

# A Case Study of Politics and U.S. Army Doctrine

## *1954 Field Manual 100-5: Operations*

by Dr. David C. Rasmussen



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## Preface

The U.S. Army significantly modified its capstone doctrine Field Manual 100-5: *Operations* in 1954 in an effort to offset President Eisenhower's fulfillment of campaign promises that he made to secure and maintain the support of the right wing of the Republican Party. This paper looks at how politics influenced national security decisions and the 1954 change to Army doctrine. The case study highlights the specific doctrinal changes and shift to nuclear warfare. It also examines the domestic, international and bureaucratic political factors and how they affected the shift. The author hopes to inform current and former Army and defense leaders about the dangers of making doctrinal decisions based on politics rather than national security considerations.



## **A Case Study of Politics and U.S. Army Doctrine: 1954 Field Manual 100-5: *Operations***

### **Introduction**

In 1954, the U.S. Army significantly modified its capstone doctrine, Field Manual (FM) 100-5: *Operations*, in an effort to offset the fulfillment of campaign promises President Eisenhower made to secure and maintain the support of the right wing of the Republican Party—a 30 percent cut to the defense budget and the withdrawal most U.S. troops from Europe. Seventy percent of this total savings was to come from cuts to the Army’s personnel strength. The Army chief of staff (CSA) at the time, General Matthew Ridgway, argued that such cuts would prevent the Army from accomplishing its primary mission—deterring its adversaries—and from fulfilling its existing U.S. treaty commitments, especially in Europe.

To overcome this opposition and instead gain the Army’s public support, something the administration wanted badly to legitimize the cuts, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) Admiral Arthur W. Radford proposed a compromise that he thought the Army would fully embrace. He proposed the president delegate to Army commanders the authority (then held only by the president) to employ tactical nuclear weapons whenever it would offer a battlefield advantage; Radford suggested it would allow Army forces to compensate for personnel cuts with the ready firepower of tactical nuclear weapons. However, unknown to Radford, the Army had been studying the effects of tactical nuclear weapons on the battlefield and concluded that *more* troops would be needed with any scenario involving the employment of such weapons. Nevertheless, CSA Ridgway accepted CJCS Radford’s compromise and then immediately directed the Army to update its capstone doctrine to incorporate the use of tactical nuclear weapons on the battlefield. He stated that this modification was intended “not as a means to support or justify administration cutbacks, but as a means to fight against them.”<sup>1</sup>

This historical case study can inform current and future Army and defense leaders about how politics can affect national security decisions, including significant and sudden changes to Army doctrine. Because the Army is a doctrine-based organization, the impact of politics



can permeate the Army's organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel and facilities. When doctrinal decisions are made on the basis of satisfying political interests rather than national security considerations, both the Army and the nation's defense as a whole can be negatively affected.

The purpose of this case study is to determine the extent politics influenced the shift in Army doctrine in 1954—a shift one might have expected to have occurred incrementally or in parallel with the first use and further development of nuclear weapons from 1945–1954. First, it is helpful to highlight specific changes in doctrinal content from the 1941, 1944 and 1949 editions to the 1954 edition of *Operations*. Second, it is necessary to identify relevant political factors at the domestic, international and bureaucratic levels of analysis during this period. Finally, one must examine the impact of these factors on the Army's doctrinal shift.

Before delving into these three ideas, it is helpful to consider how politics influenced the timing of this doctrinal shift. This consideration confirms findings from previous military doctrine studies while simultaneously aiming to provide additional insights that other studies might have missed. Similar to Barry Posen's conclusions on interwar French, British and German militaries in *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars*, the U.S. Army's pursuit of its own organizational interests partially explains this doctrinal shift in 1954. Unlike Posen's findings, however, there is not a clear connection with international politics. Rather, domestic politics created the conditions that caused senior Army leaders to use doctrine in an effort to preserve resources.

