

# Western Defense Planning

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*Captain B.H. Liddell Hart's lead article in the June 1956 issue of Military Review gives a concrete example of the difficulties of developing a coherent military strategy, as outlined in the preceding two articles. In view of the existing "mutual assured destruction" strategy at the dawn of the nuclear age, Liddell Hart's proposal for "graduated action" as a military strategy for a young NATO also prophetically foreshadowed the Kennedy Doctrine of "flexible response."*

**A**DJUSTMENT TO THE NEW realities of the atomic age is depressingly slow among the powers that be—both in high military quarters and in the centers of government. Yet, one can sympathize with the planners in their effort to adapt military doctrine to the superrevolutionary effects of atomic energy. It is very difficult for reason and imagination to bridge the gulf between warfare in the past and warfare where atomic weapons—bombs, missiles and shells—can be used in hundreds or thousands, and where hydrogen bombs, each equivalent to millions of tons of high explosive, are also available. What that means may be better realized if we remember that the original atom bomb used at Hiroshima, with shattering effect, was merely equivalent to 20,000 tons of high explosive.

On a realistic reckoning of the effects of present weapons, it is evident that present defense planning is far from being adequately adjusted to new conditions. While there is much talk of preparedness for nuclear warfare, the actual changes which have been made in military organization are relatively slight compared with the immensity of the problems arising from development of nuclear weapons.

The defense measures of the NATO countries have a palpable air of unreality, and the forces they have been building up are still very markedly under the influence of "war as it was"—in 1945 and earlier. In the continental countries, this persisting outlook may be partly explained by the fact that their leaders are less closely in touch with nuclear potentialities than those of the United States, not having taken a hand in the development of nuclear power. They are also habituated to thinking of

warfare mainly in terms of land operations with large conscript armies, an ingrained tendency which led them into disastrous trouble even in World War II by causing them to overlook the extent to which the airpower of that date could upset their military ground plans. In France, there is more sign than elsewhere of an effort to think out the military problem afresh, but the process and its application have been hindered by ceaseless colonial distractions—for years in Indochina and now in North Africa. Moreover, the influence of new French thinking tends to be diminished by the loss of prestige which France has suffered since the disasters of 1940.

In Germany there is a fund of military experience greater than anywhere else, and eventual defeat in World War II should not only produce more readiness to learn from its lessons but also create an atmosphere favorable to fresh thinking and new techniques. On the other hand, however, the chiefs of the new Ministry of Defense (Amt Blank) are handicapped by a 10-year blank in experience of dealing with military problems. They naturally tend to look at these problems through 1945 eyeglasses, while the very mastery they acquired in conducting "operations" makes it more difficult for them to visualize a kind of warfare in which there will be no scope for such large-scale maneuver. Moreover they have been working out plans for the new German forces on the lines laid down for them several years ago by NATO, and they fear to consider changes that would upset their carefully planned structure.

Visiting the army and air force executive headquarters of the NATO forces in Germany and elsewhere, one finds more realism. But as they have to carry out NATO

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plans, they are bound to put compliance with the existent plans ahead of adjustment to new conditions. Moreover, they have to train the forces under their control, which has to be done through a framed pattern of exercises, and these have to be based on things as they are, rather than on what should be.

### **“Integrity of NATO”**

At Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), the fountainhead, the primary concern has been to “maintain the integrity of NATO” under increasingly difficult circumstances. So the heads of SHAPE shrink from any adjustment which may imperil, in their view, what they have built up with so much difficulty. A keynote at SHAPE is “objectivity,” and it has been applied well in avoiding national bias in dealing with Western defense problems. But that keynote is not really compatible with the present paramount concern to avoid any changes that might upset the “integrity of NATO.” Such a concern is essentially *political* and entails an attitude to military problems that is not truly scientific. This political concern is quite understandable when one realizes that the five-year struggle to build up Western defense on the NATO basis has presented varied political complications and objections from many different countries.

