

GAME PROFILE:

NATO

Operational Combat in Europe in the 1970's

by Steve List

The Organization of the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO) is a mutual security pact currently incorporating Belgium, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Turkey, United States, and West Germany. France has withdrawn from the integrated military organization, but is still a member. She maintains ties with western Europe through the Brussels Treaty (Britain, Italy, West Germany, the Benelux), and by an agreement between the two governments. France stations two divisions in Germany which do not fall under the NATO structure.

Land defense of the territory covered by the game falls mainly to Allied Forces Central Europe (AFCENT). This is divided into the Northern Army Group (British, Belgian and Dutch forces, four German divisions) and the Central Army Group (US and Canadian forces, seven German divisions). In addition, the game

covers a part of the Jutland peninsula, which falls under AFNORTH. The Danish army and the single German division in this command are included in the game as well.

The equivalent Soviet-sponsored organization is the so-called Warsaw Pact, which comprises Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Rumania, as well as the USSR. Each member nation has bilateral commitments to every other member to further strength the alliance. In the event of war, forces of the Pact are to be operationally subordinated to the Soviet High Command, which maintains four major headquarters in eastern Europe: The Northern Group of Forces (Poland); the Central Group of Forces (Czechoslovakia); the Southern Group of Forces (Hungary); and the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany. In wartime, at least part of the Southern Group, plus Bulgarian and Rumanian troops would deploy against NATO forces in the Mediterranean area.

At peacetime levels, NATO forces in northern and central Europe are badly outnumbered (see Table A), while on a war footing the disparity gets worse. The peacetime strength of the NATO nations in the game, excluding France and Italy, which are not committed elsewhere comes to only some 28 divisions, with a total of 31 divisions (mostly US) of organized reserves. The game would be over before these could be deployed, however.

The balance of NATO reserves are earmarked to bring active units up to strength, replace casualties and form units for territorial defense. The latter would see action only when the fighting reached their localities.

Warsaw Pact nations do not have organized reserve divisions per se; rather they maintain their active duty units at anywhere from 25% to 100% of full TOE levels, with some units having obsolete equipment. Of the 200 divisions available to the Pact nations in the

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

NATO is a division level game covering an attack by forces of the Warsaw Pact on the NATO Central European Command. The territory covers all of West Germany and parts of the surrounding nations. Each hex represents 10 miles; each Game-Turn two days, with a maximum game length of 50 days. The game assumes tactical air power by each side will cancel out the other, while naval and strategic air considerations will not be felt in the time span of the game.

The game employs a two phase movement system and a relatively bloodless Combat Results Table. This results in a war of movement which can degenerate into a sort of mobile trench warfare if unit densities get sufficiently high. Both sides employ divisional size units. NATO forces also include a number of brigades, with some conversion between sizes; in addition, eliminated NATO divisions are sometimes replaced by brigade sized battle groups. All units are "conventional," with the exception of air transportable units, used by both sides, and airmobile units found only in the US Army.

Greatly affecting play are the supply rules. Units not in supply may not attack, and have their movement and defense values halved. In addition, there are three states of

attack supply: *Minimum*, at which Attack Strength is halved; *Normal*; *Maximum* (Warsaw Pact only) at which Attack Strength is doubled.

NATO units must trace a supply line no more than eight Movement Points long to a supply source. They must draw Normal Attack Supply from a source of the same nationality, but may draw other forms of supply from any friendly source. NATO supply units have a Movement Allowance of three, and can move only on the second Movement Phase, but under some circumstances they may triple this Allowance. It is a rare occurrence for a NATO unit to be found out of supply, and uncommon even for it to be out of attack supply.

Warsaw Pact units must trace a supply line no more than six Movement Points long (for Maximum Attack Supply, the supply unit must be adjacent). Supply units used for Normal or Maximum Attack Supply are removed from play. These supply units have a Movement Allowance of two and can move only on the second Phase when outside Pact territory. It is thus quite easy for the Warsaw Pact player to outrun his supply units, while expenditure of too many of them per Player-Turn will deplete his initial stock faster than they can be replaced from the rear.

