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NEEDED: PREPARATION FOR COALITION WAR

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NEEDED: PREPARATION FOR COALITION WAR

It is a tribute to the Army's resilience as an institution that it has bounced back so vigorously from the trauma of the Vietnam War. All in all, it seems surprisingly lean and healthy so soon after withdrawing from Vietnam. It has successfully made the tough transition from a draft to a volunteer army. Spurred by a dynamic new Training and Doctrine Command, it has in process major changes in doctrine, tactics, training, equipment, and even force structure. It has pruned headquarters, facilities, and the traditionally large expeditionary force tail that characterizes an Army structured to project itself overseas, to create more combat units -- notably three additional divisions -- out of a fixed personnel ceiling. And it has deployed two more brigades to Europe by scrubbing out tail within a fixed European ceiling, too. Many new items of sophisticated equipment -- some of it impressive by any standards -- are being developed and deployed. For the first time in its history, the Army even seems to have designed a superior tank, perhaps even better than the best the Germans can offer. Although the Army often seems to be its own worst publicity agent, these many evolutionary changes over the last few years add up to a near revolutionary improvement.

This trend has been powerfully reinforced by the Army's wise decision, after disengaging from Southeast Asia, to re-emphasize as its logical primary mission NATO deterrence and defense. NATO has always been the contingency that largely dictates the Army's overall size, configuration, doctrine, tactics, and equipment. It is the only justification for a 16-division active Army and a 24-division Total Force. No other plausible contingencies call for a force of remotely this size. Indeed the NATO scenario is the sizing case for most of our general purpose forces. (This article, however, will focus mostly on the Army.)

Yet there remains one enormous gap in this process of optimizing our forces for the NATO mission -- we still are not taking adequately into account the special requirements of coalition war. These requirements entail far more than combined command arrangements and

adequate provision for liaison -- important as these are. They mean more than overcoming the language barrier. They involve harmonization of doctrine, tactics, and procedures, compatibility of forces and logistics, interoperability if not standardization of equipment, munitions, and communications, even training and operating together -- in short, all the interfaces indispensable to fighting effectively alongside allies. Military history is replete with examples of the high costs of failing to take these obvious factors into account. One classic (and quite relevant) case is the Axis victory of 1940, when French, British, Dutch, and Belgian failure to operate effectively together contributed to their disastrous defeat.

As noted in the Army's splendid new version of its basic doctrine, FM 100-5, America too has fought as part of a coalition in every one of our major Twentieth Century wars. In World War I we were the late-arriving junior partner of the Entente and largely used its tactics and equipment. In World War II we became a senior partner, but we fought again in Europe as part of a coalition that we equipped largely from our own enormous war production. Korea and Vietnam were also coalition wars, if of a rather different type. Though we were the dominant partner, we also equipped and trained large ROK and RVNAF forces, which during most of these conflicts were numerically larger and took more casualties than our own troops. Other substantial allied contingents also served.

Surprisingly, despite all this wartime experience, we never spent much effort in peacetime preparing explicitly for coalition warfare again next time around. Instead, our services retreated into their institutional shells and postured as though we and the enemy would be the only ones on the battlefield. No doctrine ever emerged. Rather, in each succeeding conflict we developed an ad hoc response after war started. This worked out all right in World Wars I and II in Europe, because in both cases we had plenty of time for gradual buildup and sorting out the problems while our allies held the ring. In Korea the reverse was true. We had to hold the ring while we built up the ROK forces in a notably successful ad hoc response. Perhaps this conditioned us to "ad hoc" an RVNAF buildup again

in Vietnam. It would be instructive to analyze the reasons why this worked so well in the ROK and so poorly in Vietnam.

But let's focus on today and tomorrow, because coalition war is even more likely to be the dominant mode of employment of our general purpose forces -- and of even more critical importance. For our strategy of forward defense and overseas force projection is highly dependent on working together with allies in the key NATO scenario (indeed almost any major contingency for which we are currently posturing). This time, as FM 100-5 points out, we can no longer afford to be "historically unprepared to fight the first battle." Instead we must win it, fighting outnumbered. There will be no time to "ad hoc" again after war starts. And when we stress posturing to win the first battle fighting outnumbered, let's remember that this means NATO, not just the U.S. It matters little if our V and VII Corps stand like the Rock of the Marne in the Folda and Meiningen gaps if the rest of NATO's crucial Center Region crumbles around us.

