

# 11

## Conventional Doctrine: Integrating Alliance Forces

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If the NATO is to come to a greater reliance on conventional deterrence for peace in Europe, greater attention will have to be paid to conventional war doctrine. Conventional doctrine in Europe currently receives scant analytical treatment from experts in the field. The discussions that do occur often focus on the detailed problems of equipment, people, reinforcement, logistics, or mobilization but frequently overlook operational doctrines. This chapter analyzes NATO operational doctrines in the Central Region with a view toward assessing their contribution to conventional deterrence. More simply, this chapter seeks to answer the question: can conventional doctrine enhance conventional deterrence?

### Common Doctrine

The concept of doctrine is ambiguous. Giulio Douhet suggested that doctrine is no more than a set of general precepts about battle.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Ferdinand Foch defined doctrine as an agreed-on set of principles representing the proven best way to fight a war.<sup>2</sup> *Doctrine* is thus an enigmatic term that requires rigorous definition. For analytical purposes, doctrine is best understood as that concept for war fighting that has been recognized officially by the military forces of a country.

There is an element of truth to the old saying that "doctrine is the lies all our fathers taught us," in that official doctrine reflects the thinking of the predominant influence group within a military organization. Such thinking may be derived from an agreed-on set of principles and values, or it may reflect a consensus of a body of experts. In either case, the maxims that have been blessed for promulgation in official publications and military schools are the doctrines that are most likely to be applied in the next war, at least initially. Few of the battle leaders of the next war will have had combat experience. They will rely on familiar practices from the books and exercises of peacetime training as the first battle of the next war engulfs them in the fog of war.

To assess conventional deterrence, we must examine the doctrine that will guide battle leaders at the operational level to defeat the enemy. The body of common doctrine for NATO land forces is embodied in *Allied*

Training Program 35, Land Forces Doctrine ATP-35. This document, however, represents not so much common doctrine as it does the lowest common doctrinal denominator. The manual itself points out that significant national differences exist: "Nevertheless, it must be recognized that there are variations in tactical doctrine and terminology among nations that are impossible to totally explain or standardize."<sup>3</sup> In a general way, many NATO leaders have recognized that there are divergent approaches to NATO's operational task, but there has as yet been neither identification nor analysis of the key doctrinal differences.

ATP-35 organizes the defense of the Central Region into three areas of the battlefield: the covering force area CFA, the main battle area MBA, and the rear area RA. The covering force area is the zone between the enemy forces and the friendly forces' forward edge of the battle area FEBA. Units in this area will "observe, intercept, engage, delay, disorganize and deceive the enemy before he can attack the main force."<sup>4</sup> In the main battle area, from the FEBA rearward to the rear boundaries of the unit's fighting forces, "it is planned to fight the decisive defensive battle."<sup>5</sup> In the RA are located logistical and fire support units, as well as any reserve formations.

This three-tiered organization of the battlefield is all that NATO's doctrine calls for. Within this framework, each ally is free to establish an operational concept for defending its corps sector in the Central Region. Although all the NATO allies subscribe to harmonization of battle concepts as reflected in ATP-35, there is in fact much variation in operational doctrines.

### Sources of Doctrinal Differences

By allowing much room for doctrinal interpretation, NATO structurally encourages national differences among the allies in conventional war fighting. Such differences are rooted in complex political, historical, cultural, psychological, and geographical causes. The most significant causal factor is the political one.

NATO's overarching strategy is the two-pronged approach of flexible response and forward defense. Politically, forward defense means that a cohesive effort will be mounted as close to the eastern border as possible, with the objective of surrendering as little territory as possible initially and recapturing lost ground rapidly. Any operational concept that explicitly calls for yielding territory, even if it is in order to gain time, is politically unacceptable to the most threatened NATO member, the FRG. Yet there are differing interpretations of the operational meaning of forward defense.

Domestic as well as international politics can influence military doctrine. There is a recurring debate in the U.S. Congress over the proper role of

U.S. forces in Europe. The debate ranges across issues such as arms control and burden sharing. Dutch forces in Germany must rely on a particular kind of doctrine imposed by the system of reserve mobilization for reinforcement of its units in Germany. And domestic defense budgets impose resource limitations on doctrine in terms of equipment, training, and force structure.

