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Defense Policy Making: Constraints and Opportunities

by

Lawrence J. Korb

The most important thing that military and civilian policy makers bring to the Defense policy arena is their experiences. It is invaluable! It is something one cannot get out of a textbook and it is something one cannot buy or manufacture. At the same time, these leaders and managers must rise above that experience and look objectively at the major issues confronting their services, their agencies and their country. They must reflect, think, and learn not as specialists—all have proven themselves as specialists, whether as a captain of a ship, a commander of an air squadron, a commander of a battalion, or a manager in the public or private sector—but as executives in one of the world's, if not the world's, largest organizations with assets that are best estimated at \$415 billion. A perspective such as this is needed if we are to decide the many complex issues which confront the Department of Defense. In a macro sense, we need to keep in mind the fixed constraints that are policy realities, while exploring the changes that offer policy opportunities.

“It is a simple fact that there exists certain parameters within which we will have to operate They will not change so it is best not to waste time and energy ruminating about them.”

Fixed parameters are the things in the environment that will not change. I found during the period I was teaching students at the Naval War College, that they spent a lot of time trying to change things in the environment with which they did not feel comfortable. It is a simple fact that there exists certain parameters within which we will have to operate over the rest of our careers, and that will confront the national security decision-making environment over the rest of this century. They will not change so it is best not to waste time and energy ruminating about them—take them as a given and go on from there.

I place these fixed environmental parameters in which we will operate into four categories: first, we will deal in the area of resource

constraints; second, we will have to deal with demographic constraints; third, we will have to deal with the situation in which we may have to fight with very little warning; and finally, Congress will become increasingly involved in managing national security policy. Allow me to explore each of those areas in the above order.

There never will be enough money to provide 100 percent security or to provide all the forces that are needed. We will never be free as a nation from economic problems or competing demands from the nondefense areas. Support for defense will be cyclical. The American people always have and always will be volatile in their support for particular policy areas. Let me illustrate this with the situation that we confronted in this Administration. When we came into office, President Reagan added a little over \$200 billion to the five-year program that President Carter had left us—\$200 billion in total obligational authority. Over the last two and a half years some \$75 billion of that has been cut back by both the Executive and the Legislative Branches because we had economic problems, deficit problems, and competing demands from other areas of the budget.

Despite this, the defense situation looks relatively good. We have had five straight years of real increases in the size of the defense budget and that is unprecedented in peacetime. The average real growth since 1980 has been eight percent a year in real terms. Today the debate focuses on not whether we want to increase the defense budget, but on the size of the increase. If you go back a decade ago the debate was over how much we should decrease the defense budget. If you look back at the decade of the 70s you will find that in eight out of ten years the defense budget declined in real purchasing power and over the entire decade defense spending was reduced by an average of three percent a year in real terms.

Next, let us take a look at demographic constraints with which we will have to live. The number of 18 year olds is declining. By 1990 this age group will be almost 20 percent below the 1979 level, which was the peak year of population expansion. It will be during this time frame of declining numbers of 18 year olds that we will be expanding the size of the total force to meet the increasing number of weapons coming into the inventory. Concurrently, we will also have to deal with economic growth in the private sector which will increase competition for those manpower resources. Do not waste your time by thinking about relief that would be available through conscription. We will neither return to the draft—we just do not have the political consensus—nor should we. From my perspective the good old days of the draft were not really that good, and bringing back conscription would bring its own problems—problems that would be much greater than those faced by the All Volunteer Force. Contrary to the belief of

many people, returning to the draft would not save money but would be more expensive because it would result in higher turnover and a much less experienced force. We can make the All Volunteer Force work, that is bring the people in on a volunteer basis, if the American people support the military and—to use President Reagan’s phrase—it remains an honor to wear the uniform of the country. And we will continue to bring in the right type of people on a volunteer basis if we also provide a fair and competitive pay system. Do not lament the fact that pay consumes the largest portion of the defense budget and that it could be better spent elsewhere. Not only should it be spent on people but it is money well spent because in the final analysis it is people, not hardware, that will bring us military victory.

