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AMERICAN MILITARY INTERVENTION: A USER'S GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Deciding when, where, and how to intervene with military force presents a truly perplexing set of questions. In a post-Cold War world, with no overriding threat to serve as the focus for American national strategy, it is even more difficult to decide when, where, and how to use the U.S.'s limited military resources. In this increasingly uncertain world, it is therefore imperative that American policymakers follow clear guidelines in deciding where and when American military intervention is most needed and how it can be most effective.

Unfortunately, however, the United States currently has no such guidelines in place. Because of this, the Clinton Administration has been tempted to intervene militarily in peripheral areas of the world. In Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia, the result has been either failure or settlements that even one former Clinton advisor has characterized as "provisional, fragile, and reversible."¹ Moreover, congressional and public support has been very weak because it has been unclear to most Americans how these interventions serve the national interest.

America will continue to squander its military resources on such inconclusive and tangential operations unless the Clinton Administration and Congress adopt a concrete set of policy guidelines for when and how to use American military forces abroad. These guidelines must be flexible enough to address a wide range of military options, but they also must be constant enough to balance the projected benefit of any intervention against the costs to the American people.

1 Michael Mandelbaum, "Foreign Policy as Social Work," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (January/February 1996), p. 21.

Before approving any future military intervention, the Administration and Congress therefore should make certain that it meets the following criteria:

Criterion #1 - Military intervention should defend national security interests. Both the President and Congress must recognize that not all national interests are equally important. They must also acknowledge that not all national interests are national security interests that require military intervention. Instead of focusing on core security interests, the Clinton Administration has committed American military power only on the periphery, and with inconclusive and negligible results. The Administration has what one critic has called an “instinct for the capillary”—a tendency to send U.S. troops on missions that serve lesser national interests, or in some cases (such as Haiti and Somalia), no security interest at all.² For America to use its power effectively, it must prioritize where and how it chooses to defend its vital, important, and marginal interests, thereby avoiding both excessive activism that diffuses important resources and isolationism that eschews important opportunities to shape events.

Criterion #2 - Military intervention should not jeopardize the ability of the U.S. to meet more important security commitments. America’s current national military strategy is strategically bankrupt. Not only is the Bottom-Up Review force too small to execute the two major regional conflicts strategy, but it is woefully underfunded as well. Huge interventions in areas of marginal security interest have exacerbated the strain on the U.S. military and made it doubtful that the military can mobilize the resources necessary to defend vital national interests and honor current security commitments.

Criterion #3 - Military intervention should strive to achieve military goals that are clearly defined, decisive, attainable, and sustainable. Military interventions should be conducted to accomplish clearly definable military goals that are militarily achievable, consistent with overriding political objectives, and supported by enough force to achieve these goals. In Bosnia, the Clinton Administration has failed to define these military objectives clearly, and those objectives that have been articulated are insufficient to achieve the larger political goal of reaching a sustainable peace. Thus, there is no reliable way to measure success or failure, which is why Clinton has imposed a deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. The President, in effect, has made withdrawing U.S. forces on schedule the only clear-cut, identifiable U.S. military goal in Bosnia.

Criterion #4 - Military intervention should enjoy congressional and public support. President Clinton has made a habit of circumventing Congress in deciding to undertake military interventions. In non-emergency contingencies like Haiti and Bosnia, Congress should have the opportunity to vote on the merits of an intervention, not merely whether to support American troops already on the ground. Such decisions should not be made by polls; Americans traditionally are reluctant to intervene. However, when intervention is required, the President should mobilize public support (as President Bush did during the Persian Gulf War) so that American troops abroad will know that the nation and the Congress support not only the troops, but the actual goals of the operation.

² Jonathan Clarke, “Instinct for the Capillary: The Clinton Administration’s Foreign Policy ‘Successes’,” CATO Institute Foreign Policy Briefing Paper No. 40, April 5, 1996.

Criterion #5 - The armed forces must be allowed to create the conditions for success. The U.S. armed forces must be allowed the operational freedom to create the conditions within which they can succeed. The U.S. military should never be placed in a situation where it has no control over the outcome, as was the case in both Haiti and Bosnia.

Fortunately, Congress can help redress the policy shortcomings of the Clinton Administration. First, it should ask the President to issue a presidential directive that establishes these five criteria for military interventions. This would add to the Administration's presidential decision directive concerning multilateral peace operations (PDD-25), which was limited to guidelines for U.S. participation in peacekeeping. Congress also should require that the National Security Strategy, an annual report by the President to Congress, contain:

- ① **A prioritization** of national interests and national security interests;
- ② **A listing of criteria**, such as those listed here, that will give guidelines for when, where, whether, and how the U.S. military should conduct military interventions;
- ③ **A set of criteria** for deciding when and in what capacity the U.S. will participate in multilateral military operations through coalitions, alliances, and other structures such as the United Nations;
- ④ **An unequivocal guarantee** that the President will consult Congress before launching military interventions that are not national emergencies; and
- ⑤ **A declaration** that U.S. military forces in interventions abroad will have clearly defined, decisive, and attainable military objectives that can be achieved through proven military doctrine.

THE NEED FOR CRITERIA

Few issues of foreign and military policy are as vexing for the policymaker as military intervention. The problem of finding reliable criteria for deciding when, where, why, and how to intervene abroad with military force is made particularly difficult by several factors. First, there is the character of the "new world disorder," a volatile and unpredictable international arena that does not lend itself to conceptual or strategic clarity. On the one hand, there is no one clear and present danger on which to base a coherent strategy; on the other hand, the many lesser threats to American interests, like those posed by such rogue states as North Korea, Iran, Iraq, and Libya, cannot be ignored. These threats are more than enough reason for maintaining forces capable of many different levels of military intervention.

