There, construction units called engineer-construction battalions (batalion inżynieryjno-budowlany) are staffed primarily with recruits who are considered politically suspect, and ex-convicts. One Polish respondent who had served in such a unit because of prior involvement with firearms recalled that half of his unit consisted of "alcoholics and other degenerates," while most of the other half had only elementary educa-

2While conscription is universal in all of the Warsaw Pact countries, there are some differences in the length of service. Romanian conscripts serve only 16 months; East Germans and Hungarians serve 18 months; and Poles, Czechs, Bulgarians, and Soviets all serve 24 months.
tion. All of the construction units have relatively lax discipline, officer cadres of low quality, very limited military training, and grossly inadequate military skills.

During the induction process, the military drafting authorities, in cooperation with the youth and paramilitary organizations, attempt to select particularly reliable individuals for some of the more sensitive branches of the armed forces, e.g., border troops, special operations units, and internal security forces such as ZOMO in Poland (for details, see Section V).

A more subtle policy is pursued to attract better candidates for the NCO corps, especially those recruited to serve longer terms, and at the same time, ensure a greater degree of conformity. Bright draft-age youths with college aspirations are approached and asked to enlist for two or three years as NCOs, in return for which they are promised admission to the university upon demobilization. Since securing a study place is extremely difficult in most East European countries, these offers are often accepted, particularly in East Germany. Once in the service, however, the new NCOs learn that the promise can be reneged on for a variety of political or professional shortcomings. Explained one NPA NCO:

What is good is that you are guaranteed admission even before you apply and you just have to serve three years in the army. But the problem is that every time you do something wrong they can take it away. They can do that and you have no recourse.

Another practice designed to enhance reliability, especially in the event of domestic involvement by the military, is extraterritorial stationing. This policy, widely practiced in the Soviet Union, was succinctly explained by one of our GDR servicemen:

Simply put, the soldier should serve as far as possible from his home town. That's the rule.

The policy is identical in Czechoslovakia:

You have to serve in a different region. The Czechs are usually sent to Slovakia and the Slovaks to the Czech lands. I lived in Prague, but they sent me out west. You simply cannot serve in your own region. That's the rule for most everybody.

A similar practice is followed in Poland, where youth from the south are routinely sent to serve in the coastal area and vice versa. The opportunity to serve in one's native region is much sought after and is evidently used as an incentive to attract recruits to certain units. For
instance, one of our interviewees was promised service in his native
town if he would join a special elite unit.

INDOCTRINATION AND CONTROL

The system of political controls over NCOs and conscripts is similar
in nature and just as comprehensive as the one for officers described in
the preceding section, but it has some unique characteristics. The po-
titical apparatus represented by the political officer is again responsible
for the political awareness of the troops overall. Political education is
conducted on a regular basis, usually consisting of at least two hours
per week. The soldiers are often required to take examinations on the
subject matter discussed, and failure can result in cancellation of leave
privileges and other sanctions.

Nonetheless, our respondents reported that political indoctrination
is often conducted in a superficial and formalistic way. It is seldom
taken seriously. The following accounts provided by three respondents
are quite typical:3

In our unit it went something like this: The political officer gave us
some brochures and certain pages to read and then he disappeared
again. Then he came back in two hours and asked some questions
that we were supposed to answer. That was actually all.

It was almost ridiculous. The soldiers sit in the political education
hall and the political officers read from Rude Pravo or something else
from the party press. They explain something about Marxism and
the Soviet Union and how we should love the Soviets and some such.

The soldiers don't like to listen to this and they don't ask questions,
but there must be a discussion. So the officer will call a soldier and
ask him a dumb question and he will get a dumb answer. The whole
thing is a bit stupid.

In contrast with the officers, however, some enlisted men are said to
question particularly implausible propaganda statements and to be

3Our Soviet respondents reported that political indoctrination classes are conducted
in a similarly superficial way in Soviet units stationed in Eastern Europe. Said one:

We also had a political officer, but he was a warrant officer. Sometimes he
didn't want to conduct these classes so he just called the assistant platoon com-
mander, a sergeant, to whom he gave a newspaper showing him what to read to
the soldiers. He read about half the material and then said, "And now you may
sleep." So we just sat there, but sometimes we had to write something down,
since we had some notebooks that had to be checked once in a while. Those
who came through two such checks with the score of "outstanding" got the badge
"Outstanding Soldier of the Soviet Union."
openly skeptical at times. A GDR political officer recalled being asked questions on the legal status of Berlin and the text of the Potsdam agreement that he could not answer without contradicting the official party line. Other respondents reported that conscripts would ask simple questions that were also difficult to answer in a persuasive manner. For instance: "Why is Western music so much better than ours?" or "How come the Leopard is better than the T54/55?" Still others were simply not convinced. Said one soldier: "Sure the West is declining, but I would like to decline in a Mercedes, myself." A Polish conscript explained why political indoctrination was not more successful:

The army lasts for two or three years. Our consciousness started to form in the family and at the workplace, so the authorities were giving us their line, but we knew what was what.

Disagreement and even open opposition to political propaganda became especially common among Polish conscripts during the Solidarity period. While there is no way to reliably estimate the percentage of Polish soldiers who were Solidarity members and sympathizers at any point, it is clear from our interviews that in 1981 they constituted a majority. According to a warrant officer, 65 to 70 percent of the soldiers in his company were members of Solidarity, and virtually no one among the term conscripts was opposed to it. Even among a group of NCOs receiving specialized technical training, only about 5 percent were reported to be opposed to Solidarity. Explained a Polish NCO:

The consciousness of the young people going into the service after 1980 is dramatically different. Almost all of them had gone into Solidarity. And the political consciousness of the man who is entering the service now, who knows a little something of what went on during the Solidarity period, is different. He is more resistant to propaganda. It is difficult to convince him of the friendship of the Soviet Union.

Another respondent, when asked about the danger of challenging the political officer, explained the defiant attitudes among Polish soldiers:

From one viewpoint it was dangerous, but there was safety in numbers, since more than one soldier protested. For example, the majority, perhaps 70 percent, were against martial law and only about 30 percent were not opposed.

We were given an example of what amounted to an antiregime demonstration during a political education class in a Polish unit:

Once Solidarity had called for a 15-minute work stoppage throughout Poland and we decided to honor this call during political instruction. Nobody left the room, but nobody spoke or answered any questions.
After 10 or 15 minutes, the instructor continued with his lecture but nobody paid him any attention. He got very angry and at first said that he would treat this incident as a strike. However, later on he acted as if it had never happened.

While the political officer is the main political instrument for controlling and indoctrinating the ranks, he is also, somewhat paradoxically, the only officer in the unit who is fairly accessible and often popular with the soldiers. This is explained by the fact that the political officer is responsible for organizing various extracurricular activities in the unit such as outings to the cinema or the theater, sports events, and an occasional dance. The political officer is also the only person of authority a soldier with a personal problem can turn to. Respondents told us that it is not unusual for the political officer to gain the respect of conscripts by acting as a "party chaplain" and being much more accessible than the line commander. Explained one Polish private:

If I went to the company commander for a pass and he wouldn’t give it to me, then I would go to the political deputy... He will give me one for sure because he wants the soldiers to go to him.

Another respondent recalled that having failed to obtain a pass from his commander to spend time with his visiting girlfriend, he was able to secure one from his political officer without any difficulty. This additional dimension of the political officer's duties undoubtedly facilitates his primary task of maintaining contact with and winning the confidence of his soldiers. It helps him impose political conformity in the unit, not through political indoctrination but through a set of rewards and sanctions.

As in the party organization of the officer corps, conscripts and NCOs are also subject to political supervision by the Communist Youth organizations present in all East European militaries. The activities of these organizations include regular meetings with obligatory attendance to discuss the military and political work in the unit and measures that should be taken to improve performance. The youth organization is further responsible for ensuring that its members subscribe to a certain number of publications and for putting out a political "wall-paper" at regular intervals. Members who exhibit persistently negative attitudes can be expelled and will suffer the consequences in their future careers.

---

4 In the GDR, this organization is called Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ); in Poland and Czechoslovakia, the Union of Socialist Youth (ZSMP, SSM). The youth organization usually has its cells organized down to the squad level, and many soldiers and NCOs who are not party members belong to it.
Poland is again an exception, with a clear majority of the conscripts refusing to join the ZSMP in the early 1980s, according to our Polish interviewees. One of them described the situation in his own unit:

During my military service, they tried to make people join the ZSMP and even picked agitators from among the members whose job was to persuade the soldiers to join. But all their efforts ended in a fiasco because out of 120 soldiers in the company, only about 36 were members. There were simply too many supporters and members of Solidarity.

Another Polish respondent reported that only 30 of the soldiers in his company belonged to the youth organization.

Apart from the youth organization, there are also various “circles” that organize the soldiers for useful “sociopolitical” activities. In the East German army, for instance, there are circles for military traditions research, literature, and amateur theater, as well as an army sports club. All of these activities are overseen by the political officer and are designed to better control even the limited free time available to the soldier.

The security officer, easily the most disliked person in the unit, exercises control directly and through his network of informers. An East German political officer recalled instances where security officers in civilian clothes would patrol taverns frequented by soldiers on their Sunday leave and try to overhear their conversations. In some cases, such spying is said to have resulted in severe punishment for loose-tongued conscripts. Similarly, the security officer’s informers are directed to report any negative or critical attitudes among their peers. This results in a pervasive atmosphere of distrust among all personnel. A GDR border guard who planned to flee to West Germany with a fellow soldier, for instance, did not completely trust his friend until the end:

That’s how it was during my escape with my patrol partner. Until the last minute, I did not know if he was serious about fleeing, even though we had talked about it. And at the very end I let him run ahead of me so that I could be secure. Despite everything, I still didn’t know if he might not turn around and say, “Stop, I am from State Security.” The distrust is still there. However well you know somebody, you still distrust him.

**FACTORS AFFECTING CONSCRIPT RELIABILITY**

The all-encompassing efforts of the NSWP regimes to indoctrinate and control soldiers and NCOs indicate, at the very least, a degree of
concern about their motivation and potential loyalty in a crisis. The information provided in our interviews implies that such concerns are not without foundation.

One of the factors influencing soldier attitudes negatively, to a much greater extent than we observed in the officer corps, is the gulf between party propaganda and reality in and out of the military. The impact of this gulf is especially strong when soldiers are involved in domestic repression (as discussed at length in Section V). A Polish serviceman used in a policing function against strikers in 1970 recounted that as a result of that experience:

My eyes were opened......The idea of leaving the service was probably born then. I had had internal doubts......but what I saw in S affected me to such an extent that I started to......observe what was going on in Poland and the world.

In general, the traumatic events of the Solidarity period, like the earlier Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, had a profound effect on the rank and file. These events dramatically undermined the regime's authority and credibility and therefore lowered conscript reliability. The following assessment of soldier attitudes after martial law in Poland by a former NCO is representative:

About 90 percent of the conscripts held the same [negative] opinions that I did. People simply understood the situation. There were, of course, some cases, such as a militia man’s son who had been told things by his idiot father since childhood, who believed the party line. Even some of them, however, saw the light in the army and changed their views. But it was rare to find somebody who supported the party line and meet a single person who believed what he was told during indoctrination sessions. Some of them could explain to you that they support it, but when you meet one of them and have a drink with him, then it turns out that he says quite different things.

Even for respondents with less dramatic personal experiences, the gulf between propaganda and reality is a major cause of political disenchantment. A former GDR border guard recalls being shocked by the discrepancies between what he was taught during his training and the reality of service at the border:

I remember what they said during our training period with regard to the use of weapons and the order to shoot. It was relatively humane. It was said that weapons should be used only as a last resort, and whenever possible one should not shoot at women and children. Well, it was not that way at all when I came to the border company. There it was said that everybody that comes should be shot regardless. "Nobody passes through here," said the battalion commander,
"everybody is shot here. You can forget whatever you have been
told."

For two other border guards, this contradiction played a decisive role in
their eventual decision to defect:

We were told during our training that we have to face daily border
provocations and attacks from the West. In fact the reality is com-
pletely different. This forces most people to start thinking.

I had a lot of time during service at the border to think about all of
this. Why is this border here and against whom is this border here?
It has only one purpose, and that is to prevent GDR citizens from
fleeing. All the various blocking devices face the wrong way. From
the side of the Federal Republic it is very easy to climb over the
fence, but it is impossible from the GDR side.

A second important factor affecting the motivation of soldiers and
NCOs is the stressful nature of the service and the unpleasant, often
adversarial, relations with officers. Relations between officers and
NCOs are reported to be especially tense and to contribute significantly
to the NCOs' unhappiness. Virtually all of our interviewees who had
been NCOs thought that they were treated poorly by the officers, and
that they were overworked and underpaid. This was true even for the
professional NCOs and ensigns. Indeed, poor treatment by the officers
seems to be a leading cause of many NCOs leaving the army. The fol-
lowing comments of four respondents are typical:

I left the service because of awful differences between the NCOs and
the officers in the Polish military. Not to even mention the
discrepancies in pay which amounted to a professional NCO receiving
half of the officer's pay, but having to take on as much work and
responsibility.

Non-commissioned officers were treated much worse than the offi-
cers, and although there was no outright hostility toward the officers,
there was no great friendship either.

The only reason I wanted to quit and transfer to another line of
work was because of the problems in officer-NCO relations. Very
often relations were strained because of unreasonable orders by the
officers.

Many promises are made to the NCOs, but they are never kept. This
and the increased responsibilities given to the NCOs in the border
troops in the last few years will result in NCOs fleeing in growing
numbers.

NCOs also feel discriminated against vis-à-vis officers in a variety of
areas. Housing, a key problem throughout Eastern Europe, is a major
source of NCO discontent, as seen from the following excerpts from two interviews:

There is a housing shortage in Poland, and the officers always had priority over the NCOs. An NCO may have been on the waiting list for three years, yet when an opening came up, they would give the apartment to an officer.

I finally gave up on the military service because three and a half years after I joined I was still living in the barracks, while my family had to live elsewhere.

According to a respondent familiar with an internal NPA research project focusing on the role of the NCO in the NPA:

The study of the NCOs brought out very well the pressure they were subject to because of their subordinate position vis-à-vis the officer ranks and the lack of decisionmaking powers vis-à-vis the conscripts . . . hassle from above and from below, they were in the midst of a conflict and were the weakest link in the chain.

Most of our respondents, however, maintained that relations between the NCOs and the soldiers were usually good, as indicated below:5

In our unit, there was a tendency for the NCOs to fraternize with the soldiers against the officers. The two groups tried to outfox each other. There was much tension and problems all the time.

I would say that the soldiers and the NCOs generally held together. That was a single bloc. There were altercations with the officers sometimes, but it was basically quiet.

Another factor having a potentially negative influence on reliability is alcohol abuse. Drinking is endemic in all NSWP armies, though most of its negative effects were said to be confined mainly to off-duty hours. For conscripts and officers alike, alcohol often represents an escape from the drudgery and tensions of army life. Explained a former East German border troops NCO:

I would say that alcohol does [have an influence on the combat readiness and discipline of the army]. Most of the time, it was extreme when people were outside on their time off. Or among ourselves, we would go out merely, to be quite honest, to get so drunk that we would forget about the whole mess, so that we would be able to forget

5Walendowski's survey (op. cit., pp. 88ff) indicated considerable tension between NCOs and conscripts. This discrepancy from our findings may be the result of terminological confusion; Walendowski's respondents (half of whom were corporals, i.e., very junior term NCOs) were probably indicating their dissatisfaction with career NCOs.
what went on before our time off. And correspondingly we would
come back because we had to be there.

We were told that although alcohol consumption is strictly forbidden
on base (with the exception that beer is evidently allowed in at least
some East German units), even heavy drinking occurs regularly. East
German respondents recalled that despite stringent inspections, alcohol
was smuggled into border guards units with ease and was consumed not
only after hours but even on duty. On one occasion, an entire squad
was said to have reported for duty inebriated, and individual soldiers
patrolled the border drunk. Our respondents also described numerous
methods used in the NPA to distill various alcoholic substances.

Drinking seems to be a particularly serious problem in the Polish
army. Many of the instances of alcohol abuse definitely, if tem-
perarily, affect combat readiness. The following testimonies illustrate:

Alcohol abuse took frightening proportions but usually took place at
night. Those soldiers that wanted to drink would get organized.
Three or four soldiers like myself would get enough money together
and send two junior soldiers over the fence to get several bottles of
booz. Since there were sixty-five people in our sub-company unit,
there was always somebody who wanted to drink on a given day.
Then they would start drinking and would not quit until the next
morning; and then they would be in no shape to get up for the six
o'clock calisthenics. Often officers would come to the company's
bathroom and would find soldiers there who were unable to get up.

