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A Twenty-First Century Army

WALLACE J. THIES

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Crisis are like searchlights cutting through the fog of international politics, revealing in an instant details of the landscape that had previously been lost from view. During the year before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, debates about American defense policy dealt for the most part with whether the force structure should be cut by one-fourth or one-half. All of the services were slashing recruiting quotas, closing officer training programs, and pushing thousands of officers out of the ranks.¹ Almost every major procurement program was being looked at skeptically in Congress, and officials in the Bush Administration were scrambling to scale down requests for future spending before Congress did it for them.

Since the Iraqi invasion of its southern neighbor, the speed with which American military personnel arrived in Saudi Arabia was exceeded only by the speed with which Congress and the Bush Administration reversed course on the future of the military establishment. Almost overnight, euphoric judgments about the end of the Cold War and the triumph of democracy were replaced by warnings about appeasing dictators and analogies to the 1930s. The Bush Administration, which only a few months ago was mired in internal squabbles over which units to deactivate and which bases to close, called up the reserves to sustain a deployment that even in its early stages imposed enormous strains on all three services.² And the Congress, which just recently was complaining that the Administration was not moving fast enough to cut the force structure, responded with House and Senate resolutions authorizing the use of American force if Iraq refused to withdraw from Kuwait by the UN deadline.

This article attempts to look beyond the short-term perspectives that have dominated debates about American defense policy in recent years. The past 18 months are not the first time that the defense budget has offered a

tempting target to those who believed that capable armed forces had been rendered superfluous by changes in the climate of international affairs. The deployment to Saudi Arabia is merely the latest instance in which policy has been reversed in response to threatening developments overseas. It is useful to recall past efforts to carve a peace dividend out of the defense budget, because the consequences have not always been happy ones.

Peace Dividends of the Past

Between the end of the Second World War and the summer of 1947 total American active-duty forces declined from just over 12 million to roughly 1.5 million. Despite the decline in personnel strength, there was no corresponding reduction in the armed forces' responsibilities. On the eve of the Korean War, Army units were deployed in Europe, Japan and Okinawa, Hawaii, Alaska, and Panama, as well as in the continental United States. Many of the problems that were the product of the penurious budgets of the postwar years were particularly apparent in General Douglas MacArthur's Far East Command.

On paper, MacArthur's forces looked impressive: three infantry divisions, one cavalry division, a regimental combat team, and nine anti-aircraft battalions. By 1950, however, four years of sharply curtailed budgets had left those forces ill-prepared for anything but occupation duty. Far East Command had declined from 300,000 in January 1947 to 108,500 by June 1950. Since the administrative requirements of the occupation of Japan had continued or even increased, MacArthur and his subordinate commanders had attempted to compensate for the decline in manpower by transferring personnel from combat units to administrative positions. To maintain a four-division structure despite the personnel shortage, some elements of each division were simply eliminated. Infantry divisions had only a tank company instead of a tank battalion and an anti-aircraft battery instead of an anti-aircraft battalion. Infantry regiments had only two battalions instead of three and were missing their tank company as well; artillery battalions had only two batteries instead of three. Support elements were so inadequate that more than 150,000 Japanese civilians were employed in roles normally filled by service troops.³

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Not only were MacArthur's forces far below wartime strength, they were also badly equipped. Army procurement after the Second World War was limited mostly to food, clothing, and medical supplies. Billions of dollars of equipment had been left to rust in the supply pipeline or to disintegrate on storage fields, but as of June 1950 MacArthur's forces had received no new vehicles or tanks since the end of World War II. Almost 90 percent of the armaments and 75 percent of the automotive equipment in the Eighth Army was derived from a program to reclaim surplus equipment left over from World War II.⁴

There was a price to be paid for the corners that were cut during the postwar years, and it was paid most heavily by the men rushed into combat during June and July 1950. The three divisions from Far East Command that were the first to reach Korea suffered heavy casualties, many of which might have been avoided in a less austere budgetary climate. The scarcity of training facilities in crowded Japan and the lack of sufficient funds to support realistic field exercises meant that MacArthur's forces were seriously deficient in critical combat skills and unit cohesion.⁵ Regimental commanders whose previous experience had been with full-strength rather than stripped-down units were forced to improvise defensive tactics against a foe able "to envelope the understrength American units almost at will."⁶ Vehicles broke down quickly, radios were often inoperable, and certain types of ammunition were in critically short supply.⁷

