

The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

Volume 16
Number 1 *Parameters* 1986

Article 22

7-4-1986

NATO AND ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES

John F. Meehan III

Follow this and additional works at: <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters>

Recommended Citation

John F. Meehan III, "NATO AND ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES," *Parameters* 16, no. 1 (1986), doi:10.55540/0031-1723.1426.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by USAWC Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters by an authorized editor of USAWC Press.

NATO AND ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES

by

JOHN F. MEEHAN III

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization has been, is, and probably always will be in a state of crisis. For more than 30 years predicting the imminent demise of NATO has been a growth industry; libraries of the Western World are well stocked with books and articles detailing the approaching fragmentation and ultimate demise of the alliance. The process continues: failure of a member state to honor a NATO commitment will cause the alliance to unravel; the strategy of Flexible Response no longer serves the national interest of the member states in an age of strategic and nuclear parity; forward defense invites tactical and operational disaster. The reasons why the alliance should fragment are seemingly endless and yet NATO survives, perhaps stronger than ever. The continuing survival of NATO is the best evidence that the alliance is successful, that it has served, and continues to serve, the national interest of its members.

The nations of NATO are unanimous on one key aspect of the alliance: its prime objective is to defend NATO territory, and the defense must be accomplished through deterrence. As basic and fundamental as this objective is, it has different implications for the member states. For the United States, the defense of Europe is only one component of a loosely defined national military strategy of containment and deterrence. The United States, in consonance with its global interests, views the NATO alliance as a regional mechanism to contain Soviet expansionism in Europe but is constantly faced with a struggle to reconcile the inherent conflict between the

goal of containment in Europe and the even more basic need to avoid conflict, especially a nuclear conflict, with the Soviets. Whatever the NATO strategy, that strategy is, for the United States, a theater strategy; it is a component of the national military strategy and may either add to or detract from the effectiveness of the national strategy as a whole.

For the rest of the members of the NATO alliance, and especially for the Central European members, the NATO strategy and the national military strategy are essentially one and the same. There are no subsets. For the Federal Republic of Germany, still retaining vestiges of the concept of limited sovereignty imposed after World War II, this identification of a national strategy with the NATO strategy is most pronounced: for the Germans the NATO strategy is the national strategy by abdication.¹ The Germans tend not to view their forces in terms of a national defense but only in terms of a contribution to the alliance defense, a defense which happily is synonymous with the defense of Germany.

Unfortunately for the alliance, it is the strategy itself, NATO's strategy of Flexible Response, that serves as the focal point of criticism. Flexible Response is attacked either for its presumed conceptual failures (e.g. the wisdom of forward defense) or because of differences over the proper means of implementation (e.g. the deployment of Pershing II). In spite of a steady stream of proposals for "alternative strategies," only rarely do critics actually propose true

alternative strategies. Instead, what are presented as strategies are alternative methods of achieving the strategy of Flexible Response.

NATO's strategy of Flexible Response, or any strategy for that matter, is tailored to achieve specific objectives and consists of two components: the concepts, and the means to implement these concepts. In theory the alliance objectives determine the strategy, which in turn dictates the concepts to implement that strategy. The chosen concepts in turn define the necessary means. In practice the process tends to reverse itself: the available means dictate feasible concepts and so forth. With few exceptions, it is the concepts and the means of the strategy of Flexible Response that are attacked, not the strategy itself.

The strategy of Flexible Response, as promulgated in NATO MC 14/3, incorporates two basic concepts: the concept of graduated escalation to deter, and the concept of forward defense to provide credibility to the first. An equally fundamental but unstated and virtually uncriticized concept is that of continuous defense to ensure the inter-German border is protected, more or less equally, along its entire length. While the two stated concepts of MC 14/3 have been accepted by all the NATO states, the third concept, that of the need for a continuous defense, has not. Turkey, and Norway, for example, both support an interpretation of the NATO strategy that includes both graduated escalation and forward defense but not the requirement for a continuous defense.

NATO's military leadership clearly does not support the need for any new strategy. General Rogers' statement that "Flexible Response is as valid today as when first elaborated in the 1960s" might be dismissed as a manifestation of institutional imperatives, but to do so one must question not only the integrity of General Rogers but that of many other NATO commanders who have made similar statements.² To discount these statements it is necessary to ignore Anthony Cordesman's observation on NATO's leadership, "NATO's military men are really

citizen soldiers: they have no ideological, strategic or even bureaucratic goals other than ensuring the survival of the societies of which they are part."³ General Rogers is correct. The strategy of Flexible Response does not need to be changed, and in spite of recurring proposals for "alternative strategies," it is not at the strategic level, but at the operational level of war, that Flexible Response is vulnerable. Again, what is criticized are the concepts and means, not the strategy.

