

Numbers, Strategy, and the European Balance

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This article provides a primer on how to measure the conventional balance in Europe and a brief assessment of NATO's ability to thwart a Warsaw Pact offensive. I argue that the balance in Europe is a function of six principal factors: (1) the relative strength of the available forces possessed by the two sides, measured as a function of their firepower, mobility, and survivability; (2) the character of the terrain in the theater; (3) the degree to which force-to-space ratio constraints limit the forces that each side can deploy on the front line; (4) the relative rate at which each side can marshal and deploy reinforcements; (5) the strength of the defender's operational reserves; and (6) the individual initiative and flexibility of the attacker's commanders. After examining these factors in contemporary Europe I conclude that, contrary to the conventional wisdom, NATO's forces probably can stymie a Pact offensive in Europe without surrendering much German territory.

How to Assess the Conventional Balance

An analyst assessing a theater balance should begin by positing the goals and strategies of the two sides, and should then proceed to explore the ability of each side to execute its strategy. Thus in Central Europe NATO's goal is to defend West Germany without major territorial loss; to achieve this goal it has adopted a strategy of forward conventional defense. The Warsaw Pact would employ a strategy of armored blitzkrieg to defeat this forward defense and move its forces into West Germany. The Pact blitzkrieg would entail two main operations: a breakthrough battle, followed by a deep strategic penetration. In the breakthrough phase of the campaign, the Pact would mass armored forces at one or two points along NATO's front line and attempt to pierce it. Having done this, Pact forces would then try to drive deep into NATO's rear, cutting NATO's lines of communication as they advance, making it impossible for NATO to coordinate its forces and maintain a coherent defense.

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According to its forward defense strategy, most NATO forces would be located close to the intra-German and Czech-German borders where they would try to stop the Pact from breaking into West Germany. NATO does have operational reserve forces, which are located well behind the front, and can be used to deal with problems along the forward line or with possible breakthroughs. These reserves are not very powerful, however, since NATO has decided to concentrate on stopping the Soviets far forward. In effect, NATO's strategy is much like a goal-line defense in American football.

Two basic questions emerge from this discussion of strategy, the answers to which provide the means to assess the conventional balance in a theater such as Europe. First, what are the principal factors that determine whether massed armored forces are likely to rip open a hole along a defender's front? Second, if a breakthrough happens, under what circumstances could the attacker's armored spearheads exploit their opening and effect a deep strategic penetration before the defender seals the breakthrough and contains the penetrating forces?

Of the four factors most important in determining whether a breakthrough is likely, first is the *relative strength of the opposing forces*. The best measures of relative conventional strength are those that capture the full range of the combat capabilities of the forces, including their mobility, survivability, and firepower (including the rate and lethality of their fire). The measure that best captures these capabilities in ground forces is the "armored division equivalent" (ADE) score that the Pentagon uses as its basic measure of ground force capability.¹ An ADE is a ground unit possessing the mobility, survivability, and firepower of one American armored division. The Pentagon has assigned ADE scores to all NATO and Warsaw Pact armies, based on their net capability, to permit a direct comparison of strength across armies. This allows a net comparison of NATO and Warsaw Pact ground strength.²

1. Analysts often measure conventional capability by counting tanks, artillery pieces, anti-tank weapons, and other kinds of weapons. Simply counting tanks or artillery pieces, however, is not a good way of determining the relative strength of the opposing forces. Battles are not merely engagements between batches of tanks and artillery pieces. When the Pentagon conducts a war game, for example, it does not start by assigning each side a certain number of tanks or any other weapon for that matter. Instead, both sides are given divisions (or some part of a division, like a brigade), which represent the basic fighting unit on the modern battlefield. These divisions, of course, contain the weapons that many "bean counters" focus on. There is invariably a problem, however, with simply counting each side's divisions: they are of varying size and composition. The Defense Department deals with this problem by translating raw divisions into ADEs, the best existing measure of relative combat power.

2. Due to space limitations, I do not consider the impact of airpower on the balance. Although

A thorough assessment of the opposing forces' strength should portray both the balance of standing forces in the prospective theater of combat *and* the capacity of the opposing sides to move reinforcements into the theater. Rates of reinforcement are important because a rough balance of standing forces could quickly become an overwhelming advantage for one side if reinforcement capabilities are asymmetrical. Thus a thorough assessment of the NATO–Pact balance of forces should include estimates of both sides' buildup and reinforcement rates, expressed in ADEs.

