

TREATING NATO'S SELF-INFLICTED WOUND

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October 1973



### **The Rand Paper Series**

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**The Rand Corporation  
Santa Monica, California 90406**

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The trouble with NATO is that its posture doesn't fit its policy. There is nothing wrong with NATO's defense policy of flexible response and a forward strategy, which seem well suited to deterring or if need be blocking any Soviet push westward. What is wrong is that, though the NATO powers profess a strategy calling for a vigorous conventional response before the horrendous decision to go nuclear must be taken, their collective postures are poorly designed for enforcing much more than a brief conventional pause.

This was tolerable during the period of American nuclear supremacy. Then NATO could live with a low confidence non-nuclear posture, relying instead on the U.S. nuclear umbrella to deter any hostile adventurism. Largely for this reason our allies have not exerted themselves unduly toward strengthening NATO's conventional shield. They also have feared lest a stronger conventional option would weaken nuclear deterrence. And they have been understandably reluctant to contemplate a destructive replay of World War II.

But now NATO faces a new dilemma, because the advent of nuclear parity makes conventional deterrence and defense much more important than before. This is not to say that nuclear deterrence has become incredible, simply that the conventional component of flexible response obviously becomes a more desirable precursor to any resort to nuclear escalation. As we Americans have been trying to tell our allies for some years now, any U.S. President will want enough time to think long and hard before pushing nuclear buttons when the whole U.S. is now open to devastation.

But just when adequate conventional capabilities are becoming more important, inflated manpower and weapons costs risk pricing them out of the market. This is the other horn of NATO's dilemma, since at a time of apparent détente and strong domestic competition for resources, the pressures in most NATO countries are toward holding down defense budgets, not raising them. Instead these factors are leading the United States in particular to seek stabilizing arms controls and mutual force reductions as the preferred alternative to what might otherwise have to be unilateral cuts. But it may be quite some time before such developments materially ease the burdens of defense. It also seems imprudent to rely on detentism as sufficient reason for neglecting NATO's defenses, if only because denying other options to the Soviets helps bolster the trend toward accommodation.

Hence NATO is caught between the unpalatable alternatives of even heavier reliance on decreasingly credible nuclear deterrence or massive added outlays for high-cost conventional forces. How does NATO square this circle in a period of accommodation and inflation? Fortunately there is a viable solution to this dilemma, because it is largely of our own making. In fact, NATO is already within reach of a high confidence conventional deterrent posture at no added cost if it will only face up to the hard choices entailed.

#### A DILEMMA OF OUR OWN MAKING

When America's allies, and perhaps increasingly the U.S. itself, shrink from fielding a credible conventional defense, they are victims of a pervasive myth that effective non-nuclear defense against a Warsaw Pact (WP) attack is impossible, at least without massive added military outlays. Yet if NATO's present conventional posture is really as inferior as NATO's generals tell us, it is equally demonstrable that *the myth of inevitable Pact superiority is to a great extent a self-inflicted wound.*

The thesis that NATO's inferiority springs largely from its own failure to optimize its defense posture was cogently advanced last year in a seminal article by Steven Canby.<sup>1</sup> Building on Canby's insights, I would like to suggest some practical low cost ways to revamp NATO's conventional posture while staying within the likely severe cost constraints of the Seventies.

But first it is important to recapitulate briefly some underlying causes of NATO's present conventional inferiority vis-à-vis the Warsaw Pact. It is hardly because NATO is investing fewer resources. On the contrary, NATO is spending at least as much money and fielding as much active military manpower. In fact, NATO is probably spending more. But this hardly squares with what most NATO military authorities tell us of NATO's critical deficiencies vis-à-vis the Pact. Hence as Canby asks, "If NATO is outspending the Warsaw Pact -- in terms of both men and money -- why are we buying less security?"

True, part of the problem is more or less inherent in the differing nature of the NATO and WP situations. NATO must grant to the Pact the great advantage of the initiative, which permits an attacker to choose the time, place, and weight of his attack. While being on the defensive in turn gives NATO certain advantages, it does lack comparable flexibility. Instead it must guard numerous approaches along very long borders, which drives its present thin combat forces toward a linear defense without much depth. Add to this the Pact's classic strategic advantage of interior lines, whereas the NATO forces strung out in a rough crescent along its periphery are largely tied down to their national sectors. Another

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<sup>1</sup>"NATO Muscle: More Shadow Than Substance," *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1972, pp. 38-49.

disparity arises from the fact that NATO's military outlays are eaten up by much higher manpower costs than are those of the Pact. Lastly, NATO is only a loose coalition of 14 disparate military establishments (of course including France), which differ far more from each other than do the more homogeneous Pact forces equipped and organized mostly on the Soviet model.

