

**STRATEGY  
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**POLICY REVIEW:  
TWO MAJOR THEATERS OF WAR**

**BY**

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**Policy Review: Two Major Theaters of War**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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This document examines the policy listed in the National Security Strategy on the United State's policy of maintaining the capability of fighting two major theater wars. A literature review examines the existence of the policy. Upon determining that the policy exists, other documents are examined to determine if the policy is relevant. Finally, options are proposed to enhance the existing policy.

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## **POLICY REVIEW: TWO MAJOR THEATERS OF WAR**

The armed forces of the United States currently have a strategy to, "in concert with regional allies, must be able to deter and defeat large-scale, cross border aggression in two distant theaters in overlapping time frames."<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this paper is to review this policy and make recommendations, if appropriate, to enhance this strategy. The following methodology will be used in analyzing this policy. To begin with, the previous documents on the same subject will be reviewed. Then the present policy will be tracked to our current national military strategy. Documents that review this policy will then be examined for relevance. The results of the literature review will then be presented, focusing on specific flaws. Finally any proposed solutions will be submitted as a method to mitigate the policy shortcomings.

In order to fully examine our policy on two Major Theater Wars, it is relevant to review the current administration's stand on the issue in the previous years. In 1994 the stated policy was, " With programmed enhancements, the forces the Administration is fielding will be sufficient to help defeat aggression in two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts."<sup>2</sup> The wording in the February 1995 issue of the National Security Strategy is exactly the same as the 1994 edition<sup>3</sup>. Changes in the verbiage of the 1996 National Security Strategy suggest that the

force is more reliable and capable, "The forces the Administration fields today are sufficient, in concert with regional allies, to defeat aggression in two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts."<sup>4</sup> The 1996 strategy then addresses the future with, "Programmed enhancements will sustain and strengthen the capability to meet future threats."<sup>5</sup> The statement in the 1997 National Security Strategy is, "For the foreseeable future, the United States, in concert with regional allies, must remain able to deter credibly and defeat large-scale, cross-border aggression in two distant theaters in overlapping time frames."<sup>6</sup> Finally the October 1998 edition of the National Security Strategy states "For the foreseeable future, the United States, preferably in concert with allies, must remain able to deter and defeat large-scale, cross-border aggression in two distant theaters in overlapping time frames. Maintaining such a capability deters opportunism elsewhere while we are heavily committed to deterring or defeating aggression in one theater, or while conducting multiple smaller-scale contingencies and engagement activities in other theaters. It also provides a hedge against the possibility that we might encounter threats larger or more difficult than we expected."<sup>7</sup> The evolution of this strategy has remained fairly constant with only minor changes in the details of the wording. The 1994 policy statements included proposed enhancements and the 1996

statement indicated that the enhancements were fully in place. The major change in the 1997 version was the subtle change from two nearly simultaneous, to the term overlapping time frames and the renaming of major regional conflicts to major theaters of war. The 1998 version continues to support the overlapping time frame issue while adding a comment about our ongoing multiple small-scale contingencies. This short recap of policy indicates a relatively consistent and considered strategy that has been maintained over a long period of time.

In accordance with our doctrine, we link with the National Security Strategy to the National Military Strategy.<sup>8</sup> The current National Military Strategy of the United States does support this policy of two Major Theaters of War. The 1997 edition states, "it is imperative that the United States be able to deter and defeat nearly simultaneous, large-scale, cross border aggression in two distant theaters in overlapping time frames, preferably in concert with regional allies."<sup>9</sup> This policy is to be executed with the current force structure that currently includes ten Army divisions. A review of previous National Military Strategies reveals the same consistency as the National Security Strategies. The 1995 editions states, "The core requirement of our strategy as laid out in the Bottom-UP Review is a force capable of fighting and winning two major regional conflicts nearly simultaneously."<sup>10</sup> It is interesting

to go even further back on National Military Strategies and review the goals when the defense structure was larger. As recently as 1992 the defense department had a larger structure, twelve Army divisions for instance, but relatively the same requirements.<sup>11</sup> How is it then, that we can maintain the requirement for two Major Theater Wars and do so with less force structure? This important question and several others prompted the action of a Quadrennial Defense Review to provide a comprehensive analysis and overview of the defense department.