Another rule with major impact is the tactical nuclear warfare rule. The basic effect of this is to triple the Attack Strength of NATO units and double that of Pact units (this doubling cannot be applied on top of Maximum Attack Supply doubling). Because the Warsaw Pact can stack two divisions per hex and NATO only one, the NATO player derives relatively more benefit from this rule. Not only do his units "go further," he can achieve decent odds against positions which would be near impregnable without the nuclear rule.

The game has four basic scenarios, called M+1 and M+31, each with and without use of nuclear weapons. The M+31 scenarios represent hostilities starting after a one month buildup that brings both sides to their maximum strengths. The M+1 scenarios start with NATO having a larger fraction of its total force on the map than does the Pact. Since the Warsaw Pact buildup proceeds faster than the NATO, that player may delay start of hostilities until his strength is sufficiently greater than his opponent's. As variations on these basic scenarios are three optional rules by which both sides may lose strength due to neutrality of members of their alliances. In addition, Soviet forces may be reduced by rebellions of allied nations or trouble with Red China.

game, perhaps half are in the 75-100% range. Not all of these divisions are available for use in the west — Russian keeps 45 divisions on the Chinese border alone, while armed forces must be maintained in the "captive nations" by their own governments to prevent disaffection or open rebellion. Altogether, the USSR could deploy some 100 to 110 divisions outside her own borders, with another 20+ from her allies.

The value of the various troops in the alliances is another matter. While Russian soldiers may be highly trained and motivated, even for a war of aggression, it is unlikely the average Warsaw Pact trooper would gladly die for the Supreme Soviet and the Glory of Mother Russia. Although the Warsaw Pact is a defensive alliance, its command apparatus is totally Soviet controlled. Barring political intervention, the Soviet command could rely on the Pact command to faithfully follow orders. On the Allied side, the quality of the troops and their motivation may also vary considerably. The largely professional US and British forces, and the West Germans, should perform better than the smaller nations which would prefer to stay neutral if they could. In the interests of simplifying the game and standardizing units, the variability of quality of troops on both sides has been factored into the probability of their countries remaining neutral.

The USSR and its allies use much the same equipment and organizations. Armored divisions have three tank and one mechanized regiments, while the Mechanized divisions have the opposite ratio; each also has engineer, anti-tank, anti-aircraft, reconnaissance, and four artillery battalions. The Tank Regiment consists of three 30 tank battalions and a mechanized infantry company; the Mechanized Regiment has three mechanized and one tank battalion. The Armored division totals 9,000 men and 316 medium tanks, the Mechanized division 10,750 men and 188 tanks.

Things are not so neat on the NATO side. However, all forces here use a structure of three

brigades to a division for the most part, and the brigades are of comparable strength within each division type and from country to country. There are certain exceptions to this generalizations. The West German 6-6-8 divisions are stronger than average due to their larger AFV complement (the excess being largely specialized anti-tank vehicles). The numerous 3-3-8 divisions in some cases represent divisions with only two brigades (chiefly in the British contingent), under-strength divisions, or infantry divisions with few or no tanks.

The major exceptions are the special US Tricap and airmobile divisions. The airmobile unit consists largely of air transportable infantry and artillery, with transport and ground attack helicopters. In practice, a part of the combat units form a secure base area from which the helicopters operate. The Tricap division is similar except that it has fewer infantry battalions — instead it has a conventional armored brigade and a stronger "air cavalry" component. It is an attempt to create the ultimate in combined arms units. Of course, neither of these divisional types has been combat tested in a "mechanized environment" or in the face of enemy air opposition. And as of right now, only one of each is in existence.