As it became clear that MacArthur's forces were inadequate to halt the North Korean advance, Army planners were faced with two problems: increasing the strength of MacArthur's units to wartime levels, and creating additional units which could be used to reinforce MacArthur and rebuild the general reserve in the United States. The first of these was accomplished by stripping Army units in the United States of infantry battalions and artillery batteries. Only the 82d Airborne Division and the infantry units of the 2d Armored Division were left untouched, although the latter contributed artillery batteries. MacArthur's needs were so great that the general reserve was left with only one completely manned unit for last-resort operations, the 82d Airborne.⁸

To generate additional divisions for the Far East and to rebuild the general reserve, a combination of activating reserve components and greatly increasing draft calls was employed. The Army Reserve contributed 244,300 officers and men. Four National Guard divisions also were called to active duty during the summer of 1950, and four more after the Chinese entered the war. Two of these, augmented by draftees, were sent to Korea; two were sent to Germany; four remained in the United States to reconstitute the training base and the general reserve. Three Guard regiments and more than 700 smaller units were also called up, for a total of 138,600 personnel.⁹

The effect of these measures on the size of the armed forces was nothing short of dramatic. By June 1951 the armed forces had more than doubled

in size while defense spending had increased from about \$13 billion during fiscal 1950 to about \$50.4 billion during fiscal 1953. In 1950, defense consumed about 5.4 percent of the gross national product; by 1952 the United States was devoting about 14.9 percent of a greatly expanded GNP to defense.¹⁰

The attempt to simultaneously fight in Korea, reinforce Europe, and rebuild the general reserve entailed the allocation of so much money to defense during the first two years of the Korean War that it was difficult to negotiate in timely fashion all the contracts needed to turn appropriations into weapons and equipment.¹¹ As the amount of undelegated funds increased, a countervailing pressure for sharp cuts in the defense budget began to build. Congress cut \$4.3 billion from President Truman's \$50.9 billion defense budget for fiscal 1953, "absolutely and proportionately the largest congressional cut in the military budget between 1946 and 1961."¹² From 1953 to 1960 the American defense effort as measured by the share of GNP allocated to defense fell by about one-third, from 14.7 percent in 1953 to 9.7 percent in 1960. Total active-duty forces fell from roughly 3.5 million in 1953 to 2.5 million in 1960.¹³

The Eisenhower Administration encouraged these cuts, on the grounds that defense expenditures should be reduced to a level the economy could support without undue strain over the long haul. The budget cuts necessary to eliminate the deficit inherited from the Truman Administration could be achieved only by significant reductions in defense spending, which required deep cuts in the number of military personnel. Manpower reductions would be offset by increased reliance on firepower in the form of nuclear weapons, both tactical and strategic. The doctrinal basis for these changes was provided by NSC 162/2, approved by Eisenhower in October 1953, which rejected the assumption that a general war or even a large-scale limited war could be fought without nuclear weapons.¹⁴

NSC 162/2 authorized the services to plan to employ nuclear weapons in any conflict in which their use would be militarily advantageous, but two of the more significant military actions undertaken during Eisenhower's presidency—the threatened intervention in Jordan in April 1957 and the introduction of American troops into Lebanon in July 1958—were ones in which nuclear weapons could hardly have been less relevant. In April 1957, the Eisenhower Administration threatened to intervene if foreign "volunteers" or Syrian forces already inside Jordan went into action in support of rebellious Palestinians seeking to overthrow King Hussein.¹⁵ Where might the necessary forces have come from? There were about 1800 Marines and 50 ships with the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, but the former were too few to pacify a country as large as Jordan and the latter did not run on wheels. The question took on more than academic interest in July 1958 when American forces were dispatched to Lebanon to shore up the government of Camille Chamoun.

Eisenhower was reportedly astounded at the leisurely manner in which the Anglo/French expedition to capture the Suez Canal had unfolded in 1956, but the American landing in Lebanon two years later was hardly a model of swift and decisive action to secure important political objectives.¹⁶ Eisenhower told the NSC on 14 July, "We're going to send in everything we've got, and this thing will be over in 48 hours if we do."¹⁷ One consequence of the budgetary and manpower reductions of Eisenhower's first term was that "everything we've got" proved to be not very much, and the movement of forces to Lebanon was measured in weeks rather than days.

