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The East German Election and Soviet Troop Withdrawals

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Summary:

An analysis of the potential results of East German elections and East and West German calls for Soviet and Allied troop reductions.

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103 1

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6.2(d)

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A freely elected East German government is likely to call for Soviet troop reductions, although Bonn and East Berlin would prefer that any withdrawals occur at a measured pace and be accompanied by some US withdrawals from West Germany. The presence of about 380,000 Soviet troops and their extensive training needs have been a constant burden on East Germans. A sharp reduction in Soviet troops would give a strong impetus toward German unification, which most political parties in East Germany endorse in some form. East German officials are signaling they have no desire to be the sole East European country retaining large Soviet forces.

West German officials will try to facilitate Soviet reductions and may even be forced by domestic political pressures to echo East German calls for a partial withdrawal of Allied forces from West Germany. In a matter of weeks, Foreign Minister Genscher is likely to flesh out his ideas of how Germany fits into collective European security arrangements in order to provide the basis for agreed steps toward unity.

In talks with Moscow, Bonn will reject any formula that legitimizes a continued Soviet presence in East Germany. Bonn would be angered by any indication the US and the Soviets were trying to strike a bilateral deal that indefinitely perpetuated the presence of foreign forces in either German state and will try to block moves in this direction. Kohl government officials nonetheless are sensitive to Soviet security concerns and probably would lobby the US for early reductions in US forces below the 275,000 ceiling in NATO's current CFE proposal. Bonn might also try to reassure the Soviets by suggesting that NATO forces not be deployed in what is now East Germany once unification occurs. Kohl's chief foreign policy adviser stated publicly that East Germany could be "demilitarized."

The NATO Allies would be in a weak position to block a request by Bonn to remove stationed forces from West Germany. London and Paris, in particular, probably would caution against US troop reductions and would link the withdrawal of their own forces in Germany to a formal peace treaty. Stronger resistance, however, probably would be interpreted in Bonn as a threat to its sovereignty and to the spirit of the NATO Alliance.

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