

'The Warsaw Pact' from the Corriere della Sera (31 May 1955)

Caption: On 31 May 1955, the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera discusses the impact of the signing, on 14 May 1955, of the Warsaw Pact, a military agreement concluded between the USSR, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland and Romania.

Source: Corriere della Sera. 31.05.1955, n° 128; anno 80. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "Il Patto di Varsavia", auteur:Caleffi, Camillo , p. 1.

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Last updated: 06/07/2016

The Warsaw Pact

The true nature of the pact of alliance signed by European Communist States in Warsaw on 14 May has not yet become apparent, and little has been said or written about it. The reason is almost certainly to be sought in the multiplicity of top-level political events following one after another in a matter of days during the current month. Furthermore, the sudden revival of hopes of peace has tended to overshadow a fact that would seem to tell a different story. With this new and prevalently military alliance, the Communist countries are incontestably taking another stride in the dangerous and all too persistent rearmament race between East and West.

Some people have seen the ‘Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the People’s Democracies’ as merely the recognition of a de facto situation that has existed for many years in the Eastern bloc. For many others, its creation was a foregone conclusion, as last December Moscow announced that the armed forces of the Communist States would be unified under a single command if the Treaty of Paris were to be ratified. The alliance was perceived, therefore, as one of the Kremlin’s many reactions to the formation of Western European Union, a display of force and prestige with the underlying purpose of propaganda. But this is not so. In reality, the ‘Eastern European Union’— the EEU, as it could be dubbed — brings a further, not insignificant, element into the picture of the two great arrays of forces being marshalled by the East and the West.

The nature of the Warsaw Pact becomes clearer if it is compared with the two organisations that the Eastern alliance more or less reflects, the Atlantic Alliance and WEU. Indeed it has been defined, however improperly, as the red NATO. As soon as the ratifications of the Pact have taken place, the Communist bloc, which dominates the immense central area of the Euro-Asian continent, will have a supreme command and a general staff whose permanent base will be in Moscow. The Commander-in-Chief will be Marshal Ivan Koniev, one of the toughest, most determined military leaders of the past war, who will certainly not regard this challenging appointment as a peaceful sinecure but will imprint his own realistic and energetic personality on the new organisation. The general staff will be made up of delegates from the signatory States.

High-level problems of closer relevance to the interests of individual allies will be devolved to a political consultative committee of the signatory powers. Among the tasks assigned to this committee will be decisions on increases in each country’s armed forces. And here lies a fundamental difference between the two European unions: the purpose of the union in the East is to step up its war potential, whereas the West has to grapple with the problem of keeping its armed forces below clearly defined levels, entailing arms control and constraints on the production of weapons, with the inevitable complications contributed by committees and their bureaucracy.

The Eastern bloc Governments, the Treaty states, will be responsible for examining and deciding on questions of the deployment of the unified forces to meet the needs of common defence. This provision highlights the actual unification of the Communist armed forces, as most clearly embodied in their geographical distribution; this is no longer governed by frontiers, for these are regarded as superseded in the Eastern bloc, at least for military purposes. The Treaty admits, and it could be said almost anticipates, that there may be a presence of the Soviet ally’s units and bases in the territory of its smaller allies, in accordance with the strategic plans of the highest echelons of the military hierarchy in Moscow. The Eastern bloc will thus acquire the prerogatives of armed forces that are not just integrated but truly unified, just as was envisaged in the European Defence Community treaty when it laid the foundations for a single army in Europe following the merging of its political, economic and military institutions.

As the Warsaw Treaty is applied, the armed forces of the Communist States, with standardised weapons and equipment, trained and deployed in accordance with plans for common action, will tend to gravitate along the dividing line between East and West. Ground and air force units and bases will be deployed in a long strip stretching back as deep as required by today’s strategy: it will be a modern continuous front running from the Baltic to the Black Sea and passing through the territory of satellite States, in other words (from North to South) Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. In the vast hinterland of the

USSR, reaching right to the far-distant borders with China, will be the reserves and inexhaustible resources of the dominant power. Looking out onto the Adriatic opposite Italy, Albania will be its isolated outpost, destined to serve as a forward air-sea front here as well. This outpost, with its existing and potential forces together with any that might be transferred there by the allies, perhaps even through a consenting Yugoslavia, could pose a far from negligible threat to Italy and, with Italy, to the Atlantic defence organisation.

This is the situation today. The plans of the Moscow chiefs nevertheless include further reinforcement when the army of East Germany is set up. This will entitle the 'German Democratic Republic', the eighth member of the alliance, to take its place in the unified command if necessary. And that is not all. To complete the Communist organisational panorama, in the minds of the Soviet leaders, would be the formation of a zone of neutralised territories forward of the deployments described, two of which would be Austria and a reunited Germany, which would be virtually disarmed. Stretching in front of the Eastern bloc would then be — to borrow a term from the fortifications of olden times — a glacis, a clear, obstacle-free earthwork, not only suited to defence but also usable for any offensive manoeuvre.

The Treaty inevitably includes what are now the customary declarations of its purely defensive intentions as well as undertakings to refrain from any threatened recourse to force in international relations. Without going into the objective value of such declarations, and without looking for grounds for alarm in the clauses of the Treaty, which for the time being is only at the planning stage, it should be borne in mind that the plans to increase the military organisation of the heavily armed Eastern bloc sit uneasily with the proclaimed desire for détente and peace.

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