NATO and SHAPE plans were good military sense *when* they were framed—five years ago. But they have been whittled down repeatedly so that they no longer provide adequate defense insurance on their original basis—to furnish an effective *alternative* to dangerous reliance on the atom bomb. By the very risk of bringing on an all-out atomic war, the adoption of

tactical atomic weapons undermines the original basis and guiding principle. Moreover that basis has been badly shaken by the immense development of nuclear weapons since 1950—above all the H-bomb with its overwhelming powers of destruction and suicidal consequences, if used.

### **Compound Pressures**

At the same time, the NATO defense structure is now endangered by compound pressures—financial, psychological and political.

- *Financial*—The desire and need of all governments to reduce military expenditures which would be ruinous if forces of all types were maintained at planned scale, and also if they are to be equipped with new kinds of increasingly expensive weapons.

- *Psychological*—The growing view of the public everywhere—which is not blinkered by vested interest—that the older forms of force are out of date and irrelevant to real defense problems. This view and feeling is multiplying the financial pressure.

- *Political*—The new and more friendly line taken by the Soviet Union which fosters the feeling, not only among the public, that the danger is diminishing and that defense expenditure is becoming unnecessary. This, again, multiplies the pressure. In Germany, an important subsidiary factor is the Germans' natural desire for reunification and the growth of a feeling that this can only be attained by detachment from NATO and becoming neutral.

All these factors and pressures are likely to increase in the near future. If the heads of NATO and SHAPE cling to their present structure (and pattern of forces) and shrink from readjustment, there is all too much likelihood that the alignment will crumble away like a sand castle. It is foolish to pursue political expediency to the point where it does not make sense militarily.

Western defense planning has the ominous appearance of having traversed a “full circle” since the outbreak of the Korean conflict in 1950. To be more precise, it has moved round a spiral course and back to the same point but on a more perilous plane, while receding from its central object.

When the invasion of South Korea demonstrated that the United States possession of such a supreme weapon as the atom bomb was not sufficient to deter such Communist aggression, the Western Powers embarked on rearmament programs which were aimed to recreate a surer form of defense with enlarged conventional forces. The principal effort was made in continental Europe with the formation of NATO and under the military direction of SHAPE—but the planned scale of strength in number of divisions was never attained. Indeed, the

program itself was both whittled and slowed down—partly because the contributing governments, particularly those on the Continent, found that the burden was greater than they were willing to bear; and also in the case of France because her forces were drained away to deal with widespread colonial troubles.

At the same time, new varieties of the nuclear weapon were being developed which appeared at first sight to be an easy and hopeful means of offsetting the deficiency in conventional forces. One development was the thermonuclear weapon of such immensely destructive effect as to be capable of destroying an entire city. Another was a range of new atomic weapons small enough to be of tactical use against troops and airfields.

### Fateful Decision

These developments produced a new turn in Western defense planning—back toward reliance on nuclear weapons to counterbalance the Communist bloc's much larger numbers of troops. That decision was accompanied by a fresh and very dangerous complication arising from the fact that the Soviets had already begun to develop weapons of a similar type.

The fateful decision was made plain when General Alfred M. Gruenther stated in June 1954 that: "In our thinking we visualize the use of atom bombs in the support of our ground troops. We also visualize the use of atom bombs on targets in enemy territory." The implications of General Gruenther's announcement were made more emphatic by Field Marshal Montgomery in October when he declared: "I want to make it absolutely clear that we at SHAPE are basing all our operational planning on using atomic and thermonuclear weapons in our defense. With us it is no longer: 'They may possibly be used.' It is very definitely: 'They will be used, if we are attacked.'"

Yet, a few sentences later he stated that: "There is no sound civil defense organization in the national territory of any NATO nation"—and added that unless such security exists, "a nation will face disaster in a world war, since the homefront will collapse." It seemed extremely illogical that the heads of SHAPE should base *all* their operational planning on a course of action that, even in their view, is bound to result in "collapse." Yet, the statesmen of the NATO countries at their meeting in Paris just before Christmas endorsed this planning policy.

