

Policy Analysis

Cato Institute Policy Analysis No. 206: The Pentagon's Fraudulent Bottom-Up Review

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Executive Summary

Secretary of Defense William Perry seems determined to use the Pentagon's deeply flawed Bottom-Up Review (BUR) as the blueprint for America's defense in the 1990s. Contrary to its title, the BUR is a "top-down," highly politicized document designed to exaggerate the threat environment and preserve as much as possible of the Pentagon's budget and force structure. It would leave U.S. military spending in the post-Cold War period at approximately 85 percent of average annual expenditures during the Cold War, despite the absence of a global superpower threat to America's security. Indeed, the United States would spend more for national security than the rest of the world combined.

The BUR's strategic assumptions contain several fallacies. Contrary to the historical record, it assumes that the United States must be prepared to wage two regional wars almost simultaneously. It further assumes that opponents will have capabilities (including large numbers of tanks and artillery pieces) comparable to those Iraq supposedly had in the Persian Gulf War. The BUR also operates on the premise that if the United States maintains large enough forces, it can overwhelm such enemies and produce a quick, decisive victory with minimal U.S. casualties, as it did in Operation Desert Storm. Finally, the BUR assumes not only that most regional conflicts will affect U.S. interests and require a military response, but that other major powers would remain inert during a full-blown crisis, forcing the United States to wage war alone against a dangerous aggressor.

The force structure required to defend legitimate American security interests in the threat environment of the post-Cold War era could be achieved for substantially less than the BUR's projections. To attain that goal, there should be a comprehensive, independent assessment of U.S. defense needs.

Introduction

Administrations come and administrations go, but bureaucratic justifications for the purpose of institutional self-preservation are ever present. One of the most prominent examples is the justification being offered by the Pentagon's Bottom-Up Review to continue spending tax dollars at Cold War levels in the post-Cold War era.

After a purportedly extensive review of U.S. military strategy, force structure, and weapons modernization programs, the Department of Defense released its report on the BUR announcing the unsurprising fact that there is no longer a global Soviet threat.^[1] On the other hand, according to the report, the world is still an extraordinarily dangerous place full of regional malefactors. Moreover, two or more of them might even launch unexpected campaigns of aggression against U.S. interests or allies at almost the same time. Because the United States, as the world's sole remaining superpower, might have to respond largely by itself to such aggression, it must retain the capability to fight two large regional wars nearly simultaneously.

That thesis, imbedded in the BUR, is essentially the Clinton administration's rationale for maintaining the military status quo. It has been firmly embraced by Secretary of Defense William Perry and the president himself. Congressional criticism of the BUR has thus far been surprisingly muted. Furthermore, most criticism has not been directed at the BUR's questionable strategic assumptions but at the funding and force levels proposed to execute the strategy. In other words, a majority of congressional critics are arguing that the Pentagon needs even more money.[2] That response underscores the intellectual sterility of the defense policy debate among members of Washington's political elite.

Preserving the Status Quo

In March 1993 then-secretary of defense Les Aspin unveiled the proposed fiscal year 1994 defense budget while acknowledging that it would simply hold the line on existing spending levels until a "bottom-up review" was completed later in the year. That review would lay the groundwork for the FY95 to FY99 budgets.

On September 1, 1993, just three months before he resigned, Aspin revealed the results of the BUR to the public. As expected, the review outlined the force structure thought necessary to win two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts. The two examples of future threats cited were a remilitarized Iraq launching an attack against Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and a North Korean invasion of South Korea. Those two regional threats--along with dangers to democracy in other countries (the growing strength of ultra-nationalist elements in Russia would be an example); domestic economic peril; and proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons--constitute the new threats to U.S. security, in the Pentagon's opinion.

The money that the administration expects to allocate to the military under the BUR totals \$1.2 trillion over the next five years: \$249 billion in FY95, \$242 billion in FY96, \$236 billion in FY97, \$244 billion in FY98, and \$250 billion in FY99. Those figures are only \$104 billion less than the Bush administration's projected budgets for the same period. Hoped-for adjustments in force structure, infrastructure, weapons investment, and modernization programs under the BUR are expected to yield \$91 billion in savings, \$13 billion short of Clinton's targets.

