

The Presentation of Military Statistics

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If anyone was under any illusions that military expenditures were rationally determined then events since the end of the Cold War should have rapidly dispelled such misconceptions. Nothing more vividly illustrates the propagandistic use of military statistics than the retreat from objectivity the moment that the chosen indicators no longer serve a government's political purposes. This article reveals the official slight of hand which has occurred in recent years and which has gone largely unchallenged by the media or academics.

During the long years of the Cold War, the message of the numerical superiority of the Warsaw Pact over NATO was hammered home in a hundred different bar charts. The need to eliminate "destabilising asymmetries in forces or equipment" was the overriding concern.¹ Yet when not only the Warsaw Pact but the Soviet Union itself broke up these bar charts disappeared. The continued existence of NATO is now overlooked as new bar charts concentrate instead on the equipment levels of individual countries. This creates the impression that Russia not NATO is the major military power in Europe. Appendix A illustrates the transition in the presentation of official statistics.

More importantly, "uncertainty" has become the favourite aphorism of British politicians to justify any level of armed forces which vested interests may wish to retain. This subjectivity is very useful to those who must at all costs avoid discussion of those facts which until recently had provided a "rational" basis for defence planning.

The Balance of Power

There are those who would argue that, after the demise of the Warsaw Treaty Organisation, any imbalance between the forces of East and West is irrelevant. This view is by no means limited to hardline militarists. One well known peace researcher claimed recently:

..... the CFE Treaty codified a balance of forces (between NATO and the former WTO states) that was meaningless once the WTO and the USSR collapsed.²

This Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty, signed in Paris on 20 November 1990, had as its primary objective the elimination of the capability for launching a surprise attack and for initiating large-scale offensive action. Funnily enough, this was meant to work both ways: to guard the East against an attack from the West as

much as vice versa. Yet at the very moment that Warsaw Pact numerical superiority in forces and equipment was replaced by a NATO numerical superiority, the balance of forces apparently became "meaningless".

That this cannot be so is proven by NATO's new Strategic Concept which was adopted at its Rome Summit on 7-8 November 1991. This document was the result of a strategic review aimed at transforming the Alliance. One of its four fundamental security tasks is:

To preserve the strategic balance within Europe.³

A strategic balance presupposes an assessment of the balance of power between potential or actual rivals. Such an assessment must of necessity include military forces and equipment.

Having made the case for a continued assessment of the balance of power in Europe, it is now possible to examine the consequences of such an approach. It must also be said that merely quantitative analysis is insufficient so brief reference will be made to qualitative factors. Lastly, the possible alternative uses of military forces - that might justify extra troops beyond that which the "lowest balanced level of forces and armaments" would imply⁴ - are considered.

A Military Imbalance

The failed coup in Moscow in October 1993 was a graphic illustration of anti-Western, as much as anti-Yeltsin, feeling. Whilst the threat of civil war or a new dictatorship in Russia may have receded for a while, few think that it has gone for good. The future of the economic reform programme will be a key determinant of political stability. While that process remains so parlous, there can be little doubt that armed conflict within Russia remains possible. If a new authoritarian regime came to power, a reassertion of Russian dominance would be conceivable. And, in those circumstances, the key questions are whether Russia could attack Western Europe with any prospect of success or whether NATO could intervene in the former Soviet Union?

The analysis of the balance of power focuses on the Atlantic to the Urals region covered by the CFE Treaty. Russian forces east of the Urals are more than counterbalanced by US troops in North America which could be shipped across to Western Europe in the event of war. NATO's naval superiority would ensure that this could be done.⁵

As Table 1 reveals, the numerical advantage of the forces which could be ranged

against Russia is colossal. Since there would be little prospect of Russia securing allies from countries so recently released from the iron grip of the Soviet state, it is reasonable to assume that any aggression would be met by unanimous opposition from the countries affected. Appendix B provides a sample of the detailed figures from authoritative sources on which Table 1 is based.⁶ Note from Table B1, in particular, that NATO's manpower reductions make no significant difference to the 2.4:1 NATO/East European advantage against Russia. The implementation of CFE⁷ will actually increase that military advantage by 1996 for all the categories of weapon systems, though this may be diminished by unilateral cuts in NATO equipment. Tables B2 and B3, together with Figures B1 and B2, illustrate the massive NATO military superiority in tanks and combat aircraft.

