

# THE UNITED STATES

## THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

The end of the Cold War has had a tremendous impact on American perceptions of their international environment and their defense policies. The democratic revolutions in Eastern Europe in 1989, the decisive victory over Iraqi forces in Kuwait in 1991 and the collapse that same year of the Soviet Union all bolstered the perception at both elite and public levels that there is no credible, system-wide military threat to the territory of the United States or vital U.S. interests in the near future.

Russia and China, by virtue of their sizes, military potential, and uncertain political futures are still regarded as potential long-term strategic military threats to the United States, but these concerns are distant and largely confined to a small foreign policy elite. For the time being, both these powers are regarded as military or foreign policy concerns principally when they do not share or accommodate U.S. views on issues of importance to the United States, such as the sale of technologies in regions where the U.S. has security concerns.

Even without a significant, geographically-defined strategic threat, there is a general public perception that the international environment continues to be fraught with dangers, and the United States needs to maintain a strong military force. The foremost military threats are medium or small "rogue" states, like Iraq, Iran, and North Korea which cannot challenge the United States directly, but within their own regions can threaten U.S. allies and interests. Accordingly, official military planning is based not around containment of a strategic threat but around maintaining the capabilities to simultaneously cope with two major regional conflicts of the Persian Gulf sort. While this notion as a planning concept is not significantly challenged in American public debate, there has been a narrowing definition of the kinds of regional security threats that would engage U.S. vital interests and thus could precipitate direct military intervention.

In the absence of strategic threats, the attention of Americans has increasingly turned toward non-military threats. Polling suggests that public threat perceptions are more focused on challenges to the American "way of life" than on the physical security of U.S. territory or even resource access. Most of the new "threats" have no clearly defined geographical source. International drug flows often top the list of international concerns for the general public. Other such threats to way of life include economic uncertainty associated with

increased economic interdependence, augmented flows of migrants, the spread of new viruses, and the decline of traditional values. These issues, however, generally are seen by Americans as important economic, social, and health policies concerns and not as issues of national security.

Because of the perceived U.S. global leadership role, some in the American foreign policy elite also regard the potential for inappropriate policy responses by the United States itself as a source of threat. The main concerns expressed in more sophisticated domestic U.S. debate are: (1) a reemergence of isolationism in the American body politic, preventing effective U.S. responses to global issues, (2) a tendency within the foreign policy elite itself and the media to cast issues in short-term, partisan, or single-issue terms rather than focus on longer-term national interests, (3) a fear of an inappropriate intervention leading to longer-term entanglement and another "Vietnam syndrome," (4) a decline in strong and consistent presidential leadership or an increase in irresponsible congressional legislation (on international issues), and (5) a more general failure of American society to manage domestic socio-economic issues contributing to a loss of international moral authority.

**The Asia Pacific Region.** Among those within and outside the government who follow Asian security issues closely there is a mainstream consensus around the basic security challenges facing the region. These are described in the February 1995 Defense Department report, "United States Security Strategy for the East Asia Pacific Region" (Nye Report) as the following: a military threat on the Korean peninsula, uncertain political transitions, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, emerging nationalism amid unresolved territorial issues, and Asia's "long-standing antagonisms." The United States appears to be quite comfortable with the present security configuration in the region. Key elements of this configuration are that the United States is the only power capable of projecting military forces regionwide, its forward military presence is widely accepted and welcomed, and the prospects for serious calls on U.S. commitments appear quite limited. Threats to the status quo in any of these three dimensions would be of concern for U.S. regional security planners.

Within the generally favorable environment, China and North Korea stand out as the two major concerns. China is generally not regarded as a near-term security threat in the sense that its actions seem likely to directly threaten U.S. territory, military personnel, or vital interests. But China's acquisition of status and power may eventually undermine the U.S. regional security position in quite a different way from Japan's rise as an economic power. It is seen as perhaps the only world power with a combination of actual and potential assets—

population, physical size and resources, rapidly expanding economy, and increased technological sophistication—to be able to emerge as a comprehensive superpower alongside the United States in the 21st century.

