

NATO is reeling, beset by doubts and other problems—but the Warsaw Pact is even closer to internal crisis.

Alliances in Turmoil

BY JOHN T. CORRELL, EDITOR IN CHIEF

On a training exercise, a US Army M113 armored personnel carrier—in a setting symbolic of the Alliance itself—approaches a crossroads in Germany.

THE world's two most important military alliances have been rocked hard by the changes now sweeping through Europe.

Some analysts say that both NATO and the Warsaw Pact are disintegrating already, but that is too speculative an assessment. Neither alliance has actually begun to break apart. In each, however, conditions for disintegration are riper than they have been since the 1950s.

The cracks in the two alliances developed for different reasons.

NATO, which observed its fortieth anniversary earlier this year, is unlikely to disband, but changes seem inevitable in the scope and configuration of its military program.

Americans and Europeans alike believe that the military threat to western Europe is over. The West, weary from forty years of Cold War, has been swept off its feet by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, who talks peace and promises to reduce Soviet military power. It does not seem to matter much that he has not made his reductions yet.

The resurgence of arms control further adds to the West's comfort-

able feeling. Under a 1987 agreement, the United States and the Soviet Union are removing their intermediate-range nuclear missiles from Europe.

The focus now is on the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CAFE) proposal, which would draw down tanks, troops, and airplanes by big percentages in both NATO and the Pact. If that succeeds, negotiations will turn next to short-range nuclear weapons.

NATO is also beset with old arguments about defense budgets and about how member nations share the financial burden. At their last meeting, Alliance defense ministers reaffirmed their "guidelines" of three percent real growth in NATO defense budgets. In reality, the Western nations are inclined to cut back their military spending instead, no matter what happens in arms control.

Many Americans—including influential members of Congress—think some of the US troops in Europe should come home. They are especially rankled by the fact that other NATO nations spend far less on defense than the US does.

Europeans say that the burden is not measured by GNP percentage alone. Europe supplies most of the in-place aircraft, armor, and combat manpower. Europeans also run the more immediate risk. The first battlefields would be on their territory.

Some Europeans agree with their American critics on one thing: They also feel it may be time for the Americans to go home.

Wavering Convictions

Budgets and burden-sharing are secondary issues, though. The United States and Europe can afford defense if they are convinced they need it. NATO is unstable mainly because its convictions are wavering.

Perceptions to the contrary, the threat has not disappeared. Mr. Gorbachev says he would like to divert some of the resources consumed by the military to other uses. That is probably true, but he has been saying the same thing for several years. Nevertheless, Soviet military spending rose by its usual three percent, after inflation, in 1988, and currently accounts for something near one-fourth of the Soviet GNP.

Maihingen 2km

Ortsmittte



Mr. Gorbachev told the United Nations last December that he plans to reduce his armed forces by 500,000 troops. If he makes good on that promise, the Soviet Union would still have 4,600,000 troops. "In terms of combat power that can be brought to bear on the battlefield—even after the proposed reductions—the Warsaw Pact will continue to outnumber NATO 2.5 to one in tanks, 2.4 to one in artillery, and nearly two to one in combat aircraft," says Gen. John R. Galvin, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe.

This year, General Galvin says, the United States will produce 610 tanks. The Soviet Union will produce between 3,000 and 3,400 top-of-the-line T-72s and T-80s. "If you withdraw 10,000 tanks in two years but you are producing 3,000 new tanks per year, your withdrawals turn out to be modernization," General Galvin says.

Those numbers are disputed by the Soviets and others, but by any count, NATO must expect that massive military power will be deployed just over the border for some time to come.

Mr. Gorbachev's Problem

The Warsaw Pact, for its part, is probably closer to internal crisis

than NATO is. Dissent and disruption are flaring all along the Soviet periphery. On paper, General of the Army Peter Lushev, Commander in Chief of the United Armed Forces of the Warsaw Pact, can mobilize the armies and air forces of six east European nations without consulting anyone outside of Moscow. In practice, he must wonder how reliably those forces would respond to Soviet control.

Mr. Gorbachev has no easy choices. If he uses traditional Soviet methods to reimpose discipline, he risks alienating his admirers in the West and reawakening fear of Soviet military power. If he lets matters drift, he encourages more internal dissent, further weakening Moscow's grip on its empire. Few Russians will take it lightly if he loses control of the western approaches to the Soviet homeland, now guarded by the east European client states and the Soviet forces stationed there.

"Before this, we were faced with a Soviet Union that was big but predictable," General Galvin says. "Now they are just big."

