Prudent or Paranoid? The Pentagon's Two-War Plans

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During its first year, the Bush administration will produce a new defence plan, the fourth of the post-Cold War era. This review should entail a fundamental rethinking of the current planning framework under which the United States maintains military forces capable of fighting two major wars at the same time. A two-war capability of some sort is still needed. But the current two-*Desert Storm* concept, under which the United States would send more than half a million troops to each of two all-out wars that began nearly simultaneously and overlapped in time, should be revised.

The two-*Desert Storm* framework, though supposedly global and generic in scope, is based primarily on the Iraqi and North Korean threats. It assumes that the United States would use virtually identical types and numbers of forces – roughly six to seven active-duty ground-combat divisions including Army and Marine Corps units, ten wings of Air Force aircraft, four to five Navy aircraft carrier-battle groups, and various other assets – in each theatre. Whether the war was on the open desert of the Arabian Peninsula or the Bosnia-like terrain of Korea, and whether US armed forces were joined in combat only by limited allied support in the Persian Gulf or by South Korea's large military, official Pentagon documents suggest that roughly the same US force package would be deployed to the fight.[1] Its purpose would be first to halt enemy aggression, then to reverse any losses of allied territory that had resulted early in the war, and finally, if deemed appropriate, to overthrow the offending enemy regime and occupy its country until a new government could be installed and helped to consolidate its power.

Whether or not such a construct was ever sensible, it is not needed today. Planning for two simultaneous *Desert Storms* – operations on the scale of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, which involved more than half a million US troops – is excessive. The United States does not require the capability for overlapping large-scale counter-offensives in two theatres, both dominated by US forces, and both with the capability to overthrow enemy regimes and occupy their

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Survival, *vol. 43, no. 1, Spring 2001, pp. 37–52*

countries if necessary. One such *Desert Storm*-like capability, together with the added force structure for another smaller war as well as a sustained peace operation, would be adequate.

This overall concept might be described as a 1½ major theatre war framework. But that would understate its actual capabilities, since the proposed force posture could well be able to win two major wars at once. More accurately, it could be viewed as a '*Desert Storm* plus *Desert Shield* plus Bosnia/IFOR' posture. *Desert Shield* was the initial deployment of more than 250,000 US troops to the Persian Gulf region in 1990 after the invasion of Kuwait, to ensure that Saddam Hussein could not invade Saudi Arabia. IFOR was the initial, relatively large NATO operation in Bosnia, which involved some 20,000 US troops in-country as well as several thousand more in the region.

Of course, Operation *Desert Storm* did not overthrow Saddam Hussein or lead to the occupation of Iraq. But the forces carrying it out had the necessary firepower and size to do so, if that had been desired. As such, it is reasonable to use the shorthand of a '*Desert Storm* force package' to describe the capabilities necessary not only to conduct large-scale counter-offensives, but to overthrow and occupy as well.

This alternative force posture would be robust. It would retain nearly all air and naval forces in today's US military, while also keeping at least 11 of today's 13 active-duty ground-combat divisions, including Army and Marine Corps capabilities. It would provide enough forces to ensure that, even if engaged in an all-out warfighting effort in one theatre, the United States would retain ample firepower to deter war elsewhere, as well as to sustain an ongoing peace operation (rather than optimistically assuming forces engaged in such a mission could be rapidly redeployed elsewhere for warfighting purposes if necessary). It would save the Pentagon nearly $10 billion a year – not enough to solve all its budget woes, but a substantial step towards closing a looming resource gap widely estimated at $30bn or more annually.

With this approach, the United States could still wage war in two theatres at once – and do so assertively. In fact, the proposed force posture would provide much more than a capability once described as 'win-hold-win'. The *Desert Shield*-like force package would include enough modern, precision-strike airpower to attack enemy formations, be they Iraqi units moving southward, North Korean forces trying to take Seoul, or Chinese naval forces attacking Taiwan. And the associated ground units, though modest in number, would be capable of at least certain types of offensive operations to reclaim lost allied territory, should that be necessary.