Problems with the BUR's Budget Calculations

Military officials and their congressional supporters have been quite vocal in suggesting that military budgets must be increased both to meet the demands of the BUR's two-conflict scenario and to prevent a return to the "hollow-force" years of the late 1970s. Just before his resignation, Aspin told President Clinton that the Department of Defense would need at least another \$50 billion over five years--some 4 percent more than the original projections.[3] Although that estimate was subsequently lowered to \$30 billion, the revised figure came after the military received a congressionally mandated 2.2 percent pay raise--adding about \$10 billion over the next five years.[4]

The additional sum requested by the Department of Defense will not cover bills that will come due during the Clinton administration's term in office because of the stretch-out of weapons procurement programs throughout the Bush and Clinton years. That "investment bow wave" will probably cost hundreds of billions of dollars. As the Pentagon scrambles to protect its future pet weapons programs, it will probably cut into operations and support accounts to pay research and development and production costs. Such raiding, more than any other single factor, will likely lead to the feared hollow-force problem, just as the Nixon-era modernization programs during a period of budget constraints led to the purported hollow force of the Carter era.[5]

Protecting Pet Projects

Further evidence of a trend toward hollow forces can be found in the BUR itself. Almost no major weapons systems were earmarked for cancellation. The only casualties were the A/F-X fighter, the Multirole fighter, the F-16 (after FY94), and the F/A-18C/D (after FY97). And those programs were already candidates for termination before the release of the BUR. Indeed, it is creative use of language to call ending production of the F-16 and the F/A-18 a termination, since thousands have already been built.

As compensation for such "cuts," the administration proposes to build a third Seawolf submarine at Groton, Connecticut, to maintain two nuclear-capable shipyards; develop and build a New Attack Submarine; proceed with the

production of the F/A-18E/F; proceed with the F-22; and develop conventional bombing capabilities for the B-1 and B-2 bombers. The BUR also foresees helping General Dynamics by upgrading the Army's M-1 tanks. That action, along with the Seawolf decision, signals the Clinton administration's commitment to industrial policy in the form of welfare programs for beleaguered defense contractors.

The Army fared as well as the Navy and the Air Force in the BUR. All of the Army's major weapons programs, such as the RAH-66 Comanche scout/attack helicopter, the M2 Bradley fighting vehicle upgrades, and air defense missile programs--such as the PAC-3 version of the Patriot missile, the Theater High Altitude Air Defense missile, and the Corps Surface-to-Air Missile--emerged unscathed from the BUR.

Force Enhancement Fallacies

In addition, there was a long wish list of various "force enhancements" granted to the active-duty military. A partial list includes

procuring the F-18 E/F for the Navy and the F-22 for the Air Force;

providing additional Army prepositioned equipment for various theaters of operations;

enhancing aerial refueling capabilities to improve intervention capabilities;

enhancing the readiness of Army National Guard combat brigades so they can deploy in 90, rather than 180, days;

adding additional Marine Corps end-strength, and providing equipment and sustainability improvements to keep all three active Marine Expeditionary Forces, which are division-sized land-air amphibious strike forces, combat ready;

compensating for cuts in the number of aircraft carrier battle groups by deploying enhanced amphibious assault groups built around large-deck amphibious assault ships with AV-8Bs and Cobra attack helicopters and 2,000-man Marine Expeditionary Units or a naval task force built around the Aegis guided missile cruiser, the Tomahawk sea-launched cruise missile, attack submarines, and land-based P-3 maritime patrol aircraft;

providing additional air- and sealift, and improving the readiness of the Ready Reserve Force for rapid deployment of maritime supply capability;

developing and deploying new targeting and attack systems to find and kill mobile missiles and missile launchers; and

improving transfer of key weapons and equipment to regional allies such as South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait.