The second factor that complicates operating in this world disorder is a dilemma in the way Americans think about military intervention. Henry Kissinger has aptly described this dilemma and the solution that is needed:

America's dominant task is to strike a balance between the twin temptations inherent in its exceptionalism: the notion that America must remedy every wrong and stabilize every dislocation, and the latent instinct to withdraw into itself. Indiscriminate involvement in all the ethnic turmoil and civil wars of the post-Cold War world would drain a crusading America. Yet an America that confines itself to the refinement of its domestic virtues would, in the end, abdicate America's security and prosperity to decisions made by other societies

in faraway places and over which America would progressively lose control. Not every evil can be combated by America, even less by America alone. But some monsters need to be, if not slain, at least resisted. What is most needed are criteria for selectivity.³

The Clinton Administration has failed to put forth such selective criteria for military intervention: when and why it should take place, and how it should be carried out.⁴ Instead of offering a sensible strategy that sets strategic priorities and matches America's means to her most important foreign policy objectives, the Administration has concentrated on marginal "feel-good" operations on the periphery of U.S. national interests. While neglecting the core priorities of American foreign policy, the Administration has squandered American resources on interventions in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia—military operations in which the claimed successes are both transient and easily overturned.

Professor Michael Mandelbaum, a former Clinton advisor, writes that President Clinton has intervened on the periphery in "social work" at the expense of successfully managing relations with other great powers—the core concern of U.S. foreign policy.⁵ Nothing demonstrates the validity of this argument better than the continued insistence of Administration officials that Bosnia is a conflict "raging at the heart of Europe." Bosnia is indeed a European security problem, but hardly one that threatens to overwhelm the continent. It needs attention, but not the same sort of military attention given by America to Europe as a result of the hegemonic designs of Germany and the Soviet Union in the past. Americans deserve a foreign policy that is shorter on such rhetoric and longer on rational discourse about core and peripheral interests. Such discourse is needed to promote consensus and understanding about where, when, and how America should intervene.

Because the United States is the world's leading power, U.S. leaders must shape events and not be shaped by them. In Bosnia, however, President Clinton portrayed American leadership as a fateful burden that has painted America into a corner as the leader of the NATO implementation force (IFOR). Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke has stated that "we did not choose this as the test case....[N]obody wanted it to happen, but that is the hand history has dealt us. The U.S. role in Europe and NATO's future and our bilateral relationships with all the major countries in Europe are all going to be determined by Bosnia."⁶

In other words, the U.S. has no control over its own destiny in Bosnia or Europe, and leadership simply means accepting the many bad options presented by European and Administration indecisiveness. In addition, such a statement means surrendering America's right to help shape the future of Europe and instead allowing the American role in Europe to be determined by local factions in Bosnia. This is hardly leadership. America leads because of the conditions leadership engenders, conditions that are favorable to the U.S. and its allies. Leadership is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

3 Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), pp. 832-833.

4 Presidential Decision Directive 25 addresses only peace operations and, as discussed below, provides criteria largely ignored by the Administration that proposed them.

5 See Mandelbaum, "Foreign Policy as Social Work," pp. 16-32.

6 John Pomfret, "U.S. Builds Arc of Alliances to Contain Serbia's Power," *The Washington Post*, December 19, 1995, p. A28.

By failing to lead and shape events in Bosnia, the U.S. has relegated itself to the role of medium-sized player in a peripheral European security affair. The Administration has put aside the larger questions, such as NATO's expansion, in favor of a one-year peace implementation mission in Bosnia. More important, it has tied the measure of American power and successful foreign policy in the world to insignificant operations that the President claims are "test cases" of American leadership. The danger, as one analyst has noted, is that "it is surely perilous to think of the Balkans as an 'acid test,' 'test case,' or a 'defining moment' for anything. We have already seen what devastating effect such manufactured challenges can have on Western unity."⁷

The United States needs a military intervention policy that is consistent with America's role as the greatest power in the world today. Such a policy would be based on the need to protect and defend America's national security interests through a range of military options, including deterrence, preventive attacks, warfighting, diplomacy, and even peace operations. An intervention policy should discriminate between America's interests and how best to defend them so that America's limited military resources will be used where they are most needed and most effective and not wasted on inconsequential operations of little lasting significance.

THE INTERVENTION DEBATE⁸

The Clinton Administration has acted without an effective doctrine for military intervention. Clinton's national strategy of "Engagement and Enlargement," for example, offers more in the way of academic abstractions than discriminating policy guidance.

This reluctance to provide useful criteria for military intervention comes on the heels of long-standing debate. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger was attacked in 1984, from both the left and the right, for proposing criteria that were perceived as too restrictive. Weinberger proposed six conditions for military intervention:

- ☞ Vital national interests are threatened,
- ☞ The U.S. clearly intends to win,
- ☞ The intervention has precisely defined political and military objectives,
- ☞ There is reasonable assurance that intervention will be supported by the American people and Congress,
- ☞ The commitment of American forces and their objectives can be reassessed constantly and adjusted if necessary, and
- ☞ The commitment of U.S. forces to combat is undertaken as a last resort.⁹

7 Charles King, "Waiting for Signals from Bosnia," *The World Today*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (February 1996), p. 33.

