
Entering the 21st Century: Challenges Confronting America's Military

By

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As future stewards of your nation's security, you understand the dramatic changes the world has undergone in just the last few years. Superpower confrontation has passed, but the lid has been lifted on simmering ethnic and religious conflicts. Before, rogue states could be restrained by those who armed and supported them. Now, they are freer to gamble on the use of force to achieve revolutions in communication and commerce; to send information, goods, and dollars around the world in the blink of an eye. Yet, the openness that brings us closer together also makes us more vulnerable to problems such as terrorism and international crime.

I would like to speak today about some of the challenges confronting our military in this new security environment. I am honored to do so in this setting with you, a group that combines years of operational experience with intense intellectual study. On a personal note, let me add that as National Security Adviser, I have had the privilege of meeting and working with America's military men and women every day and to admire their service and their sacrifice. So as I talk with you of challenges faced by our military, I want to recognize the extraordinary debt that we as a nation owe to them and to the families who support them.

Over the past three years, as I have worked with the military in facing the demands of this new era, I have often been struck by three fundamental questions. I have discussed them many times with Secretary Perry and General Shalikashvili, and I am sure they have been on your minds as well: how do we maintain efficiency and effectiveness as we manage the post-Cold War drawdown of our forces? How do we preserve the strength and readiness to fight and win our nation's wars as we conduct increasingly diverse peacekeeping and humanitarian missions? And how do we attract and retain an all-volunteer force of high standards that is reflective of rapid social change in America?

Today, we know the answer to the drawdown question. Since 1989, we have reduced our force by one-third. We have cut our defense budget by some 40 percent in real terms from its Cold War high. Some 700,000 men and women have traded in their uniforms and returned to civilian life. But this time, unlike previous drawdowns, we did it right.

We recall the stories about the drawdown of the 1970s, when sailors on ships waited months for parts to fix broken equipment; when planes became 'hangar queens,' pillaged for repairs; when the Chief of Staff the Army declared that America had a "hollow army." Many of you were there. Today, our leaders have learned the lessons of earlier times. They know that we can't cut size at the expense of strength, personnel at the expense of morale, or force at the expense of readiness. In 1994, when Iraq menaced Kuwait, tensions rose in Korea, and trouble in Haiti boiled over, we showed that our military was up to the task—and more. In my view, Secretary Perry, General Shalikashvili, their immediate predecessors, and our whole military leadership have received far too little credit for one of the greatest management successes in history.

But now that our force posture is right, and our readiness is as high ever, we need to focus on how we employ our armed forces. More than any other institution in the world, when

America's military is asked to do something, it delivers. It is hard to convey how much it means to policymakers to have an instrument like that at our disposal. It provides a great sense of security and confidence. But it also carries great responsibility. We must not misuse this extraordinary institution. When we use military force, we must do so unflinchingly. But we must never ask our military to do things it can't or shouldn't do. The President has no more solemn responsibility than to decide when to put our armed forces in harm's way. He knows that, and so do all of us who are privileged to serve him.

In recent years, our military has responded to an unprecedented number and range of contingencies—nearly 40 since the Gulf war. Many of these operations have involved nontraditional tasks—distributing food, resettling refugees, and providing medical assistance. All Americans are proud of our men and women in uniform for doing this work so well. But the fact remains that we depend on them first and foremost to fight and win America's wars. This highlights the second question I raised: How do we guard our military's unparalleled fighting ability, when, increasingly, we call on it for operations other than war?

In addressing this question, let me briefly review how we approach the decision to commit our armed forces. Our nation uses force for one purpose alone—to protect and promote American interests. I believe these interests can be divided into three categories.

The first involves matters of overriding importance to our national security and survival—such as a direct attack on our soil, our people or our allies. We will do whatever it takes to defend these vital interests, including the use of decisive military force—with others where we can and alone when we must. From our swift response when Iraq moved forces toward Kuwait to our 37,000 troops in Korea, we have shown our unshakable resolve. Vital interests are the *raison d'être* of our military force—and will be so long as nations exist and human nature unchanged.