There would, admittedly, be some risk associated with moving to a smaller capability for the second possible war. But it would be quite modest for the reasons given above and developed further below. In addition, there is also risk in over-insuring against regional conflict while overworking the US armed forces and underinvesting in certain areas of military innovation, non-traditional defence activities and weapons procurement, as has been occurring in recent years.

The alternative warfighting construct would be based on seven key assumptions and judgements:

- Iraq has not rearmed substantially since Operation *Desert Storm*, as was once feared, and may not do so, depending on the future of sanctions regimes;
- North Korea's military has suffered from a decade of national economic decline and, while still menacing, is less battle-ready than it once was;
- South Korea's military, the 1997 financial crisis notwithstanding, has continued to improve. It is now capable by itself of holding off a North Korean invasion attempt with a high probability of success;
- Improved precision-strike capabilities, more combat equipment stationed near Iraq and North Korea, and improvements in strategic lift have increased the odds that the United States could make a highly effective rapid response to war against either potential foe, further reducing the chances that an enemy attack would be successful in its opening phases. Additional improvements are desirable as well, for example, in the realm of airlift, but a good deal has already been accomplished;
- South Korea's military would almost surely survive a North Korean onslaught well enough to play a major role in any combined US–ROK counter-offensive into North Korean territory, greatly reducing the probability that two separate corps structures and six to eight total ground combat divisions would be needed there from the American side;
- British forces, now structured with a Persian Gulf scenario in mind, should be factored into US war plans, reducing demands on US forces there by roughly one division of ground troops and several squadrons of fighter aircraft (other NATO allies may be able to help as well, though perhaps not with enough aggregate capability or political reliability to factor significantly into US war plans); and, finally,
- The Army National Guard's 15 enhanced separate brigades, fewer than 20% of which were factored into war plans in the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), provide additional capability for major theatre wars that can serve as a hedge against the unexpected.[2] It is doubtful that all of these brigades could be brought up to full warfighting readiness within weeks or even several months, but they should be able to perform some combat duties and contribute to tasks associated with military occupation.[3]

Creating And Debating The Two-War Standard

During the Cold War, the United States generally had only enough military capability for a single major operation along the Asian littoral – the critical strategic region stretching from the Persian Gulf around the Indian subcontinent to South-east Asia and finally to Japan and Korea. In fact, the Vietnam War required some retrenchments in US contributions to Europe's defence. But with the opportunity afforded by the end of the Cold War, as well as the increased salience of the Iraqi and North Korean threats over the last decade,

the United States has appropriately set a higher and more conservative standard.

Specifically, the current two-*Desert Storm* warfighting framework had its roots in the elder Bush administration's base-force concept devised by then Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, now prominent members of the George W. Bush administration. It became even more central in the Pentagon's 1993 Bottom-Up Review under Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, and was retained in similar form in the 1997 QDR under Defense Secretary William Cohen.

In the last half-decade, the two-*Desert Storm* construct has had its critics. Notable among them was the Congressionally mandated National Defense Panel, which produced its report in late 1997, about six months after the QDR was completed. This report stated that 'the two-theatre war construct has been a useful mechanism for determining what forces to retain as the Cold War came to a close … But, it is fast becoming an inhibitor to reaching the capabilities we will need in the 2010–2020 time frame.'[4] The National Defense Panel apparently viewed the two-*Desert Storm* concept as little more than a bureaucratic device with more relevance to the Department of Defense's internal politics and organisational requirements than to real-world threats. Similarly, the April 2000 (second) report of the Congressionally mandated US Commission on National Security/21st Century stated without further elaboration: 'This Commission believes that the "two major theatre wars" yardstick for sizing US forces is not producing the capabilities needed for the varied and complex contingencies now occurring and likely to increase in the years ahead'.[5]

These criticisms have not done enough to advance the debate over the nation's warfighting strategy. They have been too dismissive of the basic concept of a two-war capability. Some type of two-theatre capability does in fact make strategic and military sense, even if the current two-*Desert Storm* construct may not. The National Defense Panel and the Commission on National Security have not been specific and analytical enough about what should replace today's military force posture.

