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Engagement through Deployment: Shaping America's Future Military

ARTHUR H. BARBER III

The collapse of Soviet-led communism changed the simple rules by which US security was planned during the Cold War. While the debate over the new rules proceeds, US forces are moving out of overseas bases and are demobilizing. The remaining forces are conducting temporary overseas deployments more frequently and to more places than ever before, mostly for what is now called "operations other than war" (OOTW). These are the day-to-day military operations of regional deterrence, stability, and humanitarian assistance that have long been critical to US global access and influence. They will continue to be critical to the nation's engagement in world affairs.

The Defense Department Bottom-Up Review established the requirement to fight two near-simultaneous "major regional conflicts" as the primary basis for US military force structure planning. Current reductions are reshaping the military both to meet this mission and to meet stringent budget limits. It is becoming clear that these budget limits are too small to support a future force large enough to fight two wars, yet still modern and ready enough to win them. Without a compelling global threat, the spending is unlikely to increase. America's military is faced with a mismatch between its requirements and its resources.

The United States has not faced more than one major war at a time in 50 years, but over this same period its national interests and influence have depended on a robust capability to conduct multiple OOTW. The nation's future military should be shaped to follow this same broad pattern: joint operations both in global OOTW and in a single regional war. This article will characterize the nature of future joint operations and will describe the capabilities and shape of the military best-suited to conduct them.

The Nature of Future Military Operations

America's national security strategy recognizes that the world's single superpower must remain involved in world affairs, and it commits the nation to such involvement: "Our nation can only address the era's dangers and opportunities if we remain actively engaged in global affairs. We are the world's greatest power, and we have global interests as well as responsibilities."¹

During the Cold War, the United States built a global security system of alliances, bases, and forces to contain communism. The scope and durability of this system of voluntarily allied sovereign states, and the accompanying pattern of US base access and force deployments overseas, was unprecedented.² This historic luxury gave the nation great flexibility in its global use of the military instrument of national power, and the US leadership reached for this instrument frequently. Few of the events in which US forces were committed involved direct communist challenges; most were actions of engagement rather than containment. Only two of them—Korea and Vietnam—were large-scale wars.

The capability to fight and win a single major regional conflict is one of the two pillars of conventional military credibility on which the force structure for a US strategy of engagement must rest. The capability to fight two such conflicts nearly simultaneously, while desirable, should not be given undue weight at the expense of other requirements. When the United States was involved in each of the three regional wars it has fought since 1945, no second conflicts developed in other regions. Yet during two of these (Korea and Vietnam), the United States was facing a global threat with the potential to orchestrate such a challenge. During the third (Desert Storm), North Korea was ready for war but did not seize the opportunity.

The second pillar of credibility for future US force structure should be the capability to engage in what today's joint doctrine calls operations other than war. Such operations are a vital military contribution to the economic and political elements of a superpower's national security. Budgetary limits will not allow the United States to preserve force structure insurance for every possible future requirement while still leaving enough funds for modernization. The US military today must choose between maximizing the capability to refight yesterday's wars with today's forces, and building or preserving the capability to fight tomorrow's wars. The risks and pain of giving up conventional combat force structure today are real and

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immediate. The risks of reducing capability to conduct OOTW and of short-changing modernization are long-term, but taking them will inevitably put the military out of balance with national strategic requirements.

Current doctrine lists the following specific missions as part of operations other than war:³

- peacekeeping/peace enforcement
- counterterrorism
- humanitarian assistance
- counter-drug operations
- foreign internal defense
- sanction enforcement
- noncombatant evacuation operations
- deterrence
- raids and strikes

While such operations may look like wars to the participants, when viewed from a national perspective OOTW are ostensibly low-risk or short-duration affairs in which US forces operate under tight rules for limited aims. These aims include: defense of economic order, preservation of US political influence, support of international order, and unilateral actions supporting US interests. These are the exact aims of America's strategy of engagement, and operations other than war are the daily military means that execute this strategy.

