

# *Mearsheimer's folly: NATO's Cold War capability and credibility*

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# Mearsheimer's folly: NATO's Cold War Capability and Credibility

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## Introduction

Government policy is influenced by the analyses of high profile academics as well as by those within government. Professor John J Mearsheimer is a political scientist well-known for his work on conventional and nuclear deterrence, and proposer of the theory of Offensive Realism.<sup>1</sup> In assessing what is sufficient for national defence and for collective defence Mearsheimer made bold statements about NATO's capability which were clearly wrong, and could have been identified as such at the time. These kinds of bold analyses have been repeated, and defence policy has been influenced by them. The same has been happening since the end of the Cold War, based on the *post hoc* assumption of "victory", as happened after the end of the Cold War in 1991. NATO has developed new strategies to cope with the changing face of international tensions, such as the "enhanced forward presence" in the Baltic States, and Western Europe is facing new domestic political crises which make military spending and co-operation vulnerable. The influence flawed analyses can have on defence policy is dangerous in a world becoming less stable and certain by the day.

The objective of this analysis is not to vilify Professor Mearsheimer, but to demonstrate the problems associated with making an analysis without sufficient knowledge of the detail in place, and indeed the potential misuse of such an analysis in creating and continuing policy making.

## Mearsheimer's analysis

From the formation of NATO until the end of the Cold War the credibility of NATO's defences was discussed by defence professionals and academics. Most of those analyses failed to address the overall capability based on existing policy, doctrine, force structures and plans.<sup>2</sup> An example was the analysis given by Mearsheimer on the probability of a Soviet victory in a war in Europe. This provides

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<sup>1</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Dean, 'Alternative Defence: Answer to NATO's Central Front Problems?', *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)* 64, no. 1 (1987): 61–82; Richard Simpkin, 'Hammer, Anvil and Net - a Re-Examination of Conventional Defence of the Nato Centre', *BAR*, no. 72 (December 1982); Malcolm Chalmers and Lutz Unterseher, 'Is There a Tank Gap?: Comparing NATO and Warsaw Pact Tank Fleets', *International Security* 13, no. 1 (1988): 5–49; John Baylis, 'NATO Strategy: The Case for a New Strategic Concept', *International Affairs* 64, no. 1 (Winter -1988 1987): 43–59; John J. Mearsheimer, 'Prospects for Conventional Deterrence in Europe', *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, August 1985.

a useful perspective on the difficulties inherent in assessing the credibility of defence policy from a purely academic standpoint.

In 1982 Mearsheimer wrote a paper entitled, "Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Europe"<sup>3</sup> which was based on a chapter in his book, "Conventional Deterrence".<sup>4</sup> In this article, Mearsheimer examined NATO's strategy and capabilities, and the prospects for what he described as a Soviet "blitzkrieg" against NATO. He concluded that, "... the task of quickly overrunning NATO's defences would be a very formidable one."<sup>5</sup>

But Mearsheimer's analysis is flawed in several ways, as I will discuss below. As Professor Williamson Murray wrote, "Any theoretical understanding ... must arise out of real acts and occurrences in human conflict; one must not impose on the world the theoretical constructs or concepts arrived at independently of history and experience."<sup>6</sup> I will use the British 1(BR) Corps as the main example throughout this article to demonstrate the flaws in Mearsheimer's analysis.

## Opportunity

Mearsheimer focussed on the idea that war would start only if the attacker – in this case the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact – was assured of success, and would be able to avoid the conflict degenerating into a war of attrition.<sup>7</sup> He does not anticipate opportunistic "grabs" by the Soviet Union that NATO was poorly prepared to repel. The UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) view was summed up by Secretary of State for Defence Sir Francis Pym in 1980 when he warned the Prime Minister, "Short-warning aggression, and the prospect of short-duration war, is far more attractive to the Soviet Union ..."<sup>8</sup> Mearsheimer also ignored the idea that an attritional war favoured the Warsaw Pact.

In the Government War Book, the MoD considered three outline scenarios for a transition to war.<sup>9</sup> The first was a "Slow Moving Crisis" which was described as allowing, "... the Cabinet/TWC

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<sup>3</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, 'Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe', *International Security* 7, no. 1 (1982): 3–39.

<sup>4</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> Mearsheimer, 'Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe', 36, *International Security*.

<sup>6</sup> Williamson Murray, *War, Strategy, and Military Effectiveness* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013), 48.

<sup>7</sup> For a thorough discussion of the Soviet approach to war which was also inculcated into the other WTO armies, see Nathan Leites, *Soviet Style in War* (New York: Crane, Russak, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> Defence Policy and Programme, Appendix A, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Defence, 7th July 1980, 'UK Future Defence Planning', n.d., para. 2, FCO 46/2171, TNA.

<sup>9</sup> 'War Book Working Party: Post War Developments in the United Kingdom Transition to War Plans', CAB 175/32 (Cabinet Office, 11 November 1981), 14, CAB 175/32, TNA.

[Transition to War Committee] sufficient time to discuss and authorise individual GWB measures and ... requests from Major NATO commanders ..." Following this was the vaguely termed "Intermediate Timescales" which covered, "A crisis evolving in the intermediate timescale ... intended to be dealt with by a combination of MPDs [Major Policy Decisions], individual [sic] decisions and, where necessary, GDs [Group Decisions]." The last one, the Rapidly Moving Crisis, was described as a, "... rapid transition from peace to war ..." It was in a rapidly moving crisis that timescales for decision making were all important. It was sometimes also referred to as a "bolt-from-the-blue" attack.

There was some confusion in both NATO and the MoD about the likelihood of warning of an attack. The NATO assumption was not that the Warsaw Pact would launch a surprise attack, but that there would be a steady deterioration of international relations over a period of more than 20 days, resulting in an outbreak of hostilities.<sup>10</sup> Contrast this with the private comments of the US Secretary of Defense in 1979: "We estimate that the Pact could concentrate ground forces of five "fronts" – 85 to 90 Divisions – for an attack on NATO's Centre Region within about 15 days ... the Pact could also assemble over 4,000 tactical aircraft ... within three to five days."<sup>11</sup> A Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) assessment in 1977 anticipated that only two weeks warning would be available to NATO, perhaps even as little as two days, allowing a surprise attack to be launched.<sup>12</sup> The Warsaw Pact might have a week of preparation before the signs were noticed by Western Intelligence;

"... the Alliance may now receive as little as one week's firm warning of the Warsaw Pact achieving full war posture. As short a time as 48 hours warning might be obtained in the less likely even of the Soviet Union choosing to optimize strategic surprise by opening hostilities before achieving a full war posture."<sup>13</sup>

Another concern within NATO was that a misunderstanding might lead to war, or war would be caused by unintentional pressures from one side on the other.<sup>14</sup> It is difficult to conclude whether a miscalculation was expected to provoke a "bolt-from-the-blue" attack, or provide the Warsaw Pact

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<sup>10</sup> UKCICC 1252/1, 'Home Defence and Security of UK Base: Home Defence Organisation; Command and Control of Home Defence Forces, Pre-Strike Phase', n.d., para. 1, DEFE 11/879, TNA.

<sup>11</sup> Statement by Secretary of Defense Harold Brown to the NATO Defense Planning Committee Ministerial Meeting, 11 - 12th December 1979, 'NATO Defence Planning Committee 1979' n.d., FCO 46/1987, TNA.

