COMMITMENT TO PURPOSE
How Alliance Partnership Won the Cold War

Richard L. Kugler

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FOREWORD

by Robert W. Komor

As a professional NATO analyst since before its official beginning in 1949, as well as having had much to do with NATO policy in 1977–1980, I am enormously impressed by this book. Of the millions of words written about NATO, Kugler’s book is unique—at least in English. To my knowledge, this is the first book written about NATO that focuses primarily on its central defense and deterrence functions, instead of on NATO as a forum for diplomatic debate, and that directly relates this critical function to our victory in the Cold War.

I have often regretted that I have not written more about coalition defense strategy and doctrine, of which NATO is an outstanding example, because these have long been the key constructs around which U.S. post–World War II defense policy was designed. It is seldom noted that every twentieth-century conflict in which the United States has been involved has been a coalition war to which other nations almost always have contributed more ground troops than the United States. Yet this geostrategic fact (unlikely to change much in the future) has been notably lacking in influence on our strategy, force design, or military procurement. About the only case in which the United States took a peacetime lead in combined planning was in NATO, and here primarily because the Europeans insisted on U.S. leadership, largely on nuclear grounds, and secondarily, because we were invited to appoint an American supreme commander. Moreover, except for NATO strategy the United States and our allies remained determinedly nationalistic.

Indeed, joining NATO marked a radical shift in U.S. foreign policy and strategy, the biggest since the American Revolution. The United States shifted after almost 200 years of “splendid” isolation to membership in a multinational peacetime alliance. This book describes how successful this shift turned out to be, thanks primarily to our nuclear deterrent, in deterring hot war and winning the Cold War. Unfortunately, it does not focus sufficiently on how most of the allies, the United States in particular, remained resolutely nationalistic in our planning, tactics, and procurement, as if we were going to fight the enemy alone. The U.S. Army was worst in this respect, the U.S. Navy considerably better, and the U.S. Air Force best of all. Surprisingly, our NATO allies were as bad as we at coalition defense, despite far greater historical experience at coalition war.
The great strength of this book is that Kugler has a firm grip on the pulse of defense planning by both NATO and the Warsaw Pact throughout the Cold War. The author was a talented NATO analyst in the Pentagon. Consequently, his portrayal of NATO smacks of the real thing. A RAND scholar, too, he does a good job of blending the realist and multilateralist schools of thought to explain how the Cold War unfolded and how NATO foiled its adversary. An expert defense and quantitative analyst, he employs these skills to directly confront many of the Cold War's most controversial military issues. He is fair and impartial, but also hardheaded—unimpressed by trendy intellectual fashions. His abiding respect for sound defense analysis results in an impressive effort to see through the mythology, weak reasoning, partisan ax-grinding, and hollow superficiality that have often marked not only the public debate, but also academic accounts. Often he confirms the common wisdom, but often not. In several areas, his analysis will help settle old fights, but in others, his book is likely to trigger renewed controversy.

Because Kugler's instincts are centrist, this book cuts across ideological lines and is most likely to provoke rebuttals from people at the far ends of the political spectrum. Many liberals will be taken aback by his assertion that the West was not responsible for starting the Cold War, that the Warsaw Pact really was a threatening menace, and that containment and deterrence not only made sense but paid off in huge ways. They also may not react well when reading that strong U.S. forces and large defense budgets were constantly needed, that the German Army probably mattered far more than all our détente diplomacy, and that the Soviet Union spent itself into bankruptcy by trying to gain military supremacy over the West. Die-hard conservatives, on the other hand, will raise their eyebrows when reading that NATO was not hopelessly outgunned, that the West Europeans deserve more credit than they get, that there was more to U.S. strategy than nuclear deterrence, and that NATO's conventional defense prospects were better than advertised. What may really gull them is the conclusion that the Cold War was won by four decades of bipartisanship, not by Ronald Reagan single-handed.

Likewise, NATO critics may be unsettled by Kugler's sympathetic portrayal of flexible response and other NATO strategic innovations, while apologists will be unnerved by his many stinging criticisms of NATO's performance and that of the United States. When they read between the lines, State Department diplomats will be dismayed to find that the Pentagon had a better grasp of the Cold War and NATO than did State. But experienced Pentagon hands will be left trying to grapple with many insights on their own department's imperfections.

For all these reasons, Kugler may stir up a hornet's nest of controversy that, as he admits, will not be resolved until the files of several governments are opened. But debate is far better than silence. Regardless of whether one agrees with him or not, he has performed a useful service. By assembling a lot of good material and putting forth bold arguments that will not be easily dismissed, he has enabled all of his readers to come away better informed. If his book helps stimulate scholarship on Cold War history and military alliances, so much the better.
For my part, I share many of his conclusions, especially that Robert McNamara and James Schlesinger are unsung heroes of the Cold War. I also disagree with parts of his book. He has portrayed the Truman, Kennedy-Johnson, and Nixon eras about right, but he is too tough on Eisenhower, too mild on Reagan, too kind to the West Europeans, and too lukewarm about the role played by Harold Brown and his Pentagon team during Carter’s tenure. All this aside, however, his central theses hit the nail on the head. As he correctly argues, the successful outcome of the Cold War was neither predestined, nor easily achieved, nor forged by the United States acting alone. The Cold War was won because the transatlantic alliance showed “sustained commitment to a worthy purpose.” By maintaining a strong defense shield, NATO kept the West secure and helped wear down the Soviet Union. Moreover, we should take care to keep NATO alive. Though the new era poses no military threat equal to the Warsaw Pact, different problems are emerging, and they will demand equally effective solutions.

Ambassador Robert W. Komer served as Under Secretary of Defense (Policy) and Adviser on NATO Affairs during the Carter years, 1977–1981. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, he was a member of the National Security staffs in the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations. In the late 1960s, he served as Ambassador in Vietnam (Chief Adviser on Pacification) and as Ambassador to Turkey. His studies at RAND during the early 1970s laid the groundwork for the NATO Improvement initiatives launched by the Carter Administration. He has authored numerous books and articles on U.S. defense policy and strategy.
How was the Cold War in Europe won, and what are the policy lessons for the future? This question was debated during the U.S. presidential election campaign in 1992, and it seems likely to be argued about for many years to come. Covering the Cold War from start to finish, this study helps provide an answer through the vehicle of an in-depth political and military analysis. It offers a penetrating assessment of how the Western alliance mastered the difficult art of coalition partnership and thereby played a critical role in shaping the outcome. It then addresses the looming issue of whether alliance partnership can be carried forward in an era that promises to offer serious but far more ambiguous challenges than faced during the Cold War.

Research was conducted in 1989–1992 with financial support from The Ford Foundation and RAND, using its own funds. This study is intended to be helpful to government officials who deal with European security affairs, to scholars and other professionals, to students, and to other readers interested in Cold War history.
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Several RAND colleagues also played important roles. I especially want to thank Paul Davis, Ted Warner, David Ochmanek, Ron Asmus, Steve Larrabee, Jim Steinberg, Robert Levine, Charlie Kelley, Jonathan Pollack, Steve Drezner, Ken Watman, Kevin Lewis, Jim Winnefeld, Dean Millot, Ben Lambeth, and Ulrich Weisser. Scholars from the academic community who were especially helpful include Burton Sapin, Bill Lewis, Bob Blackwill, Barry Posen, Joshua Epstein, John Mearsheimer, Ted Greenwood, and Paul Bracken. At RAND, Carol Richards and Molly Coleman provided secretarial support and Meg Cecchne prepared the bibliography.

I owe a great deal to my wife, Sharon, for her helpful support throughout. This book is dedicated to my parents.
“The secret of success is constancy to purpose.”

Benjamin Disraeli
Earl of Beaconsfield
June 24, 1872
Introduction
Now that the Cold War has ended, the time has come to begin evaluating the history of this remarkable conflict. For 40 spellbinding years, democracy and communism engaged in a titanic struggle for control of Europe that saw little armed conflict but brought huge costs and appalling dangers, with Western civilization constantly hanging in the balance. This bitter contest has now come to a climactic end with a triumphant Western victory and the shattering collapse of communism. The history of this struggle needs to be assessed not only for its own sake, but to enhance our understanding of future European and global affairs as well. Because the changes since 1989 have been so profound, the future of Europe will be vastly different from the past. Inevitably, nonetheless, the Cold War will cast a giant shadow over the years ahead in ways that will not be understandable if the experience of the past four decades is allowed to recede from memory.

Whether we will successfully interpret the Cold War’s larger meaning remains to be seen, but if recent events are any indicator, we are in no danger of being allowed to forget about this conflict. Indeed, the Cold War has reappeared on the national stage with a vigor far surpassing that achieved by most historical eras. During the summer, 1992, a bitter partisan debate broke out during the U.S. presidential election over the burning issue “Who won the Cold War?” The debate began when conservative Republicans claimed the lion’s share of the credit for Ronald Reagan and George Bush, thereby enhancing President Bush’s credentials for reelection in the upcoming vote. Speaking in Los Angeles, Democratic challenger Bill Clinton retorted that past Democratic presidents had also played major roles in the victory, thereby adding luster to his own party and candidacy. Addressing the Republican Party convention a week later, Bush acknowledged the importance of bipartisanship, but then denounced the liberal wing of the Democratic Party for failing to support U.S. defense efforts from 1970 onward. Liberals shot back by dismissing the idea that U.S. management of the military balance had any bearing on the outcome, thus rendering moot the entire discussion of responsibility. This angry exchange probably shed more heat than light on an exceedingly complex topic, but it at least helped illuminate that the lessons of the Cold War have more than just academic importance. They also have profound consequences for how we will behave in the future, including the presidents that we elect.
This book provides many insights on the performance of U.S. presidents during the Cold War, but it is primarily concerned with an even more important reason why the contest was won: the Western alliance. The participants in the debate offered very different views of how succeeding U.S. administrations performed, but they all seemed to imply that it was the United States, acting alone, that won the Cold War. In fact, regardless of the brilliance and energy shown by U.S. presidents and their governments, the conflict could not even have been waged, much less won, without the Western alliance. To be sure, the United States was the West's leader, but it was the alliance that translated this leadership into positive action and added the critically needed power of our West European partners. If the goal is to explain how the Cold War was won, we had best start with NATO, for that is where a large part of the explanation lies.

Just as the American public was asked to weigh the Cold War's lessons in making its choice for president in 1992, the Western nations need to garner the enduring lessons of NATO's performance during the conflict. As the events of 1991 show, history has not come to an end in Europe and elsewhere: conflict and strife remain, as does danger. The future will present troubles and opportunities of its own, and our ability to handle them will depend upon our capacity to continue acting wisely. Recognizing this, the Western nations have decided not to retire NATO as an outmoded relic of a dying era but rather to transform it into a more political alliance. They plan to employ this newly cast NATO, along with other multilateral institutions (in particular, the European Community and Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) to help build a cooperative security architecture across all of Europe, including Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Unlike the defunct Warsaw Pact, NATO is currently surviving the Cold War's end, but if it is to continue being relevant, it must master the daunting task of designing an effective policy for the dangerous era ahead. To do so, it will need to understand the meaning of its behavior in the era behind.

The great puzzle of the Cold War is not that a bankrupt and morally depleted communism finally came toppling down after decades of failed efforts, but that the West did not buckle long before. The Soviet Union entered the Cold War with a totalitarian ideology wholly alien to the needs of modern-day Europe, but this deficiency no more guaranteed defeat than did Hitler's heinous values predestine his own downfall. Because Nazism was backed by imposing German military strength, Hitler's aggression came perilously close to succeeding, and was defeated only by a massive allied coalition military effort. When the Cold War began, the USSR enjoyed huge strategic advantages of its own in Europe that were magnified by the West's political, economic, and military weaknesses. These advantages eroded only slowly as time passed, and they provided the Kremlin powerful tools to pursue its agenda.

Especially in the late 1940s, many observers worried that the Soviet Union would win the contest, and for well-founded reasons they continued to feel this

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way for many years afterward.\textsuperscript{2} Even after the threat of Soviet invasion began receding, the USSR continued to pursue an assertive policy aimed at unraveling NATO through a complex blend of diplomacy and growing military strength. As a result, many feared that the Western alliance would collapse from within due to external pressures playing upon its internal fault lines, thereby allowing the USSR to work its will in Europe.\textsuperscript{3} Yet precisely the opposite happened. When the Cold War finally ended, the Western alliance was left standing in a surprisingly healthy state, whereas communism lay crumbled in the dust.

Whether the West played a major role in communism’s demise is an open question, but it clearly is responsible for its own safe passage through the Cold War. The scholarly issue is this: Exactly how did the West safely navigate through very dangerous waters, and what does the experience mean for the future? What lessons, positive and negative, can be derived from the Cold War, and what do they tell us about how the future can best be handled?

**ANALYTICAL APPROACH**

Focusing on this issue, this book is one of the first comprehensive studies of how and why NATO played a decisive role in winning the Cold War. Written with one eye on the past and another on the future, it unfolds in chronological fashion. Its purpose, however, is not to write a definitive history of this contest—a task best left to historians—but rather to examine NATO’s performance through a multidisciplinary inquiry composed of political science, classical military analysis, and operations research/systems analysis. By marrying these different but complementary disciplines, this study conducts a political-military appraisal aimed at determining how alliance politics interacted with defense planning to produce NATO’s behavior. It especially seeks answers to the following questions: As the Cold War unfolded, did NATO devise sound security policies and defense strategies? Did it then carry out properly balanced programs and related actions to implement these decisions? Were NATO’s goals achieved, and with what consequences for the West’s security and the Cold War’s outcome?\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{2}Not the least worried were NATO’s own governments, whose concern about their precarious security situation was a theme in their official communiqués throughout most of the Cold War.


\textsuperscript{4}Especially for the Cold War’s final two decades, the intersection of alliance politics and defense planning was not covered well in the academic literature. Security studies tended to focus on
These questions are addressed within an analytical framework designed to provide maximum explanatory power while preserving parsimony. This study focuses on the East-West struggle over Central Europe, where the Cold War was principally fought. Parallel events on NATO's northern and southern flanks were important, but are not systematically addressed here. Nor are regions outside Europe covered in any depth.

Throughout, NATO is portrayed as an alliance of nations that pooled their sovereignty in order to make collective decisions. Typically these decisions responded to the leadership efforts of the United States but were also influenced heavily by three principal actors: Great Britain, the Federal Republic of Germany, and France. The interaction among the United States and these nations is accorded considerable attention here. NATO's other nations often played weighty roles, and their defense efforts and security policies are noted. In the interests of parsimony, however, their roles are not examined in any detail. NATO thus is viewed as an alliance dominated by four democratic powers who often quarreled among themselves, but also collaborated closely in an effort to forge effective policies capable of meeting the demands of a troubled time.

This study's analytical framework employs three criteria for evaluating NATO's performance: policy development, program execution, and goal achievement. That is, it measures performance in terms of success in developing effective policies and programs that helped achieve the alliance's core goals. These goals included: protecting Western Europe's security in the face of a serious external threat, enhancing the alliance's internal solidarity and prosperity, and encouraging the withering away of communism. Security is defined in terms of containment, deterrence, and the maintenance of a stable military balance in which NATO could carry out its defense strategy.

Anchored in the premise that the Cold War was influenced heavily by the East-West military competition in Europe, this book emphasizes the rich tale of NATO's military history. Although the Cold War never broke out into full-scale warfare, the threat of massive conflict was ever present, and the hugely expensive military preparations of each side had a powerful effect on how the political struggle was carried out. This especially was the case in Central Europe, where the military balance interacted with the larger dimensions of security policy to play a major role in shaping the aspirations and fortunes of both sides.

Accordingly, this book analyzes the alliance's many important defense policy decisions during the Cold War, and places particular emphasis on examining, in greater depth than usual, NATO's ever-evolving military strategy and force posture. Military strategy is commonly regarded as a battlefield instrument for unraveling an opponent through a choreographed sequence of maneuvers, but as B. H. Liddell Hart observed, it is properly defined as a military means for pur-

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5 Throughout the Cold War, NATO's defense efforts on the northern flank focused on protecting Norway; southern flank security policy focused on defending Turkey, Greece, and Italy. Events on both flanks were chronically under-covered by the academic literature and merit far greater attention.
suing political ends not only in wartime, but in peacetime as well. Throughout the Cold War, the alliance employed military strategy as a critical part of its peacetime security policy, with important consequences. This study analyzes how alliance strategy unfolded, including the shifting emphasis accorded to nuclear and conventional defense. It assesses how NATO's strategy departures were implemented through actions to shape alliance forces, operational doctrines, defense commitments, and improvement efforts. It then goes on to appraise how the military balance was affected in a manner that, notwithstanding uneven results, safeguarded the West's security during the Cold War.

By presenting a careful appraisal of the Cold War's military history, this book debunks two common myths: that both sides engaged in a mindless arms race, and that NATO anchored its security almost entirely on nuclear deterrence. The two alliances did engage in intense military competition, but their rivalry was steady rather than fast-breaking, and it was far from purposeless or wholly nuclear. Throughout, the Soviet Union pursued an offense-minded military strategy evidently aimed at consolidating its empire in Eastern Europe and achieving dominance over the West, including a capacity to prevail quickly in a war. In reaction, NATO aspired to a defensive strategy aimed at protecting Western Europe and maintaining a balance of power that would permit an effective diplomacy toward the East. One of the Cold War's most gripping dramas is the way this costly but clear-eyed and never-ending competition played out.

In World War II's immediate aftermath, the West initially was slow to recognize the menace posed by Stalin, but once it awoke in the late 1940s, it established NATO as a political alliance lacking organized defenses. After the USSR exploded its first atom bomb and the Korean War broke out, the West laid NATO's military foundations by establishing an integrated command and enlarging its forces. As the 1950s wore on, NATO embraced a military strategy (MC 14/2, massive retaliation) that emphasized nuclear deterrence. This strategy led to a big nuclear buildup, but left NATO's conventional defenses dangerously weak.

In the 1960s, NATO embarked on an effort to correct this imbalance by adopting a new strategy (MC 14/3, flexible response) and by bolstering its con-

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7 A great deal of the academic literature on the Cold War, especially studies written in the 1970s and 1980s, focused almost entirely on the nuclear balance, thereby turning a blind eye to the evolving conventional balance. This study holds that the conventional competition was highly important as well. In the public eye, the nuclear dimension may have seemed far more important, but outside the glare of publicity, both alliances were spending far more money in quest of their conventional goals. Because strategy were a dollar sign, the conventional competition must figure importantly in any effort to explain the Cold War.

8 Throughout the Cold War, the Soviet government claimed that its military strategy in Central Europe was defensive, and accused NATO of plotting war against the Warsaw Pact: an accusation vehemently denied by the West. In 1980, however, Gorbachev candidly admitted that the Warsaw Pact's military strategy and force posture had been offense-oriented all along. Issuing orders to his generals to switch to the defensive, he shelved the USSR's long-standing complaints about NATO military strategy. His abrupt volte-face added a remarkable twist to what had been one of the Cold War's most contentious debates. See Robert D. Blackwill and F. Stephen Larrabee, Conventional Arms Control and East-West Security, Sections II and V, Duke University Press, Durham, N.C., 1989.
ventional defenses. The 1970s were a decade of ambiguous competition and growing resolve. Initially NATO responded to Moscow’s call for détente, but by mid-decade it had become sufficiently alarmed by the USSR’s relentless military buildup to begin attending to its growing defense requirements. The 1980s were a decade of growing resolve and sudden victory. Led by the Reagan administration, the alliance embarked on a concerted program to bolster U.S./NATO nuclear and conventional forces. For several years, the Soviet Union maintained pace in this mounting competition by continuing to pursue ambitious armaments efforts, but Gorbachev’s arrival in 1985 brought a new departure. Then came the deluge: the shattering collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the USSR itself. NATO skillfully brought the Cold War to a satisfying end by orchestrating the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Eastern Europe and by arranging for the alliance’s continual existence in the post-Cold War era.

This book tells this complex and dramatic tale, but it encompasses more than a narrow military history. It sets the Cold War’s military events in the context of the larger political and economic trends that also had a major bearing on the outcome. Above all, this book is a study of coalition behavior, and it views NATO as more than a military alliance. NATO was created for reasons broader than defense planning, and during the Cold War, it operated as a mechanism for combining the efforts of its many members to pursue a grand strategy that went far beyond military security. Other multinational institutions also were employed, and NATO’s members often acted unilaterally, but the alliance was the principal vehicle through which grand strategy was developed and the vitally important security component was carried out. In powerful ways, NATO acted as an all-encompassing expression of the West’s values and visions, and therefore played a dominant role in how the Cold War was won.5

Reasons for Victory

The thesis of this book is that the West survived the darkest hours of the Cold War to win a resounding victory because it showed sustained commitment to a worthy purpose. Through long years of costly and nerve-wracking competition,

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5When I refer to "NATO" in this book, I am referring to the overall alliance, and not just its organizational structure. I define NATO as the collaborative partnership that was mounted under the Washington Treaty and carried out through common policies and institutions. Combined defense planning was prosecuted under Article 5 of the treaty, and nonobligatory collective security actions—in policy areas outside Article 5—were pursued under Article 4. Unilateral efforts mounted by individual nations, or ad hoc operations mounted by subcoalitions of NATO’s members, are treated as part of the alliance’s behavior in circumstances where they were officially regarded by alliance members as contributing directly to NATO’s goals.

For example, American defense preparations in the Persian Gulf during the late 1970s were mounted unilaterally by the United States, but were officially explained as contributing directly to NATO’s security, and were accepted in these terms by most alliance nations. Actions that made only an indirect contribution to alliance security (e.g., the American and United Nations intervention in Korea in 1950) are not treated as alliance behavior. For a description of NATO’s structures and functions, see The North Atlantic Treaty Organization: Facts and Figures, NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium, 1989.
it not only maintained a stable military balance in Europe that kept communism at bay, but also preserved its own solidarity and prosperity, which helped undermine the legitimacy of Soviet rule to the east. To be sure, the West’s performance was far from perfect: Often, it committed errors, fell into fractious debates that strained its unity, acted weakly, and made dangerous detours. The United States was not without fault, and neither were the West Europeans. For the most part, however, the West steered a steady course toward a well-conceived destination. Correcting its mistakes along the way, the West never lost sight of its ultimate goals or its willingness to work hard to achieve them.

Although the West benefited from the flawed policies that the USSR pursued on behalf of corrupt visions, victory in the Cold War was not an accident, nor was it achieved by happenstance or through forces beyond the West’s control. This victory was heavily a product of multilateral actions driven by coherent policies and programs implemented through coalition management. Simply stated, NATO’s members surmounted imposing barriers to make their alliance astonishingly effective, and the alliance’s actions played a huge if often unseen role in winning the Cold War.

What is remarkable about the Cold War is not that the Western nations established a security alliance, but that they showed the unrelenting resolve to make it work under very difficult conditions. For 40 turbulent years, these allegedly weak-willed democracies maintained their composure, resolved their internal debates, and patiently overcame one problem after another. Slowly but surely, they built a united and powerful coalition, under the banner of NATO and supported by the EC, that came to overshadow the superficially strong but internally weak monolith to the east.

To be sure, the alliance’s performance was blemished, and the West emerged from the contest economically weakened, but the bottom line is that NATO worked effectively enough to outperform the Soviet Union, and by a wide margin. Its instruments of victory were community building, economic partnership, security cooperation, internal-consensus formation, policy coordination, program execution, combined defense planning, and sound management of the alliance’s military strategy and force posture. By skillfully employing these instruments and thereby mastering the art of peacetime coalition warfare, NATO’s members used their alliance to help rebuff totalitarianism and win a historic victory for democracy.

In assessing the role of NATO’s security policy and defense strategy in the victory, a sense of proportion is in order. The Cold War is a story of how democracy and free enterprise prevailed over communism and command economies. But it also is a story of a bipolar confrontation carried out through competing military strategies and security policies in which NATO stalemated the Warsaw Pact effectively enough to allow Western values to ultimately reign supreme. Had the West not built NATO into an imposing defense coalition, the Soviet Union would have had a golden opportunity to parlay its military supremacy into victory long before the lure of democracy and capitalism undermined communism from within.
An evaluation of the West's achievements must take into account the different ways that the alliance's minimum and maximum goals were attained. Throughout the Cold War, the West was preoccupied with the difficult task of advancing its own security, solidarity, and prosperity. It devoted the lion's share of its efforts to fully achieving these minimum goals. As for its maximum goal, the West had no fixed blueprint or timetable for bringing down communism but did hope that a unified and democratic Europe eventually would be achieved. Western leaders wisely shied away from militarily challenging the Soviet empire, but they calculated that a strategy aimed at containing the Soviet bloc and denying it access to the Western economy might ultimately bear fruit. Because the Soviet government foolishly squandered its own resources, this goal was attained in the late 1980s suddenly and more completely than almost anyone anticipated, but not entirely due to the West's own efforts. The West deserves full credit for protecting itself and only partial credit for orchestrating communism's downfall, but even so, its record of accomplishments is impressive.

NATO's defense efforts moreover may have played a larger role in communism's economic failure than is commonly appreciated. Because NATO maintained a strong deterrent shield, the Kremlin's blind insistence on building intimidating military power not only proved fruitless but also helped bankrupt the entire Warsaw Pact, thereby exposing communism as illegitimate in the eyes of its own people. By the early 1980s, the stagnating communist economies could no longer afford an expensive arms competition, but the Soviet government unwisely refused to relent. When dismal failure became apparent, communism collapsed shortly thereafter. By transforming enormous but meaningless military strength into economic catastrophe, the Soviet Union performed a bone-crushing jujitsu on itself, and NATO's defense strategy provided the leverage. NATO's members may not have had the foresight to anticipate this outcome, but in statecraft, sound strategy is the wellspring of good fortune.

The central arguments developed in this book, some old but others fresh and controversial, thus shed a more favorable light on NATO than was common in many circles in years past. During the Cold War, the alliance was berated by vocal critics, and as time passed, it was largely ignored by the academic community. Normally written at the height of the conflict's most static period,

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10The idea that containment would help weaken the Soviet bloc from within and thereby produce more accommodating behavior toward the West was present in earliest Western thinking on how to manage the Cold War, including George Kennan's famous "Sources of Soviet Conduct" article. The concept of actively rolling back Soviet power and communist control in Eastern Europe surfaced in the mid-1950s and appeared periodically thereafter, but never planted deep roots in Western policy. The bottom line is that although NATO's members never accepted communism as a morally equivalent value system, and tried to establish diplomatic relations with Eastern nations in ways that might weaken Warsaw Pact solidarity, they never contemplated a physical challenge to Soviet control in Eastern Europe. *Foreign Affairs*, XXV, July 1947, p. 572-582.

11During the 1950s and 1960s, academic studies on NATO proliferated, but in the 1970s and 1980s, far fewer studies were published. An exception is the excellent Brookings Institution series, which addresses a wide variety of NATO security issues. Key Brookings books are footnoted in later chapters.
these critiques drew their inspiration from NATO’s turbulent internal politics and inability to resolve the frustrating stalemate in Central Europe, but they suffered from not knowing the end game. The Cold War’s dramatic outcome provides hard-to-refute evidence that, behind the scenes, NATO was a good deal more effective than realized by its detractors. As the old saying goes, nothing succeeds like success, and in something so important as the Cold War, little else matters.

Why was NATO able to perform so effectively for so many years? Fear of the Soviet Union was one reason, but because fear could easily have translated into paralysis and disintegration, it is not a complete explanation. Another reason is that the United States provided strong superpower leadership, an important ingredient for an alliance that otherwise could have been immobilized by the inability of many small- and medium-sized powers to develop common policies. This U.S. leadership, it is noteworthy, owed less to any one presidential administration or any single policy departure than to bipartisan constancy over multiple presidencies. But while the alliance was led by Washington, the United States did not control it. Although the West European nations often were criticized for alleged failures to carry a sufficient share of the burden, they contributed heavily to NATO’s success. To the extent strong leadership drove the outcome, it was a product of an enduring axis among Washington, London, and Bonn.

Also contributing was NATO’s institutional structure, which provided (1) a forum for formulating policy and strategy and (2) executive agencies for carrying out agreed-upon programs. Perhaps more important, NATO’s democratic practices facilitated effective decisionmaking. NATO’s always-tumultuous internal politics created the appearance of an unruly house, but appearances were deceiving. NATO strove for unanimity, but not to the point of paralysis, and because its members shared common goals, decisive action was possible, especially in crises. In normal times, NATO often moved at a glacial pace, but when it acted, its actions carried the weight of the entire alliance. Because NATO emphasized careful analysis and reasoned debate, moreover, it was able to achieve a sound blend of consensus and coherence. The beneficial effects of being able to pursue coherent security policies against the background of internal consensus is one of the major themes of this book.

Many factors account for NATO’s success, but perhaps the most important factor is also the most obvious: NATO performed well because its members constantly felt that their vital interests were served by having an effective alliance. For all nations, alliance participation brought frustrations, failed expectations, and partisan clashes with other members. The resulting disagreements over objectives and priorities regularly opened deep cleavages that endured for years. But these cleavages tended to cut across national lines in ways that inhibited polarization, and when polarization threatened, compromise was employed. The art of compromise, in turn, helped ensure that the benefits of alliance participation always outweighed the costs for NATO’s members. Because NATO fulfilled its members’ core security and community-building requirements throughout the Cold War, it continued to function as a coop-
orative partnership that was carefully safeguarded whenever threatened by internal dissent or external pressures. By meeting the demanding challenges of the Cold War, the alliance created a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The Future of Democratic Alliances

The task of gauging the future must begin by briefly discussing the uneven role of alliances in history. Prior to the Cold War, alliances played a far less important role in an international system dominated by nation-states and multipolar anarchy. Treaties were often signed for the purpose of discouraging aggression, but in peacetime, nations seldom sacrificed their sovereignty on the altar of collective defense planning. The onset of war did produce coalition efforts, but normally less integrated than NATO, and when peace came, combined planning ceased. In particular, alliances composed of more than two nations were too weighted down by competing interests to hold together for long. Moreover, democracies showed no special ability to cooperate in peacetime. Notwithstanding their common values, their internal pluralism seemingly left them even less able to collaborate than authoritarian systems.\(^{12}\)

By drawing on its hidden assets and showing unanticipated staying power, NATO has shown that peacetime coalition planning can succeed, and thereby has added a new chapter to the history books. Beyond this, NATO has provided a revolutionary experience that alters earlier theories of international relations and provides democratic governments a powerful new vehicle for translating their collective visions into reality. If NATO's performance can be repeated over and over again, the potential for constructive achievements seems unlimited. But the past is not necessarily prologue. As we contemplate the coming era's very different challenges, a central question looms large: Can NATO's performance be carried into the future and applied to different situations, or was it unique to the Cold War and therefore doomed to pass into history?


This study judges that, although the Cold War was unique in many ways, democratic alliances—not only NATO but other alliances as well—now have a far better chance of working than before. Because the success of peacetime coalition planning has been demonstrated, a new set of expectations has arisen. As a result of the Cold War, the Western nations have learned the enduring lesson that alliances can greatly magnify their individual powers, thereby allowing them to attain goals far beyond what otherwise would be possible. Alliance membership requires sacrifices on behalf of the collective good, but if the sacrifices are confined to secondary interests, the payoffs for primary goals can easily make the gain worth the gamble.

Coalition planning will continue to be neither automatic nor easy, but the Cold War has established a more positive climate of opinion for judging its problems and prospects. In situations where the rationale for collaboration fails to exist, new coalitions will not be formed, and even existing alliances may eventually be dismantled. But provided there are good reasons to cooperate—and today these reasons can go beyond the presence of a threatening adversary—powerful inhibitions that earlier would have barred alliances can now be overcome. With coalition partnership now commonly seen as serving the vital interests of the Western nations, alliance membership has become a valued tool of statecraft.

Establishing new alliances will remain a difficult undertaking in the absence of a clear threat, but decisions on whether to preserve an existing alliance after the original threat has faded are driven by a less demanding calculus. The need to handle new threats and challenges, or merely to preserve an insurance policy, is one reason for keeping a coalition alive. The desire to further develop an existing community of nations, and to discourage friends from becoming rivals, is another powerful reason. Moreover, economic goals can cause an alliance to be retained even if security against an external threat is no longer a compelling rationale. Preserving an alliance that provides unambiguous internal security commitments can help encourage members to continue collaborating in their economic policies, thereby bringing prosperity to all of them. By encouraging a descent into mutual suspicion and confrontation, dismantling an alliance can help bring about a reversion to protectionist economic practices, thereby damaging prosperity for all. These security and economic benefits are all compelling reasons for keeping an alliance intact.

A decision on whether to dismantle a coalition is also affected by affordability considerations, and the calculus here is shifting in favor of retaining coalitions. A primary reason for dismantlement is to reduce the costs of alliance membership: lost sovereignty, excessive entangling commitments, and high budgetary expenditures. In today's climate, sovereignty is a less compelling influence and entangling commitments are less onerous because the risk of major war is fading. Because coalitions provide allies that carry part of the military burden, modern alliances typically reduce defense expenditures rather than increase them. For these reasons, an alliance can in many ways be a low-cost option, thereby enhancing its attractiveness even if the benefits are modest.
NATO's prospects for the future will be affected not only by cost-benefit calculations, but also by its successful past. During the Cold War's early stages, NATO had not yet been firmly established, but because the Soviet Union was very menacing and the United States was very dominant, coalition planning came easy. In later stages, the Soviets tried to downplay their threatening demeanor, the West Europeans became more assertive, and NATO's challenges grew tougher. By this time, however, the alliance was firmly entrenched, with established institutions and a long backlog of experience at problem-solving. Even though it often encountered tough sledding, NATO remained effective, and indeed continued to function even after the Soviet threat had disappeared and the EC had agreed to pursue political unity. Because NATO exited the Cold War with its reputation intact and clearly contributed to the West's victory, it acquired greater resilience for surviving in the post-Cold War era.

Powerful pressures were needed to create NATO, but because member nations currently still see good reasons for keeping it alive in altered form, equally powerful forces seemingly are needed to disestablish it. When the Western nations were confronted in the late 1940s with the issue of whether to form an alliance, they asked themselves, "Why?" Today they are confronted with the issue of whether to maintain this alliance now that the Cold War is over, and they ask themselves, "Why not?" Perhaps the alliance's internal bonds will weaken over time; as of mid-1992, there was already evidence of this trend. The need for integrated defense planning especially might fade or at least mutate importantly. But barring a major rupture among NATO's nations, the rationale for political partnership and joint security collaboration now seems firmly established and will not be easily refuted. To a degree not seen before, the Western alliance has become a public good whose worth is taken for granted. Critics today accuse NATO of being an alliance in search of a mission, but although this criticism is wide of the mark, it pays NATO's staying power the ultimate compliment.

The great policy lesson of the Cold War is simply stated: The Western democracies can accomplish magnificent things when they set their minds to the task and work together. During the Cold War, the alliance expressed its growing potency through combined military planning and collective security policy, but what especially matters for the future is the underlying pattern of political collaboration that evolved. Hopefully, this collaboration can be continued in security affairs to the extent needed, and transferred into other policy arenas as well. If so, democratic alliances will enjoy a bright future.

Whether the alliance's performance in the Cold War can be preserved and enlarged upon in the coming years remains to be seen. Because the United States and the West European nations will have new agendas in the coming era, centrifugal forces could pull the alliance apart; and even if it remains in existence, its continued effectiveness by no means is guaranteed. Much will depend on how European and global security affairs evolve, and on how NATO's members decide to employ their alliance in the years ahead. Only time will tell.

What can be said is that the worrisome fragmentation of the global security order and world economy since 1991 leaves little doubt that the need for close cooperation among these nations remains strong. Whereas the Cold War
brought ideological and military confrontation amidst a static bipolar setting, the dangers in the fluid multipolar era ahead include poverty, economic turmoil, resurgent nationalism, failed democratic reforms, social upheaval, territorial disputes, runaway proliferation, spiraling crises, and the resurrection of old historical animosities. As new economic power blocs emerge and others decline, moreover, the world economy is showing signs of growing protectionism and even mercantilism. To a degree no different from the past, these dangers will require careful management. Although the future cannot be foreseen and will compel new policies, the key to success will lie importantly in continuing to apply the Cold War's hard-earned lesson to the challenges ahead.

INFORMATION SOURCES

A complete history of the Cold War cannot be written until classified government documents are released many years from now, but the voluminous data already available seem adequate for the analytical purposes of this study, and they have been drawn upon here. Driven by the requirements of public accountability, the U.S. and West European governments have released, through their official publications, an enormous amount of normally classified information about the military balance in Central Europe, NATO's defense strategy, and alliance programs during the Cold War. Especially helpful to this study have been the annual reports issued by the Secretary of Defense and the Department of Defense (DoD) Soviet Military Power study that was published during the 1980s. Individual reports are cited throughout the manuscript.

This book also draws heavily on the voluminous academic literature, and while no effort has been made to cite all of it, I have listed studies that were especially helpful to my analyses and conclusions. Also, I profited enormously from many discussions and interviews about the Cold War with government officials, academic experts, and other observers from both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

I have also drawn upon personal recollections, but hopefully not in a biased way. During 1975–1988, I was employed by the Department of Defense in functions that dealt with NATO conventional defense issues, and I have drawn on this experience to help write the chapters dealing with associated policy issues. This book, however, is not a personal memoir. I have tried to write it from the perspective of a research scholar, to employ a wide range of data and interpretations, and to be as objective as possible. All of the information presented here about military forces, programs, and budgets is drawn from open and unclassified sources.

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

My goal is to help develop a composite analysis of the Cold War and a new theory of democratic alliances in that conflict and for the uncertain times ahead. I have attempted to advance my own arguments but also to present the Cold War's history in ways that will allow the reader to form his or her own conclusions. In the final analysis, this task is one of interpretation, not fact-finding. The specific motives of participating governments at each stage will not be known for many years, but the broad outlines of their actions and strategies are far more discernible, and invite critical appraisal. Now that the Cold War has ended, the task of evaluating its meaning has just begun and will continue for many years. This book is intended to be one contribution to that endeavor.

If this work is to be placed within the political spectrum, I would label it centrist rather than liberal or conservative. Regardless of its label, however, this book cuts sharply against the grain of common wisdom in some quarters today. For all its difficulties, I believe multilateralism is still preferable to unilaterism, and even in the post-Cold War era, sound alliance policies will need to be anchored in mutual security commitments that preserve adequate defenses. In particular, any American retreat into isolationism or a wholesale unraveling of the Western alliance would do great damage. Constructive engagement and continued partnership are the best policy prescriptions for fulfilling the opportunities at our doorstep.

Finally, by proclaiming that the West won the Cold War, my intention is to draw attention to the Western alliance's stellar performance, and not to inflict denigration on Russia and its Commonwealth partners. Like all totalitarianism, Bolshevik communism was an unhealthy departure from the proper path of political development in the modern era. Now that European communism and the Soviet Union have passed into history, the people of Russia and associated Commonwealth nations have an opportunity to provide a better future for themselves. For moral and practical reasons, the United States and its allies have every reason to help them.
Laying the Foundations:
The 1940s and 1950s
THE LEGACY OF WORLD WAR II

The Cold War’s dramatic events can best be understood by first casting communism’s origins in historical perspective. Marxism rose to prominence in the late 1800s as a legitimate protest against the evils of industrial capitalism, but by the turn of the century, many European nations had become parliamentary democracies or liberalizing constitutional monarchies. Growing wealth was producing improved living standards; social welfare policies aimed at helping the working class were being adopted. For this reason, Marxism mutated in these nations away from revolutionary class warfare and toward reform-oriented participation in the existing political systems. On the eve of World War I, radical socialism was waning as a vibrant political ideology. Replacing it was a more diffuse socialist movement that largely channeled its activities through moderate Social Democratic parties across Western Europe.\(^1\)

Where communism improbably took root was in an autocratic and backward Russia that was only beginning to enter the industrial era commonly thought to be the launching pad for proletarian revolution. Communism rose to power there largely because the corrupt czarist regime refused even modest reforms and led Russia into a bloody war that showed no signs of ending. Even then, the Bolsheviks seized power more as a result of Lenin’s skilful maneuvers than due to mass support for their ideology. Lenin’s shaky regime survived the crucial first years because it withdrew Russia from World War I and then prevailed in a civil war against poorly organized opponents who offered no credible vision for the future.\(^2\)

By the early 1930s, Bolshevism had imposed on the Soviet Union a totalitarian monolith whose repressive nature surpassed the Czar’s worst excesses. Even so, Stalin’s dictatorial regime gained stature because it proved successful at mobilizing the Soviet population in order to achieve forced industrialization. Shortly thereafter, Stalin’s iron control played an important role in defeating the Nazi invaders and pushing beyond the USSR’s borders at the end of World War II. The Cold War thus began with communism firmly entrenched in the

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1. See Thomson, *Europe Since Napoleon*.
Soviet Union and in occupation of Eastern Europe as well, facing a devastated Western Europe that had been victimized over the past half-century by ascendant nationalism, balance-of-power rivalries, and destructive wars.

The USSR’s preeminent position did not mean that communism reflected the needs and aspirations of even the people under its sway, much less the West. Because it offered totalitarian solutions to modern-day problems that demanded a more responsive economic and political order, it already was becoming an anachronism. Its main claim to legitimacy lay in its alleged ability to outpace capitalism in a never-ending pattern of centrally directed industrial production. But as economic recovery began in the West, communism’s ability to win this battle was already becoming suspect.3

Despite these liabilities, the Soviet Union enjoyed the upper hand as the Cold War gathered force in the late 1940s. In particular, it benefited from absolute political control over its imperial realm, massive military power, and a dominating presence in Central Europe. Confronting it were Western nations that, because of their pell-mell disarmament after World War II, almost totally lacked military strength. To make matters worse, the democracies suffered from other major liabilities, including widespread destitution, weakened governments and societies, a legacy of rivalry among themselves, and a traditionally isolationist leader across the Atlantic Ocean. Most vulnerable of all was war-ravaged and occupied West Germany, the focal point of the mounting East-West struggle. For these reasons, fear that Soviet communism would win its confrontation with democracy was amply justified. As matters turned out, it was NATO that prevented these fears from becoming reality.

