Tentative
Record of Decision

January 7, 1969

DRAFT

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: NATO Strategy and Force Structure (U)

Our review of our objectives in Europe and our NATO strategy and forces leads us to the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. Current NATO and Warsaw Pact military forces (men and equipment) are in approximate numerical balance. Correcting the remaining serious qualitative weaknesses is a feasible target for the NATO Alliance, provided our European allies appreciate this feasibility and act upon it.

2. The new NATO strategy officially recognizes the need for a range of military capabilities, from conventional to strategic nuclear. In this strategy, strategic nuclear forces are the main deterrent to Soviet nuclear attack on the United States and are a major deterrent to Soviet aggression in Europe. Theater nuclear capabilities primarily deter limited nuclear war. They also add to the deterrence of conventional aggression in Europe, although our ability to control a theater nuclear war is uncertain. Strong conventional forces help deter a deliberate conventional attack by denying the Pact any confidence of success, and enable us to deal successfully with a conflict arising through miscalculations. The recent invasion of Czechoslovakia emphasizes the importance of maintaining strong NATO forces.

3. Our programmed forces and those of our allies are large enough for these purposes, but we will continue to urge correction of the important qualitative weaknesses in NATO forces which prevent them from realizing their full potential.

5. All military activities in Europe that do not contribute directly and essentially to our combat capability should be limited as much as possible to save gold flow and reduce the need to redeploy combat divisions and squadrons.

I. U.S. OBJECTIVES IN EUROPE AND NATO STRATEGY

Our basic military objective in Europe is to deter any Soviet military aggression, or political pres ure backed by military power, against our

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allies. Our success in meeting this objective is demonstrated by the independence of Western Europe from Soviet political domination, despite the large military forces maintained by the Warsaw Pact. At the same time, however, a basic political problem in Europe -- the division of Germany -- remains unresolved.

The importance of maintaining strong NATO military forces has been emphasized by the recent Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Soviets have demonstrated that they are ready to use military force in Europe if political means fail and if they consider their vital interests to be at stake. Over a period of several months, the Soviets made demands on the Czech government, backed up by military mobilization and exercises. Should the Soviets act in this way toward any NATO country, NATO should have the military capability to respond effectively.

The main issue of NATO strategy over the last few years has been the appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces. In May 1967, the NATO defense ministers officially revised the guidance for the NATO strategy. The revised strategy, adopted in December 1967, reduces the relative emphasis on nuclear weapons as the basis for deterrence and the defense of NATO and increases the emphasis on conventional options.

The main reason for adopting this revised strategy is that the Soviets now have a major capability to strike back at U.S. and European cities. Thus, a threatened strategic nuclear attack on Soviet cities is no longer a credible deterrent to political pressure or limited military aggression in Europe.

A second reason is that tactical nuclear weapons, when both sides have them, are not an adequate substitute for conventional forces. Tactical nuclear weapons would have to be used in large numbers or large yields to destroy a major Pact force. The Pact could respond in kind and destroy major forces on our side. We could lose as many men as the Pact and could not count on stopping the Pact forces with tactical nuclear weapons. Moreover, using these weapons would kill millions of civilians whom we are trying to defend. It would also create enormous pressure for even more escalation to destroy the remaining delivery systems on both sides.

The essence of the revised NATO strategy is to avoid situations in which we would have to choose between using nuclear weapons and giving up territory or other crucial political objectives. Although we believe this strategy is the best way to meet NATO's political objectives while keeping the risk of nuclear war to a minimum, its success depends upon having conventional military power roughly in balance with the Warsaw Pact. Since August, the Czech crisis has increased the general interest in keeping strong NATO forces. In the long run, however, the ability of NATO to keep adequate conventional forces is being threatened by two related kinds of political pressures.

On the one hand, many Europeans and some NATO military authorities believe and have stated that the Warsaw Pact's conventional forces are so much larger than NATO's that NATO could easily be overwhelmed in any major conventional engagement. This belief leads many political leaders to conclude that NATO's existing conventional forces have little military significance, and that their political and symbolic functions could be carried out just as well by far smaller and cheaper forces.

As discussed below, NATO forces are not grossly inferior to Pact forces. We have been stressing this point with our NATO allies for several years. By correcting certain deficiencies to realize the full potential of existing conventional forces, NATO should be able to maintain a satisfactory conventional balance without substantially increased budgets. Our policy should continue to stress the importance and feasibility of maintaining a balance of conventional forces in Europe.