Yet even the preceding facts do not begin to exhaust the evidence on Western military overkill capacity. The UK Ministry of Defence is seeking to compensate for manpower reductions, such as they are, by increases in the quality and reliability of new equipment. The technological advantages the West has enjoyed in critical areas like electronics combined with the superiority of much of its military equipment, as demonstrated in various proxy wars in the Middle East, can hardly be disputed. With the collapse of military spending in the former Soviet Union NATO is likely to soar ahead with its continued arms race and vastly greater spending on research and development.⁸

TABLE 1

CONVENTIONAL FORCES IN EUROPE; THE NATO AND EAST EUROPEAN ADVANTAGE OVER RUSSIA, 1992 AND 1996

Ratio (x advantage to NATO)	Manpower		Tanks		Artillery		Attack Helicop.		Combat Aircraft	
	92	96	92	96	92	96	92	96	92	96
NATO: Russia	1.6	1.4	2.1	3.0	2.2	2.9	2.1	2.2	1.3	1.9
NATO+E. Europe: Russia	2.4	2.3	4.0	5.0	4.0	4.8	3.1	3.3	2.3	2.8

Note: a - Eastern Europe here includes Ukraine and Belarus.

Sources: see Appendix B and PRODEM Briefing A/1.

In short, the scenario of a Russian attack on Europe looks fanciful under any political conditions but NATO on its own would possess the numerical superiority needed for an attack on Russia - should the political conditions for this arise.

Military Intervention?

Such an attack, if it were ever to take place, would most probably be described as a "peacemaking"⁹ mission in the former Soviet Union. Yet the risks of political divisions emerging within the Alliance and of setting off a nuclear confrontation with Russia would be very grave indeed. If, on the other hand, no such intervention is contemplated then the excessive force levels serve no purpose.

Naturally, there are many other opportunities for a NATO role in the various armed conflicts around the world. The vast majority of these are Bosnian-type civil wars where the limitations on the use of military force are recognised even by hawkish governments such as our own. The unwillingness to become embroiled in the Bosnian quagmire, beyond supporting the humanitarian aid operation, suggests that the lessons of our colonial past have not been entirely overshadowed by military success in the Gulf. Once again, though, this reluctance to become involved in peace enforcement tends to undermine the case for retaining force levels beyond those strictly required for defence.

So we are back to where we started with the UK government relying on "uncertainty" to justify excessive military expenditures. They argue that it might just be handy to have those extra troops one day. To reduce our forces any further would put our national security at risk. Unfortunately, though, these arguments overlook the facts of the military balance described above and the opportunity costs of tying up resources which could be better used to promote global economic security. Such preventive measures could do far more to reduce uncertainty than all the Western military might in the world today.

In the absence of such measures, the very existence of large extra NATO forces for military intervention - whether acting under UN auspices or not - increases the risk of slipping into unwise military operations.

