

Applying U.S. Power in the Absence of Global Equilibrium

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BACKGROUND¹

Defending the United States against its enemies is the first and fundamental responsibility of its Federal Government. In his forward to the U.S. National Security Strategy, the President states that "the gravest danger the country faces lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology," and that its enemies have declared their intention to obtain weapons of mass destruction.² To address this threat, the U.S. is building defenses against ballistic missiles and other means of delivering payloads that threaten the security of the American people. The United States will also exercise proactive counterproliferation efforts, or preemption, to deter and defend against a threat before it can be unleashed.³ This paper examines national strategy policy and suggests how missile defense can be integrated into the National Security Strategy of the United States.

NEW AND EMERGING RESPONSIBILITIES

In preparation for the deployment of missile defenses on a global scale, Unified Command Plan 2002 (UCP 02) Change 2 assigned responsibility to U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM) for planning, integrating, and coordinating global missile defense operations and for serving as the focal point to establish desired missile defense capabilities and their associated characteristics, including their supporting systems.⁴

USSTRATCOM was also charged with providing warning of missile attack, coordinating integrated offense and defense options to aid the President and Secretary of Defense, and developing a concept of operations for global missile defense.⁵

The first attempt at linking strategic offensive and defensive capabilities doctrinally is contained in UCP 02 in a discussion of the relationship between nuclear deterrence and defending against long-range ballistic missiles. Should deterrence fail, active missile defenses that can intercept ballistic missile threats offer some measure of protection. By lowering an adversary's expectation of achieving success, the deployment of active missile defenses dissuades potential antagonists from attempting to develop and field ballistic missiles for use against the U.S. The report concludes that missile defenses enhance deterrence and dissuasion.⁶ We suggest looking at dissuasion in a slightly different way, and it may be that the threat of preemption is the most effective tool for discouraging development of ballistic missiles.

PUTTING THE HISTORICAL INTO PERSPECTIVE

The traditional view of nuclear deterrence was generally associated with the idea that an adversary is deterred by the certainty of retaliation. This certainty depended on strategic offensive forces that were developed as part of a reactive strategy. However, the inability to deter some potential adversaries, the immediacy of today's threats, and the magnitude of harm that weapons of mass destruction (WMD) can cause means the nation's reliance on reactive offensive forces is no longer sufficient.

To broaden this view, the concept of dissuasion was introduced whereby an adversary is unlikely to attack because defensive forces put the prospect of the attack's success in doubt. Hence, while rogue nations or terrorists may not be deterred from firing a ballistic missile at the United States, they may be dissuaded from trying such a reckless act because it has little chance of success.

But it may be that dissuasion is not sufficient, either. Terrorists may fire a ballistic missile at the United States merely to instill fear. And even if successfully intercepted, it raises concern that the next time may yield a different result. Hence the need, particularly until the U.S. deploys an in-depth and layered missile defense, for a doctrine of preemption that permits the U.S. to be pro-active rather than reactive. Attack operations, which are preemptive actions aimed at destroying an adversary's capabilities before they can be used, play an important role as part of a new combined concept of operations.

Preemption (acting on the basis of warnings that another nation is making preparations for a future attack) is distinct from preventive war (going to war now because it will be disadvantageous to wait until some future time).⁷ Designed to take advantage of the American fleet's vulnerability, Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor was the first battle of a preventive war. Israel's attack on Iraq in 1981 to destroy its nuclear reactor was a preemptive strike aimed at preventing Iraq from developing nuclear weapons. Similarly, the United States attacked Libya in 1986 to preempt its ability to conduct future terrorist operations abroad. The most recent attack on Iraq by the United States, to eliminate Saddam Hussein's ability to produce and proliferate weapons of mass destruction, was also an example of preemption.

Strategic Offensive Forces

The traditional role of USSTRATCOM has been to monitor worldwide early warning missile launch reports and then to initiate the appropriate response in coordination with the proper authorities. A worst-case scenario would be a massive offensive nuclear counterstrike against a 'bolt out of the blue' missile attack by a current nuclear power. Less serious scenarios could involve observing an unexpected test launch, or informing decision-makers of short range missile events that occur elsewhere in the world and that don't directly affect the U.S. Homeland.⁸

Prior to the disestablishment of Strategic Air Command, the planned U.S. response to a known threat of missile attack involved a series of escalating actions in the context of the Triad—strategic bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs)—each designed to demonstrate an intent to employ offensive forces to inflict

unacceptable damage and hence deter an adversary from launching an initial deliberate attack or follow-on attacks.⁹ Dissuasion was not an option, and preemption was planned on a limited scale. Deterrence was aimed initially at the Soviet Union and later expanded to include China.

