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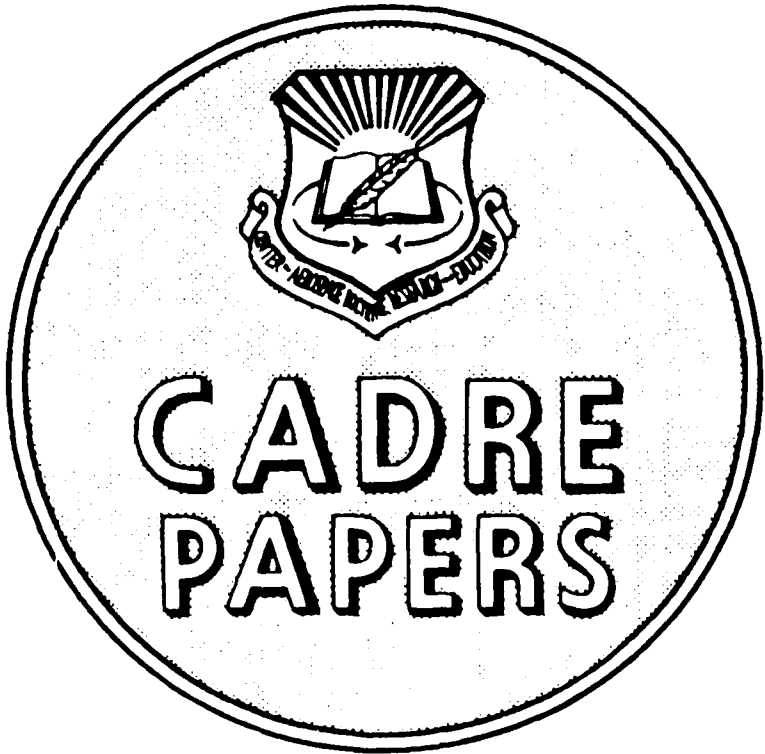
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A POSSIBLE FALLBACK  
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OPTION  
IN A  
EUROPEAN WAR  
by  
Dr Richard B. Remnek



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In recent years serious doubts have arisen about the ability of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to withstand a Warsaw Pact attack in Europe. Several factors underlie this concern: the numerical superiority and improving quality of the Soviet armed forces; the narrowing technological gap in US-USSR combat systems; new Soviet operational concepts designed to counter NATO's defense strategy; the Soviets' ability to achieve tactical surprise through deception and by selecting the time and place of attack; and strains within the NATO alliance that hinder our efforts to strengthen Western Europe's defenses.

A major part of these efforts centers on improving our ability to reinforce the key central region. For this purpose the United States has decided to preposition equipment for six divisions planned to be airlifted to Europe within ten days. (This is the POMCUS or Prepositioned Overseas Materiel Configured in Unit Sets program.) The Navy has acquired eight SL-7 fast container ships, each capable of transporting 56,000 measurement tons of equipment to Europe within five or six days. The crucial importance of these and other plans to enhance our strategic mobility has been stressed in a recent NATO study of military balance:

The Warsaw Pact can . . . mobilize its manpower more readily than NATO. It can also reinforce more quickly. . . . NATO cannot sustain an effective defence against these reinforced Warsaw Pact forces solely with in-place forces. Therefore, a successful defence is largely dependent upon the timely arrival of substantial reinforcements. . . . However, the problems would be considerable even if there were to be reasonable warning time. Rapid reinforcement is a very complex operation that demands the timely availability of numerous resources, particularly transport aircraft and shipping.<sup>1</sup>

However, it is unclear whether the early reaction to advance warning and close coordination among NATO allies needed for NATO's mobilization plans to work would take place during a crisis leading to war. To be sure, Soviet preparatory activities would probably be detected fairly early, but determining what they meant would be difficult, mainly because the Soviets would undoubtedly attempt to disguise their intentions. There is no reason to believe there would be any greater consensus among and within NATO countries about Soviet intentions than now exists. The Soviets would try to work through the European peace movement to exert pressure against mobilization. On both sides of the North Atlantic, there would be reluctance to mobilize, since diverting civilian aircraft, merchant ships, airfields, ports, railroads, and other facilities to military uses would disrupt local economies.