The report generated from the Quadrennial Defense Review, May 1997, and the congressionally directed Report of the National Defense Panel, December 1997, provide additional insight on the issue of fighting two Major Regional Conflicts. The Quadrennial Review carefully reviewed this difficult requirement. Despite some interest in falling off the need for fighting two wars the Quadrennial Review identified that "some allies would undoubtedly read a one-war capability as a signal that the United States, if heavily engaged elsewhere, would no longer be able to help defend their interests."<sup>12</sup> Thus the bottom line from this review was that the United States must continue to maintain a two-war capability. The alternative document, the Report of the National Defense Panel, while challenging the requirement for the two war capability, concluded that, "the United States cannot afford to ignore the

near-term threats posed by Korea and Iraq," and that "our current force structure is sufficient for the regional threats that we see today."<sup>13</sup> In view of the overwhelming agreement that the requirement for two wars remains, how then do the policy makers, during a time of reducing force size and increasing mission requirements, still justify our ability to fight two major wars? The answer is that gaps in our war fighting ability are covered by assuming an amount of risk. Recently, there seems to be a shift in the conventional wisdom that agrees with our ability to fight two MTWs. The recent testimony of the Chairman and Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Senate Armed Services Committee, indicated that our ability to execute the second Major Theater War is very risky. Additionally, numerous senior army leaders who have spoken to this year's Army War College students have echoed those exact concerns. The remainder of this paper will examine these two diverging opinions: that we can execute the two-war mission and that we cannot. Each will be discussed and observations made on avenues that will allow us to minimize risk associated with each. In essence the focus of the effort in this document will be to ascertain the risk associated with execution of our national policy. Many times leaders accept much more risk than they realize. This can be seen in many studies of previous campaigns and wars. The would be victor, or wise leader, must

understand the implications of this risk and is well advised when logical and considered alternatives are available.

For the purpose of argument this section will cover risk mitigation associated with accepting the premise that the forces available to the United States appear to be adequate for the task of both wars. Additional requirements, however, do exist. These smaller scale contingencies drain the ability to conduct both wars. The current National Military Strategy acknowledges these issues and accounts for them by stating that in the event we should become engaged in two overlapping Major Theater Wars, we would have to withdraw from the ongoing contingency operations and other engagement activities.<sup>14</sup> This of course introduces an amount of risk associated with each particular engagement the United States might venture into. Simply stating that the deployed forces could extract from several contingency operations and rapidly engage in a major theater of war underestimates the difficulty of the task. Our armed forces may not be fully prepared to execute such a demanding mission. How then do we execute our plan that is so steeped in risk? Have we reduced our force to such a low level that we cannot really execute our required engagement activities and still be prepared for Major Theater Wars? These are the issues that seriously undermine the legitimacy of our current strategy.

How do we make the policy work? Certainly the easiest way would be an increase in force structure. This would of course be extremely difficult. One of the cautions in the Report of the National Defense Panel was that the two-war policy might have become a force sizing function and not a strategy.<sup>15</sup> Any attempt to increase force structure would certainly lend credibility to this argument. Additionally, with no readily identifiable increase in the threat, force expansion would be difficult if not impossible to sell to policy makers as well as to the public.

A possible alternative to expanding the size of the current force would be a restructuring of the existing force. Currently there are ten active divisions in the Army. Eight additional divisions exist in the National Guard. The overall scheme of the total army concept is that the active component maintains ten divisions that are fully capable and a great deal of the support structure required to support the force. The Army Reserve is primarily designed to complete the support structure with most of its forces being combat support and combat service support. The Army National Guard is the nation's strategic reserve and provides some CS and CSS units but primarily provides combat arms units up to division level. The National Guard units deemed most deployable are several "enhanced" brigades. These are combined arms brigades formed around an

infantry or armor brigade. In Operations Desert Shield and Storm, the National Guard was able to provide combat units in the form of artillery brigades in a general support mission, however, the previously identified, highly deployable, combined arms brigades were not able to deploy. Three infantry brigades, which the federal government provided additional funding to be maintained at high level of deployability, could not pass certification at the National Training Center. As a result, these units did not deploy. This system failure occurred even though the brigades had a timeline several months longer than was ever expected. This lack of deployment should not have been a surprise however. Brigades in the active army rotate to the National Training Center about every eighteen months. Many have a very difficult time in this tough and realistic training environment. How then do we expect the National Guard Brigades, who train two days a month and an additional two weeks annually, to attain the difficult task of putting together a combined arms brigade? Many would argue that forming a combined arms battalion would be too difficult a task, given the limited training days, much less an entire brigade. Simply put, in this day of modern units with sophisticated equipment, the idea of multifunctional combat arms units in the National Guard may be over.