In answer to a threat from the Soviets, airplanes could be launched under positive control to signal intent and begin the long flight toward their targets while crisis management was employed to develop options short of war. Similarly, submarines could be dispatched from their ports and sent to safe harbors beneath the sea during negotiations.

The aim of this show of force was to assure our adversaries that the U.S. was prepared to launch an offensive nuclear strike. The assumption, however, was always that our adversaries were 'rational actors.' That is, the U.S. could assume that an adversary's national leadership would react in a manner that protected its country's national interests to include its survival, its wealth, and the general wellbeing of its people. It was believed that any 'rogue' launches would be unauthorized launches from either the Soviet Union or China as a result of actions by a rabidly anti-West faction or a failure of command and control. That perspective changed abruptly in response to actions by North Korea and the expanding reach and stated intent of terrorist organizations to obtain weapons of mass destruction.

The new reality is that low-tech terrorists with access to high-tech weapons and the regimes that sponsor them are not necessarily rational actors. Even after the wholesale destruction of al-Qaeda, continued attack planning by dispersed cells as part of a growing global movement infected by radical agendas, makes it evident that terrorists are not deterred by the threat of retaliation alone. In a recent highly publicized statement by one of Osama bin Laden's top lieutenants directed at President Bush, he declared, "The fighting Islamic Community has decided to send you one battalion after the other, carrying death and seeking heaven."¹⁰ On the other hand, the guarded and secretive nature of terrorist activities argues for the exercise of preemption. The implications of these observations are that preemption may be the best option in certain cases, and that failing, an effective missile defense may be all that separates the United States from the unimaginable consequences of a successful ballistic missile attack.

Missile Defense

Launching a large-scale offensive missile attack in response to an adversarial missile strike grew out of the concept of mutually assured destruction (MAD), a concept that guaranteed horrific consequences in order to deter the unthinkable. Now that the unthinkable is within reach of the unconscionable, development of missile defenses has taken center stage.

The Missile Defense Agency is producing a capabilities based missile defense system scheduled to become operational in October 2004 in accordance with Presidential direction. The concept of operations for the system calls for USSTRATCOM to lead integrated missile defense planning, and for each combatant commander to mount a layered missile defense for his area of responsibility using assets allocated for his use. The concept is consistent with the overall military concept of centralized planning and decentralized execution.

U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) is assigned responsibility for the defense of the Homeland. Informed of a missile threat, the Commander of Northern Command will direct forces at his disposal to intercept the threat before it strikes its target.

Unlike strategic offensive missile forces, which even when launched in response to an attack constitute an act of war, defensive missile forces are always launched to intercept an incoming threat in an act of self-defense with no intended collateral damage. This critical distinction permits differences in how the two types of forces are commanded and controlled, and makes for potentially very different but highly synergistic roles.

THE ACTORS

Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) include nuclear (N), biological (B), and chemical (C) weapons. Groups that might want to possess WMD fall into at least three primary categories:

1. Nations whose leadership can be expected to act in ways that consider their survival an essential part of foreign policy:

- Bulgaria (B), Chile (C), China (NBC), Cuba (B), Ethiopia (C), Egypt (BC), France (NC), India (NBC), Indonesia (C), Israel (NBC), Laos (BC), Myanmar (Burma) (C), Pakistan (NBC), Romania (B), Russia (NBC), Serbia (B), South Africa (BC), South Korea (C), Sudan (BC), Syria (BC), Taiwan (BC), Thailand (C), Vietnam (BC), United Kingdom (NC), United States (NBC)

2. Nations whose leadership value survival, but for whom it may not be an overriding consideration:

- Iran (BC), Libya (BC)

3. Rogue nations and factions that do not necessarily consider their own destruction as a basis for their actions:

- North Korea (NBC), terrorists, international criminal elements

Possessing WMD is not by itself sufficient to represent a military capability. A delivery system, of which an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) is the best known, must also be developed for a nation to threaten the United States. The use of 'dirty bombs' has been hypothesized as a means for special operations forces to plant

WMD in the interior of the U.S., and there are reported fears that terrorists could launch a SCUD from a ship off the coast of the United States.¹¹ The CIA also maintains that terrorists remain intent on obtaining and using catastrophic weapons.¹²

Nations with ICBM delivery systems are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and North Korea. Other nations that possess ballistic missile systems with less than intercontinental range include Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Libya, Pakistan, South Africa, South Korea, Syria, and Taiwan.