On the other hand, there is growing sentiment in the United States that we are carrying too large a share of the overall NATO defense burden. This view is reinforced by the problems in our balance-of-payments, the war in Southeast Asia, and the evident growing prosperity of our NATO allies. Prior to the invasion of Czechoslovakia, these factors had led to increased pressure from Congress and from segments of the public for the withdrawal from Europe of substantial numbers of U.S. forces. Major withdrawals of U.S. combat forces, without compensating measures from our allies or Soviet reductions or redeployments, would severely threaten the European conventional military balance.

Our NATO allies should improve their forces to fix avoidable weaknesses and do more to assist in offsetting our balance-of-payments. We will continue to press for these measures. As discussed below, there are important measures that we should take to cut our military expenditures in Europe without significantly reducing our combat capability. We will continue to seek other such measures.

A. Strategic Nuclear Capabilities

The Assured Destruction capability provided by our strategic missiles and bombers is the main deterrent to Soviet nuclear attack on the United States. Our strategic forces give us the unmistakable ability to destroy Soviet society, even after a surprise attack. They deter nuclear attacks over a wide range of situations, including not only a massive surprise attack, but also Soviet escalation to general nuclear war from a local war. They also deter the Soviets from a nuclear attack even in crisis situations when the Soviets might otherwise go to war.

U.S. strategic forces also have an important relationship to NATO. They not only deter the Soviet Union from attacks on the United States, but also help deter aggression limited to the European theater. In view of our visible political and military commitment to Europe, the Soviets can never be sure that we will not use some strategic nuclear forces in the event of a large-scale attack on Europe, even at the risk of a Soviet attack on CONUS.

Our strategic forces also enhance the deterrent value of our theater nuclear capabilities by making a theater nuclear response to a Soviet attack in Europe a more believable threat. In the event of a U.S. theater nuclear response, our strategic forces would still be a deterrent to a Soviet nuclear attack on the United States.

Although strategic nuclear capabilities strongly deter Soviet aggression, in any conflict involving strategic forces there is grave risk of escalation to attacks on cities. In a nuclear exchange of this kind, there seems no way to prevent unacceptable damage to the West. To minimize this possibility, we need theater nuclear and conventional capabilities, both to increase deterrence to limited attacks and to provide options for dealing with conflicts in the theater if deterrence fails.

B. Theater Nuclear Capabilities

NATO's theater nuclear capabilities are provided by nuclear delivery systems in Europe ranging from 155mm howitzers to tactical aircraft and Pershing missiles.

The NATO Defense Ministers in the Nuclear Planning Group have acknowledged that the number of weapons in Europe is adequate. In addition, they are uncertain as to how large numbers of these weapons could be used, except in a general nuclear war.

Theater nuclear systems do, however, increase the deterrence of a Soviet nuclear attack in Europe. Those that survived a Soviet nuclear attack would add to our ability to attack Warsaw Pact military targets without necessarily escalating to general nuclear war.

They also help deter a deliberate large-scale conventional attack. Should a conventional conflict begin through miscalculation, they provide strong incentive for ending it. In planning a large conventional attack, the Soviets would know that their actions unmistakably threatened NATO's most vital interests, and if NATO were to employ nuclear weapons against a Soviet theater force, the deterrent to a retaliatory strike on CONUS would still be very great.

As discussed in the Draft Presidential Memorandum (DPM) on Theater Nuclear Forces, the programmed NATO theater nuclear forces are capable of destroying a major part of the Soviet theater land and air forces, either in a first strike or in retaliation to a Soviet tactical nuclear attack. Such an exchange, however, would not only destroy most of the theater military forces on both sides, but would also kill millions of civilians.

Thus, while our theater nuclear capabilities have a deterrent value, the actual conduct and results of a limited nuclear war are very uncertain. Because of the steady pressure to strike deeper targets,

the rapidly increasing civilian and military casualties, and the vulnerability of logistic systems, the war would either end, de-escalate, or escalate quickly. This cautions against spending great sums to prepare for fighting a prolonged tactical nuclear war in Europe. It is also an important reason for maintaining enough conventional forces to avoid the use of nuclear weapons except under extreme circumstances.