When I was on duty during field exercises, the company commander
and first lieutenant . . . went merrymaking in town for three days
and never once showed up on the training field. I had to say that he
had taken ill or had been summoned to staff headquarters.

I saw another incident when I was working in the tank hangar.
Around 2 p.m., Sergeant F reported for duty. He was already slightly
tipsy. He wanted the company commander to substitute somebody
else for his duty and give him the day off, but the commander would
not hear of it. In fact, he instructed the sergeant to drive a tank that
needed overhauling into the hangar. During the course of the next
few hours the sergeant got really drunk and in this state he started to
bring the tank into the hangar. First he demolished the steel doors
coming into the hangar; then he knocked a hole in the roof of a low
building with the gun; finally he rammed the gun through the wall,
something that had happened also in previous years at the hands of
careless drivers. The unit commander came to inspect the damage
with the chief of staff and the duty officer and punished the sergeant
by restricting him to the barracks for 15 days, which meant that he
could not go home until 11 p.m. during those days.
A comparison of the information provided by respondents who served in the 1970s with that provided by more recent émigrés suggests a considerable increase in alcohol-related problems in all NSWP armies, but especially in the PPA. Nonetheless, drinking is likely to have much less impact on reliability in wartime than it has in peacetime. Virtually all of our interviewees also agreed that drugs play a very marginal role, or no role at all, in NSWP military establishments at present.

Access to Western media also affects the attitudes of enlisted men, in the opinion of many interviewees. The East European regimes are clearly aware of that potential and have taken a number of measures to reduce such access. In addition to general measures such as jamming of stations that are deemed particularly dangerous, specific regulations prohibit listening to Western radio and television, under threat of severe penalties.

In situations when information other than the official line is particularly undesirable from the regime's point of view, even more stringent measures are taken. A Polish officer, for example, reported that when martial law was declared in Poland, all radios owned by soldiers in his unit were requisitioned. (The testimony thus confirms the widespread presence of radios in the unit.) Another former member of the Polish armed forces confirmed a series of extraordinary practices pursued by the authorities in their attempt to isolate the military from the influence of Solidarity:

We had no access to true information about Solidarity. You were not allowed to have a radio in the caserne or any foreign publication. Even English-language textbooks were not allowed. There were frequent surprise inspections of the soldiers' sleeping-quarters halls during which their lockers were searched. There were even searches for radios under the floorboards.

A more ingenious system is used in the GDR, where many of the conscripts have private radios. Soldiers are required to permanently mark with tape on the dial the East German stations they are allowed to listen to. Then during frequent inspections, if the radio is found not to be tuned to one of the permitted frequencies, its owner is punished, regardless of whether or not the radio is on.

Despite the authorities' efforts, Western radio and television are listened to whenever possible by the enlisted men, even at considerable risk. Several of the East German border guards we spoke to used to

---

6This is not surprising, given the greater incidence of alcohol abuse among the Polish population at large. Official Polish statistics (probably deflated) show an increase in per capita consumption of pure alcohol from 3 liters in 1950 to 8.4 liters in 1980 (Sluzba Zdrowia, March 27, 1983, translated in JPRS No. 85493, May 18, 1983).
bring small transistor radios to the border, so that they could listen to West German stations while on patrol, in part to relieve the boredom. Others used every opportunity to watch Western television, which is popular throughout East Germany and parts of Czechoslovakia. We were told of several cases where this was done by the soldiers and the NCOs on a more-or-less organized basis. Polish and Czechoslovak respondents reported that many servicemen managed to listen to Western radio.  

Even when tuning in to the West is impossible, soldiers are still exposed to Western radio and television during their infrequent home leaves. Western printed media, on the other hand, are virtually unobtainable and do not seem to play a role.

Most of the respondents are convinced that Western media play a very important role in counteracting official propaganda in the military and believe that special programs geared to a military audience could be even more effective. Here are two views, by an East German and a Polish officer, respectively:

The influence of RIAS should not be underestimated as far as the East German territory is concerned. If programs based on reality are broadcast, they will in any case have a destabilizing effect on the NPA. Much too little use is made of this in the West in my personal view.

When broadcasting to Poland, Western propaganda should be improved and Western radio should stress that the Germans do not pose a threat to Poland and that the United States guarantees the present Polish borders, because it is such fears that Soviet propaganda is built on.

While our interviewees were generally aware of the various factors that could and do negatively affect conscript motivation, there was less agreement on the implications of those factors for wartime reliability.

---

5 Tuning in Western radio and television is apparently also popular among Soviet troops stationed in Eastern Europe. The following incident was described to us by a Soviet NCO serving in East Germany:

Yes, we could watch American movies occasionally on Western television at night after lights out. We had a young officer in the unit who was on duty one night. He came to the Lenin room where everyone was sitting and watching one of these movies. He started yelling that we had to go to bed immediately. When it became clear that he would not stop yelling, the “old men” (second-year servicemen) took him, tied him up, and carried him to the washroom downstairs. There were very long sinks in that washroom, so they just put him in the sink. When we finished watching the movie they untied him. After all that, he just sat there and cried. He was really scared that while he was lying there some officer would come or somebody would call his office, where he was supposed to be on duty the whole night. He did not report on us though.
(see Section VI). Several respondents believe that the regimes are seriously concerned about the potential for open disloyalty. One East German officer said:

Yes, [my troops] performed their border service well, but it was only the result of pressure and not any motivation. I wouldn’t trust my subordinates in case of war.

Another GDR border troops officer indicated, on the basis of his experience, that even there, relatively few soldiers are completely trusted:

The political reliability of border soldiers is assessed according to Order 44.5... Fifty percent of the GDR border guards are considered unreliable by the Main Political Administration. Forty percent are deemed reliable for deployment on the eastern side of the fence (feindwaerts bestaetigt), and only 10 percent are considered completely reliable and are used to patrol the western side of the fence (feindwaerts bestaetigt).9

Another East German NCO described cases of dereliction of duty in the border troops:

One goes out there into the border troops full of anticipation and nothing happens. I mean those hours in solitude. It was so bad where I was that we took books, small radios, and everything out with us because it was too boring for us out there. We sat at the gate and had our books with us and all. But nobody was very concerned with what went on out there. Normally, whenever West German customs or border defense personnel were sighted, you had to make a secret report every time. We didn’t report it at all any more... You just lay down somewhere, and hid yourself so that none of your own officers could find you. It was a game of hide-and-seek with the officers.

Another GDR serviceman observed the following practice:

When a ship of the People’s Navy sails to a forward position, i.e., in immediate proximity to Western territorial waters, the doors to the officers’ sleeping quarters are secured in such a way that they cannot

---

8This order states that every squad leader in the border troops is responsible for conducting semimonthly written evaluations of every member of his squad in the following areas: border duty, attitudes toward shoot-to-kill orders, training, and political attitudes.
9The GDR border fence is erected some distance east of the actual border. Those deployed on the western side of the fence, i.e., “in the direction of the enemy” (feindwaerts) can cross into West Germany without any problem. Border guards patrolling the eastern side, i.e., “the friendly direction” (feindwaerts) could do so only with great difficulties. It should be noted that there are evidently exceptions even among the 10 percent considered fully loyal. Three of our border guard interviewees were “feindwaerts bestaetigt.”
be locked from the outside. This is done because the officers are afraid that they may be locked in by the crew, which will then take over the ship. This happened once several years ago, and since then this regulation has been in force. Also, on the main command stand and on the bridge, a machine gun with a full magazine is placed, in case a crew member decides to jump ship.

Other respondents, while acknowledging the existing doubts and difficulties, pointed out that in a serious conflict, other considerations may contribute to a reliable and credible performance on the part of the rank and file. A key factor mentioned in this respect was the camaraderie and the feeling of mutual dependence among the soldiers in the same small unit, irrespective of soldier-officer tensions. In wartime, it was said, such factors would play an even greater role and would contribute to reliability. This school of thought is succinctly expressed in the following passage:

One should not be deceived by the fact that many soldiers flee in peacetime. It will be different in war. In a crisis situation, the soldiers hold together even more, and it is because of camaraderie and a feeling of belonging together rather than ideology. What I mean is that in a war the crew of a ship or a tank will fight, and will fight very well, because everybody depends on one another.

Overall, there was a noticeable trend in the evolution of the attitudes of our respondents toward rank-and-file reliability. Those respondents who served in earlier periods, especially in the 1960s, assessed the perceived reliability of their fellow servicemen to be much higher than did those who served later.

IMPLICATIONS

The information provided by our respondents makes clear that the NSWP regimes are concerned about the reliability of their conscript armies. This concern is palpably manifested in the differentiated recruitment and stationing practices documented above, as well as in the comprehensive political control system in place in all of the East European armies. These and other factors—strict military discipline, camaraderie and small-unit cohesion, and ignorance about the nature of a likely external conflict—contribute to NSWP conscript reliability. Among the factors that are likely to negatively affect NSWP reliability are domestic political instability, the discrepancy between propaganda and observable reality (which makes alternative, i.e., Western, information sources of particular importance), and tense relations and conflicts between officers and the ranks.
IV. RELIABILITY IN COALITION WARFARE

As noted in the Introduction, East European military forces constitute a significant slice of the total Soviet/Warsaw Pact forces that would be utilized in a conflict with NATO. Indeed, effective employment of NSWP forces is probably crucial to the success of any short-warning, surprise Warsaw Pact attack against NATO. Limited performance by NSWP forces would degrade any Soviet offensive.

This section considers the perceptions of East European servicemen of their military role within the Soviet alliance. It examines their view of NATO and Western military doctrine and capabilities and considers how relationships with the Soviet military within the Warsaw Pact may affect East European reliability in coalition warfare.

EAST EUROPEAN MILITARY PERCEPTIONS OF COALITION WARFARE

During their service in East European armies, our respondents had generally understood Warsaw Pact strategy to involve an early advance of East European armed forces onto NATO territory. Said a Czechoslovak officer:

The fighter bomber air force is to conduct strikes on airfields, communications, and economic and political targets and centers in West Germany, smoothing the way for the advance of tank armies.

An East German border guard said:

We were told, "We won't give up a centimeter of our territory." That could only mean that we must launch an attack.

A Polish officer said:

All the variants are called defensive, but it is defense by means of attack.

Another Polish officer described the basic scenario that pertained into the 1970s as follows:
NATO will take the offensive, then the Soviet Union will counterattack and the first echelon will go into combat. NATO will then launch a nuclear strike, and the first echelon will be put out of action. The second echelon will be sent into combat while the Soviet Union retaliates with nuclear weapons.

It was understood by most respondents that a Soviet attack was likely to involve nuclear weapons, and over time an effort was made in technical and propaganda publications to portray nuclear warfare as survivable. Through the 1970s, the exercises in which respondents participated always involved the employment of nuclear weapons.

It was assumed by many East European servicemen that their first-echelon forces would be destroyed by NATO at the outset of a conflict. A former East German officer said that a conflict between East and West would lead to

a plain and simple sacrifice of NPA forces, with only 3 to 5 minutes [survival time].

Another respondent quoted a senior Polish general as telling him:

It is a good thing they are training us only for the initial period of war. After three days, 50 percent will have perished.

A Czechoslovak officer said:

It is quite clear that the Czech army will perish when fulfilling its assigned task.

If these views are widely held in the East European armies (as we believe to be the case), then one must ask how and whether these armies can be motivated to fight reliably against NATO in what might seem to be a suicidal contribution to an aggressive Soviet campaign that in no way contributes to defense of national interests. One must also ask how East European military establishments can maintain morale and discipline in peacetime if this is their operational raison d'être. Clearly, Soviet and domestic coercion play a big role, along with the discipline inherent in any military organization. (We return to this factor in Section VI.) But respondent testimony allows us to distinguish a number of other factors that motivate East European servicemen and must figure in any overall assessment of East European military reliability.
Concern with NATO Attack

It is clear from our interviews that many East European servicemen place some credence in the possibility of a NATO air and ground attack into Eastern Europe—despite the doctrinal, institutional, operational, and political limitations that make this seem implausible to us even in "worst case" analyses. This concern may be explained in part by the limited and consciously distorted information about NATO that the East European and Soviet regimes permit NSWP militaries to have, by the effects of political indoctrination, and by "logic of the situation" arguments pertaining to any confrontation of military alliances. Reported an East German officer:

Some line and intelligence officers believe this scenario [involving NATO attack]; it is not just something that is spoken of during political indoctrination sessions. Not only political officers believe in it.

Two East German officers explained East German military thinking:

Initial positions are primarily derived from maneuver directions. It is said that in order to start a war using modern conventions, you need four days' preparation, and during that time in the border regions one would be able to observe unknown military vehicles, blockade forces, or civilian forces which would be carrying out specific tasks, and precision technical units performing surveys or similar assignments. All of these observations are to be reported. Conclusions would be drawn that something is in the works.

While NPA maneuvers are going on to the rear, the border troops also observe NATO maneuvers, because it is emphasized that a NATO maneuver can very quickly turn into an aggressive assault.

In some cases, Warsaw Pact doctrine is understood to encompass the notion of preventive attack, and this too is justified by the potential Western threat which is taken seriously by some East European servicemen. East German border guards were taught that:

We must observe war preparations. If the Bundeswehr is in the stage of planning an attack, we must act then.

Nor would the absence of a discernibly advancing enemy on one sector under conditions of frontal warfare constitute persuasive evidence to East European soldiers that it was the Warsaw Pact that had initiated hostilities. Said one East German officer:

It was said that a frontal war could occur in which, for example, Dresden had been attacked, while we on the border had yet to see any sign of the enemy.
Constant repetition of the “NATO threat” in professional discussions and political indoctrination has an effect on East European soldiers, including those who are in no sense party loyalists. This is indicated by the outlook of our respondents, who (having left Eastern Europe for the West) might be considered less suspicious of Western intentions than the average East European. Yet many respondents viewed the issue of a NATO military threat to Eastern Europe as a legitimate East European concern and not just Communist propaganda. For example, much propaganda use was made in the East German army of the U.S. intervention in Grenada, and this was presented, evidently with some effect, as proof of American aggressiveness. A Polish NCO recalls that he had believed that Czechoslovakia faced a military threat from West Germany in 1968:

They told us that NATO did not announce any official aggression in Czechoslovakia, but German tourists were sent there with hidden weapons. The Warsaw Pact found out what was going on at the last moment. This is what they said... I have to admit that I myself believed this in 1968. Only two or three years later, when I started my studies and got to know many more people who had different opinions and sources of information, did I [reach a different conclusion].

The cultivation of a sense of “threat” is most intensive in elite units such as the East German border guards. A former border guard commented:

What is worst of all is the friend-enemy mode of thinking that is taught, that treats civilians as enemies, as potential opponents. Also the language that is used: The term “enemy side” used to mean the western edge of the border territory.

A militarily more sophisticated version of the perception of a NATO threat is based on the conviction that, whatever the circumstances at the outbreak of hostilities, NATO could not afford to ignore East European territory in its military operations, since Polish territory especially is essential for the movement of Soviet reinforcements and supplies. Hence Eastern Europe is seen by NSWP officers as what one Polish officer termed a “natural target for NATO forces,” especially air and airborne and diversionary forces:

[East European officers] know there will be fighting on their own territory, particularly on Polish territory.1

1Specific NATO force improvements can also be viewed by NSWP servicemen as constituting an enhanced military threat to their countries. Polish military writings suggest that the deployment of Pershing II and cruise missile INF systems in Western Europe
This threat perception is enhanced by ignorance, even at high levels of the East European military establishments, of the nature of the NATO-Warsaw Pact military balance. In recent years, that balance has been portrayed in the East European militaries as one of essential parity, in part through “worst case” analysis of NATO capabilities, in part through acknowledgment of NATO technological superiority, and in part out of ignorance of Soviet and other Warsaw Pact capabilities. East European officers are exposed to considerable information about NATO, but the picture they glean from this information is one that Westerners would have some difficulty recognizing. The image of a NATO capable of advancing on the ground as well as in the air to the East is reinforced by exercises; Pact exercises that assume deep NATO thrusts were cited by respondents as an indicator that NATO capabilities are taken seriously by Warsaw Pact commanders.