Further, do not bemoan the fact that the force has a considerable number of women. Women are in the force and they are here to stay. They are an integral part of the force and they make very positive contributions. Women in the force are not an afterthought or something we used to get through the very difficult decade of the 1970s when we instituted the All Volunteer Force. The number of women in the force is growing and will continue to grow as will the opportunities in the nontraditional fields available to women within the constraints of the law. Do not get trapped into subtle forms of institutional discrimination that prevent women from fulfilling their potential or, to borrow the phrase that the Army uses in its recruiting posters, preventing them from “being all that they can be.”

Let me turn to the third point about being prepared to fight. The next war will be a come-as-you-are party, because we really cannot guarantee that we will get very much warning and, even if we did, we do not have the industrial base to do very much about it. As I sit in the councils of the Pentagon, I sometimes wonder why it is that civilians are concerned with wartime readiness posture and people in uniform seem to be concerned only about peacetime force structure. Why is it that career and “political” civilians in the office of the Secretary of Defense are pushing the hardest in areas of *mobilization*, *deployment*, and *sustainment* both in the Executive Branch and on the Hill? Since 1980 when this Administration came into office, funds for modernization have almost doubled while funds for readiness and sustainability have gone up only by about a third. We are now at a crossroads as we try to “trim back our sails” because of the cuts imposed by both the Executive and the Legislative Branches. We have to ensure that the forces that have been procured by our significant modernization effort are ready and sustainable, and that they can be supported properly when they come into the force. I think it would be the height of irony if this Administration came into office with, for example, a 500-ship Navy that was not ready to fight and would have to leave with a 600-ship Navy that was no less ready to fight.

The last factor that must be taken as a given is Congressional involvement. Since this Administration has been in office we have seen it in a number of areas. There has been a ceiling on the number of troops in Europe, there has been the establishment of an independent testing officer, and there has been an increased concern on the Hill for the role of the Reserves. This is a product of Vietnam, Watergate, and a lot of other events over which we have no control. But this is not the time to lambast Congress. When you take a look at most of the areas that Congress did get involved in, it is primarily because we in defense have resisted taking the required action. Too often the Executive Branch will dig in their feet on an issue, and the Congress had to take action because something needed to be done.

At this juncture you might be wondering, "Well, if we have to deal with those constraints then what is it we must do about it?" There are a number of things that I think you can do; a number of things I would like you to consider as opportunities in the policy arena.

First of all, we have to give more than lip service to the total force. It is like motherhood, everyone is in favor of it, but when it comes to resource allocation it becomes a different story. Whether one believes in the total force, by that I mean the Reserves and civilians as well as active military, does not really make much of a difference as the message from Congress is clear—we will *not* get the active-duty manpower that we desire. We have to begin to give the right amount of training, new equipment, and leadership to the Reserves. We have to examine the missions that they can fulfill and this cannot be done on a piecemeal or incremental basis. I really believe that we can and should find new missions for the Reserves, missions that they can perform if they receive adequate resources and training. It is prudent that we begin to plan for it *now* because it takes considerable time to make the transition in the correct way. I think we need to ask ourselves whether in fact Reserves can be integral parts of naval battle groups; whether they can play more of a role in the tactical air forces; and whether there can be more Reserve component brigades in our active divisions.

Next, we need to examine what roles that civilians, often a neglected part of the total force, can perform. By civilians I think of both those who work for the government and those with whom the government contracts for services. Base support is an area in which civilians in the private sector do an excellent job. In places like Bangor, Washington, the National Training Center, and in Vance AFB private contractors are operating bases. We definitely must make additional efforts in this area. Take a look at what our allies do as an example. The Germans have no military operating their base infrastructure. I think we have to recognize that civilians are just as patriotic and dedicated as those in uniform and not only does it save us money, but it enables us to make better use of scarce military manpower. I recognize that some who have been in the field are dead set against this idea. They may feel

that one would lose control over their work force and when one deals with civilians or with contractors, one must deal with unions and work rules. But the fact of the matter is, with limited military manpower, we must begin to move in this area or we are going to have great difficulties in the future.