Moreover, should our allies be slow to declare mobilization, it would delay our own buildup as well. In part, that is because much of the support infrastructure necessary for the deployment and reinforcement of US forces belongs to our West European allies.

And even after mobilization had been declared, the required intricate timing and close coordination might be lacking. NATO's consultative mechanisms are cumbersome; its communication system could be overloaded, especially if key communications relay points were sabotaged during the crisis phase. In general, there is serious concern whether NATO is well suited to wartime crisis management.

Should mobilization be delayed and impeded, it would follow that much of the manpower and materiel scheduled for early air and sealift



to Europe might not be in place by D day. Indeed, they may not even have reached their forward-basing and staging areas before the latter were overrun or so damaged as to be essentially unusable.

Following the initiation of hostilities, the Soviets would try to interdict supplies and troop reinforcements to Europe. As the Soviets have begun recently to think that a war with NATO could be fought and won by conventional means alone, they have upgraded the antisea line of communication mission accordingly.<sup>2</sup> Should they interdict effectively the flow of supplies to Europe, their chances of achieving a breakthrough on the Central Front would also improve significantly. In such circumstances the National Command Authorities (NCA) could be pressed by field commanders to employ theater nuclear weapons. The NCA, however, might be reluctant to do so for fear of uncontrollable escalation to an intercontinental nuclear exchange. And even if the NCA were willing, it might be unable to employ theater nuclear weapons effectively. The Soviets have developed "operational maneuver groups" to counter NATO's strategy by exploiting penetrations of NATO's forward defense lines to disrupt its rear and destroy primary targets like nuclear storage facilities.<sup>3</sup> Should they succeed, they would destroy much of NATO's forward-based nuclear assets and at the same time mix so closely with NATO's forces in the rear as to make employment of remaining theater nuclear weapons difficult.

In a scenario where, partly as a result of delayed and disorganized mobilization, the military situation along the Central Front deteriorates beyond the point of stabilization, I believe there may

yet be a conventional alternative to vertical escalation. This alternative would be to launch a counteroffensive from NATO's southern region.

The idea of a counteroffensive is not new. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, in his annual report to the Congress for FY 1983, pointed to the peacetime deterrence value of a counteroffensive that would seek to exploit Soviet vulnerabilities in Eastern Europe.

A wartime strategy that confronts the enemy, were he to attack, with the risk of our counteroffensive against his vulnerable points strengthens deterrence and serves the defensive peacetime strategy. This does not mean that any allied offensive, using any means whatsoever and at any place other than the point attacked, would serve our purpose. Our counteroffensives should be directed at places where we can affect the outcome of the war. If it is to offset the enemy's attack, it should be launched against territory or assets that are of an importance to him comparable to the ones he is attacking.

Some important Soviet vulnerabilities have to do with the fact that the Soviet empire, unlike our alliance, is not a voluntary association of democratic nations. . . . Our plans for counteroffensive in war can take account of such vulnerabilities on the Soviet side.

Strategic planning for counteroffensive is not provocative. It is likely to increase the caution of the Soviet leaders in deciding on aggression, because they will understand that if they unleash a conventional war, they are placing a wide range of their assets--both military and political--at risk.<sup>4</sup>

To the limited extent the idea of a counteroffensive along these lines has been considered, it has usually been within the geographic context of NATO's central region.<sup>5</sup> The counteroffensive option I am proposing here, however, takes the collapse of the Central Front as its point of departure. This does not mean I believe the Central Front would collapse. Rather I am simply exploring courses of action that might be available in the event the Soviets prove stronger than anticipated.

My aim here is to stimulate discussion about alternative strategies in a European war by considering one of them, a fallback counter-offensive option that has two variations. This first variation could be to stage the counteroffensive from southern France. The counteroffensive could proceed directly north through the Rhone Valley or flank main Soviet forces by swinging west and then north, around the Massif Central and through Toulouse and Limoges, or in both directions simultaneously in an envelopment maneuver. The counteroffensive would then move east to the West/East German border, thereby restoring most of the status quo ante. (Should the Soviets overrun West Berlin, it would be extraordinarily difficult to retake it short of liberating East Germany.)