The objective of NATO's strategy is deterrence. NATO, by its structuring and functioning, recognizes that in a strategic sense there are four functional areas to its strategy: political, economic, psychological, and military. In each of these areas there are fundamental disagreements among the member states over the concepts and means most appropriate to provide deterrence. These disagreements are reflected in the varying interpretations of the meaning and value of detente, in the conduct of East-West trade, and even in the type of rhetoric used when addressing the Soviets. It is in the military aspect of the national strategies that these differences are most critical. Without exception, all NATO states profess that the primary goal of NATO is to deter war and to restore the antebellum situation should deterrence fail. Unfortunately for alliance cohesion, there are two types of deterrence

Colonel John F. Meehan III is Director of Theater Operations at the US Army War College and holds the college's General John J. Pershing Chair of Military Planning and Operations. He also instructs on Soviet operations. Colonel Meehan is a graduate of the US Military Academy and holds master's degrees from the University of Colorado and Southern Illinois University. He served in Vietnam in 1966-67 as Senior Advisor with the 37th Ranger Battalion and the Tactical Operations Center, I Corps; and in 1971-72 as Secretary of the General Staff, USARV. More recently he spent four years as Liaison Officer with the US Military Liaison Mission, Berlin, and served in the Political-Military Division of the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, DA.



with very different implications for the alliance.

The first of these is deterrence by the threat of punishment of the aggressor, a punishment of such severity that it outweighs any possible gains. The second is deterrence by denying the aggressor a reasonable chance of success, a victory-denial approach.⁴ The selection of one type of deterrence in preference to the other by NATO members is the basis for the "crisis in NATO" so often alleged. As there is no agreement on the meaning of deterrence, there is in effect no agreement on the objective of the alliance; hence, the continuing struggles over a strategy and the implementing concepts and means. Only France, which left the military alliance when NATO's selected type of deterrence was no longer consistent with her own, has clearly demonstrated concern for the objective itself. Like the other European states, France sees the objective of NATO as deterrence by punishment; major segments of the US policy elite, with support from smaller segments of the policy elites in the other states, see the objective of NATO as deterrence by the denial of success. NATO's strategy of Flexible Response is an attempt to accommodate these seemingly incompatible views. The crucial element of Flexible Response is its flexible definition of deterrence, not the flexibility in its military options.

Deterrence by punishment is based primarily on the destructiveness of nuclear weapons. At its core is the belief that a state can be induced not to begin a war by the certainty of overwhelming losses. This strategy's genesis was the US use of nuclear weapons over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. If the Japanese were forced to terminate the war by such punishment, wouldn't the threat of such punishment also inhibit a state from beginning a war? Deterrence by punishment found full expression in the Eisenhower-era doctrine of Massive Retaliation, formally expressed as NSC 162/2 in 1953 and adapted to NATO in the form of MC 14/2 in 1957. Its lineage now includes several generations of nuclear strategies. This is the type of

deterrence preferred by the European states and by air power advocates in the United States. While the efficacy of this strategy arguably has been demonstrated in the war against Japan and in 40 years of European peace, the historical evidence suggests that the deterrence-by-punishment strategy must involve nuclear weapons. The strategic bombing campaign against Germany and the more recent attempt to bomb North Vietnam into submission were starkly unsuccessful. The threat of nuclear punishment as a means of deterrence may now be working in Europe; the use of conventional weapons as a means to implement a punishment strategy demonstrably has not worked. This type of strategy is one of high risk. If successful, the objective, the deterrence of war, can be obtained at little cost. If unsuccessful, few acceptable options remain.

The second type of deterrence, deterrence by the ability to deny victory, is a restatement of the traditional balance-of-power view. In the context of the NATO alliance, this view holds that war will be deterred if NATO forces are strong enough throughout the conventional-nuclear spectrum to deny the Soviets any reasonable possibility of success. Advocates of this type of deterrence argue that only by possessing "adequate" military strength for each of the three distinctive types of warfare—conventional, theater nuclear, and strategic nuclear—can the alliance deter war. The problem, of course, is to determine what constitutes adequate forces. If the choice is inadequate, then forces designed for deterrence will have to be employed in a war-fighting role.

