Gen. Colin L. Powell

National Security Challenges in the 1990s: 'The Future Just Ain't What It Used To Be'

For two years during one of the most challenging periods in modern superpower relationships, Gen. Colin L. Powell was the highly respected Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. His tenure saw the continued rise of Mikhail S. Gorbachev and its influence on world power politics. As one of President Reagan's closest advisors on strategic matters, he was at the heart of U.S. national policy-making in its positions in the turbulent Middle East, NATO and Third World affairs. Now commander in chief of the U.S. Forces Command, Gen. Powell recently addressed an AUSA symposium at the Army War College whose theme was "The Future AirLand Battle and Future Army Requirements." Gen. Powell's perceptive and sobering assessment of the United States and the world in an era of "remarkable change and uncertainty" was so well-received by those who attended the symposium that it has been adapted for the ARMY *magazine readership.*

"National Security Challenges in the 1990s" is a heady topic and, in one way or another, is on the minds of many Americans today—and indeed many people in the entire free world.

With his incredible ability to bring clarity out of confusion, Yogi Berra once quipped: "The future just ain't what it used to be." Yogi's mentor and another man who could conjure up crystal-clear logic, Casey Stengel, once cautioned, "Forecasting is a very risky business—especially about the future."

If we consult the experts, we find a wide variety of opinions. I think one of the key reasons we find such a wide variety is no one knows—or at least very few are confident of their answers—and those experts who are confident aren't very convincing.

As an example, our best experts can't even tell us with any degree of accuracy where our chief adversary, the Soviets, are going.

There are those who see President Mikhail S. Gorbachev as some sort of a Machiavellian schemer, able to orchestrate the mammoth Soviet bureaucracy toward a clever plan to dismember the NATO alliance.

Some say that he is risking chaos in the Balkans, the Baltics, Eastern Europe, Georgia and elsewhere, just to get us out of NATO; that he retired one-third of the Central Committee just to impress the European public; and that he is cutting forces just to de-nuke Europe. Oh, he wants all these things but, I submit, the real imperative for his programs is Soviet domestic and foreign impotence and failure. Other experts say we are on the threshold of a new historical era—the Cold War is over—swords into plowshares or microchips.

Mr. Gorbachev, who should know, has no more idea where the Soviet Union is headed than anyone in this room. He has *hopes*, he has a program and, as he said in the Governor's Island meeting in New York last year, he is playing real politics. But he doesn't know the outcome. Politics is the art of the possible. The possible in the Soviet Union is very different from the possible in America.

Front & Center

So what does this all mean to us? Remember the old saw, "What will all the preachers do when the Devil is dead?"

Well, our Bear may be dying—as a political and public threat, if not military. He's still a very formidable Bear and that we must never forget. But as a public and political matter, our Bear is wearing a Smokey Hat and carries a shovel to put out fires.

Although we must remember history and be wary, I believe the chances that the old familiar, ugly Bear will return in time to help us are slim. We can no longer base our policies or programming on the expectation of his return. What if Mr. Gorbachev goes? Anyone trying to replace him is going to look awfully pale against the international scene because Mr. Gorbachev is high quality diplomacy—the kind of diplomacy a Leonid Brezhnev is absolutely incapable of.

Moreover, everyone in the ruling elite—even [Yegor K.] Ligachev, the conservative—agrees that the Soviet Union can't go back. All are in accord that change is mandatory. Some people question the speed, type and degree of change, but none the critical need. People keep counting Mr. Gorbachev out, but he keeps getting stronger.

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Any successor to Mr. Gorbachev will inherit the same problems. Would a new [leader] move the Soviet Union one step toward solving its fundamental problems by [turning] and again threatening the West or [just] seeing if they can challenge our alliances, adding another Ethiopia, Cuba, North Korea or some other basket case to their column? I wouldn't bet on it.

He would find it hard to put the intelligentsia back in the Aladdin's lamp from which they've sprung. Or the nationalities? Or Eastern Europe? This time, the world and [we] are watching.

The Soviet system is bankrupt and President Gorbachev is the trustee. It's difficult to imagine anyone even envying his position, let alone actively pursuing it.

We hope, as President Bush has said on several occasions, that for the benefit of the Russian people and the over one hundred other nationalities within the USSR, Mr. Gorbachev succeeds in meeting some of the objectives he has set for his country.

We hope, too, that in that success will be seeds of a less aggressive and less adventurous some foreign policy will be sown. We already see evidence of that around the world.

We hope that eventually Soviet leaders will realize that systemic change is the only one that will bring sweeping results and that at the heart of any systemic change are freedom, human rights, real democracy, and a free market economy. Even if they realize

e problem is their political ideology, expect that to change.

nwhile, the Bear looks benign.

morrow morning we opened NATO v members, we'd have several new ants on our agenda within a week—d, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Yugo- maybe Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and e even the Ukraine.

act, members of the now-public oppo- parties in Soviet Georgia actually de- in May whether their region's future l include nonalignment or membership ATO.

s not give Mr. Gorbachev all the credit me for the national security environ- we're entering. What about our own ry? What about the change in America n before Mr. Gorbachev came along? 've had a changing public consensus in ica since about 1986. In the mid to late ties we had a post-Vietnam depression kept us from shouldering the responsi- s of a superpower.

began recovering from that depression 79 and 1980, in part because of the ac- taken by the Soviets in the waning of the Brezhnev doctrine. These actions inated in the invasion of Afghanistan. e other part of the reason for our re- ry was that our retreat from the world precipitated some disastrous events. The f the Shah in Iran climaxed these events. e American public reacted and gave the gan Administration an overwhelming date for restoring America's strength its will to use that strength when and re it was needed.

