

4. CONVENTIONAL ARMED FORCES IN EUROPE

BACKGROUND

Multilateral arms control efforts dealing with conventional forces in Europe have occurred under the auspices of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and in bloc-to-bloc negotiations between NATO and the former Warsaw Pact. In the first instance, negotiations have developed confidence, and security-building measures, and the latter negotiations have reduced and placed limits on the numbers of conventional armed forces in Europe.

Reductions in Conventional Forces

Negotiations between NATO and the Warsaw Pact on reducing conventional forces in Europe first began in 1973 with the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) talks. The MBFR talks sought to place limits on conventional forces within a zone in central Europe comprising Belgium, Czechoslovakia, East and West Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Poland. The talks were plagued by a lack of political will and problems created by a fundamental difference in the approach of the two sides. They continued without success until February 1989.

A new set of negotiations, known as the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) talks, began on 9 March 1989 and culminated in the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty). The Treaty was signed by twenty European states along with Canada and the US on 19 November 1990. This remarkably short negotiation time was due to the new political will arising from the political change which occurred in Europe during that same period, and the ability to draw on the MBFR experience. It is a treaty of historic importance as it provides the first ever limits on the large numbers of weapons deployed by NATO and the Warsaw Pact in Europe.

The CFE Treaty consists of twenty-three articles and eight protocols. It seeks not just to establish limits on certain categories of equipment and arms, but by doing so to reduce the capability for surprise attacks or offensive military action.