This second approach, deterrence by victory denial, is the deterrence strategy traditionally favored by the US Army. And it is increasingly reflected in US policy as the disastrous consequences of a failure of the deterrence-by-punishment strategy in an age of nuclear equality become increasingly unsettling to US policymakers. This growing US emphasis on a deterrence-by-denial strategy has led to acute discomfort in Europe, however, where our alliance partners

continue to stress the strategy of deterrence by punishment, with its lesser emphasis on war-fighting should deterrence fail.

When the doctrine of Massive Retaliation was adopted in 1953 it was a strategy that could be implemented at low cost and low risk. It was, and is, cheaper to match the Soviets in nuclear weapons than to acquire and maintain adequate conventional forces to do the same. Initially the cost to the United States of the failure of deterrence was small. In 1953 the Soviets had no effective strategic nuclear delivery means, and the first of the long-range Soviet bombers, the Bison and the Bear, operated only in limited numbers throughout the 1950s.⁵ For the United States, a deterrence-by-punishment strategy made eminent sense: were deterrence to fail, the United States, at least, would survive relatively intact. Because of the clear and overwhelming American nuclear superiority, the Europeans were content with the strategy: implementation was only a remote possibility, and they were not overly concerned with the Soviet threat in any case. The initial goal of NATO, from a European perspective, was to guarantee that Germany did not emerge as a revitalized threat on the Continent, not to be a check on the Soviets. The disparity between the American and European views of the Soviet threat was even greater than it is today.

The Soviet launching of Sputnik in October 1957 was the beginning of the end of the American preference for the deterrence-by-punishment strategy of Massive Retaliation. It shredded the psychological base upon which Massive Retaliation was founded and, in the process, US support for NATO MC 14/2, the NATO offspring. Sputnik was launched by an SS-6; Khrushchev claimed that the Soviets had many more such missiles, a claim the United States was then unable to disprove.⁶ Even the limited flow of information available from the U-2 flights was ended in May 1960 when a flight was shot down over the Soviet Union.⁷ If Khrushchev's claim were true, then "punishment" was now reciprocal and the argument over the

willingness of an American President to exchange the destruction of New York for that of Berlin had new relevance.⁸ By the end of the 1960s, when it was known with certainty that the Soviets did, in fact, have more launchers than the United States, the argument had a new immediacy.⁹ It was during this transition in the nuclear balance that the United States became the chief advocate for a more flexible theater strategy in Europe.¹⁰ From the European perspective, the changing nuclear balance offered no compelling reason for a change in strategy: the United States retained the ability to punish the Soviets. That the United States would in turn be punished, as Europe would be in any case should deterrence fail, only spread the risk equally. The European view of deterrence was meant to have its doomsday overtones.

The NATO strategy of Flexible Response, adopted as NATO MC 14/3 in 1967, was a political masterpiece designed to reconcile two seemingly irreconcilable versions of deterrence. To the advocates of deterrence by punishment, Flexible Response was acceptable because linkage, the indivisibility of nuclear war, seemed to imply a US/USSR strategic exchange should aggression in Europe occur. The threat of the ultimate punishment remained intact. To the advocates of deterrence by victory denial, Flexible Response offered the hope that adequate conventional forces, forces required for the direct-defense option on the escalatory ladder, could be made adequate to deter by denying the Soviets battlefield success or could at least provide time for the Soviets to reconsider and reverse their chosen course. In the best case, were NATO conventional forces to conduct a successful defense, there would be no need for NATO to employ nuclear weapons. In any case, there was at least a possibility that the Soviets might prefer the pre-war status quo rather than initiate a nuclear exchange that would destroy not only the Soviet Union but the objective, Europe, for which they had started the war.