But East European officers know far less about the Warsaw Pact side of the NATO-Warsaw Pact balance. Respondent testimony has consistently indicated that what little information East European officers have about Soviet military capabilities usually comes from Western publications. A Polish officer noted that:

In the Polish armed forces no information is ever given out about the strength of the Warsaw Pact.

A Polish NCO recalled:

They always put the emphasis on the deadly chemical and biological weapons that NATO had, but never mentioned what the Warsaw Pact troops had. They used to cite the number of American soldiers who were stationed in West Germany, but they never said how many Soviet soldiers there were in Poland.

Another Polish officer reinforced this point:

I did not have the data concerning the balance of forces between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. I do not know who had access to such data, but I do not suppose that even the General Staff of the Polish forces had such information. If the information was known, it was known to the Soviet armed forces, and if the General Staff of the Polish armed forces knew anything, it was from any snippets of

information sent from there. The General Staff did not work on such calculations. At the most, it may have worked on calculations comparing our possibilities with those of West Germany, but not on the scale of the whole theater of military operations. Therefore, strategic calculations tied to political issues were not accessible to anyone in the officer corps, even at operational staff level.

Belief in Defense of National Values

The issue of a Western threat aside, there is probably still some belief within East European armies that, whatever the failings of the Communist system, the East European states embody values that are worth defending against any outside threat. This may have been a factor especially in East Germany, propagandized to its inhabitants as a more radical departure from the German Nazi past than West Germany, although the impact of this propaganda is surely declining.

It is also clear from our interviews that, notwithstanding the official reconciliation between Poland and West Germany in the 1970s, Poles at all levels continue to be concerned about defense of Poland against a future German threat (one postulated to come from East Germany as well as from West Germany).²

Lack of Knowledge of Warsaw Pact Strategy

Particularly at lower levels of the military establishments in Eastern Europe, the offensive operational orientation of Soviet coalition warfare to which East European armies are harnessed is often not understood. At this level, many servicemen understand that their wartime mission would be to fight on their own territory.³ A former East German NCO said:

I understood it as a defensive [operational] strategy.

A career NCO in a Polish ground force division was never exposed to tactical exercises in which his unit would fight outside of Poland. This is the context in which courses in military tactics are taught in reserve officer courses today in Poland. A Czech NCO had understood his division's mission as:

²See Section VI.

³An alternative hypothesis is that indoctrination of East European servicemen in recent years with concepts of operationally defensive warfare reflects changes in Warsaw Pact coalition warfare planning envisaging a reduced role for NSWP forces as part of a Soviet offensive into Western Europe. Further study of changes in NSWP military doctrine is needed, along with examination of many other indicators, in considering this hypothesis.
to stop a first offensive if a NATO invasion ever occurred, as well as
to contain this offensive for at least two to three hours until help
came from the Soviet Union.

Even professional line officers may have a poor understanding of
what Soviet coalition warfare doctrine actually entails. A former offi-
cer reported that his military academy courses had dealt with Western
much more than Soviet doctrine:

Soviet doctrine was simply never clear or understandable.

Deterrence

East European servicemen convinced of the reality of a potential
NATO threat may view Warsaw Pact coalition warfare operational
strategy in deterrent terms and as such find it acceptable, whatever its
other disadvantages for Eastern Europe. Nonetheless, we would not
emphasize this point without further investigation; former East Euro-
pean officers who speak in deterrence terms may well have learned this
vocabulary in the West.

Cynicism

For many East European career servicemen, career stability in a
peacetime army is all that counts. Actual operational employment of
East European forces is regarded as so remote a possibility that Soviet
corridor warfare principles constitute no particular source of discon-
tent. As a Polish officer put it:

Everybody performs his task but knows ahead of time that there
won't be a war.

A Czech officer said:

During my long years in the armed forces, I have never met anyone
who actually believed that war would happen during his lifetime and
that he would be happily sacrificing his life on the Soviet altar.
Everybody believes deep in his soul that he will survive military duty,
which he considers a very good, materially rewarding profession, and
that he will retire happily on a very good pension scheme.

Military Professionalism

Military professionals seem to believe that small East European
countries bordering on the USSR have no alternative to inclusion in
the Soviet military coalition. This applies whether or not they have any real commitment to the Soviet world view. Thus, military professionals, and especially higher officers, seem to take a certain pride in the fact that their armies are intended to play a significant role in Soviet-style coalition warfare. This applies both to the “internal front,” on national territory, and to the “external front” in the West. Regarding the “internal front,” East European air defense systems, while more closely integrated in the Warsaw Pact than other elements of East European armed forces, are not paralleled by Soviet capabilities, according to former air defense officers, who stress their key role in Warsaw Pact planning. Polish logistic support is believed by Polish servicemen to be essential to the success of a Soviet transit of Poland. This NSWP military contribution is a source of professional pride.

On the “external front,” incorporation of East European military forces in Soviet coalition warfare planning at the army or divisional level as the lowest level of integration (except in special cases) provides a meaningful military mission for NSWP forces (one that would not exist if Soviet-controlled multinational units were organized at lower levels). Indeed, the Soviets may at times play on East European professional pride by paying more lip service to the East European contribution to “coalition warfare” than Moscow in fact envisages. Knowledgeable Polish respondents generally interpreted the notion of a “Polish Front” in Soviet military planning as more a Soviet sop to Polish military professionalism than a serious Soviet military planning assumption. The Polish officers associated with General Duszynski who took the “Polish Front” concept too seriously in the 1960s were dismissed. According to a Polish officer:

This whole game of an independent Polish Front was a political-morale concession in the name of independence, but seeming independence only: “Go ahead and play in this direction, but you will get nothing in case of war,” because if this [scenario] were to be realistic, the peacetime disposition of Polish forces should be quite different.4

---

4 A former logistics officer stressed that the Polish road network was more important than the rail net in this regard, even though exercises usually relied primarily on railways.

5 The issue is whether Polish “external front” forces would be grouped together in three armies under a Polish Front under Polish command, or dispersed among Soviet Fronts. See Johnson et al., East European Military Establishments, op. cit., pp. 28-29; and Michael Checinski, “Polnische Armee und Offiziere in der Organisation des Warschauer Pakts,” Osteuropa, October 1960, pp. 112ff.
Linked with this is the lasting influence in East European armies of such traditional military concepts as offense is the best defense and only occupation of territory can constitute victory. In the words of a Polish officer:

It is accepted that victory will be assured only where the soldier sets his foot and the tank leaves its treadmark.

Among officers, as among conscripts, simple routine evidently also plays its part. The constant repetition of the assumptions of Soviet-style coalition warfare in military schools, exercises, and political indoctrination has an impact. One Polish officer stated:

It became part of the routine because it was constantly practiced in exercises, so that one became used to the fact that that is how it would be. It simply became second nature. Even when a man knew intellectually that it was an absurdity, it got into his system because he had practiced it so much.

Countervailing Influences

The factors discussed above would seem to provide East European military establishments with at least a partial rationale for inclusion in Soviet coalition warfare planning beyond that which Soviet coercion and military discipline alone could provide. Western analyses of Warsaw Pact reliability—which often stress Soviet coercion and “pro-Sovietism” among NSWP officers—have generally devoted too little attention to these factors. Yet there are countervailing factors at work as well. Perhaps the main factor in this regard is the unequal nature of relationships with the Soviet military and the often distasteful (to East Europeans) substance of the personal interactions that do exist. This Soviet connection was a major topic of our interviews and is discussed in detail below. In propitious circumstances, when the constraints that normally inhibit independent thought are relaxed, these reservations come into the open and can become dominant. This was the case in Czechoslovakia in the mid-1960s, when a seemingly thoroughly pro-Soviet East European military establishment was transformed very quickly into the opposite. That Czechoslovak case retains its relevance for present-day East European armed forces.

The Czechoslovak military deviation of the 1960s has been documented in earlier studies. A former Czechoslovak officer has now

---

Johnson et al., East European Military Establishments, op. cit., Chap. 5; Rice, The Soviet Union and the Czechoslovak Army, op. cit.
given us new insight into the process by which the accepted orthodoxy of Soviet coalition warfare indirectly came into question among professional officers. Between 1965 and 1967, the loosening of political controls in the country generally penetrated the army. Line officers exerted their authority vis-à-vis the political officers, and military counterintelligence officers became passive. In these circumstances, minor professional frustrations connected with reorganization (which arise in any army) became the catalyst for a questioning of fundamental principles of the Warsaw Pact, demonstrating that their previous acceptance by Czechoslovak officers had been more apparent than real.

[At a meeting in mid-1965, discussing changes in Czechoslovak operational doctrine] one of the divisional commanders stood up and told General K that the whole [reorganization] was all nonsense, was due to the fact that the Czechoslovak army did not use its own doctrine. . . . It was at this stage that people started to complain . . . that the military were being asked to fulfill impossible tasks, and out of this arose a sort of questioning of the whole [military mission] . . . . There was considerable criticism, not just of the general practical decisions of the Czechoslovak armed forces, but of the whole relationship between Czechoslovakia and the Warsaw Pact, of the unequal representation which Czechoslovakia had in the decision-making machinery in the Warsaw Pact.

Similarly, in October 1956 some Polish units under the command of Rokossowski turned unreliable overnight, halting their march on Warsaw (as described by a junior officer at the time) and preparing to defend the capital; junior commanders who acquired independent information about the political situation gave orders that, a day before, would have been unthinkable and treasonous.

Another factor casting doubt in the minds of East European service-

men on an East European rationale for coalition war has been aggressive Soviet behavior. Respondents cited Afghanistan and Czechoslovakia in 1968 as having the effect of causing them to question the “defense” rationale of the Warsaw Pact.

IMPACT OF SOVIET TIES

The viability of the Warsaw Pact as a military alliance in a specific campaign against NATO will depend on the degree of cohesion, compatibility, and coordination among the Soviet and non-Soviet components. The mechanisms by which the Soviets attempt to control the
East European militaries have received considerable attention, but the real impact on East European military personnel is less well understood. The data from our interviews provide new insights into the Soviet methods of control and their effect on the Soviets' East European military allies.

Mechanics of Soviet Control

Soviet control over NSWP forces is exercised at several levels and in a variety of ways. None of our respondents had a sufficiently high rank to be able to provide information on the control mechanisms at top command levels. However, a number of interviewees had had concrete dealings with the Soviets at the divisional and lower levels and could thus shed some light on Soviet practices.

The direct presence of Soviet advisers, inspectors, observers, and other personnel in NSWP units has been one of the traditional forms of Soviet control. This practice was particularly prevalent in the early postwar period, when Soviet "advisers" were posted in East European armies down to the regimental level. Though this form of direct control was curtailed after 1956, it is still in effect in key areas and has been expanded in individual countries following crises. A former Czech officer reported that there are no longer Soviet advisers at any operational level, but significant numbers of them were in the Czech general staff in the 1960s. He believed that this assured Soviet control even better than the previous system, which had caused much unhappiness in the Czechoslovak military:

The Soviet advisers sat in these positions at the general staff. This is a much better system from the Soviet point of view because their people can have direct influence at the command level. When they had them at the divisional or regimental unit level, all they got was often simply a stupid Russian colonel who was out of his depth. This way they can concentrate their best people at the operational command level.

The same officer recounted an even more graphic example of Soviet control in a Czech headquarters in the late 1960s:

The Czech officers at the headquarters were under the blank order that any time a Soviet adviser asked or ordered them to give him information, they were supposed to tell him everything. The Soviet Major General, whom I met at the headquarters, had a habit of going

---

through the offices and, in a noncommittal sort of way, asking people what they were working on.

A Polish officer recalled that in the late 1970s, Soviet control was exercised more delicately but was evident nonetheless:

In theory there was only one Soviet representative at the Command. He was a general and an adviser to the Polish commander. There was nothing official about this, but it could be observed. After 1975/76 ... the Soviet system of documentation was introduced and a system of inspection from the Warsaw Pact command level was instituted.

These officers and others reported that direct Soviet control seemed to increase in crisis situations. More active Soviet monitoring and control activities of allied forces were observed, for instance, during and after both the Czechoslovak events of 1968 and the Solidarity period in Poland. A Czech officer confirmed that the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 resulted in a significant increase of Soviet military presence at command levels of the Czech military. According to him, during exercises in 1969, a Czech division was directly subordinated to Soviet officers.

Polish officers with relevant experience also reported a significant increase of Soviet presence in various advisory or surveillance capacities after the rise of Solidarity. One claimed that the staff of the official Warsaw Pact representative to Poland, Soviet General Shcheglov, expanded from its normal complement of five advisers.

Another officer recalled that in mid-1980, twenty Soviets arrived in one unit, ostensibly as service personnel accompanying a military shipment from a Soviet factory:

These Russians were presumably all military officers, although they walked around in civilian clothes and observed everything that was going on in the unit very closely. There had been no Russian observers in the unit before that time.

Another officer detailed a specific Soviet effort to intimidate Polish officers:

In February 1981, a new Soviet adviser was assigned to the Polish Air Defense forces. He was a two-star general, a former PVO commander in Kiev, and he used this opportunity to visit all Polish air defense units. He was accompanied by three other officers, a colonel, a major, and a captain, and in one unit he was interested above all in the technical specifications of the airfield, the runways, and the system of command. He himself measured the dimensions of the hangars in paces and noted that they would each hold two Soviet planes.
Later, during a reception in the general’s honor, after a few rounds of drinks, the Polish officers asked the Soviets whether they thought that Soviet troops would cross over into Poland. The Soviets replied that they expected Soviet troops to move into Poland and said that sixty fighter planes and a few helicopters were to occupy their airfield. Further, they said, the Polish air force would be grounded, the officers would be confined to their barracks, and the Polish air defense would be taken over by Soviets. The general also told the Polish officers that ten thousand Russians died in Hungary in 1956, and even if thirty thousand were to die in Poland, since greater resistance was expected, it would still be worth it to the Soviets, because they would be saving thirty million Poles for socialism. Therefore, it made no sense to put up any resistance, the Polish officers were told.

The bluntness with which Soviet officers expressed their distrust to their Polish “allies” is noteworthy.\(^8\)

In a situation where the Soviets were evidently genuinely concerned that they might have to engage in military operations against their Polish allies, additional Soviet control mechanisms vis-à-vis Polish military capabilities were activated. One respondent observed that by early 1981, only about 20 percent of the airplanes in one regiment were in combat-ready status, because spare parts and replacement equipment ordered from the Soviet Union many months earlier had not been delivered. When officers from the maintenance department checked on the reasons for the inordinate delay, they realized that the Russians were deliberately stalling because they were afraid that the planes might be used against them. Another example reveals that the high Polish command was aware of the Soviet shenanigans but was unable or reluctant to do anything about them:

\(^8\)A former Czech officer observed a similar Soviet interest in Czechoslovak air force capabilities prior to the Soviet invasion in August 1968:

The arrival of a group of Soviet officers and generals, accompanied by the commanders of the Czechoslovak Air Force and Air Defense Command at a base in May 1968 was no mere courtesy visit. After the usual small talk and refreshments, the purpose of this high-level visit became clear. The Soviet specialists had simply come to collect all the information about the systems of command and control, as well as communication codes between the Air Force command and its subordinated units, also new, updated and corrected information about airfields, navigational and radar equipment and its location, signaling codes, security of the rear, including the purpose, location and condition of aircraft and automotive fuel stores. Further, [they collected information on] the condition and quantity of rockets and ammunition and the manner of resupply—in short, all the essential and necessary information for the commencement and conduct of military operations.
Another example of this sort of behavior was the delivery of an automated system of aircraft flight control. The system was supposed to be effective within 85 percent of the range. Yet in two separate tests it was found to be only 20 percent effective. The command went through all channels to complain and declared that it simply could not accept the system in its present state. As a result of the protests, General B flew in and told the command to sign off on the delivery as if the system were in working order. The command was told that the system will be brought up to par at a later date but not to make any complaints to the Russians in the meantime.

Although the Polish military leadership evidently sought to avoid antagonizing the Soviets on even minor issues and did not want to give them any grounds for thinking the Polish army was preparing to resist a Soviet intervention, some part of the Polish army was evidently giving thought to just that eventuality. A Polish serviceman reported:

We talked about it ourselves. The ranks of the officers involved in this were officers up to the rank of captain.... They said they would not allow the Soviets to interfere in our affairs.... The soldiers said right away that they were going to turn the tank barrels against the Soviets.9

**Education and Language**

In addition to direct control measures of the kind described above, the Soviets also attempt to enhance their control over the East European military by less obvious methods. One method used to acquire leverage with the command cadres is higher-level training in the Soviet Union. A majority of the East European officers on a general officer track, we were told, undergo training at Soviet military academies such as Voroshilov and Frunze. Indeed, a course of study at a Soviet academy and connections in the Soviet military establishment often seem to facilitate promotion to the higher ranks. East European officers selected for advancement are usually sent to Soviet academies after serving as regimental commanders.