Mr. Gorbachev no longer holds a monopoly on breathtaking offers. President Bush's CAFE proposal, adopted by the NATO summit in May, calls for sweeping reductions

of armies and air forces in Europe.

Both sides would drop back to equal ceilings of 20,000 tanks, 28,000 armored troop carriers, and 16,000 artillery pieces. Land-based combat aircraft and helicopters would be reduced to levels fifteen percent below the present NATO total. These limits would apply to the Pact and NATO in aggregate. All of the withdrawn equipment would be destroyed.

The United States and the Soviet Union would each limit their combat manpower, outside of national territory from the Atlantic to the Urals, to 275,000. The troops withdrawn—30,000 by the US, 350,000 by the Soviets—would be demobilized.

The first problem is that NATO and the Warsaw Pact disagree by wide margins on the number of troops, tanks, and aircraft in place now. They also disagree on the definition of combat aircraft and about whether naval forces should be included in the negotiations.

MiG-29s Are Pure Defense?

"We consider totally unjustified the inclusion by the US of a purely defensive weapon, fighter-interceptor aircraft, into the category of aircraft slated for reduction," says Victor Karpov, Soviet Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

General Galvin says he has difficulty swallowing the idea that such aircraft as the MiG-25 Foxbat, the MiG-29 Fulcrum, and the Su-27 Flanker should be excluded. Like the American F-16, the Soviet MiG-25 and MiG-29 are multirole aircraft, perfectly capable of ground attack. The Su-27's primary duty is escorting deep-interdiction strikes—not exactly a "purely defensive" mission in itself—and it probably has a secondary role of ground attack.

"Although frequently assigned as interceptors, these aircraft have the capability aboard to become strike aircraft," General Galvin says. "It is a common characteristic of air forces that they are flexible, and that an aircraft is built to do one thing one day and something else another."

It will be to the advantage of the Soviets, who are not dependent on sealift for resupply, if they can pull naval forces into the CAFE discussions.

—Photo by Erik Simonsen



One issue in the CAFE talks will be deciding what the "combat aircraft" category includes. The Soviets contend that Su-27 Flankers like this one are purely defensive. The Flanker's primary mission is escorting deep interdiction flights, and it is thought to have a ground-attack capability as well.

According to General Galvin, seventy-five percent of the Warsaw Pact equipment moves forward by rail, and most of the remainder moves by road. The Soviets have 3,500 heavy-equipment transporters, on which they can carry ten divisions' worth of tanks in a single haul.

By contrast, ninety percent of NATO's reinforcement moves by sea and requires protection against the 200 or so killer submarines the Soviets could unleash against allied shipping.

If the negotiators can agree on definitions, base numbers, and terms of a treaty, the next problem is how to verify compliance with the agreement. As nuclear arms-control efforts have demonstrated, keeping track of big, hard-to-hide weapons is difficult enough. Monitoring troops, tanks, and artillery would require surveillance capabilities that do not now exist.

Since 1967, NATO's strategy has been Flexible Response/Forward Defense. "Flexible Response" means fielding a conventional force adequate to deter or defeat an attack without early reliance on nuclear weapons. "Forward Defense" means repelling an attack at the border instead of conceding territory (unacceptable to the West Germans), falling back, and conducting a defense in depth.

"Force-to-space ratios and the dictates of terrain mean there are certain force levels below which the West cannot reduce," General Galvin wrote in the British magazine *Survival* last spring. "Currently, NATO has twenty-two divisions deployed in the central region of Allied Command Europe, covering a frontage of more than 1,000 kilometers."

Under NATO doctrine, a division defends forty-six kilometers of front, he explained. The Alliance does not have enough forces for an adequate reserve now, and if reductions cut too deep, they would make the strategy impossible.

"In order to cover the front and carry out the defensive mission, Allied Command Europe would be forced to conduct more mobile operations, giving ground to gain time and to discover the main attack of the enemy while holding onto a strong mobile reserve for counterat-



© Gary L. Kleffer/DOI

A GR.3 Harrier jump jet operates in close proximity to ground troops. Low-level flying, an essential part of Allied exercises and training, has become a controversial issue in Germany. NATO air commanders are exploring ways to reduce the noise and disruption while preserving aircrew proficiency.

tack," he said. "This is not the current NATO strategy. Deep cuts in forces would compel a change."

Low-Level Flying

Forward Defense also means a large military presence on German soil. Seven foreign nations station 400,000 troops in Germany. They, along with German forces and additional allied units on training deployments, conduct thousands of exercises there each year.

"In the Federal Republic of Germany, a country the size of Oregon with the population density of the Eastern seaboard, there are nearly 900,000 men and women in uniform, training at high operating tempos," Gen. Thomas C. Richards, Deputy Commander in Chief of US European Command, told the Senate Armed Services Committee in April.