NATO was created in response to the Cold War and the realization that a military alliance was needed to contain Soviet expansion. But more fundamentally, NATO’s origins lie in World War II and the Anglo-American partnership that was forged then. During this bitter conflict, the United States and Britain gained major experience at practicing coalition warfare, overcoming its obstacles, and harnessing its resources. As a result, these nations were predisposed to turning to an alliance when relations with the Soviet Union broke down in the war’s aftermath. Had they not been able to draw on their wartime experience, it is unlikely that a transatlantic alliance like NATO, especially its integrated military structure, would have been possible.

Waging a coalition war against Germany was not easy. The United States and Britain shared many things, but they were still sovereign nations whose interests were not always identical. They also found themselves facing dissimilar geopolitical situations that tended to foster quite different psychological predispositions toward prosecuting the war effort. Britain, still exhausted from World War I, while confronting a threat to its physical survival and a dispiriting decline in its overseas imperial empire, was prone to a war policy of calculation and caution. By contrast, the United States, historically an isolationist nation and only recently a convert to internationalism, was acting less out of immedi-

3For an analysis of the political problems confronting communism in the USSR, see Barrington Moore, Jr., Soviet Politics: The Dilemma of Power, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1965.
ate fear for its survival than a newly awakened sense that it had vital overseas interests to protect. Enjoying vast resources that were just being harnessed and only beginning to assume its role as a global superpower, it found itself predisposed to a policy of exuberant, often naive, ambitiousness. As a result, the British and the Americans often found themselves pursuing different priorities that could not easily be harmonized. Even when they were able to reach accommodations on strategic policy, their different military doctrines, practices, and weapon systems often did not blend well together. This liability further compounded the problems they faced in trying to conduct a joint campaign to defeat powerful Nazi Germany.

A good example of the purely military problems they encountered is the campaign they waged from 1942 to 1943 to protect the North Atlantic sea lanes. The task of keeping beleaguered Britain adequately supplied while building up the military forces needed to retake Western Europe required the shipping of millions of tons of cargo every month. The Germans, who had become experts on undersea warfare in World War I, launched an intense submarine campaign to interdict this effort. Faced with this threat, the British Royal Navy, which had learned harsh lessons in dealing with German submarines in the Great War, was committed to forming cargo ships into large convoys and providing them a strong escort of surface combatants and air cover. The American Navy entered the war with a different doctrine. Preferring to hunt German submarines through search operations over large areas, it initially was lukewarm to escort operations and saw little value in the convoy strategy. This important difference nearly sowed the seeds of disaster in the troubled months of 1942 and 1943.4

The Americans and the British tried to resolve their differences by dividing the Atlantic Ocean into two separate zones. The U.S. Navy, unenthusiastic about a heavy commitment to the Atlantic campaign that would divert resources from the Pacific, assumed the task of protecting the waters along the U.S. coastline. The British and the Canadians took responsibility for protecting farther out, on the North Atlantic itself. This division of labor soon proved to be militarily untenable. The Germans concentrated their submarines along the U.S. coast and were able to inflict massive losses on Allied shipping, which the U.S. Navy initially proved incapable of protecting. Meanwhile, the British and Canadians, with only limited assets, were hard pressed to defend the lengthy Atlantic sea lanes against local German submarine forces that, while not numerically large, were still capable of inflicting major damage against inadequately protected convoys. Allied losses there ran high as well. The problem was brought under control only after the United States committed more naval assets to the sea-lane defense mission, the U.S. Navy adopted the convoy escort strategy, antisubmarine warfare technology improved, and the three nations formed a combined command capable of joint operations. Even then, the Allied victory was a narrow one. As late as mid-1943, Allied shipping losses still

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were exceeding the production capacity to replace them and Britain was running dangerously short of supplies. The situation turned around only in 1944 when the massive U.S. shipbuilding program gathered full steam.5

Similar problems arose in their initial efforts to coordinate air and land operations where the British lacked large assets and the Americans were inexperienced at developing theater-level campaigns. Nonetheless, as the war progressed the Western Allies slowly but steadily became skilled at combined planning. From 1942 to 1943 they mounted a joint strategic bombing campaign against Germany and combined offensives in North Africa and Italy. The high-water mark was reached over the following two years, during which they conducted their huge, ultimately victorious coalition offensive on the European continent. This effort began with the buildup for the Normandy invasion, which required logistics management on a massive scale. It was followed in June 1944 by the Normandy invasion itself. The largest amphibious operation ever undertaken, the invasion required joint planning of the most complicated sort. Then came the breakout at St.-Lô, the buildup of 65 divisions on the continent, and the rapid advance by fall 1944 to the German “West Wall.” This offensive campaign required the making of many difficult strategy choices and complicated battlefield maneuvers, all demanding close coordination among the Allied powers. The German counterattack at the Battle of the Bulge that winter provided the Allies their first taste of a theaterwide defensive campaign, an experience that was to prove valuable years later in guiding NATO’s efforts to plan for the defense of Western Europe against a Soviet attack. Finally, spring 1945 saw the Allied advance across the Rhine, victorious final battles, and ultimate victory.

As many history books have pointed out, Anglo-American cooperation was not achieved easily. Indeed, the two nations struggled repeatedly over strategy and tactics. In 1943–1944, they engaged in a lengthy argument over whether the Alliance strategy should emphasize a continued advance through the Mediterranean (as the British preferred) or (as the Americans preferred) an invasion of France across the English Channel. After the Normandy invasion, British and American commanders engaged in a continuing tug-of-war over how the offensive campaign was to be conducted and how resources were to be allocated to their respective forces. As the Allied armies advanced across France, British Field Marshal Montgomery constantly argued for a strategy that placed a greater weight of effort on the British and Canadian forces on the Allied northern flank. Opposing him were American generals Bradley and Patton and other commanders who favored emphasis on the U.S. advance in the center and south. General Eisenhower, caught in the middle, resolved this argument by patiently sticking to a broad front strategy that placed relatively coequal emphasis on both factions. This approach, in turn, satisfied almost no one. Although Eisenhower’s strategy was militarily prudent and politically adroit, it was criticized by both British and American generals as being insufficiently ag-

5Ibid., Chap. 9.
gressive. This stressful argument finally ceased only when the guns fell silent in May 1945.6

When World War II is judged from a historical perspective, nonetheless, what stands out is not the incessant political struggles and temporary military setbacks that bedeviled the Alliance. Far outweighing the negative features was the enormous success that the United States, Britain, and others achieved in conducting combined warfare on a grand scale. This enterprise was an entirely new, revolutionary feature of international politics that went well beyond World War I, a war in which the allies fought alongside each other but not in so integrated a fashion. This experience was enormously influential in shaping efforts by the North Atlantic nations to erect a strong military alliance to contend with Stalin’s designs in the postwar era. It provided them the technical knowledge and expertise that helped them react with dispatch once they realized that they needed to strengthen their defenses. More important, it gave them the necessary political will and confidence in each other. As a result of World War II, they knew that despite the many barriers to combined operations, a coalition effort was feasible, and the sacrifices it entailed were well worth the benefits it offered.

CONTAINMENT AND RECOVERY

Coalition planning did not get under way until well after the Cold War had begun. In the atmosphere of relief and fatigue that accompanied their final victory in 1945, the Western Allies initially were slow to react to the fact that victory over Germany had left them confronting an entirely new adversary in Central Europe. Although they began encountering problems with Stalin shortly after the war ended in May 1945, for some months they held out hope that a continuation of their wartime cooperation with the Soviets was still possible. This view was especially prominent in the United States. There the lingering spirit of wartime goodwill predominated over the skepticism that such Soviet experts as George Kennan, Charles Bohlen, and Averell Harriman felt for future East-West relations.7 The British, with their long history of diplomatic involvement in Europe’s troubled affairs, were more doubtful. But since the United States had emerged from the war as the West’s leading power, its views were decisive in shaping the free world’s stance on postwar relations with the Soviet Union.

At the time, Stalin’s agenda in Europe was still unclear. He had been a reliable ally in World War II and his postwar diplomacy, while clearly tough-minded, initially suggested a flexible willingness to respond to Western interests and pressure. Only later would it become apparent that his appetites were ag-

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gressive and tended to expand in relation to the opportunities facing him. As a result, Western governments were genuinely uncertain about whether an accord might be reached with him. Additionally, the Western Allies themselves still had not formulated a firm stance on Germany's future, an issue that was to become central in the West's dealings with Stalin. The West was in widespread agreement that Germany should be denied the military power that had permitted Hitler's invasions and facilitated Berlin's ability to play the freewheeling role in Central Europe that had led to two world wars. But there was no parallel consensus on Germany's future government, its economic recovery, its exact role in Europe, and its reunification. Within each nation, contending schools argued over future policy. While some favored an economically strong and united Germany allied with the West, others opted for a weakened, divided, and neutral nation. This ambivalence toward Germany, coupled with confusion about Stalin's intentions, led the Western Allies to continue negotiating with the Soviets in a spirit of compromise and accommodation.8

During the last half of 1945, concern began mounting as it became increasingly clear that Stalin was not going to live up to Western understandings of the agreements at Yalta and Potsdam. The West had originally hoped that Poland would be allowed to live under democratic rule and that the Soviets would merely exercise a benign "sphere of influence" in that nation. Germany, the West further presumed, would be reunited under terms acceptable to both sides. By 1946 Poland had fallen completely in the USSR's orbit, and many were coming to fear that the Soviets intended to communize and militarily occupy East Germany as well. The goals that Stalin had in mind, it was becoming clear, thus went far beyond influence, were not cooperative, and extended well westward of any concepts originally envisioned by the West. Moreover, Western diplomats were beginning to fear that Stalin had expansionist designs on prostrate West Germany as well.

It was in this atmosphere that Western opinions began to harden to the point where a policy of firmness toward the USSR started taking shape. In early 1946, George Kennan, then serving at the U.S. embassy in Moscow, cabled his influential "Long Telegram" to Washington calling attention to the USSR's expansionist aims in Europe and the need for a Western policy of firm but patient resistance. Had his message arrived six months earlier it likely would not have had so large an impact; indeed, he had sent similar warnings earlier that made headway only among like-minded colleagues. But by this time a wider range of Washington officials had become disillusioned with Stalin and believed that active American efforts to oppose him in Europe were becoming necessary. In Western Europe, a similar reappraisal was gathering force as the British, French, and other governments began discussing ways to oppose Soviet hegemony.9

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8For a study of Soviet diplomacy during the Cold War's first two decades and before, see Ulam, Expansion and Coexistence.
9In spring 1946, Winston Churchill gave his "Iron Curtain" speech at Fulton, Missouri. U.S. and Allied reactions were partly driven by a threatening speech Stalin gave in early 1946 and by his private remarks to Western diplomats that suggested that the Soviet Union intended to pursue a unilateral, expansionist course in Europe. Kennan's "Long Telegram" (Moscow Embassy Telegram #511) is reprinted in Thomas H. Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis, Containment: Documents on...
Over the course of the next two years, a consensus emerged in the West in favor of the policy of containment, a concept that Kennan was among the first to articulate. The definition of containment was to change a great deal in future years as East-West relations fluctuated. But at the time it was adopted, it was a doctrine that, while influenced by anticommunist ideology, was grounded heavily in traditional geopolitical considerations. Although it rejected Stalin’s imposition of communist regimes as an unacceptable tool of statecraft, it pragmatically recognized that the Soviets were unlikely to be dislodged from Eastern Europe anytime soon. Its primary goal was defensive: to prevent the Soviets from using their power base in Eastern Europe to extend their influence and control westward. It aspired to create a stable balance of power based on Western strength, unity, and resolve that would protect the West’s vital interests by denying Stalin control over Western Europe as well as such other strategically important regions as Japan and the Middle East oil fields.\footnote{The containment policy is described and analyzed by Gaddis in Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy, Oxford University Press, New York, 1982.}

Containment was not entirely bleak about the future of East-West relations. It accepted conflict with Stalin’s Soviet Union as a reality of postwar European security affairs, one that had to be managed carefully and could not be resolved any time soon. But it held out hope that once confronted with firm Western resistance, the Soviets would come to recognize that their hostile paranoia toward the West and their obsessive preoccupation with physical security were counterproductive. A further hope was that Soviet foreign policy would mature over time, and that the communist bloc would develop internal fissures that would prevent it from acting as a monolith. In this event, the containment policy calculated, a mutually acceptable East-West relationship eventually might be established, one that respected the legitimate interests of both sides.

Any prospects for optimism, however, lay well into the future. For the moment, containment’s authors assumed, Stalin was pursuing an adversarial course. Whether Stalin’s designs were driven by purely defensive goals stemming from traditional Russian aims, or offensive objectives growing out of communist ideology, or a combination of the two, was deemed beside the point. The core reality was that Soviet policy posed a direct, immediate threat to the safety and security of the West European nations as well as the vital interests of the United States. Given this, containment calculated, the West had no alternative but to set aside hopes for further cooperation and to focus primarily on how it could best resist Stalin’s designs in Europe.

Containment postulated that the Western nations could best implement this policy by banding together and by presenting Stalin with a united front, one aimed at denying him the opportunity to pick off the West European nations one by one. Initially, it did not perceive the Soviet threat in purely, or even primarily, military terms. While it recognized that the Soviets had the military
wherewithal to invade Western Europe, it presumed that the Soviet threat to Western Europe was largely political and economic. It feared that Stalin might employ the Soviet Union’s dominant position in Central Europe to manipulate, browbeat, and intimidate the West European nations into submission. It further worried that Stalin would take advantage of the economic chaos and political instability prevailing across Western Europe to orchestrate a series of communist takeovers by either coup d’état or democratic elections (e.g., in Greece, Italy, and France). To reduce this threat, containment called for a policy aimed at prompt economic recovery in Western Europe and the creation of stable democratic regimes there.

Containment recognized that the West would succeed only if the United States abandoned its prewar isolationism and involved itself heavily in European security affairs. It also recognized that the West European nations themselves would have to set aside their previous rivalries by cooperating together to an unparalleled extent. For these reasons, it implicitly called for creation of a close and enduring transatlantic relationship and movement toward political integration in Western Europe. Containment thus turned out to be more than a purely negative policy. It was originally designed for the defensive purpose of keeping the Soviet Union at bay. But by levying a demanding set of requirements on the West and grasping the importance of promoting democratic values, it laid the foundation for an enormously positive vision for the future. In important ways, it helped launch the West on the path of a grand strategy, one aimed not only at blocking the Soviet Union but also at building a strong and stable Western democratic alliance.

The United States began implementing containment in March 1946, when it insisted that Stalin honor his commitment to withdraw from Iran. Soviet forces had entered that country during the war. In August, the United States rebuffed a Soviet demand for a joint Turkish-Soviet defense system that would have given the Soviets military control over the Turkish Straits and the Dardanelles. Both efforts were successful. Soviet troops left Iran in May and Stalin quietly dropped his demands on Turkey, thereby leaving the Turks with sovereign control over the Straits. These two experiences suggested that while Stalin was intent on extending Soviet power into any area where a vacuum existed, he was sensitive to Western interests when the West stood up to defend them. From this, Washington drew the lesson that a policy of firmness would pay off.

The United States and its allies began applying the same philosophy in Central Europe. In 1946 the Western Allies took their first collective steps toward containment by deciding to halt payment of industrial reparations to the Soviet Union. The Soviets, who were in the process of dismantling many German industrial sites in their occupation zone and shipping the equipment to the USSR, responded to the West’s rebuff by formally denying the West access to the Soviet zone. This step left the two sides confronting each other across an increasingly tense border that, as a product of purely military agreements in the final days of the war, lacked any natural political legitimacy. Moreover, the Western zone of Germany lay destitute; fear that the German population would starve
and instability would ensue was one important motivating factor behind the West's interest in rekindling the German economy. With political tensions mounting, the United States announced in September that American military forces would remain in Europe for the foreseeable future, rather than continue withdrawing as previously planned. Washington also offered to merge, for economic purposes, the U.S. occupation zone with the zones of other powers—an offer that the other Western powers accepted but the Soviets, as expected, turned aside. Together, these two actions signaled that the United States was rapidly approaching a permanent split with the Soviets and was beginning to move in the direction of creating a coalition of Western nations to oppose Stalin in Central Europe.

Spring 1947 was a particularly important turning point in launching the Cold War. Early in March, communist insurgency in Greece led to U.S. enunciation of the Truman Doctrine, which laid the policy basis for containment and offered U.S. aid to beleaguered nations along Europe's southern flank. In the wake of this important departure, U.S. Secretary of State Marshall, U.K. Foreign Minister Bevin, and French Foreign Minister Bidault journeyed to Moscow for critical four-power talks on Berlin, Germany, and Austria. Despite intensive discussions, the Moscow Conference failed to reconcile competing Soviet and Allied positions. At the core of their differences were divergent views about Germany. Although the Western Allies still were not in complete agreement on Germany's future (the French were especially unenthusiastic about recovery), they were moving steadily in the direction of a strong, democratic system on the Western side. The Soviets, it became clear at Moscow, wanted no part of any such design. Indeed, their clear distaste for any stable German government suggested a desire to pave the way for the kind of chronic instability that could lead to a communist takeover. 11

Growing alarm in Washington and Western Europe led in June 1947 to enunciation of the Marshall Plan (later officially named the European Recovery Program—ERP). The offer of major U.S. economic assistance was extended to the Eastern bloc, but the Soviets, unwilling to permit East European nations to develop close economic relations with the West, refused. This left the United States and its West European allies free to collaborate together. Progress on the Marshall Plan proceeded slowly at first. Negotiations with the Allies bogged down over West European needs, and the U.S. Congress, still beset by isolationism, balked at the expense. But eventually the details were worked out with the Allies, and Congress came along by approving an interim aid package in November 1947 and then the entire plan the following spring. Aid to Western Europe began flowing immediately thereafter. All told, the United States eventually provided some $13 billion of economic assistance—a huge amount. By providing food, coal, and financial support for rebuilding Western Europe's in-


The adoption of the Marshall Plan (later the ERP) meant that by early 1948 the West had completed the initial phase of forging an overall strategic policy in Europe. At this juncture, Western policy was composed of two intertwined parts: containment and recovery. Containment was publicly accorded the stature of being the West's principal goal, while recovery was initially advertised as a means to this end. But in reality recovery was also an important goal in itself. By rebuilding war-ravaged Western Europe, achieving economic prosperity, and fostering stable democratic regimes there, the United States and its partners aspired to a purpose that went well beyond the management of East-West relations. Their visionary goal was the creation of a Western community of nations, one tied together by similar values, common interests, collective security, and robust trade through an open international economic system. Containment, in turn, became a means to this end as well as a goal in itself. By blocking further Soviet expansion, it was intended to provide Western Europe the security shield that was needed for recovery to take hold. Containment and recovery thus were interdependent: Together they formed the basis of a Western grand strategy in Europe, one that looked far into the future.

Along with containment and recovery came an activist policy toward West Germany that laid to rest earlier thoughts that the Western powers intended to keep that nation neutral and economically weak. In mid-1947, the Western powers began taking steps to unify West Germany and to integrate it into the emerging West European order. Despite Stalin's vigorous protests (the Soviet representative to the Four-Power Control Council governing Germany finally walked out in early 1948), this effort gathered force over the following year, ultimately resulting in creation of the Federal Republic. The West pursued this controversial course not only out of humanitarian instincts but also because containment required a rapid German industrial reconstruction that could help fuel economic recovery across Western Europe.\footnote{For an analysis of West Germany's role in Western recovery plans, see John A. Reed, Jr., *Germany and NATO*, Fort Leslie J. McNair, National Defense University Press, Washington, D.C., 1987. Also, see Catherine McArdle Kelleher, *Germany and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1975; and James L. Richardson, *Germany and the Atlantic Alliance*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1966.} In many ways, this decision marked the final political break with Moscow. The idea that a modern industrial German state was about to rise phoenixlike from its own ashes clearly was anathema to the Soviets, who only recently had been victimized by Hitler's aggression and were unwilling to tolerate a resurgence of German power. Given these incompatible views on Germany, an East-West accommodation no longer was a practical alternative. The Cold War that ensued was not a product of misperceptions. There was no lack of diplomatic encounters to clarify matters.

By adopting the twin policies of containment and recovery, the West made an explicit strategic choice in which it set aside one concept of European order...
to pursue another. It abandoned hope that it could use diplomacy to reach a grand settlement with Stalin, one that presumably would have involved a neutral but possibly reunited status for Germany. It chose instead to build its own unity and strength, anchored on West German revival. The West was well aware that this policy would alienate the Soviets, intensify the Cold War, and at least temporarily help perpetuate the division of Europe into two hostile camps. But calculating that Stalin was not amenable to further diplomacy, the West concluded that this course was best.

Did the West act intelligently by proceeding along these lines? Containment and recovery, undeniably, were purchased at a price. In their wake came a Cold War that lasted fully four decades and only now has abated. At issue is whether this price could have been avoided. Could the West, by handling Stalin more adroitly, have had its cake and eaten it too?

In answering this question affirmatively, the revisionist school of the 1970s contended that the West became so obsessively preoccupied with its own security that it went too far toward throwing down the gauntlet of confrontation with the Soviet Union. Citing failed negotiations in 1946–1948 and the fact that Stalin periodically continued to send out diplomatic feelers suggesting flexibility on Germany and other matters (e.g., his 1952 démarche endorsing German reunification), revisionists argued that the West effectively foreclosed still-existing opportunities to deal with the Kremlin. Indeed, some members of this school asserted that the West itself was the principal cause of the Cold War, either by implicitly threatening Stalin with the atomic bomb in the late 1940s or by militarizing NATO later. Presumably the entire affair could have been avoided had the West looked beyond its narrow horizons and made a stronger attempt to find common ground with the Soviets.

To what degree are these allegations correct? While there is no way of knowing the answer, without question containment was pursued in an increasingly virulent way that suggested declining flexibility toward the Soviet Union. This especially was the case once NATO was formed and the Cold War took on military overtones. Whereas the extreme revisionist theories that blame the United States for geopolitical duplicity are far wide of the mark, the more moderate theories do finger fault lines in Western diplomacy. All fail, nonetheless, to come to grips with the Cold War’s principal cause: Stalin’s brutal dictatorship and threatening policies. To acknowledge that the West is partly to blame for the Cold War’s tense atmosphere is not to justify the conclusion that a far better European security order was possible had the West gone further toward placating Stalin. The core issue is not whether containment and recovery were implemented flawlessly, but whether some other policy—involving more concessions to Stalin and less Western resolve—could have done a better job of both preserving stability and protecting the West’s security. Perhaps such a policy could have been attempted, but it was wisely dismissed by the architects.

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of Western diplomacy in the late 1940s, and it has not been adequately justified in the years since then.

While the conservative principles that drove Western policy were unglamorous and controversial, it is hard to refute their underlying assumption that in the face of uncertainty and risk, prudence should be the hallmark of statecraft. In similar situations throughout history, nations normally have been reluctant to risk their security on the thesis that steps to protect themselves might offend an already hostile, well-armed, and seemingly expansionist adversary. Nor have groups of nations typically neglected to nurture their common bonds in the face of open hostility from a rival bloc espousing entirely alien values. Those nations that departed from these norms often suffered catastrophic consequences: The failure of appeasement at Munich taught this harsh lesson. Judged by the standards and lessons of history, the West’s stance was a logical response to the situation at hand.

The West had ample justification for concluding that Stalin’s goals went well beyond an accord that merely protected the Soviet Union’s legitimate security interests. Whether Stalin would have asserted totalitarian control over Western Europe had the opportunity been offered him is a conjectural question that cannot be answered. Suffice it to say that his failure to demobilize, his brutal conduct in Eastern Europe, his threatening demeanor toward Western Europe, and the details of his agenda in Germany hardly suggested a proclivity toward restraint in the absence of firm Western resistance. In all likelihood the East-West conflict could have been averted only if the West had been willing to accede to Stalin’s unacceptable goals for West Germany and the European security order. The West’s unwillingness to do so undeniably contributed to the stormy events that produced the Cold War. But short of risking its safety and betraying its democratic values, the West had no alternative. Judged from the perspective of the Cold War’s outcome, including Gorbachev’s willingness to acknowledge manifold Soviet errors, the West’s tough-minded stance stands up well as a sound strategic choice.

There is little room for argument that containment and recovery, when judged from a historical perspective, paid the West handsome dividends in more ways than one. The United States and its allies succeeded in both stemming the Soviet tide in Europe and in orchestrating the development of a stable, prosperous, and increasingly integrated Western Alliance. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union, cut off from the West’s wealth and yet unwilling to temper its paranoia or its expansionist security ambitions, fell steadily behind. Endowed with impressive natural resources of its own, it tried to compete by energizing its own economy and by establishing an economic alliance with its East European vassals. This effort initially showed signs of succeeding, but eventually it fell victim to the inability of a command economy to offset the advantages of an open market. The result was a major strategic defeat for the Soviet Union, one that not only left the Eastern bloc far behind the West but also eventually undermined the very fundamentals of socialist rule.
NATO's BIRTH

Despite its success in forging containment and recovery, the West as of early 1948 had not yet forged the defense policies and alliance relationships that also were needed to establish a complete grand strategy. Indeed, the West's defenses were still in disarray, and deterrence was nothing more than an academic concept. At the close of World War II, the Western powers had commanded a massive army of nearly 100 divisions and over four million soldiers in Europe. Had it been retained, this force would have been strong enough to contend with the large Soviet Army that occupied Eastern Europe. But in the months following Germany's surrender, the Allies promptly began demobilizing and reconfiguring their remaining forces for peacetime occupation duty. By early 1948, the United States had only about 200,000 troops in Europe, a number that was on its way down to 95,000 soldiers. Similarly, the United Kingdom had under 250,000 troops there and France, about 80,000. Moreover, since most of these U.S. and Allied forces were engaged in occupation duties, even they had little combat proficiency.\(^{15}\)

The West’s military vulnerability in Central Europe was magnified further by highly disadvantageous terrain. By the time the Germans had surrendered in early May 1945, Western armies had advanced deeply into Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Austria. As of May 8, the British 21st Army Group and the U.S. 9th and 1st Armies stood on the western bank of the Elbe River, only 60 miles from Berlin (see Figure 2.1). To the south, the U.S. 3rd and 7th Armies occupied a generally straight line stretching from Chemnitz, only 40 miles from Dresden, to Pilsen and Linz. This gave them control of the densely forested Thüringer Wald and other defensible terrain in western Czechoslovakia. But in honoring earlier agreements with the Soviets, the British and U.S. forces withdrew westward to what became the inter-German border. This withdrawal not only robbed them of important depth but also deprived them of the Elbe River and other defensible terrain. It also left them holding a long, concave defense line against a large Soviet army that had the advantage of a convex line and interior lines of communication. In other words, the West now found itself facing the worst possible geographical situation for a small force attempting to contain a larger attacker.\(^{16}\)

The details of Allied postwar force deployments made matters worse. As of early 1948, as Table 2.1 shows, the West had available only four infantry divisions, two armored divisions, and several independent brigades—the equivalent of only about nine divisions in manpower, tanks, artillery, and other weapons. Of this force, the United States provided only one infantry division and three armored regiments. A nine-division force at best would have been enough to constitute only a World War II-type “field army,” i.e., a force large enough to defend only about 100 to 150 km of the 750-km inter-German border. For this reason alone, a serious defense of West Germany was impossible.


Figure 2.1—Allied Advance Line in Germany: May 1945

Table 2.1

Allied Forces in Central Europe: 1948

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Force</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Division/equivalents</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brigades</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanks</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armored vehicles</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antitank weapons</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aircraft</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Author's estimate based on unit lists and standard weapon inventories for this period; multiple sources.

NOTE: Allied forces also included a number of lightly armed "constabulary" units performing administrative, police, and other occupation duties.
Moreover, these Allied forces were neither integrated into a single command nor concentrated in a single location. About half were deployed back near the Rhine River, a good distance removed from units in the forward areas (see Figure 2.2). Also, about two-thirds of them—American and French forces—were deployed in the southern part of West Germany, the area where they had fought in the war. The northern half of the country, with its open terrain, was defended by only a single British armored division supported by a paratroop brigade and a few small Danish units. This maldeployment practically invited a high-speed Soviet armored attack aimed at enveloping Allied forces and seizing the lowlands.

Nowhere had the logic of demobilization been carried further than in the United States, where both the government and the public were preoccupied with returning the nation to civilian life. Although President Truman was a relative newcomer to international affairs, he was surrounded by able advisers—such as George Marshall, Dean Acheson, and Robert Lovett—who had alerted him to Stalin's intrigues. As a result, he fully supported the Marshall Plan, the European Recovery Program, the rebuilding of Germany, and the other diplomatic and economic aspects of containment. However, he was
largely blind to the West’s vulnerable defense position in Europe. While his aversion to greater U.S. defense preparedness partly owed to the pressures he faced from an isolationist Congress, he himself had his own antimilitary agenda in mind. Truman had been a longtime critic of military “waste” while serving in the Congress. Now that he was president, he was principally concerned with maintaining a balanced budget and paring back the $250 billion national debt inherited from the war, all without raising federal taxes. This led him to impose a series of austerity budgets on the Pentagon that all but eliminated the massive military posture that the United States had fielded at the end of the war and thereby helped leave Western Europe militarily destitute.

In 1945, the Pentagon’s budget had been $81.6 billion. It dropped to $44.7 billion in 1946, and then to only $13.1 billion in 1947. With the Cold War heating up in early 1948, the Pentagon had asked for a postwar budget of about $15 billion a year, which would have been enough to support a minimally adequate force posture and modernization plan. But Truman rejected this request. Privately passing the word that he eventually intended to cut the defense budget down to $6 to $7 billion, he arbitrarily imposed a $10 billion ceiling on the Pentagon and a set of similarly stringent force goals. When the military fought back, Truman ultimately compromised with a budget that fell roughly midway between his ceiling and the Pentagon’s demands. But repeated pleas for more by senior officers from all three services fell on deaf ears in the White House.

Truman’s fiscal austerity had a disastrous impact on U.S. military strength. At the end of the war, the U.S. defense establishment had included some 12 million soldiers, sailors, and airmen. The level was down to 3 million by mid-1946, to 1.6 million a year later, and to 1.5 million by mid-1948. The Army was in the worst shape of all. In 1945, the Army had stood at 6 million soldiers and nearly 100 well-trained divisions. The Army’s senior leadership had recommended a peacetime force of 700,000 troops, a universal military training program to keep manpower at adequate levels, and some 10 to 12 combat-ready divisions. By early 1948, however, the Army had shrunk to only 530,000 men, many of whom were assigned to clerical, administrative, and occupation duties. It fielded only some nine divisions, most of which were badly understrength, poorly trained, and reliant on reserve soldiers to bring them up to authorized levels. Only three active divisions were available in the United States as a usable strategic reserve, and only the 82nd Airborne Division was close to being combat-ready. This state of affairs led Army Chief of Staff General Omar Bradley to declare bluntly that the Army of 1948 “could not fight its way out of a wet paper bag.”

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19 Bradley, *A General’s Life*.

The Navy was not in much better shape. In early 1945, the Navy had consisted of 40 aircraft carriers, 24 battleships, several hundred smaller surface combatants and submarines, 24,000 aircraft, and 3 million sailors supported by an additional 480,000 Marines. The Navy’s leadership had recommended a peacetime force of 15 carriers, 400 combatant ships, 550,000 sailors, and 100,000 Marines. By mid-1948, Navy force levels fell far below this estimate, consisting then of only 11 aging aircraft carriers, 289 combatants, 429,000 sailors, and 86,000 Marines. The Air Force, too, experienced similar cuts. In World War II, the Army Air Force had consisted of 2.3 million men, 68,400 aircraft, and 218 groups (a “group” was roughly equivalent to today’s wing, numbering either 30 bombers or 75 fighter planes). The air generals had recommended a postwar force of 70 groups and 400,000 men. By early 1948, the Air Force had shrunk to 38 groups, only 11 of which were operationally effective.21

American military strength rested almost entirely on the U.S. monopoly of atomic weapons. But the U.S. atomic arsenal itself had fared no better under Truman. As of 1947, the U.S. stockpile consisted of only about a dozen Nagasaki-type atomic bombs, all of which were unassembled. Despite the Pentagon’s urgent request for a buildup to 400 bombs, the stockpile by early 1948 still stood at 50 bombs. Moreover, the Air Force lacked enough long-range bombers to reach distant targets in strength. In mid-1948, it had a paltry force of 32 B-29 bombers equipped to deliver atomic bombs. By the end of the year, the Air Force’s inventory had grown somewhat, but only to about 100 bombs and a like number of bombers. To the uninformed observer, this might have seemed like a potent force in itself. But when the all-important military details were taken into account, 100 low-yield bombs were hardly enough to blunt the massive Soviet Army. While these in theory were enough to inflict major destruction on Soviet urban areas, practical considerations made even the countercity mission a question mark.22

At the time, nuclear deterrence had not yet embedded itself into American strategic doctrine. The atomic destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had brought about a sharp moral revulsion against using these weapons on civilian urban areas, but paradoxically the postwar U.S. strategic bombing survey had suggested that equally destructive conventional bombing of such cities as Berlin, Dresden, and Tokyo had done little to hasten the capitulation of Germany and Japan.23 That survey had indicated that pinpoint targeting of key in-

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid. See also George Quester, Nuclear Diplomacy, Dunellen Co., New York, 1970. The key point here is that a credible nuclear deterrent requires more than simply the possession of nuclear explosives. It requires a sufficient stockpile to destroy the relevant targets and the means to deliver these weapons. The United States was on the way to acquiring them by the late 1940s but did not yet have them. SAC was to emerge as a full-fledged nuclear bombardment force only in the 1950s. For an analysis of the problems and prospects associated with a strategic bombardment campaign in the late 1940s, see JCS 1952/4: “Evaluation of Current Strategic Air Offensive Plans,” December 1948, reprinted in Braud and Gaddis, Containment, pp. 357–359.
23 Early in the Cold War, the United States utilized the visionary Brulé Plan, which contemplated nuclear disarmament and investing the United Nations with the remaining atomic power. When the plan fell victim to squabbling with the Soviet Union, Washington abandoned it and thereafter tried to keep nuclear weapons under its own control. Congressional legislation was passed
dustries was a far better idea, and the U.S. Air Force, which had been charged with this function during World War II, embraced this idea in the early postwar years. Even so, strategic bombing of enemy military targets had not yet emerged as the centerpiece of overall American military strategy. At that moment, a bitter battle was under way in Washington over defense unification and Cold War military strategy that pitted the traditionalist Navy against an Air Force that was only in the process of detaching itself from the Army. The Air Force was a principal proponent of incorporating nuclear weapons into national military doctrine, but because the other two services commanded great influence, U.S. military strategy was still anchored on traditional ground and maritime campaigns, with strategic bombing seen only as a supplement.

Although nuclear bombing may have seemed the wave of the future to some, daunting technical impediments made it a difficult-to-execute option in the late 1940s. The B-29 and its souped-up version, the B-50, lacked round-trip intercontinental range and therefore had to launch from bases in England and Japan in order to reach targets in the Soviet Union. Because security alliances with these nations had not yet been formed, an adequate basing infrastructure had not been built there. Even if bases in these nations were available, the problem of penetrating Soviet air space remained. Allied bombers had been able to operate safely over Germany in World War II, but only after long-range interceptor aircraft had been built and German air defense strength had been weakened. The war’s closing days had seen jet aircraft appear on the scene, and now the Soviet Union was busily deploying MiG-15 jet interceptors and radars that together raised the prospect of destroying American bombers attempting to penetrate deeply over the Russian landmass.

Even had safe penetration been possible, another powerful impediment remained: the lack of good intelligence information about industrial and military targets. Because atomic bombs had not yet acquired destructive capacity far beyond the limited yields of the Hiroshima device, information on the exact location of enemy targets was needed. At the time, strategic reconnaissance systems were not yet available and data on the Soviet Union were sketchy. Until better information became available (several years afterward), U.S. bombers operating over the Soviet Union would be flying blind, able to strike cities that might have been evacuated before being struck, but far less able to seek out and destroy industrial-military targets that were the principal focus.24

These impediments created powerful incentives for employing atomic bombs against the advancing Russian Army, which was within reach. The American stockpile, however, was far too small to inflict catastrophic damage on a huge army that would be spread out over large territory. As a result, atomic bombs were viewed by the U.S. military as a useful weapon for inflicting attri-

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tion but not yet as capable of changing warfare to the point where traditional thinking about the importance of large armies could be altered.

Nor were American planners confident that atomic bombs exerted a decisive restraining influence on Stalin, who previously had shown few scruples about sacrificing millions of his own countrymen in order to achieve his totalitarian goals. Stalin himself had been sufficiently impressed by Hiroshima to launch his own atomic program, but not enough to prevent him from imposing iron control over Eastern Europe in the face of virulent Western objections. To American planners, Stalin’s hesitancy about sweeping into Western Europe seemed driven primarily by the need first to digest Eastern Europe and to recover the USSR’s depleted economic and military resources. With this task now being accomplished, and Western Europe still weak and defenseless, the time for aggression seemed to be fast approaching. In the eyes of American planners, the atomic bomb perhaps exerted a restraining influence on Stalin, but in early 1948, Russia’s TU-4 bomber (a carbon copy of the B-29) appeared on the scene, and observers expected the Soviet Union to develop an atomic bomb within three years.25 Their expectations were to be fulfilled far sooner, but because Stalin was already capable of devastating Western Europe conventionally after absorbing an American atomic strike—a potent deterrent in itself—the West’s atomic monopoly looked like an uncertain deterrent whose powers might decline even further once Stalin got the bomb.

The West European Allies presented a similarly sad picture of military weakness. As of early 1948, the West thus lacked any real semblance of military strength either in Western Europe or the United States. By comparison, the Soviet Union still deployed some 30 divisions in East Germany and elsewhere in Eastern Europe (including 9 tank and 11 motorized infantry divisions). The West thus found itself heavily outnumbered in divisions, tanks, and other weapons. Since the Soviet units were originally on occupation duty, many had been reduced to cadre status in which only 25 to 50% of their manpower actually was present. As of early 1948, they consequently were not prepared for an immediate attack. But they were capable of being filled out quickly—far faster than the West could hope to respond. Further, as the Cold War heated up in 1948 and 1949, Stalin undertook an effort to bring their readiness up to combat status by increasing their manpower and training. This rendered them far better prepared to launch an attack into West Germany if the situation so dictated.

Also, the Soviets, who had not demobilized nearly to the same degree as the West, possessed massive reserves in the USSR itself. Western intelligence estimates at the time credited the Soviets with 5 million men still under arms, fully 175 divisions arrayed against Western Europe, and another 125 divisions in strategic reserve.26 While this estimate later proved to be inflated, there is no

25See Quester, Nuclear Diplomacy.
26In Soviet Power and Europe, Wolfe concludes that after World War II ended, the Soviet Army demobilized from a wartime level of 300 divisions and 12 to 15 million men to about 175 divisions and 4 million men. In 1948, a further reorganization was undertaken that left the Soviet Army with a different internal structure but with World War II-style weapons. Full-scale modernization of the Soviet Army with new weapons and updated training and tactics began some two years later (Chap. 3, pp. 32–50).
doubt that the Soviets easily enjoyed an overwhelming military advantage in Europe. With Germany still totally disarmed and the other West European allies militarily weak and economically exhausted, the Soviet Union's military edge was counterbalanced only by the American atomic arsenal. However, the small U.S. atomic force did not yet pose a militarily credible deterrent if Stalin were willing to pay a price for conquering Europe.

The events of early 1948 were to galvanize the West into addressing this situation. As the Marshall Plan and German recovery began gathering momentum in late 1947, Stalin had responded by stepping up his own campaign in Europe. In September, he created the Cominform to strengthen his control over communist parties across Western Europe. Soon thereafter he ordered the communist parties in Italy and France to stage general strikes aimed at crippling the economies of these nations. In February 1948, Czechoslovakia, previously a democratic nation, fell under communist rule, thereby bringing Stalin's efforts to reconstruct the political face of Eastern Europe one step further toward completion. This accomplished, Stalin abruptly began turning the screws on West Germany. In mid-June, the Soviets started disrupting rail and road traffic to West Berlin. Then on June 24, one day after the West announced creation of a West German currency, Stalin severed all land routes to that city and cut off its electricity. Apparently this step was aimed not only at squeezing West Berlin but also at pressuring the West to abandon its plans to form a West German government. The West responded by launching a massive airlift to keep the city resupplied—an act that signaled its growing willingness to resist Stalin's designs with military force. As a result of these dramatic developments, the East-West struggle took on a new and more dangerous dimension. The possibility of war, previously dismissed as remote, suddenly seemed to have become real.

Reacting to this alarming downturn, the United States and several West European nations sprang to life and embarked on a complicated diplomatic course that ultimately resulted in the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, the West's first step in laying NATO's foundation. Shortly after the Berlin blockade began, the United States started to address its military capacity to deal with the deteriorating situation in Europe. In March 1948, the U.S. Military Governor of Germany, General Lucius Clay, had cabled Washington an alarming warning that war in Europe could break out at any moment. In response, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff set about drafting a unified war plan for prescribing how combat operations might be conducted in the event of war there. Partially motivated by fear that the Berlin crisis would soon explode into war, the first plan, dubbed "HALFMOON," was hastily drafted over the next two months and published in July 1948. This "emergency" plan focused on current operations rather than strategies for the future. Later renamed "FLEETWOOD" and "DOUBLESTAR,"

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it was distributed to the U.S. commands as an interim basis for coordinating their efforts to prepare detailed operational plans. 28

HALFMOON produced a dismal forecast of how a war in Europe was likely to unfold. It envisioned a worldwide Soviet attack launched simultaneously in Europe, the Middle East, and the Far East. Realistic almost to a fault, HALFMOON predicted that the Soviets would quickly sweep to major victory in all three theaters. In Europe, it forecast that Allied forces would be driven steadily backward—first to the Rhine, then to the English Channel and through the Pyrenees Mountains into Spain. It predicted that in a matter of a few weeks, all of Western Europe likely would be lost, and a total evacuation of U.S. military and civilian personnel would be necessary. In the Middle East, HALFMOON estimated that the Mediterranean would be closed and that Soviet forces would seize control over the Persian Gulf oil fields. In the Far East, a similar U.S. evacuation from Korea and China was also deemed necessary. 29

In an attempt to cope with this defeat, HALFMOON called for a military response that at best was uninspiring. It recommended a U.S.-Allied effort aimed at maintaining three strategic footholds: the United Kingdom, the Cairo-Suez area, and Japan/Okinawa. This limited objective, it estimated, was all that then-existing U.S. and allied forces could hope to accomplish. In conjunction with an American retreat to these footholds, HALFMOON called on the U.S. Navy to begin mining Soviet ports in the northern waters and the Far East. Presuming that authority would be granted to employ atomic weapons against the Soviet homeland, it also called upon SAC promptly to launch a full-scale bombing campaign against Soviet industry and war-making capability. It envisioned that this air offensive would begin within two weeks of D-Day (strike day) and would be mounted from the United Kingdom, Middle East, and Okinawa footholds. But it did not envision that this bombing campaign would have immediately decisive results. Since HALFMOON was compelled to make do with the 50 to 100 atomic bombs then in the U.S. stockpile, it proposed to rely on conventional ordnance to make up the difference. As a result, it calculated, a strategic bombing campaign of several months duration would be needed.