NATO historians traditionally have agreed that the strategy of forward defense was a political necessity to ensure eventual German rearmament and participation in the alliance, as well as to allay French fears of a defeated Reich rearmed for the second time in a half-century. Although purely military considerations suggest that forward defense need not be concerned with protecting every square inch of West European soil, political considerations are another matter. In fact, the German Social Democratic party, for example, has advocated at different times a forward defense as far east as the Vistula, Niemen, and Elbe rivers, although surely such defensive lines would not be advocated in the 1980s.<sup>6</sup>

There is also a cultural aspect to conventional war doctrine. Many analysts have concluded that unique sociological experiences have shaped the armed forces of a given country to fight in a particular fashion. Such preferences may influence perceptions of the nature of the next war, and thus the way forces plan to fight. For example, the British may tend to favor Liddell-Hart's indirect approach, the French are sometimes accused of retaining a "Maginot mentality," and the U.S. Army may seem to try to win by sheer weight of materiel.

Force of personality of senior commanders also affects the operational implementation of NATO strategy. Pride, initiative, and aggressiveness are military virtues, and it is no accident that great military men also have great egos. Generals and marshals tend to advocate their own concepts in any coalition, and contention among subordinates traditionally plagues supreme commanders. Where a Patton and a Montgomery serve on the same side, one must hope for an Eisenhower to exercise command.

Geography can be one of the most important determinants of doctrine. Operational concepts appropriate to one region may be completely unworkable in another area. The classic topographic division of West Germany consists of the northern plain and the central and southern hills and mountains. It should come as no surprise that there are significantly differing ideas on how to stop a Soviet-style attack in separate regions.

### Forms of Defense

Given the particular set of factors—political, historical, cultural, psychological, and geographical—affecting military doctrine, the defense can take one

of four basic operational forms: area, linear, mobile, and aggressive. Most real-world operational plans are variations and modifications of these pure forms. Various factors go into the formulation of the final concept of operations, including the familiar factors of mission, enemy, terrain, and troops available. For analytical purposes, however, it is useful to establish these four basic forms and then to examine how the several national corps implement these concepts in the Central Region.

Area defense is defense in depth. The defender disperses his forces into numerous small unit concentrations in an attempt to be nearly everywhere in at least some strength in order to meet the enemy with force wherever he may strike. Once the attacker is deeply enmeshed within the defensive network, he is gradually worn down by small unit hit-and-run tactics, sometimes in the form of guerrilla warfare and sometimes by means of large-scale counterattacks to keep the attacker off balance. Although the attacker may achieve an initial penetration of the defense, he must eventually withdraw or risk being defeated by a process of attrition. The Finnish defense against the Soviet attack in 1939–1940 is generally regarded as an example of successful area defense against a superior force.

The mobile defense was developed to counter the German offensive operational concept of blitzkrieg in World War II. The defensive zone is divided into the three sectors of CFA, MBA, and RA. In the CFA, highly mobile, lightly armored forces are thinly deployed across the entire defensive front to make initial contact with the attacker. As the attack develops, the covering force tries to make the enemy concentrate his armored spearhead into corridors preselected and extensively prepared in advance by the defender. The covering force fights a delaying action in front of the enemy, falling back until the enemy reaches the main defensive area. In the MBA, the bulk of the defensive force has prepared strong positions to block and defeat the attack. If the MBA is penetrated, large mobile armored reserves are called up from the rear area to meet the penetration. Once the attacker can no longer advance, the defender rapidly mounts a counterattack to cut off and destroy the enemy or to force him to withdraw from the main defense area.

In a linear defense, the defender constructs a wall along a line that the attacking enemy is not permitted to cross. The line is fortified and covered by massed firepower to annihilate any attacker who might attempt to break through the line. Behind the fortified wall the defender positions a few mobile reserves at key locations to stop any temporary breaches of the line. The French Maginot Line was a classic attempt at linear defense. It should be recalled that the much-maligned Maginot Line was not penetrated when the Germans attacked in May 1940; it was bypassed.

Finally there is an aggressive form of defense in which the defender attempts to seize the initiative early, without assuming any one of the three other forms of defense as the primary mission of the bulk of its forces. Aggressive defense is rooted in the belief that the best defense is a good offense. The Israeli preemptive attack in the 1967 war is an extreme example of aggressive defense, but there are less drastic forms. In 1976, British Army Major R.S. Evans published a prize-winning essay that best articulated the concept of an aggressive defense. He suggested that NATO forces in Europe ought to hold large reserves well forward that would conduct offensive operations on the enemy side of the FEBA. These attacks would be directed at destroying key logistical, C<sup>3</sup>, and intelligence elements of the enemy's force, as well as at disrupting the movement of second-echelon formations.<sup>7</sup> This concept is emerging as a separate form of the defense.

