
Defense Report

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Defending Europe With Conventional Forces—A Costly, High-Risk Challenge

Each of the eight American generals who served as Supreme Allied Commander Europe expressed a need for NATO to improve the readiness of the conventional combat forces which would be available to defend West European territory against Soviet/Warsaw Pact aggression. The present commander, Gen. Bernard W. Rogers, says: "The need to improve NATO conventional forces has been a consistent and unfulfilled theme throughout the history of our Alliance."

Gen. Rogers contends that the two major reasons that NATO countries have never adequately met the need for conventional force improvements are, first, a disbelief among many that the threats we face fully justify any additional sacrifice. Second, the economies of the free nations of the West have never been able to afford the conventional force structure that is necessary.

Presently, all 16 NATO nations face a common threat stemming from the speed and magnitude of the Soviet/Warsaw Pact military buildup. Thus, if war starts tomorrow, Pact armies would outnumber NATO by more than 2:1 in divisions, and by ratios of up to 6:1 in specific weapons systems. The gap grows wider each year.

Qualitatively, just since 1970, the Soviet Union has developed and fielded more than 150 major new or modified weapons systems of all types.

In lockstep with the disturbing growth and sophistication of military hardware, the Warsaw Pact continues to refine its offensive operational doctrine and exercises its forces in a purely offensive manner. It is clear that Soviet military leaders seek the capability to rapidly overrun NATO defensive positions and bring a war in Europe to a conclusion before the West has time to effectively organize its defenses.

Faced with these obvious threats, we and our allies can no longer afford *not* to take action to correct the key deficiencies in our conventional forces. A program to enhance those forces holds no promise of easy, simplistic or cheap solutions to the challenges we face in securing continued peace and freedom for the Western World. To those ends, the road will continue to be a difficult one; but it is a road that NATO must travel.