



**14.05.1955**

**14 May: Warsaw Pact established**

**A**fter the Second World War the alliance of the “Big Three” was actually history. Tension mounted in Europe between the bloc of western countries and the USSR. In March 1946, Winston Churchill for the first time used the term “Iron Curtain” to name the border between the western states and the bloc of countries in the sphere of Soviet influence. The “Cold War” started. Pressed by Moscow, the countries dependent on the USSR rejected the American economic recovery plan known as the Marshall Plan. The USSR intended to control and manage the economies of its satellites on its own.



**I**n April 1949, the North-Atlantic Treaty was signed under which western countries set up a military alliance called NATO directed against the USSR. Its members were: USA, France, Great Britain, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Iceland, Norway, Portugal and Italy. In 1954, the FRG joined the Alliance, a country covering the part of Germany dependent on the west. That was the direct reason why the USSR established a political and military alliance called the Warsaw Pact (WP) among the countries of the Eastern bloc. It was to be a counterbalance towards NATO yet actually also served to subjugate armies of the Eastern bloc countries to Russian commanders. It also justified the placement of Red Army units across USSR-dependent countries: Poland, Romania, Hungary and the GDR. Theoretically, the WP was a defensive alliance yet in practice from the very beginning offensive plans were being developed as well.



**T**he pact was signed in Warsaw on 14 May 1955 by: the USSR, Albania, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the GDR and Poland. The first commander of the army of the alliance was Ivan Konev. The pact was to operate for 30 years and it was later prolonged by another 20, yet the events of 1989 and the process of the fall of communism in the countries of the WP took its toll on the pact which was officially disbanded on 1 July 1991 in Prague, although the very last Red Army units left Poland on 17 September 1993, a symbolic date when Poland regained her full sovereignty. Throughout the period of the stationing of Soviet troops, the Polish army was closely dependent on WP commanders, in principle always Russians. The USSR also placed nuclear weapons on Polish territory. The areas with the presence of Soviet troops were practically erased from the map. Small towns such as Borne Sulinowo, where the locals still find and dig out what was left after a huge military training area, were populated only several months after the Soviet units had left Poland.

**T**he only military operation performed by the Warsaw Pact was one called “The Danube”, that is its armed intervention in Czechoslovakia, in response to the “Prague Spring” of 1968. The establishment of the Warsaw Pact was a consequence of the division of Europe by the “Iron Curtain”. Although both alliances were defensive in theory, they assumed that war was possible at any time. That led to an arms race between the USA and the USSR as well as numerous crises, each having the potential to trigger a new war. The existence of NATO and the Warsaw Pact brought relative stability of power in Europe, although either bloc experienced conflicts of interest and crises (Albania leaving the WP in 1960 or France stepping out of NATO in 1966).



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**References:**