

National Defense: Most Dangerous vs. Best Guess

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To

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19 February 2008

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 19 FEB 2008		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2008 to 00-00-2008	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE National Defense: Most Dangerous vs. Best Guess				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) United States Marine Corps,Command and Staff College, Marine Corps Combat Development,Marine Corps University, 2076 South Street,Quantico,VA,22134-5068				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 11	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

National Defense: Most Dangerous vs. Best Guess

Over 200 years ago, a group of men gathered to create an enduring document that would usher a new era into the world: The Constitution of the United States of America. The document created a free and democratic country that stands as an example for freedom, equality, and democracy. Being a world leader has invited a full spectrum of threats against the United States in its promotion of these ideals. Unfortunately, in its zeal to defend the United States against its current enemies, the military has turned its attention away from conventional warfighting. Now, the United States military has become unwisely fixated on low-intensity conflict, almost ignoring the threat posed by the high-intensity conflicts of conventional warfare. The U.S. military's priority should be training and equipping a force for high-intensity conflict, because such training is more transferable, necessary, and efficient.

Background

The high operations tempo for the military has necessitated focusing training on the current global war on terror and largely ignoring training related to high intensity conflict. The Army Chief of Staff, General George Casey, recently cited this deficiency noting that because turnaround time is very

short between deployments for units, the U.S. is focusing on returning units to the current theater. Field rotations have become mission readiness exercises for deploying units, a last chance to make sure everyone is ready to go fight the current low-intensity fight as opposed to defend our nation against any intensity threat. While the country is doing a great job preparing its forces to return to Operations IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF) and ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF), it needs to make the time to train for the full spectrum of conflicts.¹

Nevertheless, by focusing training on doctrine and by infusing tactics, techniques, and procedures that are effective in the current arena, this deficiency can be remedied.

Transferability

Traditional military tasks are effective and applicable to the full spectrum of conflicts. By educating leaders to fight different forms of combat with a conventional military force, one makes the military as a whole more capable. Meanwhile, units can concentrate on their specialized task. Educated leaders can shape specialized tasks to respond to any conflict. For example, providing security is the same in any instance.

¹ "US Army Prepares for Future Conflicts," *Military Technology*, Vol 31, Iss 10(Oct 2007): 18.

The leader assigns a subordinate a sector and the subordinated then watches that sector. There is no difference to the subordinate whether that sector is between two trees to their front, or the roof of the building. All that matters is that they were assigned a sector, and as long as the leader can identify what needs to be done, the tasks in place can be applied to any scenario.

The human mind has a limited amount of attentional resources to divide between tasks. As tasks become familiar and instinctive, they consume less of these resources and are more reflex than analyzed thought. By limiting the number of tasks, soldiers are able to commit these task to muscle memory easier and the tasks become second nature, consuming very little of the mind's limited attentional resources. By conserving these resources more attention can be allocated to deal with things out of the ordinary and to the body's sensory capabilities. In effect, by limiting responsibilities to a few key tasks, soldiers will have more attention to focus on the ever changing environment around them to help keep them alive.²

² Robert J. Sternberg, *Cognitive Psychology*, 3rd ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2003), 66-105.

Necessary

The threat from conventional militaries of the world is more dangerous to the U.S. way of life than the threat posed by unconventional forces. Operating in defense of the nation does not require a force that is exceptional at fighting an insurgency or at low intensity conflict. In fact, a low intensity conflict itself is more likely to occur during the stabilization process of a conventional war. One has to stay focused on the overall mission but maintain flexibility to deal with the vacuum of authority created when the previous government is toppled using conventional force. Non-state actors, such as terrorists, will take advantage of the unstable environment that emerges. To use force efficiently, the conventional force must be capable of defeating a conventional threat, then transition to a stabilizing force that prevents an unstable environment.