Eisenhower announced his decision to commit American forces in support of Chamoun's government to an NSC meeting on 14 July, at which time there were three Marine battalions afloat in the Mediterranean. The first landed on 15 July, the second on 16 July, and the third on 18 July. The first Army units—the 187th and 503d Airborne Battle Groups—did not arrive until 19 July.¹⁸ Most of the Army units committed to Lebanon arrived only in early August, and it was not until 8 August that American forces ashore reached their peak strength of just over 14,000.¹⁹

The slow pace of the Lebanon operation was not for lack of advance warning. Chamoun had inquired of the US Ambassador on 11 May what the American response would be if he were to ask for help to quell the riots aimed at toppling his government. Shortly thereafter, the Marine contingent in the Mediterranean was doubled in strength, transport aircraft were sent to Germany, and 22 Army units in Europe were placed on alert for possible deployment to Lebanon.²⁰ Even so, it took roughly three weeks to move about 14,000 troops to Lebanon, despite the absence of any organized resistance there.

Eisenhower subsequently claimed that the buildup in Lebanon "could have been even faster had there been a necessity."²¹ Arguing about what might have been is itself a perilous enterprise, but a close look at certain oft-neglected details of the Lebanon case suggests that even a smattering of organized resistance might have resulted in substantial casualties for the units involved. As in the case of the Korean War, efforts to squeeze a peace dividend from the defense budget had left American forces ill-prepared for rapid deployment over long distances.

Military forces are most vulnerable during the early days of an operation, especially if they are small in number and committed in piecemeal fashion. The first unit ashore was a Marine battalion that was called on to secure a beachhead perimeter of over 9500 yards, as opposed to a normal battalion frontage of 600 to 1500 yards. The beach used for the initial landing would have proved a formidable obstacle had reinforcements been urgently required—it had very soft sand which few wheeled vehicles could negotiate, while a few hundred yards out to sea was a large sandbar. As soon as the second battalion arrived on the beachhead, the first formed into a column to

secure the dock area several miles to the north. For the first three days of the operation, forces ashore consisted of two Marine battalions which were themselves divided between the Beirut airport and the docks.²²

Because of the vulnerable location of the airport, Army and Air Force units assigned to reinforce the Marines were staged through Adana in Turkey, causing serious congestion there. Aircraft were parked nose-to-tail and wing-to-wing on every foot of concrete and on the hard ground alongside the runways. Flight crews and paratroops slept beside or under aircraft surrounded by piles of ammunition and maintenance equipment. Shortages of water, food, and compressed oxygen developed as the number of US personnel on the base increased from 300 to 5000. Poor health discipline resulted in an unusually high incidence of dysentery among the units moved to Lebanon.²³

The intervention in Lebanon should have been a reminder that major contingencies tend to occur in places where one is least prepared to respond quickly and effectively, because it is there that hostile forces have the greatest leeway to pursue outcomes inimical to American interests. Eisenhower himself conceded that the Lebanon operation demonstrated the "gigantic" costs and complications of major instantaneous deployments, but that was all he was willing to concede.²⁴ He was fortunate that his diplomatic representatives were able to rebuild the Lebanese house of cards before the American military contingent became involved in hostilities. Had there been fighting, the corners that had been cut during the years prior to the landing might have again resulted in avoidable casualties, and the Lebanon operation would be remembered today as a bitter pill instead of an unqualified success.²⁵

The end of the Vietnam War and the American disengagement from Southeast Asia sparked yet another round of hopes of a substantial peace dividend. Measured in constant dollars, US defense spending declined at an average rate of 1.5 percent per year from 1970 to 1980, and personnel strength fell to about 2.1 million, about 25 percent less than the pre-Vietnam total.²⁶ The impact was particularly severe on the general purpose forces, which were cut across the board.

The effect of these cuts was to greatly reduce the ability of the United States to respond quickly to developments in distant but strategically vital parts of the world, an outcome that was deemed not especially worrisome at the time. The 1970s were the decade when academics and some government officials propagated the notion of a "new international order," in which military force would be less important than before.²⁷ Events at the end of the decade, however, suggested that capable armed forces remained very useful, provided they could move quickly when trouble arose.

