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UNITED STATES STRATEGIC COMMAND:

FACING THE FUTURE

by

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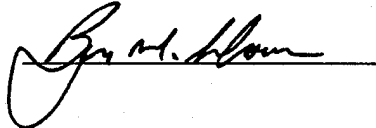
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ABSTRACT

Changes in the international and U.S. domestic environments will affect future planning for U.S. nuclear forces. This paper identifies and assesses problems U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM) will face during the next decade. Enduring problems include the large number of strategic and tactical nuclear warheads in the former Soviet Union and Russia's still potent strategic forces. Control of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has been complicated by the shift to a multi-polar world and Russia's poor economy. Fundamental changes which have occurred to U.S. forces is another problem. CINCSTRAT must work with regional CINCs to more efficiently perform his mission. STRATCOM strategic nuclear support to regional CINCs and incorporation of regional CINC precision weapons into the nuclear operations plan should be addressed. As strategic forces get smaller, CINCSTRAT should review whether a counterforce or countervalue nuclear strategy provides the best deterrence. The composition of U.S. nuclear forces may have to be changed if START II limits are implemented. The end of the Cold War has complicated rather than simplified the command's mission. To provide deterrence against major attack and employ forces if deterrence fails in the future, STRATCOM must take the lead and work with national policymakers and regional CINCs.

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SECTION I INTRODUCTION

Leon Sloss, noted nuclear policy consultant said, "Recent changes in the international environment will affect future planning for U.S. nuclear forces ...¹" In addition to changes in the international environment, I submit declining defense budgets, the drawdown of strategic forces, and Desert Storm lessons will also affect future planning for U.S. nuclear forces. In this paper, I will identify and assess problems U.S. Strategic Command (STRATCOM) will face during the next decade and make recommendations.

I propose three broad areas to bound the essay. First, I will identify "winds of change" and look at enduring problems and fundamental changes which will occur by the end of the century and beyond. Second, I will examine areas CINCSTRAT should support and coordinate with regional CINCs to perform missions in the joint warfighting environment. The third area will examine how new threats or challenges might modify the way STRATCOM performs its mission during the next decade. A short conclusion will follow.

Before looking at these specific areas, a brief review of the purpose of U.S. Strategic Command provides a starting point for the analysis. Simply put, STRATCOM's mission is to deter

major attack on the United States and its allies, and if attacked, to employ forces.² According to Paul Kaminski, Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Technology, although the Cold War is over, U.S. strategic nuclear forces will continue to play an important role in U.S. defense strategy for the foreseeable future.³ As the balance of this paper will demonstrate, the end of the Cold War has complicated, rather than simplified STRATCOM's war planning efforts.

SECTION II WINDS OF CHANGE

The first area will discuss "winds of change" blowing into the next century, and highlight enduring problems and fundamental changes. There are several realities the command must deal with which will not go away quickly or be easily dealt with.

The most obvious enduring problem is the sheer quantity of nuclear weapons and delivery systems both in existence today and still in production. While the Cold War has ended, nuclear weapons stockpiles will number in the tens of thousands for years to come.⁴ Russia still possesses 25,000 to 30,000 nuclear warheads.⁵ Although the threat from the former Soviet Union has changed significantly, Russia remains a major nuclear

power with the capacity to destroy U.S. society, and is upgrading its forces.

Russia's nuclear force is still being modernized. Although older systems are being destroyed, several systems which were introduced into its inventory in the late 1980s are still being produced and deployed. These include more than 288 mobile SS-25 ICBMs which are replacing SS-11s, 56 SS-24 silo-based and 33 rail mobile ICBMs, and 112 SSN-23 SLBMs with nuclear warheads.⁶ Although Russia's strategic modernization has slowed, the threat from Russia will continue to be the primary driver of U.S. nuclear strategy and force posture. No third world nuclear capability will begin to approach that of the former Soviet Union for the foreseeable future.⁷ Concerns are growing, however, about how to deal with small states that have or are seeking to acquire nuclear weapons.