That is an ambitious list and one that is almost certainly unobtainable because, like previous "force multiplier" initiatives, it is unaffordable. As military analyst Anthony Cordesman points out:

Virtually every major strategic review since the late 1950s has relied on force improvements to alter the military balance at the end of the period under study in ways that allowed the U.S. to win in the contingencies under study, and to compensate for its lack of force numbers. But no such calculation since 1945 has avoided severe undercosting, has led to the actual deployment of the postulated force improvements with the lethality required and/or at the time required, or has materially affected the balance of power at the time to anything approaching the degree estimated in the original planning. While technology has done an immense amount to compensate for U.S. force cuts, or for improvements in enemy capabilities over the time involved, the myth of "force multipliers" has also been a long-standing feature of the "planning-reality gap."^[6]

The Vanishing Peace Dividend

It should be noted that the budgets allocated to the military under the BUR are extraordinarily high by historical standards. According to a report by the RAND Corporation, the average yearly defense budget between 1946 and 1988, in FY88 dollars, was \$222 billion.[7] The BUR figures are scarcely lower than those of the Cold War budgets. Lawrence J. Korb, assistant secretary of defense during the Reagan administration, points out that the defense budgets contemplated by the BUR would keep spending levels at 85 percent of the average Cold War level. "Bill Clinton will spend more on defense than Richard Nixon did two decades ago [in inflation-adjusted dollars], and the United States will spend more for national security than the rest of the world combined."^[8]

Yet there are indications that the projected BUR budgets will be insufficient to support the envisioned strategy and force structure. In a February 1994 report, the Washington-based Defense Budget Project stated that

preliminary calculation yields a long-term funding requirement for the BUR of \$252 billion per year, leaving a projected shortfall of some \$20 billion per year (as contrasted with the [Clinton administration's] \$33 billion-plus total shortfall projected for the next five years) once the BUR force posture is in place. If, rather than remaining essentially flat, O&S [operation and support] costs were to begin rising again at anything like their growth rate prior to the mid-1980s and procurement costs were not effectively controlled, the long-term annual costs of the BUR could be tens of billions of dollars higher.^[9]

Cordesman found that the shortfall would have risen to about \$78 billion if Aspin had made more realistic assumptions about future savings from improvements in procurement efficiency and management reform, and to over \$100 billion if Aspin had acknowledged that Congress would continue to reject some long-standing proposals--such as shifts in the reserves and the National Guard--that Congress had already rejected every year since 1990.^[10]

Although some significant savings might be achieved if the Pentagon were to undertake further changes in the roles and missions of the armed forces, there is little prospect of that occurring. The roles, missions, and functions report, released by then-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Colin Powell in February 1993 largely ratified the existing structure and security strategy. The General Accounting Office found that the report did not recommend significant reductions in overlapping functions and that the depth of analysis of many functions was insufficient for proposing more extensive changes.^[11]

Congress was so frustrated with General Powell's report that as part of FY94 defense legislation it created its own Roles and Missions Commission of outside experts. They are scheduled to provide recommendations to the secretary of defense later this year. There are many areas in which they could offer suggestions, including redundancy in air superiority, conventional strategic attack, interdiction, and close air support; air and missile defense; and duplication of expeditionary (i.e., intervention) forces by the Army and the Marines.

The Supposedly Slimmed-Down Force

The BUR cuts 160,000 active-duty troops, reducing the total force to 1.4 million personnel by the end of FY99. Although that is modestly smaller than the 1.6 million figure proposed by the Bush administration, there is still a significant amount of excess. Perhaps most troubling, major portion of the U.S. forces is still assigned to missions that amount to a defense subsidy for wealthy allies and clients.

About 100,000 troops will remain in Europe, and another 98,000 troops will stay in East Asia. The latter figure will include two army brigades and one Air Force wing stationed in South Korea. In both cases, the United States will continue to shoulder significant responsibilities for the security of nations that should have the capability to do far more for their own defense. The nations of the European Union, for example, have nearly 2.5 million active-duty military personnel and a collective gross domestic product of more than \$6 trillion. South Korea has twice the population of its northern neighbor and an economy 12 times larger than North Korea's. Yet the United States acts as though the European nations and South Korea are incapable of taking primary responsibility for the security of their respective regions.

The envisioned force is given in Table 1. It should be noted that the recommended force levels are down from what

was previously deemed necessary. The reductions were required to fit force levels to available funding levels. An earlier version of the BUR recommended 12 active and 8 reserve Army divisions, 12 active carriers, 14 active fighter wings, and 10 reserve wings.[12] Those cuts, in the absence of any change in assumptions about the global threat environment or America's military role, illustrate that the BUR, contrary to its name, was actually a top-down exercise.