The Nye report addressed U.S. concerns regarding China's military posture, including the growth of Chinese defense expenditures, the expansion of naval capabilities, nuclear testing, and the lack of clarity about long-term Chinese military goals. As earlier mentioned, China is regarded as a military or foreign policy concern principally where it does not share or accommodate U.S. views on issues of importance to the United States, such as sales of technologies to countries where the United States has security concerns.

China's military demonstrations in the Taiwan Straits in 1995 and 1996 gave added emphasis to these concerns. In February 1996, U.S. authorities believed that it was essential to underscore the long-standing U.S. commitment to a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan issue by sending two aircraft battle groups to the vicinity of the island. This action generally was regarded in the United States as a needed and successful exercise of U.S. military power.

For the immediate future, the post-Deng leadership transition in China is regarded as critical for future global order and for U.S. longer-term relations with this power. Public dialogue has focused on two possible scenarios: (1) intensified nationalism associated with domestic political rivalries, complicating external relations and perhaps resulting in more muscular and aggressive Chinese foreign policy behavior; (2) a weakening or even breakdown of central authority, with serious internal political, economic, and social ramifications. Under either scenario, there is concern about a serious impact on relations between the PRC, Taiwan, and Hong Kong that could affect important U.S. economic and political interests in the region.

Washington's emphasis on nuclear nonproliferation catapulted North Korea toward the top of a list of U.S. security concerns in the 1990s. The October 21, 1994 Agreed Framework and the negotiating process have been criticized both by those who felt the settlement had been handled too unilaterally by the United States as well as those that felt it rewarded a belligerent regime. The Agreement's supporters, however, argue that the ultimate result, if fully implemented, halts a relatively advanced nuclear weapons program and preserves the NPT regime. It also gives outside countries a source of leverage over North Korea that did not previously exist.

In fact, the nuclear proliferation concern has receded even while the North remains a source of security threats. Of greater concern in 1995–96 was the potential for a hard or crash "landing" for the northern regime as a result of

economic distress or internal political turmoil and a resulting crisis on the peninsula. Periodic militarily-provocative behavior, including incursions of the demilitarized zone in the spring of 1996 and the blatant submarine infiltration incident in September 1996, highlights the apparent fragility of status quo on the peninsula. There is also concern in Washington with inconsistent and seemingly emotional reactions in the South, increasing the difficulties of maintaining a stable, coordinated policy toward the North.

## **DEFENSE POLICIES AND ISSUES**

Absent a credible, strategic military threat to the United States, there is no compelling philosophy or sense of direction that guides American foreign policy and national security strategy comparable to the Soviet (or "communist") threat during the Cold War. In place of "containment" the Bush Administration initially sought to develop military planning on the basis of a substantial regional as opposed to a global strategic threat, producing "base force" plans in 1991. The Clinton Administration has put forward a policy of "engagement and enlargement." This doctrine has three main objectives: (1) to maintain a stable international environment through credible American military effort; (2) to bolster U.S. economic competitiveness and wherewithal; and (3) to enlarge the world of compatible political and economic systems. The latter two economic and enlargement objectives are not well-defined in an operational sense, nor is there consensus with the Executive branch, let alone more broadly in the American system, on the relative priority of these objectives, how conflicts among them might be resolved, or how they should be achieved. While they obviously draw attention to the nonmilitary dimensions of national security, it is precisely in such nonmilitary instruments of influence such as diplomacy, foreign assistance, and international exchange that large cuts currently are being made in the U.S. foreign policy budgets. In the absence of a systemic challenge or threat to widely understood and accepted national security interests, the United States finds it virtually impossible to develop a clear set of national security priorities.