The second variation of the counteroffensive option could be staged from northern Italy and move east through the Ljubljana gap and then north toward the Baltic. It would advance by the shortest route and path of least resistance through the "weakest links" in the Warsaw Pact--Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. By interdicting Soviet lines of communication, it would flank a Soviet thrust into Western Europe. Its objective would be not simply to reverse a deteriorating military situation but also to liberate Eastern and thereby Western Europe as well.

My assumption is that the Soviets may be able to check either West or East European counteroffensive operations, but they could not deal with both simultaneously, especially after the (probably major) losses they would have suffered during the first week of the war. And should the Soviets commit themselves to countering one variant, it

would make available the other one. In short, we would take whichever avenue of advance the Soviets would leave us.

Furthermore, their unfavorable geographic position would induce them to make the first move. It is roughly 150 miles between Marseilles and Genoa, the two principal ports for offloading equipment and supplies for West and East European counteroffensive operations, respectively. In contrast, it is a little less than 500 miles between Lyon, a likely jumping off point for a Soviet assault on remaining NATO forces in southern France, and Bratislava on the Danube, which could serve well as a line of defense against a US thrust into Eastern Europe.

Besides the greater distances involved, Soviet movements of men and materiel across northern continental Europe would likely be hindered by NATO air interdiction and hit-and-run attacks by NATO military and paramilitary forces still holding out behind enemy lines. A US commander on the other hand would be able, with relative ease, to swing forces over a far shorter distance from one staging zone to the other, especially since NATO would probably control the air above the staging areas. Also, the transfer of men and materiel between staging areas would be assisted by hundreds, if not thousands, of vessels of all types and sizes that would have put into the numerous French and Italian Mediterranean ports during the prehostilities crisis period. Because it would be far easier for the United States than the Soviet commander to switch forces from one European "theater" to another, we could keep the Soviets guessing about the direction of our counter-offensive. Because of their unfavorable situation, the Soviets would

probably not be able to wait and react to our move; they would probably have to commit themselves first.

It is difficult to predict in advance which variant the Soviets would first try to counter. To a major extent their response would be based on their strategic war objectives and priorities, but these would undoubtedly be unclear, to us at least, particularly if the Soviets were able to disguise their intentions to achieve tactical surprise at the outset of war.

In the absence of certainty about Soviet strategic priorities, one can nevertheless hypothesize that the Soviets would probably choose to commit forces to the defense of Eastern Europe. This is not because they think it would be easier for us militarily to carry out an East European rather than a West European counteroffensive. It isn't. An East European operation would have to cross some very difficult mountainous terrain in Yugoslavia and have much longer logistical supply lines, which could be attacked along both flanks.

Rather, they would tend to recognize they have more to lose in Eastern Europe than gain in Western Europe, for the stakes, and hence the dangers, are far greater in their own backyard. A US victory in Eastern Europe means the liberation of both East and Western Europe. That is because an exchange of occupied territory would be politically unacceptable for the United States, for unlike the first Sinai disengagement agreement after the October 1973 war, the bargaining would not be over miles of sand but the fate of millions of human lives with strong kindred ties to the West. The Soviets would also anticipate that anti-Soviet elements in East Europe would be mobilized

to assist the allied counteroffensive operation in numerous and potentially important ways. Orchestrating that support would require clandestine preparatory organizational activities well before the counteroffensive started. Moreover, it would take time to overcome the demoralization of pro-Western elements in East Europe that would have set in after Soviet victories along the Central Front. Major East European support would probably follow, not precede, initial successes of a counteroffensive, and only then if the objective of that operation were clearly seen to be the liberation of Eastern Europe. Should the East Europeans distrust US intentions and believe we were willing to trade East for West European territory, they would probably not even cooperate with US military authorities in "liberated" areas, much less support our forward advance.

An East European counteroffensive would be a response proportional, in an international legal sense, to a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. However, since an East European operation would not restore the status quo ante, it would be far more destabilizing and hence less desirable an option than a West European campaign to retake lost territory. Faced with the loss of their East European buffer, the Soviets would be more likely to employ theater nuclear weapons and thus escalate the war perhaps out of control. Given these inherent dangers, an East European counteroffensive should be selected only when the alternatives--capitulation or escalation--seem worse.