Neither side has a significantly superior weapon or weapons system, barring well-kept secrets, but in general, the NATO forces have technically superior weapons. In addition, the average NATO soldier is better educated, if not trained, than his counterpart. This, hopefully, makes him more flexible and adaptable, and better able to use his more sophisticated weapons. In addition, the Western units have better logistical support and more depth, or "bench strength." Thus they should have more staying power in combat than the Soviet-style units, which are allowed to burn themselves out before being pulled out of action. Whether these subjective, qualitative advantages are enough to counter the Warsaw Pact's massive quantitative superiority is open to question.

There is only one type of weapon of which NATO enjoys a superiority — nuclear warheads. Not counting those the French have of their own, NATO has stockpiled some 7,000 nuclear devices to the Pact's 3,500. The situation is hardly clearcut, however. Current western strategy precludes wide scale employment of these weapons, while policy prohibits initiating their use. As all but some British warheads are stockpiled under US control, any Soviet use of nuclear weapons would go unanswered until the President authorized their use and they could be distributed to the troops. This may take too long to happen and could perhaps be prevented entirely by attacks on the stockpiles. In essence, the only superiority NATO has rests in a weapon it cannot use with full effectiveness.

The Soviet scenario for the invasion of Germany is based on doctrine calling for rapid advances, up to 70 kilometers per day, bringing them to the Rhine in four days. Such a rate of advance is some three times faster than anything in WW II. It is faster than the Israeli advance in the Sinai in 1967, and that involved only a half-dozen self-sufficient brigades with no logistical tail, rather than the 120 divisions the Pact could deploy. For such an advance to be feasible, the defending forces would have to be shattered and incoherent, offering only uncoordinated and localized resistance.

NATO planners hardly concede these conditions. They feel the first lunge of the Warsaw Pact would be slowed and contained by NATO troops on the spot; as reinforcements arrived, the Soviet advance would be halted and possible thrown back. With the resulting deadlock, the failure of their *coup de main*, the Soviets would be left with Hobson's choice of negotiating peace or escalating to general world war with concomitant employment of strategic nuclear weapons.

Obviously, both sides cannot be correct, and it's likely neither is. The largest uncertainty must remain the question of how far will either side let its position degenerate before recourse to large scale use of strategic nuclear weapons. The battle could be confined to Europe and treated as a balance of power exercise, a test of wills and conventional strength. Or it could be inflamed to a climactic showdown verging on "holy" war.

On a purely tactical plane, the Soviets enjoy quite an advantage in conventional forces. It is likely they would seek to exploit this rather than employing tactical nuclear weapons. Use of tactical atomics would give them a temporary advantage at best (unless they could wipe out the NATO stockpiles) while NATO warheads were distributed. Following their initial use, both sides would disperse their forces to avoid presenting worthwhile targets. Such dispersal would hamper the attacking force more than the defense, especially in an age of potent one-man anti-tank weapons. These have just about reached a point where tanks are as vulnerable as infantry was to machine guns in early WW I. The Soviets could retain the threat of nuclear weapons to force dispersal of NATO units while their own could operate without fear of being hit first (of course, nations have been known to junk idealistic policies on very short notice, viz US opinions on unrestricted submarine warfare when only the Nazis were doing it and then when we wanted to use it on Japan). Such military considerations, combined with the political penalties of starting nuclear war, would probably serve to keep the combat purely conventional. Unless one side starts losing badly.

NATO employs a two Phase movement system with a relatively bloodless Combat Results Table, and terrain penalties of increased movement costs rather than the "Stop-and-move-no-further" variety. As a result, there is ample scope for maneuver, and it is hard to kill units by frontal attack alone. The only sure way to destroy units is to block their retreat routes, and even then the large NATO divisions are reduced to battlegroups rather than wiped out.

These mechanics were chosen to reflect the high degree of mobility inherent in modern mechanized forces, and the difficulty of forcing decisive combat on a mobile opponent. They were also chosen with an eye toward playability. This notwithstanding, people in the Defense Department have stated that NATO handles the conflict simulation both more simply and realistically than their own wargame ATLAS.

