

# **The Objective is Influence, not Presence or Its Influence (not Presence) Stupid!**

by

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"Presence" has become something of a watchword [slogan] among those involved in charting America's future security policy and fashioning the military forces designed to support it. Because the forward deployment of American military forces will be constrained by both budget and political limitations, our national strategy now includes forward presence, instead of forward deployment, as one of its four fundamental elements. In the midst of a roles and missions reevaluation and increasingly tight budgets, the armed services have embraced a loosely defined concept of presence with a certain rhetorical flourish. The Navy- Marine Corps made forward presence a centerpiece in its slick "From the Sea" strategy White Paper and recently the Air Force Chief of Staff, General Merrill McPeak, argued that the concept needs to be more broadly viewed to take into account the "global presence" capabilities of space forces. But as the Armed Services and their advocates continue posturing and turning up the rhetoric about presence, the real complexities inherent in the use of American military forces to support identified national security objectives are being missed [ignored].

The objective of military presence is not simply to be present as events occur, the objective is to influence those events. Unfortunately, military presence can easily masquerade as the objective and the argument over which particular service or mix of forces can best attain the desired presence can dominate the debate and exclude other considerations. Presence and influence are related, but they are not synonymous. Presence, the mere fact or condition of being present, is much easier to achieve. It can be achieved in some special circumstances by sending a carrier battle group or amphibious force, in a greater number of circumstances by rapidly deploying Army elements, or in the greatest number of instances by the sudden impact of air power from Air Force warplanes quickly launched from distant bases--including those in the continental United States. In all these cases, presence is designed to shrink the time and distance equation so a potential military response will seem more immediate and visible. Still, the debate over who can best provide presence while limiting vulnerability and danger to US lives causes a loss of focus on the more important objective: influence.

Presence is only a component of influence (which is a much more sophisticated and in some ways subtler concept). Influence is also a much more elusive objective than presence. The influence military forces can exert in the international arena is related to their presence (or capability to be present), their core capabilities, the political will to use those forces, and, most importantly, the perception of those who you seek to influence. Moreover, in this complex world, the US military will be required to exert influence in ways not directly related to war fighting; i.e., missions like transporting and distributing humanitarian aid, providing health and physical services in support of relief efforts, and peacekeeping duties. Contrary to the current debate over which types of forces will best provide presence, the real question is: which forces will work

successfully across the widest possible spectrum of events to influence future international situations?

The answer to that question is not as simple as the slogan makers seem to make it. Mere presence is no guarantor of influence; after all, the United Nations and American Express are present virtually everywhere but their influence is at best limited. For example, great claims are made about the Navy's ability to operate in the world's coastal or littoral areas and thus, so the argument goes, making it the most visible and flexible service to support forward presence. What these proponents do not acknowledge is that littoral presence may or may not provide an avenue for achieving influence. In effect, a naval presence adds only the possibility for influence.

Because influence, particularly when it involves actual combat or immediate threat of combat, is the product of both capabilities and the perceived will or intention to use those capabilities, the political will of the US to put its military forces in harm's way becomes immediately important. Given the increasing reluctance on the part of the American people and their representatives in Congress to support the use of American ground troops, alternatives have to be explored. One such alternative is air power. As Eliot Cohen recently noted, US air power has both the capability and "mystique" to be militarily intimidating. Air power, as evidenced in Bosnia by the American enforcement of the no-fly zone and the quick strikes in response to Serbian arms seizures, demonstrated its effectiveness as a tool for achieving influence because it is perceived as both capable and also as the kind of military force America would most likely employ.

Nearly three decades ago Thomas Schelling, in his book *Arms and Influence*, wrote of military influence residing in its "power to hurt." With the end of the Cold War and the dramatic changes in the international community, the military influence that comes from that power to hurt must share the stage with the power to help. Military influence in non-combat situations revolves around the ability to respond quickly and massively to the problem at hand. Here also American air power has an unparalleled capacity to exert a positive influence in any region of the globe. In both Somalia and more recently in Rwanda the first, most important, and most successful American military presence was not Marines seizing an undefended airport or Army Rangers patrolling foreign streets, but the appearance of American military transport planes arriving with desperately needed cargoes of food and medical supplies.

Given the growing complexity of the world situation and the difficulty of exerting influence in it, old slogans and thinking do not serve us well. America will have a smaller military in the future, but that military must be able to exert military influence in support of US commitments anywhere in the world. A realistic evaluation of the forces necessary and useful to accomplish national security goals will require vision, thoughtful study of the alternatives, and a clear understanding that military presence does not necessarily mean influence.

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