Unlike the conclusion reached by Stephen Peter Rosen in *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military*, there does not appear to be sufficient evidence to support the idea that senior leaders established favorable conditions, such as promotion pathways, to embed this new doctrine within the Army. Also, no new Army branches were created that specialized in the employment of nuclear weapons. Furthermore, this doctrine was never fully embraced by the Army and was abandoned by the late 1950s. Unlike Deborah Avant's hypothesis in *Political Institutions and Military Change: Lessons from Peripheral Wars*, the Army does not appear to have resisted efforts by the administration to impose these cuts by turning to Congress for help (i.e., by playing Congress against the administration). However, the Army did attempt to resist these politically motivated cuts by embracing the very doctrinal change it had originally tried to avoid.

In some respects, these findings are consistent with what Elizabeth Kier found in her case study of the French Army in *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars*. She concluded that the French Army was forced into making a constrained doctrinal choice between offense and defense when a left-wing political coalition came to power and imposed severe limits on conscription. Similarly, the U.S. Army was forced into choosing between mid-intensity conventional and high-intensity tactical nuclear warfare when a right-wing American political coalition came to power and imposed severe cuts on it.

### **The 1941, 1944, 1949 and 1954 Editions of FM 100-5**

The amount of mid-intensity conventional and low-intensity unconventional warfare content in the 1941, 1944 and 1949 editions of FM 100-5 was the same. The editions each devoted 99 percent of content to mid-intensity conventional warfare and less than 1 percent of content to low-intensity unconventional warfare. None of these editions devoted any content to

high-intensity nuclear warfare. The 1954 edition, however, shifted nearly a quarter of its content from mid-intensity conventional warfare to high-intensity nuclear warfare. Atomic, nuclear and radiological weapons or their effects and weapons of mass destruction were discussed on 53 of the manual's 216 pages.

Why did the Army make this doctrinal shift toward nuclear warfare in 1954? One explanation might be that U.S. nuclear technology had advanced to the point where ground forces could finally employ such weapons. The Army tested its first cannon capable of delivering a small tactical nuclear weapon in May 1953.<sup>2</sup> However, since very few of these weapons had become available to Army field forces by 1954, they should not have warranted such a significant shift in doctrine. Another explanation might be that the Soviet Union had reached the point where it could threaten U.S. forces with nuclear weapons. However, the Soviet Union had possessed nuclear weapons since 1949. Consequently, these factors alone cannot account for why Army leaders made this doctrinal shift when they did. An examination of the domestic, international and bureaucratic political factors with the potential for affecting Army doctrinal choice during this period can provide the necessary insight into the timing of this shift.

### **Domestic Political Factors**

Domestic political factors that had the greatest potential to impact the Army's doctrinal shift in 1954 emerged from the 1952 presidential campaign and the new administration's attempts to fulfill national-security-related campaign promises. Eisenhower ran against President Truman on a platform dominated by economic issues. He criticized Truman for taxing and spending too much—especially on defense—and for creating budget deficits that would eventually bankrupt the country, risking economic collapse.<sup>3</sup> He portrayed the economic threat created by over-taxation and overspending as equal to or even greater than the military threat posed by the Soviet Union and Communism.<sup>4</sup> Eisenhower promised he would not allow the Soviet Union to determine the level of American taxation and spending and that he would let Americans set their own limits, providing them with the security they could afford.<sup>5</sup> He promised to provide “security with solvency” by solving what he called the “Great Equation.”<sup>6</sup> Solving the Great Equation meant finding the right balance among sustainable taxation, government spending and the economy. Eisenhower promised Americans he could provide them with better security for less cost and, as a result, a better and stronger economy—one that, unlike Truman's, would sustain the nation's security.<sup>7</sup>

The Truman administration had been structuring its defense budgets with an eye toward 1954 as a year of maximum danger; that was when the Soviet Union was expected to reach its peak conventional and nuclear capabilities.<sup>8</sup> This idea came from the administration's containment policy, articulated in National Security Council (NSC) paper 68 (United States 1950), which predicted that Soviet military capabilities would peak by 1954 and then decline, as its economy could not sustain military spending at such high rates. The administration surmised the United States only needed to sustain its relatively high levels of defense spending to keep the Soviet Union contained until then. Consequently, the policy of containment was not viewed as a long-term Cold War strategy.

