

1993

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Recommended Citation

Bartlett, Henry C.; Holman, G. Paul; and Somes, Timothy E. (1993) "Clear Strategies for a Murky World: "Constructive Involvement" and "Selective Response"," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 46 : No. 3 , Article 6.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol46/iss3/6>

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Clear Strategies for a Murky World "Constructive Involvement" and "Selective Response"

Henry C. Bartlett, G. Paul Holman, and Timothy E. Somes

PRESIDENT CLINTON HAS DECLARED strong and simple strategic objectives: "America must continue to lead the world we did so much to make. . . . Together with our friends and allies we will work to shape change lest it engulf us. When our vital interests or the will and the conscience of the international community is defied, we will act, with peaceful diplomacy whenever possible, with force when necessary."¹ But what are the implications of these goals? What kind of change do we seek and why? What are the strategies that will guide policy makers and force planners in this turbulent era?

Answers to these questions require a strategic assessment. The point of departure can be debated. Some focus on threats to national interests, while others look for opportunities.² Still others prefer a broader perspective, starting with a global assessment of shifting power centers, dominant trends, and driving forces for the future. Policies, objectives, and strategies are then based on the shape of things to come.³

This article starts from the perspective of global change, identifying those phenomena that seem most likely to characterize future developments. Strategists and force planners must have a clear sense of purpose as they thread their way through a maze of contentious rhetoric, official documents, contradictory scholarship, and professional judgment. The authors attempt to provide that sense of purpose by crystallizing a wide range of ideas into a handful of concepts, each encapsulated by a cogent label, or descriptor. The authors identify overarching goals, explore strategies for achieving them, and summarize the implications for military force structure.

Assessment: Trends and Phenomena

There exist a number of powerful positive and negative trends that involve demographics, religious movements, collapsing countries, integrating regions,

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and revolutions in technology. All can capture the imagination and concern of strategists. However, the art of strategic assessment lies in sifting through such factors and attempting to identify the essence of a changing world. The resulting assessment must offer guidance for decisions about America's response to the international situation.

The essence of today's world comprises two phenomena. One is the diffusion of political power (defined as the ability to influence behavior), both within and beyond national borders. The information revolution appears to be a crucial element of this condition; as a result of it, the ruling bodies in many nations are losing their ability to control events to the extent they once did.⁴ This diffusion is taking place in two directions. In some cases, power is moving upward, away from the individual state, and toward higher levels of aggregation and integration. The United Nations, the European Community, the pending North American Free Trade Agreement, and Amnesty International are familiar examples. Less apparent ones include transnational corporations, religious movements, and international environmental activism.

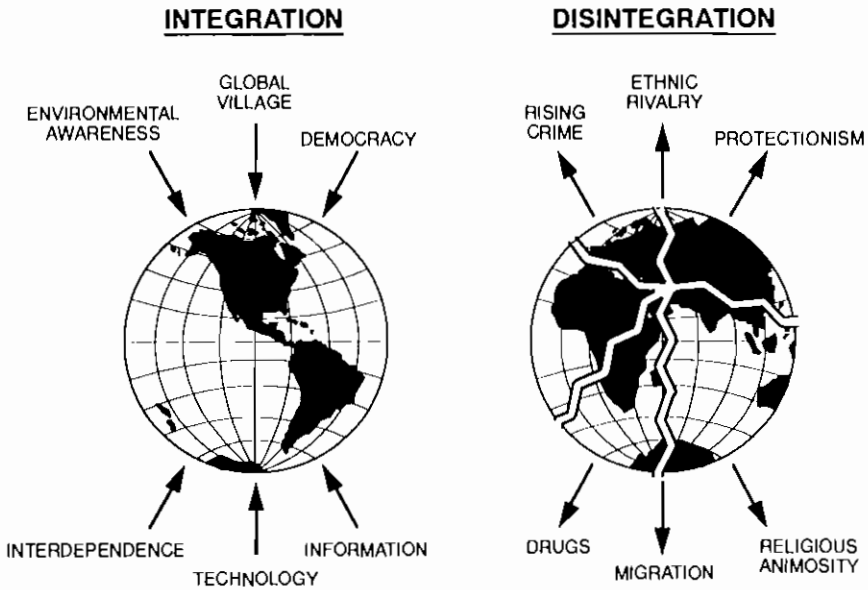
In other cases, power is shifting downward. This change is rupturing political entities along the faultlines of ethnic, tribal, and even clan loyalty. Global examples include anarchy and famine in Somalia, "ethnic cleansing" in the Balkans, and the collapse of the Soviet Union into a host of turbulent successor states. In our own country, feuding gangs, squabbling interest groups, and exploding court cases illustrate the point.

