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# New Directions in US Military Strategy

JAMES P. McCARTHY

The past two years have witnessed extraordinary flux in the international security environment. We have transitioned rapidly from an intense superpower rivalry marked by bloc-to-bloc confrontation to a constructive partnership between former adversaries in search of enduring peace and stability. The United States has responded to this dramatic turn of events by crafting a new national defense strategy to cope with evolving challenges to our nation's vital interests for the remainder of this decade. The product of this endeavor constitutes the first fundamental change in American strategy since the flexible response doctrine was enunciated in the early 1960s.

In October 1991 I joined military leaders from 37 other nations at the second Vienna Military Doctrine Seminar sponsored by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). For nearly a week, we engaged in straightforward discussions about our respective military policies, force structures, and training activities in a concerted effort to reduce tensions and enhance stability in Europe. My purpose was to present America's new strategic vision, the concepts that underlie it, and its particular application to Europe. This article encapsulates the views thus presented.

During the initial Doctrine Seminar in January 1990, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, spoke of an unbounded American faith in democracy, individual freedom, and the rule of law; of the unique role of the American military in protecting and defending the Constitution, the rights it guarantees, and the institutions it establishes; and of how we respond to the will of the people as expressed through their elected political leaders in Congress and the White House.<sup>1</sup>

Those lofty ideals still hold true today. Our armed forces continue to serve as the nation's sentinels. They encompass Americans from every walk of life and are imbued with a firm commitment to democracy, freedom, and justice. As military professionals, we are dedicated to safeguarding our nation's vital interests in a complex, still-dangerous world. That dedication

includes the willingness to give the last full measure of devotion, just as 148 brave young Americans did during the Persian Gulf War.

The American people recognize the significance of this ultimate sacrifice made by their citizen soldiers. Moreover, they acknowledge the vital contribution made by military professionals to our nation's victory in the long, bitter Cold War. However, they insist upon America's armed forces adapting to the sweeping transformation of the security environment as we embark upon a promising new era in international relations. We have responded to the will of the people with a revamped national defense strategy, prudent cuts in military force structure, and dramatic changes in our nuclear posture.

These initiatives will enable the United States to continue to play a key leadership role in promoting peace and stability on the changed global scene. In that role, President Bush has committed our nation to strive toward a New World Order based on democratic values, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. In conjunction with our friends, allies, and international security organizations, we will labor to create a more secure world in which political and economic freedom, democratic institutions, individual rights, and justice can flourish.<sup>2</sup> We dare do no less.

It is not America's intention, however, to become the world's gendarme. Rather, we will seek to mobilize the community of nations to address world security problems and to promote an environment conducive to the growth of democratic ideals and free-market economies. We anticipate working with friends, allies, and collective security organizations in future endeavors to encourage regional political stability and counter aggression.<sup>3</sup>

### *Emerging Realities for the United States*

America's new defense strategy has been devised to support President Bush's vision of a New World Order in light of several emerging and enduring realities of the geopolitical environment. The most significant emergent factor is our new and encouraging, yet still-evolving relationship with the successor states of the Soviet Union. Regardless of the ultimate nature of the Soviet states, the bipolar superpower rivalry that formed the basis of our defense policy over the past 40 years has disappeared. The Soviet people have

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championed political and economic reforms that facilitated the liberation of Eastern Europe, unification of Germany, withdrawal of Soviet forces from East Europe, dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, and implementation of landmark accords on conventional and nuclear arms. Far-reaching changes in Soviet political, economic, military, and foreign policies since the failure of the August 1991 coup have marked a watershed in US-Soviet relations.

In late September, President Bush took this historic opportunity to move to a safer, more stable relationship with the Soviet Union. He directed that the United States eliminate its entire worldwide inventory of ground-launched short-range theater nuclear weapons. Consequently, we will withdraw and destroy all of our nuclear artillery shells and short-range nuclear ballistic missile warheads. However, we will preserve an effective air-delivered nuclear capability in Europe to ensure NATO's security. In recognition of monumental changes in the international military landscape, the United States will withdraw all tactical nuclear weapons from surface ships and attack submarines as well as nuclear weapons associated with land-based naval aircraft.<sup>4</sup>

President Bush also implemented further stabilizing measures in America's strategic nuclear posture. He directed an immediate stand-down from alert of all US strategic bombers and those intercontinental ballistic missiles scheduled for deactivation under the START agreement. Elimination of the affected missiles will soon follow. The President also terminated development of the mobile Peacekeeper ICBM, the mobile portion of the Small ICBM program, and the replacement short-range attack missile carried by strategic bombers. Moreover, he proposed discussions with Soviet leaders on eliminating all ICBMs with multiple warheads.<sup>5</sup>

President Bush also endorsed greater efforts to curb the growing threat from nuclear and ballistic missile proliferation as well as immediate, concrete steps to permit limited deployment of non-nuclear defenses to protect against limited ballistic missile strikes. Finally, he proposed that the United States and Soviet Union cooperate to ensure safe and secure command and control, handling, dismantling, and destruction of nuclear weapons.<sup>6</sup>

We are consulting with our allies on the implementation of these sweeping initiatives, which fit well into NATO's new strategy and force posture. We welcome comparable initiatives being undertaken by the Soviet successors and trust that ongoing discussions will result in actions that move us closer to a new world of peace, stability, and security.

