

OPERATIONS, PROCUREMENT, AND INDUSTRIAL BASE

by Harry G. Summers Jr.

One need not look far afield to see the devastating effect that the post-Cold War drawdown in the U.S. military could have on America's ability to fight and win on the battlefield.¹ The former Soviet military, once the most feared in the world and for almost a half century the very criterion by which the U.S. military judged itself, has virtually collapsed. Like the U.S. military, Russia's armed forces have suffered draconian cuts. In 1988, during the Cold War, the Soviet military (which then included not only the Russian military but also the military forces of the other Soviet republics) had more than 5 million soldiers, sailors, and airmen under arms. By 1995, Russia, the successor to the Soviet Union, had only 1.5 million military personnel on active duty. This decline in the physical aspects of Russian combat power is only part of the story. The precipitous decline in soldier morale is even more telling. As one former officer said, "The armed forces had become a disaster area" with the soldiers "separated in spirit by the total lack of a common purpose or unified goals."² The results were apparent in the debacle in Chechnya, where lightly armed Muslim guerrillas held the Russian military at bay for almost two years.

The Hollow Army

Could a similar scenario of military decline unfold in the United States? As then army chief of staff General Gordon Sullivan, who presided over the U.S. Army's post-Cold War drawdown, emphasized in 1991, it almost did in July 1950 in the opening days of the Korean War. At that time, America's lead element,

¹This essay originally appeared in *Orbis*, Spring 1997, and arose from the Foreign Policy Research Institute conference "The Demilitarization of the Military?" Philadelphia, Pa., July 17-18, 1996.

²Vadim Makarenko, "I Realized Something Had Broken Down," *U.S. News and World Report*, Aug. 26, 1996, p. 35.

Task Force Smith (the First Battalion, Twenty-First Infantry Regiment commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Charles B. Smith), was decimated by the advancing North Korean army, which had the American troops outgunned and outmanned. In the early days of the war, the United States was behind on the weapons-technology curve. American 2.36-inch antitank rocket launchers, for instance, could not stop the North Korean army's Soviet-supplied T-34 medium tanks, and neither could the light tanks of the divisions coming from Japan.

I witnessed this tragedy first-hand as a young corporal in a tank company in the Twenty-Fourth Infantry Division, Task Force Smith's parent unit. We lost all of our 75mm-gun M24 Chaffee tanks within the first week of the war. My platoon sergeant, who had fought the Nazi panzers as a tanker in World War II, shot twelve rounds into an advancing T-34, only to see them bounce harmlessly away. The enemy tank then blew out his entire engine compartment with one round from its high-velocity 85mm gun.

As if that were not demoralizing enough, two close friends and my company commander died for want of a seventy-five-cent starter solenoid on the company tank retriever when it stalled after the driver was shot in a North Korean roadblock. Unable to restart the retriever, the three were all gunned down as they tried to escape.

Like the untrained Russian conscripts in Chechnya, we had not been prepared for the terrible realities of war. As historian T. R. Fehrenbach put it, "In the first six months [of the Korean War] America suffered a near debacle because her Regular Army fighting men were the stuff of legions, but they had not been made into legionaries."³ But it was not the first time that had happened.

From its beginning, the United States has followed a pattern of being caught unprepared, hastily mobilizing at great cost, then rapidly cutting back its forces after the crisis has passed. A few months after the end of World War I, Major George C. Marshall said in words that ring true today, "The public ran away from the tragedies of the War . . . and became obsessed with the magnitude of the public debt and the problems of its reduction. Forgetting almost immediately the bitter lessons of unpreparedness, they demanded and secured the reduction of the Army."⁴

³T. R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War: A Study in Unpreparedness* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 438.

⁴Maj. George C. Marshall, "The Effect of School Histories on National Defense," in *Report of the Tenth Annual Conference of the Association of Military Colleges and Schools of the United States*, Washington, D.C., Mar. 7-8, 1923, p. 32.