In November 1979, after the US Embassy in Tehran was seized by Iranian radicals, it took the carrier *Midway* and its escorts roughly ten days to arrive on the scene, by which time there was little for them to do except

steam in circles in the Arabian Sea. The seizure of the embassy in Tehran was followed by the attempted seizure of the Great Mosque in Mecca, attacks by mobs on the American embassies in Islamabad and Tripoli, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The Carter Administration responded to these upheavals with a blizzard of optimistic estimates of how quickly a rapid deployment force could be dispatched to southwest Asia in the event of an emergency and of how much better we could do in the future if Congress would fund all the strategic mobility initiatives that suddenly appeared in the fiscal 1981 defense budget. Far more eloquent was the Administration's inability in the short term to do much more than talk about how it planned to restore American influence in a region of great strategic importance.

Like the Truman Administration in 1950, the Carter Administration responded to trouble overseas by increasing the defense budget. Like the Truman Administration 30 years earlier, the Carter Administration pointed with pride to the long list of activities it was engaged in to strengthen the ability of the armed forces to respond to threatening events overseas. Credit-claiming of this sort is a staple of American politics, but the very act of doing so is a tacit admission of failure. The value of military forces is often better measured in terms of what does not happen rather than what does. The most capable armed forces are those that prevent trouble from arising because they exist in sufficient number and quality to dissuade troublemakers from threatening American interests. The greatly expanded defense budgets of the early 1950s and the early 1980s were less a sign of strength than of shortsightedness.

The events of the past 45 years suggest that Americans as a people have a propensity for overdoing things—in both directions—when it comes to spending money on defense. The end of a war generates inflated expectations of the savings that can be achieved by cutting back on military spending. These in turn are justified by claims that force has become less useful or that we can safely prepare for one or a few kinds of conflicts and neglect the rest. The postwar years have thus been characterized by declining manpower levels and decreasing readiness, which has left the armed forces ill-prepared to respond to future challenges.

Past peace dividends have proven largely illusory, because the savings have come at the price of diminished readiness and combat capability at the start of the next conflict. Because these shortcomings must be rectified quickly, the cost of doing so is much higher than if a more patient approach had been taken. During the early 1950s and the early 1980s, the attempt to enlarge and modernize all three services at once was itself an important cause of the rapid increase in defense spending during those two periods, because the attempt to buy many kinds of sophisticated weaponry at the same time inevitably results in substantial increases in unit costs.

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Rapid increases in the defense budget, in turn, all but guarantee that the larger forces and greater combat capability purchased during a period of rapid buildup will not prove sustainable. The higher the costs incurred while rebuilding the armed forces, the higher the hopes for a peace dividend once the challenge that catalyzed the buildup has been removed. The more determined the efforts to wring such a payoff from the defense budget, the greater the decline in combat capability, thus setting the stage for the cycle to repeat itself.

Uncertainties—Present and Enduring

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait has frequently been cited as a reminder of the virtues of preparedness despite the victory of the West in the Cold War. Reminders of this sort may be useful for accumulating debating points concerning the size and composition of next year's defense budget, but they beg the question of the longer-term relationship between military power and American foreign policy. It is folly to peg American defense policy to episodic disturbances such as the current turmoil in the Middle East. Once the Iraq-Kuwait situation has been sorted out, we are likely to witness renewed pressures to fund a peace dividend out of the defense budget. Indeed, the more costly the exertions required to evict the Iraqis from Kuwait, the greater the pressure likely to arise in favor of a substantial cut in defense spending once the troops have returned home.

Americans are frequently struck by the contemporary relevance of such defense-conscious thinkers as Thucydides, Sun Tzu, and Machiavelli, yet they are also persistent discoverers of new eras in which force will be devalued and a state's influence will depend more on the strength of its economy than on the size and quality of its armed forces. Their optimism in this regard is resilient but misguided—the prevalence of alliances, imperialism, and war throughout recorded history suggests that dramatic turning points in the conduct of international affairs are quite rare. The Cold War may be over, but there are at least four reasons for believing that large and capable armed forces will remain vital to the kind of world order in which American values and institutions can survive and flourish.