Field Marshal Montgomery's declaration was made in a lecture in London entitled "A Look Through a Window at World War III," and he pictured this as a prolonged struggle in three phases, ending in victory and the enemy's surrender—as in World Wars I and II. Repeatedly, throughout his lecture, he used the traditional terms

"win the battle" and "win the war" and talked of thus "bringing the war to a successful conclusion." These are out-of-date terms and concepts in the atomic age.

### Significant Change

A year later, in October 1955, he delivered a subsequent lecture in London which showed a significant change of outlook when he said at the end: "I now put it to you that the words 'win' or 'lose' no longer apply to contests between nations which have nuclear power of any magnitude. . . . I have been studying nuclear war for a considerable time and I have come to the conclusion that man will have it in his power in the future to destroy himself and every living thing on this planet. . . . Our aim must be to prevent war; the prospect of winning or losing is not a profitable subject."

But NATO planning has not yet been adjusted to this revised and wiser conclusion, whereas thoughtful people in most of the countries concerned reached such a conclusion long ago. The gap has produced a growing gulf between military and public opinion and unless early and adequate steps are taken to bridge this gap the entire prospect of Western defense may founder. Defense planning creates no incentive for defensive effort if it offers no better hope than mutual suicide when put into action. The NATO nations are in danger of apathetically sinking into a "Slough of Despond." If that is to be prevented, the entire system of defense must be thought out afresh with the aim of producing a non-suicidal form of defense.

### Retaliation Versus Deterrence

The power of retaliation—with the H-bomb—is the most effective deterrent to deliberate aggression on a large scale, for the aggressor, even if not destroyed, would suffer damage far exceeding anything he could gain. The capacity for "massive retaliation" with H-bombs thus renders very unlikely any "massive aggression"—such as an attempt to overrun Western Europe or to paralyze Great Britain and the United States by surprise air attack. But this power of retaliation is far less sure as a deterrent to smaller scale aggression or as a check on the risk of an unintentional slide into an all-out war of mutual suicide.

The fundamental drawback of present defense policy, based on the H-bomb, is that it tends to become an "all or nothing" course. The consequences of unlimited war with nuclear weapons would be so fatal to everyone involved that the prospect causes hesitation, delay and the feebleness in reacting to any aggression which is not obviously and immediately a vital threat. The general effect is weakening the will to make a stand against aggression, particularly any that occurs outside the vital

area of Europe, while increasing the risk that an all-out war may be precipitated through an emotional spur of the moment decision.

The Western allies' position would be firmer and their prospect better if they had an intermediate course—a policy of “graduated deterrence” and a plan of graduated action. Such a policy would show a sane realization that the concepts of “victory” and “unlimited war” are utterly

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out of date and nonsensical. Instead, this intermediate course would be based on the principle of applying the *minimum force necessary* to repel any particular aggression; its action would be directed primarily against the forces engaged in the aggression. This new aim would be to make the aggressors *abandon their purpose*, in place of the traditional war aim of “conquering” them and compelling their “surrender”—an older concept that has always been foolishly shortsighted in modern times and which has now become insanely suicidal in the atomic age.

The hydrogen bomb is a fatal boomerang that impels a new trend to the limitation of war and the avoidance of any action likely to drive an opponent to desperation. The chief hindrance to this newer aim is the habit of thought that lingers among a generation of leaders who grew up in the period and climate of “total war.” It is more difficult for them to adjust their minds and planning to the need for limitation and the principle of “graduated action” than it would have been for the wiser statesmen of previous centuries. They admit that the unlimited use of nuclear weapons would be “suicide,” but the form of their defense planning, and their speeches about it, show little reiteration is needed to keep them conscious of this aspect.

The prospects of limitation of war would be best if conventional weapons alone were used, and suf-

ficed to check aggression, but the NATO authorities have come to the conclusion that with conventional weapons their present forces are not adequate to check a possible Soviet invasion launched in large-scale strength. It is even clearer that the forces available for the defense of other regions, such as the Middle and Far East, are not adequate to check any large-scale invasion there, if they are confined to the use of conventional weapons.