However, the feasibility of the preferred West European counter-offensive may well rest on the military credibility of the East European variant. Without the United States' demonstrating the

capability and willingness to exercise that option, the Soviets would have little incentive to withhold forces to protect their deep rear. And this in turn might doom any attempt to regroup and counterattack against the main Soviet combat forces in Western Europe. Our willingness to undertake an East European operation could be demonstrated convincingly only in practice. Inserting at the outset of hostilities the large numbers of US Special Forces and covert operatives needed to orchestrate support for the counteroffensive among East Europeans might serve as an early indicator of our intent to initiate the operation if necessary. The military capability to perform this operation can be demonstrated in peacetime.

The feasibility of this fallback counteroffensive option with the forces currently available can be determined reliably only through extensive war gaming and campaign analysis at a level of detail and classification beyond the scope of this article. My objective here is simply to identify and briefly consider some obvious problems connected with the operation. The key issues are the availability of men and equipment; the security of the sea lines of communication, receiving ports, and staging areas; the physical and political problems connected with crossing Yugoslavia; and, as the forces advance, the long logistic lines and their vulnerability to flanking attack.

#### The Availability of Men and Materiel

No reliable prediction is possible about what the military balance of remaining NATO and Warsaw Pact forces would be after a successful Soviet offensive in the central region. But planning estimates can be

made in peacetime to determine what ratios of United States to Soviet forces and supplies would be needed to provide some confidence that a counteroffensive plan would work. And these ratios could then be compared with real-time intelligence information to determine whether the counteroffensive had a reasonable chance of success.

There is no way a priori to know whether enough men and materiel would be available when needed. However, in a scenario where mobilization had been delayed and, partly as a result, the Soviets broke through early (say on or about D+7), large numbers of US combat forces and materiel should still be in the pipeline. Some, if not most, of the six divisions scheduled for early reinforcement of the central region might be available, as might mobilized reservists, any withheld forward-based strategic reserves, and evacuated frontline troops. United States' troops could be augmented by Italian, French, Spanish, and if NATO's southeastern flank were reasonably quiet, Greek and Turkish forces as well. Even with prepositioning of equipment in Europe and the enhanced sealift capability of eight SL-7 fast container ships, the bulk of the heavy equipment would still be shipped to Europe by slower vessels, which might not have reached their destination by D+15. Thus, large numbers of tanks, armored personnel carriers, and other heavy equipment, which could be used in a sustained operation requiring high mobility, could be available for the counteroffensive. This might not be sufficient to accomplish the mission unless a considerable amount of equipment prepositioned in the central region could also be saved and deployed.



## The Security of Sea Lines of Communication

Of all the issues related to the feasibility of the counter-offensive operation, this one appears to be the least problematic. The sea lines of communication to the Mediterranean ports should be safer than those extending directly to the Channel ports. Routing transatlantic convoys farther south to the Mediterranean would reduce the effectiveness of a Soviet air interdiction campaign directed from the north.

The potential Soviet submarine threat to our shipping lanes in the Atlantic does not appear to be serious. The Soviets recognize that the more cost-effective way of performing the anti-SLOC mission would be by destroying ports or mining straits, not by sinking cargo vessels on the open ocean. The Strait of Gibraltar would be difficult to mine because of its width, depth, and fast currents. Moreover, any Soviet attempt to mine it would be ineffective because of Western military control of the area. A Soviet surface ship or submarine could be detected and destroyed before it could lay many mines. And the few mines that might be laid could be cleared before safe passage through the Strait would be required.

The Soviet threat in the constricted waters of the western Mediterranean would be far more serious. There the Soviets' primary target would be NATO naval forces, especially the US Sixth Fleet carriers; ports and other shore facilities would be a secondary target and cargo shipping a tertiary one.