HALFMOON hoped that this campaign would soften up the Soviet Union’s forces and war-making capacity to the point where the United States, after mobilizing, would eventually be able to mount a counteroffensive. It envisioned a second phase of war in which the West, after assembling some 23 U.S. and British divisions and 1400 tactical aircraft, would begin mounting localized counterattacks about 12 months after D-Day. HALFMOON framed initial efforts to reopen the Mediterranean and regain the Middle East oil fields. Its

28"HALFMOON" (JSC 1944/13 "Brief of Short Range Emergency War Plan") is reprinted in Etzioni and Gaddis’s Containment, pp. 315-324.
29Ibid. HALFMOON thus responded to then-existing fears that Stalin's political agenda was focused on the southern flank and the Middle East/Persian Gulf oil fields. This fear was to lessen over the next year or two as the southern-flank situation stabilized. From that point forward, U.S. defense planning focused primarily on the Central Region. Concern over a possible Soviet invasion of Iran was to resurface in the late 1970s, when the fall of the Shah of Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan suggested an impending Soviet drive southward.
plans for retaking Europe included a lengthy World War II-style mobilization, after which American forces would invade the continent and eject the Soviets. It thus called for a repeat of the Normandy invasion and subsequent campaigns. But it was silent on precisely how the United States and Britain could hope to accomplish this demanding task against an entrenched Soviet Army that, in contrast to the Germans in 1944, would not be facing the distraction of a two-front war.

Despite the alarming light it shed on the West's defense prospects, HALF-MOON itself failed to motivate the White House into launching an emergency program to rebuild America's military strength. As the Berlin crisis mounted in the summer of 1948, Truman authorized several measures to improve military readiness. Reinstating the draft, he temporarily increased troop levels in Europe and authorized expansion of the Army to 850,000 men distributed among 12 active divisions and 6 ready National Guard divisions. He also facilitated the construction of atomic bombs, brought the Air Force's 38 groups up to full strength, and authorized the speedy deployment of 10 more groups, including more strategic bombers. But as the Berlin crisis began fading in late 1948, he returned to his budget-cutting ways. The guidelines that he issued the Pentagon in early 1949 envisioned a defense budget of $12 to $14.5 billion—fully 25% less than what the three services were now demanding as the price for a serious effort to defend Europe. The Army was cut back to 677,000 men and 10 divisions. A lid was clamped on the Navy's plans for constructing modern attack carriers. The Air Force was allowed to keep its 48 combat groups, but Truman impounded the extra $1 billion that the Congress had approved for building an additional 18 air groups.30

SIGNING OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY

The events of 1948, however, were to have a more enduring impact in shaping the attitudes of key State Department and Pentagon officials who were responsible for dealing with Europe. From Berlin and HALF-MOON, they realized that as long as the West remained militarily weak, it would be vulnerable to Soviet pressure tactics as well as a direct invasion. In essence, some form of military alliance had become necessary, one that would both send a signal to Stalin and provide the means to defend the continent. State and Defense officials thus began urging the White House to move in this direction, and although they were not able to budge Truman on the U.S. defense budget, they did succeed in warming him to the idea of a North Atlantic treaty.

Support for this idea had been building in Western Europe as well. During 1946 and 1947, a number of European nations had begun to address the troublesome military situation in Europe. In March 1947, the Treaty of Dunkirk had been signed, which primarily joined the British and the French together in planning for a possible military resurgence of Germany. Shortly thereafter the West Europeans, reacting to Stalin's actions in Eastern Europe, began shifting

30Blair, The Forgotten War; Bradley, A General's Life.
their attention to the growing Soviet threat. In March 1948, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg signed the Brussels Pact. This treaty united these nations in a military alliance that was specifically directed against the Soviets. But it did not include the nation that was needed to make a Western alliance a viable entity: the United States.\(^{31}\)

The Brussels Pact nations promptly launched a diplomatic effort to remedy this deficiency. In late December 1947, the British approached the United States with the suggestion for a mutual defense arrangement that would link American military power directly to the defense of Europe. London’s démarche was strongly supported by France, the Low Countries, and other West European nations. As a result, the Brussels Pact members had little difficulty in agreeing in late spring 1948 on an effort to formally negotiate a North Atlantic treaty with the United States. This idea quickly met with favor among Secretary of State George Marshall and other senior Truman administration officials, who had come to the same conclusion but had wanted the West Europeans to take the initiative. With Truman’s approval, Marshall and others set about to mobilize political support in Congress for a formal alliance. Despite the isolationist sentiments that still existed in some congressional quarters, this effort was successfully concluded in June 1948 when the Senate passed the Vandenberg Resolution. This landmark legislation provided the executive branch the bipartisan congressional support it needed to pursue a collective security arrangement with Western Europe.\(^ {32}\)

Shortly thereafter, transatlantic planning commenced for establishing a combined staff and a military structure that would join U.S. and allied military forces together into a collaborative alliance. This complex enterprise, conducted quietly amidst the contentious 1948 U.S. presidential election campaign, took several months to complete. But it ultimately proved successful. In the process, the original membership (the United States, Britain, Belgium, Canada, France, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands) was expanded to include Norway, Denmark, Iceland, and Italy. Truman’s surprising reelection in November cleared the way for approval by Congress, which lent its assent after prolonged hearings during early 1949. In April, the United States and the West European allies formally signed the North Atlantic Treaty, thereby committing these nations to the common cause of collective security and mutual defense. In the succeeding weeks, the Western Union Defense Organization formally delegated most of its defense responsibilities to the new alliance. With this step, the North Atlantic Alliance formally assumed its role as the West’s principal mechanism for preserving peace on the troubled European continent.\(^ {33}\)

For all its importance, the formal treaty was a short, two-page document composed of 14 separate, sparsely worded articles. While the first two articles

\(^{31}\) See Pogue, George C. Marshall, and Osgood, NATO, The Entangling Alliance. Also see Acheson, Present at the Creation.

\(^{32}\)Osgood, NATO, The Entangling Alliance, Acheson, Present at the Creation; and Pogue, George C. Marshall provide accounts of how the Vandenberg Resolution came to pass.

\(^{33}\) For a contemporary account, see Don Cook, Forging the Alliance, Martin Secker and Warburg Ltd., London, 1989.
exhorted member nations to develop cooperative political and economic relations. Articles 3 to 5 established the collective security framework for the alliance. Article 5, the key provision, stated that the parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them "shall be considered an attack against them all." In the event of such an attack, Article 5 further stated, the parties will take such action as deemed necessary, "including the use of armed force to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area." With this profound but ambiguous statement, the treaty established the core political and legal foundation for the new alliance, including later movement to a collective defense structure. But military integration was not mandated or even identified as a desired goal. The treaty called for the creation of a "council" to consider matters concerning implementation. This council was granted the authority to create subsidiary bodies as might be necessary. Beyond this, the treaty provided little guidance on what kind of superstructure—in terms of organization, command network, military strategy, and force posture—should be built on top of this foundation. By saying little in this area, the treaty thus left the member nations free to create whatever kind of alliance they deemed necessary.

The following September, the alliance approved the establishment of a set of civilian and military committees that gave NATO an organizational structure, albeit not a fully developed staff system. Included were the North Atlantic Council (NAC), composed of allied foreign ministers; a Defense Committee, composed of defense ministers; and a Military Committee, composed of allied chiefs of staff. Attached to the Military Committee was a Standing Group, which was entrusted with the important function of devising defense plans for each of NATO's subregions. In November, the NAC created a defense Financial and Economic Board made up of allied finance ministers, and a Military Production and Supply Board, which reported to the Military Committee. Somewhat later the Foreign Ministers established a Council of Deputies to help the NAC facilitate political exchanges and to implement its directives.

**TOWARD A HOLLOW MILITARY ALLIANCE**

Notwithstanding the importance of these steps, the new alliance still had not yet made any formal political commitment to a defense buildup or to any particular military strategy. These issues remained to be addressed, and as of mid-1949 substantial disagreement existed on exactly what course should be pursued. Essentially, military staffs on both sides of the Atlantic favored an integrated military structure and a powerful defense force. But civilian officials, conscious of the negative impact that a defense buildup would have on economic recovery, were chary of full integration and any expensive rearmament plan. The following year the alliance struggled with the problem of striking a proper balance between these two concerns. Because caution prevailed, it initially chose to tilt toward its economic priorities and to relegate military requirements to a distinctly secondary position. It elected to begin developing plans for a serious defense effort, but it did not elect to implement them. As a result, NATO temporarily was to remain a largely paper alliance, one united by
a treaty and a loose political organization but not possessing the military wherewithal to defend itself. This situation was to continue for another nine months.

NATO’s stall pattern was hardly the fault of the professional military establishments on both sides of the Atlantic. During the months in which the North Atlantic Treaty was being drafted, important progress had been made by U.S. and allied staffs in developing operational plans that ultimately were to become the basis for guiding the new alliance’s defense efforts. The result was that by the time the treaty was signed, a broad consensus already existed among U.S. and allied senior officers on how the new alliance should go about conducting its military business. While the plans that were adopted by no means solved all the problems facing the alliance, they did provide an initial basis for joint planning. Taken together, they underscored the need to involve U.S. forces directly in the defense of Western Europe, to bolster the alliance’s total forces, and to harmonize the contributions of all members.

In the United States, the Pentagon had set about in late 1948 to integrate American war plans with evolving efforts by the West Europeans. The result was the replacement of HALFMoon with a new, NATO-oriented plan called “OFFTACKLE.” Subsequently renamed SHAKEdown and CROSSPIECE, OFFTACKLE, officially adopted in mid-1949, was a more complete plan than HALFMoon. Like its predecessor, it addressed the problem of how the United States would conduct a war with only presently existing American and allied forces. This led it to postulate limited, realistic goals for the immediate future. Unlike HALFMoon, it benefited from coherent strategic policy guidance from the National Security Council. It thus was able to outline how a military campaign might be conducted that responded to national policy goals rather than purely military considerations.

OFFTACKLE consequently elevated the strategic importance of Europe in relationship to other regions. This change was a product of a revised sense of U.S. global priorities and an altered assessment of Soviet intentions and capabilities. Like its predecessor, OFFTACKLE assumed that a Soviet attack would have a global scope. But unlike HALFMoon, it concluded that the Soviets would not have the military capability to attack in strength virtually everywhere at once. In downgrading the Soviet threat, OFFTACKLE suggested that the United States would have some flexibility to concentrate its resources on Europe, the area most heavily threatened. OFFTACKLE also downgraded the importance of retaining total control of the Middle East and the Persian Gulf oil fields. This further encouraged a U.S. focus on Europe.

With regard to defending Europe, OFFTACKLE preserved HALFMoon’s nuclear bombardment, but it also called for a serious effort to defend the European continent itself. It laid down a requirement for a main line of resistance to be anchored no farther west than the Rhine River, the best terrain feature for halting a Soviet advance with only limited U.S. and allied forces. This line was

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to be extended on the left to the United Kingdom and on the right to the Cairo-Suez area. OFFTACKLE recognized that NATO's forces might be driven back from the Rhine or, more disastrous, off the continent. But in contrast to HALFMoon, it did not conclude that a complete evacuation of Europe was certain. It postulated that NATO might be able to hold a bridgehead in Western Europe, while preserving the United Kingdom as a base for a subsequent buildup and counterattack. It also concluded that NATO might be able to retain control over the western Mediterranean and to maintain contact with Turkey in the east. OFFTACKLE therefore marked an important turn in U.S. assessments toward a somewhat more optimistic appraisal of the West's defense prospects in Europe.

Building on this appraisal, OFFTACKLE called for a three-phased war lasting more than two years that would begin with a strategic defense of Europe and Asia, and then hopefully would transition to a strategic offensive in Europe. The first phase was to cover about four months. During this time, U.S. and allied forces were to defend against the Soviet attack in Europe while U.S. bombers were to launch a strategic campaign, employing atomic and conventional bombs, against the Soviet homeland and war-making capacity. This bombing campaign was to be launched from forward bases, and also from the continental United States; at the time, the B-36 bomber was being built, which promised the capability to strike the Soviet Union from American bases. Hopefully, some 300 atomic bombs and 17,000 tons of conventional explosives were to be delivered against the USSR and its forces, enough to destroy many industrial and military targets.35

OFFTACKLE's second phase, lasting through the end of the first year, was to include successful efforts to stop the Soviet advance coupled with an intensification of the strategic bombing campaign. During this period, a sustained buildup was to be conducted in the United Kingdom and from whatever bridgehead remained on the continent. If successful, this buildup was to lead to the third phase, which was to encompass the entire second year of the war. The key operational goal was the military defeat of Soviet forces in Western Europe, through reinvasion if necessary. This victory was to lead to a fourth phase of uncertain duration and unspecified operational objectives. OFFTACKLE's political guidance contemplated war-termination goals as broad as the complete elimination of any Soviet military presence outside the USSR's borders and even the possible destruction of the Bolshevik regime itself. In this sensitive area, OFFTACKLE kept U.S. options open by neither mandating nor ruling out the USSR's "unconditional surrender": an issue only if NATO could somehow transform early defeat into eventual victory.

During the time OFFTACKLE was being written in Washington, allied military staffs were busy developing operational plans of their own. In September 1948, the Brussels Pact had formed a Western Union Defense Organization, which included a Defense Committee and a Consultative Council of Foreign Ministers. The Defense Committee was to be assisted by a Joint Chiefs of Staff

35Ibid.
to be located at Fontainebleau, France. British Field Marshal Montgomery of World War II fame was appointed chairman, with a senior French general as his deputy. Over the next several months Montgomery led an effort to formulate initial defense plans for Central Europe, plans that could be used by the North Atlantic alliance once it was launched. The United States was not a formal participant in this effort, but American military advisers were present, and Montgomery clearly had an eventual U.S. contribution in mind.30

During the months leading up to the Berlin blockade, Montgomery had fought a lonely battle in London on behalf of a British-led effort to form a continental defense pact that the United States might be persuaded to support.37 When the Cold War intensified, Montgomery finally prevailed and was given the Fontainebleau job, where he encountered difficulties with the French military. Resentful of Montgomery’s status as chairman and probably Supreme Commander of Western Union forces in a war, French generals inflicted the same insubordinations on Montgomery that he had visited upon Eisenhower in World War II. Their complaints stemmed from the belief that, especially since their nation had commanded Allied forces in World War I and at the start of World War II, France should have the senior role now. But defeat in 1940, France’s marginal role in the liberation of Europe, and current weakness limited French leverage. With the continental powers badly needing a British commitment to help bring in the Americans, the prestigious Montgomery got the appointment over French military objections. This appointment and ensuing squabbles, however, bruised French sensitivities, and laid the groundwork for problems with France that worsened steadily once NATO was established and developed its policies.

The debates at Fontainebleau were driven by more than national rivalries over command roles: conflicting strategy agendas were also prominent. Knowing Britain’s history of standing aloof from continental affairs, the French were skeptical of being placed under command of a British officer who might craft defense plans that would leave France vulnerable. Laboring under the weight of hesitancy in London about becoming permanently entangled, Montgomery faced the difficult task of deriving a strategy that satisfied the interests of both nations. Increasing the difficulty was the precarious military balance. With a force of less than ten divisions and about 400 combat aircraft at his disposal, he faced a Soviet army of 175 divisions and 16,000 aircraft, and this posture was expected to expand to 320 divisions after three months of mobilization. Only 98 Soviet divisions were expected to be committed to a Central European offensive, but even so, NATO was heavily outnumbered. This situation


led Montgomery to pose three questions: Where should we defend? How many forces are needed? Which nations are to provide these forces? Montgomery’s study was expressly intended to address not only current operations but also future goals, with one eye on the Russians and the other on Western parliaments. An important document, it marked one of the West’s first efforts to specify the military objectives that it wanted to pursue in Europe and the forces that would be needed to attain them. The defense plan that Montgomery adopted, like OFFTACKLE, called for strategic bombardment of the Soviet Union as its centerpiece along with a sea blockade of Europe and protection of the Middle East oil fields. But in deference to the continental allies, it also called for an even more serious effort to defend the European mainland itself. It was this concept that carried the seeds of a debate over NATO’s future forces, one that Montgomery hoped would lead to a substantial Western military buildup.

The exact location of where the Brussels Pact’s defense line was to be drawn—how far forward—particularly became a matter of controversy. In one sense, a forward defense of West German territory was unavoidable. The Western allies could hardly afford to cede occupied West Germany in advance, and the fact that many U.S. and Allied forces were based on German territory meant that fighting initially would break out there. But the allies had the option of conducting a mobile, delaying defense that would trade space for time and allow them to select the best terrain for making a stand. At issue was where allied forces would dig in, establish a strong main line of resistance, and attempt to hold. While this issue was most narrowly a technical military matter, it also had important political dimensions that brought into question the West’s military strategy and force levels.

Montgomery was an ardent advocate of continental defense, but he was also a military realist. His efforts to balance these two impulses led him initially to favor a defense line running from the North Sea, down the IJssel and Rhine rivers, and stretching along the French-German border to the Mediterranean (see Figure 2.3). This concept, he knew, adequately protected purely British interests, but little else. Predictably, the French, Belgians, and Dutch strongly feared that a Rhine defense, if unsuccessful, could easily lead to a repeat of Dunkirk and another occupation of their own nations. As a result, they began arguing instead for a strong defense effort well eastward, beginning on the German partition line.

These valid political concerns ran afoul of technical military calculations in ways that drew attention to Montgomery’s strategic arguments for larger forces. The problem with a defense near the East-West dividing line was that it envisioned a more ambitious effort than what existing West European forces physically could mount. If an attack occurred with little warning, allied forces might

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Figure 2.3—Rhine Defense Concept: 1950

not even be able to march to the border before the Soviets had crossed it. Once there, they would be compelled to fight a significantly larger enemy force on terrain that favored the Soviets. Quick defeat would be almost unavoidable. Indeed, Montgomery's estimates suggested that even the Rhine River would be hard to hold with only present forces. Militarily, Montgomery maintained, defense of West Germany was therefore out of the question until the West built much larger forces.

Faced with this troublesome clash between the vital national interests of its members and harsh military realities, the Brussels Pact adopted a compromise calling for a defense effort "as far forward as possible": The Western allies would initially have to satisfy themselves with a Rhine defense due to their paucity of forces; but as more forces were fielded, the defense line would be moved well forward into West Germany. In its very ambiguity, this position laid out a plausible approach for managing the present situation while also paving the way for the future. It temporarily resolved the turmoil over operational defense plans. But by leaving unanswered the critical question of where the required forces for a forward defense were to come from, it made crystal clear that
the Brussels Pact needed not only greater defense strength itself, but also military support from the United States and possibly from West Germany as well.39

The West’s initial defense plans thus were based on two sources—the U.S. OFFTACKLE and Montgomery’s study—that seemingly differed noticeably in the priority they placed on defending east of the Rhine. The Montgomery plan called for the protection of West Germany’s forward areas, while recognizing that a retreat to the Rhine might be unavoidable. By contrast, OFFTACKLE aimed initially for only a Rhine defense and recognized officially that a retreat westward might be necessary. Differences of this magnitude, with important underlying political considerations, suggesting a clash of competing national interests, often can pose serious complications for a coalition. In this case, however, the differences between the two concepts were more apparent than real. Underlying them was a common conception of the alliance’s military purposes, one that united the professional staffs on both sides of the Atlantic into a de facto coalition in favor of transforming NATO into a full-fledged alliance with all the trappings of a large force posture, an integrated command structure, and a common doctrine.

Senior U.S. military officers were hardly opposed to the idea of defending West Germany providing they were given adequate forces for this mission. Since West Germany supplied a large portion of Western Europe’s industrial strength, loss of that nation alone would have dealt the West a crippling blow. This strategic reality was well recognized by the Pentagon; West Germany’s industrial importance was one of the reasons why the United States had embraced containment in the first place. Moreover, a World War II-style reinvansion would have been costly and uncertain. For this reason alone, forward defense made sense not only to the West Europeans but also to the U.S. military. To U.S. officers, the issue was one of military practicality. They were reluctant to develop operational plans that could not be implemented with the forces that already were deployed or were likely to become available in the near future. By insisting that military realism should be the basis for determining how U.S. forces would be employed in a war, U.S. officers shied away from a forward defense that extended the West’s reach beyond its grasp. But this did not mean they opposed Montgomery’s commitment to forward defense or his goal of motivating the alliance to take defense planning seriously. To the contrary.

Although Montgomery’s plan and OFFTACKLE appeared to clash on the surface, they actually worked together, in complementary fashion, on behalf of the same cause. For different reasons, both drew attention to the issue of defending West Germany. The former highlighted the strategic need to do so, while the latter made clear that the West presently could not achieve this important goal. The two plans therefore presented a similar political message: Both implicitly called for a substantial Western military buildup. The two plans were also similar in other, more fundamental ways. While they were concerned with deterrence, both recognized that this goal could not be accomplished simply by

39Karnowski, *The German Army and NATO Strategy*, and Reed, *Germany and NATO*, present insightful accounts of Montgomery’s studies and their interaction with U.S. war plans.
threatening the Soviet Union with atomic reprisal. They defined deterrence and defense coterminously. Deterrence, they claimed, could not be achieved with anything short of the military capability to physically defend Western Europe. Defense, they further implied, could be achieved only if the alliance fielded adequate forces to cover the terrain and otherwise execute the missions associated with a traditional field campaign. They thus viewed nuclear weapons as a necessary adjunct to the West's defense posture, not as a substitute for adequate conventional forces.

The two plans also were similar in that they both called for a resort to coalition warfare of the sort that had taken place in World War II. Neither was under the illusion that Soviet military power could be countered by any single Western nation or any subset of nations. OFFTACKLE illustrated that even the minimal goal of preserving a foothold on the European continent was impossible without a substantial allied contribution. The Montgomery plan acknowledged that a large American military force would be needed simply to hold the Rhine River, much less protect West Germany. Both plans therefore recognized that the members of the Western alliance would have to combine their resources together. Anything less, they acknowledged, would doom the West to failure.

Taken together, OFFTACKLE and the Montgomery plan were sufficiently similar to provide the new North Atlantic Alliance a common but politically controversial basis for military planning as it began operations in the summer of 1949. Differences continued to exist, not among U.S. and allied military staffs but at the political level of the alliance. There, a consensus in favor of a militarily strong alliance by no means prevailed. Some favored this course, but others opposed it for a combination of political and economic reasons. The prominent belief was that the situation had not yet deteriorated to the point of requiring this step and that the economic costs of a military buildup were unacceptably high. As a result, the drive to further military integration within NATO stalled, and the alliance resorted to a declaratory policy of political formulations that carried NATO only a few steps toward the goal favored by the professional military.

That fall, NATO's civilian authorities officially set about to integrate the military's plans with the alliance's political goals and economic priorities. The result was agreement by NATO's defense ministers on a formal "strategic defense concept" (DC 6/1), which was published in December 1949. Endorsed by the North Atlantic Council in January 1950, this concept established deterrence as the ultimate goal of NATO's military plans. It also called on NATO's members to cooperate together to develop both adequate forces for defending Europe and coordinated plans for employing these forces in the event deterrence failed. When it came to details, however, DC 6/1 provided not an inte-

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40 DC 6/1 is reprinted in Ezzold and Gaddis, *Containment*, pp. 335–338. Dean Acheson's memoirs are especially lucid on alliance political negotiations in 1949–1950. See *Present at the Creation*. 
grated defense plan but rather a broad, loose, and ineffective collection of principles for coordinating the national efforts of the new alliance’s members.41

In essence, the strategic concept called for an alliance based on national specialization rather than a uniform distribution of military missions. The United States was assigned the functions of strategic bombardment and, along with Britain, defending the sea lanes. While both nations were given the mission of providing supporting ground and air forces, the task of defending the European landmass itself was assigned largely to the continental allies. This “division of labor” approach was adopted for a combination of reasons that struck responsive chords on both sides of the Atlantic. Militarily, it was appealing because it attempted to channel member nations into areas where they enjoyed relative advantages. It thus offered a way to employ NATO’s limited assets to maximum advantage. Politically, it was attractive because it left the distasteful nuclear mission in American hands (thereby satisfying a key West European concern), while acceding to the Truman administration’s reluctance to accept conventional missions that would require a big U.S. military buildup.

Notwithstanding these attractive features, however, this approach was hardly a viable basis for achieving an integrated alliance defense posture and strategy. It left unresolved the troublesome question of how the alliance could hope to defend Central Europe under a philosophy that ignored the degree to which resources were asymmetrically distributed among alliance members. Implausibly, this approach called upon France and the Low Countries somehow to build most of the ground and air forces needed to physically protect the continent. In reality, these nations neither possessed the necessary forces nor were they able to build them. The new strategic concept was silent on how the alliance was to solve this problem. Left unsaid, but widely recognized by both U.S. and allied military authorities, was the implicit conclusion that commitment of large U.S. forces and German rearmament were steps that could not be avoided if NATO truly was to aspire to a viable defense of Central Europe.42 But this conclusion had not yet been embraced at the alliance’s political levels.

Although the division-of-labor philosophy was not a satisfactory basis for a sound NATO defense program, the new strategic concept still marked an important step forward and helped temporarily to serve as an initial foundation for both allocating defense burdens and coordinating planning for rearmament. In particular, the strategic concept usefully called for a host of cooperative measures to help foster combined planning. Included were standardization of military doctrines; conduct of combined exercises; cooperation in construction and operations of military installations; standardization of maintenance, repair, and service facilities; standardization of material and equipment; cooperation in

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41DC 6/1 did not, however, imply that the United States was not to make a contribution to Western Europe’s land defenses. At issue here was a matter of degree. It said that “initially, the hard core of ground forces will come from European nations. Other nations will give aid with the least possible delay and in accordance with overall plans.” Ezzard and Gaddis, Containment, p. 338. See Blair, The Forgotten War, for a critical account suggesting that budgetary motives lay behind the Truman administration’s support of DC 6/1. Acheson implies as much in his memoirs, Present at the Creation.

42See Reed, Germany and NATO; and Karnowski, The German Army and NATO Strategy.
establishing agreements for guiding military operations; collaboration in research and development; and joint planning for psychological and other special operations. In many ways, these areas were critically important in determining whether the new alliance actually could function as a vital organization. In calling for major cooperative efforts in these areas, the strategic concept in essence helped breathe some life into NATO.\textsuperscript{43} But it fell well short of actually bringing the alliance out of infancy into adulthood.

In the following weeks, U.S. and allied military officers accelerated their campaign, albeit with little success, to bring the required maturation about. By early 1950 NATO’s defense plans evolved further due to an official analysis that addressed the important issue of exactly how many forces were needed to defend Western Europe. The analysis was commissioned by the NATO Study Group, which issued guidance to a recently established body of Regional Planning Groups instructing them to make plans and identify force requirements for a hypothetical war in 1954. This year was selected because it was far enough in the future to provide a reasonable target date for a controlled buildup, yet sufficiently near to require a concerted effort. The Regional Groups were told to develop concepts to form a shield that would provide enough forces to withstand the initial shock of aggression. Behind their screen, reserve forces would be mobilized: enough to carry out the full set of missions.\textsuperscript{44}

Based on the operational concept of defending on the Rhine or well forward, the study called for a NATO posture that would begin with 34 divisions in Central Europe on mobilization day (M-Day) and would then build to 56 divisions after one month. In addition to these “forces in-being,” which were to be used to constitute the initial defense, this analysis also called for a year-long post D-Day mobilization that would produce about 50 entirely new divisions. These extra forces, it was reasoned, likely would be needed to launch a counteroffensive to recapture territory that might be ceded in initial fighting.\textsuperscript{45}

This study laid out a force requirement for NATO that accorded with traditional military planning standards for conventional war in Central Europe: some 50 to 60 divisions for defense and about 100 divisions for going on the offensive. In this sense, the estimate was hardly controversial. Indeed, it comforting suggested that NATO initially did not have to match the Soviet Union in maneuver units to defend itself. The main aim was to help NATO set appropriate goals for the future and to prod the alliance into greater activity. But the immediate effect of the estimate was to demonstrate how far removed NATO was from a viable posture. Although some NATO members had been increasing their forces since 1948, the alliance still was capable of deploying

\textsuperscript{43}DC 6/1 thus was focused not only on NATO’s force levels but also on establishing the entire military framework for an alliance, including the all-important logistic infrastructure and armaments industry. See Lord Lionel H. Ismay, Secretary General of NATO, NATO, The First Five Years: 1949–1954, Chap. IX, Boed-Utrecht, Netherlands, 1956.

\textsuperscript{44}See Lord Ismay, NATO, The First Five Years, pp. 110–115.

only 12 divisions in Central Europe within the first month or so. Nor were
further improvements likely to be forthcoming in the foreseeable future. In the
United States, Truman continued to hold a firm line on defense spending. If
anything, he wanted to pare back U.S. forces further and to withdraw some
units from Europe. In Europe, Germany was still unarmed while Britain,
France, and the Low Countries were reluctant to divert resources that were
needed to finance their economic recovery. These attitudes hardly augured
well for NATO’s military future.

On the bright side, U.S. military assistance was now beginning to flow to Eu-

erope. In April 1949, the Brussels Treaty nations had submitted a request for
military and financial assistance, and Washington had responded in a for-

thcoming manner. The Truman administration fashioned a program for $1.45
billion in aid to be funded in the FY50 budget. In July, Truman submitted a
Mutual Defense Assistance Bill to Congress, and this legislation was finally
signed into law the following October. By late January, bilateral agreements to
implement the legislation had been signed, and the first shipments began in
early March. This aid, in the form of weapons and supplies, however, was no
cure-all without an alliancewide decision to greatly expand NATO’s ground, air,
and naval forces.46

As a result, the North Atlantic Alliance was still left confronting the Soviets
with only token opposition. Without the ability of atomic weapons to totally
change things, West Germany could not be defended. For that matter, even a
Rhine defense may have been infeasible. Although NATO had assembled a
military staff, developed a strategic concept and operational doctrine, and
begun coalition planning, it was still a hollow shell in what really counted:
military strength. This depressing realization led a number of American
diplomats to conclude that NATO should abandon its quest for a highly
developed military structure. As an alternative, they had in mind a set of formal
political guarantees that, they hoped, would be enough to reassure the West
Europeans and to deter the Soviets. This idea did not ring true with U.S. and al-

lied military authorities, who were skeptical of any arrangement that lacked
adequate military strength. But the realities of the moment gave even them
little cause for hope.

As the 1950s dawned, the newly created North Atlantic Alliance thus found it-
self facing a dubious military and political situation. On a political level, the
United States and the West European allies had recognized that the Cold War
required a Western military alliance and had committed themselves accord-

ingly. But they were still so preoccupied with economic recovery that they were
reluctant to attend to the requirements of their military strategy. Their contin-

ental defenses remained weak and American reserves could not lend much
help. NATO therefore was left dependent upon an American atomic monopoly
that, while temporarily secure, was not seen as a cure-all and could not be ex-
pected to last forever. Had world affairs not intervened at this juncture, it is
possible that NATO’s military strength would have remained at this level for

46See Lord Ismay, NATO, The First Five Years, Chap. III.
some time. But as the 1950s unfolded, the alliance was treated to a series of shocks that jarred it out of its complacency and launched it on a more ambitious military path.
NATO’s propensity to lie asleep in periods of tranquility only to burst forth in frenzied military activity was first, and best, illustrated by the dramatic events that took place as the old decade ended and a new one began.

The increasingly provocative political behavior that the Soviet Union had demonstrated in Europe was itself enough to strain NATO’s nerves. Although Stalin lifted the Berlin blockade in 1949, after the allied airlift had successfully undermined it, he continued to consolidate communist rule throughout Eastern Europe. By 1950, the “Iron Curtain” had completely descended, thereby permanently dividing the entire continent into two ideologically opposed blocs. Moreover, the Soviets by no means had reconciled themselves to the creation of a democratic nation in West Germany, especially one aligned with the West and potentially capable of rearmament. Soviet diplomacy remained fairly flexible on the subject of Germany’s reunification, at least rhetorically. But Stalin showed little practical interest in leaving East Germany or withdrawing Soviet troops.

Equally important, the Soviet Union exploded its own atomic weapon in late August 1949, thereby ending forever the American monopoly that until then had been a source of comfort in NATO’s military strategy. The United States immediately commenced development of the hydrogen bomb, a vastly more powerful weapon that was intended to partially compensate for the USSR’s unexpected breakthrough. It was to test this weapon in November 1952. But the Soviets were to checkmate this gain by detonating their own hydrogen device only eight months later. To be sure, the Soviet Union was still years away from developing the large nuclear stockpile and delivery vehicles needed to strike the United States. But, even as early as 1950, the clock clearly had already started ticking on NATO’s nuclear dominance, thereby rendering the West’s exposed position in Central Europe even more vulnerable.

As if this setback was not enough, developments in Asia dealt further shocks to NATO’s sensibilities. In October 1949, Mao Tse-Tung’s guerrilla army swept to victory in China, in the process compelling the Nationalist regime to move to the offshore island of Formosa (Taiwan). The establishment of a communist regime in China tilted the Asian power balance toward Moscow and left the

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1Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe*, provides a detailed account of Soviet defense programs and military strategy in this period.
West confronting the possibility of communist expansion there as well. Then in June 1950, North Korean forces, apparently with Soviet approval, suddenly attacked South Korea and quickly defeated the weak South Korean forces opposing them. The United States reacted by promptly sending reinforcements from its forces in Japan. But the first U.S. units to arrive were themselves overpowered by the advancing North Koreans. Within a few days of this embarrassing rout, U.S. and South Korean forces found themselves clinging precariously to a narrow foothold on the southern tip of the peninsula.\(^2\)

The prospect of a communist regime in control of the entire Korean peninsula posed an immediate threat to Japan, which had been entirely disarmed after its surrender in 1945. Beyond this, the Korean War had ominous implications for Europe as well. The now nuclear-capable communist bloc finally had crossed the great divide by initiating military hostilities against the West. Alarm spread that the Korean War might be a forerunner of a Soviet advance on Western Europe. Indeed, many worried that the North Korean attack was a diversion designed to draw the United States into a war on the other side of the globe, thereby leaving Western Europe vulnerable to a Soviet thrust into West Germany.\(^3\)

**MILITARIZING THE ALLIANCE**

These reversals motivated the United States not only to send large forces to Korea but also to bolster its overall global posture, including its military presence in Europe. The first American attempt to forge a definitive policy toward the Soviet Union and Europe, NSC-20/4, had been written in late 1948, before these setbacks had taken place. In early spring 1950, it was replaced by NSC-68, a document that assessed how the United States and its allies could find more effective means for implementing containment. Written on the eve of the Korean War by an ad hoc committee of State and Defense Department officials under Paul Nitze's direction, it was to have a major impact on reshaping the U.S. government's thinking about how containment was to be achieved and about the state of the West's defense preparedness.\(^4\)

NSC-68 viewed the international situation in alarmist terms. When the containment policy had been fashioned three years earlier, it balanced off a sober appraisal of Stalin's goals with a cautiously optimistic assessment of the West's ability to live harmoniously with the Soviet Union over the long run. NSC-68 toned down the positive side of this assessment, transformed containment into a global doctrine that went well beyond Europe's boundaries, and militarized it. NSC-68 argued that the Soviet Union's expansionist tendencies thus far had shown no signs of abating even though the USSR already had gained control of nearly all areas on its periphery that were vital to its physical security. Arguing

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\(^3\)See Lord Ismay, *NATO, The First Five Years*, p. 31.

that the communist takeovers in Eastern Europe and China had strengthened the Soviet Union's global hand, NSC-68 dismissed the contention that the communist bloc was showing signs of internal fragmentation that would prevent the Soviets from mobilizing their assets to support external aggression. Finally, NSC-68 saw no signs that the Soviets would soon prove willing to negotiate with the West on establishing a stable balance of power, or that merely political, economic, and diplomatic action by the West would be enough to check Soviet expansionism. NSC-68 thus portrayed the Cold War in starkly confrontational and military terms. Its bottom line was that the Soviet Union posed an uncompromising and growing threat, one that the West needed to take even more seriously than before.

NSC-68 particularly worried that the Soviet Union might soon resort to overt military conquest as a means to pursue expansion. George Kennan had interpreted the Soviet threat in primarily political and economic terms. Convinced that the Soviets had seen enough fighting in World War II, he was worried more about internal subversion than military attack. NSC-68 reached the opposite conclusion. It argued that military force was becoming an increasingly important instrument of Soviet foreign policy. It recognized that the Soviets thus far may have been deterred from attacking by the American atomic monopoly. To date, it acknowledged, the threat primarily had been that the Soviets might attempt either to intimidate the West politically or to use proxies to attack Western interests. But, NSC-68 estimated, this was likely to change once the Soviets had acquired a nuclear capability of their own. At this juncture, NSC-68 argued, Stalin might well resort to open conquest in Europe or elsewhere. NSC-68 thus foresaw the definite possibility of war with the Soviet Union in the not distant future: It postulated that a period of "peak danger" lay only a few years off.

NSC-68 called on the United States and its allies to intensify their pursuit of containment by actively blocking Soviet expansion not only in areas that were strategically vital to the West, but even in peripheral areas. It worried that a setback almost anywhere would create a bad precedent, encourage the Soviets to transgress further, and contribute to a loss of confidence in the West. This concern led it to establish a new concept for containment, one that called for a firm perimeter defense along the entire Soviet periphery. This concept implied that along with Central Europe and Japan, such secondary areas as Korea, South Asia, the Middle East, and the Persian Gulf were to be defended if communist military forces transgressed there. NSC-68 thus cast the containment policy in global and inflexible terms. Further, it viewed military power as a principal mechanism of containment. Setting aside Kennan's argument that political and economic instruments were equally important in the strategic equation, it contended that the West required defensive strength that at least matched the Soviet Union's military might. Indeed, it concluded that "with-

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5NSC-68 provoked sharp disagreement from critics who opposed militarizing the Cold War, and Kennan was among the most vocal. The policy guidelines laid down by NSC-68, however, were embraced by the Eisenhower administration and came to represent the dominant consensus in the U.S. government. See Issacson and Thomas, *The Wise Men*. 
out superior military strength, in being and readily mobilizable, a policy of con-
tainment . . . is no more than a policy of bluff."

NSC-68 called for an ambitious nuclear program, including development of
the hydrogen bomb, acquisition of more U.S. strategic bombers, and an up-
graded bomber air defense system. But it rejected the idea that nuclear
weapons alone could provide the West with adequate military power. It argued
that the United States had relied too heavily on nuclear weapons and therefore
was left with few options between capitulation and precipitation of a global
atomic war. To solve this problem, it called for a prompt and massive buildup
of U.S. and allied ground, naval, and air conventional strength. It did not spec-
ify how large a military posture should be built or by how much the U.S. defense
budget should be increased. But NSC-68 clearly was talking in orders of magni-
tude. Informal estimates circulating at the time envisioned a budget of about
$50 billion, or about three and one-half times larger than Truman's present
budget.6

Although NSC-68 had broadly endorsed a major rearmament effort, it did not
immediately trigger a greatly enhanced U.S. defense budget. Indeed Truman
and Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson, neither of whom were initially pleased
with NSC-68, still held out hopes of keeping defense spending and force levels
down to roughly present levels. This changed a short while later, however,
when the Korean War broke out. Within a few weeks Truman dispatched sev-
eral divisions to reinforce American and South Korean units holding out in Pu-
san. This action stripped bare the Army's reserves in the United States, thereby
leaving NATO even more vulnerable to a Soviet attack in Europe. Accordingly,
Truman authorized a quick call-up of four National Guard divisions and
265,000 men to help compensate for this diversion. With this accomplished, he
lifted the Defense Department's budgetary ceiling for FY51 and authorized the
executive branch to determine long-range force requirements for both defend-
ing Korea and protecting other regions, including Europe.7

This task was accomplished over the following year. In July 1951, NSC-114
was issued, which authorized a big, long-term defense buildup to be com-
menced immediately. In response, the Defense Department requested a
budget of $70 billion along with a buildup that would culminate in 33 Army
divisions, 3 Marine divisions, 143 air wings, 12 large carriers, and 420 naval
combatants. Truman pared this request back to about $50 billion and called for
a stretched-out buildup that eventually would fulfill Air Force goals but would
leave the Army and Navy well short of these targets. Even so, by early 1953 U.S.
force levels had reached 20 Army divisions (8 in the Far East), 3 Marine divi-
sions, 98 air wings, 14 large carriers, and 401 major naval combatants. The

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7See Bradley's memoirs for a JCS perspective on the DoD budget battles during this period (A
General's Life, Chaps. 4-5).
United States was now vastly better prepared to execute its global military strategy.\(^8\)

This military buildup was accompanied by an American effort to energize NATO. In December 1950, Washington proposed a major NATO military buildup to include increased U.S. troop strength in Europe, a combined force under an American supreme commander, and development of a fully integrated civilian and military staff structure that made NATO a true organization. Truman pledged 6 U.S. divisions to NATO's defenses plus a reinforcing corps, a level that the Congress later reduced to a still substantial deployment of 5 divisions. During 1951 and 1952, U.S. troop strength in Europe grew from 145,000 to 346,000, thereby bringing U.S. Army forces there up to a strength of 5 divisions (4 infantry, 1 armored) and 3 independent regiments. Also, the United States launched an expensive $15 billion military assistance program under the Mutual Security Act of 1951 to provide allied forces with the equipment they needed to defend themselves. This aid program was to play an important role in making possible the NATO conventional defense buildup that took place over the next several years.

