

GOLDWATER RIPPLES: HOW DEFENSE REFORM MADE THE FIGHTING FORCE MORE DIPLOMATIC

GEORGE GREANIAS
COMMENTARY

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In recent years, critics have lamented the “militarization” of American foreign policy, specifically the government’s tendency to favor military solutions for thorny foreign policy issues. All too often, however, this critique focuses narrowly on counter-terrorism and the exigencies of the “Global War on Terror” while ignoring the other equally significant ways the U.S. military has become more

enmeshed in the daily conduct of diplomacy. These include a more politically and diplomatically engaged chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, more influential combatant commanders, and strong demand for a more diplomatically useful military from Congress, foreign states, and the American ambassadorial corps.

To understand the accumulation of individual practices and changes that have undergirded America's contemporary approach to global engagement, it might be more useful to consider the recent history of U.S. "defense diplomacy." Described as the "velvet gauntlet," defense diplomacy refers to the use of a broad array of tools, from international military education and training to exchange programs, exercises, and U.S. military sales. Defense diplomacy is popular with partners and allies and has been adapted by U.S. adversaries as an influence-building tool of their own. Defense diplomacy, in short, is a habit of American statecraft. But this habit was not a product of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Rather, its contemporary origins lie, unexpectedly, in the defense reforms of the 1980s.

Three early events were critical in institutionalizing defense diplomacy's place in American statecraft. First was the reconfiguration of roles and responsibilities of the American national security apparatus caused by the *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act* of 1986. Second was the defense diplomacy that emerged in the late 1980s between Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. William Crowe and his Soviet counterpart, Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev. Finally, there was the chairman's initiative to press the cause of liberalization in the former Eastern Bloc following the dissolution of the Soviet empire.

American foreign policy analysts and practitioners should understand this history. Contemporary debate on the appropriate relationship between the uses of diplomatic and military power should also reckon with the diplomatic repertoires of the American military and the diplomatic expectations of it from partners, allies, and the rest of the American government.

BECOME A MEMBER

Goldwater-Nichols and the Reconfiguration of the Chairman's Office

In 1982, the sitting chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, Gen. David Jones, asked Congress to step in and mandate major reform of the joint system. Jones argued that the chairman was too weak, that the services were too involved in operations, and that the unified commanders did not have unified command authority. His comments and attendant article were explosive. Legislators from both political parties jumped on the reform bandwagon. They reached a clear and (eventually) overwhelming consensus that broad-gauge defense reorganization was necessary to fix the perceived flaws in the military's institutional structure.

The reformers' intention matters. Congress hoped to make the nation's warfighters better at warfighting. Diplomacy and soft power were not their concerns. Instead, they wanted to build a more interoperable and lethal force, one more capable of deterring Soviet adventurism and defeating terrorists. They wanted the military to play a more prominent role in influencing and implementing national strategy. Congressional leaders on the armed services committees thought that if they increased the authority, prestige, and autonomy of the chairman and the regional commanders in chiefs (now called combatant commanders) while simultaneously decreasing the operational influence of the services, that official military advice on matters of national strategy would become both "timely and crisp."

To do this, Goldwater-Nichols and its related reforms elevated the chairman above the service chiefs, making him the "principal military adviser" to the president. Simultaneously, Congress increased the size of his staff, vastly improved the quality of joint staff officers, provided him a four-star deputy, and gave him his own pot of money to spend on combatant commander initiatives. To empower the combatant commanders, the law made explicit that these unified commands had full, undiluted operational control over their assigned forces and that they also had

a direct line of communication to the chairman and the secretary of defense. Together with the elevated chairman, the newly empowered regional commanders were expected to develop and implement American strategy. Goldwater-Nichols created a new requirement for the president to regularly produce a *National Security Strategy*, and combatant commanders were asked, along with the chairman, to testify before Congress annually on this document. Though their stated intent was to solicit advice from these professionals in the realm of strategy, the hearings often required these military leaders to participate in the construction of foreign policy outside the narrow military domain. These hearings quickly departed from strictly delimited conversations on the security dynamics in their region and veered into topics that seemed the purview of diplomats and politicians.