Table 1 Projected U.S. Force Structure, 1999	
Service	Force
Army	10 active divisions 5+ reserve divisions
Navy	11 active carriers 1 reserve/training carrier 45 to 50 attack submarines 346 ships
Air Force	13 active fighter wings 7 reserve fighter wings Up to 185 bombers (B-52H, B-1, B-2)
Marine Corps	3 Expeditionary Forces 174,000 personnel (active end-strength) 42,000 personnel (reserve end-strength)

Note: The National Guard Bureau wants a full division.

Repackaged Assumptions

The BUR's operating assumptions closely paralleled analyses prepared by Aspin the previous year when he was chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.[13] Aspin wrote: "I nominate the Iraq or Iraq equivalent as a benchmark or unit of account for future threats. One Iraq equivalent is equal to the amount of offensive power that Iraq possessed prior to Desert Storm."[14]

The Iraqi threat equivalent, however, is a deceptive measure. It assumes that there were actually 42 full-strength Iraqi divisions in the Kuwaiti theater of operations at the start of Operation Desert Storm. That was not the case. In another analysis published only two months later, Aspin noted that the Iraqi divisions were badly understrength to begin with and by the start of the ground war had shrunk to about 183,000 troops.[15] As Chicago Tribune defense correspondent David Evans noted, Aspin's original analysis "locks in place a bogus requirement for a huge active-duty military."[16]

The BUR maintains that inflated force structure. In a letter to the Washington Post, Carl Conetta and Charles Knight, codirectors of the Project on Defense Alternatives, charged that the BUR "inflates potential military threats and proposes an extravagant way of dealing with them. The result is a proposed military force and budget that is at least one-quarter larger than America will need during the next 10 to 15 years."[17]

Similarities to Bush-Era Perspectives

One need not be a perennial liberal critic of the Pentagon to see the similarity between the "base force" proposed by the Bush administration and the Clinton BUR.[18] A memorandum prepared by the Republican staff of the House Armed Services Committee noted: "The historical Cold War objective was to have sufficient forces to be able to fight two and one-half simultaneous conflicts. With the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the Cheney-Powell Base Force reflected a shift toward a strategy premised on the ability to prevail in two major regional conflicts that began sequentially but would be fought simultaneously. The Aspin strategy maintains the basic Cheney-Powell planning goal to have sufficient forces to fight two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts."[19]

The similarity is not coincidental. When he joined Aspin in his September 1 public briefing on the BUR, Powell said,

"The strategy underpinning [it] is quite similar . . . because the world looks quite similar to us whether you're wearing base force eyes or Bottom-Up Review eyes."^[20]

Even Cordesman, a conservative analyst, acknowledged that "the Aspin-Powell view of the world bore a striking resemblance to the Cheney-Powell view of the world a few years earlier. . . . There are no radical departures from the Bush Base Force, or even from earlier U.S. strategy. The Bottom-Up Review preserves the basic overseas deployments and naval presence that the U.S. has maintained since the 1950s, although it places more emphasis on the Gulf and Asia than Europe. It calls for cooperative defense, but it preserves U.S. freedom of action and the ability to fight alone."^[21]

The BUR perspective is myopic--a pessimistic distortion of reality. As Francis Fukuyama recently wrote disparagingly, it is part of a now-fashionable mantra, uttered by both former hawks and doves, "that the world has become a much worse place since the demise of the Soviet Union."^[22] Such a view is vastly exaggerated. Robert Borosage, director of the Campaign for New Priorities, correctly points out: "It is a dangerous world, but the United States is more secure now than it has been in decades. We're planning joint military exercises with a Russian army that is having difficulty feeding and housing its soldiers. Our adversaries-- Iran, Iraq, North Korea and the like--lack weapons capable of reaching our shores."^[23]

