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U.S. Military Policy in the 21st Century

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Let me begin by saying that I believe that U.S. military leaders are guided by a basic, overarching blueprint for the preservation of American military power in the decades ahead. I will try my best to describe this blueprint, but this is not something that is explicitly, overtly articulated. Rather, it is expressed through suggestion and innuendo. However, it is no less significant for all that.

So, what is this blueprint?

First, the objective. As I see it, the ultimate objective of American defense policy for the 21st century is global military dominance forever. That is, the U.S. seeks to remain the predominant military power worldwide for as far into the future as any one of us can see. This, in turn, is intended to provide U.S. leaders with an ability to shape world affairs in a way that will boost U.S. national interests, especially economic interests.

About this, U.S. leaders are clear. According to the U.S. Department of Defense (*Annual report 2000*), "As the nation moves into the 21st Century, it is imperative that it maintain its military superiority in the face of evolving, as well as discontinuous, threats and challenges. Without such superiority, the United States' ability to exert global leadership and to create international conditions conducive to the achievement of its national goals will be in doubt." (p. 7)

Less clear, or rather less explicit, is the strategy by which the United States seeks to achieve this objective of permanent military superiority. But I think we can perceive its main outlines. I call this strategy "SHCH": Secure & Hold the Commanding Heights of Military Power. By commanding heights of military power, I mean those positions that allow the U.S. to dominate the global battlefield and overpower any potential adversary or combination of adversaries.

The concept of "commanding heights" goes back to military operations in less technologically demanding periods, to the era of the bow and arrow and the flintlock and musket, when

commanding officers always sought to capture and hold the high ground on any potential battlefield in order to fire down on their enemies from a position of advantage. In today's world, "commanding heights" tends to mean a position of superior firepower or technological advantage, allowing the dominant power to control the battlefield even if outnumbered in manpower or other purely quantitative features. It also means constructing alliances and military partnerships that allow the dominant power to isolate and contain a hostile power.

When U.S. strategists contemplate the commanding heights of military policy, they see this in both literal and figurative terms. By literal, I mean that U.S. leaders seek to ensure that U.S. forces will always control the ultimate high ground of airpower and space. In this, they are very clear: the United States must always, for now and forever, be able to defeat any enemy in the skies or in space. About this, there is no equivocation.

Speaking figuratively, U.S. strategists seek to maintain a military-technological lead over all other powers, and to assemble sufficient raw power -- both through U.S. capabilities and those of its allies -- to prevent any hostile power or combination of powers from ever being in a position to threaten American dominance of the international system. It also means dominating particular regions deemed important to U.S. interests and preserving a certain degree of global stability.

If I can stick with my "alpine analogy" of commanding heights, this means preserving U.S. dominance at three key levels. First, U.S. strategy aims to prevent any great-power challenger from accumulating sufficient strength to challenge the United States from a position of approximate parity. Using my alpine imagery, this means never allowing a potential competitor - whether that is Russia or China or some future challenger -- from scaling and capturing a mountain peak as tall as that occupied by the United States. Because the U.S. does not at present face such a competitor, U.S. strategy calls for the maintenance of technological superiority at such a high level that no competitor can ever catch up.

Second, U.S. strategy aims to prevent any regional power from threatening key U.S. allies or vital U.S. interests in regions considered important to the United States, such as Europe, the Middle East, or East Asia. Again, using my alpine analogy, this means preventing mid-level powers from seizing the foothills surrounding the American controlled high country and using this position to dominate other states that are allied to the U.S. or to cut off the flow of vital materials, especially oil, to the United States. In contemporary parlance, this is the realm of the "rogue state" threat.

This threat is described by the Department of Defense as follows: "When rogue states defy the community of nations and threaten common interests, the United States may use its military capability...to help enforce the international community's will and deter further coercion" (DOD *Annual Report 2000*, p. 6).

Under the section entitled "Fighting and Winning Major Theater Wars," the Department of Defense describes its role in this regard as follows: "In order to protect American interests around the globe, forces must continue to be able to overmatch the military power of regional states with interests hostile to the United States. Such states are often capable of fielding sizable

military forces that can cause serious imbalances in military power in regions important to the United States" (DOD *Annual Report 2000*, p. 7).

Third and finally, U.S. strategy aims to maintain a sufficient degree of stability in other areas of the world such that American businesses and those of our allies can operate with a minimum risk of chaos and disorder. You can call this, if you will, "policing the plains" or "maintaining global stability." U.S. leaders do not necessarily seek to employ American forces for this purpose, but they are quite clear that the U.S. must be prepared to use U.S. forces if and when the need arises, in situations called SSCOs, "Smaller-Scale Contingency Operations," by the Department of Defense

This outlook is expressed in the Department of Defense *Annual Report for 2000* as follows: "In general, the United States, along with others in the international community will seek to prevent and contain localized conflicts and crises before they require a military response. However, if such efforts do not succeed, swift intervention by military forces may be the best way to contain, resolve, or mitigate the consequences of a conflict that could otherwise become far more costly and deadly."