Each category of actors may require a different response in the event of a threatened or actual attack, as they are susceptible to deterrence and dissuasion to different degrees. It should also be noted that active missile defense as it exists today is designed to defend against limited threats. Hence, a concerted missile attack by China or Russia could be expected to overwhelm the capability of the system.

APPLYING DETERRENCE

The doctrine of deterrence was a concept developed by rational minds as defined by Western philosophies. The notion was that what would deter the United States from high risk strategies would deter an adversary, specifically the Soviet Union.

As China increased the range of its ICBMs to threaten the U.S. and the doctrine of deterrence was extended to include the Chinese leadership, it was unclear whether China followed Western notions of a rational actor, particularly during the Tiananmen Square events of 1989. Despite these reservations, China has proven to be a consistently rational actor with respect to WMD.

Unlike President Ronald Reagan's intent to bankrupt the former Soviet Union, the recent U.S. decision to build and deploy a missile defense system was an acknowledgement that a new group of actors was climbing onto the world stage, and that this new group might be immune to traditional deterrence. The events of 9/11 made clear that some groups are so ethereal that deterrence may be impracticable and may not even enter their calculus. The U.S. responded to the events of 9/11 by ousting the Taliban from Afghanistan and driving al-Qaeda from its strongholds. However, instead of deterring other terrorist groups from similar attacks, reports suggest that it has bolstered the determination of some to inflict harm on the U.S. and its allies.

Most recently, North Korea has clamored for world attention by issuing a series of threats aimed at inflaming relations with the United States. A completely militarized society, its populace is starving while it arms itself with prohibitively expensive weapons. The recent admission by the Central Intelligence Agency that North Korea possesses an untested ICBM with a range that permits it to reach the continental U.S. underlines the need for alternative approaches to the traditional doctrine of deterrence.¹³

ADDING DISSUASION TO THE MIX

Dissuasion is the notion that without a significant probability of success, an adversary that values its survival is discouraged from attempting to strike the U.S. Hence, dissuasion enhances deterrence.

A question to be yet decided is whether North Korea can be deterred or dissuaded. It seems clear that some leaders are unaffected by either strategy, including Osama bin Laden and a host of other potential terrorists. The U.S. appears to be treating North Korea as if its leadership values the survival of its nation, at least before the U.S. deploys its strategic missile defense system.

THE BUSH DOCTRINE: PREEMPTIVE SELF-DEFENSE

Preemptive doctrine presumes that the U.S. has the right, and even the moral obligation, to intervene in the internal affairs of another nation when the U.S. perceives an imminent threat to its security—even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of an attack. This new doctrine requires political will and imposes new requirements on the public, who must have faith in their political leaders' claims that there is an urgent need to launch a preemptive attack.

The U.S. should expect little support when it exercises preemptive doctrine. France was particularly unhappy that the U.S. might act preemptively against Iraq and headed a surprisingly aggressive diplomatic effort to cripple the U.S.-led coalition to disarm Saddam. Some argued that preemption without overt provocation violates the protection guarantees against the use of force found in Article Two of the United Nations Charter.¹⁴

Preemption could become more common in this new era of escalating terrorism directed almost exclusively at the West and at the United States in particular, generating much debate on what

grounds it is legitimate and whether it requires U.N. Security Council endorsement.

In the context of missile defense, attack operations are synonymous with preemption. An example of preemption would be the U.S. destroying the ICBM capability of North Korea, before it has an opportunity to launch its ballistic missiles. It is this kind of bold and contentious scenario that makes preemption controversial, yet which may have been the overriding factor in Libya's recent decision to abandon any attempt to procure WMD, as well as influencing Iran to agree to more stringent UN inspections of its nuclear facilities.¹⁵

A NEW APPROACH TO OPERATIONS

Is there synergy between these various doctrines, and can this synergy be harnessed to make offensive and defensive missile operations more than just a theoretical relationship?