Defense of Economic Order

Since 1945, America has pursued a policy of fostering global economic order and interdependence. It has succeeded, but as a result US prosperity now depends on an international economy that is vulnerable to many types of disruption: closure of an international trade route, restriction of market access to a vital raw material, or acts of piracy and terrorism. Such disruptions have occurred regularly around the globe over the last 50 years. Few were caused by the communist threat, and in fact the removal of bipolar bloc restraints has released many long-suppressed violent tensions around the world. This security environment will require a strong US capability to conduct both multinational and unilateral military action to defend its economic interests. In the words of one writer, "Today's economic openness has been associated with a global American military presence."⁴

Preservation of Political Influence

Because it can accompany diplomatic and economic actions with decisive military power wherever and whenever it chooses, America today has great political influence in shaping the course of international affairs. The presence of US military forces is viewed by nearly all nations in those regions of US vital interest as a welcome stabilizing factor. Without the umbrella of

deployed American forces, other nations might seek to become major military powers, destabilizing their regions and perhaps rivaling US global leadership. This nation's relative influence in the world would be weakened by abdicating its unique military role.

The presence of deployed US forces in turbulent regions extends US political influence by deterring those who might take actions unfavorable to US interests. Deterrence is the form of OOTW that links these operations to war; where it fails, war results. It is most likely to fail when the military forces behind it are not credible or visible. This occurs when the group being deterred believes that these forces will not be used, cannot remain engaged, or cannot exact an intolerable price in combat. Another writer has observed that "for future US conventional forces to deter, they must maintain some form of visibility in order to be perceived as credible and capable."⁵ Temporary deployments rather than permanent basing are the future trend for US forces in the vital national missions of deterrence and preservation of influence.

Support of International Order

The number of sovereign political entities in the world appears to have no limit, but the number able to sustain themselves is harshly finite. As a result of this dichotomy, the United Nations will probably receive an increasing number of calls for humanitarian rescues or for peacekeeping in wars of survival. While the United Nations has shown the inclination to become more involved in such operations, it does not have an independent ability to execute them. United Nations operations to maintain international order will probably remain at a high level. Even if the United States declines to support these with combat forces, most UN operations will continue to involve some form of US military logistics, communications, or surveillance support.

Today's trend away from permanent alliances toward ad-hoc coalitions for major military operations increases the importance of broad multinational cooperation in US strategy. Whether for a regional war in defense of vital national interests, or for UN operations, future US forces will often need to integrate quickly with forces of other nations. The United States can best prepare for future international operations by deploying routinely for multinational exercises with other nations. Such exercises familiarize others with US doctrine while familiarizing our forces with their capabilities and equipment.

Defense of National Interests

The nation's warfighting forces will remain focused on the arc of vital national interests which extends from East Asia through the Persian Gulf to Western Europe. There are many points outside this arc, however, where America could have to use smaller military forces to protect national vulnerabilities. America's economic interests and its citizens continue to spread to

new regions of emerging opportunity, where they are highly vulnerable targets for those seeking leverage to influence the superpower's policies. The military capability to conduct OOTW anywhere in the world will remain an important national insurance policy for US citizens and interests abroad.

Where an operation involves strictly US interests, the allies of the Cold War will not necessarily follow America's lead. When they do not, the US bases or forces in these nations may not be accessible. Even if allies support the operation it may occur in an area distant from them, or where the existing infrastructure is of limited use. Future US military forces must maintain their capability to conduct OOTW with minimal dependence on overseas infrastructure.

Joint Force Capabilities

Regardless of the nature of the operation in which they are used, US military forces must be shaped and employed so that they can control the operation in four dimensions:

- *time*: the ability to act more quickly and endure longer than the adversary
- *reach*: the ability to overcome the distance from their bases
- *military capability*: the ability to accomplish the mission and neutralize any resistance
- *political agility*: the ability to maintain superiority in use of local and international politics for military advantage

Each of these dimensions affects the type of future joint force that the United States should field. The shape of this future military will depend heavily on the balance between warfighting and OOTW capabilities. The force and systems that are best-suited for OOTW are not necessarily the most effective or economic ones for warfighting. Both types are needed, but current planning gives too little attention to the unique requirements for OOTW. As the total force becomes smaller, the specific force requirements must be clearly identified and preserved. The processes for selecting which new capabilities to field and which existing ones to retain must also explicitly consider the unique missions and requirements of OOTW.