/ith domestic problems, well-publicized urement scandals, economic and trade blems, and an ever-increasing national t, the public consensus began to change. ix-hundred-dollar toilet seats, people with r hands in the cookie jar, cost overruns, bashing and the decreasing value of the lar combined to begin washing away the ng mandate for increased defense spend-

By the mid-1980s, Congress could and did slate negative growth in the defense bud- . Congress reflected the public consensus; l this all happened *before* Gorbachev, re Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, ore a ceasefire in the Persian Gulf, *before* INF [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces] aty and *before* four Summit meetings. Something else was happening in the world, . As the restoration of America's strength s accomplished, some incredible things gan to happen. They happened partly be- use of the Soviets discovering their entire system was broken, partly because of America's restored strength, and partly because of the increasing realization among world leaders that conflict doesn't accomplish much.

I can characterize these incredible things by saying a movement toward democracy and a trend toward peace began to encircle the globe. This encirclement seemed to include every region. The Soviets left Afghanistan. The Vietnamese began seriously to consider leaving Cambodia. The Cubans were ready to leave Angola and the South Africans would guarantee the independence of Namibia. The Iran-Iraq War came to a halt, and the Persian Gulf grew quiet.

Democracies in Latin America increased from 30 percent to 90 percent of the region's nations. Korea and the Philippines and Haiti all moved fitfully but inexorably toward democracy.

And the movement hasn't abated. In May, for instance, Paraguay held the first open elections in the memory of its people—a major step toward bringing democracy to a country ruled by dictators since 1811.

And you saw the turnout of the Panamanian people—despite the ever-present threat of [Gen. Manuel A.] Noriega's stooges.

In short, notwithstanding persistent problems in various parts of the world, the international situation was—and is—improving. It was improving so measurably in January of this year that on my final day as National Security advisor, I gave the following daily situation report to President Reagan: "The world is quiet today, Mr. President."

Americans, who were already more concerned with drugs than with [Nicaraguan President Daniel] Ortega, more concerned with AIDS than the situation in Lebanon, more troubled by the deficit than by cuts in foreign aid, were hit with a gusher—peace breaking out in key troublespots. Peace spreading, domestic preoccupations, a benign Bear, all helped to forge a new consensus.

I'll wager that Mr. Gorbachev is as surprised by what's happening around the world as we are. [West German] Chancellor [Helmut] Kohl's precarious coalition, the hasty pronouncements in the West of NATO's imminent demise, the potential for a realignment of European power, all surprised Mr. Gorbachev—*pleasantly* surprised him. He isn't put out by these developments; he's elated. These developments enhance his political power and enable him to operate in difficult domestic circumstances with a degree of forcefulness he wouldn't otherwise enjoy.

The stirring in NATO and elsewhere in the world he can use to mollify those in the party apparatus who are against him. "Look at what's happening in Europe," he can say. "Did your mighty Red army ever accomplish such a turmoil? Did your tanks ever do what I have done?" And they can only answer him with stony silence.

Underlying everything, the Soviet military machine is still as big, bad and ugly as it ever was. That fact hasn't changed—yet. But I hope it will. We all should hope it will.

The Soviets still have enough nuclear warheads to destroy us and we them. That fact hasn't changed—yet.

The Soviets have an empty ideology. That fact hasn't changed either. The difference now seems to be that they are recognizing the results of that empty ideology if not the barrenness of the ideology itself.

As the Soviets undergo these fundamental, long-range changes, the perception will grow that the threat is receding more and more. Whether the reality of a lessened threat will follow remains to be seen.

These historic changes in the Soviet Union are backdropped against a quieter world. Nations seem to be moving their own way—Islamic fundamentalists, for example—or in the direction of freedom and democracy, our way—but not the Soviet way.

The dangers in this world seem to spring more from its enormous debt problems and the poverty and joblessness that those problems generate, than from irreconcilable East-West tensions.

The free world, responding to its own love for peace and prosperity, welcomes the respite from East-West tension to work on its own domestic problems and the world's enormous debt problems. Much of the West wants rapid movement in accommodating Mr. Gorbachev's initiatives.

On balance, there is in the free world a lessened appreciation of the threat and therefore a lessened desire to pay for armed forces to meet it. So what is the consensus now and how do we keep up with it?

First, the American people want us to continue to act the part of world superpower and leader. I believe they continue to want a strong defense.