Eisenhower, however, argued that it was impossible to predict when Soviet military efforts would peak and when its economy would be exhausted and that the policy of containment would instead exhaust the U.S. economy.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, he posited that excessive levels of defense spending not only had the potential to harm the economy but also that a defense-centric

mindset would gradually erode American liberties and way of life. An economy and society increasingly burdened by and geared toward a permanent war footing could only result in what Eisenhower referred to as a “garrison state.” He was describing a society in which personal freedom, liberty and economic opportunity were permanently subordinated to the needs of security. A garrison state, he argued, was something that would eventually destroy liberty and prosperity—the very ideals Americans were trying to defend.<sup>10</sup>

Eisenhower believed the Soviets envisioned an epic and lasting struggle between capitalism and Communism and were committed to succeeding, no matter how long it took. In other words, he thought the United States needed a strategy and a defense budget that could be sustained indefinitely. Eisenhower thought that if the United States followed Truman’s 1953 and 1954 budgets, the Soviets would simply increase their defense efforts. He believed that in a classic escalation scenario, the United States would then continue increasing its defense spending time and time again until its economy had collapsed and its way of life had been eroded by an increasingly militarized state. Consequently, Eisenhower offered a plan to reduce defense spending to a level that the country could afford indefinitely.<sup>11</sup> He argued the United States had to find a way to sustain the Cold War indefinitely without creating a garrison state and destroying the very thing it was trying to protect.<sup>12</sup>

Eisenhower’s second key campaign promise was to end the Korean War and prevent future U.S. involvement in any similar war. The Korean War had stalemated by the time of the 1952 presidential campaign and had become increasingly unpopular among the American people. Not surprisingly, ending the war and bringing American troops home as soon as possible became the number one issue of the campaign.<sup>13</sup>

The Korean War was a limited war with limited objectives, fought under the auspices of the relatively new United Nations (UN). In June 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea in a surprise attack that almost pushed U.S. and South Korean forces off the Korean peninsula. U.S. forces, as part of a larger, international UN force, counterattacked and pushed North Korean forces back across the North-South Korean border by October and then continued their advance through North Korean territory all the way to the Yalu River along the Chinese border. It was at this point Communist Chinese forces entered the war. The Chinese and North Korean armies pushed U.S. and UN forces back to the North-South Korean border by February 1951; this is where the conflict stalemated.

The Eisenhower campaign criticized Truman’s administration for its mishandling of the war and promised never to involve the United States in another similar conflict. This begs the question, what kind of war was Korea? Eisenhower argued it was an unnecessary and indecisive ground war that needlessly wasted American lives and resources. He said it was unnecessary because it would never have started if America had taken enough initiative to show strength against Soviet, Chinese and North Korean Communism and that it was indecisive because its objectives were limited by self-imposed restrictions the United States followed as part of an international UN force that it was trying to legitimize and maintain. These objectives became limited to restoring the original border between North Korea and South Korea solely through ground warfare on the Korean Peninsula. Attacks against Communist sources of support and sanctuary inside mainland China or the Soviet Union were off-limits to UN forces. As part of a UN peacekeeping mission, wartime objectives were focused only on restoring a member nation’s sovereignty, including borders and territory if violated. Violating borders

and territory of another nation in turn, even those of an aggressor, was inconsistent with the UN's limited goals—goals meant to keep the peace, not expand wars. The Truman administration was concerned about involving the United States in a wider war with the Soviets and Chinese—a potential World War III that Truman believed would not have been in America's best interests. The war was also indecisive because the Truman administration refused to bring all of America's capabilities to the fight. Truman would not authorize the use of strategic bombing (including nuclear weapons) during the Korean conflict, even though commanders such as General MacArthur had recommended their use to achieve victory and avoid stalemate.<sup>14</sup>

