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THE BOTTOM-UP REVIEW: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ARMY

by

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Background

Borrowing a slogan popular on Capitol Hill that the rationale for United States forces in the post-Cold War era should be reviewed “from the bottom up,” then Secretary of Defense Les Aspin began a comprehensive analysis of America’s defense needs shortly after the change in administrations in January 1993.

Reporting out in October 1993, the “Bottom-Up Review” (BUR) took into account the changes in the world and the domestic need to reduce defense expenditures. Its major conclusion was that it was prudent for the United States, in the uncertain period following the end of the Cold War, to maintain land, sea and air forces capable of fighting and winning two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts (MRCs). Beginning with the Defense Planning Guidance of September 1993 (for Fiscal Years 1995 and 1996) and May 1994 (for Fiscal Years 1996-2001), the Department of Defense (DoD) began to implement the BUR’s findings.

The BUR outlined specific dangers to United States interests, notably the threat of large-scale aggression by a regional power. It also noted that forces must be available to conduct peace enforcement or intervention missions, deter attacks from weapons of mass destruction, and perform overseas presence missions designed to implement the national defense strategy of engagement and enlargement.

In order to implement this strategy, the following major tactical force requirements were determined:

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Army:

- 10 active divisions
- 15 Army National Guard "Enhanced Readiness Brigades"

Navy:

- 346 ships
- 11 active aircraft carriers
- 45-55 attack submarines

Air Force:

- 13 active fighter wings
- 7 reserve fighter wings

Marine Corps:

- 3 Marine Expeditionary Forces (MEF)

The BUR also determined that, in order to carry out the two-MRC strategy, enhancements in force capabilities, firepower and mobility had to be made and that most new structure and enhancements could be in place by the year 2000.

Discussion

The BUR goes to considerable length to investigate various force structure options en route to deciding on the force requirements needed to fight and win two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts.

Participating in the review that led to the BUR were the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the various unified and specified commands, the services, and, as appropriate, various defense agencies.

Using a four-step methodology common to all BUR issues (assessing the post-Cold War era, devising a defense strategy to protect and advance United States interests, constructing building blocks of forces to implement this strategy, and combining these building blocks to produce options), decisions for new force structure requirements were made to cover the multiyear period out to 2000.

Most often quoted when discussing the BUR is the concept of major regional conflicts (MRCs). This concept drove the force structure decisions. With a major war against the former Soviet Union being much less likely, it was judged more probable that the United States would become engaged in regional wars on the scale of Operation Desert Storm. It was also concluded that if the United States and its allies are drawn into a regional conflict to deter aggression of one nation, there is the distinct possibility that another nation might be tempted to attack its neighbors, particularly if it believes that the United States does not have the capability to counter them.

It is for this reason that the BUR concluded that the United States should maintain adequate forces to win two nearly simultaneous MRCs. It was also believed that maintaining this much force structure would provide a hedge against a larger than expected regional threat (the BUR outlines what it expects regional threats to be).

Even though the focus of the BUR is to design a force capable of winning two MRCs, it also acknowledges that other future demands will be made on DoD. In keeping with the concept of engagement and enlargement contained in the National Security Strategy, United States military forces will likely become engaged most often in so-called "operations other than war," such as peacekeeping, peace enforcement, disaster and humanitarian relief, or other types of intervention. The BUR assumes that maintaining the necessary force structure to counter two MRCs will afford the capability to handle these kinds of contingencies as well.

A considerable amount of the BUR is devoted to various modernization issues, such as theater air forces, attack and reconnaissance helicopters, ballistic missile defense, space, attack submarines and aircraft carrier modernization programs.

Additional space is devoted to readiness issues, acquisition reform, infrastructure, personnel policy, roles and missions, and reserve forces. All of these modernization areas are designed to keep fielded the most technologically capable forces possible.

Concerning reserve forces, and in keeping with the thrust behind restructuring the active component, the BUR describes how the reserves will be adapted to the new defense mission requirements. More formerly active component missions will be shifted to the reserves, and effort will be made to provide better accessibility to reserve personnel for meeting contingency needs. Initiatives to enhance reserve readiness are also outlined.

