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Transforming the U.S. Global Defense Posture

By Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas J. Feith, to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., Wednesday, December 3, 2003.

I am pleased to be back here under the sponsorship of the Center for Strategic and International Studies. I thank your President, John Hamre, for the Center's hospitality and for his personal continuing contributions to U.S. national security policy.

The Policy organization at the Pentagon does two main kinds of work. There are the day-to-day tasks – drafting instructions for negotiators, for example, or working a coalition issue in the war on terrorism, conducting defense talks with other countries or responding to a civil war in Liberia. This topical work tends to attract the most attention from the Congress, the press and the public.

But some of the most important work we do grabs few headlines. This is the longer-term thinking about U.S. defense strategy, which is the Policy organization's second major line of effort.

From the moment President Bush came into office, he has asked the Defense Department how best to position the United States in the world for the decades ahead. He and Secretary Rumsfeld have demanding appetites for strategic thought – that is, large ideas, broad in scope, that set courses that can run many years into the future.

The name given to this effort is "transformation," because the President is determined that the Defense Department think boldly and remake itself thoroughly, changing the way we:

- Train and equip our forces,
- Use them, for combat, stability operations and otherwise,
- Position those forces around the world ,
- Work with allies and partners, and
- Conduct procurement and other business activities.

Some people think of "transformation" narrowly as a matter of using new technologies to produce better weapons. But the concept is more comprehensive.

A key facet of transformation is realigning our global defense posture – that is, updating the types, locations, numbers, and capabilities of our military forces, and the nature of our alliances. That's the aspect of transformation I want to talk with you about today.

Even before 9/11, President Bush said that the security threats of the future would differ from those of the Cold War era – that they required a different way of thinking and of organizing our defenses. He campaigned on a platform of transformation. Since the Soviet empire collapsed, he observed, the

world changed far more radically than our own defense doctrines, institutions, equipment and alliances had changed.

I can report that the United States has made progress toward transformation during the Bush Administration.

First, we've transformed our relationship with Russia. We've recognized that the hostility that characterized US-Soviet relations during the Cold War has ended, hostility that was enshrined in the doctrine of "mutual assured destruction" and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Accordingly, along with the hostility, we've set aside that morally dubious doctrine and that out-dated treaty. We're cooperating with Russia in many fields. And Presidents Bush and Putin agreed formally to make unprecedented cuts in their nuclear arsenals. At the beginning of this Administration many commentators voiced anxiety about the risks of US-Russian tensions over arms control, NATO expansion and other issues. This is now a non-issue.

Second, we are transforming our Alliances. Today, we have an enlarged NATO with increasing (though still far from adequate) capabilities, a good plan for streamlining NATO's command structure, a new NATO Four-Star Command focused specifically on military transformation and an affirmative answer once and for all to that old chestnut – can NATO take on a mission "out of area." NATO has taken on command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and NATO assisted Poland in assuming command of a multinational division responsible for stabilizing a portion of southern Iraq.

Likewise, we are developing a more robust US-Japanese alliance, an up-to-date US-South Korean alliance, and a strengthened U.S.-Australian alliance. Our key Asian and Pacific allies are investing in new technologies, playing roles in Afghanistan and Iraq, coordinating with us regarding global and regional threats, such as the North Korean nuclear program, and working with us to rationalize the US troop "footprint" in their countries to keep the alliances sustainable and capable well into the 21st Century.

And, of course, we are transforming US military capabilities – strategies, technology and organization, as well as hardware.

As we have transformed deterrence and our alliances, we want to transform our global posture. Our current posture as John Hamre mentioned, still reflects in many ways the mentality and reality of the Cold War era, during which US forces deployed forward were defensive, tripwire units that were expected to fight near where they were based. The kind of forces used for that mission are not the agile, fast, lean forces we need for the future.

Our forces overseas should not remain positioned to fight the Cold War. In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union's demise, we reduced the numbers of US troops deployed forward. But they remained concentrated in their Cold War locations, from which they have had to be deployed to deal with crises elsewhere – in the Balkans, the Persian Gulf, Central Asia and other locations. Key premises underlying our forward posture have changed fundamentally: We no longer expect our forces to fight in place; rather, their purpose is to project power into theaters that may be distant from where they are based.