They don't want a hollow military establishment, but they do want our strength maintained within the fiscal constraints dictated by our having to solve other problems in the world and in our domestic situation—and increasingly by Moscow's apparently softer approach and by the generally improved world atmosphere.

To the American public, and more so to European audiences, there appear to be very few points of conflict in the world with the

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'Year of the NCO'

SFC Miconi Plays Key Role In Maryland National Guard

By Dennis Steele
Staff Writer

When SFC Gary Miconi was a junior NCO in the regular Army a few years back, most people would not have recognized him. If anybody had, it could have gotten him killed. For a while back then, he kicked around the Ft. Meade and Baltimore, Md., area with a sordid crowd, hanging out in seedy places at odd hours and keeping his ears open for information about drug activity. That was his job.

He lived in an off-post apartment littered with paraphernalia—scales, roach clips, pipes—the sort of things any midlevel dealer would be expected to have around if somebody dropped over. His hair was long. In every aspect of his appearance, he was a hip, single, 20-year-old who made his living by buying and selling dope.

He wore T-shirts and grungy jeans, and he had a snub-nosed Smith & Wesson revolver tucked in the small of his back in case things went sour. There was always the chance things could go sour.

He was undercover—as deep as he could get in the local drug trade—and if anybody in the trade had discovered what he was up to, there was a real chance he could have ended up face down in a ditch some

In his last regular Army assignme Miconi was a military police inves assigned to the Ft. Meade Provost Ma Office. Working with civilian police cies in the surrounding community, he h to put a lot of dealers out of busine

Today, as a member of the Active G and Reserve (AGR) program, Sgt. Mic helps keep the Maryland National Gu business.

His hair is short. He wears a unifo work every day. He lives with his wi two children in a house in the Baltimor urbs, and his antidrug work now is im ment in local youth programs to kee from ever getting mixed up with drugs first place.

There has been quite a change in Miconi's life-style; but there has bee change in his attitude of doing whate

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potential to lead to superpower confrontation.

So we have not lost the consensus for a strong defense, but that consensus has changed. The *bottom line is that we can't act in the 1990s as if we had the same public consensus of the early 1980s* or as if the geopolitical situation is the same.

You can't count on real growth in the defense budget, in terms of the kind of growth we had in the early 1980s. The last five negative growth years each started out as a real growth proposal.

Will the Soviets, who can't meet the demands of the next century except to stagger into it like a punch-drunk behemoth, any time soon generate the threat necessary to convince Americans to return to the defense spending levels of the early eighties? I don't believe so—in fact, I believe the American public wants us to take advantage, cautiously, of these new opportunities.

In this world where television cameras are on the scene *before* the ambulances and fire trucks, perceptions are reality. In fact, perceptions are frequently *more* than reality because a perception that's wrong but taken for real is ten times more volatile and dangerous than an adverse reality perceived correctly.

The perception in some circles seems to be that, given the historical ups and downs of the defense budget, all we need to do is hang on for a couple of years and the Bear will be back and real growth will be restored, that having too much program for the dollars available will somehow work itself out.

I don't believe it will. I believe we're going to have to make some hard choices. In a certain ironic sense, we're going to have to meet the challenge suggested by [then Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Richard L.] Armitage when he described our recent Persian Gulf policy: "I would suggest, in all modesty, that learning to accept and live with success is, for us Americans, perhaps our greatest challenge."

The last 40 years, and particularly the last eight years of a resurgent America, have generated some remarkable successes; and we must figure a way to adjust to it—to adjust to the different public consensus and to the fiscal realities dictated by that consensus.

We recognize our moral and cultural strengths and our tremendous political strength. We recognize that it's our values and the values of our allies that are taking the world by storm and not those of our opponents, but we have an understandable focus on some internal matters —especially the threat posed to the very fabric of our society by drug abuse.

While we still want and will support a strong defense, we want it to be at a reasonable cost. I believe Americans still want a strategic, trained, ready, warfighting Army, too. They expect a good-looking Army they can have confidence in and be proud of. I believe they recognize such a force as the cornerstone of a strong defense.

They support us, but not at any cost. They don't see that as reasonable unc the changed circumstances in the worl

So our challenge in the Army is keep what we've gained over the pa eight years. To do that, to keep the be Army we've ever fielded in peacetim we've got to spend wisely and well.

Remember, the future "ain't" what used to be. We are in an era of remar able change and uncertainty. We've go to keep our sometimes insatiable appeti in check. We must work and develop th competitive strategies that promise th highest payoffs. We must ask ourselve a simple question, but one that's some times awfully hard to answer right: "D we need this?" And when it is right to sa "No," we must say "No."

Our national leaders must map Amer ica's way through the nineties maintain ing as much strength as necessary to avoi putting the nation at risk. Our part of that strength is a trained and ready Army that, irrespective of end-strength cuts modernization slowdowns and decreased budgets, continues to be the best Army in the world.

GEN. COLIN L. POWELL, commander in chief, Forces Command (FORSCOM), assumed command of FORSCOM after serving for two years as Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. Before being called to duty at the White House, Gen. Powell was commanding general of V Corps in West Germany, a command he assumed after three years as military assistant to the secretary of defense.