The United States pushed for the NATO adoption of Flexible Response and continues

genuinely to support this strategy.¹¹ Unfortunately for the cohesion of the alliance, significant segments of the US policy elite continue to express a preference for the deterrence-by-victory-denial approach. US emphasis on improving the conventional capability of NATO forces, a goal fully consistent with Flexible Response and the direct-defense rung on the escalatory ladder, can appear to the Europeans as an American expression of a preference for a war-fighting capability in Europe.¹² US actions to support a conventional force buildup, even in such agreed-upon areas as REFORGER exercises and POMCUS stockage, cause the Europeans discomfort even as they applaud the measures taken. Their attitude toward strengthening NATO conventional forces is as logical as it is unfathomable to many Americans. If NATO conventional forces were to become too strong, if the Soviets were to think that NATO believes a conventional defense, and so a conventional war, is possible, then under remote but not impossible scenarios the Soviets might risk war, believing, win or lose, that it might stay conventional. To a European, conventional strength beyond that needed to counter limited attack scenarios, border probes, and accidental incursions into NATO territory is a threat to deterrence itself. To an American, such forces are simply additional insurance because an in-place war-fighting capability can only serve to make deterrence more stable. The European preference for "defense by conventional insufficiency" is not irrational but simply a cynical phrase expressing the obvious: any war in Europe is unacceptable.¹³ The after-action photographs of Hiroshima and Hamburg look the same to a European. The only acceptable deterrence for Europe is that deterrence which makes war unacceptable to all. The doomsday implications of Massive Retaliation, incorporated into the strategy of Flexible Response, provide the preferred solution.

While the differing versions of deterrence are key to NATO's discomfort, the American predilection to simultaneously articulate opposing concepts has been a major and continuing factor in deepening

what otherwise would have been largely a theoretical argument. While many applaud General Omar Bradley's 1952 statement "When they get a bomb to neutralize ours we better have an army to neutralize their army"¹⁴ because of its endorsement of a strategy of deterrence by victory denial, just as many, and especially politicians who must find the means to pay for this equal army, can find other prestigious Americans articulating the opposing view. Examples include the 1952 prediction of General J. Lawton Collins that the employment of tactical nuclear weapons would lessen the requirement for conventional forces,¹⁵ and the comment by Edward Teller that fighting forces on a nuclear battlefield would be measured not in battalions or divisions but in commando groups of five to 50 men.¹⁶ Clearly someone is wrong, and just as clearly it is easier for all if General Bradley's school of thought is the one without merit.

Under MC 14/2, the NATO echo of the Massive Retaliation strategy, it was NATO's reasoned position that 30 NATO divisions were required in Central Europe, even though nuclear weapons were the primary weapons of the alliance.¹⁷ Under the strategy of Flexible Response, where conventional forces have a role larger than that of the "trip wire" mechanism of MC 14/2, a larger conventional force is required. Under 14/3, conventional forces have the clearly defined mission of being able to conduct a "direct defense." Unfortunately, whatever the reasoning, NATO has failed to meet even the minimum force goals of MC 14/2. Conventional "bean counts" in Central Europe are frustrating, and probably pointless, but they have led to the realization that the level of conventional forces is less than needed, causing unease in both schools of deterrence. Seeing no meaningful distinction in the level of destruction caused by a conventional war in Europe compared to that caused by a nuclear war in Europe, proponents of the deterrence-by-punishment strategy are uneasy. They are afraid the United States will not honor the strategy, will not employ nuclear weapons as it is pledged to do; paradoxically, they are afraid that it will.¹⁸

On the other hand, the proponents of deterrence by victory denial fear that inadequate conventional forces increase the risk of the failure of deterrence without providing the means to conduct war should deterrence fail. Flexible Response, meant to accommodate proponents of both types of deterrence, can fully satisfy neither. Even were NATO able to determine precisely the level of conventional forces adequate for a conventional defense, and then find the political will to build these forces, there is no reason to assume that it would do so. The "crisis of NATO" is philosophical, not military.

Proposals to change the strategy are doomed to failure, and for the same reason. Flexible Response is a compromise strategy; a move to either side on the nuclear-conventional continuum would disenfranchise significant portions of the alliance. In an unconscious recognition of this fact, most proposals of a new strategy are not what they purport to be. Most are simply proposals to change the operational concepts within the existing strategy of Flexible Response, or to redefine the means to implement the concepts.

Since the founding of NATO there have been hundreds of such serious, well-reasoned proposals for a "new" strategy. Illustrative is a strategy proposed by General Bogislaw Von Bonin in 1950, even before NATO had an agreed-upon strategy. As is true of all the proposals to be discussed, Von Bonin's proposal was fully developed and only the briefest synopsis will be given.¹⁹ The essence of this proposal was to deploy conventional forces, armed with modern antitank weapons, in defensive positions along the entire length of the inter-German border. As these forces would require minimal training they could be primarily militia. Von Bonin envisioned that these forces would be able to provide sufficient concentrated firepower to halt a Soviet advance in its tracks; nuclear weapons, in 1950 still under an American monopoly, thus would play only a limited role.²⁰

Von Bonin's strategy is clearly a war-

fighting strategy, designed to deter by victory denial. In the context of the current strategy of Flexible Response, it would not be a new strategy but simply an alternate concept to implement the direct-defense portion of the strategy.