Additionally, several of the existing National Guard divisions are not in troop lists for either of the major theaters of war we must support. They simply cannot be prepared in enough time to be used in planning with any assurance they will actually be available. With the growing number of missions and the difficulty of training reserve component combined arms units, the following might be an avenue to explore. Consider, if you will, a restructuring of the functions of some active and National Guard units. One possible form of reorganization might be to swap a like number of personnel spaces between the active force and the National Guard. Under this design, combat arms units could be swapped with combat support or combat service support. This possibly could result in the increase in the active force of one or two divisions. Such a force structure swap would certainly not enable the active component to field two fully capable divisions. These units would bridge the gap between our present active divisions and the divisions currently in the National Guard. The structure might look something like this. The newly activated division would have the infantry and armor brigades, a division artillery, and possibly an aviation brigade. Combat support (CS) and combat service support (CSS) formations would be located in the National Guard. The training cycle of these brigades would be aligned with the training cycle of the CS and CSS elements in the National Guard. Every

eighteen months or so, a combined arms brigade from this division would rotate through the National Training Center to train and certify the capability of the brigade to deploy. This type of approach could be applied as an application of the Chief of Staff of the Army's initiative known as the integrated division. This program presently places enhanced brigades under an active division headquarters. This proposed restructuring would merely be a further degree of the already agreed upon integrated division. These Divisions would certainly not be at the same level of deployability as the other active divisions, however, they would be more likely to make a timeline to support the second conflict in two-war scenario.

Why would one of these restructured combined arms brigades be more deployable than the ones that currently exist in the National Guard? The reason is quite simple; it takes less time to train a CS or CSS unit. Making the swap between the combat arms units and combat support and service support would put the elements most difficult to train in the arena where the most time could be devoted. Of course the down side of this proposal would be the loss of combat arms units in the National Guard, not an uncontentious consideration. This is a difficult issue to accept for state governments that have prided themselves on having a combined arms capability and that have executed the tough tasks in the past. Many National Guard

Divisions have a great combat legacy from the two world wars. Units were then, however, less complicated. Forming and training a division in short order was feasible. The timelines for today's two MTWs simply do not allow for mobilization, training and deployment of modern National Guard Divisions or even Brigades. This is not to imply that all combat arms units should be removed from the National Guard. Each state should retain many of the combat arms units for various purposes. Combat arms units such as field artillery brigades, should absolutely be retained in the National Guard. These units do not have the daunting task of planning and executing combined arms missions and as recently as Desert Shield/Storm, were able to expertly perform their combat mission.

Each state should retain a certain amount of infantry and armor units as well, however, these formations should not be given the task of executing combined arms operations. They should be given a realistic mission essential task list (METL) that would keep them proficient in basic infantry and armor missions, thus ensuring a base of units with those skills deemed essential for units in the strategic reserve. These infantry and armor units would have a mission more in line with maintaining skills necessary for the ability to mobilize and train units on an extended time line, not the short timeline associated with the present enhanced brigades. These units

should also be focused on the relevant and emerging task of homeland defense. Specifically, they should form the basis for the efforts we have on going to counter the effects of a terrorist delivered weapon of mass destruction (WMD), introduced into the United States. Increasingly, each state, city and town is more vulnerable to suffer from the effects of one of these terrible weapons of mass destruction. If local National Guard combat units had the primary mission of responding to an attack of this type, the results could be significant and relevant. Imagine the increased ability to deal with the consequences of a chemical or biological attack on a large urban area, if the local guard units were really equipped and trained to deal with this threat. Currently, the national plan of defense calls for a few, well-trained response teams. The overarching problem with this plan is that the units are very small and few in number. These team's deployment time to a WMD event could be many hours, if not days. Reaction to a terrorist threat of this type requires immediate response. This timeline can only be met by trained forces that are immediately available. Local National Guard units that are properly trained could meet this stringent timeline. Many experts feel this type of asymmetric approach to attacking the United States is the most likely avenue available to enemies of our country. If this is the most likely threat, then the proposed restructuring would allow the

National Guard units to focus on this type of training, not the almost impossible task of maintaining a combined arms capability. It would also give the National Guard a very visible mission for the local population to observe and possibly enhance popular opinion within the local communities.

