

NATO Proposes Lower CFE Ceilings Not Requiring Actual Force Cuts

- [Arms Control Today](#)

AFTER NEARLY three months of intra alliance discussions, NATO members on December 2 presented notional figures for national and territorial ceilings on heavy weapons which would be established under an adapted Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty.

According to U.S. officials, the initiative would reduce aggregate NATO entitlements by approximately 10 percent, but because actual NATO holdings of treaty limited equipment (TLE) are already 29 percent, or approximately 22,200 items, below its current entitlement of 75,912 items, the alliance would not be required to destroy or remove any TLE. Reluctance by potential NATO members—the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland—to lower their current entitlements and Russian insistence on alliance wide limitations that NATO deems unacceptable are hampering progress in the adaptation process.

Negotiations to adapt the CFE Treaty, which imposes equal numerical limits on five categories of weapons—tanks, armored combat vehicles, large caliber artillery, combat aircraft and attack helicopters—that NATO and the former Warsaw Pact may deploy and store between the Atlantic Ocean and the Ural Mountains, have not advanced much beyond the "basic elements" guidelines endorsed in July 1997. Under those guidelines, the 30 parties agreed in principle to replace the treaty's bloc to bloc structure and concentric zone limits with a system of national and territorial ceilings. National ceilings will limit the TLE each party can possess, while territorial ceilings will cap the total amount of ground TLE (national plus foreign stationed forces) allowed on each party's territory.

According to U.S. government officials, the United States and Germany accepted the largest reductions, while France refused to cut its entitlements. The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, despite signing NATO accession protocols on December 16, are hesitant to accept lower limits until they are full members of NATO. But both Moscow and NATO want an adapted treaty in place before the three states join NATO in April 1999.

Analysis of returns from the most recent CFE information exchange on December 12, shows that when the three prospective NATO member's current entitlements (13,114 TLE) are combined with NATO's proposed reduced entitlement levels, the total exceeds current aggregate NATO entitlements by more than 5,500 TLE, an outcome Russia is sure to oppose, as it has sought an alliance wide limit to forestall any increase in entitlements for NATO as the alliance expands eastward.

One element in NATO's strategy to diminish Russian opposition to NATO expansion is the creation of a "stabilization" zone in Central and Eastern Europe. Belarus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia would have their future territorial ceilings set equal to their current national entitlements. This would necessitate a reduction in national holdings to accommodate any foreign forces which might be stationed there in the future. Sub limits would also be established for TLE deployed in Russia's Kaliningrad military district and western Ukraine.

Securing territorial ceilings on aircraft remains a central Russian objective, but NATO continues to reject the concept of applying territorial limits to air power. The alliance contends that the adapted treaty should adhere to the precedent set in the original treaty's concentric zones, which only limits ground TLE, since air power is considered too mobile to effectively constrain and verify.

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Further complicating the issue of territorial ceilings are outstanding questions such as how to define exemptions for military exercises and temporary deployments and how to create mechanisms for revising or reallocating the ceilings once they are in force. Moscow is pressing for stricter definitions to limit NATO's presence and flexibility in new NATO member states.

In a surprise move that could influence the Vienna negotiations, Russian President Boris Yeltsin announced on December 3 a unilateral 40 percent reduction of armed forces in Northwestern Russia, but Western government officials have not yet determined whether the initiative pertained solely to troops or also included equipment. Western officials are also uncertain whether this is a new initiative or if it represents anticipated reductions under Russia's military reform program, which calls for a reduction in manpower from 1.7 million to 1.2 million troops.

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