<sup>12</sup> MO 15/3, 'JIC Assessment of Soviet Threat', 23 March 1977, PREM 16/2259, TNA.

<sup>13</sup> MO 15/3, The growth of Soviet military power, 23rd March 1977, 'JIC Assessment of Soviet Threat', para. 23, PREM 16/2259, TNA.

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Defence, 'Statement on the Defence Estimates 1980', Cmnd 7826 (London: HMSO, 1980), paras 104–111.

with the excuse to initiate a planned attack. Some "opportunism" by the Warsaw Pact might have occurred if political events in NATO suggested it would be successful.<sup>15</sup>

Hew Strachan, agreeing with John Mearsheimer, wrote in 1984 that, "NATO's existing conventional defences certainly have their defects, but they are not so weak as to invite Soviet attack."<sup>16</sup> This position is opposed by a RAND report which identified lack of sustainability and overall weaknesses in the NATO defence. The report stated that a failure to improve NATO's conventional forces would risk providing the Soviet Union with an opportunity for a, "... quick strike with a limited objective."<sup>17</sup> The report's author, Roger Facer, had been a senior civil servant in the MoD, and was therefore in a position to know the true situation. NATO had been aware of this particular threat<sup>18</sup> but the plans in place did not provide for a conventional response to a quick strike (assumed to be akin to a "bolt-from-the-blue", or Rapidly Moving Crisis). The concern was that the Warsaw Pact could prepare for a full scale attack in 15 days or less,<sup>19</sup> with much of the preparation going unnoticed, and NATO's mobilisation delayed by political caution and Soviet distraction techniques.<sup>20</sup>

Research undertaken by this author has shown that, even from a standing start, and in a war that might become attritional, the Warsaw Pact would win the conventional battle simply by being able to remain in the fight.<sup>21</sup> Although both Warsaw Pact "Opportunism"<sup>22</sup> or "salami-slicing", featured in NATO planning,<sup>23</sup> the broad threat, as assessed by NATO and the British Government, was of an attack by the Warsaw Pact on NATO with not less than 48 hours' warning: directly across the Inner German Border by large armoured conventional thrusts, including at least two tank armies in the

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<sup>15</sup> COS 1161/434B, Attachment, 18th May 1979, 'NATO Planning and Strategy', n.d., para. 11, DEFE 70/722, TNA.

<sup>16</sup> Hew Strachan, 'Conventional Defence in Europe', *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)* 61, no. 1 (1984): 41.

<sup>17</sup> Roger L L Facer, 'Conventional Forces and the NATO Strategy of Flexible Response', R-3209-FF (RAND, January 1985), v-vi.

<sup>18</sup> James R. Schlesinger, 'A Briefing on NATO and Warsaw Pact Conventional Forces as Presented to Allied Ministers of Defense by the US Secretary of Defense' (Washington, D.C., August 1973), B-5.

<sup>19</sup> Statement by Secretary of Defense Harold Brown to the NATO Defense Planning Committee Ministerial Meeting, 11 - 12th December 1979, 'NATO Defence Planning Committee 1979', FCO 46/1987, TNA.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Hennessy, *The Secret State* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 42. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, Macmillan had authorised the Vulcan and Victor nuclear strike force to Alert Condition Three (fifteen minutes' readiness, armed and fuelled) but was reluctant to disperse them to their war locations for fear of provoking Khrushchev.

<sup>21</sup> Kenton White, 'British Defence Planning and Britain's NATO Commitment, 1979 - 1985' (PhD Thesis, University of Reading, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> 'Opportunism' was the description given to expected Soviet and WTO action, at short notice, to situations seen as beneficial to their cause. COS 1161/434B, Attachment, Report on the Intelligence Working Group - MC 161/79 and MC 255, 18th May 1979, 'NATO Planning and Strategy', para. 11, DEFE 70/722, TNA.

<sup>23</sup> 'A Report by the Military Committee to the Defence Planning Committee on Overall Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Area', 16 January 1968, para. 10, MC 14/3, NATO.

1(BR) Corps sector:<sup>24</sup> air attacks on all NATO members; and denial by the Soviet Navy of NATO maritime freedoms.<sup>25</sup> The Chiefs of Staff Committee acknowledged in 1980 that the improving Warsaw Pact navy and air forces were particularly, "... better equipped and more adventurous now than they have ever been; their capability representing a formidable instrument for the exploitation of air power."<sup>26</sup> The scale of the changes in equipment levels was illustrated by the intelligence evaluation of Warsaw Pact aircraft production, which every six months was supposed to exceed the entire front line strength of the RAF.<sup>27</sup> Improvements in tank development - for example the deployment of the T64 and T80<sup>28</sup> – and anti-aircraft defence – the new range of surface-to-air missiles (SAM) and anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) – meant that the forces deployed in Eastern Europe were not only quantitatively superior to NATO, but approaching qualitative parity as well.<sup>29</sup>

## Capability

Mearsheimer is vague on "capability." Are capability and credibility the same thing? There is a difference between credible deterrence and credible defence. One might deter, but not be capable of fighting a real war. This was certainly the situation with NATO's conventional defence from the adoption of Flexible Response in 1967. Deterrence requires the appearance of credibility,<sup>30</sup> whereas defence must consist of workable strategy, doctrine and tactics: credible defence must be sustainable through sufficient forces, equipment and supplies to stop the enemy achieving its objective. Lieutenant Colonel Professor Asa Clark characterised this as the difference between minimum deterrence and warfighting deterrence.<sup>31</sup> The assessment of the levels required for credibility are different depending on whether one is considering deterrence (minimum deterrence) alone or deterrence *and* defence (warfighting deterrence). Conventional defence will inevitably

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<sup>24</sup> 'The Counterstroke Future Battlefield Study', DOAE Note 663/202 (DOAE, 31 August 1983), DEFE 48/1077, TNA.

<sup>25</sup> Annex to MO 15/3, 'The Growth of Soviet Military Power', 16th January 1978, 'JIC Assessment of Soviet Threat', PREM 16/2259, TNA.

<sup>26</sup> COS 1146/434B, Attachment, Memorandum to the Chiefs of the Defence Staff from J Duxbury, 15th May 1980, 'NATO Planning and Strategy', 9, DEFE 70/722, TNA.

<sup>27</sup> MO 15/3, Annex, Chiefs of Staff report, The Growth of Soviet Military Power, 23rd March 1977, 'JIC Assessment of Soviet Threat', para. 4, PREM 16/2259, TNA.

<sup>28</sup> A development of the T-64, it was thought to be qualitatively very similar to the Chieftain and Abrams M1, Christopher F. Foss, *Jane's Main Battle Tanks* (London: Jane's Publishing, 1983), 78–79.

<sup>29</sup> Foss, *Jane's Main Battle Tanks*, 78.

<sup>30</sup> See the section on 'Rationality and Reason', Colin S. Gray, *Strategy and Defence Planning: Meeting the Challenge of Uncertainty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 52–57; See also Herman Kahn, *Thinking About the Unthinkable in the 1980s* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 37–38. Although Herman Kahn is writing about nuclear weapons, the intent and ability to use force is important in all aspects of deterrence.

<sup>31</sup> Asa A. Clark, 'Deterrence versus War Fighting', in *Conventional Deterrence* (Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books, 1984), 13–26.

require larger forces than minimum deterrence. Although never explicitly stated, NATO adopted a minimum conventional deterrence posture.