8 The most complete, readable, and often conflicting recent treatments of the subject are provided by Richard Haass, *Intervention: The Use of American Military Force in the Post-Cold War World* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment, 1994), and Harry Summers, *The New World Strategy: A Military Policy for America's Future* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

9 Caspar R. Weinberger, "The Uses of Military Power," DoD News Release 609-84, November 28, 1984.

Critics maintained that Weinberger's criteria were a prescription for inaction, arguing that America's military options in many cases would not be clear-cut enough to support their application. In addition to the expected attacks from the left, critics ranging from Secretary of State George Shultz to conservative commentators and *National Review* magazine claimed that the Weinberger criteria were simply unobtainable in many instances in which the U.S. would want to entertain limited military action. Newspaper columnist William Safire echoed the sentiments of many when he wrote that Weinberger would restrict the U.S. to "only the fun wars."¹⁰

From the military's point of view, however, the Weinberger doctrine was meant to guarantee that the U.S. would not repeat the strategic mistakes of the Vietnam War and the failed Lebanese intervention of 1982-1983. In both of those cases, there was no clear intention of winning despite the sacrifices being made; there was tenuous public and congressional support; and the military and political objectives were never clearly defined, attainable, or decisive. The Vietnam syndrome was, in essence, the understandable desire on the part of America's military that their sacrifices not be in vain. As the post-Vietnam military sought to rebuild the strategic ethos, one officer wrote that "when it comes to being engaged in any undertaking where political objectives are hazy, public support only tepid, the prospects for a rapid decision remote, and the risk of substantial casualties high, service opinion is unanimous: count us out."¹¹

It therefore came as no surprise when General Colin Powell, who had been a young infantry officer in Vietnam, bolstered the Weinberger doctrine while serving as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Powell weighed in with even more explicit guidance as to how military force should be used in interventions.¹² In particular, he wished to reinvigorate the strategic link: closely matching military goals to political objectives. And, as is well known, he favored using overwhelming force to guarantee that objectives would be reached at minimum cost in American lives. This was very much the philosophy in the Gulf War, where Powell stated that his strategy left nothing to chance; the U.S. military was "not operating in the margin" and would "win decisively."¹³

Despite the resounding victory in the Persian Gulf, critics still openly questioned the utility of the Weinberger-Powell doctrines as guidelines for the use of force, especially in other-than-war military interventions such as peacekeeping. The late Congressman and Defense Secretary Les Aspin and others said that Weinberger-Powell left the policymaker with only two options: all or nothing. Aspin postulated that with the end of the zero-sum game of Cold War superpower rivalry, the U.S. should adopt a more flexible approach to military intervention. Knowing that military power was a blunt instrument, he also hoped that new military technologies (such as precision guided munitions) would help to provide the U.S. with more precise and flexible tools that could be used in limited military interventions

10 William Safire, "Only the 'Fun' Wars," *The New York Times*, December 3, 1984.

11 A. J. Bacevich, "Military Culture and Institutional Change," in *Peace Operations: An American Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1995), p. 105.

12 See Colin Powell, "U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 5 (Winter 1992-1993), pp. 32-45.

13 Televised interview quoted in Lawrence Freeman and Efraim Kharsh, *The Gulf Conflict 1990-1991* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993), p. 207.

without mobilizing public and congressional support or using overwhelming military force.¹⁴

The Clinton Administration's early position on intervention was couched in light of its doctrine of "assertive multilateralism" and addressed only peace operations. The Administration hoped that U.S. military intervention could be conducted mainly through such multilateral institutions as the United Nations. However, the failure of the U.N. mission to Somalia and the shocking deaths of U.S. soldiers in Mogadishu street battles prompted President Clinton's security team to rethink their criteria for participation in U.N. operations. The result was Presidential Decision Directive 25 (PDD-25), a document that set intervention criteria solidly in the tradition of prudence and caution started by Caspar Weinberger. PDD-25, published in May 1994, set out eight criteria for the U.S. to consider when deciding to support a peace operation, six further restrictions for U.S. participation should American troops be involved, and an additional three if there was a strong possibility of combat.¹⁵

Despite this note of caution, however, the restrictive criteria of PDD-25 did not prevent the Clinton Administration from undertaking a peace enforcement mission in Haiti; U.N. peacekeeping in Haiti, Rwanda, and Macedonia; and the NATO peace implementation mission in Bosnia. In these interventions, the cautionary criteria of PDD-25 were ignored. Given the controversies over Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia, it was obvious that there was little desire in the Administration to set criteria, let alone to comply with guidelines when they were set.

In March 1996, National Security Advisor Anthony Lake further contributed to the atmosphere of uncertainty in a speech at George Washington University in which he proposed seven broad circumstances that "may call for the use of force or our military forces."¹⁶ These circumstances included:

- ① To defend against direct attacks on the U.S., its citizens, and its allies;
- ② To counter aggression;
- ③ To defend key economic interests;
- ④ To preserve, promote, and defend democracy;
- ⑤ To prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, international crime, and drug trafficking;
- ⑥ To maintain U.S. reliability; and
- ⑦ For humanitarian purposes.¹⁷

14 Les Aspin, address to Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, Washington, D.C., September 21, 1992, reprinted in Haass, *Intervention*, pp. 183-190.

15 The White House, "The Clinton Administration's Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations," May 1994, pp. 4-5.

16 Anthony Lake, "Defining Missions, Setting Deadlines: Meeting New Security Challenges in the Post-Cold War World," speech at George Washington University, Washington, D.C., March 6, 1996. Lake stated that "this is a good time for this discussion," despite the fact that the Administration already had conducted or initiated three controversial military interventions in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia—and has no further military actions on the horizon before the November 1996 election.

17 *Ibid.*

This was an attempt to answer “why” and “when” the U.S. might conduct a military intervention. However, Lake’s list is not specific enough to serve as a useful guideline for military intervention. For instance, stating that the U.S. will use force “to counter aggression” is strategically meaningless. It assumes that aggression everywhere, large or small, may require the use of American military force.

Lake’s list can hardly be used to provide constructive guidance on “where” and “whether” to intervene. In addition, the question of “how” must be addressed, as it significantly affects all the other questions. Americans need a clearer set of criteria for military interventions—which, while not necessarily identical to the Weinberger or Powell criteria, nevertheless are well within the tradition which they established. These criteria are:

Criterion #1

Military intervention should defend national security interests.

The essence of American statecraft today consists of being able to discriminate among competing national interests and then balance these interests against the willingness of the U.S. to defend them. Otherwise, America risks squandering its power by failing to differentiate between vital interests and others that are merely important or marginal. Without strategic priorities, the U.S. will be left rudderless in the post-Cold War era, lurching from one media-generated crisis to another and vacillating between the extremes of mindless interventionism and rigid isolationism.