The second phenomenon is the accelerating rate of change throughout the world.⁵ There is instantaneous, continuous access to world events, and there are radically new patterns of world trade, finance, population movements, and technological innovation. As a result, global perceptions of relative wealth, injustice, and crisis are subject to sudden and unpredictable alteration. Some of these changes favor integration, compromise, and peaceful change; others foster disintegration and violent change, as shown in Figure 1.

If the world is characterized by the diffusion of power and an accelerating rate of change, then a planner should consider their likely impact on U.S. national interests over the long term. Futurologists and war gamers often postulate three alternative worlds that these and other trends might produce. The "good world" is marked by global peace and prosperity. The "bad world" means trade wars, nationalism, and ethnic conflict. And the "ugly world" is one of despotism, genocide, and terrorism.⁶

This diffusion of power and acceleration of change suggest a host of questions. Idealists will likely ask, what do we want the world to look like? Pragmatists will counter by asking, what is feasible? Both are valid questions about the fundamen-

Figure 1
Global Trends



An Overarching National Security Goal

Our underlying purpose in the national security realm should be to work toward a *peaceful and prosperous world*. In practice, this would require us to promote trends favoring a "good world" and to oppose those leading to a "bad world," or worse, an "ugly" one. Such a goal is compatible with the idealistic and internationalist strains in U.S. foreign policy since the First World War. In theory, this goal is also consistent with America's national values: representative government, human rights, the rule of law, and both political and economic freedom. Such values are clearly safeguarded by global order and prosperity. Some strategists believe that achieving such a state of affairs should be our ultimate goal, but the desirability and feasibility of such an ambitious objective are highly problematic. Domestic needs are many, the federal deficit is excessive, isolationist temptations are strong, public opinion is volatile, and many citizens are warning against over-involvement in global affairs.

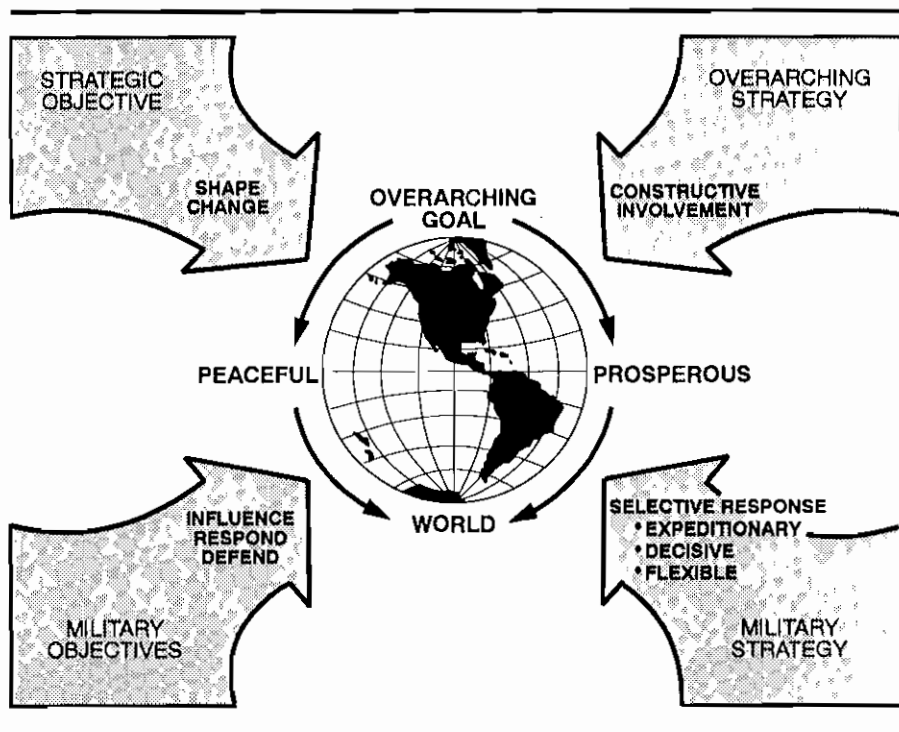
President Clinton has stressed the goal of *shaping change*. This objective is simple to understand and the words themselves convey a sense of purpose worthy

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of American values and our position of global leadership. Clinton used this concept early in his election campaign, stressing its idealistic appeal as well as its practical value. "Our goal is not to resist change but to shape it. . . . The defense of freedom and the promotion of democracy around the world aren't merely a reflection of our deepest values; they are vital to our national interests. Global democracy means nations at peace with one another, open to one another's ideas and one another's commerce."⁷ Our strategic thinking would be incomplete without the overarching goal of a peaceful and prosperous world as reflected in Figure 2, just as it would be without the nearer-term emphasis upon shaping change. Taken together, these two goals are the basis for national security strategy and national military strategy.