Citing examples from the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and the Philippine Insurrection, as well as World War I, Marshall ruefully pointed out that there are numerous instances of the same general nature. But the astonishing fact is that America continues to follow a regular cycle in the doing and undoing of measures for the national defense. Americans start in making adequate provisions and then turn abruptly in the opposite direction and abolish what has just been done.⁵

Marshall must have recalled those words in September 1939 when he was appointed army chief of staff and took charge of a force completely unprepared for World War II. As his soldiers of the First Infantry Division in France had in 1917, these soldiers paid the price in blood at Bataan and Corregidor in the Philippines, and at the Kasserine Pass and the Fa'id Pass in North Africa as they bought time for the U.S. mobilization capability to catch up. And when he took over as secretary of defense in the Korean War, Marshall must have thought of those words again as American soldiers once more paid the price for a hollow army. Eventually the prototype weaponry that for budgetary reasons had not been procured earlier, including 3.5-inch antitank rocket launchers and 90mm-gun M46 Patton medium tanks, made its way to the battlefield. But for thousands of soldiers it was too late.

"No More Task Force Smiths"

When he took over as army chief of staff in 1991, Sullivan adopted the motto "No more Task Force Smiths." It was a motto more provident than he realized. By the time General Sullivan left office in 1995, the army had declined from 770,000 soldiers and sixteen active combat divisions at the end of the Cold War to 495,000 soldiers and ten active divisions, almost 100,000 fewer than the 590,000 soldiers of the hollow army at the beginning of the Korean War.

But Sullivan had been true to his word. Though smaller than its Korean War predecessor, the post-Cold War army had no "Task Force Smiths." The army of 1950 had been gutted internally. None of its ten divisions had a wartime complement of weapons: the infantry regiments had only two of their three rifle battalions, the field artillery battalions had only two of their three firing batteries, and the divisions had only light-tank companies rather than the authorized medium-tank battalions. While also ten divisions

⁵Ibid.

strong, the active army of 1995 had not been skeletonized. Budget cuts had somewhat degraded unit readiness, but the force was not a hollow one. Instead, the entire army was armed, manned, and trained for combat.

Back to Basics

While much has been made of the current revolution in military affairs, with its emphasis on Information Age technology and computer warfare, the real revolution took place almost a quarter-century ago in response to the debacle in Vietnam. In 1972, under Admiral Stansfield Turner at the Naval War College, a “back to basics” movement began that swept the military. The false doctrines of the civilian nuclear war strategists, who preached that nuclear weapons had transformed the nature of war, were thrown out. So were the teachings of the social scientists, who argued that guerrilla insurgencies were the wave of the future and that nation building should be the principal military task.

These civilian-bred fallacies had almost destroyed the military’s ability to wage conventional war. Admiral Turner insisted that the military again become the master of its own profession, and there emerged a renewed emphasis on conventional war-fighting doctrines and training fundamentals. To that end, the army formed its Training and Doctrine Command; the air force began Project Warrior and formed its Center for Aerospace Doctrine, Research, and Education; and the navy initiated its Naval Doctrine Command. Training was revitalized, combat-maneuver training centers were established, and training simulators and computer war games were introduced to hone combat skills.

All the services also reworked their basic battle doctrines, concentrating on conventional war-fighting operations and tactics. Driven by then navy secretary John Lehman’s emphasis on offensive rather than defensive operations, the navy and marines’ Maritime Strategy focused on control of the high seas, power projection, operations on the flanks, amphibious warfare, and the ability to build a sea bridge to Europe to bring America’s mobilization capability to bear. The army formulated its AirLand Battle doctrine, with multidimensional rear-battle, near-battle, and deep-battle concepts. For its part, the air force concentrated on neutralizing and destroying the enemy’s war-fighting capabilities and will to fight.

All of that effort paid off in the Persian Gulf War. The navy’s

initiative in preparing to build a sea bridge to Europe enabled it to build just such a bridge to the Middle East. The amphibious threat from the marines kept Iraqi divisions pinned down in static defenses. AirLand Battle worked as planned, as the army cut through the Iraqi defenses. And the air force swept the skies, paralyzing the enemy’s military, political, and economic bases. Rising phoenix-like from the ashes of Vietnam, the American military had demonstrated convincingly that it was the world’s most formidable fighting force.

