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# Defense Report

AUSA



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## **Improving Conventional Deterrence— A Reasonable Prospect?**

For a generation, the security of the United States has rested on its strategic nuclear capability as the key to deterrence. But conditions have changed considerably in the past decade.

First and foremost, the Soviet Union has achieved nuclear parity and, in doing, has built a massive nuclear arsenal. The potential for mutual destruction is a haunting reality, which leads us to seek other ways to guarantee security and deterrence.

As the relative reliance on nuclear weapons decreases between the United States and the Soviet Union, the weight of deterrence will shift increasingly to conventional forces with a greater dependence on landpower.

Sadly, however, U.S. conventional forces today are not prepared for this shift. Army modernization is only a little more than one-third complete, yet successful deterrence without resort to nuclear weapons requires our conventional forces to be significantly strengthened and modernized.

NATO is the keystone to our worldwide defense structure; but even the most cursory assessments show that NATO conventional forces today are not as well equipped as Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces and this situation is not improving. The fact remains that the Soviets continue modernizing at a faster pace than the U.S. or its allies and, consequently, are better organized and equipped to exploit their conventional superiority.

To counter the Warsaw Pact quantitative edge, Army planners have sought measures which would significantly enhance the effectiveness of our conventional forces. Their major conclusions were that, while much of the technology required for a conventional defense initiative already exists, the United States has been slow in taking advantage of it. These conventional force improvements are feasible today. They are seriously curtailed, however, by lack of funding.

The present reduction in our defense budget clouds the whole issue, but the future credibility of U.S. forces demands immediate attention. We simply cannot afford to let our conventional forces gradually slip to lower and lower relative levels vis-a-vis the Soviets. If we do, we will surely pay dearly.