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The dissolution of the bipolar bloc system that broadly defined and framed the purpose of modern armed forces in the West has been supplanted by a more integrated and interdependent international environment. The purpose of modern armed forces has consequently been altered and adjusted to fit the changing nature of international relations. The principle of sovereignty has shifted from a position of inviolability to one where the international community can become involved in the internal affairs of a state and a region if it is deemed that a state poses a threat to international stability. Intervention in Somalia, Former Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Afghanistan are examples of the proactive, expeditionary defence against instability. The direct defence of the homeland as a strategic premise and priority for Britain and the United States has been replaced by a concern to defend against instability through expeditionary intervention. The focus of defence now resolves around the shift from a conventional all-embrasive threat towards the expeditionary defence against unconventional threats from failing or failed states. However, the examples of India and China - key geostrategic states with prominent armed forces – indicate that defending against instability frequently involves activities which protect and defend the homeland and its immediate locale.

The shift from defending the homeland towards defending against instability has irrevocably impacted upon the strategic formulation and utilisation of the armed forces of the United States. In reaction to the collapse of the Soviet Union and in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks in 2001, the United States has sought to structure its forces around flexible, rapid, and at times pre-emptive involvement, away from the static forward defensive strategy utilised against the Soviet Union. State-based military challenges to the United States will remain. However, the September 11th 2001 attacks and the immediate threat posed by Al Qaeda illustrated that a broader range of security challenges had emerged. The Secretary of Defence's 2008 National Defence Strategy was designed and framed so the United States can react to, and act against the security challenges of the twenty-first century. It envisages a strategic environment that "will be defined by a global struggle against a violent extremist ideology that seeks to overturn the international state system". The Strategy further points to "Armed sub-national groups [that] threaten the stability and legitimacy of key states". Potential State-based challenges from Russia, China, Iran and North Korea remain, however the longer-term approach to these challenges is geared towards deterrence and negotiation.

In terms of its defensive posture therefore the United States proceeded to close or turn over to host governments 60 percent of its overseas military installations and returned nearly three hundred thousand military personnel to the United States. US land-based forces are no longer primarily geared towards combating Soviet forces in Europe. Instead the US Army has predominantly been involved in drawn out counter-insurgency conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan directed against non-state forces. In a maritime context, the 1992 paper 'From the Sea' also documents the shift in US policy. 'From the Sea' emphasised the importance of unobtrusive forward presence – as opposed to the forward defence concept of the Cold War – and the

flexibility of sea-based forces. The US Navy therefore has been cut down in size - between September 1989 and September 2009 the Navy reduced from 592 ships to 283. The US Navy has moved from actively defending the open oceans against a perceived Soviet threat. It is now shaped and framed around a new capabilities-based approach in which there is a desire to support and work closely with other forces, such as the Marine Corps, who actively combat forms of instability ashore.

During the Cold War, the defence and security policy of the United Kingdom was centrally concerned with defence of the realm and the NATO area from the Soviet threat. The end of the Cold War changed the political map of Europe and changed the role of the UK armed forces. The National Security Strategy of 2008, shows that "there is a very low risk of military attack on the United Kingdom in the foreseeable future". The Strategy further illustrates that "most of the major threats and risks emanate from failed or fragile states...[which] have the potential to destabilise the surrounding region". The need to move from static defence to rapidly deployable forces has been readily grasped by the UK, which has streamlined its armed forces from 315,000 in 1985 to 240,000 personnel in 2009, and sought to divert spending into equipment suitable for rapid and flexible deployment around the globe. For example, the personnel numbers of the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force have halved over a period of twenty-five years. The shifted focus of defence for the United Kingdom has been shaped and framed by Britain's role in former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Sierra Leone, East Timor, and Afghanistan – as the new chapter of The Strategic Defence Review published in 2002 suggested, "by undertaking peace support operations, we can prevent instability or assist in stabilisation".

The case of the Indian armed forces offers an illustration of an armed force that has shifted from a focus on conventional threat – traditionally posed by China and Pakistan – towards one in which it seeks to combat numerous unconventional threats to and within its homeland, disputed territories – Kashmir, and its surrounding areas. A strategic concern for India originates from conventional fears of Pakistan and the Indian armed forces consist of 1,325,000 active personnel. The Army in particular retains three armoured and four rapid (partially mechanised) infantry divisions to check any possible conventional threat from Pakistan. However, other challenges such as nuclear capability, low-intensity conflict, and terrorism are the dominant Indian security concerns in the contemporary period. Kashmiri insurgents and militant Islamic groups operating in India, who are backed by Pakistan, present a dominant security concern. Indian security forces are also heavily engaged in combating the Naxalite insurgency that has spread across vast swathes of Central and Eastern India.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) is another conventional military force that has shifted its concern away from defending against a conventional threat. In May 1985 Deng Xiaoping put forward the view that China no longer faced an imminent strategic attack from the Soviet Union. The PLA was told that it must no longer prepare to fight 'an early war, major war and nuclear war', instead it was told to prepare for limited war or local war. The requirement for rapid response and joint operations diminished the dominance of the PLA and its focus on continental defence – between 2003 and 2005 alone the PLA was cut from 2.5 million to 2.3 million. However, primarily concerned with assuring their control over the PLA and the nation, the Chinese Communist Party has also sought to use the armed forces for nation-building operations which include peacekeeping and anti-piracy efforts, as a means by which to achieve

fundamental national security objectives and to enhance a deeper Chinese presence around the world. China has thus sought to use its armed forces as an instrument of statecraft, in terms of military operations other than war – MOOTWA: a use which projects external presence. However, when Chinese military and security forces are actually involved in combat, they are being increasingly exposed to non-conventional forms of armed force within or contiguous to China - Tibet and Xinjiang in particular. A central thrust of China's defensive posture continues to be the high priority focus on the potential declaration of independence of Taiwan – an area contiguous to the Chinese mainland.

The move away from static defence against a conventional Soviet threat towards a defence against instability caused and fomented by violence emanating within and erupting out of fragile or failed states, is thus the key driving force behind the change in purpose for the conventional forces of Britain and the United States. For these states, the purpose of modern armed forces is to ensure a rapid, flexible, and immediate expeditionary response to challenges that disrupt the functioning of the international community. For China and India, the defence against instability frequently involves the ability to respond to challenges that may occur within the state, or contiguous to the state. This shift in the focus of defence is the dominant factor determining the structure and purpose of military forces in these four key states and is affecting the posture of other military forces across the world.