Figure 2

Objectives and Strategies



An Overarching Strategy

Since the collapse of communism, two major strategic concepts have appeared. Former President George Bush proposed "Peacetime Engagement," which aimed at fostering a new world order. However, subsequent events have

reminded a reluctant world that the pursuit of peace often demands non-peaceful engagement.⁸

"Collective Engagement," a term used subsequently, may have conveyed a better strategic concept. It implied that the United States would work in permanent or ad hoc arrangements with other nations having common interests in order to resolve the crisis of the moment. This term is both diplomatically astute and fiscally realistic, given its stress on burden-sharing. However, the phrase implies a reliance on multilateralism, which might become a dangerous constraint on unilateral U.S. action in some situations.⁹

The authors prefer the idea of *Constructive Involvement* as an overarching national security strategy.¹⁰ The phrase itself implies several important concepts. First is a sense of American initiative, energy, and good will toward other countries. Second would be a political version of the Hippocratic Oath—improve the situation if possible, but in any case do nothing to make the patient's problems worse. Third would be a sense of flexibility: we may act unilaterally or within coalitions, peacefully or coercively, lethally or not, depending on the circumstances. It remains to be seen whether the importance of military power has declined relative to the diplomatic and economic tools of national power. But the certainty underlying this strategy is that the military instrument of national power will be used—perhaps in more humanitarian ways but nevertheless as a key element in our overarching strategy.

Finally, "Constructive Involvement" suggests that the United States is rethinking some of its long-held positions on a number of previously intractable disputes. Diffused power and accelerating change may provide the leverage for positive advances. A number of political elites are losing their ability to control events. These trends have affected both the Israeli government and the Palestine Liberation Organization, allowing peace talks that were once unthinkable. Further examples include the improvement in Russo-American relations, China's erratic but significant opening to the West, world pressures to end the Balkan chaos, and periodic bursts of optimism for Korean unification.

"Constructive Involvement," like any other all-embracing game plan, requires a set of supporting strategies to help guide the economic, diplomatic, and military instruments of national power, each described by phrases that capture the essence of their respective approaches. (As an example, a strategy of "open markets" defines an economic approach for peaceful change and prosperity. Similarly, a strategy of "coalition building and bonding" might define the thrust of diplomatic strategy.) The military strategy and objectives, which are a key focus of this paper, require elaboration.

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Military Objectives

Military power should be used rarely and with discrimination. It nonetheless can be a major determinant of international behavior. Now that the Cold War is gone—with all its imperatives as well as its constraints—three military objectives seem clear: to *influence* international actors, to *respond* to crises, and to *defend* against attack.¹¹

American influence on global events is extensive. From Cambodia through Somalia to Eastern Europe, in a myriad of civil wars and regional crises, perhaps the most important question that can be asked by the fighters as well as the peacemakers is “Where does the United States stand?” Although the exact answers will vary from case to case, the generalities are the same: America seeks to shape the world toward conflict resolution, and the military instrument will support this objective both directly and indirectly. In the United Nations, American influence is often crucial for the success of peacekeeping operations. In a host of global crises, forward presence has bolstered the resolve of friendly nations and deterred potential aggressors from attack. Our armed presence in Europe, Southwest Asia, and the Far East is still an ingredient in regional stability, as demonstrated by a host of appeals for us to stay in Nato, the Gulf, and the Pacific.

The future influence of American military power is open to question, as many of our forces return home and we continue to downsize. Not all countries or regions are of equal importance to our national interests, and many painful debates will surely erupt over the comparative importance of various friendly nations. American leaders must craft a strategy and force posture that will continue to affect the behavior of international actors—reassuring some, deterring others, and shaping the development of the overall international environment.