How the U.S. Fails to Posture for Coalition War

But there remains an enormous disconnect between this strategy and doctrine and our posturing to carry it out, a disconnect so serious as to call into question whether we and our allies can successfully carry out the coalition strategy we have designed. A brief look at how we still tend to neglect preparing for coalition war will show what I mean. I'll use the U.S. Army as my chief example, though the other services are in the same boat. And our allies are just as bad. None of us thinks NATO; we all think only in terms of our own national force contributions to it.

Let's start with what we teach at our service schools, since here is where the thinking of our professionals is formed. I am stunned that even our war colleges teach so little about coalition war (or about war itself for that matter). Their curricula mostly ignore it. When I inquired whether Leavenworth teaches coalition operations at the tactical level, I found they only looked briefly at allied unit organization and rank badges. Or take our professional literature -- hardly any attention to coalition war here. Indeed it's

surprising how little attention there is to this subject in allied military literature as a whole.

Although we plan to support allies in wartime, are our doctrines, tactics, and procedures harmonized, or at least compatible, so that we can cross-reinforce each other effectively? Do the tactics we teach at branch schools and at Leavenworth take into account that the allied troops alongside whom we are likely to fight are often structured and equipped differently, and use quite different procedures than we? Hence can our artillery readily support adjacent allied units and they us? Can we even read their map symbols and they ours? Are our logistics systems compatible, so that we can support each other logistically if need be? The answer is no.

And what about interoperability, if not standardization of equipment, so essential to coalition operations? Gardiner Tucker, NATO's former Assistant Secretary General for Defense Production, remarked that the trend is toward more destandardization instead. Nowhere have the needs of coalition warfare been more sedulously neglected. Despite a few bright spots, the proliferation of widely varying systems among the NATO allies approaches scandal. This results from largely duplicatory and overlapping R&D programs, and failure to reap the production economies of scale. Of course, the maintenance and resupply complications are horrendous too. As for the U.S. Army, DCSRDA and DARCOM seem to design and produce equipment as if the U.S. Army were the only force in NATO and we'd be fighting the Russians alone. They rarely take into account allied requirements in designing or producing new equipment; the Army has often tripped over its own overzealous performance demands. We cannot expect that an item designed for allied use will necessarily meet all our own exaggerated criteria. Yet we usually do.

Lack of adequate interoperability in tactical communications is a particular scandal, since it is indispensable to effective conduct of coalition war. We can't even talk with each other over most of the tactical communications presently in use and, worse yet, under development by ourselves and others. For example, we've been working for years on TRI-TAC, a triservice family of common equipment. But

is it more important that our Army be able to communicate with our Navy than with allied ground forces, say the German or British? The House Appropriations Committee says that in INTACS the Army has come up with its first comprehensive communications plan that looks ten years ahead. But does it take adequately into account the need to communicate with allies? Sure we can exchange liaison teams to add expensive black box interfaces to our equipment. But these are cumulatively very expensive solutions to problems we should have thought through in the first place.

Underlying the renewed need for an optimum collective defense posture, as opposed to independent and often incompatible national postures, is a simple fact -- growing military interdependence among allies. To put it baldly, the Japanese alone cannot defend Japan, the European allies alone cannot defend Europe. A U.S. contribution is indispensable, and we plan on it. But we must posture for it more sensibly too. For the U.S. is also dependent on its allies. In addition to their real estate, we expect to use their port facilities, bases, depots, transport systems, communications, and many other resources. So interdependence is a fact of life for U.S. as well as allied planners -- whether we take it fully into account or not.

Why Aren't We Optimizing for the NATO Scenario?

While the NATO scenario is our sizing case, we are not yet optimizing our GPF posture for this classic coalition need. Paradoxically, it is the U.S. that has been at the same time the strongest voice in NATO and the worst offender in terms of "going it alone." We are cast in the ambivalent role of leading NATO, yet insisting on full freedom of action in posturing our own forces. Admittedly, the U.S. faces more of a dilemma than any other ally in terms of posturing for NATO missions vs. other contingencies. As a superpower it has a global role. And non-NATO contingencies seem far more likely to occur than a major WP/NATO clash. So the U.S. must maintain general purpose forces, not just tailor them all for the NATO scenario. But one consequence has been that the U.S. force posture displays far more of the go-it-alone syndrome than

that of any other ally except France. Even our forces in Europe (not to mention our other NATO-earmarked forces) are more self-contained, the grossly overdone argument being that the U.S. must structure on an expeditionary force basis to project its military power overseas and must be able to use Europe-oriented forces for non-NATO contingencies. And in the area of defense production, the U.S. wants to have its cake and eat it too. It follows a policy of military self-sufficiency, while wanting NATO to standardize mostly on U.S. equipment.

