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Martin R. Steele

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Deep Coalitions and Interagency Task Forces

Lieutenant General Martin R. Steele, U.S. Marine Corps

THE RELATIONSHIP OF ECONOMIC PROSPERITY to security is a matter of particular interest to the U.S. Marine Corps as it considers strategy for the twenty-first century. The threads that tie strategy and economics are complicated. This complex condition is exacerbated by the very challenging economic issues we face within each service. We are all coming to grips with how to provide forces and combat capabilities to meet our strategic vision now and in the future, in a resource-constrained environment. These budget battles are at the operational level, and unfortunately they sometimes cause us to lose sight of the real changes occurring at the strategic level. As our nation struggles to come to grips with a dramatically changing world, one thing is clear: economic well-being is a global issue. No longer can economic and national security issues be treated as separate entities. They are now inextricably linked. This is one reason we in the Marine Corps believe a change in thinking and a new approach to national security is needed.

Lieutenant General Steele assumed his current duties as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans, Policies and Operations, Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington, D.C., on 3 February 1997.

Enlisting in the Marine Corps in 1965, he deployed to Vietnam in the 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division. He was commissioned a second lieutenant at Officer Candidate School in 1967. Thereafter he served in a number of field, overseas, staff, liaison, and command tours in the armored and assault amphibian communities; as operations officer of Combined Forces Command, Republic of Korea; as Deputy Director, Marine Air-Ground Task Force Warfighting Center; and during DESERT STORM as operations officer of Marine Forces Central Command. Since promotion to flag rank in 1993 he has been assigned as Commanding General, Marine Corps Base, Quantico, Virginia, and Director for Strategic Planning and Policy, J-5, U.S. Pacific Command. Lieutenant General Steele holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Arkansas, earned master's degrees from Central Michigan University and Salve Regina College (1985), and is a graduate of the Naval War College.

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To gain a proper perspective, let us break this down into three areas. First, the world is changing, particularly in the way it conducts commerce, and it will be different, possibly much different, in the future. Second, the Marine Corps' approach to the different future that we envision (a future that will hold challenges both in the budget available to the armed forces and in the external security environment—including the increasingly global economy) is much different from the approach many others are taking. Third, the different world that we foresee will present challenges that the U.S. Marine Corps, and the U.S. military, cannot face alone. To meet these challenges we must forge coalitions among government and nongovernment sources. Among the latter are business, academic, and nonprofit organizations.

The Commandant of the Marine Corps has long argued that we find ourselves at a "strategic inflection point"—a point described by Andrew S. Grove, chief executive officer of Intel Corporation, as a time in the life of a business when its fundamentals are about to change. Grove argues that when poised at such a time, one can no longer fight the competition in the same way, because "the rules of the game" have changed. As a result, technology can no longer ensure a dominant market position. Why? Because simply laminating new technology on top of old concepts and doctrine and organizations is useless in the new strategic environment. Instead, one has to try to understand how the environment has changed, anticipate the operational challenges such changes might create, and then conceive and develop new concepts and organizations designed to solve them. Whether we like it or not, an organization's structure has a profound impact on the way its human members think.

The Cold War ended peacefully, but that did not halt the continued development and proliferation of nuclear weapons. This proliferation, vividly demonstrated in the tests of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan in May 1998, does not result in greater stability. As events have demonstrated, it serves only to increase the strategic chaos and uncertainty of the post-Cold War era.

Consequently, Marines believe that even narrowly defined national security will increasingly involve the knotty operational problems of intrastate warfare, hostile operations by nonstate actors, and asymmetric interstate attacks, whether caused by ethnic tension, religious strife, or the economic competition between haves and have-nots. For those who must deal with life-or-death issues on the ground in the real world, what does this mean? The answer is apparent every day, on CNN and in operational summaries: for the next several decades, we will likely be challenged less by the sons of DESERT STORM and more by the stepchildren of Chechnya. Because of the emerging distinction between agrarian, industrial, and information-age societies and the antipathy some feel to our country and its values, there will be an ever-present danger that weapons of mass destruction—be they nuclear, chemical, or biological—may be seen as instruments of deterrence against America.

