

# ALTERNATE FUTURES

by

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It used to be that the most probable future for any institution was not likely to differ very much from its present or its immediate past. On this basis, the United States military establishment is not likely to look drastically different 10 or even 20 years ahead from the United States military establishment today—always excepting the possibility of a major war.

It is still true that the technological innovations for the next 10 years are already on the drawing boards; the military-age population for the next 15 years is already out of diapers; and the flexibility of the peacetime domestic political system in shifting the allocation of resources either between the public and private sectors or within the public sector remains quite limited—although the Reagan Administration is testing the limits of that flexibility, as will be noted below.

But we are also aware of major discontinuities in our society, so much so that a new priestly class of futurists has emerged as prophets of change. They have identified the new era as postindustrial and proclaimed the shift to an information society, organized around the computer memory chip. This revolution is announced to be as significant as the shifts from a hunter-gatherer society to an agricultural and then to an industrial

society. The futurists have noted the increasing interdependence within the global village and the trends toward a worldwide economy and a global shopping center. At the same time we are warned that, absent more effective planning, we face critical energy and raw materials shortages and an exploding world population problem. The have-not nations, which make up a majority of the present population of the planet, are demanding a major redistribution of resources, while the 1980 Global 2000 Report, prepared for the Carter Administration, predicts that, without remedial measures, the gap between rich and poor countries will actually widen over the next generation.

In the industrial societies of the West, no cure has yet been found for the newly endemic problems of stagflation, while the increasing vulnerability of these societies to low-level violence and terrorism is a growing cause for concern. The burdens of sustaining an aging population, a greater proportion of which is beyond the traditional retirement age and is consuming increasingly ingenious and expensive medical care, weigh on the more advanced societies—and include increased military retirement costs, which already take up more than eight percent of military spending.

There are a number of possible scenarios for the United States military establishment in this uncertain future. Four of these scenarios will be sketched in here: a beleaguered armed camp; a severely constrained military budget; major budget increases as proposed by President Reagan; and a new emphasis on military reform—which, in turn, could go off in several directions.

The first scenario—perhaps least likely, if most alarming—is for the United States to become a garrison state, a fortress America. Growing neutralism in Europe, as well as in the Third World, and a failure of American diplomacy to counter these trends, could lead to withdrawal of United States forces stationed in Europe and perhaps in some other parts of the world. Whether the result would be expansion of the Soviet empire or the further spread of neutralism, it would compound the sense of isolation that gave rise to the policy of withdrawal.

Bringing American forces home would not save money, at least initially, although it might reduce foreign exchange costs, to the extent that they are not borne by NATO allies. It would make the peacetime military establishment more visible on the domestic and on the local scene. Paradoxically, greater visibility might coincide eventually with a shrinking defense budget. It would be difficult, without major overseas commitments, to justify a large, two-ocean Navy, although it would no doubt still be argued that in the event of all-out war, carrier task forces would be needed to carry the war to the enemy while attack submarines fended off ocean-borne aggression. Without their peacetime missions in Western Europe and in Korea, the Army and Air Force would almost inevitably shrink. And even a further enlarged strategic nuclear force could not soak up all these savings; one of the most dangerous aspects of nuclear weapons is their relative cheapness.

The expansion of nuclear forces could take various forms. It might begin with

antiballistic missile deployment around land-based ICBM installations, probably precipitating abrogation of the ABM treaty. A kind of national claustrophobia might then lead to a revival of the concept of area defense against nuclear attack by deploying ABMs around population centers; these deployments, in turn, would lead to still greater uncertainties about the effectiveness of our second-strike capability as the Soviets emulated our ABM deployments. Matching Soviet deployment would tend to increase the arsenals of offensive nuclear weapons on both sides and the attractiveness of a preemptive strike.

