

US Peacetime Engagement: Problems and Prospects of a Paradigm Change in Strategic Perspective

by
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“What we require now is a defense policy that adapts to the significant changes we are witnessing – without neglecting the enduring realities that will continue to shape our security strategy. A policy of peacetime engagement every bit as constant and committed to the defense of our interests in today’s world as in the time of conflict and cold war.”¹

INTRODUCTION

These remarks of President George Bush extracted from his address at the Aspen Institute on 2 August 1990, contain the immediate seeds from which the US post-Cold War strategy of peacetime engagement has sprung. The enduring realities to which the president referred correspond “to three directions” toward which the revised US defense strategy is headed. These directions are “contending with the continuing Soviet reality, adopting a regional orientation, and emphasizing flexibility.”²

Peacetime engagement represents the first fundamental change in US defense strategy since the 1960s. Above all, the strategy depicts a new way of thinking about defense, a new comprehensive and multifaceted defense philosophy. Through peacetime engagement, the United States embarks upon a paradigm change in strategic perspective.³ Accordingly, after establishing the nature of the break with traditional US policy, this essay will address significant factors surrounding each of the three key components associated with peacetime engagement. The key components are forward presence, nation assistance and continuum of military operations.⁴ The essay will conclude with an assessment of the problems and prospects of this three-pronged and evolving strategy.

Peacetime engagement may be defined as “the strategic concept that coordinates the application of political, economic, informational, and military means to promote regional stability, to retain US influence and access abroad and to defuse crises.”⁵ This strategic concept marks a distinctive break with the US national security policy of containment. Peacetime engagement is the fundamental US policy of the post-Cold War era. In terms of national security strategy, the concept envisions a move from containment era flexible response to “discriminate response,” which entails both traditional “deterrence” and “influence.” National military strategy, in turn, changes from a concentration on forward defense and rapid deployment to a focus on regional contingencies characterized by “forward presence and crisis response.”

Outcomes endorsed under the new regime center on a phasing out of bipolar confrontation enroute to molding a “world community consensus” in favor of an “orderly transition” to a new world order.⁶ The US is entering what General Colin Powell, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, labeled a “fourth rendezvous with destiny.” If America rises to the challenge, writes General Powell in the journal *Foreign Affairs*, “We can have peace – [and w]e can strive for justice in the world.”⁷

The article will now analyze each of the three key components associated with peacetime engagement: forward presence, nation assistance and continuum of military operations.

FORWARD PRESENCE

This component relates to the breadth or reach of peacetime engagement. The idea is to keep America engaged on the world scene in the aftermath of the Cold War in order to prevent a lapse into isolationism as in the past. A supplementary motive lies in pulling the US’s former Cold War adversaries, especially Russia and China, into a type of common alliance centered on managing world peace and change in the new era. In this endeavor, the United Nations plays a pivotal role.

President Bush made explicit his plans for great power collusion in his famous speech entitled, “Toward a New World Order” delivered on 11 September 1990. Bush stated, “no longer can a dictator count on East-West confrontation to stymie concerted UN action against aggression. A new partnership of nations has begun.” In reference to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, Bush added: “This is the first assault on the new world we see, the first test of our mettle ... how we manage this crisis today could shape the future for generations to come.” The former president then made explicit the utility of the UN in his plans: “We are now in sight of a United Nations that performs as envisioned by its founders ... The Security Council has taken the decisive step of authorizing the use of all means necessary to ensure compliance with [UN] sanctions.”⁸

On 10 October 1990, Bush addressed the United Nations General Assembly. Among his statements on that occasion were the following: “This is a new and different world. Not since 1945 have we seen the real possibility of using the United Nations as it was designed – as a center for international collective security.” He added that we could now “build a new world based on an end to the Cold War.”⁹

Endorsing the momentum generated under Bush, as a presidential candidate Bill Clinton declared, “[It] is a failure of vision not to recognize that collective action can accomplish more than it could just a few years ago ... The role of the [UN] during the Gulf War was a vivid illustration of what is possible in the new era.”¹⁰

As president, Bill Clinton has opted for what is generally acknowledged as a Wilsonian foreign policy. Echoing his earlier role model, Woodrow Wilson, who sought to “make the world safe for democracy,” Clinton has embraced a policy of “engagement for democracy.”¹¹ Clinton is seeking to be the architect of about what Wilson could only dream and for what Bush had laid the foundation, a new world

order. Clinton is maneuvering US security policy ever closer in line with the pragmatic machinations of the UN Security Council, even as he draws down the resources allotted to the US military.