When examining the many proposals for change, one should keep in mind that two basic criteria must be met if the proposals are to be acceptable to the European members of the alliance. These criteria are, in order of decreasing importance: (1) Only a deterrence-by-punishment strategy is acceptable as the framework; (2) For lesser contingencies where conventional force is required, forward defense is synonymous with forward deployment.

Implicit in the first criterion is the conviction that in the age of nuclear parity, nuclear weapons have little or no war-fighting utility. Their *use* violates the criterion. This criterion is probably less contentious than the second, for it requires only an acceptance of the realization that in an era when both sides have large numbers of nuclear systems available, the war-fighting utility of these systems is extremely low: their mutual use cannot be expected to bring any meaningful military advantage to either side.

The second criterion is more difficult to accept. Over a period of time the concept of a forward defense has evolved to a point where it now requires the forward deployment of forces; NATO's concept of a forward defense now hinges on divisions deployed forward in their General Defensive Positions as close to the inter-German border as possible. This has not always been so. In 1963, General Lyman Lemnitzer, then SACEUR, noted in an address to the W.E.U. Assembly, "The political objective, to defend as far forward as possible, meant in practice a defense based on river obstacles deep in our own territory."²¹ When and how forward defense changed to require forward deployment is obscure. The political requirement to defend forward has been a constant; the military imperative to deploy forward has not.

With regard to the more recent proposals for a "new" strategy, examination of the concepts and means proposed reveals that the

proposals are not new strategies but simply variants of the existing strategy. They attempt to achieve deterrence either by the threat of punishment or by a denial of victory.

Representative of one of these variations is a proposal by Colin Gray.²² His concept hinges on an "inflexible tactical nuclear response—meaning a prompt resort to whatever variety and quality of nuclear weapons are necessary in order to halt a Warsaw Pact offensive."²³ Nuclear systems would be given increased survivability and mobility to lessen the risk of preemption, but the concept hinges on the programmed, automatic use of tactical nuclear systems to achieve an unstated strategy of deterrence by denial of victory.

As a deterrence-by-denial strategy, Gray's proposal would not be expected to find much European support; it clearly violates one of the basic criteria. Gray assumes that there is war-fighting utility in the use of tactical nuclear weapons and implicitly discounts the reality of linkage. If Gray does accept linkage, and he does not specifically address the point, then his proposal degenerates into a glossy version of Flexible Response with the direct-defense component being accomplished by nuclear weapons. If linkage is assumed away, then the strategy becomes a pure nuclear deterrence-by-denial strategy, bringing with it all the baggage the contemplation of a nuclear war on the European continent engenders. This deterrence-by-denial strategy, a nuclear war-fighting strategy, is representative of a class of proposals.

A French theorist, General Pierre Gallois, provides a ready example of the other extreme in nuclear proposals.²⁴ General Gallois assumes linkage may not be firm. He argues that as the ultimate Soviet goal is world domination, it would be irrational for the Soviets to provoke a possible nuclear exchange for an objective less than total world domination. A limited grab in Europe is therefore unlikely; direct defense is not a requirement; and, therefore, the best strategy is a pure deterrence-by-punishment strategy,

a European version of Massive Retaliation. This proposal would require survivable, mobile, nuclear systems which would respond to any Soviet aggression, nuclear or conventional. The inevitable consequences of such an exchange would, in Gallois' view, be of such magnitude to make Europe a "nuclear sanctuary" just as the United States is. If linkage is firm, Mutual Assured Destruction applies to both alliances in toto; if it is not firm, then MAD applies to all European participants, including the Soviets. This approach would require few, if any, conventional forces.