The next best prospect of limitation would lie in the use of gas as the unconventional weapon. It is most effective for paralyzing land invasion, and at the same time can be confined to the combat area rather than destroy entire cities and is thus unlikely to precipitate all-out warfare. On grounds of humanity, too, the chemical weapon is much to be preferred to the atomic weapon even in battlefield use, and there is profound irrationality in rejecting the former while adopting the latter. Mustard gas, the most persistent of all means of obstructing and delaying the advance of an invader, is the least lethal of all weapons.

In using nuclear weapons to counterbalance the numerical superiority of the Soviet and Chinese Communist forces, the basic problem is to draw a dividing line between their tactical and strategic use—a line that has a good chance of being maintained, instead of leading to unlimited war and universal devastation. The best chance here would naturally lie in confining nuclear weapons to the immediate battlefield, but the chances of maintaining the line would decrease in each successive stage of deeper use.

## **Drawbacks to the Policy**

The chief drawback to a policy of graduated action is that it involves a much greater financial burden that is *necessary* if we rely on the H-bomb deterrent. The word “necessary” is emphasized because at present, the West is striving to build up large conventional forces *and* to equip them with tactical atomic weapons, *as well as* building up large strategic air forces *and* providing these with H-bombs. In the absence of a plainly declared graduated policy, such a mixture of efforts is bound to suggest to our opponents not only muddled thinking on our part but also an underlying lack of determination to use the H-bomb.

If the Western Powers rely on the H-bomb deterrent to prevent war, and really intend to use this weapon should the deterrent fail, the logical course would be to reduce all conventional forces to the minimum required to check minor frontier encroachments and to suppress internal subversive activities. Indeed, the intention would be clearest, as a deterrent to aggression, if we reduced other forces to a mere police

cordons. That would be the surest way to convince our opponents that we are not bluffing when we talk of using the H-bomb if they attack.

Moreover, in the case of all-out nuclear war, such large conventional forces would be superfluous and useless in every sense. They could not maintain any effective defense once their sources of supply were destroyed, and with the destruction of their homelands, they would also have lost their purpose. Such forces would merely represent an immense waste of money and material resources that might have been better spent on efforts to counter the growth of communism by economic aid. Large conventional forces only make sense as part of a defense policy and a plan of graduated action. The big question remains whether the West can produce forces adequate both to deter and defeat invasion without recourse to nuclear weapons even in the tactical field. It is worth examining the balance of manpower compared with the Soviet bloc, with particular reference to the danger of invasion in Europe.

Such a balance sheet as indicated on the chart [below] may surprise many people in the West who are concerned with the defense problem. It is extraordinary that the Soviet Union and her satellites, with a smaller total population, should be able to produce approximately 260 active divisions, of which about 160 are available for use in Central Europe, while the NATO countries can produce barely 20 active divisions to cover that vital area. Since such a tremendous

disparity of forces is clearly not due to deficiency of potential military manpower, it must be due to lack of adequate effort or effective organization.

### Need for New Concepts

The economic difficulties of attaining the minimum ground strength required can be diminished by developing new tactics and organization. The present NATO-type divisions—a relic of World War II standards—are so costly to equip that their number is restricted, so demanding in scale of supply that they would be easily paralyzed in nuclear warfare and so cumbersome in scale of transport that they are unsuited either for nuclear or guerrilla conditions.

A Western division is nearly twice as large as the Soviet type in numbers of men and has more than twice as many vehicles without being appreciably stronger in firepower. Yet, basically, the defending side, operating in its own territory, should not need as high a scale of supply and transport as an attacker coming from a long distance away and should be able to make effective defensive use of “local” types of force which require relatively little transport. It would be far better if a large proportion of the ground forces of the continental countries were built on a local militia basis, organized to fight in its own locality and maintain itself from local stores distributed in numerous small underground shelters.