President-elect Eisenhower moved quickly to fulfill these campaign promises. He visited the Korean battlefield with his transition team in December 1952 to begin developing a strategy to break the stalemate there. He met with his nominees for joint chief chairman and secretaries of state and defense on the USS *Helena* during the voyage home from Korea to begin formulating strategies to reduce federal spending, taxes and budget deficits while still providing a better, stronger defense—in other words, to provide security with solvency. The initial elements of what became known as Eisenhower's "New Look" national defense strategy emerged during this voyage.<sup>15</sup> First, the United States would no longer look to adversaries' capabilities to determine its level of defense spending and resource commitment.<sup>16</sup> Instead, the United States would look to its economic capacity to determine what it could afford to spend on defense. Second, it would leverage its superior technology, including nuclear weapons and delivery systems, to deter threats before they materialized. It would communicate to its adversaries that it would meet any aggression at a time and place of its choosing, using the most destructive weapons in its arsenal. In this manner, the United States could provide greater security for less cost, saving Soldiers' lives and national resources. The New Look aimed for America to avoid being bogged down in limited yet costly ground wars in the future. In other words, if the United States was not able or willing to match the conventional military strength of its adversaries on the ground, it would use its superior nuclear capabilities to prevent or deter wars such as Korea from occurring in the first place. This initial strategy continued to shape Eisenhower's national security and defense policies for the next eight years.<sup>17</sup>

His administration moved quickly to implement New Look policies. First, it focused on breaking the stalemate in Korea by threatening to expand the war by using nuclear weapons against the Chinese mainland if China resumed hostilities or continued to support North Korea.<sup>18</sup> Second, it reorganized the Department of Defense (DoD) by introducing legislation to increase civilian control of the military, laying the groundwork for significant cuts in defense spending. DoD Reorganization Plan 6, legislation passed in June 1953, gave the CJCS and the secretary of defense more authority over the separate armed services, thus increasing the president's authority over the military as a whole.<sup>19</sup> The new administration proposed this legislation because it anticipated the military services and their Democratic supporters in Congress would fiercely resist the planned cuts.<sup>20</sup> Next, it replaced each member of the joint chiefs who had served under Truman with generals and admirals whom Eisenhower believed would support his agenda.<sup>21</sup>

The Old Guard—the far right wing of the Republican Party at the time—led by Senator Robert Taft, had accused Truman during his presidency of politicizing the joint chiefs, led by CJCS Omar Bradley. Shortly after Eisenhower took office, Taft demanded that he replace General Bradley and each of the other service chiefs with generals and admirals who would support any defense cuts necessary to realize the Republicans' domestic economic agenda.<sup>22</sup> During

President Truman's tenure, Bradley had had enough disputes with Taft and other members of the Old Guard that the coalition did not trust Bradley.<sup>23</sup> Because one of Eisenhower's top political priorities was keeping the Republican Party unified, and because he owed Senator Taft a political debt for endorsing him, Eisenhower supported Taft's demands. They met in early February 1953 to discuss potential joint chiefs and, with Taft's endorsement, candidates were announced in late February; the new chiefs were all appointed between April and June 1953.<sup>24</sup>

Their first task was a comprehensive review of U.S. military forces, capabilities and commitments, with an eye toward reducing the defense budget. The president told the chiefs to reduce redundancies and formulate a Fiscal Year (FY) 1955 defense budget that the economy could begin to sustain over the long haul. The new chiefs were given a defense budget target of \$30 billion,<sup>25</sup> as both the budget director and the secretary of the treasury believed that the U.S. economy could afford this amount without experiencing an economic crisis.<sup>26</sup> This was an \$11 billion—or 27 percent—reduction from Truman's \$41 billion FY 1954 defense budget.