There appear to be some important national differences in this respect, however. For instance, some 120 East German officers graduate in the Soviet Union every year, but far fewer Polish students do

---

9Another respondent claimed knowledge of organized preparations within the Polish military under martial law to resist a Soviet military invasion. We record this report but question its accuracy in the absence of corroboration.
so. One reason given for this discrepancy was the presence of military academies for virtually all specializations in Poland. On the other hand, a much smaller percentage of the total NSWP officer corps is now trained in the Soviet Union than was the case before 1956. In the immediate postwar period, national military educational institutions were few in number and poor in quality; today, an extensive network of basic, specialized, and higher military academies exists in all East European countries.

Though training in the Soviet Union undoubtedly aims to cultivate pro-Soviet attitudes and a degree of acculturation, even more important from the control point of view may be the opportunity it presents for direct recruitment of NSWP officers. Virtually all of our respondents of relevant rank were aware of this Soviet practice. The most common method used by the Soviets is to approach a suitable candidate and ask him to sign what amounts to an oath of loyalty to the Soviet Union under the pretext of having been given access to privileged Soviet military information. Refusal to do so, according to our interviewees, puts one's career in serious jeopardy and is not likely to elicit much sympathy from his national command.

Such officers do not automatically become Soviet spies, however, as one officer explained:

Graduates of the Soviet military academies who have signed a cooperation agreement should not be thought of as regular agents who cooperate with the Soviets on a daily basis. Rather they form a network which the Soviets may tap when the need arises.

Such a network could be extremely valuable, particularly in a crisis. A network of more conventional informers is believed to exist as well. On the other hand, there is reason to question whether the loyalty of these high-ranking East European officers is as strong as the Soviets desire. One indicator is the distrust with which senior Warsaw Pact officers are treated, even while they are undergoing training in Moscow. As a general rule, they are kept strictly segregated from other Soviet students, and both professional and social contacts are very limited. In some cases described to us, East Europeans seem to be treated more like Third World students than Warsaw Pact comrades in arms. One Soviet respondent noted, for example, that when he trained East Europeans at a military academy in Moscow, he was never allowed to tell his students his name or rank.

---

10 According to one respondent, however, in the late 1970s regimental commanders in the Polish air force were required to have graduated from Soviet academies, and a growing number of squadron commanders were sent there. According to him, those who refused were thrown out of the army.
The introduction of Russian as the language of command and communications in the Warsaw Pact also is designed to facilitate Soviet control and operational coordination. Most of the officers we interviewed asserted that the Russian-language competence among the NSWP officer corps is adequate for service-related duties. At the same time, many reported difficulties in conversational Russian and more advanced forms of communication. This was said to be the result of a generally negative attitude toward Russian in Eastern Europe and the limited contact between East European servicemen and Soviets.

To keep informed about the political climate in the NSWP armies, the Soviets evidently train their control and liaison officers in the respective national languages as well. Several interviewees knew Russian officers stationed in their country who spoke the native language fluently, though they sometimes concealed it.

**Official Contacts**

One of the images most assiduously cultivated by Warsaw Pact propaganda is that of brotherly ties and friendship between the personnel of the Pact's armies. Warsaw Pact media provide nearly daily accounts of the close political, social, and cultural ties of the socialist "comrades in arms." 11 11 NPA propaganda emphasizes a "neighbor regiment" program of supposedly close ties with Soviet units. But the reality of such interactions is quite different.

Most of our respondents maintained that contacts between Soviet and non-Soviet military personnel, including senior personnel, except for strictly controlled official contacts, are frowned upon and severely limited. None of our East European respondents had close official or social ties with any Soviet military person. The "joint" Warsaw Pact exercises in which some respondents had participated usually involved little or no contact among the various national units. Indeed, few had more than passing contact. Even officially sponsored contacts are relatively rare and are designed in such a way as to make personal interaction virtually impossible. A Polish officer who had observed such meetings provided the following impression:

> Meetings between soldiers of the Warsaw Pact armies are always organized in such a way as to minimize or avoid personal or private contact. Following joint exercises in the Baltic sea, the Soviet and East German flotillas would dock at Gdynia. Wreath-laying ceremonies at monuments of Soviet soldiers and banquets would follow, but these were all official functions at the conclusion of which

---

11 An example of this literature is a Soviet book praising Soviet-Polish military ties, A. V. Antosik et al., Bratskie po obrizhiiu, Braterstwo bronii, Voenizdat, Moscow, 1975.
all naval personnel would return to their respective ships. Russian and East German sailors were never allowed to find themselves in a one-on-one situation with a Polish soldier. These meetings always occur at the group level, because [the Soviets] are afraid of personal contact.

An East German respondent confirmed the contrived nature of such “friendship” visits:

There were really very few contacts with the Soviets. They were supposed to be our allies, and ties were to be maintained, but in fact that was just propaganda. Sometimes there was some kind of a visit but it was pro forma. We had a meeting with the Russians once, but that was strictly political; there were no personal contacts.

Contacts among the officers, particularly at the lower unit level, also seem to be purposely limited. According to one participant in an East German-Soviet meeting:

Even our officers told us later on that they had little contact with the Russian officers. The Soviets had been very reticent and had not said very much.

Two other East German officers commented:

I heard absolutely nothing about this brotherhood-in-arms which has always been programmed. The effects of such brotherhood-in-arms are not in the least bit noticeable—quite the contrary. The East German and Soviet armies, unlike the Bundeswehr and the American army, have nothing in common.

A few Russians were stationed on the border in our area, and I remember that on the occasion of the October Revolution anniversary our garrison command wanted to extend congratulations to them and organize some sort of competition between the units. But when we got there, their gates were closed and they did not want to agree to it, and so we did not have any contact.

According to our respondents, a key factor in this demonstrated Soviet unwillingness to allow closer personal contacts with the East Europeans, let alone any form of fraternization, was the Soviet fear that their soldiers might become ideologically contaminated through such contacts. For instance, the living conditions and general welfare of NSWP military personnel were said to be much superior to those of the Soviets, and any tacit comparison was likely to have a negative impact on Soviets and non-Soviets alike.

Such apprehensions are quite realistic. GDR soldiers, who are used to white tablecloths and china in their mess halls, and spacious
sleeping quarters, were shocked to see during a visit to a Soviet regi-
mament that the Soviets ate in the most primitive of conditions and were 
crammed eighty to a room. Several respondents told us that they were 
particularly repulsed by the lack of hygiene. Said one soldier:

The Russian barracks always stank. The stench was really pervasive. 
They don’t seem to hold much for hygiene. This creates a very bad 
impression.\footnote{12}

Another former GDR serviceman said:

Their food must also be very bad. One hears all the time from peo-
ple who live near where the Russians are stationed that they steal 
food—potatoes from the fields and things like that.

Soviet concern about such negative impressions is instrumental in their 
reluctance to interact with the East Germans, according to an East 
German political officer who tried to arrange such a meeting:

Unfortunately we couldn’t agree on a meeting. There are too many 
problems associated with such events. The difference in the living 
conditions and the better situation of the GDR personnel alone lead 
to serious concerns after such meetings. The Soviet soldiers often do 
not understand why having won the war they are so much worse off 
than the Germans.

Another former NPA officer had a similar observation:

I went to a Soviet tank regiment and came back with some very 
negative impressions of the living conditions of the Soviet soldier. 
The military leadership of both the Soviet Union and the GDR re-
strict such encounters to the very minimum. It is evident that 
integration is neither promoted, nor does it enhance combat readi-
ness. As one observes the living conditions of the Soviets, one 
becomes aware of the advantages enjoyed by the GDR troops. Such 
“friendship activities” often result in desertions by Soviet soldiers.\footnote{13}

\footnote{12}A Soviet NCO who served in a Soviet unit in East Germany confirmed to us the 
abysmal hygienic conditions prevalent in the Soviet forces. According to him, Soviet sol-
diers took a shower every two weeks at best. Once they went without bathing for two 
full months. As a result, some 80 percent of the conscripts were said to suffer from boils 
and other skin afflictions.

\footnote{13}Our interviewees provided information on the subject of Soviet defections. A Soviet 
serviceman who himself escaped across the border into West Germany knew of a number 
of cases of attempted defections. In the most spectacular case, eight armed Soviet sol-
diers attempted to flee in the spring of 1984. In another incident, two soldiers reportedly 
tried to escape by taking hostages. Our East German border guards respondents lent some credibility to such stories by recounting several incidents where they were alerted 
of Soviet escape attempts and reported that AWOL Soviet soldiers were regularly on 
their “watch lists” of potential escapees.
Concerns about the potentially demoralizing effect of contacts with East European people and lifestyles were confirmed by our Soviet respondents. When asked what the Soviet soldiers thought of Poland, a Soviet who had served there replied:

When we first got there, it was like the West for us. We came to the unit by bus and we saw a lot of beautiful houses around us and a lot of Western cars like Mercedes and Volkswagens. We had never seen things like that before. And we thought, what are they unhappy about, what else do they want—they have everything. Even when they had ration cards, you could still buy something with them. You could only buy fat in my town. 14

A Soviet NCO who served in East Germany recounted a visit by some NPA soldiers to his regiment:

Once some Germans came to us and just sat separately in a group. They were so clean and neat and our soldiers were so sloppy. They just stared at us and we didn't talk to them at all.

Efforts to minimize the contacts of Soviet military personnel stationed in Eastern Europe are not limited to NSWP units. Consistent efforts are evidently made to restrict the opportunities for interaction with the general population as well. A Polish NCO who served many years next to a Soviet unit recalls that Soviet soldiers who had been allowed to go to the nearby town in the early 1970s practically never left their barracks after 1977. A Polish respondent with knowledge of a Soviet garrison recounted:

The [Soviet] families were transferred quite often so that they did not come into contact with Polish families. Soviet families are forbidden to maintain contacts with Polish people. This is an official rule. They are not allowed to become friends with Polish people or visit them—especially to drink vodka with them.

This self-imposed isolation apparently was tightened further during the Solidarity period. According to a Soviet respondent, after mid-1980, nobody was permitted to leave the base except on business and accompanied by an officer. Soldiers who needed to drive to town were given specific directions to avoid any plants or factories that were on strike. Even in the politically stable environment of East Germany similar prohibitions were in effect. Explained a Soviet interviewee:

14Soviet soldiers thus had the same reaction as other Soviets who visited Poland in 1980–81. Official Soviet visitors to Warsaw would tell their Polish hosts (according to one interviewed in 1984), "If this is a crisis, we would like to have such a crisis."
Whenever we went to field training by train, which we did sometimes, we were not allowed to come into any contact with the Germans. Now there seems to be a rule in the Soviet army in [East] Germany that prohibits the soldier from leaving the regiment under almost any circumstances. There was almost never leave of absence. This meant that we seldom had any days off.

The same interviewee related an instance of what appears to be a deliberate attempt on the part of the Soviet military authorities to portray the GDR population as hostile:

I remember that there was a holiday in East Germany in June. It was some anniversary [June 17, anniversary of the 1953 uprising, officially commemorated only in West Germany]. On that day, nobody was allowed to leave the regiment and we were checked to make sure that everybody was in. Even the officers were not allowed to leave the regiment that day. We were told that the Germans had wanted to make a revolution against the Soviets on that day a long time ago, and since then, on the anniversary of this day Soviet soldiers started to disappear and were never heard of again.

Unofficial Contacts

The concerted efforts by the Soviet military to isolate their soldiers from their East European colleagues and populations are often unsuccessful. Despite prohibitions and the considerable risk involved, unofficial contacts are not only possible, but wide-ranging at times. But these unofficial contacts have nothing to do with the Warsaw Pact “brotherhood of arms.” Most of them have a black market motivation, though they could have political implications. Most revolve around Soviet soldiers’ efforts to obtain alcohol or other goods. Our East European and Soviet respondents both confirmed that lively trade in various commodities, some of them stolen, does take place.

East German respondents reported trading with the Soviet soldiers, both during “friendship” encounters and off base. The main trading items were personal objects such as watches, transistor radios, and lighters, but military equipment, including weapons, was said to have also been sold occasionally. As a German border guard stationed close to a Soviet unit recalled:

We traded very often with the Soviet troops. That happened frequently. When we were out on duty, we would agree on a specific time and place for a trade meeting. There were Soviet soldiers there and some of them came armed.
According to a former Soviet NCO, Soviet army bayonets were a particularly popular item for sale to German civilians and, on a much larger scale, pilfered construction materials and gasoline. To conduct these activities, Soviet soldiers and NCOs often left their units without permission.

A Soviet soldier serving in a large city in Poland told us that Soviet servicemen had excellent relations with Polish servicemen, who regularly supplied them with vodka and moonshine. To get money for vodka, the Soviets sold gasoline during trips to the city, as well as other products. Officers and NCOs were evidently also engaged in illegal dealings and reportedly sold large amounts of food pilfered from the unit's kitchen, including meat and butter, which had become scarce in Poland. A Polish respondent with knowledge of a Soviet garrison recounted:

An unbelievable amount of goods are traded secretly between the Soviets and Poles. The Soviets maintain contacts with Poles, even though both sides are prohibited from doing so. These contacts are maintained unofficially.

The contacts maintained with Polish soldiers and civilians, according to a Soviet respondent, allowed them to get a better idea of what was going on in Polish society at the time and made them less susceptible to official propaganda. In his own case, it led to the decision to defect.

IMPLICATIONS

East European servicemen apparently understand that their armed forces are intended to support a Soviet offensive against the West in the event of a conflict in Europe. Soviet and local regime coercion, along with military discipline, are intended to ensure that the East European militaries fulfill their intended role—a role which would seem to run counter to the national interest of even Communist East European states. Reliability is also fostered by a number of other factors noted in respondent testimony: some genuine concern with a threat from NATO, resulting from political indoctrination and the absence of objective information; residual belief in defense of national values; lack of sufficient knowledge of the operationally offensive nature of Warsaw Pact planning, especially at lower levels in the East European militaries; professionalism of the East European officer corps; and the often cynical personal stake of East European officers in the Soviet/Communist system.
Yet there are countervailing influences as well, and our respondents suggested fragilities in Soviet-East European military relations which may work to reduce the reliability of NSWP forces in a Warsaw Pact-NATO conflict. Political liberalization in Eastern Europe and Soviet interventions generally have fostered national and anti-Soviet tendencies in the East European armies, demonstrating the coercive and potentially brittle nature of the Warsaw Pact military alliance in "normal" times. Relations between Soviet and East European servicemen display little mutual trust. The Soviet military seems to be on a continuous search for new and more effective control mechanisms. The Solidarity period in Poland demonstrated that the Soviets remain fully aware of and prepared for the possibility of armed conflict with their East European military allies. While propagandizing the slogan of military "brotherhood in arms," the USSR in fact seeks to carefully limit military integration and personal contact between Soviet and East European servicemen to avoid political and ideological contamination. Similarly, the USSR seems to perceive East European populations as potentially hostile and a source of ideological contamination that could be detrimental to Soviet military morale.

East European servicemen, on the other hand, are constantly reminded through Soviet behavior of the unequal nature of Soviet-East European military ties and the distrust with which they are regarded, even if they seem resigned to the inevitability of Soviet hegemony and display little sign of overt hostility. East European soldiers in fact have little personal contact with Soviet servicemen. The contacts that do occur, among officers as well as enlisted men, tend to increase rather than reduce the antagonisms felt by East Europeans toward the Soviet Union.

The extent to which this complex and uneasy Soviet-East European military relationship would influence NSWP military performance in a conflict with NATO is uncertain. Some clues to East European perceptions on this subject are provided by the responses to our poll of émigré views on NSWP reliability, as discussed in Section VI.
V. RELIABILITY IN DOMESTIC CONTINGENCIES

East European armies have important domestic as well as international functions. They contributed to the Communist consolidation of power in the initial postwar period and have subsequently served as a buttress to the Communist regimes. They have figured one way or another in all the East European internal crises of the postwar period. They have constituted an arena for the forced indoctrination of the conscript soldiers serving in their ranks. Socioeconomic stagnation and crisis in Eastern Europe have portended a greater domestic repression role for the Communist militaries—an eventuality realized with the proclamation of martial law in Poland in 1981 and the greater domestic prominence of the military in Romania.

