

May 20, 1987

**Letter, Fritz Streletz to Comrade Erich Honecker
[about the Military Doctrine of the Member States of
the Warsaw Treaty]**

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Summary:

The report examines the implications of the changes in the Warsaw Pact's new military doctrine adopted in May 1987 and its emphasis on the future defensive character of the alliance. The new doctrine stresses that the Warsaw Pact will never initiate military actions against another country unless it is attacked first, the Warsaw Pact will never employ nuclear weapons first, and the Warsaw Pact has no territorial claims against any other country in or outside of Europe.

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of the German Democratic Republic
Minister for National Defense
The Minister

Berlin, 19 May 1987
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handwritten:
EH [E. Honecker] 20-5-87
H Keßler [H. Kessler] 21-5-87

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!

At the invitation of the Minister for Defense of the USSR, Marshal of the Soviet Union [Sergey] Sokolov¹, on 18 May 1987 a meeting of the Chiefs of the General (Main) Staffs of the armies of the Warsaw Treaty was held in the Defense Ministry of the USSR concerning the subject

“Military doctrine of the Member States of the Warsaw Treaty”.

With consent by the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany and Chairman of the National Defense Council of the GDR, Comrade Erich Honecker, the Deputy Minister for National Defense and Chief of the Main Staff of the NVA [Nationale Volksarmee; National People's Army], Colonel General [Fritz] Streletz, participated in the meeting.

Before the beginning of the meeting, our comment regarding the phrasing on p. 3, II, 1st paragraph, was explained in a private conversation with the Marshal of the Soviet Union [Sergey] Akhromeyev and Marshal of the Soviet Union [Viktor] Kulikov:

“In the military-strategic situation, as it has emerged in the current moment in the world, even the maintaining of parity ceases to be a guarantor of war prevention”.

As a result of this conversation, both comrades had talks with the [Soviet] organs in charge. At the end of the meeting in Moscow, it was informed that the indications by the GDR are fully justified and will be fully considered during the final review of the document.

¹ Translator's note: Sergey Sokolov (1911-2012). Soviet Minister of Defense 1984-1987, dismissed 11 days after this meeting because of Mathias Rust Affair.

To the chiefs of the General (Main) Staffs the military doctrine of the member states of the Warsaw Treaty was explained in detail and - new - the military strategy (doctrine of NATO) was handed over.

I am taking the liberty to present to you² attached

- the main content of the statement by the Minister for Defense of the USSR, Marshal of the Soviet Union Sokolov
- the main content of the statement by Marshal of the Soviet Union Akhromeyev with the remarks by the Romanian side regarding the draft document of the military doctrine, as well as
- the document concerning the military strategy of NATO.

The task assigned to the delegation of the National People's Army for this meeting were fulfilled. All measures resulting from the consultation in Moscow will be implemented by the Ministry for National Defense in close cooperation with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Simultaneously I am taking the liberty to hand over to you on behalf of the Member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the SED and Minister for National Defense, Army General Keßler, the documentation "Military Doctrine of the GDR" worked out in the Ministry for National Defense.

I am asking you to please take note, respectively for your instruction.

With socialist greetings
[signed Streletz]
[as representative of the Minister] Streletz
Colonel General

² Translator's note: Formal address in German.

Appendices

Main Content
of the statement by the Minister for Defense of the USSR,
Comrade Marshal of the Soviet Union Sokolov,
on 18 May 1987

[Signed EH]

On 18 May 1987 the Minister for Defense of the USSR, Comrade Marshal of the Soviet Union Sokolov, received the Chiefs of the General (Main) Staffs of the armies of the member states of the Warsaw Treaty for a 45-minute long visit concerning the draft "Military Doctrine of the Member States of the Warsaw Treaty" to be discussed at the [next] meeting of the Political Consultative Committee.

During this visit from the Soviet side were present:

- the First Deputy Minister of Defense of the USSR and Chief of General Staff of the Armed Forces, Comrade Marshal of the Soviet Union Akhromeyev
- the Supreme Commander of the Joint Forces, Comrade Marshal of the Soviet Union Kulikov
- the First Deputy Minister of Defense of the USSR, Comrade Army General [Pyotr] Lushev
- the Chief of the Political Main Directorate of the Soviet Army and Naval War Fleet, Comrade Army General [Alexey] Lisichev
- the Chief of Staff of the Joint Forces, Comrade Army General [Anatoly] Gribkov

At the beginning of his remarks, Comrade Minister Sokolov asked to convey his thanks to the Defense Ministers of the member states of the Warsaw Treaty for their operative reaction to the invitation of the Chiefs of the General (Main) Staffs to this meeting in Moscow.

