*Chapter 15*

# A NEW RAPPROCHEMENT

By the mid-1980s, as Ronald Reagan embarked on his second term, the military buildup launched at the outset of the decade was beginning to show results. Increasingly reassured, the Joint Chiefs believed that they had turned the corner and were now better poised to compete effectively in military power with the Soviet Union than at any time since the Vietnam War. Despite the re-imposition of congressionally mandated funding constraints, starting with the FY86 budget, they saw the balance of forces shifting back in their favor. As always, the JCS wanted more to be done than available money allowed and urged the President and Congress to be, if nothing else, consistent in their level of support for military programs. Yet, all things considered, the buildup seemed to be having the desired effect of restoring both a stronger defense posture and a renewed respect for the country's Armed Forces. Not since the early 1950s had the Nation's Military Establishment felt so assured.

Though more confident in the future than they had been for some years, the JCS were hardly complacent. As the President's second term began, changes in the Soviet Union, highlighted by the emergence of new leadership under the reform-minded Mikhail S. Gorbachev, created uncertainties in assessing the future direction of Soviet policy. At the same time, the ongoing modernization of Moscow's strategic forces, the heavy concentration of Soviet troops in Europe backed by SS–20 missiles, the continuing intervention in Afghanistan, and a surge of Cuban and Eastern Bloc "advisors" into Nicaragua suggested that the Communist threat remained as real and dangerous as ever. Against this backdrop, the Joint Chiefs saw no choice but to continue the defense policies and programs already in effect and to maintain a high level of military preparedness for the indefinite future.

## DEBATING JCS REORGANIZATION

Of the challenges facing the Joint Chiefs at the outset of President Reagan's second term, none took up more of their time or was more frustrating than the growing

movement in Congress for JCS reform. While dissatisfaction with the JCS system had existed ever since passage of the National Security Act of 1947, it had grown appreciably in the aftermath of Vietnam, the hurried execution of the 1975 *Mayaguez* rescue operation, and the failed *Desert One* mission in 1980 to free the Tehran hostages. Over the years it had become virtually an article of faith in some academic and congressional circles that the Joint Chiefs were little more than a committee of bickering military bureaucrats, wholly incapable of detaching themselves from parochial interests and rendering objective advice on such cross-Service matters as the allocation of resources and the impartial assignment of military functions.[1]

At the outset of the Reagan administration, some of the most severe critics of the JCS system were, in fact, its own members, including the serving Chairman, General David C. Jones, USAF. During his early days as CJCS, Jones had dismissed talk of restructuring the JCS as unwarranted and had taken the position "that the fundamental organizational structure is sound."[2] But he had changed his mind by the early 1980s. Having served on the JCS as Air Force Chief of Staff and as CJCS for a combined total of 8 years by the time he retired—longer than any other officer—he found himself increasingly frustrated with what he saw as a lengthening list of JCS lapses, failures, and "lowest common denominator" solutions. "The tough issues," he recalled, "got pushed under the rug."[3]

Jones' discontent first surfaced outside the Pentagon in early February 1982 when he and Secretary of Defense Weinberger appeared at a closed-door session of the House Armed Services Committee. During an exchange with committee members, Jones acknowledged his dissatisfaction with the current system and confirmed his support for measures to augment the powers of the Chairman, curb the heavy personnel turnover on the Joint Staff, and create a more efficient and responsive JCS organization.[4] A few weeks later, he went public with interviews to the news media and an article (cleared in advance with Secretary Weinberger), "Why the Joint Chiefs of Staff Must Change," in the February 1982 issue of *Directors & Boards*, which was reprinted a month later in *Armed Forces Journal International*, with a somewhat larger readership. Characterizing current arrangements as a "cumbersome committee process," Jones described the system as rife with inter-Service rivalry and competition. "We need to spend more time on our war fighting capabilities," Jones insisted, "and less on an intramural scramble for resources." Toward that end, Jones endorsed reforms to strengthen the authority of the Chairman over the combatant commanders, limit Service staff involvement in JCS actions, and broaden the training, experience, and rewards for joint duty. To facilitate attainment of these goals, Jones also favored providing the Chairman with a deputy.[5]

Among the Service heads at the time, only Army Chief of Staff General Edward C. Meyer showed any interest in Jones' proposals. Arguing that times had changed since World War II when the JCS came into existence, Meyer considered the existing system obsolete. Going well beyond Jones' proposals, Meyer wanted to abolish the Joint Chiefs and vest full authority over military planning and direction of the Joint Staff in the CJCS.[6] But after General Vessey's appointment as Chairman in the summer of 1982, Meyer muted his criticism. Vessey and Weinberger agreed that while the JCS system could be improved, its corporate structure and organization were sound and whatever reforms were needed could be achieved through administrative means. Indeed, for Vessey, the very essence of the JCS system was its corporate character, which he was loath to tamper with in the name of progress and reform.

After discussing the matter at length with the Service chiefs, Vessey notified the Secretary of Defense on November 22, 1982, that he could find no consensus among his colleagues in support of "sweeping changes." While conceding that their operations were not without "flaws," there was agreement among the Joint Chiefs that the problem stemmed largely from tensions that had developed over time between OSD and the JCS because of overlapping responsibilities. Vessey declined to assign blame for this situation but did acknowledge that the JCS needed to be more professional and objective in providing military advice. Still, he and his colleagues saw little they could do directly and felt that it was up to the Secretary of Defense to take corrective action by according them larger staffing and a more substantive role "on major decisions of strategy, policy, and force requirements."[7]

Meanwhile, inspired by Jones, Meyer, and a lengthening list of think-tank studies, key members of Congress began taking a closer look at alleged JCS shortcomings. Many on Capitol Hill initially agreed that Vessey's advent had improved the overall efficiency, effectiveness, and image of JCS operations. But after the bombing of the Beirut barracks and reports of breakdowns in coordination during the Grenada operation in October 1983, sentiment in Congress began to coalesce around the need for legislative action to strengthen the JCS system and make it more responsive. Stung by the untoward publicity, Vessey rushed through a series of administrative reforms aimed at improving JCS performance in the areas of resource allocation, the evaluation of cross-Service needs, and participation by the combatant commanders in the programming and budgeting process.[8] But it was too little too late, and in October 1984 Congress added a provision to the Defense authorization (P.L. 98-525) broadening the powers of the Chairman over the Joint Staff and simultaneously serving notice that it intended to revisit the entire question of JCS organization in the next session.[9]

Vessey now found himself unexpectedly at the center of a looming battle royal with Congress. While acknowledging that he faced "considerable outside pressure to reorganize," he continued to believe that through the stringent application of administrative reforms he could fend off the imposition of congressionally-mandated changes. If he could improve the effectiveness of the Joint Staff, he thought he could demonstrate that "we're doing our job as laid out in the law."[10] But despite Vessey's best efforts to find in-house solutions, support in Congress for legislative action continued to grow and by the summer of 1985 both the House and the Senate were actively considering bills to reform the JCS. In June 1985, hoping to head off a wholesale reorganization, President Reagan created a Blue Ribbon Commission on Defense Management, chaired by former Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard, to review the overall status of defense organization and suggest appropriate remedies.[11] Undeterred, reformers in Congress refused to await the Packard Commission's findings and pressed ahead along a course of their own that would culminate in the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act.

Feeling that he had done as much as he could, Vessey stepped down as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs on September 30, 1985, more than 6 months before the end of his term. His successor, Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr., USN, came with a lengthy résumé of staff and joint command jobs. Like Vessey, Crowe saw room for improvement in the quality and effectiveness of the Joint Staff.[12] But he was far less averse than his predecessor to accepting legislatively-mandated changes and had once testified before Congress in support of increased statutory powers for the Chairman and a stronger joint system.[13] Realizing that his views were at variance with the prevailing sentiments of his fellow Navy officers, he explained that his position was the result of experience. "I happened to be one of the people [in the Navy] who agreed that some reorganization was appropriate," Crowe recalled. "For three years, from 1977 to 1980, I had served as the Navy's JCS deputy, and during that time I had done a lot of thinking about the subject."[14] As Chairman, Crowe tempered his views somewhat to bring them more into line with Weinberger's. Yet overall, Crowe's advent was highly instrumental in tipping the balance in favor of the reform movement.