First, the countries of eastern Europe have ousted their dictatorial rulers in favor of democratic governments, but their internal politics remain unsettled and the potential for instability and the emergence of long-suppressed regional tensions remains high. Instability in eastern Europe was the catalyst for the First World War and an underlying cause of the Second. Both of those wars occurred despite assiduous efforts by academic thinkers to identify reasons why war had become unthinkable and/or impractical.²⁸

Second, the diffusion of modern military technology throughout the Middle East does not bode well for the future. The Israeli-Palestinian struggle is merely one of many Middle Eastern flashpoints. Numerous other states in the region are involved in rivalries that could explode into hostilities: Iraq threatened to invade Kuwait in 1961 and actually did so in 1990; Iran has made threatening statements concerning its neighbors across the Persian Gulf; Syria has had designs on Jordan and Lebanon; Libya has been involved in Tunisia, Chad, and the Sudan. The history of the 20th century has not been kind to monarchical regimes, especially those in and around the Middle East. The violent overthrow of the ruling families of Egypt, Iraq, Libya, and Iran; past insurrections in Jordan and Oman; and the evident nervousness of the royal family in Saudi Arabia all suggest a considerable potential for intra- and inter-state violence in that part of the world.

Third, the possibility that legitimate government authority may disintegrate completely in countries racked by social revolution is likely to be with us for many years to come. Reasonable people can disagree about whether the government of Maurice Bishop in Grenada posed a clear and present danger to its Caribbean neighbors or whether there was an imminent danger to the lives of American students at the medical school there. Few, however, would argue that a government has the right to disintegrate into anarchic violence or that international norms proscribing intervention in the affairs of sovereign states compel nearby countries to do nothing while contending factions unleash mob violence against their political rivals and anyone else who gets in their way.

Finally, there is the Soviet Union. For centuries before the Bolshevik revolution, the Czars and their agents used territorial expansion as a means to compensate for Russia's poverty and backwardness. Territorial expansion was also encouraged by an unfavorable geographical location: vulnerable borders in the west, restricted access to the north Atlantic and the Mediterranean, tenuous lines of communication with the Asian part of the empire. The expansionist tendencies exhibited by the Soviet Union during the Second World War and the early Cold War had their roots in centuries of Russian history. It would seem unlikely that even a Soviet Union committed to internal reform would suddenly abandon foreign policy goals so deeply embedded in Russian history. Conversely, secessionist tendencies in the Soviet Union should be more a cause of alarm than of complacency in the West. A beleaguered Moscow leadership

may yet see no recourse other than force to assert control over territories that have been part of the Soviet Union for half a century or longer. In such a case, how would the United States and its European partners choose to react?

Preparing Sensibly for the Future

Even if we concede that international politics is unlikely to lose its competitive and strife-ridden character for a long time to come, there remains the question of what should the Army be doing to prepare for future conflicts? The Army faces a heavy burden in this regard because the tasks it will be called on to perform in support of American foreign policy toward Europe and the Third World are quite different. If the Army had access to unlimited funds for personnel and procurement, it would be possible and even preferable to fund what for all practical purposes would be several armies wearing the same uniform: armored and mechanized divisions for high-intensity conflicts, light infantry divisions for low-intensity conflicts, airborne divisions, Rangers, Special Forces, and so on. But budgets for personnel and procurement are not unlimited and will likely be subject to further erosion once the deployment to Saudi Arabia has been concluded. Choices will have to be made concerning how best to use the limited resources available in the face of seemingly endless federal budget deficits. The stakes involved include more than just money—one cannot help wondering how many of MacArthur's men died because neither they nor their units were adequately prepared for the intense combat they encountered during July and August 1950.

The ability of the Army to contribute to the goal of war-prevention in Europe will continue to be a function of the number and quality of the units that it stations there. While the United States will withdraw some forces from Europe, it is in no one's interest for the Army to withdraw entirely from the reunified Germany. Naval and air forces will not suffice in this regard; what will be required for many years to come is an American presence in the center of Europe. The purpose of such a presence is to reassure Europeans on both sides of the continent that the history of the first half of the 20th century will not be repeated. Paradoxically, complaints that there is no one in Europe to fight against should be taken as an indicator of the success of the policy of maintaining an American presence there. The louder those complaints grow, the more likely the policy is working.

Scenarios that unfold outside Europe pose a greater challenge, in part because there are so many to consider and in part because the Army is divided as to whether its mission is to deter wars or to fight them.²⁹ The debate over deterrence versus warfighting is one of those rare cases in which both sides have managed to miss the point. Winning wars is wonderful, preventing them is even better, but to prevent wars it is first necessary to be able to fight them. The most effective armed forces are those that are so well-prepared to fight

that potential opponents think long and hard before challenging them and then decide not to because of the costs and risks involved.