But can we afford such expensive practices any longer in the face of a growing threat and continued fiscal constraints? Tailoring a large fraction of the U.S. force posture more explicitly for the NATO coalition mission could: (a) free substantial resources for tradeoff; (b) materially improve the effectiveness of our NATO contribution; and (c) last but not least, actually improve army capabilities for responding to other contingencies as well. I have in mind such measures as faster reinforcement, a more relevant reserve structure, and the economies and efficiencies inherent in both greater reliance on host nation support and more compatible or common R&D and defense production.

For example, we are coming around belatedly to realize that we can no longer afford the luxury of gradual mobilization while our allies hold the ring, as was the case in World Wars I and II. If NATO's biggest worry is a short-warning blitzkrieg breakthrough of its thin covering forces, then quickest possible U.S. reinforcement is of even higher priority than more massive reinforcement later on. Lifting two or three U.S. divisions to Europe within a week of M-day might make all the difference. It would give the Center Region its only real reserve to counter threatened breakthrough. And it is quite feasible to get at least the heavy divisions of REFORGER and 2+10 to Europe in a week or so, particularly since all but their individual equipment will be prepositioned in Europe when POMCUS stocks are rebuilt. The remaining need is enhanced readiness, such as allowing higher unit strengths. This can be a straight tradeoff between readiness and something less essential.

Quick reinforcement also means that the traditional U.S. Army practice of taking an enormous expeditionary force tail with it for self-sufficient operations is no longer feasible. Instead we simply have to rely more on use of available host nation resources, if we are to be able to deploy sufficient combat forces quickly enough to cope with a Warsaw Pact blitzkrieg. Fortunately, today's Western Europe is rich in many of the assets that we formerly had to bring from CONUS.

Maximum flexibility of force employment is also critical to halting blitzkrieg. As SACEUR is stressing, he must be able quickly to concentrate ground forces -- of whatever nationality -- at the crucial points if he is to prevent breakthroughs. But achieving this flexibility will be critically dependent on compatibility of forces, doctrine, tactics, and procedures, not to mention interoperability, if not standardization of equipment. I need hardly stress their importance to professional readers, especially for operating in other national sectors -- as U.S. forces will inevitably have to do.

Preparing for Coalition War Is Now Critically Important

In short, there is an overwhelming case as to why we and our allies must start preparing better for coalition war. Failure to do so was not so crucial a flaw in earlier, slower moving conflicts, or when U.S. nuclear superiority provided NATO's real deterrent. But in today's fast moving world, when Soviet blitzkrieg capabilities are growing, can we any longer neglect preparing in peacetime?

There are strong budgetary reasons too. As any officer who ever served on a Pentagon staff well knows, affordability is what drives the decision process. At a time of sharp fiscal constraints and competing priorities, can national defense managers any longer afford the costly waste and duplication inherent in failing to posture optimally for coalition war? And how long will our Congress stand for it? Already Senators Nunn, Culver, McIntyre, and Taft are probing this issue. But the Congress in turn must recognize that funding combined training and exercises, enhanced readiness, and

and standardization -- more in the last few years than in the previous few decades. Our Army itself is looking much more seriously at utilization of host nation resources, both to save spaces in peacetime and to meet urgent wartime requirements without the need to bring so huge an expeditionary-force tail from the CONUS. And for the first time, the new FM 100-5 includes a whole chapter on NATO (which in effect stresses the same need as does this article). But so far all this is only a promising beginning.

Nor do I wish to underestimate the difficulty of achieving practical solutions. The problems involved are enormously complex. Whatever the clearcut advantages of defense cooperation, national particularism will die hard. Bureaucratic inertia is another potent obstacle. At a conservative estimate, it could take 20 years to create an optimal coalition posture from the present mess. But it won't be achieved at all unless all the problems outlined herein are addressed seriously and consistently.

This will not happen -- it never has in NATO -- unless the U.S. takes the lead. Since the U.S. Army has the most to gain and most to lose among the U.S. services, it should point the way by analyzing the lessons of the past, developing a coherent doctrine for coalition warfare, and then pressing for the decisions needed to carry it into effect. Unless the Army does so, it will be omitting a vital element from its promising post-Vietnam recovery. Because our Army is being sized and configured primarily for what FM 100-5 rightly calls the most demanding scenario, it must be able to demonstrate convincingly that Western Europe can be defended against a growing threat. To do so credibly within likely constraints, we and our allies must better prepare to fight together effectively. Nor should it be forgotten that posturing for coalition war is essential to most non-European contingencies too. In sum, it is central to the Army's own future -- and potentially the nation's future as well.

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