Holding the Line: U.S. Defense Alternatives for the 21st Century

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mention violations of the NPT or to explain why nations would have joined Nato had there been no inequitable Soviet threat. Even those who share the author’s beliefs in a smaller American defense structure or minimal deterrence would be confused by many of his supporting reasons. At one point, Steinbruner castigates the former colonial powers for not intervening quickly enough in the civil wars of their violence-prone former colonies. How would they do so without possessing superior military force? Steinbruner describes the internal conflict that plagues much of the world, including terrorism, as a “contagion”—as if it were a theoretical illness that had nothing to do with actions of actual people. As in the logic (some might say illogic) of the prisoners’ dilemma and tit-for-tat games once used to describe the theory of nuclear deterrence, neither the magnanimity nor the fears of the human spirit play a role in this book’s equation.

Despite the publisher’s reputation and the implied support of influential (mostly retired) authorities, serious students of globalization or defense policy should avoid this book. It is not merely a weak argument; these are not principles of global security for the real world.

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This is the rare book that actually lives up to its blurbs. It should be required reading for U.S. defense planners, especially Bush administration officials for whom increasing defense spending rather than “holding the line” is an article of faith. They would profit greatly from the volume’s analysis of where not to look for the savings that might pay for the administration’s promised transformation of the military. Hint: cutting infrastructure will not pay for military transformation. Cindy Williams, a senior research fellow in the Strategic Studies Program at MIT and a former assistant director for national security at the Congressional Budget Office, has assembled an impressive group of contributors. In a focused, well integrated volume, they take on a range of pressing defense issues that converge on a central, critical question: how can the U.S. military be reshaped—transformed—while holding the line on defense spending? Holding the line means maintaining defense spending at about $300 billion (in fiscal year 2000 budget-authority dollars) for ten years. That amount, it is argued, is sufficient for transformation if it is spent effectively and efficiently—which requires merely discarding outmoded strategy and force structure.

In her introductory chapter, Williams lays the foundation for what follows with an instructive discussion of the post–Cold War drawdown, the pressures generating rising defense costs, the reasons we should not succumb to those pressures, and the need to reconcile strategy and practice and to recalibrate the two-major-theater-wars yardstick that was used to size U.S. conventional forces after the Gulf War. An effective force-protection device, the two-major-theater-wars standard is both the source of rising defense costs and an obstacle to a fiscally responsible transformation of the U.S. military. Williams is especially struck by the fact that each service’s share of defense
spending has been held essentially con-
stant since the end of the Cold War.
Strategy and force structure alternatives
advanced by three of the contributors
propose to take care of that problem.
Lawrence Korb develops Williams’s ac-
count of contemporary defense planning
with a critical appraisal of the Pentagon’s
three post–Cold War reassessments—the
first Bush administration’s 1990 “Base
Force,” which introduced the two-major-
regional-wars construct; the Clinton ad-
ministration’s 1993 Bottom-Up Review;
and the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Re-
view, which also embraced the two-war
view. Korb also delightfully exposes the
misleading assumptions that inform the
conventional wisdom about the inade-
quacy of current levels of defense
spending.
The search for ways to utilize Depart-
ment of Defense monies more effectively
and efficiently begins with nonsolutions.
Williams convincingly argues that infra-
structure reform—eliminating functions,
consolidating and collocating activities,
privatization, and outsourcing—“will not
be the miracle cure for the Pentagon’s
budget woes.” Gordon Adams finds that
for strategic, political, technological, and
economic reasons, contemporary burden
sharing by America’s European allies can
yield no more of a budgetary payoff than it
did during the Cold War. Further cuts
in nuclear forces will not result in signifi-
cant savings either, according to David
Mosher, who expects, not unreasonably,
that “missile defenses will be the most
likely cause of budget growth.”
The resources required for transforma-
tion can only be extracted from the con-
tventional force structure. It is the Army,
Air Force, or Navy (and Marines)—take
your pick—that will bear the brunt of re-
structuring. Owen Cote advances the
alternative likely to be most popular
among readers of this journal—a naval-
centric strategy and force structure that
features a significantly more innovative
Navy. Under this alternative, a somewhat
smaller Air Force and a more signifi-
cantly reduced but more mobile Army
would be the bill payers. James Quinlivan
proposes what he considers a balanced
future force structure centered on a reor-
ganized, modernized Army. The Navy
would lose two carrier battle groups un-
der this alternative; the Marine Corps
and the Air Force would be smaller as
well. To support what he labels a “flexible
power projection strategy,” Karl Mueller
would shift resources from the Army and
Navy to a modernized, more capable Air
Force. The Army would give up 30 per-
cent of its active combat forces and
two-thirds of its National Guard units,
while the Navy would have to make do
with nine rather than twelve aircraft
carriers.
Cote, Quinlivan, and Mueller each iden-
tify the strategic assumptions upon
which their respective force structures
are built. Their assumptions about the
future security environment differ signif-
ically. Unfortunately, we do not know
what that security environment will actu-
ally look like. Defense planners, by na-
ture cautious and conservative in the face
of uncertainty, will want to hedge against
each set of problems the authors identify;
one way of doing this is to acquire the
full range of capabilities they describe. In
the end, while we know we should look
to the conventional force structure to re-
solve the resource dilemma, the dilemma
remains unresolved. What we still need is
a reliable means of choosing among the
assumptions—no small intellectual chal-
lenge. A larger dose of grand strategy
than provided in Williams’s introductory chapter is required for that undertaking.

