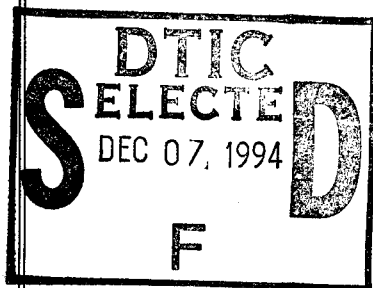


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The Post-Cold War Era and The Weinberger Doctrine



Lieutenant Colonel
Kathy L. Johnson
United States Air Force

Faculty Research Advisor
Mr. James E. Toth

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THE POST -COLD WAR ERA AND THE WEINBERGER DOCTRINE

Lt Col Kathy L. Johnson, USAF

At the height of the Cold War, in 1984, then Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger developed six criteria for deciding when to use United States combat forces abroad. These criteria, which became known as the Weinberger Doctrine, outlined specific tests which should be met before deploying United States combat forces.

The criteria were developed at a time when some members of the Reagan Administration appeared eager to use combat force as the instrument of choice for influencing world events. Secretary Weinberger, on the other hand, believed that military force is just one of many tools of national power, and certainly not the preferred tool in every situation. Thus, he sought to restrict use of combat forces to specific situations where they could be most effective.

In the ten years since Secretary Weinberger first enunciated his tests for the use of combat forces, the world political environment has changed tremendously: the Berlin wall is down, Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe has ended, and the Soviet leadership has renounced its communist doctrine. The Cold War is over. Yet, our troops are still actively engaged in a number of countries. And at home, we are in the midst of a public debate concerning the use of United States military forces abroad.

Because of this changed (and changing) world political environment, now is an appropriate time to examine the relevance of the Weinberger Doctrine to the post-Cold War world. In this paper I describe the background of the Weinberger Doctrine, and discuss each of the six criteria, with emphasis on how the criteria relate to the post-Cold War environment. After examining two significant changes--the shifting balances of power and the increased threat of regional conflicts--I explain why we no longer need the Weinberger Doctrine.

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Introduction

At the height of the Cold War, in 1984, then Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger developed six criteria for deciding when to use United States combat forces abroad. These criteria, which became known as the Weinberger Doctrine, outlined specific tests which should be met before deploying United States combat forces.¹ Stated as questions, the tests asked:

Is a vital national interest at stake?

Will we commit enough forces to win?

Do we have clearly defined political and military objectives?

Will we reassess and adjust our forces as necessary?

Will Congress and the American people support the action?

Is the use of force our last resort?

The criteria were developed at a time when some members of the Reagan Administration appeared eager to use combat force as the instrument of choice for influencing world events.² Secretary Weinberger, on the other hand, believed that military force is just one of many tools of national power, and certainly not the preferred tool in every situation. Thus, he sought to restrict use of combat forces to specific situations where they could be most effective.³

In the ten years since Secretary Weinberger first enunciated his tests for the use of combat forces, the world political environment has changed tremendously: the Berlin wall is down, Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe has ended, and the Soviet leadership has renounced its communist doctrine. The Cold War is over.

Yet, our troops are still actively engaged in a number of countries. And at home, we are in the midst of a public debate concerning the use of United States military forces abroad. As the world's only remaining superpower, some advocate the United States adopt an interventionist role. Others note that with our own economic problems, the United States cannot afford to be "the World's policeman."⁴

Blechman and Kaplan, writing almost 20 years ago, asserted that military forces are less likely to be used when foreign policy is unambiguous and matches "the reality of limits on the US ability to influence world affairs."⁵ Today, with increased uncertainty in our foreign policy, and serious concerns about our ability to shape the world as we might like, we are witnessing the obverse of this assertion--our military operations tempo remains at a high level.

Because of this changed (and changing) world political environment, now is an appropriate time to examine the relevance of the Weinberger Doctrine to the post-Cold War world. In this paper I will describe the background of the Weinberger Doctrine, and discuss each of the six criteria, with emphasis on how the criteria relate to the post-Cold War

environment. After examining two significant changes--shifting balances of power and the increased threat of regional conflicts--I will explain why we no longer need the Weinberger Doctrine.

