

# Melting Down the Pupils

Use of statistics on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office wall chart

'Arms control and disarmament' is the heading on a wall chart which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office produced to coincide with the United Nations Special Session on Disarmament. The arguments used on it, however, bear an uncanny resemblance to those the

Government usually uses to try to justify its increases in expenditure on nuclear weapons.

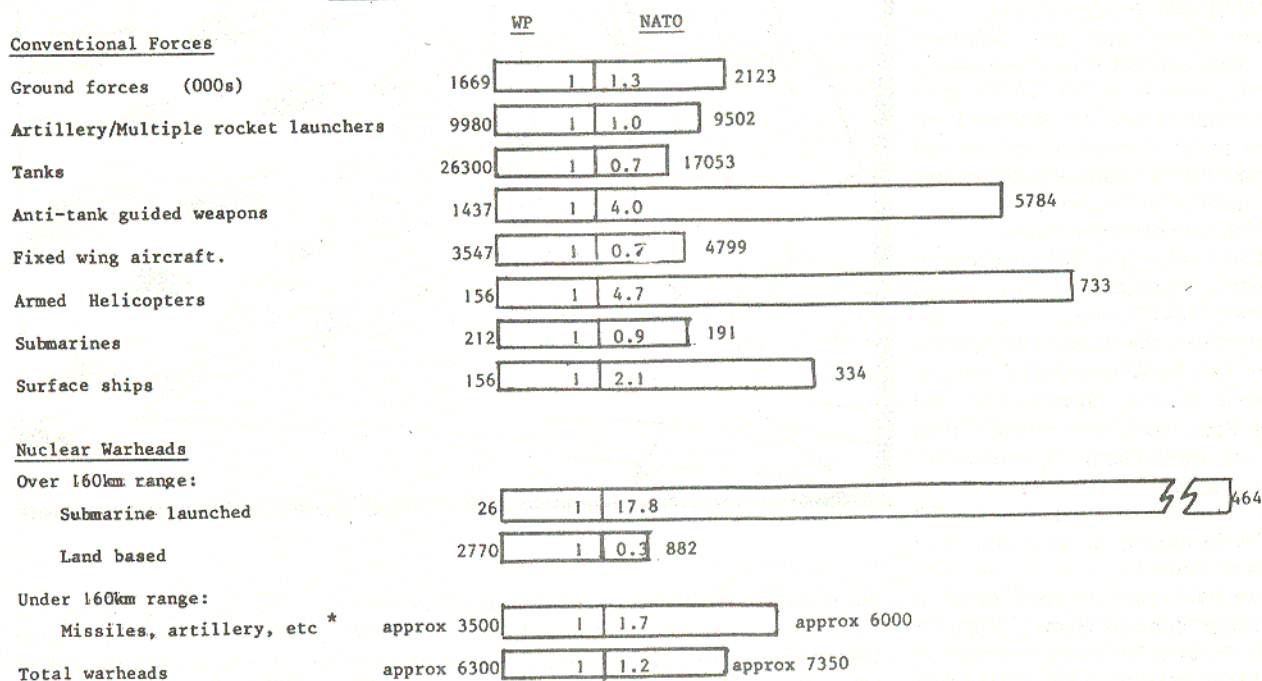
Prominently displayed on the wall chart are statistics on 'The nuclear balance in Europe. These are wonderful examples of the way statistics can be selected to give the impression that the Warsaw Pact (WP) has an overwhelming superiority over NATO in both nuclear

and conventional forces.

To start with, there is no mention of Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles. Britain and France each have more of these than the Soviet Union has assigned for use in the European Theatre. In addition, the United States has assigned 40 of the very potent Poseidon Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles to NATO's European Command.

The comparison of land based nuclear forces appears to exclude Pershing 1A missiles operated by the United States and West Germany. French weapons are also excluded. While it is true that France is outside the NATO command structure, France is inside NATO politically. Other published lists of NATO forces include French forces, so it is interesting that