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Bart Brasher begins his retrospective discussion of *Implosion* with a simple synopsis in chapter 1, “The Last 1,000 Days of the Cold War.” Mentioned in this chapter is a discussion of the period of the Reagan administration when Defense personnel numbers and budget authority reached their peaks. He includes interesting *USA Today* statistics about defense spending in the United States and in the USSR, as well as a breakdown of how many soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines were serving. He also discusses how each service recruits, tests, and promotes its enlisted and officer personnel. Brasher then proceeds to the topic of the security environment (primarily by describing where U.S. military forces are deployed and in what numbers), the demise of the Soviet Union, and various operations that the U.S. military was involved in through the end of the 1980s. He closes this chapter with a discussion of the base realignment process, military readiness at the end of the Cold War, and the size of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, reserve components, and nuclear forces.

The book’s style is readable, and Brasher takes time to explain acronyms, even to describe how civilian control of the military is organized. His explanations about the military and government processes are clear even for the uninitiated. However, it is clear well before the end of the first chapter that the author’s approach consists primarily of stringing together information gleaned from various sources; the first thirty-four-page chapter contains 151 endnotes. Also, the book is replete with numbers and statistics; the average paragraph contains at least two or three. For example, the following is the concluding paragraph of the discussion of Operation JUST CAUSE: “Casualty figures for the invasion included 24 Americans dead, including two who were killed accidentally by their own forces. The number of U.S. wounded was 324, while the PDF suffered 314 killed, 124 wounded, and 5,313 captured. Serious estimates of Panamanian noncombatants killed ran from 100 to 202. Within a few years, Panama was a democracy and Noriega was in a stateside prison, convicted of the narcotics charges brought against him.”

The next several chapters fall into a pattern. For each year from 1990 through 1994, Brasher uses statistical tidbits to discuss human resources, the security environment, the “Base Force” (and other alternate force structures), military readiness, and downsizing. Each chapter sets forth the “security environment,” a chronological account of defense and military issues, primarily illuminated by force-deployment statistics. Subchapters cover in a clear and concise fashion such subjects as contingency operations, the Bottom-Up Review, the base closure process, modernization, and “topsizing.” Chapter 7 covers the downsizing of the military from 1995 and 1996, and chapter 8 covers the “Quadrennial Defense Review and the Out-Years, 1997 to 2015.” Brasher’s conclusions, which occupy two pages, include: “Although many equate the initiation of personnel and force structure..."