Though these 1986 reforms are well known, their more obscure second-order effects enjoy less notoriety but played a crucial role in the development of defense diplomacy. First, the arrival of the vice, along with improvements in telecommunications, enabled the chairman to travel more. With the vice minding the store, the chairman was free to stay away from Washington for longer periods of time, knowing that his four-star deputy enjoyed deep continuity on joint issues and would be able to effectively represent joint positions to the White House and interagency community. Additionally, the newly minted vice position enabled a subtle yet significant shift in focus for the assistant chairman. Pre-reform, the three-star assistant chairman of the joint chiefs of staff was the chairman's primary liaison to the rest of the executive branch and the White House. Post-reform, the newly minted four-star vice could handle many of these duties, especially regular participation in the National Security Council at the deputy level. This new four-star vice thereby freed the three-star assistant chairman to focus almost exclusively on his most important interagency partner: the secretary of state. The assistant chairman became, as Colin Powell recalled, the chairman's "eyes and ears to that person the chairman had responsibility for providing military advice to but had to be delicate in doing it, and that was the secretary of state." The assistant began traveling everywhere with the secretary of state post-

Goldwater-Nichols, a tradition that has endured. This provided the chairman a window and conduit into the diplomatic realm as well as a prompt to remain engaged with global diplomatic issues even when security concerns were peripheral.

The combined effect of these two developments was a new joint chiefs of staff environment in which the chairman traveled more and longer, the vice could continually keep up with the National Security Council deputies committee demands, and the assistant chairman kept the chairman closely connected to the secretary of state personally.

Okies, Russkies, and Defense Diplomacy's Contemporary Rise

Shortly after these reforms took hold in 1987, the United States confronted dramatic changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The new Goldwater-Nichols-empowered chairman was incentivized to play a role in not just security policy, but indeed all foreign and military policy. Congress wanted a more strategically assertive chairman, the White House solicited more (and more frequent) military input at both the chairman and vice levels, and the regional commanders had a more effective and direct hotline to Washington. Moreover, the chairman was enabled to play a nimbler role in this vein than he otherwise would have been owing to the first- and second-order effects of the vice chairman's arrival. Now the principal military adviser charged with timely and crisp advice, the chairman was drawn further into international political developments even when the military aspect was subdued.

It is common to associate the post-reform military with chairmen Colin Powell and John Shalikashvili. In truth, the earliest glimmers of this new diplomatically alive force began under Powell's predecessor, Navy Adm. (and Cheers star) William Crowe. Chairman Crowe began his first term in 1985 under the *ancien* joint system. After Goldwater-Nichols passed, the more subtle effects of the legislation were

evident in Crowe's unique initiatives, especially in the way he responded to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's charm offensive. Crowe took it upon himself as chairman to establish a direct dialogue with his Soviet counterpart, Akhromeyev. Crowe conceived of a series of reciprocal defense diplomacy exchanges between the U.S. and Soviet militaries. The secretary of defense was "not enthusiastic" about the idea, and the Department of State was, at best, lukewarm. Crowe remembered that senior career diplomats at State did not want some unsophisticated "Okie" meddling in the delicate and rarified art of international diplomacy.

Given these headwinds, Crowe took the sensible course of not seeking formal approval at all and instead simply notifying the White House of his plans. After hosting the Soviet marshal at the Pentagon in late 1987, Crowe planned a large-scale visit for a Soviet military delegation for the following summer. In July 1988, Crowe provided the Soviet delegation with a nationwide *tour de jointness*. Though the more well-publicized of these events were muscle-flexing displays like a naval airpower demonstration from the deck of the USS Theodore Roosevelt, the "nonmilitary" elements of the visit were perhaps more important. Crowe took Marshal Akhromeyev to a series of cultural events including a rodeo, a visit to a Native American reservation, and a Chamber of Commerce dinner in San Antonio where members of the American business community feted the short-statured Russian general and thanked him for his commitment to peace. Akhromeyev reciprocated the following year when Crowe and the American military vice service chiefs visited the Soviet Union and spent an extended period behind the Iron Curtain. Just as Akhromeyev was congratulated by American citizens for reducing tensions, Crowe was embraced by a weeping babushka in Stalingrad who was overcome with relief that there would not be a war.

The Crowe-Akhromeyev exchanges continued into the years to come. Crowe established an interagency working group for military-to-military contacts so that the rest of the U.S. foreign policy establishment could help the chairman manage future exchanges. The warm personal relationship these two men developed

through the visits proved useful during the tumultuous years that followed. Akhromeyev confided to Crowe that *perestroika* was unsettling the country and that Russia's youth seemed to have turned on his generation. He told Crowe that his own daughter wanted him to "shut up and get out of the way" and let Gorbachev's reforms go through. Crowe reported back to the White House and secretary of defense that the Soviet Union was extraordinarily fragile. These exchanges provided the two influential leaders, and their entourages, keen insights into the military capabilities and intentions of their adversaries as well as unique diplomatic intelligence and contacts.