In the following statement he outlined:

- This meeting has major importance for the preparation of the meeting of the Political Consultative Committee of the member states of the Warsaw Treaty next week³ in the capital of the GDR, Berlin.
- Even when each country has its own military doctrine, it is currently important to undertake the formulation of a military doctrine of the Warsaw Treaty. It is especially significant to work out the political content of a military doctrine of the Warsaw Treaty that is binding for everyone.
- For 20 years, NATO is declaring its military doctrine to be a defensive doctrine and is thus alleging that the Warsaw Treaty has an aggression doctrine.

³ Translator's note: Held on 28 and 29 May 1987.

- Although the states of the Warsaw Treaty have repeatedly issued statements on military issues, so far there has been no explanation of the military doctrine of the Warsaw Treaty to the public.
- However, it is important to make clear to the entire world our understanding of war and of the struggle for peace, as well as the potential character of an aggression by the adversary and our planned counter-measures in this case.
- This why we are proposing to address the global public with a uniform military doctrine of the Warsaw Treaty.
- Such a document would serve as a good collective foundation of our peaceful intentions.
- The Soviet party and state leadership is convinced here that such a document would be met with a broad resonance in the world.
- The military doctrine of the Warsaw Treaty has a pronounced defensive character. We will never start a war in first place.
- For our own peoples as well as for the adversary, the collective defense of the socialist community of states has to be clearly visible.
- Due to the complicated military-political situation in Europe, our people must experience the collective protection of the socialist achievements.
- The member states of the Warsaw Treaty and the Soviet Union have submitted innumerable proposals for healing the international situation and on disarmament. Every time the response of the NATO states was negative or completely lacking.
- Our defensive doctrine is requiring that the leadership organs of the armed forces and the troops are focusing in training and education more than before on the fulfillment of defensive tasks. This is an extremely difficult task.
- At the same time it has to be considered that the aggressor can only be ultimately defeated through decisive offensive operations.
- Therefore it is of special importance to be always ready to inflict on the aggressor a decisive defeat.
- Defensive operations have to be prepared and fought in such a way that we are not losing or conceding territory. The active defense must therefore begin at the border between NATO and Warsaw Treaty.
- We must not first lose 100 to 200 kilometers of territory and then launch an offensive; instead every inch of ground of the socialist states must be persistently defended.

- In this context, active and uninterrupted intelligence is of foremost importance. This is why all machinations of NATO, especially its large exercises, have to be attentively monitored in order to timely draw from them the necessary conclusions.
- The mutual information exchange between our allies has to be further improved in this regard in order to exclude a surprise by the adversary.
- An important significance also lies with a timely panning of pioneer-style build-up of defense, especially the provision of forces and arms as well as the rapid expansion of defensive positions.
- On all questions we always have to start from the actual capabilities of the adversary. On our side, the measures to guarantee the military-strategic balance (the parity) have to be organized in such ways that, in case of an aggression by the adversary, its destruction has to be possible.
- Here we are founding our political efforts on realizing the approximate military-strategic balance through an even lower level, if at all possible.
- The defense readiness of our states, respectively the combat readiness of our armed forces, must always be like that the adversary will not dare to test our strength.
- The policy of our communist and workers parties is unchanged and aims at strengthening the struggle for peace as well as at achieving the elimination of all nuclear weapons.
- However, given current conditions we have to prepare both for a nuclear missile war as well as for a war with conventional means.
- France and Great Britain are currently not willing to become involved in a reduction of nuclear weapons. But if these two states are resisting the reduction of their nuclear weapons, the Soviet Union cannot accept a zero option in Europe since otherwise NATO would gain unilateral advantages.
- This is about the correct understanding that the issue is about the reduction of nuclear arms material in general and not just about the reduction of missiles. This is a big difference.
- Overall, it has to be stated with regard to NATO armies that a broad modernization and introduction of new fighting technology and armament is underway there. This is why by no means we may accept unilateral reductions.
- Experiences are showing that so far NATO has not honored our goodwill. For us, this leads to the conclusion to permanently conduct a joint and coordinated policy within the Warsaw Treaty.
- Also, the cooperation of our fraternally allied armies has to be deepened further. Periodical meetings and exchanges of experiences between the Ministers for Defense as well as the Chiefs of the General Staffs should therefore become a permanent pattern of our joint efforts.