### ***Enduring Realities for a Global Power***

America's new defense strategy recognizes that our security is inextricably linked to that of Europe. The transatlantic partnership is embodied in the Atlantic Alliance, which remains at the center of our security relations with all of Europe. This collective defense organization is indispensable to

security and stability on a rapidly transforming continent. NATO's recent emphasis on dialogue, cooperation, and collective defense has promoted a constructive partnership with Central and East European nations seeking democratic governments and free markets. Moreover, the Alliance is making an essential contribution to the formation of a Euro-Atlantic security community founded on CSCE, NATO, and the growing integration of Europe.

We remain concerned over potential political and economic instability in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The delicate evolution to democracy and a more integrated Europe is endangered by the resurgence of fear and hostility, competing territorial claims, extreme nationalism, ethnic rivalries, and historic antagonisms. The Yugoslavian civil war is but one manifestation of the centrifugal forces that threaten to disrupt the peaceful transformation of Europe. Continued US participation in a strong and reliable Atlantic Alliance will play a vital stabilizing role during this pivotal time of instability and uncertainty in Central and Eastern Europe.

The enduring interests of the United States and our allies dictate that we also remain engaged in the Middle East, Southwest Asia, and the Pacific, as well as the Western Hemisphere. Our new strategy will support America's continued efforts to enhance regional security and stability, promote democratic reforms, support economic progress, and fulfill our obligations to other nations in these vitally important regions.

Furthermore, that strategy anticipates we will collaborate with allies and coalition partners to resolve a variety of unexpected, fast-rising crises in the future. For many, the world remains a place of danger, turmoil, tyranny, and conflict. Continued global proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and the means to deliver them threaten regional peace and security. In addition to Kuwait and Iraq, recent crises in Liberia, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Zaire, as well as natural disasters in Bangladesh and the Philippines, drive home the need for US military assistance and the difficulty of predicting when that assistance may be required.

### ***A Revamped US Defense Strategy***

The improved security environment in Europe has enabled us to move from a strategy based on containing communism and deterring global conflict to a more diverse, flexible strategy that responds to regional threats to peace and stability. Our new defense strategy is based upon four foundations to ensure we can respond to tomorrow's challenges as we streamline our military force structure today.<sup>7</sup>

- *Nuclear Deterrence.* The central concept that guides our military strategy remains deterring potential adversaries from using force against the United States, our friends, and allies. We will continue to field modern nuclear forces to convince potential adversaries that the cost of aggression will exceed

any possible gain. Modern strategic nuclear forces combined with a defensive system against limited strikes will provide a credible deterrent against the use of nuclear weapons. Advanced fighter bombers and air-delivered nuclear weapons will help underwrite NATO security in Europe.

- *Forward Presence.* We will maintain a meaningful, albeit smaller, presence of US military forces in key regions of the world. The diminished threat of global conflict makes it possible to scale back forward-based US troops, yet still demonstrate America's commitment to allies; contribute to regional stability; and provide an initial capability to respond to unfolding crises. In Europe, we plan to cut our forces by more than half, to approximately 150,000 troops by mid-decade.

- *Crisis Response.* We have refocused our strategy to deal with regional crises as the most likely threat to security and stability in the world. The potential crises we may face are many and varied, and could arise on short notice. We fully expect that the United States, our allies, and coalition partners will be called upon to deter regional aggressors, mediate regional economic and social strife, and promote the stability necessary for fragile democracies to flourish. Thus, American forces must be able to respond on short notice to a variety of crisis situations and conduct operations ranging from disaster relief to combat.

- *Reconstitution.* As we draw down our forces, we will pay close attention to the vital elements of military potential necessary to reconstitute large, competent forces in the event a global threat resurfaces. We will do the necessary planning and invest in the required assets to enable our nation to mobilize manpower, form and train units, and activate the industrial base on a broad scale. We will monitor the world situation for indications of a resurgent threat that would require the United States to begin rebuilding its global defenses.

### ***Underlying Military Strategy Concepts***

These four foundations are underwritten by a broad set of military strategy concepts designed to capitalize on our enduring military strengths while exploiting the weaknesses of those who might challenge our interests.