When peaceful influence fails to achieve our goals, we may have to respond coercively. Favored instruments will be diplomatic or economic, but they may be seen as toothless without the backdrop of a viable military capability. In some cases, combat will not take place at all. In others, there will be some level of warfare. Our preferred military strategy should aim at seizing the initiative, using joint or combined task forces to liberate conquered land, enforce sanctions, or even preempt aggression.

In the event of combat, our intentions would be to defend U.S. national interests, most often by halting regional aggression. Specific examples include helping to assure rights of passage, defend threatened territory, and protect endangered peoples. From an overall, global perspective, however, our goal for the military instrument is to influence global trends in the direction of the “good world.”

Military Strategy

We suggest that the best military strategy supporting constructive involvement is one of *Selective Response*. "Selective" implies restraint and discrimination; in some contexts, it can suggest a sense of superiority befitting the sole remaining superpower. Above all, the word hints at a necessary degree of uncertainty about our potential behavior toward presently unknowable adversaries. The military instrument of national power could be used, as required, for peacekeeping, peacemaking, deterring, compelling short of war, and fighting.

However, of course, the phrase "Selective Response" is not enough. Substantive concepts are required to guide military planners in the employment of existing capabilities as well as planning for future forces. We think that the key elements of a new military strategy of selective response are captured by the terms *expeditionary*, *decisive*, and *flexible* (see table). These terms, or descriptors,

Strategy of Selective Response

Key Elements	Employment Implications	Force Planning Implications
Expeditionary	Tailored missions Promptness Fewer forces forward	Power projection system Global strategic mobility Robust supporting systems
Decisive	Overwhelming force at points of engagement Maintain initiative	Superior capabilities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nuclear • Conventional • Non-lethal
Flexible	Joint tasking Combined operations Unpredictable scenarios	Broad array of capability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly trained people • Interoperative doctrine/systems

give the essence of how existing forces will be employed, and are guides to future force planning as well. Deciding the exact level and mix of future forces would require the integration of other analytical approaches, drawing insights from regional studies, plausible scenarios for conflict, mission area analysis, and technological opportunities, all within fiscal constraints. Although the concepts conveyed throughout the table provide an overall sense of the strategy and its implications, there is a need to amplify some of the thoughts.

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Expeditionary. During the Cold War, forward-based forces were critical to the military strategy. The intentions and capabilities of the Soviet Union justified their importance. Forward-based forces are still necessary—for example, in Europe, Korea, and the Persian Gulf—but they are not the crux of our military strategy. No longer must they deter or be ready to defend against any enemy on the scale of the old Warsaw Pact. However, they still contribute to the overall strategic goal of shaping the global environment. Forward forces, although diminished in size and mission, reassure a host of old and new friends, stabilize dangerous situations, and affect the behavior of potential aggressors.

When American combat power is required, the lion's share will be expeditionary forces, departing from the United States and returning home when their immediate missions are achieved. They will require tailoring for specific missions and will look very different in many cases from the more traditional employment packages of past wars. This stress on expeditionary capabilities will pose major challenges for our power projection system. Global mobility—air, sea, and land—will require careful thinking, costly investments, and large logistical capacity. The systems supporting an expeditionary force will need to be robust and sophisticated, especially the capabilities to command, control, communicate, and gather intelligence.

Because of the accelerating rate of change, these forces will be required to move rapidly. Strategic and tactical warning is likely to be ambiguous. Almost invariably, national decision makers will require precious weeks to build domestic and international consensus behind their actions. The armed forces committed to such contingencies may often be reacting to an adversary's initiative. As a result, promptness of response will become a key requirement for expeditionary forces.

Decisive. When military forces are used, it is because decisive action is desired. Force planners should strive to retain the technological "high ground," developing superior weapon and support systems for use throughout the spectrum of conflict—from nuclear, through conventional, to non-lethal systems. Such superior equipment will help commanders to concentrate overwhelming force at the right points of engagement. A key goal of future combat employment will be to dominate the timelines of a crisis. Once having decided that response to a given situation is required, U.S. strategists will presumably attempt to seize the initiative, perhaps even to preempt aggression if possible.

Flexible. Flexibility is the third key descriptor. It flows directly from the authors' conviction that the diffusion of power and the accelerating rate of change are the dominant characteristics of the future. Military commanders must be prepared to face enemies radically different from before in widely scattered regions of the globe. The characteristics of the battlefield will change throughout

the spectrum of conflict. With campaigns large and small, conventional and unconventional warfare, combat and non-combat missions, and with the possibility of confronting weapons of mass destruction, each conflict will be unique. Operating as a part of joint task forces will become increasingly routine. At the same time, combined operations among multinational forces will also grow in importance, requiring greater attention to burden-sharing with friendly nations.

