



A First Look at President Bush's June 2002 West Point Speech

In his recent speech at West Point, President Bush described an expansive and aggressive agenda for the future of American foreign policy. A central theme of his speech was the need for the preemptive use of military force to confront challenges to American security before they fully emerge. If fully realized, the requirement to use preemptive force in a wide variety of circumstances and locations has important implications for the future of American land power.

The President stated that “the war on terror will not be won on the defensive” and that “we must take the battle to the enemy” before our adversaries attack America or her friends. In the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States, waiting to absorb a blow is no longer an option because “we will not leave the safety of America and the peace of the planet at the mercy of a few mad terrorists and tyrants.” He concluded that “if we wait for threats to fully materialize, we will have waited too long.” Meeting this threat will require “all Americans to be forward-looking and resolute, to be ready for preemptive action when necessary to defend our liberty and defend our lives.”

The President also stated that the new threat requires new thinking. He explained that a Cold War-era strategy focused on deterrence and containment would have little utility in confronting the new threats to the United States. While stating that these strategies may still apply in some cases, the President said that “deterrence . . . means nothing against shadowy terrorist networks with no nations or citizens to defend . . . [and] containment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies.” Instead, the President called for a combination of a rapidly deployable military with global

reach, effective homeland defense (including missile defense), and superior intelligence operations at home and abroad to be the cornerstones of America’s strategy to win the war on terror.

To achieve this goal, the President said that America’s military must be preminent: “America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenge, thereby making the destabilizing arms races of other eras pointless, and limiting rivalries to trade and other pursuits of peace.” In addition to its scope and size, such a future force must also be more flexible and responsive than in the past—“a military that must be ready to strike at a moment’s notice in any dark corner of the world.”

There are several important implications of this strategy for the future of American land power. First, the Army’s Transformation plans support the President’s vision of a future military more flexible than today’s force. Preemption means acting quickly to confront a threat before it emerges. Doing so will require a military that can move rapidly, operate upon arrival in a wide variety of terrain and political circumstances, and quickly develop its own intelligence picture. The Objective Force of the future will be capable of doing just that by deploying rapidly to austere theaters and operating without substantial logistical support across the entire spectrum of possible military operations. The capability to rapidly deploy and employ ground combat forces must continue to be a vital part of a military strategy designed around the preemptive use of force against our adversaries in the war on terror.

Second, the President’s demand that the United States not leave the safety of America and the world in the hands of a few “mad terrorists and tyrants” will clearly, at times,

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require the projection of land combat power and subsequent occupation of the territory of enemy nations or uncontrolled areas where terrorist organizations flourish. While in some instances surrogate land forces may be available, the United States cannot be dependent upon local groups with their own political agendas.* Taking and holding terrain, controlling resources that our enemies find valuable and intend to use to strike America, and removing hostile regimes from power will require the continued existence and maintenance of powerful land combat forces. American aerospace and naval power will also play a crucial role in such preemptive actions, but maintaining the capability to strike at enemies in all terrain, weather and political circumstances will require potent and effective land combat forces.

Finally, retaining “military strengths beyond challenge” will clearly require a balanced and complementary mix of military capabilities. Only a balanced mix of land, air, space and naval power will ensure the continued dominance of American arms in the post-9/11 security environment. Leaning too heavily on one type of combat power will needlessly simplify the challenge for our adversaries. Rather than facing an “unsolvable” military puzzle where their efforts to meet one form of American power will make them vulnerable to another, they will simply have to mitigate the impact of one type of military force. Maintaining

American military power “beyond challenge” cannot rest upon one service or one form of military force. Nor can it depend on facing incompetent enemies. The United States must retain the ability to conduct sustained land combat operations against a competent, well-armed enemy as a part of this blend of military capabilities.

The President’s call for the preemptive use of military force will challenge the United States Army in new ways. However, as demonstrated in Afghanistan, the Army stands ready. The Army’s mix of heavy, light and special operations forces already provide a wide variety of military capabilities to the theater commanders. Soon, these forces will be joined by medium-weight interim brigade combat teams (IBCT) that will provide even more flexibility. For the future, the path of Army Transformation envisions an Objective Force tailor-made to meet the President’s goal of a rapidly deployable, highly lethal military force that can quickly reach “any dark corner of the world” to defend American interests. Regardless of what form it takes, it is clear that American land power must be a vital part of future U.S. strategy to win the war on terror and defend liberty.

* Jeffery Record, “Collapsed Countries, Casualty Dread, and the New American Way of War,” *Parameters*, Vol. XXXII, No. 2 (Summer 2002), p. 20.

Key Points

- Army Transformation has set the Army on a path to achieve the President’s vision of a military that can rapidly deploy and fight anywhere on earth. Today’s forces already provide a wide range of capabilities, and the Objective Force of the future will be even more flexible, deployable, and lethal.
- Preemptive military action to confront emerging threats will require land combat forces fighting as part of a balanced and joint combat team. The U.S. military cannot become “one-dimensional.” Land, sea, air and space power must work together to be effective.
- Maintaining a preeminent military that is “beyond challenge” must include robust and potent land combat forces that are well-equipped and well-trained. The ability to conduct sustained, high-tempo, complex combined-arms combat operations is not a capability that can be quickly created from scratch. A sustained investment in soldiers, equipment and training is necessary to maintain this capability.