I referred to the fact that Congress has put a ceiling on the number of troops in Europe. That ceiling is something with which we must live and, therefore, we must deal with it intelligently. If we do not begin to use more civilians, both US civilians and foreign nationals, we are going to have to withdraw combat troops from Europe; something that nobody wants. When you analyze our force structure in Europe, you find that for every three Army troops there, there is one civilian doing important tasks. But yet in the Air Force there is only one civilian for every six uniformed persons. The ratio of military to civilian across the Services is an area that we have to scrutinize and one where opportunities for efficiencies abound.

We need to pay more attention to logistics support all throughout the acquisition cycle. We should do research and development on logistics just as we do on system performance. This is necessary so that weapon repair can be accomplished more rapidly and with less manpower. The Army has a wonderful system coming into the force, the Apache advanced attack helicopter. It has 1980s technology but its logistics support is of the early 1970s and requires toting around a 40 foot van.

We have to pay more attention to industrial mobilization. We had before the Congress this year a relatively inexpensive program that would have enabled us to cut or surge capability time—the time in which we could double the production rate of systems like the TOW Antitank missile, the Phoenix air-to-air missile and the F-100 engine. Yet both the logistics R&D program and the industrial mobilization program did not get a warm reception from Congress because these initiatives did not have wide support by the members of the Uniformed Services and some civilians in the Pentagon.

We also have to begin to work more with our allies. The idea of coalition warfare, like the total force, is not something to which you can just give lip service. We have to take advantage of the unique capabilities of our allies. There is no reason why we cannot rely on them more for combat service support in Europe. In the early days of this Administration we concluded an innovative agreement with the Germans in the area of host nation support. Under the terms of this agreement the Germans would provide us almost 100,000 Reservists from their own armed forces to provide combat service support for us. Yet this program almost died on the Hill because of lack of enthusiasm from many members of the Executive Branch. Not only do we have to push this through the Congress but we have to look at other areas of the world, such as Korea, to see where we can make similar agreements.

Together with our allies we have to purchase common equipment. Too often we tell our European allies that standardization and interoperability considerations dictate that they should buy and use our equipment. We have to begin to look at buying more of their equipment for our forces.

DoD must become more efficient and well-managed. I am convinced that when looking at the needs of the military the American people will be very generous in supporting increases because they recognize that defense has been underfunded for a long time. However, they will not support increased expenditures if they do not perceive that DoD is well-managed. Let me outline a couple of areas in which we have tried to achieve management reforms and have been thwarted over and over because we have been a house divided against ourselves. First, the area of surface transportation is a mess. This situation has been recognized by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, yet nothing has happened. Second, there is no reason why we cannot have the Defense Logistics Agency involved more in the management of consumables so the Services can work on what they do best, that is repairing and working on end items. Third, there is no reason why our base support functions have to be so expensive. Every time we study base support we find that even if the government competes with industry and wins the contract, the competition saves us 20-30 percent of our manpower cost. Yet in each of these areas Congress has prevented us from moving very far because we have been a house divided against ourselves, that is, certain groups lobby against corrective actions because they impact on Service prerogatives. It has always amazed me how military people can expect extreme loyalty from their subordinates and, yet, they do not give it to the Secretary of Defense when it comes to issues that impact on Service roles and missions.

In conclusion, these are the challenges that we face but they can be managed. We are certainly better off than a decade ago. Ten years ago the military could look forward to years of shrinking defense budgets and the creation of an All Volunteer Force without adequate planning or experience. That is behind us and we have now a Secretary of Defense and a President who are strongly and firmly committed to providing us with the best. You have the right stuff, the real question is to do the right thing. It is basic to our survival.

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