Crisis prevention and crisis management in scenarios that unfold outside of Europe will require an Army that can arrive on the scene *before* trouble gets out of hand and in sufficient numbers to prevail against those who would do harm to American interests. The faster the Army can arrive in numbers large enough to make a difference, the less likely it is that hostile states or revolutionary groups will take actions harmful to American interests. The standoff resulting from the Iraqi seizure of Kuwait and the American deployment to Saudi Arabia suggests that it is by far preferable to deter attacks on friendly states than to compel a predator to surrender its prize. Since there are many important states far from the United States but close to potential foes, the Army (and the Navy and Air Force as well) will need to work even harder in the coming years to improve our capability for rapid deployment over long distances. There are several steps that the Army can take in this regard.

One is to deploy troops and equipment closer to potential trouble spots. If the key to coping with future challenges is the ability to arrive on the scene quickly with forces large enough to give an opponent second thoughts about initiating hostilities, then the post-Cold War preoccupation with pulling forces back to the United States is misguided and inappropriate. Units based in the United States are so far removed from the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, and Asia in general as to be of little use in the event of emergencies there. Our Korean experience suggests that the most expensive military forces are those that are not available when needed and thus must be rebuilt during the inflationary spiral that accompanies a major war. Units slated for withdrawal from Europe should be considered assets to be retained rather than burdens to be discarded, since maintaining them in the force structure will ultimately be less costly than recreating them under the strain of a future emergency. They should be relocated to bases outside the continental United States, such as Guam or Puerto Rico, rather than brought home and demobilized. It may even be that the present Iraqi-generated crisis will open the door politically for a semi-permanent US ground presence in the Gulf.

Basing considerations are also important in the case of the Army's light infantry divisions. These are supposed to be swiftly deployable to tropical or

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desert environments, yet two—the 6th Infantry and 10th Mountain Divisions—are permanently based in Alaska and upstate New York. The forces currently deployed to Saudi Arabia are learning first-hand the debilitating effects of heat, wind, and sand, but many of those units came from warm-weather climates such as Georgia, Texas, and southern California. Sudden changes of climate are even more debilitating for units moving from a cold-weather climate to the desert. The first time the Iraqis threatened to invade Kuwait, in 1961, ten percent of the British soldiers flown there directly from the United Kingdom were out of action from heat disorders during the first five days of the operation. The experience in Kuwait inspired a British army trial to compare the reactions to field exercises of a platoon flown from the UK to Aden with those of a platoon stationed in Bahrain during the previous nine months. The results showed that none of the troops from Bahrain suffered from severe heat illness and only a few from minor complaints. In contrast, one-fourth of the troops from the UK were ineffective within a few hours of arrival in Aden, and over the 12-day period of the trial the platoon from the UK became, for all practical purposes, ineffective for combat.³⁰

Second, more needs to be done with respect to promoting interservice cooperation. Interservice cooperation is one of those subjects about which much is said and little is done, but treating it seriously for a change could do much to mitigate the adverse consequences of the austerity likely to be imposed once the troops come home from Saudi Arabia. It does little good to deploy Army units closer to potential trouble spots unless they are endowed in advance with the means of getting there. Instead of separate Army and Air Force installations, we should be thinking about collocating Army units and the Air Force transports that would carry them into action. Some of the equipment slated for withdrawal from Europe could usefully be stored aboard Navy vessels that could maintain an over-the-horizon presence near potential trouble spots. Eight fast sealift ships and nine maritime pre-positioning ships participated in Operation Desert Shield, but the pace of the deployment suggests that much more remains to be done.

The more of these combined units that can be deployed forward as a result of new basing arrangements and/or frequent and realistic exercises, the more visible their activities will be and thus the greater their ability to deter crises by dissuading hostile states from challenging American interests. The greater the number of combined units forward-deployed, the more rapid the Army's response to crisis situations and thus the more effective it can be in support of efforts to manage and defuse crises short of war.

Third, we need to think about re-equipping Army units to make it easier for them to move quickly across long distances. Army officers have talked for years about the advantages of equipment that would be easily air-transportable, but results have been sadly lacking. In December 1980, to

cite one example, Army officials were said to be thinking about a 22-ton tank that would be easier to transport over long distances than either the M1 or the M60,³¹ but more than ten years later a scaled-down tank that can be moved relatively easily by air is still the subject of vague plans for the future.