The Soviet Mediterranean Squadron consists on average of 45 ships, roughly 12 of which are submarines.<sup>6</sup> During a local crisis such as the

October 1973 war, the Soviets doubled their routine peacetime presence. In a war crisis that focused on central Europe, however, the Soviets would probably commit their Northern Fleet attack submarines, which normally service the Mediterranean Squadron, to perform a higher priority mission--protecting their own SSBNs withheld as a strategic reserve in the Norwegian and Barents seas. While the Soviets would be unlikely to augment their submarine force in the Mediterranean, neither would they be likely to draw it down if NATO carrier groups were deployed there. The Soviet Mediterranean Squadron normally has enough combatants to form three anticarrier warfare (ACW) groups,\* enough to target two US and one French carrier battle groups.<sup>7</sup>

In the western Mediterranean, Soviet submarines probably pose the main threat to Western naval forces. The noise generated by the great volume of peacetime seaborne traffic there undoubtedly hinders our ability to detect Soviet submarines. Our ability to listen to (noisy) Soviet submarines would improve significantly if the thousands of fishing vessels and smaller craft were called to port in a crisis leading to war.

The Soviet air threat is probably less problematic since the western Mediterranean is beyond the range of unrefueled Backfires operating from Crimean airfields. To be sure, the USSR might deploy its Backfires to Libyan airfields before hostilities if it believed it had a reasonable chance of disabling our carriers thereby. But such

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\*A Soviet ACW group usually includes one SSM-equipped major surface combatant, a SAM-equipped surface combatant, an SSM-equipped submarine, and one or more attack submarines.

forward deployment of Backfires during the prehostilities period would be a risky exercise in crisis management.

Soviet surface combatants pose even less of a threat provided they are not allowed during the crisis period to interposition themselves with US warships, as they did during the October 1973 Middle East war. Should Soviet combatants be located beyond the SSM range of US ships at the outset of war, they would be highly vulnerable to US land- and sea-based attack aircraft.

In general the Soviets would seem to pose a serious but manageable threat to our naval forces in the Mediterranean. With our naval and land-based air forces, we should be able to neutralize the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron in time to protect the SLOC through the western Mediterranean.

#### The Security of Ports and Staging Areas

There is a reasonable prospect that the ports and staging areas would be secure long enough to initiate a counteroffensive. The underlying assumption here is that the Soviets do not possess the resources or capabilities to break through on central and southern regions simultaneously. With their forces concentrated along the Central Front during the initial phase of the war, a simultaneous sweep in the southern region to the Mediterranean ports would be beyond their capability. In peacetime, there are four Soviet and six Hungarian divisions, equipped with over 2,300 tanks and 1,400 artillery pieces, stationed in Hungary.<sup>8</sup> In a crisis, these divisions could be reinforced from the Kiev Military District. This augmented force

would then be available for a push against northern Italy. Given their questionable reliability, however, it seems unlikely that the Hungarian divisions would be used in front-line combat operations. The reinforced Soviet combat forces even with the Hungarian divisions are a little more than 200,000-men strong. They would probably be supported by most of the 2,300 Warsaw Pact aircraft estimated to be available in the region. These Warsaw Pact forces would face at minimum 8 Italian divisions, or some 128,000 men, equipped with 1,250 tanks and 1,550 artillery and mortar pieces, and with 3,127 tube-launched, optically-tracked, wire-guided and Milan antitank-guided weapon systems on order. These ground forces would be supported by most of the 990 NATO aircraft committed to the Southern region's defense. Although the Warsaw Pact would have 50 percent more troops, more than three times as many tanks, and more than twice as many aircraft available, it might not be sufficient to offset the Italians' defensive advantage.

Furthermore, the Soviets would have to push through difficult mountain passes in Yugoslavia, which could be blocked by the Yugoslav Army. Even in the worst and highly unlikely case that the Yugoslavs permitted the Soviets to pass through to the Italian border prior to hostilities, a Soviet advance into northern Italy would be impeded by numerous river obstacles. And if the Soviets succeeded in moving up the Po Valley, they would be entering a cul-de-sac, which could be surrounded by Italian forces defending mountainous terrains along the Apennine ridge and Dolomites. Even in the worst case the Italians

should be able to hold the high ground above their Mediterranean ports and thereby defend the staging area needed for a counteroffensive.

One wonders, moreover, whether the Soviets would be willing to bear undoubtedly heavy combat losses for initial objectives limited to taking out specific targets such as NATO airfields and any theater nuclear assets. These could be targeted perhaps just as effectively by saboteurs or long-range SS-12 Scaleboard or follow-on SS-22 surface-to-surface missiles, whose employment would have the diplomatic bonus of not violating Swiss, Austrian, or Yugoslav airspace.

