The Soviet Army (SA; Russian: Советская Армия [СА], Sovetskaya Armiya [SA]) is the name given to the main land-based branch of the Soviet Armed Forces between February 1946 and December 1991, when it was replaced with the Russian Ground Forces, although it was not taken fully out of service until 25 December 1993. Until 25 February 1946, it was known as the Red Army, established by decree on 15 (28) January 1918 "to protect the population, territorial integrity and civil liberties in the territory of the Soviet state." To the organizational structure of Soviet Army belonged, besides Ground Forces: Strategic Missile Troops, Air Defense Forces and Air Forces (ranking first, third and fourth within Soviet Armed Forces; Ground Forces holding second place).

**After ww1**

At the end of World War II the Red Army had over 500 rifle divisions and about a tenth that number of tank formations.[1] Their experience of war gave the Soviets such faith in tank forces that the infantry force was cut by two-thirds. The Tank Corps of the late war period were converted to tank divisions, and from 1957 the rifle divisions were converted to motor rifle divisions (MRDs). MRDs had three motorized rifle regiments and a tank regiment, for a total of ten motor rifle battalions and six tank battalions; tank divisions had the proportions reversed.

The Land Forces Chief Command was created for the first time in March 1946. Four years later it was disbanded, only to be formed again in 1955. In March 1964 the Chief Command was again disbanded but recreated in November 1967.[2]

Marshal of the Soviet Union Georgi Zhukov became Chief of the Soviet Ground Forces in March 1946, but was quickly succeeded by Ivan Konev in July, who remained as such until 1950, when the position of Chief of the Soviet Ground Forces was abolished for five years, an organisational gap that "probably was associated in some manner with the Korean War".[3] From 1945 to 1948, the Soviet Armed Forces were reduced from about 11.3 million to about 2.8 million men,[4] a demobilisation controlled first, by increasing the number of military districts to 33, then reduced to 21 in 1946.[5] The personnel strength of the Ground Forces was reduced from 9.8 million to 2.4 million.[2]

To establish and secure the USSR's eastern European geopolitical interests, Red Army troops who liberated eastern Europe from Nazi rule, in 1945 remained in place to secure pro–Soviet régimes in Eastern Europe and to protect against attack from Europe. Elsewhere, they may have assisted the NKVD in suppressing anti-Soviet resistance in Western Ukraine (1941–55) and the Baltic states.[6] Soviet troops, including the 39th Army, remained at Port Arthur and Dalian on the northeast Chinese coast until 1955. Control was then handed over to the new Chinese communist government.

Soviet Army forces on USSR territory were apportioned among military districts. There were 32 of them in 1945. Sixteen districts remained from the mid-1970s to the end of the USSR (see table at right). Yet, the greatest Soviet Army concentration was in the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany, which suppressed the anti-Soviet Uprising of 1953 in East Germany. East European Groups of Forces were the Northern Group of Forces in Poland, and the Southern Group of Forces in Hungary, which put down the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. In 1958, Soviet troops were withdrawn from Romania. The Central Group of Forces in Czechoslovakia was established after Warsaw Pact intervention against the Prague Spring of 1968. In 1969, at the east end of the Soviet Union, the Sino-Soviet border conflict (1969), prompted establishment of a 16th military district, the Central Asian Military District, at Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan.[7] In 1979, the Soviet Union entered Afghanistan, to support its Communist government, provoking a 10-year Afghan mujahideen guerrilla resistance.

**Cold War**

Throughout the Cold War (1945–91), Western intelligence estimates calculated that the Soviet strength remained ca. 2.8 million to ca. 5.3 million men.[9] To maintain said strength range, Soviet law minimally required a three-year military service obligation from every able man of military age, until 1967, when the Ground Forces reduced it to a two-year draft obligation.[10]

By the middle of the 1980s the Ground Forces contained about 210 divisions. About three-quarters were motor rifle divisions and the remainder tank divisions.[11] There were also a large number of artillery divisions, separate artillery brigades, engineer formations, and other combat support formations. However, only relatively few formations were fully war ready. Three readiness categories, A, B, and V, after the first three letters of the Cyrillic alphabet, were in force. The Category A divisions were certified combat-ready and were fully equipped. B and V divisions were lower-readiness, 50–75% (requiring at least 72 hours of preparation) and 10–33% (requiring two months) respectively.[12] The internal military districts usually contained only one or two A divisions, with the remainder B and V series formations.

Soviet planning for most of the Cold War period would have seen Armies of four to five divisions operating in Fronts made up of around four armies (and roughly equivalent to Western Army Groups). In February 1979, the first of the new High Commands in the Strategic Directions were created at Ulan-Ude.[13] These new headquarters controlled multiple Fronts, and usually a Soviet Navy Fleet. In September 1984, three more were established to control multi-Front operations in Europe (the Western and South-Western Strategic Directions) and at Baku to handle southern operations.

In 1955, the Soviet Union signed the Warsaw Pact with its East European satellite states, formalising Soviet military control over their armed forces. The Soviet Army created and directed the Eastern European armies in its image for the remainder of the Cold War, shaping them for a potential invasion of Western Europe. After 1956, Premier Nikita Khrushchev reduced the Ground Forces to build up the Strategic Rocket Forces — emphasizing the armed forces' nuclear capabilities. He removed Marshal Georgy Zhukov from the Politburo in 1957, for opposing these reductions in the Ground Forces.[14] Nonetheless, Soviet forces possessed too few theater-level nuclear weapons to fulfil war-plan requirements until the mid-1980s.[15] The General Staff maintained plans to invade Western Europe whose massive scale was only made publicly available after German researchers gained access to National People's Army files following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.[16]

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