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Romania and the Warsaw Treaty

Shortly after the beginning of the Cold War in 1947, the two camps in conflict, one led by the United States and the other by the Soviet Union, started to organise in order to resist an eventual aggression from their adversary. Each gesture of the opposing side, even those of a defensive kind, were interpreted as threatening acts. In Moscow, Stalin gradually became influenced by a paranoid war psychosis. Thus, the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) on 4 April 1949 and the onset of the Korean War on 25 June 1950 were seen as acts of aggression which prepared the ground for a general war against the socialist camp.

As a result a secret conference was organised in Moscow from 9 to 12 January 1951, with the participation of popular democratic countries (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria) and the USSR, which established the necessary framework for the organisational, doctrinal and logistic uniformity of armies in countries of the socialist camp, according to the Soviet imposed model. The purpose was to increase the war preparedness of armies from the Soviet bloc in order to resist an attack from the 'imperialist countries.' Such an attack, in Stalin's eyes, would happen in the next two to three years. At the end of the conference a Permanent Coordination Committee of communist countries' armies was established under the leadership of the Soviet Minister of Armed Forces, Marshal Aleksandr Vasilevsky. Made up of two permanent representatives of each country, the committee had a consultative character and was to exclusively concern itself with the endowment of member armies with military technology and equipment. This body, which also had a permanent technical secretariat, acted as a forerunner to the Warsaw Treaty Organization created in 1955.



The new developments in Western Europe, especially the decisions regarding remilitarisation and the accession of West Germany to NATO, were seen in the East as signs of an increased military threat. As a result, on 14 May 1955, the USSR, Albania, Bulgaria, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania and Hungary signed a 'Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance' in Warsaw which laid the foundation for a collective security organisation made up of the signatory countries.

Members of the Warsaw Treaty were committed to defend each other in case of an act of external aggression based on the inviolability of their borders and territories. The treaty also provided that

member states hold periodic consultations regarding important international issues related to their common interests. The main structures ensuring the functioning of the alliance were as follows: the Political Consultative Committee (made up of political leaders of member states), the Supreme Command of the Unified Armed Forces, the Combined Staff of the Unified Armed Forces, and the Unified Secretariat of the Treaty. For the leadership of the Supreme Command, the office of Supreme Commander of the Unified Armed Forces (UAF) was created, to which the Combined Staff of UAF (stationed in Moscow) was subordinated. The deputies of the Supreme Commander were the ministries of defence or other military leaders from the signatory states. Thus, following NATO's model, the Warsaw Treaty gathered military forces of signatory states under a unified military command. The Marshal of the Soviet Union, Ivan Konev, was appointed as Supreme Commander of UAF.

The Treaty's was to last for twenty years (until 1975), providing a clause concerning automatic prolongation of the Treaty's validity for a period of ten additional years (until 4 June 1985), in case no contracting parties officially denounced it at least a year before its expiry. Another condition by which the Treaty could end was the creation, in Europe, of a general European collective security treaty. On 26 April 1985, in Warsaw, the Treaty was prolonged for another twenty years.

Although the Warsaw Treaty did not provide for anything explicitly concerning the presence of Soviet troops on the territory of another member state of the organisation, the Declaration of the Soviet government of 30 October 1956 mentioned that, in the future, the presence of these troops was to be made on the basis of an agreement between all members of the Warsaw Treaty, but also through bilateral treaties which involved the consent of the state on whose territory the troops were stationed.

For this reason, the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania in the summer of 1958 was made both on the basis of an agreement between governments in Bucharest and Moscow and the approval of the Consultative Political Committee of states participating to the Warsaw Treaty during the session of 24 May 1958. The consultation mechanism was not always put into practice. Many decisions were taken by the Soviet leadership without even informing its partners. One such decision was of the deployment of nuclear rockets to Cuba. The lack of consultations within the Warsaw Treaty during the Caribbean Sea nuclear rocket crisis in the Autumn of 1962 was used by the Bucharest authorities in the subsequent years as a justification for Romania's refusal to accept any strengthening of Soviet guardianship over the foreign policy or military activities of the socialist camp countries.

Without foreseeing an eventual exit from the Warsaw Treaty, the Bucharest leadership supported a decision-taking mechanism based on consultations and the principles of equality and independence. Any common action or decision of international policy was only to be taken at the level of heads of state, after prior exchange of information and mutual consultations, in order to take into account the position expressed by each member state. At the same time, the right to full command over the national army had to reside with the Romanian state.

The challenges offered to the unified command principle within the alliance by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceaușescu and the refusal to subordinate the Romanian army to a military structure led by Soviet marshals was interpreted in Moscow as an attempt by Bucharest authorities to avoid the commitments taken in Warsaw in May 1955, as well as an attempt to weaken the communist bloc in Europe.

Other lessons were learned by Romanian leaders in August 1968 from the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the armies of the USSR, East Germany, Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria. As the invasion had been preceded only a few months earlier by broad activities undertaken on Czechoslovakian territory by troops of the Warsaw Treaty countries, Romania no longer allowed such common military manoeuvres to take place on its territory. At the same time, the movement of foreign troops across Romania's territory was severely restricted. Starting in 1969, soldiers from the armies of other Warsaw Treaty Organization member states were restricted from participating in manoeuvres on Romanian territory; tactical situations were mainly tested in maprooms.

These decisions produced tensions in Romania's political and military relations with the other member states of the alliance and were permanently criticised, especially by Soviet political and military leaders, until the official dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty Organization on 1 July 1991.

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