The new chiefs were skeptical that they could meet commitments around the globe with this reduction.<sup>27</sup> However, given that Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin had died in March 1953 and that the Korean War armistice was on track to be signed by July that same year, Eisenhower argued that international tensions had eased enough that U.S. military commitments could be significantly reduced.<sup>28</sup> Unconvinced, the joint chiefs came back to the administration in October 1953 with a recommendation for a \$36 billion budget.<sup>29</sup> Eisenhower answered by directing a cut to the Army's endstrength from 1.5 million to 1 million Soldiers, a measure that would end up being the administration's primary means of reaching its \$30 billion defense target.<sup>30</sup>

These cuts made it more difficult for the joint chiefs' to meet commitments abroad. In the face of a growing impasse between the administration and the chiefs, CJCS Radford offered two options: The administration could either reduce its military commitments abroad or allow the Army to begin employing small tactical nuclear weapons on battlefields against military targets to offset its personnel reductions. Radford argued that using these weapons would allow the Army to fight and win battles with far fewer Soldiers.<sup>31</sup>

This differed from the policy of massive strategic nuclear retaliation already adopted by the Eisenhower administration. Massive retaliation meant attacking and destroying enemy industrial and population centers with high-yield strategic nuclear weapons delivered by the Air Force. Radford's recommendation would mean the Army would be given the authority to employ low-yield tactical nuclear weapons in land battles against enemy ground forces. The administration quickly approved his recommendation and moved forward to submit its \$30 billion defense budget to Congress for FY 1955—including a recommended reduction in Army endstrength from 1.5 million to 1 million.<sup>32</sup>

It was approved with only minor Democratic opposition, led by Senator John F. Kennedy. Kennedy—with Senators Lyndon Johnson, Albert Gore, Sr., and Hubert Humphrey—proposed an amendment that allocated an additional \$350 million to the Army in order to slow the pace of its personnel cuts. This was also intended to reassure America's allies, both in Europe and Asia, that the United States remained committed to maintaining its defense agreements.<sup>33</sup> However, the amendment was quickly defeated by the Republican majority in both houses of Congress, and the FY 1955 budget was passed in August 1954.<sup>34</sup> With his campaign promise to cut the defense budget now fulfilled, Eisenhower announced that the Republicans had moved the country out of a wartime economy into a peacetime economy and had “exorcised a specter.”<sup>35</sup>



One problem with the administration's new nuclear policy was that CSA Ridgway did not agree with it. He believed the use of nuclear weapons would increase the requirement for Soldiers, not lessen it.<sup>36</sup> His belief was based on a 1951 Army study, conducted with the help of the California Institute of Technology, and the initial results of an ongoing 1953 Army study (that he had initiated) on the effects of small tactical nuclear weapons on the battlefield.<sup>37</sup> He also objected on the grounds that suitably small nuclear weapons—ones that could be used safely near friendly troops—had not yet been produced in adequate numbers to allow for an immediate and significant troop reduction.<sup>38</sup>

Further, he argued that their use—or even the threat of their use—could alienate allies, as it was likely to be allied territory and populations that would suffer significant and possibly permanent damage from them.<sup>39</sup> Concerning troop reductions, he argued that any significant and abrupt move in this direction would dampen allied willingness to contribute troops themselves.<sup>40</sup> If the United States reduced the number of troops committed to the defense of Europe and Asia, allies such as Britain, Germany, France and Japan would likely reduce their commitments as well.

Finally, Ridgway argued that the use or threat of use of small nuclear weapons could easily and uncontrollably escalate into a massive strategic nuclear exchange.<sup>41</sup> He believed that a policy of avoiding rather than promoting the use of any nuclear weapons could keep future conflicts similar to the Korean War from escalating into a general war between the United States and the Soviet Union—one that would involve the use of strategic nuclear weapons capable of destroying dozens of American and Soviet cities and killing or injuring millions of innocent civilians.

The Eisenhower administration, however, pressured Ridgway to support its goals, going so far as to demand that he recommend the cuts himself.<sup>42</sup> He refused, offering the explanation that he was not an economist and could not claim to know what level of defense spending would or would not be good or bad for the economy.<sup>43</sup> Instead, he said, he was a military expert who had studied the use of tactical nuclear weapons on the battlefield, and thus, he authoritatively concluded that doing so would require more, not fewer, Soldiers. Consequently, he was genuinely surprised when President Eisenhower stated in his January 1954 State of the Union address that “[t]he defense program for 1955 . . . is based on a new military program unanimously recommended by the joint chiefs of staff.” In response, Ridgway commented in his memoirs that, “[a]s one member of the joint chiefs of staff who most emphatically had not concurred in the 1955 military program as it was presented to the people, I was nonplussed by this statement. The fact is the 1955 budget was a ‘directed verdict.’”<sup>44</sup>

