

NATO MINISTERIAL MEETING
Paris, France - December 1964

THE ROLE OF TACTICAL NUCLEAR FORCES IN NATO STRATEGY a/
(Defense Background Brief)

Summary:

The range of alternatives in NATO runs the gamut from relying on nuclear defense to relying principally on a major nonnuclear option buttressed by tactical nuclear options. The current NATO posture in Central Europe is oriented too much to general war to the detriment of essential nonnuclear capabilities. Nuclear options are not adequate substitutes for nonnuclear options; they require more men, they run greater risk of general war; they are more destructive of civilians; they are subject to uncertainties in the behavior of troops, civilians and decision makers, including our allies; and they give up NATO's advantage in tactical air. Nevertheless a modest tactical nuclear capability is required to reassure our allies, help deter nuclear and nonnuclear aggression, and provide a hedge short of general war should deterrence and our nonnuclear defense fail. These tactical nuclear forces should complement and not detract seriously from our nonnuclear posture (e.g., QRA aircraft); they should be able to survive nonnuclear conflict and an enemy first nuclear strike; they should provide a balanced capability for the nuclear conflict which follows; and they should be capable of being used in a selective, controlled deliberate manner. We should make a concerted effort to change NATO's political directive and strategic concept to emphasize the need for flexible response capabilities, especially nonnuclear ones. We should review carefully on a case-by-case basis the need for major expenditures in the tactical nuclear field.

The Range of Alternatives

The range of alternatives runs the gamut from denying the feasibility or desirability of a major nonnuclear option in Europe and relying primarily on nuclear defenses to arguing for the feasibility and desirability of a major nonnuclear option and rejection of the view that a tactical nuclear option can be substituted for the nonnuclear option. The current NATO strategic guidance places primary emphasis on the nuclear solution; the French do too, relying even more on strategic nuclear forces; the British favor an initial nonnuclear delay capability of perhaps a few days followed if necessary by the selective use of up to 200 tactical nuclear weapons per corps as a "link" if necessary to general war; the Germans advocate prompt use of small nuclear weapons in the engaged battle as a substitute for the nonnuclear option, followed by deeper strikes if required; whereas some American studies consider that current NATO forces would be unsuccessful in nonnuclear defense against large nonnuclear attack and therefore contemplate an engaged nuclear battle and possible theatre wide nuclear war which excludes attack on the US and USSR, the official US position argues for a strong

a/ Since this paper summarizes a DoD draft which has not yet been fully coordinated, its contents are subject to some revision.

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nonnuclear option, rejects any substitution of nuclear forces for nonnuclear forces, and argues for a major nonnuclear option.

Current NATO Concepts

The US played a major role in orienting NATO originally towards primary reliance on nuclear weapons. As a result NATO's strategic directive, MC 14/2, gives first priority to preparations for general nuclear war and SACEUR's posture and plans focus primarily on general nuclear war. But SACEUR cannot do much in general war. Most of his forces, his command-control-communications, and logistics systems are highly vulnerable to surprise/attack, the contribution of his strike forces is small compared to that of our strategic forces; while his forces may help deter attack, we cannot be confident that they can effectively defend Europe if deterrence falls.

Under current guidance SACEUR's nonnuclear potential is not fully realized. Approximately one third of his "dual capable" aircraft are withheld for nuclear tasks only; NORTHAG forces are weak; non-US ground forces suffer deficiencies in personnel, equipment, logistics and mobilization potential, air defenses are incomplete; his aircraft are concentrated and unsheltered. As a result SACEUR cannot now exercise a major nonnuclear option.

Since SACEUR's contribution to the nuclear exchange in general war is small and his ability to defend Europe in nuclear war is questionable, we must change the NATO strategic concept to lessen the emphasis on general war and permit SACEUR to improve his nonnuclear capabilities. At an annual expenditure of nearly \$30 billion, the NATO allies should be able to design a more effective alternative.

Substituting Tactical Nuclear Option for Nonnuclear Option

Advocates of the nuclear option envisage a range of demonstration, engaged battle and selective theater-wide nuclear options. They see it as exploiting NATO's strategic nuclear superiority and large tactical nuclear stockpile, which should inhibit the Soviets from escalating beyond a certain level in an aggression undertaken for a limited objective. Assuming nonnuclear defense to be infeasible, they expect our allies to accept engaged nuclear battle in Central Europe and abide by its constraints.