The Weinberger Doctrine: Background and Reaction

The genesis of the Doctrine was two well-known United States military "failures"--the Vietnam War, and the terrorist bombing of United States Marines in Lebanon in 1983.⁶ Both represented situations where United States military forces, in spite of overwhelmingly superior equipment and weapons, failed to accomplish their objectives. Indeed, even in retrospect, it is not clear what those objectives were. Also, as mentioned in the Introduction, Secretary Weinberger was serving in a "hawkish" Administration, known for its propensity to use military force for achieving foreign policy objectives. By applying specific criteria to determine the use of military force, Secretary Weinberger hoped to temper the influence of those people in the Administration who were more likely to rely upon the military.⁷

The Weinberger Doctrine generated a great deal of public debate. Numerous critics charged that the Doctrine heralded a United States return to isolationism.⁸ Terry Deibel, a professor at the National War College, argued that by adhering to the Weinberger Doctrine, there would be very few places where the United States could use military forces.⁹ Essayist William Safire wrote that applying the Weinberger Doctrine would require a popularity poll

before entering a conflict, resulting in only the "Fun" wars being fought.¹⁰ Similarly, Edward Luttwak, a military analyst, indicated that by outlining his Doctrine, Weinberger told the world that we would only use military forces where we know we're going to win quickly and easily, and only if we have complete public support.¹¹ According to William F. Buckley, Jr., "Weinberger sets an impossible standard. The *sine qua non* of popular support is success. But if the mission is indeed 'vital,' then it has to be carried out, even at the risk of failure."¹²

Proponents, although neither as numerous nor as vocal as critics, praised the Weinberger Doctrine for representing a well-reasoned approach to the use of military power.¹³ Paradoxically, advocates came from two traditionally disparate groups: liberals and the military. Liberals supported the Doctrine because they believed it would constrain the indiscriminate use of military force as an instrument of national power.¹⁴ The military, who suffered in Vietnam and Lebanon from limited public support, poorly defined objectives, and inadequate forces, welcomed the Weinberger Doctrine as a definitive guide for the use of military power.¹⁵

Within the Reagan Administration, opinion on the value of the Weinberger Doctrine was divided. Persistent conflicts between Secretary of State George Shultz and Secretary Weinberger were already common knowledge before the Doctrine was announced. It was not surprising, therefore, that the greatest differences of opinion regarding the Weinberger Doctrine were between the Departments of State and Defense. Secretary Shultz publicly

disagreed with the Doctrine since he believed it would unduly restrict our use of combat forces in situations abroad. Secretary Weinberger, for his part, accused Secretary Shultz of being too eager to use combat troops to achieve "fuzzy diplomatic objectives."¹⁶

The Six Tests of the Weinberger Doctrine

The six tests of the Weinberger Doctrine, on first glance, appear surprisingly straightforward and easy to understand. Looks, however, can be deceiving. In reality, the tests are very complex, and subject to interpretation in both intent and application.

Test One **The United States should not commit forces to combat overseas unless the particular engagement or occasion is deemed vital to our national interest or that of our allies.**

Few, if any, Americans would argue the appropriateness of using combat forces when United States interests are threatened. The issue is deciding exactly what is vital to our national interest. Obviously, such decisions are easier at the extremes--for example, a direct attack on the United States is clearly a threat to our national interest; a fight among neighboring tribes in New Guinea is not. Between these two ends of the continuum, there is much room for discussion.

A quick review of newspaper headlines for the past eight months indicates we are in the midst of just such a discussion.¹⁷ Ostensibly the debate concerns the functions of and need for the United States military in the post-Cold War world. In reality, however, the debate is more fundamental: it focuses on our struggle to delineate United States national interests.

How we resolve this struggle has important implications for all of us. If we define national interest narrowly (i.e., only in terms of situations which represent a direct threat to our security), the result will be a foreign policy characterized by isolationism. There will be few situations requiring United States involvement. A more encompassing definition of national interest will result in an internationalist approach, with far more situations compelling us to become involved.

Obviously, we must achieve closure, if not consensus, on the definition of national interest in order to have a coherent foreign policy approach. Without closure, our reactions to world events, and corresponding decisions on the use of military force, will be arbitrary and subject to the whims of public sentiment. Secretary Weinberger's Test One was designed to preclude such capriciousness. However, our continuing policy shifts on the use of military force--witness our confusion in Bosnia and Somalia, for example--testify to the practical difficulties in using this test.

To a certain extent, these difficulties are the inevitable result of the flexibility inherent in Test One. Secretary Weinberger acknowledged that rather than being etched in stone, American interests are situational, and must be influenced by our best judgment and basic values.¹⁸

This flexibility has both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, the ambiguity facilitates freedom of action--we can broaden or narrow our focus on world situations, and therefore our need to become involved, by revising our views on what is in our national interest. Being unpredictable has some obvious advantages, while being predictable in some cases is dangerous. For example, in 1950 we mistakenly omitted South Korea from our definition of the United States "defense perimeter" in Asia, with tragic results.

