

May 9, 1940

**Memorandum to the Politburo of the Central
Committee of the CPSU on Troop Strength Orders
for the Red Army, 9 May 1940**

Citation:

"Memorandum to the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU on Troop Strength Orders for the Red Army, 9 May 1940", May 9, 1940, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Library of Congress
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/110996>

Summary:

Memorandum to the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU on Troop strength orders for the Red Army, May 9, 1940. Proposals for strengthening of Soviet armed forces.

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

TOP SECRET
EXTREMELY URGENT
Copy No. 3
PEOPLE'S COMMISSAR OF DEFENSE OF THE USSR
May 9, 1940
TO THE POLITBURO OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE ALL-RUSSIAN COMMUNIST PARTY (BOLSHEVIK) [TSK VKP(b)]
Comrade STALIN J. V.
TO THE COUNCIL OF PEOPLE'S COMMISSARS OF THE USSR

Comrade MOLOTOV V. M. (Stamp of Soviet Army Central National Archives)
The operational organization and strength of the Red Army for all service arms were reviewed and approved by the Defense Committee on December 1, 1939 (Order No. 433 of the Commissar of Defense). However the military operations underway against the White Finns made it impossible to implement the government's decisions. The war with the White Finns resulted in the organization of new artillery, air, and other service arms and an increase in the strength of the Red Army. After the end of the war, we reviewed and on April 4, 1940, approved the organization and strength of the infantry and efforts to reinforce the troops assigned to the Transcaucasus, North Caucasus, Odessa, and Kiev Military districts, but did not review the organization and strength of other service arms. At present, a commission of the Central Military Council is in the process of submitting a number of valuable proposals for the organization of certain service arms based on the experience of the Finnish War. I, however, without waiting for the commission to complete its work, consider it necessary to review and approve the current organization of the Red Army, while making the necessary changes and additions to the organization of each service arm which are clearly needed right now, and adjust the numerical strength of the Red Army so as to eliminate the unneeded personnel who have been called up from the reserves. Subsequently, after the commission has completed its work, we can make the appropriate changes in the organizational structures of the individual service arms as needed within the authorized manpower limits. For this purpose I would like to submit the following proposals for your consideration:

INFANTRY
The organization and strength of the infantry should be left as approved on April 4, 1940, with the following recent additions:

1. The strength of the infantry divisions in the First and Second Red Banner of Labor Armies should be increased by 550 men each, which would give us 15 12,550-man infantry divisions.
2. We should organize a Karelian-Finnish division with a strength of 9,000 men over and above the 160 authorized divisions but within the manpower limits established for the infantry of the Leningrad Military District. To accomplish this we should convert one 12,000-man division in the Leningrad Military District into a 6,000-man division and one 12,000-man division into a 9,000-man division. Thus, the total number of infantry divisions in the Red Army would be equal to 161, with the following breakdown by numerical strength:

a) 14,000-man infantry divisions	3	b)
12,550-man infantry divisions	15	c) 12,000-man infantry divisions
80	d) 12,000-man mechanized infantry divisions	3
12,000-man mechanized divisions	4	e)
divisions (the Sakhalin and Karelian-Finnish	3	f) 9,000-man infantry
Leningrad Military District)	3	g) 9,000-man mountain
infantry divisions	10	h) 6,000-man infantry divisions
	Total	161

The total numerical strength of the infantry, including corps headquarters, corps units, and supernumerary infantry units, would be equal to:

52 infantry corps headquarters with corps units but no corps artillery at peacetime strength	57,400 men	3 14,000-man infantry divisions
42,000 men	15 12,550-man infantry divisions	
188,250 men	80 12,000-man infantry divisions	960,000 men
3 12,000-man mechanized infantry divisions		
36,000 men	4 12,000-man mechanized divisions	48,000 men
3 9,000-man infantry divisions	27,000 men	10 mountain
infantry divisions	90,000 men	43 6,000-man infantry divisions
258,000 men	3 6,098-man separate infantry brigades in the Far East	
	18,294 men	6 1,520-man airborne brigades
9,420 men	3 600-man motorcycle battalions	1,800
men	Total	1,736,164 men

This infantry strength does not include the separate infantry brigade dispatched to Hankow, because this brigade will be transferred to the navy.

