

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Jan Hoffenaar, Dieter Krüger, eds. *Blueprints for Battle: Planning for War in Central Europe, 1948-1968*. English translation edited by David T. Zabecki. Foreign Military Studies Series. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012. xxxvii + 261 pp. \$40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-3651-6.

Reviewed by Tal Tovy (Bar Ilan University)
Published on H-War (January, 2013)
Commissioned by Margaret Sankey



In August 1949, the United States lost the automatic monopoly it had enjoyed since the summer of 1945. With the possession of atomic weaponry in the hands of the Soviet Union, the arms race began, bringing in its wake the development of certain concepts, such as the balance of terror and Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD). Together with the arms race, military strategists, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, began to plan and prepare for conventional confrontations in the center of Europe, with the possibility that escalation might occur and atomic weapons would be activated. Parallel with the deterioration in the relations between the two superpowers, military confrontations began breaking out, which the United States associated directly with the desire of the Soviet Union to enlarge the area of Communist influence. Most of these conflicts were in Southeast Asia, such as the Philippines (1946), Indochina (1946), and Malaya (1948). In October 1949 Communism was victorious in China, and in June 1950 the Korean War broke out. During the second half of the 1950s, the Cold War spread toward the Middle East and Africa, and at the end of that decade it crossed over into Latin America. Despite all those wars and military clashes of variously ranged forces, the United States and the Soviet Union continued to regard Central Europe as the main and future arena of contest between them. For this purpose both sides created war plans in advance of the expected clash. This collection of essays, edited by Jan Hoffenaar and Dieter Krüger, deals with those war plans.

Research into the historical phenomenon called the Cold War had already begun during the period itself. Various scholars, mainly Western ones, were asked to re-

spond to two basic and essential questions. The first was who should be blamed for the outbreak of the war, and the second was how should it be characterized? Was this a struggle that originated in the essentially ideological differences between the two superpowers or a political power struggle between the two great victors of the Second World War, such as the fierce contest for hegemony conducted by European powers throughout the modern era? For a study of the military history of the Cold War, the focus was mainly on the military policy of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), since the many strategic documents of NATO were accessible to those researching the organization. But “little research has been done on the operational planning of the alliance,” which means that although research can trace the strategic design of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), there is a lack of studies on how these strategic guidelines were translated into operational plans among the operative ranks of SHAPE at the army and corps levels (p. xv).

The research situation is different when concerned with the operative plans of the Warsaw Pact. This is because Warsaw Pact countries, most of which are now members of NATO, published their various plans after the Soviet Union collapsed and the pact was annulled. But it should be remembered that it was the Soviet Union that had directed the Warsaw Pact and that it did not publish any strategic documents. The research also deals with the military history of the Cold War in the nuclear and conventional arms race and with the military confrontations that occurred during the Cold War period, especially the wars in Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan.[1]

The attempt to understand the operative plans of the two alliances as well as the working plans of the operational forces are the rationale that underlies this collection of essays.

The subtitle of the book, “Planning for War in Central Europe, 1948-1968,” raises two questions: why is the focus on Central Europe and why is it centered on this particular period? From the geographical viewpoint, both the Soviet Union and NATO regarded the plains of Germany as the main arena for the confrontation of their armies. NATO concentrated most of its army in West Germany, near the border with East Germany, as part of its strategic approach called Forward Defense. This strategy maintained that NATO forces should plan defensive battles in the immediate proximity of the border between the two German states. For the Soviet Union, this was the level area that provided an ideal arena for the maneuver of the thousands of tanks in their alliance and for the armored warfare in which the conventional military might of the Warsaw Pact would find full expression. Such wide-ranged armored maneuvers were not possible in the northern and southern flanks of Europe.

With regard to the chronological bracket for the collection of essays, it is well known that no precise date can be given for the outbreak of the Cold War. But there is no doubt that in 1948, at the end of the process of turning the states of Eastern Europe into Communist states, and after the publication of the Truman Doctrine (March 1947), which defined the U.S. containment policy, both superpowers already found themselves in a state of political confrontation. In addition, the Soviet siege of West Berlin almost led them to the extreme point of military clashes. The year 1968 was chosen because it was in this year that “NATO’s official declaration of détente” was issued, and because this declaration was a “more important paradigm shift than ... Flexible Response” (p. xxix). But perhaps another interpretation could be suggested.

The end of the 1960s marks a generational change among the Soviet senior officer ranks who, during the 1950s and 1960s, held important command positions that they had already acquired during the Second World War and who continued to regard Germany as the most dangerous enemy for the security of the Soviet Union in the immediate term, especially in view of the rearming of West Germany. Although this officer rank was aware that the United States was powerful economically and militarily and that the Soviet Union would have to confront it in the future, the danger of a West Germany, industrialized and armed, suffused with desire for revenge

(so the Soviets thought), seemed to them very close and real. Therefore most of the Soviet forces were concentrated on the borders with West Germany with reserve forces stationed in the western parts of Poland. In other words, the veteran officer ranks continued to regard the threats against the Soviet Union in European geopolitical terms.