More and more often, however, we face situations that do not threaten our nation's vital interests—yet do still affect our interests and the character of the world in which we live. It might be a conflict, such as Bosnia, that produces terrible suffering and jeopardizes stability in region of vital importance to our nation. Or it might be a brutal coup, like the one in Haiti, that endangers democracy in our hemisphere and prompts thousands of desperate refugees to seek sanctuary on our shores.

This second kind of case is more difficult to address, because our interests, though important, are less immediate, and the threats may be less clear. That is why before we use force, we must make a careful assessment: Can the use of our military forces advance American interests? Do they have a reasonable chance of success? Are the interests at stake commensurate with the costs and risks? Have other means been tried and failed to achieve our objectives? Before we send our troops into situations where our interests are less than vital, they need a clear and achievable mission, the means to prevail, and a strategy for withdrawal that is based on the military mission's goals.

In both Haiti and Bosnia, we met those standards, and our troops have performed superbly. Contrast these operations with Vietnam or Lebanon, where clear and achievable military missions were not defined soon enough—or ever. In Vietnam, our society blamed our soldiers for a defeat that was not theirs. Because we neglected to ask the right questions, the men and women of our armed forces paid a terrible price—both in Vietnam and when they came home. We must never put them in that position again—never.

There is also a third category for using not force but the unique capabilities of our forces. This category involves primarily humanitarian interests. Generally, the military is not the best tool to address such concerns. But sometimes a humanitarian crisis—such as Somalia or Rwanda—may swamp the ability of relief organizations to respond. Sometimes only our military

has the capability to kick-start longer term disaster response before handing the operation back to the relief community.

In considering such cases, we should always keep in mind that the force of our example bolsters our leadership in the world and enhances our ability to achieve our interests. When millions of human lives are at risk, the world's most powerful nation cannot simply sit on the sidelines. The American people would not allow it—and that is to their credit.

None of this means America should become the world's policeman. We cannot answer every 911 call around the globe. But when we have weighed the risks and costs against our interests, and when we can make a difference, we have a responsibility to act.

Over the last three years, I believe our military has risen to these new challenges with extraordinary professionalism and skill—whether restoring democracy to Haiti or stopping the slaughter and safeguarding the peace in Bosnia on one hand, or saving hundreds of thousands of Somalis from starvation or delivering nearly 15,000 tons of food, medicine, and supplies to Rwanda's refugees on the other.

But performing peacekeeping and humanitarian missions while preserving warfighting capabilities is more than a conceptual challenge. It is also a challenge to mindset and culture. Is it possible to maintain the ethos of the warrior in servicemen and women who are serving on missions of peace?

The answer was made clear to me last Christmas, when I visited our troops in Haiti with General Shalikhshvili. I will never forget how I felt as he addressed those young Americans. He told them they were tough troops, trained to do tough work. "But today," he said, "is Christmas. Take a step back. Look at what you've done. You've saved the lives of thousands of people. Your mothers would be proud." I could see those soldiers look a little embarrassed at the praise, but they also seemed very proud as the General's words sunk in. They were every bit the world's best-trained, best-equipped, best-prepared soldiers that we count on them to be. And, yet, they were also agents of hope for a nation in need—in the best tradition of our people. That moment captured unequivocally for me that, yes, we can do both.

It seems to me there are four basic points to keep in mind.

The first is that power matters, even in operations other than war. Our military's successes in Haiti and Bosnia came because they established a secure environment in each through the exercise and example of their military power and prowess.

The second point is that our goals in operations other than war must be practical and limited. We cannot deceive ourselves into thinking that the very presence of our troops will conjure democracy into existence or flip the switch on to prosperity. At best, we can only give others a chance to rebuild their lives themselves. By restricting our engagement to the time and tasks necessary to complete our military mission, we underscore that the core purpose of our military is to fight wars—not to build nations.