In all East European countries, the military and party leaderships have attempted to distance the military from domestic strife. Unrest in Eastern Europe has generally been put down by internal security forces or by the Soviets directly, not by the East European armies. Tensions have been created within the military when this has not been the case, and conflict has arisen between the regular military and internal security forces. Even those military officers committed to the Communist system evidently regard it as the job of the internal security forces to maintain order—a perhaps necessary but unsavory task that internal security forces are well paid to carry out and to which the army itself should not have to stoop.

THE MILITARY'S DOMESTIC FUNCTION:
CASE STUDIES

We were able to gather considerable evidence on the role and reliability of the military in East European domestic crises. Most of the data are from Poland (which has experienced the greatest number of crises and produced the greatest number of participant witnesses).

Poland: Pre-1970

At the time of the 1955 Poznan riots, the PPA was confined to barracks throughout Poland and internal security forces were deployed, so that (as one former officer put it) "the people's army would not get
involved in riots." Some military regulars were utilized to flesh out the police reserves in suppressing the Polish student unrest of 1968, but this was unpopular in military ranks. According to a former officer:

The militia is favored because it is the first instrument of power, which wields a truncheon. They have to be paid to do the beating. The military does not like them. There were incidents when attempts were made to mobilize the military to do police work. In 1968 officers were told to report in civilian clothing and they were given truncheons. Some refused, saying, "If you want me to defend Poland I'll be glad to do it but with a rifle or automatic weapon, not a truncheon." . . . If you talk to a militia officer, he will say that the army will not take on the role of the militia; it will not pick up the truncheon. That is why in 1968 it was not the army but only the party. The officer was called up as a party man in civilian clothing.

Poland: 1970

Much more unsettling for the Polish military was its use for domestic repression in 1970—the first attempt in postwar Eastern Europe to use regular forces on any scale to suppress internal unrest. A previous RAND analysis concluded that "the military performed its directed internal repressive function only partly and reluctantly, and with profound repercussions for its domestic role as an institution." Several respondents who participated in the 1970 repression generally corroborated this conclusion, but they amplified it considerably.

A former officer in a coastal headquarters testified to resentment and outrage among senior officers that Gdansk Party Secretary Kociolek threatened the striking workers, that naval uniforms were passed out to the police, and that military personnel were deployed as a blocking force throughout the coastal region. At the general officer level, there was sentiment against the strikers; one general told his subordinates that they should "make marmalade out of those workers." But he also pulled landing craft in close to shore to be able to escape. His behavior incensed other officers, who sought to defuse the mood of the strikers. A company commander who was ordered to keep demonstrators away from a certain sector told the workers, "Listen, I am in the army and I am under orders not to let anyone through here. Try to understand, I can't let anyone in." The workers replied, "Let him be. He's a soldier and has to follow orders." With the acquiescence of his commander, one senior officer used his telephone to warn strikers of impending assault.

---

1Johnson et al., *East European Military Establishments*, op. cit., p. 51.
Use of force against demonstrators on the part of the military (which resulted in casualties) led to outrage:

In our garrison command there were maybe three officers who did not react to the news of the shooting of the workers. But the rest of them were very shaken by this, felt outraged and powerless. The buildings were cordoned off and no one was allowed access. An older officer came to me and suggested that we go out to the perimeters of the building to see what was going on. He wanted to go outside because he simply wanted to talk [without being overheard]. Once outside he exclaimed: "What bandits! What is to be done? What is to be done?"^2

Another respondent, a career NCO who served with troops sent from outside the coast to put down the strikes, also testified to the impact of the shootings. In testimony referred to in Section III and quoted here at length, he said that he believed he was being sent to put down hooliganism or German subversion and in advance took pride in this mission. But the reality of domestic repression was the catalyst of his disillusionment with the system.\(^3\) It is likely that many of those who participated were similarly affected.

---

But respondents downplayed the significance of the "Letter from the Officers of the Gdansk Garrison" published in Zolniers Wobnsci, March 4, 1971, which defensively stated that "the coastal events were painful for the entire community, and probably most painful for ourselves" (see Johnson et al., East European Military Establishments, op. cit., p. 52). The officer cited above said that neither he nor any of his colleagues knew any signatories; they believed the letter was written in the Main Political Administration in Warsaw in an effort to reduce tensions. Their views were much stronger than those expressed in the letter.

^2In December 1970, I and a number of my friends were sent to S, of course also with the destination of Gdansk, to put down the December riots. And speaking frankly, while I was on the way to S and Gdansk, I was convinced that I was going there to restore order. . . . "They taught us something in the military so we'll put it to use. We'll restore order and we'll still have time to go home for Christmas." This was my attitude on the way to S. Once we got to S, my eyes were opened. . . . I saw that our assignment to S was one big lie. . . . I personally was not used to break up the crowds around the plants which had been set on fire several times. I was used in town to keep order at the S railroad station and in the streets. I walked around in S with an automatic rifle, armed from head to toe, with live ammunition, fixed bayonet, smoke grenades, a standard grenade, and two concussion grenades. Ammunition was not counted when it was issued. You took as much of it as you were able to carry. NCOs were also issued hand guns and all soldiers were issued knives. We were literally armed as if we were going into action against an equally well armed opponent. I was in charge of a squad at the time. There were also two platoons which had been issued long militia truncheons. In S I realized that there were none of the gangs or German minorities we were being scared with. They told us that the German minority was demanding autonomy, the opening of German schools. I believed it all on the way to S and Gdansk; then in the streets I saw it was not that way at all, that what was happening had nothing to do with riots, that no one was thinking of opening the border and starting a conflict. People simply wanted bread and money for their labor. And then I started to observe political life and the
Martial Law in Poland

A large number of respondents had served in the Polish army during and just prior to martial law. Their experiences indicate how the Polish army was used to suppress Solidarity and their descriptions enable us to assess the motivational factors affecting both officers and conscripts.

With the outbreak of unrest in Poland in 1980, career Polish servicemen were subjected to a propaganda barrage intended to convince them that the rise of Solidarity constituted a threat to Polish security and to their personal interests. This propaganda had an effect. Political officers circulated false reports of harassment, beatings, and poisoning of officers by Solidarity; a Polish officer recalled (as noted in Section II) that ten or twenty such reports were circulated in his regiment each month. They were “within the bounds of probability” and found some resonance. (Some of these same political officers had reportedly been sympathetic to the strikers’ demands in mid-1980, arguing for their immediate acceptance and criticizing the practices of civilian bodies.)

Command as well as political officer channels conveyed the view that Solidarity’s activities were decreasing combat readiness at military installations and thus threatening Polish security. Respondents offered evidence which they and their fellow officers had found persuasive; these factors probably affected the professional military more than political propaganda. For example, a Polish officer noted how strikes of construction workers had delayed construction projects in his unit. In the coastal region, Solidarity unions were formed among civilian workers in the naval shipyards and in the military billeting administration.

Such developments—real and imaginary—were played up by military and political authorities and evidently led many officers to conclude by spring 1981 that Solidarity had to be put down, even though there was considerable sympathy for the workers’ basic demands and their accusations of inefficiency and corruption in the government apparatus. An officer in one military district staff commented to a respondent at the time:

situation in the military with skepticism. People in the officer cadre behaved in various ways; some of them were fairly decent, others were fairly brutal, and still others were simply scared. I got the impression that for this action they used those officers who did not think too much or those who consciously followed all party directives. For example, the captain who was our commander and should have commanded our group was not used for this expedition. And the commander of our group was the deputy commander for political affairs of the school and not the line commander or the military training commander.”
Everything will go wrong here, the Russians will invade, Jaruzelski must do something.

An NCO who left the army in the mid-1970s and became involved in oppositional political activities but retained contact with soldiers from his unit recalled their attitude toward him:

They saw me as the enemy. . . . This was due to the propaganda campaign in the military and the militia. From the very inception of Solidarity, any member of the union and especially an activist was seen as a potential enemy.

Solidarity activists in general had little contact with the professional military. That lack of contact can be explained by any of several factors: hostility on the part of officers, a belief that in any showdown the army would side with the “nation,” or (most plausibly) a refusal to confront the issue of the military’s role. According to one former Solidarity activist who had been a career NCO:

Of course we did print material intended for the military, for soldiers to take to their units. Quite frankly, we were flattering the military a little, making references to the old, honorable military tradition, seeing them not as defenders of the government but of the nation, of society. But this was all too little. We should have made many contacts in the military to gain supporters among them. I think that people were not prepared for that. I found it fairly easy because I had been in the army, and I had the same mentality as those people in uniform. But someone who had been in the army only two years or was in the ranks found it hard to get to the officers or NCOs. And they are the ones that should have been contacted above all others, that middle group of young officers and NCOs, and not the old cadres, because that was material that had to be written off as a loss in this action.

While there was a growing sense within the army in 1981 that something had to be done, the concrete plans for martial law were evidently closely held until the last minute. Regimental commanders in one command were told in November 1981: “The Solidarity matter has gone very far, and a bloody showdown is inevitable. We know that something will happen, although we don’t know what and how.” Contacts with the Soviet military during 1981 brought many indications of Soviet concern and pressure (see Section IV) and doubtless reinforced this outlook.

—

4The attitude was similar to that pertaining to Soviet pressure. As one Solidarity activist interviewed in 1981 put it, when asked how he thought Solidarity could succeed in the face of Soviet pressure: “If we think about the possibility of Soviet intervention, it will paralyze us, so we do not.”
Both conscript and officer respondents depicted the higher levels of the Polish military as so identified with the system that they were solidly behind the imposition of martial law. Some conscripts put all professional military people in the same category; other conscripts and most officer respondents depicted the officer corps as internally divided, with some sympathy for the Polish workers’ opposition, little if any ideological commitment, and primary concern for their own positions and careers, but also potentially disloyal to the regime. Said one officer:

Officers are very much restricted by their profession. If they do not follow orders, they will not advance, they will not get their pensions. Many of them serve, but they are not convinced of the legitimacy of the solution [of martial law].

Yet former Polish servicemen thought that, in different circumstances, the mix of factors motivating officers might have been different. Said one:

At that time, I met officers who I thought had blinders on—all they thought about were their job and that’s it. I was amazed to see that these people had had wide intellectual horizons, a good world view. All that was needed was the right time for all of this to be released, so that people would no longer be afraid to act.

Under the conditions that pertained in Poland in 1981, with pressure mounting from both Solidarity and the Soviet Union, preparation of the military for martial law was presented to the officer corps as preventive and defensive, as strengthening the military against potential or actual threats by Solidarity. In early 1981, according to a former officer, reports of Solidarity excesses “served to initiate the reinforcement of the defenses of military units, to protect against purported attempts to disarm soldiers in order to use their weapons for future attacks.” By the same token, he said, secure communications channels were established, justified by references to the danger of strikers disrupting the normal channels and crippling Polish defense capabilities.

In this atmosphere, the Polish military was able to halt the spread of Solidarity as an organization within the armed forces, in contrast to the experience of the Czechoslovak army in 1968, when autonomous organizations were formed within the military. In Poland, efforts to form union organizations among civilians working on military bases were defeated. One officer recalled how an effort to form a union among civilians on his base was turned aside with the argument that “since the unit had to maintain a high level of combat readiness, they
could not afford to be serviced by Solidarity groups which would strike whenever they wanted to. And a Solidarity group was never formed.” As a precautionary measure, preparations were made to dismiss civilian workers within the military who went on strike, or to muster them into the army.

Although the Polish army successfully prevented the formation of Solidarity organizations on its bases and within its ranks, by early 1981 conscript contingents were affected by the Solidarity experience; a former officer estimated that one-fourth of the new conscripts arriving in his regiment in early 1981 had Solidarity experience. The military devoted careful attention to the past political activities of new conscripts. Even after completing the induction process, new conscripts were interviewed about their prior Solidarity or other political activities. A Polish inductee of early 1981 reported that recruits were told by their officers, “We will knock that Solidarity out of your heads.”

This attention to conscript activities resulted from the military’s awareness that conscripts entered the army with the same views as the average Polish citizen in the Solidarity era and were potentially quite unreliable. For this reason, an effort was made to limit conscripts’ access to information other than what was conveyed to them in political indoctrination. For example, one respondent’s brother, who was in the army when martial law was declared, did not find out about the respondent’s arrest until he was released from the service; he had no leave, and he did not receive letters sent to him from his family.

There was also intensified political indoctrination. At the platoon level, the soldiers could be coerced into silence, but in larger assemblies conscripts would openly voice their views. Yet soldiers continued to obtain some nonofficial information, from foreign radio broadcasts, from Solidarity leaflets picked up while on patrol, and from family contacts. According to one enlisted man, “Seventy percent of the conscripts [in his unit] were opposed to martial law; the remaining 30 percent were not opposed to anything.” Soldiers who voiced opposition to the official line were threatened with sanctions, but evidently were not imprisoned.

Respondents reported more serious cases of insubordination as well. Two hundred soldiers from one group of units staged a “sit-in” in November 1981 to protest the prolongation of service. As a result, half were reportedly sent to the brig for two weeks, while the other half received leave. A former NCO said tensions within his unit led to a suspension of political instruction:
Our political indoctrination sessions ended some time in August [1981] because we said that we would no longer attend them, as they usually erupted into scenes between us and the political officer. Since we could not see eye to eye at all in this area, political sessions for NCOs were suspended. They were only officially resumed when martial law was declared.

Respondent testimony confirms that the Polish high command was able to mobilize and deploy the Polish army efficiently on December 13, 1981. Soldiers carried out their orders. Military discipline was strengthened by a lack of information about the circumstances; several respondents on active duty on December 13 were deployed well before they learned why from Jaruzelski’s 6:00 a.m. radio broadcast. Under martial law, soldiers were used in support and blocking roles; no respondent knew of any cases of regular soldiers being used directly to confront Solidarity. Several reported that some soldiers were deployed without ammunition; others had been well armed. A former NCO reported that the attitude of soldiers toward strikers was friendly. Another Polish NCO described the situation under martial law in words similar to those of several respondents:

Soldiers would show their empty magazines to the strikers, saying, “We have no ammunition, we will not shoot, we are here because we have to be.” The ordinary soldier had to be there because he was subject to scores of very strict regulations and sanctions. Rebellion would immediately have been punished with very heavy sentences.

There were frequent occurrences of soldiers going AWOL from guard and patrol duty under martial law. Some soldiers fled to the local priest; others found discipline so lax that they could visit friends’ apartments while supposedly on patrol. They sought every opportunity to avoid having to arrest or report people. Reservists called up during martial law were motivated by the pay and guaranteed food and other goods. As martial law continued, cases of insubordination occurred. A Polish respondent provided this eyewitness account:

Once we went on strike. This was because they put a stamp in our military books which meant that we were discharged from military service. Everyone was very happy to be a civilian again, but we did not hear the order to change into civilian clothes. We waited. All of a sudden, a few hours later, we heard an order to stay in the unit. The stamps in the book were invalid. We rebelled against the order and gathered in a square. We had our backpacks and guns with us. We sat down and no force could move us. Our commander was shouting, threatening us, but we just sat like nothing was going on. They were looking for the leader of the group who started the strike... but nobody said anything. We sat there for half a day or so. We did not go to eat our meals or anything. We did not give
them back our guns. Since we had ammunition with us, they were somewhat scared. [A colonel addressed the assembled soldiers] in a gentle tone . . . but we did not listen to him at all. They ordered us to stand up and as we got up he started being tough with us. [He threatened the striking soldiers with a court-martial and said] they had the right to shoot us as is done under martial law. Some soldiers got scared, saying that they had families—wives and small children. So we returned the guns. We made them agree to the condition that we would no longer be taken out on patrols or pull guard duty. . . . They supposedly reached an agreement with us. The colonel left, but nothing changed at all.

Martial law duty was also unsettling to some officers; respondents cited cases of technical specialists who refused to lead patrols, arguing that this was the responsibility of political and line officers. They also cited cases of junior line officers who refused orders and were relieved of command. Such refusals reportedly led to transfers and arrests. One NCO was officially told of five, arrests the day martial law was declared; one of his friends, a platoon leader, was sentenced to 15 years for discarding his weapon and urging his soldiers to do the same. Several respondents or their relatives left the military in order to avoid being put in the situation that occurred under martial law.