Finally, it will be necessary to change the way in which the Army and indeed all the services respond to the prospect of declining budgets. Budgetary shortfalls have typically been met with cuts in the operations and maintenance account and stretch-outs of expensive procurement programs. The former produces an immediate decline in outlays (important to deficit-cutters) while the latter offers the hope of keeping production lines open until the purse strings loosen. A strong case can be made that this is the wrong way to respond to declining budgets, for two reasons.

First, cutting the operations and maintenance account reduces the visibility and efficacy of the Army's exercises and preparations for future conflicts, thereby diminishing its ability to contribute to the goals of crisis prevention and crisis management. Second, stretching out procurement plans has the effect of entangling the Army in a vicious cycle from which it has proven very difficult to break free.³²

Production stretch-outs invariably raise unit costs, thereby reducing even further the number of items that can be bought for a given sum. More important, rising unit costs encourage the services to initiate elaborate research and development projects intended to produce new weapons that can do the work of several items in the current inventory (e.g. the LHX helicopter). Because the new systems are expected to perform several missions as well or better than the items they replace, they prove to be more complex than expected, thereby raising R&D costs and unit costs as well. The higher these costs prove to be, the more exaggerated the claims made on behalf of the new system, thereby inspiring skepticism among military reformers and Congressional critics. The greater the skepticism, the more the new system is called on to do in order to justify funds already committed and future spending authority that will be requested from Congress. As unit costs continue to climb, production rates are slowed even further and procurement plans stretched out over longer periods, thereby exacerbating the rise in unit costs. Alternatively, programs are canceled in favor of more exotic combinations of new technology (e.g. DIVAD and FAADS). In the meantime, troops in the field must continue to rely on the supposedly outdated or ineffective systems that inspired the search for an elaborate technological fix in the first place.

To Conclude

Four times since the end of the Second World War defense budgets in the United States have been cut in anticipation of changes in the international arena that would render capable armed forces less necessary and a

substantial peace dividend possible. These hopes have been repeatedly frustrated, but Americans have demonstrated an almost boundless capacity to believe that the future will be brighter than the past.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait occurred at a time when the defense budget had already been declining for several years and the Bush Administration and the Congress were at odds over whether the force structure could safely be cut by one-fourth or one-half. It is instructive to ask what the outcome might have been had the attack on Kuwait occurred after the cuts under consideration had been carried out. Would the result have been another Korea, with understrength American brigades enveloped by a numerically superior foe while the nation rushed to rebuild the forces that it had recently discarded in a fit of absent-mindedness?

Americans combine a hard-headed determination not to back down from a challenge with an easy susceptibility for the notion that international politics has changed, that force has lost its utility, and that the defense budget can safely be cut. It is one of the more remarkable aspects of the American political scene that a people capable of the exertions required by the Second World War, the wars in Korea and Vietnam, and the Cold War could so easily convince themselves that the end of a war will bring fundamental changes in international affairs and that similar exertions will not be required in the future. Even more remarkable is the apparent ability of Americans to forget how these hopes have been dashed repeatedly in the past and to cling to the notion that this time things will really be different.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the UN response as manifested by Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm have temporarily side-tracked the latest round of hopes for fundamental change in the conduct of international affairs, but the history of the last 45 years suggests that it will be followed by renewed optimism that the elusive peace dividend will finally materialize. It behooves those concerned about the future of the armed forces to think carefully about what can be done—in the face of the inevitable pressures to the contrary—to ensure that the forces are well-suited to the challenges likely to arise during the 1990s and beyond. The Army of the 21st century is being built now.

NOTES

1. Molly Moore, "Military's Painful Mission," *The Washington Post*, 17 July 1990, pp. A1, A6. See also George Wilson, "Sweeping Restructuring of Military to be Powell's Mission," *The Washington Post*, 30 September 1989, p. A7.

2. See, for example, Molly Moore and Patrick Tyler, "Deploying Major U.S. Force in Mideast Would Take Weeks," *The Washington Post*, 3 August 1990, p. A27; Molly Moore, "Pentagon Strains to Move Forces," *The Washington Post*, 14 August 1990, pp. A1, A17.

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