Restructuring the Army National Guard and redistributing missions between Active and Reserve Components would provide relief to the seemingly flawed policy. For the foreseeable future the United States will see no decrease in the demands placed on it as a world leader and it appears that the likelihood and necessity to engage in areas such as Kosovo will and should continue. There is little likelihood we will see a backing away from the "engagement" aspects of the National Security Strategy. This path, as has been previously noted, is fraught with risk. Since we have already accepted that this risk is necessary, what can we then do? One approach that does not change our policy but lends more credibility to execution of it is to take prudent steps to reduce the associated risk. Currently there is no requirement to address and mitigate risk associated with the acceptance of a new mission and our ability to meet the two-war requirement. The steps to do this can be incorporated in planning stages prior to the onset of deployment of troops. Prudent considerations could look something like this. First, the forces required for deployment into the new

engagement would be identified. Existing plans would then be scrubbed to determine what impact the involvement of these forces would have. New plans would then be developed that would allow these forces to be withdrawn rapidly from the new mission and then quickly inserted into back into a major theater war.

An example of this could be viewed in the current situation in Bosnia. We currently have the majority of a division-sized force on duty in the Bosnia region. As we are executing the mission now, the committed force rotates on roughly an annual basis. To assume however that we have but a single division involved seriously underestimates the problem. One division is engaged, one is recovering from the engagement, and one is training for the mission, thus the risk of this operation grows tremendously. For arguments sake, three divisions are focusing their energy on the Bosnia mission and not on war fighting. From a ten division active force, three are not fully prepared for the primary mission, to fight and win one of our two major wars. This type of risk acceptance is extremely open to negative comments as well as possible failure.

A possible solution leading to risk reduction in this case might be to assign one of the two divisions currently in Europe the Bosnia mission. Moving a division to a different location in the same region would keep the unit within the basic area of responsibility and thus reduce the need for rotation of the

other units within the force. While the entire division is not needed for the Bosnia mission, the complete division should be involved. If the Bosnia mission calls for two brigades, the "non-engaged" brigade, should be rotated out of Bosnia to the training centers in Germany to preserve their combat skills for a major war. In doing this, we only tie up one division with the non war fighting mission and through managed training, this unit will remain much more combat ready for introduction into a major war.

This type of adaptive solution will support our valid mission of fighting two major theater wars. While the proposed solution for the Bosnia mission will need more fleshing out to be fully effective, an approach like this will mitigate some of the risk associated with the assumption of smaller scale contingencies. If we force ourselves to add this risk reduction step in all of our lesser commitments, we can enhance the viability of our two major theater war policy and carry out our other important requirements in lesser regional conflicts and peacekeeping operations.

The second school available to the student of the two MTW problem is the less popular one. This view accepts that we cannot adequately execute our policy of fighting both wars. Again, many senior leaders have openly and officially stated that the second war is fraught with risk. What options can we

offer policy makers if the decision is to change our strategy and modify this critical aspect of our National Security Strategy? The first step is to propose what the new strategy will be. Lessening our commitment to the world of two near simultaneous MTWs does not mean full abandonment of the existing policy. Options available can range from two MTWs fought in sequential order, to a true reduction to only one MTW. Several areas in the middle can be envisioned and discussed. The other aspect of falling off our existing strategy is the logical adjustment to the existing force structure. Each of these will be examined and discussed in the following paragraphs.

Adjusting our plans to support one MTW and downsizing the force structure can be seen as a possible option. Granted, under this option the enemies of the United States can certainly take advantage of us while we are engaged in one Major Theater War. Hostile regimes might then see a window of opportunity to move on their long-standing designs. Of course, the nuclear forces of the United States could be a clear deterrent to hostile countries in this case. This type of diplomacy can easily lead to a disproportionate level of response. The positive side of the argument is that without resizing the force, we would be in a situation where we could fight the one MTW and still remain engaged in our commitments in the smaller scale contingencies. Of course, if we lost the mission of

fighting the second MTW, it is very likely that a substantial force cut would follow. This type of cut would make supporting our numerous small-scale contingencies even more difficult.