A consequence of martial law in Poland has been a decline in the prestige of the armed forces, even though their reputation remains higher than that of the police or the party. In suppressing Solidarity, the armed forces demonstrated that they were not the continuation of the prewar Polish national-qua-anti-Soviet tradition in which many Poles continued, wishfully, to believe. In the past, when Communist officers tried to explain this to their non-Communist families, they were simply not believed. Martial law has changed this. One example is the altered atmosphere in reserve officer classes in universities. Prior to martial law, there was some discussion of political matters and posing of awkward questions during classes. After the imposition of martial law, as one former reserve officer reported:

There was no communication with [the officers]. It was a total break.

An NCO who served under martial law reported that when his platoon marched along the main street of one Polish city, "people would spit at our feet for what the army had done there."
INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES

Poland

The task of direct confrontation of Polish workers and population under martial law fell to the police, especially to the specialized elite mobile attachments, the ZOMO (literally, the Motorized Detachments of the Citizens' Militia), subordinated to the Interior Ministry. Similar internal security units have been used in the past to crush opposition in Eastern Europe (the use of military regulars in Poland in 1970 is the major exception). ZOMO has existed as such for over 15 years. In the mid-1970s, there was one ZOMO detachment for each voivodship; subsequently, in the wake of the unrest of 1976, ZOMO was strengthened in numbers. Although specially trained for population control, ZOMO is not self-sufficient, but has to rely on the military for logistic support. A former officer said that ZOMO had only one transport squad capable of moving a company, so it relied on the military for aircraft. Officer training is conducted in conjunction with the training of border troops (military units subordinated to the Interior Ministry in peacetime).5

During martial law, ZOMO was utilized to directly confront, disperse, and arrest Solidarity supporters, with the regular military generally providing show-of-force and backup support. This led to incidents between the two organizations. An eyewitness to the occupation of the Szczecin shipyards on December 13 said a tank unit was used to penetrate the shipyard, and the colonel in command told the workers to disperse; he confronted the ZOMO and internal security service commanders who wanted to arrest people on the spot and prevented this. The respondent said that "this colonel thinks along different lines" than the police. ZOMO personnel held the same view, according to a former militiaman:

[In the 1970s] emphasis was placed on expanding [ZOMO-type] units and great sums of money were allocated to this, because the military cannot be counted on in such situations [of internal unrest] ... the military's duty is to protect the borders.

There was considerable resentment between the military and the militia in practice. Respondents with both military and militia backgrounds recounted cases of military/ZOMO tension and fights under martial law.

Under martial law, as before, only ZOMO officers and NCOs were career personnel. The officer cadre was fleshed out with reserve

---

5Several of our respondents had served in or with ZOMO and provided a detailed picture of the structure and activities of ZOMO and associated police organizations. This study draws on that part of the testimony concerning military/ZOMO relations.
officers from other forces under the jurisdiction of the Interior Ministry, including the Border Patrol Forces (WOP). According to a former ZOMO militiaman, ZOMO units typically consisted of half career militia and half militia reservists or reserve soldiers called up to serve in ZOMO. After martial law was imposed, ZOMO attracted conscripts who wanted to avoid the rigors of regular military service, who wanted the better pay, food, and accommodations, and/or who enjoyed terrorizing people on the streets. (Some had criminal backgrounds.) ZOMO service also provided entry to state jobs later. Other conscripts were reportedly simply assigned to ZOMO instead of regular military units. A former ZOMO militiaman confirms that under martial law, some sentenced criminals were recruited directly. Respondents had differing views (but no hard knowledge) about whether or not ZOMO forces used drugs. One former NCO who trained with ZOMO officers in the early 1970s and experienced ZOMO actions under martial law provided a detailed description of how ZOMO personnel are motivated to act ruthlessly against the population:

Recruitment and verification of soldiers for ZOMO are carried out in quite a cunning way. The soldiers to be recruited for ZOMO arrive in the unit, and I, for example, had instructions to train them at an accelerated tempo and high exertion level. In other words, we were to give them hell, so that they would end up hating the military. A relatively high number of people had been screened out for physical and psychological reasons. Those were people who broke down during the training process and were disqualified. The soldiers were closely observed during training and at the moment when they were on the borderline between breaking down or overcoming this phase of training, there was a reversal in those detachments and soldiers were offered militia service in ZOMO detachments. These soldiers didn’t know too well what ZOMO was all about, but at that time training exercises were suspended and talks began. These talks lasted a week or two. It varied—sometimes they lasted several days, depending on how the psychologists read the situation. They were told they would get different uniforms; they would get leave and patrol duty in the city. For serving in ZOMO units, they would have money paid into their savings account, and upon leaving the service they would have such and such an amount in their account. They would get better food, higher pay, and other things, and no more field exercises. That is how it was, and they were given a month to make up their minds. And they were in fact given other field uniforms, that is, green uniforms but of a slightly darker shade, such as the ZOMO now wear. They were issued militia uniforms so they felt different about themselves because when they went into town the patrols did not bother them and they were already militiamen and not conscripts out on leave. And then there was simply a relaxation, a decline in discipline. The large majority signed up for the transfer to the ZOMO. They then underwent military training which consisted of learning
how to write reports, handle various records, conduct searches and interrogations, and control vehicles. Then drill began, but these were specialized drills to disperse crowds, simply to put down riots, disturbances. I must say that when I watched these drills it looked to me as though I was watching the Praetorian Guard from history books. Looking at those detachments, you see old Rome before your eyes. These people are dangerous in a tight formation, but they are less dangerous in an engagement where the group is split up. To a certain degree, these people were turned into robots performing certain functions but not thinking independently. I think this must have been done consciously, because if the ZOMO were taught to think when going into action or were not prevented from thinking, then the ZOMO detachments would not be dangerous in their contacts with people. The ZOMO man simply does not think at that time. His psyche has been formed to believe that everybody controls everybody else, everybody watches everybody else. They are brainwashed into believing that people represent a terrible danger to them. During training they are shown photographs of drastic crowd behavior in panic situations, during desperate actions. It looks dreadful. I don't know where they get such photographs from, because I myself saw slides of ZOMO men being literally lynched by the crowd. Whether this actually happened [I don't know]. I did meet people who had been in ZOMO detachments. These were rural people. I believe that these people look at the issue this way: If I won't do it, then somebody else will. He simply earned some money during that period of time, he had some benefits, he got something out of it, and now he has to get on with his work, that's all. From conversations, I know other people's opinions are that such people in particular are later tapped by the militia to be informers for them in the workplace, maybe not as agents but as trusted people in places of employment and such... It seems to me that these people are excited by the heat of the action. Frankly speaking, I do not believe they take narcotics or are drugged or something before going into action. I think it is a matter of creating a psychosis; it is the psychological approach of the people who command them. On the other hand, as an observer of the events in May [1982 in Szczecin], I saw that if there had actually been leaders in the crowd, then the ZOMO would probably not have been dangerous. Even with a disciplined crowd, they purposely send in provocateurs who trigger the psychosis of hatred, and then of course there is a violent explosion. They will find a way to introduce a few ringleaders to start a fight. I have been in the military, so I know that when you are in the ranks, when you see what kind of equipment you have at your disposal, you draw strength from the group. I don't know in fact where this comes from, but it does make for more decisive action, for a certain brutality, a certain ruthlessness, a desire to show that what you have at your disposal is so dangerous that the rest does not count.

Yet our respondents who had direct experience cautioned against overrating or demonizing ZOMO and other internal security units. A part of ZOMO's ranks are composed of soldiers seconded to it or called
up for reserve duty. ZOMO units, too, have internal tensions. One respondent recalled a case in 1981 when ZOMO career militia refused orders to disperse a peaceful demonstration in Lodz. He added:

Certain militiamen were given show trials with very severe sentences to scare others into following orders, so that they would not think that the country pays for nothing. [The message was,] "When things were quiet you gladly worked for us, but now that things are a little worse, you want to disappear. No, you are going to keep working for us."

East Germany

Similar issues of motivation and reliability arise for conscripts in the East German border troops, who are faced with the daily possibility of killing would-be escapees from the GDR. Political criteria weigh heavily in the selection of conscripts for the border troops. Inductees are asked if they would be able to fire on people; those who say no are conscripted elsewhere. Of course, the answers given during the induction process are no guide to actual behavior.

The ill will of the population clearly affects soldiers who serve in the border troops. A former NCO said:

I experienced [hostility from the population]. [Driving in uniform some distance with a former acquaintance] he also spoke about it: "You shoot people." We heard that from German friends at that time.

Another former NCO reinforced this point:

Among the population, the border troops also have the reputation of being elite troops. The border troops are hated very much precisely in Berlin. They are thoroughly hated in the large cities. I was trained in F. It is a somewhat bigger town, and there the relations with the population were very good. On the other hand, I have also seen quite different reactions. I heard that a sergeant shot someone on the street in Eisenach following the 1984 Rosenmontag.

Many from this supposedly loyal and reliable elite internal security force have defected to West Germany.6

---

6Respondent testimony casts doubt on the character of the East German factory-based security units, the Kampfgruppen (Battle Units), which are sometimes regarded in Western analyses as elite internal security forces. The Kampfgruppen units with which respondents were familiar had little equipment and engaged in little training. Nor did former East German soldiers think the Kampfgruppen could constitute any significant reinforcement to the East German army. Further study of this organization is warranted.
IMPLICATIONS

The above discussion suggests that there are clear limits on the reliability of the regular military for domestic repression. The past record itself provides one argument for the limited domestic reliability of East European armies: They have never been used on any scale in direct action against their own people, perhaps because the East European military and party leaderships suspect that they cannot be so used. Jaruzelski’s much-debated statement of 1976, “Polish soldiers will not shoot Polish workers,” can be understood as descriptive and not necessary prescriptive. When faced with domestic unrest, the East European regimes may be capable—as they were in Poland in 1980–81—of instilling within the professional military a sense of real threat on military as well as political grounds. The regimes can deploy their armed forces in domestic crises, relying on military discipline and servicemen’s ignorance of the circumstances of deployment. But utilization of the regular military for even limited domestic repression has, in all cases to date, intensified strains within the officer corps and the military establishment at large. It has greatly intensified dissatisfaction and lowered morale among conscripts. It seems unlikely that the reliability of the East European armies would hold in violent internal repression, where they would have to shoot large numbers of civilians. These conclusions are supported by our poll on whether East European armies could be utilized directly to repress their own populations with violence—whether “the army could be used to shoot workers.” The results are discussed in Section VI.

Because of the limited reliability of the regular East European armed forces in domestic crises, the Communist regimes have designed elite internal security units for domestic repression. But their efficiency and reliability evidently also have limits; this is clear in the case of the East German border guards.
VI. EXTERNAL AND DOMESTIC RELIABILITY:
WHAT EAST EUROPEAN SERVICEMEN SAY

In addition to soliciting personal experiences bearing on reliability, we also polled our respondents on their views about (1) whether East European armies could be utilized effectively in support of a Soviet attack on Western Europe; (2) whether the military would resist a Soviet invasion (a question relevant only for Poland); and (3) whether East European armies could be employed directly to repress with violence their own populations, i.e., whether "the army could be used to shoot workers." The result of this poll is of course a compilation of attitudes, not direct experience (in contrast to the rest of this study). But although the responses are not hard data, they represent the attitudes and judgments of individuals—officers, NCOs, and soldiers—who have served in East European armies and have trained for and simulated conflict with NATO. Some of the respondents were placed in positions in which they might have had to fire on civilians. Some of them have thought much about the issue. Thus we believe that their views, while not an infallible guide to real behavior, are an important input to any evaluation of the reliability of East European armies.

We distill and analyze this testimony below, letting our respondents speak at length. Not all respondents could or would offer judgments on reliability. Thus we offer no quantitative breakdown of the responses. The testimony quoted here is representative of that of other respondents of similar backgrounds. Where contradictory views were put forth, these are included as well.

EXTERNAL RELIABILITY AGAINST NATO

A number of respondents, primarily former officers, stressed the overall reliability of East European military forces. According to an East German officer:

The combat readiness and reliability of the [East German army] are often underestimated. . . . I would like to emphasize quite strongly that in case of a successful blitzkrieg there would be no problems. Myths from the Third Reich also come into play. They are not as dead as one sometimes thinks, at least as far as the NPA is concerned.
A Czech officer asserted:

[Czechoslovak armed forces are] a well-prepared, well-equipped, and well-armed contingent which is capable of fulfilling the duties assigned to it without any complicating factors.

A former senior Polish officer made the same point:

I personally would caution against putting too much emphasis on the expectation of disloyalty of the NSWP armies.

A Polish NCO, asked whether soldiers under his command would have fought well against West Germans or Americans, replied:

Yes. They would have performed the task 100 percent.

Our interviews sought to elicit respondents' justification for such viewpoints. In the process, the respondents offered numerous qualifications and limitations to such predictions of absolute reliability. These are discussed below.

Military Structure

Several East European officers stressed the importance of institutional factors over individual motivation in assessing reliability. They argued that military performance is determined by Soviet controls and strict centralization of the military structure, not individual preferences, and these will ensure reliability. A former Czechoslovak officer said:

The issue of using the armed forces in the large sense of the word is decided by the command echelon. In certain specific conditions, certain problems can arise, but generally speaking, with this highly centralized organizational system and with the existing disciplinary system, I do not see such problems or difficulties. . . . The structure of this army, its training, armament, the quality and combat readiness of its officer cadre, particularly the senior cadre, all of these elements are conducive to its reliable use against NATO.

A Polish officer, granting differences within the officer corps, maintained that the directives of the upper strata supporting Soviet purposes would prevail:

There are differences within the officer corps. The younger officer, even though he has been raised in the spirit of the party, so to speak, is not as dedicated [as the senior officer]. He is likely to follow the voice of the people. But when it comes to the strategic-operational
use of forces within the Warsaw Pact framework, the decisive role is played by the top echelon, with no influence whatsoever from the younger cadre. And the very top echelon is absolutely pro-Soviet.

The Impact of Ideology

No respondent questioned the fact that NSWP officers would lead their units into battle against NATO. This judgment was justified with a variety of arguments. Respondents pointed to the influence of Communist ideology and Soviet-sponsored indoctrination on officer reliability, although in a more differentiated form than Western discussions generally assume. An East German officer articulated a theme common to much respondent testimony: Communist ideology as such is dead in the East European military elites, just as in other elites, but the Soviet/Communist version of East-West relations and military affairs continues to shape the thinking of the East European officer corps:

Officers, tied as they are to the command structure, the party apparatus, and the hierarchies, are thoroughly capable, willing, and ready to fight. The notions of imperialism and class enemy are still a factor in the military, although Marxism has lost its appeal. But in foreign policy and military strategy, it still has some effect on the majority of the officers.

A Czechoslovak officer stressed ideology, material benefits, and belief in victory as factors motivating East European officers:

There is very strong ideological and political pressure on the Czechoslovak officer corps. The officers are mostly convinced that their mission is the right one. They enjoy very good material conditions compared to other Czech citizens. There is a very strong impact of ideology and a great deal of disinformation or insufficient information, and no one is able to verify the veracity of the information that is being purveyed. . . . There is also the sustained and systematic spreading of the belief that the Warsaw Pact armies are so well prepared, coordinated, trained, and commanded that they will be able to achieve their assigned objectives in a short period of time. . . . I've absolutely no doubt that with very few exceptions, they would obey any order that was given to them. I have myself posed the hypothetical question, "What would a Czechoslovak pilot do were he put in the same position as the pilot of the Russian plane that shot down the Korean airliner?"—that is, if he knew clearly and convincingly that he was ordered to commit murder. I'm convinced that, whatever the circumstances, he would not have refused and would have fired, just the same as his Russian counterpart did.
Military Professionalism

Other former officers stressed that military professionalism and routine contributed to reliability. Said one Polish officer:

A tailor makes clothes and a soldier wages war. It is all the same to him whether he is to take Denmark or Great Britain. There may be different emotions, but it is a matter of routine. And this was confirmed best of all during the period of martial law, when orders were followed contrary to [the soldiers’] beliefs.

Lack of Information

Probable ignorance of the real political and military situation in the event of a conflict was another factor widely cited by our respondents as contributing to reliability. As a Polish officer put it:

[In the event that the Soviets decide to launch a surprise attack on the West in the absence of aggression from the West] Polish units would not know that it is the Soviets who are initiating the action. The West will always be the one who started it. . . . There won’t be a propaganda situation in which the East would start the conflict. The West is always the one who starts it. [If I am told military] strikes have occurred, I am here, I don’t know what is happening 200 kilometers away where the strike occurred. There is no such situation. There is no contact; the telephone is not working because of the atomic strike, therefore communications have been disrupted. . . . Don’t think that it will be a clear-cut matter. It is generally understood that the Polish soldier is only defending himself, he never starts it.

