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# An Overview of U.S. Military Posture

By

Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr.  
Chairman, The Joint Chiefs of Staff

[The following is a reprint of a statement by Admiral Crowe before the Senate Budget Committee in Washington, D.C., on March 14, 1989.]

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I appreciate this opportunity to participate in these hearings and to present a global overview of our military posture. I have submitted a written statement for the record and with your permission will, this morning, only highlight the major points.

As you know President Bush has modified defense fiscal guidance previously issued by President Reagan and initiated an interagency review of our national security strategy. In turn, the services are reworking programs to square with the priorities of the President. Until this work is completed, I will not be prepared to address in specific the defense budget for FY 1990.

## NATIONAL MILITARY STRATEGY

In peacetime, the United States bounds the cost of defense with a military strategy designed to deter major hostilities and to support our foreign and economic policies. This practice dictates a healthy strategic and theater nuclear capability, high-quality conventional forces, total force planning, limited reserves of war material, continuing modernization of equipment, and combat forces forward deployed to areas of special interest.

Seldom has the U.S. government been engaged in a more complex array of international relationships and negotiations than it is today. In such an environment, I see no alternative to the tried and proven formula of dealing from strength as we seek to secure our future.

## SOVIET MILITARY POWER

My formal statement first addresses the Soviet approach to military power. This committee is, of course, aware of the impressive strength the Kremlin has mustered over the last four decades and that the USSR represents our most imposing potential adversary. Any U.S. military strategy must confront these realities.

On the other side of the ledger, we are witnessing a remarkable series of policy changes in Moscow. General Secretary Gorbachev has outlined in some detail the economic woes of the USSR and launched *perestroika* and *glasnost* in a effort to prepare his country for the next century. His policies, if carried to conclusion, could have profound implications not only for his own nation but also for Russian relationships with the Free World.

Given these events, I was not surprised by the unilateral force modifications announced last December. I was, however, impressed by the size of these reductions (500,000 troops) and the proposal to complete them by 1990-1991. I suspect he must now let the dust settle before going further. But I do anticipate additional initiatives.

If carried out, these Soviet decreases will influence the balance of land power in Europe and Asia. Opposite NATO's Central Front, Warsaw Pact cutbacks could represent a down payment on

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a less offensive posture—and virtually eliminate the “surprise” attack option for Soviet ground forces. Perhaps more important is the recent announcement of future slashes in production and redirection of military plants to civilian output.

For our part, we must satisfy ourselves that these promises actually materialize. It is equally important to understand that much of the global military picture will remain untouched by these measures.

## GLOBAL MILITARY OVERVIEW

My full statement then breaks down our global posture and addresses current defense issues. To preserve time, I will touch only on the more significant items.

**First, Maritime Defense:** On balance, we would fare well in a maritime contest with the Soviet Union. But such a confrontation will nevertheless require an all-out effort if we are to confine the Russian fleet to its home waters and to establish control over vital ocean lines of communication.

The primary threat at sea is the Soviet submarine fleet, which presses the U.S. to stay ahead in the anti-submarine warfare race. The quality of our ships and aircraft and the exceptional calibre of our people provide us the overall edge. Our naval power will be vital in confining the Kremlin to a land campaign and in threatening the Soviets on a number of unpredictable axes. Similarly, it facilitates communications with our allies and the projection of our air and ground power in major war, limited hostilities, or peacetime crises (e.g., Persian Gulf).

The Soviets do not enjoy this significant flexibility. It would be folly to let our maritime capability degrade.

**Strategic Mobility.** The U.S. is relatively well-postured in terms of lift for contingencies short of major war.

Given a crisis involving NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet Union would have an initial jump in reaching Western Europe due to the short distances and a developed road and rail system. Similarly, Russian strategic airlift permits transferring people and light cargo between the European and Asian fronts—all within Soviet airspace.

The Kremlin also enjoys a peacetime advantage in merchant shipping, which can be easily commandeered for military purposes. Once global hostilities commenced, however, the Soviet Merchant fleet would find itself bottled up in port or otherwise out of action.

