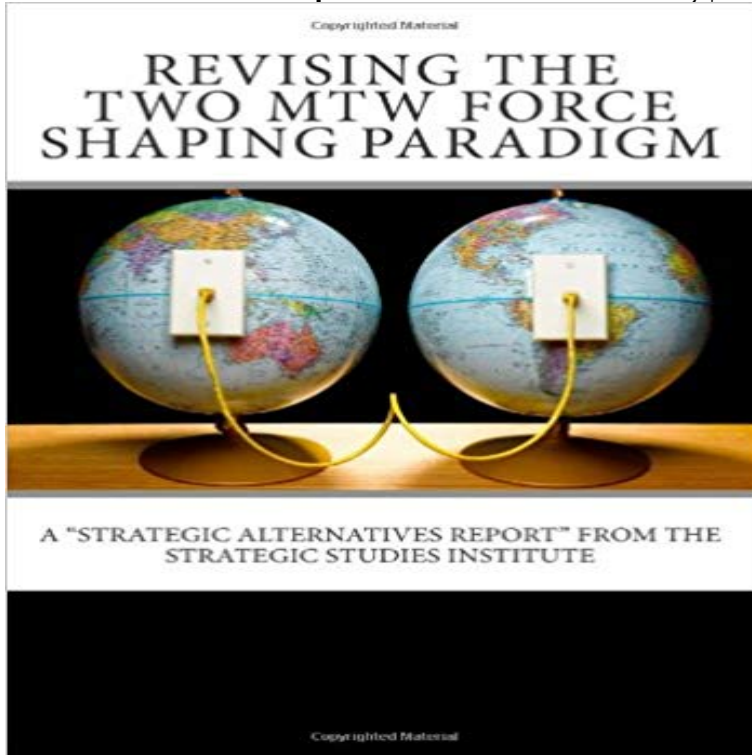


# Revising the Two MTW Force Shaping Paradigm: A Strategic Alternatives Report from the Strategic Studies Institute



Since the early 1990s, U.S. military strategy has called for a force able to fight and win two nearly-simultaneous major theater wars (MTWs). An MTW was something similar to Operation DESERT STORM--a large-scale conventional war in Eurasia against an aggressive regional power involving substantial American forces from all services and, most likely, allies or coalition partners. While policymakers and planners admitted that the outbreak of two nearly simultaneous MTWs was unlikely, they felt that a military able to deal with such a challenge would also be sufficient for other likely missions and tasks. The two MTW force shaping paradigm had a tremendous effect on American strategy. National security strategy always has both internal and external dimensions. The external dimension specifies how a nation will deal with others, specifically how it will use power resources to protect or advance its interests. The internal dimension deals with building a consensus on strategic objectives and methods, mobilizing support for the strategy, and developing the means to attain the objectives, including a military force. Many factors shape force development, including geography, wealth, strategic culture (including a nation's tolerance for risk, its aggressiveness, and its worldview), level of technological development, strategic objectives, the shape and form of threat, domestic politics, commitments, partnerships, and expectations concerning the nature of current and future armed conflict. These factors made the two nearly-simultaneous MTW force shaping paradigm the appropriate one in the 1990s. Geography dictated that any war involving the U.S. military would take place overseas. Only Eurasia combined a high enough level of U.S. national interest and of threat to lead the United States into a large scale war. The wealth of the United States meant that

the nation could support a force that was large enough and advanced enough to project decisive power to nearly every part of the globe. Americans saw armed conflict as abnormal and episodic, arising from aggression by dictators. Such dictators, in the American worldview, only understood force, and thus must be deterred or defeated rather than accommodated. If one succeeded at armed aggression, others would be inspired to attempt it. This meant that the United States sought to deter or reverse aggression in a wide band where vital interests were at stake, including Europe, Southwest Asia, and Northeast Asia. The best way to deter aggression, American strategic thinkers held, was through military preponderance. During the 1990s, the assumption was that the primary threat to regional stability and U.S. interests came from rogue states largely armed with Soviet or Soviet-style equipment, and thus preferring to fight a Soviet-style war based on armor-heavy conventional units. Such rogue states wanted to expand their territory or augment their national power by controlling vital resources and were willing to use force to do so. Because the primary threat defined as one that was both possible and potentially dangerous came from rogue states, the United States could expect to fight with allies or coalition partners in an MTW.

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