The following table summarizes the relationships between the concepts discussed thus far. It can be observed that no single doctrine crosses the spectrum of actors, nor does any response mechanism cross the spectrum of doctrines. We observe, however, that nations led by leaders that value their nations' survival may be influenced by all three doctrines.

ACTORS				
DOCTRINE		Nations that Protect their Survival	Nations that Value Survival	Rogue Nations and Terrorist Factions
	Deterrence	Offensive Missile Operations	Offensive Missile Operations	N/A
	Dissuasion	N/A	Defensive Missile Operations	Defensive Missile Operations
	Preemption	N/A	Attack Operations	Attack Operations

These observations point to the need for a new way of thinking that includes a flexible approach that accounts for the actors involved,

and which in some sense compartmentalizes the three responses. The following three figures look at the operational procedures for each response option of offensive forces, active missile defenses, and attack operations.

What Figure 1 reveals about strategic offensive operations is the finality of the decision process. The President's options, other than exercising positive control over whether to respond, have to do with only the magnitude of the U.S. response. It is important to note that only the President has the authority to direct the expenditure of nuclear weapons. Finally, whether the President authorizes a response or not, the threat will strike its target.

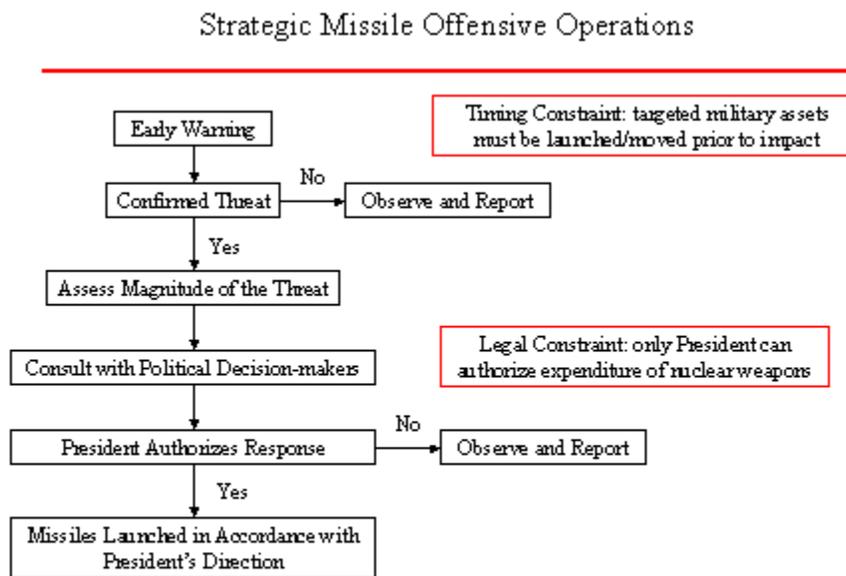


Figure 1

Figure 2 provides operational procedures for defensive operations. The contrast with offensive operations is notable. First, there is a sense of urgency if defensive operations are to be successful, because an interceptor must be launched in time to negate the incoming threat. The second important difference is that the President can delegate the authority to launch an interceptor once the threat is confirmed. There is also a sense that the response is 'automatic,' and action will be taken unless vetoed by either the President or the commander. Finally, and most importantly, if defensive operations are successful, the threat will not strike its target.