Such forces, a superior form of “Home Guard,” would provide a deep network of defense, yet need much less transport than the present NATO type, be

	NATO Bloc		Soviet Bloc	
		Millions		Millions
<b>Forward</b>	France	42	USSR (Europe)	170
<b>Center</b>	Belgium	9	Poland	25
	Holland	11	Czechoslovakia	13
	Denmark	4	East Germany	17
	West Germany	49		
		<b>115</b>		<b>225</b>
<b>Close</b>	United Kingdom	50	Hungary	10
	Italy	53		
	Portugal	9		
		<b>227</b>		<b>235</b>
<b>Left Wing</b>	Norway	3		
<b>Right Wing</b>	Greece	8	Bulgaria	7
	Turkey	23	Romania	17
		<b>261</b>		<b>259</b>
<b>Back</b>	United States	161	USSR (Asia)	42
	Canada	15		
		<b>437</b>		<b>301</b>
<b>Friendly</b>	Finland	4		
	Sweden	7		
	Switzerland	5		
	Spain	9		
		<b>482</b>		

much less of a target, be less liable to interception and become effective with far shorter training thus relieving the present burden of conscription. A portion of these type forces in rearward areas might be moved up as reinforcements to the forward layers of the defense if, and as, conditions allowed. With suitable planning, this can be achieved and such forces will not need the large scale of organic transport and equipment that makes the existing NATO-type divisions so vulnerable, as well as so costly.

The “local” type forces should be backed by mobile forces composed of professional troops, mounted entirely in armored cross-country vehicles, streamlined in organization and trained to operate in “controlled dispersion” like a swarm of hornets. With such quality and mobility, fewer troops would be required than in the present NATO divisions and they would be better fitted for guerrilla-like war as well as for atomic war wherein mobile action would only be practicable for relatively small forces. The idea that the present NATO forces are capable of fighting “a mobile battle” is another current illusion. It would lie with the overseas members of NATO, especially Great Britain and the United States, to provide most of the new model mobile forces. Relieved of conscription and the demand for quantity, the European members could do this more effectively and less expensively than today.

## Conclusions

To rely mainly on the “Great Deterrent,” the H-bomb, would be the *cheaper* defense policy if carried out logically. Great savings would then be possible, thus relieving the economic strain that has become an increasing handicap on the Western countries. But the “Great Deterrent” is a weak deterrent to small aggression, and a very insecure insurance against the risk of this spreading to the point of becoming a common slide

into a suicidal great war. Indeed, its basic drawback is that if it fails as a deterrent, and is put into action, it automatically entails suicide for Western civilization.

To adopt the principle of “graduated action” would be the *safer* defense policy. Moreover, by making it clear that we intend only to use the H-bomb as the last resort, we should strengthen our moral position, diminish the fear that any stand against aggression will be more certainly fatal than giving way and check the spread of neutralism. The use of this principle would allay the growing antagonism in Asia which has been fostered by the way that Western leaders, by their harping on “massive retaliation,” have lent color to the idea they are the most likely “mass destroyers” of mankind.

The problem of establishing differential stages of action with nuclear weapons is difficult, requiring special study which it has not hitherto received. But even if battlefield action in frontier zones were found to be the only practical differential short of unlimited warfare, even that limitation would be well worthwhile because of its moral and political advantages. This would give the defense the best chance of profiting by unconventional weapons without precipitating an all-out war.

The *safest* degree of graduation, however, would be to develop ground forces adequate to repel invasion without any recourse to nuclear weapons, and thereby likely to deter any attempt at invasion, even in a minor way. It is largely an organizational problem, and its solution depends on a clear grasp of the problem and the will to solve it, rather than on additional outlay of money.

At present we are “getting the worse of both worlds” by incurring the heavy expense of trying to create forces required for both policies without having the potential advantages of either. The lack of clarity tends to combine maximum cost with maximum insecurity. **MR**

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