Dominating the dimension of *time* requires forces capable of a speedy response, or a sustained one, or both. Fast-breaking OOTW, such as counterterrorist actions or assistance to endangered US citizens, require forces that can apply a decisive capability promptly. Even for those operations where coalition action is appropriate, an initial US stabilizing response is likely to be required until a coalition force can be formed and fielded. To achieve time dominance, the United States will need a mix of ready, air-deployable units plus forces that are routinely deployed at sea near potential crisis scenes. The sea-based forces provide capabilities that are not air

deployable, support air-deployed forces, and provide an alternative if air base access is denied.

Other forms of OOTW—peacekeeping, postwar stability operations, deterrence, and humanitarian relief—may require US forces capable of remaining engaged indefinitely. When such a requirement develops in a place where US forces are not permanently based, this endurance will require extended forward deployments. The active US forces that are initially deployed must be backed up by a pool of other active units to serve as their rotation base. This pool must be large enough to provide the required endurance without an unbearable strain on people or equipment.

US forces can be effective militarily only if they have the *reach* to apply the needed capability at the place and time it is required. As former President Bush noted, “No amount of political change will alter the geographic fact that we are separated from many of our most important allies and interests by thousands of miles of water.”⁶ Reach depends on the location of the operation compared to the location of accessible supporting bases (afloat or ashore). American forces in OOTW will often be operating at a great distance from their supporting land bases; the reach capability to offset this is expensive but essential. The future combat and logistic reach of US forces must not become unduly constrained by dependence on access to foreign bases.

Military forces engage in most types of OOTW as much for political effect as they do to achieve a specific military objective. The success of the United States in OOTW depends on having forces that are properly shaped and employed in both the political and the military dimensions. Future forces must be *politically agile* in two forms of political operation: domestic and international.

The agility of US forces in the domestic political arena depends on the public’s perception of mission cost versus mission importance. Operations that are perceived to have the risk of high human or dollar costs are unlikely to be sustainable unless the US public sees vital national interests immediately at stake. Without public and congressional support, mobilized reserve forces are unlikely to be available to help conduct an OOTW. The forces committed to many types of potentially risky OOTW will require low visibility to media, low vulnerability to casualties, and low dependence on reserve-component support. This form of agility is best provided by active-duty forces at sea and in the air, rather than forces on the ground within reach of protagonists and media.

International political agility in an operation depends on two factors: the depth of US commitment and the degree to which other nations participate. As the US increases its visibility and investment of prestige in an operation, its agility to change policy becomes more limited. Operations that achieve US objectives through multinational action or action in the air and sea offer more agility and less risk exposure than unilateral US actions or

those involving land operations. International agility depends on having a full range of military capabilities available, to permit choice of the one best-suited to complement other nations' contributions.

Shaping the Joint Force

The Bottom-Up Review defined a large force structure requirement for the strategy of engagement. The US defense budget has not provided enough funds to simultaneously support and modernize this force. Estimates of the shortfall range from \$20 billion per year upward, primarily in modernization accounts and in support of the military's hard-to-shrink infrastructure.⁷ This mismatch between requirements and resources will soon force further reductions in the size of America's military. The core capability of a modern force capable of decisive success in multiple global OOTW and a single major short-warning conflict must be identified and retained in this process.

The Bottom-Up Review identified other smaller force structure options, based on the number and time spacing of the major regional conflicts that each could cover. This report said that the ability of its preferred force to conduct OOTW was good.⁸ The types of force reductions in its smaller options clearly demonstrated, however, that these options took proportional decreases in both warfighting and OOTW capabilities. This is not the best approach to shaping a smaller military force to support the national strategy. The capability for OOTW should not be slighted to support forces for fighting wars that this capability might prevent.