### National Corps Doctrines

The latitude allowed to national forces in implementing NATO common doctrine permits widely divergent conceptual schemes for conducting the Central Region war.<sup>8</sup> There is sufficient variety in national doctrines that adjacent fighting forces may be waging completely different forms of battle at the operational level. There are five member nations in NATO's integrated military structure that contribute significant forces in the forward defense of the Central Region of Western Europe. Each national force has a distinctive doctrine for waging the operational first battle.

The West Germans are preparing to fight a classical armor-heavy mobile defense. Under this concept, defensive positions are prepared and occupied. Forward units fight to channelize attacking formations, and, at a strategically decisive place and time, the commander launches an armored counterattack to stop and repulse invading forces. The Germans, who perfected the mobile warfare idea, continue to practice it in the defense of their homeland.

U.S. Army doctrine calls for an aggressive defense: the Air-Land Battle. This concept involves conducting simultaneous deep attacks into the depths of oncoming Warsaw Pact formations at strategically vulnerable points while fighting an overall defensive battle across the entire front. This defensive effort is characterized by strong points and delaying actions. The Americans have changed their doctrinal concept for the defense of Germany several times in the past fifteen years; thus Air-Land Battle represents an evolutionary development that over the years has moved from a relatively static concept through progressively more mobile doctrines to this latest idea depending largely on mobility for the decisive defeat of the enemy.

Although Air-Land Battle is espoused by the U.S. Army, the concept has not been totally embraced by U.S. forces assigned to defend the NATO central region. General Rogers has publicly stated that Air-Land Battle is not the concept that would be used if conflict broke out in Western Europe.<sup>9</sup> He recognizes that in coalition warfare, a host of factors—political, strategic, military, economic, social—influence operational doctrine and its implementation. If U.S. forces were to shift away from active or mobile defense concepts to Air-Land Battle precepts without changes in the doctrines of the Allies, the doctrinal disparity would be striking. For the purposes of assessing the political and military implications of alliance doctrinal disparity, this analysis assumes that U.S. forces would indeed adopt the Air-Land Battle concept as their NATO doctrine.

The Belgian force deployed in West Germany requires initial reinforcement from Belgium prior to implementing its doctrine for stopping a Warsaw Pact attack. Once suitably strengthened, the Belgian army plans to conduct a somewhat fluid variation of the classical area defense in depth. Throughout their defense sector, the Belgians plan platoon and company-sized fighting positions and combat positions that are overlapping and mutually supporting. No large reserve is deployed in Germany. The corps will depend on the arrival of mobilized reserves from Belgium to perform the essential reserve missions of counterattack and reinforcement.

British doctrine calls for a modified area defense. Strong forward defensive positions will be backed up by smaller scattered multiple antitank fighting positions of about squad or platoon size. These antiarmor elements will allow enemy armor to pass and then engage them from the flanks and rear. At the decisive moment, a counterattack will repel the enemy from the British sector. It is interesting to note that the British Army is one of the few in NATO that does not prescribe operational parameters with doctrinal guidance. There is no British equivalent of the U.S. Army's FM 100-5. British doctrine is thus more fluid and adaptable.

The Netherlands Army in Germany, like that of the Belgians, requires reinforcement from the homeland in order to carry out its mission. The Netherlands Army plans to fight an area defense that relies on shifting massed artillery fires to achieve operational mobility to stop any penetrations of the main battle area. With the bulk of its forces held in unmobilized reserve formations in Holland, however, the greatest problem facing the Dutch will be getting to the war. Once in place, they plan to prepare strong defensive positions backed up by heavy concentrations of prearranged indirect fires to halt the attacking enemy. A strong mechanized and armored force, organized out of mobilized units redeploying out of the Dutch homeland, will counterattack to restore the German border.

The national doctrines vary in form, each emphasizing one or two principles of war at the expense of others to achieve a guiding mechanism for the defeat of attacking Warsaw Pact forces. These varying doctrinal emphases reflect the unique circumstances of each country. Viewed in terms of NATO's conventional operational doctrines, the central region can be represented schematically as shown in figure 11-1. In this diagram ovals represent relatively fixed positions. Arrows show the route of advance from the RA of counterattacking forces. These are, of course, only notional representations of the various doctrinal frameworks.