Soon after becoming Chairman, Crowe established informal staff-level contacts with the congressional committees considering the new legislation and sounded out the Service chiefs about a possible compromise. Crowe acknowledged that some degree of legislatively-imposed reorganization was unavoidable, but he shared his colleagues' concern that Congress, in its zeal to reform, had "overdramatized" the problem of inter-Service rivalry and its impact on JCS effectiveness.[15] While favoring measures to streamline the system, Crowe and the chiefs unanimously

condemned any effort by Congress to abolish the JCS organization and replace it with a joint military advisory council. "While this proposal may have some theoretical appeal to some," they told the Secretary of Defense, "it has no 'real world' merit and, if adopted, would dramatically compromise the quality of advice to you and to the President."[16] Incorporating these views with his own, Weinberger notified the Senate Armed Services Committee on December 2, 1985, that while he was prepared to entertain modest changes, including a stronger advisory role for the Chairman and creation of a Vice Chairman to help expedite JCS business, he saw no need for the sweeping reorganization some in Congress insisted was needed.[17]

By now, differences had become so pronounced that an easy and amicable reconciliation of views between the congressional reformers and the administration was practically out of the question. The most contentious issues were those involving personnel policy centering on the creation of a joint officers corps, a proposal that had especially strong support in the House Armed Services Committee. Worried that a joint officer corps would deprive them of their best officers, the Service chiefs opposed the measure. In an effort at compromise, Crowe invited members of the committee, including Congressman Bill Nichols of Alabama, a key figure in shaping the emerging legislation in the House, to a breakfast meeting with the Joint Chiefs at the Pentagon on June 24, 1986. As the meeting progressed, the atmosphere became visibly strained. Finally, in an emotional outburst, the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Watkins, said: "You know, this piece of legislation is so bad it's, it's . . . in some respects it's just un-American." Nichols, who had lost a leg in combat in World War II, was personally offended and left the meeting indignant, less disposed than ever to listen to the chiefs or to accept Pentagon advice.[18]

After this regrettable incident, the Joint Chiefs played a diminishing role in the legislative process that culminated in passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act. As often happens in the legislative process, the reorganization bills passed by the House and Senate required a conference to iron out differences. Working together, the co-chairs of the conference committee, Nichols and Barry Goldwater of Arizona, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, wrote the final law. As the conference was getting underway, Admiral Crowe made a last-minute appeal to delete all provisions relating to personnel policy.[19] But his request fell on deaf ears. The final legislation—approved in the Senate on September 16 and in the House the next day—reflected congressional preferences far more than anything the White House or the Pentagon wanted. Secretary of the Navy John F. Lehman, Jr., suggested that President Reagan ought to veto the legislation, but the President, facing other problems in Congress, signed it into law on October 1, 1986.[20]

## THE GOLDWATER-NICHOLS ACT OF 1986

Culminating nearly 4 years of public debate and legislative maneuvering, the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 (P.L. 99-433) was the most extensive revision of the National Security Act since 1958. The most significant changes were those affecting the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the military command structure. Throughout the new law, the emphasis was on achieving a higher level of inter-Service cooperation and collaboration and a greater degree of integrated effort in practically every level and area of military activity, a concept increasingly referred to as "jointness." Though military leaders by and large agreed that it was a worthy objective, many if not most would have preferred a less detailed and less prescriptive law.

The most striking features of the law were those affecting the Chairman who now became "principal military advisor" to the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense, superseding the JCS in that role. Functions and duties previously conferred collectively on the Joint Chiefs of Staff now passed to the Chairman, thus ending the days of corporate decisionmaking and consensus recommendations. In effect, the Service chiefs became a committee of senior military advisors to the Chairman. For assistance in discharging his expanded duties, the CJCS acquired a Vice Chairman and unfettered authority over the Joint Staff. Held to its current strength of 1,627 military and civilian personnel (a ceiling repealed in 1991), the Joint Staff remained barred from becoming "an overall Armed Forces General Staff," a prohibition first introduced in 1958. Still, with an added proviso in the law requiring officers to have joint duty for high-level promotion, the Joint Staff stood poised at last to gain primacy over the Service staffs.

In addition to increasing the Chairman's stature and authority, the new law gave him more specific responsibilities vis-à-vis the combatant commands and the military command structure. Although there had been talk of including the Chairman in the military chain of command, Goldwater-Nichols made only slight changes in the interests of protecting and preserving civilian control. Command lines, as laid out in 1958, continued to run from the President to the Secretary of Defense to the combatant commanders. However, the new law also authorized the Secretary to use the Chairman as his channel of communication with the combatant commanders, a practice already in effect. With the added authority of Goldwater-Nichols, the Chairman's role as the routine channel of communications between the National Command Authority (NCA) and the combatant commanders became fully institutionalized. In consequence, even though the Chairman had no statutory authority to exercise command, his responsibility for receiving political directives and

translating them into operational orders gave him a de facto measure of command authority.[21]

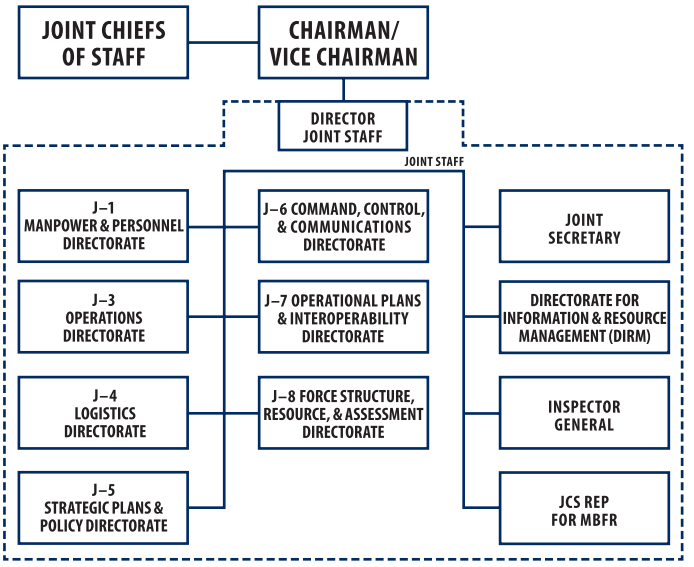
The most controversial feature of the new law was its treatment of military personnel policy. Admiral Crowe and others had tried to persuade Congress not to include these provisions or, at least, to tone them down. But by the time the final legislation came to be written, relations between the Pentagon and Capitol Hill had become so strained that members of the conference committee were in no mood to listen. The result, bearing the designation of Title IV, was a highly prescriptive set of regulations for joint duty and promotion aimed at improving professionalism and eradicating alleged Service parochialism. Although the conferees dropped the idea of a joint officer corps, they agreed that officers should be encouraged to develop a "joint specialty" and affirmed a practice already in use requiring new flag officers to attend a "Capstone" course to prepare them for joint assignments with senior officers from other Services.

Implementing the Goldwater-Nichols Act fell largely to the Chairman, Admiral Crowe, who adopted an "evolution-not-revolution" philosophy modeled on Forrestal's approach to unification in the late 1940s. Crowe hoped to complete the process with "as little trauma and disruption as possible."[22] On November 6, 1986, he approved a directive restructuring the Joint Staff to meet expected Goldwater-Nichols needs. To augment the five existing directorates, Crowe revived the moribund Command, Control, and Communications Systems Directorate (J-6) and added two new ones—the Operational Plans and Interoperability Directorate (J-7), later renamed the Directorate for Operational Plans and Joint Force Development, and the Force Structure, Resource, and Assessment Directorate (J-8).[23] Crowe also put considerable personal effort into clarifying the role of the Vice Chairman (VCJCS), whose only assigned duty under the law was to preside at JCS meetings in the Chairman's absence. Secretaries of Defense had customarily regarded their deputies as their "alter ego" since Forrestal coined the phrase in 1948; Crowe believed the Vice Chairman should be prepared to function in a similar capacity.[24] The first Vice Chairman, General Robert T. Herres, USAF, took office on February 6, 1987, but did not receive a specific assignment of functions until April, when the Secretary of Defense, at Crowe's suggestion, directed that the VCJCS should concentrate on acquisition and resource management issues in order to free up time for the Chairman to deal with military policy and strategic matters.[25]

The toughest adjustments were those of redefining the Service chiefs' role under Goldwater-Nichols. Operating initially under a modified version of the old system, Crowe affirmed existing procedures that allowed his colleagues to present divergent views to the Secretary of Defense.[26] But since the JCS were no longer bound

Figure 15–1.