An East German border troops officer held a similar view:

There were tactical exercises, alerts, and so on during which one could observe people’s motivation. [The exercises were] treated as a necessary evil and performed with more or less conviction. I start from the premise that in case of conflict, it is truly difficult to get accurate information and you have to rely on . . . what you are told; so a large number will quite normally follow the orders they are given.

Another East German officer responded:

In case of conflict, orders will be followed because . . . all the soldier is aware of is that West Germany is going to be invaded. He knows absolutely nothing of any further operations. He is quite uninformed. The Communist practice of restricting information to certain levels is carried further in the military than anywhere else.
Stressing the difficulties of obtaining accurate information, several respondents (including the Polish NCO quoted above) thought it would detract significantly from reliability if East European forces thought they were part of an aggressive invasion force. In the words of an East German border troops officer:

If it were to become apparent that one's own superiors are the actual aggressors, then many would refuse to fight or would go over to the enemy. I would be among them. Should I know that we had attacked, then I wouldn't hesitate for one second; I would know what I have to do. I would have to go over to the side which must defend itself. Independently of the system, whether one likes it or not, I am of the opinion that when one is attacked one has to defend oneself. I can imagine that many see it this way. The moment they notice that "we are actually the aggressors," they will say "we are on the wrong side."

**Coercive Military Discipline**

Harsh military discipline was cited by many respondents as contributing to the reliability of officers and conscripts. Said a former Polish reserve officer candidate:

I believe that in a crisis, when officers would be given orders and threatened with the death penalty if they refused, then most of them would obey.

A Polish NCO maintained:

The units will have to obey the orders of their superiors in the first instance. And in case of war, that is how it will be, abstracting from the opinion of individuals . . . because individuals will have differing points of view.

Two other Polish NCOs held the same view:

There will certainly be a few commanders who will refuse to [fight]. But they will get a bullet through the head . . . and the rest will go.

They would fight [on the Soviet side in a conflict with the West]. I think they would fight poorly, but they would fight. Why? Because the Soviets use a very simple method. In the rear they have their [KGB] units and whoever hesitates is taken care of on the spot, so he has to advance.

A Hungarian respondent, too, stressed the overriding importance of strict military discipline; in his view, the army would follow orders
because resisters would be discovered and exemplarily executed. A former Czechoslovak conscript said:

In case of war, Soviet troops will automatically advance to the border, and that will be a difficult situation for the Czechoslovak army. The young people do not want to fight but they have the Soviet army to reckon with.

Respondents commonly linked the effectiveness of military discipline with military success; in the event of defeat or stalemate, the impact of disciplinary sanctions would be relaxed. Said a Polish officer (whose words are indicative of the overriding importance of harsh discipline for the wartime and postwar officer corps):

The Soviets can have confidence in the Polish army because it is a disciplined force and will follow orders. Of course in case of defeat everything falls apart. But under normal circumstances, i.e., in case of success, there will be no breaking of ranks. I believe that the Soviets can confidently expect the Polish armed forces to fight well against Americans, Danes, or Germans because the essence of every army is discipline. I have been in the military for many years. I cannot imagine not obeying an order. A soldier in any army, no matter what the system, must be disciplined. An army can be poorly outfitted, poorly commanded, poorly fed, poorly organized, but it is still an army if it is disciplined. If there is no discipline, there is no army. And this discipline is strong in Eastern armies. There can of course be individual cases of bucking the system, but that is unimportant. First of all, the soldier is raised in this spirit from the very beginning and it is part of his existence as a soldier. Second, under Eastern conditions another aspect comes into it, and that is that the soldier has a wife, children, a father, and a mother. Every case of bucking the system has an impact on the family, and the soldier knows this. Therefore, under normal circumstances the soldier can be counted on because he simply cannot do anything else. If you take 1981, with Solidarity and martial law, there were 10 million people in Solidarity, in essence the whole adult population of Poland; and the soldier participated in this. His father, his mother, his brother all were in Solidarity; he himself was in Solidarity at times, and yet the soldier stood on the side of the Soviets and he did not buck the system. The Polish soldier may not have participated in the invasion of Czechoslovakia very enthusiastically but he went there. That is why I believe that under the normal turn of events and also considering that the Polish army has Russians both in front and back of it . . . they can rely on it 99 percent of the time. But I do specify that this is if events run their normal course for them. The Tsar's army also fell apart in 1917 when the Tsarist system fell apart. And as long as things proceed normally, then nothing falls apart.
A former career NCO with more recent Polish military experience commented:

At first Poles will go with the Soviets to fight against the West because they won't have any other option. They will not fight well, [but] if you are told to go or else you'll get a bullet in the head, you will go. But if the fighting gets hard and drags on, there will be cases of sabotage against the Soviets. The Poles will not fight well against the Americans, and if they ever get the opportunity they will turn against the Soviets.

A former Soviet serviceman with experience in Poland felt that East European and Soviet soldiers would find themselves in the same position:

If it started, it would be considered a state of war where you are supposed to be shot if you do not obey an order. Certainly [Soviet soldiers stationed in Poland] would [fight] without any desire.

Several respondents stressed that officer-soldier tensions would be magnified in a conflict. In the words of a Polish conscript, should the opportunity arise, soldiers would kill officers, for "there was no sense of group spirit in our army." An East German officer said, "I would not trust my subordinates in time of war." Given the opportunity, many respondents asserted, desertions could occur on a large scale. In the words of an East German border troops NCO:

Each individual—a large percentage—is intent on saving his own skin. Wherever there is a hole, and if that hole is in the rear, that's where people are going to flee to. If the biggest opening lies in the rear, that will be the direction of flight and not forward if that's where the enemy is.

The Nature of the Enemy

Notwithstanding the elapse of forty years without significant military conflict in Europe (except for Soviet policing in Eastern Europe) and notwithstanding the present age of automated warfare, our respondents almost universally believe that reliability remains correlated to the nationality of the opponent. Especially (but not exclusively) those from Poland thought that the East European armies would be more reliable against German units than against American units. A Polish officer, asked how he thought the Polish soldier in the ranks would fight if he had to fight together with Soviet units on Western territory, replied:
Of course it depends to a great extent on who the enemy is. In 1943, the Germans were the enemy, and should the Polish army be confronted by Germans also, then regardless of the fact that they [the Germans] are not Hitlerites, Poles have an enormous prejudice against the Germans.

While we expected such views from respondents who were part of the wartime and immediate postwar generations in Poland, the same distinction among national opponents was made by Polish respondents in their twenties. This was the view of a Polish NCO, who also said that Polish servicemen would be less reliable fighting abroad than on Polish territory. Asked whether he thought that his unit was well prepared for combat, he replied:

Most definitely. There may be differences of opinion now and a lack of integration, but especially in the units there always was and always will be patriotic fervor. If we had to fight Americans, then there are still differences of opinion—the average Pole still thinks well of them. But if we had to fight West Germany, then I am almost sure that the Poles would rise to the challenge. [If the Poles had to fight the Germans on German territory as part of the Warsaw Pact], patriotic fervor would not have the same effect. Poland can come together when it has to defend its own territory, but rarely to invade somebody else's.

A younger Polish NCO doubted the resonance of official anti-West German propaganda, but articulated continued Polish ambivalence about Germany:

There is the possibility of German reunification and then they could attack us if we are not in the Pact. The Soviets are holding everybody down. If they didn't, it is clear that the two Germanies would unite. Everybody knows this.... Nobody believes [that the FRG is an aggressive nation]. If there were no television or radio or if one could not move around [Poles might believe this], but after all, many Poles travel; they keep in touch, and now everybody knows. Poles are no longer so ignorant. [Asked if there is any difference between Poles' attitudes toward the American and West German armies]: Of course. They would fight against the West Germans.

Another young Polish NCO said:

\[1\] Anti-West German propaganda has remained a staple of political indoctrination in the Polish army. Typical of this line was an article published in the Main Political Administration monthly in October 1985 entitled "The Bundeswehr—Thirty Years in the Service of Militarism and Revanchism" (Kmdr. Dr. Zbigniew Cieckowski, "Bundeswehr—30 lat w służbie militaryzmu i rewanszymu," Wszech Ludowe, October 1985).
Everyone [in Poland] has some kind of objection against the Germans.

Similarly, a young Polish private said:

The majority of Poles have an unfriendly attitude toward the Germans. On the other hand, whatever is American is good. [Asked if Poles would fight against Americans in case of war, he replied]: They would fight without conviction. . . . In my view, they are likely to fight [with conviction] against the West Germans.

A Polish officer was more emphatic:

You cannot count on the Polish army in an encounter with Americans.

Domestic Ferment

A variety of respondents held that social developments within the East European countries in the past decade further reduced any remaining ideological commitment of servicemen to Communist aims and thus reduced soldiers’ combat motivation. A Polish NCO said:

The political consciousness of the man who is entering the service now, who knows a little something of what went on during the Solidarity period, is different. He is more difficult, more resistant to propaganda. It is difficult to convince him of friendship with the Soviet Union.

An East German border troops officer said:

The emigration [from East to West Germany, primarily of pensioners] plays a role. Many GDR citizens now have relatives in the West. They would be involved in a mobilization. Every day there are more people in the West that [the GDR soldier] knows and might have to fight. That is not insignificant.

An East German officer was confident of officer reliability against NATO but suggested that the “German issue” required more attention in political training:

I believe that 90 percent of NPA officers would take up arms. But inner conflicts are on the increase, and the national issue is part of them. That is why there is this attempt to again emphasize German history and especially Prussian military traditions.
A Polish officer who stressed the importance of military organization and discipline thought reliability had nonetheless been reduced as a result of the Solidarity period in Poland:

If the exercise involved the central front and one assumed that the Silesian Military District would be in that, then the Polish soldier could run into Americans. I do not know how the Polish soldier will behave; I am just thinking out loud. But seeing the new political situation evolving in Poland, where the conflict between the government and society has been increasing... it is conceivable that the Polish forces would not hold firm. On the other hand, you have to consider that the Polish forces will be dispersed, not [concentrated] in one front, so that Soviet control over them will be easier. Within the Polish forces, the Military Security Service (WSW) will be very active. They have their counterintelligence people in every company.

A Polish NCO, asked whether the combat readiness of the Polish army was affected under martial law, replied:

I think that to a certain degree, it was affected. The openness of propaganda, not only from the top but especially from the unions, increased and changed the consciousness of society. It had to have some influence, and social discipline loosened up a lot. We heard of cases of rebellion among soldiers, in conflict situations, where brother was set against brother. Military discipline also had to be affected some. The young soldier who went into the army after martial law had a different attitude... We heard many rumors about discipline problems in the army. Many soldiers refused to take the oath of allegiance because the text of the oath refers to friendship and alliance with the Soviet Union... They were willing to swear allegiance to Poland but not to the Soviet Union. There were cases of court martial for refusal to take the oath.

A former Polish conscript stressed that forty years of Communism gave soldiers no motivation to fight well:

[The soldier would have to participate in a Soviet campaign against Americans. He] would have bullets coming at him from the front and from the rear... He would fight without conviction because what would he fight for? He simply has no motivation. Socialism has given him nothing.

**NATO Strategy**

We were also interested in our respondents' views as to whether East European military reliability rested on a "natural" Western threat to Eastern Europe, given its proximity to the USSR and its forced
incorporation in a hegemonic Soviet alliance that threatened the West, or whether that reliability might be affected by specific Western policies and actions. Many respondents found it difficult to address the issue; in the words of a former career Polish NCO (who thoughtfully addressed other issues):

You know, I never thought about that.

Several respondents referred to Polish history and questioned how the West could help Poland in such dire circumstances. Opined a former NCO:

The West does not have strong enough reasons to give us that much assistance.

All respondents who addressed this issue pointed to the obstacles, yet some thought reliability might be reducible by specific Western behavior. Former officers stressed the difficulties. One Polish officer, asked about the Polish reaction in a hypothetical conflict where NATO promised to spare Poland if the Polish military did not support the Soviet side, responded:

That is like telling the story of Little Red Riding Hood. It is not credible that such a proposition could be made and followed at any serious level. [Even though, as an officer candidate told me,] the best thing that could happen is if the Americans declared war on Poland, and the Poles surrendered the next day.

Another Polish officer expanded on this thought:

We have to ask ourselves if it is realistic for us [in the West] to expect the Polish armed forces to refuse participation in war if we tell them that we will not touch the armed forces or Polish territory if they refuse to carry out their orders. The Polish armed forces exist within the mass of Soviet forces, about 20 divisions in the GDR, an innumerable number of divisions, maybe in the hundreds, marching from the Soviet Union. All of Poland is surrounded by them, and neither the GDR nor Czechoslovakia is well disposed toward Poland either. . . . Would you as a NATO commander be able to promise the Poles you would not touch Polish territory from the strategic point of view? . . . He does have to win the war. How can he win the war without touching Polish territory? [He would say]: “Although we have nothing against the Poles, and we want to help them, in fact, our strategic interests dictate that we do hit Polish territory because if we don’t they will overrun us.” To me, neither the expectations of the Polish armed forces protesting nor [Western] promises to them in such a case seem realistic. It is difficult [for NATO] not to do anything on Polish territory, because it is
important from a strategic communications viewpoint. If NATO were to promise to strike only against Soviet and not Polish units if the Polish army were to remain on Polish territory, how do you differentiate between them, and does this make any sense? Can one trigger [Polish-Soviet] conflict in Poland? Maybe one can. I do not see many possibilities—but it is important to try.

A Polish career NCO responded that strong personal guarantees would have to be extended to East European servicemen to lower their reliability:

I believe that the soldier will fight where he is sent. This is connected with a person’s inner fears. On the other hand, [he might not fight] if some pressure were applied somewhere, some kind of propaganda, leaflets telling him that his family’s safety and welfare would be 100 percent guaranteed, that his family, his fiancé, or wife would in no way be harassed. But who would give such a guarantee? It would have to be some organization, for example, the Americans. So we are fighting, and I agree to surrender; what guarantees do I have that my family won’t be jailed, harassed, killed... would it be enough for an American soldier to say in Polish, “Come on over to my side, we’ll work something out together?”

Another Polish NCO commented:

After 40 years of propaganda in Poland, it would be difficult for the Americans to convince the Poles [by saying] that if you don’t fight we won’t touch you. However, Polish national consciousness is much more open to the West, if only because of the 10 million Polish émigrés living in the West, in Western Europe and in the United States. The average Pole is rather well disposed toward the West, less well toward Russia. But those who hold power are tied to Russia. There is also this issue: The Polish population is being repeatedly told that the territory of Poland... is the first line of defense of the Soviet Union.

Another former NCO with more recent experience in the Polish armed forces responded:

Poles have never been at war with the United States and feel considerable sympathy toward it... but during the initial period of war there will be incredible confusion... most of the commanders are pro-Soviet... so you will get an order and you will go.... [Asked if Poles can count on the West, he replied]: Absolutely not. They cannot count on anything.

Many respondents thought Western information, if available to East European military personnel on a timely basis, could have an effect on reliability. An East German political officer said:
The influence of RIAS should not be underestimated as far as the East German territory is concerned. If programs based on reality are broadcast, they will in any case have a destabilizing effect on the NPA. Much too little use is made of this in the West, that is my personal view... because Western opinions are just simply not known and if they are, then only through a filter. This would have a negative impact on combat readiness.

A former Polish officer maintained:

It is important [for the West] to continue persuading the population of the satellite countries... that NATO is not an aggressive but a defensive pact, that it has no intention of attacking anyone, of changing any borders in Europe, of giving any territory back to the Germans. The Germans themselves should see to it that all propaganda which paints them as enemy No. 1 is eliminated. At the same time, [they should make it clear] that they have to arm because they feel threatened by the Soviet bloc, which is stronger than they are. [The Soviets] are constantly increasing their armaments, and if [the West] arms, it is not to be the strongest but to catch up to [the Soviet bloc]. I think that at present Western propaganda instruments are too weak and the printed word does not get through to Poland... Radio Free Europe and Voice of America transmission must be improved technically to counteract the effects of jamming.

The Importance of Circumstances

For most respondents, East European military reliability against NATO (as in other contexts) would be affected importantly by the specific circumstances of the moment. A Polish officer stated:

The average officer is prepared. What things will look like in reality if a war were to break out will depend not on the present [political] situation but on the conditions, on the atmosphere prevailing when combat begins. His motivation, his attitude toward Americans and Germans will depend on the conditions prevailing at the outbreak of war.