The differences across national corps sectors are striking. At least three differing forms of defense are evident with no apparent sequence or logic to the scheme. Three countries' forces, all in the northern geographical half of the continent, employ an area defense. Under the Air-Land Battle concept, the United States, in the south, would use an aggressive defense, while the three German Corps in the Central Region, intermingled among the others, plan to conduct a classic mobile defense. These wide-ranging differences in operational concepts produce mixed results with regard to the potential for alliance conventional deterrence.

### Implications

The first and perhaps most important result of wide divergences among allied doctrines is that conventional deterrence will be difficult to achieve and maintain. As long as significant differences exist and persist, extensive coordination and liaison among adjacent forces will be imperative. This is certainly true of actual wartime combat operations. It is especially important in peacetime, when the objective is the creation of the perception in the enemy's mind of an overwhelming ability and political will to defeat him without early resort to nuclear weapons—that is, conventional deterrence. Effective deterrence necessitates that alliance members demonstrate an ability to avoid operational disharmonies, a difficult task.

The history of coalition warfare suggests that differences among allies will persist. Where common doctrine allows for different methods of fighting, it falls on the shoulders of the senior joint commanders and their staffs to ensure that differences are resolved in such a way that subordinate units do not operate at cross-purposes to each other. This is one of the greatest advantages to the continued presence of the NATO integrated military structure; such differences can be identified and solutions worked out in peacetime.