How does one measure capability in military terms? Analysis of conventional capability has usually been a simple exercise in accounting, comparing the numbers of personnel, ships, aeroplanes and tanks and drawing conclusions. Usually done on a "NATO versus Warsaw Pact" basis rather than nationally, the comparison gives no indication of the capabilities of the supporting infrastructure to prosecute any hypothetical war.<sup>32</sup> Professor Stephen Biddle offers an alternative which is an interesting mathematical analysis of what he terms "modern-system war" which diverges from the normal bean-counting exercise.<sup>33</sup> There is no measurement for military capability other than the employment of that organisation in war. Only then will its true capability be seen. Furthermore, this misunderstanding of military capability seriously undermines Mearsheimer's view of Realism and military capability as a measurement of a state's power in international relations.

It is clear that by using Mearsheimer's simplistic analysis of capability the Argentinians should have beaten the British forces in Falklands. Equally, as Iraq had shown itself a capable enemy against Iran, the Iraqi defences in the First Gulf War of 1991 should have been much tougher to crack by the coalition. Capability measurement was significantly off the mark.<sup>34</sup>

## Mobilisation

Mearsheimer dismissed the idea that the Warsaw Pact forces were capable of a standing start attack. The relative speeds of mobilisation by either side were cause for concern by Western planners, and this concern was recognised in their planning.<sup>35</sup> Many of the scenarios for simulation were referred to by the respective mobilisation times for the Warsaw Pact and NATO forces. The initial mobilisation day was referred to as M-day, and the first day of combat as D-day. There were several scenarios and settings which are used throughout the Government and NATO documentation, referred to in the style 5/3 or 31/24. The first number refers to the number of days the Warsaw Pact would have to mobilise and prepare, and the second number refers to how much

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<sup>32</sup> Chalmers and Unterseher, 'Is There a Tank Gap?: Comparing NATO and Warsaw Pact Tank Fleets', *International Security*; Lawrence Freedman, 'British Foreign Policy to 1985. II: Britain's Contribution to NATO', *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)* 54, no. 1 (1978): 30–47; Hugh Faringdon, *Confrontation: The Strategic Geography of NATO and the Warsaw Pact* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul PLC, 1986); Mearsheimer, 'Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe', *International Security*.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen D. Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle*, chap. 7.

<sup>35</sup> MO 15/3, The growth of Soviet military power, 23rd March 1977, 'JIC Assessment of Soviet Threat', para. 23, PREM 16/2259, TNA.

time NATO would have. There was a delay between the Warsaw Pact mobilising and NATO confirming mobilisation had occurred. The Government War Book states, "For planning purposes, it is assumed the most likely period of warning of hostilities would be 1-2 weeks ..." <sup>36</sup> but plans used by both the Government generally, and MoD in particular, used a longer period of warning thus enabling full mobilisation. <sup>37</sup>

Rather than selecting the option of a delayed mobilisation of NATO, Mearsheimer chooses a similar type of scenario that most NATO exercises are predicated on: the Warsaw Pact mobilisation is followed by NATO with little or no delay. This conveniently allows full mobilisation of all available forces. This is recognisably similar to the WINTEX <sup>38</sup> timescales and the 31/24 scenario where the Warsaw Pact mobilise for 31 days and NATO for 24. <sup>39</sup> This particular scenario provides NATO with the greatest opportunity for full mobilisation, and, more importantly, full deployment. <sup>40</sup> The drawback with this scenario is its failure to recognise the capability of the Soviets successfully to employ distraction methods to keep the Western countries guessing their intentions right up to the point of invasion. <sup>41</sup> Mearsheimer states, "...there is little doubt that NATO would detect a full-scale Pact mobilization almost immediately." <sup>42</sup> However, little or no warning came from the Western Intelligence Agencies before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, who concluded before the invasion that, "We have not seen indications that the Soviets are at the moment preparing ground forces for large-scale military intervention ..." <sup>43</sup> Additionally, a US Presidential Inquiry in to the war scare in 1983 showed that clear Warsaw Pact military preparations had been missed: "The Soviet air force standdown had been in effect for nearly a week before fully armed MIG-23 aircraft were noted on

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<sup>36</sup> 'Cabinet Office War Book, Volume 2', 1980, 1, CAB 175/31, TNA.

<sup>37</sup> Exercises used a build up over several months, with four weeks between NATO putting the armed forces on alert and the outbreak of war. 'WINTEX-CIMEX 83 Committees', 1983, CAB 130/1249, TNA; 'Exercise Square Leg; Armed Forces Command and Control for Home Defence', 1981, HO 322/950 - 951, TNA.

<sup>38</sup> WINTEX-CIMEX was a Command Post Exercise (CPX) intended to simulate NATO's response to a worsening international crisis. The title comprises 'Winter Exercise - Civil/Military Exercise' and were performed biennially. It did not involve the deployment of troops.

<sup>39</sup> For example, see E W Lawrence, P M Sutcliffe, and Squadron Leader R Miller, 'Maritime Operational Scenarios for Use in DOAE Studies' (DOAE, December 1977), DEFE 48/980, TNA; 'Crusader 80, Part A', n.d., FCO 46/2446, TNA; 'NATO Exercise LIONHEART 84', n.d., FCO 46/3059, TNA; 'WINTEX-CIMEX 83 Committees', CAB 130/1249, TNA.

<sup>40</sup> The clear drawbacks of basing policy creation on the 'best-case' scenario are discussed in Kenton White, 'Britain's Defence Fallacy and NATO', *British Army Review*, no. 167 (Summer 2016): 38-49.

<sup>41</sup> MISC 93(83) 1, WINTEX-CIMEX 83 Pre-exercise information, Annex A, JIC assessment, 'WINTEX-CIMEX 83 Committees', para. 4, CAB 130/1249, TNA.

<sup>42</sup> Mearsheimer, 'Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe', 39, *International Security*.

<sup>43</sup> National Intelligence Officer, 'Soviet Options in Afghanistan', Interagency Intelligence Memorandum (Director of Central Intelligence, 28 September 1979), 1.



air defense alert in East Germany."<sup>44</sup> Western intelligence seemed to have a problem identifying Soviet and Warsaw Pact mobilisations and preparations for war, and it is certainly possible that extensive mobilisation by the Warsaw Pact was feasible without NATO becoming aware enough to ask for the political decision to mobilise.

He also assumes, wrongly as the facts show, that NATO mobilisation would occur smoothly and quickly. Sufficient warning was crucial to enable timely mobilisation of the Armed Forces. According to the Chiefs of Staff in 1978, mobilisation of the reserves would take, "... between 15-20 days ..."<sup>45</sup> but this relied on several days' warning time prior to mobilisation. In contrast to this upbeat appraisal, the units required to react most speedily give a different timescale. The Commandos were supposed to be available to respond rapidly to a sudden crisis. The Government War Book recognised that, "With no warning time or prior implementation of Transition to War Measures it is clear that it would take up to a fortnight to bring Commando Forces to a full war footing."<sup>46</sup> NATO responses to aggression would be slow initially, allowing for mobilisation to take effect.

