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Development of a Coherent American Strategy

ANDREW J. GOODPASTER

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When times are good, there is a human tendency to take for granted a stable security and a durable peace, with national values intact. But these are not the best of times. The level of concern has risen in our country on precisely these matters—keeping our nation secure, the peace lasting, and our national values whole. Perhaps the events in Iran and Afghanistan triggered this concern, but I believe that our people sense a deeper cause for worry behind those events. I believe that they rightly sense a growing threat to our safety and our well-being. In American newspapers one reads of cracks in the NATO alliance, the cornerstone of strength and security for the West and for all free nations. Moreover, those cracks are products of internal pressures as well as external ones. As the interests of the United States and its allies diverge, so do the cracks spread. And the resulting grave situation cannot be left unattended.

In the spring of last year, President Carter characterized the moment as “potentially the most dangerous . . . since World War II.” There was some skepticism over that statement, but if we reflect on real possibilities, we will see the essential truth of his comment. If the Soviets were to move toward the Persian Gulf and the sources of oil that lie there, I believe that we would have no choice but to oppose them, and the outcome of that opposition and the extent of its possible escalation are hard to predict. If the Soviets were to intervene militarily elsewhere—in Africa or Latin America, for example—and apply the Brezhnev Doctrine to the fruits of that intervention, we could soon be confronted with a similar crisis and the same need for decision.

The times have not been good, in part because our influence in the world has lessened in relation to what it was in the first decade or two after

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World War II. This decrease in stature may be only a temporary aberration, but it has unquestionably brought with it serious stresses and strains, and from it has grown the uneasy feeling that we are failing to define and fulfill the role that we can and should have in the world. We hear many complaints, from within our borders and without, that we lack a clear picture of what we should do and how we should go about it. Our national strategy must be credible, consistent, and rational. Only with such a strategy can we be confident as to what our military force structure should be and when and how we should be prepared to use those forces.

With a new administration having just assumed the reins of government, perhaps now is a propitious moment to glance at the security environment we will face in the early years of the 1980s. Four factors compose the key to understanding this environment. *The first of these factors is that we face higher levels of risk and danger.*

This increased danger can be observed, for example, in the fact that our economic lifeline has become so exposed. The flow of oil needed for the industries of the Western democracies to survive and prosper lies vulnerable to outside interference, and both the dependence of the West on that oil and the oil flow's vulnerability to interference are increasing. Furthermore, the Soviets are on the move. They have demonstrated by their action in Afghanistan that they are prepared to accept a higher degree of risk and pose a more activist challenge to the West. They seem to have been seeking military dominance since the mid-1960s, and they have built up their strength to the point that they now move from a powerful military base. In the strategic nuclear field, as in other military areas, their massive research, development, and production efforts have given them a tremendous destructive capability.

During the period since World War II, it has been noted that we can discern multiple Soviet thrusts of major proportions. The first, under Stalin, was projected against the Soviet Union's immediate neighbors to the West—creating satellites of the nations of Eastern Europe—and also in Asia against South Korea. Then, under Khrushchev, pressure was applied to Berlin, and to the Western Hemisphere through Soviet intervention and support in Cuba. Most recently, under Brezhnev, the thrust has been directed against South Vietnam and other nations of Indochina, against Africa, and against Afghanistan. The first two of these aggressive moves were contained. The thrust during Stalin's time was contained by the formation of NATO and by the Korean War. In Khrushchev's reign, the threat to Berlin was reasonably resolved, and Western Berlin remains free; Cuba, however, passed within the hegemony of the Soviet Union. The thrust under Brezhnev, however, has not yet been contained.

Other elements of risk and danger are the spread of terrorism and disorder, and the extension of authoritarian and dictatorial rule to additional countries of the world. Taken in combination—our growing economic vulnerability, the Soviets' increased bent for international adventurism, and a general permeation of instability and oppression throughout large regions of the globe—these elements pose a serious threat indeed.

The second key factor in the security environment of the Eighties can be summarized as unpredictability. We are not able to predict in detail and

in specific form Russian intentions. There are varying interpretations, for example, of their motivations for going into Afghanistan, and we do not know the extent to which they calculate that the “correlation of forces” which they think now lies in their favor will permit them to take a more aggressive policy and posture elsewhere. There is unpredictability as well in the turbulent, unstable, often fragile governments of the Third World. And our allies are perhaps less predictable than they have been. This unpredictability places a premium upon the maintenance by the West of a broad range of capabilities, particularly those of the United States—military capabilities, to be sure, but not the military variety alone. Capabilities of economic strength and national will are equally important, and together with military strength are much more suitable to rely on than are unsure estimates of what Soviet intentions may be or mere hopes that those intentions will turn out to be benign.