In sum, the Eisenhower administration developed its New Look defense policy to fulfill three key campaign promises: reduce federal spending; end the Korean War; and do not involve the United States in any more costly, limited wars like Korea.<sup>45</sup> To fulfill these promises, America needed to find a way to leverage its nuclear arsenal in a way that President Truman had not.<sup>46</sup> Its strategy was to use the threat of massive retaliation with strategic nuclear weapons in response to aggression anywhere, including any renewed aggression by China on the Korean Peninsula. The decision to authorize the use of tactical nuclear weapons on the battlefield was its justification for cutting 33 percent of the Army's endstrength—a necessary cut if a real reduction in defense spending was to be accomplished. However, as Ridgway's objections demonstrate, the assessment of Eisenhower's administration was by no means infallible, nor were its conclusions unopposed.

## International Political Factors

Several international political factors had a strong potential to affect Army doctrinal change in 1954, including U.S. and Western European efforts to rearm Germany as part of an integrated European Defense Community; France's deteriorating situation in Indochina; the death of Stalin; the end of the Korean War; and U.S. and Soviet nuclear capabilities.

From 1949 to 1954, NATO powers—especially the United States, Britain and France—struggled to agree on a way to allow Germany to rearm and contribute to the defense of Western Europe. The United States and Britain were interested in any solution that would ultimately allow a reduction in their ground troop commitments; the French were interested in finding a solution that would prevent any future German military resurgence.<sup>47</sup> The French opposed allowing Germany to join NATO as an equal partner because this would have allowed Germany to create and command military units, opening the door for a possible resurgence of German military power. Instead, the French recommended the creation of a European Defense Community (EDC).<sup>48</sup> The EDC was envisioned as a pan-European army that would have integrated individual German soldiers in units mixed with soldiers from other Western European nations. Mixed EDC units would then augment and serve under NATO command. An EDC treaty was finally reached and signed by all NATO members in May 1952. Over the next 15 months, all NATO member nations voted to ratify the EDC treaty—except for France.<sup>49</sup>

U.S. efforts to promote French ratification affected U.S. defense policy during this time. In return for promises of French ratification, the United States made guarantees that it would maintain its ground troop strength in Western Europe.<sup>50</sup> The French were concerned that a reduction in U.S. troop strength would lead other NATO allies to reduce their strength as well, eventually leaving France alone and vulnerable to any future German military resurgence.<sup>51</sup> The French were also concerned by the increased ability and willingness to use nuclear weapons against the Soviets; the idea that the Americans and British were willing to turn Western Europe into a nuclear battlefield did not sit well with France—or with Germany, for that matter.<sup>52</sup>

In exchange for EDC ratification, the French requested that the United States increase its support to France's efforts to defeat the Viet Minh and maintain its colonial power in Indochina.<sup>53</sup> The United States agreed to provide supplies, equipment and limited air and naval support. However, it was not willing to provide ground troops, nor could it find any utility for using nuclear weapons against the decentralized Viet Minh.<sup>54</sup> Despite this military assistance and French promises of EDC ratification, the French parliament ultimately voted against the treaty in August 1954. At that point, the only remaining viable alternative for NATO allies was to allow Germany to join NATO and contribute German units commanded by German officers, something that the United States and Britain had supported as early as 1949—and something that the French reluctantly agreed to in October 1954.<sup>55</sup>

Germany agreed to contribute 12 divisions (560,000 soldiers) to the common NATO defense. However, it was another three years before the first German division was ready for duty, and Germany never actually reached its required troop strength of 12 divisions.<sup>56</sup> Eisenhower's New Look policy to cut defense budgets and troop strength depended in part on the promised German contribution of troops, as well as troops from other NATO countries, and consequently, his policy was seriously hampered.<sup>57</sup>

