

Editorial

‘The ultimate goal of our military force is to accomplish the objectives directed by the National Command Authorities. For the joint force of the future, this goal will be achieved through full spectrum dominance – the ability of US forces, operating unilaterally or in combination with multinational and interagency partners, to defeat any adversary and control any situation across the full range of military operations.

The full range of operations includes maintaining a posture of strategic deterrence. It includes theater engagement and presence activities. It includes conflict involving employment of strategic forces and weapons of mass destruction, major theater wars, regional conflicts, and smaller-scale contingencies. It also includes those ambiguous situations residing between peace and war, such as peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations, as well as noncombat humanitarian relief operations and support to domestic authorities.

The label full spectrum dominance implies that US forces are able to conduct prompt, sustained, and synchronized operations with combinations of forces tailored to specific situations and with access to and freedom to operate in all domains – space, sea, land, air, and information. Additionally, given the global nature of our interests and obligations, the United States must maintain its overseas presence forces and the ability to rapidly project power worldwide in order to achieve full spectrum dominance.’

United States Department of Defence: Joint Vision 2020, 30th May 2000

For many years students of military doctrine have needed some lifeline, to maintain an ever more tenuous link with reality. The explosion of technical capacity has blown apart old notions of what constitutes reality. If this mental upheaval had liberated men’s imaginations to engage such problems as world poverty, there might have been much good in it. But such concerns are not respectable among practical statesmen, who find it easier to look into the problems of domination.

‘Full spectrum dominance’ is a product of prolonged thinking of the unthinkable, and it is a permanent preoccupation of some of the more thoughtful members of the military establishment of the United States. Those whom the Gods would destroy ...

Now the Western press reports that within weeks of his installation, President Bush is already planning to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972, widely seen as a pillar of global security. For Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, this Treaty is reported to be ‘ancient history’, and by an Orwellian leap, ‘Cold War thinking’. That is why Senator Jon Kyl, a member of the Intelligence Committee, can insist that the administration is ‘poised to withdraw’. For him, the Treaty is ‘an anachronism of the Cold War that prevents us dealing effectively with the threats of the 21st century’.

And these threats are? In all seriousness, John Barry has informed the readers

of **Prospect** that Rumsfeld's fears were validated on the 31st August 1998 by the launch of a North Korean missile, the Taepo Dong-1, which 'turned out to have a third stage'. If it had worked, this third stage would have given the missile an intercontinental range. But this pig did not fly: it fell in the sea.

Other pigs cannot fly, either. The missile which the North Korean leaders would have liked to have had matches the National Missile Defence which President Bush would also like to have. Somebody has drawn a good picture of the idea: but up to now nobody has found out how to make it work. Billions of dollars have been lavished on NMD, and billions more are earmarked. But imaginary NMD, so far, equals imaginary Taepo Dong. The seas are full of the by products of this military imagination.

Would it not be possible just to imagine other expensive systems, without actually spending all that money on them? But the logic of full spectrum dominance does not work in such a way. Let John Barry explain:

'If North Korea – bankrupt, primitive, starving, isolated North Korea – could develop something close to an Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM), the world really was a more threatening place.'

The logical conclusion was, he went on,

'America's thirty-five year debate about missile defences was suddenly over'.

For those who retain that subversive link with reality, of course, the argument is that because North Korea can draw a picture of a three-stage missile, America should draw more pictures of an anti-missile shield. After spending obscene amounts of money, both countries can initiate tests, neither of which may function. But the real world is really mad, and the mere thought that if those poverty stricken Koreans tried hard, they might one day find a way of getting their third stage to work, implies that full spectrum dominance depends on an American capacity to shoot it down, even if it is down already.

To this end, the allies must be intimidated into believing that deployment is inevitable. The adversaries, (yesterday's 'partners', and today's 'competitors',) must also be intimidated. But they have a choice. They can, if they do not approve of the unilateral destruction of the ABM Treaty, manufacture very large numbers of missiles capable of saturating the new defence, even before it has been finally perfected. As President Chirac has informed us

'This is the age-old battle between the sword and the shield: and invariably the sword will win.'

President Bush has lost no time whatever in asserting the practical consequences of full spectrum dominance. Unfortunately, he has enunciated the consequences of the new doctrine before he has set its material prerequisites in place.

In the year 2000, President Jiang Zemin of China, and Russian President Putin issued a joint statement to insist that it is 'of vital importance to maintain and strictly observe the ABM Treaty'. Both China and Russia have the means, if not

the wish, to multiply their strategic nuclear arsenals to the point which could swamp the new defence of the United States, if we were to accept that an early and workable prototype of National Missile Defence could actually be set in place. In spite of the fact that President Bush has not yet achieved his aim, his frequent insistence on it has caused alarm in chancelleries all around the world, and could indeed provoke the very proliferation of nukes which he aims to inhibit.

To enforce respect for his dominance, President Bush has also unilaterally withdrawn from the Kyoto agreements to control global warming, and has provoked very general hostility among all those States which laboured to refine an agreement on global warming. As if to emphasise the issues at stake, an American spy plane is grounded on Hainan Island, and the United States and China are locked in an intricate disputation about whether President Bush knows how to apologise for spying on his 'competitor'. Is all this so far removed from the dogma of full spectrum dominance? Nobody thinks that Chinese planes have a right to cruise the American seaboard, in order to pick up titbits of electronic information, or messages from nuclear submarines. Is it not, after all, an American century, and an American globe?

Pride comes before a fall. Roy Medvedev has shown, in his percipient study of Russian history since the end of the Soviet Union, how much responsibility for the crisis of the Russian economy should be laid at the door of the military industrial complex. To stay abreast in the production of rockets, nuclear submarines, and aircraft carriers, Russia ruined itself. More and more of the cleverest people were deployed in military production, and more and more investment was swallowed up by it. Unkind critics called the Soviet Union Upper Volta with rockets. But the rockets did not maintain the integrity of the Soviet Union: they rather contributed to its disintegration.

Could the pursuit of full spectrum dominance lead into the achievement of its opposite? The American economy is phenomenally productive, and it seems unthinkable that it should falter, no matter how many mad projects are foisted on it. But the mentality of dominance is the secret weapon of self-destruction. Maybe the inauguration of President Bush began something quite novel: the long haul to the re-education of America, and the reduction of domination to absurdity.

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