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At present, there are no clear *mortal* strategic threats or “peer competitors” on the horizon. True, we still can be seriously challenged—for example, if things “go south” (literally and figuratively) in Korea. Also, we have not yet reached the final chapter of our Persian Gulf experience. But the magnitude of today’s threats pales in comparison with those our predecessors faced in World War II and that we faced during the Cold War. In many ways this nation is more secure today than at any other time in its history. Moreover, we are spending as much on defense as the next six great powers combined, and four of them are our allies. However, we are missing one key piece of information: a clear vision of the capabilities needed to operate in the future security environment.

The end of the Cold War also means that defense is no longer a subject that excites the American people. We in the military are victims of our own success, as well as of the consequences of demographics and of our shift to the all-volunteer force. Consider that in 1945, in a country of 150 million people, there were close to fifteen million men and women under arms; today, in a nation of close to three hundred million people, there are a little more than one million men and women under arms. In five decades we moved from one in ten Americans serving in the military to one in three hundred. No wonder fewer and fewer Americans are related to, or know, a service member.

An inward focus on domestic issues, in the absence of any pressing external threat, is a natural tendency in a democracy. Unfortunately, this lack of interest in defense issues is mirrored in Congress. Since representative government is designed to reflect the will of the people, it should be no surprise that Congress is clearly focused on domestic issues, with an emphasis on economics. As you well know, members of Congress are not isolationists. They are, however, thinking principally about issues like crime, social security, jobs, and education—not surprisingly, the issues about which the American people are most concerned. As a result, up-and-coming members no longer seek seats on the House National Security Committee or the Senate Armed Services Committee. Reflecting the clear economic focus on the Hill, they vie instead for seats on the Commerce or Finance committees. Moreover, the demographics of Congress parallel trends in the nation at large: where in 1975 more than 70 percent of the members of Congress had military experience, today the fraction is half that and falling. To use my own service as one example, just eight years ago there were thirty-two former Marines on Capitol Hill; today there are but nineteen. Moreover, the few members who are interested in defense are focused on a bewildering variety of issues—ranging from the shipbuilding base, to B-2 bombers, to gender-integrated training, as well as such very large topics as readiness, force modernization, and personnel retention.

As a direct consequence of all this, it is highly unlikely that a clear-cut national security vision can be established. “Containment” is gone, but nothing has replaced it, at least in the American public’s thinking. Marines feel strongly

about their view of the future and what it might hold—but so do airmen, sailors, and soldiers, and their collective views, as you well know, are often diametrically opposed. Each of the services has friends on Capitol Hill, but they, because of their small numbers, can seldom push through initiatives that clearly favor a single service. As a result, I am less than optimistic that a fundamental change soon will come about as a result of congressional activism or a measured strategic debate.

This is not to say that change will not come. It certainly will. But barring a national security crisis that galvanizes substantive strategic discussion, it seems most likely that change will come about as the inevitable result of declining resources. Like it or not, the budget is driving us inexorably toward some very difficult choices. Simply put, sooner or later, both the Congress and the services must confront the fact that at current budget levels we can no longer sustain and modernize our force structure while also operating at the tempo and on the scale that we have been—deployed across the planet, ready not only to respond to crisis but to help ensure economic vitality, stability, and security. For the past three years the Commandant has testified to Congress that the Marine Corps is underfunded, particularly in its modernization account. The same is true for the other services. Something needs to change, but what is not yet clear.

In a balanced-budget environment, to expect simultaneous increases in all the service budget shares defies reason. For the first time since the end of the Cold War we are in a zero-sum budget game: any congressionally directed increases to any particular program or service must result in a like decrement somewhere else. And relief is nowhere in sight. By the year 2000, defense spending as a share of gross domestic product will fall to 3.2 percent, less than in any year since before the Korean War, and less than a third of pre-Vietnam Cold War levels. Given the pressures that entitlements and debt reduction will continue to exert on the federal budget in the first decade of the twenty-first century, it is hard not to conclude that each of the services will be forced to contend with decreased, not increased, budget figures.

Additionally, some economic trends are emerging in the world that have impacts on our views of national security. Businesses are becoming more global in scope, and capital is flowing globally, but trade is becoming more regionalized. The formation of such economic entities as the European Union and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation organization is an example. This regionalization of trade is prompting a focus on regional security. Often this means that the nations involved want to handle their own security issues without the intrusion of outsiders like the United States on their soil, and also that they are less likely to participate in out-of-region excursions. In fact, the “one world government” that so many feared is now less likely to appear. Of course this makes it harder for the United Nations to garner support for operations around the world, resulting in correspondingly increasing calls upon the U.S. military.

