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**THE AGING TWO MRC FORCE: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH
TO FORCE MODERNIZATION**

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MILITARY STRATEGY AND OPERATIONS

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Introduction

The National Military Strategy (NMS) is the force structure roadmap the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff provides to the President, the National Security Council and the Secretary of Defense.¹ In his cover letter introducing the 1995 National Military Strategy, General Shalikashvili emphasizes that “dramatic events comprising the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union, as well as longer-term economic, demographic, environmental and technological developments, have profoundly altered the international security environment.” He further “defines” the new security challenges as more ambiguous and equally dangerous.² The most challenging aspect of the current NMS is the 1993 *Bottom Up Review (BUR)* core requirement that U S military forces be capable of fighting and winning two major regional contingencies – nearly simultaneously.

With U S Armed Forces beginning their ninth consecutive year of force structure drawdown, and the third anniversary of the *BUR* approaching, are U S forces able to support the two-MRC requirement? First, there is growing concern over the “amount” of U S military forces available to decisively fight and win two MRCs. Critics argue that a gap exists between the planned *BUR* force structure and budget reality. A second closely related concern goes to the shape of U S military forces – the relevance and agility of major force structure elements to counter those “equally dangerous, ambiguous threats” referenced by General Shalikashvili. With approximately two-thirds of the current DoD budget and Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP) allocated for manpower, operations and upkeep of the existing force structure, sufficient dollars are not programmed for force reshaping modernization programs.

With the above concerns as lead-ins, four issues central to U S military strategy versus the size and shape of U S military forces will be examined in this paper. First, the validity of the

“two-MRC” requirement is reviewed and examples of budgetary shortfalls impacting the ability to field adequate forces discussed. Second, as a resource-constrained DoD budget is a reality, a discussion ways to use force structure trade-offs to fund modernization programs is provided. Third, an alternative to the two-MRC core requirement will be discussed. Finally, and as part of this paper’s conclusions, key political issues associated with the major shift in U S military strategy proposed by this paper will be assessed.

Two Major Regional Contingencies: Can We Pay the Bills?

On 1 September 1993, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin published the *Bottom Up Review*, an assessment of the United States military’s post-Cold War force structure requirements. Citing an “era of new dangers”, this review outlined the strategy, force structure, modernization programs, industrial base and infrastructure needed to meet the changing threat.³ Major active force structure elements of the *BUR* are summarized below.

<u>Service</u>	<u>Force Structure</u>
Air Force	13 Air Wings
Navy	11 + 1 (reserve) carriers
Army	10 Divisions
Marines	3 Divisions (law)

(Total active duty manpower – 1.445 million personnel by FY99)

Subsequent to releasing the *BUR*, debate began in earnest over the mismatch between the size of the force called for by the *BUR* and the level of resource dollars programmed to pay the bill. The Government Accounting Office estimated that the *BUR* force was underfunded by approximately \$50 billion over the FYDP. The Congressional Budget Office’s projection was bleaker – a \$150 billion funding shortfall.⁴ Early in 1994, the Air Force Service Chief General Merrill McPeak,

complained about the mismatch between the programmed *BUR* force structure and the budget, publicly stating that an additional 10-15 percent cut in Air Force “*BUR*” force was required to meet budget constraints

Coupled with the funding issues highlighted above are concerns about the size of the force versus fighting and winning two near-simultaneous MRCs. During the *BUR* process the Air Force argued for 22 fighter wings to counter a two-MRC “win-hold-win” strategy, but ended up with 20 wings for a “win-win” strategy⁵. After a American - Egyptian joint exercise in 1994, General Joseph Hoar, head of U S Central Command stated “Airlift in this country is broken right now. I’m not sure it’s workable for one major regional contingency.” General Fogleman, Chief of Staff of the Air Force admitted that he could not provide the airlift required for two MRCs, stating “I can do one, but even here there are some heroic assumptions involved.”⁶ As the United States continues to close overseas facilities, strategic airlift and sealift play increasingly critical roles in America’s ability to quickly and decisively project power.

Another fundamental drawback of the two-MRC philosophy is the significant amount of resource dollars required to maintain a “status quo” force structure – the dollars spent to man, operate and maintain existing forces as opposed to investments in force modernization and recapitalization. Since 1991 at least 20 major weapons systems programs have been terminated. The military drawdown has reduced total budget outlays by 39 percent since 1985 (the height of the Regan build-up). However, military procurement accounts have incurred a 71 percent decrease during the same time period.⁷ This negative trend continues as total DoD procurement dollars decreased from \$44.1 billion in FY 94 to \$43.4 billion in FY 97. As part of his 1995 Chairman’s Program Assessment General Shalikashvili specifically addressed his concern over the shortfall in procurement accounts, and requested a \$60 billion dollar plus up beginning in FY 98.