Yet even these facts of life do not fully explain the paradox between comparable inputs and such apparently asymmetrical outputs. At least equally important, NATO and the Pact have deliberately chosen to allocate their resources -- and structure their forces -- quite differently. The WP has gone a long way toward configuring its forces for an overwhelming armored and air blitzkrieg thrust across the NATO Center Region, whereas NATO's posture is far from optimal for holding against such an attack. In surprising contrast to the way the Pact has invested the bulk of its general purpose forces in creating this blitzkrieg option, NATO has invested its comparable resources across a much wider spectrum of capabilities than would seem optimum in terms of meeting what it regards as the most worrisome threat. Indeed, except for the West Germans, it is notable how modest a proportion of the military budgets of the Center Region countries -- Britain, France, and the United States included -- is directly invested in coping with it.

Of course, there are many reasons for all this, such as the low likelihood of Communist aggression, residual confidence in the U.S. nuclear umbrella, desires to posture against other contingencies, institutional pressures to maintain balanced national forces and the like. But can we afford these expensive practices in the constrained environment of the Seventies?

Furthermore, NATO has been guilty of double "worst case" thinking in regarding the Pact forces as 10 feet tall. This results partly from the prudent intelligence tendency to assume that, because everything could conceivably work perfectly for the enemy, it probably will. Thus NATO tends to assume that the Warsaw Pact could not only launch an overwhelming attack but do so with little warning. But the bulk of its divisions are understrength or cadre units, needing time to train, equip, and deploy before they could operate at full effectiveness. They also have serious logistic deficiencies. Hence if the WP launched a surprise attack, it could hardly employ initially its second and third echelon divisions, while if it opted for a massive attack it would have to sacrifice strategic surprise.

Then NATO planners -- all too painfully aware of our own readiness and deployment problems -- naturally grind in another worst case analysis by assuming that NATO counter-measures will be impeded by all the operational difficulties that our intelligence has already discounted on the other side (fortunately, it is doubtless an institutional fact of life that the other side's planners and intelligence officers overestimate NATO's capabilities about as much as we overestimate theirs).

Fear of an overwhelming quick attack before NATO could fully mobilize also has driven NATO's stress on expensive ready divisions -- to the neglect of the kind of quickly mobilizable cadre/reserve units which compose so much of the threat from the East. Ironically, the sedulous fostering of this image of an overwhelming threat by generations of NATO military authorities to buttress their pleas for higher defense spending has had the opposite effect. Instead, it has helped convince their civilian masters that only nuclear deterrence makes sense. It has also had the



side effect of convincing many in the U.S. Congress that, if U.S. troops are really in Europe only as a nuclear tripwire, we need hardly keep 300,000 of them there just for that purpose.

Much is also made of NATO's numerous deficiencies in anti-tank and air strength, and its lack of enough ready ground combat forces to provide initial defense in depth against a Soviet-style blitzkrieg attack. No NATO commander, past or present, seems to feel NATO has enough ready divisions. Such deficiencies are real enough. What people fail to realize is that they are largely matters of choice, in that resources which could be allocated to rectify them are instead diverted to posturing for extended conflict, or against other lesser contingencies or the like. To take only one example, developed technology exists for a range of highly effective anti-tank weapons systems to cope with Soviet armor; the real question is why our allies have yet bought so few of them.

Moreover, why does NATO generate so few ready divisions compared to the Pact, despite comparable active manpower? It is primarily because NATO allocates its manpower differently and structures it in a smaller number of much larger divisions, designed to be indefinitely sustainable in extended combat and thus having a much higher ratio of organic and nonorganic support than their WP counterparts. This is particularly the case with U.S. forces, and helps explain why the U.S. Army generates only 4-1/3 large divisions out of almost 200,000 men in Europe while the Soviets manage to eke out 20 divisions, with much higher aggregate shock power and firepower, out of only 300,000-odd Red Army personnel in East Germany.