CORPS AND HIGH COMMAND RESERVE ARTILLERY
Corps artillery has the same strength as authorized on December 1, 1939. Corps artillery has an authorized peacetime strength of 62 artillery regiments, but currently there are 61, because one regiment has been transferred to the High Command Reserve artillery. My proposal calls for leaving corps artillery at 61

regiments and in wartime expanding them into 75 artillery regiments as soon as ordnance becomes available, which would give us a wartime strength of 29 corps consisting of two artillery regiments each and 35 corps consisting of one artillery regiment each. At present only some of the artillery regiments are at peacetime strength. My proposal calls for putting all the corps units at peacetime strength, with the exception of four artillery regiments which will be transferred to the Transcaucasus Military District. During the war with the White Finns, the High Command Reserve artillery was augmented with 6 conventional artillery regiments, 5 152-mm howitzer regiments, 3 203-mm howitzer regiments, two separate BR-5 280-mm howitzer battalions, and two separate BR-2 conventional artillery battalions. At present the High Command Reserve artillery consists of the following units:

Conventional artillery regiments.....	7	Howitzer regiments.....	17
Heavy conventional artillery regiments.....	1	Heavy howitzer regiments	20
(handwritten:) Separate 152, 280, and 205-mm howitzer battalions...	10	Separate BR-2 batteries.....	2

My proposal calls for keeping all of the current artillery regiments and bringing them to peacetime strength, with the exception of three 152-mm howitzer and two 203-mm howitzer regiments and a heavy battalion to be transferred to the Transcaucasus Military District. Due to manpower problems, the artillery of the Transcaucasus Military District and the corps artillery of this district must be left at wartime strength for the time being, which will require additional manpower of 10,500 men. The total peacetime strength of the corps artillery and High Command Reserve artillery would be 153,000 men. Keeping the Transcaucasus Military District artillery at wartime strength and the associated addition of 10,500 men would be accomplished by drawing from the reserve manpower pool.

CAVALRY With respect to the cavalry, the partial reductions in force planned in December 1939 were never implemented because of the war with the White Finns. Instead of the planned conversion into a cavalry brigade, the 25th Cavalry Division was reorganized into a wartime mechanized cavalry division. The 72nd Cavalry Division of the Kiev Special Military District, which was to be reorganized into a mountain cavalry division, was left unchanged. During this time the 24th Cavalry Division was brought up to wartime strength and transferred to the Transcaucasus Military District. Based on the earlier decision, my proposal calls for converting the 25th Cavalry Division of the Leningrad Military District into a separate cavalry brigade while leaving the other units with the same organization at peacetime strength as follows:

Cavalry corps headquarters with divisions	5	total of	2,030 men	6,560-man cavalry
divisions in the Far East and Transbaikal Military Districts	13	total of	85,280 men	6,821-man cavalry
27,284 men	Mountain cavalry divisions	5	total of	
14,750 men	3,543-man cavalry divisions	2	total of	
7,086 men	Reserve cavalry regiments	6	total of	
4,320 men	Separate cavalry brigades	2	total of	6,448
men	Maintenance detachments		total of	170 men
	Total		147,428 men	

In this case my proposal calls for returning the two cavalry regiments and artillery battalion of the cavalry division belonging to the Transbaikal Military District and currently stationed in the Mongolian People's Republic to their divisions, which had already been provided for by Order No. 433 of the Commissar of Defense.

ARMOR (TANKS) During the war with the White Finns, our armor strength grew, with three separate tank regiments expanded into three separate tank brigades, along with a new BT (high-speed) tank brigade and two T-26 tank brigades. In addition, a tank regiment is now being converted into a tank brigade, and a new T-26 brigade is being organized in the Transcaucasus Military District. At present the tank brigades which fought in the war against the White Finns are still at wartime strength, and our armor forces still include a separate machine gun infantry brigade which was previously part of an armor corps and fought in the war with Finland. My proposal calls for reducing the tank brigades which are now at wartime strength to peacetime strength, with the exception of the three tank brigades which are currently stationed in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and the two tank brigades in the Transcaucasus Military District, leaving the latter at wartime strength. The armor training battalion in the Transbaikal Military District

which trained armor cadre from the Mongolian People's Republic and the 15th Machine Gun Infantry Brigade should be disbanded. The 34th BT (High-Speed) Tank Brigade, which is underequipped, should be reorganized and assigned to a mechanized division. In this case our tank and armor forces would be as follows:

T-35-KV tank brigades	1	T-28 tank brigades	3
BT High-speed tank brigades	16	T-26 tank brigades	
18/38 Mechanized armor brigades	3	Separate tank regiments	6
The tank training regiment of the Military Mechanization and Motorization Academy	1	The mechanized armor training battalion	1

The total strength of tank and armored forces would be equal to 96,785 men.

AIR FORCE
The strength of the air force was authorized at 230,000 men by Order No. 433 of the Commissar of Defense in 1939. Order No. 97 of February 26 of this year added 31,210 men to this total for the purpose of organizing new air regiments, while Order No. 139 of March 11 of this year authorized an additional 30,711 men for training pilots and maintenance personnel. Thus the total authorized strength of the air force is 291,210 men. At present the actual strength of the air force is 293,271 men, including 103,646 men in military schools. My proposal calls for leaving the air force at the strength authorized by the Government (291,210 men).

