The Best Defense Is . . .

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THERE is a momentous problem confronting the Allied Command Europe (ACE) and the North Atlantic Alliance. If the Soviet Union should launch a massed conventional arms limited objective campaign in Central Europe with initial air superiority, then what is the most effective and prudent response for ACE?

Many will say that this situation is so unlikely to occur as to be absurd. The objection will be made that the Soviets are unlikely to attack NATO in this era of declining tensions. A further objection will be that a Soviet offensive would probably be unlimited in scope and would doubtless be supported with all available tactical nuclear fires.

Can we safely accept the assumptions inherent in these objections to the problem stated above? What are these assumptions? First, there is the notion that détente is solid enough to preclude such an attack in the future. Second is the belief that the Russians would necessarily find it to be in their own best interest to initiate a general onslaught, with all its risk of creating a unity born of desperation among the NATO allies. Third is the idea that the Soviets would find it necessary or even desirable to let the nuclear "imp" out of the bottle in such a situation. These assumptions must be examined closely before they are accepted as facts.

The policy of détente in the Soviet Union is, at least to some extent, dependent on the personal support of Secretary Brezhnev and his supporters. Their maintenance in power needs the continued momentum of success in such areas as SALT, Soviet-American trade and the Middle East. These are all sensitive areas, and setbacks are possible in all of them. A really damaging reverse could be the end of those associated with détente in Moscow and with them the policy itself. The fall of Khrushchev is an example of this phenomenon.

A post-détente Soviet government, disillusioned by the failure of its previous efforts and perceiving a lack of will in the West, might well decide that the time had come to use the strength it has created in Central Europe. Recent Soviet activities in Angola do not support the belief that the USSR has renounced the use of force as a means of exporting revolution.

A Communist aggression in Central Europe is not likely to be unlimited in nature. As long as the United States adheres to the NATO Treaty and maintains at least a parity of strategic forces with the USSR, the Soviets are unlikely to adopt a course of action that appears to them to lead to a strategic nuclear response by the United States. To take such a risk would be "military adventurism" of the worst sort and, according to their political and military doctrine, quite unacceptable.

It seems more probable that they would, in these circumstances, choose the option of a carefully limited offensive "in response" to a well-prepared and staged West German "provocation" or "aggression." An artificial "casus belli" such as this can be created easily in controlled or sympathetic mass media.

At the outset of such an offensive, the limited nature of the attack would be clearly stated along with a disavowal of hostile intent toward such
countries as Denmark, the Benelux, Great Britain and, of course, France. The idea would be to smash the ACE conventional forces in the forward area, seize a slice of Germany and then announce a willingness to negotiate. It might well work.

Would the USSR employ nuclear weapons in support of this kind of effort? A better question might be, why should they? At present, there is a current of popular disbelief flowing in the West as to the reality or magnitude of the Soviet threat. With this, there is a concomitant disinclination to make the financial and other sacrifices needed to match Soviet power in the arena of Central Europe. This results in a large imbalance of conventional combat power in favor of the Soviet Union in the two Germanies.

The Russian preponderance in mechanized equipment and sheer numbers immediately available is compounded by their automatic possession of the initiative and ability to mass against specific sectors. A loss of air superiority resulting from the initial numbers and early air strikes against NATO airfields is likely to complicate still further the ACE defense problem.

Further inhibiting Soviet willingness to use nuclear weapons in this sort of operation is the fact that American response to such employment is incalculable. In fact, no one really knows what will happen after the first tactical nuclear weapon is used on a European battlefield.

If the contingency of a Soviet limited objective attack in Europe is a plausible case, then what is NATO's

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present chance of defeating such a strategy? Not very good it appears. Our numerical disadvantage alone seems to leave us only one good alternative to defeat—the tactical nuclear weapon. This is the stone with which David may hope to slay Goliath. Is this satisfactory? No. The inhibition with regard to the open-ended nature of nuclear conflict in Europe applies to us as well as to the Russians. More importantly, our adversaries are not so simple as to think seriously that any incursion across the West German border will cause the release of US nuclear weapons to the NATO field forces. How solid then is the deterrent effect of our tactical nuclear capability when arrayed against a possible Soviet attack which would be both relatively shallow and ambiguous in intent? The necessary conclusion is that NATO should develop a defensive strategy which is not dependent on the American tactical nuclear deterrent when defending against Soviet attacks that may not appear to the USSR likely to exceed the threshold necessary for release of nuclear weapons.