Part of Clinton's decisional calculus lies in the priority of the US economic crisis. Faced with well-known budget shortfalls, the president hopes to have it both ways: to solve the domestic money problem while simultaneously extending the reach of US military and diplomatic influence in the world. The label "collective internationalism" has been attached to his efforts to have the US share the benefits of the collective power concentrated in the security council.¹²

On the verge of strengthening collective internationalism, the Clinton administration has endorsed the call of the UN Secretary General for a "Standby UN Army." In the winter of 1992-93 issue of the journal *Foreign Affairs*, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali published the article, "Empowering the United Nations," which calls for such a force. Boutros-Ghali envisions a strengthened secretary general directing the force under the general guidance of the secretary council.¹³

On 3 May 1993, the US Ambassador to the UN, Madeleine Albright, stated before Congress that, "a standby force is the way to go" to give the UN an enhanced military capability. She added that the UN peacekeeping mission needed an operations center, an intelligence capability and a more rigorous approach to budgeting: these in addition to national forces earmarked for UN use.¹⁴

Since the Ambassador's remarks, however, the highly publicized scenes of mobs dragging dead American personnel through the streets of Somalia has muted, at least temporarily, American calls for a standby UN force. Furthermore, reacting to increasing criticism over administration foreign policy, on CNN's "Global Forum" of 3 May 1994, Clinton discussed his Haitian policy in terms reminiscent of old fashioned US unilateral interventionism in Latin America. Upon deciding to make intervention a viable option, the US would then seek to muster multilateral legitimacy for its unilateral decision.

While the Clinton administration continues to address the first component of peacetime engagement by enhancing US ability to maintain a forward military presence in the world, it is also bent upon the process of nation assistance, the second component of the strategy.

NATION ASSISTANCE

The sudden eclipse of the relative equilibrium of the Cold War has thrust upon the world psyche a thirst for ethnic, racial and religious self-determination. If left unrestrained, demands to fulfill these psychic needs could engulf the planet in multiple crises of unprecedented proportions. It is in an effort to bring some modicum of civility and equilibrium to this dynamic and sensitive process of radical change that a policy of nation assistance has been embraced as a component of peacetime engagement.

Forward military presence wedded to collective internationalism creates the conditions which facilitate the implementation of nation assistance. In terms of the larger concept of peacetime engagement, the objective is to harness peace through Third World development in a coordinated global and regional context. Due mainly to new thinking among US defense analysts, regional organizations like the Organization of American States are becoming revitalized to tie regional development to the goals and resources of the United Nations and the larger international community.¹⁵

Coordination and cooperation, then, are imperative to effective nation assistance. This extends to the country team concept. Operating under US and international guidelines, US ambassadors in Third World countries are expected to guide the multifaceted divisions of their embassies in a coordinated, synergistic, manner to ensure the smooth transition of the host country to an embrace of democratic pluralism and free trade economics. Success depends upon melding of the diplomatic, economic, informational and military segments of the country team.

Not only is cooperation between the country team, itself, on the one hand, and cooperation between the team and the US and international spheres on the other imperative. Also of paramount importance is the coordination and cooperation of all these with the host country and its various divisions. All of these levels must communicate and act as a unit for maximum success; success is defined as molding a fit between the goals and policies of a respective nation state with those of the larger new world order.

A nation state whose policies are out of alignment with the larger goals of the emerging world system can disrupt the delicate equilibrium of the whole. For instance, with the world locked ever more tightly into a free trade mode monetary equilibrium depends upon a vision complementary to the Group of Seven (G-7) economic powers whose deliberations basically govern exchange rates. Furthermore, a viable system of free trade depends upon democratic pluralism in nation states as a hedge against economic protectionism.

