

Crafting Strategy in an Age of Transition

SHAWN BRIMLEY

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The United States is at a transition point nearly unparalleled in its history. Years of war abroad have severely strained America's military, and the ongoing economic crisis will force ever-greater constraints on all forms of discretionary spending. Rising regional powers, energy scarcity, climate change, and failing states are some of the myriad variables that will combine to form a daunting set of strategic challenges for the Obama Administration. Not since the late 1940s has America's defense community faced challenges of such size and scope. Unlike the immediate aftermath of the strategic shocks of Pearl Harbor and 9/11—when the imperatives of war demanded a focus on near-term requirements—the years following such fundamental disruptions to America's strategic context offer valuable opportunities and time to reflect on what has changed, reset defense priorities, and renew US strategy for the long term. Then as now, as the fog of uncertainty associated with the emergence of a new geostrategic era begins to dissipate, the contours of the strategic environment can be more clearly perceived.

As the fog lifts it becomes apparent that despite valiant efforts and good intentions, America suffers from strategic distraction, dislocation, and near-exhaustion. The United States is, as Army Chief of Staff General George Casey and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Michael Mullen often observe, "out of balance." America's defense posture today assumes far more strategic risk than is prudent and rests on a shifting global foundation certain to exacerbate the constraints and risks to US power and prestige. The defense community is not as prepared as it should be for the challenges of today and tomorrow—it can, and must, do better.

Strategy is the art of connecting aspirations with prudent plans and finite resources. This article will attempt to diagnose a troubling strategic inheritance, describe a changing geopolitical context, and advocate a defense strategy that can best protect core American interests in an age of transition.

A Troubled Inheritance

By almost any measure, President Barack Obama faces a daunting national security inheritance. Even before the onset of the current economic crisis, a series of imposing challenges—from wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to an exploding national debt at home—promised to force the new administration to make hard choices among competing priorities. In the context of the most dramatic economic storm since the Great Depression, such choices and tradeoffs are now not only necessary but imperative. The Obama Administration is accepting a troubled inheritance on three dimensions of American power: military, diplomatic, and economic.

The most pressing challenge for the new Pentagon team will be countering dramatic constraints on America’s freedom of action around the globe. With the preponderance of US ground forces either en route to, deployed in, or returning from commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan, the ability to react to any consequential strategic surprise is seriously curtailed. Admiral Mullen’s guidance for 2008-2009 paints an ominous picture: “The pace of ongoing operations has prevented our forces from training for the full-spectrum of operations and impacts our ability to be ready to counter future threats. This lack of balance is unsustainable in the long term.”¹ The challenge for Pentagon leaders will be to find ways to generate options for a new President within an operational environment that fundamentally limits what American forces can do and how they might react to unexpected contingencies. Moreover, almost every outside study examining the Pentagon’s procurement and acquisition programs has concluded that the system is broken. “It may be hard for most people to believe that our defense establishment is in a serious decline,” argued former procurement

Shawn Brimley is a Fellow at the Center for a New American Security in Washington.

official John Christie in a recent issue of *Proceedings*, but he was correct to conclude that unless major changes are made soon, “US defense forces will continue to shrink and age, and we rapidly will cease being a dominant military force in the world.”²

The new administration also inherited nonmilitary instruments of statecraft that are struggling to rejuvenate an expeditionary ethos and capability that became seriously atrophied in the post-Cold War era. Despite a notable increase in funding for the State Department in recent years, resources and capabilities for diplomacy, foreign assistance, field development, and public diplomacy remain a fraction of what they should be. It is not in America’s interest to constantly depend on its military to provide, in some instances, all the elements of statecraft.³ Indeed, in his current guidance for the joint force, Admiral Mullen warns that “we must guard against the further militarization of our foreign policy.”⁴ During the Cold War, US leaders understood the necessity of using all elements of national power to counter an adversary who practiced ideological warfare. The future will require the United States to be adept not only in countering extremist strategies, but also those of rising autocratic powers, emboldened by the current economic crisis and likely to challenge western liberal economic models in ways not seen for decades.⁵ Moreover, America’s image abroad has significantly eroded in recent years, making it difficult to persuade international partners and allies to continue their participation in ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and hampering the ability of US diplomats to make progress on key international issues.⁶

Finally, the scale and scope of America’s economic woes will provide the immediate context within which the new administration will need to balance competing domestic and international priorities. The economic backdrop is sobering. America’s national debt, accumulated over decades, totaled \$5.7 trillion in early 2001. When President Obama took the oath of office, the national debt exceeded \$10 trillion, or approximately \$90,000 per US household.⁷ The challenge of arresting the current economic decline in the face of what is likely to be a 2009 budget deficit of at least \$1 trillion, or nearly seven percent of gross domestic product, is difficult to overstate.⁸ The crisis within America’s financial services sector, the ongoing mortgage and foreclosure challenges, and the potential for a continuing recession will all combine to force the new administration to make hard choices concerning where and how to balance strategic risk.

