

February 1987

First Assessment of the Military Content of the 24th International Wehrkunde Conference from 31 January to 1 February 1987 in Munich

Citation:

"First Assessment of the Military Content of the 24th International Wehrkunde Conference from 31 January to 1 February 1987 in Munich", February 1987, Wilson Center Digital Archive, DVW-1-115512, bl. 10-33. Bundesarchiv Militärarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau. Contributed by Stephan Kieninger and translated by Bernd Schaefer. <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/291090>

Summary:

The report looks into the 24th Internationale Wehrkundetagung in Munich focusing on "Perspectives of NATO" and emphasizing a continued NATO's reliance on nuclear weapons and the strategy of flexible response. NATO policymakers did not endorse Egon Bahr's scheme for the creation of a nuclear- and chemical-weapons free zone in Europe.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

Original Language:

German

Contents:

Translation - English

Council of Ministers
of the German Democratic Republic
Minister for National Defense
The Minister

Berlin, 6 February 1987
Tgb.-Nr.: A-33/87

handwritten:
HK [H. Kessler] 6-2-1987
EH [E. Honecker] 9-2-1987

General Secretary of the Central Committee of the
Socialist Unity Party of Germany and
Chairman of the National Defense Council
of the German Democratic Republic

Comrade Erich Honecker

Dear Comrade Honecker!

From 21 January to 1 February 1987 the 24th Wehrkunde Conference¹ was held in Munich, where about 160 high-ranking politicians, academics, and military from the NATO states participated.

From the perspective of the Ministry of National Defense a

“First Assessment of the Military Content of the 24th International Wehrkunde Conference”

was compiled.

I am taking the liberty to present you² with this material in the appendix.

I am asking you to please take note.

With socialist greetings
[signed Kessler]
H. Kessler
Army General

¹ Translator’s note: Annual conference on “military matters” (Wehrkunde) held in Munich since 1963. It did not have an official English name, therefore the German term ‘Wehrkunde’ will be used throughout this translation. Since 1992 the annual event is called the Munich Security Conference.

² Translator’s note: Informal address in German.

Council of Ministers
of the German Democratic Republic
Minister for National Defense
The Minister

Berlin, 6 February 1987
Tgb.-Nr.: A-33/87

handwritten:
HK 6-2-1987

Member of the Politburo of the Central Committee
of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany and
Minister for State Security

Comrade Army General Mielke

Dear Comrade Mielke!

From 21 January to 1 February 1987 the 24th Wehrkunde Conference was held in Munich, where about 160 high-ranking politicians, academics, and military from the NATO states participated.

From the perspective of the Ministry of National Defense a

“First Assessment of the Military Content of the 24th International Wehrkunde Conference”

was compiled.

I am taking the liberty to present you³ with this material in the appendix.

I am asking you to please take note.

With socialist greetings
[signed Kessler]
H. Kessler
Army General

³ Translator's note: Formal address in German.

Council of Ministers
of the German Democratic Republic
Minister for National Defense
The Minister

Berlin, 6 February 1987
Tgb.-Nr.: A-33/87

Member of the Politburo and Secretary of the Central Committee
of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany

Comrade Hermann Axen

Dear Comrade Axen!

From 21 January to 1 February 1987 the 24th Wehrkunde Conference was held in Munich, where about 160 high-ranking politicians, academics, and military from the NATO states participated.

From the perspective of the Ministry of National Defense a

“First Assessment of the Military Content of the 24th International Wehrkunde Conference”

was compiled.

I am taking the liberty to present you⁴ with this material in the appendix.

Comrade Colonel Sayatz is commissioned from our side to work on this problem.

I am asking you to please take note.

With socialist greetings
[signed Kessler]
H. Kessler
Army General

⁴ Translator's note: Informal address in German.

Highly Confidential!
GVS Nr. A 614 418
1st Copy 9 pages

handwritten:
EH 9-2-1987

First Assessment
of the Military Content of the 24th International Wehrkunde Conference
from 31 January to 1 February 1987 in MUNICH

I.

1. From 21 January to 1 February 1987 the 24th Wehrkunde Conference was held in Munich, where about 160 high-ranking politicians, academics, and military from the NATO states participated.

The conference was held under the title “Perspectives of NATO”.

2. The participants from the United States again used the conference

- to demand a more significant subordination from their European alliance partners under the Reagan Administration’s course of confrontation and armament upgrades
- to make in blackmailing fashion the continued presence of strong U.S. armed forces in Europe contingent on far-reaching concessions by the European NATO states in economic terms and
- to confirm the negative position of the military-industrial-complex of the United States especially with regard to the elimination of all nuclear weapons, a ban of nuclear tests, and a ban of chemical weapons, and
- to influence the European NATO allies in this vein.

In this context, the official representative of the U.S. Department of Defense, Perle⁵, demanded

- the support for the SDI [Strategic Defense Initiative] Program,
- to maintain a strong nuclear arms potential, and
- a qualitative strengthening of the conventional combat power of NATO armed forces.