Herein lie the main problems: firstly, knowledge of how quickly troops can or cannot be deployed was essential to be able to develop plans: secondly, without stores and ammunition they could not fight; without logistic support they would not have ammunition. When so much of the planning involved the use of non-regular troops, timing and warning were crucial. According to the Government War Book, the plans to provide logistic support to British forces in continental Europe would take nearly four weeks, "... dependent on mobilisation and requisitioning powers ..."<sup>47</sup>

The timescales for mobilisation and deployment had not changed from those of the late 1970s, but the exercises to test them became more media focussed than before. For Exercise Lionheart in 1984 the 8,500 men of 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade, a regular formation, embarked at Marchwood military port, near Southampton, and arrived 36 hours later at Esbjerg, Jutland.<sup>48</sup> An exercise such as this was good publicity, showing the troops streaming onto and off RORO ferries at ports in England and Denmark.<sup>49</sup> No mention was made of either the lack of enemy interdiction, or the reliance on civilian

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<sup>44</sup> 'The Soviet "War Scare"' (President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, 15 February 1990), 8, George H W Bush Presidential Library.

<sup>45</sup> MO 15/3, Annex A, 16th January 1978, 'Defence against the Soviet Threat to the United Kingdom', n.d., 2, PREM 16/1563, TNA.

<sup>46</sup> TO.2119/431/80, Annex A, 'Ministry of Defence (MOD) War Book', n.d., 8, DEFE 24/1418, TNA.

<sup>47</sup> Measure 3.39, 'Government War Book, Volume 1' (Cabinet Office, 1985), CAB 175/53, TNA.

<sup>48</sup> David C. Isby and Charles Kamps Jr, *Armies of NATO's Central Front* (London: Jane's, 1985), 305.

<sup>49</sup> *Exercise Lionheart Days 1 - 10*, VHS, Exercise Lionheart 84 (Ministry of Defence, 1984); Drew Middleton, 'British Start War Games on the Continent', *The New York Times*, 18 September 1984, US edition.

equipment, especially dock facilities. This coverage also conveniently avoided mentioning the missing logistical troops, all reservists.

Transport for the mobilisation of some units might have proved troublesome, depending on the timing. According to Colonel Hellberg, in 1982, when the Commando Brigade was mobilised for the Falklands, "... British Rail were unable to reposition their rolling stock in time to meet any of the deadlines ..." because a weekend was approaching.<sup>50</sup> The Brigade had to rely instead on hastily arranged road transport to move its supplies. In a full mobilisation, the movement of ammunition by road and rail would be made easier by a relaxation of the laws preventing explosives being transported, but there would have been a hugely increased demand for that rolling stock.<sup>51</sup> Protection of that rolling stock, and the transport infrastructure generally, would pose many problems if war were to break out.

## Operations and Deployments

Basic assumptions made by Mearsheimer regarding force deployment, doctrine and tactics were flawed. NATO cannot deploy its "... 30 brigades along the front in the traditional 'two brigades up, one back' configuration."<sup>52</sup> In the Belgian sector, there were two small divisions deployed, and the same in the Dutch sector. The Dutch were reluctant to deploy troops forward in peacetime for financial reasons, so unless there was enough warning the mobilisation and deployment of these brigades remained in question.<sup>53</sup>

Mearsheimer's diagram representing the "Initial Distribution of NATO Divisions" shows the sectors as having all their divisions "up" in the forward defence line, and all equally capable.<sup>54</sup> Using the British sector as an example it is shown with four divisions in the battle-line. In reality, at least one of 1(BR) Corps' divisions is allocated to rear-area defence, some 100km behind the front line and predominantly filled by reservists (2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division).<sup>55</sup> This division was not equipped with the same level of anti-tank capability or protection available to the Armoured Divisions. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Armoured Division is held in reserve to counter-attack any penetration of the main line, in

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<sup>50</sup> Colonel IJ Hellberg, 'An Experience with the Commando Logistic Regiment Royal Marines', in *The Falklands Conflict Twenty Years on: Lessons for the Future*, Sandhurst Conference Series (Abingdon: Frank Cass, 2005), 110.

<sup>51</sup> To Authorise the Easing of Restrictions for the Conveyance of Military Explosives Through United Kingdom Ports, Measure 3.43, 'Government War Book, Volume 1', CAB 175/53, TNA.

<sup>52</sup> Mearsheimer, 'Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe', 27, *International Security*.

<sup>53</sup> 'NATO Short Term Initiatives' (MOD, 1978), DEFE 11/811, TNA, D/DS6/7/107/1, Briefing notes for Secretary of State for Defence, Visit to the UK by Netherlands Defence Minister, 26th January 1978.

<sup>54</sup> Mearsheimer, 'Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe', fig. 2, *International Security*.

<sup>55</sup> Isby and Kamps Jr, *Armies of NATO's Central Front*, 269.

accordance with the doctrine of the "Counterstroke". The Counterstroke, "... is a counter attack with the specific aim of destroying enemy forces which are on the move ..." <sup>56</sup>, an approach which relied upon mobile forces identifying and attacking weaknesses in the enemy advance, at short notice and using reserves specifically kept for this purpose. It relied upon mobility in a fluid battle, highly trained troops, good communications between the units involved, and flexible command. General Bagnall's development of the British Army doctrine in the 1970s and 1980s promoted this use of mobile defence and manoeuvre rather than the previous static, attritional defence. <sup>57</sup> General Sir Nigel Bagnall was commander 1<sup>st</sup> British Corps in Germany, and then of NATO Northern Army Group, and proposed the doctrine of the "Counterstroke" to thwart the mobile Soviet attacks. According to the DOAE, there would be, "... a greater emphasis on offensive action ..." <sup>58</sup> This "Counterstroke" doctrine was further refined by General Farndale who succeeded Bagnall as GOC Northern Army Group (NORTHAG).

This then leaves two divisions "up", less their forward battle groups and reconnaissance units, defending the 65km front in the British sector. These are the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armoured Divisions which were intended to fight the initial high intensity battles against the Warsaw Pact forces. These consisted of four brigades (sometimes three, depending on which White Paper was the latest).

Furthermore, many units permanently stationed in BAOR were kept under strength, and the cadre companies and units were to be brought up to strength during a crisis by the mobilisation of regular reservists using the Individual Reinforcement Plan. These personnel were for the reinforcement of units categorised as "A1", the highest state of preparedness. As such, the reinforcements were expected to be with their units no later than 48 hours after being called up. <sup>59</sup> The Individual Reinforcement Plan intended that those 'A1' categorised units would receive their reinforcements within 48 hours of mobilisation. As part of this process, newly released reservists, presumably more experienced with current training, would be prioritised for allocation to Germany. <sup>60</sup>

From the analysis of the wargames, and the timescales involved in mobilising and transporting the reinforcements to the continent, it was possible that the Armed Forces would face a similar problem

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<sup>56</sup> Annex C to Section 2, 'BATUS Training Report, 1981' (MoD, 1981), 2C-1, MoD.

<sup>57</sup> Colin McInnes, *Hot War, Cold War: The British Army's Way in Warfare, 1945-95* (London ; Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1996), 60-68; See also Wyn Rees, 'Preserving the Security of Europe', in *Britain and Defence, 1945 - 2000. A Policy Re-Evaluation* (Pearsons Education Limited, 2001), 60.

<sup>58</sup> 'The Counterstroke Future Battlefield Study', para. 2, DOAE Note 663/202, DEFE 48/1077, TNA.

<sup>59</sup> DP 14/81, Annex A, Appendix 5, Serial 3A4(2) EL49, NATO Force Goals 1981-1986 and Long Term Defence Programme, 6th October 1981, 'NATO Long Term Defence Planning', 1981, FCO 46/2586, TNA.