The number of nuclear nations is on the rise and nuclear proliferation is a growing concern.⁸ According to a recent article in U.S. News and World Report, "With the threat of nuclear weapons development in North Korea and Iraq, a new era of nuclear proliferation has begun."⁹ Argentina, Brazil, Pakistan, India, Israel, and South Africa all have declared or undeclared nuclear material reprocessing or enrichment plants in operation.¹⁰ The hardest part of nuclear bomb construction is producing the enriched uranium or plutonium; once these materials are available it is relatively easy to construct the

bomb.¹¹ With more sources for bomb material, nuclear proliferation is becoming harder to monitor and control.

Another aspect of the proliferation problem concerns the political and economic turmoil associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union. While most experts think the command and control of strategic nuclear weapons in Russia is secure, there are some fears about control of the approximately 15,000 tactical nuclear warheads that were produced.¹² These weapons were less protected by safeguards and were more geographically dispersed than the strategic weapons. In addition, the collapse of the Soviet Union has made uranium ore and other nuclear materials more available on world markets.¹³

Nuclear technicians from the former Soviet Union are working in Libya and Algeria.¹⁴ There is concern about the 2000 to 3000 people who worked in the former Soviet Union estimated to have detailed knowledge of nuclear weapons design.¹⁵ Due to the worsening economic conditions in Russia, these technicians could sell their services to countries pursuing nuclear weapons.

The nuclear proliferation problem will not go away. In 1993, 16 nations were either confirmed or suspected of possessing nuclear weapons, according to the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA).¹⁶ The technology, resources, and people required for nuclear weapon production can be obtained by nearly any organized group determined to do so. However,

nuclear proliferation is not the only proliferation problem the command will face. Other weapons of mass destruction, chemical and biological weapons, are another enduring problem.

Because chemical weapons are fairly easy and cheap to produce, they are becoming more and more prominent in the arsenals of Third World countries.¹⁷ According to DIA figures, confirmed proliferation of countries with biological weapons went from three to ten and chemical weapons from ten to seventeen between 1980 and 1993.¹⁸ Similar increases are seen in the number of countries DIA suspects of chemical and biological proliferation.¹⁹ In addition to proliferation of those weapons, proliferation of delivery systems for those weapons is a growing concern.

William Webster, former head of the CIA said "...many third world countries will have fearsome missiles within a few years."²⁰ Already Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Syria have Soviet Scud B missiles which can carry a chemical warhead more than 300 miles. Saudi Arabia has Chinese CSS-2 missiles with a range of 1620 miles. Egypt is working with Iraq and Argentina to develop Condor 2 missiles. Libya is interested in acquiring Brazilian missiles which would put Israel in its range.²¹ Former Secretary of State James Baker noted "Perhaps the most frightening is the combination of the ballistic missile and chemical weapons."²² Proliferation of chemical or biological weapons with improved delivery systems is another problem which

will endure.

Changes in the world also contribute to proliferation. With a shift from a predominantly bi-polar to a more multi-polar world, U.S. security policy has increased focus on potential problems beyond Europe and new strategic concern with proliferation of advanced technologies. Non-proliferation and containment of advanced technologies is harder to control.

In addition to these enduring problems the command must face, STRATCOM faces fundamental changes in U.S. strategic forces. These include smaller forces due to reduced defense budgets and arms control agreements, and less U.S. overseas presence.

Dramatic changes have occurred in U.S. strategic forces since 1991. Bombers were taken off nuclear alert, and Minuteman I and Peacekeeper ICBMs are being retired. In January 1992, President Bush canceled the small ICBM program.²³ Modernization of U.S. strategic forces has stalled. Only 500 single warhead Minuteman III ICBMs will be retained.²⁴ The B-2 buy went from 132 to 75, and was capped by Congress at 20. The final B-2 will be delivered in 1998, unless Congress adds to the buy.²⁵ SRAM II, the follow-on to the retired SRAM missile carried by B-52 and B-1 bombers was canceled. All B-52G bombers are gone and the bomber road map shows deep reductions in the U.S. bomber force. The 1993-94 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) recommended 66 B-52s and 20 B-2s for the bomber leg of

the strategic triad.²⁶

U.S. plans for modernizing the submarine leg of the triad, unlike the other two legs, remain largely unchanged. The U.S. still plans to procure and field 18 Trident submarines, with production complete in 1999. However, the NPR recommended a need for only 14 Tridents.²⁷ The NPR also recommended continuing production of the D-5 missile, which had been scheduled to terminate before 14 Tridents were fitted with it.²⁸ At this time, it is still not clear how many older C-4 missiles will be retained for the submarine force.²⁹

