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THE FUTURE U.S. ARMY: OUTLOOK FOR THE 1990's



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MID-INTENSITY CONFLICT IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD: THE U.S. ARMY AS A
CONTINGENCY FORCE

SUMMARY OF REMARKS BY

GENERAL MAXWELL THURMAN, USA
(Commander in Chief, U.S. Southern Command)

The remarks of General Thurman were delivered on 9 May 1990 at the sixth in a series of eight guest speaker presentations to be held for members of Congress and their staffs. The series is cosponsored by the AUSA Institute of Land Warfare and the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis. The overall theme of the series is "The Future U.S. Army: Outlook for the 1990's." A separate Background Brief will be issued on each of the eight topics presented.

With the field experience of the "Just Cause" operation in Panama as a basis for his analysis, General Thurman argues that the United States needs to rethink its full range of force structures and processes to meet changing worldwide requirements. Current U.S. forces, he contends, are still shaped by preparing to meet the global, monolithic threat posed by the Soviet Union, which he calls the most arduous, but least likely, case they might face.

Rapid shifts toward multipolarity in world affairs demand a change in the way U.S. forces are designed. Due to pressure for fewer forward-deployed forces, and because threats to the United States in this new environment cannot be expected to come from one source, the "contingency equation" must be given increased attention. The United States force planning process must undergo a significant shift in which contingency operations would no longer be a subset of a primarily global focus, but would stand on their own. The challenge, according to Thurman, is to build and maintain a standing force from which contingency packages can be tailored for responses to a near infinite set of threats ranging from Central America to Europe to the Pacific.

Wherever contingency forces are to be deployed, several considerations will affect the commander's planning and operations. Among these are the military end to be achieved; the nature and strength of the threat; forces available and the extent to which overwhelming forces are to be considered; sea- and airlift available; time constraints; the area of operations; command and control relationships; substitutability; allies; the political situation and possibilities for negotiation; and the rules of engagement.

Forces for contingencies must be structured to meet the precise requirements and conditions, including time. Each one is different. In Just Cause it was the challenge of executing in a matter of hours to take out 27 targets simultaneously. Forces were uniquely selected with major use of air drop and gunships at night. Other contingencies would require different, but hand-tailored forces.

Thurman stated the requirements for successful contingency planning and execution as quick response for early victory, good intelligence, rapid projection of combat power, and precise command and control. He emphasized the need for peacetime practice and rehearsals.

To meet the contingency force requirements which the United States is likely to face in the future, General Thurman suggests several courses of action:

- The United States must strengthen its strategic lift forces. This entails emphasis on the C-17 as the major basis of strategic airlift, as well as a more concerted effort to build fast sealift capabilities.
- Weapons systems need to be lighter and more lethal. These might include a modern, lightweight, armored attack vehicle and light, lethal, individual antitank weapons.
- Technology can be traded for people where lower levels of forces are likely. Increased efficiency through application of advanced technologies and greater use of stand-off attack systems should allow fewer forces to achieve greater results.
- Intelligence collection capabilities need to be increased. Relatively inexpensive, low-orbit satellites and new collection technologies can increase the level and quality of intelligence gathering.

As the United States looks ahead, General Thurman called for the force structuring process to be "turned upside down" among all the Services. The need, he says, is to turn away from the global conflict approach to one more tailored to conflict scenarios the United States is most likely to face. These scenarios demand a force structure on the part of the United States which has the highest possible degree of flexibility, mobility and lethality.