

causes some to doubt the French commitment to the forward defence of the Central Front, and, hence, to exclude these forces from estimates of the balance.⁷ Similarly, doubts are sometimes raised regarding the willingness of the smaller NATO nations to commit their combat forces in all circumstances. Soviet protestations of American and/or German provocation and Soviet promises to avoid direct engagement with national forces may convince some West European nations to withhold their forces from combat. Although the present commitment of the smaller European nations to the Alliance is acknowledged as strong, some analysts may assume that the spectre of imminent conflict may prompt these nations to reconsider their military commitments to the Central Front; this assumption would be reflected in the exclusion of these forces from the NATO order of battle.

Qualitative Factors Affecting the Balance

The preceding discussion demonstrates the importance of the assumptions underlying the assessments of the conventional force balance. Bearing these in mind, how then should one interpret portrayals of the conventional force balance? Specifically, what is the significance of quantitative asymmetries in the balance for the outcome on the battlefield? Can numerical superiority in manpower, tanks, and artillery guarantee victory in conventional war?

The lessons of history suggest that superior numbers cannot always ensure victory on the battlefield. For example,

⁷ Concern with the French commitment to West German security has faded in recent years. Since the early 1980's, French officials have stated repeatedly that France's 'vital interests' are no longer confined to the area west of the Rhine, but, instead, begin at the Elbe (the river separating East from West Germany). The growing recognition of the two countries' common security interests is best symbolized by the proposed creation of a joint Franco-German army brigade.