C. Conventional Capabilities

We maintain conventional forces to help deter, or if necessary to meet, limited military aggression or political pressure backed by military power -- without having to initiate the use of nuclear weapons. This basic objective does not require us to be prepared to defend against any scale of conventional attack in any kind of situation that the Warsaw Pact is conceivably capable of creating. Such an objective would require more ready forces for NATO than for the Pact (because of the potential advantage provided by the initiative of the aggressor), would be extremely expensive, and might be self-defeating by generating a counteracting buildup of forces by the Pact. The following specific goals for our conventional forces, which are consistent with those agreed on in the new NATO strategy, will allow us to meet our basic objective.

1. NATO's conventional capabilities should help deter a deliberate conventional attack by denying the Warsaw Pact any confidence of success.

In the absence of adequate NATO conventional forces, the Soviets might in some circumstances be tempted to launch a deliberate, conventional attack. If NATO maintains adequate conventional forces, however, the Soviets would, in considering any deliberate attack, be forced to plan an attack so massive that it would clearly threaten NATO's most vital interests and would require near perfect preparations to mount. At this level of attack, the difficulty of execution, the credibility of the NATO nuclear deterrent, and the potential Soviet loss greatly increase. Such a deliberate conventional attack would then be no more rational than a deliberate nuclear attack.

2. NATO should have the capability to deal successfully with a conflict arising out of some unexpected event or miscalculation of intentions during a period of tension or political crisis.

NATO's goal in any such conflict would be to end it rapidly, giving up as little territory as possible. Thus, where there is a choice, capabilities which contribute promptly to meeting the Pact's attack -- such as close air support and combat troops -- are more valuable than those which would make their main contribution later in the war, such as interdiction and sustaining logistic support.

Moreover, since a war in Europe is likely only in the event of a significant change in the political situation, this kind of conflict is likely to be preceded by a period of tension or crisis.

. Thus, while we must maintain forces in place to deal with the Pact's immediately available forces and to deter a deliberate attack, NATO's mobilization and reinforcement capabilities are equally important. An approximate balance of NATO and Pact conventional capabilities, both before and after mobilization, should enable us to meet our basic objective.

Conventional forces of this size would not, of course, guarantee that we would never be faced with the choice of using nuclear weapons or giving up crucial political objectives. It is possible to conceive of situations, such as a massive Soviet attack launched before NATO had reacted, which could bring us to this point. The risk of these situations is relatively low, and the cost of being prepared to avoid them is high; therefore, we are not setting greater objectives for conventional forces at this time.

II. THE BALANCE OF NATO AND WARSAW PACT CONVENTIONAL CAPABILITIES

The DPMs on Strategic Offensive and Defensive Forces, Theater Nuclear Forces, General Purpose Forces, and Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) Forces describe in detail NATO and Warsaw Pact nuclear capabilities and naval forces. They also discuss what is needed to meet our objectives for strategic, theater nuclear, and ASW forces. The remainder of this memorandum analyzes NATO's conventional capabilities in Europe.

The main problems in evaluating NATO's conventional capabilities relative to those of the Pact arise from differences in the mix, structure, and location of forces.

France remains a member of NATO and still has 70,000 troops in Germany, but has withdrawn from the integrated command structure. Although all allied facilities have been relocated from France, her territory would be valuable, and her forces make up 22% of NATO's M-Day land forces. In the event of a deliberate large-scale attack, these forces would probably be available -- and in any case would have a deterrent value -- but the likely French attitude in other situations is very unclear.

Since the invasion of Czechoslovakia, Polish and East German forces comprise about 40% of the Pact M-Day land forces (excluding Czech forces), and more than 20% of the M+90 forces. Without these allied forces, the Soviet conventional forces would be smaller than NATO's. The recent SNIE stated the following:

> "The Soviet leaders themselves have probably not yet reached firm decisions as to the future Warsaw Pact military posture. We believe that they must now re-examine their decision of the late 1950's to place heavier reliance on East European Armies in operations against the Central Region of NATO. The Czechoslovak situation is but the latest in a series of developments putting in question the reliability of East European forces -- Rumanian insubordination, the abortive Bulgarian military coup, and Polish military disgruntlement at involvement in the Middle East crisis of 1967. The contribution of each East European country would have to be weighed separately by the Soviets since there are wide variations in reliability. Soviet concern on this account may result in broad changes in Warsaw Pact organization and troop dispositions but it is still too early to predict them."