Strategic Missile Defense Operations

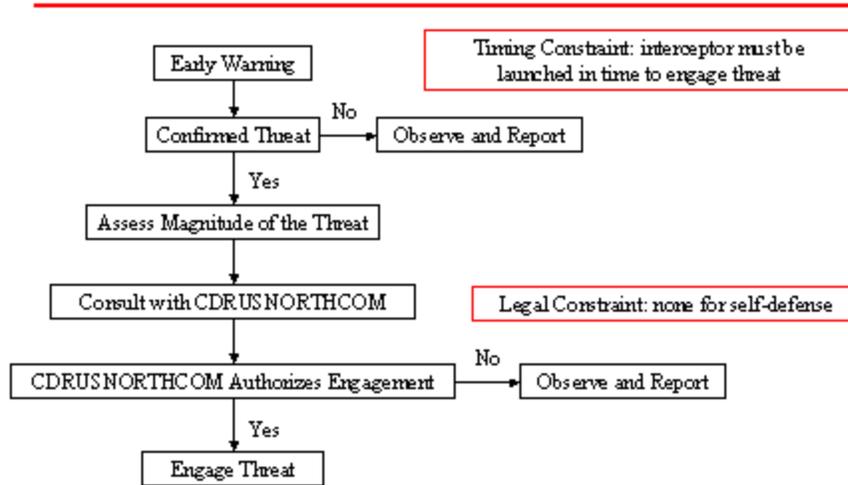


Figure 2

Figure 3 illustrates attack operations procedures. Attack operations can be mounted quickly as they appeared in the U.S. attack on Libya, or they can be planned extensively and for a long time as the Gulf War and the most recent Iraqi incursion showed. Attack options will have to be weighed carefully, because there is a potential for conflict with international law.

Attack Operations

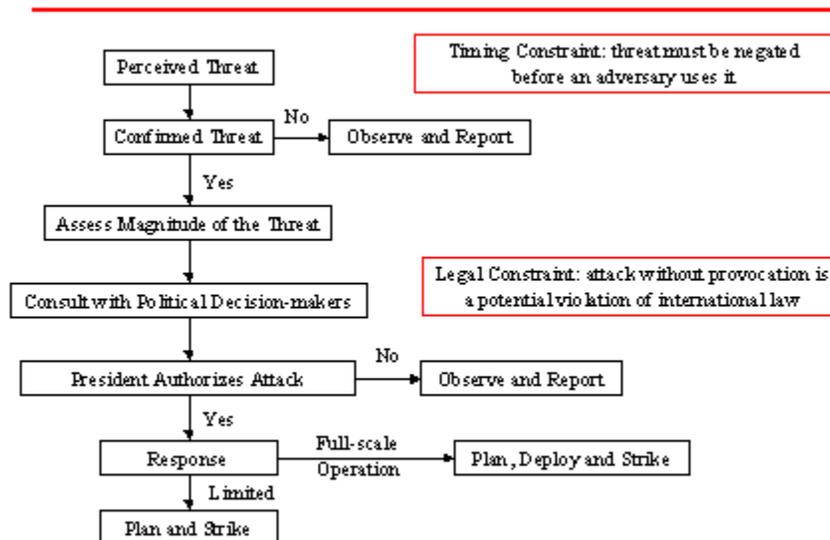


Figure 3

Proposed Concept of Operations

Combined Concept of Operations

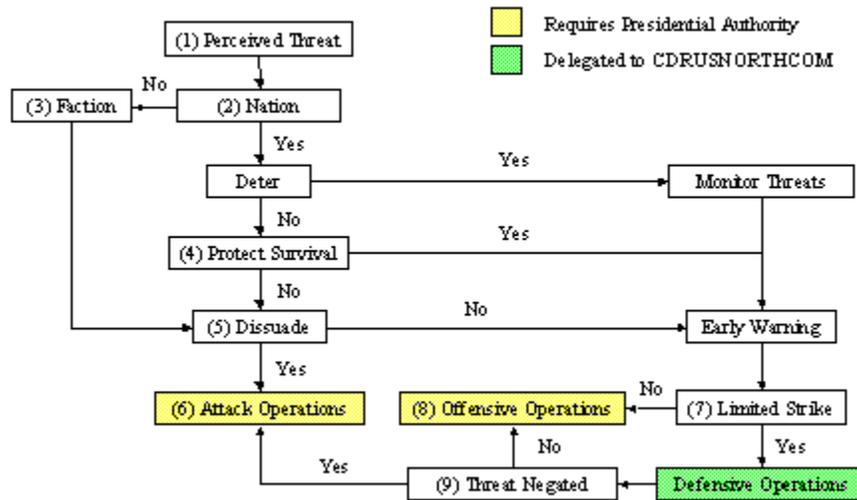


Figure 4

Figure 4 proposes a combined concept of operations that includes our original table, as well as the procedures contained in Figures 1 through 3.

The following text talks to the sequence of events as represented by Figure 4.

1. The U.S. determines that a threat to its national security exists.
2. If the threat emanates from within a nation, the U.S. may attempt to deter its leadership using diplomacy or a limited show of force.
3. If the threat emanates from the actions of some non-state faction, the U.S. will depend on dissuasion to protect its interests.
4. If the nation regards its survival as essential and deterrence fails, the U.S. can expect to resort to

strategic offensive/defensive operations.