<sup>60</sup> DP 14/81, Appendix 5 to Annex A, NATO Force Goals 1981 - 1986 and Long Term Defence Programme, 6th October 1981, 'NATO Long Term Defence Planning', 5, FCO 46/2586, TNA.

to that of the BEF in 1940 during the retreat to Dunkirk:<sup>61</sup> had a breakthrough of the front line been created, the rear area troops would have been ill equipped to stop it.<sup>62</sup> In BAOR, some non-front-line units were equipped with Saxon armoured personnel carriers (the armour of which was supposed to be proof against only small calibre weapons), and yet others only had lorries. Rear-area troops, such as the 2nd Infantry Division, were poorly equipped to fight a mechanised, fast moving enemy, having reduced numbers of anti-armour and other heavy weapons, as well as limited mobility.

## Sustainability

Mearsheimer stated that NATO had, "... the wherewithal to deny the Soviets a quick victory and then to turn the conflict into a lengthy war of attrition ..."<sup>63</sup> In fact, the sustainability of NATO's conventional defences, certainly in Northern Army Group (NORTHAG), was inconsistent with his viewpoint. Critical to the sustainability of the defence of NATO were levels of war reserves, and their maintenance and availability. The situation at that time was summed up in a memorandum to the Minister of State for Defence:

"Among the most serious shortfalls are Army air defence and anti-tank missiles (Blowpipe, Rapier, Swingfire, Milan, Tow) and [RAF] air-to-air missiles (Sidewinder, Sparrow, MRAAM). [Based on the latest plans] stocks of Blowpipe by 1980 will be sufficient for less than 5 days at intensive rates and stocks of Rapier, only 2 days. [Similarly] 5 days' stocks of Milan will not be accumulated until 1987/88 and of Swingfire until 1984/85. Heavy ammunition is also in short supply, for example Chieftain APDS (3 days' stocks by 1980) [Armour Piercing Discarding Sabot], 155mm shells for FM70 [Artillery piece] (2½ days' in 1980) and 51mm Mortar ammunition (3½ days by 1980)."<sup>64</sup>

The Chiefs of Staff advised the Government in 1981 that, "... BAOR did not have the capability to sustain conventional warfare in the Central Region for more than four days ..."<sup>65</sup> The indications were that vital stock such as anti-tank missiles and tank rounds would be used up within three days.

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<sup>61</sup> Hugh Sebag-Montefiore, *Dunkirk: Fight to the Last Man* (London: Viking, 2006), 377–465.

<sup>62</sup> Sebag-Montefiore, *Dunkirk: Fight to the Last Man*, 132–33. Like the 2nd Infantry Division in BAOR, the rear-area troops during the fighting in Belgium and Northern France in 1940 were not equipped to the same levels as the 'fighting battalions'. They lacked artillery and anti-tank and anti-aircraft capability.

<sup>63</sup> Mearsheimer, 'Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe', 4, *International Security*.

<sup>64</sup> D/MIN/JG/7/11, Annex A, Memorandum to the Minister of State for Defence from the Private Secretary, 21st December 1977, Ministry of Defence, 'War Reserve Stocks', n.d., DEFE 13/1059, TNA.

<sup>65</sup> VCDS(P&L) 203, Draft of Memorandum to the Secretary of State for Defence from VCDS(P&L), 1981, Holding of War Reserves, 'NATO Logistics Policy General UK Logistics Assumptions', n.d., para. 4, DEFE 25/432, TNA.

Because of this lack of reserve stocks, in the event of a drawn out war in which nuclear weapons were not used, NATO could suffer defeat through attrition alone. The war reserves of ammunition, if not fuel, equipment, vehicles and personnel, would be used up within the first few days of a war. The concept of a longer war was discussed in NATO, but not given significant weight.<sup>66</sup> This lack of sustainability reached through all the Armed Services, and was threatened by additional cuts to the stocks. The Vice Chairman of the Defence Staff wrote in 1981;

“... BAOR does not have the capability to sustain conventional warfare for more than 4 days without resort to nuclear weapons. I am ... dismayed to see that ... rather than enhancing our logistic posture the Army are proposing a reduction in B vehicles and spares, in order to reach baseline targets. An even more serious prospect is that in order to reach second-line targets both the RN and Army would have to make swingeing cuts in stock levels of key items including Sidewinder missiles, the new tank gun round and rockets for the new multiple launch rocket system. I cannot believe this is right.”<sup>67</sup>

Any idea of a sustainable deterrent force in Europe was undermined by these significant deficiencies in ammunition stocks, logistical handling, resupply and reinforcement. The Chiefs of the Defence Staff wrote to the Secretary of State for Defence in the following terms:

“Present (and past) policies have thus dangerously lowered the nuclear threshold and represent (of necessity) a return to the ‘trip-wire philosophy’ of the early 1960s at a time when we no longer have strategic nuclear supremacy and possibly not even parity.”<sup>68</sup>

The Sterling value of the shortfall of war reserves for the UK was not insignificant. The Armed Forces showed nearly a £1000m deficit (in 1979 prices) in stockpile requirements in 1980<sup>69</sup> and following the defence review of 1981, if the finances were to be provided as planned, the three services would

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<sup>66</sup> DEF 062/24. Ministerial Guidance, 9th March 1979, ‘NATO Ministerial Guidance’, n.d., 2, FCO 46/1990, TNA.

<sup>67</sup> VCDS(P&L) 203, Memorandum on the State of Logistics, from VCDS(P&L) to COS, 20th March 1981, ‘NATO Logistics Policy General UK Logistics Assumptions’, para. 3, DEFE 25/432, TNA.

<sup>68</sup> The State of Logistics, Memo from CDS (draft) to the Secretary of State for Defence, April 1981, ‘NATO Logistics Policy General UK Logistics Assumptions’, DEFE 25/432, TNA.

<sup>69</sup> RN £308m, Army £392m, RAF £233m, in briefing draft from ACDS(P&L) to VCDS(P&L), 27th October 1981, ‘NATO Logistics Policy General UK Logistics Assumptions’, 1, DEFE 25/432, TNA.

take up to a decade to rectify the shortfall.<sup>70</sup> The projected cost alone of providing additional SWINGFIRE<sup>71</sup> war reserves was £201M (1978 value).

In 1981, General Bernard Rogers, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) wrote that,

“... Alliance capabilities today are clearly inadequate to meet the growing Warsaw Pact conventional threat. Instead of possessing the variety of capabilities which would truly translate into flexibility in response, NATO is left in a posture that in reality can only support a strategy more accurately labeled [sic] a ‘delayed tripwire.’ The amount of delay following a conventional Warsaw Pact attack before the tripwire would be activated and NATO would face resorting to the nuclear option would depend on such variables as length of warning time and the timeliness and appropriateness of decisions taken by political authorities.”<sup>72</sup>

Intelligence and analysis from NATO suggested the Warsaw Pact forces were configured for a war of at least several weeks.<sup>73</sup> The Warsaw Pact had forward based war stocks providing two weeks’ offensive support as well as ammunition and fuel stocks to fight a high intensity war for about two months.<sup>74</sup>

## Warsaw Pact Tactics

The idea that the Warsaw Pact would use “steamroller” tactics was criticised by Mearsheimer,<sup>75</sup> despite this being the approach anticipated by BAOR and NATO generally.<sup>76</sup> This is predicated on Mearsheimer’s incorrect understanding of Blitzkrieg, and Soviet and Warsaw Pact implementation of their method of attack. Mearhseimer states in the footnote of page 12 that there has been no, “... systematic study of this military strategy.”<sup>77</sup> Dr Ned Wilmott described Blitzkrieg as, “... a broad

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<sup>70</sup> PAO 5/81, Expansion of Defence Industrial Capacity in a Time of Tension, Note by the ACDS(P&L), 2nd February 1981, ‘NATO Logistics Policy General UK Logistics Assumptions’, para. 1, DEFE 25/432, TNA; Speaking note, War Reserves and Stock Levels, ACDS(P&L), 27th October 1981, ‘NATO Logistics Policy General UK Logistics Assumptions’, 1, DEFE 25/432, TNA.