References

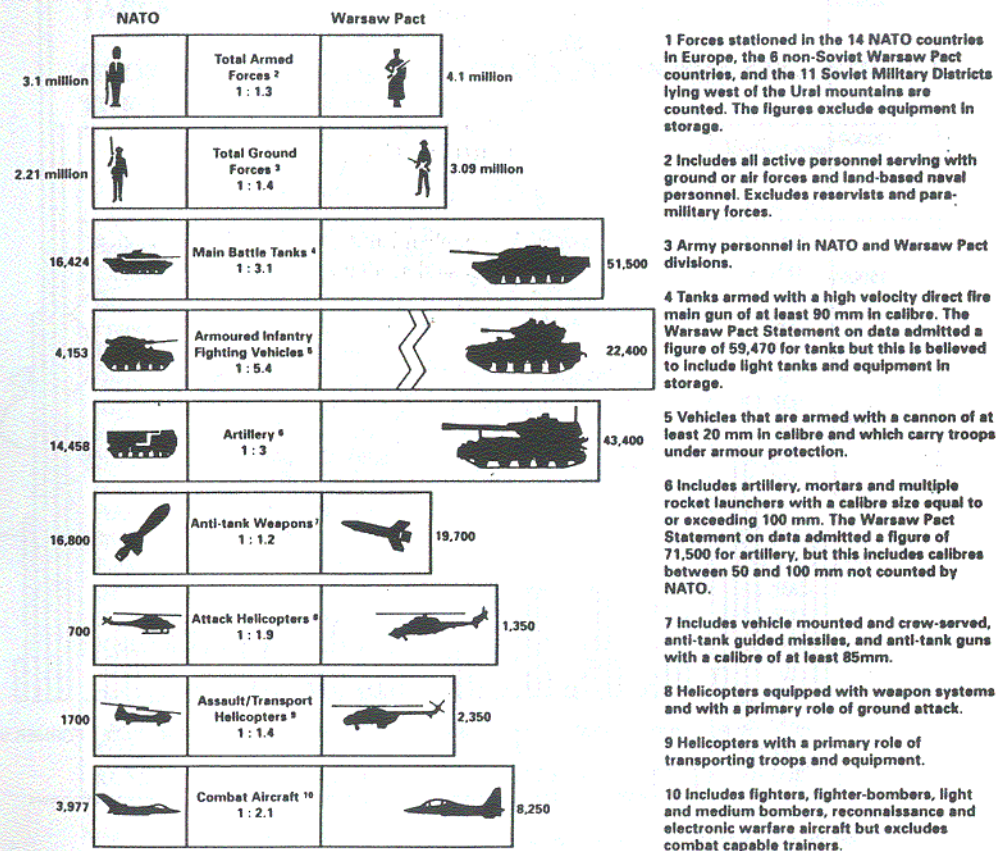
1. NATO review, no 3 (June 1989), pp 24-5
2. Jane M.O. Sharp, "Conventional Arms Control in Europe", in SIPRI, SIPRI Yearbook 1993: World Armaments and Disarmament (Oxford University Press, 1993) pp 592-3
3. NATO Review, No.6 (December 1991), p. 27
4. See NATO Review, no. 3 (June 1989), p. 22

5. See The Triumph of Unilateralism: The Failure of Western Militarism, The New Militarism Briefings, No. 1 (Project on Demilitarisation, Leeds, March 1993), Appendix A, pp, 39-40
6. For full details see NATO's Military Supremacy: What Is It For? The New Militarism Briefings, No A/1 (Project on Demilitarisation, Leeds, September 1993) Appendix D
7. The CFE Treaty covers only main battle tanks, artillery systems, armoured combat vehicles (not shown in Table 1), attack helicopters and combat aircraft. A separate CFE-1A Agreement covers ground and air force personnel in the Atlantic to the Urals region.
8. See Militarism or Disarmament?: Challenging the West's Technological Arms Race, The New Militarism Briefings, No B/1 (Project on Demilitarisation, Leeds, August 1993)
9. The term "peacemaking" is used here as a euphemism for military intervention or peace enforcement. This is how political and military leaders often apply it. Peacemaking proper is based on diplomacy.