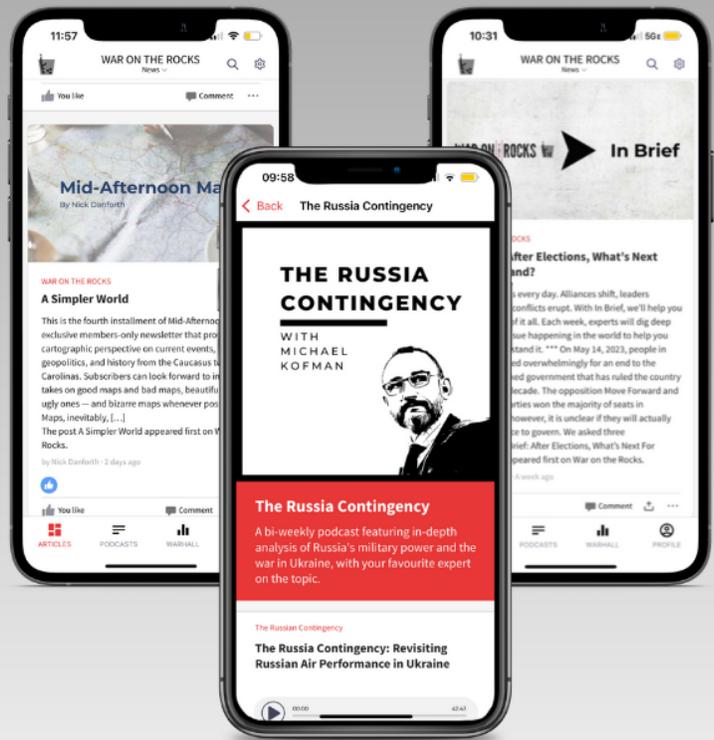
Goldwater-Nichols was decisive in enabling Crowe to launch this initiative as well as to breathe institutional energy into it. Having a capable vice chairman made it possible for Crowe to leave Washington for so long and to carry out the series of exchanges. Further, his leveled-up joint staff provided the institutional heft required to plan, coordinate, and manage such visits, especially when the rest of the U.S. national security apparatus was apprehensive about the initiative.

Crowe's diplomatic push was popular with Congress as well. Testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee in 1989, the senior senators from both parties went out of their way to congratulate Crowe on his program. Later that year, when General Powell was testifying at his confirmation hearing before the same body, he recognized these exchanges as a signal accomplishment of Crowe's tenure and one that should be replicated and sustained.

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A View to the '90s

Once the Cold War era came to its sudden close, the U.S. military tiptoed further into the diplomatic realm. Despite sweeping budget cuts, Powell ensured that the military *increased* its diplomatic role through a large-scale but little-noticed European defense reform initiative known as the Joint Contact Team Program. At its core, this was a liberalization and democratization program designed to prevent communist backsliding within Central and Eastern European militaries. Powell hoped to inculcate foreign military — and civilian — officials with a Western, Huntingtonian conception of civil-military relations. This was a high-demand program from the partner states and the U.S. ambassadorial corps, but it was less attractive to America's diplomatic leadership in Washington.

This somewhat paradoxical appeal — a diplomatic initiative with a lukewarm commitment from diplomats — is a prime example of defense diplomacy’s awkward position in American strategic culture. The national-level diplomatic community was focused on marquee matters of high policy such as nonproliferation, European security, Somalian turmoil, Yugoslavia’s crackup, and especially Soviet/Russian stability. In this context, they worried about the wisdom of decentralizing diplomacy and inviting other non-State Department actors into the space. Meanwhile, two Goldwater-Nichols institutions — the “new” chairman and combatant commanders — embarked on a new diplomatic odyssey of their own to liberalize former communist militaries.

An easy way to appreciate how Goldwater-Nichols made the development of defense diplomacy possible is to consider the demand and supply dynamics for military engagement at the end of the Cold War. First, the demand. The “Visegrad” states of Central Europe — Poland, Hungary, and the former Czechoslovakia — entered the 1990s electrified by both fear and hope. To manage their uncertainty, these states were desperate for any and all contact with the West. While the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was not ready to integrate them, U.S. European Command and the chairman were. The Joint Contact Team Program was ready with liaison teams, training programs, and institution-building initiatives to make their militaries more culturally Western. Conceived of as an urgent, near-emergency measure by the chairman and the European Command commander, this military-to-military contact program was portrayed as a necessary first step to insure against a “third reverse wave” in democratization and as a good-faith down payment on future NATO membership.

