

ASPECTS OF NATO

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MILITARY POSTURE NATO AND THE WARSAW PACT

NATO is a defensive alliance. Its military posture is based on the principle of maintaining adequate defence to deter aggression and, should deterrence fail, to preserve the territorial integrity of the members of the Alliance. The basis for NATO's assessments of the quantity and quality of forces necessary to carry out these rôles is the military posture of the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact allies ⁽¹⁾.

The military posture of the Warsaw Pact, and in particular that of the Soviet Union, continues to exceed greatly the legitimate needs of defensive security. In spite of a slow-down of economic growth in recent years, the Soviet Union still devotes between 11 and 13 % of its gross national product to military expenditure, which has been growing by 4 to 5 % in real terms every year. Within the Soviet defence budget, a much larger proportion than in the West is spent on investment in arms and equipment.

As a result of this high priority given to military spending, the Warsaw Pact has made considerable improvements, in number and in quality, across the whole spectrum of its military capabilities. This careful and systematic development has produced formidable, well-organised, well-balanced, and modern forces capable of conducting both defensive and offensive operations, including conventional, chemical and nuclear warfare. The introduction of new aircraft with much increased ranges, and the steady expansion of the Soviet navy also enable Soviet influence and military power to be felt over wide areas of the globe.

The sections which follow examine briefly the military posture of the Warsaw Pact and NATO in the major areas of nuclear forces, ground forces, naval forces and air forces. Direct numerical comparisons have been avoided since any assessment of relative strengths and weaknesses must take into account not only the required relationships between defensive and offensive forces, but less quantifiable factors such as morale, levels of training (where, in general,

NATO still retains a clear advantage) and the quality of military equipment (where NATO's former marked lead has been more and more eroded in recent years). In short, NATO, being a defensive alliance, does not need to match the Warsaw Pact man for man and weapon for weapon. What is needed are sufficient nuclear and conventional forces to maintain an effective deterrent and thus preserve peace.

STRATEGIC NUCLEAR FORCES

Strategic nuclear forces comprise three elements - intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers. NATO's strategic nuclear forces are provided primarily by the United States, but also include a small number of SLBMs deployed by the United Kingdom. Overall, the Soviet Union has a greater number of delivery vehicles, although the United States at present has more warheads - an advantage which is diminishing with the increasing Soviet deployment of multiple independently-targetable re-entry vehicles. The Soviet Union has a greater number of ICBMs, the most modern of which are superior to those of the United States, particularly in terms of throw-weight. It also has more SLBMs, but those of the United States have a considerably larger number of warheads. The United States has a substantial advantage in numbers of strategic bombers.

The SALT II agreement⁽²⁾ recognises, and would codify the essential equivalence between the strategic nuclear forces of the United States and the Soviet Union. Under the SALT II agreement, the Soviet Union would have to reduce its strategic nuclear forces by about 250 missiles or bombers, and the United States by about 30 missiles or bombers, by the end of 1981. The Soviet Union would be able to continue to increase its number of warheads. Within the constraints of the treaty, both sides could be expected to make limited improvements throughout their strategic nuclear forces, but essential equivalence would be likely to continue.

THEATRE NUCLEAR FORCES

The Warsaw Pact has over the years developed a large and growing capability in nuclear systems that directly threaten Western Europe and have a strategic significance for the Alliance in Europe. This situation has been especially aggravated over the last few years by Soviet decisions to implement programmes modernising and expanding their long-range nuclear capability substantially. In particular, they have deployed the SS-20 missile, which offers significant improvements over previous systems in providing greater accuracy, more mobility, and greater range, as well as having multiple warheads, and the

Backfire bomber, which has a much better performance than other Soviet aircraft deployed hitherto in a theatre rôle. During this period, while the Soviet Union has been reinforcing its superiority in Long Range Theatre Nuclear Forces (LRTNF) both quantitatively and qualitatively, Western LRTNF capabilities have remained static. Indeed these forces are increasing in age and vulnerability and do not include land-based, long-range theatre nuclear missile systems.

At the same time, the Soviets have also undertaken a modernisation and expansion of their shorter-range TNF and have greatly improved the overall quality of their conventional forces. These developments have taken place against the background of increasing Soviet inter-continental capabilities and achievement of parity in inter-continental capability with the United States.

These trends have prompted serious concern within the Alliance, because, if they were to continue, Soviet superiority in theatre nuclear systems could undermine the stability achieved in inter-continental systems and cast doubt on the credibility of the Alliance's deterrent strategy by highlighting the gap in the spectrum of NATO's available nuclear response to aggression.