<sup>71</sup> SWINGFIRE was the name for the wire guided anti-tank missile system developed in Britain during the 1960s.

<sup>72</sup> Bernard W. Rogers, ‘The Atlantic Alliance: Prescriptions for a Difficult Decade’, *Foreign Affairs* 60, no. 5 (1982): 1152.

<sup>73</sup> Julian Thompson, *The Lifeblood of War: Logistics in Armed Conflict* (London: Brassey’s, 1991), chap. 9.

<sup>74</sup> Ministry of Defence, ‘Statement on the Defence Estimates 1989’, Cmnd 675 (London: HMSO, 1989), 45.

<sup>75</sup> Mearsheimer, ‘Why the Soviets Can’t Win Quickly in Central Europe’, 34, *International Security*.

<sup>76</sup> The expected WTO invasion is described as an ‘echeloned pile driver’. Attachment, Memorandum from R Burns to Mr Figgis, 21st December 1978, ‘British Army of the Rhine’, 1978, para. 16, FCO 46/1735, TNA.

<sup>77</sup> Mearsheimer, ‘Why the Soviets Can’t Win Quickly in Central Europe’, 12, *International Security*.

frontal attack in order that the enemy front should be gripped, thereby ensuring that contact could not be broken ... With the enemy's attention held, the main blow(s) would fall on a relatively narrow frontage by concentrated armour and motorized forces."<sup>78</sup> A NATO report from 1984 states that the Warsaw Pact forces are, "... organised and equipped to take the offensive right from the beginning of a conflict."<sup>79</sup>

Mearsheimer states that the Soviets did not have, "... a neatly packaged doctrine for fighting a conventional war."<sup>80</sup> But that is precisely what had been developed from the success of "deep battle" in World War Two. Soviet doctrine had always espoused speed and mass, and the latest iteration of this was the Operational Manoeuvre Group (OMG).<sup>81</sup> Intended to break into the rear areas of NATO's defences, this was of deep concern to NATO commanders. The US Army Field Manual on Soviet Operations and Tactics proposed the purpose of a Soviet attack was, "... to carry the battle swiftly and violently into the enemy rear."<sup>82</sup> This effect would be amplified if NATO units fought following the policy of "Forward Defence".<sup>83</sup> The direct threat to the forces in Europe was summed up in the Battle Notes for 1(BR) Corps: "Soviet military doctrine requires that offensive operations are mounted by a superiority of tanks, infantry and artillery ... The primary aim of such operations will be the destruction of NATO's defensive capability ..."<sup>84</sup> The doctrine relied on an attack making a quick breakthrough of the "crust" of NATO's "Forward Defence". The Soviet frontage for a division in attack formation, "... is normally 15 to 25 kilometres wide. This width could vary considerably with the situation."<sup>85</sup> Mearsheimer repeats the idea that Soviet forces would not be able to concentrate to achieve a marked local numerical superiority, but that they would be echeloned. Here he misunderstands the idea of echelonning in the attack. The forces do not pile up one behind the other, but are fed through regularly, so that the defenders have no let up to reorganise or redeploy.<sup>86</sup> In the US Field Manual FM100-2-1, an instance is cited of a World War Two Soviet *Corps* attacking across a front only seven kilometres wide achieving a 17-to-1 superiority in

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<sup>78</sup> Ned Wilmott, *Strategy & Tactics of Land Warfare* (Secaucus, N.J.: Chartwell Books, 1979), 29.

<sup>79</sup> *NATO and the Warsaw Pact: Force Comparisons* (Brussels: NATO Information Service, 1984), para. 8.

<sup>80</sup> Mearsheimer, 'Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe', 12, *International Security*.

<sup>81</sup> Andrei Afanas'evich Kokoshin, *Soviet Strategic Thought, 1917-91*, CSIA Studies in International Security (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1998), 177-80.

<sup>82</sup> US Department of the Army, 'The Soviet Army: Operations and Tactics', Field Manual (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 16 July 1984), 2-10, FM 100-2-1.

<sup>83</sup> Colin McInnes, *NATO's Changing Strategic Agenda: The Conventional Defence of Central Europe* (London ; Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 97.

<sup>84</sup> '1(BR) Corps Battle Notes' (BAOR HQ, 1981), 2-4-1.

<sup>85</sup> US Department of the Army, 'The Soviet Army: Operations and Tactics', 5-18, Field Manual, FM 100-2-1.

<sup>86</sup> Mearsheimer, 'Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe', 29, *International Security*.

tanks<sup>87</sup> which effectively invalidates Mearsheimer's "Force-to-Space Ratio" argument.<sup>88</sup>

Furthermore, the US 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division breached the Iraqi defences in 1991 on a front of only 6 kilometres.<sup>89</sup> In contrast, in the main battle area of BAOR the British divisions which were "up" were expected to defend a frontage of 30-35 kilometres each. It would certainly have been feasible, had the Warsaw Pact forces wished to break through the British Corps front, to have achieved a greater than 3:1 superiority *at the point of attack*, normally assumed to be the minimum for success.

Furthermore, Mearsheimer's dismissal of armour heavy formations being detrimental to the Soviet ability to fight a mobile war is in direct contradiction to a CIA report on the uses of the Operational Manoeuvre Group. He comments that, "...Soviet divisions have become extremely heavy units ... Past a certain point ... there is an inverse relationship between the mass and velocity of an attacking force. As the size of the attacking force increases, the logistical problems as well as the command and control problems increase proportionately."<sup>90</sup> The CIA report describes a Front OMG as, "... an armor-heavy [sic] formation varying in size from corps (two-divisions) to army (three or four divisions)."<sup>91</sup> It would also be capable of, "... a wider range of tasks, and designed to operate farther from friendly forces."<sup>92</sup> The Soviet doctrine placed emphasis on flexibility and less dependence on a long logistical tail for the OMGs.

Mearsheimer continues to confuse blitzkrieg and the Soviet way of war in World War Two, claiming that the Soviet forces, "... instead of relying on deep strategic penetrations ... Soviet strategy called for wearing the German Army down by slowly pushing it back along a broad front."<sup>93</sup> The Red Army performed multiple penetration and encircling operations during the last years of the war, piercing the overstretched Axis defences and penetrating in depth. During the Cold War the Warsaw Pact planned to achieve local superiority to break through the NATO line in several places. This led Mearsheimer to another misunderstanding: that multipronged advances by the Warsaw Pact would be beneficial to NATO. Mearsheimer writes, "... it will, at best, end up pushing NATO back across a broad front ..."<sup>94</sup> but he does not take into account the "holding" battles or "grip" described by Wilmott above, along the whole front which would not allow the NATO forces to disengage and

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<sup>87</sup> US Department of the Army, 'The Soviet Army: Operations and Tactics', 2-7, Field Manual, FM 100-2-1.

<sup>88</sup> Mearsheimer, 'Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe', 26-28, *International Security*.