The death of Stalin on 5 March 1953—after he had ruled the Soviet Union for 28 years—and the end of the Korean War gave Western powers hope that an easing of international

tensions might be possible.<sup>58</sup> That hope reinforced a reluctance to continue working toward troop level commitments previously agreed to by NATO members. The British began to argue that NATO conventional force levels were either unachievable or had now become unnecessary.<sup>59</sup> Newly elected President Eisenhower and prominent Republicans in Congress also used the death of Stalin to promote the idea that large numbers of U.S. troops in Europe would no longer be necessary.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, France continued to argue that the United States and Britain should keep large numbers of troops in Western Europe, not because they were concerned about an aggressive Soviet Union, but because of their fear of Germany.<sup>61</sup> The death of Stalin simply reinforced the idea among American and French leaders that Germany, not the Soviet Union, was the real threat to France.<sup>62</sup>

Allied hopes that international tensions would ease after Stalin's death and the end of the Korean War were short-lived. On 1 August 1953, four days after the Korean armistice was signed, the Soviet Union tested its first hydrogen bomb. This came just 10 months after the United States conducted its first hydrogen bomb test—leading defense experts in the United States and allied NATO countries to conclude that the gap between American and Soviet nuclear capabilities was rapidly closing, calling into question the ability of the United States to exercise deterrence through nuclear power.<sup>63</sup> With this ability uncertain, the United States and its allies could be forced to match the Soviets and its Communist allies, such as China, in conventional capabilities.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the end of the Korean War, China continued to support nationalist movements in Asia<sup>65</sup> and provided significant materiel support to the Viet Minh, who were battling the French in Indochina. The United States threatened nuclear retaliation against the Chinese only if they escalated to intervening directly in Indochina.<sup>66</sup> Although the Eisenhower administration considered sending ground troops to relieve the French, such an action would have required more U.S. troops than had been used in Korea—something that would not have been politically acceptable given Eisenhower's campaign promises to avoid costly ground wars of this type.<sup>67</sup>

### **Bureaucratic Political Factors**

The Army's situation as a federal bureaucracy changed rapidly and dramatically during the first two years of Eisenhower's presidency. Army roles, budget and endstrength were all significantly reduced. Previously, victory or defeat in wartime—and the achievement of political objectives—were often decided by Army success or failure on the battlefield. As such, the Army traditionally held a higher priority of roles and resources than the other services. As recently as World War II and the Korean War, it was the Army that conducted the majority of combat operations, with naval and air forces merely providing support. However, the new policy of massive nuclear retaliation as the primary means for deterring threats meant that air forces had become the decisive player; the United States no longer needed a large and costly Army. Its only remaining role would be the restoration of a defeated enemy's civilian order in the aftermath of a nuclear attack.<sup>68</sup> The preparation and conduct of large-scale land combat operations would no longer be required.

The policy of massive retaliation provided the Eisenhower administration with the justification it needed to reduce the defense budget. As previously discussed, in his first two years, the overall defense budget was reduced from \$41 billion to \$30 billion. Although Air Force and Navy budgets and personnel were reduced as part of that, cuts were disproportionate; 76 percent came from the Army.<sup>69</sup> From FY 1954 to FY 1955, the overall defense budget was reduced



by 31 percent from \$12.8 billion to \$8.8 billion.<sup>70</sup> Cuts to the Air Force were made primarily in troop transport aircraft and close air-to-ground tactical aircraft used to move and directly support Army forces—forces considered superfluous by the administration.<sup>71</sup> These savings were reinvested into the Air Force budget for long-range, nuclear-capable bombers, effectively bolstering the new deterrence posture.<sup>72</sup>

The Army did not easily accept the change of roles and status. From 1953 to 1954, Army leadership, particularly CSA Ridgway, worked behind the scenes to show that air power alone, even with nuclear weapons, was not sufficient to deter aggression or to win a war and achieve any meaningful political objective if deterrence failed.<sup>73</sup> But the fact remained that in order to reduce defense spending to the levels promised, the Eisenhower administration needed to significantly reduce the Army's budget and personnel. It was within this context that CJCS Radford recommended that the administration consider allowing the Army to employ tactical nuclear weapons whenever it could offer a military advantage,<sup>74</sup> thereby giving it a tool with which it could fight on the modern battlefield without the need for a large and expensive force. By changing the justification for Army cuts, the administration believed it could finally gain the Army's support. The NSC adopted Radford's recommendation in October 1953, not considering the belief of Army leadership that the employment of nuclear weapons would require more rather than fewer Soldiers and equipment. In short, the administration's argument had backfired, providing the Army with more reasons for opposing personnel cuts.