Resurgent isolationism could revive enthusiasm for massive civil defense and obliterate the lessons of the Kennedy Administration's abortive experiment with an expanded civil defense program, which collapsed in a flurry of debate over the morality of shooting one's neighbors when they sought to share one's private fallout shelter. There are renewed rumblings from the Reagan Administration about massive evacuation plans for a nuclear crisis, despite overwhelming evidence that the most elaborate evacuation scheme, American or Soviet, could be neutralized by relatively minor shifts in the targeting plan for strategic nuclear weapons. The strongly negative reactions of the grass roots to current evacuation plans make this development unlikely. It seems even more unlikely that the United States would attempt to emulate the Swiss and the Swedes, with their very different vulnerabilities, by honeycombing

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urban areas with deep underground shelters.

Without effective alliances, foreign trade would be stifled because it would be thought that the country could not afford to rely on sources of supply outside the continental United States. Economic autarky would reduce the gross national product and lower the general standard of living with consequent domestic political unrest but with even greater disturbance to the economies of the less-developed countries. They would be effectively cut off from the trade and assistance necessary to improve their economies and to control the rising tide of population growth. The United States could, with some severe transitional pains, adapt to the cutoff of strategic materials and of fossil fuel sources from outside the Western Hemisphere. The consequences of a collapse of international trade for Europe, Japan, and particularly for the Third World would be no less than disastrous.

Rising unemployment in the United States would make restoration of the draft unnecessary, particularly with a smaller force structure. But compulsory universal service, both military and (with limited military manpower requirements) civilian, might be instituted because of the ravaging social effects of dangerously high unemployment figures for young people.

Perhaps the most alarming consequence of this scenario would be the horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons to other countries and, inevitably, to political factions within some countries and eventually to private terrorist groups. The reduction of superpower influence and the probable disappearance of even rudimentary international institutions would encourage this development. In sum, this scenario could be characterized as a nuclear holocaust waiting to happen.

**T**he second scenario—at the opposite end of the spectrum, and almost equally unlikely—envisages a significant decrease in military spending below the FY 1983 Reagan budget increment. Such a decrease could presumably result from

greatly increased pressures on the discretionary portion of the overall federal budget, currently estimated at some 24 percent, of which 14 percent is military and 10 percent civilian spending. These pressures could, in turn, be a by-product of continuing inflation, recurring recessions, social unrest, and the inability of the system to make internal adjustments.

The dangers of unraveling alliance budget commitments are apparent in the absence of effective new arms control agreements. Consequent reductions in force structure could, but would not necessarily, result in some scaling back of international political commitments.

Budgetary constraints might lead to consideration of less expensive, less advanced, and less complex military technologies. But since the United States military seems to have particular difficulty in constraining the complexity of new weapon systems, a more probable route would be to cut back actual numbers of missiles, planes, tanks, and ships to be purchased. There might well be a political tug-of-war between those who felt that because the United States could not give up its traditional European commitments, its friends in Japan and Korea would have to be left to fend for themselves, and those who fervently believed that the path of empire still stretched westward and that the greater political and economic opportunities were to be found in what is still called the Far East. One can even imagine a situation in which the rising tide of economic and political change in Latin America would focus the attention of the United States military establishment on that area—however inappropriate and even self-defeating the military instrument might prove to be.

How rationally the military establishment would react to substantial budget cuts (or increasingly constraining budget limitations) is a question that has no obvious answers. One can only offer the general observation that it is easier to improve the efficiency of an expanding organization than of a contracting one, since in a period of contraction each unit and subunit tends to

draw its wagons into a circle and take up firing positions against attacking budget-cutters.

There is still a possibility that imaginative military and civilian leadership could take advantage of the situation to produce a leaner, tougher military establishment, perhaps even one that relied much more heavily on reserves, intensively and realistically trained, to fill out the skeleton units held together by a highly professional cadre. This possibility is explored in greater detail in connection with the fourth scenario below.