It is within this context that political and economic underdevelopment becomes a world security issue. Hence the US policy of peacetime engagement attaches maximum importance to the component of nation assistance. Nation assistance, in turn, is divided into "reactive" and "proactive" components. The former describes emergency responses to crises of either the natural or man-made variety. The latter or proactive component refers to the promotion of conditions for peace that require long-term involvement.

The proactive element consists of designs to achieve security through "stability" and "sustainability." Stability is no longer defined in terms of maintaining a status quo equilibrium as under the old bipolar balance of power configuration. Rather stability under the new world order paradigm means establishing the conditions for orderly change or transition. In a like manner, sustainability refers to development or transition into the new world order in an environmentally and resource-sustainable manner.¹⁶

The root causes of instability include such problems as poverty, illiteracy, and ethnic and social unrest. Augmenting these conditions are governments with institutions incapable or unwilling to come to grips with them. US students of developmental theory since the 1950s have considered the development of democratic and free trade regimes as depending fundamentally upon the cultivation of upwardly mobile, risk-taking political and economic entrepreneurs as progenitors of change.¹⁷ The primary difference between the fifties and the current era lies in the different world systems within which the respective change agents have been cultivated: in the fifties the ideal was the entrepreneur with an allegiance to the "free world," while currently loyalty to the norms of the new world order is the priority.

The role of the US military in the developing Third World agents of change is critical and not without precedent. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the military surveyed the West, developed the frontier and inland water navigation and even built the Panama Canal.¹⁸ Under the Kennedy administration the military played a strong developmental role through a policy of military civic action featuring medical, sanitation, engineering and social and economic development technics.¹⁹

The Bush and Clinton administrations have drawn on these traditions to place a high priority on what Clintonites call "democracy building." For example, a new undersecretary position at the state department is charged with coordinating developmental policy with the assistant secretary for democracy and human rights, a newly created position in the Pentagon. Some 13 percent of the Clinton administration's fiscal 1994 budget for international affairs, amounting to \$2.7 billion, was earmarked for developmental initiatives.

The *Washington Post* reported that one of these initiatives involved a re-democratization of Haiti.²⁰ Appearing before the House Foreign Affairs Committee on 18 May 1993, Secretary of State Warren Christopher confirmed that the US was doing its part to assemble a rather substantial multilateral foreign aid package for the Haiti project.²¹

Nation assistance and forward presence-collective internationalism are two of the three key components of the US policy of peacetime engagement. As these two work in tandem with each other, so together they blend with the third component, continuum of military operations.

CONTINUUM OF MILITARY OPERATIONS

According to the study, "Shaping an Army for Peace, Crisis and War," the continuum of military operations recognizes three strategic environments.²² The first of these, called the environment of peace, focuses explicitly on peacetime engagement. Counter-narcotics, anti-terrorism and peacekeeping supplement the parent function of nation assistance in the environment of peace. This environment features a policy of positive "influence" on the target countries.

The second strategic environment in the continuum of military operations is called "hostilities short of war." "Suasion" is the policy of choice in this environ-

ment. Types of operations typical of hostilities short of war include raids, peacemaking, noncombatant evacuation operations and counter-terrorism. Two distinct levels of suasion exist to control critical situations. One of these is the attempt to deter an adversary through a show of force; the mere presence of US military personnel may sometimes stymie a would-be aggressor. The second policy option under the rubric of suasion is the use of force to compel compliance, as in the US raid on Libya in 1986. Finally, the third strategic environment within the continuum of military operations is war, either limited or total. In this environment use of force is referred to as coercion.