By contrast, the younger officers examined the place of the Soviet Union in relation to the rest of the world, especially in light of the deteriorating relations, almost to the stage of military confrontation, with China. They claimed that Chinese revisionism of the Mao variety was no less dangerous and perhaps was even more so than Western capitalism, and therefore it was necessary to act in regions outside Europe, and in particular to obtain influence on developing countries on the African continent. In this way, the Soviet Union would not only extend the area of its influence but also harm Chinese and Western interests.

The collection is based on a conference held in March 2007 with participants from the United States, Russia, and various European countries. Readers of these conference offerings are given a sweeping vista of the war plans developed by the two alliances for the arena of Central Europe during the first two decades of the Cold War. The first piece, by Lawrence Kaplan, provides a survey of the strategic issues in which both alliances were engaged during the period and the area on which the other essays are focused. This is an important contribution to understand the historical and military framework of the period. Seven chapters deal with the Soviet Union as the leader of the Warsaw Pact, with one devoted to East Germany, which, like its western sister, was also said to be the arena where fierce and bitter battles might take place.[2] Two essays examine the issue of logistics (one for each alliance). These two pieces are important since the war arena—Central Europe—was thousands of kilometers away from the centers of industrial and logistical power for both alliances. As historian Martin van Creveld proves in his classical work, *Supplying War*, any war in which millions of soldiers, tanks in the tens of thousands, and airplanes in the thousands pose enormous logistic challenges to the various command ranks.[3] The combination of the various operational and logistic aspects of the two alliances creates an almost complete picture so that we can conduct a comparison between the operative preparations of the armies before the war (which did not break out).

Since the book also examines the war plans of other

armies that were members of the alliances, especially among NATO countries, such as the armies of West Germany, England, and Holland, perhaps it would have been worthwhile to consider the inclusion of an essay on the French army during the period under discussion. France was a senior member in NATO until it withdrew from the alliance in 1966. It would be interesting to show how the French army merged with the general plans and how French forces were integrated in the defense of Central Europe after the withdrawal from NATO. Despite the lack of a French perspective, this is a very useful collection of essays about a subject that has been overlooked in more general histories. For example, in 2001 three volumes appeared dealing with the history of NATO (*A History of NATO: The First Fifty Years*, edited by Gustav Schmidt). But these volumes deal with political and strategic issues and lack the operative aspect that is supplied by the present collection. A comprehensive three-volume history of the Cold War was also published by Cambridge University Press in 2001 (*The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, edited by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd A. Westad); it focuses on the political, economic, and strategic issues of the Cold War but does not contain essays on the way in which armies translated general frameworks into operative war plans.

This collection of essays obliges those researching the military history of the Cold War to continue to publish further studies that will illuminate aspects derived from the discussion on the Central European front during the years 1948-68. For example, some possible directions for future studies include changes in military perceptions after 1968, especially the attempt by the U.S. Army to find a military theory that would in turn develop into a war plan that would allow it to avoid using nuclear weapons; operative planning in the flanks of the central front, and the ways in which it would form a broader operative integration; and the southern and northern fronts along with the more distant periphery, such as the sea arena of the North Atlantic and the Middle East.[4]

There is also a need to examine external influences, whether political or military, on the operative plans of both alliances, such as the wars in Korea and Vietnam for the United States, and the military confrontation with China for the Soviet Union. If we widen the chronological framework, there is the prospect of discussing the influence of the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan, as well as the pressures generated against the Warsaw Pact as a result of the uprisings that broke out in countries that were members in it (Hungary and Czechoslovakia). We should remember that even in NATO there was no consensus among various participants, especially France (which finally seceded from it) and West Germany. It is necessary to note that the raising of issues for further discussion is not intended as a negative criticism of the book but should be regarded as suggestions for further research, scholarly meetings, and conferences.

Notes

[1]. See, for example, David Miller, *The Cold War: A Military History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); and David Stone, *Wars of the Cold War: Campaigns and Conflict, 1945-1990* (London: Brassey's, 2004).

[2]. In this connection, it is worth noting the science fiction book of John Hackett, *The Third World War: August 1985* (New York: Macmillan, 1978). The book is based on an imaginary scenario, but it examines the conduct of the war in light of war plans of both sides.

[3]. See especially the analysis by van Creveld on the war campaign of the Western Allies from Normandy to the borders of Western Germany. Martin van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 289-312.

[4]. The Middle East was discussed in detail in the book by Michel J. Cohen, *Fighting World War Three from the Middle East* (London: Frank Cass, 1997). The book focused on the years from the end of the Second World War until 1954.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-war>

Citation: Tal Tovy. Review of Hoffenaar, Jan; Krüger, Dieter, eds., *Blueprints for Battle: Planning for War in Central Europe, 1948-1968*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. January, 2013.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=37123>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.