Maintaining the world's best conventional military is paramount to global security. The United States military serves as a deterrent to protect allies. Moreover, the American military can be counted on to protect the sovereignty of all countries. Without the balance the U.S. military provides with its projection capability, the world would fall into a series of

conflicts in which every petty warlord or dictator would try to impose his will on neighbors. This country's power works as a deterrent only if it has the power to project and the will to use it. The latest National Security Document reemphasizes the U.S. will to project power with preemptive use of military force; now the United States just has to have the force available to support its international policies.³

Efficient

Another problem with directing the U.S. military toward counter-insurgency operations is the delay created for the procurement of equipment for future threats. It takes over a decade to develop, evaluate, and field new equipment to the operating force. If the U.S. focuses on procuring for today's threat, it will be unprepared to face future threats. The military needs to work on platforms that are versatile and relevant, not just make quick reactions related to the current operating environment. Quick reactions cause a waste of money and require supplemental budgets that overextend the economy and are not focused on the future. Also, the equipment acquired is not as rigorously tested and evaluated before it gets to units

³ "United States Issues New National Security Document, Reaffirms Possible Preemptive Use of Force," *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol 100, No 3(Jul 2006): 690-724.

in combat.⁴ Regarding this difficult task, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates noted, "It strikes me that one of the principal challenges the Army faces is to regain its traditional edge at fighting conventional wars while retaining what it has learned and relearned about unconventional wars, the ones most likely to be fought in the years ahead."⁵

The precision strike capabilities of the U.S. military's air power has helped greatly to reduce collateral damage and support ground forces, but this capability has also created a problem that must be addressed. While the abilities of the aircraft have greatly added to the U.S. warfighting capability, the number of sorties flown is aging the air forces at a high rate and the funding is inadequate to provide replacements at a rate that will be able to sustain the current operations tempo. Without a substantial reset or procurement of new air frames,

⁴ James McAleese. "Procurement Challenges To Meet Our Current And Future National Security Needs," *Defense Daily International*, Vol 3, Iss 24(Apr 2002): 1.

⁵ "Gates Says Army Will Be Challenged To Keep Edge In Conventional Warfare While Retaining Lessons Learned From Low-Intensity Conflicts," *US Fed News Service, Including US State News*, 1 Nov 2007.

U.S. air power could become severely limited due to the strain of sustained combat operations.⁶

The Senate Armed Services committee recently confirmed the need to maintain a force capable to fight the full spectrum of combat operations while maintaining a precision capability.⁷ Because of the time it takes to develop and field new equipment, steps must be taken now in order to fund the procurement of new equipment and the restoration of our air forces.

Counterarguments

Many critics like Andrew Krepinevich, who heads a defense think tank, argue that the U.S. military must be oriented toward irregular warfare rather than on conventional warfare. He believes irregular warfare is the most likely threat therefore should be the priority.⁸ Irregular warfare operations are the current trend, but only because the perceived weakness in the U.S.'s armor is its ability to wage such operations. The adversaries of the U.S. will always look for U.S. weaknesses in order to maximize their own combat potential. This idea is one

⁶ "Generals Geriatric Air Force." *CNN.com*. February 18, 2008.http://www.cnn.com/2008/US/02/18/airforce.wornout.ap/index.html?eref=rss_topstories (accessed February 18, 2008).

⁷ "Democratic senators, analysts call for reorganized military," *Aerospace Daily & Defense Report*, 20 Nov 2007, 3.

⁸ Art Pine, "Military Growing Pains," *National Journal*, Vol 39, Iss 44(Nov 2007): 58.

of the most fundamental in warfare: Do not attack an enemy's strength, find a weakness and exploit it. The perception that the weakness of the United States is their ability in the low intensity fight and not the high intensity arena of conventional conflict is reassuring. Even if irregular threats are going to continue and be the most likely threat, irregular threats are not the most dangerous. The most dangerous threat is the attack of a large conventional force, and the U.S. must always be prepared for that first.

A number of historical examples exist which suggest what would happen if another country felt it could win in a conventional war. World War I was supposed to be the war to end all wars, but only two decades later the Germans felt they could prevail, and World War II began. Also, after the first war in Iraq, many people were convinced there would never be another force-on-force war and that the tank was a weapon of the past. Even in the beginning of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, some like James McAleese felt another conventional war was unlikely, no need for a strong conventional force existed.⁹ Then the second Iraq war began, and the U.S. had to use divisions to defeat a conventional force once again.

⁹ James McAleese. "Procurement Challenges To Meet Our Current And Future National Security Needs," *Defense Daily International*, Vol 3, Iss 24(Apr 2002): 1.

Conclusion

Because focusing training on low intensity conflict limits the ability to hone conventional warfighting skills, ignores the most dangerous threat to the country, and delays procurement for future threats, the U.S. military's priority should be training and equipping a force for high intensity conflict. The United States must focus first on the most dangerous threat to the nation, a conventional threat. Focusing on a conventional threat means training and procurement should be focused around conventional tasks and equipment, while irregular capabilities are developed as a secondary issue.

Word Count: 1553

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