The third point to bear in mind is that peacekeeping and humanitarian missions can also provide valuable experience for when the 'big ones' come along. They catalyze innovation—such as the joint planning among our services that was at the heart of our success in Haiti, or the provision of near real-time intelligence to our field commanders in Bosnia. They can break new ground in our cooperation with other nations—such as our historic partnership with Russia in Bosnia—as well as with UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the media. And they can help our troops to keep their skills sharp—though, of course, not all warfighting skills are put

to use in these operations. That is why we must continue to devise new ways for our units to keep their edge, such as rotating troops out of Bosnia for essential training in Hungary.

Finally, I believe our men and women in uniform are rightfully proud of what they are doing on these missions and that from that pride comes power. They show the world an America that is strong enough to be caring, generous, and humane, and that reinforces our nation's ability to lead the global march for peace and freedom. So we are starting to find ways to balance the equation successfully.

I want to underscore that in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, just as in combat, the President retains and will never relinquish command authority over American forces. But from the Revolutionary War to Korea to Desert Storm, the occasional, temporary placement of our forces under the operational control of foreign commanders has been part of our nation's security structure—and must remain so.

Some have proposed that in order to deal with these greater numbers of operations other than war, we should dedicate some of our forces to peacekeeping operations only. There are others who suggest that our servicemen and women be allowed to decide the extent of their participation in such missions. My own view on both issues is, no. As I said earlier, we use force for one reason only: to protect and promote our nation's interests. In order to maintain a disciplined fighting force, where morale is high and unity is strong, peacekeeping and humanitarian operations must be a common responsibility—no less than deterring conflicts or winning wars. And I'll tell you now, as I thought on Christmas Day—not only can our troops do both, they are. Anyone who has any doubts should ask both Saddam Hussein and the Haitian people.

But to keep our troops the best they can be, we must address the final challenge I posed at the outset: attracting and retaining an all-volunteer force of high standards and technical skill that is reflective of American society.

Part of why our military has been so successful is that it seeks to employ the best talents that America has to offer, regardless of gender or race. Indeed, I think we can safely say that our military is the most merit-based major institution in American society. Not only does it demand high quality at the outset, it encourages its members to become even better—and provides opportunities to do so. Our armed forces set an example for American society in giving those who take responsibility and work hard a chance to make the most of their own lives.

Almost five decades ago, the integration of our armed forces not only strengthened our combat readiness, it helped spur our nation to fight racism at home. Today, because the public still sees itself when it looks to our troops, it expects the military to keep pace with—and even to be a model for—the standards that govern the rest of society on issues from equal opportunity to sexual harassment.

Our military continues to work hard to improve opportunities for women and minorities. Last month, I attended the graduation of nearly 1,000 new sailors at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, and I was very proud, as I looked out at them, to see that—in this particular class—more than one-third were women.

In the 1970s and 1980s, I was a skeptic about an all-volunteer American military, primarily because of the concern that there could develop a gap between the military and the rest of our society. Today, after three years' experience, I can see that, quite simply, I was wrong.

I have discussed some of the challenges our military is meeting for America, but there is also a challenge America must meet for our military. Our servicemen and women put their lives

on the line for our country. They must have the resources they need to do their jobs. This demands constant reassessment, as we have done—increasing the defense budget when we recognized funding shortfalls, seeking additional appropriations for unexpected contingencies, and making sure, as we approach our four-year strategy review, that our strategy is backed by sufficient resources.

But important as technology and weaponry are, we must always remember that the core of our military strength is the faces behind the force. For me, they are the rangers I met who had just come home after a terrible—and, too many forget, heroic—fire fight in Mogadishu. They spoke first of their willingness to serve anywhere, at any time. Or the troops I have visited in Haiti, who took such pride in what they had done for the people of Haiti. Or the members of Charlie Rock Company at Outpost Lima in Bosnia, setting up camp on a muddy hill to help preserve a hard-won peace—a peace won in large part through the strength and skill of our Air Force pilots and Navy aviators.

We are all proud of these and the other men and women of America's armed forces. The President and I are grateful that you, the Class of '96, will be among those who lead them, work with them, and support them as we enter the 21st century. I believe that with your wisdom, vision, and leadership, our military and our nation will remain the most powerful, successful, and admired the world has ever known.