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The United States, NATO, and the Soviet Threat to Western Europe: Military Estimates and Policy Options, 1945–1963

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As relations between the West and the Soviet Union plunged toward Cold

War in the aftermath of World War II, the United States and its allies fearfully beheld what they thought was a massive Soviet capability to successfully invade Western Europe, the conquest of which would drastically alter the world balance of power in favor of the Communists. Western leaders continuously warned that the Soviets had refused to follow the Western pattern of demobilization and that this had left the West to face Soviet armed forces of four million men, all “on a wartime footing” and backed by “war industries going at full blast.” With fewer than twenty ready divisions available to defend the central front in Western Europe (from the North Sea to the Alps) at any time during the period between 1948 and 1960, Western leaders often proclaimed...

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