Along with these forces came the weight of U.S. political leadership, and a positive West European response. In January 1951, General Eisenhower, who had been recalled to active duty, arrived in Europe to assume the position of NATO's first supreme commander (SACEUR); Montgomery was appointed Deputy SACEUR. In addition to establishing SHAPE headquarters the following summer, Eisenhower visited West European capitals and Washington, D.C., urging an immediate upswing in NATO's defense programs. His campaign was well received and soon resulted in major improvements that went far beyond the beneficial effects of the U.S. assistance program. British and French defense spending that year jumped upward by 33 percent. Total NATO spending leaped from $20 billion in 1950, to $40 billion in 1951, to $60 billion in 1952. In this time, military manpower increased by 50 percent. The alliance also launched programs to increase training, to procure larger ammunition stockpiles and other war reserves, and to construct new airfields, signal networks, pipelines, and storage facilities. These measures had the effect of building the all-important military infrastructure that was necessary for NATO to establish a better defense posture. As these measures took effect, optimism began building on both sides of the Atlantic.\(^9\)

Along with these improvements come a series of institutional enhancements that further energized NATO. NAC was upgraded from a foreign ministers' body to governmental level, to include defense ministers. In late 1951, agreement was reached on establishment of a civilian International Staff to facilitate

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\(^8\) Eight of these divisions, along with supporting air and naval forces, were deployed in the Korean theater. Even with this diversion, significantly more U.S. forces were now available for Europe than only two years before.

\(^9\) See Jordan, *Generals in International Politics*, Chap. 1, "Eisenhower: Rekindling the Spirit of the West," University of Kentucky Press, Lexington, 1987. See also Lord Ismay, *NATO, The First Five Years*, p. 110. Among the more important developments was Winston Churchill's return to power in 1951, which transformed British opinion in favor of a continental commitment and NATO militarization.
coordination of decisions with alliance military authorities. In November, the NATO Defense College was created. In early 1952, the SACLANT and CINCHAN military commands were officially established to guide NATO's naval operations in the North Atlantic, and subsidiary military commands were also established. Shortly thereafter, Lord Ismay (U.K.) became NATO's first Secretary General, and the various staffs serving him were amalgamated into a single organizational headquarters, located in Paris. With these important steps, NATO at last had become an alliance with a full-fledged organization and military command structure.

Provided adequate forces were fielded, creation of an integrated military command promised to substantially improve NATO's defense prospects. Prior to this step, NATO's theater defenses were divided into separate northern, central, and southern regions. These regional groupings were not bonded together to form an integrated posture capable of coordinated operations across all of Europe. Nor were NATO's naval defenses closely tied to the continental campaign strategy. Within each region, moreover, national armies continued to operate separately, with no common doctrine. The integrated command provided a vehicle for solving these problems by organizing the Central Region forces under a single military leadership, relating regional defense strategies to each other, and blending together continental and maritime concepts. These improvements were far too complex to achieve overnight, but over a period of months and years, NATO's integrated command made great strides toward bringing them about. As a result, NATO was transformed from a loose coalition into a tightly knit military alliance capable of combined operations on a grand scale.

During this period, NATO also launched an effort to adapt a coherent military strategy, one that dropped the earlier division of labor philosophy and openly called for a large defense posture of U.S. and allied forces. A series of studies resulted in agreement in 1951 on MC 14/1, NATO's first formal strategy statement. Representing a combination of American and West European thinking, MC 14/1 postulated a strategy that relied heavily on strategic nuclear weapons, but it also incorporated ambitious goals for NATO's conventional defenses. It recognized that NATO's present force limitations temporarily would make a defense of all West German territory impossible. Accordingly, it called for a defense line initially along the Rhine River. But in a marked departure from the past, it also limited the Rhine defense to a period of five years, during which time NATO's forces were to grow to the point of making a more forward defense possible.\(^\text{10}\)

MC 14/1 relied on American strategic bombardment and alliancewide mobilization to achieve ultimate victory. But the forward defense component of the strategy was recognized as being viable only if NATO's ground posture could be significantly strengthened. Building on Montgomery's earlier efforts, the NATO military staff produced a revised estimate calling for 90 active and reserve divisions "in being." This force level however did not apply only to the

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\(^{10}\)See Karnowski, The German Army and NATO Strategy, Chap. 2.
Central Region (defined as the area stretching from Denmark through West Germany and France) and the AFCENT command there, which accounted for only 54 divisions. It also envisioned a strong conventional defense along the southern flank under AFЮOUTH (21 divisions) for defending Greece, Turkey, and Italy; on the northern flank in Norway under AFNORTH (14 divisions); and in the North Atlantic (1 division presumably for Iceland). Thus NATO's military strategy, in response to the alliance's growing membership, had been expanded to include the entire European theater.11

THE LISBON GOALS

Although the alliance now found itself in high gear, the NATO staff's ambitious force goals soon proved to be more than the traffic would bear. At the time, NATO's entire posture still numbered only some 12 divisions and 900 combat aircraft. Many European and American political leaders objected that a major, fast-paced military buildup would consume scarce investment funds, trigger inflation, deplete currency reserves, and thereby undermine Western Europe's economic recovery. In response, the alliance commissioned a further internal review of its military requirements in order to adjust force levels, readiness standards, and scheduling to the prevailing political and economic constraints. To be undertaken by a Temporary Council Committee, this study was aimed at determining whether the military authorities were asking too much or the governments were offering too little. The goal was a compromise plan that balanced requirements against fiscal realities. This study was led by three "wise men"—Averell Harriman (U.S.), Jean Monnet (France), and Sir Edwin Plowden (U.K.)—who commanded political stature across the alliance. It culminated in the force goals that were officially adopted by the North Atlantic Council at Lisbon in early 1952. As shown in Table 3.1, the Lisbon goals established alliancwide targets for ground and air forces (along with a navy building to over 700 ships).

Although the Lisbon agreement was later to be characterized as an exercise in futility, at the time it was regarded as a major achievement in alliance planning. It reflected a NATO-wide decision partially to subordinate economic re-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Force</th>
<th>1952</th>
<th>1953</th>
<th>1954</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divisions</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aircraft</td>
<td>4000</td>
<td>6500</td>
<td>9000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Osgood, NATO, The Entangling Alliance, pp. 87-88.

11Ibid.
covery to rearmament and to establish a common frame of reference for guiding member nation defense efforts in the years ahead. While it did not scale back the total force level envisioned by earlier studies, it did stretch out the pace at which NATO's members would be required to meet the new goals. Also, it mandated that only 35 to 40 of the 96 total divisions need be combat-ready units. Its basic concept was to create enough active forces to contend with highly ready Soviet units that might launch a surprise attack, while deploying the remainder as less expensive reserve units whose readiness would be linked to the arrival of later-deploying Soviet reserves. As a result, the Lisbon goals concluded that about 60 percent of NATO's posture could be less expensive reserve units that would be available a few days or weeks after mobilization. It thus attempted to launch a buildup that would be financially affordable and politically realistic. Even so, the Lisbon goals postulated daunting targets for the alliance. These targets, it was widely recognized, could be achieved only if all member nations exerted strong efforts in the face of tough economic difficulties. A true coalition response was required.

Although skepticism prevailed in some quarters, the alliance's initial response was encouraging. On the northern flank, Norway and Denmark began upgrading their combat forces. On the southern flank, Italy, Greece, and Turkey (the latter two nations were admitted to NATO in 1952) did likewise. In the critical Central Region, a similar pattern emerged. Belgium, aided by U.S. military assistance, committed itself to an ambitious rearmament program. Its defense budget grew from only 5 million francs in 1948 to 21 million francs in 1953; its army doubled in size in this period from 75,000 soldiers to 150,000. Reacting to the Lisbon goals, Belgium set a future target of fielding 3 active and 2 reserve divisions, an air force of 400 aircraft, and a 15-ship navy. The Netherlands committed itself to providing a single corps of 1 active and 4 reserve divisions that could be mobilized within 48 hours. Canada also agreed to provide a single brigade in Europe and an air division, plus 2 reinforcing brigades. The United Kingdom agreed to reverse its centuries-old policy of avoiding continental commitments and set about to establish a combat-ready British Army of the Rhine (BAOR), a force that would field 4 or 5 divisions. Perhaps most important, France, then an outspoken advocate of forward defense, agreed to provide about 15 divisions. At the time, however, the French had only 5 divisions in Europe; 10 others were tied up in Indochina and elsewhere. France's ability to fully meet this commitment anytime soon was a large question mark.\(^{12}\)

As a result of these increases, NATO's defenses in 1953 stood at much higher levels than had been the case five years before. As Table 3.2 shows, NATO's strength had at least doubled in nearly every category. These increases did not fully offset the Soviet Union's edge, but they brought the force balance closer into alignment. The Soviets, of course, retained the capacity to reinforce from the western USSR, but the United States now had the capacity to reinforce NATO with at least an additional 3 to 6 divisions. All this was not nearly enough

\(^{12}\)Osgood, *NATO, The Entangling Alliance*. 
Table 3.2  
NATO Force Trends in Central Europe: 1948–1953

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Force</th>
<th>1948</th>
<th>1953</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manpower (000s)</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division/equivalents</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brigades/regiments</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanks</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>1650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armored vehicles</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antitank weapons</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>1100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>1150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aircraft</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>1300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Author’s estimates from multiple sources.

to give NATO a highly confident defense posture, especially for a forward defense of West German territory. But it was enough to begin making NATO competitive on the battlefield at least in the early stages.

The Lisbon Force Goals promised to improve NATO’s defenses in the Central Region further. But even if the United States and its other NATO allies completely met all the commitments entrusted to them, together they would provide only 37 to 42 of the 54 divisions (depending upon the extent of U.S. and French reinforcements) that the Lisbon goals required for Central Europe. As the architects of the Lisbon agreement were well aware, a viable Central Region posture could be attained only if the alliance faced up to the politically wrenching problem of allowing West Germany to rearm. Accordingly the Lisbon goals, based on complex alliance negotiations that had been under way since 1950, also called for deployment of 12 West German divisions.\(^\text{13}\) Over the next two years the alliance’s defense deliberations were to focus primarily on how this controversial goal could be achieved.

GERMAN REARMAMENT AND THE TRANSATLANTIC BARGAIN

Efforts by the occupying Western powers to establish a sovereign Federal Republic of Germany were part of a conscious strategy to integrate that nation within the Western alliance, including both its military and economic arms. This campaign got under way in 1948 and steadily gained momentum in the following years. In late 1948 West Germany’s Parliamentary Council met in Bonn to establish a provisional constitution for a new state. The new constitution, termed the “Basic Law,” was approved by allied military governments and adopted in May 1949. Two weeks later, the Federal Republic was officially proclaimed and placed under the guidance of a civilian High Commission. In the following months Konrad Adenauer, an ardent advocate of integration with the West even at the expense of reunification, was elected and confirmed by the new Bundestag (Parliament) as the FRC’s first Chancellor.

\(^{13}\)Karnowski, *The German Army and NATO Strategy.*
Over the next three years, the Federal Republic emerged as a stable, economically strong, pro-NATO democracy. In no small way, this achievement was a product of Adenauer’s visionary but clear-minded, pragmatic leadership. Adenauer calculated that Germany needed to be anchored in the West not only to protect itself from the Soviet Union, but also to ensure that the FRG would never again succumb to nationalist forces at home. As a result, he consciously sought to embed the FRG in Western institutions and to be “a good ally.” The West, for the most part, reacted favorably to Adenauer’s agenda. The state of war between Germany and the Western powers was officially terminated, and in 1951 West Germany became a member of the new European Coal and Steel Community, the forerunner of the Common Market. In May 1952, a Contractual Agreement was signed by the United States, France, and Britain, thereby formally ending the military occupation of Germany. Full sovereignty, however, was not achieved until almost three years later, after a lengthy diplomatic dispute over Germany’s rearmament.

At the time, interest was rapidly mounting across Western Europe for economic integration and close political cooperation. Creation of the Bretton Woods accords some years earlier had laid the foundations for an open world economy, anchored on U.S. leadership and transatlantic trade, that promised to help fuel economic growth and prosperity on both sides of the Atlantic. In the aftermath of the Marshall Plan, the European Coal and Steel Community had been created to tie West Germany’s vibrant economy into Western Europe as a whole, thereby binding the FRG politically to its neighbors. Sensing the enormous gains that might be achieved if national barriers to trade and capital formation could be broken down, proponents were laying the groundwork for the Common Market, and visionaries were calling for a full-scale economic union and even political integration. Sensitive about the implications for lost sovereignty and national identity, many governments were receptive to lowered trade barriers but less enthused about broader schemes. Even so, the path was being rapidly cleared for major steps toward economic integration.

The debate brewing in Western Europe was to unfold in a fashion that led to steady flowering of the Common Market, then to creation of the EEC, and still later, to the EC. Gradually, the circle of nations was to widen, and the scope of collaborative actions was to increase. The entire process was to play a major role not only in fostering Western Europe’s prosperity, but also in strengthening the Western alliance and exposing the fault lines of communism. But as of the early 1950s, these achievements lay far in the future. With economic integration just getting under way, and East-West relations in a precarious state, security affairs remained a dominant concern. NATO’s defense posture demanded shoring up, and any effort to fully integrate West Germany required not only economic ties but also reciprocal security commitments. German rearmament and entrance into NATO held the key to attaining these goals.

Interest in rearming West Germany had emerged together with the drive to make that nation an important political and economic contributor to the Western alliance. The idea of rearmament first took hold in the Pentagon in 1948, where U.S. military officers were quick to realize that Western Europe could not
be defended without a German military contribution. Political support for this idea was lacking, however, especially among France and other West European nations that still were embittered by World War II. Moreover, West Germany itself was hostile to the idea; immediately after becoming Chancellor, Adenauer swore off any interest in rearmament. By 1950, opinions had changed. That year the United States, driven by ambitious Pentagon demands for a highly developed NATO defense establishment that would make a large U.S. force presence sensible, conditioned its military commitment to NATO on agreement that German rearmament would eventually be undertaken. By this time, the British and West European nations (minus France) also had reconciled themselves to the idea, especially if German forces would become part of an all-European army. The stage was thus set for the alliance to begin moving in this direction.

The drive that took place in 1950–1952 to rear West Germany, restore its sovereignty, and admit it into NATO—astonishing steps given the recent legacy of World War II—can be understood only in the context of the changes that were taking place in European security affairs and the West’s attitude toward the FRG. Prior to 1950, the situation in Europe was fairly fluid. Many in the West still hoped that a satisfactory deal could be worked out with Stalin now that he had come to understand NATO’s resolve and the limits of Soviet power. Reinforcing their hopes was the fact that Stalin himself had been showing some signs of flexibility after having been rebuffed over Berlin and confronted with NATO’s formation. The outbreak of the Korean War, coupled with what seemed to be a decision by Stalin to abandon any interest in a settlement with the West, changed this. It became apparent in the West that Europe was now permanently divided into two opposing camps and that a prolonged period of tension was in store. Indeed, fear spread that the Korean War was only the Eastern bloc’s opening gambit and that Western Europe would be next.

The division of Europe into two blocs cast West Germany into the role of being a Western front-line state, one that could not be allowed to remain neutral and unarmed. The idea of rearming West Germany would have been anathema only a few years before, when anger toward Germany still ran high in most Western nations. But the West’s psychology had undergone a fundamental transformation since then; West Germany, in the West’s collective mind, had gone from being a foe to becoming a friend. This process had started as early as 1946, when Western officials began sending signals of acceptance to West Germany, and crystallized during the Berlin crisis of 1948–1949. During the Berlin blockade, Germans began being perceived as innocent victims of Soviet aggression who had the pluck and determination to stand up to Stalin’s bullying tactics. Meanwhile, denazification and the creation of democratic institutions in the new Federal Republic helped cleanse Germany’s authoritarian and militaristic image. Also, West Germany’s energetic economic recovery and its evi-

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14The background events leading up to the FRG’s admission into NATO are covered by Reed, Germany and NATO; Kelleher, Germany and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons; and Richardson, Germany and the Atlantic Alliance. For an excellent analysis of the action of the Bundeswehr, see Donald Abenheim, Reforging the Iron Cross: The Search for Tradition in the West German Armed Forces, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1988.
dent willingness to be a stable contributor to the Western community were impressive. Taken together, these developments gave West Germany an entirely new and attractive image. Essentially, NATO's members came to conclude that the Federal Republic was needed in the alliance not only for geopolitical purposes, but also because it belonged in the fold for reason of common values.

In West Germany itself, the Adenauer government began to see potential advantages in rearmament and entrance into NATO. Adenauer recognized that this step likely would be controversial among the German populace, which had developed a markedly antimilitary orientation since 1945. Abroad, rearmament could be expected to stir up fears of a resurgent German militarism and irredentism. Equally important, it likely would put a final nail in the coffin of reunification. Offsetting these drawbacks, in Adenauer's eyes, was the principal consideration that the FRG could not be physically protected from Soviet aggression in the absence of NATO membership and a sizable German Army. This alone made rearmament a practical necessity. Politically, rearmament also offered a host of benefits as long as it could be undertaken within the framework of NATO and other Western institutions. Among these benefits, rearmament could help gain sovereignty for the FRG and establish a more equal relationship with other Western nations. Entrance into NATO, in turn, could help gain concessions from the United States and other members regarding the FRG's security, while serving to erase lingering memories of World War II. Finally, Adenauer hoped this act might help strengthen democratic institutions within West Germany while further promoting the cause of political integration across Western Europe.

As the early months of 1950 passed by, Bonn received a growing number of signals from the United States and other NATO nations giving a green light to rearmament. Adenauer initially demurred, but when the Korean War broke out in late June he dramatically switched positions and became an active proponent of rearmament. In late August, he informed the Allied High Commission that West Germany was now willing to make a military contribution within the framework of a European force. This was followed by his decision in October to initiate a secret, low-keyed effort in Bonn to begin drawing up plans (expressed in the Himmler memorandum, the Bundeswehr's—defense force's—Magna Carta) for the formation of a West German defense establishment, one that would be tightly integrated into Federal Republic democratic institutions. This effort produced tentative ideas on a host of matters, including force levels, doctrine, weapon systems, and logistics. Adenauer then appointed Theodore Blank, a parliamentary deputy of the CDU party, as his new security adviser, with a small staff of civilians and ex-military officers charged with responsibility for transforming the Himmler concepts into full-fledged plans. In succeeding months, Blank's staff was to grow steadily, eventually mutating into the present-day FRG defense ministry.

Meanwhile, official interest grew steadily in other NATO capitals, including Washington. In January 1951, General Eisenhower spoke favorably of the idea. That month, FRG officials met with the U.S., British, and French High Commissioners at the Petersberg castle outside Bonn and opened formal discussions
about FRG rearmament, entrance into NATO, and sovereignty. As these talks progressed over the following months, the West’s commitment to these steps steadily deepened. That September the North Atlantic Council officially agreed to consider West Germany’s participation in NATO of a political and military nature. The only issue was one of exactly how rearmament was to be achieved and within what Western institutional framework.

It was at this juncture that the French, who still remained opposed to the emergence of any German army as an independent entity, entered the arena in an effort to channel rearmament in a direction acceptable to them. In Paris, a number of West European allies had been negotiating on forming an all-European military force. The onset of the Petersberg talks in Bonn led the French government to invite the FRG to join the negotiations in Paris. This accomplished, the French in October proposed the Pleven Plan (named after Premier Rene Pleven), which called for creation of a European Defense Community (EDC). As envisioned by Pleven, the EDC was to include a Special European Force under a European Minister of Defense, which would have its own command staff but still would be controlled by SACEUR. German soldiers were to contribute to this force, along with other continental allies, but the Federal Republic would be not allowed to form its own General Staff, defense ministry, or armaments industry. In essence, the Pleven Plan aimed at creating German forces without rearming the West German state itself.\textsuperscript{15}

The United States and other alliance members, including the FRG, came to support the basic idea that any German army should be integrated into the Western alliance in a European army. The Paris Conference in July 1951 endorsed this concept, and General Eisenhower agreed to cooperate in its development. The specifics of the Pleven Plan, however, drew little support outside France. On purely military grounds, it suffered from technical drawbacks. It initially envisioned that the new European force would have no national identity above the battalion (later regimental) level. This concept drew a cool response from NATO’s military commanders, who felt that multinational integration below the corps level (or at most, division) was operationally infeasible. Equally important, the Pleven Plan was politically unacceptable. It implied French domination of the European force and the near exclusion of the Americans and British—an idea received poorly in Washington and London. Moreover, it was viewed in Bonn as an affront to the FRG’s sovereignty.\textsuperscript{16}

The Pleven Plan’s rejection triggered the United States and other West European nations into launching negotiations aimed at creating an EDC and a rearmed West Germany in an alternative, more widely accepted way. The goal of this approach was to tie West German forces to the alliance, preserve a balance of military power between the FRG and France, and achieve an equitable distribution of U.S. military assistance among the West European nations.

\textsuperscript{15}For an appraisal of French policy in this period, see Michael M. Harrison, The Reluctant Ally: France and Atlantic Security, Chap. 1, Johns Hopkins, Baltimore, Md., 1981.

These negotiations culminated in May 1952—the same time that the Lisbon Force Goals were agreed upon—with the signing of the Treaty of Paris, which, upon approval of allied parliaments, was to bring the EDC to life. Ratification of the EDC, in turn, was to trigger activation of the Bonn Convention, also signed at this time, restoring West Germany to full sovereignty.

The EDC treaty envisioned a European force, but unlike the original Pleven Plan it authorized national units at the divisional level and abandoned plans for integration at lower echelons. It was intended to merge the armed forces of six signatory nations: France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. It also included agreements committing the U.S. and British forces to the defense of EDC nations, including West Germany, and called upon France to contribute 12 to 15 divisions. Equally important, it established upper limits on total German military strength that remained in effect, with peacetime German ground, air, and naval manpower to be limited to 500,000 men. Although some earlier studies had envisioned a German army of 18 divisions, the EDC treaty limited the FRG to 12 active divisions plus some reserve units. In total, some 43 allied divisions were to be fielded, all under a supreme commander and with a single budget. The budget was to be controlled by an executive commission, a council of ministers, an assembly, and a court of justice. The EDC thus aimed to propel the West European members a good distance in the direction of political integration.17

The EDC, however, never got off the ground because the French, having been important architects of this laboriously negotiated treaty, promptly backed away from the entire enterprise. Shortly after the treaty was signed, the French government decided to delay ratifying it until early 1953. Under intense U.S. pressure, exemplified by Secretary of State Dulles’s famous “agonizing reappraisal” speech, the treaty was finally submitted to the National Assembly for approval, where it promptly encountered major opposition from hostile French political parties from both the left wing and the right wing. The treaty languished until 1954, when the Laniel government fell because of Indochina. The new Premier, Pierre Mendes-France, demanded major revisions to the treaty, which were rejected by the other signatories. Facing continuing demands from the United States and other alliance members to approve the treaty and thereby restore the FRG’s long-delayed sovereignty, he finally brought the treaty to a vote. On August 30, 1954, the National Assembly rejected it by a margin of 319 to 264.

This negative reaction partly was a product of resurgent French nationalism, which rejected the concept of European unity and any loss of sovereign control over French forces. Another factor was disgruntlement over Washington’s failure to assist France in Indochina in ways sought by Paris. But France’s reaction also was driven by practical reasons. Militarily, the French were unable to meet the treaty’s force commitments due to their large overseas deployments.

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17Early studies by the FRG government had identified a requirement of 12 to 18 divisions. The EDC treaty and the subsequent Paris Agreement limited the Bundeswehr to 12 active divisions. Also, they allowed the FRG to deploy a reserve Territorial Army. The FRG thus was granted flexibility to build a posture somewhat larger than the 12-division limit.
Politically, France by 1954 also had begun to become concerned about West Germany’s growing political energy and was chary of an organization that left out the British as a counterbalance. Whatever the causes, France’s decision—not the first (or last) by Paris to annoy Washington, London, and Bonn—left the dismayed alliance with the dispiriting task of forging an entirely new arrangement for authorizing the FRG’s admission into NATO.

The task might have been impossible if support for West Germany’s rearrangement and entrance into NATO had dissipated in the intervening years. But this was not the case. The political atmosphere in Europe, to be sure, had changed for the better. But the bloc-to-bloc nature of what was rapidly becoming a permanent bipolar confrontation along the inter-German border had not changed. As a result, NATO’s governments remained intent on bringing the FRG into the fold.

The Korean War scare had long since died down and then disappeared entirely when an armistice ended the war in 1953. In May 1952, Stalin had surprisingly announced a proposal calling for German reunification and withdrawal of foreign troops in exchange for a neutrality that would keep Germany out of NATO. Several months of diplomatic contacts ensued, after which the FRG and other Western governments decided that Stalin’s proposal would give the Soviets too much latitude for intervening in Germany’s affairs and therefore declined to negotiate formally. Following this rejection, Soviet diplomacy went into a temporary hiatus brought about by Stalin’s death. By early 1954, Moscow became active again and within a few months the Soviet government offered a number of proposals for a European collective security system to replace NATO. These ideas were also turned aside by the West because they would have forced the United States out of Europe, denied immediate free elections in Germany, and otherwise failed to provide adequate security guarantees to other West European allies. Early 1954 thus found little prospect for an East-West deal in Central Europe; however, at least the two sides were now talking to each other.

Notwithstanding this progress, in other ways the Cold War seemed even more entrenched than ever. In particular, the Soviet government’s adoption of a more flexible stance on German reunification and other European security issues was accompanied by a widespread acceleration of military modernization programs that steadily improved the quality of Soviet forces arrayed against Western Europe. Most noteworthy was the appearance of light and medium bombers that could deliver nuclear weapons against targets in Western Europe as well as U.S. bomber staging bases along the USSR’s periphery. Within the Soviet homeland, the USSR’s bomber air defense network, which was not particularly strong in World War II, was beefed up noticeably, thereby suggesting a concentrated effort to block attacks by U.S. bombers.

In the forward areas, meanwhile, Soviet occupation forces in East Germany were organized into a “Group of Soviet Forces, Germany (GSFG),” made up of six field armies, thus implying adoption of a formal wartime mission. The GSFG’s 22 divisions, along with 8 Soviet divisions in other East European nations, were promptly reorganized, brought to higher standards of training and readiness, provided better logistic support and facilities, and given new
equipment. For example, in 1952 the T-54 tank replaced the World War II vintage T-34 and modern jet fighters were deployed to Soviet tactical air units in the forward areas.

This force improvement campaign was accompanied by a Soviet effort to rehabilitate the military forces of its East European allies. In 1948 the Soviet government had begun signing separate mutual defense treaties with each of these nations. Rearmament began almost immediately, commencing with the establishment of a large “people’s police force” in East Germany. By early 1954, efforts were under way to field some 65 to 80 East European divisions, about one-half of which were maintained in combat-ready status. Some 30 of these divisions were arrayed in Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia, within easy striking range of West Germany’s borders.

All this military activity left the Western allies suspended between confusion and anxiety. Although Soviet diplomacy was steadily signaling a flexible willingness to negotiate Europe’s future, Moscow’s military buildup was making Western Europe even more vulnerable to invasion than before. Especially in the eyes of suspicious Western governments, the whole effort suggested a cynical Soviet effort to divide the Western allies among themselves while preserving massive Soviet military strength in Central Europe. Whatever the case, the Soviet Union’s military buildup was having the effect of leaving West Germany vulnerable not only to a Soviet invasion launched after several months of reinforcement from the USSR but also to a surprise attack mounted by Soviet forces stationed in East Germany. This important development strongly increased the rationale for deploying a West German army that, along with U.S. and British forces, could respond quickly.

The ambiguity of the situation triggered a bitter public debate within West Germany, where the question of rearma ment was taken up by the Bundestag in 1953. In particular, the SPD party, claiming that Stalin’s 1952 proposal was a “lost opportunity,” attacked Adenauer on the grounds that rearma ment would permanently scuttle any hope for reunification. Adenauer, dismissing Stalin’s démarche as a charade, countered with the argument that West Germany’s security would be far better ensured by embedding the nation in the Western alliance. Moreover, reunification, he maintained, could best be achieved through a “policy of strength” that only full sovereignty, rearma ment, and membership in NATO could provide. In the end, Adenauer prevailed in a way that strengthened his position within West Germany. A number of SPD members relented and began working with Adenauer on planning for the Bundeswehr’s creation.

By fall 1954, the West German government still firmly supported the idea of rearma ment and entrance into NATO. Similar attitudes prevailed in most other Western capitals, where suspicion of Soviet motives remained high. This was especially true in the United States, where the frustrating experience of the Korean War had left the American government still intent on erecting a solid NATO deterrent in Central Europe. The only issue was finding some new mechanism to replace the EDC, one that West Germany, France, Britain, and other alliance members would accept.
Negotiations in the following weeks fortunately led to agreement on a new plan, largely engineered by U.K. Foreign Minister Anthony Eden with U.S. support, that proved satisfactory.18 This plan abandoned the idea of a separate West European defense force by calling for integration of purely national forces under a strengthened SACEUR, who was given responsibility for operational control of German forces in wartime and inspection of them in peacetime. It provided for West German membership, as a fully sovereign nation, in both NATO and the Brussels Treaty (now named "West European Union," or WEU). The EDC's troop limits remained in effect and the FRG voluntarily pledged not to produce nuclear weapons and certain other armaments (chemical and biological) or to create a General Staff. The FRG also voluntarily pledged not to undertake a military role independent of NATO or to use force to change European borders. Additionally, the British and the United States promised to retain a large force presence in Germany for as long as necessary, thereby meeting an important French and West German demand. This accord was quickly approved by the allied governments and was signed in Paris in October 1954.19

Although the Paris Agreement has largely been forgotten by contemporary generations, its signing was one of the most important events in NATO's history, comparable to the North Atlantic Treaty itself and the establishment of NATO's integrated military structure. What the Paris Agreement did was to help seal the transatlantic bargain by creating a set of three mutually reinforcing, interdependent commitments. From the United States, the Paris Agreement formalized a commitment to provide both extended nuclear deterrence to Western Europe and a sizable American military presence there. It thereby permanently reversed the alliance's original commitment to a division of labor that excused the United States from defending the European continent. From West Germany, it extracted a commitment to rearmament, but one of moderate, politically acceptable proportions. From the other Western allies, including Britain, it secured a commitment to provide sizable military forces for the defense of the continent.

Hence, each participant was required to undertake important, enduring obligations of the sort that sovereign nations do normally accept. The Paris Agreement made these obligations acceptable by offering each participant offsetting strategic gains that exceeded the costs of these commitments. The West European allies agreed with the United States that they would cooperate in building a strong NATO defense posture, which made a lasting U.S. military presence in Europe a safe and beneficial proposition. The West European nations (the FRG aside) got extended deterrence from the United States made credible by an American presence, as well as guarantees that a rearmed West Germany would play a healthy role in Europe. For its part, the Federal Republic got sovereignty, coequal status in the Western community, and an alliance

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18Eden claimed to have concocted the plan in his bathtub. For his views, see his memoirs, Full Circle: The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Houghton-Mifflin, Boston, 1961.
19See Hoopes, The Devil and John Foster Dulles, for an in-depth discussion of the London and Paris meetings that led to this agreement.
commitment to defend West German territory. While granting the FRG sovereignty, the allies kept their legal rights regarding Berlin and other aspects of German unity, including control over a future peace treaty resolving Germany's post-World War II status. In exchange, the FRG secured NATO agreement to support eventual reunification of Germany, a provision that was highly important to Adenauer internally. The Paris Agreement thus created a mutually satisfying exchange. What made it most satisfying and enduring is that this exchange upgraded the common interests of all participants in one simple but fundamental way. By establishing multinational roles and missions that were blended together to create a workable coalition, it laid the basis for a cooperative program to build the kind of military posture that could defend the West's security interests. The Paris Agreement provided the foundation upon which NATO's later innovations in military strategy and force posture were built. It remained in effect throughout the Cold War, a monument to NATO's ability effectively to conduct coalition planning, management, and politics.

In the wake of the Paris Agreement, the FRG was formally admitted into NATO in May 1955. In response, Bonn announced a plan to undertake establishment of a defense force (Bundeswehr) and full rearmament. Bonn aimed to field the first German soldiers by the following fall and to begin providing staff support for NATO. By using U.S. weapons under the security assistance program, it hoped to deploy the first two German Army (Bundesheer) divisions as early as 1957. By 1961, it aspired to achieve activation of all 12 divisions as well as a lightly equipped reserve Territorial Army for rear-area security. Bonn also established plans for a sizable air force of 10 tactical fighter wings (85,000 men) and a small coastal navy of 15 squadrons (20,000 men).

Although German planners initially favored an army largely made up of armored divisions, Bonn's final plan called for a mix of four different types of divisions: five armored, five armored infantry, one airborne, and one mountain division. Support structures were purposely kept small and were made reliant on the territorial reserves and the civilian sector. The guiding concept was to configure the army solely for strategic defensive operations; more armored divisions and larger support structures would have allowed broader scope for offensive operations. The approved posture provided the large infantry forces that were needed to help defend a broad front line in sufficient density. At the same time, it rejected such concepts as fixed installations, barrier systems, and use of lightly equipped infantry on any terrain other than mountains and thick forests. German planners, many of them Wehrmacht (armed forces) veterans, had concluded that the army's main maneuver divisions must be able to fight in the intense mobile, armor-dominated battles that would take place on the open, rolling terrain along the key attack corridors. Each of the ten heavy divisions consequently was provided a balanced combination of armor, infantry, and artillery. Also, plans were drawn up to mechanize the infantry battalions in both the armored and armored infantry divisions by providing them armored
personnel carriers. This was done to give infantry units sufficient mobility and protection from enemy artillery fire.\(^{20}\)

The impending deployment of these German ground forces raised important questions about NATO’s defense concept. For all practical purposes, early movement of the defense line from the Rhine River well eastward was a precondition for the FRG’s willingness to rearm. But exactly where the new line was to be drawn remained an open issue. American and allied military authorities remained cautious about any plans that tactically might be difficult to implement and could expose NATO’s forces to quick penetrations. A core problem was that rivers (e.g., the Weser, Main, and Danube) and other defensible terrain in many areas were located some distance to the West. Moreover, many allied forces were stationed in the middle of West Germany and were most familiar with the terrain there. Moving them forward en masse would have been difficult and costly. This was a practical factor that unavoidably weighed heavily in the calculations of budget-conscious NATO governments.

The basing pattern of German Army deployments interacted with allied deployments to pull NATO’s defense doctrine into the FRG’s forward areas. When the allied buildup occurred in the early 1950s, British and Belgian forces were based well forward in the FRG’s northern areas, where they could guard the high-speed approach from Magdeburg to the Ruhr. To the south, three U.S. divisions were deployed to guard the approach to Frankfurt, and two additional divisions were based in Bavaria, not far from Munich. In response to a host of military and practical considerations, West German divisions were interspersed with these allied forces in ways that blocked still-open terrain features and created the framework for a defense far eastward of the Rhine River. Of the seven FRG divisions that had become operational by the late 1950s, three were based immediately north of the British forces, where they could guard the North German Plain, two more were based in the center near Kassel, and the final two divisions were based far south in Bavaria (see Figure 3.1). The net effect was to achieve a heavy NATO concentration on the most dangerous northern terrain while maintaining some strength in Bavaria. The forces in the north were deployed fairly near the inter-German border, whereas units to the south were deployed farther back. Because all these units could retreat, this basing pattern did not dictate a forward defense, but NATO’s physical center of gravity undeniably was being pulled eastward.\(^{21}\)

The FRG itself obviously favored a forward defense, but officially adopted a reserved stance on quickly pushing NATO into defending along the inter-

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German border. Adenauer was reluctant for the FRG to immediately take the initiative on this sensitive issue in ways that might appear overly assertive. He was also influenced by senior officers of the new FRG Army who were militarily unattracted to any rigid interpretation of forward defense. The doctrine that they had inherited from the Wehrmacht in World War II stressed mobile defense in which major counterattacks would be launched into the flanks of advancing enemy forces. This provided a rationale not for a thick, linear line along the border but instead a thinner front and the massing of large reserves in the rear areas.  

For these reasons, no decision was immediately taken. The simple fact that the German Army would not be fully fielded for several years meant that this difficult decision did not have to be made for the moment. But once the German Army reached full strength, NATO officials knew, the alliance would have to come to grips with it. This doctrinal issue notwithstanding, the decision to rearm West Germany meant that NATO's defense strategy and conventional

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force posture, after five years of struggle, finally seemed close to realization. The United States had firmly committed itself to Western Europe's defense. An operational plan had been established that commanded political and military support across the alliance. NATO's charter members had agreed upon designs to provide forces to execute it. Finally, progress was well under way to create the solid foundation of German military strength that was necessary for the military strategy to work.

This momentum slowed, however, during the next several years because of a decline in political tensions in East-West relations, the steady fading of the West's sense of urgency, and the associated rise of economic and budgetary priorities on both sides of the Atlantic. The result was a sharp swing, first by the United States and then by the entire alliance, toward relying on nuclear weapons for deterrence and defense. A predictable, if not entirely intended, byproduct of this shift toward a nuclear strategy was a sharp downswing in NATO's conventional defense efforts, resulting in the alliance's failure to attain the defense goals it had so enthusiastically embraced only a few years before.
While nuclear weapons had been integral to NATO's military strategy from the onset, they had originally played a circumscribed role that did not interfere with the goal of also building conventional strength. MC 14/1 had assumed that NATO's defense posture would fully incorporate nuclear weapons into its operational plans and force structure and that these weapons would be used early. But it essentially laid nuclear forces on top of what otherwise was a traditional plan for waging a conventional campaign in Central Europe. MC 14/1 adopted this approach primarily because NATO's military commanders continued to regard nuclear weapons as a firepower-enhancing adjunct to conventional forces, rather than the forerunner of an entirely different form of warfare. Their judgment stemmed primarily from the fact that even as late as 1951, the West's nuclear inventory was as yet a relatively modest one. Although the United States was embarking on a major nuclear buildup, its strategic bomber force for the moment was still unable to wage a militarily decisive bombardment campaign against the Soviet Union. Additionally, the alliance lacked the delivery systems and the small, low-yield nuclear warheads that were needed for tactical employment on the battlefield. Nuclear integration into NATO's ground and tactical air forces thus was not then feasible, and the alliance's tactical concepts for land warfare had no alternative but to rely primarily on conventional weapons for their firepower.

**NUCLEAR BUILDUP**

All this began to change as the mid-1950s approached. By the time Eisenhower assumed office, the SAC was well on the way toward acquiring a force of 300 intercontinental B-36 bombers supported by about 1400 medium-range B-47 jet bombers that could reach the Soviet Union from U.S. bases along the USSR's periphery. There were also plans to replace the aging and vulnerable B-36s with a force of about 500 intercontinental B-52 jet bombers that could strike the Soviet Union from bases within the United States. The B-52 promised to provide a vastly better capability for penetrating modern air defenses. Equally important, SAC by now was acquiring far better information about Soviet targets, and was building an impressive organizational structure for strategic bombardment. Moreover, nuclear weapons that could be employed tactically started entering the U.S. inventory as well. In October 1953, the first
U.S. atomic artillery piece, the 280-mm cannon weighing 85 tons, arrived in Europe. In 1954, smaller and more maneuverable rockets and missiles, including Honest John, Corporal, Matador, and Regulus, followed. Under development were even smaller nuclear tube artillery shells and bombs that could be delivered by tactical aircraft.

This technological revolution greatly expanded the role that nuclear weapons, once fully deployed, were capable of playing in NATO’s military strategy. The acquisition of a large force of modern bombers gave the SAC the nuclear capability to destroy the Soviet Union’s war-making industrial potential in a single crushing blow, thereby obviating the need for a prolonged and marginally effective conventional bombing campaign. Sophisticated plans were developed for striking at the USSR’s military and industrial base with nuclear weapons that could not help but inflict widespread destruction on the USSR’s urban areas. Simultaneously, the deployment of tactical weapons promised to provide NATO’s theater commanders the capacity to wage a nuclear campaign on the battlefield itself, one aimed at blunting a massive Soviet invasion through nuclear firepower delivered by NATO’s ground and air forces. Since the Soviet Union still lacked both a credible strategic bomber force and a sizable inventory of tactical nuclear weapons, the West temporarily enjoyed nuclear superiority over the USSR to a seemingly decisive degree. NATO’s emerging nuclear force posture thus seemed to provide the alliance a conveniently low-cost and militarily effective alternative for deterring a Soviet attack and defending Central Europe.

U.S. efforts to integrate nuclear weapons into its force posture and strategy began accelerating early in 1953, shortly after the Eisenhower administration took office. Eisenhower himself saw the military potential of nuclear weapons and quickly embraced them as the solution to the West’s defense problems. Aware that the alliance was going to encounter difficulty meeting the Lisbon Force Goals, he felt that NATO would have serious trouble executing its increasingly ambitious defense plans if it continued to rely on conventional forces. He concluded that nuclear weapons offered a viable mechanism for underwriting the West’s military strategy. Eisenhower also was motivated by his own budgetary priorities. By late 1953 the Korean armistice had been signed, Stalin had died, and the Cold War seemed to be thawing. The prevailing mood in the United States was one of war-weariness coupled with a desire to return to peace, prosperity, and tranquility. All this led Eisenhower, himself a fiscal conservative, to scale back U.S. defense spending in order to bring the federal budget back into balance and to facilitate the steady, inflation-free economic growth that the nation wanted. Because nuclear weapons were cheap and powerful, they fit perfectly into this calculus. By substituting them for expensive conventional forces, Eisenhower found a way to cut the DoD budget while maintaining a seemingly strong deterrent.

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Accordingly, in late 1953 the White House issued NSC-162, which articulated an entirely new national security policy for the Eisenhower administration. Called the "New Look," this policy rejected NSC-68's assumption that East-West relations were likely to reach a peak danger point in the near future. Envisioning instead an enduring East-West struggle lasting many years, the New Look asserted that the United States needed to settle down for the years ahead. This meant that the United States needed to place high priority not only on defense preparedness but also on its own economic health and social cohesion. Above all, NSC-162 asserted, the United States could not afford to bankrupt itself in pursuit of military strength that would provide short-term security at the expense of stripping the nation of its competitiveness in the long run.