As a final point of reference, over 65 percent (\$160.6 billion) of the 1996 defense budget pays manpower, operations and maintenance costs of existing systems, while less than 30 percent (\$73.7 billion) funds all DoD military research development and procurement programs

The 1995 Strategic Assessment published by the Institute for National Strategic Studies emphasized that current weapons procurement plans are not sufficient to maintain a steady pace of modernization of the planned force.⁸ This report went on to say that in about 10 years, all services will be faced with widespread obsolescence of major end items of equipment – attack helicopters, bombers, airlift aircraft and submarines. This problem is exacerbated by cancellation of major follow-on system “buys” such as the Comanche armed reconnaissance helicopter, and delays of other programs such as the V-22 and the *Arleigh Burke* class destroyer. The 1995 Strategic Assessment also raised the possibility of the declining importance of main battle platforms as centerpieces of the force structure. Supporting rationale for this statement includes the higher vulnerability of large battle platforms to precision-guided munitions. As important, the integration of advanced weapons and communications/sensing systems – the military technological revolution – is increasingly the key to success in war and is independent of platform size. Finally, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction makes dispersion of forces (smaller, cheaper platforms) preferable to smaller numbers of large, major platforms.⁹

The two-MRC mindset held by *BUR* supporters is strongly influenced by the most recent “MRC” data point – Operation Desert Storm. Supporters tend to forget that Desert Storm was a resounding success because it was preceded by Desert Shield. With more than five months to stage and train forces, and then fighting an enemy force situated in essentially in fixed positions, Desert Storm memories tend to skew reality. While many valuable lessons were learned from this operation however, key points must include (1) the amount of time to achieve a position of

“decisive force”, (2) the failure of some aspects of the mobility equation such as the Civil Reserve Airfleet (CRAF), and (3) the U S was fortunate to fight a Saddam Hussein on terrain favorable to U S reconnaissance and power projection systems. A Korean scenario is a significantly different animal – short response time, postured, confident opponent, difficult, unfriendly terrain.

How does the U S achieve needed force modernization in a resource-constrained world? Given that Korea appears to be the most stressing scenario, an alternative strategy could be to carefully focus (1) preserving sufficient present day force structure to decisively counter the Korean threat, (2) maintaining a residual conventional deterrence capability (air power/precision strike being the best candidates) against a second potential aggressor and (3) use monies normally programmed to support the “excess” force structure to fund an aggressive force modernization plan. To support this alternative strategy a ‘one MRC plus’ force of 7-8 aircraft carriers, 6-7 Army divisions, 12-14 Air Force wings and 2 Marine divisions is suggested.

A Slightly Re-Shaped Military Force

The United States requires rapidly deployable, efficient and lethal air, sea and land-based power projection forces to support the National Military Strategy. As documented by Desert Storm, Haiti, Bosnia, Rwanda etc., post Cold-War operational tempos for all services have remained constant or increased, while available force structures continue to decline. This steady/increasing appetite for U S forces is further exacerbated by decreases in overseas basing. The end result is aging forces that will continue to be over-tasked. However, the U S should view the near-term world geostrategic landscape as a window of opportunity – a timeframe lacking a competing superpower -- to begin re-shaping military forces by using significant force structure trade-offs to fund the growth needed in research, development and procurement accounts, necessary to support an aggressive force modernization program. This process will

result in a “capabilities gap” – an interim period with a lower number of deployable power projection forces. Another equally important supporting rationale supporting force structure trade-offs for force modernization is that the current strategy of “incremental modernization” is inefficient and wastes scarce resource dollars for the following reasons:

- Procurement programs tend to be stretched out, resulting in higher “per unit” costs for end items due to longer exposure to inflation, lower annual inventory objectives and fixed industrial overheads (facilities, salaries, etc)

- The force structure composition is made up of a higher total number of different systems. For example, the Navy will have F-14s, F/A-18s (four types) and JAST on carrier flight decks. Each of these aircraft have their own peculiar training and support logistic “tails”

- Technology advances which could produce real manpower savings (one-third of the total DoD budget) cannot be fully embraced. Under the current plan, any savings attributed to this area will probably be “in the margins”

To meet the “presence” component of the strategy, ways to provide adequate numbers of effective forward deployed force packages must be pursued. For example, the Navy must shift away from the “carrier paradigm” and aggressively pursue transforming its carrier fleet into smaller, cheaper platforms. As a point of reference, a *Nimitz* class CV costs about five billion dollars while a *Wasp* class amphibious assault ship costs slightly over one billion dollars. More importantly, approximately 2800 people are required to man a CV while an LHD needs slightly under 1,000 personnel. This should not be interpreted to mean that an LHD is the same as a CV, but that by thinking “smaller” for sea-based power projection platforms, an opportunity exists to increase inventory numbers, thereby providing for flexibility for meeting deployment demands.