The third key to our security environment is the difficulty we have in forging a national consensus. Many observers see our security debate as divisive and our actions as disjointed, inconsistent, and subject to sudden reversals. One result is additional stress and strain on our allies, who look to the United States for leadership and steadiness in the pursuit of fundamental security policies. Further, on occasion we seem to be dominated by the things that divide and weaken us rather than the things that unite and strengthen us and which have made our country great. It often appears that the tearer-downers are prevailing over the builder-uppers. We certainly do not lack for critics, and I think that is part of our problem: too many people are inclined to sit in the bleachers and throw brickbats at the players on the field, or to sit in their easy chairs and toss their empties at the TV screen in moments of exasperation.

A fourth key—one that some might dispute—is that we are still paying the price for Vietnam. We were defeated there, but we were defeated primarily on our home front. We took the easy way out. We know it, our allies know it, and our opponents know it. To look at that defeat with any degree of wisdom, we might begin by recalling the comment of Pogo: “We have met the enemy and he is us.” From that starting point we can face up to the issue of our role in the Vietnam War and then move forward as a nation to fashion and maintain a security structure that meets our needs in a coherent and comprehensive way. I do not doubt that we can do so. The real question is whether we will.

The best approach to the problem of developing a coherent and comprehensive strategy may be to consider in turn US values, security interests, security policies, and the military forces needed to protect those values and interests and to carry out those policies. During the years that I spent working with General Eisenhower, later President Eisenhower, we had occasion to discuss these matters and try to put them in some kind of coherent relationship, and part of what I will describe is the product of those discussions.

The starting point, I have long felt, must be an identification and a clarification of the basic American values that are at risk and that must be protected at all costs. My friend and former boss, General Maxwell Taylor, put it this way: The job of our military forces is to protect our “national valuables.” What are those national valuables? I think they can be sufficiently identified in the terms in which they are set down in the Preamble to our Constitution:

“To . . . establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity. . . .”

We proceed from that to examine how those values seem to be at risk in today’s international arena. There is risk to the safety of our people and our homeland. There is risk to our commerce, to our industry, to our economic well-being. There is risk to the ideals of freedom and human dignity on which our country is founded. And it becomes our task to find ways to deal with those risks, to assure safety for our people and for our commerce, to guard ourselves against outside interference or coercion that would deny us the ability to determine our own way of life.

From this understanding we must proceed to identify the major security interests that require protection; these will in turn constitute the basis on which to design our military structure. We must be careful to trim these to a hard core, and I suggest that two tests are of chief importance in this regard. First, we should identify those interests whose importance to us is so great that we would feel justified in fighting for them. Second, we should pare from the list those potential military involvements where we could not be sure that even by fighting we could achieve a satisfactory result at an acceptable cost. When we apply those two criteria, I think we come up with a short and manageable list.

To illustrate what I have in mind, we might apply those tests to the case of South Vietnam. Even if it be granted that that country’s continued independence was a sufficient American interest to justify resort to arms, we still should not have done so unless we could influence the situation enough to justify our human and material costs.

By applying these tests, I believe we can identify three principal sets of interests. First, with regard to the Soviet Union, our interests center on containment of further expansion into the crucial areas of Europe, the Persian Gulf, and northeast Asia, Japan, and Korea. Second, with regard to our allies, our interests can be clearly and simply defined as to prevent their gravitation into the Soviet orbit and to join with them in collective security efforts for our common benefit. And our third set of interests entails keeping the nations of the Third World independent and accessible, which will require among other things the maintenance of freedom of the seas. This seems an appropriate and manageable list of interests against which we can define our security policies and shape our security forces.

Now, what should those policies be? I like to suggest three principal paths by which our interests can be safeguarded. These can be summarized in the terms defense, deterrence, and detente.

By defense, I mean armed forces in being and in a state of readiness such that if we had to employ them they would be effective. It means real forces in being, capable of being committed, of being employed, and of successfully safeguarding those interests and those values mentioned earlier. But defense obviously is not enough. Alone, it is not our chosen route to maintaining security, not at a time when thermonuclear arsenals have the power to effect awesome devastation.

We move then to deterrence as the second line of policy, the preferred method to dissuade any opponent—and particularly the Soviet Union—from resort to force or the threat of force to obtain its ends. For deterrence to succeed, we must ensure that no opponent achieves a preponderance of military might. Both we and they must remain knowledgeable that we could oppose them militarily with success. We must confront any potential opponent with such a prospect of loss, with such risks, with such likelihood that they would fail to gain, as to make the adventure unattractive to him. Deterrence has achieved great success over the past 30 years or more in several key areas of the world, particularly in the area of NATO. Look back in history and try to find a comparable period in which there was peace in Western and Central Europe. One can go back 500 years, perhaps longer, without finding such a time. But during the past three decades, the only conflict seen in Europe has been in Eastern Europe in the form of Soviet attacks on its allies and satellites. I submit that the benefit of NATO's power and the effectiveness of the principle of deterrence have been amply demonstrated. And I believe that deterrence must remain one of the major lines of policy through which we maintain our security.