Given this emphasis on economic prosperity at home, the New Look aimed at striking a balanced relationship between the ends and means of national security policy. With respect to ends, the New Look called for continued pursuit of containment around the globe. Indeed, it said that the United States should strive to gain the initiative in the Cold War and, if possible without undue risk, to roll back the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe, the Far East, and elsewhere. But in addressing the question of means, it called for pursuit of this ambitious goal at affordable cost. This led the New Look to emphasize a wide variety of policy instruments beyond purely military power, including alliances, economic assistance, psychological warfare, and covert action. Instruments of this nature, the New Look's authors felt, could help block Soviet expansion inexpensively, thereby allowing the United States to win the Cold War not only in the short term but in the long term as well.

In situations when Soviet provocation could be answered only through military force, the New Look sought to economize by calling on the United States to respond at times, in places, and in ways that took advantage of its own strengths and capitalized on enemy weaknesses. In particular, the New Look concluded that the West should not attempt directly to counterbalance Soviet conventional military power in areas around the USSR's periphery where the Soviets could bring their strengths to bear. Instead, the New Look said, the United States and its allies should strive to enhance deterrence through the threat of retaliation elsewhere: on the seas, in other locations, and, if necessary, with nuclear escalation. Contrary to popular impressions, the New Look did not envision the use of nuclear weapons in all, or even most, contingencies. Nor did it call for brinkmanship tactics in every crisis. But it certainly did call for early nuclear escalation in the event of a major Soviet attack on the United States and Western Europe. The military strategy that it endorsed for this situation was one of "massive retaliation," a term that Secretary of State Dulles made famous in his speech to the Council of Foreign Relations in early 1954.3

Although this concept became associated with Dulles because he was among the first to use it publicly, massive retaliation was a product of the Pentagon's efforts to use newly emerging nuclear technologies to come to grips with Eisenhower's budgetary stringency. Its origins lay in OFFTACKLE, which called for nuclear bombardment of the Soviet Union as part of the first phase of the West's military strategy in Europe. Recognizing that NATO was unlikely to field all the conventional forces required by MC 14/1 and the Lisbon goals, Pentagon planners essentially lifted the nuclear bombardment phase out of OFFTACKLE and made it the core feature of Eisenhower's strategy. Massive retaliation was based on a scenario in which the Soviet Union was assumed to strike first by launching an all-out attack aimed at conquering Western Europe and destroying U.S. military and industrial power as well. It envisioned that the war would begin with a Soviet nuclear strike on the United States and Western Europe, followed immediately by a full-scale Soviet invasion intended to overrun the entire continent. In response to this provocation, it called on SAC to deliver a massive nuclear blow against the Soviet Union's urban and industrial areas and military facilities. Because a Soviet nuclear attack was expected to take several days to unfold, the hope was that prompt American retaliation could blunt this effort, as well as severely degrade the USSR's capacity to wage an offensive campaign in Europe. Accompanying this, U.S. and allied forces were to use their tactical nuclear weapons to destroy advancing Soviet armies in Europe. Massive retaliation calculated that the West, due to its nuclear superiority, could win this exchange decisively, or at least inflict damage far in excess of expected gains, thereby removing all possible incentives for the Soviets to attack in the first place.\(^4\)

Massive retaliation was a strategy aimed primarily at deterring a Soviet attack by making the risks and costs of aggression far outweigh any rational calculus of gains. Preoccupied with deterrence of major aggression, it was less concerned with developing a coherent doctrine for actually fighting a war in Europe, especially in situations that fell short of an all-out attack. Nor was it highly concerned with controlling escalation once a major war had begun. Indeed it calculated that escalation was made virtually unavoidable by the all-out nature of the Soviet attack, and was made desirable by virtue of the West's ability to use nuclear weapons to prevail. Underlying this hope was the assumption that the West would retain a wide nuclear superiority over the USSR.

Massive retaliation also was a programmatic strategy, one aimed at accommodating the reduced defense budgets that the Eisenhower administration was willing to fund. While providing a powerful rationale for beefing up SAC and for distributing nuclear weapons to U.S. and allied forces in Europe, it left NATO's conventional forces with only a supporting role to play in defending Western Europe. It therefore offered a plausible reason for cutting back on expensive conventional forces, which now were relegated to a secondary position in U.S. military strategy and NATO's defense planning.\(^5\)

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\(^4\)For an account of how U.S. strategic nuclear doctrine and war plans developed in the 1950s, see Rosenberg, *U.S. Nuclear War Planning*.

\(^5\)For a further analysis see Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*. 

As a result of the New Look, massive retaliation, and the post-Korea demobilization, U.S. defense spending dipped downward from $44 billion in FY53 to about $36 billion in FY55 and FY56. Along with these smaller budgets came major reductions in U.S. combat forces. The Army was instructed to reduce from 20 divisions and 1.5 million soldiers to 14 divisions and 1.0 million men. The Navy was ordered to reduce from 1126 combat ships to 1030, with an equivalent cut in manpower from 760,000 to 650,000. The Marine Corps maintained its legislatively mandated three divisions but was cut from 240,000 to 190,000 men. By contrast the Air Force, the primary beneficiary of the nuclear strategy, was allowed to grow from 910,000 men and 110 wings to a SAC-dominated 975,000 men and 137 wings.

The New Look and massive retaliation were to come under mounting attack from 1956 onward, a development that led the Eisenhower administration to soften their sharp edges. The result was the eventual adoption of a partially modified defense policy dubbed the "New New Look." This policy altered U.S. military strategy in three ways. Recognizing that the Soviets were acquiring a nuclear deterrent at a faster pace than originally estimated, the New New Look deemphasized massive retaliation's call for absolute nuclear superiority. It substituted instead an emphasis on "sufficiency"—a finite deterrent that, while capable of doing more than only destroying Soviet urban areas, would not be able to completely eliminate the USSR’s retaliatory punch. The New New Look also placed greater emphasis on the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons, thereby giving U.S. ground and air forces a greater capacity for waging a limited theater nuclear war. Finally, it placed greater emphasis—at a primarily conceptual level—on conventional forces for fighting wars in which nuclear escalation was not appropriate.6

Despite these changes, the New New Look did not fundamentally alter the original doctrine’s preoccupation with nuclear weapons and low defense budgets. In 1956, the Eisenhower administration set a goal for future DoD budgets of $38 billion annually, a level some $3 to $10 billion lower than the JCS and DoD requested each year. Actual spending slowly rose above the administration’s target, reaching $43 billion in FY61, Eisenhower’s last budget. But much of this increase reflected inflation. In real terms (constant dollars) the defense budget in 1960 was lower than any year since 1950. Moreover, ever-increasing portions of the budget were allocated to nuclear modernization programs, thereby channeling money away from conventional forces and changing the internal distribution of DoD funding. Air Force spending rose steadily until by the late 1950s the Air Force was receiving nearly one-half of the entire budget. Naval funding remained roughly constant as the Navy, with supercarriers capable of nuclear strike operations, successfully carved out a role for itself in the new strategy. Despite the vociferous objections of its leadership, which rejected the notion that nuclear weapons could handle all future challenges, Army spending plummeted. From a 1953 peak of over $16 billion, it fell to $8.7 billion

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by 1955. Thereafter it recovered only slowly. By 1960, it was still only $9.6 billion, or less than one-quarter of total defense spending.

These stringent budgets, coupled with the rising costs of modern hardware, had a predictable impact on the U.S. force structure. The Air Force was scaled back from 137 to 126 wings. With SAC consuming 54 wings and strategic air defenses another 34 wings, this left USAF tactical forces with only 35 wings. While carrier force levels remained constant, the Navy lost some 20 combat ships. The Army suffered the worst of all. By 1959, it had reached a low point of 859,000 active soldiers and 14 divisions. Moreover, only 11 divisions were near combat ready; the remainder were training divisions that could not quickly deploy to war. The resulting posture, together with the Marine Corps, was still large enough to enable the United States to respond to small "brush fire" wars and limited contingencies, such as the Lebanon landing that took place in 1958. But it left the United States lacking the forces to fight a major conventional war of the sort that could occur in Europe.\(^7\)

Shortly after the Eisenhower administration decided to anchor U.S. military strategy on nuclear weapons, it launched a diplomatic effort to refashion NATO's military strategy along the same lines. This campaign began in earnest in late 1953 and mounted steadily from 1954 to 1956. It culminated at the NATO summit of fall 1957, when the alliance formally adopted a new, nuclear-oriented military strategy (MC 14/2) and approved important programmatic decisions to field the nuclear forces required by it. Eisenhower's last three years in office were largely devoted to implementing these decisions and fending off criticisms directed at them, while trying to strike a balance between the allies' demands for greater sharing of control over nuclear weapons and congressional reluctance to provide it.

One of the most important problems that the Eisenhower administration encountered in its campaign in Europe was that of convincing the West European allies to recognize the virtues of a nuclear-oriented strategy. Initially, the West European allies, many of which were not yet well versed on nuclear weapons, reacted uncertainly to the idea. The reaction was most muted in Paris, where the French government initially was slow to understand the implications of Washington's shift. In Germany, meanwhile, the idea of a nuclear strategy initially provoked a strongly negative and emotional response from the general populace. This especially was the case after a SHAPE war game in June 1955, uneasily named "Carte Blanche," suggested that even a relatively minor nuclear exchange on West German soil could result in the detonation of over 300 warheads causing five million casualties.\(^8\) The FRG government took Carte Blanche in stride, but even it did not immediately favor a nuclear strategy. While Adenauer recognized the military and budgetary arguments for this course, he also feared that a nuclear buildup could lead to the withdrawal of American forces and that an actual nuclear war would result in the obliteration

\(^7\) For a critique of the U.S. Army in the late 1950s, see General Maxwell Taylor, The Uncertain Trumpet, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960.

\(^8\) See Osgood, NATO, The Entangling Alliance, Chaps. 5-6. Also, Kissinger, Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy, Chap. 9.
of Europe. As a result, he initially wavered. The British were favorably inclined to a nuclear strategy for largely budgetary reasons. Nonetheless, London voiced concerns similar to Bonn's, while also questioning whether NATO's threat to escalate would be credible in Moscow.  

Despite their initial misgivings, both Bonn and London ultimately decided to bow to American leadership on this issue. One reason was their reluctance to divide the alliance. To them, the most important goal was to preserve the U.S. commitment to NATO; the question of military strategy, while important, was secondary. Also, they feared that opposition would result in their loss of influence within NATO's councils. Nuclear weapons offered an important vehicle for maintaining national prestige. An equally important reason was that a nuclear strategy provided them an opportunity to back away from their own costly conventional defense commitments, while modernizing their remaining forces with highly advanced, nuclear-oriented weaponry. These reasons were especially important in Bonn, where a bitter debate in 1956 elevated nuclear advocate Franz Josef Strauss to the defense ministry and transformed Adenauer's government into a firm supporter of nuclear deterrence. Other allied nations had reservations, but in the end they reacted in a similarly pragmatic way.

The allies' willingness to embrace nuclear weapons was partly driven by purely military and budgetary issues, but it was also heavily influenced by broader trends in European security affairs at the time. Key among these was the need to reassure London, Paris, and Bonn of the U.S. commitment to Europe. The events of 1956 were particularly influential in this regard. Coming on the heels of prolonged transatlantic tensions over policies in the Third World, the Suez crisis that year drove a wedge between the United States and its British and French allies. Washington had failed to back an aborted effort by these two nations to intervene militarily in the Israeli-Arab War in order to regain control of the Suez canal. The crisis led to the fall of Eden's government and left a bitter residue on both sides of the Atlantic for months afterward. In the face of these strains in NATO's unity, the Soviet invasion of Hungary, which was undertaken at the same time as the Suez crisis, made clear the West's inability to influence events in Eastern Europe. It also highlighted West Germany's exposed position and its heavy reliance on American support. The United States at the time seemed to question its force presence in Europe, thereby further heightening Bonn's concerns. By late 1956, all three West European governments therefore had come to doubt Washington's constancy. Their fears created strong political reasons for adoption of a new strategy that underscored both the American commitment to Western Europe and the healing effects of nuclear strength.  

NATO's willingness to embrace nuclear weapons also was influenced by the deterioration in East-West relations that took place around this time. In early 1955 the Soviets had surprisingly announced their intention to sign the Austrian State Treaty, which provided for withdrawal of Soviet forces and an indepen-

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10For an analysis of these trends, see Hoopes, The Devil and John Foster Dulles.
dent, neutral status for that nation. This démarche was connected with
Moscow’s campaign to derail the FRG’s rearment and entrance into NATO,
but it spawned hopes for the better across Western Europe. In mid-July, an
East-West summit was held at Geneva, which gave further cause for optimism.
There the Soviets astonished their Western counterparts by signing a commu-
niqué that expressly called for German reunification through free elections in
both halves of that nation. Hopes were dashed at a foreign ministers’ meeting a
month later, however, when the Soviets sweepingly rejected reunification and
elections. Disillusioned Western negotiators arrived home with the conclusion
that the Soviets would never permit reunification except under conditions of
the communization of all of Germany.\(^{11}\)

From that point on, events quickly slid downhill. The Soviet Union’s brutal
subjugation of Hungary in late 1956 returned the Cold War to earlier, darker
days. Tensions mounted throughout the following year. Then in November
1956 Soviet Premier Khrushchev announced his intention of signing a “peace
treaty” with East Germany that, he implied, would terminate allied rights in
West Berlin. He called on the Western allies to begin negotiations with the East
German government toward a complete withdrawal of allied forces from that
city, and set a six-month deadline for completion of the task. Shortly thereafter,
Soviet troops began both detaining allied truck convoys to West Berlin and
complaining about Western air traffic to the city.

Khrushchev’s pressure tactics confronted the West with an ominous diplo-
matic crisis. At a minimum, his actions seemed designed to compel the West to
grant de facto recognition to the East German government, a step that would
have undermined Adenauer, caused grave troubles within West Germany, and
divided NATO. Beyond that, Khrushchev seemed to be implying that the Sovi-
ets were prepared to use force to seize West Berlin, an act of war that would
have compelled the West, still badly outgunned in conventional forces, to re-
spond. The West held its ground and the crisis fortunately receded the follow-
ing spring when the two sides reached agreement to convene a foreign minis-
ters’ meeting followed by a summit to discuss European issues. But the Berlin
problem was by no means resolved and the West faced the future with a sense
of foreboding.

The Soviet Union’s diplomatic pressure tactics were accompanied by a
troubling upswing in its defense efforts. In May 1955 the Warsaw Pact was
formed, thereby confronting NATO with a threatening military alliance that
brought Soviet and East European forces together under a single command
structure. From 1955 to 1959, Khrushchev pared back the Soviet Union’s mili-
tary manpower from its Korean War peak of about 5.7 million men to about 3.6
to 4.0 million. This sizable cutback, however, reflected no appreciable down-
grading of the Soviet/Warsaw Pact threat to Central Europe. Soviet troop
strength in Eastern Europe remained at about earlier levels, and the 28 to 30
Soviet divisions there were streamlined with new tanks, APCs (Armored Per-

503–534.
sonnel Carriers), and other weapons that substantially augmented both their firepower and their mobility. In the western USSR, meanwhile, the Soviets continued to maintain and upgrade a sizable number of reserve divisions. All told, the Warsaw Pact still easily maintained the force of 80 to 100 combat divisions, along with tactical air support, that military planning standards held necessary for a full-scale theater offensive.\textsuperscript{12}

Accompanying this was an extensive nuclear modernization of Soviet theater forces. The middle to late 1950s saw the deployment of a large force of medium-range bombers coupled with a research and development movement toward introduction of medium-range and intermediate-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs and IRBMs). By the late 1950s, several hundred bombers were deployed in the western USSR and missiles were entering the inventory, enough nuclear power easily to devastate all of Western Europe. Additionally, the Soviets began developing FROG and SCUD shorter-range missiles to support their ground units. Along with the development of tactical air bombs, these missiles promised to provide Soviet military commanders the capacity to wage a fast-moving offensive theater nuclear campaign, even against NATO’s nuclear-equipped forces.

Equally important, the Soviets began making rapid strides toward the long-feared deployment of intercontinental ballistic missiles. The launching of the Sputnik satellite in October 1957 caused the most public alarm in the United States and Western Europe. But a more militarily important development was their first successful test of an ICBM two months earlier. The Soviets were still some years removed from a full-fledged, operationally effective force. But they nonetheless appeared to be ahead of the United States in this critical weapon; at the time, U.S. ICBMs and SLBMs were themselves only in the early stages of development and testing. The two sides thus were locked in a race to deploy intercontinental missiles, and the likely winner was by no means apparent.

Seven years earlier, in 1950, events of this magnitude had been enough to galvanize the entire NATO alliance into bolstering its defense spending and the launching of ambitious efforts to increase its force levels. But nothing of this sort happened now. With both sides of the alliance locked into a stance of fiscal stringency, the net effect of these political trends was to make nuclear weapons look even better in the eyes of the West European allies. As a result, political support for adoption of a nuclear strategy built steadily across Western Europe. Acceptance of this course was not uniformly enthusiastic. For example, Denmark and Norway acquiesced in Washington’s new strategy but refused to allow nuclear weapons to be deployed on their soil. But the key West European powers—Britain, West Germany, and France—increasingly favored the idea.

West Germany continued to adhere to the 1954 accord barring it from owning nuclear weapons, but Britain elected to join the nuclear club. In 1954, the British government announced its decision to build a strategic nuclear force anchored on Vulcan and Valiant bombers, to be supplemented later by Blue Streak and Blue Steel missiles. By 1957, Britain’s conversion to a nuclear strat-

egy was well under way, and this change, influenced also by budgetary shortfalls, helped bring about a refashioned conventional strategy with lower horizons. That year, the British proclaimed steep budgetary cutbacks and manpower drawdowns. Thereafter, the defense budget was to be limited to about 7% of gross national product (GNP), and defense manpower was to be cut from 700,000 to 425,000 soldiers. The primary reduction was to come in forces for colonial missions, but the British military presence in Central Europe was shaved also: a clear indication of growing reliance on nuclear deterrence. Montgomery, still Deputy SACEUR at SHAPE, declared that the changeover to nuclear deterrence was made necessary by declining defense budgets that made conventional defense infeasible.13

The French were not far behind. The massive U.S. security assistance program launched by the United States in the early 1950s focused heavily on France, which received nearly one-half of the sums expended. This aid was intended to provide the basis for a major expansion of French conventional forces, including an active Army of 15 divisions and sizable reserves. Large French defense expenditures, however, were also required, and by the mid-1950s domestic economic problems and the Indochina War had wrecked the plan. As of late 1954, the French evidently had only six divisions in Central Europe, and even these units were manned at only 70% of active strength. The end of the Indochina War permitted a refocus on NATO’s defense, but then the Algerian War intervened to draw off French forces. By early 1956, over 500,000 troops had been deployed to Algeria, and only 200,000 troops remained in France. This restricted French contributions to NATO to only 1–2 divisions and a tactical air army.

Against the backdrop of their faltering conventional defense plans, the French turned to the United States for nuclear help, but were rebuffed. Although the American government looked with favor on Britain’s plans for an independent deterrent posture, it was unenthusiastic about aiding France’s entrance into the nuclear age. To the extent the Eisenhower administration was willing to help, it proved unable to surmount the McMahon Act of 1946, which sharply restricted the release of nuclear information even to allies. In addition to barring help to French nuclear plans, this act translated into reluctance even to inform Paris about American nuclear war plans and warhead stockpiles, including stockpiles on French soil. When the Americans modified the McMahon Act in 1958 to provide nuclear help to Britain but did not extend the same privileges to France, the effect was to create the impression in Paris that France was being denied coequal status with Britain.

Angered by these rebuffs, the French government was left uncertain about not only its status, but also about the credibility of Washington’s intentions to carry out U.S. nuclear commitments to Western Europe and France. Ever since the heated debates in 1949 with Montgomery over the Rhine defense concept, the French had worried about NATO’s reliability, and with the alliance now

moving to embrace an American-dominated nuclear strategy that they were not allowed to fully understand, they became even more anxious. This anxiety, coupled with the allure of belonging to the prestigious nuclear club, led Paris to begin pursuing independent nuclear ambitions, and these ambitions grew as dissatisfaction with dependence on the United States deepened. The process began in late 1954, when the French government backed away from a full-fledged commitment to develop a national nuclear force, but did embark on a nuclear energy program that left open the option of producing nuclear weapons. As the late 1950s unfolded, the French increasingly pursued weapons-related research, and by 1959, they were on the verge of testing their first nuclear bomb. The task of transforming these preparations into a nuclear deterrent posture was left in the hands of Charles de Gaulle, who had no doubts about his priorities.

To many Americans, de Gaulle appeared on the scene as a rogue elephant still smarting from World War II insults and determined to carry out vengeance against the United States, Britain, and NATO. But his negative stance derived from the Fourth Republic’s failure to find a satisfactory role in NATO. The alliance had started out under the leadership of a U.S.-British-French triumvirate, but through a variety of circumstances, France had steadily retreated to the sidelines. By 1954, the alliance was led primarily by the Americans and British, and then West Germany’s emergence as a strong partner brought about a Washington-London-Bonn axis that further relegated Paris to subordinate status. Even though this development was partly France’s own fault, Fourth Republic governments were deeply unsettled, and when de Gaulle took power in 1958, his stance reflected greater continuity in French thinking than many Americans realized.

Deeply patriotic and determined to restore France’s self-esteem, de Gaulle set about to bring stability to French government and politics. He also undertook to refashion French foreign policy by disentangling from draining colonial involvements and focusing on France’s role in Europe. His goal was to establish France as an influential power in Europe, and he defined France’s leadership role in terms of independence from the United States and NATO. This stance left him favorably inclined to pursue a national deterrent posture (force de frappe, or strike force), one that would both elevate France’s prestige and enhance French security. With de Gaulle at the helm, France moved steadily toward nuclearization, and this development further reinforced the growing nuclear emphasis on NATO’s military strategy, but in ways different from those envisioned by Washington.¹⁴

By the time the decade ended London, Bonn, and Paris had come to embrace nuclear weapons wholeheartedly as the key for linking U.S. military power to Europe. This view made them hostile to any suggestion that nuclear weapons were not a perfect deterrent and opposed to any thoughts of attaching major importance to enhanced conventional strength. By 1960, many were even willing to assert that strong conventional defenses actually would undermine

¹⁴See Harrison, The Reluctant Ally, Chap. 1.
deterrence by signaling a lack of resolve to escalate. This extreme position hardly left them open-minded to the intimations of reappraisal that were beginning to emanate from the United States by this time.

The emergence of this allied consensus enabled the United States to steer the alliance in the direction that Eisenhower had settled on in 1953. The process by which NATO officially came to adopt a nuclear strategy began late that year, when the NAC endorsed a "long haul" approach to defense planning that relaxed NATO's previous urgency about its conventional buildup. The following year MC 48 was issued, which implied a requirement for low-yield battlefield nuclear weapons that not only would be held by U.S. forces but also could be distributed to allied units in wartime. In December 1955, the NAC acted on MC 48's conclusions by deciding to equip NATO's existing forces with these weapons. This left out West German forces, which were only in the early stages of deployment, but over the following year, support built for distributing nuclear weapons to FRG units as well.15

These developments set the stage for the landmark decisions that were taken in 1957 and ratified by the NATO summit meeting, attended by Eisenhower and other chiefs of state, that fall. At this summit, NATO decided to provide U.S.-built IRBMs to SACEUR, a step designed to give NATO an interim missile force until ICBMs became available. At the urging of the FRG and other allies, it also decided to establish a large nuclear stockpile in Europe under a Program of Cooperation (POC) in which the allies would receive access to nuclear warheads for attack aircraft, battlefield missiles, field artillery, and surface-to-air missiles. This decision, which took nearly a full decade to implement, was to result in the eventual deployment of over 7,000 nuclear warheads in Europe. Equally important, the summit resulted in NATO's decision to set aside MC 14/1 and to adopt MC 14/2, which anchored NATO's defense plans on a large-scale theater nuclear operation backed by a massive strategic nuclear blow against the Soviet homeland.16

The new strategy was not entirely indifferent to conventional defenses. The debate at the time centered around whether NATO's conventional posture should provide merely a "tripwire" or instead a true "pause." The tripwire idea envisioned a very brief defense effort, one that would serve to trigger an almost immediate nuclear response. By contrast, the pause concept called for a somewhat more prolonged defense, one lengthy enough to provide NATO sufficient time to assess the situation before making the decision to escalate. This "pause" concept was especially favored by SACEUR (first Alfred Gruenther and later Lauris Norstad), who wanted a broader set of options than a purely tripwire posture could provide. MC 14/2 responded positively to SACEUR's wishes. But like massive retaliation, it still called for a large-scale resort to nuclear weapons, tactically and strategically, a relatively short time after war had begun.

15See Schwartz, NATO's Nuclear Dilemmas.
It thus relegated conventional forces, per se, to playing a limited role in alliance military doctrine.\footnote{Schwartz, NATO's Nuclear Dilemmas.}

Not surprisingly, NATO's adoption of MC 14/2 brought in its wake a downgrading of the ambitious conventional defense goals that the alliance had adopted at the 1952 Lisbon meeting. This process had begun as far back as 1953, when the NAC's "long haul" decision had retained the original Lisbon goals but relaxed their demanding timelines, thereby permitting a more leisurely approach. MC 48, in turn, had retained the Lisbon goals for active forces but pared down immediate requirements for reserve formations. In 1956 the NAC carried this a step further by directing SACEUR to reappraise NATO's overall force requirements in light of the anticipated distribution of nuclear weapons. Based on the results of SACEUR's review, the NAC in 1957 tentatively approved a Central Region requirement for 30 active divisions that were to be available on M-Day or shortly thereafter. These divisions were to be oriented to mobile operations; while they were to have a "residual" conventional capability, they primarily were to be configured for tactical nuclear war. The goal of also providing up to 30 less ready reserve formations was kept on the books, but it was relegated to a distant priority that, by common consensus, no longer was taken seriously. These force goals eventually were given formal approval in MC 70, an important planning document adopted in 1958.

With MC 70, the alliance thus completed a formal process in which, driven by its growing emphasis on nuclear weapons, it backed away from its earlier commitment to field some 50 to 60 ground divisions. The rationale was starkly simple. A posture of 50 to 60 divisions was needed to fight a full-scale conventional defensive campaign. By contrast, a posture of 30 divisions was all that was deemed necessary to wage a nuclear war and otherwise support the new strategy. By postulating that the firepower of nuclear weapons could offset the need for forces on the ground, MC 14/2 thereby offered NATO's financially stressed nations an appealing way to buy deterrence cheaply.

CHINKS IN NATO's NUCLEAR ARMOR

The nuclear weapons that NATO deployed in the United States and Western Europe during the late 1950s and thereafter brought with them a host of beneficial results. In addition to restoring the alliance's self-confidence, they created two of the three legs of the military triad that was to anchor NATO's defense policy in the coming decades. The specific military strategy that was adopted in 1957, however, eventually turned out to be a mistake because it carried a good thing too far, misinterpreted newly emerging requirements for deterrence, and had adverse consequences for NATO's conventional defenses that went well beyond its original intent.

NATO's military strategy for the late 1950s became impaled on the fact that an alliance commitment to massive nuclear retaliation and its evolutionary offshoots was made before the dynamics of deterrence in the nuclear age were
clearly understood. In the years immediately after massive retaliation and single-minded nuclearization were embraced, careful investigation into the complex nature of deterrence shed the disturbing insight that the requirements of this doctrine were far more complex than previously imagined. The mere presence of a large U.S. and NATO nuclear posture was not sufficient to deter an enemy nuclear attack: NATO's posture had to be sufficiently survivable to retaliate credibly, and if it was not survivable, deterrence would not be ensured. Equally important, even a survivable Western nuclear posture might not credibly deter nuclear aggression if the enemy possessed retaliatory nuclear punch. In this circumstance, the enemy might dismiss NATO's nuclear threats as a hollow bluff, and launch an attack with its own overpowering conventional forces under the mantle of mutual nuclear deterrence. These realizations raised serious doubts about MC 14/2 and the force posture it bequeathed.

To a worrisome degree, MC 14/2 was based on faulty assessment of war in the nuclear age. It assumed that any war in Europe would be an all-out conflict in which the Soviet Union would pursue unlimited political goals, probably would be the first to employ nuclear weapons, and would indiscriminately attack targets in the United States and Western Europe. Under these circumstances, a total Western nuclear response clearly would have been politically feasible, indeed unavoidable. But MC 14/2 ignored the equally likely possibility that if both sides possessed nuclear forces capable of retaliating and therefore not disarming each other with a surprise blow, the Soviets might both attack with limited aims and employ military force in limited ways, perhaps not even using nuclear weapons at the onset. In this situation, the onus of crossing the nuclear threshold would lie entirely on the West's shoulders. Given the stakes, risks, and interests of NATO's nations in this situation, an all-out response might be neither politically feasible nor militarily appropriate. MC 14/2 thus left the alliance without a coherent military strategy for dealing with limited war.18

The rationale for MC 14/2's reduced conventional posture was based on the proposition that the enhanced firepower of nuclear weapons could offset the traditional need for large ground forces. But as a number of U.S. and allied army officers argued at the time, the tradeoff between firepower and mass was a complex one. Many officers were concerned that even with a full complement of nuclear weapons, a 30-division posture might not be large enough to wage a successful tactical nuclear war, especially against a larger and similarly armed enemy. Advocates of tactical nuclear weapons argued that since the Soviets would be compelled to mass its ground forces in order to punch through NATO's defenses, nuclear strikes could be employed to inflict heavy damage on them. Critics countered that in order to coerce the Soviets to concentrate, NATO would be obliged to mass its own forces, thereby exposing them to Soviet nuclear fires as well. On balance, since tactical nuclear war seemed likely to be characterized by the same relative attrition dynamics that often dominated

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conventional fighting, it was not evident that a small nuclear army could beat a larger one.

While this issue was itself a worrisome imponderable that was as yet unresolved, there was no doubt about the limitations of a 30-division posture in a purely conventional war. A posture of this small size would suffice only to establish an initial defense line across the Central Region front. It would provide almost no additional reserves and would leave the forward line vulnerable to early penetrations even in purely conventional combat. For example, at the Battle of the Bulge in 1944, American forces in the Ardennes were penetrated by advancing German units before the end of the first day because the American units there were thinly spread. NATO's forces likely could hold out longer, but how much longer was uncertain. Without reserves, breakthroughs could not be countered and likely would result in the speedy defeat of NATO. Moreover, even if NATO's 30 divisions were able to hold the line and compel the Soviets to fight a grueling attrition battle, they lacked the conventional firepower to defeat their numerically superior opponents. Outnumbered by 3:1 or more, they would be worn down and eventually annihilated by enemy tanks and artillery. To prevent defeat, they would be required early and massively to resort to nuclear firepower for this purpose alone, even if the enemy did not itself initiate nuclear war.¹⁹

MC 14/2 and the new force goals thus combined together to forge a revolutionary change in NATO's strategy that extended well beyond the workings of the new strategy alone. A nuclear buildup plausibly could have been adopted as a logical supplement to a still-existing strong conventional posture—the position that MC 14/1 implicitly endorsed and MC 14/3 later adopted. Under the old strategy, nuclear escalation was viewed as a desirable way to maximize NATO's prospects for successful deterrence and defense. But it was not unavoidably required and, if the enemy exercised nuclear restraint, it plausibly could have been treated as a drastic step to be undertaken only as a last resort. Escalation would have become absolutely necessary only when the conventional defense collapsed. With a 50- to 60-division posture, this promised to happen relatively late in the fighting (after several days and weeks) and conceivably might not have occurred at all. The new strategy and force goals, for all their fiscal attraction, stripped away any possibility of a prolonged conventional phase and avoidance of nuclear war. For all but minor contingencies, they left NATO physically dependent upon nuclear escalation as its primary military option against major aggression. This state of affairs was reflected in the official statements of many NATO military authorities, who stressed that irrespective of Soviet actions, the alliance actively planned to initiate tactical nuclear war in Europe early in the game, and in a big way.

¹⁹A key point here is that the long breadth of the inter-German border and force density requirements would have compelled NATO's commanders to commit most of these 30 divisions along the front line, thereby leaving NATO without operational reserves that could be withheld from initial commitment for subsequent use in breakthrough sectors. For a good discussion of tactical nuclear operations, see Alain C. Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, How Much Is Enough? Shaping the Defense Program, 1961–1969, Chap. 4, Harper and Row, New York, 1971, pp. 117-154.
To make matters worse, MC 14/2’s adoption soon led to a major downswing in NATO’s conventional force strength that went further than its backers endorsed and originally envisioned. As a result, MC 14/2’s deleterious effects extended well beyond the adverse consequences of its doctrine and force goals alone. During the last three years of the 1950s, public attention was largely riveted on the steady stream of NATO nuclear programs that followed MC 14/2’s adoption and the controversial issues these measures raised. Behind the scenes, meanwhile, NATO’s conventional defense efforts—their rationale undercut and their constituency weakened—suffered a steady loss of momentum. As of early 1955, NATO’s posture in Central Europe had reached a level of about 20 active and reserve divisions, with the additional 12 FRG divisions to be available soon. As the strategy pendulum swung sharply toward nuclear weapons, however, NATO’s force efforts began diminishing appreciably.

The new strategy did not result in any immediate withdrawal of American forces from Europe. But this possibility constantly was under examination in Washington, and was even endorsed by JCS Chairman Arthur Radford, a Navy admiral who was strongly committed to nuclear weapons. Eisenhower turned aside Radford’s advice in this area; U.S. military manpower levels in Europe, which totaled 427,000 men in 1953, were still at a relatively high 379,000 by 1960. But his budget reductions did cut heavily into additional ground reinforcements the United States might be able to send in an emergency. The allies meanwhile took steps that actually did scale back NATO’s forces in Europe. For example, MC 14/2 and MC 70 philosophically pulled the rug out from under any immediate urgency for the FRG rearmament program. While Bonn did not reduce its original aspirations for total force levels, it did react by stretching out the Bundeswehr’s activation schedule. The new schedule became hostage to a host of constraints, including budgetary restrictions, reduced conscription periods, and training delays. The first four German divisions did not become available to NATO until late in the decade, and completion of the buildup, originally set for 1961, was slipped until 1965.20

The French reacted in a more extreme way by sending four additional combat divisions to Algeria to fight a war that soon came to tie down 500,000 French troops. By the late 1950s actual French contributions, originally envisioned to build to some 15 to 20 divisions, had dropped to the equivalent of only one division. More important, Charles de Gaulle, after coming to power in 1958, immediately began questioning what he regarded to be France’s subservient role in the alliance. In addition to embarking on a course to make France an independent nuclear power, he also began moving toward taking it entirely out of NATO’s integrated military structure. Although this step was not culminated until 1966 when France entirely withdrew from NATO’s integrated military structure, de Gaulle started the process of dissent in 1959 when he removed some French naval units in the Mediterranean.

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20See Karskowski, The German Army and NATO Strategy; and Kelleher, Germany and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons.
The other allied powers did not raise similarly negative questions about their role in NATO, but they did generally pare back their force contributions and defense budgets. In 1956 the Belgians decided to deactivate one of their three divisions by placing it in reserve status. In 1957 the British announced a major, cost-reducing defense cutback by disbanding two Army divisions, reducing active military manpower from 690,000 to 375,000, and by cutting the BAOR from 77,000 to 64,000 soldiers. The Netherlands Army also underwent a cutback. Originally envisioned as a five-division force, by the early 1960s it had been scaled back to three divisions. Similar reductions in Danish forces rounded out this downward trend in NATO’s posture.21

These publicly visible steps were accompanied by less visible changes that had similarly detrimental consequences for NATO’s conventional war-fighting capability. In response to the nuclear strategy, the U.S. Army abandoned its traditional structure, which had provided for three large regimental-sized formations that were intended to operate closely together on the battlefield. This structure was an outgrowth of World War II and the Korean War, and was ideally suited to operations aimed at holding large segments of ground over a sustained period. But it was not well suited for nuclear combat. By virtue of its tendency to concentrate forces, this structure seemed vulnerable to nuclear fires and otherwise ill suited to the demands of the relatively open and highly fluid nuclear battlefield.

The Army reacted by adopting the so-called “Pentomic” divisional structure for its infantry divisions, which still dominated its force posture. This concept provided for five smaller “battle groups” to replace the three regiments and a leaner logistic support structure than before. These battle groups were intended to operate independently of each other and to rely primarily on their nuclear firepower to undertake both offensive and defensive operations. By virtue of their larger numbers of separate units, they offered the commander greater versatility on the battlefield. Since they were smaller than a regiment, they were also more agile and presented a less lucrative target to enemy nuclear fires. The Army began implementing the Pentomic structure for its infantry divisions in 1956. Not long thereafter, the Germans, the British, and other NATO armies began following suit to varying degrees.22

This change may have rendered NATO’s armies better able to fight on the nuclear battlefield, at least as it was theorized at the time. But it also undercut their ability to conduct sustained conventional fighting. Minus its nuclear firepower, each battle group lacked the mass, firepower, and logistic support to

21See Osgood, NATO, The Entangling Alliance, p. 133. For historical data on West European force trends, see David C. Isby and Charles Kamps, Jr., Armies of NATO’s Central Front, Janes, London, 1907.

22See A. J. Bacevich, The Pentomic Era: The U.S. Army Between Korea and Vietnam, Ft. Leslie J. McNair, National Defense University Press, Washington, D.C., 1986. In general, the allies did not go as far as the Pentomic structure. The Germans, for example, adopted a brigade structure that was oriented to fighting a nuclear war but could also conduct conventional operations. The negative effects of the Pentomic structure thus were felt primarily in southern FRG, where U.S. forces were concentrated. The allies, however, trimmed their support structures and war reserve stocks to the point where they would have been hard-pressed to conduct sustained conventional operations.
hold a large piece of terrain or to engage a well-armed enemy. In order to fight effectively as a combined arms division, the individual battle groups needed to be brought either into direct physical contact or at least into sufficient proximity to coordinate their efforts. However, their primary reliance on nuclear firepower dictated a doctrinal practice of deploying them well apart on the battlefield in order to avoid destroying each other with nuclear fires. This constrained their ability to work together in either defense or offense and made logistic resupply difficult. It also created open gaps in the defense line through which, in purely conventional fighting, an enemy easily could pass. The Pentomic division thus left NATO with porous ground defenses that were an open invitation to conventional attack not only by virtue of their small size but also their internal structure. Further compounding this problem was the fact that U.S. and allied ground forces, being nuclear oriented, were not provided the sizable war reserve stocks of equipment and ammunition that are needed to sustain fighting beyond a few days. Even had NATO's ground forces somehow been able to contain the initial Soviet thrust, they soon would have run short of bullets to continue the fight.

The negative effects of the Pentomic structure were compounded by parallel trends in tactical air forces that left NATO's air arm also oriented to nuclear war. The 1950s saw the United States and its allies modernize its air forces with a large number of modern jet fighter-bombers that were a major improvement over the models that had fought in the Korean War. But these aircraft were primarily designed to deliver tactical nuclear weapons against enemy rear-area targets. As a result, they lacked the command and control systems, avionics, aerodynamic features, and advanced munitions for conducting effective conventional strikes, especially in close air support operations against enemy armored formations. Further, they were not provided the survivable air bases, maintenance support, and sustaining stocks needed to fight beyond a few days. The net result of these developments was that NATO's air forces were largely incapable of fighting conventionally in ways that NATO's ground forces most needed their help.23

Similarly, NATO's naval forces also acquired a decidedly nuclear orientation. This especially was the case for the U.S. Navy. Primarily configured to launch nuclear strikes from carriers against the Soviet homeland, it lacked the doctrinal orientation and the warships needed to protect NATO convoys plying the North Atlantic sea lanes and to conduct sustained conventional strikes against sea or land targets. Thus, all three of NATO's force elements—ground, air, and naval—were configured for nuclear war. This may have enabled NATO to escalate early and to prosecute its nuclear war plans to swift completion. But it also left the alliance hard pressed to conduct a conventional war in the systematic, coordinated way needed to contain a Warsaw Pact attack. As the 1950s drew to a close, NATO found itself with a strategy, doctrine, and force structure that not

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23NATO's nuclear-oriented aircraft of this period primarily included the U.S.-made F-100, F-101, F-102, and later, the F-104, as well as the British Hunter and Javelin.
only prescribed nuclear war, but deprived the alliance of full alternatives for anything else.

The combined effect of all these changes—the adoption of a nuclear strategy, reduced force goals, allied force cuts, and a nuclear-oriented force posture—left NATO’s forward defenses in worse shape than was commonly appreciated. By 1960 NATO’s Central Region posture stood at only 19 divisions. Taking into account manpower and equipment shortages, the real level was somewhat less (17.3 divisions). The capability of this force was eroded further by cutbacks in both allied spending and U.S. security assistance, which produced trimming in such important areas as readiness, training, procurement, maintenance, and spares. Even had this posture been adequately funded, it still would have been incapable of sustained forward defense in a major war. NATO’s critics charged that NATO forces were reduced to being a trip wire, or a “plate glass window” that would shatter at the first blow. Perhaps this accusation went too far. But there is little doubt that NATO’s forces were unable to constitute a firm frontal defense. As tactical concepts at that time recognized, they would have been compelled to fight a mobile defense that, at a minimum, would have ceded large portions of West Germany.

Equally worrisome, NATO’s ground posture had shrunk to the point where its capability to wage tactical nuclear war against a nuclear-armed enemy was itself uncertain. With only about 19 divisions, it fell well short of the 30 divisions needed to meet MC 14/2’s goals, which themselves were regarded as too low in many military circles. Hopes for waging nuclear war in Europe consequently depended heavily upon NATO’s tactical air forces and “theater” nuclear systems, including the 105 U.S. ICBMs that the alliance had agreed during 1957 to 1959 to deploy in Great Britain, Italy, and Turkey. These forces and NATO’s related command and control system, however, were vulnerable to a surprise attack by enemy ICBM/IRBM nuclear missiles. Such an attack, if successful, threatened to strip NATO of its theater nuclear deterrent and leave the alliance vulnerable to a swift Soviet nuclear land campaign.