THE FORCES ASSIGNED TO FORTIFIED AREAS
The number of troops assigned to fortified areas was set at 48,000 men by Order No. 433 of last year. Keeping the forces assigned to the Dniester fortified areas at wartime strength has meant that fortified area troops continue to be over strength and currently number 105,500 men. In light of the impossibility of reducing the forces in the Dniester fortified areas to peacetime manpower levels and the need to organize units for the new fortified areas in the Transcaucasus and Kiev Military Districts, we must, for the time being, authorize a strength of 75,000 men for the forces assigned to the fortified areas.

CHEMICAL FLAMETHROWER UNITS
At present our chemical flamethrower units include 3 flamethrower tank brigades, two separate flamethrower battalions, and 1 experimental flamethrower battalion. My proposal calls for disbanding the separate flamethrower battalions and giving the flamethrower tank brigades a total authorized strength of 6,700 men.

MORTAR UNITS
Until now mortar units have been classified as chemical units. During the Finnish War these units were extensively used as High Command Reserve mortar units. My proposal calls for beefing up the mortar units and organizing two new separate High Command Reserve mortar battalions this year. Subsequently, as ordnance becomes available, the number of mortar units will become even larger. This year the Red Army should have a total of 8 separate High Command Reserve mortar battalions with a total strength of 2,900 men.

AIR DEFENSE FORCE
The total authorized strength of the air defense forces in December of last year was set at 75,000 men. The war with Finland and the need to reinforce the Transcaucasus, Odessa, and Kiev Military Districts made it necessary to strengthen the air defense forces. The following units were organized for this purpose: an air defense artillery regiment in Baku, five air defense artillery battalions in Moscow, and twenty medium-caliber air defense artillery battalions and seven small-caliber air defense artillery battalions to reinforce the Transcaucasus, Odessa, and Kiev Military Districts. The air defense forces now include:

Anti-aircraft artillery regiments	23	High Command Reserve anti-aircraft artillery regiments	1
Separate air defense battalions	51	Air defense regiments	12
Separate air defense battalions	45	Anti-aircraft machine gun regiments	4
Separate anti-aircraft machine gun battalions	2	Obstruction Balloon regiments	3
Separate obstruction balloon battalions	5	Air observation, warning, and communications regiments	6
Separate air observation, warning, and communications battalions	9	Searchlight regiments	4
Separate searchlight battalions	11	Moscow Air Defense regiments	3
Moscow Air Defense battalions	4	Air defense signal battalions	4

Plans call for bringing all units to peacetime strength, with the exception of the Transcaucasus and Odessa Military Districts, which will be left at wartime strength. In this case the total numerical strength of the

air defense forces would amount to 93,000 men.

SIGNAL CORPThe total authorized strength of the signal corps was set at 21,000 men last December. The war with the White Finns resulted in major increases in signal corps strength. We will have to maintain a large signal establishment due to the need for communications and training in the Transcaucasus and Odessa Military Districts. My proposal calls for the following signal corps establishment:

	Signal regiments	13	
Signal battalions	28	Line signal battalions	3
Cable and pole climber companies	7	Telegraph construction companies	14
Telegraph operation companies	4	Military postal transports	5
Military postal facilities	2	Radio battalions	4
Special (OSNAZ) radio battalions	14		

All of the above signal units will be manned at Peacetime levels, with the exception of units in the Transcaucasus, Odessa, and part of the Kiev Military Districts, where establishments will be maintained at wartime levels. The total numerical strength of the signal corps, including district signal establishments, will amount to 42,250 men.

ENGINEERThe authorized strength of the engineers was set at 25,000 men. The war with the White Finns revealed the inadequate size of our engineer corps and the obsolescence of our engineering technology. Such engineering technologies as camouflage and demolitions proved to be deficient. Currently engineer units have a cumulative strength of 34,600 men. My proposal calls for a strength of 20,400 men and a comprehensive review of the entire organizational structure of the engineer corps on the basis of the experience of the war with Finland.

RAILROAD TROOPThe authorized strength of the railroad troops was set at 13,912 men. During the war with Finland their manpower level rose to 45,398 men. In light of the need to build and improve the railroads, I consider it necessary to leave the strength of the railroad troops at 20,000 men.