The proposals by the USSR concerning the elimination of all nuclear weapons and for a mutual test ban agreement, he [Perle] called “dangerous nonsense”. Those proposals would be just aiming at “undermining Western security”.

⁵ Translator’s note: Richard Perle (born 1941). Assistant Secretary of Defense for Global Strategic Affairs from 1981 to 1987. Perle resigned from his position about six weeks after this Munich Conference.

At the same time, he sharply criticized leading politicians from the Western European NATO states for their alleged “lack of clarity” in their statements vis-a-vis the Soviet Union. Although it would have been “clear to them for a long time” that a foregoing by the United States and NATO of nuclear and chemical weapons as well as of nuclear tests is impossible, they are not publicly articulating this with clarity.

Other U.S. representatives, among them 3 Senators from U.S. Congress and the U.S. Ambassador to the FRG [West Germany], [Richard] Burt, threatened a potential partial withdrawal of U.S. forces from Europe (100,000 men). They linked that threat with the demand for a significant increase of the conventional armed forces of the Western European NATO states.

FRG Minister of Defense [Manfred] Wörner again emphasized the role of the FRG as the main ally of the United States in Europe. His statements underlined the intention of the Kohl Government to continue the current military policy and to move up the implementation of the long-term program to increase the combat power of the Bundeswehr [West German Armed Forces].

In addition, he advocated for

- the maintaining of the NATO strategy of “Flexible Response” on the foundation of an effective nuclear arms potential of all components and of an increased conventional combat power of the NATO armed forces
- the further presence of strong U.S. armed forces in Europe
- the expansion of armament cooperation between the European NATO states as well as with the United States
- an unequal reduction of armed forces of the Warsaw Treaty as a precondition for agreements pertaining to conventional arms control in Europe

With regard to nuclear arms reduction he phrased it like that: “It cannot be rationale and purpose of Western security policy to strip Europe from nuclear weapons of all kind and ranges”.

This thesis was strongly supported by CSU [Christian Social Union] Chairman [Franz-Josef] Strauss who demanded a linkage between a zero option on intermediate nuclear forces and the reduction of short-range missiles (up to 1,000 kilometers), as well as a determined implementation of the SDI Program of the United States.

The British Defence Secretary [George] Younger supported Wörner’s demands to strengthen the “European pillar” within NATO.

He justified that with the statement that “the relationship between Europe and the United States has changed” and it is important “to play a significant European role within the alliance”. It would be obvious in this framework “that the European interests cannot always be identical with those of the United States”.

In this context, Younger referred to the limited means of the European NATO states concerning the massive increase of their military expenses as demanded by the United States. It would be important to use the available financial means more effectively.

3. The member of the SPD [Social Democratic Party] Presidium, Egon Bahr, proposed to supplement the joint proposal by SED and SPD for a chemical- and nuclear-arms-free zone in Central Europe with the creation of a “Region of Structural Non-Aggression Capability”.

According to this proposal, Warsaw Treaty and NATO should withdraw their heavy combat equipment and arms like tanks, artillery, helicopters, and fighter aircraft from a corridor of 150 kilometers each along the dividing line between NATO and Warsaw Treaty.

In the opinion of the author [Bahr], such a proposal would be easy to negotiate, easy to monitor, and it would represent a first step towards achieving conventional stability from the Atlantic to the Ural - what would make the negotiations over conventional disarmament in Europe easier.

This concept was rejected by the majority of conference participants. General [Wolfgang] Altenburg called such a corridor an “illusion”.

II.

1. Overall, the conference illustrated that the conservative circles within NATO, especially the United States, the FRG, and Great Britain, are unabatedly striving for gaining military superiority over the states of the Warsaw Treaty .

From a military perspective, the proposal by Egon Bahr to create a “Region of Structural Non-Aggression Capability” deserves special attention (Appendix).

It does fit within the political line of NATO aiming at achieving from the states of the Warsaw Treaty an unequal reduction of their conventional armed forces in disarmament negotiations.

An assessment to what extent this proposal is adhering in detail to the principles of equality and equal security is only possible after factoring in the potential impact on the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany.

This assessment would have to be done by the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the USSR.

This proposal would require a significant change in deployment of the armed forces on both sides.

In determining the corridor from where the heavy fighting capabilities would have to be withdrawn, the following lines were agreed with the SPD in the “Guidelines for the Creation of a Nuclear-Free Corridor in Central Europe”:

- Cuxhaven, Bremen, Bielefeld, Siegen, Mannheim, Ansbach, Munich in the FRG and
- Stralsund, Berlin, Wittenberg, and Dresden in the GDR.

2. Regarding the NATO armed forces in the territory of the FRG about 50 percent of the ground forces would be affected, especially tank brigades, infantry brigades, artillery units, and helicopter squadrons of the United States, the FRG, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and Belgium.

Not affected would be the armed forces of France and Canada stationed on FRG territory.

From the components of the proposal that became known, it is nothing said to what extent operative - tactical missiles are concerned.

