
Defense Report

AUSA



Reducing Nuclear Missiles Demands Balanced Conventional Forces

The way defense planners on both sides of the Atlantic have neglected NATO's conventional fighting forces could turn out to be some of the greatest savings we ever regretted. Admittedly, the doctrine of flexible response, with its reliance on nuclear weapons, has given the people of Europe the longest period of peace in history. But lately, the distinct possibility of reducing or removing nuclear missiles from Europe makes the specter of the massive Soviet conventional arsenal loom ever larger over those who live in its shadow.

Warsaw Pact non-nuclear forces outnumber those of NATO in every category. The Soviets and their Eastern Europe satellites have a 2-1 advantage in tanks. In mortars and artillery the edge is slightly greater. They have a 5-1 advantage in fixed-wing aircraft and a 2-1 margin in armored personnel carriers and infantry fighting vehicles. In total division equivalents, the communists again outnumber the democratic nations by better than 2-1. Even the U.S. lead in helicopters is rapidly diminishing as the Soviets improve their weaponry through purchased or stolen Western technologies.

NATO military commanders have for years pressed their governments for increased modernization of their conventional fighting forces in order for them to be successful in blunting any possible Warsaw Pact attack. "Still," says Gen. Bernard W. Rogers, the retiring Supreme Allied Commander, "the NATO Army is not now adequate to the task."

Gen Rogers' successor is Gen. John R. Galvin. At his confirmation hearing, he told Congress: "The United States would be forced to resort to nuclear weapons within days of a conventional war in Europe because NATO lacks the conventional and tactical firepower to keep an invasion at bay."

With the current, stepped-up negotiations concerning possible missile reductions, thoughtful people are beginning to look more closely at the neglect of our conventional forces. It will be extremely costly—it may even be too late—to try to catch up. For the sake of our democratic principles, our national security and the well-being of our NATO allies, we had better try.