Due to these force reduction measures, The General Accounting Office estimates savings of 100 billion dollars including projected life-cycle costs.³⁰ There is a downward trend in defense budgets and I expect this trend to continue. Even with no budgetary limits, U.S. strategic forces would still shrink due to START I and START II arms control agreements.

Strategic arms reduction agreements are another fundamental change facing the command. Both the United States and Russia are well on their way to reducing forces to START I limits of 6,000 accountable nuclear weapons.³¹ Although not yet ratified, the START II agreement will go well beyond the limits of START I. This agreement proposes a limit of 3500 strategic warheads for the United States and Russia by 2003.³² These reductions may force a significant shift in U.S. nuclear

strategy.

A final fundamental change is reduced U.S. overseas presence. In 1960, 68 U.S. strategic bases ranged the globe, with a particularly heavy concentration of bases in Western Europe to counter the Soviet threat. By 1997, the nation will have a total of only 14 strategic bases, all located in the continental United States.³³ J-5 planners at USSTRATCOM must cope with all of these changes.

SECTION III JOINT WARFIGHTING ENVIRONMENT

The second area addressed in this paper is missions CINCSTRAT should support and coordinate with regional CINCs in a joint warfighting environment. STRATCOM is a unified command, one with a broad continuing mission, but unlike a combatant command, STRATCOM has no area of responsibility (AOR). Because of STRATCOM's specific mission to deter major attack and employ forces should deterrence fail, STRATCOM plays only a limited role in directly supporting regional CINCs, but even so, more coordination between STRATCOM and the regional CINCs is required.

One major lesson learned from Desert Storm was the effectiveness of precision guided munitions (PGMs). PGMs work well, but they cannot do everything. Should a regional CINC

need to destroy a deep, hardened underground facility, a nuclear weapon could be the only way to do the job. The issue of introducing a nuclear weapon into a regional scenario has extreme political implications, and the President would not be expected to authorize such use except in extraordinary circumstances.

Because this is such a remote possibility, no procedures have been established for operational or combatant control of a strategic nuclear asset in a regional CINCs AOR. This is an area that needs attention. Procedures should be established between regional CINCs and STRATCOM in the unlikely event that nuclear weapons would be required.

A second related consideration is the Air Tasking Order (ATO) built by the regional CINC's Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC). The JFACC and his staff do not have the expertise required to employ strategic nuclear weapons. However, STRATCOM is improving its strategic planning system to provide adaptive planning against rapidly changing threat environments.³⁴ Procedures should be developed for STRATCOM planners to use their new capability to augment the regional CINC's JFACC staff to guide employment of these weapons. These planners would help build the nuclear strike into the ATO, and would assist with weapon effects, fallout areas, safe zones, etc.

Just as there are no provisions to plan a nuclear strike

with a regional CINC, there are no procedures to employ regional CINC PGMs in the STRATCOM Single Integrated Operations Plan (SIOP). Desert Storm demonstrated the value of these weapons, and PGMs could conceivably be employed on some SIOP targets to limit damage and fallout while still achieving strategic objectives. CINCSTRAT should take the lead to determine the benefits and practicality, and if feasible, to develop procedures to incorporate conventional precision guided weapons into the SIOP.

SECTION IV NEW THREATS OR CHALLENGES

The third area this paper will address is new threats or challenges which might modify the way the command performs its mission during the next decade. While I do not expect STRATCOM's mission can to change, several issues will affect how the command will do business.

The primary mission of STRATCOM is to deter major military attack. That attack is usually assumed to be nuclear, but the command has to be concerned with the threat posed by other weapons of mass destruction, chemical and biological weapons. As previously noted, while the threat of global nuclear war has diminished, many potential adversaries are working to acquire weapons of mass destruction (WMD). U.S. policy of deterrence

must remain credible with regard to the use of nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. This form of deterrence will differ from that of the Cold War, but it must ensure that a leader has to account for possible repercussions if he attacks the United States or an ally with weapons of mass destruction.³⁵ STRATCOM has a primary role to play in this area, and should take the lead with other U.S. government agencies to deter use of WMD on the United States and its allies.