From a military perspective, the withdrawal of forces and equipment from a 150-kilometer zone would require an extended time span of maximum 10 hours regarding the capability for the offensive groups of NATO ground forces towards the State Border of the GDR and not, as Bahr claimed, of several days,

Especially, however, it has to be considered that the offensive capability of the NATO aerial forces and the strategic nuclear weapons of the United States deployed in the territory of the FRG, namely

- Pershing II and
- Cruise Missiles

would remain basically unaffected.

The military weight of the Bahr proposal is furthermore influenced by the following factors:

- by the concentration of combat ready units of NATO for many years for drills in the context of the NATO fall exercise series near the borders of the GDR and Czechoslovakia, when during the course [of these exercises] up to 13 divisions were deployed simultaneously respectively directly in successive order in this corridor
- by the permanent deployment of NATO forces on the 9 military training areas in the border areas for training purposes, as well as
- by the high level of infrastructural expansion of the FRG border areas for deploying strong armed forces groups of NATO, as well as for guaranteeing rapid movement of the forces and their secure positioning

3. For the NVA [Nationale Volksarmee; National People's Army] of the GDR this proposal would have the consequence that from the ground forces of the NVA about 68 percent of the tank, motorized infantry, artillery, and combat helicopter units would be affected, as well as concerning the air force of the NVA about 67 percent of the fighter aircraft squadrons.

Furthermore, this corridor does contain about 67 percent of the military depot facilities of the GDR where in part also heavy combat technology is stored.

In an area of about 150 kilometer along the State Border of the GDR there is the majority of NVA exercise areas located, as well as substantial elements of the operative infrastructure of the territory (roads, signal facilities, train stations).

4. For the Kohl Government this proposal is hardly negotiable, since with it

- the FRG would enter a de facto partially demilitarized status and its role as the main deployment country for the armed forces of the United States outside their territory would be diminished;
- the strive of the FRG to expand its position within NATO would be countered; it would lead to a substantial reduction of the military role of the FRG in the framework of that alliance [NATO], and thus the FRG position vis-a-vis its imperialist [i.e., Western] main rivals would be weakened;
- the projects decided for the NATO long-term armament program and at the meetings of the NATO leading organs pertaining to increased expansion of the conventional armed forces and significant interests of the Military-Industrial-Complex in the FRG would be adversely affected; as well as
- the abandonment of the doctrine of “Forward Strategy resp. Forward Defense “, including the concept of “deep strikes” and “AirLand Battle”, and thus a fundamental change of NATO’s concept would become necessary.

In case of an implementation of the proposal, for about 50 percent of forces on the territory of the FDR new locations for deployment would have to be found.

This would lead to a high density of deployment, since currently it cannot be expected that France would be willing to accept other NATO contingents on its territory.

The territories of the Netherlands and Belgium have a limited capacity for hosting forces.

6⁶. This proposal would have far-reaching consequences for the organization of GDR national defense. This would result in

- a fundamental change in deployment of the forces of the NVA and the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany, where as a consequence only about one quarter of the GDR territory would actually be available and thus the capacity in the GDR for troop deployment would be exceeded by far (this would raise questions for the deployment of parts of the Group of Soviet Forces on the territory of the People’s Republic Poland and the USSR);
- substantial economic burdens in order to cover the costs and material requirements of redeployment, which would come with the new construction of barracks, airfields, and training grounds;
- a fundamental reorientation of the operative structure of the armed forces of member states of the Warsaw Treaty in Western direction, thus touching on basic questions of coordination in the framework of the socialist military coalition.

Thus the conclusion can be drawn that the proposal to create a “Region of Structural Non-Aggression Capability” should only be looked at in combination with reductions of conventional armed forces, as they are contained

⁶ Translator’s note: This is a miscount, should actually be 5.

- in the Budapest Appeal of the member states of the Warsaw Treaty⁷ and
- in the positions of the socialist states concerning the Vienna negotiations on the reduction of armed forces and armaments in Central Europe.

⁷ Translator's note: Public Statement by the Political Consultative Committee of Warsaw Treaty member states from 11 June 1986.

[Appendix]

[Cover Page]

Proposal
to create a
“Region of Structural
Non-Aggression Capability”

[Map]

[Entries] NATO [at left hand side, blue]
Armed Forces in the FRG

Deployment of Armed Forces in 150km Territory	Percentage of Overall Strength
Ground Forces - Tanks - Infantry - Artillery - Combat Helicopter	50
Aerial Forces - Fighter Aircraft	10

[Entries] NVA [at right hand side, red]

Deployment of Armed Forces in 150km Territory	Percentage of Overall Strength
Ground Forces - Tanks - Infantry - Artillery - Combat Helicopter	68
Aerial Forces - Fighter Aircraft	67

Note:

1. The Armed Forces of the GSSD⁸ are not considered.

⁸ Group of Soviet Forces in Germany (“Gruppe der Sowjetischen Streitkräfte in Deutschland”).

2. Bases and military training areas are not considered,