Likewise, force planners need to think in terms of the total force. There must be a recognition of the need for U.S. components on the future battlefield to be fully capable of integration with the other U.S. services. As an example, before specific weapon systems are developed, the underlying and integrating command, control, communications, computer, and intelligence functions must be thought through. Doctrine, tactics, and equipment must allow a high level of interoperability among the services and allies. Finally, planning and fighting under uncertainty will place a premium on educating and training our people for rapid adaptation to change.

Force Planning Cases

When force planners confront the reality of defining a specific force structure, it is vital that they think in terms of major planning cases. Properly selected, these cases encourage integration of related capabilities into coherent packages, permit the development of scenarios relevant to each planning case, allow the establishment of clear priorities among the planning cases, and foster jointness as opposed to service parochialism.

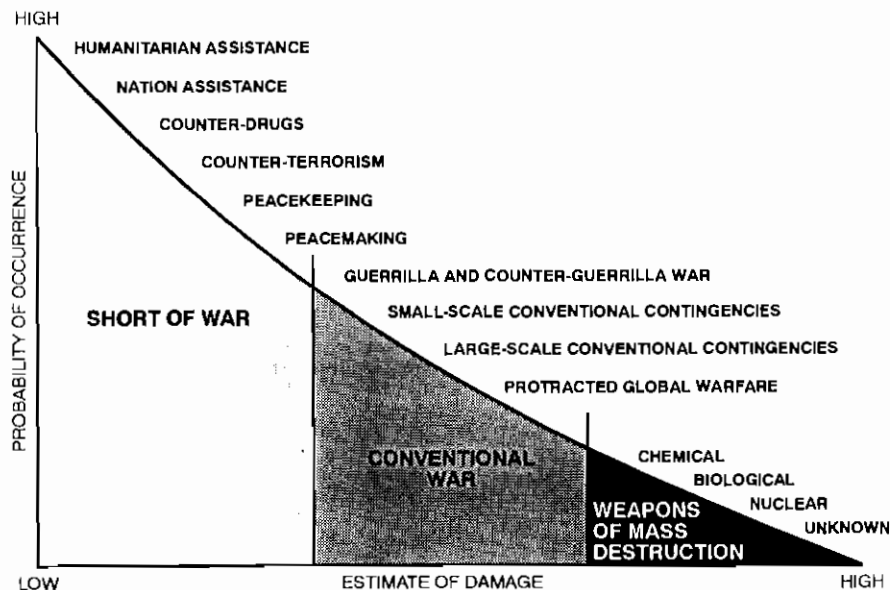
Like other authorities, we develop planning cases in terms of the spectrum of conflict, which is defined by two axes: the vertical reflects the probability of occurrence, while the horizontal shows the estimate of damage to U.S. national interests (see Figure 3). The spectrum can be divided logically into three force planning cases: the *short of war* case (ranging from humanitarian missions, assistance to nations, counter-drugs and counter-terrorism, through peacekeeping, to peacemaking); the *conventional war* case (beginning with smaller contingencies such as Grenada or Panama, through large scale, combined-arms combat like Korea, Vietnam, or Desert Shield and Desert Storm, to protracted global war); and the *weapons of mass destruction* case (which includes chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, and perhaps others of even greater destructiveness yet to be discovered).¹²

For each case, the strategy of selective response and the key descriptors "expeditionary," "decisive," and "flexible" should act as general guides for developing forces. The weapons of mass destruction case could cause the greatest damage to national interests, despite its low probability of occurrence. Thus it must be dealt with first—and there is less margin for error here than in the other two cases.

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Figure 3

Spectrum of Conflict and Force Planning Cases



In the weapons of mass destruction planning case, “expeditionary” implies a trend away from forward-based assets for nuclear strikes. Few—perhaps no—weapons would be in Europe, in the Pacific, or on naval surface platforms. Breakthroughs in arms control and disarmament seem likely to eliminate chemical weapons from the U.S. arsenal, but the requirement for *some* weapons of mass destruction will continue to influence the global environment. Thus, all offensive and defensive systems under this planning case will operate from the United States and therefore will require global mobility. The terms “decisive” and “flexible” imply survivable capabilities that can threaten punishment (offensive systems), deny objectives (theater and continental defensive systems), or neutralize enemy threats (preemptive capabilities).