On the negative side, ambiguity can cause political problems, both at home and abroad. Domestically, it's hard to get public support for a foreign policy based on shifting views of national interests. Most people prefer hard and fast rules as a basis for foreign policy actions. From an international perspective, other countries find it disconcerting to deal with an ally who refuses to specify the "rules of engagement" for becoming involved in situations abroad.

Test Two If we decide it is necessary to put combat troops into a given situation, we should do so wholeheartedly and with the clear intention of winning; **Test Three** If we decide to commit forces to combat overseas, we should have clearly defined political

and military objectives.

Tests Two and Three assume that we only use combat forces in well-defined situations where we have a clear intent to "win" the conflict. This assumption is a logical outgrowth of the Vietnam experience, and may still be applicable to a limited number of situations we're likely to face in the future. The tests ignore, however, the fact that at times we might want to intervene not to win a war, but simply to influence in some way the behavior of the party or parties concerned.

We traditionally define "winning" almost exclusively in a tactical sense; that is, we define "winning" as achieving victory in a given combat situation. This definition does not consider the strategic implications of our actions; nor does it acknowledge that we might win the battle, but lose the war.

Vietnam provides an interesting example of this shortsightedness. While negotiating in Hanoi a few days before Saigon fell, US Army Colonel (now retired) Harry Summers Jr. told a North Vietnamese Colonel: "You know, you never defeated us on the battlefield." The Colonel replied: "That may be so, but it is also irrelevant."¹⁹

Just as it was irrelevant in Vietnam, our traditional concept of "winning" might also be irrelevant to the types of military operations we are likely to face in the future. In many of

these conflicts, our combat troops will serve in multilateral coalitions with forces drawn from other United Nations (UN) or North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries, or even from the former Soviet Union. Furthermore, as we recently saw in Somalia, the mission for our troops can shift, in a short period of time, from peace-making to peace-keeping to peace-enforcing to nation-building.²⁰ In these ambiguous situations, we frequently don't understand who the enemy is (perhaps because there isn't an enemy, in the typical sense), so it's difficult to define what constitutes winning, and what our objectives are.

By restricting the use of combat forces to clear-cut fights we can win, the Weinberger Doctrine potentially impairs the effectiveness of military force as an instrument of national power. This restriction ignores the fact there may be some circumstances when we want to undertake a limited military action rather than engage in an all-out war. In some situations, a well-planned and executed limited military action can preclude the need for a "larger war."

Test Four The relationship between our objectives and the forces we have committed--their size, composition, and disposition--must be continually reassessed and adjusted if necessary.

This test recognizes that combat situations are fluid, and requirements must be adjusted, as necessary. It's difficult to find fault with this concept; a prudent commander will always closely monitor the match between objectives and forces. In addition to providing assurance

that the forces are adequate for the job, this monitoring will also help prevent mission creep by requiring continual assessment and reassessment of the match between ends and means.

Test Four is also applicable to our current non-combat (i.e., "peacetime") environment. Many people assume that with the end of the Cold War we can significantly cut defense expenditures since we no longer need as large or strong a military as we had before. No doubt, there is some excess military capability we no longer need. However, the end of the Cold War does not necessarily mean greater stability. The potential for regional conflicts in a number of "hot spots" around the world may mean that we need a different type of military force, with different capabilities. For example, we might need a deployable force with the airlift and sealift to get to remote trouble spots quickly.

Our capability to meet military challenges in the coming years depends, to a large extent, on our success in properly tailoring our forces. This tailoring must include the flexibility to change not just the size and composition of the troops, but also their "combat" orientation--we need motivated and well-trained troops who are as adept at combat and humanitarian missions as they are at the "peace-" missions.

Test Five Before the United States commits combat forces abroad, there must be some reasonable assurance we will have the support of the American people and their elected representatives in Congress.

Public hostility towards members of the Armed Forces, resulting from their role in a conflict not widely supported, was a painful reality during the Vietnam War.²¹ While Test Five is, at least in part, a result of this experience; it also has a historical basis in the writings of Carl von Clausewitz.

In his book On War, Clausewitz described the "paradoxical trinity" of the people (violence and passion), the military (uncertainty and chance), and the government (political purpose and effect).²² He believed the conduct of war requires a balance between these three elements. Thus, according to Clausewitz, the role of government is to "abstract the energies of society without succumbing to their irrational power: a government channels psychic energy into rational policy, which the army helps carry out."²³

Desert Storm is a recent example of a military operation where Clausewitz's three elements were in balance--President Bush did an excellent job defining for the American people the importance of deterring Iraqi aggression. As a result of his efforts, the military successfully carried out a major combat operation that was widely supported by the people.