- *Readiness.* America's streamlined forces will maintain a high state of readiness to provide the capabilities required for deterrence and rapid response. They must be able to respond on short order, deploy to the flash point, and conduct effective operations upon arrival. Moreover, they must be capable of prosecuting complex military endeavors in conjunction with allied and friendly forces. Therefore, our armed forces must continue to engage in realistic training and rigorous exercises with our friends and allies to ensure they remain ready for action.

During the Persian Gulf Crisis, the US VIIth Corps deployed from Germany to Saudi Arabia to spearhead the coalition offensive that expelled Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Realistic training alongside Allied forces in Central

Europe prepared the corps for this crucial mission which entailed integrated combat operations with coalition forces.

- *Collective Security.* We expect to strengthen the world community's response to crises through multilateral operations under the auspices of international security organizations. Collective security arrangements coordinate common security interests; codify commitments, roles, and responsibilities; enhance combined doctrine and interoperability; and provide integrated command structures. We will rely on international security relationships to further mutual interests in a future marked by declining defense budgets and reduced forward presence.

As we saw in the Gulf War and Kurdish relief operations thereafter, the United States seldom responds to a crisis on its own. We consult with our allies and friends, then work together to prevent a crisis, manage it, or resolve it. In early January of 1990, NATO members agreed to dispatch Allied Command Europe's Mobile Force-Air to eastern Turkey to serve as a warning to Iraq against attacking an Alliance member. This historic first deployment of NATO's immediate response force proved effective in deterring Iraqi aggression against Turkey.

- *Arms Control.* Arms control agreements can bound uncertainty and reduce nuclear, chemical, biological, and conventional arsenals. The United States engages in arms control not as an end in itself, but as a means to enhance national security. We seek to reduce military threats to our national interests, inject greater predictability into military relationships, and channel force postures in more stabilizing directions while we retain vital military capabilities for defense of our interests.

Over the past several years, we have worked with our allies and former adversaries to establish a series of treaties which provide the foundation of Europe's developing security architecture. These precedent-setting agreements include the 1986 Stockholm Document on Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs), the 1987 Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the 1990 Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, and the 1990 Vienna Document on CSBMs. The CFE Treaty brings us closer to a stable balance of conventional military capabilities in Europe. Moreover, CFE follow-on negotiations seek to establish manpower limits and stabilizing measures to further constrain the capability of nations to regenerate combat power and jeopardize stability in Europe.

- *Security Assistance.* We will employ security assistance programs to enhance collective security, demonstrate US commitment, reinforce alliance cohesion, stabilize regions, strengthen developing democracies, and contribute to allied military professionalism. Investing in the security infrastructure of allied and friendly nations greatly enhances their ability to resist coercion or aggression while facilitating coalition assistance in the event of a crisis. In particular, the United States has extended military education and training

programs to officers from Europe's new democracies to further their professional development, while NATO has offered an Alliance familiarization course that addresses civilian oversight of defense matters.

The military strategy concepts described above are designed to promote conditions that help prevent crises and deter conflict. If it becomes necessary to invoke major military force to resolve a crisis, then the following military strategy concepts are especially applicable.

- *Maritime and Aerospace Superiority.* As a trading nation, the United States must maintain assured access to the airways, space, and sea-lanes. The economic health and well being of our country depends upon the free flow of goods and people between nations. During a crisis, the capability to establish and maintain control of the air, space, and seas en route to and within an affected region is vital to an effective response and sustained operations.

Given the criticality of Mediterranean sea-lanes, NATO acted to prevent Iraqi mining of key choke points during the Gulf Crisis. Forty Allied ships serving in four naval formations guarded the Mediterranean lines of communication in conjunction with more than 30 maritime patrol and airborne early warning aircraft. The integrated efforts of this combined air-sea task force assured the safety of the Mediterranean sea lanes and kept supplies and combat forces flowing to Southwest Asia.

- *Power Projection.* Our reduced forward presence makes it imperative that we have the capability for rapid movement of forces from the United States and forward bases to regional hot spots. The certain knowledge that we can reach out and affect a situation with military capability should deter would-be aggressors, assure friends and allies in volatile regions, and reinforce our contribution to collective security. If all else fails, then the capability to employ America's military power around the globe will help resolve a crisis in favor of US and coalition interests.

The rapid deployment of American Patriot missile units from Germany to Israel during the Desert Storm air campaign vividly demonstrated the importance of a robust power projection capability. From the time European Command received the tasking order from the Joint Staff, it took only 28 hours and 35 minutes to have the first Patriot firing battery in place and operational, defending innocent civilians from Iraqi SCUDs. That rapid response was crucial to the morale, not to mention the physical security, of our friends, and it assured continued coalition solidarity against Iraq.