A consensus has developed, however, on the need to stabilize the U.S. military effort, which had gone into steep decline on virtually all measures of military effort with the end of the Cold War. U.S. military expenditures, procurement, and manpower levels were all dramatically affected by the end of the Cold War. Defense spending as a share of GNP dropped from 6.5 percent in 1985 at the height of the Reagan build-up to 4 percent by 1995 and is projected to drop to 3 percent by 1998 under the Clinton's Administration's projections. Former President Reagan's 600-ship navy has been long abandoned. The

current number stands at around 430 and is to be reduced to 346 under the Bottom-Up Review (BUR) developed by the Clinton Administration in 1993. The BUR calls for 11 carrier groups, with one additional carrier for training/reserve purposes. The same plan envisions reductions in the number of Air Force fighter wings from 22 in 1991 to 13. The number of active Army divisions are being reduced from 16 to 10. The total number of active U.S. military forces has dropped from 2.1 million in 1990 to the current 1.5 million and will continue to trend downward toward stabilizing at 1.45 million by 2001.

**Table 3.**

**U.S. Active Duty Personnel in the Post-Cold War Era**

Fiscal Year	End-Strength (000s)
1989	2,130
1990	2,069
1991	2,002
1992	1,808
1993	1,705
1994	1,611
1995	1,523
1996	1,482
1997	1,457*
2001	1,445

\*Note: An additional 901,000 in 1997 are in-guard and reserve units.

There has been a dramatic drop in spending on military procurement in the post-Cold War era. With inflation factored in, spending for military procurement in FY96 is seventy percent below the FY85 peak. The Administration argues that reduced procurement, created by the large inventories generated in the 1980s and the declining force personnel numbers, cannot be sustained, and that procurement spending will need to increase again as obsolescence will require replacement and modernization. Procurement, of course, has a large political constituency. Critics argue that the declines have already damaged the overall effectiveness of U.S. forces and that too much emphasis has been placed on

readiness and morale (including a pay increase) at the expense of adequate equipment. They argue that increased spending is needed to maintain readiness and morale and achieve a level of modernization consistent with the effort required to respond to two regional conflicts as envisioned in the BUR. It also is contended that current levels are not only very low but endanger the maintenance of an adequate defense industry. The same concerns stimulate government and private industry support for weapons exports.

In a bow to the continued popularity of defense procurements, President Clinton in September 1996 signed an election year defense appropriations bill including congressionally favored procurements above the administration's request, including \$3.4 billion for four Aegis radar-equipped destroyers, \$2.2 billion for production models of an enhanced Navy FA-18 fighter and \$2.2 billion for the Air Force F-22 air superiority fighter. There will continue to be conflict over the acquisition of particular systems and their relevance in terms of overall strategic plans, reflecting economic and political considerations as much as strategic ones.

Another source of criticism comes from those who believe that the BUR and the force and procurement plans that follow represent an approach that focuses too much on the last war (i.e., the Gulf War) where high-technology weapons and conventional forces were highly effective. Precisely because of Iraq's defeat, these critics argue, regional powers are unlikely to challenge U.S. interests in so direct and conventional a manner. Moreover, the emergence of two such conflicts simultaneously is a highly unlikely scenario. These critics suggest the United States should give greater attention to preparation for unconventional forms of conflict. The BUR is scheduled to be repeated next year.

Aside from the BUR, other important changes have occurred in the U.S. security doctrine during the Clinton Administration. The 1994 Nuclear Posture Review, which examined strategic issues not covered in the BUR, rejected the deterrent posture of mutual assured destruction in favor of "mutual assured safety," but envisioned a robust nuclear "hedge," justified primarily by the possibility of a reversal in course in Russia if democratic reforms fail. The Administration also was concerned about the slow pace of dismantling Russian systems and the unauthorized leakage of Russia nuclear material. The basic concept of a nuclear triad involving air, sea, and land-based nuclear deterrent forces is maintained, as also is the need for a nuclear weapons industry. Under this cautious approach, the Administration believes that strategic commitments to allies can be maintained while insurance exists against any failure of the Start II agreement.

Nuclear non-proliferation has been reemphasized and increased attention given to defense systems intended to deal with regional powers that seek to or have acquired weapons of mass destruction (WMD). There has been a strong consensus around the heightened visibility the Clinton Administration has given to curbing WMD in such countries or regions as North Korea, Iran, and South Asia, although questions over the consistency and effectiveness of these efforts have arisen.

