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# Defense Report

AUSA



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## **Improving Our Conventional Military Capability — A National Imperative**

Since the end of World War II our stated military strategy has highlighted the need for a conventional and a nuclear deterrent against the Soviet threat. We have been constant in our view of the security requirements, with the defense of NATO and Western Europe falling just behind the defense of the United States.

Few would quarrel with this ranking since we are essentially an outgrowth of Europe and our many political and economic interests there dictate this focus. Europe is where we and our NATO allies face the Soviets and the Warsaw Pact across a common border and where the potential for a nuclear conflict seems to be the highest.

In an effort to move away from the nuclear response and its associated devastation, NATO, in 1967, developed the current flexible response strategy — a strategy which combines forward conventional defense with the threat of offensive nuclear weapons, escalating to all-out strategic nuclear war if necessary. Implicit in this strategy is an adequate and credible conventional combat capability — otherwise the word flexible loses its meaning and leaves us no choice but to resort to the early use of nuclear weapons.

Given the importance of a credible conventional defense in Europe, we need to examine closely whether or not we are capable of conducting a successful conventional fight. If success is defined as maintaining the integrity of the present borders, the answer is probably no. The conventional balance in the NATO area substantially favors the Warsaw Pact.

Faced with a dramatic decline in military budgets, it is now necessary for both defense planners and Congress to re-evaluate the priorities and requirements for our defense budget into the 1990s. Two of the basic questions are: how much do we really need for nuclear deterrence and are we ignoring the conventional needs?

Unbalanced solutions to these problems will further erode our conventional warfighting effort. Until we have buttressed our conventional capability, the huge expenditures for more Trident II missiles, stealth bombers, supercarriers and Star Wars need to be more carefully allotted. We simply cannot afford to bet all our ships on an uncertain future.

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