This vulnerability left the alliance highly reliant on SAC and its retaliatory punch. Notwithstanding the progress that the Eisenhower administration was making in enlarging and diversifying the American strategic nuclear deterrent, however, major problems were emerging even here. Until missile-equipped Polaris submarines and ICBMs could be deployed in the early 1960s, SAC’s deterrent was based on a large bomber force deployed on a small number of bases in the United States and elsewhere. These bases, as well as the U.S. command and control system, were vulnerable to enemy ICBMs, which could span an intercontinental range in only 30 minutes. As late as 1957, the Soviet Union possessed neither the MRBM/IRBM nor ICBM missiles that were necessary to make the West’s theater and strategic nuclear forces vulnerable. But in the following three years this situation had begun to change with alarming speed. By early 1960 the Soviets already were deploying a large MRBM/IRBM force and were also busily at work developing an ICBM. Deployment of a large ICBM force was still a few years off—indeed, the United States and NATO initially overestimated
how fast the Soviets would proceed. Eventual deployment nonetheless was a virtual certainty; the only issue was when.24

The most nightmarish fear confronting the West was that the Soviets might become capable of launching a combined ICBM and MRBM/IRBM attack that would destroy NATO's entire nuclear posture. Even if NATO shored up the survivability of its nuclear forces, its conventional deficiencies still posed a major problem if left unremedied. The risk was that the Soviets might believe that their own retaliatory capability would deter NATO from being the first to cross the nuclear threshold. Increasingly, Western defense experts began to worry that NATO's conventional vulnerability might tempt the Soviets to capitalize on their superiority in ground forces in the hope of quickly conquering Western Europe by conventional means alone. As much as anytime before, the alliance required a strong military posture of survivable nuclear forces and powerful conventional forces. As the 1960s dawned, however, the alliance suddenly found itself with a defense posture that on all sides fell well short of what was required.

LESSONS LEARNED

With the benefit of hindsight, history often seems to unfold in a logical and almost inevitable fashion. As a result, many historical surveys convey a mechanistic sense of events that does not do justice to the fluidity of the period under review. In reality, most important historical periods contain a large number of crossroads in which key decisions, political struggles, military conflicts, and other events easily could have gone in entirely different directions. The 1950s fall into this category. Perhaps the Cold War was inevitable, but there certainly was nothing inevitable about NATO's growth from a diplomatic treaty into a fully developed alliance with an integrated military structure and command system. This development was a product of many decisions on both sides of the Atlantic that easily could have gone differently, especially if key personalities and governments had bowed to the countervailing pressures that they faced. Thus, NATO did not rise on its own. It was created by a strategic vision and then built through a good deal of hard work and political labor.

To what degree was the entire enterprise a success? Did the creation and building of NATO enable the West to achieve its key security goals of preserving Western unity and containing Soviet power in Europe? In answer to these questions, beyond doubt it is true that the 1950s closed on a sour note. With its military strategy in turmoil and its forces disturbingly vulnerable, the alliance found itself confronting the need to make unpleasant, costly, and internally stressful defense choices. All this smacked of déjà vu. Yet the alliance unarguably was a good deal better off in 1960 than it had been in the late 1940s. Then, the alliance had no integrated military structure and its nuclear and con-

24 The Gaither Committee report, which stressed U.S. deficiencies in technology, and other studies prodded the Eisenhower administration to react. See Huntington, The Common Defense, pp. 106–116. In response, the Eisenhower administration stepped up its missile program and tried to accelerate U.S. scientific research, but the benefits were still several years off.
vventional forces were so weak that quite apart from their ability actually to de-
 fend Western Europe, deterrence itself was in question. In the years since, the
 alliance made major strides forward that, while easily overlooked, were only
 partially undone by its nuclear fixation.

 Most important, the United States and its allies made the decisions to form
 the North Atlantic Alliance itself, to create an integrated military structure, and
 to develop operational plans for defending the Central Region and the flanks.
 The alliance also laid a logistic infrastructure and undertook the task of learning
 how to wage coalition warfare. Along with these decisions by individual mem-
 ber nations to commit themselves and their resources to the alliance.
 Particularly important were the U.S. decision to permanently station large
 American combat forces in Europe and the alliance's willingness to permit the
 rearmament of West Germany.

 In the wake of these decisions, the alliance successfully deployed a large and
 powerful nuclear force that, for all its limitations, was still an essential com-
 ponent of deterrence. Because nuclear vulnerability was still a theoretical worry
 rather than an existing reality, NATO failed primarily in the sense that its
 achievements in building conventional combat forces fell well short of its ori-
 ginal aspirations and what was demanded by its security requirements. But
 NATO at least learned a lesson from its flirtation with nuclear weapons. Also,
 the conventional defenses that NATO fielded in the late 1950s were significantly
 larger and more powerful than its posture of the late 1940s. Table 4.1 displays
 trends for NATO's ground and tactical air forces during these years. These
 trends, it should be noted, are a product of complex changes in both U.S. and
 allied forces. In the early 1950s overall force levels rose because nearly all
 participants were expanding their forces and reconfiguring them internally.
 Although the force levels of several members dropped in the late 1950s, the
downswing was offset by initial deployment of FRG forces. Since FRG
rearmament originally was intended to augment NATO's posture, not com-
 pensate for drawdowns by other members, the net result fell well short of
NATO's original aspirations. Nonetheless, NATO still made progress in all cate-
gories of weaponry.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Force</th>
<th>1948</th>
<th>1953</th>
<th>1956</th>
<th>1959</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manpower (000s)</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>602</td>
<td>644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divisions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brigades/regiments</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division/equivalents</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanks</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>1650</td>
<td>1850</td>
<td>2300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armored vehicles</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>4000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antitank weapons</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>1150</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>1800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aircraft</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>1300</td>
<td>1600</td>
<td>1800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Author's estimate from multiple sources.
These force levels include only immediately available forces deployed in Central Europe in peacetime. In an emergency, additional reinforcements would have been available from the United States. In 1948, some two U.S. Army divisions and six USAF tactical fighter wings would have been available by M+45 (mobilization day plus 45 days). From 1953 onward, U.S. reinforcements would have included 3 to 6 divisions and 8 to 16 air wings. The increased contribution of U.S. reinforcements must be taken into account in assessing NATO's force posture during this period.

In addition to this quantitative growth, NATO's forces also improved qualitatively with the introduction of new weapons in virtually all categories. The U.S. M-48 and the British Conqueror replaced such older model tanks as the M-47 "Patton." In providing better firepower, mobility, and survivability, these new models significantly improved NATO's armor. Also during this time, NATO tried to mechanize its forces with the introduction of the M-75, M-59, Saracen, and AMX 13 armored personnel carriers. This revolutionary development was to greatly improve the mobility and survivability of NATO's infantry units, thereby enabling them to join with armored units to stand up against Soviet armored attacks. The widespread deployment of 90-mm and 105-mm recoilless rifles further strengthened the capacity of NATO's infantry to participate in the antitank battle. Finally, self-propelled artillery began entering NATO's inventories in the mid-1950s. The appearance of the M-52 (105-mm), M-44 (155-mm), and M-55 (203-mm) dramatically upgraded the ability of NATO's forces to deliver lethal firepower and to maneuver with NATO's armored and mechanized infantry forces.

NATO had entered the 1950s with ground forces that were largely configured as foot infantry supported by small numbers of tanks and towed, underpowered 105-mm artillery. By 1959, its forces had become largely armored and mechanized units with modern tanks, armored personnel carriers, and heavier, self-propelled artillery. As a result, NATO's forces were well on their way toward acquiring the capability to fight as a modern combined-arms force capable of performing the complicated, high-speed operations required on the modern battlefield. Many of these upgrades were driven by NATO's nuclear doctrine. But as a by-product, they also greatly strengthened NATO's conventional war-fighting capability.

NATO's improvements in the 1950s thus were a product of both quantitative expansion and qualitative upgrades, both of which must be taken into account in forming an overall evaluation. Table 4.2 provides an estimate of the combined effects by displaying trends in NATO's ground force strength as measured in static weapons scores. The table assigns NATO's forces in 1948 an index score of 1.0 and then displays the extent of growth in the years thereafter relative to this base. As this table suggests, NATO's ground forces in 1959 were about 4.5 times stronger than in 1948. Roughly 70% of this increase was due to quantitative expansion and the remaining 30% to qualitative gains. Moreover, this increase measures only improvements to NATO's in-place ground forces. When NATO's air expansion and qualitative upgrades are factored into the equation, NATO's combined score increases from 1.3 in 1948 to 5.7 in 1959.
Table 4.2
Trends in NATO's Conventional Forces
(Measured in static weapons scores)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Force</th>
<th>1948</th>
<th>1959</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-place ground forces</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-place air forces</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground reinforcements</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air reinforcements</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Author's estimates based on Weapons Effectiveness Indicator/Weighted Unit Valuation (WEI/WUV) scores for NATO's ground forces. The WEI/WUV system provides a basis for scoring weapons according to their technological sophistication and their relationship to one another. It is based on a multiattribute utility function. For example, an M-60 tank might receive a WEI score of 1.0, while an M-47 might be accorded a .60 score. A tank might be given a WUV category weight of 60 points, and an armored personnel carrier, 10. WEI/WUV scores are then added together to determine the entire score for the NATO posture in any one year. From this, historical trend lines can be determined. The assumption is made here that three NATO tactical fighter wings approximately equate to one ground division in total firepower, kill potential, and costs.

The growth in NATO's reinforcement capability from the United States was less substantial but still impressive. Overall, as Table 4.2 suggests, NATO's total conventional combat power—in-place and reinforced—increased roughly fourfold during the 1950s.

NATO's force increases, of course, must also be judged in relation to gains made by Soviet/Warsaw Pact forces in this period. Table 4.3 displays relevant force ratios in purely quantitative terms. The table shows that NATO roughly held its own from 1953 onward even though Soviet/Warsaw Pact forces were themselves strengthened with more divisions and more weapons so that they could better execute their offensive strategy. Overall, NATO probably also held

Table 4.3
Force Ratios, Warsaw Pact/NATO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Force</th>
<th>1948</th>
<th>1953</th>
<th>1956</th>
<th>1959</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manpower</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division/equivalents</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanks</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armored vehicles</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antitank weapons</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aircraft</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

its own in modernization rates, while preserving its traditional edge in weapons quality. On both sides, weapon replacement policies tended to be driven by obsolescence schedules and by the need to maintain inventories at an acceptable average age. This tended to dictate a replacement rate of 7% to 10% per year across the inventory and a slow, steady accretion of combat power of 2% to 4% per year. As a result, major qualitative changes seldom occurred overnight, or in one side and not the other. There was a natural tendency for both sides to improve at a similar slow, steady pace. This pattern seems to have prevailed throughout the 1950s.

In any case, a major arms buildup emerged in Central Europe during this time. This was not an “arms race” in the classical sense; especially from 1953 on, both sides proceeded methodically rather than at breakneck speed. Nonetheless, what unfolded was a competitive interaction between the two sides as they both sought to strengthen their forces in order to counterbalance the other. It should be noted that this was a competitive buildup between an offensive strategy on the Warsaw Pact’s part and a defensive strategy on NATO’s side; NATO embraced far less ambitious force goals and simply was trying to protect itself, not gain an overall advantage. Nonetheless, Central Europe increasingly became an armed camp as both sides expanded their arsenals. This buildup was driven largely by nuclear doctrines on both sides; during the 1950s, the Warsaw Pact, as well as NATO, turned toward a predominantly nuclear strategy. Only in the 1960s and thereafter were the two sides to begin competing heavily in conventional terms.

The most important question, of course, is whether and to what degree NATO strengthened its ability to defend itself in an actual war in Central Europe. In addressing this issue, it is important to evaluate NATO’s force posture in relation to the growing Warsaw Pact threat as well as the Central Region terrain, required density standards, and the requirements of its own strategy. Taking all these factors into account, there is little room for doubt that NATO’s forces would have acquitted themselves far better in 1959 than in 1948. At the same time, it also is true that NATO’s forces in 1959 still fell well below the levels that NATO military commanders felt were needed for an adequate posture: 30 divisions for a nuclear strategy, 40 to 50 divisions for an “initial” conventional defense, and 50 to 60 divisions for a stalwart posture capable of a firm forward, linear defense. NATO’s forces thus fell somewhere between impotence and adequacy.

One of the most important indicators of NATO’s progress is that as the 1950s unfolded, the debate over NATO’s defense doctrine steadily shifted away from the Rhine River and toward the inter-German border (see Figure 4.1). This shift partly reflected NATO’s transformation due to West Germany’s admission into the alliance. But it also reflected growing confidence in the capabilities of NATO’s nuclear and conventional forces. In any event, gone were the late 1940s’ debates over whether the Rhine could be held. In their place came a

25 In general, each new era of weapons technology is estimated to increase the value of NATO’s hardware by about 20%, a number consistent with Weapon Effectiveness Indicator scores.
debate over the kind of NATO force posture that would be needed to protect West German territory, including the forward areas.

This is not to say that NATO's doctrine in the 1950s came to settle on the layer cake array and a frontal, positional defense directly on the border. These changes were to come later, in the 1960s and the 1970s. The tactical concepts of the 1950s focused on mobile defense operations in which NATO's forces would employ tactical nuclear weapons as they gave ground against a larger Warsaw Pact attacker. A common concept of the late 1950s was a "Weser-Lech" defense, which contemplated a steady withdrawal to the river lines about 100 km behind the inter-German border. But within this framework, the goal of NATO's doctrine and force plans was to contain the Soviet attack in the forward areas. In contrast to earlier years, this goal was taken seriously. In this sense, forward defense increasingly became a political-military reality, one that promised to shape NATO's defense planning in the years ahead.

To what degree could NATO actually have executed a forward defense in the 1950s? The answer depends heavily on the kind of war that would have been fought. A full-scale nuclear war inevitably would have resulted in massive losses on both sides, possibly enough to prevent a badly damaged Warsaw Pact
force from overrunning NATO's few survivors. In any event, the outcome
would have been determined by the strategic nuclear war that would have been
fought over European heads, with the most likely result being a cataclysm for
both sides. With respect to a nonnuclear conflict, it is impossible to assess how
a NATO-Warsaw Pact conventional war might have been fought 30 to 40 years
ago, especially since the two sides were largely girding themselves for nuclear
combat during the 1950s. Nonetheless, some speculations can be offered based
purely on the physical size, weaponry, and dispositions of the two sides then.
Had war broken out in 1948, NATO's forces almost certainly would have been
defeated very quickly if they had made any attempt to defend West Germany.
Enemy forces likely would have swept across the northern German plain, de-
scribed on NATO's small combat formations in southern Germany, decisively
defeated them in detail, and then marched westward. In all likelihood, NATO's
forces would have been unable to form even a defense line on the Rhine River.
The war probably would have ended with Soviet forces standing on the banks of
the English Channel.

By 1959, the military situation had changed dramatically for the better. By
this time, NATO's forces—taking into account in-place forces and outside rein-
forcements on both sides—would have been outnumbered by about 3:1 rather
than by the larger 5:1 ratio that prevailed in 1948. More important, NATO's
forces were now far better able to fight together cohesively because their de-
ployment patterns had improved. In 1948, most of NATO's forces had been
based back near the Rhine and in the southern half of West Germany. By 1959,
NATO's "center of gravity" had moved well forward. This was driven largely by
the FRG's decision to base its ground forces along the Hamburg-Hannover ur-
ban axis, within 50 to 100 km of the Inter-German border. Also, by 1959 a four-
division German corps and the BAOR, with three divisions, were based in
northern Germany. This enabled them to block a Soviet thrust across the
northern German plain and to protect the Ruhr industrial basin. In Central
Germany, three U.S. divisions supported by one German division protected the
critical Frankfurt area. This left the southern part of Germany sparsely pro-
tected, but this area was less strategically vital to NATO.

NATO's forces in 1959 thus were far better able to defend critical terrain fea-
tures in West Germany and to block likely avenues of advance. They also were
sufficiently large and well armed to conduct coordinated, multidivision maneu-
ver operations of the sort that can unhang a substantially larger attacker.
By 1959, NATO's forces thus had viable defense options. They were not con-
demned to automatic defeat, and they were strong enough to give Warsaw Pact
commanders something to think about. NATO's forces were not large enough
to form a thick, linear defense line along the inter-German border. But they
would have been able to mount initial resistance in the forward areas and then
to conduct a mobile retrograde, in the process delaying the Warsaw Pact's ad-
vance and inflicting sizable losses on enemy forces. In the end, Soviet forces
might have breached the Rhine River. But especially if American reinforce-
ments arrived in time, NATO's forces might have succeeded in digging in there
and halting the advance.
Although this scenario hardly amounts to a strategic victory for NATO, it does measure the extent to which NATO's forces had improved in the span of 12 years. Even if NATO's forces lacked a confident capability to defend West Germany, they were able to make the cost of aggression fairly high. For example, Soviet losses in a 1948 invasion likely would have been only 50,000 to 75,000 soldiers assuming purely conventional combat. By 1959, the price had risen at least four-fold. Moreover, Soviet commanders would not have been certain in advance of their ability to march to the English Channel. Quite possibly, NATO would have been left with a sufficiently large foothold to launch a counteroffensive once the United States and other allies had fully mobilized. By 1959, NATO's conventional forces thus posed something of a deterrent in themselves. Added on top of NATO's powerful nuclear arsenal, they made the overall deterrent stronger still.

In an operational sense, as well as purely quantitative terms, then, the 1950s were a decade of net progress for NATO's conventional forces. Moreover, NATO's forces were destined to grow further for the simple reason that by 1959 the German rearmament effort was finally in full swing. Perhaps the decade can best be described as one of "two steps forward, one step backward." In the process, NATO failed to meet the requirements of its military strategy and its force needs, especially for conventional defense. But it did considerably broaden its military options in Central Europe. Equally important, NATO successfully laid an increasingly solid foundation for the further improvements in its strategy and force posture that were to come in the 1960s and 1970s. Without this foundation, these improvements would not have been possible.

Above all, the alliance weathered the Stalin era unscathed. Containment and deterrence, for all their flaws, had worked. In the process the West European nations had made major strides toward economic recovery, political stability, and the beginning stages of integration. Gone were fears that Germany and France would turn on each other, or that the other West European nations would embark on a destructive course. For its part, the United States had shaken off isolationism, had resisted the impulse to turn inward, and had emerged as a committed apostle of transatlantic unity. These political and economic gains far outweighed the West's military successes and failures. The upcoming decade promised to be a period of strain and even crisis. But the Atlantic alliance had the luxury of facing it with a far greater sense of unity and confidence than only a decade before.

Partly due to NATO's emergence as a unified coalition, the 1950s ended with two hostile, militarily primed alliances glaring at each other across the inter-German border. The tensions of the moment suggested that an explosion was inevitable, if not immediately at hand. But in reality, this bipolar system was a good deal more stable, and the West incomparably more secure, than had been the case a decade earlier when no alliances existed. In essence, Soviet power had reached its high-water mark. The USSR's inability to bludgeon the West into submission over Berlin, or to entice it with suggestive diplomacy, was evidence of this strategic fact. The Soviets may have enjoyed an overall military predominance in Central Europe, but this edge failed to bring them decisive
political leverage against the West. Moreover, morally the two alliances were on entirely different planes. Whereas NATO rested on a foundation of democratic values, legitimate commitments, and growing prosperity, the Warsaw Pact drew its strength entirely from uninvited Soviet forces and East European governments whose internal support at best was skin deep. This difference was not to manifest itself openly for nearly 30 more years. But when it did, it proved to be decisive.

The 1950s also were a decade in which the West made several basic policy and strategy choices, the legacy of which shaped the debates ahead. In evaluating these choices, it is clear that NATO erred by embracing a primarily nuclear strategy in the late 1950s. Nuclear weapons had an important role to play in protecting the West’s security, and the alliance was justified in its decision to deploy them in large numbers. But their deployment should not have led to the downgrading of NATO’s conventional forces to the point where Central Europe was more vulnerable to a Soviet attack than was necessary.

NATO did not embark on this erroneous course, however, because it was totally blind to the limitations of nuclear deterrence. Several years before massive retaliation, the United States and key West European nations had already recognized that nuclear weapons had only a limited role to play. NSC-68, MC 14/1, and other earlier strategy decisions make this clear. This course was chosen primarily for budgetary reasons, to buy deterrence on the cheap by avoiding the onerous cost of conventional defenses. In the end, the Western allies came to regret this shortsighted decision, just as they came to regret their similarly motivated demobilization after World War II. By being penny-wise and pound-foolish, the West both compromised its security on the eve of an unexpected intensification of the Cold War and put itself in the uncomfortable position of having to make a hasty, costly, and internally stressful effort to rectify things. The lesson is obvious. The path to security seldom offers easy shortcuts; the traveler is best advised to reconcile himself to the difficulty of the journey.

This experience also showed that the decision to rely heavily on nuclear weapons had a negative impact on NATO’s conventional defenses that went well beyond what the strategy itself permitted. The reason was alliance dynamics. In order to build an adequate conventional posture, contributions from all NATO’s nations were essential. No one nation, or group of nations, could handle this task alone. MC 14/2 and massive retaliation were blind to this reality. While they were not entirely indifferent to the need for conventional strength, they created considerable ambiguity on exactly how many conventional forces were needed to achieve deterrence. Some nations, driven by their own budgetary priorities, took advantage of this ambiguity to scale back their contributions, even if only marginally. This step undercut the rationale for ambitious conventional programs among all other participants, even nations that initially were not inclined to embrace nuclear weapons entirely. The result was a cascading effect across the entire alliance that left NATO with weaker conventional defenses than even its nuclear strategy required. The lesson is that conventional defense was a fragile enterprise, one easily undercut by a strategy that created the impression of relegating it to a subordinate position.
If NATO failed to find security in nuclear weapons in the 1950s, it also was unable to build upon the "division of labor" approach that it originally adopted at its inception. While this idea made sense technically, it quickly was exposed as having major political liabilities. It incorrectly assumed that the West European allies could build adequate conventional defenses in the absence of a major contribution by NATO's largest member, the United States. It also failed to anticipate that the United States would be unwilling to provide extended nuclear deterrence coverage to Western Europe in the absence of the sizable American military presence there. Further, it shortsightedly promised to allow some allies to escape from the responsibility of dealing with nuclear missions, thereby threatening to render NATO less able to forge a consensus on nuclear release in a crisis. For all these reasons, NATO quickly discarded its original endorsement of a formal division of labor. The experience of the 1950s suggests that this approach provided a useful mechanism for fine-tuning NATO's forces at the margins; but it did not offer a sound basis for establishing NATO's entire defense posture.

During the 1950s, NATO evolved in a way that upgraded the interests of the United States, Great Britain, and West Germany, but unfortunately left France increasingly disaffected. Despite the Suez crisis setback, the Anglo-American friendship remained special and grew stronger. As time passed by, West Germany increasingly gained the confidence of NATO's members and a strong triangular partnership was forged among Washington, London and Bonn. As this partnership emerged, France steadily was marginalized. Preoccupied with domestic turbulence and belabored by its disastrous experience in World War II, France resented the loss of status and influence brought about by American leadership, Britain's close ties to Washington, and West Germany's growing strength. Also affecting French feelings were dissatisfying experiences with the United States over colonial affairs, especially France's disastrous involvement in Southeast Asia and North Africa. Lacking military strength and the capacity to influence the alliance's visions or even to preserve coequal stature for itself, it began seeing NATO as a mixed blessing. De Gaulle was a logical by-product of smoldering French resentment, and when he appeared as an apostle of French revival defined in anti-NATO terms, his attitude was far from atypical among Frenchmen.

By contrast, the West behaved in a remarkably far-sighted and consistent way in its handling of West Germany. The West chose to commit itself to West Germany for reasons that stemmed from a clear understanding of its own vital interests and a sense of grand strategy. This commitment thus went well beyond any ideologically inspired, short-term fixation against communism for its own sake. The central features of the West's defense policy and strategy that emerged in the 1950s—extended nuclear deterrence and a growing emphasis on forward defense—grew directly out of this commitment and were not a product of ill-considered fears or bureaucratic aggrandizement. Similarly, the explosive growth in the West's military requirements in the 1950s primarily was an outgrowth of this commitment as well as concern about the Soviet military threat.
The extent to which the Cold War turned into a competitive military rivalry between the two sides clearly was unfortunate. But given the Soviet Union's heavy reliance on military power to underwrite its designs, NATO could have avoided an arms race only by endangering and possibly sacrificing its vital interests in Germany and Western Europe. The West chose otherwise. As a result it won the battle for West Germany, and Stalin lost. The basis for communism's eventual defeat in the Cold War was thereby laid.

The West also performed well in shaping the transatlantic political bargain that transformed NATO from a paper treaty into an entangling but militarily powerful alliance. This bargain, to put matters mildly, was an exceedingly complex one. Recognizing that West Germany must remain free from Soviet control, the United States agreed to commit American military power to this task. But as a precondition for the permanent stationing of large U.S. military forces in Central Europe, Washington demanded that West Germany rearm in order to allow NATO to build an adequate NATO defense posture. The FRG in turn proved willing to undertake rearmament and to anchor itself in NATO, but only on condition that the alliance commit itself to a defense of West Germany itself, including territory near the inter-German border. France, the United Kingdom, and other West European nations accepted West German rearmament and forward defense, but they attached to this agreement the stipulation that a tight lid be kept on the size of German forces. This proved acceptable to Bonn, but only if the other West European nations pledged to make up the difference in forces needed to protect the FRG. Seldom, if ever, has an equivalently complicated strategic accord been attempted, much less brought to fruition.

Although NATO was created in 1949, fully five years of stressful negotiations were required to lock this transatlantic bargain into place by securing the necessary commitments from the relevant actors. Only after this step was accomplished were NATO and its military structure finally set in concrete. But because this bargain produced an alliance that served the vital interests of NATO's members, it proved to be a solid one. By building on the firm foundation that it provided, NATO was able to grow steadily in strength and stature as the 1950s unfolded. Although its historical origins soon receded from public consciousness, this bargain remained alive throughout the Cold War. In a silent way it continued to form the bedrock of the Atlantic community.

The 1950s also showed, however, that this bargain was a potentially fragile one that left the alliance prone to internal fissures. The transatlantic bargain was based on separate but interlocking commitments from the three main actors in the deal: the United States, the FRG, and the other West European nations. Given this interdependence, failure by any one of these partners to honor its commitment in theory would have undermined the reasons that had led the other two partners to make their own commitments, thereby giving them cause to withdraw as well. The result easily could have been a serious weakening of the alliance and perhaps its complete unraveling. In the 1950s the NATO nations recognized this vulnerability and took care to ensure that alliance policy and strategy never undermined these three actors' commitments. The same
principle applied through the remainder of the Cold War and helped keep NATO together.

In the final analysis, NATO entered the 1950s as a loose collection of sovereign nations and exited it as a unified alliance capable of coalition planning in peace and war. NATO was able to take this enormous step forward because all its members decided to surmount their national instincts, their doubts, their fears, and their histories in order to cooperate together. In particular, Britain, France, and other West European nations decided to place the bitter legacy of World War II behind them by admitting West Germany into their fold as a trusted and coequal ally. This decision was born of pragmatic self-interests. But it also reflected confidence in the healing effects of recovery and in the ability of democracy to survive in a nation that only five years before had been ruled by a Nazi dictatorship. As events turned out, this decision proved to be a wise one. For its part, the newly created Federal Republic responded with a degree of commitment and responsible policy that even its most ardent advocates had not anticipated. The result was the creation of a West European community, anchored on a transatlantic military alliance and an economic partnership, that fundamentally reshaped the face of Europe.

This success would not have been possible without the strong leadership role that NATO’s largest member, the United States, played in this period. In particular, the United States performed well during the time when the new alliance was being established. In these years, 1950 to 1954, the United States showed vision, creativity, and the ability to wisely exercise power on behalf of the common good. Surmounting the normal tendency of governments to behave indecisively in such situations, it adopted clear goals and energetically set out to attain them. Guided by a strong sense of priorities, it refused to be intimidated by either the barriers facing it or by the need to spend resources. As a result, it succeeded on a scale that was not matched until the Cold War’s final days. By committing itself to Western Europe’s security and then by demanding an integrated military organization, a force posture aligned with a coherent military strategy, and German rearmament, it helped fashion a real military alliance, one that brought the North Atlantic Treaty to life. The Vietnam War 15 years later was to show that this optimistic spirit can carry the seeds of its own destruction when it is not tempered by an understanding of the constraints that even superpowers face. But the experience of NATO’s early years shows that the gain sometimes is worth the effort and that a powerful, determined nation can often achieve great things if it sets its mind to the task at hand.

At the same time, the United States did not perform flawlessly during NATO’s first decade, especially the last half of the 1950s. As the primary architect of NATO’s nuclear strategy, it bears heavy responsibility for the errors that the alliance committed in establishing a military doctrine that undermined deterrence and strained NATO from within. Also, the United States often did not adroitly handle relations with individual West European allies. In particular, it ran afoul of both Britain and France over Third World problems, the aborted Suez crisis being the most obvious example. While it went to great lengths to support Britain’s unique position in Europe itself, it was considerably less sen-
sitive to France. Part of the problem, of course, was France's own erratic and often counterproductive behavior over German rearmament, its own nuclear aspirations, the Common Market, and other issues. But the United States was also part of the problem, with lasting consequences.

Finally, the United States often behaved in a disruptive zig-zag fashion from the mid-1950s onward that caused troublesome strains in its relations with West Germany. In the early to middle 1950s, Washington had asked Adenauer to wage a difficult political battle within his nation on behalf of rearmament built on a strong West German conventional defense establishment. Shortly after Adenauer had won this battle, the United States abruptly shifted gears by endorsing a nuclear strategy that called the original enterprise into question. With the rug having been pulled out from under him, Adenauer now was obligated to build support in West Germany for a strategy about which he himself had reservations. No sooner had this battle been won than critics in the United States began calling the nuclear strategy into question and demanding a return to conventional defenses. In the 1960s Adenauer came under pressure from a new administration in Washington to reendorse a military strategy that he had once supported but had been compelled to repudiate, largely out of fealty to Washington. The whole experience left Adenauer unnerved and wary of his inconsistent American allies. On balance, the Federal Republic benefited enormously from its close association with the United States in these years. Indeed, it owed its existence to Washington's support. Nonetheless, the Bonn-Washington relationship was less smooth than it otherwise might have been.

The experiences of these years illustrate the enormously important role, for good or ill, that American leadership played in determining NATO's vitality and cohesion. When the United States showed vision, acted consistently, and exercised its power on behalf of goals that made sense for Western Europe, the allies cooperated. But when Washington vacillated, or adopted self-serving goals, or showed unawareness of Western Europe's own political dynamics and military needs, NATO withered. The alliance that emerged from the 1950s was not purely, or even primarily, an American creation. But it was an alliance whose energy, strength, and purpose depended enormously on Washington's constancy and vision. The 1950s provide ample lessons on how the United States can lead wisely or poorly, lessons that continued to apply throughout the Cold War and, in different ways, still apply today.

In conclusion, NATO performed unevenly in the 1950s, but on the whole well enough to lay the foundations for the West's eventual victory in the Cold War. The alliance worked best when, confronted by intense crisis, it faced the task of creating a strategic vision to guide its security policy. It performed considerably less well when, once the crisis had receded, it faced the less stimulating task of translating its visions into reality through concrete programs that cost considerable sums of money. NATO's ability to implement its policies by showing sustained commitment to purpose, and to remedy its strategy errors without driving key members out of the alliance, were major question marks as the decade came to a close. To some observers at the time, these problems seemed
potentially grave enough, in the face of a mounting Soviet military threat and the Kremlin’s divisive diplomacy, to cause the West’s undoing. Subsequent events, however, were to prove otherwise.
The Great Strategy Debate: The 1960s
Speaking on a blustery winter day in early 1961, newly elected President John F. Kennedy launched his administration with a stirring inaugural address that called the American people to arms. During the bitter 1960 election campaign against Vice President Nixon, Kennedy had portrayed the Eisenhower administration as old, tired, and incapable of mobilizing a somnambulant nation to deal with the weighty domestic and international problems at its doorstep. At the core of his campaign was a promise to inject American government with new ideas and fresh departures that would reawaken the entire country. Although he won the election by only a razor-thin margin, his youthful energy, inspiring rhetoric, and idealistic visions brought him widespread public admiration. Equally important, the Democratic Party now controlled the White House and dominated Congress, creating the political conditions that permitted a strong presidency. As a result, Kennedy was able to issue his uplifting call to arms in the confidence that the American public and the federal government would listen.¹

Kennedy boldly laid down a domestic platform calling for a New Frontier of liberal policy departures to be carried out by the federal government. The American economy had been buffeted by recession in the late 1950s, and he called for aggressive use of Keynesian economics to stimulate an industrial upsurge, thereby fostering sustained growth while aiding the working class that was the Democratic Party's core constituency. Much of Kennedy's energy, nonetheless, was focused on foreign policy, where the new president demanded strong action to grapple with the troubled international situation. Kennedy perceived problems all over the globe requiring a more assertive defense of democratic values, but he was especially concerned about Europe, where the Cold War struggle between democracy and communism was fast approaching a new and more dangerous phase.²

In the Kremlin, Khrushchev now seemed sufficiently in control to pursue an activist foreign policy, and with the USSR now acquiring nuclear missiles, the


²For an overview of the foreign policy agenda confronting Kennedy, see Seymour Brown, The Faces of Power: Constancy and Change in United States Foreign Policy from Truman to Reagan, Columbia University Press, N.Y., 1983. See also Thomas K. Finkleer, Foreign Policy, the Next Phase, Council on Foreign Relations, N.Y., 1960.
mercurial leader seemed bent on provoking a showdown with the West over Berlin and the European security order. Kennedy called for a determined Western response aimed at standing up to the Kremlin, but the task of forging this response was anything but easy. Indeed, the crises looming ahead confronted the United States with profound military and security dilemmas that, in no small part, stemmed from America's own ambiguous interests.

In the early 1950s, the United States had committed itself to Western Europe's defense on the assumption that it had bedrock interests to protect there. But this commitment was made in the confidence that, for the moment at least, a European war would not bring about the physical destruction of the United States. This comfortable situation was now changing fast. The USSR already had strategic bombers capable of reaching the United States, and it was embarking on an effort to deploy ICBM and SLBM missiles that could not readily be prevented from retaliating even if the United States struck first. To make matters worse, the USSR still enjoyed a conventional military preponderance that had grown in recent years as NATO's defense efforts slackened. Because even a conventional war in Europe easily might go nuclear in ways that could visit attack on the United States, the entangling NATO alliance now directly exposed America to the numbing risk of annihilation in a war accelerating too fast to control. The unfavorable military balance of power in Central Europe compelled the U.S. government to ponder a sobering question: Exactly how "vital" were American interests in Europe, and how far did they allow American commitments to go?

As the Kennedy administration weighed the alternatives, it was compelled by alliance dynamics to take into account the vital interests of the West Europeans, whose own situation had changed since the early 1950s. Of the allies, Great Britain was most secure in its relationship with the United States and its role in NATO, and being an offshore island power, was the most relaxed about the European power balance. Led by the conservative Macmillan government, Britain retained a strong self-identity and profited from centuries of stable democratic government. It suffered from chronic economic problems that were compelling a steady military withdrawal from its old colonial empire, but this disengagement was allowing it to focus more intently on Europe. Its policy there benefited not only from a special friendship with the United States, but also from its own emerging nuclear deterrent, which provided national insurance in case the American commitment faltered. Even so, the British government was well aware of a long history of policy and strategy struggles with the United States conducted behind the veil of close partnership, and knowing that Western Europe could not stand up to Soviet military blandishments without an unwavering American commitment, it eyed the Kennedy administration warily.

Compared to Britain, West Germany suffered from a weaker identity, less military assurance, and greater anxiety about Washington. Dangerously ex-

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posed by virtue of its front-line status, the Federal Republic had no national nuclear deterrent, and therefore was left entirely dependent on American guarantees. Democracy by now was firmly implanted and German industry was booming, but although the government operated effectively under the highly regarded Adenauer at the head of a stable conservative CDU-FDP coalition, West Germany still had not established a firm image of itself. Although it had the trappings of sovereignty, including a growing army, it was a nation-state in search of a soul, which left it unsure about its standing in Europe and torn by conflicting foreign policy priorities.

Knowing that participation in NATO was essential for West Germany’s security and prosperity, Adenauer remained committed to the principle of being a good member, but he doubted that his allies truly shared the FRG’s long-range visions in Europe. By virtue of constitutional mandate, the FRG was formally committed to the goal of eventually achieving unification. The Adenauer government was well aware that this goal could be achieved only in the dim future, but although this distant vision was given rhetorical lip service by NATO’s members, it clearly was embraced with less than total enthusiasm. Especially because Adenauer felt that denying the GDR legitimacy was the best means to achieve eventual unification, he regarded West Berlin as a litmus test of his Eastern policy, a measure of the FRG’s sovereignty, and an important symbol of unification. That city stood exposed to Soviet pressure tactics, and Adenauer feared a Western sell-out brought about by the USSR’s growing nuclear power and allied ambivalences. Concern about West Berlin, the larger implications for unification, and the FRG’s physical security made Bonn even more wary of Kennedy than were the British.5

For de Gaulle, wariness had long since given way to steely-eyed clarity about both the United States and France. In the short time since assuming power, de Gaulle had approached Washington with requests to be included in alliance nuclear planning and to create a triumvirate leadership of France, the United States, and Great Britain. Rebuffed on both fronts, he became even more convinced that the United States sought domination of NATO for its own purposes, and that Washington could not be relied upon either to protect French interests in a crisis or even to grant France the dignity it deserved. Kennedy’s rise to power did little to change his mind. Indeed, de Gaulle viewed Kennedy’s endorsement of an allied security pillar as a thinly veiled plan to perpetuate American dominance by sapping West European countries of their national identities and organizing them under a sterile supranational bureaucracy that would dance to Washington’s tune.

Prior to de Gaulle’s presidency, the unstable Fourth Republic had been plagued by problems that had marred French politics for over a century: an antagonistic relationship between the executive and legislative branches, ineffective bureaucratic institutions, and large parts of the population permanently hostile to the constitution. De Gaulle by no means solved these problems, but

5See Wolfram E. Hannefier, Germany, America, and Europe: Forty Years of German Foreign Policy, Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 1989.
by infusing the Fifth Republic with a stronger presidency and greater emphasis on efficient administration, he brought greater stability and effectiveness to the turbulent French political scene. Furthermore, his withdrawal from Algeria and disavowal of further colonial misadventures allowed the French populace to focus on its role in Europe. By 1961, France's domestic situation had stabilized and de Gaulle was acquiring far greater latitude to pursue his foreign policy visions. He set about reestablishing a continental leadership role for France, and he defined this role in terms of independence from the United States and Kennedy.6

Great Britain, West Germany, and France thus pursued quite different priorities, but what they had in common was a greater willingness to forcefully express their national interests than during the 1950s. Earlier these nations were still weakened by World War II's lingering effects, but now all three enjoyed greater economic power and internal strength and were better able to assert themselves in alliance politics. Their demands confronted the Kennedy administration with the difficult problem of leading the alliance in ways that not only fought off Soviet pressures but also blended American interests with the needs of these three powerful partners.

Strategic solutions to the Cold War's agonizing dilemmas, moreover, were not readily available. Although Western Europe was integrating and becoming stronger, it was still far removed from forming a powerful security pillar that could remedy NATO's troublesome defense deficiencies and political vulnerabilities without a major American military commitment.7 Short of writing off Western Europe to Soviet domination—a course rejected by Kennedy—American disengagement thus was not a feasible choice. Nor did the alternative of striking a deal with Moscow offer serious hope. Khrushchev showed no special willingness to negotiate on terms that respected Western interests; indeed, earlier signs of Kremlin flexibility over West Berlin and related issues seemingly were giving way to greater rigidity. Any U.S.-led effort to probe Moscow's stance was further constrained by the need to respect Bonn's sensitivities over Berlin and the GDR. Confronted by a bellicose adversary and tied down by NATO's internal dynamics, the Kennedy administration saw no beckoning path for politically resolving the mounting confrontation in Central Europe.

This troublesome situation left Kennedy squarely facing the alliance's precarious defense situation and the vulnerabilities created for the American homeland. To protect both the United States and Western Europe, America had little alternative but to shore up NATO's defense posture and especially its conventional forces. Because marginal force improvements would not suffice, an entirely new military strategy had to be adopted that would point the way toward a less nuclear-reliant defense. But in order to avoid fracturing the alliance, the United States had to fashion a solution that also satisfied the vital interests of its principal partners, all of whom remained happily wedded to a

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military strategy of nuclear deterrence and massive retaliation that Washington no longer could accept. The controversial path of wholesale strategy reform that the Kennedy administration chose to follow, and the bare-knuckled intra-alliance political fight that ensued, was to make the 1960s the decade of NATO's great strategy debate.

KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION DEFENSE POLICY AND STRATEGY

Complaints against massive retaliation and MC 14/2 had begun mounting on both sides of the Atlantic long before Kennedy entered the White House. Dis-satisfaction with the policy ran especially high within the U.S. Army. Although the Air Force and Navy had fared well under Eisenhower's nuclear strategy, the Army had been relegated to a secondary status and was left largely incapable of fighting any major war other than a nuclear conflict. As far back as the mid-1950s, General Maxwell Taylor and other senior U.S. Army officers had been expressing disagreement with this situation. Citing the Korean conflict and other hot spots around the globe, they voiced doubt that nuclear forces would deter all forms of aggression, or that the United States readily would escalate if confronted with a limited, nonnuclear attack. They also expressed skepticism that, even in a nuclear war, nuclear weapons would reduce the need for flexible and diverse ground forces. Their answer to these problems was a larger Army and a change in both U.S. and NATO military strategy. In the late 1950s Taylor had resigned his post as Army Chief of Staff to make his complaints public. By the time Kennedy took office, he and other disgruntled Army officers were eager to help the new administration reform U.S. strategy by bolstering American conventional defenses.