Another Frenchman, Marc Geneste, advocates similar concepts in support of a different strategy.²⁵ Geneste would construct positional defenses in depth but would maintain some mobile forces for use in a counterattack role.²⁶ Primary reliance to defeat attacking Soviet forces, however, would be on the use of mobile nuclear weapons. Since NATO forces would be well dug-in, and therefore sheltered from the effects of nuclear detonations, it follows that "anything on the surface is irrevocably condemned to death."²⁷ As radical as this proposal may seem in contrast to current NATO concepts, it really is a portion of Flexible Response under a different cover. The escalatory ladder is assumed to exist, and therefore the proposal is, like Flexible Response, a combination of the deterrence-by-punishment and deterrence-by-denial strategies. Geneste would accomplish the direct-defense component of the strategy by the means of tactical nuclear weapons, not conventional forces. The strategy and the concepts are the same as in Flexible Response; only the means have been varied.

Other proponents of this type of approach, David Buder for example, would also use nuclear weapons for direct defense. Buder would divide the border area, to a depth of 100 kilometers, into well-defined segments, each watched over by a nuclear forward observer and his security force. His concepts are the same as Geneste's: a positional defense based on the use of nuclear firepower.²⁸ In concepts and means, the proposals of Gallois and Geneste are the

same. The strategies they propose are incorporated into Flexible Response.

Samuel Huntington's proposal for a "retaliatory offensive" does incorporate a new concept.²⁹ His proposal is for a deterrence-by-punishment strategy based on the threatened use of conventional forces, rather than nuclear retaliation. Interestingly, if one accepts the Warsaw Pact's claim to be a defensive alliance, even though all its forces are structured and deployed for offensive operations, then Huntington's proposal would have NATO adopt a mirror-image strategy.

Huntington's proposal is simple in concept, but complex in its implications. Arguing that NATO wastes critical resources by deploying expensive maneuver forces, designed for offensive operations, in a defensive mode, he would capitalize on the existing offensive capabilities of current NATO forces by responding to a Soviet offensive in Europe with an immediate NATO counteroffensive deep into Eastern Europe. Huntington reasons that a NATO offensive deep into Eastern Europe would put at risk something of value to the Soviets, i.e. the stability of Eastern Europe, and he selects the US V and VII Corps as the units best suited to conduct such a counteroffensive—which is both logical and unfortunate. The success of Huntington's proposal rests on the unstated assumption that NATO could conduct and logistically support such an offensive. Unfortunately, time and distance factors indicate that a Soviet offensive in the NORTHAG area would cut NATO's north-south lines of communications long before V and VII Corps, attacking northeast through the Fulda Gap, could cut Soviet LOCs. Were the NATO strike force positioned in the Schleswig-Holstein area, Huntington's proposal would be more realistic. Supply of the NATO counterattack then would not be dependent on an almost instantaneous opening of new LOCs either through France or from the south.

Were Huntington's proposal to be accepted by NATO as militarily feasible, then it might appeal to advocates of both types of deterrence. For the Europeans, preferring a

deterrence-by-punishment approach, it offers a concept using existing means to satisfy the strategy without the use of nuclear weapons; however, Europeans and other deterrence-by-punishment advocates would have to accept the belief that their strategy can be achieved without nuclear resort. As noted earlier, this seems to be a contradiction. For the advocates of deterrence by denial, the war-fighting version of deterrence, the proposal also would be satisfactory. Because Huntington's concept would not detract from the existing defensive capabilities of NATO units, it also provides for the direct-defense requirement as presently incorporated in Flexible Response. Therefore, Huntington's proposal for "conventional retaliation" is, in fact, a new concept, but not incompatible with Flexible Response. It could, with further elaboration, incorporate the requirements of both types of existing deterrence strategies.

A second broad category of strategies comprises those deterrence-by-denial strategies that are based on the use of conventional forces. Recognizing the political and social, if not the military, futility of hoping that NATO will ever match the Soviets in deployable conventional forces, these strategies rely on fortifications, either as an attrition mechanism or as an economy-of-force measure, to redress the conventional imbalance. European objections to these strategies are expressed in political, not military, terms.

Proponents of these strategies accept one or both of two unstated assumptions: that there are no longer any "open plains" of northern Europe, and that the Maginot Line was successful. Upon cursory examination both assumptions seem suspect; however, a persuasive argument to accept both can be made.

While the plains of northern Europe are, in topographical terms, obviously still there, the urbanization of the FRG may have rendered them unsuited for mobile warfare. Proponents of this view point out that on the average a sizable German town is reached for every six kilometers of movement and that if these urban areas were occupied by defensive

forces, a fast-paced offensive through the area would be difficult, if not impossible.³⁰ The Schlieffen Plan, and presumed Soviet plans for major offensive actions in the area, may be outdated.