- *Decisive Force and Strategic Agility.* Once America's leaders decide to respond to aggression with military power, we will assemble on short notice the necessary elements to apply the decisive force required to prevail in the shortest feasible time and with minimum loss of life. That capability rests on the strategic agility of forces based in the United States and overseas to deploy anywhere in the world in response to a crisis. We are



structuring our military forces abroad and in the United States to be more responsive while continuing to invest in the airlift and sealift required to deliver those forces in a timely manner to a crisis flash point.

The massive deployment of coalition forces to Southwest Asia and their victory over Iraq reflected the importance of possessing both strategic agility and overwhelming force when responding to crisis situations. America's success in this endeavor hinged upon the strong support from friends and allies in Europe who enhanced the movement of our forces bound for the Gulf in the largest US military deployment since World War II.

- *Technological Superiority.* The United States will continue to focus on technology to offset quantitative advantages of potential adversaries; to reduce the risk to US and friendly forces; and to increase the potential for a prompt and successful termination of a crisis. In peacetime, advanced technology is a key element of deterrence. In war, it enhances combat effectiveness and reduces loss of life and equipment.

Our experience in the Gulf with stealth fighters, precision-guided munitions, M1A1 tanks, Patriot missiles, multiple launch rocket systems, and other advanced weapon systems demonstrated the efficacy of fielding forces with modern weapons and advanced support systems. The United States must remain on the leading edge of modern technology to fulfill security obligations to its citizens, to its friends and allies, and to the international community.

### *Principal Directions in US Defense Strategy*

We will follow three key directions in implementing the concepts that make up our revised defense strategy. Those include contending with the continuing Soviet reality, adopting a regional orientation, and emphasizing flexibility.

The United States is pleased with the general direction being taken by the former Soviet Republics in political and economic liberalization, foreign policy, and military reform. However, we realize the transition to free, democratic societies may be a difficult one fraught with instability and violence. Thus, the United States will continue to maintain a strong defense posture with the capability to reconstitute America's global defenses if a major threat to our security resurfaces.

While the political and economic transformation of the former Soviet Union progresses peacefully, we will continue to adapt America's defense strategy and force posture to the improving security environment, much as President Bush did in his recent nuclear policy initiatives. Continued expansion of Soviet cooperation with the community of democratic nations, combined with the flexibility of our national defense strategy, will enable us to do much more, together, to resolve regional crises and promote peacetime engagement.

Our new defense strategy emphasizes the importance of democracy, regional stability, the capability of friends and allies to resist aggression or

coercion, and reducing the need to employ military force. We will seek to strengthen the bonds of friendship and alliances through activities that assist governmental and socioeconomic development. These activities extend beyond increasing indigenous military capabilities to assisting countries in building their national infrastructures. In concert with the needs and desires of host nations, our forces can help improve a country's capability to perform public functions and services in response to societal needs.

Moreover, we will engage other nations in peacetime activities of broader significance to the world community. Those endeavors include detecting and significantly reducing the production and trafficking of illegal drugs; deterring, monitoring, and neutralizing terrorist threats while protecting vulnerable targets; and conducting humanitarian assistance, civil affairs, and disaster relief operations.

As one of the few nations in the world with the means to respond meaningfully to disasters, the United States will continue to help nations when they request assistance. Not only must our forces be prepared to provide humanitarian aid, but in cases such as the resettlement of Kurdish refugees in Northern Iraq, they must be capable of employing force to assist and protect those in need.

### *Prepared for the Future*

America's revamped defense strategy is designed to cope with sweeping change in a remarkably different but no less challenging world. The United States is responding with new approaches to security that seek to build constructive relationships with former adversaries, reinforce regional stability, and counter remaining threats through multilateral coalitions. Moreover, bold initiatives in the nuclear arena by Presidents Bush and Gorbachev promise a more peaceful, hopeful future for all mankind.

America is prepared for the challenges of the future. We will remain engaged in the world, as a friend, as a reliable ally, and as a leader in the pursuit of peace and stability within a New World Order.

#### NOTES

1. Speech by General Colin L. Powell to CSCE Military Doctrine Seminar, Vienna, Austria, January 1990.
2. *National Security Strategy of the United States* (Washington: GPO, August 1991), p. v.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
4. George Bush, "Unilateral U.S. Nuclear Arms Drawdown Seizes Historic Opportunity," *Defense Issues*, 27 September 1991, p. 2.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
7. George Bush, *National Security Strategy of the United States, 1991-1992* (Washington: Brassey's [US], 1991), pp. 98-127. A fifth foundational principle—"A Smaller and Restructured Force"—is, of course, self-evident.