The United States today has a limited pool of resources to use for military interventions. These resources are manifested in tangible forms (for example, number of troops, carrier battle groups, or fighter wings) or intangible forms (public support, willingness to sacrifice). America must use these resources wisely, only where American action is most needed and most effective. Devising criteria for military intervention requires a methodology to establish priorities among America’s interests in the world.¹⁸ It is not enough to develop a laundry list of national interests and assert that they are all equally important.

America’s national interests vary not only in degree of importance, but also in the types of military interventions necessary to defend them. **Vital national interests** (a term often used but not universally understood) are interests essential to the continued existence and well-being of America as a free and prosperous nation. They also are national security interests: Threats to vital interests threaten the security of the United States. Therefore, the United States should be willing to go to war to defend these interests, and should consider all manner of military intervention in order to uphold them. In contrast to Weinberger’s criteria, military force in defense of vital national interests should not necessarily be used only as a last resort; many times it will be more effective when used as a first resort. Vital national interests include:

18 See Kim R. Holmes, ed., *A Safe and Prosperous America: A U.S. Foreign and Defense Policy Blueprint* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1994), pp. 1-19.

- ✓ **Protecting** America's territory, borders, and airspace;
- ✓ **Preventing** a major power threat to Europe, East Asia, or the Persian Gulf;
- ✓ **Preventing** hostile interference by an outside power in the Western Hemisphere;
- ✓ **Ensuring** access to foreign trade and resources; and
- ✓ **Protecting** Americans, at home and abroad, against threats to their lives and well-being.

Important national interests are those which are less than vital but important enough to warrant major diplomatic, economic, or possibly limited military intervention. This recognizes the need for more flexibility than given by the Weinberger doctrine. In the post-Cold War world, with its lesser but more nebulous threats, the U.S. must be prepared to use limited force in defense of national security interests that are not vital national interests. Important interests are not always national security interests, however, because not all threats to the security of the U.S. can be addressed through military means. Important national interests include general stability in Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia, as well as promoting more open trade arrangements with Japan and China, promoting democracy and stability in areas such as the former Soviet Union, and combating terrorism and the flow of illegal drugs into America. As a rule, military intervention should be considered as a last resort in defending most of these interests. In most cases, diplomatic and economic efforts will be more effective.

Marginal interests are national interests, but rarely national security interests, and should not be high on the list of priorities that require the commitment of America's military resources. Marginal interests include political stability and economic development in many parts of the developing world, humanitarian concerns, and environmental issues. These interests also should be considered marginal from a military perspective because they tend to involve the sorts of problems that do not lend themselves to military solutions, especially when imposed by an outside force. For instance, the attempts by U.S. and U.N. military forces at coercive disarmament, political reconciliation, and nation-building in Somalia backfired. Problems of economic and political development, humanitarian crises, and environmental concerns only rarely are susceptible to a military solution. Lasting solutions to these problems most often come from within and are best supported by diplomatic or economic programs.

While policymakers must always weigh other considerations, such as moral and legal factors, calculations of national interest must always be their principal focus in setting priorities for military intervention. Moral considerations, media pressure, and legal prerogatives do not always give policymakers a clear sense of the value of a national interest to America and what Americans will be ready to sacrifice for that interest.

For instance, moral outrage and disturbing media images fueled President Bush's decision to conduct a limited humanitarian relief effort in Somalia. Moral considerations and vague internationalist ideals also drove President Clinton to continue the Somalia operation and expand its goals to include political reconciliation and nation-building. However, these moral motivations never gave either President a sense of what the Somalia effort was worth to the American people. In the end, 18 American soldiers killed on October 3, 1993, turned out to be too much for America. The result was a humiliating withdrawal because of a miscalculation over value and the threshold of national sacrifice. The Somalia

episode showed the transient and ephemeral nature of national interests generated by the media or academic abstractions about the new world order.

Moral umbrage, media-generated urgency, and offense taken from legal transgressions all combine to add pressure for military intervention. Naturally, the policymaker needs to consider all these factors. However, only calculations of national interest, based on the prosperity and well-being of America and her allies, can measure accurately what the American people will sacrifice to see the intervention through to a conclusion. As former National Security Council official Richard Haass writes, "the ability to sustain an intervention over time, and, more importantly, despite human and financial costs, is linked directly to the perceived importance of the interests at stake."¹⁹

Criterion #2

Military intervention should not jeopardize the ability of the U.S. to meet more important security commitments.

The U.S. is operating with an enormous gap between its national objectives and its military means to achieve them. The gap between security commitments and actual forces is exacerbated by the fact that even the inadequate force of the Clinton Administration's Bottom-Up Review is underfunded by some \$150 billion over the next five years.²⁰ In the meantime, while drastically cutting America's armed forces by some 35 percent, the Administration has used what is left for tangential peace operations in Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia: missions where the reward for the U.S.'s military efforts are tenuous, indecisive, and easily reversible.

The current national security strategy ostensibly is predicated on fighting and winning two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts (MRCs). While President Clinton maintains that "the forces the Administration fields today are sufficient to defeat aggression in two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts,"²¹ most experts disagree.²² More damaging is the assessment of the uniformed military, those who actually will have to carry out the Clinton strategy with inadequate resources. General Ronald Fogleman, the Air Force Chief of Staff, has testified before the House National Security Committee that the service chiefs "had made no secret of the fact that we have never had the force structure that was called for... to execute the two-MRC strategy."²³

This strategic bankruptcy, exacerbated by military interventions in areas of marginal strategic importance, violates what the great American foreign policy thinker Walter Lippman called "the controlling principle" of strategy: that a nation should keep its goals within its means and should never make commitments without providing the resources

19 Haass, *Intervention*, p. 71.

20 U.S. General Accounting Office, *Future Years Defense Program: Optimistic Estimates Lead to Billions in Overprogramming*, July 29, 1994, and Baker Spring, "Clinton's Defense Budget Falls Far Short Again," *Heritage Foundation Backgrounder Update* No. 242, March 7, 1995.

