

# US FORCES: MANY ROLES IN THE 21st CENTURY

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The roles of armed forces in the strategic environment of the 21st Century deserves our attention today.<sup>1</sup> The strategies, doctrine and force structure that we develop in the next few years ahead will determine the way we operate in the new century. The problem is that military strategists cannot predict, with certainty, the most critical and most likely threats that will endanger national interests and those of its friends and allies. The considerations here focus on security concerns of the United States, but similar issues will be of interest to policy-makers and strategists in other modern democracies in Iberoamerica and elsewhere.

Which current and future dangers will require counteractions by U.S. unilateral or coalition forces? What missions will tomorrow's armed forces be expected to perform? And, how should they be organized to accomplish these missions? A look at the emerging threat environment can help us to understand future roles of the armed forces.

The Soviet Union which transfixed U.S. strategic options for nearly fifty years has disappeared from the threat environment, leaving its weapons of mass destruction as a legacy. Traditional dangers such as terrorism and nuclear proliferation are subject to closer analysis now, as are an array of newly perceived dangers called Gray Area Phenomena.

This is seen in President William J. Clinton's *National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*. It describes an array of perils: proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD); regional instability (exemplified by the 1990 Gulf War); deterioration of political and economic reform in the regions of the former Soviet Union; and the transnational dangers (e.g., gray area phenomena such as banditry, terrorism, warlordism, rapid population growth, refugee flows, narcotrafficking).<sup>2</sup>

## **GRAY AREA PHENOMENA AND THE NEW DANGERS**

The National Security Strategy (NSS) puts strong emphasis on unconventional and nontraditional perils such as terrorism and the gray area phenomena. The gray area phenomena are transnational "threats to the stability of nation-states by non-state actors and non-governmental processes and organizations."<sup>3</sup> After regional war and weapons of mass destruction (WMD), they are viewed by many analysts as the most serious and probable issues threatening the global community in the post-Soviet era.<sup>4</sup>

Gray area phenomena include black market trading of nuclear material, weapons proliferation in all its dimensions (including WMD in the hands of rogue states, terrorists and organized criminals), conflict over scarce resources and environmental degradation, ethnic and religious conflict, spread of uncontrollable viruses and other diseases, the transnational linkages of crime,

drugtrafficking and its linkage to terrorism and insurgency, illicit electronic capital movement, migration and illegal immigration, famine, and areas in megacities and the countryside where government control and services have eroded.

Unrestrained by borders and international protocols, these new dangers threaten the traditional nation-states. Traditional states are not prepared to deal with non-governmental dynamics operating outside the domains of state and alliance systems. Yet our doctrine and force structures are designed around traditional concepts of overwhelming conventional force to achieve decisive victory against established state militaries--an unlikely formula for success against most of these threats.

### ***PEACETIME ENGAGEMENT***

If this view of future threats is on target, then what should we expect our joint forces to be able to do to protect national interests? The President's National Security Strategy makes it clear that the United States will not back away from the new dangers, even as we defend against the old ones:

Our nation can only address this era's dangers and opportunities if we remain actively engaged in global affairs.<sup>5</sup>

The thesis of the National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement is that the United States can effectively address this era's dangers and opportunities if it is actively engaged in global affairs.

"Engagement" means deterring and containing threats through cooperative security arrangements and activities around the world to enhance U.S. security. Examples of such tasks could be combined training exercises, multilateral military planning, intelligence sharing, and joining with allies to develop new technology. "Enlargement" means promoting economic growth and democracy throughout the world, and there are military roles for this too: nation assistance, military support to civil authorities, environmental clean-up and disaster relief.

The problem for our armed forces is that its future roles will be so widely varied that it could be difficult to accomplish everything well. The following objectives and concepts support the National Security Strategy of today and provide a view of the roles that joint forces will play in the mid term.

### ***MISSION: MAINTAIN A WARFIGHTING CAPABILITY***

The foremost role of the armed forces will be to deter or defeat aggression. This is the war-time role. In addition to maintaining an ability to deter and defeat attacks by weapons of mass destruction (WMD), U.S. joint forces will be required to fight two major regional contingencies (MRC) at about the same time.<sup>6</sup> This requirement was most recently established during a sweeping budgetary analysis under former Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, called the "Bottom-Up Review."<sup>7</sup> The rationale for maintaining a two war capability well into the future were provided by Secretary Aspin:

First, we need to avoid a situation in which the United States in effect makes simultaneous wars more likely by leaving an opening for potential aggressors to attack their neighbors, should our engagement in a war in one region leave little or no force available to respond effectively to defend our interests in another.

