

1989

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Recommended Citation

Van Kappen, Franklin E. (1989) "Military Issues in Nato: Dialogue or Monologue?," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 42 : No. 2 , Article 7.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol42/iss2/7>

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Military Issues in Nato: Dialogue or Monologue?

Colonel Franklin E. Van Kappen, Royal Netherlands Marine Corps

The Soviet Union began to expand its sphere of influence after World War II and by 1948 had consolidated communist rule throughout Eastern Europe. In order to provide a system of collective security for European countries still outside the area of Soviet control, the North Atlantic Treaty was signed on 4 April 1949 by the United States, Canada, and 10 European countries. The treaty provided that any other European state could be invited, by unanimous agreement, to join the alliance and that any member could withdraw upon submission of one year's notice after the treaty had been in existence for more than 20 years. Four countries have since joined the alliance, but none have withdrawn.

The Warsaw Pact (WP) was created on 14 May 1955. Its ostensible purpose was to counter the threat of a remilitarized West Germany. In fact, the parties were already integrated into the Soviet military system through a network of standard treaties of alliance concluded between 1945-48. In 1968 WP forces repressed the reform movement in Czechoslovakia, also a WP member. To justify this intervention, the U.S.S.R. elaborated the Brezhnev doctrine of the limited sovereignty of members of the socialist community. The Brezhnev doctrine underlined the fact that Nato and the WP are basically different in character. While the WP is based on the principle of limited sovereignty of its member nations and is controlled by the U.S.S.R., Nato is a voluntary alliance between democratic and sovereign nations based on the principle of equality between member nations. Neither the U.S.A. nor any other nation has control over Nato. As a result, variance of opinion between member nations is one of the characteristics of the alliance. Despite this, Nato has held together, survived many crises, and achieved its main objective of containing Soviet expansion in Europe.

Now, similar to many times in the past, Nato faces another internal crisis. This time however, the crisis seems to be more serious than before. Recent

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political, technological and demographic developments have forced Nato to rethink its overall strategy on a fundamental level; far-reaching decisions must be made, and the United States and Western Europe disagree about the course to steer. Although variance of opinion between member nations fits the normal pattern of Nato decision making, this time the split seems to be more serious.

What has forced Nato to rethink its strategic and operational concepts? How do U. S. and Western European views on these issues differ?

Nato strategy has one constant aim: to deter the Soviet Union from attacking its members. The so-called "scaled flexible response" has so far been considered the most effective strategy in this respect. The contents of this strategy are, however, presently under discussion, and there will almost certainly be some changes.

The primary reason for reconsidering the current strategy and altering the face of deterrence is the ever-growing doubt concerning the stabilizing effect of nuclear weapons. Although Nato has progressed significantly since the days of Massive Retaliation and Mutual Assured Destruction, the strategy of the Flexible Response, ultimately, also relies on the use of nuclear weapons. What Nato finally counts on to stop an invasion is deliberate escalation to the nuclear level in the hope that Soviet fear of a nuclear exchange will create the conditions to achieve war termination on favorable terms. This strategy has serious limitations. One of its effects has been that Nato planners have focused excessively on the idea of the nuclear exchange, neglecting to deal effectively with many important and far more plausible situations in which threats of nuclear annihilation would not be credible. The biggest drawback of this strategy is that in order to be effective, the Soviets actually have to believe that Nato is willing to "self-destruct" in order to avoid Soviet domination. It could be seen as a bluff, and the bluff could be called.

The heated debate in the West, especially amongst the younger generation, about the consequences for mankind if deterrence fails and nuclear weapons are used, undermines the credibility of the nuclear deterrence itself. This is probably the main reason why six years ago the United States launched the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in an attempt to reduce Nato's reliance on nuclear weapons. However, SDI sparked off much discussion in Western Europe, and although it is still not clear what we can expect of it, the opposition to SDI is understandable. Though it now appears unlikely, if SDI succeeds and both superpowers acquire effective ABM defense, then both superpowers would be virtually invulnerable. Western Europe, however, would still sit under the conventional threat. Some critics have suggested that SDI clears the way for a conventional war in Europe.

This line of thought demands at least some consideration, especially if considered in combination with the effects of the recently signed treaty on Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF). Just as with SDI, although the INF treaty will reduce Nato's reliance on nuclear weapons, it will not decrease the considerable conventional threat in Europe. For Europeans with one eye on the WP's conventional superiority, these developments are viewed with mixed feelings. All European nations have, however, in the end, officially agreed to INF; there was no other choice. The INF treaty is in line with the Nato double-track decision of 1979. Many in Europe, however, feel that Gorbachev has pulled "a fast one on Nato." As far as the way ahead is concerned, there is consensus in Nato that the conventional defensive capacity of Nato has to be strengthened. Recent discussions in the United States to reduce the number of American troops stationed in Europe come, therefore, at the worst possible moment. Any move to reduce the conventional strength in Europe would not only send the wrong signal to the Soviets, but also to the West Europeans.

