



Jarosław Palka, *Polskie Wojska Operacyjne w układzie Warszawskim* (Polish Operational Formations at Warsaw Treaty). Warsaw: Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), 2022.

Friedrich K. Jeschonnek

With the establishment of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) in 1955, the Polish People's Republic committed itself in case of war to provide the new eastern alliance with the second largest number of armed forces behind the Soviet Union. Posture and plans were “top secret.” In case of mobilization, they would comprise a front with about 300,000 soldiers, as well as territorial defence, air defence and naval

units as part of the mutual Joint Baltic Fleet. The front formation was referred to in the nomenclature of the WTO as the 3rd Front or “Coastal Front.” In the event of war, they were to be subordinated to Soviet Western Theatre command and control. The main role and mission of the Polish Forces were not only to protect Polish territory but also to significantly and effectively contribute to “counteroffensives against NATO aggressions.” In a pre-planned offensive against NATO, Polish forces were to take Jutland and the Danish islands in cooperation with other WWTO forces on one hand and on the other, take the area of Lower Saxony, the Netherlands and parts of northern Belgium after attacking along the northern German coast.

Using the almost completely preserved files of the Polish General Staff, contributions from contemporary witnesses, and discussions with other historians, the author describes and analyses the developments of the contingency planning of the Polish armed forces, in particular, those of the Coastal Front during the Cold War. For this purpose, the monograph is structured in nine major parts, including the initial planning before the establishment of the WTO, structures, performance, statutes and security system of the WTO, the military doctrine of the Polish People's Army (PPA), the strategic and operational plans of the PPA as a core part including national defence, war games, large-scale exercises and command post exercises based on wartime plans, nuclear operational planning and contingencies at the end of the WTO.

In light of Polish security policy and armed forces, Palka describes the development and emergence of the first operational offensive plans after 1960 in much detail. Explained is the extensive planning that occurred after the allocation of directives and missions by the Soviet General Staff and continued with their further development until 1989. Not only the planning results but also coordination work with the Soviet General Staff as the High Command in the WTO are included in combination with underlying standards, command arrangements, statutes and nuclear options. Reference is made to compartmented work, secrecy and other planning procedures. Findings among archival sources show some generals and a few officers thinking critically about the operational requirements and normatives directed by the Soviet Union as the leading power in the WTO.

Several times, the plans were assessed by Polish authorities as partly unrealistic or unfeasible with reference to force comparisons with the expected opponents. The

operational plans also served as the basis for force planning, capability development and armament of the PPA. However, forces modernisation could not always keep up with the need for adequate equipment despite considerable armament efforts. This was several times communicated to the Soviet partners, but they did not change their directives or assist otherwise. This changed under Gorbachev's rule when some operational norms and requirements were lowered or reduced. While the mass of the First WTO-Strategic Echelon, mainly parts of the 1st Soviet Front in the GDR and the 2nd Czechoslovak Front, changed to defensive planning after 1985, it remained for the Coastal Front and components of the Polish Naval forces along with other Soviet fronts to again contribute to a counterattack on NATO as part of the Second Strategic Echelon. In this respect, the expectations of the Polish military leadership to participate according to their capabilities were never met by the Soviet leadership.

The considerable high value of Dr. Jaroslaw Palka's study is that it is the first comprehensive overview of the operational-strategic planning of the PPA within the framework of Polish security policy and thus the first to disclose a large part of the WTO's operational planning in its whole Western Direction or Western Theatre. The author knows how to map the complexity and problems of national and multinational operational planning processes in the WTO as well as to include all concerned training, exercises and structural changes. The unique selling point of the work is that it covers the entire period of the Cold War in its security policy and strategic dynamics in relation to the PPA.

While the author perfectly discusses the complexity of national and multinational planning processes in the WTO, at the same time he includes the accompanying training, exercises and structural changes. All Polish operational plans presented are noteworthy in their dimensions (room, space and postures). The ways in which all Polish plans were really reflected in the contemporary operational plans of the Soviet General Staff for the Western theatre of war can only be finally assessed when the archives of the Russian Federation disclose their own theatre-relevant documents, which is hardly to be expected in the distant future. Nevertheless, the study provides a special gain in knowledge regarding multinational cooperation in the WTO, such as unknown internals between the so-called "allied or friendly" states. While the cooperation between the Polish and Soviet General Staff is discussed in great detail, less

is said about the operational-planning relations between the East German and Polish Armies, although the Polish coastal front was always to march through East German territory and attack from there. It would be desirable if the aspect of operational cooperation from a Polish perspective were to be deepened in a follow-up edition.

A comparable analysis in depth and details of the interactions at secret planning processes or of their results does not (yet) exist for NATO (and WTO) states for the entire period of the Cold War. Siegfried Lautsch (2012), with his highly acclaimed work *Kriegsschauplatz Deutschland: Erfahrungen und Erkenntnisse eines NVA-Offiziers* [Battlefield Germany: Experiences and Insights of an NVA Officer], exclusively analyses the operational planning of East German Military District V during the 1980s. Petr Lunak's 2007 work on CSSR war planning, *Planning the Unthinkable: Czechoslovak War Plans, 1950-1990*, covers the entire period of the Cold War, but mainly as a source edition less detailed or comprehensive without illustrating maps. Hoffenaar and Schoemaker's 1994 study *Met de blik naar het Oosten: De koninklijke landmacht, 1945-1990* [With a View to the East: The Royal Netherlands Army, 1945-1990] focuses only on Dutch land forces and mainly the Netherlands Corps for the entire period. Ingo Trauschweizer's work, *The Cold War US Army* (2008), is more of a security policy record rather than a presentation of military operational history. Studies on specific operational plans of the WTO from the Soviet Union are completely absent, as are those of NATO. Much of the two alliances are still secret on operational issues. The military-historical reappraisal of the operational plans of the Bundeswehr, American, British, Belgian and French armed forces is mainly limited to the period up to 1970.

The work of Dr. Jaroslav Palka thus sets new standards for the historiography of operational and strategic planning during the Cold War. With regard to the scientific methodology, it shows extensive careful research and a brilliant multi-perspective approach. The book is written in a military-technically clear, factual, apolitical and easy-to-understand way. Very valuable is the annex with contemporary photos and maps, with which findings in the text become visually accessible. So far, only a Polish version is available. Due to its significance for international military-historical research and the ongoing reappraisal of the Cold War, this work is a prime example that should be followed by other nations. It deserves a large readership and should be translated into other languages, preferably first into English.

Friedrich K. Jeschonnek is a retired Col GE Army with 45 years of military service in nearly all levels of command for the German Army and NATO. Among presentations at public seminars and conferences, he has reviewed military and political-related books for the German Magazine Hardthöhenkurier, which is a military magazine for soldiers and the armament industry. His major research interest is the war planning of the West and East during the Cold War period.