The Third Turning

In addition to inheriting this troubled national security environment, the Obama Administration will have to come to grips with an international system that is undergoing fundamental changes not seen since the end of the Cold War. Simply reacting to the challenges of the present without contemplating the deeper and more fundamental forces that are forming the contours of the future is perhaps the largest strategic risk facing those charged with crafting US national security and defense strategy. It is precisely when the demands of the present seem overwhelming that the need to consider America's strategic position in the larger context of history is most urgent.

During the last century there have been only two fundamental shifts, or turns, affecting the foundation of the international system. These turns are short periods that set the stage for events and conditions that occur in the succeeding years. The first turn involved the shift away from a world of competing great powers before the Second World War toward a global environment defined by the contest between the United States and the Soviet Union. This first turn, roughly between the end of the war in 1945 and the first successful Soviet atomic test in 1949, not only altered the basic framework of the international system but essentially defined in fairly precise terms the requirements for American grand strategy and defense policy. In 1950, as the nature of the emerging strategic environment became increasingly clear, the planning document NSC 68 outlined what would become America's decades-long Cold War strategy. NSC 68 provided a two-pronged approach: "One is a policy which we would probably pursue even if there were no Soviet threat. It is a policy of attempting to develop a healthy international community. The other is the policy of 'containing' the Soviet system. These two policies are closely interrelated and interact on one another."⁹ By sustaining a global system that was inherently advantageous to American and allied interests while simultaneously containing the worst of what George Kennan called "Russia's expansionist tendencies," the Cold War ultimately concluded in the West's favor.¹⁰

The period between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the 1991 Gulf War constitutes the second turn. The bipolar standoff that defined 40 years of the Cold War was replaced by a unipolar world in which the United States enjoyed unrivaled freedom of action. Following the second turn,

America stood alone for more than a decade as a global sheriff, using its power to advance a uniquely western vision while attempting to rein in the darker aspects of globalization, such as anarchy and terrorism. Unipolarity came at a cost, however, as the lonely challenge of global leadership proved a thankless task. The Clinton Administration struggled to define a grand strategy in the absence of a single overarching external threat, and, consumed by the consequences of the Soviet Union's devolution, spent much of the decade dealing with critical issues such as securing the nuclear arsenals of newly free East European states, helping adapt Cold War-era alliances to a new era, and reacting to ethnic conflict in Africa and the Balkans. Military operations during this period, including humanitarian and stability operations in Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean, proved to be harbingers of future challenges.

The world is currently undergoing another large shift in the international system. The attacks of 11 September 2001 and America's 2003 invasion of Iraq arguably marked the beginning, or an acceleration, of a third turn in the global strategic context. The notion of a third turn, recently endorsed by the National Intelligence Council's *Global Trends 2025* report, is the result of the slow and gradual shift from a unipolar to a complex multipolar world. On nearly every dimension of power, from percentage of global military spending, to gross domestic product, to the persuasive power of its political and economic system, the United States will begin to lose its dominant relative advantage. "The international system—as constructed following the Second World War—will be almost unrecognizable by 2025," the National Intelligence Council report concludes, "owing to the rise of emerging powers, a globalizing economy, an historic transfer of relative wealth and economic power from West to East, and the growing influence of nonstate actors."¹¹ Along with the rise of new great powers such as China and India, the future is likely to see increased conflict driven by climate change, resource scarcity, and the continued proliferation of nuclear technology. This geopolitical turn is not complete nor is it fully understood, but that it has begun is undeniable. The core undertaking for the Obama Administration will be to address the challenges of today while preparing the United States to adapt to a world in which power is more diffuse and sources of danger more distributed.

An Evolving Environment

The ongoing shift to a multipolar world characterized by increasingly powerful state and nonstate actors is already impacting the operational environment for America's joint force. Beyond the imperative to achieve sustainable stability in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the broader operational challenges associated with likely twenty-first century threats are as daunting as the strategic inheritance. There are three core challenges likely to pose increasing difficulties for American military forces over the mid- to long-range future: developing tensions in the global commons, the rise of hybrid forms of warfare, and the persistent need to assist important weak states.

First, the United States' dependence on free and fair access to a vibrant global economy requires stability in the global commons, those areas that no single nation controls but that provide access and connectivity to much of the world.¹² Ninety percent of global trade travels by sea, and all advanced nations are at least somewhat reliant on a global communications system comprised of Internet servers and orbiting satellites. Since World War II, the United States essentially has been the guarantor of the global commons, ensuring freedom of the seas and the ability of individuals to traverse much of the world. This extended era of uncontested dominance of the global commons may be coming to an end. A recent string of high-profile examples—including China's successful antisatellite missile test and spacewalk; India's unmanned lunar mission and augmented naval capability; Russia's naval and air posturing in the evolving Arctic region; the rise in offensive cyberspace operations; and recurring piracy in key littoral environments—all point to a future where the United States will confront increased tension and complexity throughout the global commons. The *2008 National Defense Strategy* reflects this insight, stating that “the United States requires freedom of action in the global commons and strategic access to important regions of the world to meet our national security needs.”¹³