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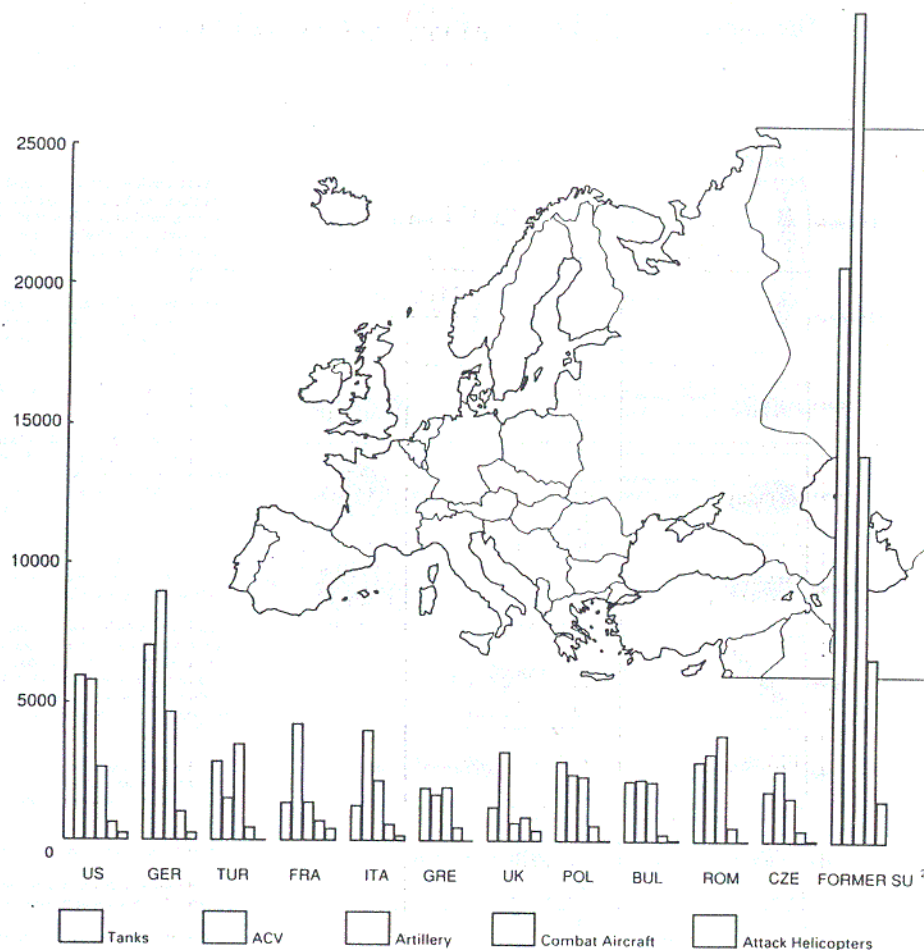
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Appendix A**FIGURE A1****The current disposition of forces - Atlantic to Urals**

Source: Statement on the Defence Estimates 1989, Cm. 675-I (HMSO, London, May 1989), p. 46

FIGURE A2

CFE Treaty: Largest declared equipment holdings¹

① Figure shows declared holdings, as at 19 November 1990 (corrected) of equipment in ATTU limited by CFE Treaty.

② Equipment holdings declared by the former Soviet Union.

Source: Statement on the Defence Estimates 1993, Cm 2270 (HMSO, London, July 1993), p. 54

Appendix B

Throughout this section, Eastern Europe refers to Bulgaria, the former Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Romania. The former Yugoslavia has not been included in view of its disintegration and the continuing civil war there. So as to simplify the analysis, the agreed DFE limits for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova are also excluded here. However, equipment assigned to them under CFE is included within Russian totals.

TABLE B1

GROUND AND AIR FORCE PERSONNEL IN THE ATLANTIC TO THE URALS REGION (ATTU) 1992-1996

	Manpower ^a		Reductions ^b (est.) (’92 to ’96)
	1992	1996e	
Belgium	71 300	42 900	28 400
Canada	5 100	0	5 100
Denmark	24 3000	24 300	0
France	330 400	294 500	35 900
Germany	411 800	345 000	66 800
Greece	139 800	139 800	0
Italy	306 000	248 500	57 500
Luxembourg	800	800	0
Netherlands	76 000	40 200	38 800
Norway	25 400	23 000	2 400
Portugal	45 500	45 500	0
Spain	173 200	146 900	26 300
Turkey ^c	512 000	402 800	109 200
UK	222 500	189 000	33 500
USA ^d	182 100	100 000	82 100
NATO Europe	2 526 200	2 043 200	483 000
Eastern Europe ^e	791 200	791 200	0
Ukraine	230 000	450 000	-220 000
Belarus	125 000	100 000	25 000
TOTAL	3 672 400	3 384 400	288 000
RUSSIA	1 536 000	1 450 000	86 000