Without even considering other threats, the Saddam Hussein and Kim Jong Il regimes must still be assumed to be dangerous. The process of *détente* on the Korean Peninsula offers hope that one major regional threat may soon diminish, but it would be greatly premature to discount the North Korean threat when the reconciliation process has led to absolutely no reduction in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) conventional military capabilities. The United States cannot drop the current two-war planning framework until convinced that its successor would provide adequate deterrent and defence capabilities *vis-à-vis* these and other threats, including a possible threat by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to Taiwan.

In fact, the National Defense Panel was easily rebutted – and chances are that the Commission on National Security will be too. The sweeping way in which the Panel had dismissed the two-war standard gave Defense Secretary

Cohen an easy response: which bad guy did the National Defense Panel want him to forget about, Saddam Hussein or Kim Jong Il? And which national interests did the panel want the United States to abandon: assured access to Persian Gulf oil or commitment to South Korea's security, not to mention promotion of general stability and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in both theatres?

Despite their flawed reasoning, however, in a broader sense the National Defence Panel and Commission on National Security are right. Being able to handle overlapping crises or conflicts in two different places is a sound strategic pillar on which to structure US military forces. But envisioning simultaneous replays of *Desert Storm*, most likely in Korea and the Persian Gulf, smacks of preparing to fight the last war. It is unclear if the incoming Bush administration will pick up where the NDP left off on the two-war issue. But there is reason to hope that it might, given Bush's interests in military reform and in focusing more attention and resources on new security challenges to the United States and its allies.

Iraq and the Persian Gulf Region

Given current and foreseeable security conditions, the United States and allies could stop Iraqi aggression with no more than 200,000–300,000 US troops. They could also carry out devastating attacks, primarily aerial, against Iraqi conventional and economic targets. This capability would pose a compelling deterrent to any Iraqi aggression, even if most US combat forces were already deployed in a major *Desert Storm*-like war in Korea or elsewhere. Under extreme circumstances, such as a campaign to march on Baghdad, overthrow Saddam and occupy Iraq, more American forces might be needed; however, the probability of such an operation is modest. More to the point, the probability that such an operation would be needed at the same time that half a million US troops were fighting in Korea is very small indeed.

While it remains dangerous, the Iraqi military machine is notably weaker than several years ago, with few prospects of strengthening in the foreseeable future. Saddam's conventional military forces remain only about half the size and capability they were in 1990. As opposed to Iraq's pre-*Desert Storm* inventory of 5,500 tanks, it now has some 2,200. Its total number of light tanks and armoured personnel carriers is down from 7,500 to about 3,500; troop levels have declined from 1,000,000 to just over 400,000.[6] Nor has the decline in raw numbers been counterbalanced by any improvement in equipment quality, troop training or other intangibles.

US commanders felt confident that they could have defended Saudi Arabia against a possible Iraqi attack once the *Desert Shield* force was deployed in October 1990. That should come as no great surprise. The high calibre of US military personnel, combat equipment and supporting capabilities such as advanced reconnaissance systems would make such a *Desert Shield* capability significantly superior to the notional 'regional aggressor' force originally specified in the 1993 Bottom-Up Review, even though that aggressor force

might be two to three times as large.[7] Against the current Iraqi threat, this conclusion is even more convincing.