At a special meeting of Foreign and Defence Ministers on 12th December 1979⁽³⁾, it was decided to modernise NATO's long-range theatre nuclear forces by the deployment in Europe of 572 United States ground-launched missiles, all with single warheads; to seek limitations on United States and Soviet land-based long-range theatre nuclear missile systems; to withdraw 1,000 United States nuclear warheads, thereby reducing the overall warhead level in Europe⁽⁴⁾; and to accommodate the deployment of the 572 new systems within the reduced level.

The arms control portion of the 12 December 1979 decision is an integral part of the Alliance's efforts to assure the undiminished security of its member States and to make the strategic situation between East and West more stable, more predictable, and more manageable at lower levels of armaments on both sides.

The commitment to both the modernisation and arms control decision was reaffirmed at Ministerial meetings in Rome and Brussels in May 1981. It was recognised that there is a continuing need for NATO to maintain strong, diverse and flexible nuclear forces to ensure deterrence.

In the light of increasing Soviet Long-Range Theatre Nuclear Force deployments, which in the case of the SS-20, already exceed the total LRTNF deployment planned by NATO, the modernising of NATO's LRTNF is more essential than ever, and offers the only realistic basis for parallel Theatre Nuclear Force arms control. For these reasons it was agreed that NATO would move

ahead with its planned schedule of Long-Range Theatre Nuclear Force modernisation whilst at the same time making efforts to reach balanced, equitable and verifiable arms control agreements limiting such forces.

GROUND FORCES

The combat power of Soviet divisions facing Allied Command Europe has been considerably increased in the last ten years. Particular emphasis is placed on mobility, and cross-country and river-crossing capabilities. One of the most important aspects of the Soviet ground forces modernisation has been the increase in conventional artillery (as well as the equipping of these forces with a variety of nuclear weapons for tactical use). Chemical warfare defensive equipment is an organic part of ground force units down to regimental level and training in its use features in many exercises. Warsaw Pact forces are also believed to maintain a stockpile of modern offensive chemical weapons, and are trained to use them.

In general, the Soviet ground forces are kept at a high level of proficiency though suffering from over-rigidity in their training. They are able to operate efficiently in both small and large-scale manoeuvres. The Soviet army is thus a modern well-equipped and efficient fighting force which is being constantly modernised. Perhaps the most serious aspect of the growing Soviet land forces' capability is their greatly increased potential for launching an attack with less preparation than in the past and their ability to sustain such an attack for longer than hitherto.

NATO ground forces in Europe have also undergone improvements in recent years, in response to the Warsaw Pact modernisation, but the pace at which improvements have been made has been slower, and, in many areas the technological lead and qualitative superiority of NATO forces' equipment have diminished. The standardisation of much equipment throughout the Warsaw Pact forces gives them some advantage, although steps are being taken to improve the standardisation and interoperability of NATO forces' equipment. Certain geographical features also tend to favour the Warsaw Pact and enable it to benefit from internal lines of communication, reinforcement and logistic re-supply.

Among the features less favourable to the Warsaw Pact is the qualitative superiority which NATO retains in certain areas of equipment and also in training; in particular flying hours and sea-going experience are considerably less in the Warsaw Pact forces than in those of NATO, although this advantage is being affected by the greatly increased cost of fuel. Moreover, the reliability of some of the non-Soviet Warsaw Pact forces would in certain circumstances be doubtful.

NAVAL FORCES

At the beginning of the 1960s, Soviet naval doctrine underwent a fundamental change. The navy, whose traditional rôle has hitherto been confined to the defence of Soviet home waters, was transformed to give it offensive capabilities in support of Soviet policy worldwide. To this end, the Soviet Union embarked on an impressive shipbuilding programme, enabling it to bring increasingly sophisticated types of vessels into service more rapidly. Emphasis has been placed on the ability to project and support military power in areas remote from national territory. An additional factor is the supporting rôle played by the Soviet merchant navy.

