



2013-022

Jan Hoffenaar and Dieter Krüger, eds., *Blueprints for Battle: Planning for War in Central Europe, 1948–1968*. Trans. David T. Zabecki. Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2012. Pp. xxxvii, 261. ISBN 978-0-8131-3651-6.

Review by Kevin M. Woods, Institute for Defense Analyses (kevinmwoods@gmail.com).

Blueprints for Battle is an important contribution to Cold War history. There are many worthy general and strategic histories of the forty-plus-year standoff,¹ but, as the volume's translator, David Zabecki, notes in his foreword, "there is a dearth of critical scholarship" (ix) on operational-level matters, particularly NATO and Warsaw Pact plans to deploy their arsenals to achieve designated ends. Given the sheer volume of works dedicated to ideological, strategic, and political aspects of Cold War planning, a general reader might think that actual war-fighting questions in Europe were, at best, an afterthought.

Students of traditional military history are often disappointed by studies of the Cold War in Europe, with its lack visceral evidence and perspectives forged in the crucible of combat. Modern wars, despite their wanton destruction and chaos, always leave a wealth of physical, documentary, and human records to inform subsequent military analyses and the writing of histories. The Cold War was—thankfully—different: the clash of strategies in Central Europe, the critical theater of the conflict, was limited to what the editors call a "virtual war"—a never tested set of assumptions, plans, and preparations. The authors of the essays gathered here present careful international analyses of "what might have been," while avoiding "dry academic speculation about something that never happened."²

Composed of papers presented at an international gathering of military historians in 2007, the book provides well-documented insights into the plans for a ground war at the national, army, and corps levels during the first half of the Cold War. A major strength is the qualifications of the editors and contributing authors of the fourteen essays. The collection starts with a theater-level strategic overview and then moves down through lower echelons of command. Topics include military concepts, intelligence challenges, and logistical aspects of operational war plans in the period. As in most collections of conference papers, the contributions are uneven in quality. The least satisfying essays, because they treat already well studied and understood subjects, are "Soviet Union Military Planning, 1948–1968," by Viktor Gavrilov (Institute of Military History, Russian Defense Ministry), and "War Games in Europe: The U.S. Army Experiments with Atomic Doctrine," by Donald A. Carter (U.S. Army Center of Military History). Nonetheless, all the essays will reward readers interested in Cold War military history or the relationship between political and strategic assumptions and actual military capabilities.

The collection opens with overviews of early NATO and Warsaw Pact perspectives on a potential military confrontation in the Central Sector. The first, "Strategic Problems and the Central Sector, 1948–1968," by the dean of NATO history, Lawrence S. Kaplan (Georgetown), examines the early political and military challenges of forming an alliance in the wake of the Second World War. Complementing this overview is the tersely informative essay on "Aims and Realities: NATO's Forward Defense and the Operational Planning Level at NORTHAG [Northern Army Group]," by Bruno Thoss (Military History Research Institute [MGFA], Germany); it highlights the implications of nuclear weapons for NATO plans to shift from a fallback defense of the Rhine to a forward defense along the Weser. Matthias Uhl (German Historical Institute, Moscow) considers "Soviet and Warsaw Pact Military Strategy from Stalin to Brezhnev: The Transfor-

1. For a survey of the current literature see Ingo Trauschweizer, "Toward a Military History for the Cold War: A Bibliographic Essay," European University Institute Working Papers, Max Weber Programme 2009/29 – <http://www.miwsr.com/rd/1306.htm>.

2. Gregory W. Pedlow, "Concluding Remarks: Warfare in the Central Sector" (240).

mation from ‘Strategic Defense’ to ‘Unlimited Nuclear War,’ 1945–1968,” stressing the “nuclear romanticism” of early Soviet plans.³

The essays on intelligence and security are among the best in the book. In “Waiting to Be Kissed? NATO, NORTHAG,⁴ and Intelligence,” Richard J. Aldrich (Univ. of Warwick) tackles the convoluted expansion of NORTHAG’s intelligence capabilities—specifically the all important warning system: “although commanders in Germany wanted better intelligence on Warsaw Pact capabilities, what they wanted above all was reliable war warning.... There was a prevailing paranoia that the Soviets would somehow manage a sneak attack” (60). Jan Hoffenaar (Netherlands Institute of Military History [NIMH]) discusses the Soviets’ presupposition of NATO’s aggressive intent, as manifested in Warsaw Pact planning in “East German Military Intelligence for the Warsaw Pact in the Central Sector.” Through the lens of East German Army intelligence services (Verwaltung Aufklärung, Nationale Volksarmee [NVA]), he shows that Marxist-Leninist ideology prejudiced Warsaw Pact military assessments of NATO toward early warning of perceived inevitable capitalist aggression.