5. If the nation's leadership merely values its survival or if the threat emanates from a non-state faction, then the U.S. will depend on dissuasion to protect its interests.

6. Even if dissuasion succeeds in the short term, attack operations might be justified based on an assessment of whether there is an imminent threat to U.S. security.

7. If dissuasion fails, the U.S. can expect a limited strike and will need to resort to strategic missile defense operations.

8. If the attempt to defend the U.S. fails or an adversary launches a massive strike, the U.S. might resort to strategic offensive operations.

9. After successfully negating a limited threat, the U.S. will have to decide whether attack operations might be justified to prevent a future attack.

Implicit within Figure 4 is the notion that the U.S. is always ready to respond operationally to an early warning event, regardless of the employment or success of a particular doctrine. Also implicit is that defensive operations can be conducted rapidly to protect the Homeland, while strategic operations and their grave consequences require the deliberate involvement and authority of the President.

This distinction between the authority exercised under strict time constraints to protect the nation using active missile defenses to intercept limited strikes, and the deliberate authority required to wage nuclear war with an adversary that attacks the U.S. with overwhelming force, argues for the separation of these two responsibilities. Their separation, however, would not preclude USSTRATCOM from informing the President of the predicted success or failure of on-going missile defense operations and then

assisting the President in determining whether attack operations or a subsequent offensive response is required or justified.

Finally, based on the focus of the National Security Strategy of the United States, the proposed concept of operations is germane to all global threats and U.S. response options.

THE NEW ENVIRONMENT

Missile defenses are becoming an integral part of the U.S. national security strategy with respect to deterrence, dissuasion and preemption. However, in light of the fact that active missile defenses will be limited in nature when first deployed, reactive strategic offensive forces will retain their role as the primary shield of deterrence. Active missile defenses, meanwhile, will be restricted to dissuading limited strikes that involve unauthorized or accidental launches from Russia or China, or launches by rogue nations and terrorist factions. Nevertheless, the use of missile defenses is preferable to offensive forces, particularly if the possibility of a ballistic missile attack against the West becomes more likely.

As U.S. missile defenses increase in number and the systems that comprise them become more capable and robust, it could be that dissuasion will become the dominant aspect of U.S. policy, ahead of deterrence, and in fact make preemption less necessary (although the threat of WMD and catastrophic attacks using alternative and human delivery systems may guarantee preemption a permanent role in U.S. policy). Senior decision-makers must be made aware of these seemingly subtle yet significant implications to military and political policies.

A concept of operations consisting of deterrence, dissuasion, and preemption, including the use of both strategic offensive forces and active missile defenses, should be developed and implemented by USSTRATCOM and the U.S. combatant commands. In the absence of equilibrium, the strength and determination of the United States must be brought to bear in a constructive and synergistic way to ensure a global balance of power that favors freedom.

NOTES

1. Dr Grier is a Research Staff Member with the Institute for Defense Analyses, and Mr Rapkoch is a Senior Systems Engineer with L3-Communications/SYColeman. Both are

assigned to the Joint National Integration Center as part of the Command and Control, Battle Management, and Communications Directorate. Both are retired military officers. The views expressed here are their own.

2. The National Security Strategy of the United States, U.S. Government Printing Office, September 2002, p iii.
3. Ibid, pp 14-15.
4. Unified Command Plan 2002 (UCP 2), Change 2, Core Messages, 7 January 2003.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. 'Preventive attack' has been suggested as a term to distinguish between preempting near-term and long-term threats.
8. The U.S. Homeland is defined as the 50 states and the District of Columbia.
9. Nuclear bombers are no longer part of the concept. They were stood down by former President George Bush in 1991.
10. MSNBC Website, Associated Press, 24 Feb 2004.
11. The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, Eyes on the Skies, discussion with Donald Rumsfeld and Richard Garwin led by Margaret Warner, 15 Jul 1998, www.pbs.org/newshour.
12. MSNBC Website, CIA Director George Tenet, quoted by the Associated Press, 24 Feb 2004. Catastrophic weapons are any that cause significant numbers of casualties such as aircraft or car bombs.
13. MISSILE DEFENSE BRIEFING REPORT NO. 44, March 13, 2002, American Foreign Policy Council, Washington, DC.
14. Article Two of the United Nations Charter states, "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations."
15. Both decisions occurred within weeks of each other in late 2003.

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