Nor do our NATO allies plan to mobilize large numbers of reserve combat forces to match the prospective WP buildup. In fact, they have very few reserve divisions at all (they do plan to mobilize substantial

personnel, but mostly to flesh out support for existing active units). They seem to be posturing for only a brief conventional phase before a nuclear response would be required. The United States, on the other hand, maintains numerous reinforcement and reserve divisions which it apparently contemplates deploying gradually to Europe to sustain extended conventional conflict. We are also posturing for an extended campaign to keep open the Atlantic sea lanes against a conventional submarine threat. This anomalous contrast between the American and allied postures is difficult to understand. We seem to be planning for the very replay of World War II that is anathema to our allies. All in all, has NATO sorted out its priorities very well?

#### THE ESCALATING COST OF CONVENTIONAL DEFENSE

Moreover, the normal answer to NATO's security dilemma -- to buy more forces to meet the full spectrum of threats -- is not a viable answer these days. For the other horn of NATO's dilemma in the Seventies is that just when a credible conventional capability is becoming more essential, it is becoming more expensive. While we are all familiar with the rising costs of modern weaponry, it is important to recognize that it is the high cost of manpower which is currently driving defense budgets, especially as the U.S. and other NATO countries are forced to rely increasingly on expensive volunteers rather than cheap conscripts. Some 67 percent of the entire U.S. Army budget now goes for personnel. Ten years ago an American recruit got \$78 a month base pay. In 1974 he will get \$328. Perhaps the biggest single reason why the USSR seems to be able to buy so much more than the U.S. in the way of forces and weaponry from comparable defense outlays lies in Soviet ability to keep drafting cheap manpower into its armed forces.

NATO will find it hard enough even to keep defense spending at more or less present levels in terms of real purchasing power, in the present climate of inflation and détente. Indeed, this budget squeeze appears to be the principal driving factor behind NATO interest in Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions, especially in U.S. troops in Europe. It is less MBFR's military acceptability or stabilizing impact than Congressional pressures to reduce defense burdens that make MBFR a preferable alternative to what might otherwise be unilateral cuts. But if the U.S. withdraws substantial troops from Europe, either by East/West agreement or unilaterally, there would be strong pressure to demobilize the personnel withdrawn, since otherwise little budget savings would be possible. Thus NATO's dilemma would be further sharpened. This prospect further underlines the need to find new approaches to NATO conventional defense which avoid politically unrealistic budget increases and permit absorbing some force cuts. The Alliance will have to find ways of doing more with less.

#### THE RESTRUCTURING OPTION

There is a solution to this dilemma, though a very painful one. While none of its elements are particularly novel, collectively they involve a sharp departure from the conventional wisdom. They require facing up to hard choices of a sort traditionally difficult to make, because they run up against the built-in institutional reluctance of NATO's military establishments to change long-accepted doctrines and practices.

This solution is to restructure NATO's existing force posture to emphasize first things first, and to free up the resources needed to this end by cutting back on many more marginal activities. Tradeoffs rather than add-ons, reallocating existing budgets rather than buying yet more forces,

would have to be the order of the day. Controversial as it may be, force restructuring does offer perhaps the only viable way of fielding a more credible conventional posture at little if any added cost, in fact after some MBFR or other cuts. It would bring NATO's posture into conformance with NATO's strategy, making flexible response a reality while still raising the nuclear threshold.

Fortunately, NATO already fields the bulk of the forces required for a more effective conventional option. The remainder could readily be provided by reallocating Alliance member military resources within the massive defense budgets the NATO nations will still be spending. After all, even if current European NATO defense budgets were held at the present \$28 billion level and the U.S. contribution at \$17 billion, the many needed tradeoffs could be accommodated. Indeed, if the pressures cited earlier forced the NATO powers to rationalize their defense establishments and accept a higher order of interdependence, it might prove a blessing in disguise.

Force restructuring to utilize expensive active personnel more efficiently gets at those huge manpower costs that are driving up defense budgets now that NATO can no longer rely so much on cheap conscript manpower. Such personnel costs are sopping up so much money (especially in manpower-consuming ground forces) that essential force modernization is being compromised. This is why the West German Force Structure Commission's 1972 Report recommended a richer reserve to active force mix of Bundeswehr brigades to meet the FRG's force commitments to NATO, while still reserving enough funds for modernization. Just such kinds of force restructuring are what NATO will be forced increasingly to adopt.

AVENUES TO VIABLE CONVENTIONAL DEFENSE

NATO must put its money where its mouth is, and give highest priority to fielding sufficient ground and air forces, tailored to provide the most effective initial defense in depth against the kind of blitzkrieg for which the prospective opposing forces seem designed. Obviously there is merit in posturing against a wider range of contingencies, including extended conventional conflict. But if NATO cannot afford to do so, the sensible alternative is to invest most heavily in meeting the most important needs, if necessary at the expense of others.