The air-power component of a *Desert Shield*-like deployment – at least as large as that which participated in NATO's Operation *Allied Force* against Serbia in 1999 – could devastate an enemy's defence and industrial infrastructure while also striking at moving armour and other military vehicles. This would be supplemented by the ground component. It is possible that a *Desert Shield* force could suffice to overthrow the Iraqi regime, should that be considered necessary. General Norman Schwarzkopf considered developing plans to evict Saddam from Kuwait with a force of this size, before the United States decided to double the deployment – and that was against an Iraqi military twice as big as the current one.[8]

There is a good chance that a *Desert Shield* force would get to the Persian Gulf quickly enough to prevent losses of allied territory in the early stages of a future war. Since the end of the Cold War, the US military has stored more equipment in the Persian Gulf region and purchased more fast sealift in the form of large medium-speed roll-on/roll-off ships. In addition to forces routinely based or deployed overseas, including some 25,000 in the Persian Gulf region, there is an army brigade set of equipment in Kuwait, another afloat at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, and elements of yet another in Qatar. Marine brigade-equivalent sets are at sea at Diego Garcia and the Mediterranean. These units could be 'married up' with troops airlifted from the States within one to two weeks. Modest additional improvements in pre-positioning and lift could improve response time further.[9] Just as importantly, significant stocks of air force precision-guided munitions are now located overseas as well.[10]

The United States should also assume that, with high probability, London would send a full ground division and several squadrons of aircraft to participate in combat operations. Given the two countries' special relationship, close combat cooperation in *Desert Storm*, continued combined efforts enforcing no-fly zones and conducting occasional strikes against Saddam's forces since 1991, and similar strategic views on the need to contain and disarm Saddam, it is very likely that they would fight together in a future conflict against the country that remains the most probable aggressor in the region. Moreover, the UK shows every sign of further improving its expeditionary warfare capabilities, making it likely that its contributions could approach the general vicinity of 50,000 troops.

There are some scenarios that would require the United States to deploy more than a quarter of a million troops against Iraq. But they are rather unlikely. Most importantly, it is difficult to imagine Saddam feeling emboldened by the knowledge that the United States could promptly deploy only 200,000–300,000 forces to oppose him, if otherwise occupied in a different conflict at some future date. A *Desert Shield* force would surely retain powerful deterrent capabilities.

North Korea

The security situation on the Korean Peninsula is different from the Persian Gulf, but on the whole, just as favourable for US force planners. North Korea's military has not been weakened by war, but it has been weakened by economic collapse. Even more significantly, over the last two decades or so, South Korea has moved from inferiority to outright superiority over the North, as its economy, weaponry and forward-defence positions have improved greatly.

In 1997, the US Defense Intelligence Agency reported that, while North Korea's military remains dangerously poised near Seoul, its 'capability to conduct large-scale combat operations continues to deteriorate as worsening internal economic conditions undermine training, readiness, and sustainment.' The decline continued thereafter.[11] North Korea did reverse the decline significantly in 1999, but its ability to improve its forces is in serious doubt. It continues to have a weakening economy, with a GDP that has declined by roughly half in the last decade and now totals only about $12bn.[12] Over the past decade, most weapons have been produced at modest rates and arms imports have been quite limited. The US intelligence community cannot easily determine the implications for force readiness. However, it would be surprising if the mission-capable rates of North Korean equipment had not declined significantly – probably by considerably more than the 10% drop experienced by US aircraft over the past decade.

The South Korean capital remains vulnerable to North Korean artillery, missiles and special forces. North Korea now has about 500 long-range artillery tubes within range of Seoul at all times, roughly double the levels of a few years ago, which amounts to a massive terrorist capability.[13] A war on the peninsula would cause untold civilian deaths as well as large numbers of military casualties.

However, most of the military casualties would be North Korea's. Its armoured forces are even more obsolete than Iraq's. In any invasion attempt, those weak armoured forces would have to cross the most militarised swathe of land on the planet: the density of ROK/US troops forward-deployed near the DMZ in Korea is greater than NATO's along the intra-German border during the Cold War.[14] North Korea would have to conduct this thrust without using roads and bridges that would surely be destroyed in the early minutes of any attempted invasion. If attacking near Seoul through the Chorwon or Munsan corridors, it would need to cross the Han or Imjin rivers (these rivers routinely freeze in the winter, but their ice might not prove strong enough to support a large armoured force, especially when being bombed by allied aircraft and pounded by artillery). North Korean chemical weapons, commandos deploying through tunnels or on small planes, and forward-deployed dug-in artillery would complicate the battle and cause many casualties, to be sure. But North Korean armoured forces would have great difficulty breaking through allied lines and marching on Seoul.[15]

The country's recent economic troubles notwithstanding, South Korea's armed forces are much improved and still getting better. Together with the

modest US forces in place on the peninsula, they could quite likely hold off a North Korean invasion attempt. South Korea, together with the US Army's 2nd Infantry Division and forward-based American air-power, could cause great damage to North Korean forces, with high confidence of success in stopping an assault well north of Seoul.