Certain special rules incorporated in the game add complexity to the basic system, both to increase "realistic simulation" and to some extent guide the conduct of the game. The Battlegroup rule was created to reflect the greater staying power of western style mechanized units. Combat which would

Table A
NATO AND WARSAW PACT
BALANCE OF FORCES

Category	NATO*	Warsaw Pact Total	USSR Component
Armored Divisions	10	33	21
Other Divisions	14	35	20
Combat & Direct Support Troops	600,000	900,000	600,000
Tanks (not including stockpiles to replace combat losses)	6,500	17,000	10,000

* This includes all forces of the NATO Northern and Central European Commands. Most of the Danish Army is already included in the game; the equally small Norwegian army is the only other ground force in Northern Europe. This table does not include France or Italy.

the front, he could only expend four on each of the first five Game-Turns before running out.

In general, the Pact player should limit his offensive to the Hamburg area. The terrain is not particularly helpful to the defense, numerous city hexes are in the area, making it too rich for NATO to abandon, and it is close to the East German border. While his main concentration should be here, a powerful secondary force should be maintained in the south with sufficient supplies to make it a viable threat. The NATO player must either leave a large enough force in the south to contain it or run the risk of a secondary offensive achieving more success than the main one. By doing this, the Soviet player can to some extent minimize his disadvantages and negate some of the NATO advantages.

Of the four scenarios, the "M+31 conventional" gives the Soviet player his best chance. He should avoid the nuclear scenarios; the NATO player gets too much of an edge in them without corresponding changes in the victory conditions. In the M+1 scenario, an attack on Game-Turn One against a competent NATO player is foolhardy; there are just not enough units for flank security. The Pact player must wait until he has sufficient force to launch, support and sustain an offensive. Otherwise it will bog down and no reserves will be available to meet the NATO counter move. Table B shows a Game-Turn-by-Game-Turn comparison of the number of divisions available to both sides, and the ratios of available Attack Points to enemy Defense Points. It is not until Game-Turn six that this ratio for the Warsaw Pact exceeds that for NATO. It is not until Game-Turn Nine that the Warsaw Pact Defense Strength exceeds NATO Attack Strength. And it is Game-Turn Ten before the Pact can even muster a 2:1 ratio in the number of divisions. The situation for the Pact player improves the longer he waits. By waiting long enough, he could turn the M+1 scenario into M+31. There is an important qualification to this analysis — the Soviets must conduct a battle of attrition until the NATO player no longer has enough units to hold a continuous front. When this point is reached, a breakthrough and mobile exploitation can seize a large piece of territory and a defense for it can be set up. While supply units are brought forward, the NATO player can cobble together a new line, and the process can begin again. Thus, the fewer units the

NATO player has, the fewer units he can lose before breaking. The earliest point at which the Soviet Player is strong enough to implement this strategy will be influenced by neutrality effects, but will generally not occur before Game-Turn Six.

The NATO player must prevent the Soviet player from scoring too many more points. The implementation of this means denying cities to the enemy and destroying his units. To do this, the player must concentrate the various national contingents with their supply units well forward, place a heavy screen in front of the Soviet advance, and harass its flanks. If the Soviets should advance on a wide front, a deep withdrawal (which does not abandon any cities) may entice a reckless advance which could be counter-attacked to advantage. At the worst, such a withdrawal would cost the Pact player time while he advanced his supply units into position to begin his battle of attrition.

Before discussing gamemap tactics, certain rule clarifications are in order. The stacking rules for NATO units are somewhat unclear, as are the breakdown/buildup rules. All NATO divisions can be broken down into brigades. Brigades can be combined to reform any of the divisions except the West German 6-6-8's. These cannot be rebuilt. NATO units can, in effect, stack only three "stacking points" per hex. Supply units, 5-5-8 and 6-6-8 divisions count as three points, brigades as one. The exceptions to this are the 3-3-8 units, no matter if marked as brigades or divisions, and the Tricap base elements. These units are worth two stacking points. Exchanges are based on the face value of units, forgetting supply and terrain effects. NATO divisions may not break down into brigades to extract casualties. Soviet units cannot use Maximum Attack Supply and nuclear weapons at the same time to quadruple their Attack Strength.