As are most national security documents generated by government agencies, the BUR was a politically driven work. And, like many past analyses, it overstates the threat and understates not only U.S. capabilities but those of other major democratic capitalist countries as well. In 1993 the Project on Defense Alternatives noted: "There is no serious military threat for the present, near-, or mid-term to the basic security of the G7/OECD cluster of nations. Even when looking ahead 15 years, the probability of encountering a new 'grand threat' to OECD vital interests comparable to the WTO/USSR is vanishingly small."^[24] As military affairs analyst Bill Sweetman wrote, "The fact that there were no screams, protests or expressions of shock when it was released this fall tells us the review was inadequate."^[25] Borosage summarizes the bogus quality of the BUR: "No new strategic conception was offered: the Bush strategy was simply stuffed into the Clinton budget constraints. . . . Like the Bush plan, the Bottom-Up Review does not so much reinvent the military to meet a changed threat as it reinvents the threat to fit the existing military."^[26]

Aspin's own comments confirmed that such doubts about the BUR were warranted. In a press conference he admitted, "We did the Bottom-Up Review to meet the targets of the original budget resolution, the deficit reduction, the economic package that the President proposed in February [1993]."^[27]

The BUR: A Bogus, Politicized Exercise

Indeed, there is reason to be suspicious of the entire BUR. It was first proposed to Aspin by Under Secretary of Defense Frank G. Wisner in language that would make Madison Avenue proud. Wisner wrote in a 1993 memo to Aspin that "the bottom-up review will follow the same construct you used with the Democratic Caucus last year. But it will use the analytical expertise in OSD [office of the secretary of defense] and the Joint Staff to update that effort by: Providing more thorough and compelling descriptions of the New Dangers."^[28]

As noted by the Washington-based Center for Defense Information, that statement raises two huge warning flags. First, any really worthwhile review is based on a dispassionate calculation of the dangers that truly threaten the United States. There is reason to question whether that was done with the BUR. Wisner proposed to hype "New Dangers" to provide a compelling rationale for high military spending and force structure levels. His approach was reminiscent of Powell's cynical comment in 1991: "I'm running out of demons. I'm running out of villains. I'm down to Castro and Kim Il Sung."^[29] In both cases, the objective was to find reasons to justify predetermined policy conclusions.

Second, because it was conducted within the OSD and the Joint Staff, the BUR fell prey to bureaucratic imperatives. The primary institutional imperative is to justify the Pentagon's budgets and roles by defending its turf and taking on new functions. Any review conducted entirely within the Defense Department is inevitably flawed by such motives and self-serving interests. It is illogical to expect defense officials to come up with any strategy that might have the effect of significantly downsizing their institution.

The Relatively Benign Threat Environment

It is worth emphasizing that with the demise of the Soviet Union there no longer is a direct threat to the physical security of the United States. Secretary Aspin himself acknowledged that point on September 2, 1993, in an address at Georgetown University. "We recognize that there are circumstance in which Russia could become a major regional threat. But like Humpty-Dumpty, the massive Soviet military machine can't be put back together again," he said.[30]

There is ample evidence to support that conclusion. The Russian army is an absurdly top-heavy institution with 630,000 officers commanding 544,000 enlisted personnel. Much of the force is incapacitated by extremely low morale and lack of even the most basic supplies.[31] The navy is not in significantly better shape. In February 1994 Russian naval leaders announced that they were mothballing three of the country's five aircraft carriers because of lack of funds or facilities for needed overhauls.[32] The military budget the Yeltsin government is proposing to parliament for the next fiscal year is a meager \$22 billion, down from \$47 billion in the current fiscal year.

As William Hyland, former editor of Foreign Affairs, wrote in the beginning of 1993:

No president since Calvin Coolidge has inherited an easier foreign policy agenda than Bill Clinton. Indeed, Ronald Reagan and George Bush and their predecessors have done the heavy lifting. Nowhere are American vital interests under attack or even seriously threatened. The United States in 1993 is able to deter any conceivable attack and able to deal with any conceivable threat to its national security. Its international position is probably better now than at any time since 1920.[33]

Measured against the revolutionary changes that have taken place in the international political system in recent years, the BUR resembles nothing so much as a self-serving justification for preservation of the military status quo. As Borosage noted:

The military will be pared back, not transformed. The army loses 2 divisions, but the marines gain the equivalent of one. The air force loses 4 air wings, but gains the use of 200 strategic bombers for conventional purposes. The navy developed a "requirement" for 12 aircraft carriers during the Second World War. For much of the Cold War, the same 12 carrier battle groups were kept to protect vital sea lanes. Now, Secretary Aspin reports, "these missions are no more. Without the Soviet Navy, no one challenges us for control of the seas." The new navy is relegated to "showing the flag" and patrolling distant shores rather than the high seas. Yet this new mission is said to demand the same 12 carriers (or specifically 11 carriers, plus one trainer), which would be available in a crisis.[34]

The BUR's Faulty Strategic Assumptions

Putting aside the fact that the BUR established objectives for which its proposed forces are largely irrelevant-- such as peace enforcement and peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and counterdrug and counterterrorism activities; using military-to-military contact to foster democratic values in other countries; and halting or at least slowing the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons--it has two major defects. First, the funds allocated for executing the strategy are insufficient. Second and more important, the strategic assumptions of the BUR are invalid.

The first point, ironically enough, is consistent with past U.S. Cold War planning. Whether it was a two and a half war, a two war, or a one and a half war strategy, there was always a gap between requirements and capabilities. Cordesman points out that "the U.S. never, at any point during the Cold War, avoided a 'planning-reality gap' between actual war fighting requirements, and the forces and capabilities it actually funded for even a theater-wide conflict in Europe. Even when the U.S. emphasized conventional options for NATO, it did not really seek to fully implement a 'one war' strategy."[35]

More serious, though, are the BUR's faulty strategic assumptions. There are several significant fallacies: the belief that two major regional wars requiring a U.S. military response are likely to occur simultaneously and the premise that a regional adversary would have

capabilities (especially the emphasis on armor and artillery) similar to those supposedly possessed by Iraq during the gulf crisis; the assumption that if the United States maintains large enough forces, it can overwhelm such an enemy and produce a quick, decisive victory with minimal U.S. casualties, as it did in Desert Storm; and the assumption that not only will most regional crises affect U.S. interests and require Washington's military response, but that other major powers would remain inert during a full-blown crisis, forcing the United States to wage war alone against a dangerous aggressor.

One, Two, Many Saddams

The BUR requirement to "maintain sufficient military power to be able to win two major regional conflicts that occur nearly simultaneously" is unnecessary. Even Secretary of Defense William Perry, in a statement before the Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, conceded, "I think it is entirely implausible that we would ever fight two wars at once."^[36] Yet the Clinton administration's defense structure is predicated on the need to have enough forces to meet precisely that contingency.

True to tradition, but contrary to the BUR's own rhetorical declaration that "every war that the United States has fought has been different from the last, and different from what defense planners had envisioned," it presumes that the conflicts of the future will be similar to the those of the past--especially the most recent one, the Persian Gulf War.

Why any potential regional aggressor would imitate Saddam Hussein's strategy, having seen the outcome of Operation Desert Storm, defies logic. Nevertheless, the BUR presumes that the United States must be able to fight, nearly simultaneously, two regional aggressors that can each field 400,000 to 750,000 total personnel under arms; 2,000 to 4,000 tanks; 3,000 to 5,000 armored fighting vehicles; 2,000 to 3,000 pieces of artillery; 500 to 1,000 combat aircraft; 100 to 200 naval vessels, primarily patrol craft armed with surface-to-surface missiles, and up to 50 submarines; and 100 to 1,000 SCUD-class ballistic missiles, some possibly with nuclear, chemical, or biological warheads. In short, the BUR envisions an armor-heavy, combined arms offensive, a force far more appropriate to the type of attack U.S. forces planned for during the Cold War when NATO confronted the Warsaw Pact across the heart of Europe.

Both aspects of that scenario are highly improbable. Since World War II the United States has found itself engaged in three major regional conflicts: the Korean, the Vietnam, and the Gulf wars. According to Andrew Krepinevich, director of the Defense Budget Project:

In all three instances, the United States committed the bulk of its conventional combat power to the conflict. In two instances, during the Korean and Vietnam wars, the United States had its forces deployed for over three years. During these same two conflicts, the other "hostile nation" was not Iran, or Libya, or North Korea, but a superpower rival, the Soviet Union, whose ability to exploit the U.S. engagement, either directly or through proxies and clients, dwarfed that of any possible U.S. adversary that exists today, or any that can be reasonably anticipated over the next decade. Yet in no instance did the United States find itself confronted with a second major regional conflict.^[37]

It is especially doubtful that a second regional conflict would occur on short notice. Vietnam, for example, proceeded in slow motion. Most of the "crises" that have attracted the attention of U.S. officials in the immediate post-Cold War period (e.g., Bosnia, Somalia, and the confrontation over North Korea's nuclear weapons program) have likewise evolved over a period of months or years.