**JCS Organization Chart, 1987**




*Note: Only major organizational entities shown.*

by the corporate unanimity rule, "split" recommendations became a thing of the past. As required by law, Crowe held "regular" (weekly) JCS meetings. In considering cross-Service matters such as arms control and the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), he routinely sought the collective advice of the Service chiefs and made it a practice to submit recommendations to the Secretary on a corporate basis. Crowe's caution and restraint disappointed those in Congress who expected the new law to have an immediate and dramatic impact on the way the JCS conducted business.[27] But it seemed to Crowe the right thing to do. "I started gently," he said, "but as time passed and the chiefs grew used to the idea of the new arrangements, I exerted my authority more and more."[28]

Like the original National Security Act passed in 1947, the Goldwater-Nichols amendments were a venture into uncharted territory. An intricate set of prescriptions, the law established many new responsibilities and created new relationships which only time and experience could sort out. It needed to be interpreted, applied, and tested. Within the military, it was a less than overwhelmingly popular piece of legislation, partly owing to some of its contents, but also because of the legislative process that brought it about. As the first Chairman to operate under Goldwater-Nichols, Crowe was understandably hesitant to make dramatic changes and sought

to ease the Services into the new system. Subsequent Chairmen would be less patient and less reticent. But as far as Crowe was concerned, the implementation of the Goldwater-Nichols Act was an ongoing process and had barely begun by the time he left office.

## NATO RESURGENT

While Congress and the Reagan administration were dueling over the future organization of the Joint Chiefs, a slow but steady transformation was taking place in Europe toward equalizing the military balance between East and West. For years, the Joint Chiefs had complained that NATO trailed the Warsaw Pact in effective military power and lacked the full spectrum of tactical nuclear and conventional capabilities to realize the goals set for itself under the flexible response doctrine and the forward defense strategy. But with the impetus of the Reagan buildup, the situation began to change. Determined to eliminate the deficiencies of the past, the Reagan administration lent its support to programs it saw as crucial to the restoration of NATO's power and credibility. Among them were the revival of the neutron bomb, which President Reagan announced in August 1981, and the decision to press ahead with deployment of a new generation of intermediate-range ballistic and cruise missiles. Both were controversial decisions that went forward despite public protests and sharp criticism. Yet as the process advanced, it became increasingly clear that the United States remained not only firmly committed to NATO but to reasserting its own influence and leadership within the Alliance as well.

The most difficult problems, as always, were those surrounding NATO's conventional capabilities, which routinely fell short of projected requirements. By the mid-1980s, having wrestled with this problem for decades to no avail, the Joint Chiefs and others in the Pentagon reached the sobering conclusion that the Europeans would probably never meet their agreed conventional force goals and that it was pointless to continue badgering them. Rather than seeking quantitative improvements in NATO's capabilities, U.S. defense planners looked to new and emerging technologies to provide qualitative multipliers to improve NATO's defenses. That approach had been tried numerous times, invariably with mixed results. But in light of the wide range of breakthroughs and improvements such as those driving the Strategic Defense Initiative, the chances of success seemed better than ever this time around. The upshot was the Conventional Defense Initiative (CDI), which the NATO defence ministers embraced at their May 1985 meeting. While many of the taskings were identical to those of the defunct Long-Term Defense Plan of the Carter years, the CDI was less ambitious than LTDP (thereby rendering

it more attainable in theory) and relied squarely on advances in technology as a key means of improving NATO's conventional defense.[29]

Adoption of the CDI followed in lockstep with a related breakthrough in military thinking known as the Follow-On Forces Attack (FOFA) concept. Much of the impetus behind FOFA came from General Bernard W. Rogers, the NATO Supreme Commander from 1979 to 1987. As Army Chief of Staff immediately prior to becoming SACEUR, Rogers had encouraged the development of a new doctrinal concept known as AirLand Battle, which emphasized close coordination between land forces pursuing an aggressive maneuvering defense and air forces attacking the enemy's rear echelon units.[30] FOFA emerged from that broad operational concept. Meant as an enhancement to the flexible response strategy, FOFA envisioned the use of sophisticated surveillance aircraft (called JSTARS) to direct conventional attacks behind enemy lines against Warsaw Pact armored formations and other reinforcements. NATO would still need strong ready forces along the central front to meet the enemy's initial attack. But with FOFA, Rogers argued, NATO stood a better chance of reducing the number of Warsaw Pact reinforcements to "manageable proportions," thus lifting the nuclear threshold.[31]

While the Joint Chiefs applauded NATO's efforts, they cautioned against overoptimism and warned that the full impact of the CDI and FOFA initiatives was difficult to predict and, in any case, would not be felt for some time. Technically complex and expensive, FOFA relied on advanced computer systems and precision-guided munitions that were still experimental or in exceedingly limited supply. JSTARS, a joint Army-Air Force surveillance and tracking system around which the FOFA concept revolved, was barely more than a drawing-board concept. Initially, by speeding up the deployment of their reinforcements, the Soviets thought they could overcome whatever deep attacks NATO might launch.[32] But as they took a closer look at the situation and the possibility that not all would go according to plan, they came to the conclusion that they were steadily losing ground and that the initiative was passing to NATO. Publicly, the Soviets denounced FOFA as a veiled instrument of aggression, while privately Warsaw Pact military planners engaged in a frantic search for something to counter it. Increasingly they worried that the mainstay of their ground attack force—the heavy battle tank—might soon be obsolete. With the potential of President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative factored into the equation, Moscow's long-term military prospects had never seemed bleaker. NATO's, conversely, were looking up, though as those familiar with the Alliance's condition were well aware, a lot of work remained.[33] Still, according to British intelligence expert Gordon S. Barrass, "NATO leaders felt that they had finally gained the upper hand."[34]

## GORBACHEV'S IMPACT

It was against this background of a resurgent NATO, the intensifying application of new technologies by the West, and signs of wavering confidence among Soviet defense planners that Mikhail S. Gorbachev ascended to power in Moscow as General Secretary of the Communist Party in March 1985. A dedicated Marxist, Gorbachev led a younger generation of reformers whose goal was to protect and preserve the Soviet system through the restructuring of the crumbling Soviet economy (*perestroika*), greater openness in public affairs (*glasnost*), and improved East-West relations. Curbing the drain caused by heavy defense expenditures was a top priority.[35]

While some in the West proclaimed Gorbachev's advent as the first step toward ending the Cold War, others—including the Joint Chiefs of Staff—adopted a more reserved outlook. Despite an improved atmosphere in East-West relations, JCS posture statements and threat assessments remained essentially unchanged throughout the 1980s. Outward improvements in U.S.-Soviet relations aside, the Joint Chiefs continued to view the Soviet Union as an implacable enemy with a "heavy dependence on military capabilities." Afraid of letting down their guard, the Joint Chiefs repeatedly recommended a high level of military preparedness across the entire spectrum of conflict contingencies, from sub-limited conventional conflicts to all-out nuclear war, until there was clear-cut evidence that the global force-to-force balance had shifted in favor of the United States and its allies.[36]

Still, the sincerity and seriousness of Gorbachev's overtures were hard to ignore. Wary at the outset, Reagan initially dismissed Gorbachev as "a confirmed ideologue," while Gorbachev looked on the President as "a product of the military-industrial complex" prone to "right-wing" extremism.[37] But as they became more familiar with one another, they reached a meeting of the minds and formed a close and productive partnership which, though far from perfect in solving problems, proved of fundamental importance in easing East-West tensions and eventually in ending the Cold War. Although the Joint Chiefs were slower to come around, their gradual acceptance of Gorbachev's initiatives as more than propaganda ploys effectively set the stage for a wholesale reconsideration of military requirements under the next administration.

Among the breakthroughs that Gorbachev's advent helped to facilitate, two in particular had a major impact on JCS thinking: the 1987 INF Treaty mandating the complete elimination of such weapons, and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan initiated a year later. Both involved significant concessions which in years past the Soviets had strenuously resisted and which the JCS had likewise been disinclined to contemplate without adequate assurances of Soviet compliance.