We are revising our thinking about forward deployed forces in light of our new strategic circumstances. The 9/11 terrorist attack literally brought home to us how dangerous those circumstances can be:

Terrorists as well as rogue states can command formidable destructive power, including through access to chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, but also by targeting the critical infrastructure on which advanced industrial societies rely:

- U.S. and friendly territories are vulnerable.
- The proliferation of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and missiles continues.
- Ungoverned areas serve as breeding grounds for global terrorism.
- Threats from these sources may require immediate military responses.

President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld directed a reexamination of US forward deployments that is free of old orthodoxies and takes the long view. We are aiming to achieve the most basic and comprehensive review of the nation's global defense posture since the United States became a world power.

In the immediate post-World-War-II period, Dean Acheson had a sense that his work was creating institutions that would last a long time; he made that point by entitling his memoirs Present at the Creation. President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld likewise are thinking about the relatively distant future. In developing plans to realign our forces abroad, they are not focused on the diplomatic issues of the moment, but on the strategic requirements and opportunities of the coming decades.

Let's be clear about what we are and what we are not aiming to achieve through transforming our global defense posture:

We are not aiming at retrenchment, curtailing U.S. commitments, isolationism or unilateralism. On the contrary, our realignment plans are motivated by appreciation of the strategic value of our defense alliances and partnerships with other states.

We are aiming to increase our ability to fulfill our international commitments more effectively.

We are aiming to ensure that our alliances are capable, affordable, sustainable and relevant in the future.

We are not focused narrowly on force levels, but are addressing force capabilities.

We are not talking about fighting in place, but moving to the fight.

We are not talking only about basing, we are talking about the ability to move forces when and where needed.

In transforming the US global defense posture:

We want to make our forces more responsive given the world's many strategic uncertainties.

We want to make our military presence increasingly rotational with the emphasis, as I've noted, on the capabilities of forces rather than their numbers.

We want to benefit as much as possible from the strategic prepositioning of equipment and support.

We want to make better use of our capabilities by thinking of our forces globally, rather than as simply regional assets.

We want to be able to bring more combat capabilities to bear in less time, that is, we want to have the ability to surge our forces to crisis spots from wherever our forces might be.

Strengthen Allied Roles

It bears reemphasizing: Our military forces, both forward deployed and based at home, are only part of our military capability. Another part is rooted in the network of alliances and security relationships we have created with other nations. When the United States acts in the world, we don't act by ourselves, but as a part of a community of states. That network of friendships and alliances is a valuable element of this community. The network's composition and nature have changed over the years as strategic circumstances in the world have changed. To surmount such problems as terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and failed states, we need to organize differently and increase our capabilities. Realigning the US global defense posture is an essential part of what we need to do.

Understanding of our realignment plans should help lay to rest the accusations that the US favors "unilateralism" in national security affairs. Our plans will help ensure that the US has the defense resources and relationships in place to allow us to work with allies and friends in the future. It will make those relationships affordable and usable, that is to say, relevant.

Our intent is to expand existing security relationships, and develop new ones. We want to build partnerships that manage concerns, ensure compatibility among forces, and facilitate intelligence sharing. In some cases US forces will be in a supporting role, in other cases, US forces will be supported. For example, we were in a supporting role when West African ECOWAS forces intervened recently in Liberia and when Australian forces did their peace operations in East Timor. Examples of support for U.S. forces include NATO ISAF forces in Afghanistan, and the role British and Polish forces have taken in commanding multinational divisions in Iraq.

Changes in the U.S. global posture also aim to help our allies and friends modernize their own forces, strategies and doctrines. As we discuss the US realignment with them, we are discussing cooperative transformation efforts. The new NATO Response Force and Allied Command – Transformation in Norfolk are examples of combined allied transformation efforts.

Realigning the U.S. posture will also help strengthen our alliances by tailoring the physical US "footprint" to suit local conditions. The goal is to reduce friction with host nations, the kind that results from accidents and other problems relating to local sensitivities. Removal of the U.S. Air Expeditionary Wing from Prince Sultan Air Base, for example, should help improve our relations with the Saudis, and relocating U.S. forces south and out of the densely-populated Seoul area in Korea will help remedy various problems with the Korean public while serving other important military purposes as well.

Contend with Uncertainty

Our new posture emphasizes agility to respond to changing circumstances. Intelligence is never perfect, so we need to be able to hedge against errors regarding emerging threats. We need to plan, but we must plan to be surprised. Our forces will be deployed forward in regions selected to enable them to reach potential crisis spots quickly. We also want to maintain familiarity with various parts of the globe.