In a less vocal way the SACEUR of the late 1950s lent their own weight to these arguments. General Gruenther, SACEUR during the period 1954–1957, had taken pride in the progress that NATO had made in building better conventional defenses in Central Europe and viewed the shift toward nuclear weapons with some misgivings. His successor, General Norstad, presided over NATO's nuclear buildup with greater enthusiasm and was a vocal advocate of further enhancements, including deployment of an MRBM on European soil. But he also recognized that nuclear forces might not be appropriate for all contingencies and that even in the event of a full-scale Soviet invasion, NATO might prefer to defend conventionally for a limited period. Accordingly, he advocated the "pause" concept, which called for sufficient ground and air forces to delay the Soviets for at least long enough to determine that escalation was NATO's only alternative for protecting its security. This led him to urge that NATO field 30 active divisions in Central Europe, the number officially endorsed by NATO's force goals then.9

8 See Taylor, The Uncertain Trumpet.
In Europe, most allied governments initially had been ambivalent about massive retaliation, but under Eisenhower's leadership they had grown comfortable with a nuclear strategy and the budgetary advantages it offered. This stance, however, was not shared by all politically influential factions within these nations. In the FRG, Chancellor Adenauer, Defense Minister Franz Joseph Strauss, and other figures of the conservative CDU/CSU government still supported MC 14/2. The young generation of SPD leaders then coming into political maturity, however, were inclined to be critical of NATO's nuclear strategy. For example, Helmut Schmidt, who would later rise to chancellor, called for a greater emphasis on conventional preparedness. A similar pattern prevailed elsewhere in Europe. The idea of a more flexible NATO strategy primarily found a home among moderate liberals, some of whom, while not yet in power, were beginning to have a say in their nations' policies.

Within the United States, support for this idea had spread by 1960 to the rising breed of civilian defense intellectuals, who were coming to populate the universities and academic "think tanks." For example, William W. Kaufmann had written an influential critique of massive retaliation several years before. At RAND, he and RAND colleagues were arguing in favor of a more flexible nuclear doctrine and beefed-up conventional forces. In a similar vein, Henry A. Kissinger, then a scholar at Harvard and the Council of Foreign Relations, was advocating both better theater nuclear defenses and stronger conventional forces. Other scholars, all dwelling on the risks and requirements of limited war, were echoing parallel themes. These civilian strategists by no means agreed on exactly how the United States and NATO should proceed, but they were united in their criticism of massive retaliation.

The rising chorus of dissent in America and Europe had led the Eisenhower administration to acknowledge that limited aggression should be met by a non-nuclear response, but Eisenhower never abandoned his primary emphasis on nuclear weapons or his support of fiscal restraint in defense spending. Kennedy had criticized the Eisenhower administration on both accounts during his presidential campaign and promised to overturn this legacy. He was bothered by the prospect of the small "brush-fire" conflicts that the United States might be called upon to fight in distant corners of the globe, but he was also concerned about NATO and its military dilemmas. The answer to both problems, he publicly maintained, was stronger conventional defenses and less reliance on nuclear escalation. Kennedy thus entered office not only with advice from many security experts to forge a revolution in the West's military thinking but also with a firm desire of his own to move in this direction.

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Kennedy's determination to bring greater coherence to U.S. defense strategy and national security policy was reflected in his efforts to centralize decision-making in these areas. Kennedy was intent on being an activist president, one who would not be captive to government bureaucracies. He relied heavily on McGeorge Bundy, his National Security Adviser, and the White House staff to provide alternative sources of advice and fresh perspectives. He also turned regularly to his energetic Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara, who himself had embarked on an ambitious program to strengthen civilian control and centralize planning in the Pentagon. The combination of Bundy and McNamara, along with a coterie of other advisers, helped Kennedy counterbalance the more traditional views of the State and Defense Departments and played a major role in the innovative policy decisions made during his administration.

These institutional changes notwithstanding, Kennedy's initial defense program and budget decisions were focused not on conventional defense, but rather on bolstering the U.S. nuclear forces. Kennedy had inherited from Eisenhower an FY62 defense budget of only $44.9 billion. In the initial weeks after taking office, he bolstered this budget to $51.0 billion, a dramatic 13.6% increase. Nearly $2 billion of this increase went to the strategic nuclear forces, a large amount by the standards of the day. The steps that he approved included faster production of Minuteman ICBMs and Polaris submarines, higher alert rates for B-52 bombers, and a strengthened national command and control system. The Polaris and Minuteman measures were particularly noteworthy because they promised to substantially enlarge the U.S. offensive missile force. During 1961–1962, a force target of 1,000 Minutemen ICBMs, 656 Polaris ICBMs, and about 417 submarines was agreed upon. To many observers, these decisions suggested, not change, but continuity in U.S. military strategy.

What, then, were Kennedy, McNamara, Bundy and the others up to? Although historians will debate this issue for many years, the answer seems to be that initial appearances were misleading. Beyond doubt, Kennedy and McNamara felt a sense of urgency about the need to shore up the U.S. nuclear posture, and they were willing to launch expensive programs for this purpose. But these decisions were not representative of their long-term goals for U.S. military strategy. What they wanted over the long term was to fashion a more balanced strategy that made sense in the coming era of mutual nuclear deterrence. This strategy called for strong nuclear forces, but it also called for the transfer of greater overall responsibility to the conventional forces.

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15Kennedy inherited a robust ICBM and SLBM development program from the Eisenhower era, a product of the Killian and Gaither reports, both of which had urged a high-priority ballistic missile program. See Bundy, Danger and Survival, pp. 325–328, 334–340.

To be sure, this shift in priorities did not seem to be the case at first, but it started becoming apparent by the end of Kennedy's first year in office. At that time, the Kennedy administration released its first defense budget, which unveiled a comprehensive plan for bolstering the U.S. conventional posture. In succeeding years, the Kennedy administration's sense of direction was to become even more apparent as the nuclear buildup tapered off and an increasingly large share of the budget was invested in conventional forces. The magnitude of this trend is illustrated by Table 5.1, which displays how DoD funds were distributed between the strategic nuclear forces and the conventional forces during the period FY62-FY65, the budgets that the Kennedy administration shaped during its tenure. The share allocated to strategic forces shrank dramatically from 22% to only 13% of the DoD budget.\footnote{Department of Defense Appropriations, 1966. Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Appropriations of the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate, 89th Cong., 1st Sess. on H.R. 9221, Washington, D.C., 1965. For an analysis of U.S. defense spending patterns throughout the Cold War, see Kevin N. Lewis, National Security Spending and Budget Trends Since World War II, N-2872-AF, RAND, Santa Monica, Calif., 1990.}

Kennedy's early nuclear modernization program decisions were not aimed at restoring either U.S. nuclear supremacy over the Soviet Union or the massive-retaliation strategy that had prevailed in the 1950s. Instead, they reflected more limited aims: a desire to render U.S. strategic forces invulnerable, to make them more flexible, and otherwise to configure them for the missile age. The distinction here is an important one, and because it sheds revealing light on the Kennedy administration's overall military strategy, it merits elaboration.

Since 1957 the Soviets had been actively developing long-range missiles in ways that seemed to presage an early ICBM deployment, possibly in large numbers. Kennedy's early nuclear decisions were influenced heavily by his judgment that the Soviet Union was embarked on an upward nuclear path and the United States needed to react accordingly. This is not to say that Kennedy and McNamara were driven by fear of a "missile gap" or other ill-focused concerns that the Soviet Union had already acquired nuclear supremacy over the United States. The issue was not the present, but the future. Data at the time showed that despite earlier concern that a missile gap was emerging—a fear that Kennedy had openly played upon during his presidential campaign—the Soviets in fact had not yet begun deploying ICBMs in large numbers. As a result, Kennedy, upon entering office, found that the United States still enjoyed nu-

\begin{table}
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\hline
Category & 1962 & 1963 & 1964 & 1965 \\
\hline
Strategic nuclear forces & 11.2 & 10.3 & 9.2 & 6.9 \\
Conventional forces & 20.5 & 21.0 & 21.4 & 21.9 \\
Total DoD budget & 51.0 & 52.2 & 52.5 & 52.4 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{DoD Budgets: FY62-FY65 (Current $, billions)}
\end{table}
merical preponderance over the Soviets and would remain superior at least for a time. But the long-term trends were less certain. The Soviets evidently already had a small missile force, and Pentagon planners believed that in future years they would very likely deploy a large inventory of ICBMs and SLBMs and possibly a ballistic missile defense system as well. Although there were major uncertainties, the only issue was when and to what degree. The Soviets’ past record—they had developed nuclear weapons and theater delivery systems much faster than the West originally estimated—hardly suggested that their performance now was likely to be either restrained or sluggish. As a result, the Kennedy administration still felt a sense of concern about the nuclear balance, one that led it to favor prompt action.

A principal motivating factor was that the U.S. nuclear posture of 1961 was by no means problem free. The posture, by virtue of its heavy reliance on bombers stationed on a limited number of air bases, was disconcertingly vulnerable to even a small, crude Soviet ICBM strike. It was this vulnerability to preemption, rather than the missile gap, that lay behind Kennedy’s urgency to deploy a sizable U.S. missile force. A large force of ICBM and SLBM missiles promised both to eliminate the present risk and to make secure the U.S. retaliatory capability regardless of how fast Soviet missile programs unfolded in the future. The decision to deploy these missiles thus was heavily motivated by defensive objectives and was consistent with an overall strategy of deemphasizing nuclear weapons.

Kennedy’s nuclear buildup did not reflect any serious expectation that a U.S. disarming capability over the Soviet Union—the hallmark of a nuclear strategy—somehow could be maintained, especially over the long run. At the time, as Table 5.2 shows, Soviet ICBM and SLBM forces were still quite small. As a result, Kennedy’s missile deployment did produce a temporary U.S. superiority. But this advantage was more an accident of history than any foreordained American plan, a product of the failure of Soviet deployments to accelerate as fast as had been expected. The U.S. advantage also was a decidedly temporary one. Within two years, a Soviet missile deployment program was under way. By the mid-1960s, this buildup was to establish firmly the Soviet Union as a nuclear superpower. Eventually, the Soviets were to catch and then, in some ways, surpass the United States.

Even the meaning of the numerical advantage that the United States enjoyed in the early 1960s was itself suspect. A comparison of ICBM forces, in isolation, suggests that the United States might have gained a temporary ability to destroy the Soviet Union’s small, vulnerable ICBM force in a surprise attack. But the

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18 The missile gap controversy is examined in Schlesinger, A Thousand Days. See also Bundy, Danger and Survival. Bundy reports that in early 1960, U.S. Intelligence estimates predicted a large Soviet ICBM force within two to three years, but when reconnaissance-derived data became available later that year, this estimate was downgraded. Eisenhower, however, never made this change clear, and Kennedy entered the White House unaware only to discover that the alleged gap did not exist (see pp. 334–351).

19 For an assessment of air base vulnerability at this time, see Albert Wohlstetter, “The Delicate Balance of Terror,” Foreign Affairs, January 1959.

20 See Bundy, Danger and Survival, p. 554.
Table 5.2
U.S./Soviet Strategic Nuclear Force Levels

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICBMs</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>1,054</td>
<td>1,054</td>
<td>1,054</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLBMs</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombers</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>1,600</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>650</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,952</td>
<td>1,800</td>
<td>1,794</td>
<td>2,122</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>2,282</td>
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<td>Soviet Union</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICBMs</td>
<td>0-25</td>
<td>25-75</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLBMs/SLCMs</td>
<td>25-75</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombers</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>604</td>
<td>822</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>1,570</td>
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Soviets also possessed an SLBM and bomber force, which would have been harder to destroy. Only a few of these forces would have been necessary to destroy many U.S. urban areas. Also, the Soviet Union possessed several hundred medium bombers and a growing number of medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles (MR/IRBMs), which could not have been prevented from devastating Western Europe, the area that the United States presumably would have been trying to protect by launching a missile attack in the first place. For this reason alone, the U.S. nuclear predominance of the early 1960s was more impressive in numbers than in strategic importance.

Kennedy and McNamara believed that the perpetuation of a U.S. disarming capacity was not a viable option regardless of how much money the United States was prepared to spend, and therefore it could not be the foundation of American military strategy. The Soviet nuclear program was simply too vigorous, and the alternatives open to the Soviets too broad, to render such a capability feasible. As a result, the United States needed to come to grips with the fact that its homeland was becoming vulnerable to a massive Soviet missile attack, either in retaliation or as a preemptive act. To Kennedy and McNamara, this was a given, if harsh, reality of modern international politics.21

This state of affairs left Kennedy and McNamara skeptical about the continued utility of nuclear weapons for any mission beyond nuclear deterrence. They took pride in the accomplishments of their nuclear buildup and paid public lip service to the virtues of strategic superiority, but in private they placed little stock in the idea that nuclear “superiority”—measured in purely numerical terms—brought the West any diplomatic leverage in East-West relations. Al-

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21See McNamara’s testimony to the Congress during these years, multiple sources. See also Kaufmann, The McNamara Strategy.
though they did acknowledge that inferiority might have a debilitating psychological effect (even if there were no military consequences), they felt that both the United States and the Soviet Union had plenty of nuclear muscle to assert their interests, but no overwhelming advantage capable of compelling the other side to back down. Further, they believed that although the threat of nuclear reprisal would deter any enemy nuclear attack, it might not deter enemy conventional aggression in Europe or elsewhere, especially if the West’s conventional defenses were inadequate. They also dismissed the idea that the United States could confidently aspire to dominate the escalation process and emerge unscathed. They personally doubted that nuclear escalation could be controlled once the nuclear threshold had been crossed. For this reason, they believed that if nuclear weapons were initiated, damage would far exceed the stakes in nearly any East-West crisis. This violated the most fundamental principle behind the use of force: that it serve intelligent political purposes. To them, nuclear war was to be avoided at almost all costs, and nuclear weapons were to be treated as instruments of last resort.

McNamara himself had a deep distaste for nuclear weapons. In the early 1980s, long after he had left office, he wrote that he had privately recommended to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson that the United States should not be prepared to resort to nuclear war even in the event of an impending conventional defeat in Europe. Whether McNamara would have adhered to this stance in an actual crisis cannot be determined, but sentiment clearly reflected his strong fear of escalation and nuclear destruction. McNamara’s aversion was so strong that in private conversations with his personal aides, he rejected the thesis that nuclear weapons were beneficial because they frightened both sides into exercising restraint. To him, any deterrence benefits that nuclear weapons provided were more than outweighed by the catastrophic damage that they would inflict if they ever were used. While he acknowledged that the nuclear genie irretrievably had been let out of the bottle, he personally preferred the kind of military world that existed before Hiroshima.

None of this implies that Kennedy, McNamara, and other administration officials were opposed to intelligent programs that made the strategic forces more secure and flexible. Indeed, they sought to increase the nuclear posture’s security and flexibility as part of their efforts to enhance stability, but these attitudes left them decidedly ill-disposed to massive retaliation. They rejected both of this strategy’s central tenets: that the West should be prepared to immediately initiate nuclear war in response to conventional aggression, and that it

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23See McNamara’s testimony to Congress. From all indications Kennedy shared McNamara’s thoughts, but his exact views are unclear. See also Bundy, *Danger and Survival* for an insightful analysis of Kennedy’s views on nuclear weapons and the East-West military balance, pp. 352-384.

should launch a single, crushing blow aimed at destroying not only enemy military forces, but cities as well. To them, exactly the opposite made sense.

Kennedy and McNamara believed that U.S. strategic forces should be viewed primarily as a means of retaliation rather than as instruments for launching a nuclear war. This did not mean that U.S. missiles never would be used in a first strike mode, especially in limited ways. Kennedy and McNamara had inherited a policy commitment to initiate nuclear war to defend Central Europe, if necessary. Aware that the West European allies placed great emphasis on this commitment, they continued to honor it rhetorically. But this concession to first use evidently was made more out of obligation than enthusiasm. Their overriding goal was to see the West's military strategy based on “second strike” nuclear principles.

With respect to targeting doctrine, Kennedy and McNamara both believed that U.S. forces should be designed in light of the possibility that they actually might have to be used in a war, against an enemy that could strike back. As a result, they rejected the view that the initial U.S. response should be a massive one and that enemy cities should be struck early and devastated totally. What they wanted was a capability to respond flexibly and in limited ways, to climb the ladder of escalation gradually, and to withhold strikes from Soviet urban areas. This capability, they hoped, would enable the West to tailor its use of nuclear weapons to its political and military purposes, while giving the Soviets an incentive to withhold strikes against U.S. and allied cities. This emphasis on flexibility led them to demand options from U.S. war plans and delivery systems that went beyond the single script offered by massive retaliation.25

For a host of political and military reasons, they believed that the need for multiple options extended to the point of requiring a capability to strike enemy military targets, to support SACEUR’s war plans, and otherwise to carry out U.S. obligations to NATO. As a result, they favored an offensive posture that could provide an impressive counterforce capability. During 1961 to 1963, they funded an expensive array of programs to build a force posture along these lines, and their nuclear strategy variously came to be called one of “no cities,” “counterforce,” and “flexible response.” There were decided limits, however, on how many funds they were willing to invest for this capability. And they were under no illusions that the nuclear posture they were designing could function as an across-the-board deterrent or a victory-providing instrument for actually defending Western Europe if deterrence failed.26

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25See Kaufmann, The McNamara Strategy. For an analysis of steps taken by the Kennedy administration to make U.S. nuclear war plans more flexible, see Desmond Ball, “The Development of the SIOP, 1960–1963,” in Ball and Richelson, Strategic Nuclear Targeting, Chap. 3. See also Bundy, Danger and Survival, p. 354.

26In endorsing the counterforce/multiple-options strategy, Kennedy and McNamara rejected two competitor concepts that were popular at the time. The “Minimalist” strategy called for only enough forces to destroy Soviet urban areas. The second, the “Full Counterforce” strategy, favored by senior Air Force generals, called for a posture fully capable of destroying the Soviet military target system. The Kennedy-McNamara strategy came closer to the Air Force concept, but shied away from any first-strike implications as well as its endorsement of very large force requirements. At the time, for example, the Air Force was requesting some 1600 Minuteman ICBM missiles. Kennedy and McNamara pared this number back to 1000, a number that reflected OSD (Office of
Kennedy and McNamara thus did not view nuclear weapons as the centerpiece of American military strategy, especially for the wars that the United States was most likely to have to fight. Also, it is important to remember that while they were bolstering the U.S. missile force, they simultaneously were paring back SAC’s bomber force, thereby keeping the U.S. nuclear posture roughly level at about 2000 total launchers. At McNamara’s behest, Kennedy canceled the new B-70 bomber, an act that provoked a storm of controversy in Washington, and went on to retire many of the Air Force’s older B-47 and B-66 bombers. Between 1961 and 1964, the U.S. bomber force fell from about 1800 to 1000 bombers; two years later, it was down to 700 bombers. Only the new B-52s were to be kept on duty, and McNamara himself was harboring plans for retiring them as well. Evidently by 1963 he had come to conclude that the future U.S. posture should include only ballistic missiles and no bombers. Whether Kennedy would have gone that far is an open question. But there is little doubt that both Kennedy and McNamara were embarked on an effort not to enlarge the strategic forces, but rather to restructure them. Both wanted a better-designed nuclear posture, but they wanted one that would play a smaller role in U.S. and NATO military strategy than before.

They reacted to Europe-deployed theater and tactical nuclear weapons in a similar vein. These weapons provided NATO a temporary advantage in battlefield capability that would endure until the Soviets followed suit. After that, they would be needed to help deter a Soviet theater nuclear blitzkrieg and to provide initial options short of a strategic exchange. For these reasons, and because the NATO allies had been promised a sizable tactical nuclear stockpile, Kennedy and McNamara decided, with only certain exceptions, to bring to fruition plans inherited from the previous administration to deploy several thousand nuclear warheads to Europe. But to Kennedy and McNamara, these weapons were only a partial answer to NATO’s military dilemmas. Both men were insistent that release authority for these weapons remain under U.S. control, and they tried to tailor deployments to help facilitate a doctrine of flexible employment and gradual escalation.


See also Kaufmann, The McNamara Strategy. A less flattering interpretation of Kennedy and McNamara holds that their force posture decisions were driven not by a coherent military strategy, but rather by Congressional politics, which presumably set a floor on the administration’s procurement of missiles and bombers. While Congressional pressures clearly entered the equation (as they do in any administration, by law), this interpretation is wide of the mark. Kennedy and McNamara themselves never embraced a substantially lower theory of force requirements than the posture that they authorized, nor did OSD studies in these years. In general, the Kennedy-McNamara years saw a uniquely determined effort to subject force posture decisions to careful planning and analysis, and McNamara’s studies played a large role in White House decisions. That judgment is shared by senior military officers of the time. Kennedy’s decisions cannot be understood outside a political framework but neither can they be explained in a strategy vacuum.

Interview material. See Kugler, "The Politics of Restraint."

See McNamara testimony to Congress.
This skepticism about nuclear weapons of all sorts led Kennedy, McNamara, Bundy, and others to conclude that, as a matter of high priority, the United States and NATO required a substantially better conventional defense posture, one that could play a much larger role in the West's military strategy than before. Stronger conventional forces were needed, they believed, to deter non-nuclear attack, to defend if deterrence failed, and to help control escalation. Most immediately, they wanted broader conventional options that could handle limited contingencies and at least delay the need to escalate in a full-scale war, thus partially reducing the West's undue reliance on nuclear weapons. Ideally, they wanted a posture strong enough in itself to handle any form of conventional aggression without resort to escalation at all. In this event, they believed, nuclear weapons could be relegated to the properly limited role that they were still capable of playing in modern military strategy.\textsuperscript{29}

CONVENTIONAL DEFENSE PROGRAMS

Progress on actually building U.S. conventional forces came slowly in early 1961. Although Kennedy did fund about $1 billion of enhancement measures in his early decisions, he chose to put off decisions on long-range plans until McNamara was able to study the matter thoroughly. McNamara immediately commissioned a set of internal Pentagon analyses to identify the issues and alternatives. The results of these studies were first used to help shape the FY62 defense budget supplementals that the Kennedy administration requested during the following months. They then were employed as the basis for developing a comprehensive program to be implemented in succeeding years. McNamara began outlining this plan in the DoD’s FY63 budget, which was released to Congress in early 1962. He elaborated on it more fully in the subsequent budgets for FY64 and FY65, issued over the following two years. Since this plan had an important bearing on the goals that the Kennedy administration set for NATO strategy reform and force improvements in Central Europe, it is worth examining in some detail.\textsuperscript{30}

When McNamara accepted Kennedy's offer to become Secretary of Defense, he left behind his job as President of Ford Motor Company, where he had developed a reputation for using modern management techniques, including quantitative analysis. He brought this penchant to the Pentagon, where he encountered a military service-dominated bureaucracy noted for its focus on means and not ends. That is, the services were efficient at producing weapons and forces, but they were less effective at tailoring their products to serve the nation's political-military goals, or even at achieving close cooperation among themselves. This lack of focus on ends, in turn, meant that the forces and weapons bought by the services might not meet national security requirements. From his first day at the Pentagon, McNamara was determined to achieve

\textsuperscript{29}See Bundy, \textit{Danger and Survival}, p. 352.
\textsuperscript{30}This material is taken primarily from McNamara's posture statements and public testimony to Congress during the period 1961–1964, and from multiple official sources. See also Enthoven and Smith, \textit{How Much Is Enough}?
meaningful reform, even at the cost of tense relations with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the services.

Realizing that this enterprise required a strong Office of the Secretary of Defense, McNamara brought with him a highly talented team of advisers. His Deputy Secretary was Roswell Gilpatric (later it was Cyrus Vance), a lawyer and friend of the Kennedy family. Charles Hitch, who had recently written a path-breaking book on Defense Department financial management, became the Comptroller. Assigned to lead the newly created Systems Analysis Office, which was to play a major role in McNamara’s management strategy, was Alain Enthoven, a brilliant young economist with a predilection for defense affairs. Running the Office of International Security Affairs, which handled NATO and Western Europe, was Paul Nitze, the author of NSC-68, the critical strategy study of the 1950s. These men shared McNamara’s aspirations and were to play a major role in carrying out his agenda.

The management revolution that McNamara and his advisers visited on the Pentagon was carried out through the vehicle of the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System (PPBS), which was installed early in 1961. Prior to PPBS, the Pentagon’s budget was allocated directly to the services and administered through traditional resource-oriented categories (e.g., personnel, operations, maintenance, procurement, research and development). Because these categories could not readily be linked to performance outputs (including achievement of national goals), civilian leaders had a difficult time ascertaining whether service funding priorities were adequately serving the national policy and strategy guidelines laid down by the White House. To a dismaying degree, felt McNamara, the Pentagon was flying blind, and the nation was being ill-served. PPBS endeavored to solve this problem by gathering the reigns of power in McNamara’s hands and by creating a new and more insightful conceptual lens for viewing the budget.\textsuperscript{31}

Under PPBS, McNamara began the annual budget cycle by forging detailed planning guidance based on national policy and strategy. He then issued this guidance to the military services, who were required to submit their funding requests to him. McNamara then made an independent judgment, based on advice from his staff, about whether his guidance was being carried out. Moreover, PPBS required the services to organize their submissions into output-oriented “program” categories (e.g., strategic nuclear forces and general-purpose forces), which were easily linked to policy and strategy goals. With PPBS, McNamara had a vehicle for intruding directly into service plans and reshaping them to conform to his vision of national requirements.

McNamara energized the programming phase of PPBS by aggressively employing the management techniques of operations research/systems analysis to

judge service proposals on grounds of cost-effectiveness. Operations research permitted analysis of one or two weapons by employing such concepts as diminishing marginal returns, production possibility schedules, and cost-exchange curves. Systems analysis was used for more complex problems involving several weapons and multiple objectives. Together, these quantitative techniques allowed McNamara to peer through the often vague professional advice offered by military officers and to make decisions on the basis of formal economic criteria.

McNamara applied these techniques not only to the individual services, but also to issues that cut across service boundaries, and NATO was one of them. By using these techniques, McNamara was able to gauge the NATO/Warsaw Pact force balance in relation to Western military strategy, and to make judgments about both strategy and force posture in light of the alliance's security needs. Moreover, he was able to identify improvements needed to shore up NATO's posture, to derive remedial programs, and to establish priorities among U.S. and allied forces on the basis of performance and affordability. Beyond this, he was able to identify areas where NATO's posture could be improved by forcing the ground, air, and naval components to work together. McNamara was partly motivated by a desire to pare away ineffective or redundant programs, but because NATO enjoyed high priority in U.S. policy, his primary goal was to improve the alliance's defenses, and especially its conventional posture.

At first, the techniques that McNamara and his aides applied to NATO were crude yardsticks: simple counts of divisions, air wings, weapons, and manpower. But as time passed, better techniques were developed, and McNamara's insights grew more astute. He soon became knowledgeable about the complexities of ground force structures, air operations, attrition dynamics, support processes, and campaign analysis. With this growing sophistication, he was able not only to bring greater clarity to a hideously complex subject that previously had defied clear understanding, but also to fashion a coherent relationship among resources, force posture, and strategy.

The management revolution that McNamara carried out provoked a huge uproar in the Pentagon, where the services protested vociferously about civilian meddling in their affairs. Nor did McNamara's reforms go down well in NATO circles, among either senior military officers or foreign civilians who resented American intrusion into the details of their forces and budgets. But enjoying Kennedy's firm support, McNamara pressed forward relentlessly, steamrolling personalities and institutions that got in the way of his logical mind and love for numbers. In the process, he was to make a huge imprint on U.S. and NATO thinking about the defense situation in Europe.

As of early 1961, however, NATO lay in the future, and McNamara was primarily concerned about U.S. conventional forces, where he found a posture that not only was insufficiently large, but also was poorly designed and badly lacking in internal balance. For example, the Navy provided inadequate sealift to transport U.S.-based Army units to overseas contingencies, while the Air Force's combat aircraft were not oriented to providing support for Army forces once they got there. Meanwhile, the Army itself was not sized, structured, or
equipped for conventional fighting. Having atrophied during the preceding years of nuclear planning, it reflected no sound management philosophy. McNamara’s plan, which grew out of studies prepared by his staff, aimed at bringing about sweeping changes to rectify this situation.

At the core of McNamara’s plan was a program to increase the Army’s size, capability, flexibility, and responsiveness. The active Army of 1961 had provided only the equivalent of 11 combat-ready divisions. Moreover Army support units for even these divisions were undermanned and poorly stocked. To remedy this problem, McNamara fastened upon a goal of fielding 16 active divisions, along with three independent brigades and six armored cavalry regiments. All of these units were to be made capable of fighting on short notice and to be sufficiently supported to sustain combat for a lengthy period. To help achieve this goal, McNamara decided to increase the readiness of the Army’s three training divisions, build two entirely new divisions, and increase funding for support units and war reserves stockpiles.

McNamara also set about to reshape the Army’s internal structure. Based on a study of the many theaters in which the Army might fight, he decided to configure it with several types of divisions that would provide a broad range of capabilities for different kinds of combat. He initially settled on a program to structure the Army with three armored, two mechanized, nine infantry, and two airborne divisions. Later, this plan was altered somewhat to provide even greater diversity. One mechanized division was converted to armored status, an infantry division was transformed into a helicopter-equipped “air assault” division, and a separate air cavalry brigade was created. Also, McNamara approved plans to abandon the nuclear-oriented Pentomic division. In its place was adopted a new, conventional war-oriented structure called the “ROAD” division. This model was to have three large brigades that would command some ten battalions. Along with this step came guidance to broaden Army doctrine to include nonnuclear operations.

McNamara instituted similar changes in the Army’s Reserve and National Guard forces. He had inherited a posture of some 37 divisions: 10 Reserve and 27 National Guard. This force appeared imposing on paper. Indeed it was larger than DoD war plans required. But most of these units were undermanned and poorly equipped to the point where they could not be made ready for combat within an acceptable period of time. Senior Army generals largely discounted this force as being incapable of contributing to the nation’s immediate security needs. In World War II the Army had found that it could train an entirely new division of recruits in a shorter period than its reserves could be made ready. Little had changed since then. The Reserve and National Guard forces tended to reflect domestic political imperatives rather than strategic needs. Since the Pentagon was spending considerable sums on these forces and needed their help, McNamara found this situation intolerable.

McNamara set about to improve things within the limits of the 700,000-man ceiling then authorized. His goal was to trim away expensive and unavailable

32 For an analysis of the Pentomic division, see Bacevich, The Pentomic Era.
units, while preparing a smaller and more ready force that would be promptly available in the event of war. He disbanded four reserve divisions but authorized each of the remaining six divisions an increased manning level of 75%. He also pared down the National Guard to 21 divisions and approved a higher manning level of 50–60% for the survivors. His specific aim was to build Reserve units that could deploy overseas within eight weeks after mobilization and National Guard divisions that would be available after 24–36 weeks.

The tactical air and naval forces also required expansion, but fewer internal changes. McNamara authorized an air buildup from 16 to 21 active wings, along with the equivalent of ten reserve wings. To achieve this buildup, he increased procurement of new F-105 and F-4 fighter bombers from 180 aircraft per year to 435 annually. Among a variety of related measures, he approved construction of aircraft shelters and other air base enhancements for units deployed overseas. He also purchased larger munitions stocks that would enable the Air Force to fight sustained conventional war and to support the Army.

The active Marine Corps was maintained at three divisions, and plans were set in motion to form a Reserve Marine division. McNamara set the Navy’s force level at 836 ships, including 15 attack carriers, nine smaller antisubmarine warfare (ASW) carriers, and a large fleet of surface combatants and attack submarines. In doing so, McNamara faced the challenge of maintaining a large Navy in the face of growing bloc obsolescence problems as many ships of World War II vintage approached retirement. For this reason, he began turning aside Navy requests for nuclear-powered carriers and other types of expensive modern warships. His goal was to build a posture that balanced the Navy’s needs for both size and modern equipment.

Finally, McNamara launched plans to expand the Defense Department’s strategic lift forces for deploying combat units overseas. Here McNamara was guided by two principles. First, a war in Europe or elsewhere very likely would break out suddenly, perhaps after only a brief period of warning. The United States would have to be capable of reacting quickly. Second, what mattered was getting to the battlefield first with the most. A large posture might count for little if it could not arrive early in the fighting. Similarly, overall requirements probably would be lower if the defense was strong from the onset.

Accordingly, McNamara approved a costly program to enhance overseas mobility. He authorized procurement of more C-130, C-135, and C-141 transport aircraft; in the early 1960s, as a result, U.S. airlift capacity more than doubled. He also approved acquisition of new high-capacity cargo ships and other measures to improve U.S. sealift. Finally, he approved the prepositioning of equipment for two U.S. Army combat divisions in Europe. The specific goal of these measures was to provide an improved, time-phased overseas deployment rate. The program for prepositioning was designed to permit deployment to Europe of these reinforcing divisions within a few days: the time needed to transport their manpower by passenger airplanes. The airlift measures were intended to provide one or two additional divisions during the following two or three weeks. The sealift programs aimed at establishing a massive seaborne
reinforcement and replenishment effort within about a month, with the total buildup to take place over several months.

These force structure reforms, and the centralization of Defense Department decisionmaking that accompanied them, did not endear McNamara to the military services, which resented civilian intrusion into their business. But even his severest critics were hard pressed to refute the notion that McNamara's plans flowed from a coherent strategic concept. McNamara's concept called for a stable overseas force of five Army divisions and three regiments in Europe, along with four total divisions in the Pacific: two Army divisions in Korea, an Army division in Hawaii, and a Marine division divided between Okinawa and Hawaii. These ground forces, associated tactical air units, and naval forces of the Atlantic and Pacific fleets were to provide highly visible deterrence and an initial capability to react in a crisis. Backing up these forward-deployed forces was to be a central "strategic reserve" in the United States of eight active Army divisions, two Marine divisions, and a large mass of active air, naval, and mobility forces. In a less immediately available status were to be the Army's six reserve divisions and reserve air units. These active and reserve component forces were to provide a large pool that the United States could draw upon to reinforce its units in Europe and Korea, the most likely sites of a major war, or to respond to contingencies elsewhere. The idea here was to use the global flexibility provided by this strategic reserve to help compensate for the lack of adequate overseas-based forces in either theater.

Once this concept had been firmly established as the basis for guiding the Defense Department's planning efforts, McNamara felt that the task of determining the overall size and composition of U.S. forces had been completed. The task ahead was one of ensuring that the posture was kept adequately ready, sustained, and modernized. As he was well aware, however, his plan for enhancing purely U.S. forces was not sufficient to solve all the West's security problems. It merely meant that the United States was now in a position to make its largest possible contribution to what unavoidably had to be a coalition effort involving many other nations in Europe and the Far East.

McNamara publicly claimed that President Kennedy had instructed him to fashion a proper U.S. military strategy independent of any arbitrary budget ceiling and then to design a posture that would support it at lowest cost. In truth, McNamara's strategic concept was responsive to fiscal constraints, albeit less stringent ones than Eisenhower had imposed. For this reason, McNamara's strategic concept did not pretend to offer absolute security. While it provided intelligent guidelines for supporting America's global interests, it was based on a force posture that, despite McNamara's best efforts, alone was not strong enough to meet all military requirements that might arise. It aspired to buy more insurance and provide a higher level of military confidence than previous plans and forces. But it did not claim to eliminate all potential risks.

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33See Entloven and Smith, How Much Is Enough? for an analysis of civilian-military relations in McNamara's Pentagon.

34See McNamara's testimony to Congress, multiple volumes.

35See Kaufmann, The McNamara Strategy.
In particular, the new posture fell short—in size and lift capability—of fully providing the capacity to support the "2-1/2 war" strategy that McNamara later characterized as his goal. That meant a NATO-Warsaw Pact war in Europe concurrently with a People's Republic of China (PRC) assault in Asia (either in Korea or Southeast Asia) and a small contingency elsewhere. McNamara's posture could have fought a global war of this sort only if time permitted the full mobilization of the Army's 21 National Guard divisions, a step that would have provided fully 46 Army and Marine divisions. But mobilization and deployment of the National Guard would have taken at least four to six months. In the dangerously long period in between, McNamara's posture would have provided only some 19 active divisions (Army and Marine) and six less-ready Reserve divisions, a total of only 25 divisions.

This force, of course, was not without impressive capabilities of its own. For example, it could have provided eight divisions for a Korea conflict (enough for that theater) and a three-division strategic reserve, while also setting aside some 13 divisions for Europe. Although these 13 divisions would have been sufficient for peacetime needs and most limited crises there, they would not have been adequate to contend with a full-scale war. To defend Western Europe in this case, deployment of nearly all 25 divisions would have been necessary, thereby making a Korea commitment impossible. Hence McNamara's readily available posture fell short of being able to fight two large wars at once. In truth, it could have fought only one. With U.S.-PRC relations unsettled at the time, Washington's margin of insurance rested on the hope that sufficient time would elapse between wars in Europe and the Far East to mobilize the National Guard.

The ability of this posture to handle the NATO contingency even in the absence of a Far East diversion was itself uncertain. While a buildup of 20-25 U.S. divisions in Western Europe would have appreciably bolstered NATO's defenses, the deployment of these forces, even with McNamara's stronger mobility programs, would have taken two or three months or longer. In the interim, NATO would have been limited to the five U.S. divisions available on M-Day and the few divisions that would arrive in the first weeks. If the Soviets succeeded in launching an attack before the U.S. reinforcement effort was fully under way, NATO's prospects for holding out would not have been bright.

For this reason, McNamara was chary about claiming too much for the Kennedy administration's military buildup with respect to NATO. In his public statements of the early 1960s, he was careful to point out that NATO might not be able to contain a determined Warsaw Pact attack, and if so, it would have to resort to nuclear escalation. Since the United States could not hope to solve this problem by itself, NATO's future prospects therefore rested in the hands of the West Europeans. Somehow, McNamara and Kennedy knew, the allies had to be persuaded to follow the U.S. example by disengaging from their reliance on nuclear weapons and by embarking upon their own conventional buildup.

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36 See McNamara's testimony to Congress in 1962.
Although the Kennedy administration was preoccupied in its early months with American defense policy, it was not silent on the larger matter of NATO’s military strategy. It began presenting its views, albeit in a restrained tone, during the NATO ministerial meetings that were held in the spring and fall of 1961 and in private meetings with West European political leaders. Also, it issued a number of public statements on this topic to the U.S. Congress and the American public, all of which were picked up by the European press, disseminated widely across the continent, and studied carefully by keenly interested allied governments.

On the whole, while impressed by the new administration’s vitality, most West European governments reacted warily to Kennedy’s interest in refashioning U.S. and NATO military strategy.\(^1\) Having been wrenched around by the Eisenhower administration’s endorsement of a nuclear strategy only a few years before, they were reluctant to undergo yet another U.S.-inspired change in NATO’s doctrine. This view was especially prevalent in West Germany, where the Adenauer government had been compelled to pay a heavy domestic price out of loyalty to Eisenhower and didn’t want a second beating to please Kennedy. The British were more philosophical, but the attitude in Paris, where Charles de Gaulle saw American leadership of NATO as a threat to France’s stature, was even less forthcoming.

Although their views were not unanimous, most allied governments by now had come to believe firmly that deterrence was the predominant goal of alliance strategy, rather than actually preparing for war. They further believed that the alliance could best safeguard deterrence by unambiguously expressing its firm resolve to use strategic nuclear weapons at the onset of any Soviet attack. They also doubted that NATO could afford to build an effective conventional defense in the face of the Warsaw Pact’s vaunted superiority in these forces. Many went beyond this to conclude that a conventional buildup actually would weaken deterrence by leading the Soviets to believe that NATO in fact was not prepared

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to use nuclear weapons to resist an invasion. All this hardly left them predisposed to Kennedy's arguments for flexibility and stronger conventional forces.2

These judgments were influenced by more fundamental concerns. On budgetary grounds, most allies were averse to the high costs of a major conventional buildup, especially in light of the dubious returns they believed it would yield. They had prospered under the Eisenhower administration's nuclear umbrella, which partially excused them from the onerous military burdens that the ambitious 1952 Lisbon goals had placed on them, and were in no mood to change now. Their highest priority was to continue their economic recovery, and they did not welcome the idea of diverting more resources into defense preparedness. Most also still bore the psychological scars of World War II in ways that further tempered their willingness to play the role in the NATO alliance that the Kennedy administration envisioned for them. This was especially true in the FRG, where rearmament was compelling West Germany to assume the burdens of a front-line state long before its citizens were eager for this role. It also was true in France, which still was struggling to recapture its self-confidence after the humiliations of World War II and its internal instability of the 1950s. The British were more forthcoming, but their struggling economy placed sharp constraints on the assets that even they could afford to divert to military strength. None of this meant that the West European allies were oblivious of their alliance responsibilities or indifferent to the need for a coherent NATO military strategy. Nonetheless, most preferred to let the United States handle the Soviet military threat, thereby placing the defense burden primarily on American shoulders while allowing themselves to attend to their economic agenda.

The allies' negative attitude toward higher defense spending can be understood only in the context of the economic circumstances that prevailed in Western Europe at the time. The Common Market had been formed in the late 1950s, and West Europeans stood poised on the brink of the economic expansion that was to enlarge their wealth over the following two decades. But in 1961, they still were poor in relation to their American cousins. West Germany's per capita income was only 40% that of the United States, and the other European nations were no better off. The Europeans still had little discretionary income to invest in new initiatives, and their overwhelming priority was to put it into industrial expansion rather than military programs. The consensus was that Western Europe simply could not afford the large defense budgets that the Americans wanted for the alliance.3

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3The British were spending about 7 percent of GNP on national defense and West Germany and France somewhat less. A prevailing rule-of-thumb among finance ministries was that only 3–4% of GNP was affordable. The steady rise of West European economies meant that a sizable defense
Dependence on U.S. military power, however, did not translate into a ready willingness to do Washington's bidding on the delicate matter of NATO's defense strategy. The allies' enthusiasm for being completely dependent on American pledges in particular was tempered by growing concern about whether they could safely afford to rely on U.S. nuclear guarantees now that the Soviet Union was acquiring long-range nuclear forces of its own. This left them acutely sensitive to any signs of reappraisal from the United States, regardless of how highly veiled they might be. The specific agenda that the allies were pursuing differed from one country to the next. The French were coming to see salvation in building their own national nuclear deterrent, one whose independent use against the Soviet Union would automatically draw the United States into the fray. The British wanted to continue building their own fledgling nuclear posture while tightening nuclear links between Washington and London. The West Germans and the other allies were not seeking national nuclear independence, but they were coming to favor stronger alliacewide nuclear integration. What united all the allies was a common belief that the main item on NATO's agenda was not a conventional buildup but rather a reaffirmation of extended nuclear deterrence and concrete steps to strengthen the U.S. nuclear guarantee.\(^4\)

In light of these views, which differed so sharply from Washington's, the Kennedy administration's dialogue with the West Europeans got off to a rocky start. Kennedy's early rejection of massive retaliation and his calls for better conventional forces did not go down well in Europe, especially in capitals that also did not welcome the fiscal implications. Partly for this reason, the Kennedy administration initially adopted an approach that stopped short of saying that NATO's basic strategy should be altered. It maintained instead that the alliance merely needed to execute the force goals already on the books. At the time, NATO's official goals, although derived from MC 14/2, called for 30 active divisions in Central Europe and, as a distinctly secondary priority, another 20-30 reserve divisions. Achieving these goals alone, McNamara and other U.S. officials said, would give NATO sufficiently broad military options, including a more sustainable conventional defense.