If the policy was modified to read, fight two MTWs sequentially, the task is a bit easier. This would not necessarily reduce all risk associated with the second MTW. Under this scenario, the United States could execute existing war plans for the first MTW while maintaining current commitments throughout the world. The real question would be, how much time would be available before beginning the second MTW? The additional problem of reconstitution of forces from the first MTW significantly affects the determination of the timing of the start of the second war.

Another issue that could significantly impact on the two MTW policy is the uncertainty in Korea. Over the past several years, the North Koreans have suffered from the staggering amount the government spends on the military. Some experts estimate that North Korea spends nearly 25% of its gross domestic product on the military. How long can this go on? It is conceivable that in the near future, the North Korean government might fall, leading to a reunification with an economically successful South Korea. If this happens, do we abandon the two MTW policy? This we should not do. There will always be hostile forces in the world and the same theory that

keeps us on track for two MTWs, will still exist. What the force should begin to size itself on is capabilities rather than threats. A reasonable capability for the United States armed forces is likely described as a force with the ability to execute two near simultaneous major theater wars while continuing previously committed military operations. This approach would be a hard sell to Congress because it would likely result in a recommendation of an increase in our armed forces. Additionally, most people understand a threat. It was easy to show the threat the Soviet Union posed to the United States. In the absence of the Soviet Union we have substituted Iraq and North Korea to ease the realization of why we need our forces. The United States, for previously stated reasons, must remain capable of executing a two-war scenario as a capability, not a response to a specific threat.

Which direction is the most reasonable for us to adopt as our National Security Strategy? A logical adjustment would be a change from simultaneous to sequential prosecution of MTWs. This type of strategy would fully allow the armed forces to deploy, fight, terminate the conflict, and reconstitute prior to deploying to the second MTW. This would ease many of the difficulties associated with executing both at the same time. Some major drawbacks that will be solved are the difficulties of strategic lift, shortage of major logistical structure and

fulfilling our existing worldwide obligations. Another approach is forced risk mitigation when the country is about to undertake an additional military operation. Adjusting contingency plans to reflect the units deployed on ongoing missions provides a much clearer picture of the impact of additional commitments. Restructuring the combat forces in the National Guard would provide further enhancements to execute the mission of fighting and winning two major wars. This proposal would add new formations of combined arms units to the active army and will greatly increase our deployability posture as well as more realistically aligning the existing capabilities of the total army.

The best advice we could provide policy makers is that the second MTW is for the time being, a high risk operation. The proposed solutions to our present operating system can significantly enhance our ability to win the second MTW while reducing the associated risk. This risk can be couched in terms of success or increased casualties. Maintaining a Cold War-type force structure will not enable us to accomplish our missions with minimum risk to the force. It is clear however, that as a world leader, the United States must remain capable of two MTWs as well as continuing to honor our existing commitments worldwide. It is going to be challenge to balance our existing capability with our obligations.

Word Count 4607

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> A National Security Strategy For A New Century, The White House, Oct 1998, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> A National Security Strategy Of Engagement And Enlargement, The White House, July 1994, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> A National Security Strategy Of Engagement And Enlargement, The White House, February 1995, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> A National Security Strategy Of Engagement And Enlargement, The White House, February 1996, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> A National Security Strategy For A New Century, The White House, May 1997, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> A National Security Strategy For A New Century, The White House, Oct 1998, p.22.

<sup>8</sup> Doctrine for Planning Joint Operations, Joint Pub 5-0 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 13 April 1995), II-5.

<sup>9</sup> National Military Strategy of the United States of America, Shape, Respond, Prepare Now: A Military Strategy for a New Era, (Washington D.C.: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, September 1997), 15.

<sup>10</sup> National Military Strategy of the United States of America, A Strategy of Flexible and Selective Engagement, (Washington D.C.: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1995), ii.

<sup>11</sup> National Military Strategy, (Washington D.C.: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1992), 19.

<sup>12</sup> Secretary of Defense, Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review, (Washington D.C.: The Secretary of Defense, May 1997), 12.

<sup>13</sup> National Defense Panel, Transforming Defense, National Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, (Arlington, VA: National Defense Panel, December 1997), 23.

<sup>14</sup> National Military Strategy of the United States of America, Shape, Respond, Prepare Now: A Military Strategy for a New Era, (Washington D.C.: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, September 1997), 15.

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