Resumed in the spring of 1985, the INF negotiations proceeded in tandem with talks on START and space-based defensive weapons (i.e., SDI). The ostensible goal was a comprehensive agreement. Unable to make headway on an overall accord, Gorbachev indicated in October 1985 that he would entertain dealing with INF separately from other systems, a change of procedure that allowed the INF talks to go forward at a faster pace.[38] The main concern raised by the Joint Chiefs was that as the elimination of nuclear weapons gathered momentum, the Soviets would be in an even stronger position than before because of their numerical superiority in conventional forces. President Reagan, however, was skeptical and sought to reassure the chiefs that their concerns would be addressed one way or another.[39] What finally emerged in the form of the INF Treaty, signed in December 1987, was practically unprecedented: a worldwide ban on all U.S. and Soviet ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges of 500 to 5500 kilometers, backed by enforcement provisions allowing each side to conduct on-site inspections of the other's facilities.[40]

For Gorbachev, the INF Treaty was both a spectacular gesture of goodwill that cemented his reputation as a peacemaker in the West and the coup de grace to the Kremlin's hard-line defense planners who orchestrated the military buildup under Brezhnev. Soviet strategy as laid down from the mid-1970s on by Marshal Nikolai V. Ogarkov, chief of the General Staff, had relied on the SS–20 to spearhead a massive, surprise nuclear strike in conjunction with an immediate, high-speed conventional air and ground assault, to overwhelm NATO defenses.[41] What Ogarkov and other Soviet defense planners had failed to anticipate was that NATO would have the unity and resolve to respond with a theater missile modernization program resulting in the deployment of a new generation of more effective and usable weapons (the Pershing II especially) that could strike the Soviet homeland. Instead of an asset intimidating the West, the Soviet arsenal of SS–20s had become one of Moscow's most notorious liabilities.[42] All the same, the hard-liners gave way grudgingly. While Ogarkov's successor, Marshal Sergei F. Akhromeyev, dutifully endorsed the INF Treaty in public, he disparaged it in private as a "lopsided deal."[43] As yet, discontent within the Soviet military appeared manageable, but as a massive letter-writing campaign against the treaty by retired officers indicated, it was far from popular among the former rank and file.[44]

In the West, the most strenuous objections to the INF Treaty were raised by the former NATO Supreme Commander, General Bernard Rogers. Characterizing the treaty as the product of "short-term political expediency," Rogers believed that eliminating the Alliance's INF capability would cripple its capacity to offer the full range of effective deterrence.[45] Others, however, disagreed. While Crowe recalled

some grumbling from Army and Marine Corps leaders, the consensus among the Joint Chiefs was that the INF Treaty marked a major breakthrough and was "too attractive a proposition to pass up."[46] As the most far-reaching arms control agreement thus far negotiated, President Reagan hailed it as "a realistic understanding" capable of providing a "framework" for a fundamentally improved relationship.[47] Likewise, it tended to confirm Reagan's philosophy that patience and persistence pay off in the long run and that the elimination of nuclear weapons, a goal his critics derided as a fanciful notion, was not so impractical after all. Buoyed by the positive outcome of the INF talks, the President indicated that he looked forward to signing a START treaty, incorporating a 50 percent reduction in heavy missiles, when he and Gorbachev met in Moscow in the summer of 1988. But as the date of the summit approached, continuing objections by the Soviets to SDI and a superabundance of unresolved details, many having to do with verification, prevented the two heads of state from consummating a deal. Not until 1991 did a START agreement materialize.[48]

No less significant than the INF Treaty in changing JCS thinking was the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan brought on by a combination of diplomatic pressure from the West and military pressure from the American-backed *mujahideen*. Dating from the waning days of the Carter administration, U.S. covert involvement in Afghanistan had remained a fairly low-key affair until President Reagan took steps in March 1985 to bolster the U.S. role.[49] As part of the effort, the Joint Chiefs waived their self-imposed prohibition on sharing high-technology weapons and released shoulder-fired Stinger antiaircraft missiles to the insurgents. A major turning point in the war, the advent of the Stingers severely restricted the Soviets' use of the air and compelled them to make significant changes in strategy and tactics. If not decisive, the introduction of the Stingers certainly helped to even the playing field and allowed the mujahideen to fight the Soviets and their allied Afghan forces to a virtual standstill.

Even before the Stingers were introduced, Gorbachev was convinced that the war in Afghanistan (increasingly costly and unpopular at home) could not be won, and in the autumn of 1985 he received approval from the Politburo to explore a strategy of withdrawal. Yet it was not until after the Stingers made their appearance on the battlefield that UN-brokered peace talks began to bear fruit. Eventually, under accords signed on April 14, 1988, the Soviet Union agreed to withdraw half its troops by August, and the rest by mid-February 1989.[50] Assuming Soviet compliance with the accord, the Joint Chiefs expected the logical result to be a steady decline in the power and authority of the Soviet-backed Islamic regime in Kabul. Whether it would be an inward-looking Islamic state, reserved in its dealings with

the United States and the Soviet Union alike, or a "fundamentalist" regime comparable to neighboring Iran, remained to be seen.

The impending withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan was by any measure a triumph for the Reagan administration's hard-line foreign policy. Like the INF Treaty, it further validated the President's contention that steady pressure from all directions would elicit significant changes in Soviet behavior. A major defeat for Kremlin policy, analogous in many ways to the American setback in Vietnam, the withdrawal from Afghanistan was perhaps the clearest indication to that point that Soviet power and authority were in decline. Yet for the Joint Chiefs and others in Washington, recognition of the full implications of the Soviet withdrawal emerged slowly. All that seemed to matter at the time was that the Soviets had given up and, in so doing, had removed what the JCS had once considered a major menace to U.S. interests in Southwest Asia and the Middle East.

## TERRORISM AND THE CONFRONTATION WITH LIBYA

With American military power on the rise and signs emerging that the Cold War might be winding down, the Reagan administration operated more freely in accepting risks. One of the areas where it stepped up U.S. involvement was against the growing threat of state-sponsored terrorism. Bolstered by assistance and coaching from Moscow, state-sponsored terrorist groups had become a favorite means among radical Third World regimes of putting pressure on the West. By the mid-1980s, one of the most notorious culprits in the eyes of President Reagan, the Joint Chiefs, and many others was Libyan strongman Muammar Qaddafi. Charismatic and unpredictable, Qaddafi pursued a unique brand of revolutionary ideology that combined militant Islam, popular democracy, and communal ownership of property to create something approximating an Islamic socialist state. In foreign policy, he aligned himself with the Soviet Union in return for military assistance and regarded Israel and the "bourgeois" countries of the West, led by the United States, as his enemies. He openly offered his support to international terrorist groups to bring them down. As one observer put it, "No country . . . not even Syria or Iran, matched the record of Libya under Qaddafi as an epitome of lawlessness and contempt for international norms."[51]

During his first term, President Reagan had authorized varying combinations of naval exercises, economic sanctions, and diplomatic pressure to try to persuade Qaddafi to moderate his policies and behavior, all to no avail. A major exporter of high-grade crude oil, Libya enjoyed close political and economic ties with many European countries, including Italy and France, despite its reputed links to

terrorism. The net effect was lukewarm support for sanctions and other nonmilitary forms of pressure that Washington tried to apply. Then, in June 1985, Hizballah terrorists hijacked a U.S. airliner flying from Athens to Rome. During the episode the hijackers tortured and murdered an American passenger, Navy Petty Officer Robert Stethem. While there was no direct evidence connecting Libya to the hijacking, the assumption of the Joint Chiefs and others in Washington was that Qaddafi's role in terrorism overall was too pervasive to rule out the possibility and that curtailing that role would go far toward curtailing terrorism in general.[52]

Though committed to a strong stand against Qaddafi and terrorism, the Joint Chiefs wanted to avoid overreacting. Supported by Secretary of Defense Weinberger, they urged caution in responding and resisted efforts by Secretary of State George P. Shultz, National Security Advisor Robert C. McFarlane, and others who wanted to make greater use of military power. But during the waning months of 1985 came a rapid succession of bloody terrorist incidents—the seizure of the cruise liner *Achille Lauro*, the hijacking of an Egyptian airliner, and the machine gun attack on the passenger lounge of the Vienna, Austria, airport. As a result, the JCS found themselves under mounting pressure to conduct a major retaliatory campaign that would severely punish Qaddafi and weaken his power and prestige if not topple him. Finding the options limited, Chairman Crowe initially relied on a resumption of large-scale naval operations off the Libyan coast to convey the message to Qaddafi that the United States meant business. But after the April 5, 1986, terrorist bombing of a discotheque in West Berlin frequented by U.S. Service personnel, President Reagan ordered the JCS to prepare immediately for stronger measures. As the President characterized it, the intelligence was "pretty final" that the Libyans had helped plan the attack.[53]

The discotheque bombing set a planning process in motion culminating in the most deliberate and deadly military action yet taken by the United States against Qaddafi—the bombing raid on Libya carried out jointly by Air Force and Navy planes on April 14–15, 1986. Hurriedly assembled, the operational plan preferred in the Joint Staff drew on prior contingency planning and exercises conducted by the Air Force. It envisioned attacks carried out by F–111 medium-range fighter-bombers flying from bases in the United Kingdom. The President wanted to retaliate as soon as possible, and since the British had not as yet approved use of their facilities, the Joint Chiefs developed an alternative plan that relied on carrier-based planes already in the Mediterranean. A third option—to mount a raid with Tomahawk sea-launched cruise missiles—also received brief consideration but was soon dropped for lack of suitably armed and programmed missiles. Eventually, the British came around and gave the green light to use their bases. But by then the JCS, working

in collaboration with the U.S. European Command, had settled on a composite operation (*Eldorado Canyon*), which incorporated attacks by land- and carrier-based air simultaneously.