Second, fielding forces sufficient to win two wars nearly simultaneously provides a hedge against the possibility that a future adversary...might one day confront us with a larger-than-expected threat.<sup>8</sup>

In this regard, the armed forces will have to maintain a power projection capability to augment or establish U.S. presence in a theater of operations. It is the defense against the most dangerous threats that will drive force structuring for the foreseeable future.

### ***THE TWO WAR FORCE***

Secretary Aspin's 1993 Bottom-Up Review recommended this force structure for funding in the five year defense program. These are the forces we are likely to have available at the turn of the century:

#### ***Warfighting Force Structure for 1999***<sup>9</sup>

##### **Army**

10 - Divisions Active  
15 - Brigades Reserve Component

##### **Navy**

11 - Carrier Battle Groups  
45-55 - Attack Submarines  
346 - Ships Total

##### **Air Force**

184 - Bombers (B52H, B1, B2)  
13 - Fighter Wings Active  
7 - Fighter Wings Reserve

##### **Marine Corps**

3 - Expeditionary Forces

Under the START I and START II treaties the United States is reducing its nuclear arsenal. Upon completion of the process (estimated 10 years), U.S. nuclear forces will look like this:

#### ***Strategic Forces for 2003***

18 Trident submarines with 192 C-4 and 240 D-5 missiles  
500 Minuteman III missiles (single warhead)  
94 B52H Bombers with ALCM with 1980 warheads  
20 B2 Bombers with 320 warheads<sup>10</sup>

Recently, analysts have explored the "Revolution in Military Affairs" (RMA) idea and its impact on force structuring.<sup>11</sup> It asserts that the high-technology of micro-electronics, computers, precision guided munitions, sensors, stealth, information systems are now making traditional approaches to warfare obsolete. Certainly the armed forces must continue to exploit technology for every battlefield advantage, and adjust doctrine appropriately. But military analyst A. J. Bacevich warns of reactionary visions which replay the Persian Gulf War over and over again, and obscure the two "genuine" RMA of this century:

The first of those revolutions was the advent of total war, culminating in the creation of nuclear weapons. The second--in large measure stimulated by the first--was the proliferation of conflict at the opposite end of the spectrum: terror, subversion, insurgency, and "peoples war."<sup>12</sup>

This reminds the military planner that in the broadest sense, future military roles will be maintaining a robust warfighting capability (including fighting in a WMD environment), and supporting peacetime engagement policies via other military operations (OMO, also called military operations other than war, OOTW).

### ***MISSION: SUPPORT ENGAGEMENT AND ENLARGEMENT STRATEGIES***

Important roles of the armed forces will be to reinforce conventional warfighting strategies through other military operations (OMO) during peacetime. The U.S. Army's FM 100-5, *Operations*, provides a detailed listing of the kinds of OMO roles military forces must be prepared to execute while supporting U.S. engagement policy. These include evacuating U.S. nationals, support to domestic civil authorities, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, security assistance, nation assistance, counterdrug support, counterterrorism, shows of force, insurgency and counterinsurgency, attacks and raids, peace operations (peacekeeping and peace enforcement) and arms control and counterproliferation. Counterproliferation and peace operations, prominent in the news and security literature in recent years, will likely dominate OMO in the years ahead.

### ***COUNTERING PROLIFERATION***

Maintaining ready troops able to fight in a nuclear-chemical-biological environment will continue to be critical, but great emphasis will also be placed on "providing the military capabilities needed to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction and to protect the United States, its deployed forces, and its allies from the consequences of proliferation."<sup>13</sup>

Military roles will include support to Defense Counterproliferation policy in two categories: prevention and protection. Prevention will include denial of WMD technology, arms control measures, and international pressure through sanctions and information warfare. Protection could include defensive and offensive operations against the threats posed by WMD and their delivery systems.