Tactics for this game closely parallel real mobile warfare. Frontal attack seldom achieves anything but forcing an enemy to retreat along a route of his choice. It is only by flanking him and blocking his retreats that units can be easily destroyed. The NATO player is better equipped to do this: not only are his units more mobile and equipped with a more flexible supply system, he has several airborne units which can penetrate enemy Zones of Control into flanking positions.

The Warsaw Pact player is better equipped to operate in the classic Soviet steamroller style. He should use his units en masse as a bludgeon rather than as a rapier. By attacking at 3:1 or 4:1 odds along a broad front, supplies permitting, he can inflict enough retreats to force back the NATO line and get enough exchanges to eventually deplete the NATO force. Because of supplies, this "broad" front may be no more than 10-15 hexes wide, so it is important to have strong enough flanks that the enemy cannot break through and cut off the salient being formed. Since each hex in a defense line can generally be attacked from two others, the Pact player can bring a maximum of twenty Attack Strength Points against a given hex to only twelve for the NATO player (neglecting nuclear rules and Maximum Attack Supply). In general, the Pact player can create stacks against which the NATO player can seldom get better than 2:1 odds, while he can usually get at least 3:1 against NATO units. By getting the most attacks per supply unit possible and properly consolidating gains (i.e., by not rushing headlong into a breach and getting cut off), the Pact player can force a slow retreat while eliminating enough units through exchanges that the NATO force will become too weak to effectively counterattack, and eventually too weak to hold a long continuous front.

The NATO response to this should take the form of sniping at exposed units and counter offensives against weak sections of the Soviet line. This can destroy units and divert supplies

Table B
GAME-TURN BY GAME-TURN
FORCE COMPARISON

Game-Turn	NATO division equivalents available*	Warsaw Pact divisions available*	Available Attack Points vs. Defense Points	
			Pact vs. NATO	NATO vs. Pact
1	28 ½	35	1.07	1.55
2	28 ½	38	1.16	1.42
3	33 ½	48	1.23	1.33
4	36 ½	58	1.26	1.21
5	38 ½	58	1.19	1.26
6	40 ½	64	1.27	1.17
7	42	70	1.34	1.11
8	43 ½	78	1.45	1.01
9	45 ½	86	1.54	.95
10	46 ½	94	1.64	.88
11	48 ½	102	1.69	.84
12	50 ½	109	1.75	.81
13	51 ½	116	1.84	.76
14	51 ½	123	1.93	.71
15	56	128	1.84	.74

* "Available units" does not include those coming in as reinforcements on that turn, nor does it include NATO Territorial infantry brigades.

COMBAT RESULTS TABLE

DIE ROLL	<i>Combat Odds (Attack Strength-to-Defense Strength)</i>									
	1-1	2-1	3-1	4-1	5-1	6-1	7-1	8-1	9-1	10-1
1	Dr1	Dr2	Dr2	Dr2	Dr3	Dr3	Dr3	De	De	De
2	Dr1	Dr1	Dr2	Dr2	Dr2	Dr3	Dr3	Dr3	De	De
3	Ar1	Dr1	Dr1	Dr2	Dr2	Dr2	Dr3	Dr3	Dr3	De
4	Ar1	Ar1	Dr1	Dr1	Dr1	Dr2	Dr3	Dr3	Dr3	Ex
5	Ar1	Ex	Ex	Dr1	Dr1	Dr2	Ex	Ex	Ex	Ex
6	Ae	Ae	Ar1	Ex	Ex	Ex	Ex	Ex	Ex	Ex

Odds less than 1-1 are NOT permitted; Odds greater than 10-1 are treated as 10-1

from the main battle. The German 6-6-8 divisions are most usefully employed blocking the main enemy advance. They allow maximum concentration of strength for counterattacks, and when lost to an exchange in defense, force the enemy to lose two divisions.