## **Conclusion**

Army resources were under attack from Eisenhower even before he was elected president. Before, during and after becoming president, he held that the United States could not afford to maintain a large standing army, that costly ground wars of the future could be avoided thanks to his administration's willingness to threaten the use of nuclear weapons, and that the Army of the future would be needed only to restore civil order in the aftermath of a strategic nuclear attack delivered by the Air Force—something President Eisenhower believed was highly unlikely. Consequently, the Army's budget was cut by 31 percent and its personnel by 33 percent. Between June and October 1953, Eisenhower approved NSC recommendations to use the threat of massive nuclear retaliation to prevent future wars or to win them should deterrence fail. He also approved a policy giving the Army broad discretion to employ tactical nuclear weapons on the battlefield as a means of fighting a ground war, however unlikely, with fewer Soldiers. The Army saw its resources, roles and autonomy shrink while the Air Force's expanded. The only new funding that the administration and Congress would approve for the Army were requests for items to use in battles that would involve tactical nuclear weapons.

The timing of administrative decisions to reduce Army resources is highly congruent with the Army's doctrinal shift in September 1954. If the administration had decided not to allow the Army to employ tactical nuclear weapons, the Army would not have had any reason to incorporate them into its doctrine. In other words, if the administration had not created conditions that necessitated the Army requesting resources to fight in a nuclear environment, it is unlikely that Army leaders would have thought it necessary to make a corresponding doctrinal shift.

CSA Ridgway and other senior leaders believed that the use of tactical nuclear weapons on the battlefield would require increased personnel and equipment. By embracing the use of these weapons and incorporating them into Army doctrine, Ridgway saw an opportunity to fight to preserve Army personnel strength and conventional equipment—such as new armored

and mechanized vehicles suited for fighting in nuclear battles—in the face of severe budget cuts. General James Gavin, Army chief of research and development at the time, also stated that the Army should embrace these weapons as a means of preservation rather than a justification for reduction.<sup>75</sup> CSA Maxwell Taylor, Ridgway's successor, stated that he had directed an additional modification to the 1954 edition of FM 100-5 to further embed nuclear weapons into the doctrine specifically because “spending on nuclear weapons had become so appealing to the public as well as to Congress.”<sup>76</sup> Several scholars also concluded that the Army made a doctrinal shift in 1954 in an effort to fight for more resources.<sup>77</sup> It is clear, then, that the Army purposefully made this shift to offset Eisenhower's efforts to cut defense spending.

As the Army in the past has made doctrinal shifts in response to domestic political pressures, rather than more reasonably adjusting doctrine to maintain alliances or deter enemies, it is conceivable that it could be pressured to take such steps again and that the Army is as vulnerable to domestic politics today as it was in 1954. The Army prides itself on being a nonpartisan professional military organization, but when it makes a doctrinal shift primarily in response to domestic politics, it becomes less professional and more political. How can the Army resist the pressures of domestic politics and so maintain its professionalism? In 1954, it could have chosen not to adopt a doctrine simply to prevent cutbacks and garner additional resources. It could have chosen to maintain the doctrine it had and found some other way to resist the politically motivated cutbacks of Eisenhower and his supporters. At the very least, even if it had resulted in a smaller Army, this attempt could have insulated the institution from taking on a political flavor and aided in the preservation of its professional character. A smaller, more professional Army might have been preferable to the larger, more political Army that it has become.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>15</sup> Kolodziej, *The Uncommon Defense and Congress*, 181; Snyder, "The New Look of 1953," 391.
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- <sup>20</sup> Snyder, "The New Look of 1953," 518.
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- <sup>22</sup> Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1977), 401.

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