The Concept

In the remainder of this article, the authors will attempt to outline a possible defensive strategy and technique designed to meet the needs of the dilemma described above.

Several assumptions critical to a discussion of the defense of Germany should be stated. First, West Germany will continue to be adamant about defending as far east as possible. West Germany, the obvious economic and emotional target of the USSR, is not expendable. Second, the political climate in the United States will continue to make it impractical to increase significantly US forces in Europe. Third, no additional allied forces are likely to become available.

The proposed concept is based upon a corollary derived from several principles of war such as Napoleon's XVIIth or Jomini and Clausewitz' principles of the defensive-offensive maneuver. The corollary:

A defense that is to be a deterrent must appear to make the cost of what will be lost in an attack greater than what would be gained if the defense were breached.

How is this to be done in the context of no nuclear weapons and a massive Russian preponderance of forces? Clearly, some element or system of elements which will have a "force-multiplier" effect must be found. The needed element must enable a smaller force committed to the defensive to inflict such loss on the attacking forces as to make the whole scheme patently unprofitable and probably unattempted.

When one searches for an analogous situation in history, several come to mind. In classical times, there is the case of Leonidas and his Spartans at Thermopylae. In the Middle Ages, there is the English "miracle" of Agincourt. In recent times, there is the exemplar provided by the Finno-Soviet Winter War of 1939-40. In this conflict, the Soviets in the end triumphed at a cost of at least 200,000 killed. Most of these losses were taken in attempting to breach the Mannerheim Line across the Karelian Isthmus between Leningrad and Helsinki. Significantly, the Soviet Army was prevented by the severity of its losses from taking full advantage of its "victory." Perhaps nearer to the American consciousness is the example provided by the later stages of our own Civil War. In the period after Gettysburg, Lee bridled his instinct
for the offense and tended to rely on the defensive tactics that had won him such a victory at Fredericksburg in December 1862. In battles such as Mine Run, Spotsylvania and Cold Harbor, his army's lines were unbreakable against odds of 2 and sometimes 3 to 1.

The art of defense is all too often taught and imagined to be an undesirable alternative. It carries with it the undeserved stigma of being incapable of bringing about victory. This is an inaccurate view of the lessons of history. For the smaller force, the well-fought defense has often proven to be a decisive form of combat. At Agincourt, the French Army was, for all practical purposes, destroyed attacking the English. Imagine what the course of American history might have been if Longstreet's advice had been heeded at Gettysburg. He urged a tactical defense. There, the cost of an offensive fixation was a catastrophic reverse.

At this point, one should look for a useful generalization from these examples, a principle that has relevance to our times. What are the common threads that run through these struggles of the past? First, there was a high skill level in the defending forces. This could be the hoplite phalanx, the longbow, the rifled musket or the techniques of northern warfare. Second, there was a high standard of leadership, and, third, there was the careful selection and improvement of defensive ground.

The first two are of great significance. Imagination, creativity and resourcefulness characterize the style of leadership found most often in skilled defenders. Additionally, inferior soldiers are inferior in any form of combat. Highly skilled and experienced troops exponentially harden a defense. History sparkles with the legends of resolute and successful defenders, seasoned and skilled soldiers imaginatively led. In contrast, defensive failures usually can be traced to a major deficiency in one of the three areas mentioned.

Nevertheless, it is in the selection and improvement of defensive positions that the essence of success ap-
pears to lie. In all our examples, high-quality troops were committed to defensive battle employing the best field fortification techniques known at the time, on ground chosen with an eye to maximizing defensive strength and protection while minimizing the attacker’s mass. In some cases, the attacker’s characteristic of mass actually worked against him because of the defender’s dispositions and use of terrain.

Thus, at Thermopylae, the small Greek force was artfully positioned on a gravel beach 30 yards wide between a sheer unscalable cliff and the sea. To further strengthen the position, an earthen wall was thrown up for the hoplites to fight behind. Grit and the dismay of the Persians at their losses did the rest.

At Agincourt, Henry V knew that his little force could not stand in open ground against the massed weight of the heavy French cavalry. Therefore, he positioned his men at the end of a long, open space between woods, with archers in the woods to deliver a cross fire when the French advanced. The open space had been plowed and was wet. The infantry erected sharpened stakes to their front. The French rushed, were halted and were then shot to pieces by the archers.

In the case of the Finns, the Mannerheim Line blocked the direct route to Helsinki. It consisted of light fortifications sited to make the most of Finnish manpower and to cost the Russians dearly. The Soviets won in the end but at the high cost already mentioned.