The game can be made more interesting by the addition of some rule variants. I propose three dealing with air power, airborne units, and airmobile units.

The airmobile elements of the airmobile and Tricap divisions are not self-contained units. They are dependent on their base elements for logistical support and maintenance of their transport helicopters. During playtesting, a rule was used which required the base and airmobile elements to stay within a certain distance of each other. It was dropped as unnecessary when it was found players seldom separate the units anyway. For purists, airmobile elements should be kept within eight hexes of their parent base elements.

A variant scheme is this: treat all airmobile elements as having a Movement Allowance of two. Base elements may move an airmobile element (or any air transportable unit, for that matter) from any point within eight hexes of the base element to any other similar point, under these restrictions: This eight hex path cannot pass through enemy units or their Zones of Control unless occupied by a Friendly unit. The transported unit may "move" through enemy Zones of Control as long as

those hexes are also occupied by friendly units. The transported unit may not use its own Movement Allowance in a phase it is so transported. The transported movement is done before the base element moves. Airmobile base elements may transport two units in this manner per movement phase. Tricap base elements may only transport one.

The next variant covers the use of air transportable units. All current rules stay in effect except the one concerning the twelve hex supply line. That rule does not apply when moving these units to a new location, but if such a supply line does not exist at the end of that friendly Player-Turn, the unit is eliminated. [Alternately, the unit is rendered immobile, loses its Zone of Control and is eliminated if forced to retreat. It returns to normal at the end of the movement phase that the supply line is established.] Units may not be landed more than twelve hexes from a friendly unit.

Tactical airpower is not included in the game. As both sides feel their air forces will mop up the skies with the opposition, it was assumed for design purposes that they would cancel each other out. This variant assumes only that on the *average* will they cancel out. Either side has the chance to gain a temporary superiority. At the beginning of each Game-Turn, each player rolls the die. The one with the higher roll will have air superiority for that Game-Turn only. If they roll the same number, neither has superiority and standard rules apply.

Effects of Warsaw Pact Air Superiority: The Movement Allowances of NATO units are reduced from eight to six for mechanized units, three to one for supply units; others (including the variant for airmobile units) remain the same. Supply lines for NATO units can be no more than six Movement Points long, and crossing a river hexside or entering a mountain pass costs three Points rather than two. Warsaw Pact supply units may move in both Movement Phase regardless of location.

Effects of NATO Air Superiority: Pact units have their Movement Allowances reduced from six to four for mechanized units, with others staying the same. Pact supply units may move only on the second phase regardless of location. Those outside Pact territory attempting to move run the risk of destruction. Roll the die once for each such unit. A roll of one or two results in elimination. Warsaw Pact supply lines may be no more than four Movement Points long. Crossing a river hexside or entering a mountain pass costs three movement points rather than two.

In addition to the above effects, players may wish to include these as well: The player who has air superiority may round off fractional combat odds in his favor, e.g., 13 to 4 rounds to 4:1 rather than 3:1.

Instead of the above — units belonging to the player with air superiority are not halved when attacking across rivers.

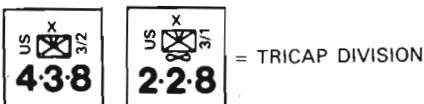
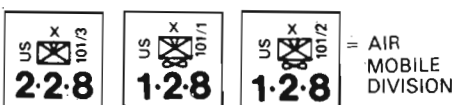
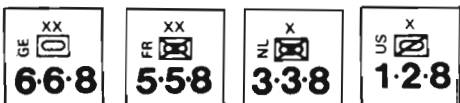
(Note: In the above variant, all references to "mechanized" units should be taken to mean all units with a Movement Allowance of eight).

TYPICAL UNIT COUNTERS

Soviet



North Atlantic Treaty Organization



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