Another point of consensus in Nato is that the path back to a pure conventional defense is not a realistic one. Nuclear weapons will continue to play a role in the overall deterrence and therefore cannot be disregarded entirely. However, there should be less ambiguity about the nature of this deterrent. The alliance should threaten to use nuclear weapons not as a link to a wider and devastating nuclear war—although the risk of escalation would still be there—but mainly as an instrument for denying success to the invading Soviet forces. The nuclear weapons would have to be used discriminately and selectively. The strengthening of the conventional defense however must have the highest priority.

Because of the enormous costs of a credible conventional deterrence, burden sharing, always a sensitive issue, will receive renewed attention. It is a popular belief in the United States that Europe does not pick up its fair share of the defense burden. Critics in the United States point out that as an average, most European countries spend approximately 3.4 percent of their GNP on defense, and the United States spends close to 7 percent. They normally forget to mention that West European countries spend all their defense money on Nato, while the United States also spends an enormous amount of defense money on its commitments in other parts of the world where U.S., and quite often not European, interests are at stake. The claim by the United States that it must contain the global communist threat outside the Nato area, and that its involvement outside the Nato area is also in the interest of Western Europe, is too general to be convincing. As long as Europeans have no say in U.S. policy outside the Nato area, and as long as the United States does not share its strategic and operational thought processes, the Europeans are not willing to write the United States a blank

check. There are just too many recent examples of U.S. adventures outside the Nato area based on serious judgment errors—Vietnam being a prime example.

In those cases where conflicts outside the Nato area affect the interests of an individual European nation, or a group of European nations, the United States should discuss burden sharing with those nations on a bilateral or multilateral basis. The recent operations in the Persian Gulf are a good example of burden sharing outside the Nato area between the United States and Western Europe. Apart from the United States, there were five European navies operating in the Gulf. These navies, although all from Nato countries, operated there on a multi or bilateral basis and not as a result of the Nato charter. The fact that the Europeans operated in the Gulf underlines the fact that they will share the burden with the United States in those cases where their interests, and not only those of the United States, are at stake.

There is more to burden sharing than this. In essence, however, the argument stems from the difference between a global perspective and a regional perspective.

Another aspect related to burden sharing is the Europeans' desire for a bigger share of the economic advantage and the technological advancement that go hand in hand with the development and production of modern conventional weapons systems. Too much European defense money ends up in the United States. Very little U.S. defense money ends up in Europe. Even in those cases where there are European-made weapons systems available that are of equal or even superior performance to the American systems, the United States prefers to buy American. This situation is an ever-growing source of irritation for most European nations.

Another influence upon the strategic equation is the availability of manpower. In the near future, lack of manpower will be a real problem. This applies to both East and West, regulars and conscripts, quantitatively and qualitatively. An extrapolation of the trend in current demographic statistics shows for example that:

- In the 1990s West Germany will have 100,000 conscripts too few, which of course will have a serious impact on the available manpower for mobilization.
- In the year 2000, 50 percent of the population in the U.S.A. will be over 40. This also will have a serious effect on the available manpower for Regular as well as Reserve forces.

Increasing the number of servicewomen will not solve this problem. We have to bear in mind that civilian industry will suffer from the same problem, and this will exacerbate the problems for the military. Key specialized personnel will be in short supply and consequently more expensive. In short, this implies that in the near future, defense will have to be organized with

fewer people. A more capital-intensive and less manpower-intensive military force will thus emerge. If we accept that our military ability must remain at present levels, then this can only be compensated for by adopting advanced technology.

The changing character of technology is another factor that drives the strategic thought process. There are clear signs that the Western world is in transition from an industrialized to an information-based society in which flexible automation, data processing and the use of robots are the principal components. This is why the United States presented the so-called "Emerging Technologies" (ET) initiative in 1982.