The ultimate objective of actions radiating from all three strategic environments is peace. The environment of peace, hostilities short of war and war all look forward to final consummation of a peacetime situation through "post conflict activity." Meanwhile, even in a condition of war, the theater commander is expected to continue monitoring activities in all three strategic environments. Peacetime engagement and hostilities short of war are not to be discontinued just because war breaks out.²³

An example of how the levels of the continuum of military operations support and reinforce one another is seen in the Saudi Arabian connection to Desert Shield/Desert Storm. Several decades of US peacetime activities in Saudi Arabia paved the way for success in the military conflict which followed in 1990 and 1991. For example, activities endemic to what is now called peacetime engagement accounted in large part for the well developed infrastructure which greeted US and coalition troops in 1990. The ports, air bases and military cantonments were present, to a large extent, because of US peacetime policies.

President Bush acknowledged the fruits of previous US peacetime success in his 1991 speech on national security strategy. The president quoted Saudi King Faud as follows:

I trust the United States of America. I know that when you say you will be committed, you are, in fact, committed. I know that you will stay as long as necessary to do what has to be done, and I know you will leave when you are asked to leave at the end, and that you have no ulterior motives.²⁴

Success in the Gulf Crisis placed unprecedented demands upon US commanders. Even as they coordinated all three environments of the continuum of military operations in the theater of war, they were obliged to play the politics of world coalition building pursuant to the larger thrust of peacetime engagement policy.

What then is peacetime engagement? It may be described in both a broad and a narrow sense. In the broader and formal sense, it is the US national security policy associated with its three key components of forward presence, nation assistance and the continuum of military operations. Interpreted more narrowly and realistically, peacetime engagement is fully associated with only two key components, those of

forward presence and nation assistance, while in the third key component, continuum of military operations, it refers to only one of three strategic environments. The development of theory linking the broad and narrow perceptions of US peacetime engagement presents analytical problems which remain to be unraveled.

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

A prerequisite to viable theory building is consensus over terms and definitions. Efforts to reach such a consensus led in July 1991 to a "Peacetime Engagement Conference" in Washington, DC. Under the sponsorship of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict, the meeting drew representatives of the Departments of State and Defense, branches of the armed services, the Joint Staff and others.

The meeting managed agreement of certain aspects of peacetime engagement. Foremost is the view that it is a national security policy, not a war-fighting strategy. However, the conferees concluded, it "encompasses all US security policy in an environment short of war and therefore is broader than low-intensity conflict."²⁵

This means peacetime engagement arguably should constitute more than just the first of three strategic environments in the continuum of military operations. Rather, "being broader than low-intensity conflict" it should also encompass the second strategic environment, hostilities short of war. If it could then take the next step and come to envelop war, the third strategic environment, then environment of peace or peacetime engagement would encompass all three environments in the continuum of military operations. Added to its envelopment of the other two key components, forward presence and nation assistance, this would make peacetime engagement a truly comprehensive policy.

Therefore, the task for theory is to build a case for the linkage of peacetime engagement to the third strategic environment, war, in the continuum of military operations. As a first step in developing such a theory, we should come to grips with the wider connotations surrounding the word "linkage."

A synonym for linkage in the literature of security policy is the term synergy, which refers to the properties of a whole system created through the interaction of its parts. In synergistic or systems analysis, the whole is considered to be the greater than the sum of its individual parts. A related descriptive term is differentiated integration, referring to the process of integration of otherwise disparate parts into an integrated whole. This is unity in diversity where diverse parts find unity in the process of pursuing the common objective of wholeness. From a synergistic perspective, peace is described in terms of wholeness; peace is a process of integration.

Utilizing the process of creating wholeness as a common perspective, we can describe the formation of peace at various levels. On the level of the three-fold continuum of military operations, we can describe the process whereby the three

strategic environments coalesce around the common objective of peace. This the literature already concedes: peacetime engagement, hostilities short of war and war already adhere officially to the common ultimate objective of promoting peace. The task for theory at this level is to link this process of peace formation synergistically to other levels of peace promotion through placing the process in a systems context.

The synergistic promotion of peace at the three-fold level of the continuum of military operations could be linked to the level of theater war. The process by which commanders at the theater level integrate the various factors of war ultimately into peace could then be synergistically described. Through linkage inherent in systems analysis, the analytical problem mentioned earlier of the separation of the national security policy of peacetime engagement from war fighting could be surmounted; war fighting could be incorporated into the same framework of analysis as the larger and more comprehensive policy of peacetime engagement.