Force XXI

But the services did not rest on their laurels. After the Persian Gulf War, each reassessed its war-fighting doctrines and organization for combat in preparation for the twenty-first century. Most striking was the navy’s abandonment of its traditional blue-water strategy in favor of an emphasis on the world’s coastlines, or littorals, as described in *Forward . . . From the Sea*.

The air force similarly underwent a major transformation. Acknowledging that in the post-nuclear age the term “strategic,” once a synonym for nuclear weapons, had reverted to its original meaning, the air force discontinued its Strategic Air Command, which had been the very heart of the air force for almost a half-century. It then adopted a new strategy, Global Reach, Global Power, and reorganized its force into “movers” and “shooters” in the new Air Mobility Command and Air Combat Command, the latter with composite squadrons of tankers, bombers, and fighters.

The nation’s land forces underwent the least reorientation. Pleased with the performance of its AirLand Battle doctrine in the Persian Gulf War, the army made few immediate changes in either its war-fighting doctrine or its organization for combat. It did, however, set up an experimental force as a test-bed for the digitalization of combat operations.

The U.S. Marine Corps, only slightly affected by the post-Cold War drawdowns, was more than pleased with the navy’s new coastal strategy, which seemed tailor-made for the marines’ traditional amphibious warfare mission. Prior to the war in the Persian Gulf, the marines had reorganized into marine air-ground task forces, in which units at every level from battalion to corps had an integral land component, air component, and logistics component. From the battalion-level marine expeditionary units to the corps-level First Marine Expeditionary Force, this new struc-

ture had been battle tested and validated in the Persian Gulf, and the marines saw no need for major change.

Unlike in previous postwar drawdowns, the military made a major effort in the latest reorganization to adapt its doctrines and structure to new realities. Both the Bush administration's 1991 Base Force model and the Clinton administration's 1993 Bottom-Up Review formulated a military strategy to square the enormous reductions in the size of the force with the dangers of the post-Cold War world. But it soon became obvious that the new strategy had severe deficiencies.

First was the notion that the United States could fight two major regional contingencies nearly simultaneously in Northeast Asia, the Middle East, or Western Europe. Given the cuts in military capabilities, this so-called win-win strategy stretched credibility, for each of the previous wars in Northeast Asia and the Middle East required more divisions than existed in the post-Cold War force, and there was no evidence a new conflict would be any less intense. At best the United States had a "win-hold" capability, and even that was tenuous.

But the real Achilles' heel of the new strategy was that it was seriously underfunded, with estimates of the shortfall ranging from \$150 million to \$200 billion. But instead of facing that fact, America tried to wish it away and avoid the hard choices that have to be made. One evasion was to assume that historically low inflation rates would make the problem go away. Another, a favorite of the defense contractors, was to argue that high technology could substitute for manpower, enabling further reductions in force size.

Technology versus Manpower

These arguments touch on a basic philosophical difference among the services. In the army and the marines, "machines" serve the man, and force levels are a primary concern. In the navy and air force, man serves the "machine," and technology has the edge, as it does with the American people. The revulsion over the carnage of World War I, where more U.S. soldiers were killed in action in three months on the line than in ten years in Vietnam, encouraged the idea of using "things" rather than people to win wars. On the very eve of Pearl Harbor, for example, columnist Walter Lippman wrote that America would fight World War II with air and naval power, and that there would be little need for land forces. Although events proved him wrong, this thinking led

to the enormous postwar cutbacks in ground forces and the hollow army with which the United States entered the Korean War. And these same ideas were at work in the post-Cold War drawdown. Although the army had been cut by more than one-third, that was not good enough for those who believed technology could substitute for soldiers.

"Can we make a trade-off between nine more-modern divisions and ten less-modern divisions?" asked Senator Carl Levin (D-Mich.) during an April 1994 Senate Armed Services Committee meeting. "You could start modernizing tomorrow if you lopped off another two or three divisions," said Senator John Warner (R-Va.).⁶ Three years later their notions still persist, and the army today is under pressure to cut 20,000 more soldiers in order to free up funds for new technology. Adding fuel to this debate are the think tanks that preach that high technology renders soldiers obsolete, and that future wars in the Information Age will be fought by computers rather than soldiers. It is no accident, said one panel participant, that many of these think tanks receive a lot of money from the military-industrial complex, whose high-tech systems benefit the contractors instead of the military.