Relative force ratios are important indicators of the outcome of theater engagements, but they do not tell the whole story. Force ratios are good predictors of success in protracted wars of attrition. This is not a significant issue for NATO, however, since the chief danger to NATO is a Pact blitzkrieg, not a war of attrition.³ Force ratios also reliably indicate quick success when one side has an overwhelming force advantage. It is difficult to say precisely what ratio represents a decisive advantage for an attacker, but the defender would probably be in serious trouble if the overall balance of ADEs in a theater of the size and geography of Central Europe favored the attacker by 2:1. A theater-wide balance of 3:1 or more would almost surely mean rapid defeat for the defender.⁴ The attacker could then easily concentrate forces along various breakthrough sectors and simply steamroll over the defender's forces, regardless of how well the defender fought.

However, if the balance of ADEs in the theater falls below 2:1, the theater-wide force ratio becomes merely one of several factors that determine the outcome of the battle. The side with the weaker force may defend successfully, or may even score an offensive success, if other factors lie in its favor. There are, for example, a number of important cases where an attacker scored a stunning victory without the benefit of numerical superiority. Two of the

it is possible that NATO's air forces will not have the decisive influence on the ground battle that many expect, it is clear that the air balance, when qualitative and quantitative factors are considered, does not favor the Pact.

3. Decision-makers contemplating an offensive are very unlikely to strike if they expect to engage in a war of attrition. Instead, it is the possibility of a quick and decisive victory that leads to deterrence failure. A particular military strategy, the blitzkrieg, is the only route to rapid victory on the modern battlefield, and therefore NATO must focus on thwarting a Soviet blitzkrieg. For further elaboration of this matter, see John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), chapter 2. Furthermore, the Warsaw Pact's prospects in a long war of attrition are bleak, since NATO has a much larger latent resource base.

4. This discussion assumes that the fighting skills of the opposing forces are roughly equal. If this is not the case, however, the ratios would have to be adjusted to account for qualitative as well as quantitative differences.

most well-known cases are the 1940 German victory in France and the 1967 Israeli victory in the Sinai. Therefore, it would be a mistake to assume that a stable conventional balance exists simply because forces are equally balanced or the defender has a small numerical advantage over the attacker.

In situations where the attacker does not have a significant advantage in *overall* forces, the battle is decided by the attacker's ability to use cunning to gain a temporary but overwhelming *local* force advantage, thus creating the opportunity to break open a hole in the defender's front. In effect, the attacker attempts to get around the overall balance of forces by establishing a brief, decisive advantage at a particular point of attack. The defender can defeat this attack if its forces can hold until reinforcements arrive to reestablish the overall balance in the sector under attack. It is a widely accepted rule of thumb that the offender needs a force advantage of 3:1 or more at the point of attack to achieve a breakthrough.⁵ The offender's prospects of bringing about such a local asymmetry in forces is largely a function of the next three factors.

Terrain is the second factor determining the outcome of major breakthrough battles. The defender prefers a front covered with obstacles—rivers, mountains, forests, swamps, urban sprawl, man-made defensive positions—so that there are few locations where the attacker can place a main axis of attack. The defender then has a good chance of predicting where the attacker will strike, minimizing the attacker's prospects of outfoxing the defender. Also, a defender faced with few possible breakthrough points along the front can concentrate forces in front of them, since the defender does not have to worry very much about the obstacle-ridden portion of the front.

A third factor is the severity of *force-to-space ratio constraints*. The size of the forces that both sides can place on the front line is limited by the nature of the local geography and the transportation system. Beyond a certain number, more forces simply will not fit on the front. Many of the attacker's vehicles must travel on roads, and must be spaced out to prevent several vehicles from being destroyed by single bombs or artillery shells. Therefore, the force that the attacker can place forward is sharply constrained by the

5. The subsequent analysis, as will become clear, assumes that the key consideration in determining who wins breakthrough battles is whether or not the attacker can achieve a local force advantage of 3:1 or more. Many students of the conventional balance attempt to go beyond this basic calculation by plugging each side's forces into sophisticated models designed to determine battle outcomes. I am doubtful about the utility of such models and believe that the best we can do at this point is make rough estimates based on force ratios at the point of attack.

