Top Military Figures Reject Conflict with Russia and China

by Carl Osgood

May 24—Two top military leaders, former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. James Cartwright (USMC-ret.) and current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey, in response to questions from *EIR*, broke with anyone promoting conflict with Russia and China. Their remarks, made at the Joint Warfighting Conference in Virginia Beach, Va., May 15-17, show the level of resistance to such British-inspired conflict from within the highest levels of the U.S. military.

Dempsey has been warning for some time against falling into the trap of conflict with China, simply out of fear of China's rise as a global power.

Cartwright's pushback against conflict came during the keynote address to the conference on May 15, in which he was sharply critical of the process within both the Congress and the Executive branch whereby resources are being matched to the strategy of the Obama Administration.

He mentioned the AirSea Battle concept, which is being jointly developed by the Air Force and the Navy against anti-access/area denial measures being taken by certain countries to keep U.S. forces out of range in case of a conflict. While the Pentagon refuses to say the concept is aimed at China (it is also aimed to a lesser extent at Iran), its proponents outside the Pentagon have no such restraints. Cartwright said some see AirSea Battle as the "Holy Grail" of how we're going to do business in the future, but the problem is, "AirSea Battle is demonizing China. That's not in anybody's best interests." Furthermore, the so-called Asia pivot is being interpreted as the United States leaving the rest of the world behind, when, in fact, we're not. "How do we explain ourselves with AirSea Battle and pivoting?" he asked. "We have to start to think about what the strategy is."

EIR asked Cartwright whether, given the issues around AirSea Battle and China, and the concerns that the Russians have expressed about U.S. missile defense policy in Europe, we should reconsider our strategy towards both countries before we get into a strategic conflict with them.

Cartwright replied by describing the two concerns that have been expressed to him by Russians he has been in dialogue with. One, they're concerned about the possibility of U.S. missile defenses being able to "reach out and touch" their ICBMs and therefore upsetting the balance of power. Secondly, "there's the potential that you could, in fact, generate a scenario where, in a bolt from the blue, we launch a pre-emptive attack and then use missile defense to weed out their residual fires [that is, retaliatory launch of their remaining ICBMs—cjo]. . . . We're going to have to think our way out of this. We're going to have to figure out how we're going to do this."

Another concern, Cartwright said, comes from the Block IIB Standard missiles that are to be installed in Poland and Romania in a couple of years, as part of the Ballistic Missile Defense System (BMDS). "The question is, should we do that? Maybe we shouldn't. I don't know yet. There's more dialogue that must occur between now and then, but that's a very good question, and we have to find a solution."

The 'Thucydides Trap'

The following morning, *EIR* had the opportunity to ask Dempsey to respond to Cartwright's remarks. He denied that AirSea Battle is demonizing China: "AirSea Battle is absolutely not a tactic oriented on any particular adversary. There are any number of countries that are developing anti-access strategies, and, if we hope to maintain our freedom of action, we've got to address them."

With respect to China, however, Dempsey repeated his warning against the "Thucydides Trap," that is, going to war simply because we fear the rising power of China.[1] "There's a huge history, here, of the existing superpower dealing with a rising power," he said. "We ought to be the superpower that breaks that paradigm." He said that there are terrific military relations with China at the service level, and "we're trying to ratchet that up a notch or two."

"I'm one of those who believes that we can manage

1. Thucydides wrote, in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, "What made war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta."

DoD Photo/Cherie Cullen

DoD Photo/Tech. Sgt. Jacob Bailey, USAF

Former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. James Cartwright (left) and current JCS Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey are trying to cool off the hotheads whose policies are stoking the flames of war.

this relationship in a way that brings greater stability, not greater instability," he added.

On Russia, he noted that his Russian counterpart, Gen. Nikolai Makarov, is coming to Washington in July, and that "there are more things that we agree about than disagree," though prominent among the disagreements is missile defense. "This is a conversation we need to have," he said. "There are more opportunities in both relationships than there is liability," although as great powers, they also both have to understand the more complex and competitive strategic environment of the coming period. "There are lots of opportunities for us to work together on things like international terrorism, transnational organized crime, border issues, piracy, and were doing a lot of that already."

What Is AirSea Battle?

The debate on AirSea Battle reached a fever pitch during the week of the conference. Not only was there a panel discussion on it at the conference, featuring a retired Air Force general and a retired Navy admiral, but the chiefs of the Air Force and the Navy were defending it during a presentation at the Brookings Institution in Washington at virtually the same time. Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz and Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Jonathan Greenert went to great lengths to try to explain what AirSea Battle is, and to deny that it is aimed at any particular potential adversary.

The AirLand Battle doctrine of the 1980s, in which the Army and the Air Force developed a battle plan against massed Soviet tank formations in Europe, has been cited as a precedent for AirSea Battle. But whereas AirLand Battle was incorporated into the Army's FM 100-5 Operations manual, no intention to do anything similar with AirSea Battle has yet emerged.

What did emerge from Schwartz's and Greenert's discussion at Brookings was a mélange of ideas as to how the Air Force and the Navy can do things differently, all justified by the "need" to maintain the U.S. military's freedom of action anywhere around the globe. "It's a mistake to apply it to any particular campaign," Greenert said. "Access is an important strategic aim for the U.S.," Schwartz added. "It's what we're responsible for."

The assumption of the discussion around access, however, is that the U.S. military presence in the Pacific is largely responsible for the economic growth and stability in that region over the past few decades. Therefore, in order to maintain that stability, the United States has to develop countermeasures against actions taken by other powers to limit that U.S. freedom of action. In the Pacific, it is hard to see how the description of such countermeasures applies to any country other than China; but a look at the map of the western Pacific easily shows that China, with its heavily export-oriented economy, has a great deal to fear from a lack of access to the so-called "global commons." The East and South China Seas, which are China's access to the Pacific, are ringed by island chains from Japan to the Malay Peninsula, and some of the world's famous "chokepoints" are among these islands. It is in the neighborhood of some of these chokepoints, such as Singapore and Darwin, Australia, that U.S. forces are being re-postured under Obama's "Asia pivot" strategy.

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