American ambassadors strove mightily to support them but lacked capability. Embassies in the former Eastern Bloc were relatively small and weak, given these countries’ former status as enemies. In Hungary, Ambassador Mark “Robie” Palmer asked the U.S. military to develop ties with the Hungarian military. In Poland, Ambassador Thomas Simons pressured European Command to build what

would become the Marshall Center as a diplomatic engagement platform for West and East. In Czechoslovakia, U.S. ambassador and former child star Shirley Temple presided over what remains a large-scale annual pro-American rally whereby the U.S. military's World War II liberation of Czechoslovakia is celebrated. These and other ambassadors enthusiastically solicited support from European Command to bring as much American military attention to these young democracies as possible.

The suppliers of defense diplomacy during this era were eager to meet this demand. Powell was alarmed — as were most others — by the August 1991 coup attempt in Moscow that hastened the Soviet empire's collapse. He directed his staff to create a program of military contacts for the “newly independent states” along with a concept paper he could take to the interagency community. His staff turned the product around quickly, and two weeks after the Soviet Union dissolved, the interagency working group on military contacts (the successor to Crowe's interagency working group) approved Powell's concept. Powell believed that “all contact was good,” and his policy guidelines reflected this. In practice, the Joint Contact Team Program consisted of a series of combatant command-run engagements on a wide variety of “noncombat” subjects dealing with anything and everything that was not maneuver warfare. American contact teams helped partners write their constitutions, develop a noncommissioned officer corps, build their chaplaincies, manage civilian airspace, liaise with their legislatures, conduct public affairs and more.

Powell initially funded the program with the “initiative fund.” This was a Goldwater-Nichols-inspired tool developed by Congress to further empower both the chairman and the combatant commands. Using this funding stream, relying on his own strategic intuition, and leveraging the forums built by his predecessor (for example, the interagency working group), Powell and European Command launched the Joint Contact Team Program officially in 1992. As Powell described America's strategy to manage the post-Cold War era, he specifically called out his defense diplomacy initiative. He told reporters:

We are doing democracy activities. ... Our forces in Europe that are providing forward presence are spending more and more of their time traveling into the nations of the former Warsaw Pact to teach them, to learn from them, to exchange experiences and to help them understand the role of the armed forces in a democratic system.

The Legacy of Goldwater-Nichols

Since Chairman Powell and European Command launched the Joint Contact Team Program, defense diplomacy has only become more deeply institutionalized. Indeed, the program itself was the direct progenitor of the National Guard's robust State Partnership Program, which pairs up the troops from individual states with the militaries of partner countries abroad. These programs frequently serve as bridges beyond the military realm, providing platforms for deeper, subnational engagement for businesses and academia as well. Moreover, the NATO Partnership for Peace program followed the Joint Contact Team Program, and the two initiatives shared a common origin, a common logic, and a common hope on behalf of their participants: alliance membership.

The architects of Goldwater-Nichols were not trying to make the military an implement for global liberalization when they crafted the legislation. They hoped the military would lead the development of America's Cold War strategy and that the chairman would be better postured to present military options to civilian officials in a "timely and crisp" manner. But these very reforms designed to make the military more strategically adroit also served as an invitation for the chairman and combatant commanders to play a persistent leadership role in diplomatic affairs. The chairman and the European Command commander began offering defense diplomatic means to policymakers for two reasons. First, Goldwater-Nichols placed them both in a position where they needed to offer policy solutions

for nonmilitary problems. And second, there was an urgent demand for such initiatives from the countries in question and their American ambassadors. Powell and Crowe offered up the military element of national power to solve national problems in nonmilitary domains. In so doing, they set the U.S. foreign policy apparatus on a course whereby it has become an accepted feature of the policy landscape that the military can do diplomacy in addition to warfighting.

This system has had its drawbacks. As Gen. David Berger pointed out, the U.S. foreign policy agenda appears to be set in large measure by the regional combatant commands. He worries that the United States should be more concerned with managing “global threats” and “global problems,” while the combatant commands draw too much attention to their specific regions. With the combatant commanders wielding great influence, they may prevent the U.S. foreign policy apparatus from approaching issues transregionally.

Nonetheless, the United States would be wise to tread lightly in de-emphasizing the size and remits of the geographic combatant commands. Committing to a more trans-regional or functional combatant command orientation invites the risk of ceding the hard-won soft power influence vested in existing commands to countries like China, which have added defense diplomacy to their own repertoire. Any rethink of the current configuration should reckon with the fact that other countries want ready diplomatic engagement with the U.S. military. Since the 1980s, meeting this demand has been central to American foreign policy.

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George Greanias, Ph.D., is a U.S. Army lieutenant colonel currently serving as a professor of strategic intelligence at National Intelligence University. The views expressed here are his own and do not reflect the positions of any U.S. Government entity.

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