A strategy of selective response would have the greatest impact upon the conventional planning case. “Expeditionary” demands a conventional power projection system, one capable of operating faster and perhaps under worse conditions than Desert Shield and Desert Storm. In spite of the decline in resources, such a power projection system must be joint, based upon complementary forces. If our conventional forces are to be truly decisive and flexible when called upon for regional defense or intervention, they must be able to

proceed rapidly from deployment, through reinforcement and sustainment, to withdrawal.¹³

The short of war planning case encompasses a wide range of missions. Over the past several decades, the U.S. armed forces have taken part in many operations on the "low intensity" side of the spectrum of conflict (i.e., high probability of occurrence, low estimate of damage to U.S. interests). Conditions presently seem to be shifting further toward the extreme left of the spectrum of conflict. Counter-drug operations have already become a way of life for some units, while humanitarian missions, peacekeeping, and perhaps peacemaking operations are of growing prominence. Like the other two planning cases, the key attributes of non-traditional forces will be their expeditionary, decisive, and flexible natures.

Thoughtful critics will ask at this point, "How many of these contingencies are to be handled simultaneously? How long must the established force levels remain in the theater? And how fast do forces have to get to the scene in each case, given warning assumptions?"¹⁴

Answers to these questions will differ sharply, and no set of answers will satisfy all authorities. Historical experience—to say nothing of current concern about a turbulent, fast-changing world—suggests a minimum requirement to support one major, conventional war.¹⁵ It is probable that intervention would have to be rapid, and it might be necessary to sustain the effort for a significant period of time. Additionally, the United States should be prepared to support a second, concurrent regional crisis. However, involvement in that contingency would be limited, concentrating on space, air, sea, intelligence, and logistical support with limited land force involvement. Our plans, however, would anticipate a slower response and less endurance than in the major war.

The armed forces of the U.S. should also have sufficient and readily available capability to deal with simultaneous short of war situations like restoring order in Somalia, protecting the Kurds, or providing humanitarian relief to the cyclone victims of Bangladesh. Beyond these capabilities, there is the need for a reservoir of personnel, industrial capacity, reserve assets, and national will on which U.S. leadership could draw in such less likely scenarios as protracted war against another major power.

The ultimate goal that Americans have sought through two world wars and the Cold War is a peaceful, prosperous world. This utopian vision will not soon be achieved. Indeed, we must take care to avoid open-ended commitments, whose costs may eventually exceed the tolerance and generosity of the American people. However, it is worth continually reminding ourselves what the nation is attempting to accomplish. With the "good world" as our desired

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end, the intermediate objective should be to nudge events in that direction. For that reason, the overarching national security strategy should be a positive one, the very name of which should evoke a sense of U.S. global leadership and initiative. The phrase "Constructive Involvement" conveys that meaning.

Military force will continue to be a part of this effort to shape global change, and it is imperative that military objectives be clear. The military instrument of national power will be used in the future as it was in the past: to help shape the global environment by influencing the behavior of international actors; to respond to crises; and to defend our interests. A strategy of selective response meets those objectives. A flexible, expeditionary, and decisive force designed within the constraints of available resources will give the United States the ability to contend successfully with the full array of contingencies likely to be faced into the twenty-first century.

The concepts contained in this article are few and simple. They distill the essence of the world situation and how Americans should deal with it. The authors stress the need for a top-down logic that begins with the most important national objectives and proceeds downward through supporting levels of objectives and strategies. Such an approach has several advantages. Most importantly, it helps strategists and force planners stay focused on the "big picture." Secondly, it links ends and means, from the highest to the lowest levels, thus favoring unity of purpose. Finally, this combined employment of strategy, top-down logic, and descriptors can help both to build continuity and capitalize on change as the Clinton administration attempts to shape the country and the world that it has inherited.

Notes

1. William J. Clinton, Inaugural Address, "An 'American Renewal': Transcript of the Address by President Clinton," *The New York Times*, 21 January 1993.

2. Robert J. Art offers a top-down, interest-driven approach in "A U.S. Military Strategy for the 1990s: Reassurance Without Dominance," *Survival*, Winter 1992-1993, pp. 4-23.

3. For an approach to strategy that proceeds from global trends and power centers, see Henry C. Bartlett and G. Paul Holman, "Grand Strategy and the Structure of U.S. Military Forces," *Strategic Review*, Spring 1992, pp. 39-51.

4. Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1990), p. 182. Nye focuses on five trends that have influenced the diffusion of power. They are "economic interdependence, transnational actors, nationalism in weak states, the spread of technology, and changing political issues." The authors are also indebted to Carl H. Builder's insights, especially his description of the diffusion of power as expressed in conversations and in his unpublished article, "Is It a Transition or a Revolution?"

5. Builder, "Is It a Transition or a Revolution?" pp. 9-11. The author explores the impact of the information revolution upon global change.

6. For a study that also poses three (other) alternate futures, each of which would have distinctly different force planning implications, see William W. Kaufmann, *Assessing the Base Force: How Much Is Too Much?* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1992), pp. 74-75.

7. William J. Clinton, "A New Covenant for American Security," Speech, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.: 21 December 1991 (as published in *Foreign Policy Bulletin*, November/December 1992,

8. George Bush, "United States Defense: Reshaping Our Forces," Speech, Aspen Institute, Aspen, Colo.: 2 August 1990 (*Vital Speeches of the Day*, 1 September 1990, p. 677).

9. Then-Secretary of State James A. Baker, speaking to the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, declared that "We plan to build a democratic peace by pursuing a straightforward policy of American leadership called 'collective engagement.'" (*The New York Times*, 22 April 1992, p. A6.) George Bush continued to use this term in the third edition of his *National Security Strategy of the United States*, January 1993 (see p. 6).

10. In this article, our term "overarching national security strategy" is synonymous with what some authors call "grand strategy" and others "national policy." Such terms capture the sense of a "game plan" that tries to incorporate every instrument of national power to achieve the broadest and most important goals of a country—both at home and abroad.

11. James A. Winnefeld, *The Post-Cold War Force-Sizing Debate: Paradigms, Metaphors, and Disconnects*, R-4243-JS (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1992). Winnefeld does a comprehensive job of linking global assessments to their force-planning implications, arguing that U.S. military forces have a role beyond contingency response. See p. 32 for his effort to divide force requirements into three elements:

- (Help) *shape* the future security environment.
- *Deter* current threats and those that emerge (midterm) in spite of our shaping efforts.
- *Respond* to one or more contingencies when deterrence breaks down.

We would note that Winnefeld omits the requirement to *defend* from this array, although he discusses it elsewhere (for example, p. 47).

12. For our thoughts on the Cold War planning cases, see Henry C. Bartlett and G. Paul Holman, "Dominant Force Planning Cases: Maxwell Taylor for Today's Strategic Thinkers," in Force Planning Faculty, eds., *Fundamentals of Force Planning, Vol. I: Concepts* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1990), pp. 153-166.

13. Mackubin T. Owens, Jr., "After the Gulf War: The Marine Corps and the New National Military Strategy," Force Planning Faculty, eds., *Fundamentals of Force Planning, Vol. II: Defense Planning Cases* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1991), pp. 349-360. He explores the concepts of sequencing, comparative advantage, and complementarity. As an example, Owens points out on p. 353 that "the concept of sequencing helps us to see that Marine Corps and Army forces are not so much in competition for an expeditionary 'mission' as they are complementary contributors of forces for an expeditionary *capability*."

14. Then-Representative Les Aspin asked these questions in the context of the 1992 defense controversy. "An Approach to Sizing American Conventional Forces for the Post-Soviet Era: Four Illustrative Options," presented to the House Armed Services Committee, 25 February 1992, in Force Planning Faculty, eds., *Fundamentals of Force Planning, Vol. III: Strategy and Resources* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1992), pp. 570.

15. For a "balance of power" analysis, one which relies on historic lessons from past major wars, see Colin S. Gray, "Strategic Sense, Strategic Nonsense," *The National Interest*, Fall 1992, pp. 11-19.



1993 Air Power History Symposium

The 1993 Air Power Symposium, sponsored jointly by the Royal Air Force and the United States Air Force history programs, will be held on 9 and 10 September 1993 at Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, D.C. The Symposium will address "Anglo-American Air Power Cooperation during the Cold War Era." Three panels will feature papers by scholars and participants on policy decisions, acquisition, and crisis response. Seating is limited, so those interested in attending should register early. For further information, please contact Dr. Roger G. Miller, Center for Air Force History, CAFH/DR (Building 5681), 170 Luke Ave., Suite 400, Bolling AFB, D.C. 20332-5113, (202) 767-4713.