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These are some of the social and economic trends affecting the strategic security debate in our country. We need also, however, to look at the interface between the strategic and operational levels if we are to understand the total dynamic. The Marine Corps believes that the current strategic inflection point will result in a kind of “revolution in national security affairs.” This revolution will be the result of four key currents now discernible in our global “fishbowl”:

- By 2025, as a result of a steady *migration to the urban littorals*, more than 70 percent of the world’s peoples will reside in urban areas. The majority of these peoples will live in cities in the world’s littoral regions, within five hundred kilometers of a coast.

- In the increasingly urban world, there will be a *global “trisection”* of information, industrial, and agrarian-age societies, with ever-increasing cultural and economic gaps between them. These gaps will be exacerbated by a large “youth bulge” in agrarian-age countries as well as in the poorer, infrastructure-impooverished industrial-age countries; those youth will face decreased employment opportunities.

- As a result, a *pervasive tension* will exist, as nations and peoples competing for wealth and resources interact. Mass communications will shape opinions and give rise to movements that transcend, and are beyond the control of, governments.

- To this add *rampant asymmetry* in the worldwide military competition. Instead of the homogeneous Cold War threats, built around large armored forces, there will be a “hyper-diversity” of threats, spanning a broad range of technology, operations, and tactics.

So how does the Marine Corps view the situation? The bottom line is that given the economic outlook sketched earlier, we will be able to afford neither the Marine Corps we have now nor the one we need in the future. We might stick our heads in the sand and deny this simple fact; or we can pridefully assume we, and only we, will benefit from large budget allocation increases at the expense of other services. Instead the Corps is preparing for the future through a process called “Sea Dragon,” a five-year experimental effort.

This effort is the focus of immense institutional capital—invested in the Marine Corps Combat Development Command, located in Quantico, Virginia. The business terminology is intentional, because we consider carefully any use of our precious capital, whether human, intellectual, or cash. Also, our planning process for these investments is very much like the strategic planning process so in vogue in today’s business world. Only our cost of failure is higher. By analyzing the pertinent strategic guidance and comparing it against the changes we envision in the future, we develop concepts that focus on our

“niche capability”—not only forced entry from the sea but the increasingly demanding roles of naval engagement throughout the globe, and preventive defense. So the commanding general of the Combat Development Command is the single “commander” for the combat development system, responsible for the development of doctrine, organizations, training, education, and support for operating forces and Marine air-ground task forces. He also coordinates the development of our future concepts and will be the link to the Naval War College’s new component, the Navy Warfare Development Command.

Additionally, there has been an effort to conceptualize a “combined-arms approach” to national security, one based on the idea of building *deep coalitions* among interested partners both inside and outside government, and among international organizations and our allies.

This has been an especially knotty problem to debate, because it often generates accusations of studying a problem outside the Marine Corps’ “traditional lane.” However, at a strategic inflection point the old lanes no longer have meaning. We are convinced that the notion of a “three-block war”—that is, Marines feeding and nurturing hungry children one morning in a humanitarian assistance role, separating tribal factions at noon in peacekeeping operations, and fighting a mid-intensity conflict that same night, all within a three-block radius—requires us to think anew about the problem of operations other than war and to recognize that the old paradigms have indeed broken down.

As a result, we believe, we must spend more time closing the interagency gaps between cabinet departments, expanding the notion of “jointness” to include a new level of governmental coordination, and forging new collaborative partnerships with our allies and nongovernmental organizations

It may even be time to review the 1947 National Security Act—the basic national security organization that served us so well during the Cold War. Although this specific proposal has had mixed reviews, nearly all agree that times have changed, that today is truly not like yesterday, and that we must take a hard look at our “organization for combat.” We need to bring together all the elements of national power, looking beyond the Defense Department—to the State, Commerce, and Justice departments, to other government agencies, business, academia, and the myriad of nongovernmental and private voluntary organizations that operate globally but have complementary goals and share common values. Some are fearful of such a leap into uncharted water, but we hope that the needed debate will begin soon. Otherwise, the current strategic inflection point will be a huge missed opportunity. We are ready to explore what military professionals can do to establish “deep coalitions” applicable to solving the operational challenges of the three-block war.