South Korea possesses less armour than North Korea. However, the ROK's technological edge evens out the overall balance of tanks, artillery, planes and other heavy equipment between the two countries. For example, on a per weapon basis, South Korea's tanks are nearly the equal of the US inventory; the Korean K1 is based on the US M1 and shares a number of important components. Seoul undoubtedly possesses net superiority over the North. By examining a wide body of historical battle outcomes, Colonel Trevor Dupuy estimated that such readiness factors can at least double combat capability. Yet, as Lawrence Korb has pointed out, the Pentagon's models inexplicably appear to assume that South Korean soldiers would in fact fight *less well* than North Koreans.[16]

South Korea fields a force that is extremely well-placed to stop any invasion attempt. Attackers attempting to penetrate directly through such densely prepared positions in previous analogous conflicts have usually advanced at most a couple of kilometres a day, even when not technologically outclassed by their opponent, as the North Koreans certainly are. Given the lethality of modern air-power and the ability of the United States to quickly fly combat jet reinforcements to the region, such a slow pace of advance would be disastrous for Pyongyang within days of the start of the war. (The United States and Republic of Korea have potent air-power in the region at all times, but if North Korea chose a heavily overcast day to attack, that air-power might not be very effective at first.) Nor could North Korea undertake a 'left hook' or bypass the equivalent of the allies' 'Korean Maginot Line'. Robust defences extend across the peninsula. In addition, the allies enjoy overwhelming dominance in all-weather day–night reconnaissance systems that keep watch over all significant troop movements.[17]

Chemical and biological weapons do pose a special hazard in Korea, given the limited confines in which a battle would be fought. US forces have increased their attention to such threats in recent years, and South Korea should do more as well.[18] However, it is harder to use chemical weapons effectively on the battlefield than commonly asserted – especially for an infantry army like North Korea's.[19] It is extremely challenging for a soldier, suited up in bulky and probably mediocre protective gear, to cover many kilometres on foot in an effort to take advantage of possible holes in enemy lines created by chemical attack. Nor should North Korea assume that any chemical or biological attack, particularly if it proved highly lethal, would not be met with US nuclear retaliation. Nuclear airbursts over invasion corridors just north of the DMZ would cause little fallout and little harm to the allies, while having a very considerable tactical effect on DPRK forces. They would also send a powerful message: the United States will not tolerate the use of

weapons of mass destruction against its military or its allies.[20] The DPRK chemical and biological threat, while real, does not fundamentally change the basic military balance.

On balance, while North Korea currently poses a numerically larger threat than Iraq, in any invasion attempt it would have to penetrate the most robust forward defence on the planet – and do so with a technologically inferior military. US forces, above and beyond those already in place in North-east Asia, would probably not even be needed to help defeat such an attack. Additional American troops could well be needed to help South Korea march north of the DMZ, overthrow the North Korean regime, and reunify the country. But such a counter-offensive would have less time-urgency than a defensive stand to save Seoul. Moreover, given the damage North Korean forces would likely suffer during the course of an invasion attempt, *Desert Storm*-scale US forces might not be needed even for such an overthrow-and-occupy operation. Finally, as argued before, the clinching argument is that whatever the probabilities of these various scenarios in Korea, the probability of all-out simultaneous wars in *both* Korea and the Gulf is very modest – particularly since, under the proposed force posture, the United States would retain a robust deterrent for a second conflict even as it fought the first.