I mentioned a third course, one bound to raise a hackle or two: detente. That term has been somewhat corrupted through overuse and exaggeration, but in the sense of negotiations, opening up and maintaining communications with the Soviet Union, it retains its importance. Obviously, detente has its limitations, yet there is great promise in negotiations that may limit the buildup of thermonuclear weapons and that may emplace restraints that increase stability, decrease instability, and reduce the likelihood that these weapons would be used in some form of uncontrollable escalation. With regard to the negotiations on mutual and balanced force reductions in Europe, progress may have been limited thus far because neither the United States nor the Soviet Union senses the same degree of threat or anxiety as is present in the case of the thermonuclear arsenals. And with regard to the Third World, I think the Soviets have put us on clear notice that they do not wish to follow the course of negotiations and restraint in those areas. But recognizing the limitation of detente, particularly the poor prospects of linking detente to acceptable Soviet behavior across the entire spectrum of East-West relations, it remains a productive line of policy in limiting the buildup of thermonuclear arsenals and in adding stability to the balance of terror.

Against this background of values at risk, security interests, and major lines of policy, I would suggest that it is a manageable task to design military forces to carry out those policies to safeguard those interests, and to protect those values. The size, composition, deployment, and readiness of those forces can, I believe, be rationally determined.

There are three main categories of forces to which I believe we must give our attention in this regard. The first category is that of our strategic nuclear forces. Here the governing principle is that we should maintain strategic nuclear forces that are second to none. Rough parity should be our guide. We should work at the same time to maintain these forces in a high state of readiness, and yet negotiate toward achieving a greater degree of stability in their deployment, and reducing the overall opposing levels, if possible. With that as our principle,

I believe that such questions as what balance should be struck among the triad of bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles will fall into place. That is not to say that such decisions will be easy or that the resultant costs will be light.

The second category to be addressed is that of our regional forces and deployments in NATO, in northeast Asia, and in the Persian Gulf area. Here, too, principles can be laid down which will define the kind of security assurance that we need. In NATO the principles have been elaborated, and I think there is little doubt in NATO as to what needs to be done. There is occasional hesitation or disagreement or resistance in some respects, but that doesn't detract from or bring into question the larger agreement on maintaining NATO's secure military posture. The recent events in Poland seem to have firmed this resolve. I cannot believe that any Soviet military planner would find attractive the idea of conducting a military adventure into Western Europe. NATO's deterrence remains strong, and it can continue to remain strong if the member countries will continue to carry the burdens that are involved—and they are not excessive burdens.

In northeast Asia, again I believe that the stability that has been achieved can be maintained. We are concerned, of course, about recent political events in Korea, but there is a strength in South Korea which I believe can give us confidence over the long pull. I think that those who concern themselves closely with security affairs can be gratified by our government's decision to maintain our military strength in Korea.

In the area of the Persian Gulf, the situation of course is in flux. Many people are concerned—and there are good grounds for concern—about whether we would have the strength to deal with a military thrust by the Soviets in the direction of the Persian Gulf. But I recall in that connection the words of Winston Churchill in Fulton, Missouri, in 1946, when he gave his famous Iron Curtain speech. He said that the Soviets “seek the fruits of war without the costs of war.” I believe that remains true, at least where war with a major power is concerned, and that if they are faced with determination and the prospect of unpredictable military operations which could spill out of the Persian Gulf into other areas, they must feel some restraint about any direct military challenge in that area. Of course, that is speculation and not wholly comforting. The fragility and chaos that exist in Iran at present and the imponderables introduced by the Iraqi-Iranian war suggest many possible avenues of subversion, infiltration, and access other than direct military intervention. Our recent emphasis on the development of rapid deployment forces seems to be a salutary move. But our failure in Vietnam brings to mind a point that needs to be made in this regard. It seems to me that we face an unresolved problem in that we have yet to develop and improve our capability to control and direct operations in distant areas of the world. I question our ability on that score. I question whether we have clear lines of command and control that would promise unity of command and thus full combat effectiveness and efficiency in those operations. Improvement seems needed if we are to avoid suffering again from confused and multiple lines of control as we did during the Vietnam War.