At the end of his remarks, the Minister for Defense of the USSR, Marshal of the Soviet Union Sokolov, expressed the hope that the Political Consultative Committee of the member states of the Warsaw Treaty in Berlin will accept the joint defense doctrine and thus a good foundation for further joint work will be established.

The task is there for the leading military cadres of the allied states to conduct broad propagandistic work after the adoption of the military doctrine by the Political Consultative Committee.

In conclusion, Comrade Minister Sokolov thanked the Chiefs of the General (Main) Staffs for their appearance at the consultations in Moscow and asked them to convey the most cordial greetings to the Ministers of Defense of the member states of the Warsaw Treaty.

Main content
of the statement by the First Deputy of the Minister for Defense of the USSR and
Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces,
Comrade Marshal of the Soviet Union Akhromeyev,
on 18 May 1987

[Signed EH]

At the beginning of the consultation, Marshal of the Soviet Union Akhromeyev thanked the Chiefs of the General (Main) Staffs of the armies of the Warsaw Treaty that they followed on short notice the invitation to exchange opinions on the draft “Military Doctrine of the Warsaw Treaty” to be discussed at the [next] meeting of the Political Consultative Committee.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Akhromeyev emphasized at the beginning that current political tasks are requiring the draft of a foundational document pertaining to the military doctrine of the Warsaw Treaty in order to guarantee a uniform performance.

Military doctrines are a system of principles and opinions regarding the nature and character of a war, the preparation of a country for war, as well as the methods of fighting a war for the protection of the socialist achievements.

Especially in the present time, where imperialism is using all propagandistic means against our policy of peace and our struggle for guaranteeing the security, it is important to jointly explain to the world our political objectives as well as the principles and foundations of the military doctrine of the Warsaw Treaty.

Obviously and notwithstanding, each member state has its own military doctrine with consideration of its own conditions, even when it is part of an alliance like the Warsaw Treaty.

The likely adversary, the NATO, did already adopt 20 years ago its military doctrine officially at the highest level, namely the doctrine of the flexible response, and it is accordingly structuring its operations.

Extensively Marshal of the Soviet Union Akhromeyev explained the individual paragraphs of the draft of the military doctrine of the member states of the Warsaw Treaty. He argued in detail that they are in accordance with the foreign policy objectives, the strengthening of world peace and security, and that they are not standing in contrast to international agreements arranged by individual states.

Although the military doctrine has two strands, namely the political and military-technical, the draft is especially emphasizing the political element of the doctrine.

Regardless of the fact that imperialism is posing a serious threat and danger for mankind with its policies of arms race and confrontation: we are eager to preserve the military balance.

In this context, the security of the entire socialist community and of each individual state is supposed to be guaranteed. This means, there is no separate security for individual states, instead for each state there does exist the same security. We do not want to have more, but also not less security.

As it was already stated at the Budapest Meeting of the Political Consultative Committee⁴, the military doctrine is based on the defense character of the doctrine. It was underlined, however, that in case of a potential aggression all means available to the alliance will be applied to repel the aggression and strike the aggressor with a devastating blow.

Under the current conditions it is thus important to further increase the combat readiness and the preparation of the armed forces in order to be ready at any time to repel with all determination an aggression, even in case of potential penetrations into the own territory.

Marshal of the Soviet Union Akhromeyev directed the attention especially to the following particularities of the draft of the doctrine:

1. The catastrophic consequences of a nuclear war and the practical work do require to adopt the issue of preventing any kind of war into the military doctrine of the USSR. Based on the fact that in a nuclear war mankind is threatened by annihilation, the prevention of war was also included in the draft document for the military doctrine of the Warsaw Treaty.
2. The emphasis of the defense character of the doctrine is important, since the propaganda of the adversary does constantly emphasize the alleged military superiority of the Warsaw Treaty and its aggressive strategy. However, a military superiority of NATO over the Warsaw Treaty will also not be allowed.
3. It is emphasized that we advocate for a military balance and do not strive for armed forces and armaments exceeding the necessary requirements. This position has been repeatedly emphasized by the leading representatives [of the USSR].
4. In the draft document the concrete proposals from the member states of the Warsaw Treaty have been summarized, which are expressing the defense character of their military doctrine.

The constructive character of the document also finds its expression in the submission of a proposal to NATO for a meeting with experts from both sides to compare the military doctrines.

In the current document, we have refrained from the explication of the military-technical side of the military doctrine since these issues cannot be discussed openly. There are certain military secrets that are reflected in the concrete plans.