Concurrent with the development of a smaller carrier, aggressive development of a STOL-capable Joint Advanced Strike Technology (JAST) is required. JAST offers the services the real opportunity to neck-down the total number of different types of fielded aircraft, thus achieving significant development, procurement, training and infrastructure savings. RADM Steidle, JAST Program Deputy Director, states that JAST will finally produce a stealthy attack aircraft for the Navy after two failed attempts – the A-12 and the A/F-X¹⁰. JAST also provides a replacement airframe for the Air Force's F-16 and the Marine Corps AV-8B. Of equal importance, JAST Program Managers are cautiously optimistic that “per unit” costs could come in about 30 percent lower than expected (\$34-35 million vice 50 million) due to improved manufacturing techniques.¹¹

The Army and the Air Force must re-think how to provide close air support. Presently, the Army relies on Air Force A-10s to perform a mission that may be suitable for the A-64 Apache *Longbow* with the Comanche helicopter providing targeting and force discrimination cues. The present Comanche program is essentially a “development only” program, with constrained procurement accounts precluding the fielding of operationally significant number of aircraft. Meanwhile the Air Force continues to support another separate aircraft system (A-10) and the associated training, maintenance and logistics support infrastructures.

The Navy and the Air Force need to pursue alternatives to manned precision strike aircraft. While cruise missiles represent one alternative, the high per-unit cost (\$1+ million per missile) argues in favor of developing reusable platforms. With significant efforts underway to further develop an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) reconnaissance capabilities such as *Predator*, the feasibility of a UAV strike capability should be fully explored. UAVs are cheaper to operate and maintain because of the lack of platform systems dedicated to support and protect the pilot. However, another significant paradigm – the pilot at the tip of the spear – needs to be broken to

fully incorporate the capabilities current technology UAVs bring to the battlefield. There is evidence that a paradigm shift is “beginning” as Israel has launched a development program for a UAV that carries rockets to intercept ballistic missiles.

Adequate Sealift and Airlift will be the mobility underpinnings of U.S. forces. C-17 and large RO-RO hull requirements must be validated and then procured. Given smaller power projection capabilities, sealift and airlift represent true force multipliers. Reliance on stop-gap programs such as CRAF to meet lift shortfalls is a non-starter. As important, Army, Marine and Air Force pre-position requirements must be met.

Aggressive pursuit of systems integration which provides the full spectrum of information dominance (surveillance, intelligence, communications, friendly/foe identification, and battle damage assessment) remain a top procurement objective. Recently retired VCJCS, Admiral Bill Owens’ “systems of systems” represents another, reusable force multiplier. Owens has stated that improving battlefield “fidelity” is not really a budgetary issue as most of the systems are already fielded. The real issue is tying (integrating) single-service designed systems together.¹²

The above paragraphs briefly touch on some selected ways to re-shape our forces. Of greater importance is the approach employed to systematically take down force structure to pay for these programs. The historical DoD “fair share” approach – nearly equal resource apportionment for each service – will not work. Instead, a two-pronged approach which front-loads procurement of low-risk technology systems that provide the best warfighting pay-off, coupled with a thorough re-evaluation of the current doctrinal approach to joint warfighting is recommended. The Joint Warfighting Capabilities Assessment (JWCA) provides the mechanism to assess capabilities and doctrine. The recommendations of the JWCA provide the baseline for procurement decisions developed by the Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC).

The Need For a Revised Strategy

The kinds of force structure transformations previously highlighted cannot be supported until the two MRC focus of the current strategy, and the traditional way(s) the U S supports overseas deployed presence are changed. By way of background information, when Secretary of Defense Les Aspin began to advertise a “win-hold-win” *BUR* philosophy, as a way to justify a carrier force structure of ten or less, the State Department weighed in on behalf of South Korea. South Korean concerns over having to “hang on” while U S forces were engaged elsewhere were instrumental in the State Department’s successful advocacy for a “win-win” strategy -- a two MRC force structure.¹³ With this said and the reality of an outyear’s budget ceiling, what specific changes are required to the current strategy?