The necessity of relying on East European forces therefore appears to limit considerably the Soviet capability for offensive conventional action.*

5. Capability to Meet Strategic Objectives

This survey of NATO and Warsaw Pact forces in the Center Region shows that NATO's conventional forces are adequate in size for the objectives discussed above, although they have considerable qualitative weaknesses.

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*The JCS do not agree.

With regard to deterring a deliberate large-scale conventional attack, the Soviets would have to launch an attack of more than a million men, involving large reinforcements from the Soviet Union, to generate the force ratio advantage needed to have reasonable confidence of success at a conventional level. Furthermore, they would have to count on mobilizing large numbers of vehicles and on enlisting the cooperation of the East Europeans without stimulating a NATO reaction until a few days before the attack was launched. Nothing in their military doctrine, force posture, or recent political action suggests that the Soviets view such an attack as a rational possibility, given NATO's existing conventional and theater nuclear forces.*

Another possible kind of deliberate conventional attack would be a smaller scale surprise attack designed for limited objectives. A special intelligence study made for the tripartite talks estimated that the largest attack that could be launched in the Center Region with the objective of complete surprise would be the 20 Soviet divisions (280,000 men) in East Germany. More likely, it would be limited to one or two armies of four to eight divisions. Because of maldeployment of NATO forces, the Pact could probably seize some NATO territory. However, with these forces alone, the ratio of NATO and Soviet forces would be much too low for a continued Soviet offensive. Large reinforcements would have to be brought in or the East Europeans induced to attack.

It is far more likely that any war in Europe will arise from a miscalculation of intentions during a political crisis (such as the Berlin crisis of 1961). Such circumstances are more favorable to NATO than a deliberate Pact attack, since the Pact would probably not have the initiative in deploying forces. As shown above, under these circumstances and if all allies on both sides cooperate, the manpower on both sides would be about equal. Even if the Soviets mobilized considerably faster than shown, they would at most have a temporary advantage.

Considering the uncertainty of land warfare, no definitive statement can be made concerning the outcome of a conflict in Europe. (For example, the Israelis recently conducted a successful offensive campaign with numerically inferior forces.) The forces are closely enough matched so that NATO ought to be able to prevent any sustained advance across a wide front, particularly if we improve our mobilization capability. Because of the immense danger of escalation, the mutual pressures to end such a conflict would be great. For these reasons, our planned forces should provide reasonable confidence of meeting this contingency.

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*The JCS believe that the type of conventional attack most dangerous to NATO is an attack in which the Pact tries to achieve the best possible balance of surprise and attack size through a limited, concealed reinforcement.

B. The NATO Flanks

NATO's defense is weakest in the Northern Norway area. Norway has only 5,000 troops there and allows no foreign troops on her soil in peacetime. The Soviets could seize Norway down to Bardufoss virtually unopposed and could probably use airborne and amphibious forces to overwhelm the Norwegian brigade and take the remaining territory down to Bodo.*

The value of this territory is doubtful, however, especially compared to the cost to the Soviets of holding it. The Soviets would have large forces tied down that would be subject to substantial casualties from guerrilla action in hostile terrain. Ground supply lines would be closed or nearly closed most of the year, and naval traffic would be subject to interdiction. Furthermore, such Soviet action would be likely to solidify NATO in more important areas.

The most critical area on NATO's Southern flank is Greek and Turkish Thrace.

The Greek and Turkish land forces have adequate manpower to meet this threat, but their equipment should be improved.

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*From Bodo 300 miles south to Trondheim the terrain and distances involved would make Soviet land operations much more difficult. Also, in the south the Norweigians can mobilize an army of over 100,000 men, some of whom could be sent north if the territory were still held, or used for guerrilla action.

**These forces have not been covered by the comprehensive review of Warsaw Pact land forces now underway.

C. Weaknesses in NATO's Military Posture

While NATO's forces are roughly in balance (in size) with the Warsaw Pact forces, there are certain weaknesses, particularly in our allies' forces, which might prevent their full potential from being realized. None of these would be expensive to remedy. Our efforts in NATO should concentrate on the need to correct the following weaknesses.