Theater missile defense systems have been emphasized as compared to systems focused on the defense of the continental United States from intercontinental or space-based missiles. The Strategic Defense Initiative ("Star Wars") was renamed the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization and modestly increased funding provided for anti-missile defense. The bulk will go toward systems to protect U.S. forces from "theater-range" missiles.

## **CONTRIBUTIONS TO REGIONAL AND GLOBAL SECURITY**

The broad foreign policy objectives of the Clinton Administration are the maintenance of security, the sharing of economic benefits, and the promotion of democratic values. There is a continuing and even reinforced perception, underscored by the need for American diplomatic initiatives in Bosnia and the Middle East, that it is still only the United States that has the comprehensive instruments of policy needed to exercise global leadership. At the same time, a public mood of resentment with "unfair" burdens has been reflected in efforts by the United States to reduce its overseas expenditures and prod its allies into greater burdensharing.

In the Asia Pacific region, the United States continues to see itself as the linchpin of regional security and stability. In the early part of the Clinton Administration, more assertive and often poorly coordinated U.S. policies in many areas—curbing nuclear weapons in Korea, pressing for increased access in Asian markets for U.S. goods, and urging the U.S. human rights agenda—resulted in sharp foreign policy disputes with many of the region's countries. At the same time the increased level of presidential attention to the region, particularly evident in the meetings of the APEC economic leaders and in Mr. Clinton's trip to Japan and South Korea in April 1996, has helped offset some of the inconsistencies and tensions associated with these initiatives. The relatively warm reception given to the continuing U.S. security presence in the region reinforces a strong American belief that this presence is an essential contribution to regional and global security.

In the security field, four broad efforts at strengthening regional security have been notable during the Clinton years: (1) the formal shift from downsizing to stabilizing the U.S. military presence; (2) the enthusiastic embrace of multilateral security dialogues; (3) the development of bilateral contacts and dialogues (“engagement”) with countries where U.S. relationships were weak or had deteriorated; and (4) a restructuring of the alliance with Japan.

**The Forward Presence.** The American foreign policy establishment regards forward presence as the premier U.S. contribution to regional stability. In an effort to strengthen confidence in this presence, the Clinton Administration signaled the end of an approach adopted in 1990 calling for a gradual phase down of American forces in Asia. Gradual reductions had taken place in U.S. forces in Korea in the early 1990s, but later phases of this process were terminated because of tensions associated with the North Korean nuclear program. A more substantial U.S. withdrawal took place in Southeast Asia because of the failure of the U.S. and Filipino governments to agree on an extension of U.S. bases in the Philippines. Gradual future reductions were envisioned depending upon the security situation in East and Southeast Asia.

In 1993, however, the BUR affirmed the need to keep U.S. armed forces deployed forward in Asia at current force levels of about 100,000 personnel. This approach was underlined by the February 1995 Nye Report which saw this U.S. force level as critical to maintaining regional security, maintaining the growth of markets important to the United States, and expanding democratic values. Unless the United States provided “the central, visible, stabilizing force” in the region, that report stated, some other nation might and in a way not compatible with U.S. interests. Arms races could also result. Summarizing future policy, the report stated that “reductions resulting from the end of the Cold War have been accomplished; no further changes in warfighting capability are currently planned; the United States will maintain a force structure requiring approximately 100,000 personnel in Asia. The United States will also pursue modernization initiatives to improve the capability, flexibility and lethality of all our forces, including those in the region, and ensure that our forces will be able to deploy more quickly in a crisis.”

Some critics argue that the administration has given too much attention to the 100,000 number which may not be politically sustainable. There also are critics who believe the U.S. forward presence is destabilizing over the longer term and should be phased out, but these currently have little influence on U.S. policy or public debate. Such arguments, however, could become more salient again, especially if there is any resolution of the stand-off in the Korean peninsula.