The assumption that the United States would be facing an armor-heavy opponent in a typical conventional war scenario is also questionable. Desert Storm should have taught other would-

be adversaries the futility of trying to match the U.S. military in such a fight. With the possible exception of a war with North Korea, most regional conflicts in which the United States might intervene would involve lightly armed, highly mobile opponents--including guerrilla units. The BUR is a classic case of preparing for the previous war, characterized by a style of warfare that is increasingly irrelevant in the post-Cold War world.

The Vain Search for Antiseptic Victories

In the already voluminous literature analyzing the BUR, very few experts argue that the United States would be unable to ultimately prevail, even if two conflicts did erupt. The problem facing U.S. military planners, however, is how to enable the United States to win with the speed, negligible casualties, and overwhelming success it enjoyed during Operation Desert Storm.

It cannot be overemphasized that the circumstances surrounding Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent U.S. strategy to eject Iraqi forces were so unusual as to be virtually unrepeatable. Yet the implicit assumption of the BUR, which in turn underlies the Pentagon's call for continued high budgets and new weapons systems, is that future wars will be like that conflict. It is difficult to imagine that any future opponent would be as maladroit and outright stupid as Hussein, adopting a static, conventional defense in open terrain. Despite the fanfare about a "military- technological revolution," most wars will continue to be bloody and costly affairs. To pretend that future conflicts will be recreations of Operation Desert Storm that the United States will win in two months with only a few hundred casualties, as the BUR does, is either naive or disingenuous.

There is no feasible way to build forces large enough or capable enough to routinely produce triumphs comparable to Desert Storm. The wonders of America's high-tech military apparatus, impressive as they are, were not able to avoid frustration and prevent casualties in the urban street fighting that characterized the U.S. intervention in Somalia. Nor would they be terribly applicable to the guerrilla warfare that is likely to await U.S. forces if the decision is made to intervene in Bosnia. If the overriding political goal is to minimize American casualties, the United States needs to be far more selective about the regional conflicts in which it would intervene. The BUR is a futile attempt to evade that reality in the hope that oversized forces can guarantee antiseptic victories.

The Lonely Superpower Style of Warfare

Finally, although lip service is paid to the idea of fighting as part of a coalition, as in Desert Storm, the operative presumption is that U.S. forces must be sized and structured to preserve the flexibility and the capability to act unilaterally on a massive scale. Even accepting the dubious premise of the BUR that American interests would often be served by intervening in regional conflicts, the internal logic is weak. Is it really reasonable to imagine that the United States would find itself fighting major regional wars without support from other powers whose interests were also threatened? What, for example, would South Korea be doing when its national survival was at stake, in the event of a North Korean invasion? Similarly, if Persian Gulf oil supplies were endangered to the point of shutting down industrial economies, would not Western nations assemble again as they did in Desert Storm?

There is a conceptual contradiction at the heart of the BUR. If a regional conflict were serious enough to jeopardize important American security interests and thereby warrant U.S. military intervention, it is highly improbable that the United States would have to wage such a conflict alone. Conversely, if the other major powers in the international system chose to stand aside from a regional conflict, then one of two conclusions would be logical. One possibility is that the struggle is not serious enough to justify U.S. intervention. The other possibility is that,

although the conflict may pose some danger to America's security, it is minor enough (and probably close enough to home) that U.S. forces can manage the problem without a large-scale military effort. The BUR's force requirements, however, are predicated on the far-fetched belief that, although the United States would face a regional conflict requiring a very sizable military response, other powers would not feel threatened enough to join in.