The Soviet navy consists of four fleets : the Northern, Baltic, Black Sea and Pacific. Each of these fleets is backed up by its own fleet air force, consisting of strike/reconnaissance and anti-submarine aircraft, with a number of transport aircraft in support. Nearly all Soviet medium-range bombers can carry anti-ship missiles with ranges of about 100 nautical miles. The Soviet Union has established a greatly increased Mediterranean presence with its Mediterranean squadron, but this lacks adequate air cover. A similar squadron is also permanently present in the Indian Ocean. However, the relatively small number of naval bases and facilities available to it outside its home waters, and its limited access to the main ocean areas, constitute a major weakness for the Soviet navy. Non-Soviet Warsaw Pact navies are small and are mainly equipped for amphibious operations and for operating in home waters.

NATO's geographical position and economic dependence on freedom of the high seas for much of its vital trade impose very different requirements for naval forces. In this respect, the ability to defend the transatlantic and Mediterranean sea lines of communication, to preserve the integrity of the NATO area and to protect shipping carrying military and industrial supplies to Europe, is of crucial importance to NATO, whereas the Warsaw Pact is essentially independent of sea lines of communication, and would remain so in the event of a conflict.

The Soviet navy's emphasis on attack submarines, large surface warships and naval aviation bombers gives it the potential means of severing Western Europe from American reinforcements. NATO's naval forces, with their very different rôles of neutralising Soviet strategic nuclear submarines, safeguarding transatlantic sea lines, and in general preventing the Warsaw Pact from gaining maritime supremacy in the North Atlantic, include escort vessels, carrier task forces, submarines and amphibious forces, which in total can match the Soviet naval forces, although the submarine threat remains a large one. NATO therefore at present remains capable, although with increasing difficulty, of meeting its maritime goals.

AIR FORCES

The Soviet Union is carrying out a continuous and progressive tactical aviation modernisation programme. The Soviet attack air forces facing NATO have increased by about 20% in the last five to six years, and the introduction of modern aircraft comparable in quality to those of NATO has more than tripled the range and doubled the payload of some fighter and ground attack aircraft. A large number of well-protected airfields are available, providing the Soviet air force with a rapid deployment capability, and thus improving their flexibility, mobility and survivability. Airlift capability continues to improve. In addition, Soviet civil aviation could conceivably double military airlift capability.

In general, Soviet airforces in the 1980s include large numbers of the most modern aircraft, whose ranges and firepower give them a strong offensive capability in Europe.

To respond to this threat, NATO maintains in Europe an air defence system covering a range of altitudes, and consisting of an early warning and control system, a belt of surface-to-air missiles, and fighter aircraft capable of engaging air and ground targets. Air defence is supplemented by the anti-aircraft weapons of ground and naval forces.

Although inferior in numbers of aircraft, NATO has a higher proportion of multi-purpose aircraft of good performance with highly qualified aircrew, but the Soviet Union is closing that gap with its large modernisation programme, as well as catching up with NATO's general technological advantage.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

The conventional forces of the Warsaw Pact facing NATO, and especially its ground forces, are superior to those of NATO. The numerical advantage which the Warsaw Pact has had for many years was in the past largely offset by the qualitative superiority of NATO forces in equipment and training. However, this superiority, while it remains evident in a number of areas, has been gradually diminished in recent years, particularly in the land forces, by the massive Soviet investment in military hardware.

Nevertheless, NATO's defence posture is believed to be adequate for its purpose of deterring aggression and defending the NATO area should deterrence fail. Any attempt to breach NATO's conventional defences would require a massive effort, and the possible consequences, including nuclear escalation, would be difficult to calculate, and would entail a degree of risk which it is believed would be completely unacceptable. However, the maintenance of an adequate defensive posture requires a constant effort to preserve the effectiveness of all

three elements of the triad of forces - strategic nuclear, theatre nuclear and conventional - and the clear linkage between them.

- (1) *The Warsaw Pact was founded on May 14, 1955, with the signature of a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance by eight European states (Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, Rumania, and the USSR). Albania's participation lapsed in 1961 and it formally denounced the Treaty on September 12, 1968. The 1955 Treaty reinforces a series of bilateral mutual aid treaties - many of which predate the Warsaw Pact - committing the signatories, inter alia, to providing mutual military assistance, and is complemented by a series of status of forces agreements between the USSR and its allies. This parallel series of agreements would continue to tie the Warsaw Pact countries to the Soviet Union if the Pact itself were to be dissolved.*

- (2) *At the time of writing, the SALT II agreement has not yet been submitted to the United States Senate for ratification and remains subject to re-examination, and possible re-negotiation, by the United States Administration under President Reagan.*

- (3) *France does not participate in the integrated military structure of the Alliance and did not take part in the Special Meeting.*

- (4) *This withdrawal was completed in 1980.*