New thinking among security policy analysts has already begun to place war fighting in a synergistic context. For example, the winter 1992/93 issue of *Parameters*, the quarterly of the US Army War College, discloses that technological development is compressing the battlefield dimension of time while extending that of space. This is causing the three levels of war – strategic, operational, and tactical – to merge into a “single new structure for the integration of complex air-land-sea combat operations.” Linked to this is a growing capacity “to immediately convert tactical success on the battlefield into decisive strategic results.”²⁶

Synchronization and synergy are pivotal to success on the battlefield as the entire operation is predicated upon the integration of interrelationships so profound and fundamental that the whole becomes greater than the sum of its individual parts. The days when the execution of battle occurred in time-phased linear sequences with the levels of war fastidiously differentiated are yielding to a battlefield environment of fluidity and unpredictability.

Synchronization and synergy are therefore of necessity coming to characterize methodology utilized in the study of war fighting. Two cases in point are recent monographs from the Army’s Institute of Land Warfare. In one of these, Dr. Charles Kirkpatrick tells us that systems methodology focusing on relationship and integration, held the key to US Army preparedness for the Persian Gulf Crisis.²⁷

The other study of the Institute of Land Warfare, under the authorship of Dr. Richard Hooker, likewise describes a systems approach to war fighting in his analysis of the maneuver-based Air Land Battle doctrine followed in the Gulf War. Hooker says this doctrine stresses “fluid, nonlinear” movements on a “chaotic fast-paced, messy battlefield characterized by friction in all its forms.” Maneuver-based doctrine is best understood, he stresses, as a “thought process” featuring the intuitive response to events of highly motivated individuals.²⁸

What these studies stress as the important characteristics of theater battle are being incorporated into a framework for analysis of national strategy and political change at the macro or systemic level of the larger international system. For a fertile

effort toward building a theory integrating the variables for victory on a modern battlefield to the type of macro or systemic political change envisioned through peacetime engagement we turn again to an article in a recent issue of *Parameters* entitled "Chaos Theory and Strategic Thought."²⁹ The study postulates the view that international system structure and stability lie buried within apparently random, nonlinear processes. These processes the study characterizes as "dynamical systems" with a large number of variables of shifting parts. Within these systems "nonperiodic order exists."

As in the morphology of battlefield change, patterns of order ebb and flow in a larger chaotic system in rhythm with input mainly from individuals with highly developed intuitive skills. Chaos theory holds that international political and military structure is a product largely of "conflict energy" flowing from these self-actualized individuals and the institutions in which they play dominant roles. The synergistic effect of these intuitively derived energies instigates conditions for change in international status quo. When this process "ripens" into a "critical state" systemic change is believed to ensue.

This whole process chaos theory describes as "self organized criticality." The assumption is that change occurs as a result of interrelations and integration among forces intuitively generated from within the international system. Change is internally rather than externally generated, according to chaos theory.³⁰

The variables of chaos theory, then, are subject to analysis utilizing the synergistic approach of systems methodology. This has been shown to be the same methodology which could be used to describe and link the integration processes in the continuum of military operations. The integration of the three strategic environments and the integration of the variables of the battlefield share with each other and with the larger variables of chaos theory a common synergistic focus on peace formation as a process. Thus possibilities exist through systems analysis to develop a comprehensive theory of peacetime engagement linking the policy fully to its key component of continuum of military operations as well as to the other two key components of forward presence and nation assistance.

Practical ramifications from a theoretically integrated strategic concept are readily apparent. El Salvador is a poignant example. According to a veteran of the US nation assistance program in that country, lack of systemic integration of local strategy with a coherent parent US strategic concept greatly complicated the task of US advisors. This shortcoming reduced US supported government troops to gaining victory through basically a psychological endurance contest with the guerrillas.