How would this idea of bringing together all elements of national security work? How can the business community influence the U.S. military’s ability to

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provide a safe, secure, and stable global environment for commerce? Take, for example, large companies with activities all around the world. Their employees are in no way “spies,” and they would properly refuse to “collect intelligence” even if they were asked to. Nonetheless, they interact closely with their counterparts all over the globe. They might find themselves on the scene in the early stages of what could become a crisis, seeing in the normal course of business indications that the nation’s intelligence community might miss—as the Central Intelligence Agency seems to have, in the case of the Indian nuclear tests. If this information can find its way to the nation’s leaders, diplomacy might be able to avert a situation with worldwide implications. Yet we now have no linkage, formal or informal, with this source. Here is a way to improve our “human information” resources without a large expenditure of national treasure. U.S. companies want a stable environment to conduct global business, and they are willing to help ensure this stability.

This is not to say the business community is the only source of valuable information. A Sikh newsletter, one with in effect millions of eyes and ears in India, warned in early May 1998 that preparations were underway for an Indian nuclear test. Another example of a heretofore untapped resource is the myriad of retired and former military personnel who have worked overseas, for both U.S. and foreign companies. They have access to a wealth of information that is not readily available elsewhere. One retired Marine suggested, “We have no desire to become junior G-Men. . . . However, we do have years of experience and knowledge of areas, locations, and information that is not found outside of a few people, in the know.” In a precrisis or crisis situation, their information could prove invaluable. They have their fingers on the pulse of a region, and their information, personal contacts, and experience could help avoid a misstep. Such inputs might not have an impact on the final outcome of a particular crisis, but we will never know until we start to think innovatively and expand the horizons of our security partnership.

The business community—and not only the traditional weapon systems and consulting contractors—can also contribute to our efforts to think through future warfare concepts. For instance, large computer makers work every day, for their own reasons, on security for network-centric environments—an issue that looms very large for the military today. In fact, this is the sole focus of hundreds of their highly trained employees. The military cannot possibly match this focus in numbers or expertise. So, as the chief executive officer of one such firm recently asked, “Why not let the computer industry handle this rather than create four duplicative, not as effective, capabilities?” It is a very good question, and exactly what I mean by bringing together all elements of national power.

How do we do this? The Quadrennial Defense Review and the National Defense Panel gave us some ideas, but these take us only so far into the future.

We need to look further ahead and consider more options. "Deep coalition" partners will find the key sometimes in cooperation with the military, sometimes working with—instead of against, as is often the case—each other, without the military.

In this regard, the QDR and NDP must be viewed as just the beginning of the fundamental debate about U.S. strategic thinking, which in our view is long overdue. With the end of the Cold War, the world is undergoing a strategic shift greater than that which occurred after World War II. Few of the answers to the questions that lie ahead have been found. I suspect that once a true debate begins we will find the answers in organization, technology, and people. None of these will be the "silver bullet." All must be explored and integrated. Again, the real question is, "How will this occur?"

The strategic environment will increasingly call for new ways of organizing to address the complexities that the future will bring. Over the past decade, corporations have quickly adapted to opportunities and challenges in the world, and as a result we now witness economies of scale reaped at the global level, common currencies and skill specializations based on regional similarities, and products scaled down to individual cultural, local, and personal tastes—all over the world. If corporations can change to meet the demands of the world's consumers, then surely governments can change to meet the needs of their citizens.

As America's first-to-fight force, the Marine Corps is often the nation's first response to a crisis. As such, the Corps is not only the first representative of the U.S. government but often the cornerstone of the nation's response. The Marine Corps has noticed that its expertise—in expeditionary warfare, combat in three dimensions, direct action, urban operations—falls outside of what is elsewhere considered requirements. The Corps operates in the humanitarian, technological, diplomatic, and economic realms, and we often wonder why we do so alone, when other government agencies have expertise that fits them to serve alongside us. Given the reality we face and the rich intergovernmental possibilities we envision, we believe that a truly "national" response is needed for crises to which we currently respond only, or principally, with a military force. A variety of government agencies, as well as such nongovernment actors as academia, law enforcement, the judiciary, business, and relief organizations, should be called on to offer their particular contributions to crises that are increasingly multidimensional in nature.