The third scenario is based on the current budget projections of the Reagan Administration and contemplates major increases both in commitments (Total Obligational Authority, or TOA) and in outlays, as far ahead as the projections extend. From the \$196 billion in TOA and \$180 billion in outlays originally proposed in the Carter Administration budget for the fiscal year ending 30 September 1982 (and representing a significant increase over the FY 1981 budget), the Reagan Administration increased the FY 1982 spending figure only to \$181 billion and the TOA figure only to \$200 billion (although the original Reagan revision of the Carter budget was for \$222 billion). The cumulative effects appear in the later years; projections for fiscal 1983 through

1987 appear in the table below. These figures anticipate a spending total of \$1.6 trillion over the five-year period, and, if approved by Congress, will result in an increase in the proportion of the federal budget devoted to the military from 28.5 percent to 37 percent, and in the percentage of gross national product so committed from 6.3 percent to 7.4 percent. At this writing, it appears that these figures will be cut by Congress, but probably not by a large enough figure to alter the general shape of this scenario.

Some observers believe that even if these increases are approved by Congress, the military establishment simply cannot absorb them at the rate proposed. Some argue that many of the increases will be lost in price hikes for major equipment well beyond the general inflation rate. At the same time, these proposals fall far short of the "wish list" compiled by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the forces and the equipment they believe would be needed to meet the Administration's national security objectives. Their list apparently includes nine more carrier task forces, 14 more Air Force fighter wings, and nine more Army divisions, as compared with one more carrier task force, three fighter wings, and one Army division in the Administration's budget proposals through fiscal 1987.

The Reagan Administration's proposed increases involve some expansion of the numbers of men and women in uniform. But

Administration Defense Budget Projections  
Fiscal 1983-1987 (Billions of Dollars)

Fiscal Year	Total Obligational Authority			Outlays		
	Total, Current Prices	Total, Constant (FY83) Prices*	% Change from Previous Year in Constant Dollars	Total, Current Prices	Total, Constant (FY83) Prices*	% Change from Previous year in Constant Dollars
1983	258.0	258.0	13.2	215.9	215.9	10.5
1984	285.5	269.8	4.6	247.0	233.2	8.0
1985	331.7	297.8	10.4	285.5	255.6	9.6
1986	367.6	314.0	5.4	324.0	276.0	8.0
1987	400.8	325.9	3.8	356.0	288.7	4.6

\*The following inflation rates were employed in calculating the constant prices: FY 82 to 83, 6.1%; FY 83 to 84, 4.9%; FY 84 to 85, 4.6%; FY 85 to 86, 4.5%; FY 86 to 87, 4.4%.

that expansion is constrained by the limited ability to attract volunteers from a declining 18-year-old age cohort; and, at this writing the political possibilities for a reinstated peacetime draft seem to be minimal.

The bulk of the new spending is likely to go for machines rather than for people. The MX missile, the B-1 and Stealth strategic bombers, and the additional Trident submarines are large-cost items; and the new tanks, ships, and planes for the nonnuclear forces are even larger ones. The bias of the system is toward developing and procuring new and more complex weapon systems, rather than spending scarce dollars on training, maintenance, and general readiness. Whether Congress will be willing to authorize and appropriate funds for the full expansion called for in this scenario remains, at this writing, very much an open question.

Assuming, as seems likely, that there are some cuts from the level proposed by the Reagan Administration, these cuts (or rather these smaller increases) are likely to come in the areas of training and maintenance, just because these are the areas where current spending can be most readily reduced. The initial costs of planning and developing a new system are a relatively small portion of the total costs. Funds may be obligated at the outset of the program for later engineering, actual production, and deployment; but the larger and more complex the system, the more actual spending will be concentrated in "out years"—and at that late stage it is possible to argue that we are already so far down the road with this system that it would be a pity to abandon it.

The consequences of the infusion of new funds in this manner may be, paradoxically, to reduce the overall effectiveness of the military establishment. More elaborate weapons may produce a more muscle-bound military, particularly if it is strapped for funds to practice how to use and maintain those weapons. On the nuclear side, greater accuracy and more destructive capacity, as in the MX missile (for which no survivable launching pads have yet been identified), may suggest to the Soviets that the United States is contemplating a first strike that could destroy

a large proportion of their nuclear forces, heavily concentrated in fixed land-based silos. This fear may lead the Soviets to adopt a launch-on-warning policy which could all too easily trigger a nuclear exchange that neither side intended.