This, then, is the broad landscape of U.S. military strategy. Let me turn now to some of the structural components of this strategy. The military plans and programs intended to carry out the broad goals of national strategy include the following:

1. Absolute nuclear superiority. It is true, of course, that senior U.S. officials occasionally speak of their desire for a nuclear-weapons-free world, and that some former U.S. military officers, such as General Lee Butler, have suggested that the U.S. can accomplish its strategic aims without nuclear weapons. But this is just wishful thinking on Butler's part and pure smokescreen on the part of current U.S. officials. In reality, U.S. military leaders are just as committed to nuclear weapons as they were during the Cold War era and have no intention of ever giving up U.S. nuclear superiority. According to the Department of Defense, "Nuclear weapons remain important as one of a range of responses available to deal with threats or use of NBC (nuclear, biological, or chemical) weapons against U.S. interests" (DOD *Annual Report 2000*, p. 5-6).

2. Closely related to this is NMD, or National Missile Defense. However much scorn may have been heaped on Ronald Reagan's so-called "Star Wars" plan, the U.S. military leadership have never given up the dream of creating a leak-proof shield against enemy nuclear missiles in space, so that the United States could use nuclear weapons against other powers without fear of retribution. It now looks as if we are moving much closer to such a system under the guise of a limited defense system against missiles fired by so-called rogue-states, such as from North Korea or Iran. I can speak at length about the absurdity of spending \$60 billion or more to develop a system to defend against a hypothetical North Korean or Iranian missile threat, but the important point here is that analysts in China and Russia are very skeptical about the officially stated purpose of the Clinton Administration's NMD plans, and fear -- correctly, I think -- that it is a just the first step towards a more elaborate, expansive system aimed at their own missile systems.

As noted by the United States Space Command (US SPACECOM) in its *Long-Range Plan*, "Global Engagement [in outer-space terms] is a combination of global surveillance of Earth [see

anything, anytime], worldwide missile defense, and the potential to apply force from space.... By 2020, a *second* generation system for the National Missile Defense is expected to be in place [the Clinton plan being the first generation], with many of the weapons and sensors potentially moving into space... At present, the notion of weapons in space is not consistent with U.S. national policy. *Planning for the possibility is a purpose of this plan* should our civilian leadership decide that the application of force from space is in our national interest." (Emphasis added.) This is, of course, the ultimate "high ground."

3. A third component is to preserve U.S. superiority in conventional weapons, especially airpower. As shown by the Persian Gulf War and the Kosovo conflict, U.S. military strategy in conventional conflicts calls above all for absolute dominance of the airspace over the battlefield, so that U.S. air forces can attack enemy forces on the ground with relative impunity. The U.S. obviously enjoys this advantage against any conceivable adversary today, and U.S. strategy calls for the U.S. to preserve their advantage for the indefinite future by investing heavily in the development of new aerospace technologies.

4. The fourth component is to maintain a global power projection capability such that the U.S. can amass superior firepower anywhere in the world to overpower any conceivable local or regional adversary in a very short time and with very little risk to U.S. forces. This is the Operation Desert Storm mentality, and it is deeply embedded in U.S. defense policy.

5. Finally, the fifth component is to manage the global distribution of military power in such a way as to enhance the net power of U.S. allies and constrain the power of potential adversaries. This means, for example, applying global non-proliferation restraints against so-called rogue states, such as North Korea and Iran, while essentially turning a blind eye to the proliferation activities of U.S. allies, like Israel. This also means providing the most advanced conventional weapons to allies, such as Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), while trying to prevent other suppliers, especially Russia and China, from supplying arms to countries the US does not like, such as Iran, Syria, Sudan and Libya.

Obviously, one could go into a great deal of detail within each of these areas, but I think the basic outline is clear: secure and hold the commanding heights of military power for the United States and its closest allies, while denying these positions of advantage to any potential challenger.

One could also speak at some length on the problems attached to this strategy. I believe that the very pursuit of superiority in this brazen, aggressive manner will arouse hostility from peoples and states who would be perfectly happy to cooperate with the U.S. if they were not cast in the role of potential adversary or, in the case of U.S. allies, as second-class citizens. And by arousing such hostility, the U.S. will lead these peoples and states to seek ways of defeating the U.S. plan -- and I have no doubt they will find some ways to do this, because no military plan can ever be fool-proof (the great lesson of the Maginot Line). But this would be a longer discussion than we have time for, so I will stop here.