Considering the manpower requirements of forces in nuclear conflict, it appears that if our forces are inadequate for nonnuclear conflict, they will have little more prospect for success in a nuclear engaged battle, particularly if the enemy employs the larger yield weapons which he may have. Once a nuclear battle commences, the temptations to exploit enemy vulnerabilities by pre-empting to higher levels will be large (like the gambler finding irresistible the temptation to recoup his losses). Considering the wide range of conditions which might bring on nuclear war, it would be imprudent to count on the Soviet's not escalating beyond the engaged nuclear battle. Once conflict commences, our European allies will be under strong compulsion to keep it nonnuclear, and to terminate nuclear war quickly by negotiation or possibly by escalation. For all these reasons the tactical

nuclear option is not considered an acceptable substitute for a nonnuclear option.

On the other hand, a major-nonnuclear option is feasible for the Central Region. Assuming US division forces equal to two of the Pact and non-US NATO ones equal 1.2 of the Pact, NATO confronts the 34 Pact divisions operational in East Germany and Czechoslovakia today with 35 division equivalents and within 30 days it can deploy a total of 57 division equivalents as compared to the estimated Pact capability to deploy up to 60 divisions in three or four weeks. Affording a major alternative to suicide or surrender, these forces reduce the strain on Alliance unity that would be occasioned by a requirement to employ force; they incur smaller risks of escalation to general war; they help us preserve the initially important nonnuclear-nuclear firebreak; they are less destructive of their civilian environment than their nuclear counterparts; they exploit the advantages of Western military experience, industrial base, and tactical air superiority; and they offer more meaningful military results than nuclear options in which we have had no experience and which involve such major uncertainty in the behavior of troops, civilians and decision makers as to offer only low confidence of a favorable outcome. For all these reasons a major nonnuclear capability constitutes the only satisfactory basis on which to plan for defense of Western Europe.

The Case for the Tactical Nuclear Option

The weapons are there; their presence reassures the allies of the US commitment to use whatever weapons are necessary in their defense. They serve as an intermediate deterrent; without them the Soviets might be tempted to launch a nuclear attack in Europe; with them we hold the equally vulnerable Soviet forces hostage. They also contribute to the deterrence of nonnuclear aggression. And they represent a worthwhile hedge short of general war if deterrence and our nonnuclear defenses should fail. For all these reasons we should have this intermediate option. Since we cannot rely on this option with high confidence, our goals for it should be modest.

Characteristics of a Preferred Nuclear Posture

Since peak demands on our nuclear and nonnuclear capabilities are likely to coincide, we must face squarely the dilemma of where to assign "dual capable" forces and not permit our nonnuclear capability to be seriously degraded by withholding major forces for nuclear missions only, e.g., QRA aircraft. Our tactical nuclear forces should be able to survive nonnuclear operations and an enemy first strike in nuclear operations, and should provide a balanced capability for the nuclear conflict which follows. In this regard our command-control-communications probably govern the balance and we probably should avoid concepts visualizing sustained nuclear engaged battle operations at an intense level over a period of weeks or all-out theatre war over a relatively few days. Finally, in addition to the full conventional option our tactical nuclear posture should include options for the selective; controlled, deliberate use of nuclear weapons. SACEUR's political directive, strategic guidance, and emergency defense plan should be changed to enable him to develop the appropriate range of options, giving

primary emphasis to the nonnuclear one. Whereas the US cannot dictate the strategy and force structure to NATO, all US officials should work to this end.

Force Implications

Since we may not be able to provide a complete command-control system, even at high cost, that can survive a theatre-wide exchange for more than a few days, our objectives in this area may have to be modest. Substitution of Pershing for QRA aircraft would reduce the vulnerability of SACEUR's key nuclear strike force and release high performance aircraft for the vital nonnuclear mission. The vulnerability of these aircraft in nonnuclear war can be reduced better by providing them soft shelter than by dispersing them. We are seeking to improve our air defenses. We should concentrate primarily on increasing attrition rates against aircraft in nonnuclear war and not on highly complex defenses against nuclear attack. The allocation of 20,000 US custodial personnel in support of SACEUR's full nuclear dispersal plan does not appear to be the most profitable use of US manpower. In view of the quantity of nuclear weapons in Europe and their vulnerability, any increase in number is questionable.

There appear to be major gaps in our program. We have not addressed the question of manpower reserves in sufficient detail. Our logistics and LOC are vulnerable. The target acquisition problem is severe. The best mix and magnitude of our tactical nuclear stockpile is in doubt. We do not know how to terminate nuclear war. We should avoid going ahead with parts of what is not yet an integrated program unless there is very strong justification on a case-by-case basis.

Studies

In order to lay foundations for an integrated program it is proposed the CJCS Special Studies Group should complete by March 31, 1965 a study which designs, costs, and compares alternative tactical nuclear force structures for Central Europe. To prescribe manner, pacing and tactics to be employed in effecting the necessary change in SACEUR's strategic guidance, the Department of State and DOD should jointly consider the problem of obtaining the necessary consensus within NATO,

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