As former army vice chief of staff General Frederick Kroesen pointed out, excessive faith in today's high technology is but the latest manifestation of the "silver bullet" fantasy. Earlier versions included the horse, the phalanx, the crossbow, the iron-clad knight, the cannon, the machine gun, the tank, poison gas, the airplane, and the atomic bomb. Certainly the technology of the Information Age will revolutionize the battlefield, and cyberspace systems and digitalization have already begun to do so. The resulting changes will no doubt be as dramatic as the battlefield changes of the Industrial Age. But as the distinguished military historian Sir Michael Howard noted, the nation must also be prepared to wage war at the level of the Agrarian Age, for old verities about will and courage still apply. Despite the intense debate over technology, the central issue confronting the armed forces has not been faced—whether the United States should maintain a Cold War-type military with a relatively large standing army or whether it should return to the much smaller force of the interwar years.

Instead of using regional contingencies as the criterion for shaping the force, another panelist said, America should plan for

⁶Lisa Burgess, "Congress Wrestles with Technology, Force Cuts," *Defense News*, May 9–15, 1994.

the unforeseeable. U.S. forces should have a more generalized strategy that minimizes the odds that they will get into serious trouble, no matter where they have to fight. But certain vested intellectual, organizational, and industrial interests weigh against such a strategy: planners are wedded to their own ideas and concepts. The services prefer to fight the types of wars for which they are best trained and structured. And industry pushes for scenarios where their weapons systems are optimized.

What America suffers now, asserted another panelist, is a disparity among policy, force posture, and the budget. If, as some argue, war fighting is no longer the primary role of the military and peacekeeping should be the armed forces' principal focus, then the military as it exists today is unnecessary. But since the American people are not anxious to support such a "touchy-feely" military, they are not likely to favor a defense budget geared toward those tasks.

The Military-Industrial Complex and Procurement

Some people assert that the matériel dimension of strategy is the real heart of the "American way of war," by which the enemy is not so much defeated as overwhelmed by the enormous U.S. mobilization capability and matériel superiority. During the April 1951 Chinese spring offensive in Korea, for example, American field artillery fired twenty-seven *Liberty Ship* loads of ammunition to turn back the 250,000-man attack, inflicting 70,000 casualties in the process. *Time* magazine quoted one U.S. officer as saying, "They're spending people the way we spend ammunition."⁷ In wartime, that equation suits the American people, who prefer to spend "things" and be the war's "arsenal of democracy" rather than spend the lives of their children and become its charnel house. But in peacetime, many Americans see the "arsenal" as a corrupt "military-industrial complex" that squanders tax money on overpriced toilet seats and \$200 hammers. It follows that peacetime defense spending has been a prime target of budget cutters. While the size of the military has been cut by one-third in the wake of the Cold War, the share of the gross domestic product devoted to national defense has been slashed in half, declining by 54 percent in real dollars since 1985 to its lowest level since before World War II.

Moreover, the Defense Department's procurement budget is at

⁷Quoted in Harry G. Summers Jr., "Spring Offensive, 1951," in *Korean War Almanac* (New York: Facts on File, 1990), p. 256.

a fifty-year low. While a crisis is not immediately at hand, such reductions do portend future problems. Technology buys time, and intelligence estimates hold that the U.S. military today has about a fifteen-year edge on its likely opponents. Unless that current technological advantage is maintained, however, a "bow wave" will develop that will reach staggering proportions early in the next century. When the problem becomes apparent then, it will be too late to solve it. To change the military of 2015, one must start now. Except that now there is no vision to initiate those changes.

A case in point is the issue of air dominance. The navy and air force are calling for a \$300 billion investment in new jet fighters to replace their aging aircraft. Even though the number of aircraft has been cut by some 35 percent since the Persian Gulf War (from 8,200 to 5,900 planes) to free up dollars for modernization, that is not enough to pay for the new planes. "Getting there by 2001, as planned," notes the *Washington Post's* Bradley Graham, "assumes future savings from military base closing and more efficient purchasing practices—assumptions that are proving more difficult to achieve than top defense officials had anticipated."⁸ Base closings will certainly not compensate for the shortfall. As one panelist pointed out, Washington has already closed some 20 percent of the bases in the United States, but it will be ten years before the government sees any savings.