The nation's future military must be shaped to support OOTW as a primary mission, and two new principles should determine the size and type of the force structure maintained for this mission. First, the structure must be large enough to sustain reasonably likely levels of OOTW without crippling the initial-response force for a major war. Second, the structure must include those types and numbers of forces that economically deliver the mix of rapid response, reach, capability, and political agility appropriate to each OOTW mission. America does not need two separate military forces, one for war and the other for OOTW. Most of the *types* of forces needed for global OOTW will also be needed as part of the nation's warfighting force in a major regional conflict. The *size* of the active-component structure for each type of force, however, should be determined by integrating the requirements for rapid-response warfighting missions with the often larger day-to-day requirements for sustaining endurance in global OOTW.

Shaping for Endurance

Endurance is an expensive quality in OOTW. The recent major shift of US forces out of permanent overseas bases means that endurance will increasingly depend on having a pool of active units as a rotation base for temporary deployments. The smaller the pool compared to the deployment requirements,

“America does not need two separate military forces, one for war and the other for operations other than war.”

the longer each unit must stay away from its home base. The size of the pool required to keep a single unit on a rotational forward-deployment commitment depends on three considerations:

- PERSTEMPO (Personnel Tempo of Operations) limits
- time required for transit to and from the deployed location
- time required for training and maintenance between deployments

Based on these considerations, the support pool can range from just one active unit of a particular type to support a commitment, to as many as five or more. There is tremendous leverage in knowing where the threat will develop and permanently basing units there, but this solution costs flexibility and foreign exchange, both in short supply. Without such basing, any long-term deployment commitment can tie down a substantial force. This is an important factor to remember in matching future OOTW commitments to resources.

The military's people pay a high price in deployment time if the force is too small for its commitments. America's Navy learned this price in the late 1970s, when it experienced a sudden surge in commitments for ship deployments to the Indian Ocean while its force structure was at a post-Vietnam low. The resulting long, closely spaced deployments had catastrophic effects on the retention and quality of its force. Since then, the Navy has developed a strict "PERSTEMPO" policy⁹ that is accepted by Congress as a valid factor in planning peacetime force structure. The PERSTEMPO policy focuses on *people* by establishing the concept of a "personnel tempo of operations" limit on their time away from home. It guarantees people in deployable units that they will not be deployed (in peacetime) for periods longer than six months, and that their units will on average spend at least half their time at their home station despite deployments and interdeployment training.

All services today are facing the dilemma of the 1970's Navy: steady or growing commitments for certain types of units, with a shrinking active-duty force as a rotation pool. There have been initiatives to use reserve component forces to augment the rotation pool. This has a high cost in domestic political agility, so the services have generally limited usage to individual volunteers and to small units on their annual training periods. No other service has yet articulated and enforced a formal policy with hard

quantitative limits similar to the Navy's PERSTEMPO. Until they do, the inevitable decline in retention of skilled and experienced personnel—the hidden cost of endurance in OOTW—will quietly hollow every capability of our military forces.

Shaping for the Missions

When the United States must fight a major war the nation's decisive capability is land combat forces, deployed primarily through naval power. When the mission is OOTW, the decisive capability depends as much on the political situation as the military one. It is important that the United States have a broad array of military capabilities from which to shape the best response in either instance. Where a firm statement of US commitment is required, deployment of land-based combat units is often the best answer if time permits and local access is available. For missions requiring more agility or less power, special operations forces (SOF) and land-based support units such as military police, logistical, medical, and engineer units can be deployed alone. Finally, naval forces and strategic air forces can provide a more politically agile and speedy capability than land-based combat forces, but with more combat power than SOF.