While the Soviets probably could not overrun the Mediterranean ports and staging areas in time, they might be able to saturate them with enough missiles equipped with chemical weapons to force cancellation of the operation. It is worth noting that the Italian ports are no further from East Germany than are the French channel ports and are well within the range of SS-12 and SS-22 missiles. However, the Soviets are estimated to have 170 of these missiles.<sup>9</sup> And should they have other targeting priorities when the battle in the central region was in doubt, there may be too few of these missiles left afterward to get the job done.

Finally, there seems to be a reasonable chance that NATO forces would be able to control the air above the staging areas with land-based aircraft supported by sea-based fighter aircraft from US and French carriers. Should the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron be eliminated early on, the Sixth Fleet carriers might then move into the western Mediterranean. When the Central Front collapsed, the carriers could be stationed where their aircraft could cover the

ports and staging areas as well as possible withdrawal south of surviving NATO forces. Our ability to maintain air superiority would also be enhanced through aircraft attrition. After the first week of the war, the number of Soviet long-range Su-24 Fencer A and MiG-27 Flogger D/J ground-attack aircraft would probably have been significantly reduced. Destruction of forward airfields, including any of those the Soviets may have captured, would make it difficult for them to employ their older and shorter range tactical aircraft in either a ground-attack role or as fighter escort for bombers. Also, if our air defense system, including C<sup>3</sup> and AWACS, remained intact in the region, we should have the advantage when performing the easier air intercept mission with the support of surface-to-air missiles over our own territory. Therefore, we should be able to hold and defend the ports and staging areas long enough to launch the counteroffensive. But once it started, the severe military challenge would come.

#### Crossing Yugoslavia

The winding, narrow roads of the Ljubljana gap make passage difficult for any army. Should the Soviets already possess that territory, say as a result of having penetrated northern Italy, it would be doubly difficult to retake it. At a minimum this would require tactical surprise, which might be achieved by timing airborne operations to coincide with the start of the counteroffensive. There are two obvious problems connected with an airborne attack: First, would there be enough airborne forces available after the first week of war to seize the Yugoslav passes? Second, if their drops were

successful, could the airborne forces hold long enough for link up with main force elements? I believe the first problem would be the more serious of the two.

It is unlikely there would be any US airborne forces that had not been committed to battle within the first week of war. And should any paratroops survive a Soviet breakthrough, it would be difficult in the extreme to reconstitute them for another airborne operation. Of the forces currently available, the reserve airborne forces would probably come from Italy's airborne brigade and perhaps France's airborne division. If they succeeded in taking the passes, they should be able to hold them until ground forces arrived. The lead units could be Italian forces that had earlier taken up defensive positions in the Trentino-Alto Adige region, only 120 miles from Yugoslavia's Julian Alps. (Should the Po Valley be overrun, the Italians could fall back to defensive positions north and south of the Soviets and then proceed to counterattack from both directions at the start of the counter-offensive.)

But what might happen if the Soviets had not breached the Ljubljana gap and Yugoslavia decided to defend it with front-line troops? If the Yugoslavs, perhaps "fraternally" assisted by the Soviets, had dug in, it would seem to be extraordinarily difficult to dislodge them. One can only hope, perhaps wishfully, that with the fate of both East and West Europe in the balance, Yugoslavia would be willing to cooperate with a US-led counteroffensive.

It is in Yugoslavia, furthermore, that the war could well turn nuclear. Soviet employment of tactical nuclear weapons to attempt to

check our advance would be far more effective in the Yugoslav mountain passes, where our forces would be concentrated, than in the Hungarian plain, where our troops could spread out. The Soviets would also try everything they could, perhaps including the use of nuclear weapons, to keep us from entering Hungary and unleashing thereby the force of anti-Soviet nationalism in Eastern Europe.

