

Ottawa intends do its part to redress the imbalance.

But behind the scenes, an alternate view is emerging. A growing number of experts is demanding that NATO adopt a more sophisticated means of comparing the capabilities of the two opposing alliances.

"It makes no sense to compare gross numbers, as so many journalists and politicians do," said a report released last week by a group of arms control experts in Washington. Its authors included Johnathan Dean, former head of the U.S. negotiating team at the conventional force reduction talks and retired Vice-Admiral John Lee, a former high-ranking NATO official.

"The widely accepted notion that the Warsaw Pact enjoys overwhelming superiority in Europe is wrong," the study concluded.

In Ottawa, the Centre for Arms Control and Disarmament is about to launch an investigation of its own. "Getting at this question requires Canadian planners to go beyond the orthodoxies that come out of NATO," said Barrett. "We should be doing our own studies to assess the level of our conventional deterrence."

"The military rule of thumb is that an attacker needs a 3-1 advantage," he explained. "But if

we see ourselves as the defender (NATO has always said that it would not strike first in conventional war), we may not be as badly off as we think."

Canada's role in the post-summit arms control debate, Barrett suggested, should be to project more confidence in NATO's strength and demand more critical analysis from its western allies.

Roche welcomed this proposal. "Conventional weapons have been used in 150 regional wars since 1945, killing more than 20 million people," he noted. "Gorbachev has said he is ready to move on conventional forces. He should be pushed."

This kind of thinking is by no means widespread in Canada. And it is being resisted vigorously by the federal defence department, which looks on the post-summit era as the new golden age for Canada's conventional forces.

But ideas, once planted, are hard to kill.

There was a time — not long ago — when the idea that the leaders of the two superpowers might get together to eliminate an entire class of nuclear weapons seemed unthinkable. But somehow the dreamers prevailed.

The next unlikely idea is already germinating.