The Technique

The lesson to be derived from history, with regard to operations against numerically superior forces, is that good troops, well-led and well-positioned, have a far greater effect than their mere numbers would cause one to expect. What is proposed in this article is the creation of a defensive zone in West Germany, running from the base of the Jutland Peninsula to the Swiss frontier, roughly contiguous to the borders of the Soviet bloc states. Such a defensive belt should average about 40 kilometers in depth in good defensive terrain. The tactical concept within this zone would be to establish a matrix of previously prepared fortified positions. The number of positions would vary from sector to sector within the defensive belt but would generally exceed the number of cross-attached combat arms teams assigned to defend in an area. Each position would be built for defense by a “task team” consisting of a cross-attached tank-infantry company augmented with certain supporting elements. All positions would be built for 360-degree defense and would be essentially field fortifications constructed of earth and timber with a minimum use of concrete except where absolutely necessary. Supplies necessary to the conduct of a 10-day defense of position by a “task team” would be prestocked in all positions under the peacetime care of a civilian caretaker group.

The positions constructed would constitute a grid, adapted to the terrain, upon which Alliance forces would maneuver in the conduct of the defense, occupying positions successively in a retrograde movement back from the present frontiers.

Each position must meet two equally important criteria. First, the location of the position must provide maximum advantage in fields of fire to confront the enemy while complementing the defense of other positions. Second, the location of the position must afford the small cross-attached teams of
mechanized infantry, armor and supporting weapons (artillery, mortars, antiaircraft, and so forth) realistic alternate routes of maneuver in and out of the positions.

The idea is to inflict high casualties on the enemy while using the best terrain to optimize weapons effectiveness and prepared positions with overhead cover to minimize friendly losses. The ideal of minimum losses will be aided by the fact that the attacker will have a difficult time deciding which of the positions in the grid are actually occupied until he reaches them. A deceptive camouflage plan, as well as the communication system described below, will greatly embarrass enemy target acquisition efforts.

The momentum and bulk of the Soviet forces, predominately tanks, must be used to the Soviet disadvantage. As an attacker penetrates the matrix defense, the defensive pressure increases gradually as the canalization of the spearheads increases. Accordingly, the following waves of mechanized troops will tend to slow down, bottleneck and jam up into more lucrative targets for the defenders who are fighting from one well-sited defensive position after another. It is particularly critical to this form of defense that defending units not allow themselves to become engaged to such a degree that any withdrawal is impossible. A unit defending a given fortified locality should be withdrawn by higher headquarters when the continuation of action on that position would result in destruction of the unit. The unit then would be withdrawn over a covered route to a vacant fortified position farther to the rear. Such withdrawals would be assisted by covering fires provided by adjacent units, artillery fire, smoke and such limited objective attacks as may be required to assist the withdrawing unit. Withdrawals preferably would be made during periods of reduced visibility. If it becomes impossible to extricate a particular unit, then a determined and prolonged resistance on the part of the encircled “task team” will be expected. Such a resistance will be greatly facilitated by the facts that each position is organized for all-round defense; every position is pre-stocked with supplies; and all “task teams” are organized to contain minimum support elements such as air defense artillery, medical personnel, and so forth. A protracted defense of perhaps three or four days by cut-off units would prove to be a severe embarrassment to a Soviet commander trying to conduct offensive operations farther to the west.

The individual fortified localities will be organized for all-round defense and mutual support on successive lines. Within the position, fighting positions for all troops will be pre-constructed with overhead cover. There will be dug-in hull-down positions for all armored vehicles, and fires will be preplanned with range cards and concentrations established in advance and maintained on the position in a central locked bunker. The defended locality will be surrounded with defensive barbed wire and mines.

Communications

Within the defended belt, all communications will be by protected multiple wire circuits. These circuits will run in buried conduit and will surface at hookup points inside each defended locality. An occupying unit will have to connect telephones, teletype equipment, and so forth to have dependable secure communications. Area signal centers will be the focus for command and control through this protected
land-line system. An all-wire, multiple-circuit, protected communications system may, at first glance, seem extravagant. Further examination will show this system to be a very good investment.

Modern armored and mechanized forces are hopelessly addicted to wireless communications in connection with their high mobility. To take advantage of this vulnerable characteristic, the defenders will, upon initiation of the attack, blanket all attainable wireless transmission frequencies with high-powered jamming. The objective will be to prevent any use of wireless communications within the matrix defensive zone. The fixed nature of the defense installations makes possible the use of very high-powered equipment and large antenna arrays. The true beauty of this approach is that it will greatly disrupt the operations of the attacker while the defender is enjoying unusually dependable signal support.