The book’s two essays on NATO and Warsaw Pact logistics demonstrate the failure to allow for the peacetime limitations of an alliance in assessing the logistical requirements of the Cold War. Herman Roozenbeek (NIMH) argues, in “Waste and Confusion: NATO Logistics from the Dutch Perspective,” that economic circumstances, changing operational concepts, lack of interest or trust, and “exercises [that] did not last long enough for logistics problems to arise and then be resolved” (101) meant that many of NATO’s logistical difficulties remained unresolved throughout the Cold War. Dimitri N. Filippovych (Univ. of Moscow) argues much the same from the perspective of the other side in “The Logistics of the Soviet and Warsaw Pact Armed Forces in the 1950s and 1960s.” Owing to a paucity of primary sources, he concentrates on Soviet logistics doctrine rather than actual plans. Especially instructive is his account of efforts to create a “mobile echelon of forward logistics bases” (115) to sustain fast moving fronts while avoiding nuclear attacks.

The heart of the book is its four essays on German, British, and Dutch plans for war in Central Europe. The first two of the articles treat East and West Germany, the states with most to lose in any direct conflict but the least influence over events. Helmut Hammerich (MGFA), in “Fighting for the Heart of Germany: German I Corps and NATO’s Plans for the Defense of the North German Plain in the 1960s,” spotlights the shift of NATO’s defense posture from “fall back to the Rhine” to “defense of the alliance’s territory as far to the east as possible” (160). Readers will appreciate the deft use of still limited primary sources to explore the relationship between nuclear weapons and conventional defense from a German perspective. Torsten Die-drich (MGFA), in “The German Democratic Republic,” reconstructs “the operational thinking of the Eastern bloc and the NVA by considering various exercises, the preparation of the countries for war, and structural changes in their armed forces” (176). Here again we read of NATO planners’ naive preconceptions about operations on a nuclear battlefield.

In the third essay on planning, “The British Army of the Rhine [BAOR] and Defense Plans for Germany, 1945–1955,” Robert Evans (Army Historical Branch, UK) explores British contributions through 1955. Early military perception of defense against Soviet attack as “a lost cause” resulted in desperate plans, collectively known as CONGREVE, stipulating rapid withdrawal to positions west of the Rhine. Interestingly, the introduction of atomic weapons initially shifted the BAOR’s focus from mere survival to maintaining Royal Air Force beacons long enough to allow nuclear strikes. The other NATO perspective is clarified in “The Dutch Contribution to the Defense of the Central Sector,” by Jan Hoffenaar (NIMH). Dutch forces, which, before 1949, “had in the event of a land attack only emergency plans to evacuate the members of the Dutch Royal Family,” (218) now faced one of the thorniest operational questions of any European NATO member—how to get to the fight. Since the Netherlands I Corps was not forward deployed, it confronted critical issues of

3. Citing Soviet Rear Admiral Konstantin I. Derevyanko’s 1961 criticism of unrealistic assumptions about the ability of Soviet troops to fight through “unlimited nuclear warfare” (40).

4. NORTHAG comprised Army corps from Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. The commander of the British Army of the Rhine was “dual-hatted” as the NORTHAG commander.

timing, coordination of forces, logistics, and refugee control. Despite relatively rapid advances in these areas, NATO “could never entirely eliminate the fear that the Dutch units would not manage to reach the war in time” (234).

The essayists in this volume, like other scholars in the field, are constrained by the spotty available archival evidence. For “war plans never-executed” are universally more difficult to locate and declassify than those actually executed. As Robert Evans notes, “every year the corps-level plans for Germany were renewed and distributed [and] ... headquarters destroyed the obsolete plans” (203). Accessing material from former Warsaw Pact countries is particularly difficult. Work based on limited access to the archives of non-Soviet satellites may aspire, as Hoffenaar cautions, only to a “provisional analysis of the ‘yield’ of military intelligence” (76). These factors, together with the vagaries of declassification of relevant documents across a military alliance, leave the impression that Cold War scholars are just picking around the margins of their subject. But, as pertinent intelligence records, including many Soviet documents, become more widely available in the West, the “provisional analyses” published here will point the way for further research.⁵

Michael Howard, reflecting on the purpose of military history, once warned of the risk of trying to understand war through the works of “popular and impressionistic writers of the ‘lions led by donkeys’ school,” who find it “unnecessary to go through the tedious business of working from contemporary documents.”⁶ By this criterion, *Blueprints for Battle*, the first work of a projected series, is a worthy contribution to what remains an incomplete military history of the Cold War.

5. See, e.g., Joan Bird and John Bird, eds., *CIA Analysis of the Warsaw Pact Forces: The Importance of Clandestine Reporting*, CIA Historical Collections (2012) – <http://www.miwr.com/rd/1307.htm>.

6. “Military History and the History of War,” *The Past as Prologue: The Importance of History to the Military Profession*, ed. W. Murray and R. H. Sinnreich (NY: Cambridge U Pr, 2006) 17.