thickness of the local road network.⁶ If the attacker crams too many forces at or near the point of attack, a “traffic jam” develops that makes it very difficult to maneuver the striking armored forces. The defender can place more forces in prepared positions off the roads, so it can put more forces in less space than can the attacker, but there are limits to the size of the defender’s forward forces as well. This limit, known as the maximum force-to-space ratio, is generally believed to be roughly 1 brigade per 7 kilometers of front for NATO forces in Germany, and slightly fewer forces per kilometer for the Pact, although these are very approximate rules of thumb.⁷

Force-to-space ratio constraints generally help the defender by preventing the attacker from exploiting whatever local materiel superiority he enjoys at breakthrough points. The attacker, of course, strives to achieve overwhelming superiority at his chosen breakthrough points by suddenly concentrating his forces at these points. As noted, an attacker probably requires a local force advantage of at least 3:1 to tear open a hole in the defender’s front. If both sides have large forces at their disposal, however, the attacker may be unable to place enough units forward to gain a 3:1 advantage, even if he has local materiel superiority, simply because there is insufficient elbow room at the front. Instead the attacker must stack his forces up behind the front, where they cannot contribute to the breakthrough battle.

For example, suppose a defender with 10 brigades must defend a 70 km front against an attacker with 70 brigades. It appears at first glance that the attacker has a 7:1 advantage, making a breakthrough very likely. On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that the attacker cannot squeeze all 70 brigades along the 70 km front. Instead, the attacker must stack many of those brigades behind the front, where they would not contribute to the breakthrough battle. This situation, which is analogous to the “crossing the T” phenomenon known in naval warfare, means that along the front, where the fighting that will decide the battle is taking place, the relative force ratio would be closer to 1:1 than 7:1. Assuming that both the attacker and the

6. To illustrate: when the Germans attacked France in 1940, the forces in their armored wedge extended some 250–300 kilometers from front to back. See Colonel Guenther Blumentritt, *Schreiben des Ia der HGr. A an General v. Manstein vom 16. 2. 1940*, a copy of which can be found in *Dokumente zur Vorgeschichte des Westfeldzuges, 1939–1940*, ed. Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1956), pp. 153–155.

7. These calculations assume that a brigade, be it Pact or NATO, is approximately one-third of an ADE. Also, these estimates assume that both sides place about two-thirds of the brigade directly forward and one-third in immediate reserve. The minimum force-to-space ratio is usually considered to be 15 km, which again is simply a rule of thumb.

defender can place one brigade every 7 km (which is really crowding the attacker's front), the attacker would have 10 brigades matched against 10 defensive brigades, far short of the 3:1 advantage he needs for a breakthrough.

One might argue that, although those 10 brigades are not likely to pierce the front, they will wear down the 10 defending brigades to the point where the attacker's unused 60 brigades can be brought forward to make the breakthrough. However, this is true only if the defender does not have additional forces he can move to the threatened front. If the *overall* balance of forces between the two sides approximates parity, the defender, like the attacker, should be able to replenish his exhausted forces, making it very difficult for the attacker to win the breakthrough battle.

To summarize these last two points: the principal goal of an attacker who lacks a decisive advantage in force size is to use stealth to gain an overwhelming local force advantage, thus creating the opportunity to rip open a hole in the defender's front and effect a deep strategic penetration. But if the terrain is riddled with obstacles and force-to-space ratio constraints are severe, the defender can more easily deal with any potentially dangerous force asymmetries that the attacker may gain by stealth, and can reestablish the overall ratio of forces at the point of attack before the attacker breaks through.

This discussion brings us to the fourth factor affecting the breakthrough battle: *relative rates of reinforcement into the breakthrough battle area*. As noted, the defender must match the attacker's concentration at the main point of attack. To do this, the defender must be able to move forces already in the theater, be they operational reserves brought forward or units along quiet areas of the front moved laterally to threatened points. The defender must also be able to compete with the attacker in bringing outside forces into the theater. The defender's basic aim is to ensure that the attacker does not win the breakthrough battle by wearing down the defender to the point where the defender has virtually no forces remaining.

If the attacker achieves a breakthrough, his ability to effect a deep strategic penetration is largely determined by two additional factors: the *strength of the defender's operational reserves* and the degree of *flexibility and initiative in the overall command structure* of the attacking forces.

