



The Bunker: There's Got to Be a Better Way

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The military brass go to church with the president

Unrest has been sweeping the nation following the death of George Floyd while in police custody in Minneapolis May 25. A different kind of unrest swept through the national security community late Monday when Defense Secretary Mark Esper and General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, accompanied President Trump through Lafayette Park, shortly after U.S. Park Police and National Guard troops used tear gas and concussion grenades to clear protesters from the president's path. Their destination: St. John's Episcopal Church, where protesters had started a fire in the basement nursery on Sunday. Their mission: let Trump brandish a Bible.

Earlier in the day, during a conference call, Trump pledged to send in the military to quell the protests if he feels it's needed. He urged the nation's governors to "dominate" the protesters with help from their National Guard. His defense chief promptly verbally saluted. "We need to dominate the battlespace," Esper told the governors. "The sooner that you mass and dominate the battlespace, the quicker this dissipates, and we get back to the right normal."

Apparently, the Pentagon's top civilian and military officer, complete in battle dress, lacked the foresight to realize that serving as props in Trump's tear-gas procession would diminish not only them, but the 1.3 million active-duty men and women wearing the nation's uniform.

GOING FOR BROKE

More cash for nuclear arms is stupid...and unaffordable

It's been almost 30 years since *The Bunker* floated on air while walking into the Pentagon following the historic nuclear-weapons cuts made by presidents George H. W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev. Here's what Bush ordered, according a secret 1991 memo from Defense Secretary Dick Cheney to the U.S. military:

SUBJECT: Reducing the United States Nuclear Arsenal

Pursuant to the President's direction to me, I direct accomplishment of the following as soon as possible:

1. The United States armed forces shall eliminate its inventory of ground-launched theater nuclear weapons.
2. Tactical nuclear weapons shall be removed from all surface ships, attack submarines, and land-based naval aircraft bases.
3. United States strategic bombers shall stand down from their alert postures and their nuclear weapons shall be removed and stored in secure areas.
4. The United States intercontinental ballistic missiles scheduled for deactivation under the terms of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty shall stand down from alert.
5. Development of the mobile Peacekeeper ICBM rail garrison system and the mobile portions of the small ICBM program shall be terminated.
6. The nuclear short-range attack missile program (SRAM-II) shall be terminated.
7. A Unified Command Plan with a United States Strategic Command to which all elements of the U.S. strategic deterrent are to be assigned shall be submitted to me.

DECLASSIFIED IN FULL
Authority: EO 13526
Chief, Records & Declass Div, WHS
Date: MAR 04 2016



(Source: [National Security Archive](#))

Amazing.

Several days later, Gorbachev did much the same, marking the fastest reversal ever in the nuclear arms race. Alas, the magic didn't last. Pretty much every president since—in Moscow as well as Washington—has been content to set their atomic arsenals more or less on autopilot, cruising along without great changes in the margin of terror.

And now the Trump administration says it is poised to shift the arms race out of neutral to full-speed ahead. “We know how to win these races,” Marshall Billingslea, the White House point man on arms control, **said** May 22. “And we know how to spend the adversary into oblivion. If we have to, we will, but we sure would like to avoid it.” That's a fatuous claim coming from a government that plans to spend—so far—**\$6 trillion** trying to cushion the economic fallout from the coronavirus pandemic.

If you review the **exchanges** between Bush and Gorbachev 29 years ago (handily posted and put into context by the non-profit National Security Archive after they were declassified in 2016), it becomes clear that trust is a necessary catalyst for such action. Trust will not be won at the point of a gun, nuclear or otherwise. Even if the U.S. could afford to buy a bigger one.

THERE'S GOT TO BE A BETTER WAY

Fresh thinking on national security

The intense focus on spending more to win the peace, or at least an uneasy truce, suggests that the U.S. is playing the wrong game, and has been for quite a while. It may be time to weigh the wisdom of Baseball Hall-of-Famer “Wee Willie” Keeler to “hit ‘em where they ain’t.” That's the thrust of several recent think pieces, which argue that a wholesale rethink of U.S. national security is long overdue. These arguments tend to come from the fringe because members-in-

good-standing of the national-security establishment all color within the lines. But as tensions mount among the U.S., Russia and China, it is becoming increasingly clear that old groupthink needs to be shown the door.