This approach, aided by the tense atmosphere in Europe, produced positive results during the Kennedy administration's first year in office when allied defense spending rose by an average of 22%. The FRG primarily was responsible for this upward trend: Bonn's spending rose by fully 50% as it funded its long-planned rearmament program that by now was gathering momentum. But other allies contributed as well: British spending increased by 14%, Italian and Danish budgets by about 30%, and French spending by 8%. This trend soon began to make itself felt as allied increases interacted with the U.S. buildup to bolster NATO's posture. As a result, McNamara was able to point out that SACEUR soon would be able to command the equivalent of more than 20 divisions within a few days of mobilization, a useful increase over the 17 divisions effort was still possible, but nonetheless, constraints on long-term expenditures set sharp affordability limits on how much conventional strength could be maintained.

\(^4\)See McNamara's testimony to Congress in 1961.
of only two years before. Nonetheless, this still fell well short of NATO’s official force goals for even a nuclear strategy, much less a full-fledged conventional defense.5

THE BERLIN CRISIS

The Kennedy administration might well have continued pursuing this restrained course, but the Berlin crisis intervened at this point to send shivers down Washington’s spine and galvanize it into greater action.6 In January 1961, Soviet Premier Khrushchev had openly threatened to sign a peace treaty with East Germany, an act that he claimed would end the West’s legal rights in Berlin, including occupation rights, access rights, and four-power administration of the divided city. In early June, Kennedy met with Khrushchev in Vienna, where the Soviet Premier bluntly made clear his demand for a Berlin settlement inimical to NATO’s interests. In the following weeks, Khrushchev stepped up the pressure by complaining about the flow of refugees to West Berlin, forecasting new travel restrictions along the air and ground corridors from the West, and increasing Soviet military spending. Then during the night of August 13, East German troops installed roadblocks and barricades on streets linking the two parts of the city and began building the infamous wall to seal off West Berlin from the communist side. A crisis that potentially could lead to war seemed in the offing, one that focused a bright spotlight on NATO’s weak conventional defenses.

Although the Soviets focused their complaints on West Berlin per se, in past years they often had turned the screws on that city as part of a much larger agenda. One Soviet aim seemed to be to gain Western recognition of the East German state, a step that the FRG as well as other NATO nations were not prepared to take. Beyond this, many Western analysts believed that Khrushchev was using the West’s exposed position in Berlin to compel a showdown that would expose American reluctance to defend Western Europe’s interests, intimidate West Germany, and weaken NATO.

Kennedy and other Western leaders were resolved to stand firm on Berlin, but they wanted to act in ways that would contain the risk that nuclear war would break out. As a result, in the spring of 1961 Kennedy ordered contingency plans for managing the crisis and especially for responding intelligently to an overt Soviet military move to deny Western access to the divided city. His order resulted in an internal study by Dean Acheson on Berlin options as well as creation of a U.S. interagency task force on Berlin. Following this, a Washington Ambassadorial Group was formed, consisting of representatives from the United States, Britain, France, and West Germany. Also, SHAPE Headquarters, under General Norstad, intensified its analyses of Berlin alternatives. The

5See McNamara’s public testimony in 1961 and 1962. Also, see Kaufmann, The McNamara Strategy, and Enthoven and Smith, How Much Is Enough?

6For first-hand accounts of U.S. and NATO planning during the Berlin crisis, see Schlesinger, A Thousand Days; Bundy, Danger and Survival; and Acheson, Present at the Creation.
summer and fall were to see intense activity by these groups aimed at deciding how NATO could respond if a showdown over Berlin occurred.

Together, these reviews produced a four-phased sequence of increasingly strong responses by NATO. The first three phases began with diplomatic embargoes and economic sanctions and escalated through limited conventional military measures, including maritime harassment, NATO mobilization, and armed probes down the autobahn to West Berlin. The fourth phase involved further escalation, including the use of nuclear weapons. The development of these options put NATO in a better position for responding to whatever Soviet moves might lie ahead, but they also illustrated graphically how ill-prepared NATO was to employ conventional forces in the crisis. Part of the problem was that SHAPE’s original plans had been poorly developed and resorted far too early to nuclear weapons. But even with better plans, NATO’s inadequate conventional forces severely inhibited the alliance’s ability to respond in military ways that made sense.7

To be sure, NATO had enough forces to engage in limited military moves that were designed simply to send a political signal. For example, if West Berlin were sealed off, NATO was capable of sending a powerful armored force up the autobahn to Berlin, one that the East German Army alone could not contain. But if the Soviet Army chose to offer resistance, NATO’s forces were too weak to liberate West Berlin or otherwise engage in militarily decisive operations. In this event, Norstad reported, a NATO advance would probably reach only to Magdeburg, a town on the Elbe River about 25 miles into East Germany. Having contained NATO’s advance, the Soviets would then be in a strong position to launch a theaterwide counterattack that might overpower NATO’s defenses and result in the complete loss of West Germany. SHAPE’s only counter was an immediate, large-scale use of nuclear weapons, including nuclear bombardment of the Soviet Union. Lacking a strong conventional posture, NATO thus found itself in a poor position for climbing the nonnuclear rungs of the escalation ladder against a Soviet adversary that held the trump card of military supremacy in Europe.

Faced with these daunting military constraints, Kennedy and other Western leaders behaved with a mixture of firmness and caution as the crisis unfolded. Among his moves, Kennedy opened negotiations with the Soviets to determine if the Berlin problem could be resolved on terms that respected the West’s interests. He also acted unilaterally by sending a contingent of U.S. troops to Berlin to exercise the West’s rights and to warn the Soviets not to institute another blockade. In a similar vein, he dispatched Vice President Johnson to West Berlin to reassure the people of that city and appointed retired General Lucius Clay, a leading figure in the 1948–1949 Berlin airlift, as his personal representative there.

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7See Paul Nitze, From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision—A Memoir, Chap. 12, Gove Weidenfeld, New York, 1989, pp. 195–213. Nitze, the Pentagon’s Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, provides a detailed account of how these options were developed. The accounts written by Schlesinger (A Thousand Days) and Bundy (Danger and Survival) confirm this interpretation. See also Acheson’s memoirs, Present at the Creation.
While Kennedy turned aside the idea of declaring a national emergency, he did approve measures to bolster American forces in Europe as well as U.S.-based units that could be quickly deployed there. This partial buildup was deemed necessary not only to shore up the alliance's defenses but also because it was a good means to signal Washington's resolve. As a result, the United States increased its military presence by 1500 soldiers in Berlin and by 40,000 men in Europe overall. Eleven tactical fighter squadrons were dispatched there and total American ground strength was enlarged to the equivalent of six divisions. In the United States, a partial mobilization was ordered and reserve formations were called up. Within a few weeks 45 combat air squadrons and two National Guard divisions were activated; two more Guard divisions were placed in a high state of readiness for a possible callup. Overall, the U.S. defense establishment increased by about 300,000 soldiers.

The Berlin crisis began to ease during the winter of 1962 as the Soviets, evidently content with the Berlin Wall and reluctant to provoke NATO further, turned down the heat. But even though it ended peacefully, the crisis had driven home to the White House, in ways that genuinely unsettled American leaders, the message that the United States and NATO needed to bolster their conventional defenses. The allies did not react in a similar vein. Indeed, their sense of urgency began to fade as the Berlin crisis receded, and old arguments came back to the fore. In Washington, Kennedy administration officials came to the conclusion that if a sustained NATO buildup was to be achieved, the United States would have to bite the bullet by engaging the allies in a formal debate over NATO military strategy itself. This debate, they knew, would have to directly confront the sensitive issue of how far the alliance could afford to go in continuing to place reliance on nuclear weapons and whether it should transfer greater responsibility to NATO's conventional forces.\footnote{Kennedy evidently was wary of provoking a strategy debate, but decided to back McNamara, who argued in favor.}

**THE ATHENS SPEECH**

The Berlin crisis helped jar the Kennedy administration into pursuing an activist course of strategy reform in Europe that was to plunge the alliance into a stressful, multiyear debate and change NATO in major ways. This debate revolved around the intricacies of modern strategy, but it can be understood only in the context of the larger NATO political setting of the early 1960s. The previous decade had seen unprecedented harmony in transatlantic relations, and the Kennedy administration hoped to revitalize the alliance to strengthen NATO's bonds strategically, politically, and economically; but events were pulling in the opposite direction in ways that made a fruitful dialogue on military strategy all the more difficult.

One problem was that the United States clearly intended to lead the Western alliance on a diplomatic path aimed at defusing the confrontation with the Soviets over Central Europe. Although this course was dictated by the growing
nuclear arsenals on both sides, it rankled West Germany's nerves. The Adenauer government still refused to recognize the East German regime and sought reunification as the price for Bonn's acceptance of postwar borders. Adenauer feared that Kennedy was willing to betray West Germany on this score, as part of a policy of East-West accommodation. The Berlin crisis had reinforced these fears to the point where signs of American flexibility on military strategy was seen as further evidence of American willingness to accept the political status quo in Europe.

France meanwhile was distrustful of Kennedy for entirely different reasons. De Gaulle saw Kennedy's European policy as an effort to perpetuate American control over the continent, thereby denying France its rightful grandeur. Determined to wrench Europe away from American control and place it under French direction, de Gaulle was opposed to the idea of cooperating with Kennedy's strategy reforms on purely political grounds, regardless of their military content, and he doubted that any American president would risk national survival by using nuclear weapons to protect Western Europe.⁹

Transatlantic relations thus were already frayed on the eve of NATO's strategy debate. Additionally, relations among the West European partners also were showing signs of eroding. Both West Germany and France were skeptical of American political intentions, but not in ways that drove them into each other's arms. Adenauer wanted to continue in a confrontationist course with the Soviet Union, but de Gaulle, no enthusiast over German unification, envisioned harmonious relations with the Soviets on terms that left Moscow's empire in Eastern Europe unchallenged. Bonn and Paris also entertained different visions for the six-nation EEC launched by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. The West German government sought an integrated community, one linked to the United States in a close economic partnership. De Gaulle, by contrast, wanted a loosely knit economic confederation that left France's sovereignty unchecked, kept the United States at arm's length, and even excluded Britain, America's close ally. This conflict between France and West Germany threatened to stall West European integration, possibly to the point of rehashing old animosities.

The British, meanwhile, found themselves caught between the United States and their continental allies. Unwilling to part with the United States or commit themselves to West European integration, Britain had joined with six other European nations to form the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). Europe consequently found itself at sixes and sevens, with the Common Market and the EFTA dividing the continent into two separate trading blocs. On the outside stood the United States. Fearing the emergence of adversarial transatlantic economic relations, the United States sought to knock down trade barriers through the Kennedy round of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) negotiations. This effort was to pay off some years later, but in 1961, Washington was beginning to doubt the intentions of its West European partners, especially in the sensitive areas of agricultural policy and balance-of-

payments dynamics. The West Europeans, for their part, saw in American policy a self-centered effort to perpetuate the advantageous features of the Bretton Woods accords, which helped insulate the United States from international economic competition.\footnote{For Kennedy's views, see Schlesinger, \textit{A Thousand Days}, pp. 843--848.}

To complicate matters further, events on NATO's southern flank further strained NATO's cohesion. The conflict between Turkey and Greece over Cyprus had flamed anew in 1960, in ways that left the United States and other alliance members arrayed against Turkey's designs on Cyprus. Taken together, these trends—growing transatlantic frictions, the slowing of West European integration, and southern flank strains—created a troubled atmosphere. The setting was hardly ideal for a debate over military strategy that, even in the best of circumstances, would have been contentious.\footnote{For an overview of U.S.-West European strategic and economic relations in the early 1960s, see Hanrieder, \textit{Germany, America, and Europe}; Gary Clyde Hufbauer, \textit{Europe 1952: An American Perspective}, The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 1990; Lawrence S. Kaplan, \textit{NATO and the United States: The Enduring Alliance}, Twayne, Boston, 1988.}

Within this setting, McNamara began moving toward strategy reform in the NATO ministerial meeting of Fall 1961, when he began outlining the Kennedy administration's views in a preliminary fashion. This accomplished, he then took a giant second step by addressing the subject more completely in the next ministerial session, held in Athens in the spring of 1962.

In the landmark address he delivered there, his intentions were not wholly focused on administering a strategic shock to the allies; indeed, one of his goals was to reassure them about the U.S. commitment to Western Europe's defense. But he also had two other goals in mind that were unavoidably controversial. First, he wanted the allies to appreciate the need for greater flexibility in NATO's military strategy, especially the need to de-emphasize massive retaliation and nuclear escalation as the foundation of deterrence. Second, he wanted to discourage the West Europeans from deploying their own nuclear missile forces and to prod them into making a commitment to stronger conventional defenses. He was particularly worried about France's nuclear program, which he did not want to become a model for other nations. These goals motivated him to attempt a highly ambitious task for a single speech: the presentation of a comprehensive statement on the full extent to which the United States believed that NATO military strategy should be changed. This required a revealing assessment of how the changing roles of nuclear and conventional forces were linked together, one that lent itself to both scrutiny and incredulity.\footnote{Kaufmann, \textit{The McNamara Strategy}, provides an analysis of the events surrounding the Athens Speech. See also Stromseth, \textit{The Origins of Flexible Response}.}
councils, the Ann Arbor Speech was delivered in a public forum. Although lacking the classified details of the Athens Speech, it conveyed the same provocative policy conclusions. It attracted considerable media attention in the United States, and its contents quickly became public across Western Europe. Efforts by other U.S. officials to articulate McNamara’s themes in different forums following the Ann Arbor Speech attracted similar attention. Later that summer, Washington announced that the present SACEUR, General Norstad, would be replaced by Army General Lyman Lemnitzer and that General Maxwell Taylor, a noted proponent of flexible response, would become Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Together, these developments had the effect of transforming an internal NATO matter into a full-blown public debate, one that had the potential of causing serious transatlantic frictions at a time when alliance nerves were already wearing thin.

At Athens and Ann Arbor, as well as elsewhere over the next several months, McNamara stressed three central themes that reflected the Kennedy administration’s views about NATO’s military strategy. First, he made clear that the U.S. nuclear guarantee to Western Europe remained intact and that deterrence was Washington’s foremost goal. Second, he went on to say, deterrence was not so certain that the West could completely dismiss the prospect of nuclear war. Accordingly, he maintained, NATO defense plans needed to address exactly how such a war might be fought. He proposed that the West should approach a nuclear war in much the same manner that it traditionally waged a conventional war: It should conduct nuclear operations with a view toward attaining specific wartime goals, which might be limited in nature.13

This led him to conclude that NATO should not plan an automatic, massive first strike against the Soviet Union’s cities and urban-industrial areas. Instead, he said, NATO should design its strategic forces to absorb an enemy first strike and then to retaliate in a flexible, measured way. Specifically, NATO should plan to attack the enemy’s military forces while avoiding cities, if possible. In this way, it might be possible to control escalation and avert massive damage to both sides. What applied to strategic nuclear war, he said, was also relevant to tactical nuclear operations. Rather than launch a theaterwide nuclear blitzkrieg at the onset, he asserted, NATO should plan to undertake a controlled response. It should try to exercise restraint in the scope and nature of its targeting, and it should climb the escalation ladder as slowly and carefully as possible, all the while trying to terminate the fighting.

Within this revised framework for nuclear operations, McNamara addressed his third theme: NATO’s need for better conventional defenses. He maintained that in the interests of achieving deterrence and permitting a controlled response, NATO should strive to build much stronger forces. NATO’s future posture should do more than merely provide a brief “pause” before escalating. It should aspire instead to conduct a full-fledged forward defense against a major attack, aiming to contain it as long as possible and preferably to defeat it

13See Kaufmann, The McNamara Strategy, and McNamara’s own annual reports to Congress, which provide a detailed presentation of these views.
entirely. In essence, he called for a posture that, without resorting to nuclear weapons at all, ideally could conduct an effective defense along traditional lines.

FEASIBILITY OF CONVENTIONAL DEFENSE

McNamara maintained that a viable NATO conventional defense was a feasible proposition. Part of his argument was that the West's economic recovery had come far enough to the point where the West Europeans now had the financial, industrial, and manpower resources for such an endeavor. Indeed, the NATO nations were now economically superior to the Warsaw Pact by a wide margin, and the difference was growing daily. In purely material terms, there was no reason why the West, by intelligently pooling its resources, could not afford to compete with the Soviet bloc. The issue was a matter of willpower, not assets. Equally important, he maintained, the Soviet Union was not the invincible military leviathan of common lore. This was a theme that he was increasingly to develop, with growing analytical power, as the 1960s unfolded. But it was present in his arguments, if only in sketchy form, from the early 1960s onward. His arguments merit a detailed recounting here, for they played a key role in his efforts to persuade the allies to follow his lead.

During the 1950s, the West had unquestioningly accepted the assumption that the Soviet Union enjoyed overwhelming conventional military preponderance over NATO. By 1960, this belief had acquired the status of a virtual myth: something so held to be true that it was beyond inquiry. McNamara was not a man who believed in myths, especially when they stood in the way of sound policy. Moreover, Khrushchev himself had substantially pared back Soviet conventional forces during the late 1950s. These actions suggested that Soviet military strength was not what it had been in Stalin's heyday and that the present Soviet government was not completely oblivious to competing priorities and the need to institute economies.

McNamara sensed this even before he had the data to prove it. In contrast to Western intelligence analysts, who tended to focus solely on the Soviet Union, McNamara and his OSD aides had the advantage of managing the Pentagon's budget and force posture. This left them sensitive to the tough budgetary choices that had to be made in the Pentagon, aware that resources were never unlimited, and attuned to the realities of having to make unpleasant tradeoffs. What applied in the Pentagon, they believed, inevitably must apply, to some degree, to the Kremlin as well. The Soviets clearly had decided to emphasize large size in structuring their Army's combat forces. But in the process, they very likely had made compromises in such important areas as readiness, sustainability, and modernization, a practice that the U.S. military services had followed before McNamara arrived. Precisely where the Soviets had made their

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14The following material on McNamara's analysis of the NATO-Warsaw Pact military balance is taken primarily from his annual posture statements and Congressional testimony during these years. See also Entoven and Smith, How Much Is Enough? For a detailed appraisal of McNamara's views and those of the OSD staffs. Interview material also has been used.
tradeoffs, at the time, was uncertain. But the likelihood of internal compromises meant that the reality of Soviet military strength might well fall far short of appearances.

These suspicions led McNamara to apply the same analytical techniques to the West’s intelligence estimates that he was employing to shape the U.S. defense program. Beginning in 1961, he had instructed two of his OSD staffs—Systems Analysis and International Security Affairs—to work with the Central Intelligence Agency in analyzing the Soviet defense establishment with the goal of separating fact from fiction.\(^\text{15}\) This effort quickly began to shed startling new insights that tended to confirm McNamara’s basic instincts. As it grew in stature during the following years, it raised increasingly persuasive doubts (in McNamara’s mind at least) about Soviet invincibility, doubts that made NATO’s defense tasks seem more manageable.

Even on the surface of things, the notion of Soviet/Warsaw Pact superiority did not stand up well. Aggregate economic data suggested that the Soviet Union, being a less prosperous and more agricultural nation than the West, should have more difficulty in supporting a large military establishment. When the data on manpower levels were added up, not surprisingly it turned out that NATO actually had more men under arms than the Warsaw Pact: 6.0 million vs. 4.5 million. Moreover, a so-called “PEMA Paradox” (PEMA means “Procurement, Equipment and Missiles for the Army”) became evident when Soviet defense spending was examined in detail. While its exact defense spending levels were uncertain, the Soviet Union was not credited with a defense budget vastly larger than that of the United States. Consequently, the USSR seemed unlikely to be able to afford all the equipment required to fully outfit the 175 divisions that the West estimated to be in its Army. This would have required budgetary expenditures roughly four times what the United States spent on its Army and equal to U.S. expenditures for all its forces, an improbable level. This insight, in itself, did not prove that the West’s threat estimates were inflated, but it did raise intriguing questions.

As McNamara’s analysis probed more deeply, a second “PEOPLE Paradox” became evident. Although the Soviets were credited with 175 fully armed, combat ready divisions, their entire Army apparently totaled only about two million active duty soldiers, or enough to man only about 40 divisions at full strength comparable to U.S. standards. This did not mean that the Soviet Army was itself limited to a posture of 40 divisions, since the two armies had vastly different support philosophies that enabled the Soviets to field more divisions than the U.S. Army for a given level of manpower. The U.S. Army was known to provide its divisions with large support forces to provide sustainability in overseas fighting, whereas the Soviets, who were able to draw directly on their homeland assets and placed less emphasis on sustainability, evidently relied on a leaner support structure.\(^\text{16}\) Nonetheless, this difference in support systems did not seem fully to explain the PEOPLE Paradox: Two million troops were

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\(^{15}\)See Enthoven and Smith, *How Much Is Enough?* Chap. 4.

\(^{16}\)A U.S. division fielded 16,000 troops, but another 30,000 soldiers were needed to provide it adequate rear-area support.
barely adequate to man 175 divisions alone, with no allowance for any divisional support or a training base and other unavoidable overhead.17 Somewhere, something was wrong with the West’s estimates. The only conceivable answer was that the Soviet divisions relied heavily on reserve troops to fill out their divisions and support structures. This, however, meant that large portions of the Soviet Army were less ready than the West originally had thought.

Further detailed analysis showed that while the Soviet Army did maintain a large number of fully active divisions, at least half of their divisions were kept in “cadre” status. In essence, they had only 10–50% of their required manpower and would need to draw on mobilized reserves to reach full strength. Further degrading their readiness was the fact that many of these units also did not have a full complement of equipment and therefore would need to draw on reserve stocks or the civilian economy. These constraints on their readiness did not mean that these divisions would not be available to fight in a war against NATO. Over a period of weeks and months, they could be brought to active status, trained, and deployed forward. But the delay would provide the United States time to reinforce NATO by deploying its active forces and even to mobilize its own National Guard and Reserve units. Thus NATO would be able to build up larger forces than the 25 divisions that were immediately available in Central Europe.18

The realization that the wartime military balance in Central Europe would be a function of time-phased buildup rates on both sides triggered an intensive OSD analysis of exactly how many Warsaw Pact forces would deploy for battle and on what schedule. McNamara’s staff concluded that the Soviets would have immediately available only their roughly 25 divisions based in East Germany, Poland, and perhaps Hungary. These Soviet forces possibly could be joined by another 35 divisions from the GDR, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. Even assuming these divisions would be fully loyal to the Soviet cause (about which important questions remained), they would provide the Soviets a total of only 57 divisions. This was a large force, McNamara’s staff concluded, but hardly a juggernaut. These forces, the OSD analysts acknowledged, later could be reinforced with 30–60 additional divisions drawn from the USSR, especially from the nearby Baltic, Byelorussian, and Carpathian military districts. But a Warsaw Pact attack of around 90–100 divisions seemed a likely upper limit given terrain impediments, logistic constraints, competing requirements on the flanks, and the Soviets’ need to withhold strategic reserves.19 This itself would

17In the U.S. Army, about 40% of total manpower was needed for the training base and overhead units.
19In testimony to Congress, McNamara and his aides discussed the 90–100 division upper limit as a function of terrain impediments, but the notion was hardly new. As far back as 1949, Montgomery had reached the same conclusion, and as division frontages had grown wider in the 1950s, this conclusion grew stronger. The core consideration here was that the Central Region front was only 750 kilometers long. Even if the Warsaw Pact had packed the entire front with divisions on narrow 10-kilometer frontages (an unlikely tactic), only 25 divisions could be committed at once. Accounting for operational reserves, the total offensive posture could hardly be more than 90–100 divisions.
be an imposing force, one large enough to wage an ambitious offensive cam-
ampaign to completion against an unprepared defense. But it was not so large that
it could not be contained by a well-established NATO defense that took advan-
tage of favorable terrain and prepared defense positions.

Given relative buildup rates on both sides, the NATO-Warsaw Pact ground
balance in divisions seemed likely to be only about 2–3:1 in the Warsaw Pact’s
favor at D-Day, far less than earlier estimates, which had suggested a hopelessly
large 7:1 disadvantage. Moreover, more detailed analysis of the exact force
composition on both sides suggested that the balance might even be closer. In
particular, the OSD staffs came to realize that Soviet and East European divi-
sions individually were not as large as most comparable NATO divisions. For
example, U.S. and West German divisions fielded about 16,000 troops while
Warsaw Pact divisions typically had only 9,000–11,000 men. The Warsaw Pact
divisions normally were equipped with a comparably large number of tanks and
artillery pieces, but they had fewer infantry, anti-tank guns, mortars, air de-
fense, and other weapons. Also, their divisional and non-divisional support
structures (combat support and combat service support units) fell far short of
NATO standards. As a result, they lacked comparable assets in command and
control, intelligence and communications, maintenance, engineers, transport,
logistics, and other important areas that contributed heavily to combat power.

These differences led OSD analysts to conclude that U.S. Army divisions in-
dividually were substantially stronger than their Soviet counterparts. Initial es-
timates suggested a U.S. advantage of 1.2–1.7:1. With the help of static fire-
power scores that were developed to gauge relative strengths, the estimate
eventually rose to at least 2:1 and perhaps as high as 3:1. Not all West European
divisions enjoyed a comparable advantage, but since West German units were
similar to U.S. divisions, they too seemed to be substantially stronger than So-
viet units. None of these comforting statistics necessarily meant that U.S. and
NATO divisions were themselves properly structured. Indeed, many of their
supports assets seemed likely to become a factor only over a sustained period
and might not be much help in a short blitzkrieg war that the Soviets probably
would try to wage. But these data did puncture further holes in the myth of So-
viet invincibility.\(^{20}\)

Similar insights arose as a result of OSD analyses of the tactical air balance.
The Soviets originally were credited with nearly a 3:1 advantage in combat air-
craft. But when U.S. reinforcements and basing constraints on Soviet aircraft
were taken into account, the numerical balance seemed about equal. Beyond
this, NATO’s tactical air forces enjoyed important qualitative advantages in air-
craft, pilots, munitions, and command and control. This particularly was the
case in the important area of ground attack capability. The Soviet Air Force was
primarily oriented to air defense operations and seemed capable of giving a
good account for itself in this mission. But its aircraft of the time—MiG 15s,

\(^{20}\) The U.S. Air Force was oriented to conducting offensive attack missions, and therefore had
designed aircraft for these missions. By contrast, the Soviet Air Force, long under sway of the Army,
primarily focused on air defense, and its aircraft carried far smaller ground-attack payloads than
did NATO counterparts.
17s, and 21s—were far inferior to such NATO aircraft as the F-4 and F-105 in range and payload capacity for bombing missions. The OSD analysis optimistically concluded that NATO enjoyed fully a 4:1 lead in the ground attack mission. While the U.S. Air Force disagreed, it came to acknowledge a 2:1 lead for NATO. Even this edge promised to help NATO offset any deficiency in ground combat forces.²¹

These insights led McNamara to infer that a viable NATO conventional defense was a feasible goal. He believed the air and naval situations were well under control. The primary problem lay in the ground balance, where NATO’s forces fell below desired levels. But even here NATO’s task seemed far from hopeless. An important factor was that NATO did not necessarily have to match the Warsaw Pact’s ground forces in divisions, tanks, firepower, and manpower. To some degree, NATO, being on the defensive, could fight outnumbered. What mattered most was whether NATO’s forces were large enough to meet the requirements of their defensive strategy. NATO’s posture in Europe fell well short of these requirements. But once reinforced from the United States, it promised to come considerably closer.

Even with this analysis, McNamara stopped short of claiming that NATO’s forces were fully adequate. This especially was the case in 1962–1963, when his analyses had not yet been fully developed. In later years, he was to grow even more optimistic about NATO’s prospects. But in 1962–1963, he readily acknowledged risks, uncertainties, and deficiencies in many areas. However, he asserted even then, NATO’s shortcomings could be rectified through a moderate expansion of allied ground forces and a set of improvement measures to remedy existing problems in weapon inventories, readiness levels, and sustaining stocks. These were requirements that NATO could well afford to meet. The challenge ahead, he concluded, was to keep NATO’s nuclear problems in perspective and to address the task of pursuing a conventional buildup, one that could be achieved at affordable levels.²²

**ALLIED REACTIONS**

The Athens Speech itself did not immediately provoke a strong reaction from the allies, who had been sensitized to the need for flexibility by the Berlin crisis and by McNamara’s initial forays at earlier meetings. Some new general guidelines were adopted regarding the circumstances in which NATO might be compelled to resort to nuclear weapons and the political consultative mechanisms that would be employed then. The Athens meeting also produced a U.S. reaffirmation of its nuclear commitment to NATO as well as a similar guarantee by the United Kingdom and a general pledge by the West European allies to examine ways to strengthen their conventional forces. For the most part, the allies reacted unenthusiastically to McNamara’s suggestion that a new strategy should be adopted. But neither did they formally rebuff McNamara. Apart

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²²See McNamara’s testimony to Congress.
from France, whose reaction predictably was negative, they adopted the non-
commital stance that McNamara's ideas should be taken under consideration
and that the alliance should proceed in a measured fashion to review its de-
fense options for the future. With this, the meeting adjourned and the allied
ministers returned home to mull over McNamara's words.23

As American public pressure for strategy reform built during the weeks after
Athens, a more vocal allied political response began to emerge. The West Eu-
ropean governments by now had come to realize that McNamara, who had not
fully consulted them in advance of the Athens Speech, was not speaking alone.
The drumbeat of official signals coming from Washington was an unambiguous
indicator that the entire United States government was prepared to exert its
weighty influence to move NATO in the directions that McNamara was urging.
In essence, Washington was seriously proposing to yank the rug out from under
the very nuclear strategy that it originally had written and that NATO had dil-
gently been working on for several years. To the allies, the unwelcome prospect
of a future filled with change, uncertainty, and instability lay ahead. This was
something that they scarcely would have welcomed under the best of circum-
cstances but might have been willing to tolerate had they been sympathetic with
Washington's goals. In this case, however, their reaction was doubly negative
because they felt an aversion, on substantive and economic grounds, to the new
military strategy that the United States was attempting to foist upon them.24

Especially since McNamara had presented his ideas in a candid and detailed
way, many European security experts privately acknowledged that he had
raised important issues that needed to be addressed. Some also expressed
agreement with his conclusions or at least sympathy with his reasoning. But
official reactions took an entirely different, negative form. The French reacted
in a particularly hostile way that was hardly unexpected given de Gaulle's skep-
ticism about American intentions and his firm commitment to a nuclear strat-
egy.25 The British responded in a more neutral fashion. The Macmillan gov-
ernment took umbrage at Washington's apparent criticism of the U.K.'s nuclear
deterrent (McNamara later denied that he had the British in mind in his attacks
on national nuclear forces). But it did not oppose Washington's quest for a
more flexible defense strategy. Where it parted from McNamara was in its as-
se ssment of NATO's conventional improvement priorities. It questioned
whether the military balance was as close as McNamara claimed and whether
NATO needed, or could attain, staying power lasting more than a brief period.
In contrast to McNamara's wish for a defense posture of three months duration,
the Macmillan government favored a posture that could defend only a few days
before going nuclear.

The German response fell midway between the French and British reactions
but was decidedly unenthusiastic. The Adenauer government had shown an

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23 See Schwartz, NATO's Nuclear Dilemmas; and Stromseth, The Origins of Flexible Response, for
further analysis of allied responses.
24 Ibid.
25 For articles that provide a spectrum of American and allied opinions, see Kissinger, Problems
of National Strategy. Also see Aron, The Great Debate.
aversion to the prospect of nuclear escalation during the Berlin crisis the previous year, and Defense Minister Strauss, while an open advocate of nuclear deterrence, had publicly acknowledged the need for flexibility in NATO’s strategy. Within the West German defense establishment itself, the Air Force strongly favored a nuclear strategy, but many Army officers endorsed a conventional buildup that would strengthen the Bundeswehr while reducing its reliance on nuclear weapons. The West German government leaned heavily toward preserving MC 14/2, but its mind was not entirely closed on the subject.

What mattered most to Bonn was the American nuclear guarantee, NATO’s commitment to forward defense of German territory, and the FRG’s close relationship with the United States. It was precisely in these areas, however, that the new strategy left Adenauer government more than a little uneasy. The United States had placed Adenauer in a difficult domestic position by announcing a change in strategy only a few years after he had led a bitter internal battle, at Washington’s behest, to nuclearize the German military. Washington’s abrupt turnaround had the effect of endorsing the platform that the opposition SPD Party had adopted, while foisting on West Germany a strategy that seemed to make the U.S. nuclear guarantee ambiguous. As a result, Adenauer’s political leadership, already weakening, was further eroded. Also, Washington’s stance complicated Adenauer’s efforts to maintain good relations with de Gaulle. Adenauer now found himself being torn between Washington and Paris, and his reluctance to offend de Gaulle exerted a constraint on how far he was willing to go toward strategy reform. All these considerations hardly left Adenauer and his advisers grateful to McNamara’s démarche.26

Although specific allied reactions thus varied from one capital to the next, some themes were common to all. In general, many found the very fundamentals of McNamara’s thinking to be disturbing. In particular, they were alarmed about McNamara’s treatment of the extent to which the role of nuclear weapons in NATO’s strategy should be scaled back.27 The French, the FRG’s Strauss, and even some British officials were leading exponents of this theme. What stressed their nerves most was McNamara’s contention that deterrence no longer should be NATO’s sole goal; that NATO should begin preparing seriously for the prospect of actually fighting a war in Central Europe. Almost as stressful was McNamara’s related argument that the alliance no longer should plan to respond to conventional aggression by immediately bringing American strategic nuclear power to bear. The allies perceived these propositions to be, at best, contradictory to their deeply held judgments about how stability was preserved and, at worst, in direct conflict with Western Europe’s vital interests. To them, McNamara seemed willing to accept the outbreak of war in Europe as a feasible policy choice and yet unwilling to employ the weapons that the United States for years had been claiming were NATO’s only hope for prevailing in such a conflict. This was precisely the opposite of what they had come to expect from the United States and what they wanted to hear.

27For more detail on the West German position, see Richardson, Germany and the Atlantic Alliance; and Kelleher, Germany and the Politics of Nuclear Weapons.
From the allies' vantage point, McNamara's finger seemed too close to the nuclear trigger in one way and not close enough in another. While his stance reflected an understandable American perspective, it seemed likely both to weaken deterrence and to increase the likelihood of military defeat if war were to occur. To them, deterrence was driven not by operational military details but rather by the sheer danger of nuclear war. If NATO were to reduce Moscow's sense of danger by making escalation more controllable, deterrence inevitably would be weakened. And if NATO were also to swear off actually employing nuclear weapons early in a war, then NATO's forces hardly could hope to cope with the advancing Soviet Army. The result of this two-fold error in military strategy, they concluded, could be the very destructive war and subsequent Soviet occupation of Western Europe that NATO originally had been created to prevent.28

To them, McNamara's hostility toward allied independent nuclear forces and his insistence that they bolster their conventional defenses seemed doubly ironic. McNamara appeared to be weakening the American guarantee that was his sole argument against nuclear forces of their own. Simultaneously, he was urging them to abandon their own nuclear aspirations to fund a conventional buildup that promised to erode the credibility of NATO's threat to escalate, regardless of whether the U.S. nuclear pledge remained intact. Taken together, these arguments were more than most allied governments were prepared to swallow.

McNamara, a man who preferred to erect NATO's strategy on a foundation of tight logic rather than a politically acceptable balance of competing perspectives, rejected these apprehensions. He insisted that a major goal of his new strategy was to enhance deterrence rather than weaken it. The previous strategy of massive retaliation, he argued, was no longer credible in Moscow. The new strategy would bolster deterrence by giving NATO credible options and by placing the onus of nuclear escalation on the Soviet Union's shoulders rather than on NATO's. In light of this gain, he said, any theoretical loss in deterrence due to the reduced automaticity of NATO's nuclear response at most would be minor and would be more than offset by the gain accrued from providing NATO improved prospects for defending itself and for controlling escalation if war in fact occurred. To him, the allies were so preoccupied with safeguarding deterrence that they seemed shortsightedly oblivious to the dangers that weak defenses and runaway escalation posed for Western Europe.29

The allies, in turn, were taken aback by McNamara's summary rejection of their theories of deterrence. Some came to perceive in McNamara's relentless military logic an unspoken but profoundly disturbing political agenda, one that confirmed their deepest suspicions about American intentions. When the fog of argumentation was cleared away, they felt, a central fact stood out: The United States, now threatened by Soviet missiles, seemed to be backing away from its nuclear commitments in Europe. Washington evidently remained will-

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28See Aron, The Great Debate.
29See McNamara's annual reports and public testimony, multiple volumes.
ing to fight a conventional war there and perhaps a tactical nuclear war as well. But, in the minds of McNamara’s harshest critics, the American government no longer seemed willing to expose the United States to a Soviet nuclear attack. To them, American vital interests seemingly now extended to the point of sacrificing blood and treasure to protect Western Europe but not to placing at risk the physical survival of the United States itself. This dark thought clearly was on Charles de Gaulle’s mind. He said so openly. The West Germans and other Europeans talked more discreetly in public, but in private many worried that de Gaulle might be right.

If the worst were true, many allied experts concluded, the United States was not trying to enhance deterrence but instead was merely endeavoring to make Europe safe for a major conflagration that would inflict even more devastation than World War II. And by being so openly forthcoming about its views, Washington was explicitly signaling this new stance to the Soviets. It was telling them that it actually was willing to fight a war for control of Europe and was proposing ground rules for the conflict: that neither the United States nor the Soviet homeland would be brought under nuclear bombardment. In the process of making this announcement, the allies feared, the United States was removing the major and perhaps only risk that could deter the Soviets from invading Western Europe. The prospect of a painful theater campaign would not deter the men in Moscow who had long since shown a willingness to spend Soviet lives and inflict widespread devastation in their quest for strategic gains.

The allies’ reaction to McNamara’s call for a conventional buildup stemmed primarily from these nuclear fears. Many allied governments did not welcome American pressures to increase their spending on conventional defenses beyond what their domestic constituencies and national budgets would permit. But as a practical matter, most privately recognized that NATO’s conventional forces needed strengthening and that a great deal could be done with even limited investments. To them, the problem was that McNamara had not only justified a conventional buildup as a worthy goal in itself, but also had portrayed it as the vehicle by which NATO could reduce its dependence on extended nuclear deterrence. This led them, especially in late 1962 and early 1963, to react negatively to a conventional buildup as a matter of principle. Fearing the larger strategy implications, they began throwing as many darts as possible at McNamara’s arguments in favor of the feasibility of conventional defense. Their rejoinders were cast in largely technical terms that questioned McNamara’s optimistic portrayal of the conventional balance. But their real agenda was nuclear.

McNamara’s response to these allied nuclear fears was that the United States was deploying over 7,000 tactical nuclear weapons to Europe and distributing them to the allies for their use upon issuance of release authority. This, he pointed out, was not the behavior of a nation that was trying to disentangle itself from NATO’s nuclear planning. The allies offered the rejoinder that these

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31 See McNamara’s testimony to Congress, multiple volumes.
weapons lacked a strategic dimension: They were mostly incapable of striking targets within the Soviet Union. The missiles and aircraft that were capable of long-range strike missions, they pointed out, remained exclusively under American command, control, and release authority. Moreover, symbols mattered to them as much as operational details. Their lack of command authority over strategic assets, they feared, created the impression that Western Europe had been relegated to a junior status whose interests might be subordinated to the goals of the superpowers.³²

In retrospect, McNamara marshaled better analysis and technical data than his European critics in this debate. He correctly had ascertained that the requirements of deterrence had changed and that NATO required a more flexible, less nuclear-reliant strategy if it was to achieve the multiple objectives that concerned all alliance members. His analysis of the conventional balance, as many West European experts privately recognized, was on the mark. The allied rejoinders were not entirely without merit, but on the whole they lacked the rigor, depth, and clarity of McNamara's arguments. In particular, the allies found themselves dubiously arguing that a more flexible strategy and stronger conventional defenses somehow weakened deterrence. They also placed themselves in the position of clinging to an inflated estimate of the threat and asserting that a major improvement in NATO's posture was not worth the marginal price it would cost. Beyond doubt, this left McNamara holding the analytical high ground.

However, friends can be lost by winning arguments, especially when more is involved than cool logic. Something of this sort happened here. The allies were reacting to what they perceived as a hidden agenda in McNamara's stance that violated the bonds of mutual trust and shared interests that united the alliance. Their behavior was driven as much by visceral emotions as by a purely intellectual appraisal of the issues. In fairness to Kennedy and McNamara, West European skeptics misinterpreted American motives and were slow to recognize how Washington's strategy agenda served their own interests. But in the strategy controversy that embroiled NATO in late 1962, allied misperceptions and suspicions became so deeply ingrained that they could not be easily corrected, especially overnight. As a result, the debate itself began to become a barrier to constructive change rather than the engine of progress that Washington originally had hoped it would be.

Indeed, the entire alliance seemed to be coming apart at the seams. The British government began treating Washington with a wariness that had not been seen since the divisive Suez crisis in 1956. In Paris, de Gaulle stepped up his criticism of the United States and his advocacy of major changes within the alliance to enhance France's influence. In Bonn, Adenauer increasingly showed signs of joining the pro-Gaullist faction of the CDU. Perhaps most ominously, Strauss began talking openly of a possible West German move to develop its own nuclear deterrent.³³ Similar signs of nervousness appeared elsewhere

³²De Gaulle especially stressed this theme.
³³Indeed, Strauss openly emphasized this possibility in a press conference in Washington, D.C., where the Kennedy administration could not fail to notice.
across Western Europe. These trends pointed in one direction: the fracturing of NATO’s unity in ways that would have undermined one of the most important goals of alliance military strategy.