The attacker's penetrating armies will be vulnerable to counter-attack, since they will be moving forward rapidly on unfamiliar terrain at the head of long logistical columns. The defender therefore may be able to seal off the pene-

tration if he rapidly brings reserves to bear. The size and quality of the defender's reserves become important for this reason.

To forestall such a counter-attack, the offender must take immediate advantage of the breakthrough opening and then maintain a rapid rate of advance so as to keep the defender constantly off balance. This is a demanding task because the commanders of the attacker's armored spearheads, operating in the proverbial fog of war, will have to make rapid-fire decisions on the basis of incomplete information, while facing a constantly changing situation. A deep strategic penetration therefore is best served by a flexible command and control structure and an army commanded at all levels by individuals capable of intelligently exercising initiative. Delegating responsibility to officers and non-commissioned officers who can make bold decisions in difficult circumstances maximizes the prospects that the attacking forces will not get bogged down, undermining the blitzkrieg.

The NATO–Warsaw Pact Balance

Considered together, these six measures indicate that NATO has a good chance of defeating a conventional Warsaw Pact attack in Central Europe.⁸ Let us start by looking at comparative force ratios, focusing first on standing forces in the region. The Pact has an advantage in ADEs of 1.2:1. This is not a decisive margin, especially since non-Soviet divisions, whose loyalty to the Pact is dubious, comprise more than half of the Pact total.⁹ Most pessimistic

8. Although it is widely assumed that NATO conventional forces are hopelessly outmatched, no detailed studies in the public record support that position. In fact, almost every detailed examination of the issue concludes that NATO is already in reasonably good shape or, at worst, that NATO is not far from the point where it could stand up to a Pact offensive. See, for example, William W. Kaufmann, "Nonnuclear Deterrence," in John D. Steinbruner and Leon V. Sigal, eds., *Alliance Security: NATO and the No-First-Use Question* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1983), pp. 43–90; William Mako, *U.S. Ground Forces and the Defense of Central Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1983); John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe," *International Security*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Summer 1982), pp. 3–39; and Barry R. Posen, "Measuring the European Conventional Balance: Coping With Complexity in Threat Assessment," *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Winter 1984–1985), pp. 47–88. Moreover, it is my experience from many conversations with military officers and government officials who have worked on this issue that their views generally fall in the same range. In short, the prevalent pessimistic view is a myth that is unsupported by scholarship, analysis, or sound professional opinion. How this gloomy view gained such broad currency, especially among members of the press corps, is a puzzle.

9. Barry Posen convincingly argues that even this ratio underestimates NATO capabilities, because the ADE measure best captures those elements of capability in which the Pact invests most heavily, while failing to capture those elements of capability that NATO stresses. In

students of the balance will concede when pressed that NATO is not badly outnumbered in terms of standing forces and might very well thwart the Pact's initial offensives. Nevertheless, they argue that NATO will eventually be overwhelmed by the arrival of Soviet reinforcements from outside the theater. NATO, so the argument goes, cannot match the vaunted Soviet second echelon.¹⁰ Barry Posen has demonstrated that this is largely a myth and that NATO, if it mobilizes soon after the Pact does, has the capability to keep the overall ratio of forces close to the pre-mobilization ratio of 1.2:1.¹¹ In short, NATO has the raw numbers to stand up to a Soviet offensive. The common image of overwhelming Pact materiel superiority, created by misleading "bean counts" of unrepresentative classes of equipment, is simply incorrect.

NATO also is in good shape regarding the other three factors that would influence the outcome of a breakthrough battle. The terrain along the intra-

building its divisions, NATO invests heavily in command and control, logistics, training, and maintenance for its divisions, while the Pact does not, instead buying greater numbers of weapons for its divisions. ADE scores underestimate NATO's relative strength because they largely reflect the numbers and the quality of the weapons in a division, while failing to fully measure the military benefit of investment in command and control, logistics, training, and maintenance. Posen concludes that if this bias were corrected, the real ratio for standing forces in Europe would be about 1:1. Posen, "Measuring the European Conventional Balance."