China–Taiwan Contingencies

In the last decade, American war-planners devoted most of their attention to Korea and the Persian Gulf, even though war in the Taiwan Strait may now be just as likely. However, an analysis of possible China–Taiwan military scenarios suggests that a US *Desert Shield*-like force capability, emphasising naval power and air-power, should be more than adequate to prevail in a future conflict, should Taiwan require American military assistance. This US military contribution would most likely be needed not to stop a Chinese invasion, which Taiwan should be able to defeat on its own, but to break a PRC naval blockade of the island.[21]

China does not have the key elements for a successful invasion, and it is unlikely to obtain them in the course of the decade. To succeed, an invader should first be able to achieve air superiority. Second, the attacker should try to use manoeuvre, surprise and strength to land troops in a place where they locally outnumber defenders in troops and firepower. Third, it should be able to strengthen its initial lodgement faster than the defender can bring additional troops and equipment to bear at the same location. If an attacker can do most or all of these things, it has a good chance of establishing and then breaking out of an initial beachhead. Attackers can succeed without necessarily enjoying all three advantages; however, they have rarely succeeded in the past without at least two of them. China would be unlikely to achieve any of the three.[22] Taiwan has its own military shortcomings, to be sure.[23] But they would likely prove less onerous than China's, given that the task of defending Taiwan is less complex than the enormously difficult mission of conducting an amphibious and airborne assault upon it.

Amphibious assault forces would also need to cope with anti-ship missiles that might be launched from the defender's planes, ships or shore batteries. Such missiles could hit approaching amphibious ships miles offshore. Helicopters or planes used in the assault must deal with the threats not just of anti-aircraft artillery but also of surface-to-air missiles, which are now extremely effective against low-flying aircraft.[24] Given these trends in weaponry, amphibious assault against fixed defensive positions has become harder. This has led to the US Marine Corps now placing a premium on manoeuvre and speed rather than traditional frontal attack.[25]

The most effective way for China to threaten Taiwan militarily over the next decade is by a blockade conducted principally by its submarine force. PRC missile attacks could be highly effective in terrifying and demoralising the Taiwanese population**,** but would lack the accuracy to be militarily decisive. Nor would they likely cause enough harm – assuming that Beijing would employ only conventional warheads – to be economically devastating. Even a 'leaky' blockade could have much more serious effects, drastically curtailing ship traffic to and from Taiwan and thus severely harming its economy. Such a blockade might not be enough to ensure Taiwan's unconditional capitulation, but it could put China in a good position to coerce Taipei into accepting a confederation on political and economic terms highly favourable to Beijing.

Were the PRC to undertake a blockade, US help might be needed to break it. To do so, the United States would want to deploy enough force to establish air superiority, if not throughout the Strait, then at least in the open ocean approaches to Taiwan and along Taiwan's coasts. It would also provide direct protection for shipping from Chinese submarines and mines, necessitating convoy escorts, minehunters and minesweepers. An additional requirement would be an offensive capability for pursuing Chinese submarines at sea, most likely provided by US attack submarines. Finally, the US would need enough offensive strike power to go after targets in coastal China if necessary. Given the uncertainty about whether Japan would allow bases on its territory to be used in such a conflict, and limited facilities on Taiwan itself, most of these US capabilities would probably have to be provided via naval platforms.

It is beyond the scope of this article to provide detailed calculations of the corresponding force requirements for these missions. But, as I have argued elsewhere, a US naval armada of nearly the size generally assumed for a standard major theatre war should suffice to break the blockade decisively.[26] In particular, four aircraft-carrier battle groups, two dozen additional surface combatants for convoy escort, about 15 attack submarines, 10–20 P-3 aircraft as well as several additional ships (such as T-AGOS) for anti-submarine operations, and half a dozen mine-warfare vessels could be needed to decisively defeat a Chinese operation. They would establish local air superiority; maintain anti-submarine barriers; escort commercial ship convoys; de-mine harbours; and provide various options for attacking Chinese ships as well as key ports and airfields in south-eastern coastal China. Several US Air Force fighter squadrons on Taiwan and/or Okinawa might replace one or two

of the carrier battle groups, if Tokyo assents to the latter and if the former seems militarily sound under the specific circumstances of battle.