New nonnuclear weapon systems have greater firepower, speed, and complexity, but they may stretch the capacity of their operators and maintenance crews almost to the breaking point. The principal criticism of the new M-1 tank seems to be its frequency-of-repair record. The advanced electronic gadgets in the F-18 have been criticized as being less reliable than simpler but more rugged systems in earlier designs. And the recent naval battles off the Falklands have raised serious questions about the vulnerability of even the biggest and best-defended capital ships.

What remains unclear in this scenario are the national security and foreign policy objectives to be served by the additional expenditures. Clearly, this third scenario differs from the first in its continuing commitments to allies in Western Europe and the Far East, manifested through the continued presence of United States forces, as well as in other ways. It differs also in the commitment, somewhat imprecisely defined, to resist the takeover of Persian Gulf oil resources by an outside force, presumably the Soviet Union. And it differs in its determination to keep sea-lanes open for United States commerce. It is less clear how this scenario differs from the second scenario. Presumably, it would pursue the same objectives with more dollars to spend on them. But, for the reasons given above, there are grounds to believe that it might be no more effective.

**W**e now come to the fourth scenario, sometimes characterized as the "military reform" or "not bigger or smaller, but better" scenario. It assumes some increases in the defense budget, but it focuses on selectivity, innovation, and reexamination of basic concepts and doctrines. As Senator Gary Hart, a leader in the Senate Armed Services Committee, put it

recently: "If the Reagan Administration is serious about efforts to strengthen the military, it will have to look beyond the size of the budget."

The military reformers, who include a number of younger officers, members of Congress and congressional staff, and academic observers of the military scene, argue that the United States and its NATO allies can no longer afford to rely on military doctrine that emphasizes massive firepower rather than maneuver any more than we could continue to rely on nuclear superiority. The reformers question the value of giant aircraft carriers and associated carrier task forces over larger numbers of smaller, less expensive carriers with vertical- or short-takeoff-and-landing aircraft. They put more faith in versatility and reliability, rather than in high performance, as desirable airplane characteristics. They give high marks for technological ingenuity, but they put their greatest emphasis on innovations in military theory—and on the kinds of military education and career management that offer scope for the military theorist.

The reformers are determined to change the situation that has led Paul Bracken and Martin Shubik to ask the question: "Has the Department of Defense become incapable of being intellectually surprised?"

Military reformers seem equally concerned to develop new techniques to deal with low-level violence, including international terrorism, as with conventional war. They speculate that the bureaucratic tendencies that seem to go with very large size in the military establishment may be the worst enemies of effectiveness, and they look for ways to offset those tendencies without sacrificing critical mass. It may be that when the Administration's military budget projections begin to meet increasing resistance on Capitol Hill and throughout the country, some of the reformers' proposals may find increasing favor.

The reform movement has not yet matured to the point where it divides in order to go off in several different directions. But "reform" cannot persist indefinitely as a unifying concept; changes can be made in different and inconsistent ways.

At this stage, at least three separate axes of development can be discerned:

The first axis is one of technological simplification; multipurpose weapons, ruggedly designed, relatively simple to operate and relatively (everything is relative) inexpensive per copy, are substituted for complex, expensive, and highly specialized systems, some of them said to be beyond the competence of today's recruits to handle. Also, since simpler weapons are less expensive, one can buy more of them, as with the smaller aircraft carriers advocated by Senator Hart.

Charles Hitch, the man who introduced program budgeting in the Pentagon under Secretary of Defense McNamara in the Kennedy era, likes to tell the story of the bronze spears and the iron spears. When iron spears were introduced, some thousand years before the Christian era, bronze spears were clearly superior; but bronze ones were so much more expensive that only one soldier in 10 could be equipped with them, and the ranks of soldiers armed with the cheap iron spears won the battles and the war.