Counterproliferation concepts focus on regions and countries where the dangers of proliferation are particularly acute. Therefore, U.S. joint forces will be actively engaged with foreign

governments and their military forces in order to contribute to regional stability, and to reduce the need for, or reliance upon, WMD. This makes clear the linkage between military roles for theater warfighting and military operations other than war during peacetime. Peace operations (peacekeeping and peace enforcement) are also examples of the relationship of OMO to warfighting.

## ***PEACEKEEPING***

Whether or not the United Nations is able to organize an effective U.N. force structure, U.S. forces (and those of other modern militaries) will be involved in peace operations around the world. As strategy analyst John F. Hillen has written:

In reality, ambitious missions such as those in Somalia and Bosnia require the UN to use great power forces because they are the only ones capable of establishing, controlling, and sustaining the complex military enterprises inherent in these new missions.<sup>[14](#)</sup>

Armed forces involved in the peacekeeping role will take on numerous and complex additional tasks. These can be surveillance, observation, reporting, information gathering and analysis, negotiation, investigation, patrolling, traffic control, monitoring transportation of goods, local security, search and seizure of contraband, medical care, supervision of internees and prisoners of war, humanitarian aid, evacuation and relocation of refugees, engineer construction, mine clearing, ordnance disposal, route maintenance, force security.<sup>[15](#)</sup>

## ***PEACE ENFORCEMENT***

A more forceful approach, peace enforcement is a military operation in support of diplomatic efforts to restore peace between belligerents who may not be consenting to intervention, and who may be engaged in combat activities.<sup>[16](#)</sup> The peace enforcement mission suggests a situation so unhinged that only outside force can bring about order. In peace enforcement operations, military forces assume their warfighting role as required, but must be prepared to transition to peacekeeping activities. Such will be the complex nature of military roles in the 21st Century.

Given the grey area phenomena challenge to national security (described herein), the important supporting role of military forces in countering terrorism, drug trafficking and internal threats to law and order deserve brief mention.

## ***COUNTERING TERRORISM***

Counterterrorism operations will be critical for protecting national interests against the fanatical actions of the few who reside at the fringes of humankind. This is due to the continued existence of rogue states that support terrorism for religious, political, economic or ethnic reasons. As the U.S. Department of State (DOS) reminds us:

None of the traditional state sponsors of terrorism has completely abandoned the terrorist option, especially against dissidents, nor severed ties to terrorist surrogates.<sup>17</sup>

"Furthermore," reminds Laurence E. Pope, former DOS Coordinator for Counterterrorism, "terrorist acts are part of a larger phenomenon of politically inspired violence, and at times the line between the two can become difficult to draw."<sup>18</sup>

### ***COUNTERING DRUG TRAFFICKING***

This notion extends to the problematic issue of illicit drug trafficking. Because of the inability of democratic nations (especially the United States) to come to grips with the supply and demand aspects of illicit drugs, narcotrafficking (and often related activities as banditry, insurgency and terrorism) continues as a threat to national security. The DOS understands that this danger will not soon disappear:

While all the affected governments now recognize in varying degrees the threat which drugs and drug-related corruption pose to their sovereignty, only a few have been able on their own to translate this recognition into effective, sustained action.<sup>19</sup>

Well into the next century, the military role of supporting civil authorities will find constant application in the counterdrug war at home and in host nations.

### ***SUPPORTING DOMESTIC CIVIL AUTHORITIES***

There are other linkages concerning grey area threats. Illicit drug trafficking has contributed to disorder in some megacities where the rule of law and government services have eroded. In some cases, the nation's military forces will be needed to supplement local authorities during periods of civil disturbance.<sup>20</sup> This has already been seen in the United States during civil disturbances in Los Angeles, California in 1992.

During the recent Los Angeles riots, 54 persons were killed, 2,383 injured (221 critically), and 13,212 arrested. There had been 11,113 fires, and damage was estimated at \$717 million for Los Angeles County. It lasted from the afternoon of April 29 through about the morning of May 4, 1992, with a gradual return to normalcy thereafter. The riot has been described by the commander of National Guard troops, Major General James D. Delk, as a case study in urban warfare.<sup>21</sup>

The underlying causes for domestic civil disturbances (unemployment, broken families, poverty, and racial tensions) are not going to be resolved soon. It seems obvious that military forces must prepare themselves to support law enforcement in environments that can include heavily armed groups of criminals capable of attacks on soldiers in congested urban terrain. By far the most serious challenges faced by law enforcement and the military during the Los Angeles riots were the ethnic street gangs who sniped at police and military personnel throughout the initial five days of urban conflict.