The reality is that the United States has no need to sustain an expensive capability to wage two major regional wars nearly simultaneously and largely unaided. The United States can afford to view future military threats without undue alarm, as it has throughout most of its history. Indeed, that may be more feasible in the coming years than it has been at any time in several decades. There is no single opponent or alliance of opponents in the foreseeable future capable of posing a military threat that would cause irreparable harm to U.S. national interests.

A Modest Alternative

There is an alternative to the fatally flawed BUR. The United States should explicitly adopt a strategy based on maintaining the capabilities needed to wage only one major conflict plus a small surplus to deal with minor contingencies. That approach would be consistent with what has actually happened throughout most of America's history. It would also recognize that, while the world may be returning to its normal tumultuous state, very little of the accompanying strife threatens the United States. There is no need to assume that regional conflicts will always, or even usually, require a U.S. military response.

In many cases, the United States may even be able to benefit from the defense efforts of other likeminded countries without having to become directly involved with its military forces. Major regional powers are likely to have their own security reasons for wanting to respond to nearby disorders. U.S. leaders should encourage such initiatives instead of conveying the impression that those powers can and should rely on the United States to solve military problems in their regions.

The force structure required to protect America in the relatively low-threat environment of the post-Cold War era could be achieved for substantially less than the BUR's projections. The United States would maintain a sufficient edge to defend its security interests against the most likely threats but not attempt to guard against every conceivable danger, however improbable. Such an approach might not be intellectually elegant, but it would provide enough forces in a high state of readiness to meet any credible military threat. To attain that goal, we need a comprehensive, independent assessment of America's defense needs, not the BUR charade staged by the Pentagon.

Notes

[1] See Les Aspin, Bottom-Up Review (Washington: U.S. Department of Defense, September 1, 1993); Les Aspin and Colin J. Powell, Force Structure Excerpts, Bottom-Up Review (Washington: U.S. Department of Defense, September 1, 1993); and Les Aspin, Report of the Bottom-Up Review (Washington: U.S. Department of Defense, October 1993).

[2] Sen. John Glenn (D-Ohio), for example, insists that the United States is cutting "too fast too soon," in terms of both spending levels and force structure. "Glenn Skeptical of Bottom-Up Review," Defense Daily, March 21, 1994, p. 417.

[3] Lawrence J. Korb, "Les No More: How the Pentagon Undid the Defense Secretary," Washington Post, December 19, 1993, p. C3.

[4] Clay Chandler, "1995 Budget Gives Additional \$10 Billion to Pentagon for Raises," Washington Post, December 23, 1993, p. A8.

[5] An insightful look at the trend toward hollow forces is found in David Segal, "The Shell Game," Washington Monthly, July-August 1993.

[6] Anthony H. Cordesman, U.S. Defense Policy: Resources and Capabilities, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Division of International Studies, Working Paper 98 (Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center, December 1993), pp. 44-45.

[7] Kevin N. Lewis, Historical U.S. Force Structure Trends: A Primer, P-7582 (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corp., July 1989), p. 7.

[8] Lawrence J. Korb, "Shock Therapy for the Pentagon," New York Times, February 15, 1994, p. A21.

[9] Andrew F. Krepinevich, The Bottom-Up Review: An Assessment (Washington: Defense Budget Project, February 1994), p. 58.

[10] Cordesman, p. 59.

[11] See Colin L. Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Report on the Roles, Missions, and Functions of the Armed Forces of the United States (Washington: Government Printing Office, February 1993). For analysis and commentary on that report, see Roles, Missions and Functions of the Armed Forces of the United States, Hearing before the House Armed Services Committee, 103rd Cong., 1st sess., February 24, 1993, Hearing no. 103-17 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1993); and General Accounting Office, Roles and Functions: Assessment of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Report, GAO report NSIAD-93-200 (Washington: GAO, July 1993), p. 2.

[12] Cordesman, p. 22.

[13] See Les Aspin, "An Approach to Sizing American Conventional Forces for the Post-Soviet Era," House Armed Services Committee News Release, January 24, 1992; and Les Aspin, "Defense 1997 Alternatives: A Briefing," House Armed Services Committee, February 25, 1992. The latter is a supplement to Aspin's report, "An Approach to Sizing American Conventional Forces for the Post-Soviet Era: Four Illustrations."