

General Haig Is Altering NATO Deployment

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CASTEAU, Belgium—Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr. has begun to alter the deployment of United States forces on the central European front to correct a long-standing strategic weakness of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The objective, the Supreme Allied Commander said in an interview, is to strengthen forces on the northern sector of a front that runs from Denmark to Switzerland. The most powerful Soviet armored forces, being equipped with the latest tanks, are concentrated on the North German plain in East Germany.

One of the two American infantry brigades being added to the NATO forces will be assigned to the Northern Army Group area, held at present by West German, British, Belgian, Dutch and Canadian forces.

What General Haig termed the maldeployment of forces, especially those of the United States Seventh Army, has been sharply criticized in the United States and other alliance countries on the ground that the best force, the Seventh Army, is too far south to share in the defense of the North German plain, across which Soviet tanks would be expected to attack.

West German military lead-

ers, the only dissenters, would prefer a stronger concentration facing Czechoslovakia, where the Russians have maintained five divisions since 1968.

"We have an important maldeployment problem," General Haig said in the interview. "We must strengthen our positions on the ground and in the air in the north."

General Haig replaced Gen. Andrew J. Goodpaster in the most important American overseas command in December, 1974. Although the choice by President Ford of his predecessor's White House chief of staff aroused sharp controversy in the Army, the general showed no sign that this had affected his determination to alter existing deployment, to push NATO defensive lines as far forward as possible and to increase the international content of major training exercises.

His concern with the defensive posture in northwestern Europe is equaled by his anxiety over the southern front, on the Mediterranean. He sees the situation in Turkey as potentially disastrous to NATO, involving, if the worst comes, the loss of a million "well-trained, highly motivated" Turkish troops and airmen.

In Europe the West faces Soviet forces equipped with at least 16,000 tanks in service and approximately 40,000 in

reserve. The military problem, as General Haig sees it, is one in which NATO must "take risks" by positioning forces as far forward as possible to reduce the military and political impact of attack.

The staff has absorbed the major tactical lesson of the Middle East war of 1973—that attrition in armor and other weapons is far higher than in World War II, Korea and Vietnam.

Reserves in the U.S.

An armored division and a mechanized division in the United States are scheduled to reinforce the Seventh Army in a crisis. The equipment for both is stockpiled in Germany. Two brigades of another mechanized division in the United States are dual-based, with heavy equipment stored in West Germany. In addition an armored cavalry regiment is earmarked for NATO service in the event of war.

NATO sources expect that one of the two Marine divisions in the United States would also be made available.

General Haig believes that weapons and equipment stockpiled over the years will suffice to replace early losses; according to staff officers the situation is less promising in other forces.

None of the NATO tanks, according to a British source,

are equal to the one being delivered to Soviet armored divisions. The consensus of armored experts is that the Soviet tank, the T-72, is superior to the British Chieftain, considered the best tank in the Atlantic armies.

General Haig disclosed that Supreme Headquarters was planning to expand international tactical exercises, the object being to improve command and control.

Although the general has initiated programs that he believes will increase military potential, he considers that the alliance's capability to deter attack is equally important. Deterrence, he maintained, rests on the "perception of the will and solidarity" of the alliance, which in turn is "a product of our own self-confidence."

The West cannot hope to achieve a military balance resting on deterrence, he said, "while undercutting confidence in the security establishment of the alliance."