21 The White House, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, February 1996, p. 14.

22 For instance, U.S. General Accounting Office, "Bottom-Up Review: Analysis of Key DoD Assumptions," January 31, 1995; Andrew Krepinevich, letter in *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Winter 1996), p. 106; and Defense Budget Project, *Bottom-Up Review: An Assessment*, 1994.

23 Quoted in Rowan Scarborough, "Pentagon Document Lets JCS Talk Frankly," *The Washington Times*, March 15, 1996, p. A2.

necessary to achieve them. For the United States, this means ensuring that the shrinking military forces of the U.S. are trained, ready, and postured to defend the national security interests of the U.S.

The primary mission of the U.S. armed forces should be to fight and win the nation's wars, although this obviously does not mean that war is their only task. In fact, of the over 250 military interventions carried out by the U.S. since 1789, only five have been declared wars.²⁴ In the post-Cold War world, the U.S. military must be prepared for all manner of military interventions, including limited conventional warfare (Panama 1989 and Desert Storm), punitive airstrikes (Libya 1986 and Iraq 1993), deterrence (Kuwait 1994), shows of force (Persian Gulf 1988 and Philippines 1989), and support for peace operations (when their goals are clearly defined and they serve the national interest). However, two critical points must instruct the wide range of possible interventions.

The first is common sense: Forces intervening somewhere are not available elsewhere. Nor are they training. Congressman Ike Skelton (D-MO) has noted that "peace-keeping commitments may so degrade the armed forces' warfighting capability that it will be impossible to carry out the national military strategy."²⁵ His findings are supported by the General Accounting Office, which has found that even small combat units returning from peace operations need up to six months of recovery time to train back up to warfighting standards; larger units (such as divisions) need more.²⁶ This means that because the Bosnian peace implementation force requires so many resources from the 1st Armored and 3rd Infantry Divisions, the U.S. Army in Europe is unable to meet the Army's standards of warfighting readiness for one to two years. It also means that the shrinking forces of the U.S. are finding it difficult to keep up with their many security commitments.²⁷

The second point must always underpin American military strategy: Focus on warfighting and keep America's powder dry to protect vital security interests. Lieutenant General Wesley Clark, the Joint Chiefs' strategic planner, knows that the U.S. armed forces may be called upon to conduct many types of limited interventions in defense of less important interests. He notes that "American military power need not, and indeed, must not, be reserved for use only in cases of vital interests."²⁸ However, it is equally true that military interventions in support of peripheral interests should never come at the expense of an American military force trained for and capable of protecting vital interests: a perilous

24 Richard Grimmett, *Instances of Use of U.S. Armed Forces Abroad, 1789-1995*, Congressional Research Service, 96-119F, February 6, 1996.

25 Speech to U.S. House of Representatives, October 4, 1993, reprinted in Summers, *New World Strategy*, p. 191.

26 U.S. General Accounting Office, *Peace Operations: Effect of Training, Equipment, and Other Factors on Unit Capability*, NSIAD-96-14, October 1995, pp. 28-39.

27 Robert Gaskin, former Pentagon planner, stated that U.S. military forces are "approaching burnout." Quoted in Art Pine, "U.S. Military Highly Rated, But Strains Begin to Show," *The Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1996, p. A7. See also the General Accounting Office report highlighting the strain on the military, "Military Readiness: A Clear Policy Is Needed to Guide Management of Frequently Deployed Units," April 8, 1996. This strain is also reflected in the "readiness crisis" of 1994. See John Luddy, "The Truth is Out: The U.S. Military's Looming Readiness Crisis," *Heritage Foundation F.Y.I.* No. 51, February 21, 1995.

28 Wesley K. Clark, address to Reserve Officers Association conference, Washington, D.C., 1996, reprinted in *The Officer Magazine*, March 1996, p. 33.

situation that many believe the U.S. is rapidly approaching today. As Colin Powell stated shortly before he retired,

we can modify our doctrine, we can modify our strategy, we can modify our structure, our equipment, our training, our leadership techniques, everything else to do these other missions, but we never want to do it in such a way that we lose sight of the focus of why you have armed forces—to fight and win the nation's wars.²⁹

The U.S. must act like a great power and use its military forces where the American role is unique and decisive. The U.S. must concentrate its diplomatic, economic, and military efforts on its core interests: relations with other great powers and preventing major conflicts between them. For instance, America's military role in NATO is to prevent the domination of Europe by a hostile power or bloc of powers. This is a role that no other nation in the world can play. Consequently, an America with security commitments all over the world cannot be expected to play the principal military role in every local security crisis that does not threaten the basic security of the European continent.³⁰ As Richard Haass has written, "there is little reason for U.S. involvement in peacekeeping, a mission that can be readily undertaken by the forces of many countries."³¹

Criterion #3

Military intervention should strive to achieve military goals that are clearly defined, decisive, attainable, and sustainable.

Interventions must always be driven by political and military objectives that will define success or failure in an operation. More important, military objectives must support the political objective. In Vietnam, the numerous battlefield victories achieved by American and South Vietnamese forces made little difference to the political outcome of the conflict. In order to correct that incoherence in America's Vietnam strategy, the U.S. military now specifies in campaign plans exactly how military achievements will produce the political success of an operation. This is what the Weinberger doctrine meant by "winning." For instance, in the Gulf War, the military objective was to expel the Iraqi Army from in and around Kuwait. When the U.S. military accomplished that task on the battlefield, the political objective was also ensured: Kuwait was liberated and its national sovereignty restored.