However, while the dangers of escalation to nuclear war may be great as US forces push through Yugoslavia, so too would the opportunity be for a peaceful resolution of the war. This is not simply because of the heightened tensions that would surround our movement into Yugoslavia. It is also because both sides would be reluctant to proceed further--the Soviets toward initiating nuclear war and the United States toward entering and hence liberating Eastern Europe, a militarily demanding and politically provocative mission whose incalculable consequences could well push the war out of control. Yugoslavia might be the interlude that would give both sides reason to pause and perhaps end the war on mutually agreeable terms.

#### Long Logistic Lines and Their Vulnerability to Soviet Counterattack

Should the counteroffensive continue into Eastern Europe, the long logistic supply lines would become a problem, though how serious it would be is unclear. The narrow roads through Yugoslavia could become a major bottleneck that would slow the advance. Ammunition and spare parts in particular might then be in short supply.

The longer the logistic lines became, the more vulnerable they would be to a Soviet counterattack along their flanks. However, the



Soviets would have problems in mounting a counteroffensive. It would certainly be difficult for them to do so from the west, since that would draw down on their main forces in Western Europe, perhaps enough to allow us to open a second front in France. Also, Soviet troop movements along north European roads would be harassed by a NATO air interdiction campaign. The Soviets' air interdiction capability from the north might be far more constrained, however. Were Switzerland and Austria to declare neutrality at the outset of the war, the USSR would probably prefer that they continue to remain neutral with a US counteroffensive under way. Were Moscow to believe that violating their airspace would give them a pretext to support NATO, it might opt to respect that airspace. With the shorter-range strike aircraft they would probably have left, they would almost be unable to fly around the 420-mile-wide zone of Swiss and Austrian territory that would shield the movement of US troops and equipment across Italy through Yugoslavia and into Hungary.

A flank attack with less capable reserve forces from the east poses other difficulties for the Soviets. Given the terrain features, the Soviets would probably counterattack across the Hungarian plain. Their advance could be resisted by the local population supported by US Special Forces. After US forces had entered Hungarian territory, local support for the counteroffensive would probably be at its peak.

Should the Soviets use airfields and staging areas in the Western Ukraine for this counterattack, we could wage unconventional warfare there to hamper their operations.\*

To be sure, expanding the war to Soviet territory and energizing centrifugal ethnic strains in the process would raise the stakes considerably and push the Soviets toward vertical escalation of the war. Nevertheless, were the United States to demonstrate beforehand its capability to infiltrate and organize one of the most nationalistic regions of the USSR (e.g., by organizing a Ukrainian detachment within the Special Forces), it might deter the Soviets from mounting a counterattack from their soil. Therefore, it is not as easy as it first might seem for the Soviets to attack the flanks of an East European counteroffensive.

The discussion thus far has focused on problems connected with an East European counteroffensive. This is not to suggest that the preferred West European counteroffensive thrust is problem-free. Although the problems are fewer and similar (e.g., securing the SLOCs and staging areas), there is one problem that is unique and deserves attention. And that concerns the French role. French military doctrine calls for a nuclear countervalue riposte to a Soviet invasion of French soil. The French Army is not configured for a prolonged

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\*It is worth noting that the Western Ukraine was officially incorporated into the USSR only in 1945. In the interwar period the Western Ukraine was divided between Poland and Czechoslovakia. It has always had strong ties with the West through the Uniate Church. Since 1945, the region has been a major seedbed of dissent nationalism. As that part of the Soviet Union most likely to welcome US liberation of Eastern Europe, it would be a fertile ground for covert operations deep in the enemy's rear.

conventional war but for brief offensive operations employing tactical nuclear weapons.<sup>10</sup> For the counteroffensive to work, the French would have to forgo their doctrine, employ their forces in a defensive role for which they are ill-prepared, and permit their territory to be used as the principal battleground of choice. This presupposes a degree of cooperation well beyond that which now exists as a result of recent French moves toward closer coordination with other NATO countries. One can only hope that at the crucial moment the French would desist from unilateral nuclear escalation and subordinate their plans to ours.

Alternatively, the Soviets might promise not to attack France in exchange for French neutrality. That transaction would leave us with only the Eastern Europe option and would also facilitate the release of Soviet forces to counter it. However, such a bargain would be far more likely to be struck in a limited war that involved only issues in which France had no interest than in an all-out war that threatened the viability of the West European economic system.