Most significantly, Army reserve component forces are targeted for restructure by the BUR. Aimed at producing a more responsive force, the BUR focuses on the inherent strengths of the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard. The combat support and combat service support units of the Army Reserve will be expanded to provide additional support to active Army combat units and other United States combat forces. Reserve combat force will be the emphasis of the Army National Guard, which will retain 37 brigades (adequate to continue to provide sufficient forces for supporting civil authorities), including 15 Enhanced Readiness Brigades. The aim of the Enhanced Readiness Brigades is to be able to mobilize, train and deploy within 90 days in order to support active forces being employed in regional conflicts. Total Army reserve component force strengths will be reduced from 700,000 currently to 575,000 by 1999.

Analysis

Almost immediately following the release of the BUR, defense experts began to question the assumptions and call for changes to the report. Even DoD realized that some areas needed additional study, and commenced several analyses of various aspects of the two-MRC strategy in the immediate period after the publication of the BUR.

Several of the areas being reexamined involve key portions of the study, such as the ability to redeploy forces from one operation to another, the availability of adequate strategic support and mobility forces, the shifting of assets between MRCs, and the viability of the enhanced brigade concept.

The General Accounting Office (GAO) has recently completed a review of the BUR's assumptions and has questioned several conclusions. Some of the areas they analyzed are summarized below.

DoD has stated that it does not have enough of certain specialized assets, such as aircraft, to support two simultaneous MRCs and that it may need to shift these assets from one conflict to another. The GAO questions how this will be done and also asks whether sufficient logistical support to move these assets will be available. The GAO calls on DoD to examine this area.

Along the same lines, the GAO also questions whether sufficient mobility assets now exist and, if not, when they will become sufficient to move all necessary forces to fight and win two simultaneous MRCs. DoD noted in the BUR, based on its own congressionally-mandated mobility requirements study, that improvements were needed in mobility capabilities. The BUR concurred in the mobility study's findings, and called for increasing prepositioned land equipment in the Persian Gulf area. Many of the suggested solutions, though, will not become available until the year 2000 at the earliest, making the viability of the two-MRC strategy questionable, and difficult to budget for.

Another area that seriously impacts on the Army is the BUR's assumption that there would be sufficient support forces to support two MRCs. The GAO believes that, in the event of two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts, the Army would be unable to provide sufficient support for either the current structure of 12 active divisions or the 10-division future force. This contention was based on the last Total Army Analysis (TAA), which computes support needs. DoD, in turn, disputes this contention, saying that total personnel strengths of the active and reserve components, as called for in the BUR, are only slightly smaller than present strengths, and that this will give the Army flexibility to provide more support as needed in a two-MRC strategy. Still, a final answer to this issue will not be available until the next TAA is completed, later in 1995.

Of particular importance to the Army is the concept of the Army National Guard's Enhanced Readiness Brigades and whether or not they can meet 90-day post-mobilization deployment requirements that are called for in the BUR. Since specific issues about the enhanced brigades — such as their specific wartime missions, the ability of the brigades to deploy quickly and fulfill their missions, and the specific enhancements that will be required to make the brigades ready — were not defined in the BUR, additional study was recommended. This is currently ongoing; until it is completed, the assurance that the brigades will be available as planned to support the two-MRC strategy will remain in question.

Related to this issue is whether or not the Enhanced Readiness Brigades can meet their 90-day deployment goals as called for in the BUR. Based on the experience of mobilizing reserve component combat brigades during Operation Desert Storm, in which the three mobilized Guard combat brigades experienced problems in achieving basic skill proficiency at the time of mobilization, the Army

significantly changed its strategy for training Guard combat brigades. This new strategy, known as “Bold Shift,” will focus brigade training during peacetime at the basic skills level, with more complex skills to be trained on after mobilization.

The GAO, in its review of this new training strategy, still finds it lacking and believes that this will affect the capability of the Enhanced Readiness Brigades to carry out their missions in support of the BUR’s two-MRC strategy. DoD admits that it will take time to fully ascertain the viability of the enhanced brigades, but believes they are a valid planning force for supporting the two-MRC strategy.

Summary

Many questions obviously remain concerning the viability of the armed forces in carrying out the strategy contained in the BUR. Since many of the planning factors in the report are based on assumptions, time will be required to show whether they were good or bad. Additional analysis is obviously required, and the expected savings projected from the BUR are at best problematical.

(This Essay was prepared by Colonel Gayden E. Thompson, USA Ret., a recent Research Fellow for the Institute of Land Warfare.)

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