The decision to use both land- and sea-based air was a practical move. Though derided by some naval aviation enthusiasts as a needless display of "jointness," it reflected the approved rules of engagement prescribing minimum collateral damage to civilians in urban areas. To obtain the accuracy the President wanted mandated the use of precision-guided munitions that Air Force F–111s were better equipped to deliver than Navy planes were at the time. Thus, while the F–111s spearheaded the raid with attacks on Tripoli, where the targets tended to be in built-up areas, carrier-based F–18s and A–6s hammered the more dispersed military targets across the Gulf of Sidra in Benghazi. [54]

Cleary punitive, *Eldorado Canyon* was never intended to inflict permanently crippling damage. Like the Doolittle raid on Tokyo in the early days of World War II, it was a demonstration of American resolve. Its objectives, as outlined by President Reagan prior to the attack, were to highlight Libya's vulnerability and to demonstrate that Qaddafi's continuing pursuit of terrorism would not go unpunished. "I have no illusion that these actions will eliminate entirely the terrorist threat," the President told his close friend, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. "But it will show that officially sponsored terrorist actions by a government—such as Libya has repeatedly perpetrated—will not be without cost."[55]

Still, the raid on Libya moved the war on terrorism up a notch or two. A steadily growing menace, terrorism was destined in little more than a decade to succeed the Cold War as the number one security issue facing the United States and its allies. But in President Reagan's day, compared with the weighty issues of the Cold War, terrorism still seemed a problem of secondary importance and received ad hoc responses. Even so, it was beginning to loom larger and posed challenges that the JCS were as yet unsure how to handle. As the head of a country with close economic ties to the West through its oil sales, Qaddafi was in some respects a unique case. But he was also the same kind of leader, driven by fanatical religious zeal and messianic visions, that the Joint Chiefs were fated to come up against again and again. Inconclusive in its results, the clash with Libya during the Reagan years was a foretaste of the much more serious confrontations with terrorism and terrorist states yet to come.

## SHOWDOWN IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Despite the new rapprochement in Europe and waning Soviet enthusiasm for the conflict in Afghanistan, the Cold War elsewhere continued almost unabated. Nowhere

was that more true than in Central America, where the United States remained locked in an escalating struggle with the Soviet- and Cuban-backed Sandinista regime of Nicaragua. Throughout President Reagan's first term, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had consistently opposed direct military intervention in Central America and had encouraged the administration to rely on surrogates, known as counterrevolutionaries or "contras," to carry the fight to the Sandinistas. But as the President's second term was getting underway, there were growing signs that the contras were running out of steam, causing the JCS to reassess their position and to accept the possibility of a larger, more direct military role. Out of the ensuing give-and-take emerged a revised covert action program which President Reagan approved in January 1986, subject to the approval of legislative authority by Congress.[56]

The new program attempted both to revitalize the contra movement at the grass roots level in Nicaragua and to mobilize additional support in the United States. Controversial throughout their history, the contras resembled a rump version of the deposed Somoza regime and enjoyed barely lukewarm backing on Capitol Hill, where there was a general reluctance to provide much beyond humanitarian assistance. Under the new program, the administration proposed to expand its help to the contras with government-funded arms aid and professional training organized under the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In October 1986, after a lengthy and spirited debate, Congress finally approved the administration's request under its revised "covert" action program for $100 million to help the contras—$70 million in military aid and $30 million in humanitarian assistance.[57]

Almost immediately, however, implementation of the administration's program fell under the gathering cloud of the Iran-contra affair, a scandal that blew up over revelations of clandestine arms sales to Iran and the skimming of profits by members of the NSC Staff to subsidize the purchase of arms and ammunition for the contras. The precipitating event occurred on the morning of October 5, 1986, when a Soviet-made surface-to-air missile brought down a chartered C–123 cargo plane that was on a resupply mission to contras operating in northern Nicaragua. It turned out that the plane and its cargo were part of an off-the-books covert assistance program going back more than a year to circumvent aid prohibitions imposed by Congress in 1984. The Joint Chiefs knew of the contra resupply program, but they had no part in organizing it and assumed it to be part of a privately-financed and privately-run operation. If they had reason to think otherwise, they kept the information to themselves.

Reverberations from the Iran-contra affair extended far and wide, and by the summer of 1987 it was a full-blown scandal. Talk of impeaching the President was in the air. Ironically, at the same time the administration's Central America policy

was falling under renewed attack in Washington, its revamped covert assistance program was beginning to show signs of turning the military situation to the contras' advantage. Better trained and indoctrinated, they were gradually becoming more effective fighters and more accepted by the local population. All the same, many Central American leaders, even those aligned with the United States in opposition to the Sandinistas, were uneasy about the contras' activities, and in August 1987 they joined in support of a new diplomatic initiative sponsored by Costa Rican President Oscar Arias to end the conflict through new, supervised elections.

With momentum building behind the Arias peace plan, Congress in February 1988 suspended further funding for the contras. Shortly thereafter, backed by Soviet attack helicopters and Cuban troops, the Sandinistas launched an all-out assault on the contras' base camps along the Nicaragua-Honduras border. Amid the escalating crisis, President Reagan met with his senior advisors and congressional leaders on the afternoon of March 16, but was unable to enlist the support of House Speaker Jim Wright and other key Democrats who were either noncommittal or opposed to any U.S. military action.[58] The next day, responding to a formal request from the Honduran government for U.S. assistance, President Reagan ordered a brigade-sized task force of the 82[d] Airborne to conduct a 10-day "readiness exercise" in Honduras. Meanwhile, U.S.-piloted helicopters began ferrying Honduran troops into the battle zone.[59] Though the JCS rules of engagement governing these deployments made it highly unlikely that U.S. and Sandinista forces would ever confront one another, the implied threat of American military intervention appeared to have the desired effect, and within days the Nicaraguans curtailed their offensive. Yet even though the contras avoided annihilation, the fighting had taken a heavy toll on their numbers. On March 23, 1988, seeing no other choice, their leaders declared a unilateral ceasefire.

From that point on, the contras' fortunes entered a steep decline, a process hastened by political infighting within its leadership, dwindling resources, and the Reagan administration's grudging acceptance of the Arias peace plan. By May 1988, the contras were down to 400 front-line troops, too few to pose a serious threat to the Sandinista regime. Feeling that it had run out of options, the Reagan administration let matters drift until it left office in January 1989. By then, the incoming Bush administration, hoping to eliminate Central America as a source of continuing domestic political discord, had settled on a different course that abandoned further military pressure on Nicaragua in favor of negotiated solutions through multilateral diplomacy.[60]

Though disappointed by the turn of events in Central America, the Joint Chiefs took the outcome in stride. While it was a setback in certain respects, the

emerging settlement was not the disaster that some within the Joint Staff had worried it might be. Indeed, as the dust settled, it became clear that the Sandinistas were far weaker politically than previously supposed. In agreeing to elections—finally held in 1990—the Sandinista regime virtually sealed its own demise. Even though the Joint Chiefs had not played a large or conspicuous role, their insistence that aid and training to the contras be placed on a more systematic and professional basis had gone far toward rescuing a faltering program and turning it around. All things considered, the chiefs' involvement helped to produce a more favorable outcome than would otherwise have been the case.