Many possibilities spring quickly to mind. Much NATO investment in keeping the Atlantic sea lanes open might be switched to filling ground and air deficiencies. True, Western Europe is notably dependent on overseas supply, especially oil, but how many ships are going to risk submarine attack by sailing before Soviet sub strength has been attrited and convoys organized? So Europe would have to live on stocks in any case during the initial stages of a blitzkrieg. A different order of priorities also might lead to cutting some British, French, American, and other NATO forces postured for non-NATO contingencies in favor of a stronger Center Region defense. Britain, France, Belgium, and Germany (not to mention the U.S.) all have sizable airborne units of limited utility against an armor-heavy attack. Reexamining national overheads, balanced national forces, and separate training establishments might offer other sources of savings. The high tail-to-teeth ratios of most major NATO military establishments partly reflect a failure to adjust to the constraints imposed by escalating manpower costs (Great Britain seems a notable exception, precisely because it has had to man its forces with volunteers since 1967).

By such means, NATO could free up enough resources to permit generating more ready or quickly available ground and air combat forces to thicken up the NATO shield and properly execute the "forward strategy." However, this would also require restructuring NATO's existing ground/air posture along the following lines:

1. MBFR or other troop cuts should be absorbed as much as possible from support and overhead structure, rather than at the expense of initial combat strength. Does it make sense to weaken precisely those forces

which must absorb the first shock of any attack? As for the U.S. forces in Europe, our 4-1/3 divisions and related air strength hold a crucial sector of the NATO Center, and it is unrealistic to expect that any other ally could replace them.

2. To economize on high cost active manpower, NATO should restructure its ground combat forces around a smaller leaner divisional "slice" tailored for initial anti-armor defense and designed to be fleshed out later if necessary for extended conflict. They should have a higher combat-to-support troop ratio, as the best and perhaps only way to generate enough such forces within likely budget and MBFR constraints. Though this smacks of copying the Russians, apparently anathema to most soldiers, it is just possible that we have something to learn from them.

3. Since NATO can probably count on reasonable time to mobilize and deploy before a major WP attack, our allies could also economize on active military manpower by creating five to eight similarly configured cadre divisions, to be fleshed out quickly on mobilization by much cheaper trained reserves. Most of them have more trained men than they presently plan to mobilize. Such cadre/reserve units would help thicken up NATO's

defensive shield and free up some higher cost active divisions to be held in mobile reserve for preventing breakthroughs.

4. Partly for similar reasons of economy, the continental NATO countries should more fully exploit the potential of cheap territorial forces (which have only small peacetime cadres) for rear area security and support of all NATO combat forces. Here again the Germans are ahead of their allies. One former commander-in-chief of the NATO Center, General Von Kielmansegg, has even proposed that "six militia-type blocking brigades of West German territorial forces should also be formed for front line delaying action."<sup>2</sup>

5. As for the United States, it should posture for much quicker ground and air reinforcement of NATO with existing active forces. This would also be perhaps the most effective way to compensate for any withdrawals of U.S. forces. The revolution in airlift has created potentials which have not yet been fully exploited. A few added divisions and air wings sent rapidly to Europe would be much more useful in deterring or if necessary stopping a blitzkrieg than much larger forces which might arrive too late to influence the outcome.<sup>3</sup> It is precisely because our allies do not believe they can count on quick enough U.S. reinforcement that they tend to discount its contribution to the conventional balance. But the Europeans in turn have been incredibly slow in working out the necessary reception and basing arrangements to enable us to come quickly to their defense.

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<sup>2</sup>*The Force Structure in the FRG*, Report of the Force Structure Commission of the FRG, 1972, pp. 43-44.

<sup>3</sup>Most of the U.S. reserve establishment, especially the Army's, seems designed for a replay of World War II and should be cut sharply as well as restructured. But political vested interests have repeatedly thwarted Pentagon efforts at reform.

6. All of the above forces must be provided much stronger anti-armor capabilities, given the nature of the threat. Divisions should be given more AT missiles, mobile ground tank killer units could be formed, highly mobile AT-helicopter units could be used as "linebackers" to blunt any major penetrations, and light AT weapons could be widely distributed to reserve and territorial forces.

7. NATO's air forces, now a disparate collection of national air arms, need pulling together to enable them to fully exploit the inherent flexibility of airpower via improved command and control plus low cost measures to enhance survivability. There is no reason why NATO could not expect clear-cut air superiority over its critical Center Region, if only the usual political and bureaucratic obstacles could be overcome.