The other alternative, more efficient purchasing practices, was favored by two panelists whose time in office afforded them substantial experience in promoting competition and second sourcing for military procurement. During their tenure, sole-source and cost-plus procurement fell from 85 percent to 35 percent, with a significant reduction in costs. The cost of an *Aegis* cruiser, for example, went from \$1.5 billion to \$800 million. But the recent consolidation of defense industries in the name of efficiency has decreased competition. Lockheed-Martin accounts for 60 percent of current procurement. By returning to a Soviet-style monopoly supply system, the United States is in danger of unilateral disarmament.

The Dow Jones industrial index has increased more than 70 percent in the past three years, noted one participant. But during the same period, in an era of declining military budgets, the defense industrial index rose almost 500 percent. Chief executive officers are back in the cost-plus high cotton with \$40 million

⁸Bradley Graham, "Pentagon Faces Huge Bill for Jet Fighters," *Washington Post*, Aug. 22, 1996.

bonuses, and none of them can lose money. And a dependence on internal defense industrial facilities is not an answer either. Combined, these large pockets of socialism—such as the army arsenal system, the navy shipyards and weapons stations, and the air force depots—are wasting \$40–50 billion a year. A classic example from the Reagan years was the very high speed integrated chip (VHSIC). The Pentagon bureaucracy said Silicon Valley could not be counted on to produce fast enough chips for the integrated circuits of the high-tech weapons system then under development. So Washington taxed each of the services nearly \$2 billion a year and sank approximately \$12 billion overall into the VHSIC program. When the chip was finally produced in 1989, it was significantly slower and several generations behind the commercial counterpart produced by Silicon Valley companies.

Ironically, America is currently experiencing a golden era of productivity. The U.S. industrial base for high tech, low tech, heavy industry, and manufacturing is the marvel of the world. And this base can still provide the country with an affordable defense if the government tells manufacturers exactly what military capabilities the United States needs. If Washington fails to do that, the industrial base will be in the driver's seat. The U.S. defense posture will then depend on what the industrial complex wants to sell instead of on foreign policy and defense decision makers, leaving the country at the mercy of the American "Krupp."

Although he agreed with that assessment, another panel member pointed out that procurement reform is a second-order issue. Even a 50 percent reduction in the existing \$39 billion procurement budget would make only a small dent in the \$260 billion defense budget. The big money is in operating and maintenance funds, and cuts there must be accompanied by a clear plan of action. Thus, the armed forces need a new NSC-68, the blueprint that laid out a coherent military policy to guide the Cold War procurement policies.

Conclusion

What was not said by the panelists was as important as what was said. No one forecast any substantial increases in the defense budget in the foreseeable future. Despite some rumblings from the Republicans, defense spending was not a major issue in the 1996 presidential campaign. Perhaps one explanation is that, according to a 1995 public opinion poll, only 9 percent of Americans see for-

eign policy and defense as America's biggest problem, down from 42 percent in 1982.

But relief may be at hand. On July 17, 1996, the very day the Defense Task Force convened, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John Shalikashvili unveiled his *Joint Vision 2010*, which addressed one of the panel's primary concerns. It was intended to serve as an industry road map for the next fifteen years, said the *Defense Daily*, "by channeling the military services' varied acquisition programs, as well as doctrine and strategy differences, into one common direction."⁹

As the *Defense News* noted,

Joint Vision 2010 marks the first attempt by a Joint Chiefs chairman to define a strategy for each of the military services to follow in crafting investment and modernization plans. . . . Shalikashvili's plan also will serve as a litmus test for the military services' various weapons programs.¹⁰

A valiant attempt to apply logic to what has been until now an illogical system, *Joint Vision 2010* was long overdue.

⁹Vega Muradian, "New Joint Warfare Plan Also an Industry Road Map," *Defense Daily*, July 18, 1996.

¹⁰Robert Holzer, "Shali Pushes Future Force Strategy," *Defense News*, Aug. 19–25, 1996.