<sup>89</sup> Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle*, 139.

<sup>90</sup> Mearsheimer, 'Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe', 30, *International Security*.

<sup>91</sup> CIA, 'The Soviet Operational Maneuver Group', Intelligence Assessment (Directorate of Intelligence, Office of Soviet Analysis, February 1983), 1.

<sup>92</sup> CIA, 'The Soviet Operational Maneuver Group', Intelligence Assessment, 1.

<sup>93</sup> Mearsheimer, 'Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe', 13, *International Security*.

<sup>94</sup> Mearsheimer, 'Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe', 19, *International Security*.



retire in order. Probably the most concerning point made by Mearsheimer is the idea that some parts of the front would not need defending in any strength because of the, "... obstacles along the NORTHAG front ..." <sup>95</sup> such as rivers, forests and cities. This is remarkable reminiscent of the complacent thinking of 1940 and 1944 regarding the Ardennes.

Successful attacks – those made by the Warsaw Pact which break into and through the NATO line – would be reinforced from the subsequent echelons and OMGs, and there would not be a "broad front" retreat by NATO. A Warsaw Pact attack would aim to punch holes through the NATO front, allowing Operational Manoeuvre Groups (OMG) to attack the rear areas and encircle NATO forces. <sup>96</sup>

According to Professor Michael MccGwire,

"the strategy of defeating NATO by conventional means ... entailed the creation of 'operational maneuver [sic] groups' that would paralyze NATO's command and communication system by seizing its neuralgic points before its political leaders could make up their minds about resorting to nuclear weapons." <sup>97</sup>

This also had the effect of tightly intermingling the opposing forces so that tactical nuclear weapons could not be used for fear of hitting one's own troops.

General Bagnall experienced the effects of Warsaw Pact doctrine during a wargame with a Soviet trained Afghan officer, Colonel Wardak, in 1983. Wardak had escaped from Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion in 1979. General Bagnall invited him to a wargame at 1(BR) Corps HQ where Wardak employed the training he had received at the Voroshilov General Staff Academy. <sup>98</sup> By using an attack on the British sector, he fixed the British forces with frontal attacks and forced them to commit their reserves. On doing so, his Warsaw Pact forces broke through the Dutch and Belgian Corps on the flanks and surrounded 1(BR) and 1(GE) Corps. <sup>99</sup> Warsaw Pact victory was total.

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<sup>95</sup> Mearsheimer, 'Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe', 27, *International Security*.

<sup>96</sup> William Baxter, *Soviet Airland Battle Tactics* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1986), chap. 4; Gordon S. Barrass, *The Great Cold War: A Journey Through the Hall of Mirrors* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009), 270; Richard Holmes, *Nuclear Warriors: Soldiers, Combat, and Glasnost* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991), 129.

<sup>97</sup> Quoted in Vojtech Mastny, Sven Holtsmark, and Andreas Wenger, eds., *War Plans and Alliances in the Cold War: Threat Perceptions in the East and West*, CSS Studies in Security and International Relations (London ; New York: Routledge, 2006), 29.

<sup>98</sup> See 'Conduct of the Offensive Operation without the use of Nuclear Weapons' in Graham Hall Turbiville, jr, ed., *The Voroshilov Lectures: Materials from the Soviet General Staff Academy*, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press Publications, 1990), 107.

<sup>99</sup> Barrass, *The Great Cold War: A Journey Through the Hall of Mirrors*, 270.

Mearsheimer indicates that the Warsaw Pact overall had a 2.5:1 superiority in tanks and 2:1 in infantry.<sup>100</sup> He takes a very optimistic view of the ability of NATO to prepare for and repel an attack, but he takes a conversely pessimistic view of the Warsaw Pact's ability to prepare and launch that attack.<sup>101</sup> Mearsheimer does not present any nuances of the competing strategies, doctrine and tactics which might reveal a different outcome to his conclusion. He omits entirely the airborne capability and Operational Manoeuvre Group concept, both of which were important to Soviet and Warsaw Pact doctrine. These omissions undermine the validity of the argument he puts forward. The use of simple "bean-counts" to compare forces gives little meaning to the analysis. By invoking the concept of Blitzkrieg, Mearsheimer undermines his own conclusion. A brief comparison with "Fall Gelb"<sup>102</sup> is instructive. In 1940, the Allies considered their position strong, with greater forces and more capable weapons.<sup>103</sup> A simple evaluation of forces sizes was inadequate to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of the two sides. Britain and France could field 3,383 tanks, while Germany only 2,445, with a balance of infantry divisions.<sup>104</sup> Following Mearsheimer's approach to force comparisons, in 1940 the Allies should have easily held off the German attack. History shows that this did not happen, and the cause was not numbers, but a difference in the thinking and tactics employed.<sup>105</sup> The planning and doctrine proved the difference between successful attack and defence.

The problems associated with fighting through cities are mentioned, but it was Soviet doctrine to "hug" cities, rather than become involved in street-fighting. The idea was that by hugging the city (meaning infiltration of the outer suburbs but no serious attempt to occupy the entire city) NATO could not deploy nuclear weapons, and the defenders of the city would be effectively cut off from the battle by minimal forces.

## Conclusion

The credibility of NATO's conventional defence relied upon sufficient weapons, with adequate supplies of ammunition and enough well trained personnel to use them. Despite Bagnall's

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<sup>100</sup> Mearsheimer, 'Why the Soviets Can't Win Quickly in Central Europe', 8, *International Security*.

<sup>101</sup> For a contrasting view, see 'Offensiveness, Defensiveness, and War Aims' in Beatrice Heuser, 'Warsaw Pact Military Doctrines in the 1970s and 1980s: Findings in the East German Archives', *Comparative Strategy* 12 (1993): 447.

<sup>102</sup> 'Case Yellow', the code name for the German invasion of the Low Countries and France in 1940.

<sup>103</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *The Second World War* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975), 51–62.

<sup>104</sup> Gordon Corrigan, *Blood, Sweat and Arrogance: And the Myths of Churchill's War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006), 211.

<sup>105</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the reasons for the defeat of the Allies in 1940, see Corrigan, *Blood, Sweat and Arrogance: And the Myths of Churchill's War*; Sebag-Montefiore, *Dunkirk: Fight to the Last Man*; Taylor, *The Second World War*.

improvements in tactics and operations, as well as developments of more accurate and sophisticated "smart" weaponry, if those weapons ran out of ammunition before the enemy's did, or the trained soldiers, sailors and aircrew were not available to use them, then they were effectively useless. General Thompson wrote, "The consequences of dependence upon defective stockpiles do not bear thinking about, for it could spell nothing short of disaster."<sup>106</sup> The proliferation of ATGWs towards the end of the 1980s went some way to making up the numerical inferiority of NATO against the Warsaw Pact. There was still the problem that a large number of anti-tank weapons would have been deployed in the reinforcement phase, which would have meant a degradation of the army's ability to stop and hold a "bolt-from-the-blue" attack. The "holding force" had both insufficient numbers and low reserve stocks to fight any attack.

Mearsheimer's analysis seems to be based partly on the idea that belief and fact are the same thing, and partly on an ignorance of the true state of affairs – taken in by the western propaganda. The sufficiency of arms and men was not the real problem, but the "come as you are" approach extended to a severely limited supply of ammunition which meant attrition would only work one way.