In the first draft document on the military doctrine there also was an assessment of the military doctrine of NATO.

⁴ Translator's note: Held on 10 and 11 June 1986.

However, after a decision by the Soviet party leadership this subject was deleted from our military doctrine in order not to provide NATO with any starting points for polemics.

This was also the reason why there had been a delay in submission of the military doctrine to General respectively First Secretaries of the fraternal parties.

In discussion, all Chiefs of the General (Main) Staffs agreed with the general intentions of the draft document.

The most important remarks from the Romanian side are listed in the appendix.

Appendix

Remarks
by the Romanian Side on the Draft Document

- Calling the document Military Doctrines (plural)
- To enter in the document a solemn commitment to ban war from the history of mankind
- To make the commitment not to use nuclear weapons until the complete liquidation of these weapons
- Expressing clearly that military doctrines are not impacting the independence and sovereignty of states and do not allow an interference in internal affairs
- To state in the military doctrines that each country is determining for itself what political development it is undertaking, and that no foreign territory may be occupied if there had not been aggressive actions in the beginning
- Not just stating the commitment to halt nuclear weapons tests but also to end the production of nuclear weapons
- To make a commitment to liquidate all military bases abroad and withdraw all forces to its own territory
- Establishing a zone in the border areas with a width of 150 kilometers, where there are no tanks and artillery deployed but where just border units of the respective country are allowed to operate
- To emphasize in the document that all military alliances are a danger for peace
- To make the commitment not to allow an increase in military spending and strive for its constantly lowering level

Comrade Marshal of the Soviet Union Akhromeyev noted about these proposals respectively remarks that today's meeting does not have the goal to finalize the draft of the military doctrine. These questions must be discussed by the expert groups which, as it is known, are also staffed with highly educated military people.

To the question by Comrade Marshal of the Soviet Union Sokolov whether these remarks are reflective of the position of the Romanian party and state leadership, it was replied this was just the opinion of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Socialist Republic of Romania.

The Military Strategy of NATO

[Signed EH]

In December of 1967 NATO officially adopted the strategy (doctrine) of “flexible response”. It does consider as main adversaries of the [Western] bloc the Soviet Union and the other countries of the Warsaw Treaty, and as the primary area of military operations the European Theater of War in case of unleashing a war against those [member states of the Warsaw Treaty].

According to this strategy, wars between the countries of the North-Atlantic Alliance and the states of the socialist community are divided in two categories:

- the limited war and
- the general nuclear war.

The limited war is a war where both sides are pursuing limited political and military-strategic objectives and intentionally limit the application of military means of armed struggle, as well as the areas of military operations.

Political objectives of a limited war can be:

- change of the system of society in one or several socialist countries
- preservation of the existing regime or
- defeating progressive forces in individual capitalist countries and
- other objectives.

The main content of a limited war will be offensive and defensive operations by groups of NATO armed forces with the objective

- to liquidate the forces of the adversary and
- to occupy its territory.

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[Chart]

Military Doctrine of the GDR

The military doctrine of the GDR is consisting of the obligatory principles and scientifically founded positions of the party and state leadership regarding

- the nature and character of a war imposed by imperialism
- the organization and perfection of national defense to guarantee the reliable protection of the socialist achievements in the context of the Warsaw Treaty according to the danger of aggression emanating from NATO, as well as
- the ways to prevent a war, especially a nuclear war, and the defending of peace through disarmament and confidence-building measures, as well to establish a comprehensive system of peace and equal security for all states.

The military doctrine of the GDR is identical in general terms with the military doctrine of the USSR and the other states of the Warsaw Treaty.

At the same time, the national defense of the GDR has special characteristics according to our concrete political, military, economic, and military-geographical conditions, like for instance

- fulfillment of special tasks within the framework of the Joint Forces (no strategic forces)
- particularities in the territorial area (militias of the working class, direct military securing of the state border with the FRG and Berlin-West)
- no developed armament industry

Elements of the Military Doctrine

Political Aspects

The defense character of our military doctrine finds its expression among else in

- the concentration of all efforts of the party, the state, and the entire society on the prevention of a war (principle of never again must from German soil, from the territory of the GDR emanate a war)