Victor Rosello explained the problem as follows: "Had the Salvadoran Joint Command prepared a strategic plan that integrated strategic, operational, and tactical objectives, coordinated into multiple inter-zonal operations, the military might have defeated the FMLN on the battlefield." Rosello placed much of the blame for this oversight on the "US military advisory mission for not providing

more professional advice at the operational and strategic levels ... training and advice remained predominantly tactical.”³¹

Adoption of such a theoretically coherent and comprehensive policy of peacetime engagement as envisioned in this study assumes the surmounting of several analytical problems. Otherwise, a policy based on chaos theory and designed to formally integrate variables at the micro level of battlefield change with those of international systems change at the macro level would operate *within a different paradigm than is apparent at present. This may be demonstrated in several ways.*

First, current policy assumptions contrast with chaos theory over the cause and nature of change. Chaos theory holds that system change and transformation result from basically intuitive causes generated internally, from within the system. On the other hand, pragmatic, not intuitive, change generated from the outside rather than from within the system is the current thrust of US peacetime engagement policy.

A second analytical problem stems from the essentially status quo orientation of the current policy of peacetime engagement. The implied assumption that the present world power coalition of G-7 economic countries and the permanent members of the UN Security Council will maintain an indefinite equilibrium contrasts with the assumption of chaos theory of an international system in constant flux and characterised by unpredictability.

A third problem calling for reconciliation centers on the current policy presumption that the nation state will continue indefinitely as the primary legal entity underpinning international affairs. A policy based upon chaos theory could ordain no such constant as nation states forever governing the international system. It would allow, rather, for the possible demise of nation state dominance in favor of smaller ethnic-religious entities.

Should strategists of peacetime engagement overcome these analytical nuances to embrace a policy more “in sync” with chaos theory, a world characterized by instability would still loom as a distinct possibility. This argument flows from the assumed key role under a chaos bound paradigm for individuals with highly developed intuitive-based decision-making skills. Hitching the future of the world to the “inner voice” of self-actualized, intuitive, wise persons is a risky venture, given that human evolution has as yet revealed no provable pattern toward goodness in an absolute sense.

The antecedents of chaos theory and to a large extent of the secular pragmatism of the Bush-Clinton variety are rooted in their modern form in the French Revolution. History records the painful results in post-revolution France of acting upon the premise that de-emphasis on classical reason in favor of pragmatism and intuition would lead to a utopian environment. Furthermore, transplanted to Germany via Napoleon, French Revolutionary thinking watered the seeds of a resurrected naturalistic mythology in that country to plunge the world into two

major wars. That this same mindset has now come to characterize the US cultural milieu is the thesis, for example, of Allan Bloom's bestseller *The Closing of the American Mind*.³²

In the face of history, then, pause is in order before fully embracing the premises undergirding the emerging paradigm of peacetime engagement. With US policy still in a formative stage there exists the option of circumventing the echoes of the French Revolution to focus upon authentic American tradition flowing from the US Declaration of Independence. As heirs of that venerated document, Americans have historically assumed that all humankind is possessed of a latent common desire to rise above the situation based ethics of naturalism to embrace reason in the classic sense. Deducing truth from presumed transcendent absolutes is a distinctively American trait.

A return to classical reasoning could help extirpate US strategy from its reactive mode. Short of such a paradigm shift back to rational or cognitive basics, the impending wedding of secular pragmatism to a chaos oriented intuitional framework stands to reinforce the inclinations of the Clinton administration to fashion security policy primarily along lines which domestic politics and the all encompassing media might dictate. A rededication to defining goals in terms of values reflecting universal absolutes would enhance US capability to anticipate and mold events in a predetermined strategic direction. Such a perspective could also be made accommodative to the growing need for initiative and flexibility at the tactical and operational level.

In unprecedented and dangerous times, neither secular pragmatism nor an intuitive process teleology need go unchallenged as the philosophical moorings upon which is based the US strategic concept. With the United States currently the dominant, unipolar, power in the post-Cold War world, there is extant a window of opportunity to consider the promotion of a new world order on the common ground of classical reason.

In an international environment suddenly characterized by awakening natural propensities toward ethnic and cultural cleansing, is it prudent to adopt a policy explicitly committed as in chaos theory to unleashing those very natural and intuitively derived propensities?

Endnotes

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