In the same vein, Eugene Fubini, former chairman of the Defense Science Board and a philosopher among defense engineers, observes that one shouldn't buy the "best" system, because it won't work under adverse conditions; one shouldn't buy the second best, because it will cost too much for what it will do; one should buy the third best.

The second axis is oriented toward sophisticated simplicity in weapons, like the Exocet missile, the single "smart bomb" that homed in on and sank the British destroyer *Sheffield*, 30 miles away in the South Atlantic. It has even been suggested that some of these weapons might be able to take the place of battlefield nuclear weapons, thus raising the nuclear threshold, above which there may be no stopping place until Armageddon is reached.

Such sophisticated weapons, it is argued, cannot be designed by a committee, but only by an individual or a small team free of institutional restraints. Such a team developed the Sidewinder heat-seeking missile which is so effective in aerial combat. The Sidewinder was designed and built by a small group of

scientists in the defense laboratory at China Lake, in the California desert, working on their own time and with scrounged materials. A similar environment was found in the "skunk works," a completely separate division of the Lockheed Company, where Kelly Johnson designed and built the U-2 and the SR-71, revolutionary reconnaissance aircraft.

The optimal conditions for developing weapons of elegant, sophisticated simplicity may not differ from the optimal conditions for producing weapons of rugged simplicity. The kinds of warfare they envisage, however, may be quite different. Sophisticated weapons may obviate the need for overwhelming firepower, and they may be launched and operated from well behind the front lines. On the other hand, they put very heavy demands on what military shorthand labels C<sup>3</sup>I: command, control, communications, and intelligence. High-level direction and coordination of sophisticated weapons, based on adequate and accurate intelligence, are essential to their effective use. It is a continuing complaint that the C<sup>3</sup>I function tends to be neglected in favor of more glamorous military concerns. Current anxiety about the adequacy of the function in a crisis, particularly where the use of nuclear weapons is threatened, has attracted new attention and new resources. But most reformers believe that even this increased attention is still insufficient.

In their most highly developed form, these weapons may introduce the concept of the automated battlefield in which technicians working in clean, well-lighted rooms engage each other in a kind of giant television war game, locating each other's remotely operated weapons by using remote sensors. The automated battlefield may never become a reality and, in any event, the concept does not cover the situation in which one side is unwilling to accept defeat according to the rules of the game. But long before one reaches the automated battlefield, the first two axes appear to diverge.

A third axis of development points toward a style of warfare that emphasizes maneuver over firepower.

"Maneuver warfare" has been defined, in legislation introduced by Senator Hart calling for a special study of the subject, as "envisioning an [armed] conflict as time-competitive observation-orientation-decision-action cycles in which the object is to destroy the enemy's cohesion by maintaining a consistently faster cycle." Reaching beyond the stilted language of the legislative draftsman, Senator Hart cited recent examples of maneuver war: the German blitzkrieg, General Patton's campaigns, the landing at Inchon in Korea, and "almost all of [the] Israeli campaigns." "Maneuver," he explained, "is not simply a matter of moving, or even of moving rapidly. Maneuver means moving and acting consistently more rapidly than the opponent." The object is to be able to react more quickly, to go from observation to action faster than the enemy can move at each encounter, until he feels he has lost control of the situation. Strategy, doctrine, weaponry, and training are all focused on this ability.

Maneuver necessarily puts heavy emphasis on individual training, and consequently encourages experimentation with manpower policy. One option is to place more emphasis on highly trained cadre in the active duty forces and on experienced, regularly exercised reserves to fill out the units. With smaller operational units, reserves should be more readily mobilized; and with the accent on movement rather than firepower, experienced reserves might be more valuable than more recently trained recruits. A recent report by a group of National Guard generals that advocated, among other things, the maneuver strategy, even proposed that National Guard units choose and procure their own simple, inexpensive equipment. Here the first and third axes intersect.