The Army today is relatively well structured to deploy decisive power to war. This Army relies heavily on its reserve components to provide combat service and support forces, based on the assumption that these forces will be used only when combat units are deployed for a major war. The day-to-day missions of the Army today, however, are OOTW. Their demands are pushing people in some types of active-duty SOF and support units—few of which remain—to very high PERSTEMPO levels. This will exact an inevitable price in personnel retention and readiness. There is little room for absorbing more cuts or more deployments in these portions of the Army. The combat forces of the Army—and their supporting Air Force tactical fighters—are under proportionally less demand for OOTW. Even if cut by an amount that would reflect reduction to single-war capability, they would be more than adequate in size to also support most OOTW tasking.

The traditional missions of US naval forces in peacetime are in fact OOTW: deterrence, sanction enforcement, counterdrug operations, and immediate availability for raids, strikes, and other operations. The core elements of naval forces, ranging from aircraft carriers to amphibious groups to Tomahawk-firing warships, can deliver both combat power and endurance in most of the missions of OOTW in the littoral areas of the world. Naval forces have been called upon for OOTW about twice as frequently since 1945 as land-based forces (air and ground),¹⁰ more than 200 times through 1990.¹¹ The political agility and rapid in-theater availability of naval forces, as much as their military capability, have influenced decisions to use them so frequently. It is not cheap to maintain a naval force with the balance and size to sustain

this kind of global flexibility, but cheapness is relative: the most expensive force for a given mission is the one that does not have the flexibility or availability to be used when force is needed.

Naval forces that are continuously present in the littoral areas of a theater generally provide a stronger signal of deterrence than air or ground forces that are not deployed there. Beyond the littoral, or working with naval forces within it, long-range Air Force aircraft also can meet some of the surveillance and strike missions of OOTW. Both types of forces usually can be maneuvered to be as obtrusive as the situation in a crisis demands. And neither is as dependent for its success or endurance on reserve mobilization as the Army. Naval forces need and use virtually the same support forces in peacetime operations as in war, while the Air Force generally needs only readily available individual volunteers from its reserve components.

As a consequence of the world situation and America's policy of active engagement, forces of all the services are experiencing unprecedented levels of demand for OOTW today. Navy ships, Marine Expeditionary Units, Air Force surveillance and airlift units, and Army SOF, combat service support, and some light infantry forces have been deployed operationally in far more places and greater numbers than envisioned when the Bottom-Up Review was released. All these constitute the joint package of forces upon which America will continue to rely for the diverse OOTW missions of global engagement. The requirements for OOTW deployments are a principal factor determining the size and composition of these forces. If they are not large enough to meet the demands of OOTW without exhaustion, engagement will become an infeasible strategy.

Like the forces for warfighting, the forces for the future missions of OOTW will be shaped from every service. But the balance between the services, between the active and reserve components, and between the capabilities within each service often will be quite different from the balance for warfighting. As America's military becomes smaller, shaping it to maintain the balance for both of these vital missions will require a clear understanding and recognition of all the requirements it must meet.

Conclusion

America has adopted a strategy of engagement that is both appropriate and essential to its long-term security. The process of shaping the smaller joint force to execute this strategy in the future must fully implement what former Secretary of Defense Aspin recognized:

While deterring and defeating major regional aggression will be the most demanding requirement of the new defense strategy, our emphasis on engagement, prevention, and partnership means that, in this new era, US military forces are more likely to be involved in operations short of declared or intense warfare."¹²

Today's military force structure, built primarily for warfighting, is being used heavily every day for OOTW. Such operations are the daily price of maintaining US engagement and influence. Based on their inherent characteristics and on current experience, Army active-duty support forces, certain Air Force aircraft units, and many types of Navy, Marine, and SOF forces provide the capabilities the US needs and deploys most frequently to conduct OOTW. These forces must remain large enough in America's future military to sustain this critical type of support.

The nation's strategy of engagement rests on two equal military pillars: the capability to conduct diverse global operations other than war, and the capability to deploy to a single major regional war and win. The military of the future must maintain a balance in both capabilities, while still sustaining a foundation of readiness and modernization. A smaller US military can be shaped which does this, if the reductions are focused on the force structure supporting the lower-priority capability for a second major war. America's joint military must demonstrate that it is smart enough to recognize the strategic needs of the future and joint enough to protect the forces that best meet them.

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