Some military actions, such as the US attack of terrorist sites in Libya and the invasion of Grenada, generate their own public enthusiasm. More typically, however, as in the Desert Storm example, our government must actively cultivate public support for its military actions. This can be a very difficult task; the American public is fickle, and at times support for a

given operation appears to ebb and flow with the daily news reports. The media, by providing near real-time information on a given conflict, significantly complicates the issue of public support. Broadcast media, such as cable news, in deciding which world situations to publicize, can have tremendous influence on our foreign policy.

Recent events in Somalia highlight the relationship between media reporting of military actions and public support. Our troops first deployed to Somalia as part of a humanitarian effort. Initially, most people appeared to support the deployment, or at least there were no widespread cries against it. Public support continued as we saw food being delivered to starving people. Despite the fact that the mission changed, first to restoring law and order, then to nation building, and finally to capturing Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed, the majority of Americans continued to support our military involvement with Somalia.

The tide of public support turned quickly, however, following the deaths of 18 American soldiers on 3 Oct 93. The evening news showed videotapes of angry Somalis dragging an American soldier's corpse through the streets. Suddenly, the public began to question if we had a reason to be involved in that country. As one columnist noted, our altruism appeared to shrink when the blood of American soldiers was spilled.²⁴ The result: a Congressional mandate and a Presidential decision to remove all United States troops from Somalia by 31 March 94.

Ideally, we would always want to ensure support of the American people before committing combat forces abroad. Realistically, however, such "spontaneous" support will not always be available beforehand. There will be many times when the government must take an active role, as did President Bush during Desert Storm, in convincing the public they should support a military action. The bottom line is that Americans typically will support military action they believe is in their nation's interests.

Test Six **The commitment of US forces to combat should be a last resort--only after diplomatic, political, economic, and other efforts have been made to protect our vital interests.**

According to this test, we should exhaust all other means of influence before actually using combat forces. In other words, Secretary Weinberger intended this test to ensure we apply military force judiciously and not indiscriminately. If all other means of achieving our objectives have been tried unsuccessfully, then and only then should we resort to combat. As former Secretary of State Shultz noted, "Americans will always be reluctant to use force....It is a mark of our decency."²⁵

Some people have suggested that Test Six would preclude us from using combat troops as a "show of force." This interpretation is not consistent with Secretary Weinberger's approach. To understand Test Six, it's important to distinguish between the use of combat

forces (i.e., the actual conduct of war), and the use of military force short of combat. Using the military strictly for a show of force in or near a conflict area, prior to attempting diplomatic, political, economic or other efforts, is consistent with this test. As an example, we recently used the threat of military exercises with South Korea to convince North Korea of our concerns about its presumed nuclear capability.

The Current World Political Environment

Much has changed in the world political environment since the Weinberger Doctrine was developed. One of the most dramatic changes was the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. Many people believed that with the demise of the Soviet Union, the world would become a safer place.

While it's true we are not as afraid of a nuclear missile attack from the Soviet Union as we once were, the world is still a dangerous place. In the words of former Secretary of Defense Les Aspin said, "The new world order is long on the new world and short on the order."²⁶ There are many reasons for this "New World Disorder." I'll describe two of these in detail: the shifting balances of power and the increased threat of regional conflicts..

Shifting Balances of Power: Adapting to a Multipolar World

During the Cold War, when the world was bipolar, there was little ambiguity concerning anticipated actions and reactions of the two superpowers and the countries aligned with them. Within the United States, the Soviet threat helped forge a consensus and cement our national will to support relatively large defense budgets and oftentimes difficult alliances.²⁷ Just as a small kid will rely on a stronger one for protection against the playground bully, the Soviet threat resulted in some countries allying themselves with the United States and following our lead on a number of issues.

Now, without the unifying theme of containing communism as a guide, international relations are more confusing, and United States foreign policy is correspondingly more complex. The words of Soviet spokesperson Georgi Arbatov in 1988 have proven chillingly prophetic: "we are going to do a terrible thing to you--we are going to deprive you of an enemy."