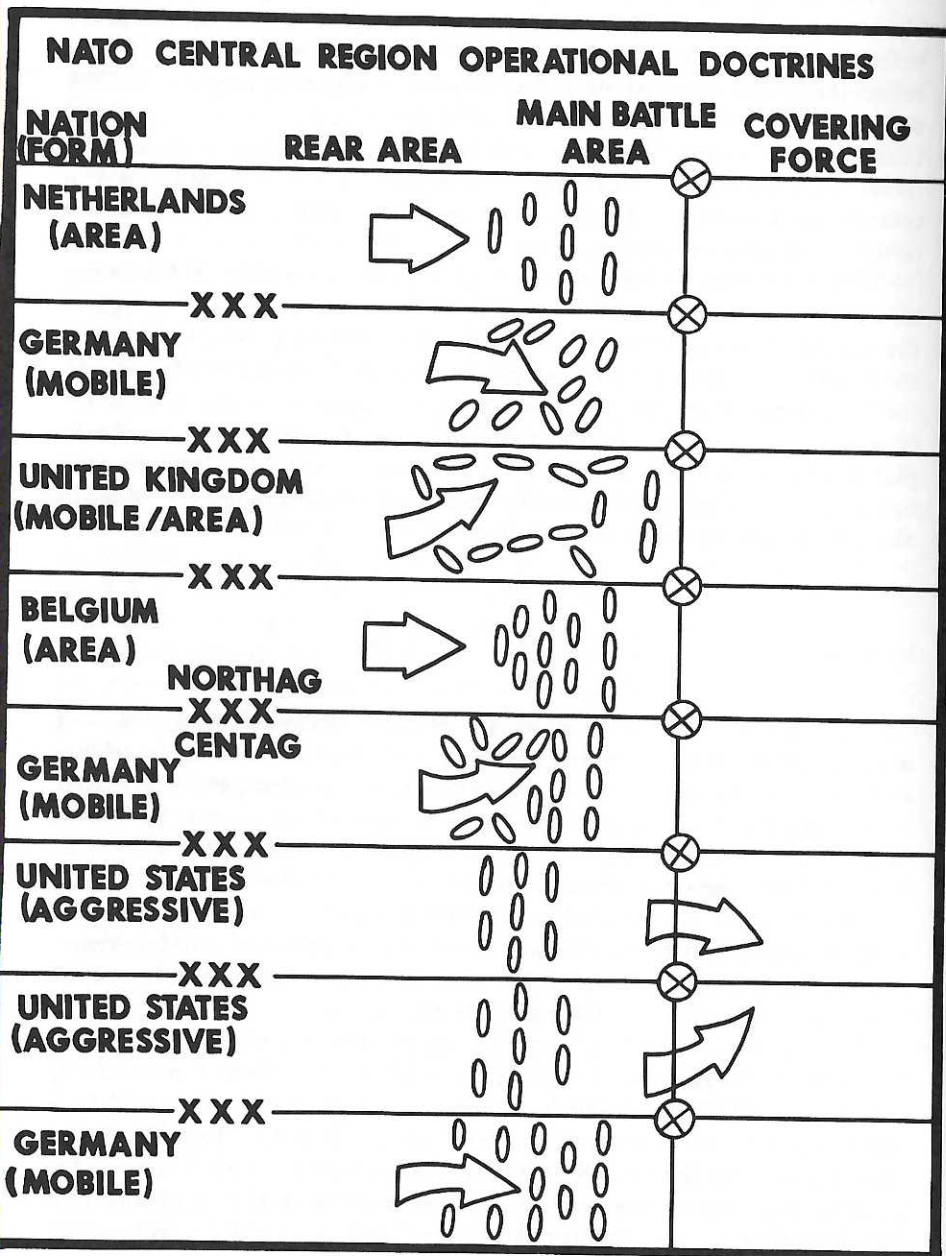


Figure 11-1. NATO Central Region Operational Doctrines

Doctrines have a tendency to become dogma, and it is therefore unrealistic to expect the allies to be able to come to some sort of consensus on a single way to fight the defensive war in Central Europe. In the event of war, NATO may need another Eisenhower to keep the Pattons and Montgomerys of the future, if not operating in the same manner, then at least not harming each other's effort. Aggressive leadership by joint commanders will be the only means to accomplish this where doctrines diverge.

NATO Has some experience at resolving such doctrinal rivalries. Flanking national units exchange plans and liaison officers, but it takes continuous attention to and anticipation of potential problems to ensure harmonization of operations. Key control measures—such as the actual trace of the FEBA—must be accurately established and coordinated. Frequent exchange of liaison officers is vital between adjacent units down to battalion level so that flanking allies are advised of each other's activities and intelligence. Fire support planning must be thoroughly coordinated so that neighboring units can call on each other's artillery if necessary and so that artillery units can fire across boundaries at extended ranges as needed. These procedures and plans are exercised in joint maneuvers, but alliance interoperability at the operational level must continue to be practiced to meet the requirements of a strategy of conventional deterrence.

The second implication of the absence of an operational, nonnuclear doctrinal consensus for conventional deterrence is more ominous. Considering the nature of the anticipated Warsaw Pact threat, it is possible to identify the weak links in the NATO chain of defense by looking at how forces are matched to their doctrines. There are some serious mismatches, particularly with the U.S., Belgian, and Dutch forces. The force-strategy disjuncture is a problem that has been with NATO since the Lisbon Conference. But if the alliance is to rely on conventional deterrence, then a similar mismatch at the operational level becomes just as important.

The U.S. Air-Land Battle version of aggressive defense would presume the presence of large, highly mobile, responsive, and sustainable forward reserves. Yet U.S. forces in Europe are already highly taxed to man defensive positions. The problem of garrison maldeployment heightens this difficulty. The Americans will be hard pressed to create the reserves necessary to conduct deep attacks in the face of an all-out Warsaw Pact offensive. U.S. forces are sufficiently mobile and are equipped with proficient C<sup>3</sup> and intelligence capabilities to make Air-Land Battle operations theoretically possible; however, large-scale exercises employing Air Land Battle precepts suggest that insufficient logistics capabilities are on hand in Europe to support wide-ranging and continuous maneuver.

The Belgian and Dutch forces are too understrength and poorly equipped to make a positional defense on the north German plain a credible deterrent. Both corps maintain less than a division at any given time in West

Germany, and both countries require mobilization of reserves to fill out the units necessary to defend their sectors. Given the fact that positional, area-type defenses require the longest time to prepare and to strengthen, the lack of manpower in these corps sectors makes conventional war-fighting ability less believable there.

A third implication operates at a conceptual doctrinal level. All other things being equal, the northern corps sectors that rely on area-type defenses are more susceptible to penetration by a Soviet-style multiple echelon offensive. In the Northern Army Group (NORTHAG) area, the Warsaw Pact forces face three corps sectors known to be organized into area-type defenses: British, Belgian, and Dutch corps. Because it is easier to identify gaps and to break through a relatively static positional defense, Warsaw Pact forces may concentrate their efforts against these sectors. The combination of open terrain and positional defense force deployments makes the NORTHAG front particularly vulnerable in the 1980s. This vulnerability will remain a controversial policy issue.