The second assumption, relating to the success of the Maginot Line, is an emotional issue. France fell in 1940: the Maginot Line failed. Some make the case that the failure was political, however, a failure to implement the concept, not a failure of the concept itself. The concept involved had three axioms: (1) There could be no gaps in France's defensive arrangements—the entire French border must be defended (a continuous defense); (2) A minimum amount of French territory could be surrendered (forward defense); (3) Firepower was the key to victory (attrition).³¹ Since these three axioms are the same as those upon which NATO has based its defense of Western Europe, it is difficult or at least uncomfortable to refute their validity. Why then the failure? The failures were political: inadequate fortifications in the north, lack of mobile forces to conduct the maneuver war envisioned in the north, and complacency. The French politicians, and military, forgot these words of Napoleon: "It is an axiom of the art of war that the side which stays within its fortifications is beaten."³²

French military men were forced to ignore the axiom by circumstances. The Maginot Line was not completed in the north: its planned extension would have placed Belgium on the "wrong side" of the line and was thus politically inexpedient. The mobile armor forces deemed essential for the conduct of a mobile defense in the north, to compensate for the lack of fortifications, were not organized for a host of political, military, and economic reasons, not the least of which was a national complacency based on a false sense of security of being behind impregnable defenses. Advocates of fortification strategies feel these factors need not apply to the NATO alliance in the 1980s; opponents are not so sure.

Proponents of fortification strategies point to the successes of World War II, not the failures, to buttress their arguments—not

France, not Singapore, but the Siegfried Line. The Siegfried Line, built in 1938 and finally manned after four years of neglect by military rejects dragged off the streets of Germany, was a success. It cost Patton's army 96 days and 68,000 casualties to get through it.³³ The US Army's official history recalls, "They had fought a large scale delaying action with meager resources while at the same time building up a strike force to be used in the Ardennes."³⁴

Advocates of fortification strategies, such as John Tillson, generally propose a fortified belt to be manned by militia and backed up by NATO's existing mobile forces.³⁵ While these proposals may be militarily sound, they have been politically unacceptable. The Federal Republic, for a series of understandable political and economic reasons, simply does not wish to fortify its border with East Germany. A German variant on the theme, that of General Löser, calls for militia-manned defensive strong points in depth.³⁶ All of these concepts that rely on fortifications support a deterrence-by-denial type of strategy. The objective is deterrence by denying the Soviets any possibility of conventional victory. These approaches are not incompatible with Flexible Response; they do raise NATO's nuclear threshold even as they lower the threshold for the Soviets. Depending on the proponent, and how the concepts are defined, these proposals can accommodate graduated escalation and be fully consistent with the strategy of Flexible Response.

Flexible Response, incorporating elements of deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial, may well be the optimum strategy.³⁷ Discussion rages over the operational concepts and the means to implement the strategy, not over the strategy itself. Accordingly, the crisis in NATO will end not with the selection of a "new" strategy but when the allies agree on what concepts and means will accomplish the chosen strategy with the most efficiency, least cost, and minimum risk.