## TENSIONS IN THE PERSIAN GULF

While the struggle for Central America tested the Joint Chiefs' capabilities and willingness to cope with low-intensity conflict, the resumption of tensions in the Persian Gulf challenged their resourcefulness in more traditional ways. Since taking office, using the prism of the Cold War, the Reagan administration had treated a Soviet invasion or attack against the Gulf oil fields as the primary danger in that part of the world and urged the JCS to plan accordingly.[61] Even so, the source of greatest volatility in the region was the ongoing conflict between Iran and Iraq. Precipitated by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's attack on Iran in 1980 over a border dispute, the Iran-Iraq war had degenerated into a World War I-style conflict, complete with trench warfare, human-wave assaults, and chemical weapons. Deadlocked on the battlefield, the two antagonists took to crippling one another's economic base by attacking their respective capacities to produce and export petroleum products. So intense did the "tanker war" become that in the summer of 1984 the United States and other Western powers joined together to provide naval protection for nonaligned (primarily Kuwaiti) shipping. But by the end of the year, the attacks mostly stopped and the international protection effort relaxed.

The official policy of the United States toward the Gulf War was neutrality. Unofficially, the Reagan administration leaned in favor of Iraq. Characterizing Saddam as a "no good nut," President Reagan was fully aware that the Iraqi leader's regime was one of the most corrupt, ruthless, and repressive in the Middle East.[62] All the same, he was determined to block Iranian and radical Shia expansionism and worried that an Iranian victory over Iraq would destabilize the region. The policy in effect at the outset of President Reagan's second term was to do what was feasible and practicable, short of overt assistance or direct intervention, to avoid an Iraqi defeat or collapse. In practice, this meant seeking other governments' cooperation in enforcing an arms embargo against Iran (Operation *Staunch*), encouraging Saudi

Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, France, and other countries friendly with Iraq to keep its war machine going, and from time to time providing the Iraqi armed forces with limited operational assistance and intelligence.

While tilting toward Iraq, the Reagan administration also pursued backchannel contacts with Iran that had the unintended side-effect of complicating JCS efforts to assure the safety of neutral shipping in the Gulf. The leading figures in this enterprise were former National Security Advisor Robert C. McFarlane and an assistant, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver L. North, USMC, who secretly helped arrange arms transfers to the Iranians in an effort to secure the release of Western hostages being held by Islamist militants in Lebanon. Limited initially to a handful of HAWK antiaircraft missiles purchased from Israeli stocks and a few hundred antitank TOW missiles, the arms-for-hostages deal was never large enough to tip the military balance in Iran's favor. But it carried immense weight as a symbolic gesture. Privately, as North and his associates expanded their contacts with the Iranians, President Reagan became concerned that they would send the wrong signal and lead Tehran to think that the United States was on its side.[63]

The initiation of U.S. covert aid to Iran late in 1985 roughly coincided with Tehran's decision to pursue a bolder, more aggressive strategy in its war with Iraq. Reeling from years of heavy casualties and mounting costs, Iran's leadership was desperate for a breakthrough, and in February 1986 it launched a two-pronged counterattack—a diversionary operation north of the Hawizeh Marshes followed by a major amphibious assault in the south that seized the strategically important Faw Peninsula. Eventually, the line stabilized, but only after heavy fighting that brought the Iranians to the outskirts of Basra, Iraq's second largest city. Even though the chances of Basra falling appeared remote, Iran's battlefield successes suggested a looming strategic shift in the war in Iran's favor. In March, Iran resumed its attacks on Gulf shipping, scoring eight hits, all but one against non-Arab vessels.[64]

The turning point resulting in U.S. intervention was Kuwait's request in November-December 1986 for Western and Soviet protection against further Iranian attacks on its shipping.[65] Until that time, the Joint Chiefs had held stubbornly to their current force strategy under which for years they had managed to limit U.S. commitments in the region. Playing down the impact of renewed threats to shipping, the JCS cautioned against hasty action. Indeed, during interagency deliberations extending from late 1986 into early 1987, Admiral Crowe and members of his staff made the point repeatedly that while they appreciated the seriousness of the situation, they saw the Kuwaiti request as opening Pandora's Box by pressuring the United States to protect other noncombatants' shipping. As Crowe later recalled:

"I had done more agonizing over this issue than over any other since my appointment as Chairman."[66]

After weighing the pros and cons, President Reagan concluded that the resumption of Iranian raids on Kuwaiti shipping, coupled with the possibility of direct Soviet intervention, left the United States no choice but to play a more active and direct role. By early March 1987, hoping to head off Soviet involvement, he and his advisors settled on a policy of escorting 11 Kuwaiti tankers reflagged as American vessels, part of a multinational effort to protect shipping in the Gulf.[67] Working out the details fell to Admiral Crowe, who arrived in Kuwait a few days later on a previously scheduled visit to the Middle East. By the time he returned to Washington, Crowe was convinced that reflagging the Kuwaiti tankers held the key not only to the maintenance of regional stability, but also to the preservation of friendly relations with the Arab world. "My conclusion," he recalled, "was that we should go into the Persian Gulf . . . because it was the best chance we had to repair our Arab policy and to make some significant headway in an area where it was absolutely crucial for us to forge the strongest ties we could manage."[68]

## OPERATION *EARNEST WILL*

The ensuing escort operation (*Earnest Will*) finally got underway in July 1987 and lasted until September 1988. Though undertaken on a multinational basis, it had only token contributions from other Western countries and was predominantly a U.S.-led and U.S.-directed affair. At its height, *Earnest Will* involved 27 U.S. surface vessels and 13,700 American Service personnel. It was also the first major test of the recently reconstituted joint system under the Goldwater-Nichols Act. Over the years, the Rapid Deployment Force and its successor, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), had done extensive planning for ground and air operations in the Middle East. But having been unable to find a well-qualified senior naval officer for his staff, the USCINCCENT, General George B. Crist, Jr., USMC, had as yet made limited headway toward developing a maritime plan for the region. Seeking to consolidate his authority, Crist sought full control of the operation and in so doing found himself at odds with his Navy counterparts. In late August 1987, to end the squabbling, Secretary of Defense Weinberger established a new subcommand—Joint Task Force Middle East (JTFME)—headed by a naval officer, Rear Admiral Dennis M. Brooks, who exercised day-to-day responsibility for escort duties, while Crist oversaw strategic direction of the operation from his headquarters in Tampa, Florida.[69]

This inauspicious introduction to the era of "jointness" under Goldwater-Nichols was soon followed by the need for a wholesale reappraisal of the U.S. role and objectives under *Earnest Will*. As originally envisioned, the operation was to have been a fairly passive enterprise focusing on escort functions. But by the time it commenced, the security situation in the Persian Gulf had deteriorated to the point that U.S. warships were becoming as much the target as commercial shipping. A case in point was the cruise missile attack against the American frigate USS *Stark* on May 17, 1987, by an Iraqi fighter that nearly sank the ship and left 37 U.S. sailors dead. Though the Iraqis promptly apologized, insisting that the attack had been a mistake, the incident underscored the dangers involved by the very presence of U.S. warships in the Persian Gulf and helped to usher in a more aggressive approach by the Joint Chiefs toward their escort responsibilities.

The Iraqi attack on the *Stark* notwithstanding, the assumption in the Pentagon and at USCENTCOM headquarters continued to be that Iran was the principal troublemaker and the most likely to come into conflict with U.S. forces. Operating on that assumption, JCS planners expected the Iranian threat to take several forms. With replacement parts and pilots in short supply, Iran had all but abandoned air attacks on shipping since the spring of 1986 and had turned to unconventional tactics carried out by Revolutionary Guards, who proved adept at hit-and-run raids using small speedboats and powerful rocket-propelled grenades. At the same time, Iran also acquired a small arsenal of short-range Chinese SILKWORM antiship missiles, which it deployed adjacent to the Strait of Hormuz and on the Faw Peninsula within range of Kuwait.[70] The most dangerous and persistent threat, however, came from Iranian antiship mines. Initially, the Iranians denied any involvement in mining operations. But on September 21, 1987, a U.S. Army helicopter-gunship, flying from a Navy frigate, strafed and disabled the *Iran Ajr*, a converted Iranian troop ship, as it was laying mines in the path of the convoying oil tankers. The next day, U.S. Navy SEALS boarded the ship and seized a sizable cache of military documents confirming Iran's involvement in mine-laying and other operations.[71]

Following the *Iran Ajr* incident, American and Iranian forces became engaged in a steadily escalating contest for control of the Persian Gulf. By the end of 1987, Iranian attacks on shipping were up 53 percent over the year before. Avoiding ships under U.S. escort, the Iranians concentrated their attacks on vessels without protection. As a result, the JCS came under mounting pressure (primarily from Saudi Arabia) to expand the scale and scope of the U.S. protection regime by providing assistance, upon request, to all nonbelligerent vessels under attack. On April 14, 1988, the on-again-off-again conflict finally boiled over when the missile frigate USS *Samuel B. Roberts* found itself in the middle of a freshly laid Iranian minefield. In

attempting to escape the *Roberts* suffered heavy damage when it struck one of the mines. U.S. retaliation was inevitable.