Notes: ^a - excluding reserves

^b - author's calculations. - sign signifies anticipated increase in forces

^c - manpower figure is for all of Turkey not just ATTU

^d - it is anticipated that US troops in Europe will be reduced to 100,000 not just 150,000 as previously planned

^e - force reductions assumed to be complete although further reductions are possible

Sources: Defence Reductions in NATO Europe, BASIC Report 92.1;
IISS, The Military Balance 1992 - 1993; Statement on the Defence Estimates 1992.

TABLE B2

MAIN BATTLE TANKS IN THE ATLANTIC TO THE URALS REGION (ATTU) 1992-1996

	Tanks		Change
	1992	1996 ^a	
NATO Europe ^a	23 412	19 142	-18 %
Eastern Europe	12 390	6 850	-45 %
Ukraine	6 300	4 080	-35 %
Belarus	1 850	1 800	-3 %
TOTAL	43 952	31 872	-27 %
RUSSIA ^b	11 000	6 400	-42 %

Notes: ^a - planned or future unilateral cuts may reduce estimated holdings in 1996 below CFE residual ceilings.

^b - includes (for 1992) equipment assigned under CFE to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova but which may not yet have been handed over.

Sources: IISS, *The Military Balance 1992-1993*; author's calculations.

Figure B1
TANKS IN THE ATTU, 1992-6

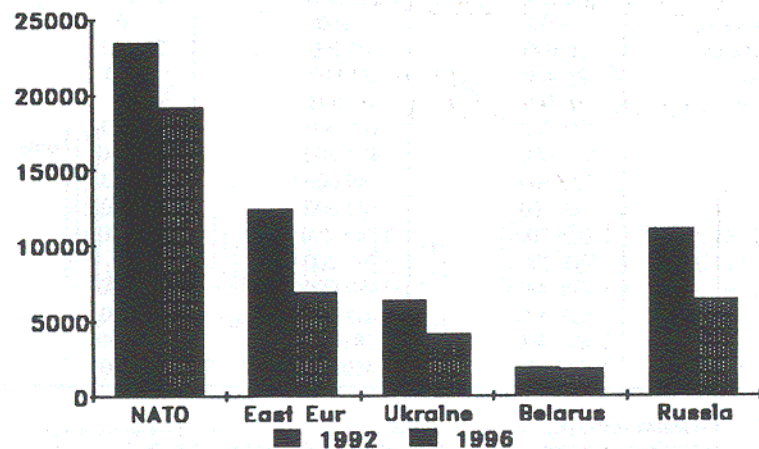


TABLE B3

COMBAT AIRCRAFT IN THE ATLANTIC TO THE URALS REGION (ATTU) 1992-1996

	Combat Aircraft ^a		Change
	1992	1996 ^a	
NATO Europe ^b	5 174	6 662	+29 %
Eastern Europe	1 790	1 650	- 8 %
Ukraine	1 380	1 090	-21 %
Belarus	617	260	-58 %
TOTAL	8 961	9 662	+ 8 %
RUSSIA ^c	3 950	3 450	-13 %

Notes: ^a - does not include land-based maritime aircraft for which a separate limit has been set

^b - planned or future unilateral cuts may reduce estimated holdings in 1996 below CFE residual ceilings

^c - includes (for 1992) equipment assigned under CFE to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova but which may not yet have been handed over

Sources: IISS, *The Military Balance 1992 - 1993*; author's calculations

Figure B2
COMBAT AIRCRAFT IN THE ATTU, 1992-6