MOTOR TRANSPORT UNITSThe government authorized 12 motor transport regiments and 17 motor transport battalions. In order to supply active forces, the motor transport units were beefed up and reached a cumulative strength of 121,437 men. My proposal calls for the following motor transport units:

Automobile regiments	12	Automobile battalions	45	Tractor battalions	1	Separate automobile companies	5	Automobile training regiments	1
Automobile training battalions	4								

The increase in the number of battalions was due to the need to provide more vehicles available for the Transcaucasus and Odessa Military Districts and retain vehicles to meet the needs of the northern units of the Leningrad Military District. The total numerical strength of MT units in the proposed organization will amount to 44,000 men.

ROADBUILDING UNITThe authorized peacetime strength of these units was 5,710 men. They primarily included units supporting forces in the Mongolian People's Republic. Currently the roadbuilding units have a strength of 69,216 men. Because of training and road maintenance requirements, my proposal calls for retaining the following Units for the Transcaucasus, Odessa, and Leningrad Military districts.

Reduced-strength road maintenance regiments	6	Military roadbuilding battalions	7
Mechanized military roadbuilding battalions	4	Military bridging battalions	2

The total strength of the roadbuilding units would be 19,000 men.

MILITARY SCHOOLThe total authorized strength of military schools and military academies for 1940 was set at 170,300 men. Recruitment of an additional 30,000 men over and above this figure was authorized due to a shortage of command personnel. The major shortage of command personnel which occurred after the expansion of Units for the front compelled us to strengthen our system of military schools. For this purpose we organized 27 new infantry schools, bringing the cumulative strength of the military schools to 288,220 men. We had to organize an additional four mortar schools to meet the Red Army's growing needs for certain specialized command personnel. Because of this, we must temporarily, until sufficient numbers of command personnel are trained, authorize a strength of 290,000 men for the military schools, with 20,000 making up for the shortage of command personnel.

RESERVE UNITMy proposal calls for the following numbers of reserve units:

Reserve infantry brigade headquarters	5	Reserve infantry regiments	27	Reserve artillery regiments	3	Reserve tank regiments	1	Reserve anti-aircraft artillery regiments	2
---------------------------------------	---	----------------------------	----	-----------------------------	---	------------------------	---	---	---

The combined numerical strength of these reserve units would be 26,000 men.

ARMORED TRAINA cumulative peacetime strength of 3,271 men was authorized for armored

trains. My proposal calls for leaving this figure unchanged at 3,271 men.
 TOPOGRAPHICAL UNITS My proposal calls for leaving the strength of these units unchanged at 3,530 men.
 LOCAL INFANTRY UNITS My proposals calls for leaving the authorized strength of these units unchanged at 42,810 men.
 CENTRAL, DISTRICT, AND LOGISTICAL SERVICES My proposal calls for maintaining the following services at their current strengths:

6,392 men	Veterinary services	40,584 men	Medical units	1,254 men	Food supply
supply		4,625 men	Uniform and equipment supply		3,469 men
2,038 men	Political education				
Artillery depots, firing ranges, and workshops		14,147 men	Motor transport depots and workshops		
261 men	Fuel depots	6,965 men	Map depots		
Military transportation agencies, food service units			facilities, and general labor		1,463 men
5,000 men			Total		86,193

men
 THE TOTAL STRENGTH OF THE RED ARMY The total numerical strength of the Red Army after the aforementioned proposals are implemented would be equal to 3,212,666 men. Considering that 30,000 trainees will be enrolled at military schools to offset the shortage of command personnel without any rise in total strength, I hereby request an authorized strength of: 3,182,666 men

Reserve	17,334 men	Total
3,200,000 men		

As of May 1 the total number of men in the Red Army, not counting demobilized reservists, was equal to 3,886,329 men. Thus, at present the Red Army has the following number of men in excess of the proposed authorized strength 686,329 men.

In order to bring the Army to its authorized manpower levels, I hereby request authorization to put the following categories of personnel on reserve status in the month of May:

- a) the personnel of units and services to be reduced to peacetime strength and the units organized during the war in the Leningrad, Kiev Special, Baku Special, Kaliningrad Special, Odessa, Kharkov, Moscow, Orel, Volga, Ural, Siberian, and North Caucasus Military Districts, with the exception of units to be transferred to the Tran-scaucasus Military District: 173,461 men
- b) all rank-and-file personnel called up from the reserves and awaiting discharge from military hospitals and convalescent battalions: 70,000 men
- c) the temporary personnel of reserve units called up from the reserves: 140,000 men
- d) the excess assigned personnel of infantry divisions to be reduced to peacetime strength: 302,865 men

Total	686,329 men
-------	-------------

Subsequently we plan to discharge unneeded temporary personnel and replace them with Category 11 conscripts born in the years 1912-1919 after we have determined the age distribution by units, about which I will issue a supplemental report. I ask you to confirm the proposed actions and numerical strength of the Red Army.

People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR
 Marshal of the Soviet Union
 K. Voroshilov