8. If resources are constrained, especially manpower, our NATO allies can no longer for the most part neglect such classic "economy of force measures" as more extensive use of mines, preplanned demolitions, and even barrier systems to slow down a WP offensive. Ironically, the nation which would benefit most from these, the exposed FRG, is the one which apparently has the greatest political inhibitions about their prewar deployment.

9. Finally, NATO must move toward a more rationalized force posture if it is to have a high confidence conventional defense at bearable cost in the Seventies. Can NATO any longer afford the luxury of 13 completely separate national military establishments, most with balanced tri-service forces, in the face of inflated manpower and equipment costs? But here it is important to distinguish between interdependence and integration. NATO's own checkered experience shows that integrating forces or even



standardizing weapons runs afoul of deeply imbedded national vested interests. Perhaps better to start with the easier end of the problem, such as logistic support in items common to all NATO users like petroleum or transport. The dated NATO concept that each ally's logistics are its own national responsibility is incompatible with the needs of the Seventies. In particular, why should so high a proportion of expensive U.S. military manpower in Europe have to be allotted to support functions, when substitute European assets are available? Prospective U.S. withdrawals may lead our allies to be more forthcoming than in the past with such help, since otherwise U.S. combat forces may have to be withdrawn from the NATO shield.

Such European assumption of certain support functions might even permit more equitable burden sharing on a basis palatable to our allies. This is because many such activities for which the United States now allocates active peacetime military forces or stockpiles equipment could probably be met in wartime by mobilized European resources, thus permitting large U.S. savings at little or no peacetime cost to our allies. Why should our allies cavil at firming up arrangements now for wartime provision of shipping, port facilities, airfields, transport services, and other goods and services needed by U.S. troops coming after all to their defense? Wartime costs could be shared on a lend-lease basis.

Nor can any serious effort to improve NATO's military effectiveness while living with severe budget pressures and possible manpower cuts neglect the potential French contribution. Here the essential thing is to recognize that France seems determined to remain *in but not of* NATO and to build pragmatically around this political fact of life. For Paris is by no means insensitive to the importance of a viable Western European

defense posture. Indeed it is as vocally unhappy as any other European ally over the pitfalls in U.S. withdrawal from Europe, even under MBFR. Far more practical cooperation is possible if the NATO military authorities would accept the value of more contingency planning and preparation without fruitlessly insisting that France give up the prerogative of deciding herself when and how she would come to NATO's help. Restructuring French ground forces would in turn permit contributing more than seven division equivalents to the needed NATO defense in depth, when West Germany manages to produce twelve from a comparably sized active Army.

What about costs? It is readily demonstrable that reducing less essential forces, proposed streamlining of active forces, and using more reserves to compensate for MBFR or other active manpower cuts could easily generate enough savings to cover the chief add-on costs entailed -- chiefly more equipment for the added combat units proposed. For example, it is U.S. experience that a reservist costs only one-fourth as much in peacetime as a regular soldier.

#### CONCLUSION

None of the above ideas are especially novel. Most have been advanced in one form or another for years. What *IS* new is that the bind in which NATO finds itself means that their time has come. Only by such means is NATO likely to be able to produce enough ready or quickly mobilizable ground combat forces for a high confidence initial defensive posture, while still living within likely budget ceilings and absorbing say 10%-20% MBFR cuts.

In the event of cuts in U.S. forces, such a posture would also help reassure our European partners that the U.S. was not bugging out on its allies. And it would be far better suited to effective deterrence -- which after all is NATO's real aim -- by making it harder for an enemy to think he might be able to defeat NATO quickly while relying on nuclear parity to inhibit a nuclear response. It would also permit raising the nuclear threshold, while still preserving the nuclear options inherent in flexible response. In sum, the restructuring option offers the most viable approach to NATO deterrence and defense within the constrained environment of the Seventies.

Naturally, such restructuring would entail attendant risks. Greater stress on reserve forces could expose NATO to surprise attack before it was fully mobilized, though this risk seems overdrawn. Buying more combat forces poised for a strong initial defense at the expense of support and sustaining power would risk running out of gas if conflict were prolonged. But the Warsaw Pact forces are also designed for a short war.

All things considered, such risks seem more acceptable to NATO than the risks entailed in its current inadequate conventional posture, especially if it is further eroded by budget pressure and troop cuts. In the last analysis, what alternative does NATO have in an era when there are too few resources to go around? NATO must put first things first.