NOTES

1. Horst Mendershausen, *Territorial Defense in NATO and Non-NATO Europe* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1973), p. 16.
2. Bernard W. Rogers, "Sword and Shield: ACE Attack of Warsaw Pact Follow-on Forces," *NATO's Sixteen Nations*, 28 (February-March 1983), 16.
3. Anthony H. Cordesman, "The NATO Central Region and the Balance of Uncertainty," *Armed Forces Journal*, 120 (July 1983), 56.
4. Wolfgang Heisenberg, "The Alliance and Europe; Part I: Crisis Stability in Europe and Theater Nuclear Weapons," Adelphi Papers, No. 96, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Summer 1973, p. 5.
5. Robin F. Laird and Dale E. Herspring, *The Soviet Union and Strategic Arms* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1984), p. 13.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
7. Adam B. Ulam, *The Rivals, America and Russia Since World War II* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), p. 311.
8. The credibility of nuclear weapons rests on this point. While the American policy of deterrence assumes this is a given, from a European perspective there is ample cause for doubt. Three months after the Soviets tested their first ICBM, the Secretary of State, Christian Herter, raised a red flag when he was quoted as saying, "I cannot conceive of any President engaging in all out nuclear war unless facts show clearly that we are in danger of all-out destruction ourselves." Pierre M. Gallois, *NATO's Obsolete Concepts* (London: The Institute for the Study of Conflict, 1978), p. 3.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
10. As early as January 1954 the American Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, made a statement to provide flexibility to the inflexible doctrine of Massive Retaliation when he noted, "Nuclear weapons would first be used on a selective basis against military targets and would not be employed in every small aggression." (Heisenberg, p. 3.) The "spasm" approach to nuclear weapons employment was a transitory phase, valid only when the United States possessed an absolute monopoly.
11. Jean D. Reed, *NATO's Theater Nuclear Forces: A Coherent Strategy for the 1980s* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1983), p. 10.
12. Even the words of General Rogers, a strong advocate of the efficacy of Flexible Response, can be subject to misinterpretation. Writing in his role as CINCEUCOM in *Defense 84*, General Rogers lays out the many measures being taken to improve the conventional force posture without mentioning Flexible Response.
13. Arlene Ido Broadhurst, *The Future of European Alliance Systems* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982), p. 82.
14. Derek Leebaert, *European Security: Prospects for the 1980s* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1979), p. 10.
15. David N. Schwartz, *NATO's Nuclear Dilemmas* (Washington: Brookings Institute, 1983), p. 31.
16. Malcolm Hoag, *Rationalizing NATO Strategy* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1964), p. 7.
17. Schwartz, p. 59.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
19. The author apologizes for the violence done to the views of the authors and proponents of the "strategies" presented which results from the truncated presentation and discussion of their well-reasoned proposals. By avoiding any concrete proposals of his own, the author hopes to avoid the same fate. The purpose of the presentation is to show that most "new" strategies are really proposals for the adoption of alternate concepts, or means, to implement the existing strategy.
20. Leebaert, p. 15.
21. Malcolm W. Hoag and Kenneth C. Strother, "An Illustrative Area Defense Ground Posture for NATO's Central Front," RAND, RM 3996-ISA, August 1964, declassified 31 December 1972, p. 6.
22. Colin Gray, "Deterrence and Defence in Europe: Revising NATO's Theater Nuclear Posture," *RUSI Journal*, 119 (December 1974), 3-11.
23. R. Levine et al., "A Survey of NATO Defense Concepts," RAND, 1982, p. 36.
24. Gallois, p. 3.
25. Marc Geneste, "European Land Defense," *Comparative Strategy*, 2 (November 1980), 239-47.
26. Except as otherwise noted, synopses of the proposals presented here are as extracted from Rand Note, N-1871-AF, June 1982, as prepared by R. Levine, T. T. Connors, M. G. Weiner, and R. A. Wise. This publication is the best recapitulation of the many proposals that the writer is aware of.
27. Levine, p. 34.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
29. Samuel Huntington, "Conventional Deterrence and Conventional Retaliation in Europe," *Military Strategy in Transition*, Keith A. Dunn and William O. Staudenmaier, eds. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1984).
30. Phillip A. Karber, "In Defense of Forward Defense," *Armed Forces Journal*, 121 (May 1984), 34.
31. William L. Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), pp. 180-85.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 186.
33. Charles B. McDonald, *The Siegfried Line Campaign*, part of the official history series *U.S. Army in World War II* (Washington: US Army, 1963), p. 616.
34. *Ibid.* Another fortification success story was the Russian use of in-depth fortifications during the battle of Kursk. The Soviet army, making good use of their defensive belts and violent offensive counterattacks, presented what proved to be an impenetrable barrier to the best the German army could muster in 1943 on the Eastern front.
35. John C. V. Tillson, "The Forward Defense of Europe," *Military Review*, 61 (May 1981), 68.
36. Levine, p. 46. The NATO force structure has a built-in bias against the use of militia forces. Part of this results from the professional predilections of NATO military leaders whose professional experience has been almost exclusively with mechanized/armored forces, and part, perhaps more significantly, results from the fact that militia forces are outside the NATO chain-of-command and a member state receives no NATO credit for their maintenance.
37. As David Holloway points out, for the Soviets deterrence is a political, not a military concept. In theoretical terms the Soviets seek not deterrence but war prevention: a policy that requires all possible steps to lessen the risks of war. In this framework, war preparation assists in war prevention and in this sense is similar to Western deterrence-by-denial strategies. The Soviets make no distinction between the goals of deterrence and containment, using the same Russian word for both. David Holloway, *The Soviet Union and the Arms Race* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1983), p. 33.