The purpose of ET is to use the emerging technologies of the information-based society to our maximum advantage by stimulating research and development in this field. It is expected that ET will enable Nato to make massive improvements in its conventional military means. Flexible automation will bring enormous advances in communications and data processing. New developments in microelectronics and laser technology will enable Nato to carry the battle straight into enemy territory. These developments will improve not only the remote target acquisition capability, but also the ability to deliver the correct ammunitions on the correct target at the correct time. The improvement of the so-called "smart" weapons might even result in weapons that search for targets independently. The much greater precision, range, and destructiveness of new weapons will enable Nato to use conventional weapons for many of the missions once assigned to nuclear weapons, extend war across a much wider geographic area, and make war much more rapid and intense. As a result, Nato's reliance on large reserve formations that require time to mobilize will diminish, while at the same time the reliance on in-place forces gains in importance.

Another important factor is that ET offers many possibilities to reduce the number of functions presently carried out by human hands. Thus, valuable manpower could be saved. In some areas only command and control would remain the sole responsibility of men. However, the application of new technology makes other demands on personnel. In a military system controlled by microelectronics, senior noncommissioned officers, petty officers and junior officers will be more the controllers of programs than leaders of men. These developments will require changes in training and in operational thinking. In training there will be an increased use of simulators, even at the infantry soldier's level. As a result, operational performance in the future will take on a highly technological character. ET will also involve ever-increasing costs, and here lies a principal problem. How will the costs be borne?

It is impossible for most individual countries to develop the entire package on their own and at the same time integrate a complete ET program. For

each project to remain affordable, choices have to be made and priorities established. ET had a difficult start in Europe because the United States applied enormous political pressure on Western Europe to accept it almost at once. The great political pressure and undue haste backfired and its effect has been exactly the opposite of that intended. It provided critics in Europe with new arguments to reason that the United States seemed to be in an unjustified hurry and that ET was probably nothing more than a new U.S. initiative to pressure Western Europe into paying for a number of expensive items on the U.S. shopping list. This resulted in suspicion and misunderstanding of the reasons for ET by the general public, and European policymakers have tread very carefully in dealing with the difficult issues that have to be resolved. Like all policymakers within a democratic system, they are very sensitive to public opinion.

Despite the difficult start, ET seems to have gotten off the ground. The application of ET will undoubtedly improve the conventional defense of the alliance, but it will be expensive financially and perhaps also politically. In order to facilitate this process and to ensure that the delegation of tasks will be as efficient as possible, the Military Committee in Brussels decided in May 1984 to institute a Conceptual Military Framework for alliance-wide application. Within this framework all Nato tasks are to be laid down in order of importance. It will provide the basis for establishing priorities and delegation of tasks.

Until recently, Nato put all its cards on the prevention of war through nuclear deterrence. As a result, the operational level of war—how a war would be fought should deterrence fail—never got the proper attention. Needless to say, the important subject of “war termination,” so far, has been discussed only in vague terms. Forced by recent developments, Nato has to face these important issues of warfighting and war termination. Although Forward Defense and prevention of “breakthrough” will undoubtedly continue to be the most crucial operational objectives, new concepts must be developed to enhance the credibility of a more conventional deterrence. To be effective, these new concepts must include the capability to shift from an initial defensive posture to an offensive mode once fighting has started. The shift from defensive to offensive is necessary to regain the initiative that initially will be lost as a result of the fact that Nato is a defensive alliance and therefore will never deal the first blow.

There is, however, a danger that an increased Nato offensive capability will be perceived by the Soviets as a direct threat, and by our own general publics as a violation of the fundamental principles of nonaggression on which Nato was founded. Some European critics on the left of the political spectrum take this argument to the extreme and advocate that the Soviets need reassurance that they will not be the victims of an unprovoked attack by Nato. They insist that Nato should base its defense on non-offensive

defense and delete all offensive weapons from its arsenal. This line of thought leads eventually to what is called the "Finlandization" of Western Europe, i.e., Soviet dominance of Western Europe short of actual occupation. However, the majority of Europeans do not take such an extreme view; Finlandization does not pose an acceptable alternative to them. Most Europeans agree that a purely defensive posture, without the capability to "bring the war to the enemy," will not provide the required level of deterrence. The real challenge, of finding the right mix of defensive and offensive capabilities (both active and passive) that complement each other at any level of conflict, is, therefore, as much a political decision as a military one.

Most of the new ideas are encompassed within the so-called Follow-on Forces Attack (FOFA) concept. FOFA contains elements also present in Deep Strike and the Airland Battle theory. However, they are not one and the same. FOFA is a tactical subconcept for Nato. The central idea is that a purely static and shallow defense has no hope of repelling an invasion. The alliance must instantly launch air strikes against the enemy's follow-on forces when they are still in their assembly areas. Thus, the possibility for follow-on forces to participate effectively in the battle is diminished. In this respect FOFA seems similar to Deep Strike. However, FOFA also includes plans for Nato ground forces to mount counteroffensives across the Nato-WP border.