In assessing the Los Angeles civil disturbance operation, General Delk suggests that "MOUT" training (short for Military Operations in Urban Terrain) is needed for urban conflict.<sup>22</sup> This underscores the seriousness of military roles in support of civil authorities as we face a new century of uncertainty and challenge.

## **MILITARY ROLES FOR 21st CENTURY FORCES**

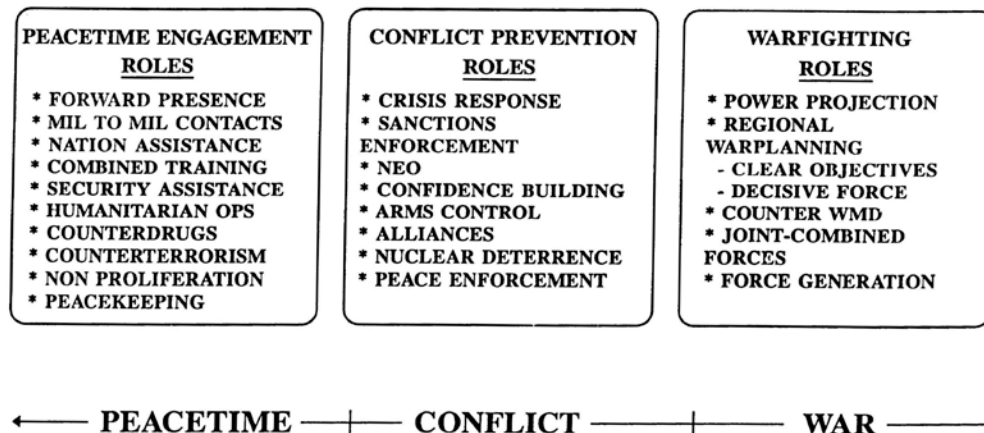


Figure 1

### ***NEW ROLES FOR OUR ARMED FORCES***

As we prepare our armed forces to meet the dangers of the century ahead we cannot be mesmerized by the promise of technology to resolve problematic military issues. Technology will have important applications both on the theater battlefield and in military operations other than war. Information systems will be especially critical for success along the operational continuum of peace, crisis, and war. But the challenges of preparing the armed forces to fight in major regional conflicts and other military operations (OMO) will require flexibility in adapting doctrine and force structure to meet the new dangers of proliferation and grey area phenomena.

The primary war-time role of deterring or defeating aggression will continue to demand the bulk of U.S. force structure if a two MRC capability is to be maintained. But there is an essential role for joint forces in OMO too, and these operations will be more prevalent in future years if the dangers of the grey area phenomena continue in evidence.

Now is the time for innovation and flexibility in joint doctrine and force structure. For example, why not stand-up a permanent joint command to conduct OMO in support of the regional U.S. Commanders-in-Chief. Such an innovation will go a long way towards answering A. J.



Bacevich's concerns that we have yet to adequately respond to the genuine RMA of this century: nuclear warfare and OMO. It would be a major new role for a functional joint command-- training for and conducting many of the demanding OMO (e.g., counterproliferation, peace operations, counterterrorism, nation assistance).

This standing joint force should be organized functionally to integrate the diverse capabilities of units provided by the services. For example, a nation assistance command would consist of engineer, medical, and civil affairs units. A security police command would contribute to joint force operations as well as training assistance to host nation military and police units. A transportation command would provide air and ground transportation and staff deployment planning assistance to the joint command. The signal command would be capable of supporting command and control for multiple deployments around the globe. Finally, a special mission command would be largely based on Special Operations Forces with additional psychological operations and military intelligence units assigned. Each of the services would share the force structure load by providing forces assigned to the standing joint command for OMO.

A permanent joint OMO command will protect joint combat forces from the myriad of peacetime missions that are critical to the regional strategies of the CINCs. Training in the joint command could focus on the OMO roles described above, while main-line combat forces could continue training toward their mission-essential warfighting tasks.