**Multilateral Security Dialogue.** The enthusiastic U.S. embrace of a multilateral security dialogue, which crystallized in the form of the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1994, was the most dramatic change in the Clinton Administration's approach to Asia Pacific security issues as compared to its predecessor. There has been some concern among U.S. government circles, however, that some Asians have interpreted this change in U.S. approach as an effort to establish a basis for reducing U.S. security commitments in the region in the future. A major emphasis has been to reaffirm that U.S. support for multilateral dialogue is supplementary to and not a substitute for U.S. bilateral alliances in the region and the U.S. forward military presence.

The Administration hopes that the ARF dialogue will develop over time into a forum for enhancing preventive diplomacy, developing confidence-building measures, and enhancing "modest defense transparency measures," such as publication of white papers and limited exchanges of defense information. The Administration also supports the creation of a Northeast Asian subregional security dialogue for discussion of the special and complex security programs of that area and has set the groundwork by encouraging unofficial "track two" dialogue activity. Former Secretary of Defense William Perry had also called for multilateral ministerial level dialogue among defense ministers of the major Northeast Asian-North Pacific countries.

**Bilateral Dialogues.** A third effort has been the intensification of bilateral dialogue and engagement with countries with which U.S. relations have been troubled, such as China, North Korea, and Vietnam. In contrast to the first two innovations, the specific contents and sometimes even the dialogue process itself has become quite controversial. Developing a new strategic dialogue with China is the most important of these efforts. In the post-Cold War era, China has lost its importance to the United States as a strategic partner vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, but it has become an even more critical country in terms of its regional and global roles on a variety of issues. Through what the U.S. Administration calls "comprehensive engagement," the United States has sought to promote Sino-American cooperation on controversial issues including human rights, trade, and Chinese missile sales that had arisen in the relationship as well as encourage what Americans regard as its integration into regional and global systems. An effect of this has been to restore high-level dialogue between the two countries and military-to-military dialogues. In May 1996, former Secretary of State Warren Christopher called for regular ministerial meetings with China every six months in recognition of the strategic importance of the two countries to each other and their relationship to the world. The two countries' foreign

ministers met at the United Nations in September, and Christopher visited Beijing in November 1996 as bilateral dialogue intensified. National security advisers also exchanged visits during 1996. The American government also views its engagement with North Korea—intended to end the nuclear weapons program, encourage north-south dialogue, and promote North Korea's integration into the regional and global communities—as another contribution to stability.

**U.S.-Japan Security Relationship.** The mainstream security community in the United States regards the U.S.-Japan alliance as the linch-pin to U.S. security contributions to the region. Recognizing that the relationship was in some political difficulty, in 1994 the United States government initiated a review with an eye toward modernizing the relationship and placing it on a more equitable basis. In the midst of this review, the September 1995 rape by three American service personnel of an Okinawan schoolgirl triggered an upsurge of long-standing Okinawan resentment at the disproportionate burden this prefecture bears in hosting the U.S. forces in Japan. A common interest in maintaining the effectiveness of the security treaty facilitated an agreement in April 1996 on a package of force alignments including the return to Japan of the Futenma Air Base, two communications centers, a port, and other areas over the next five to seven years. At the same time, an acquisition and cross-servicing agreement was signed that allows the United States to purchase military spare parts from Japan in peacetime. The two countries also agreed to review their 1978 bilateral defense guidelines to improve response in the event of a regional military emergency.

The security agreements with Japan are a step toward potentially more significant military cooperation between the two governments, but it remains to be determined how Japan can cooperate militarily on a broader regional basis with the United States within its Constitutional framework. Adjustments and modernization of the security relations will continue. It should be anticipated that there will be continued pressures from the U.S. to increase Japanese burdensharing in more than financial terms and pressures from Okinawa to further reduce the size of U.S. operations in the prefecture.

Despite the March 1996 Taiwan Straits crisis, the United States government and people appear to be relatively sanguine about the security outlook in Asia and the Pacific. Ironically, the indefinite retention of U.S. forces in the region, with little domestic opposition, probably reflects U.S. optimism about the role that the mere presence of its military forces play and their ability to contribute effectively to the maintenance of stability in the region. Thus the United States believes that it is making a signal contribution to regional security at a relatively low risk.