The third major category comprises those forces involved in assuring freedom of the seas. Here we find an asymmetry of strategic needs. The west has a greater stake in keeping the seas free than the Soviet Union, so that the task for us is considerably greater. In peacetime, the Soviets do indeed project their influence and power via the sea, but in time of war they would not have the same need for the use of the seas as we. Denial of sea routes could be a major Soviet objective in wartime, while secure seas would have to be ours.

Where do we stand today? With regard to the strategic nuclear forces, first of all, we stand at a state of rough parity. In terms of numbers of warheads, we probably still have some advantage. In terms of total megatonnage, the advantage certainly lies with the other side. But the trends have not been favorable. I think there is a recognition today that those trends must be halted and reversed, and I would hope that there is a recognition that we must not legislate ourselves into a position of strategic inferiority in this category.

With regard to our regional forces, I have already indicated my belief that in NATO and in northeast Asia we have attained the stability that should be our aim. We need to continue the modernization of our forces and we need to make sure that no disparity of strength arises to the degree that the Soviets might feel free to use pressure tactics or blackmail in an attempt to "Finlandize" the nations of those areas. With respect to the Persian Gulf, we still have a lot of homework to do, but we seem to be on the way to developing with our allies and friends force capabilities that will give some degree of assurance that we can maintain secure access to the oil of that region. In addition, the work underway with respect to the rapid deployment force in due time should put us in a position to meet the requirements of military action in the Third World if it becomes necessary. On the high seas, however, I think we have real reason to be concerned. For many years now, our Navy has been prevented from proceeding with a modernization program that would assure freedom on the seas. The needs of the navy to meet that problem should be put at the top of our priority list, in my opinion.

That is where we stand today with respect to the forces. But where do we stand today with respect to our ability to employ those forces?

Again, I say that we have a structure of command for our strategic nuclear forces which should give us the degree of confidence that we require. Our command arrangements are also effective with respect to the regional forces in NATO and northeast Asia, although the communications aspects might be improved. Our readiness to employ forces effectively in the Persian Gulf area and in other areas of the Third World are subject to some question, however, for reasons already mentioned.

Now we need to return to our primary questions. Can we as a nation fashion and maintain a security structure that meets our needs in a coherent, comprehensive, and comprehensible way? I believe that we are able to do so. *Will* we fashion and maintain this kind of security structure, including the necessary military components? *Will* we remedy our shortcomings? Here the answers are far from clear.

The record of the past decade is not reassuring. We have slipped to a position of military inferiority in some major sectors, and we have been seen

on occasion as unable to set and pursue a clear line of policy, and then to mobilize and sustain support for that policy in our own country. In the background are many unsettling doubts. For example, would the Soviets move forward if they had an opportunity? Have the events in Afghanistan removed all doubt on that score? And do the dangers that exist in Iran allow us any room at all for complacency?

The breadth of public confusion is also troubling. When we look at the requirements that fall upon opinion-makers in our country, we have to question whether they are doing their job adequately. Public confusion can only be dispelled by education—by work to build a greater understanding of the important issues we face and the means of dealing with them. We rely heavily on the public media for the forming of opinions and attitudes. Yet we have barely begun to understand the effect of television in that regard, or its limitations. Television is a powerful medium with great ability to arouse emotions. But it is limited in its ability to build understanding of complex issues. For this one must look to the print media, and one must look especially to those national leaders who shape opinion.

Another matter of concern is the loss of discipline within the government in Washington. Self-serving leaks of information, on occasion misrepresenting lines of policy, on occasion giving only part of a story—such actions confuse and mislead observers and are particularly destructive at a time when the ability of the United States to project influence is under challenge. There has been, it seems, an inability to subordinate lesser issues to greater ones, and even to determine which are which. As a result, whether the topic is inflation at home or setbacks abroad, our people wonder what is the clear line of policy that we are attempting to follow.

To conclude, the problem we face is not really a question of the adequacy of our resources; we have sufficient resources, if they are properly used, to permit us to be confident that we can remain reasonably secure. Of course, there will be puzzling aberrations. There may be mad men, as in Iran. There may be miscalculations, as I believe was the case with the Soviets in Afghanistan. There may be reckless attempts at hegemony which could create great dangers of clash, especially between the Soviets and the Chinese. But if we properly use our resources, I believe that we can have great confidence in the security of the United States and our allies.

Beyond that, the problem we face is not really a question of what other nations do. Others may be partly responsible for maintaining our security and a stable peace, but not primarily so. The real question at issue is our own will—our readiness to give serious and sustained attention to these complex and difficult issues; our openness to reach intelligent decisions; our willingness to take responsibility, to pay the costs, to make the sacrifices. “Security,” as President Eisenhower once said, “is a great burden, but war, the failure of security, would be a catastrophe.”