The engagement policy of U.S. National Security Strategy will be well-served by a force structure prepared to fight major regional wars with trained combat forces, and engaged in OMO with the uniquely trained forces of a joint command permanently organized for that purpose. And because the strategies, doctrine and force structure that we develop in the few years ahead will determine the way we operate in the next century, the equal importance of warfighting and OMO capabilities should be recognized today.

### *Endnotes*

1. The term "roles" is not used here to describe the basic purpose of each service as originally set forth by the U.S. National Security Act of 1947, but to describe the missions or tasks that air-land-sea services must be prepared to tackle jointly.[BACK](#)

2. William J. Clinton, President of the United States, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, July 1994, February 1995, February 1996).[BACK](#)

3. J.F. Holden-Rhodes and Peter A. Lupsha, "Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Gray Area Phenomena and the New World Disorder," paper presented to the Office of International Criminal Justice, University of Illinois at Chicago, "High Intensity Crime/Low Intensity Conflict Conference," Chicago; September 27-30, 1992, 1. Also see *Gray Area Phenomena, Confronting the New World Disorder*, Max G. Manwaring, ed., (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).[BACK](#)



4. For example, see Graham H. Turbiville, "Operations Other Than War: Organized Crime Dimension," *Military Review*, 74, no. 1 (January 1994): 35-47. Also find a series of articles concerning gray area phenomena and OMO in the Cass Publications international journal, *Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement*.[BACK](#)
5. Clinton, NSS 1994, ii.[BACK](#)
6. Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) are nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.[BACK](#)
7. Les Aspin, Secretary of Defense, U.S. Department of Defense, *Report on the Bottom-Up Review* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, October 1993), 27-31. The since the fall of the Soviet Union, the global threat from massive Soviet nuclear and conventional forces has been supplanted by aggression in two theaters simultaneously, underscored by the specter of proliferating nuclear and other WMD.[BACK](#)
8. Ibid, 19.[BACK](#)
9. Ibid, 28.[BACK](#)
10. Ibid, 26.[BACK](#)
11. For examples see the series of Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) published papers from the, SSI-U.S. Army War College, Fifth Annual Conference on Strategy, "The Revolution in Military Affairs: Defining an Army for the 21st Century," held in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, April 1994. These 1994 SSI publications included: Paul Bracken and Roy Acal , *Whither the RMA: Two Perspectives on Tomorrow's Army*, July 22; Jeffrey R. Cooper, *Another View of the Revolution in Military Affairs*, July 15; Sir Michael Howard and John F. Guilmartin, Jr., *Two Historians in Technology and War*, July 20; Michael J. Mazarr, *The Revolution in Military Affairs: A Framework for Defense Planning*, June 10; and Steven Metz and James Kievit, *The Revolution in Military Affairs and Conflict Short of War*, July 25. [BACK](#)
12. A. J. Bacevich, "Preserving the Well-Bred Horse," *The National Interest* (Fall 1994), 48.[BACK](#)
13. U.S. Department of the Air Force, *Counterproliferation Master Plan* (draft) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Air Force, July 15, 1994) 6.[BACK](#)
14. John F. Hillen III, "UN Collective Security: Chapter Six and a Half," *Parameters* XXIV, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 29.[BACK](#)
15. U.S. Army, Chief of Staff, Army Strategic Fellows Briefing, *Peacekeeping and Peace Enforcement* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, January 6, 1993) slide 27A. [BACK](#)
16. Chief of Staff, Army Strategic Fellows briefing, slide 15A. See also U.S. Army FM 100-5, *Operations*, Glossary p. 7.[BACK](#)

17. Laurence E. Pope, Acting Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1992), 1.[BACK](#)

18. Ibid, v.[BACK](#)

19. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics Matters, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* (Washington, D.C.: 1992), 9.[BACK](#)

20. In the United States, countering civil disturbances is a primary mission of the National Guard under command of the state governor; as needed to restore law and order, the President can "federalize" the state Guard and contribute federal (active duty) forces under the president's command.[BACK](#)

21. James D. Delk, *Fires & Furies: The L.A. Riots* (Palm Springs, CA: ETC Publications, 1995), 291. The book has important lessons for civilian and military leadership concerning civil-military cooperation and military operations other than war. [BACK](#)

22. Delk, 322-3.[BACK](#)