The day after the incident, Admiral Crowe attended a breakfast meeting at the Pentagon hosted by Secretary of Defense Frank C. Carlucci to discuss retaliatory measures. Also present were Secretary of State Shultz and the President's assistant for national security affairs, Lieutenant General Colin L. Powell, USA. Feeling that the United States had exercised restraint long enough, Crowe, with Carlucci's support, urged destruction of an Iranian warship to demonstrate that "we were willing to exact a serious price." Around 11 a.m., the meeting adjourned to the White House, where President Reagan joined in. In the President's mind there was no doubt that retaliation was imperative. Moreover, he offered no objection to further military action should Iran resist or challenge U.S. forces. Around noon, Crowe placed a secure telephone call to Crist at USCENTCOM headquarters in Tampa, Florida, relaying the President's decision and setting in motion Operation *Praying Mantis*, which got underway on April 18.[72]

The immediate targets were the Sassan and Sirri gas-oil platforms in the central and southern Persian Gulf. While it was against U.S. policy to attack "economic" targets, these (like other Iranian oil platforms) were heavily fortified and served as bases for raids on shipping. Only the Sirri platform was still pumping oil.[73] In retaliation for the destruction of the oil rigs, Iranian air and naval forces counterattacked, precipitating a major naval battle. During the engagement, U.S. air and surface units, using laser-guided bombs and other advanced technologies, destroyed a missile patrol boat and several smaller craft, sank the British-built Iranian frigate S*ahand*, and severely damaged its sister ship, the *Sabalan*. By the time the engagement was over, Iran had lost half of its navy. The only U.S. loss, apparently the result of a mechanical failure, was a Cobra attack helicopter and its two-member crew.[74] Still, in assessing the overall outcome, Crowe was quite pleased. Feeling that the United States had made a much more forceful statement of its resolve this time around, he was also deeply impressed by the high degree of joint action achieved in the field.[75]

By mid-1988, with its economy in a shambles, much of its navy at the bottom of the Persian Gulf, and its air force down to a handful of flyable planes, Iran was no longer in a position to mount a serious challenge to the United States. Sensing that the worst had passed, JCS planners began to prepare for the drawdown of U.S. forces. In April 1988, for air defense purposes, the Navy added an Aegis missile cruiser, the USS *Vincennes*, to its flotilla operating in the Persian Gulf. The decision to do so was at the instigation of the NSC Staff, which wanted to avoid a repetition of the *Stark* incident, and went against the better judgment of JCS and Navy planners, who considered Aegis cruisers ill-suited to the relatively shallow "green water"

environment of the Persian Gulf.[76] According to Admiral Crowe, who reluctantly supported the NSC's recommendation, the deployment of the *Vincennes* was a belated development and came about only after intelligence reports that the Iranians, having become desperate, were reconfiguring what was left of their air force to attack U.S. warships.[77]

On July 3, 1988, while on patrol duty in the Persian Gulf, the *Vincennes* shot down an Iranian civilian airliner, killing all 290 passengers and crew aboard. Unable to distinguish one type of plane from another, the *Vincennes*' radar mistook the airliner for an Iranian F–14, which had been prowling the same area the past few days. Immediately after, as if sobered by the incident, Iran and Iraq dramatically scaled back their military operations in the Persian Gulf. The last reported attack against neutral shipping by either belligerent occurred on July 20. Having fought one another almost continuously for 8 years, both sides were showing marked signs of war-weariness, especially Iran. The end of the war was anticlimactic, as Iran and Iraq both grudgingly accepted a UN-brokered cease-fire, which took effect on August 20, 1988. Escorts ended a month later, though as a precaution the Navy continued to operate a less demanding regime of protection, termed an "accompany mission," that lasted until June 1989.

Throughout *Earnest Will*, the approaching end of the Cold War undoubtedly allowed the Joint Chiefs to operate more freely and to take greater risks. A major factor in Middle East politics from the mid-1950s on, the Soviet Union was barely noticeable during the escort operation and its aftermath. Still, it was the possibility that Moscow might steal the march on the West by taking over protection of Kuwait's tankers that prodded the United State into action in the first place. Though not as strong as it was, the specter of Soviet power remained a formidable factor.

Overall, however, the demise of Soviet power was steadily reshaping JCS perceptions of American security interests and the accompanying need for military forces. For two generations, the Joint Chiefs had framed their assessments of U.S. defense requirements around the dangers posed by a nuclear-armed Soviet Union and its satellites. But by the end of the Reagan Presidency, the chiefs' image of the Communist threat had begun to change. Although they still credited the Soviet Union as having formidable military capabilities, they could not ignore the emerging changes in Soviet policy instigated by new leadership in Moscow. While it was too soon to tell with certainty how the Gorbachev reforms would play out, one clearly intended result was to loosen the Soviet military's grip on resources. Should that trend continue, it would doubtless fundamentally alter JCS perceptions of their own military requirements.

In sum, as the Reagan administration drew to a close, decades of tension and competition between East and West were starting to give way, a situation far different from only 8 years earlier. Whether the current rapprochement would last or, like "peaceful coexistence" and détente degenerate into another round of the Cold War, remained to be seen. As usual, the Joint Chiefs were cautiously optimistic, not wanting to let down their guard but aware also that change was in the air. They could sense that they were entering a period of transition but could not as yet foresee its outcome or full impact.

## *NOTES*

1 On the background and origins of the JCS reorganization debate, see Gordon Nathaniel Lederman, *Reorganizing the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), chaps. 1–2; Daniel Wirls, *Buildup: The Politics of Defense in the Reagan Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 79–101; and Archie D. Barrett, *Reappraising Defense Organization* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1983).

2 CM-79-78 to SECDEF, September 1, 1978, "National Military Command Structure and Departmental Headquarters Studies," U, JCS 1977/409-5.

3 Interview with General David C. Jones, USAF (Ret.), by Walter S. Poole and Steven L. Rearden, February 4, 1998, Arlington, VA.

4 James R. Locher III, *Victory on the Potomac: The Goldwater–Nichols Act Unifies the Pentagon* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 33–37.

5 David C. Jones, "Why the Joint Chiefs of Staff Must Change," *Armed Forces Journal International* (March 1982), 62–72.

6 Edward C. Meyer, "The JCS—How Much Reform Is Needed?" *Armed Forces Journal International* (April 1982), 82–90.

7 CM-143-82 to SECDEF, November 22, 1982, "JCS Reorganization," JCS Reorganization Notebook No. 3, JHO; see also Locher, 79–80.

8 JCS Historical Division, *Organizational Development of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1942–1989* (Washington, DC: Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, November 1989), 60–62.

9 P.L. 98-525, October 19, 1984; H. Rpt. No. 98-1080.

10 "CJCS Guidance to the OJCS Special Study Group," January 7, 1985, JHO Collection.

11 NSDD 175, "Establishment of a Blue Ribbon Commission on Defense Management," June 17, 1985, U, available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-175.htm>.

12 CM-152-86 to Service chiefs, January 29, 1986, "Nomination and Selection of Quality Officers for Assignment to OJCS," U; and CM-153-86 to Directors and Heads of Agencies, OJCS, January 29, 1986, "Selection of Officers to the OJCS," U, both in JHO 15-009.

13 See Crowe's testimony in U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Investigations, *Hearings: Reorganization of the Department of Defense*, 99:2

(Washington, DC: GPO, 1986), 343; see also Lederman, *Reorganization of the JCS*, 72, 138 note no. 39.

14 William J. Crowe, Jr., *The Line of Fire* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 148.

15 JCSM-397-85 to SECDEF, November 13, 1985, "Joint and Service Improvement Initiatives," U, JHO 15-006; Crowe, *Line of Fire*, 155.