The level of training activity—the low-level flying in particular—has become a controversial issue. Anti-defense critics in Germany lead complaints about the disruption. They also charge that such flying is

the result of NATO's Follow-On Forces Attack (FOFA) concept, which they denounce as too aggressive.

In wartime, Allied airmen would be required to penetrate enemy defenses to attack the rear echelons. To survive the radar-directed fire from the ground, they would have to fly low and fast.

"The only way to avoid that kind of flak is to fly in the weeds," General Galvin says. "We don't even fly as low [in training] as we would fly in combat, but we have to fly low in order to penetrate."

NATO has cut back sharply on low-level flying in Germany. Tactical units deploy elsewhere for considerable portions of their training.

"The average amount of time that a pilot gets today to practice [at low level] is rather small, considering the difficulty of the operation," General Galvin says. "It is often a matter of less than half an hour a week for a crew."

Under a concept called "Right Mix," General Galvin and the NATO air chiefs are exploring less

disruptive options, including simulation, to ensure adequate training.

General Galvin cautions Americans against jumping to conclusions about the training controversy. In a June 6 speech to the Columbus, Ohio, Rotary Club, he said that recent polls show that West Germans are still in favor of the Alliance.

"Eighty percent of the Germans are for NATO, and seventy-five percent are for the deployment of Allied forces within their country," he said. "The Germans don't like low-level flying. It scares the chickens and all that. And they don't like tanks in their backyard. But they sure like NATO. I wouldn't worry about the Germans."

Money and Other Upsets

Since its inception in 1967, the weakest aspect of the Flexible Defense strategy has been that it is not really flexible. The Western nations have never been willing to pay for sufficient conventional forces. This led to excessive reliance on tactical nuclear weapons, with US strategic nuclear forces as the ultimate backup. In turn, the nightmare of a nuclear shootout became a staple of the European antidefense movement.

The unwillingness to spend more on conventional defense is at the

heart of the burden-sharing issue. The United States, Greece, Britain, and Turkey allocate between four and six percent of their respective Gross Domestic Products to defense. The other allies spend less. West Germany is conspicuously low at three percent of GDP.

In its annual report to Congress on Alliance burden-sharing, the Pentagon says that GDP percentage alone is not a valid measure of a nation's contribution. It lists thirteen other factors, such as host nation support, that should be considered. It also notes that nations with a military draft get more manpower for their money than the United States does with its all-volunteer force.

Congress does not buy that argument. The burden-sharing panel of the House Armed Services Committee, chaired by Rep. Patricia Schroeder (D-Colo.), expresses a strong view: "The US and its allies do not agree on the immediacy or level of the threat, [but] a high level of US defense spending provides them with a no-cost insurance policy if our threat assessment turns out to be right and their assessment wrong."

Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) and Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) of the Senate Armed Services Committee also

call for the Europeans to do more. "If our NATO Allies are not serious about conventional defense, then we do not need all of the 325,000 American troops deployed in western Europe," they said in August. "If the only function of our armed forces in Europe is to make our allies confident that we will use nuclear weapons to defend the continent, we can make do with substantially fewer US troops there."

New Record for Peace

Europeans have a keen sense of history, and this has been a big year for anniversaries in Europe. NATO celebrated its fortieth birthday April 4. World War II began fifty years ago in September. In August, more than a million Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians timed their anti-Soviet demonstration to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the pact between Hitler and Stalin that cost the Baltic nations their independence.

On the occasion of the NATO observance, British Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe pointed out that "four months ago, another milestone was reached which attracted little notice at the time. It was the surpassing of the previous record for the period when Europe had been at peace, forty-three years and seven months between January 1871 and August 1914. The forty years of NATO's existence has, I am sure, been a primary reason why that record has been broken."

NATO, an alliance of sixteen sovereign nations with considerable experience at resolving their differences, has more options for continued vitality than the Warsaw Pact does.

If Mr. Gorbachev makes major reductions to his armed forces and forgoes centralized control from Moscow, the Warsaw Pact is essentially defunct. If he reasserts control and maintains his force structure, the success of his international public relations campaign will be at an end, and he will become the catalyst that pulls NATO back together.

As a free alliance of free nations, NATO has room for organizational maneuvering. It can change its military size and configuration as well as the internal alignments of power and still have a functioning alliance left. ■



As this shot from *Reforger* shows, NATO training exercises often get up close and personal for the West Germans. There have been complaints, but there are also many reports of German citizens greeting the troops with encouragement and offers of refreshments. NATO still gets high marks in opinion polls.