One final issue that pertains to both counteroffensive options concerns the allocation of scarce resources. To remedy any deficiencies in our ability to carry out a fallback counteroffensive it might be necessary to divert resources for this purpose from strengthening our defenses in the central region. This would be worse than "robbing Peter to pay Paul," since it would make greater the need for a fallback plan.

However, in a scenario where mobilization was delayed, large numbers of men and amounts of materiel should be available, though whether they would be sufficient would depend on the correlation of

remaining military forces at the time. Our needs are likely to be specific (e.g., expanding US Special Forces for multiple missions). Some improvements in our ability to undertake a fallback counter-offensive might also strengthen our overall defenses (e.g., developing an air assault and airborne reserve force). In the final analysis, developing the capability for a fallback option is somewhat like purchasing life insurance. For both there are opportunity costs to be paid in anticipation of future need.

It is worth adding that acquiring the capability to undertake a counteroffensive option is not simply a military matter. Political factors are equally important. Yugoslavia and France, for example, would play pivotal roles in determining the success or failure of the counteroffensive. Hence, effective diplomacy in support of specific military objectives would be essential.

This discussion suggests that a fallback counteroffensive could become a realistic option should the need arise in a European war. More detailed analysis and planning, changes in our force structure, and successful joint exercises would be needed to gain confidence that such an option could be successful. However, what is perhaps more important for the purpose of peacetime deterrence is that even with our current capabilities, there is no certainty that the counter-offensive would fail. And that should create uncertainty in the Soviets' mind about our response to the collapse of NATO's Central Front. It would certainly heighten their caution about the dangers of starting a war if they believed that even were they able to place at risk our valued assets in Western Europe, we might still be able to

threaten their control of their vital East European buffer. Given their acute sensitivity to their strategic vulnerabilities in Eastern Europe, it would not take very much convincing for the Soviets to take an East European counteroffensive option seriously. If they were to do so, it would also induce them to reallocate forces from offensive to defensive purposes and to improve the flexibility and adaptability of their forces to deal with unexpected military responses--areas in which the Soviets are currently deficient. By exploiting Soviet political and military vulnerabilities, and East European counter-offensive option can thus enhance our overall deterrence posture.

The policy of Russia is changeless. . . . Its methods, its tactics, its maneuvers may change, but the polar star of its policy--world domination--is a fixed star.

Karl Marx, 1867

I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest.

Winston Churchill, London.  
October 1, 1939

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## NOTES

1. "War or Peace: The Official NATO Study of the East-West Military Balance," in Current News (Special Edition), 13 July 1982, 10-11.

2. For evidence that the Soviets have introduced within the past two years an independent option for a protracted conventional coalition war, see James McConnell, "The Soviet Anti-SLOC Mission in the Context of Soviet Doctrine," Center for Naval Analyses Memorandum 82-0700 (12 May 1982). Previously, the Soviet contemplated only a conventional phase, approximately one month in duration, of a war that would inevitably escalate to the nuclear level.

3. For a full discussion of the operational concepts underlying these units, see C. J. Donnelly, "The Soviet Operational Manoeuvre Group--A New Challenge for NATO," International Defense Review (No. 9, 1982), 1177-86.

4. US Department of Defense, Annual Report to the Congress by Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger, 8 February 1982 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1982), I-16.

5. See, for example, Sir John Winthrop Hackett, The Third World War: The Untold Story (New York: Macmillan, 1982), and Samuel P. Huntington, "The Renewal of Strategy" in The Strategic Imperative, edited by Samuel P. Huntington (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger, 1982), 21-32.

6. United States Navy Department, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Understanding Soviet Naval Developments, third edition (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1978), 13.

7. See Charles C. Petersen, "Trends in Soviet Naval Operations," in Soviet Naval Diplomacy, edited by Bradford Dismukes and James M. McConnell (New York: Pergamon, 1979), 49-50.

8. See War or Peace: The Official NATO Study of the East-West Military Balance, 18; I.I.S.S., The Military Balance 1982-83, 22.

9. See Air Power, December 1982, 145.

10. See Diego Ruiz Palmer, "French Military Doctrine for Theater Warfare," Ground Defence International, (December 1980), 10-12.

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