In contrast, we would have the use of the oceans, but would still be at full stretch to reinforce Western Europe rapidly—fundamentally a consequence of insufficient merchant bottoms as well as the wide use of flags of convenience.

Looking ahead, with substantial force reductions, mobility assets would become even more crucial to our global posture.

**Space:** Both the U.S. and USSR have fashioned a significant military capability in space. Moscow as usual favors size and numbers. We tend toward sophistication. It is vital to maintain a robust space effort—for it is the military wave of the future. My chief concerns are the Soviet anti-satellite weapons, which place some of our most important space systems in jeopardy. We desperately need our own anti-satellite systems as a counter and deterrent.

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**Strategic Nuclear Forces:** While each side uses a different approach, the U.S. and USSR have a rough strategic parity. The Kremlin has fielded some impressive modern ICBMs, including two mobile variants, and puts emphasis on passive measures as well. In general, the larger size of Soviet weapons gives them a megatonnage edge, but this means little in the overall nuclear calculus.

Washington has in train its own modernization effort (i.e., D-5 missiles, Peacekeeper, B-2, air-launched cruise missiles, etc.). These improvements are "imperative" to keep pace with the Soviets and especially if we move into a START regime. Our most pressing current problem is to resolve the mobile missile issue and to move into development. Put simply, a healthy strategic deterrent is the foundation of our overall defense posture.

**Conventional forces:** The United States' conventional strength around the world is relatively adequate to deal with a wide spectrum of peacetime crises and limited contingencies.

The most stressful and worrisome challenge, however, would be full-fledged conflict with the Soviet Union and, in turn, the task of defending NATO Europe alongside our allies.

If deterrence fails in Europe and the initial defense falters, the coalition will face the unpalatable prospect of losing considerable European territory or, in the alternative, resorting to theater nuclear weapons. The latter is NATO policy.

Today the NATO alliance is still not able to mount a well-founded conventional defense against a determined Soviet campaign. To avoid the nuclear prospect nothing will substitute for such a capability—i.e., large numbers of well-trained forces, modern weapon systems, adequate inventories of sophisticated conventional munitions, and sufficient combat logistics support.

Of great concern is the possibility that the NATO coalition's members will not make the investments necessary to meet this challenge. Perhaps unilateral Soviet reductions or future negotiations will redress the balance, but it is much too early to rely on such predictions. Experience would argue that the best way to bring the Kremlin's leaders to the table is to enhance our own strength.

The bottom line is that the U.S. cannot solve this problem alone. Without allied willingness to spend more, a successful conventional defense of Western Europe is indeed questionable.

This lack is a significant weakness in our global security stance. This shortcoming does not necessarily mean that Europe is in immediate jeopardy. As mentioned earlier, deterrence has a number of elements beside local military strength. It does mean that if we are to confront steadily decreasing appropriations, we should look closely at all elements of deterrence and favor those with the highest payoff.

Having stressed the NATO area in order to note our most pressing challenge, let me now comment briefly on the remaining regions of special U.S. interest.

## **EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC**

In the Pacific, forward defense of the United States is bolstered by our alliance with Tokyo. In turn, we are committed by treaties to the defense of Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). To maintain a favorable balance of power in the region, we must be prepared to protect lines of communications to China as well as to Southeast Asia.

Today, I judge the posture of U.S. and allied forces in the Pacific sufficient to deter the Soviets from a major attack in that theater and, if deterrence fails, to secure fundamental interests.

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North Korea still enjoys a marked advantage over the south in ground formations. The ROK, however, is well postured defensively and buttressed by the 2nd U.S. Division. More critical would be U.S. air in the Far East, which is positioned to render immediate assistance. It is very unlikely that Pyongyang would provoke this combination without support from the People's Republic of China or the Soviet Union.

Two words of caution are in order. First, the Soviet Union has been steadily increasing the quality and quantity of its air and naval forces in the Pacific. Second, our bases in the Philippines are under local political pressure.

In short, our air and naval strength in the Western Pacific is crucial, and we must remain flexible on base options.