First, careful articulation of the revised strategy and rationale driving changes must be provided to Congress, and then to key U S regional allies in Northeast Asia, Southwest Asia and Europe. The principle component of the new strategy is a fall back to a “win-hold-win” with one significant change. Should a Korean MRC occur, U S forces would begin rapid closure on the region. Simultaneously, a contingency power projection force (land and sea-based airpower, augmented with a limited number of ground troops) would be deployed to the Persian Gulf to preemptively counter an Iraq or Iran incursion into friendly Gulf states, preserving U S access to the region’s oil sources. Should a Southwest Asia MRC erupt, a similar kind of contingency augment force could be provided to Korea. However, the U S already maintains a significant sea, air and ground based presence in the region. Effectively, Korea would accept this strategy while weighing in the long term, the continued value of U S leadership and friendship. Positive U S actions vis-à-vis a steady level of defense spending would to a certain extent allay Korean concerns.

Second, the classic ways the U S provides overseas presence through routine deployments must continue to evolve. It is important to note that trends are already established regarding both forward deployed force composition and degrees of coverage. For example, U S Cold War carrier presence in the Mediterranean theater and the Western Pacific was continuous. During the early 1980's the Indian Ocean was added to the equation. The post-Cold War era and Desert Storm saw a further shift of "presence" into the Persian Gulf AOR. With the level of forces reductions advocated in this paper to support recapitalization programs, larger coverage "gaps" and smaller force compositions would become the norm. While not optimum, these trade offs are necessary to preserve the force for MRCs, and maintain acceptable operational tempos. In essence, U S presence would be maintained through rotations of ships, aircraft and troops, with a larger "duty force" designated to respond to an emergent contingency. This concept of forward presence would be facilitated by ever-improving C4I architectures that enable both forward and rear echelon elements of the "force" to retain visibility on the designated area of operations. The trade-off is response time.

Political Fallout and Conclusions

Three major constituencies, Congress, Industry and U S citizens, must be considered as a policy shift of this magnitude is formulated and implemented. First, all attempts must be made to have the majority of Congress "buy in" to this process, emphasizing that the process has two major elements -- a strategic shift and a force structure transformation. As expected, some members will be reluctant to take down the force on the promise that it will reappear in a different form. Alternatively, other members will view the process as an opportunity to shift more DoD dollars into domestic programs. A close partnership with the second political constituency -- Industry -- provides a mechanism to work congressional issues. Without question, U S industries

would strongly favor a force recapitalization program of this magnitude. Third, this strategy must be carefully sold to the U S public. In two significant ways -- taxes and sons and daughters electing to serve in the armed forces -- U S taxpayers provide critical support. At the risk of sounding trivial, candor is usually the best approach with this constituency. While the vote will again be mixed, Desert Storm should be the principle point of reference to demonstrate the value of a strong, competent military -- one that can provide a decisive force, achieve a quick victory and minimize the cost in human terms.

In the final analysis, there are an infinite number of weapons systems recapitalization variations that provide a modern, technologically superior force. In essence, the U S is proceeding down a course of "in the margins" systems improvements. However, the rate of progress and amount of resources committed are insufficient to achieve the degree of modernization required. Recently, all of the Service Chiefs were asked by Representative Floyd Spence, Chairman of the House National Security Committee, for their views on the amount of additional money required by each service in the 1997 defense budget. The Army asked for an additional \$7 billion, Navy and Air Force followed with about \$3 billion each, with the Marines saying they needed another \$2 billion. When queried concerning the adequacy of a \$38.9 billion procurement account for FY 97, General Shalikashvili testified that the services should be spending around \$60 billion dollars a year on procurement starting in 1998. Secretary Perry testified that while \$60 billion was a goal, they could not hope to achieve this target until around 2001.¹⁴ However, with an essentially flat budget for the foreseeable future, significant force structure trade offs will be required to support the kinds of procurement goals desired by the Joint Chiefs.

Again, a window of opportunity does exist as there is currently no other world power which possesses a comparable level of military power. However, it is unreasonable to expect that this situation will be the norm for the long term. As important, the present force structure is insufficient to meet the stated requirement, and needed modernization programs are being delayed into order to “sustain” the force. Finally, the U S exerts significant world influence and leadership through the routine employment of military forces. Maintaining the viability, “threat relevance” and agility of this force over the long term, requires innovative solutions and the acceptance of some degree of risk to achieve the kind of force structure desired in the future.

Endnotes:

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