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GDR Announcement of Force Cuts

On the evening of 23 January, Honecker announced the following unilateral cuts:

- (a) a reduction of the armed forces by 10,000 men (out of a total of 120,000);
- (b) the disbandment of six tank regiments and the reduction of 600 tanks, which would be converted to civilian use or scrapped (this is out of a current total of 3,000 tanks);
- (c) the disbandment of an air force squadron and the withdrawal from service of 50 combat aircraft (out of a total of 350).

At the same time a reduction of 10 per cent would take place in expenditure on national defence.

2. Honecker said that these measures would be completed by the end of 1990. The structure of the armed forces would be changed so as to have "an even stricter defensive character". Honecker also gave details of the withdrawals of Soviet tank divisions from the GDR in 1989 and 1990 in the context of Gorbachev's announcement at the UN.

Comment

3. This is a significant cut, no doubt co-ordinated with Moscow. But, as with the cuts announced by Gorbachev at the UN on 7 December, it will still leave the Warsaw Pact with a

major overall numerical advantage. The effect will in any case depend in part on the nature of the tanks and aircraft that are chosen for removal. The main purpose is no doubt to intensify pressure on the FRG over SNF modernisation in the wake of the announcement on 19 January by Shevardnadze of the withdrawal of some tactical nuclear systems from Eastern Europe. The initiative will also help the GDR in its relations with the Soviet Union by showing support for Gorbachev's recent approach to arms control, an area where Honecker may have had some reservations. There will also be welcome economic benefits for the GDR in terms of defence savings.

4. Also on 23 January a senior Polish General, Tadeusz Szacilo, said that the Polish armed forces were considering cutting back their numbers from the current level of 400,000 (a figure higher than our estimates and probably including paramilitary troops) by reducing conscription and lowering the two-year period of service. He did not give any further details. It is possible that we may soon see a similar announcement by the Czechoslovak or even the Hungarian leadership, although there is so far no evidence for this.



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