- the recognition of the existing borders in Europe (no territorial demands whatsoever and the renunciation of the threat respectively use of force)
- the exhaustion of all options of the GDR to harness the potential aggressor and to maintain an approximate military-strategic balance between NATO and the Warsaw Treaty through
 - securing a politically stable and economically dynamic development of the GDR
 - guaranteeing the necessary level of national defense for the reliable collective military protection of the GDR
 - strict fulfillment of the alliance obligations
 - strengthening of the fighting community with the Soviet Union and the other fraternal armies
- the support for all initiatives
 - to limit the military potentials on both sides to a level actually needed for defense and to limit the danger of surprise attacks
 - by the USSR to renounce the first use of nuclear weapons
- the active contribution towards disarmament, among else by political initiatives to establish
 - a zone free of chemical weapons in Europe as well as
 - a nuclear-free corridor in Central Europe

A war imposed by imperialism would be a just war of defense. It would be fought with the inclusion of the entire potential of the GDR with the aim to deliver a devastating response to the aggressor (class assignment for the armed organs: guaranteeing the sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, and the security of the GDR)

Military-Technical Aspects

The military-technical aspects are consisting of - contingent on the development of technological means of the armed struggle and periodically more or less changing guidelines (military strategies) -

- the military-strategic character and content of a potential war

Nuclear war or a war of global range fought with conventional arms that could extend to all continents and world oceans as well as to air space and space itself and would last very long.

- the forms and methods of how war is fought

Defense war of the Warsaw Treaty (active and determined combat operations to repel an aggression and completely destroy the aggressor, among else by devastating counterstrikes)

- the preparation of the armed forces

Fighting with active and uninterrupted intelligence in order to explore timely the aggression preparations as well as the aggressive intentions of the adversary and derive from them the required conclusions.

Guaranteeing of a high level of combat readiness (political-moral preparation, training, structure, deployment) in order to thwart any surprise by the adversary.

- the preparation of the economy and the territory

The economic securing of preparation for the war and the needs of the war

The transition of the economy to a state of defense (economic mobilization) and the guarantee of its steadfastness

The operative build-up of the territory

- the organization of the territorial and civil defense

- the preparation of the population

- the development of military science and the art of war

Remarks on the Military Doctrine of the GDR

[Signed EH]

Characteristic aspects of a potential war between the states of NATO and the Warsaw Treaty would be

- the simultaneous or subsequent involvement of most states in the world
- a confrontation fought with unprecedented ferocity by coalition armed forces numbered in the millions
- the extremely determined political and military objectives on both sides
- the application of the entire military, economic, and intellectual potential of the states and coalitions
- the destruction of almost all economic centers and objects in a short period of time as well as
- the massive losses among the population and in the armed forces of both sides.

The use of nuclear weapons would place the existence of all of mankind on the line.

Also a war fought with non-nuclear means would have devastating consequences especially in Europe. (Among else, in Europe there are about 200 nuclear power plant reactors and a branched out network of chemical factories whose destruction would make a life on the continent impossible).

Based on the defense character of our military doctrine and the increasing capabilities of the NATO armed forces, the Joint Forces [of the Warsaw Treaty] are facing the task to counter in case of a NATO aggression with an active strategic defense and subsequently defeat the adversary through a determined counter offensive.

This way the strategic function of the territory of the GDR would experience an overall expansion where it is not just

- deployment, allocation, and transition space as well as
- the base for extensive supply and additional movements, but especially also
- the area of operation of the Joint Forces and
- the front area.

In case of a surprise aggression, the adversary could succeed with temporary penetrations of our territory and turn the entire territory of the GDR for an extended period of time directly into a battle zone.

The obligations taken over by the GDR in the framework of the Warsaw Treaty are unchanged and consist in

- the preparation of our armed forces for participation in the repelling of a NATO aggression and the destruction of the aggressor within the the framework of the Joint Forces as well as in
- the systematic operative preparation of the [GDR] territory with regard to the expected operations by the Joint Forces and their support in preparing and implementing their operations.

At the same time, the issue of strategic defense warrants the following additional considerations:

- First, the defense operation should be planned “as far advanced as possible” [towards the intra-German border]. Through persistent and steadfast defensive operations, conditions have to be created to move directly towards a counter-offensive after the launch of an aggression by NATO.⁵ This way double combat operations (attack of the adversary and counter-offensive of the Joint Forces) could be reduced to a minimum.
- Second, in light of the temporary military advantage of the aggressor, temporarily deeper penetrations by NATO armed forces would have to be considered as well as more major destruction, losses, and outages than previously assumed.
- Third, not just the measures to support the Joint Forces, but also the conditions for their implementation through the organization of defense on the territory of the GDR would become significantly more complicated.

⁵ Translator’s note: Next to these two sentences Erich Honecker drew a big question mark in the margins of the document.