Stated a Polish NCO:

It is difficult to speculate what would happen in a threatening situation. Poland lives with impending threat every day. The Communists keep threatening Polish society with the dangers of war, imperialism, Americans on the one hand, and on the other hand, when the situation gets sticky, they threaten the Communists with the Soviet Union.
An East German border troops NCO made a similar argument:

I can easily imagine that, independently of the intensity of events, at the moment that they receive their orders or have to go into battle, [they will ask themselves] what should they do, morality apart. I am sure that some of them will cross over to the enemy or that some of them will desert. But at the moment of attack, one must defend oneself. That is quite normal, after all. At the moment when one attacks, we are told that we have been attacked. The problem is that it is so difficult to distinguish, and that is why evaluation is hard.

Only a few respondents, including an East German NCO, predicted unreliability:

I have also heard of many who would put a white flag in their knapsack in case of war. This also applies to nuclear war. Although we were trained for defense in case of attack, most people were of the opinion that it did not make any sense. What was it we always said? Before we get out of bed the Yank will be at the door selling his first chewing gum. Yes, before we climb out of bed, when it shakes and rattles out there, then it is all too late. Most people thought that one way or the other, [official NPA scenarios] were crazy ... most of them knew beforehand that when it starts it is too late.\(^2\)

**RELIABILITY AGAINST THE SOVIET ARMY**

We also asked our respondents to estimate the behavior of East European servicemen in the face of armed Soviet intervention in their countries, of the kind that occurred in Hungary in 1956 and seemed to threaten Poland in 1980–81. Respondents asserted uniformly that differences exist between Soviet and East European military establishments, notwithstanding Soviet hegemony. None viewed these differences in and of themselves as likely to undermine external reliability. Some Polish respondents thought they could foster national resistance in the case of a Soviet invasion. A Polish NCO held the view that:

\(^2\)A former Czechoslovak NCO reported that following the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968, soldiers in his division would have tried to switch sides in the event of a conflict with NATO:

I can give you a specific example taken from the end of 1968 when a poll was conducted among the soldiers of the division. They were asked what they would do in case of a conflict between West and East. I was the typist who recorded the results. More than 75 percent of the soldiers said they would turn against the Soviet soldiers should a conflict between East and West arise ... and many officers would do the same.
[Should officers issue the command to oppose the Soviet Union] some soldiers would certainly obey, but it is obvious that we cannot cope with the Soviet Union by ourselves and we absolutely cannot count on the West.

Another Polish NCO, asked whether some officers and NCOs would still fight the Russians in case of an invasion, replied:

I am 70 percent sure that they would. . . . Of course, there are highly placed unit commanders, each one of whom has been to Moscow for training; those people I do not know about. . . . but generally speaking, the Soviet army is not liked in the Polish army as a whole.

Still another Polish NCO thought that most Polish officers would not resist a Soviet invasion, but that soldiers—from privates to senior corporals—would do so. Another Polish NCO, asked if he thought his commander would have followed Soviet orders during a Soviet invasion of Poland, replied:

In the beginning for sure; but if there were such incidents as Soviets shooting Poles, then I am 50 percent positive he would have turned against them.

DOMESTIC CONTINGENCIES

We also explored our respondents' perceptions of domestic reliability, that is, the behavior of East European armies in suppressing internal strife or uprisings. Most of the responses concern Poland, since our Polish sample was the largest and because of the timeliness of the issue with respect to martial-law Poland. Respondent testimony indicates just how much the issue is “in the air” in Poland; it is of concern to anyone mobilized in domestic contingencies. Concern about killing fellow nationals appears to be self-generated but is reinforced by civilians with whom the military comes in contact. Said a former Polish conscript:

We never discussed this subject [firing on the population] among ourselves. I personally think that everybody thought about this subject, but no one started a discussion about it. But you could feel that the issue sort of hung in the air.

A Polish NCO described a situation that other respondents indicated occurred frequently under martial law in Poland:
[When I was on patrol during martial law] the first question civilians always asked was, "Would you shoot me, a fellow Pole? Would you shoot my mother, would you shoot your mother?" . . . If you shoot, it could be your brother . . . and yet the civilian population was somewhat afraid . . . So such questions were asked everywhere.

Respondent testimony on whether or not the officer corps would order soldiers to fire on their fellow countrymen was contradictory. Most of the interviewees suggested that in a serious domestic confrontation the officer corps would be divided; some officers would give the order to shoot civilians, while others would not. Said one Polish officer:

I left Poland before all the Solidarity unrest. But it seems to me that even today the army would follow orders issued by its superior officers.

A Polish NCO who claimed to have served in an elite unit under martial law was asked whether he thought that soldiers from his unit would have shot any workers who somehow managed to make their way through the ranks of ZOMO and the regular army. He responded:

First of all, when we penetrated into the building we had absolute orders to shoot any person whatsoever attempting to get into the building without showing his identification papers. [Asked whether they would have shot not at 5 or 6 but at a large crowd of hundreds of workers] All the more . . . knowing the atmosphere within the company . . . First of all, let's begin with the fact that many people in the company worked for the Soviet Union . . . . That is why there was never any loose talk among friends. In my company, the atmosphere actually was Soviet, so that I suspect that here an order would be executed perfectly 80 percent to 90 percent of the time. ³

A Polish conscript, asked whether in a tense situation while on patrol in town an NCO or career officer might give the order to shoot at civilians, responded:

There really are such people who would issue an order to shoot, such as my company commander. I vilify him because he was such a typical Communist, looking out for his career. Such people would give the order to shoot at workers, demonstrators, although I do not believe that the soldiers would carry out such an order.

³We include this testimony here, although we have doubts about the respondent's veracity in discussing his elite, spetsnaz-type unit, in the absence of corroborating evidence.
Most respondents—former officers and NCOs as well as conscripts—shared the view that soldiers would generally not carry out orders to fire on their fellow citizens unless immediately and directly faced with extreme sanctions themselves. A Polish NCO maintained:

In spite of everything, soldiers are there to represent the army externally and not internally. And I think that, at least during the time when I was serving, soldiers could not have forced themselves to shoot at the man in the street.

An East German border troops officer, granting that innocent East Germans were killed at the border, argued that the number would have been much higher were it not for the qualms of the soldiers:

The soldier does his duty. He does not do it willingly. A good soldier is always a contradiction... after a successful border escape, there is an investigation, and you are told you could have gotten him if you had only done this or that. That is the problem; none of us wanted to go to prison or whatever for negligence. That is the problem of the border. I believe there would be a lot more killings on the border if the border troops were not so conscientious and fired more or shot to kill.

A Polish officer, asked whether he thought that the army would side with or against the workers, replied:

If you had asked me this question several years ago, I would have answered that the military would definitely not have shot at the workers. Going by my inner convictions, watching what is happening in the country from afar, knowing the nature of the military, knowing what kind of army it is, I tend to assume that today there are relatively more people in the officer cadre who would be ready to lead the military into such an action than there once were, but as to the soldiers themselves, there are no such soldiers. There may be a conflict [within the military]. It is difficult to say what its outcome might be.

Said a Polish NCO, when asked whether regular line units would fight against the workers if the government had to call them up because the militia and ZOMO forces would not suffice:

This is a difficult question... I cannot answer whether they would fight against civilians. I think it would depend on the climate prevailing in Poland at that time. Of course you would surely find some people who would be willing to fight. But I think that in an appropriate climate many people, maybe the majority, would not fight against the workers. But I cannot say this unequivocally... After all, this soldier is none other than the man who left his place of
work, went into the army, and will return to his job in two or three years' time.

Another Polish NCO stated:

[In jail.] I talked with soldiers and I absolutely never came across the opinion that "I would go out and shoot." Shooting was unthinkable. . . . I doubt that regular paratroopers would have fired.

A Polish officer made the same point, and it was restated in more or less the same words by many Polish respondents:

Line officers can be used against the workers. They can give orders, but the soldier is the one holding the rifle and he can fire in the air or above their heads.

Another Polish NCO responded:

My sister was [an officeholder] in Solidarity. And I am ordered to shoot people, to shoot my sister? To shoot Poles? I am supposed to defend Poles.

Another Polish NCO who served during martial law had worried about insurrection:

I wondered . . . whether soldiers would shoot [workers] . . . there were those who said that if they were to receive an order to shoot, their first shot would be aimed at the back of some officer's head.

A Polish officer reflected on the dilemma in which a soldier would be placed if ordered to shoot demonstrators:

Different people would react differently. It would depend on the actual situation, on the actual moment, on the psychological situation. First of all, it would depend if there was a chance not to incur the risk of being shot on the spot. After all, the army is terrorized. Every human being reacts differently to terror. Ask yourself how you would behave if you were ordered to shoot and you knew that you yourself would be shot if you did not follow orders. How would you behave? How would your various friends behave? Of course, if this threat were removed, if only lesser sanctions applied, such as dismissal from the service, or some such thing, then reactions would be different. The percentage of those who would refuse to shoot would be much greater. And if there were the possibility of incurring no sanctions whatsoever, then . . . [very few would shoot].
IMPLICATIONS

The East European former servicemen we polled generally believe that in a conflict with NATO, the USSR would be able to rely on the East European armies to support an initial offensive against the West. They stress the importance to officer reliability of military organization, professionalism, and careerism or stake in the system. They stress the impact of political indoctrination, but with important qualifications. Respondent testimony suggests that political education does not create believing Communists, but it does shape the way in which officers view the world, and it explains the exaggerated suspicion or hostility with which the West and Western military capabilities, in particular, are viewed. Respondents stress the difficulties of obtaining accurate political or military information that, were it available, would undermine this Soviet/Communist world view.

Respondents uniformly stress the importance of military discipline as a factor contributing to reliability. They view officer discipline as enhanced by the positive incentives of material benefits and self-identification with the system. But they view conscript discipline as resulting exclusively from negative sanctions, not positive rewards or a mixture of the two. They believe this coercion can be effective—for a time, and given military success. But they also point to the fragilities of that discipline and question whether it would hold in the face of protracted conflict or military reversals: Given the opportunity, many soldiers would desert. Younger East European (especially Polish) servicemen continue to share the belief of their older counterparts that East European armies would be more reliable against traditional enemies, especially Germans, than against Americans. Respondents also linked reliability with perceptions of which side is the aggressor in any conflict. Many maintain that reliability has been diminished as a result of the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia, the Solidarity period in Poland, and the greater contact of East Germans with West Germany in the past decade.

Asked whether they thought differentiated Western military behavior toward the East European countries could affect reliability, respondents stressed inherent difficulties, given the forced inclusion of Eastern Europe in the hegemonic Soviet alliance. Most thought that Western information conveyed by radio or other means that countered Communist lack of information or disinformation could reduce military reliability.
Polish respondents thought that parts of the Polish army would resist a Soviet military invasion and the use of force against the Polish population.

Respondents (again primarily Polish, but also East German) questioned the reliability of the East European armies for violent domestic suppression. Although officers might order troops to fire on civilians, conscripts would in many circumstances, our respondents felt, resist or disobey such an order.
VII. CONCLUSIONS

The discussion in Sections II through V indicates that our respondents' experiences provide a mixed picture in terms of factors fostering reliability and unreliability in East European armies. Many key elements of the NSWP armies seem to have changed little in the past twenty-five years, which suggests continuity in terms of relative degree of reliability. These elements include politically directed recruitment of officers, the elaborate political control system, continuing political indoctrination, special units for conscripts whose loyalties are particularly suspect, and strong coercive discipline. Continuity is also indicated by the extended Soviet control system in which the upper echelons of the NSWP armies function, which is designed to control those armies while isolating them from undesired contact with the Soviet armed forces, but which also serves to constantly remind NSWP military professionals that their loyalty remains suspect in Soviet eyes. Soviet military operational planning attempts to leave the NSWP armies with no alternative to early commitment under Soviet command in an attack on Western Europe. NSWP officers perceive a (perhaps enhanced) "NATO threat." But while these constant features of NSWP militaries would seem to suggest considerable reliability, this reliability is fragile, for it rests in part on the containment and suppression of group and individual dissatisfactions which are likely to reemerge in times of political turmoil or crisis.

There have, of course, been some changes in the NSWP armies over the past twenty years, and the thrust of these changes has been in the direction of reducing rather than enhancing reliability. The changes are related to the evolution of Eastern Europe generally in a direction counter to Soviet interests. The Communist commitment that once motivated East European military officers, like other elites, is practically dead. Officers are recruited and motivated by material rewards and (as their careers progress) self-identification with the ruling regimes, rather than ideology. (This factor may not decrease reliability, but does provide a different motivation for it.) At the same time, the social gap between senior officers and their fellow countrymen has increased, a consequence of a widening divergence between regimes and societies generally in Eastern Europe, and specifically of greater popular opprobrium of the military, especially in Poland. Involvement of the Polish military in domestic policing functions has increased dissatisfactions within the armed forces. Officers and soldiers alike seem
to have greater interest in and access to alternative information sources, especially Western media. Conscripts and term NCOs have never shared regime values, but today many recruits (in Hungary, East Germany, and especially Poland) enter the armed forces having been exposed to alternative political thinking and activities. Although we lack conclusive evidence, it appears that tensions within the militaries (primarily between officers and conscripts and term NCOs) are on the rise. Sociological research on this topic within East Germany was stopped in the early 1980s, according to a former East German officer, precisely because it demonstrated growing intrarmilitary tensions for which there were no evident solutions. Fears of national enemies have declined, although they are still stronger than might be expected, especially with regard to Polish apprehensions about a German threat.

When we polled our respondents on their own estimates of reliability, we found that (generalizing from many diverse views) on balance they predicted reliability more than unreliability in a standard scenario of a short-warning Warsaw Pact attack against NATO. Yet, as demonstrated in Section VI, they also offered significant refinements and qualifications of those estimates. It is important to note that respondents with more recent military experience and more junior rank tended to place more emphasis on potential unreliability: NSWP service men will fight because they have to, but they will not necessarily fight well, and many will desist or desert should the opportunity arise. Most respondents felt there were strong limits on reliability should a Soviet offensive against Western Europe falter or be reversed. Likewise, most respondents judged the reliability of the NSWP armies in violent domestic repression to be low. They foresaw greater reliability in a scenario in which NSWP armies perceived their mission as defending national territory against a Western incursion.

This study thus provides empirical support for earlier studies concluding that the USSR can rely on NSWP forces—but very conditionally. Our findings are generally congruent with those of Walendowski's empirical study. Our analysis suggests a brittle NSWP military reliability in the event of a conflict with NATO. The testimony of our respondents suggests that the Soviet-imposed institutional structure, coercive military discipline, information controls, and the exigencies of Soviet-style military conflict could contain the impact of the influences that promote unreliability. This system succeeds in blurring what in other countries and contexts would be a legitimate distinction between “external offensive” and “external defensive” mili-

1 Walendowski, op. cit.
tary reliability. In brief, the USSR has succeeded in fostering a somewhat higher level of NSWP reliability than the multiple and increasing Soviet-East European tensions, within and outside the armed forces, would suggest. In this sense, the Soviet General Staff can perhaps expect performance from the NSWP militaries at least as good as the Wehrmacht General Staff obtained from the Italian, Romanian, and Hungarian armies in World War II. Reliability need not rest on close identification between the national interests of the NSWP states and the USSR; it can be created on other bases.

Yet the quality of NSWP reliability that emerges from our respondents' testimony is fragile. It is vulnerable to numerous adverse (from the Soviet viewpoint) influences. It rests on a containment of tensions and coercive control mechanisms that impose their own costs, and if those mechanisms break down, Moscow may be confronted with serious unreliability problems. In the event of military reversals or protracted conflict, these mechanisms will be subjected to severe challenges. The implication is that NSWP reliability could quickly dissipate, for the Soviet-imposed military system in Eastern Europe does not appear to be conducive to resiliency in the face of challenge. Moreover, there are multiple increasing challenges to NSWP reliability in peacetime.

Earlier studies of NSWP armies have commonly assumed that the USSR has understood the potential challenges to NSWP reliability and has taken corresponding preventive measures. But our émigré-based analysis suggests the utility of another careful look at the role ascribed to NSWP forces in Soviet strategy and the mechanisms by which Moscow seeks to insure itself against NSWP unreliability.

---

2 The distinction is made for NSWP forces in Herspring and Volgyes, op. cit.
3 The criterion suggested in Herspring and Volgyes, p. 284.