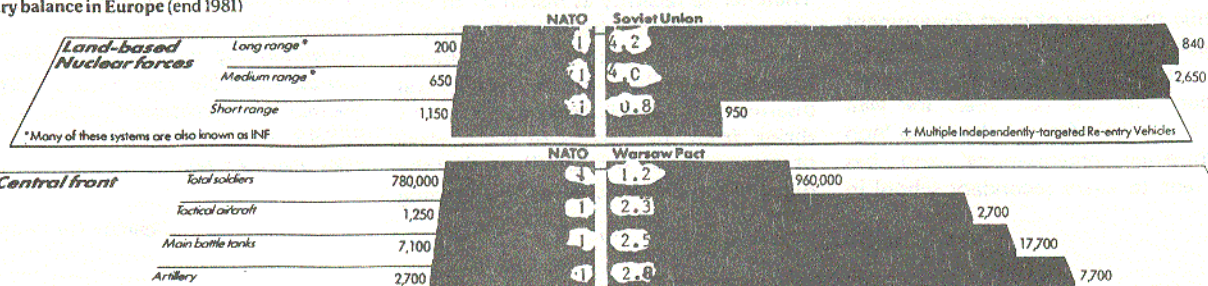
The Military Balance in Europe as the Kremlin might Present it.



\* Not available from IISS. Sources quoted by Mary Kaldor in the 'Bulletin of the European Disarmament Movement' No 3 1980.

Extract from government wall-chart. Wall-chart available from: Arms Control and Disarmament Unit, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Downing St (E), London SW1

The military balance in Europe (end 1981)



they are excluded on the wall chart.

A major omission is any mention of the many American and Soviet long range strategic missiles which can be targetted on Europe. The destructive power of these missiles dwarfs that of the 'Eurostrategic' weapons.

The wall chart presents the data about nuclear weapons in terms of the numbers of delivery systems, that is of aircraft and missiles. This is not, of course, the best measure of the ability to do damage. For this it would be more appropriate to present the numbers of warheads. In general, NATO delivery systems tend to carry more warheads than do Warsaw Pact systems. Even the numbers of warheads are a rather crude measure, however. Other considerations, such as the sizes of warheads and the accuracy of missiles need to be taken into account.

The comparison of conventional forces on the wall chart is headed 'central front'. It thus ignores the other two NATO-WP fronts in Europe, the 'Northern front' and the 'Southern front'. Also omitted is any comparison of naval forces, in which NATO has a clear superiority over the Warsaw Pact.

None of the comparisons on the wall chart take into account any differences in the quality of the equipment being compared. Almost all military sources agree that because the West is ahead in technology, particularly in micro electronics, NATO weapons are more effective than the supposedly similar weapons held by Warsaw Pact countries. Also, one of the reasons why the Warsaw Pact has larger numbers than NATO of some items of equipment, notably tanks, is that its member countries are less inclined than NATO countries to dispose of older and more obsolete equipment.

As we have argued in some detail in 'The Nuclear Numbers Game',\* there are no such things as 'unbiased' statistics on the military balance. Each side has its own ideas of what is important. The Government has selected statistics which give support to its policies, but it would be just as possible to select statistics which could be used by the Kremlin to support a hard line Soviet position. The diagram illustrates how this could be done, using data published by the London based International Institute for Strategic Studies, a body which generally supports NATO interests.

While the prices of most Government publications have increased astronomically, at a much greater rate than inflation over the last year, the wall chart is available free of charge to 'non governmental organisations' and has been sent to every secondary school in



the country. The helpful official in the Foreign Office's Arms Control and Disarmament Research Unit who sent us the wall chart, offered us no less than three other publications, which were also free of charge. These were a 15 page pamphlet 'Peace and disarmament', which elaborated the points in the wall chart, a leaflet 'The balanced view' which is an anything but balanced attack on unilateral disarmament, and the May 1982 issue of the Unit's newsletter 'Arms control and disarmament'.

The newsletter included extracts from a speech made by Margaret Thatcher as recently as March 27 of this year in which she claimed 'Of course, I want to see nuclear disarmament. Indeed I should like to see general disarmament as well. Wouldn't we all? I shrink from the horrors of war-nuclear or conventional'. It is less likely that she has changed her mind about the opening

sentences of the extract in which she said, 'Mr Chairman, if the first purpose of Government is to protect the nation against attack from within, a second and equally important duty is to protect it against attack from without.' Presumably all these free publications are part of the assault against the 'attack from within'. At least we have been warned.

**Ben Armstrong, Jeff Evans, Alison Macfarlane (Radical Statistics Group)**

*\*Radical Statistics Nuclear Disarmament Group. The Nuclear Numbers Game, Understanding the statistics behind the bombs. Available from Radical Statistics Nuclear Disarmament Group, c/o BSSRS, 9 Poland Street, London W1V 3DG. Price £1.50 plus 35p p&p*