Unquestionably, the US remains the world's only superpower. However, the world is now multipolar, with several centers of power, rather than bipolar.²⁸ Before, many countries were willing to follow the US lead almost unquestioningly. Now, these countries that once took direction from the United States are pursuing their own agendas. There are several recent examples of this phenomenon: US inability to get European countries to lift the arms

embargo against Bosnian Muslims; China's reaction when the US threatened to withdraw Most Favored Nation trade status because of human rights violations; Japan's initial reactions to threats from the US about unfair trade practices.²⁹

One indicator of the shifting balances of power is the increasing frequency of multilateral operations (referred to as "multilateralism by the Clinton Administration). From 1944 to 1990 the United Nations averaged one Security Council Resolution per month. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, the UN has averaged more than five Security Council Resolutions per month. In the past five years the UN supported 17 peacekeeping missions, compared to 13 during the 43 years of the Cold War; UN troops increased sevenfold, and the budget increased tenfold.³⁰

The Threat of Regional Conflicts

You need only review today's headlines to verify that the world is still a dangerous place. Regional conflicts, already occurring in several areas of the world, appear to be increasing in both frequency and magnitude.

There are several reasons for the increase in regional conflicts.³¹ One reason relates to the new world political environment. During the Cold War, the world was definitely bipolar: the United States versus the Soviet Union. As superpowers, we exercised some restraint over

our allies and coalition members when there was a possibility that a local conflict could lead to a superpower confrontation. Now, regional powers operate more freely within their areas of control.³² This is particularly true for countries that previously were members of the Soviet bloc. In addition, as previously noted, some countries are becoming more powerful in the vacuum left by the demise of the Soviet Union.

Also, some countries of the world are still trying to deal with the aftermath of the colonial era, when boundaries were drawn by the more powerful countries without consideration of cultural factors, such as ethnic, linguistic, or religious backgrounds. Similarly, political boundaries drawn at the end of World Wars I and II, in many instances, did not consider these factors. The result: in some cases, ancient enemies were grouped together in a single country; in other cases, ancient cultures were separated. Absent a specific threat from the former colonial powers or the superpowers, irredentist forces will be more likely to try to right the wrongs inflicted upon them.³³

Because of these potentially volatile situations, there is an increased threat of regional conflicts. We're already witnessing the results of this paradigm in the former Yugoslavia. Examples of other places where conflicts might erupt include countries in the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia. In addition, there are several regions with already existing conflicts--Lebanon, Israel, Kurdistan, Sri Lanka, and Cambodia, to name just a few.

Do We Need The Weinberger Doctrine Today?

In spite of the changes in the world political environment, one challenge faced by Secretary Weinberger a decade ago remains with us: determining the appropriate uses of military power. We could, as Weinberger did, take the approach that we need criteria for deciding when to use United States combat forces. With many international situations compelling us to action, having criteria might simplify our decisions.

The problem is that criteria limit our freedom of action; they make us more predictable. During the Cold War, with more straightforward international relationships, being predictable was not a significant concern. Now, however, there are advantages to the flexibility of allowing a mismatch between declaratory policy (what you say you're going to do) and operative policy (what you actually do).

With the rising tide of regional conflicts, there appear to be many potential predators ready to attack a weak neighbor, or even to turn on their own people. By using our criteria, an aggressor could determine the outer limits of our tolerance for aggressive behavior before we would be compelled to take military action. The results of this predictability can be disastrous. For example, shortly after Secretary of Defense Perry and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Shalikashvili stated that the United States would not support air strikes against Bosnian Serbs at Gorazde, the Serbs renewed their attacks against the

Muslims.³⁴

The Weinberger Doctrine filled a critical gap in our military thinking between the end of the Vietnam War and the heyday of the Cold War. Now, however, we don't need the Weinberger Doctrine, or indeed any firm criteria defining the use of military power. What we need is a well-articulated, comprehensive foreign policy to lend meaning and order to our international relations.

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28. Carpenter, 27.

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30. Madeleine K. Albright, Speech at National Defense University, Ft McNair Washington, D.C., 23 Sep 93; Robin Wright, "Somalia Casts a Shadow on U.S. Policy," Los Angeles Times (Washington Edition) 4 Mar 94: 5+.

31. I use the term "apparent" because some writers suggest that regional conflicts are not increasing; rather, media reporting is causing us to pay more attention to the conflicts. Other writers suggest that we are more focused on regional conflicts now since we no longer have the threat of the Soviet Union to occupy our time. There are probably some elements of fact in each of these assertions; however, I don't believe they fully explain away the phenomena.

32. Carpenter, 33; Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," Foreign Affairs Summer 93: 22-49.

33. Carpenter, 33.

34. Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Officials Debate Policy to Halt Serbs," New York Times 6 Apr 94: 1.