A second challenge is the drawdown in U.S. nuclear forces and any resultant change in nuclear strategy. The United States has long had a counterforce strategy, one heavily oriented to destroying enemy strategic nuclear forces and supporting infrastructure. According to some experts, given the growing mobility of Russian forces it will become increasingly difficult to maintain a counterforce capability.³⁶ In addition, some say it is beyond the capability of U.S. forces to achieve a total disarming strike today.³⁷ This capability will further diminish as the United States draws down strategic nuclear forces.

Charles L. Glaser makes a very good argument for a change to a countervalue nuclear deterrent strategy.³⁸ As both Russia and the United States move toward implementation of START II force levels, he maintains that the current counterforce policy will no longer be feasible. This may be especially true with

smaller, more mobile Russian forces. The example of the difficulty of attacking SCUD missiles during the Gulf War makes questionable the ability to find and destroy mobile ICBMs in the wide expanses of Russia. A review of U.S. targeting and deterrence strategy will be required to ensure the United States can continue to deter major nuclear attack. As the military voice for nuclear policy, CINCSTRAT should initiate this review.

A third challenge also concerns the drawdown of nuclear forces and the reduced defense budgets. The 1993-94 Nuclear Posture Review reexamined the concept of a triad of nuclear forces as the basis for a strategic deterrent. The NPR determined the triad concept still valid for a START II sized force.³⁹ Bombers were maintained to hedge against technical failure of a delivery platform or weapon, or technological breakthroughs by political adversaries. However, some experts have suggested a dyad force of SSBNs and bombers.⁴⁰ Others argue for reliance upon only the submarine leg for strategic deterrence.⁴¹ While the mix of a triad of strategic forces is settled for now, CINCSTRAT should initiate a review of this issue again before the START II reductions take place and if defense budgets continue to decline.

SECTION V CONCLUSION

This paper has identified and assessed problems, and made recommendations to deal with many challenges U.S. Strategic Command will face through the end of the century and beyond. I examined three broad areas to make this analysis.

First, I identified "winds of change" and looked at enduring problems and fundamental changes. Enduring problems include the large amount of strategic and tactical nuclear warheads in the former Soviet Union, and Russia's smaller but still potent strategic forces. In addition, control of proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, and delivery systems has been complicated by the shift from a bi-polar to a multi-polar world, and Russia's poor economy. This will make deterrence of weapons of mass destruction more important and more difficult. Fundamental changes have occurred to U.S. strategic forces due to defense budget reductions, arms control treaties, and reduced U.S. overseas presence.

The second area concerned the issue of how CINCSTRAT should coordinate with regional CINCs in the joint warfighting environment. The issue of STRATCOM strategic nuclear support to regional CINCs should be addressed, so procedures are in place in the unlikely event such support would be required. In addition, incorporation of regional CINC's precision munitions

into STRATCOM's SIOP should be explored.

Third, this paper discussed what new threats or challenges might modify how the command performs its mission during the next decade. I do not expect the mission of STRATCOM to change, but several issues will affect the way the command accomplishes its mission. STRATCOM's role in deterring WMD must be worked out. As strategic forces get smaller in the future, CINCSTRAT should initiate a review of counterforce versus countervalue nuclear deterrent strategy. While the 1993-94 Nuclear Posture Review decided upon a strategic triad of forces for now, if START II is implemented, the U.S mix of strategic forces should be readdressed. Something less than a strategic triad of forces may provide credible deterrence at less cost.

The bottom line for STRATCOM in the future seems to be doing more with less. The end of the Cold War has complicated rather than simplified accomplishment of STRATCOM's mission. The United States will have smaller forces and defense budgets after the turn of the century. To provide deterrence against major attack and employ forces if deterrence fails in the future, STRATCOM must take the lead and work with national policymakers and regional CINCs for solutions to the challenges of a more complex world.

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