Maneuver warfare has historically had a particular attraction for the side that is outnumbered or outgunned. It appeals to the David in every citizen of the Western democracies, to the tradition of Merrill's Marauders rather than the charge of the Light Brigade. But one does not have to accept the proposition that the Soviets are stronger in

conventional forces to support the maneuver concept.

There is controversy over the application of the doctrine in Western Europe and particularly in the north German plain. Since NATO was put together, West Germans have insisted on a "forward defense" so that their territory would not be overrun; a forward defense is still official NATO strategy. But among those who are exploring alternatives, the proponents of maneuver warfare are concerned that military planners are trying out some of their ideas but with concentrations of firepower so great as to defeat the basic purpose—and to scare off the Germans who don't want their entire country to become a battlefield.

The fourth axis of reform is organization—or, rather, reorganization. Some of the more organization-minded of the reformers set a good deal of store by a greater degree of unification among the four military services. They point out that the compartmentation of warfare into land, sea, and air wars, with a special amphibious role for the Marines, is quite anachronistic, and they observe also that such integration as exists in the operational commands and the Joint Staff is more formal than functional. So long as the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff look to their service staffs rather than to the Joint Staff to prepare their positions, and so long as officers serving in joint commands look to their respective services for promotion, unification is a very pale reality. No one has seriously proposed a single service since the Symington Report a decade after World War II. What the military referred to as "purple suits" are not likely to replace Army greens and Navy blues for the foreseeable future. But General David Jones, who retired as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the summer of 1982, publicly advocated, as he was leaving office, organizational changes to make the Joint Staff truly joint and to strengthen the hand of the Chairman. General Edward Meyer, Chief of Staff of the Army, has gone even further; he advocates divorcing the members of the Joint Chiefs from their roles as heads of their respective services so that they form a sort of military

advisory council to the Secretary of Defense and the President. Both Jones and Meyer would strengthen the hand of the unified commanders in the field, breaking down interservice barriers to permit tighter coordination (a special requirement for maneuver warfare). There are no indications, however, that the services are prepared to surrender any of their traditional prerogatives. It seems likely that organizational changes will still be debated long after major changes in strategy and force structure have been effected.

The reformers are evidently not all moving in the same direction. But at least they are talking to each other, so that diverging paths can come back together. And, as suggested, a rising defense budget creates a better climate for reform, as was last demonstrated in the early 1960s.

**N**o account of alternative futures would be complete without at least mentioning some of the more far-out alternatives that appear from time to time in newspaper feature stories. The simple fact is that (like nuclear wars) space wars, biological weapon wars, and even chemical weapon wars are not reasonable methods by which one government can work its will on another.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the strongest conclusion that one can reach about the future of military establishments in general is that, almost in the proportion that they become more frightening, they become less effective instruments of national policy.

At the other end of the spectrum of violence, the military may become more involved in learning to cope with low-level internal violence and specifically with the phenomenon of terrorism, from which the United States has thus far been almost completely spared. Federal troops have been called on only rarely to intervene in domestic disorders; in only 18 major incidents over the 190 years since that use was authorized by Congress has intervention been necessary. But a series of terrorist incidents, or even one major disruption of daily life in one large metropolitan area—an accomplishment well within the reach of a professional terrorist



group—could make significant demands on the military to help provide essential supplies and services and to assist the state and local police in maintaining order.

The scenarios for the future of the military establishment cover an even broader spectrum than the present expectations of the American people for the military. To the extent that the military budget remains at or above present levels, in a period of fixed real incomes and declining psychic incomes for most Americans, the pressure on the military to operate more efficiently and effectively, and on the civilian leadership to define and refine national security policy, will be particularly severe. It remains to be seen whether

these pressures will be great enough to overcome the centrifugal tendencies of what is almost certain to continue as the largest bureaucracy in the country, and to force the country to decide what it wants of its military.

#### NOTE

1. This is not to deny the vital importance of orbiting satellites in verification, particularly of nuclear weapon deployment, nor the value of a minimal chemical warfare capability so that neither side can force the other into the inconvenience of protective measures without being compelled to the same measures itself.