## **SOUTHWEST ASIA**

In Southwest Asia, U.S. security interests are tied closely to energy—namely, access to petroleum at reasonable prices. The Persian Gulf has more reserves than any other area in the world, and no producer can lift oil at less cost per barrel than Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Should the Soviet Union ever decide to co-opt the gulf oil fields, we estimate they could overwhelm the regular forces of Iran, but the Kremlin always has to worry about what happens next. Our war games suggest, for example, that the Central Command can contest a Soviet advance in Iran and probably maintain some access to the Persian Gulf. With stiff resistance by the Iranians, a multilateral response by the West, and support from the Gulf Cooperation Council added to the picture, the Soviets would be confronted with even more serious problems than they suffered in Afghanistan.

## **LATIN AND CENTRAL AMERICA**

Central America is in a state of flux. The Arias Peace Plan was designed to bring democracy to Nicaragua, but until now, Managua has ignored this injunction. The burden of proof is still with the Sandinistas. They must renounce force if the area is to stabilize.

Meanwhile, the United States faces a crisis in Panama and sagging confidence in the leadership of the Panamanian defense forces. Concurrently, we are plagued with a narcotics problem that poses a threat not only to the integrity and stability of governments to our south, but to the social fabric of the United States itself.

Against this background, I much prefer to see a bipartisan agenda for the area and an enhanced security assistance program keyed to promoting stability and internal security.

## **BUDGET**

Let me quickly add to what Deputy Secretary of Defense Taft has said about the budget. America will enter the 1990s spending little more than 5 percent of its gross national product on defense. This is a very modest investment of resources considering the size of the product, international conditions, the military threat, and our global interests.

Over the last four years, U.S. strategy has worked out a relatively reasonable balance between our various global responsibilities. In the process, however, our forces are tightly stretched. We are now at the point where even small cuts will translate into disproportionate reductions in capability, and the level of our capabilities involves more risk than the chiefs would prefer. Specifically:

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- All of our active and Reserve forces will not be ready on an everyday basis to defend NATO, Southwest Asia, or the Pacific Far East against a major threat from the Soviet Union;
  - In the unlikely event that deterrence fails and we engage the Soviet Union worldwide, we will have to sequentially reinforce and defend the various theaters; and
  - On NATO's Central Front, we may be forced to trade space for time or consider resorting to the use of nuclear weapons. Neither option is very palatable.
  - At the same time, the US. is challenged to maintain a credible nuclear deterrent, a secure position in space, a supportive maritime environment, and strategically mobile ground and air forces.

We have had four years of negative growth—an 11 percent cutback. Last year, we drew down combat units in every service. We are now at the point where continuing negative growth will have a disproportionate impact on capability and degrade our overall posture accordingly.

It is a simple but fundamental fact that we cannot spend less and get more defense. We can throttle back in a smart or foolish fashion, but we cannot have more security in the process. Similarly, it is vital to appreciate that we can no longer be strong everywhere. Lastly, sizeable force reductions could very well generate some compression of our overseas posture—i.e., forward deployed units—and, in turn, [result in] less support for foreign and economic policies, less influence with our allies, less ability to deal with crises, etc.

Even the amended budget which resumes modest growth in FY 91, will pose some very difficult choices. However, to ignore it and adopt a no-growth pattern or to fall below the President's amended budget would be a grave mistake given the uncertain security environment.

In my view, it is extremely premature to say that Gorbachev will survive, that *perestroika* will succeed, that a START agreement will be concluded, that an effective conventional arms pact is doable, that third country terrorism will recede, and that the drug problem is in hand. Yet there are those who would jump to these conclusions in the rush to reduce spending.

There are a number of encouraging signs on the horizon; our strength has been instrumental in producing these developments. But to discard our policy of peace through strength just as it is beginning to bear fruit makes no sense to me. Yes, perhaps the brave new world coming will offer genuine opportunities for reducing the military, but we should move as our confidence grows—not prematurely.

My plea is that as we face a more confining fiscal climate, effort must be made to look at the overall picture—threat, international situation, our alliances, state of our forces, arms control goals—rather than viewing defense only through an accountant's green eyeshade.