The United States need not increase the size of its navy to cope with this scenario. Helping Taiwan defeat a Chinese naval blockade of the island would tax US naval force structure roughly as much as a conflict in the Persian Gulf or Korea, while taxing the Air Force much less, and American ground forces not at all. Such a conflict would probably pose greater risks of casualties to US air and naval crews. Moreover, it would almost surely require temporary reductions in other US naval activities around the world (though some presence could be sustained in the Persian Gulf, and an armada could be generated for a second major war if absolutely necessary). But it would not require a larger US force posture – or argue against the force posture proposed here.

Although the United States has ample capability to help defend Taiwan under a *Desert Storm* plus *Desert Shield* plus Bosnia/IFOR force posture, it should not be complacent about such a conflict in broader strategic terms. Even if the United States, working with Taiwan, could break a Chinese blockade, sink much of the PRC fleet near Taiwan, and at least temporarily disable Chinese airfields and ports in the vicinity of the Strait, it could not plausibly eliminate all PRC means of waging lower-level war against Taiwan thereafter. Nor, on the other extreme, could it prevent China from taking steps that risked escalation, perhaps even to nuclear levels. As unlikely as the latter concerns may be, they cannot be dismissed, given the importance of Taiwan to China. These considerations argue for a US war plan assertive enough to achieve decisive victory, yet militarily and politically restrained enough to minimise China's incentives either to carry on the war at a low level indefinitely or to escalate the conflict.[27]

Conclusion

The US Department of Defense's existing two-*Desert Storm* warfighting requirement, while hardly the outmoded concept that its critics often allege, is not optimal for the United States. It overinsures the country against the risk of regional conflict, causing other defence investments and priorities to be short-changed. This has probably been the case throughout the 1990s, but is increasingly so today, given the continued deterioration of the Iraqi and North Korean militaries, as well as ongoing improvements in the South Korean armed forces and in the rapid response capabilities of the US Department of Defense.

The current emphasis on fighting two near-simultaneous *Desert Storm*-like conflicts should be replaced with a framework that would allow for a single all-out war in one theatre together with a smaller operation elsewhere and a modest peacekeeping mission in yet a third theatre. This alternative framework would make modest force reductions possible, and save the Pentagon nearly $10bn a year. More importantly, the Pentagon could restructure the military, increasing certain types of units – such as military police, psychological operations forces, and electronic warning and AWACS capabilities – that are

currently overused. This would enable the military to handle a broad panoply of overseas deployments with less strain on US armed forces personnel.

Cutbacks should not go too far. If an enemy pulled off a massive coordinated surprise attack or used weapons of mass destruction, 200,000–300,000 US troops could prove insufficient. Most responses to possible enemy use of weapons of mass destruction should focus on better protective gear and on warfighting concepts that minimise vulnerabilities – but there could be an old-fashioned need for more manpower as well, if an enemy attack caused large numbers of US casualties or detracted from the US ability to exploit fully its high-technology capabilities. And if, in a future war, the United States and its allies decided to overthrow the Iraqi or North Korean regimes – as seems quite plausible, should another war be initiated by Saddam or Kim Jong Il or their successors – large US forces could be needed to mount a major ground counter-offensive. Even if a US president decided to negotiate an asylum arrangement for leaders of the regime it wanted out of power, rather than risk large numbers of US casualties, it would probably need to threaten credibly an all-out counter-invasion to convince enemy leadership to step down. Making that threat credible could itself require deploying significant numbers of the troops that might be needed for an actual all-out counter-offensive.