A fourth implication of increased reliance on conventional deterrence has to do with the role of reserves in counterattack missions. Because of the doctrinal vulnerability of NORTHAG, theater reserves will need to be prepared to reinforce that sector. Additionally, flanking forces need to be prepared to shift mobile units to adjacent sectors if breakthrough attempts in the Dutch, Belgian, and British corps sectors succeed. This problem is particularly important for the Dutch and Belgian corps because these two forces may have to be reinforced not only in the MBA but also in the CFA at the start of a future European conflict.

Regardless of the size and composition of reserves, all national corps depend on counteroffensive operations to repel an aggressor once the initial attack is slowed. These counterattacks may occur at different times during the course of the battle, depending on the outcome of the MBA fight. Therefore, there might be an uneven withdrawal on the part of the invading Warsaw Pact forces. Thus counterattacks will have to be thoroughly coordinated with adjacent friendly units. This would be especially true of forces that abut the U.S. corps if the Americans implemented Air-Land Battle concepts and carried the initiative well into the rear of enemy formations. Such actions, if successful, would likely be far forward of any other NATO forces.

Because each ally establishes and operates under its own doctrine, these problems probably will not be resolved through compromise or through some sort of integrated NATO doctrine. Within the common understanding set forth in ATP-35, doctrinal differences for operations will persist among the allies. It may turn out that the diversity of doctrines complicates the problems of the Warsaw Pact attack planners in such a way that it becomes difficult for them to identify areas in which to attempt initial breakthrough

attacks. This diversity also serves to complicate Soviet training programs. While a case for some diversity can be made on these grounds, it is unlikely that individual national doctrines have produced the optimal pattern of diversity.

This assessment of the military implications of doctrinal diversity within the alliance has identified problems currently confounding conventional deterrence. These differences need not condemn NATO conventional deterrence to failure, but they will clearly complicate the task of developing a coherent conventional strategy.<sup>10</sup>

### Conclusion

Can conventional doctrine enhance conventional deterrence? There is no doctrinal formula that will provide NATO with a conceptual guarantee that conventional deterrence will work. Attrition-maneuver, annihilation-attrition, and all such conceptual schemes for understanding styles of war are oversimplifications of a phenomenon that is vastly more complicated than any dichotomous formulation could explain. Doctrinal differences exist among NATO allies, and these differences will persist. One of the paramount tasks of the SACEUR is to work to harmonize alliance military capabilities: doctrine, force structure, planning, logistics, and so forth. Although significant progress has been achieved in the post-Vietnam period, these efforts will continue to be frustrated by limitations inherent in the diversities of coalition warfare. If the alliance wants increased reliance on conventional deterrence, NATO's military and political leaders must come to grips with a set of problems that will be amplified by doctrinal differences at the operational level. Conventional deterrence may work, but it will have to be worked at.

### Notes

1. Ted Schroeder, U.S. Air Force, "Doctrine and Strategy—The Misunderstood Basics," *Military Review* 59 (January 1979): 12–13.
2. I.B. Holley, Jr., "The Doctrinal Process: Some Suggested Steps," *Military Review* 59 (April 1979): 5.
3. North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Allied Training Program 35, Land Forces Doctrine (Brussels: NATO, 1981), p. xiii.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Federal Republic of Germany, *Germany Reports*, 3d ed. (Bonn: Press and Information Office of the Federal Republic, 1961), p. 292.
7. R.S. Evans, "The Need for Offensive Operations on Land," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute* 121 (September 1976): 23–28.

8. The information in this section is based on interview data obtained in November 1981 and on the following doctrinal publications: U.S. Department of the Army, *Field Manual 100-5, Operations* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army, 1982); Federal Republic of Germany, Ministry of Defense, Army Staff III-6, *Command and Control in Battle Army Regulation 100/100* (Bonn: Führung im Gefecht, HDv 100/100, September 1973); and Belgian Army Manual G119, *L'emploi tactique des grandes unite's*, 1979.

9. Charles Doe, "Air Land Concept, NATO Tactics Differ," *Army Times*, October 10, 1983, p. 19.

10. Differences in military doctrine and in conceptions of forward defense also have important political implications. For an analysis of these factors see Kleckley in Chapter 5 of this volume.