A task force is a natural idea for an organization like the Marine Corps to propose. Over the past four years we introduced the Chemical/Biological Incident Response Force, or CBIRF, to respond to catastrophic events like Tokyo's sarin attack. The CBIRF received recognition for its service at the Atlanta Olympics, the president's inauguration, and the economic summit in Denver. The CBIRF serves as a model for one potential national security environment. It uses

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information technology to tap into a rich network of nongovernmental expertise that the Corps could never provide on its own. Through this network we have Nobel laureates as advisors, universities as consultants, and biological sciences experts for analysis and antidote services. The CBIRF introduces another novel concept: it is subordinate to local civil authority. Instead of having the military charge in and take over, the CBIRF puts first-response capabilities into the hands of those with the local experience and expertise. Such concepts lead us to believe that other elements of national power as well can be brought to the point of policy implementation at the most critical time—in response to crises, when our actions save the most lives, lastingly shape a situation, and have the greatest likelihood of success.

This force would be task organized for the particular issue or problem at hand, bringing to bear the full weight of national capabilities to help solve complex problems. The makeup of the task force would be tailored to the contingency, but it would be formed around a standing command structure. By design, a task force commander would ensure that no individual department or agency dominates the response to a contingency. Because these challenges are rarely purely military in nature, we do not envision the military leading such a task force. Rather, we see the deep coalitions of business, academia, Justice, and State working together, rather than in their own “stovepipes,” as the primary agents for deterring trouble and preventing situations from blossoming into crises. If a crisis does occur, the normal role of the military would be to provide security and stability, allowing the deep coalition partners to solve the underlying problem. The intrinsic value of this task-organized structure is that it would be led in each case by the agency whose mission is most naturally aligned with the nature of the crisis.

Such a sweeping proposal will not be implemented overnight. The Marine Corps realizes that this is a project in its infancy—one with hope and promise, but clearly not one that can be tested tomorrow. We believe that a generational shift must occur—with interagency training, education, and career paths built around such a task force, much as the military’s Joint Staff model has evolved since the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986.

We have forever shed our Cold War paradigm. The world’s security environment has dramatically changed. National security changes need to occur at the operational and strategic level of the U.S. government. It is still too early to predict with any degree of accuracy how national strategy will evolve; there are simply too many options. In the absence of a crystal ball, that evolution can best be accomplished by a debate, followed by a complete rethinking, restructuring, and integration of our security organizations. We must also realize that there are no procedural, organizational, or technological silver bullets; there will always be a need for good people and a sound underpinning in the operational arts. We

will be ready for the future if we take time to think about it, validate new ideas, and allow each service to experiment, and if we operate in conjunction with all the elements of national power in the dramatically changing environment of the twenty-first century.

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This Issue's Cover

Captain Alan Bean, born in Texas in 1932, was commissioned in 1955 from the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps program and entered flight training; by 1960 he was a test pilot, and in 1963 he was accepted for astronaut training. In his eighteen-year career in the U.S. space program he flew (and walked on the Moon) in the November 1969 Apollo 12 mission and commanded the Skylab II space station. Throughout those same years, however, he had been both studying painting and practicing it as an evening relaxation. Upon his retirement from the Navy and the space program in 1981 he devoted himself to a new career: "to paint the moon, to share and to document through my art what we as a nation accomplished with Project Apollo, and to make sure each painting is as beautiful and as accurate as I know how to make it."

Captain Bean's work has a tactile, plastic quality fully evident only in the original, but close examination even of a reproduction reveals glimpses of it: for instance, faint striations on the Moon's surface to the lower left of Apollo 8, and (on the back) on the Moon's surface to the left of the rising Earth, are in fact full-size impressions of one of his lunar boots. (The original paintings are large, some three by five feet.) As George E. Hicks, of The Greenwich Workshop, which handles Captain Bean's paintings and prints, explains in his pamphlet *Alan Bean: Astronaut, Lunar Explorer, Fine Artist*, "To create a textured surface, [Bean] mixes and applies a thick acrylic modeling medium to the board [of aircraft plywood]. As the material begins to harden, he works on the surface by marring it with tools he actually used on the moon. The lunar hammer that drove Old Glory's flagstaff into the soil [and] the core bit used to collect soil samples . . . find their way into, or more accurately, *onto* each and every Alan Bean original."