The European countries are positive regarding FOFA because it fits within the overall concept of forward defense. The discussion centers, therefore, not so much on FOFA itself, but mainly on the argument that FOFA might clash with "prevention of breakthrough," which has a higher priority (at least for the Europeans).

Some of the technology and weapons systems required to implement FOFA have yet to be developed. ET and Nato's Conceptual Military Framework are therefore crucial for the success of FOFA.

Another important operational priority within Nato is attaining and maintaining a favorable air situation. In light of the ever-improving air defense systems, it is becoming more and more difficult for aircraft to hit targets in enemy territory. The addition of surface-to-surface cruise missiles to bolster Nato's ability for the execution of offensive counter air tasks would therefore be most welcome. The problem lies in the difficulty to distinguish the difference between a conventional and a nuclear cruise missile. Critics state that the use of conventional tactical cruise missiles would make the nuclear threshold more vague. The discussion gets even more complicated because the requirements for the nuclear threshold are not the same in peace as they are in war. In peacetime, deterrence is best served by a low nuclear threshold; once war has broken out, Nato's interests

are best served by a high nuclear threshold. These conflicting threshold requirements are part of the basic discussion about nuclear deterrence in general. Last year's INF treaty complicated the issue even more because it precludes the stationing of cruise missiles (nuclear as well as conventional tipped) in Europe. Sea-based cruise missiles on board submarines might offer an alternative.

Although nuclear weapons will continue to play a role, it is expected that in the future Nato's reliance on them will diminish. The face of deterrence itself will change. There will be a gradual shift from a mainly nuclear deterrence to a deterrence where conventional high-technology weapons systems play an ever-increasing role. In order to support the shift, new operational concepts will have to be developed that will enable Nato to move quickly from an initial defensive posture to an offensive one. This implies that planning for actual fighting and war-termination will receive increased attention.

Forced by demographic developments, a less manpower-intensive military structure will emerge. The ever-increasing costs of a mainly conventional deterrence will most probably be countered by a combination of redistribution of tasks between the Nato nations and savings made in manpower intensive areas made possible through the application of ET.

By the nature of its role within the alliance, the United States will continue to be the driving force behind many of the changes. However, the United States has to be careful in setting the pace, not only because of the financial aspects, but also because the situation in many European countries is far from straightforward. There are many opposing interests which combine to present a very complex picture. From a European perspective, the United States has a tendency in this respect to ask too much too fast.

The enormous costs for material and personnel will most likely force the Europeans, despite their differences, to work more closely together and to combine their efforts for a common defense. The increased European unity in this respect will become apparent in greater demands on the United States to share the economic advantages and technological advancements that go hand in hand with the intended changes in the strategic and operational force levels. The United States should consider these demands very closely and attempt to remove the existing frustrations. A two-way street can exist only as long as both sides make use of it.

More involvement by the Europeans in the power struggle outside the Nato area will occur only if the United States is prepared to share its operational and strategic thought processes. It is important in this respect to remember that the United States and Western Europe, although they share the same values, play different roles in the world. The United States is a superpower; Western Europe is not. The United States is a unified federal state; Western Europe consists of a group of small nations attempting to

bind themselves together in a loose political and economic federation. The United States has interests worldwide; Western Europe is mainly interested in the Nato area. The different perceptions of the United States and Western Europe stem mainly from these differences.



Intraship Relations

“Captain W.C. Harllee, U.S. Marine Corps, had earned a reputation as being a *rebel* and a *maverick* but was, nevertheless, capable. In September of 1911 he reported to the USS *Florida*, commanded by Captain W.R. (Wild Bill) Rush who was strictly *spit and polish* and who acquitted himself well in the Spanish-American War and would do so again at Vera Cruz. On Captain Harllee’s reporting for duty, the conversation went like this, ‘Good morning, Harllee. I’ve learned a lot about you and it’s not all good. Don’t expect to get away with anything at all on board my ship.’

“Harllee replied, ‘Captain Rush, I’ve heard about you and it’s not all good either, but what you have heard about me that’s unfavorable must have come from persons who didn’t have enough to do except harass their subordinates. My record will show that I’ve gotten along famously with busy people. You’re going to be very busy running this ship, and I propose to help you. We’re not going to have any trouble.’

“Rush responded, ‘All right, Harllee, I hope so. We’ll certainly give it a try. But remember you’re helping and not vice versa.’ ”

John Harllee
*The Marine from Manatee: A Tradition of
 Rifle Marksmanship*
 (Washington, D.C.: National Rifle
 Association, 1984)