10. I have found that pessimistic analysts will often admit that NATO's standing forces are competitive with those of the Pact, but such analysts frequently advance five additional arguments to support their pessimistic conclusions. However, I do not find these additional arguments persuasive. First, they warn that the Pact has much greater reinforcement capability. This is simply not true, as outlined above. Second, they suggest that the Soviets could launch a massive surprise attack and gain victory by catching NATO unprepared. The problem with this argument is that NATO's forces are regularly maintained in a higher state of readiness than the Pact's, and it would be extremely difficult for the Pact to mobilize those forces without NATO noticing. Third, the pessimists more plausibly claim that NATO will detect a Pact mobilization, but for one reason or another will not mobilize its own forces. This situation may obtain in a crisis and is therefore a deadly serious matter. However, this important political problem has little to do with the military balance *per se*, which is the focus of our attention here. It reflects a potential deficiency among NATO political leaders, not in NATO forces; and the solution lies in socializing Western elites to recognize that they must mobilize their forces immediately on receiving warning of Pact mobilization. Fourth, pessimists warn that NATO will simply run out of ammunition after a few days of fighting. However, proponents of this view have offered no evidence to support their contention. Moreover, publicly available evidence does not suggest that the Pact has any advantage over NATO in this area. Fifth, some pessimists suggest that the Soviets can somehow deploy decisive forces in NATO's rear without winning a breakthrough battle, by using specialized forces. These include the so-called "Operational Maneuver Groups" (OMGs) that some hypothesize the Soviets have formed, or the *Spetsnaz* special forces. However, no serious evidence has been advanced to support claims that these forces could have a significant impact on the course of the campaign, and the *prima facie* case that they could do so is exceedingly weak.

11. See Posen, "Measuring the European Conventional Balance"; and his contribution to this forum.

German and Czech–German borders is riddled with obstacles and there are only a few places, all well known to NATO planners, where the Pact might place a main axis of attack. Given the excellent intelligence-gathering assets available to NATO, it is unlikely NATO will not anticipate the location of the breakthrough battle.

The Pact faces severe force-to-space ratio constraints because NATO has enough forces to thickly populate the front lines; this means the Pact cannot concentrate its forces tightly enough at main points of attack to gain sufficient superiority to break through. For example, plans call for 30 NATO brigades to be deployed forward along the northern half of NATO's front, which measures about 225 km. If all those brigades were placed right at the front, each would cover 7.5 km. If NATO chose to deploy those forces in the traditional "two brigades up, one back" configuration, each of the forward deployed brigades would have to cover 11 km, with 10 brigades in immediate reserve. Assuming that the Pact cannot put more than 1 attacking brigade on a 7 km front, then Pact forces can only achieve temporary local superiorities in the range of 1.6:1, which is probably not enough to break through. The southern portion of NATO's front, where the Americans are positioned to thwart Soviet attempts at breakthrough, also looks good.¹²

Regarding reinforcements, I have already noted that NATO's standing forces are not significantly outnumbered. Since contingency plans exist for moving those forces about the theater to reinforce threatened points, NATO should be able to reduce force imbalances that develop at those points. NATO also can marshal and deploy reinforcements almost as fast as the Soviets can deploy their second-echelon forces from the Western Districts of the Soviet Union.

Thus, there are good reasons for doubting that the Pact can rip a hole in NATO's front. Let us assume nevertheless that the Soviets win a major breakthrough battle. How likely is it that they will then effect a deep strategic penetration? Surprisingly little attention is paid to this question, probably because it is widely assumed all "would be lost once the Soviets opened a hole in NATO's front. This is, however, a mistaken assumption.

12. The commander of American forces in Europe, General Glenn Otis, recently reported that his staff had studied the force-to-space ratio constraints on the Pact and discovered that it can place far fewer forces at the point of attack than NATO planners thought possible. He concluded, "The first echelon of the Soviet force is going to have a whale of a time doing anything to us." See Charles D. Odorizzi and Benjamin F. Schemmer, "An Exclusive AFJ Interview with: General Glenn K. Otis," *Armed Forces Journal International*, January 1987, pp. 44–47.