For military objectives to contribute to the political goal of an intervention, they must be clearly defined, decisive, and attainable. In some American interventions, the military was not given a clearly defined objective whose attainment could be measured. For instance, in Lebanon in 1982-1983, the U.S. Marines in Beirut were asked to "establish a presence." This objective was ambiguous, indecisive, and unsustainable, and made little contribution to the political goal of stabilizing Beirut and Lebanon. In Somalia, the initial mission to provide humanitarian relief was clearly defined, and the U.S. military was able to measure its success. However, the mission of nation-building could not be supported by

29 General Colin Powell, remarks to defense writers' group breakfast, September 23, 1993, quoted in Summers, *The New World Strategy*, p. 139.

30 See John Hillen, "Getting NATO Back to Basics," *Strategic Review*, Vol. XXII, No. 22 (Spring 1996).

31 Haass, *Intervention*, p. 149.

unambiguous and conclusive military missions. As a result, the U.N. force never defined the criteria for its success in Somalia, and the military forces were left to hope that an incoherent campaign of partial disarmament and the fact of their presence would make political reconciliation possible. There was no direct connection between military goals and political objectives, only an oblique influence on political events by various military activities.

Working toward clearly defined goals may seem a rather obvious point, but it has been violated consistently by the Clinton Administration. Lacking clear military and political objectives for his military options, Clinton has fallen back on setting deadlines for troop withdrawal as the only objective that is both clearly defined and attainable. In short, Clinton has substituted time-driven objectives for event-driven objectives. This violates the profound military dictum of Clausewitz that “No one starts a war—or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so—without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve and how he intends to conduct it.”³²

In contrast, for the Clinton Administration it is enough that an intervention endure for a certain period of time. Bosnia is case in point. The Administration has not given the military an objective the achievement of which would signal the end of the mission and the accomplishment of something important—an exit strategy. Instead, President Clinton has offered an exit date and stated that the U.S. military effort in Bosnia will last “about a year.” Therefore, U.S. troops will pull out of Bosnia regardless of whether they achieve any other objectives. In other words, the “exit strategy is the mission. That is, the mission is to show up and leave, not to stay until the [unstated] goals are fully achieved.”³³ Some critics have maintained that this lack of strategy is intentional because if a goal is never set, Clinton cannot be accused of not reaching it. Exit dates, in fact, are foolproof; time always marches on. Supporting the realization of the Dayton Peace Accords—the vaguely stated goal of the mission in Bosnia—may not be achieved, but the goal of withdrawing U.S. troops can be.

Time-driven interventions are the *de facto* strategy of this Administration because it cannot find achievable and sustainable military goals in its ill-defined and ambiguous interventions. In his March 1996 address on intervention, Anthony Lake stressed the Administration’s emphasis on schedules and deadlines rather than objectives: In Haiti and Bosnia, “for these operations to succeed, tightly tailored military missions and sharp withdrawal deadlines must be the norm.” Lake has been forced to rely on deadlines and timelines because the Administration is intervening in peripheral conflicts that cannot long sustain the support of the American people and their Congress.

If the American people thought the Bosnian intervention was really as profoundly critical to the security of Europe as the Administration pretends, the effort would be worth doing for more than “about a year.” The American public has supported U.S. involvement in NATO for 47 years but is skeptical about Bosnia. This inconsistency between rhetoric and commitment illustrates the Administration’s failure to measure the real value of marginal

32 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 579.

33 Thomas L. Friedman, “The Clinton Gamble,” *The New York Times*, December 6, 1995, p. A23.

national interests. The President's pollsters know that weak public support for inconsequential interventions can be somewhat ameliorated by deadlines, regardless of mission accomplishment. They also know that if the going gets rough, they can pull out the troops and argue that nothing much was lost anyway —precisely because Americans know that no vital interests were at stake.

This is a gross misuse of American military power. When the U.S. military is committed to an intervention, it must be given goals whose success can be measured clearly. If policymakers do not set clearly defined military and political objectives, they will tend to choose, as in Vietnam, plans that are politically controllable over plans that will be militarily and politically successful.³⁴ This is the case in Bosnia. The military plan is controllable, but whether it will be successful is out of the military's hands. As a result, there is no guarantee that the year spent in Bosnia will achieve anything of note.³⁵ Ultimately, the goal of the U.S. military is to be persuasive in peace and decisive in war. To satisfy both conditions, it needs clearly defined and decisive objectives in all interventions.

Criterion #4

Military intervention should enjoy congressional and public support.

The role of Congress in foreign policy and defense today is certainly not what the framers of the U.S. Constitution intended. During the past three years, Congress has been marginalized and unable to vote on the merits of a military intervention. This condition was fostered during the Cold War and exacerbated by the necessity that the President be able to act with secrecy, expediency, and continuity of purpose. However, neither Somalia, nor Haiti, nor Bosnia represented a critical emergency or imminent threat to national security. There was time for debate about ends and means, costs and benefits, and the role of American military force in the world. Congress must reinvigorate its constitutional role by reasserting its decision-making powers concerning military intervention without infringing on the President's ability to act decisively in a crisis.

In both Haiti and Bosnia, President Clinton committed large numbers of U.S. combat forces without the approval of Congress. In fact, in both instances, the President obtained the authorization of the U.N. Security Council before asking the U.S. Congress for its support. In the debate over the Bosnian intervention, by the time Congress was prepared to vote, the vote was no longer about the value and efficacy of the intervention itself. Rather, it was about upholding a President that already had committed American troops and American prestige. Having painted Congress into a corner, the President won the vote to uphold American credibility and support American troops. Even so, the House of Representatives voted 287-141 to condemn the mission while expressing support for the troops. The Senate voted 69-30 to stand by the troops but “not endorse the President's decision [or] the agreement reached in Dayton.”

34 See Stephen Rosen, “Vietnam and the American Theory of Limited War,” *International Security*, Fall 1982, p. 84.

35 There are also considerations of cost. The U.S. spent \$6.6 billion in incremental costs on Haiti, the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, and Rwanda from 1992-1995. U.S. General Accounting Office, *Peace Operations: U.S. Costs in Support of Haiti, Former Yugoslavia, Somalia, and Rwanda*, GAO/NSIAD-96-38, March 1996, p. 2.