An additional advantage offered by the wire approach is the small target which will be presented to Soviet radio direction-finding equipment. The security of the system will greatly complicate the enemy target acquisition process.

Air Defense and Air Space Control

It is accepted as an assumption of this article that air superiority will be with the USSR for the first and most critical phase of the attack. This being the case, some provision must be made for air defense over the defensive belt. If unchallenged, the Soviet air arm will make hash of both the defended localities and any movements between them.

The answer to this threat is to move
THE BEST DEFENSE IS . . .

Vulcan

Chaparral
the air defense capability as far forward as possible into the belt and to declare the block of air space over the belt to be an "air defense free fire zone." Below a prescribed altitude, all man-made flying objects would be subject to engagement by the defender's air defense assets. Redeye, Chaparral and Vulcan would be present as organic or attached in the many combat arms "task teams" defending in the belt. The "task teams," whether occupying a position or on the march, thus will never present a "soft" target for Russian aviation. Ammunition resupply will be effected through the pre-stocking procedure previously mentioned. The bonus presented by the ground support fire capability of the Vulcan will also aid in position defense.

HAWK would be moved forward into the defended zone as necessary to engage higher targets. Nike Hercules would supplement this defense from locations to the rear of the belt under centralized fire control.

This type air defense will have several beneficial effects. Soviet air units will experience a high rate of attrition while "boring in" in attempts to support their armored units trying to get forward in the maze of our defense matrix; the intense volume of ground fire will tend to force the enemy air upward where bombing accuracy will suffer somewhat and aircraft will be more vulnerable to weapons systems such as HAWK and Nike Hercules; and NATO air forces will be enabled to concentrate scarce assets for a resolution of the counterair battle without having to piecemeal aircraft into a low-level defense over the defended belt.

**Ranger and Special Forces Operations**

Special operations forces can make a significant contribution to a defensive scheme of this kind. They would
operate forward of the defensive zone in two bands.

Immediately forward of the allied defensive belt in what will become the Soviet forward support area will be numerous small Ranger teams. During the defense, the Ranger team mission will be to destroy communications, concentrating on couriers, ground wire circuits and command posts. This effort will dovetail in its effect with the major jamming campaign in progress to the west.

Because of the short duration of operations, Special Forces will not be able to rely heavily upon well-developed indigenous assets. The Special Forces’ primary mission should be to concentrate immediately on the petroleum, oils and lubricants (POL) flow. This may include pipe lines, tanker trucks, airfields and storage sites. An impediment to the POL stream needed by the armored force making the attack would cause grave difficulties to the Soviet command. The Special Forces’ operational area would be located at some distance to the east of the Ranger combat zone.

The Desired Effect

Soviet Armed Forces engaged in a limited offensive against the kind of defensive system outlined above would find themselves committed to an attritional battle of horrendous scope and intensity and on terms adverse to themselves in spite of their great numerical advantage. The offensive probably would grind to a halt somewhere in the depths of the defensive matrix in a welter of casualties and snarled command systems.

The prospect of such a struggle at prohibitive cost and for little gain would deter the aggressor from making the attempt. If the Soviet Army did succeed in fighting its way out of the other side of the defense belt, the prize won would be the near certainty of the commitment of American nuclear weapons to the contest.

What NATO would give itself by adoption of a defensive scheme similar to the one outlined here is a convincing deterrent at any level of aggression. For this reason, a system of this sort, if adopted, should receive wide publicity in its general terms. A deterrent system is ineffective if it is completely hidden from the adversary.

Conclusion

It should be pointed out that the technique of defense described in this article is applicable to situations other than the arena of Central Europe. In the 1973 October War in the Middle East, Israeli forces fighting from carefully prepared positions on the Golan Heights badly mauled attacking Syrian forces before Israeli mobile reinforcements arrived on the scene.

In some portions of the Golan front, the massed Syrian armor and infantry never did manage to break through the Israeli positional defense. Dug-in tanks and prepared infantry positions played a large role in turning back very determined Syrian assaults.

There would seem to be an application for this kind of defense wherever a force of quality troops faces an enemy superior in numbers, equally mobile and—even worse—possesses command of the air. The problem faced by Jordan in a possible defense of its western front along the Jordan River would appear to be another likely location for a matrix defense.

An old military saw states that “The best defense is a good offense.” What we have tried to show in this article is that, in some cases, THE BEST DEFENSE IS A GOOD DEFENSE.