The nuclear triad, for example, has outlived its usefulness. “The United States needs a modern approach to strategic deterrence that places greater emphasis on denying the ability of other great powers to project offensive military forces by using conventional capabilities rather than the nuclear triad,” a May 26 white paper from the libertarian Cato Institute **argues**. For the better part of the past century, the U.S. has championed “a military-centric approach” that American powers-that-be conclude “explains the absence of a major-power war since the end of World War II” even as the nation remains perpetually frightened. “Despite the fact that the United States enjoys relative safety, U.S. officials see only grave and urgent dangers,” the study points out. Time for “a more realistic and prudent military budget.”

Emmanuel Gfoeller, an Army officer and West Point graduate, says it’s time for “a dramatic shift” in the way the U.S. perceives its role in the world. “Gone are the days of the U.S. Department of Defense being the sole entity synonymous with the management of conflicts,” Gfoeller, **wrote** May 28 on the *Real Clear Defense* website. “The United States now finds itself in a competitive space that transcends the traditional domains of warfare and encourages the mixed employment of power to gain the upper hand.” He’s pushing the U.S. to engage in what he calls “gap warfare,” finding geopolitical nooks and crannies to exploit. It would rely on many tools other than tanks, troops and bombers, and it is something, Gfoeller says, the Russians and Chinese have been winning at in recent years.

Luke Nicastro, a foreign-policy utility infielder, believes the U.S. needs a leaner strategy for the 21st Century. “A successful grand strategy must distinguish between core and peripheral interests, prioritizing the former and limiting investments in the latter,” Nicastro **wrote** May 29, also at *Real Clear Defense*. “With nearly 800 military bases and hundreds of thousands of troops deployed abroad, ongoing combat missions in war zones like Afghanistan and Somalia, and an ever-expanding list of countries we are obliged to protect, Washington remains addicted to a seemingly indiscriminate global presence.”

We’ve heard all of this before, of course. Defense Secretary Bob Gates and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton **teamed up** a decade ago to try to demilitarize U.S. foreign policy, with little to show for it. But that doesn’t mean they were wrong to try. And, more importantly, it doesn’t mean it’s wrong to try again. That’s probably why Gates has **resumed his call** in *Foreign Affairs*.

KNEE TO NECK

On cops and soldiers

The Bunker began his reporting career covering police, and finished it covering the military. The overwhelming majority of those in both professions are great, and a credit to their communities and country. *T.B.* reckons they’re not much different from reporters, or plumbers for that matter. But cops and troops operate under the authority of the state, complete with weapons. Sometimes, frankly, their status as armed protectors inflates their sense of righteousness, and can lead to tragedy.

The Bunker has seen faces that betray that attitude – just look at Derek Chauvin, the Minneapolis police veteran as he stared May 25 into that cellphone lens that ended George Floyd’s life and Chauvin’s career. Chauvin’s been arrested for murder, and his actions have plunged the nation into turmoil. For many of us, there is nothing more reassuring than police officers and soldiers doing their jobs well. And there’s nothing scarier if they go off the rails. It remains a fact that to bring violence to an end, force—either police or military—sometimes may be required. And it will continue to be needed on U.S. soil until social ills marbled throughout American society are banished to the history books.

That requires all of us to step back from the abyss, and commit to fixing the flaws in the American experiment.

FROM THE DoD PRESS ROOM

Adieu to a fine Pentagon pencil-pusher

The Bunker and other military reporters of a certain age may fondly recall **Joe Volz**, who covered the beat for the *New York Daily News* in the early 1980s. His work on military readiness, or the lack thereof, made him a Pulitzer finalist in 1981. 1935-2020. R.I.P.

WHAT WE'RE READING

Here’s what has caught *The Bunker's* eye recently

Bulletproof

Boeing, the nation’s second-largest defense contractor, is laying off some 6,770 workers because of the coronavirus. Fewer than 100 of those canned work in the company’s defense business, *Defense News* reported May 27.

Pro-Vaxxers

If doctors can develop a vaccine against the coronavirus, the U.S. military is standing by to carpet-bomb the nation with it, *Axios* reported May 29. Just like in a real war, where air-defense sites are targeted to clear a path for follow-on strikes, key decisions will involve where to fire the initial vaccine volleys.

Cleaning up

The Pentagon awarded a sole-source contract, potentially worth \$600 million, for washing machines for the N95 masks critical to protecting health-care workers from COVID-19. Unfortunately, NBC News reported May 20, the Battelle Memorial Institute machines begin degrading the masks after two or three washings, not the 20 advertised.

Anything is plausible these days...

The New York Times reported May 26 that President Trump is thinking of ordering all U.S. military troops out of Afghanistan before the presidential election in November. Enough to make you wish he had been in the White House in 2002.

Heck of a week out there. Thanks for hunkering with *The Bunker*, and here’s hoping next week will be better.