Similarly, in the first months of his Administration, the President expanded the U.S. role in Somalia and pushed the United Nations to take on a more ambitious mandate. Congress never approved this plan, and when 18 U.S. soldiers were killed in Mogadishu on October 3, 1993, Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) led the successful effort to cut off funds for the mission and force a unilateral U.S. withdrawal from Somalia by March 1994. Not having consulted Congress before changing the nature of the Somalia intervention, President Clinton could not gauge the inherent value of the mission to Congress and the American people. Committing U.S. troops and national prestige to interventions when Congress is unsupportive and the national will is not engaged weakens American credibility abroad.

There has always been tension between the Congress and the President over foreign policy, and military intervention in particular. The framers of the Constitution clearly intended both the legislative and executive branches to have a role beyond one branch's rubber-stamping the unilateral actions of the other. The system delineated by the framers was to have Congress declare war (Article I, Section 8) and the President wage war (Article II, Section 2). But since modern convention is for nations to resort to the force of arms without declaring war, this system of checks and balances has broken down. And yet, as Professor Christopher Layne recently noted, "as the embodiment of the American people's political will, Congress has a legitimate role in deciding whether U.S. troops participate in global military interventions."³⁶

The American people must be involved in supporting significant military interventions, and this requires the support of Congress as well. If an intervention is not supported by the public, it can collapse after minimum resistance and a few American casualties. This is not to say that Americans are intolerant of casualties incurred in military interventions, but they will not tolerate losses in interventions that do not have clear goals and readily apparent benefits that are worth the cost in blood and treasure. As strategist Harry Summers has written, "casualties per se are not the limiting factor. It is whether those casualties are disproportionate to the value of the mission."³⁷ This proposition is supported by a recent sociological study of public opinion during the Lebanon and Somalia interventions. The study showed that public approval of some interventions "is not conditioned by a knee-jerk reaction to casualties. Judging from the responses we have seen to Lebanon and Somalia, it is conditioned rather by the demand that casualties be incurred for some clear and worthy purpose."³⁸ If the mission appears to be worthless, the tolerance for casualties will be low.

The decision to undertake a military intervention cannot be made by polling or by having 535 Members of Congress act as national security advisors. Traditionally, the American public and Congress are reluctant to intervene. Presidential leadership can make a significant difference in building a case for intervention, however. President George Bush worked assiduously for months to rally Congress and the public behind Operation Desert

36 Christopher Layne, "Congress in the Age of Peace Enforcement," *The Los Angeles Times*, January 11, 1996.

37 Harry Summers, "After the Doubts, Salute and Obey," *The Washington Times*, December 11, 1995, p. A18. See also Summers, *The New World Strategy*, Chapter One.

38 Professor James Burk, "Public Support for Peacekeeping in Lebanon and Somalia," paper read at biennial meeting of the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society, October 20-22, 1995.

Storm. Even then, not a single member of the Democratic leadership in either the House or the Senate voted in favor of the Desert Storm resolution.

Congress and the American public should be involved in voting on the merits of any American military intervention, and it is the task of the President to seek that consensus. Only when the nation is solidly behind an intervention can the U.S. hope to sustain credible military efforts abroad.

Criterion #5

The armed forces must be allowed to create the conditions for success.

The U.S. should use its military forces for objectives that can be achieved decisively, and that are politically decisive as well. This does not mean saving the U.S. military for just “the big ones,” as some critics charge. Limited interventions done properly, such as the 1986 F-111 raid on Tripoli in Libya, can have a decisive effect. However, in limited interventions, there is often the temptation to restrict military requirements because the purpose is to send a political signal. This happened in 1979 when Iran was threatening Saudi Arabia. Embarrassingly, it was revealed that the F-15s which President Carter sent to help defend Saudi Arabia were unarmed. It was an empty political signal that could have been a military disaster. If U.S. combat forces are to be used in any intervention, their operations must be completely consistent with the proven operational doctrine of the United States military. This allows the U.S. armed forces to create and control the conditions for their success, no matter how big or small the tasks and the stakes.

Strategy is the art of using military means to achieve political ends. A coherent strategy ensures that the armed forces have objectives that, once attained, contribute directly to the desired political solution. These military objectives must be clearly defined, attainable, decisive, and consistent with military doctrine. In other words, the military should be given goals that it understands, that it can reach through methods for which it is well-trained, and that will make a difference once attained. From a military perspective, the most sought-after strategy would be similar to that used in the Gulf War, in which President Bush formulated “clear-cut and attainable political objectives; and the armed forces achieved those objectives through rapid and decisive military action.”³⁹ While this formula is not always so easily achieved in limited military interventions, the policymaker should strive to replicate it as much as possible.

The U.S. military prefers rapid and decisive action because it delivers results. Not only is overwhelming force and decisive action consistent with the greatest success, but it tends to be the least costly way to fight. In any intervention, the military wants to keep the initiative. The actions of U.S. forces, not others, should dictate the pace of events and the outcome. Even in limited interventions, the use of overwhelming force helps American forces keep the initiative and create the conditions for success. It also helps minimize the casualties and costs of protracted or attritional warfare. Although this is often referred to as the “Powell Doctrine,” it is in fact a classic tenet of military action. The official history of World War II notes that “the efficient commander does not seek to use just enough means but an excess of means. A military force that is just strong enough to take a posi-

39 Summers, *The New World Strategy*, p. 45.

tion will suffer heavy casualties in doing so; a force vastly superior to the enemy's will do the job without serious loss of men."⁴⁰

Many types of intervention are inherently resistant to this formula. Peacekeeping, for example, relies on the consent and cooperation of the local factions in order to succeed. The peacekeepers themselves cannot guarantee the outcome no matter how efficient their operations. It is for this reason that peacekeeping missions can carry on for 20 years on the Golan Heights, 30 years on Cyprus, or 40 years in India and Pakistan with no conclusion. This also could become the case in Bosnia, where U.S. forces have been deployed to a volatile environment without being able to create the conditions for success. Such interventions should be avoided, since they offer no control over what return can be expected from America's military sacrifices. The U.S. should not be interested in make-work military options in which a "draw" is a good result.