NATO strategic documents make clear the need for sufficient war reserves to maintain credibility,<sup>107</sup> but continual "cheese-paring" was a constant problem within the MoD.<sup>108</sup> Once spending had been set, new cost cutting measures would leave the Service Chiefs with little or no room for manoeuvre, the contracts for major systems and spending already having been signed. The only place for cuts would therefore be in training, fuel and spares. The inadequacy of the stocks and supplies for warfighting, as well as the over-dependence on reservists, were displayed in both the Falklands and the First Gulf War. It was questionable if the Armed Forces were as capable as many wanted to believe.

The effects of the "victory" in the Cold War can be seen in changes to the defence policies of the NATO countries after 1991. The theory was that minimum deterrence had worked, and the notion, amongst others, that it did not matter what reserves of ammunition were available, and that reliance on reservists to fulfil front-line duties, were acceptable. Professor Colin S Gray warned against relying on theory, despite its apparent clarity. "Historical accuracy is far more important than

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<sup>106</sup> Major General Julian Thompson, *Lifblood of War: Logistics in Armed Conflict* (London: Brassey's, 1994), 335.

<sup>107</sup> 'Measures to Implement the Strategic Concept for the Defence of the NATO Area', 8 December 1969, para. 18, MC 48/3, NATO.

<sup>108</sup> John Nott, *Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Recollections of an Errant Politician* (London: Politico's, 2002), chap. 8.

clarity that misleads. The cost is too great in providing a distorting mis-characterization of strategy by theory that is neat at the price of inaccuracy.”<sup>109</sup>

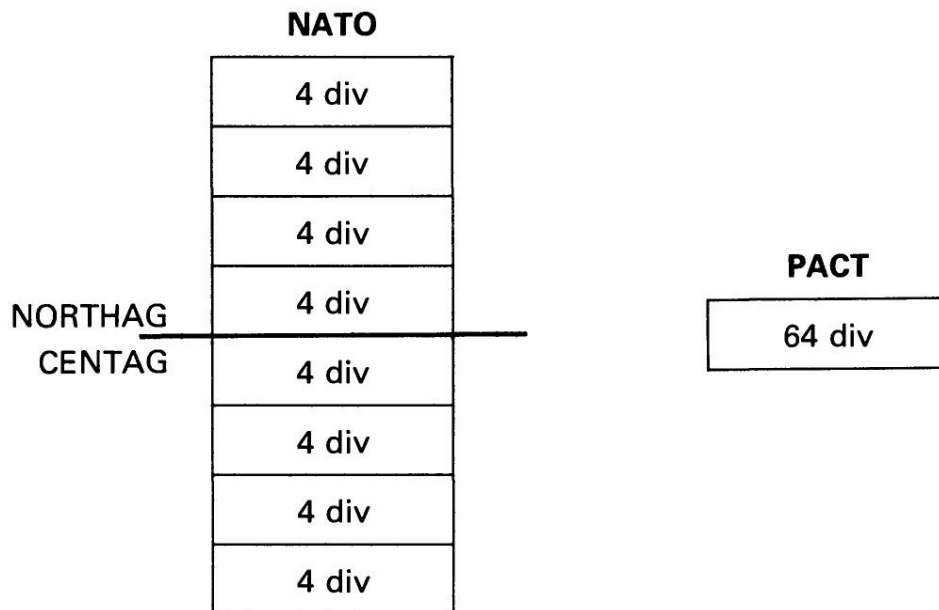


Figure 1 - Mearsheimer's distribution of divisions on the Central Front

<sup>109</sup> Colin S. Gray, *Strategy and Politics* (London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 14.

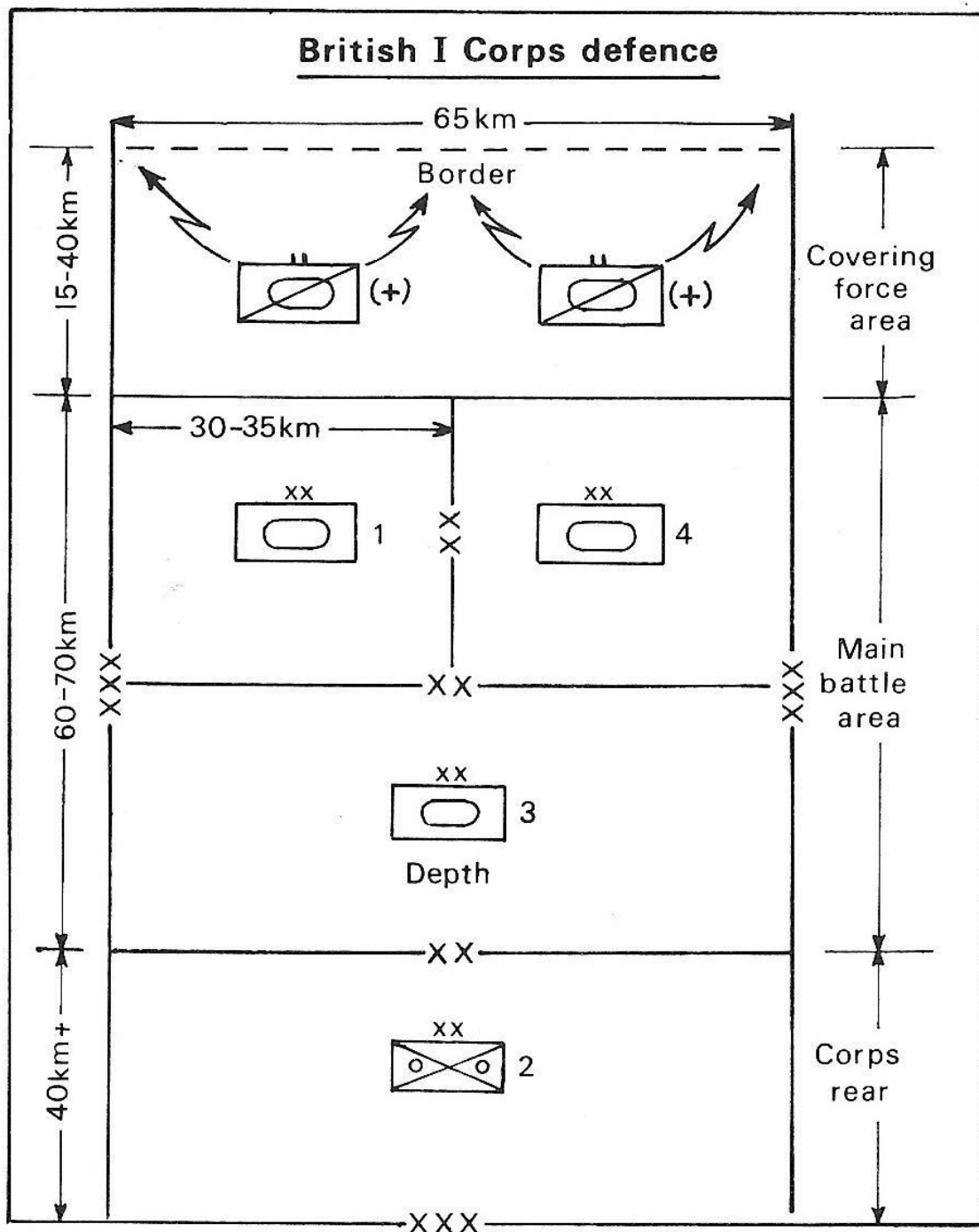


Figure 2 – Actual British Corps defence area, Isby, and Kamps, Armies of NATO's Central Front, p269