16 JCSM-401-85 to SECDEF, November 12, 1985, "DOD Organization," U, JHO 15-006.

17 Letter, Weinberger to Goldwater, December 2, 1985, U, JHO 15-007.

18 Crowe, *Line of Fire*, 158–159; Locher, 423–424.

19 Letter, Crowe to Aspin, August 13, 1986, U, JHO 15-0012.

20 *Congressional Quarterly Almanac, 1986*, 459. Although a major event in the history of the Department of Defense, passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act received no mention in either Reagan's or Weinberger's memoirs.

21 See Christopher M. Bourne, "Unintended Consequences of the Goldwater-Nichols Act," *Joint Force Quarterly* (Spring 1998), 103–104.

22 Crowe, *Line of Fire*, 160.

23 CM-424-86 to DJS, November 6, 1986, "OJCS Restructuring," U; and DJSM 1915-86 to Directors and Heads of Agencies, OJCS, November 7, 1986, "OJCS Restructuring Directive," U, both in JHO 15-0012; *Organizational Development of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1942–1989* (Washington, DC: Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Chiefs of Staff, November 1989), 64–65.

24 Crowe, *Line of Fire*, 159.

25 CM-660-87 to SECDEF, April 6, 1987, "Duties of the VCJCS," U, JHO 15-0012; Memo, SECDEF to CJCS, April 15, 1987, "Duties of the VCJCS," U, in notebook labeled "OCJCS Restructuring Nov 1987," JHO Collection.

26 CM-465-86 to CNO, December 5, 1986, "Implementation of the Special Operations Command," U; DJSM 226-87 to SECDEF, February 6, 1987, "Timely Advice," U, both in OCJCS Restructuring November 1987 Notebook, JHO Collection.

27 See Paul Y. Hammond, "Fulfilling the Promise of the Goldwater-Nichols Act in Operational Planning and Command," in James A. Blackwell, Jr., and Barry M. Blechman, eds., *Making Defense Reform Work* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1990), 127–129.

28 Crowe, *Line of Fire*, 161.

29 Richard L. Kugler, *Commitment to Purpose: How Alliance Partnership Won the Cold War* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1993), 428–430; John S. Duffield, *Power Rules: The Evolution of NATO's Conventional Force Posture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 227.

30 Though Rogers was instrumental as Army Chief of Staff and SACEUR in promoting the AirLand Battle concept, much of the inspiration behind the idea came from two successive heads of the U.S. Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC)—General William E. DuPuy and General Donn A. Starry. See John L. Romjue, "The Evolution of the AirLand Battle Concept," *Air University Review* 35 (May–June 1984), 4–15.

31 Bernard W. Rogers, "Follow-on Forces Attack: Myths and Realities," *NATO Review*, No. 6 (December 1984), 1–9.

32 William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 75–78.

33 According to General Sir Peter de la Billière, who led British troops during *Desert Shield/Desert Storm* in 1990-1991, efforts by the British Army of the Rhine to assemble one fully operational armored brigade for that operation "turned the whole system inside-out." "Some of our armoured vehicles were old and plain worn out; others were run down and not properly maintained or else not used due to the lack of spares, money and training." General Sir Peter de la Billière, *Storm Command: A Personal Account of the Gulf War* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), 26.

34 Gordon S. Barrass, *The Great Cold War: A Journey Through the Hall of Mirrors* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 341.

35 Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, trans. by Georges Peronansky and Tatjana Varsavsky (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 401f.

36 Joint Staff, *United States Military Posture FY 1989*, 1–9 and passim, U, JHO 13-005.

37 Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 615; Gorbachev quoted in Jonathan Haslam, *Russia's Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 354.

38 Maynard W. Glitman, *The Last Battle of the Cold War: An Inside Account of Negotiating the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 117–119.

39 Reagan Diary, October 27, 1986, available at <http://www.reaganlibrary.com/white–house–diary.aspx>.

40 Joseph P. Harahan, *On–Site Inspections Under the INF Treaty* (Washington, DC: On–Site Inspection Agency, U.S. Department of Defense, 1993), 169–175, reprints the INF Treaty. The treaty did away with 2,692 missiles and banned eight types of systems. For the NATO powers, these were the Pershing II, the BGM–109 ground–launched cruise missile, and the Pershing 1A. For the Soviet Union, they were the SS–20, SS–4, SS–5, SS–12, and SS–23. Two missiles that had been tested but not deployed were also banned because of their ranges: the U.S. Pershing 1B and the Soviet SSC–X-4 cruise missile.

41 Joseph D. Douglass, Jr., *The Soviet Theater Nuclear Offensive* (Washington, DC: Office of Director of Defense Research and Engineering, Net Technical Assessment, 1976), examines the origins of this strategy and his philosophic underpinnings.

42 Haslam, 359.

43 Akhromeyev quoted in George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), 1012.

44 Barrass, 212–214, 342–343; Odom, 134–135.

45 Hugh A. Williams, "Flexible Response and the INF Treaty: What Next? (Study Project, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, March 14, 1988), 1, 13–17.

46 Crowe, *Line of Fire*, 264.

47 "Remarks on the Departure of General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev," December 10, 1987, *Reagan Public Papers, 1987*, 1498–1499.

48 Reagan, *An American Life*, 697–705; Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1994, rev. ed.).

49 Shultz, 1086–1087.

50 Tom Rogers, *The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Analysis and Chronology* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 31–36.

51 Brian L. Davis, *Qaddafi, Terrorism, and the Origins of the U.S. Attack on Libya* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 18.

52 NSDD 179, July 20, 1985, "Task Force on Combatting [sic] Terrorism," available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-179.htm>.

53 Diary Entry, April 7, 1986, Douglas Brinkley, ed., *The Reagan Diaries* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 402–403. Also see Charles G. Cogan, "The Response of the Strong to the Weak: The American Raid on Libya, 1986," *Intelligence and National Security* 6 (July 1991), 618.

54 Stanik, *Operation Eldorado Canyon*, 176–205, summarizes the operation. For criticism of the operation as a joint endeavor, see John F. Lehman, *Command of the Seas* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1988), 300–301; and Davis, 120.

55 Quoted in Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 444.

56 U.S. Congress, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran–Contra Affair*, 100:1 H. Rpt. No. 100-433 and S. Rpt. No. 100-216 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1987), 64–65.

57 PL 99-500, October 18, 1986. See also NSDD 248 (sanitized), "Central America," available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdd/nsdd-248.htm> (accessed July 19, 2011).

58 Robert Kagan, *A Twilight Struggle: American Power and Nicaragua, 1977–1990* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 588–589.

59 Brinkley, 587–588.

60 See James A. Baker, III, with Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace, 1989–1992* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 48–53.

61 Michael A. Palmer, *Guardians of the Gulf: A History of America's Expanding Role in the Persian Gulf, 1833–1992* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 116–117.

62 Entry, June 11, 1981, Brinkley 25.

63 Entry, February 11, 1987, Ibid., 474.

64 Nadia El–Sayed El–Shazly, *The Gulf Tanker War: Iran and Iraq's Maritime Swordplay* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 224–225.

65 Palmer, 122–123.

66 Crowe, *Line of Fire*, 180.

67 Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace* (New York: Warner Books, 1990), 397; Shultz, 925–926.

68 Crowe, *Line of Fire*, 181.

69 Palmer, 132.

70 U.S. intelligence identified these missiles as the HY–2, a Chinese copy of the Soviet-made SS–N-2 STYX. The Joint Staff referred to these missiles as the SILKWORM, a generic term used to encompass several slightly different models.

71 Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 414–415; El–Shazly, 248.

72 Crowe, *Line of Fire*, 200–201.

73 Hans S. Pawlisch, "Operation Praying Mantis," Appendix A in Palmer, *On Course to Desert Storm*, 141–146, places output of the Sirri platform at around 180,000 barrels per day.

74 David B. Crist, *Gulf of Conflict: A History of U.S.–Iranian Confrontation at Sea*, Policy Focus No. 95 (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2009), 8–9.

75 Crowe, *Line of Fire*, 201–202.

76 Palmer, 146.

77 CM-1485-88 to SECDEF, August 18, 1988, "Formal Investigation into the Circumstances Surrounding the Downing of Iran Air Flight 655 on 3 July 1988," (declassified), 887/546 (July 28, 1988); and <http://www.dod.mil/pubs/foi/reading_room/172.pdf>.


General Colin L. Powell, USA, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, 1989–1993