Focus Across Regions as well as within them

In the Cold War, we focused on threats to specific regions. Now we are dealing with threats that are global in nature. So global strategies and actions are required. President Bush's Proliferation Security Initiative is an example of a global strategy for dealing with the spread of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and missile-related materiel and technology. We need to be positioned properly – with the right forces, the right relationships and the right authority – to execute that strategy. In addition, we want to develop our capacity to project power from one region to another – threats don't respect the administrative boundaries of the Defense Department's Unified Command Plan.

There is value in developing support capabilities away from front lines – relying on so-called "reachback" technology. For example, intelligence support, including battle damage assessment, can be provided from outside the theater of operations. We also may be able to increase our use of "reachback" capabilities of our allies and friends.

Develop Rapidly Deployable Capabilities

Because our forward-deployed forces are unlikely to fight where they are based, our key goal must be to make those forces rapidly deployable to the relevant areas as events require.

We can project power in a rapid manner, whether from bases in the US or overseas, but it is helpful to have support infrastructure overseas. Examples of an expeditionary approach to warfighting that drew upon such infrastructure include Kosovo, a case of power projection within a region, in pursuit of regional stability and in concert with regional allies, and Afghanistan, a case of global power projection, in which forces flowed into Central Asia from US, European, and Asian theaters. We are encouraging allies to establish deployable – truly usable – headquarters and forces. We intend to increase combined training for expeditionary operations, for example, to encourage Allied participation in so-called "high-end" U.S. exercises

For this deployability concept to work, US forces must be able to move smoothly into, through, and out of host nations, which puts a premium on establishing legal and support arrangements with many friendly countries. We are negotiating or planning to negotiate with many countries legal protections for US personnel, through Status of Forces Agreements and agreements (known as Article 98 agreements) limiting the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court with respect to our forces' activities. And we are putting in place so-called cross-servicing agreements so that we can rapidly reimburse countries for support they provide to our military operations.

Focus on Capabilities, Not Numbers

Military capabilities have increased stunningly over the past decade as a result of technology and innovations in tactics. Our wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have shown the world how relatively small forces can have large, strategic effects. A single fighter/bomber sortie now hits multiple targets, whereas in the past, multiple sorties were required to hit a single target. Small teams of Special Forces and Marines, supported by flexible close air support and often operating together with indigenous forces, were able to accomplish missions in Afghanistan and Iraq that in the past would have required brigades or divisions. Old military thinking about numbers has been overtaken thoroughly by events. Longstanding notions about ratios of offensive versus defensive forces and about how much can be accomplished by a certain number of troops or platforms have had to be revised wholesale.

Military and political leaders around the world are just beginning to absorb the lessons of the recent fighting and to appreciate why US officials emphasize military capabilities as opposed to numbers of forces. These lessons have an important bearing on our global posture realignment. Our key purpose, as I've noted, is to push increased capabilities forward, which is crucial to the security of the United States and our allies and friends. That purpose does not require that we push additional forces forward. In fact, we can now have far greater capabilities forward than in the past with smaller numbers of forces. We want to ensure that our allies and friends recognize that, in transforming our posture, we are strengthening our commitment to secure our common interests, even in those places where we may be reducing forces levels.

Conclusion

Last week, President Bush announced that we would "realign the global posture of our forces to better address" the new challenges we face and would be consulting around the world on this matter. I have discussed the principles and purposes of our realignment work. But I want to stress that no

final decisions have been made.

So the consultations that the President announced last week will be real consultations – all the decisions the President will eventually make will depend on the inputs we receive in the course of these consultations. How our partners react to our ideas is important to us, as are the steps they are willing to take to advance our common security interests through host-nation support and other means.

Indeed, the consultations in and of themselves are an element of our global posture. They help strengthen our relationships by harmonizing our thinking and our assessment of threats and military requirements. They give us an opportunity to explain the rationale of our global realignment – such as our focus on capabilities rather than numbers.

In their recent trips to Asia and Europe, Secretaries Rumsfeld and Powell began to describe our efforts. Next week, my colleague Under Secretary of State Marc Grossman and I will carry forward the consultations, which will over time include US allies and partners in every region of the world. This is a global initiative, and our consultations will be global.

Our friends and allies are sensitive to changes in the US overseas posture. That is why we are consulting with them before the President or Secretary Rumsfeld makes any decisions on changes. Whatever improvements in military effectiveness the actual posture decisions produce, they will serve our interests fully only if they also help sustain and strengthen our ties with our friends, allies and partners around the world. We are confident that they will.



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