1. Vulnerability of Aircraft

Our tactical aircraft are parked on open ramps and are vulnerable to destruction, much as the Arab air forces were in June 1967. Many studies have demonstrated the importance of shelters in solving this problem. We should continue to try to have shelters approved in the joint NATO infrastructure program, for both U.S. and allied forces.

2. Inadequate Ammunition

Our allies have very small stocks of air-to-ground ordnance, which would prevent their aircraft from realizing their offensive potential. Allied stocks of ground ammunition are higher than air ordnance, but are still low, especially in certain key items such as tank ammunition. We should continue to stress the need for building balanced ammunition stocks.

3.

4. Mobilization

Our Center Region allies have a large manpower mobilization base (as a by-product of short terms of service), but in the past have not taken its training or equipping very seriously. We should continue to urge the Belgians, Dutch, and British to keep their reserve units fully equipped. The Germans now have no major reserve combat units, and should

create more reserve battalions to fill out their 12 active divisions to full strength. We and our allies should consider developing the capability to reinforce without unit training when necessary, in a manner comparable to the Pact.

5. Greek and Turkish Armies

The Greek and Turkish armies are rich in manpower, but poor in equipment. We should concentrate our military assistance on improving their army equipment to the maximum extent that political conditions permit.

III. THE FUTURE U.S. PROGRAM FOR NATO

A. Force Requirements

The following U.S. forces, costing about $12 billion per year,* should be held for and primarily oriented to NATO/Europe:

The previous discussion showed that, with these forces, we could roughly match the Pact land forces in manpower and probably gain an air advantage. In addition, we have a large Strategic Reserve which could be deployed to NATO, and we could draw on our Asia forces if further reinforcements were required. In general, plans and facilities are available to do this. The DPMs on Tactical Air Forces and General Purpose Forces discuss these interactions in detail, including comparisons with forces recommended by the JCS.

For historical political reasons, these forces do not conform exactly to the forces "committed to NATO". NATO committed forces include, in addition, two Marine Corps division/wing teams and a major portion of the Navy. However, these forces are not kept in the force structure primarily for the purpose of supporting NATO. Also, there are some differences in the U.S. land and tactical air force commitment from that shown above.

B. Balance-of-Payments

One pressing problem in maintaining our NATO forces is the nearly $1.5 billion per year balance-of-payments expenditures, most of which is associated with our NATO forces in Europe. The net deficit (after deducting receipts) was about $500 million per year from FY 65-67. Unless we can continue to show progress in reducing this outflow, we may not be in a position to maintain the forward deployment of the combat divisions and squadrons now planned.

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*Including airlift, sealift, and part of the associated escort capability.
**One of these divisions is provided logistics for indefinite combat in order to improve multi-mission capability.

Yet the 4-1/3 division forces in Germany (including combat and service support) account for less than 40% of our balance-of-payments expenditures in Europe. This is true in part because the average grade of combat personnel is relatively low, and proportionately more of them live in government quarters. Much of our balance-of-payments expenditures stems from many less important functions, such as overlapping and expensive higher headquarters, the operation of airbases no longer needed, the operation of redundant communications, and the operation and maintenance of peacetime facilities. Reductions in these activities save significant budgetary costs, since overall manpower ceilings are also reduced and operating and maintenance costs are cut. On the other hand, redeploying divisions and squadrons from Europe to CONUS saves very little budgetary cost, while creating major military and political problems. Thus, we will continue to reduce peripheral support activities in Europe as much as possible, in order to minimize the need to take out combat units.

C. Structure of Land Forces

Another problem that needs restudying, especially in view of the new intelligence on Soviet land forces, is the adequacy of our anti-tank capability and the structure of our own land forces. With about the same manpower at M+90, NATO has half as many tanks as the Pact and generally the same or more of other force elements. When anti-tank weapons and other factors are considered, the tank/anti-tank balance may be about even, but provides little margin for confidence.

Adding more of our current kind of divisions would be an extremely inefficient way of increasing our confidence to meet the Soviet tank threat. We would have to add more than 30 armored divisions (a force of more than 1,400,000 men) to match the Pact tank for tank in the Center Region. We need to develop options, including possible changes in force structure, specifically designed to counter the tank threat. The OSD staff will be studying this problem over the next year, and the Army should orient its own studies in this direction.