Also, war could occur in a place where the United States has important interests yet is less prepared to respond quickly. Most other plausible military scenarios – notably, possible war against China over Taiwan – would not require 500,000 American troops including two full corps of ground units. But some could involve several divisions nonetheless. For these reasons, keeping the capability for a single *Desert Storm*-like war, as well as a *Desert Shield*-force package and a smaller deployment elsewhere, is critical. Planning for two overlapping *Desert Storms*, however, is excessive.

These ideas are superficially similar to those put forth as a trial balloon by then-Secretary of Defense Les Aspin in 1993. Known as 'win-hold-win,' the concept envisaged completing an all-out war in one theatre while simply holding the line in a second. Once the first war was won, troops were to be redeployed to reinforce the US position in the second theatre and permit a major counter-offensive operation there too. But the win-hold-win caricature of that approach understated its actual military capabilities and doomed it to rejection. Subsequently derided as 'win-hold-oops' for the excessive risk it allegedly introduced into war plans, it never stood a real chance bureaucratically or politically.[28]

The important point to recognise is that a smaller capability including just three or four divisions of ground forces, with its overwhelming airpower and other long-range strike systems, can do far more than hold a defensive line. Operation *Allied Force* against Serbia in 1999, in which NATO won a war with only 50,000 troops, showed what is possible when modern air-power works in tandem with a modest ground force. Even more striking was the coalition air campaign against Iraq in 1991, which severely weakened Iraq's forces prior to the coalition ground counter-offensive. This concept has its limits, admittedly,

but a *Desert Shield*-force package – defined here essentially as the air-power for a major theatre war, plus roughly one corps of ground combat units – constitutes far more than a 'hold' capability.

In addition, the likely role of certain allies cannot be ignored. British forces, probably including a full ground-combat division and several squadrons of fighter aircraft, would almost certainly fight alongside the United States in a future war against Iraq. South Korea is among the best and most capable military allies of the United States, and Pentagon war plans should stop underrating its strength. In fact, when still chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Les Aspin had emphasised the differences between the Korean and Persian Gulf theatres in a defence white paper – but regrettably that analysis never seemed to make it to the Pentagon with him.[29]

These are the kinds of arguments and ideas the next quadrennial defence review should consider. The alternative is to worry so much about a simultaneous worst-case war scenario in both Korea and the Gulf – something the United States could not even have handled during most of the Cold War – that the country underfunds readiness, research and preparing for the challenges of the future.

Notes

1 See Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, *Report on the Bottom-Up Review* (Washington DC: Department of Defense, October 1993), pp. 13–22; and Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defence Review* (Washington DC: Department of Defense, May 1997), pp. 12–13, 24–26, 30.

2 See Frances Lussier, *Structuring the Active and Reserve Army for the 21st Century* (Washington DC: Congressional Budget Office, December 1997), p. 11.

3 Since 1997, the army has decided to try linking virtually all of its reserve combat force structure, including not only the enhanced brigades but also its guard divisions, to concrete war plans. But the military need for doing so is suspect.The new proposed policy may really reflect a desire to give the guard's units – many of which do not meet good standards today – specific goals and a clear focus rather than a need to use all of them in likely regional wars. See Steven Lee Myers, 'Army Weighs An Expanded Role for National Guard Combat Units', *New York Times*, 4 August 2000, p. A1; and General Accounting Office, *Army National Guard: Enhanced Brigade Readiness Improved but Personnel and Workload Are Problems*, GAO / NSIAD-00-114 (June 2000), pp. 5–6.

4 See National Defense Panel, *Transforming Defense: National Security in the 21st Century* (Arlington, VA: Department of Defense, December 1997), p. 23.

5 Gary Hart, Warren B. Rudman, and others, *Seeking a National Strategy: A Concert for Preserving Security and Promoting Freedom* (Alexandria, Va.: United States Commission on National Security / 21st Century, 15 April 2000), pp. 14–15.

6 The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 1990/1991* (Oxford, England: Brassey's, 1990), p. 105; IISS, *The Military Balance 2000/01* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 140–141. For measures of capability that factor in equipment quality as well as quantity, see O'Hanlon, *Defense Planning for the Late 1990s*, p. 43.

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