The Soviet army lacks several characteristics important to effecting a deep strategic penetration. It has an extremely rigid command structure and its officers are notorious for their lack of initiative. Soviet prospects look even bleaker when one considers: their soldiers are deficient in map-reading skills; they have serious communication problems in many of their divisions because soldiers speak different languages; their divisions in the center region are overall about 85 percent manned in peacetime, which means they would have to rely quite extensively, from the start, on manpower brought in from the Soviet Union; and they train new recruits in those same divisions, which means that for significant periods of time about 25 percent of the manpower in their best divisions is not fully trained. The Soviet army is not a paper tiger, but neither is it a highly efficient fighting force primed to execute a demanding task like the deep strategic penetration.¹³

Although NATO does not have robust operational reserves in the European center region, it has a good number of units that can be used to close down a Soviet penetration.¹⁴ There are three French divisions now stationed in southern Germany and additional French units can reinforce them from France in a crisis. The Americans have pre-positioned equipment for five divisions well behind the front, and can fly in troops from the U.S. to man these divisions in about ten days. Other forces include a Canadian brigade in southern Germany and the German Territorial Army, which contains six armored brigades and six mechanized infantry brigades and can be mobilized in a few days. Thus NATO will probably have more than 12 divisions in Germany promptly available to serve as an operational reserve, with more possibly available in France. Moreover, more will become available as further NATO reinforcements stream into the theater.

Let us assume that a Pact breakthrough occurs on an army-wide sector of about 50 km and that 5 Pact divisions break through, with 3 divisions leading the charge and 2 divisions immediately behind, and that an equivalent NATO

13. For important evidence of this point, see Scott D. Dean and Benjamin F. Schemmer, "Warsaw Pact Success Would Hinge on Blitzkrieg, US Army Observer Says," *Armed Forces Journal International*, November 1987, pp. 29–36.

14. There has been much talk in recent years about improving NATO's conventional force posture, with most attention falling on two questionable approaches: developing esoteric technologies and devising new strategies to replace forward defense. However, the only sure way to enhance NATO's prospects in a conventional war is to increase the number of fighting units in Europe. Then, NATO could further thicken its blanket of forces along the intra-German and Czech-German borders and, more importantly, substantially beef up its operational reserves. Unfortunately, there is hardly any interest in increasing NATO force levels and, if anything, it appears that NATO's armies will decrease in size over the next decade.

force would be required to stop these Pact divisions. If so, NATO requires roughly 5 operational reserve divisions within reach of the potential break-through sector. Using this standard, NATO probably has enough operational reserves today. After all, the units listed above should provide enough forces to create 2 operational reserves of 5 divisions each. Since it would surely take the Soviets some time to break through NATO's front, it should be possible to move those reserves into position to do battle with the attacking armored spearheads.

Conclusion

The chief question in assessing the European balance is whether the Soviets have the wherewithal to launch a successful blitzkrieg against NATO. This question can never be answered with certainty, but there is ample reason for thinking the Soviets cannot overrun Germany with conventional forces. This situation, coupled with NATO's formidable nuclear deterrent, goes a long way towards explaining why no serious defense analyst believes a major war in Europe is likely in the foreseeable future.¹⁵

Although NATO is now in quite good shape at the conventional level, any significant reductions in the size of NATO's standing forces would undermine that situation, even if Pact forces were equally reduced. This is the case because the force-to-space ratio constraint faced by the attacker is partly a function of the density of the population of the forces in the theater. When the front lines are densely populated, there may be no place where the attacker can pack in enough forces to gain decisive local superiority; but if the front lines are thinly populated, there may be many places where such local superiority is possible. Therefore, the loss of a handful of American brigades and a commensurate number of German brigades would markedly increase the chances that the Soviets could break through NATO's front. The danger of reducing NATO force levels becomes even more apparent when one considers that NATO does not have very powerful operational reserves in the theater.

There is presently some discussion of reaching an accord with the Soviets where both sides pull large numbers of troops out of Europe. Advocates of

15. This conclusion does not mean, however, NATO should de-emphasize its nuclear deterrent. Such a move would be a grave mistake, since conventional forces, even very robust ones, could never have the deterrent value of nuclear weapons.

such an accord apparently hope that the Soviets will agree to asymmetrical reductions in NATO's favor, thus producing overall force ratios that more closely approximate parity. However, their analysis rests on two dubious assumptions: (1) that conventional deterrence is better served by fewer rather than more forces in Europe, and (2) that parity in overall numbers is a sound indicator of a stable deterrent situation. In fact, it would be a major mistake for NATO to agree to *any* reductions in its force size, not only because of force-to-space ratio considerations, but also because there is no reason to think that a somewhat smaller Pact force would be any less dangerous than the present one. After all, the Wehrmacht overran the West in 1940 with about 2700 tanks, while the Pact now has more than 15,000 tanks in Europe.