However, because the U.S. is the world's military superpower, American forces will be involved in multilateral peacekeeping or other inconclusive interventions. It is imperative that the U.S. play only a supporting role in these indecisive multilateral ventures. The U.S. should promote a sensible division of labor in multilateral operations; America is not just another power. Using U.S. leadership in this way will extend American resources and allow the U.S. to focus on those crises in which the American role can be both unique and decisive. Faced with all manner of security crises, both great and small, the U.S. should function much as the Mayo Clinic does in an unhealthy world: American combat troops should not make a house call for every case of nighttime heartburn, but instead should support local doctors as the need arises. More important, the forces of the U.S. should be committed to those illnesses that are truly consequential and for which the unique and decisive capabilities of the American military are most needed and most effective.

The U.S. also must decide when to work under the rubric of an international organization, as part of a coalition of the willing, or on its own. As a rule, if a military intervention is worth doing, it is worth doing alone. However, operating with the support and assistance of allies can offer tremendous political and military advantages. Another factor that must be recognized is the constraints presented by international organizations. An alliance such as NATO has the political legitimacy, military authority, and practiced procedures for mounting and deploying significant military operations; an organization such as the U.N., however, is not capable of forming, directing, and employing large military forces in pursuit of ambitious objectives. It is inhibited by the constraints inherent in a 185-member voluntary organization. The U.N. has neither the legitimacy nor the authority that would allow it the resources and procedures for forming and controlling complex military operations.

The more complex a military operation becomes, the more it will require a stringent, rehearsed, and reliable command and control structure that can be provided only by a practiced alliance structure or a coalition dominated by a major power. A coalition of the willing, such as that in the Persian Gulf War, can be a tremendous success as long as there is a clear unity of effort and purpose among coalition partners and a legitimate and authoritative framework for command and control. Any time U.S. combat forces are involved in

40 Mark Watson, *U.S. Army in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 1950), quoted in *ibid.*, p. 232.

coalition operations, the United States should work either as the lead nation or in a parallel command and control structure where American troops remain under U.S. command and control. U.S. troops should never be put under non-U.S. command and control structures in order to “balance” coalition forces on paper; they must always have the operational autonomy to succeed through operations based on American training and doctrine.

CODIFYING A MILITARY INTERVENTION POLICY

The Administration and Congress should institutionalize these steps in order to provide strategically sound criteria for military intervention in the post-Cold War world. The goal should be for Congress to have some oversight over America’s military interventions without usurping the President’s duty to form and implement a national military strategy. The President should codify his military intervention policy in a Presidential Decision Directive similar to PDD-25, but addressing more than multilateral peace operations. Unfortunately, there is no legal recourse against a President who insists on making poor strategic decisions. However, Congress can take steps to redress this problem through the National Security Strategy. This is a presidential document required by Section 603 of the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Department Reorganization Act of 1986. In this document, the President is required to lay out his national security strategy: when, where, why, and how he intends to use America’s armed forces in promoting the goals of the nation.

Because President Clinton’s National Security Strategy has failed to provide constructive criteria about America’s role in the world and how the U.S. armed forces will support that role, Congress should consider an amendment to the 1997 defense authorization bill requiring the President to:

- ① **Prioritize national interests** and specify national security interests that the President will support through military intervention.
- ② **Stipulate the criteria**, such as the five listed here, that will be used to discriminate when, whether, where, and how the U.S. will undertake a military intervention.
- ③ **Specify the criteria** used to decide when and in what capacity the U.S. will participate in multilateral military operations through coalitions, alliances, and other multilateral structures.
- ④ **State unequivocally** that he will consult Congress before launching military interventions that are not national emergencies.
- ⑤ **Declare** that U.S. military forces in interventions abroad will have clearly defined, decisive, and attainable military objectives that can be achieved decisively through proven military doctrine.

CONCLUSION

There is always a measure of political and military risk to military intervention. However, by establishing workable criteria, the United States can minimize those risks or, at the very least, ensure that risks are consistent with costs. The Clinton Administration has not done well in measuring the value of its interventions and has persisted in costly and inconclusive operations on the periphery instead of focusing on America’s core interests. By refusing to prioritize the value of national interests, the Administration has failed to under-

stand the price, in magnitude and duration, that the American people are willing to pay to protect these interests.

Strategic priorities lend clarity and coherency to a national security strategy that addresses criteria for military intervention. They also help to allocate America's finite means among the many different challenges facing the U.S. today. Failing to match means to ends results in a credibility gap and severely strained forces, a condition the United States is approaching today.⁴¹

In addition, if a military intervention is worth undertaking, and is better than other options, it also must be accomplishable. Thus, the U.S. must set clearly defined and achievable military objectives that the armed forces can achieve through their proven operational doctrine. Empty political "signaling" that overrides military requirements for successful operations is ultimately self-defeating. Most important, the objectives U.S. military forces achieve must be able to stand alone as politically decisive; the U.S. should not be in the business of making strategic gestures that are transient and easily reversible. Intervention must achieve a goal that serves the long-term security interests of the United States.

The U.S. owes it to its armed forces to give them every conceivable advantage in any intervention. This includes giving them enough autonomy to create the conditions they will need to succeed. It also means that when working in a multilateral framework, U.S. forces should have a unique and decisive role that makes sense for a global leader with singular capabilities. Finally, by keeping Congress and the American people involved, the President can assure that the value of his objective is understood by all and that the benefits from military intervention are worth the costs in blood and treasure.

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41 Many have written that the credibility crisis is already upon the U.S. See Jonathan Clarke, "Rhetoric Before Reality," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 5 (September/October 1995), pp. 2-7.

