

# WAITING FOR THE NEXT STEP...

In his UN speech, Mr. Gorbachev said: "We will maintain the defence capability of our country at a reasonable and sufficient level." What does this mean? What would make Western Europe feel more secure?

I would like to outline three different subjects for analysis: the number of forces, the structure of forces, and Soviet political behaviour.

**The number of forces.** Western Europe's key problem is what we regard as the worrisome conventional superiority of the Warsaw Pact. In the Central Region, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), some 800,000 Western ground troops face 1.15 million Eastern troops, with a tank imbalance of 13,000 to 21,000 and an artillery gap of 4,700 to 14,600.

West Europeans have always worried more about troop reinforcements than about forces already in place. And here, the Warsaw Pact has a natural advantage which derives from the simple fact of geography: the Soviet Union is close by and can reinforce its forward troops by road and rail while the United States must do so by sea, across 4,000 kilometres of ocean.

And so the edge that the East has become quite dramatic 30 days after

the start of the conflict. According to the West German defense ministry, the lineup would look like this: 2.8 million NATO troops against 6 million Warsaw Pact troops; 22,000 tanks against 54,000 tanks; 18,000 Western against 48,000 Eastern artillery pieces.

That does not look like "reasonable sufficiency"; indeed, it looks more like an impressive invasion capability. Yet, if "sufficiency" means anything, it would be the certainty that both sides would be capable of defending themselves, but unable to attack each other.

Mr. Gorbachev's announcement in New York that he plans to remove 50,000 ground troops and 5,000 tanks from Central Europe is an important step forward. Yet this would merely reduce, but not eliminate Warsaw Pact superiority. "Sufficiency" would therefore be well-served by drastic reductions in tanks, infantry and artillery. A very good start would be equal numbers for both sides. "Sufficiency" also requires **structural change**.

**The structure of forces.** The Soviet doctrine since World War II has heavily favoured the offensive; accordingly, the aggressor must be defeated on his own territory. Perhaps that

doctrine is changing now; however, the existing deployment of Warsaw Pact forces leaves ample reason for concern.

According to NATO estimates, the Warsaw Pact has 2,500 assault bridges mounted on armoured vehicles; the Western alliance has only 454. This vast gap in river-spanning equipment suggests an army that plans to move fast in search of conquered space. Hence drastic cuts in the number of such bridging devices would be very reassuring. The same would hold true for other fast-attack forces. Any removal of offensive forces from a forward position would mute the threat of an unreinforced attack.

Western Europe would, therefore, feel most assured about constraints of both mobility and reinforcement capabilities. In practice, this would mean a different force structure: fewer tanks and more antitank weapons, fewer mechanized forces and more infantry, fewer long-range aircraft and more air defense fighters, fewer Category One and more Category Three divisions.

The Soviet Union could take a number of reassuring steps elsewhere. According to NATO, the Soviet output of main battle tanks in 1987 rose to 3,400 - up from 3,000 in 1985. This is 2 1/2 times more than the total tank

force of France. Perestroika must extend to the Soviet arms sector: the pace of Soviet arms procurement must be slowed down.

All these changes, especially if they continue, will have a far greater impact on Western threat perceptions than a ten per cent reduction in Soviet forces. The Soviet Union will always be a great power - and always stronger than any West European nation, and that will always be a problem. But a steady, predictable and responsible foreign policy will make a real difference. Mr. Gorbachev has made a great start, but is the change irreversible? As a good Socialist would say, this is a "historical process", and, unfortunately, we do know about the unpleasant dialectics of history.

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The basic point is this: once we have learned that we can trust each other - which depends on continued deeds rather than on inspiring words - then we can afford to pay a lower premium for military insurance. As a result, we will buy fewer bombs and bullets - which is the nicest way to move toward "reasonable sufficiency".

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## ...THIS TIME FROM NATO

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Western analysts are fond of comparing NATO and Warsaw Treaty Organization armaments numerically. Well, numbers do look convincing, especially to those seeing them for the

a million troops and 10,000 tanks is a considerable contribution to lessening military tensions in Europe. Of course, it does not eliminate all asymmetries and disproportions in the

sion announced by Mikhail Gorbachev to the United Nations is the beginning of a radical turn from an offensive to a defensive structure of Soviet armed forces. Yes, the Soviet

armed forces deployed in the European part of the Soviet Union. Allegedly, these can quickly advance to the frontline and exploit the strategic success of the attacking