Second, future adversaries are likely to challenge America's strategic interests by utilizing perceived asymmetric advantages at both ends of the conflict spectrum. The 2007 US maritime strategy observed that modern “conflicts are increasingly characterized by a hybrid blend of traditional and irregular tactics, decentralized planning and execution, and nonstate actors using both simple and sophisticated technologies in innovative ways.”¹⁴ America's continued strength in major force-on-force conflict will

incentivize future adversaries toward distributed cellular forms of insurgency characterized by the improvised explosive devices and ambushes seen in Iraq and Afghanistan, or toward the use of organized small-unit kinetic operations buttressed with employment of advanced technology such as the antitank and antiship munitions successfully employed by Hezbollah in the 2006 Lebanon War. Indeed, an influential study of Hezbollah's performance in 2006 concluded that while ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan require US forces to adapt to more traditional forms of insurgent warfare, "Hezbollah does demonstrate, unambiguously, that even today's nonstate actors are not limited to the irregular, guerrilla model military methods so often assumed in the future warfare debate."¹⁵ A future that includes hybrid warfare will demand that the joint force be proficient across the entire spectrum of conflict, and the development of such proficiency will be a central task for military and civilian leaders.¹⁶

Finally, given the certainty of continued global economic and resource challenges, future conflicts will likely occur in chronically weak or failing states. The frequency and severity of security issues associated with the erosion of national control in failing states will continue to increase. Moreover, the rise of new regional and great powers will increase the prospects that neighboring nations will either reap the benefits of expanding trade or suffer the consequences of population movements and disruptions to traditional economic and cultural patterns. Many governments will not have the option of choosing their fate in this regard. The increasing frequency of state failure or chronic governance shortfalls will pose two major problems for the United States. First, weak nations have proven to be catalysts for the growth of extremism and occasionally provide sanctuary to dangerous nonstate actors. Second, US interests will require that some countries, those that possess nuclear weapons or vital resources, either be protected from failure or stabilized in a post-failure scenario by American and allied military forces. Such intervention, ranging from military advising and training to counterinsurgency and stability operations, is often inconclusive, does not play to America's strengths, and yet is likely to remain a fixture of the future international security environment.

Grand Strategy in Transition

Having provided an overview of the ongoing changes in the international system and some key features of the future operational

environment, the question of grand strategy can be addressed. The United States has many interests and faces a number of threats, but troubled economic times and ongoing conflicts will require the new administration to articulate a principled rationale for the maintenance and exercise of American power.

It is first necessary to contemplate those instances where the previous administration may have failed to sufficiently appreciate what the emerging strategic environment required. For years, progress in Iraq and Afghanistan was hampered by a stubborn adherence to the goal of achieving maximalist end-states that caused or exacerbated a host of strategic errors—from the dismantlement of the Iraqi Army in 2003 to the continued belief that building an effective central government in Kabul was a reasonable and low-cost proposition. At the same time, the conclusion reached early in the Bush Administration that America did not need to embrace key international partners and allies proved to be a dramatic constraint on its ability to forge consensus on issues ranging from climate change to nonproliferation. In the modern era, a minimalist view of what international institutions and alliances have to offer erodes rather than reinforces American power and influence. Leadership shown by both former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates in recent years has ameliorated some of the damage, but as Richard Haass notes, because of “what it has done and what it has failed to do, the United States has accelerated the emergence of alternative power centers in the world and has weakened its own position relative to them.”¹⁷

At the same time, however, to paraphrase Mark Twain, the rumors of America’s demise tend to be exaggerated. The United States will remain a powerful nation well into the future. America’s relatively liberal immigration policies and a culture of tolerance will help ameliorate the effects of aging populations that strain much of the rest of the world, while the US economy will remain an effective engine for growth provided that investments in infrastructure, education, and cutting-edge research and innovation continue during this economic downturn. Fareed Zakaria correctly comments that despite the emergence of what he terms the “post-American world,” the United States will “remain a vital, vibrant economy, at the forefront of the next revolution in science, technology, and industry.”¹⁸

If America is to ease the transition into its role as a critically important actor in a twenty-first century international system defined by the emergence

of new powers, the United States needs to embrace its central role in sustaining an international system that can accommodate them. A truly grand strategy for America would be one that recognizes that the future of US power is coterminous with the fate of the international system the United States spent decades building and reinforcing during the Cold War. Successfully containing the Soviet Union is only one part of America's proud Cold War legacy; constructing and then sustaining the very foundations of the international system is arguably the more important component, one that tends to be overlooked. "Far from justifying a radical change in policy," James Steinberg argues, "the evolution of the international system since the collapse of the Soviet Union actually reinforced the validity of the liberal internationalist approach."¹⁹ Moreover, the insight that NSC 68 provided in 1950 is just as relevant today: "In a world of polarized power, the policies designed to develop a healthy international community are more than ever necessary to our own strength."²⁰

A grand strategy of sustainment would shift the emphasis of US policy toward the long-term objective of ensuring that the fabric of the global system is not only strong enough to endure twenty-first century challenges, but that it evolves and adapts in ways favorable to American interests. For example, a key strategic issue for the United States will be to help ensure that the rise of new great powers will not cause conflict that puts the status of the global commons in jeopardy. Emerging naval powers such as China and India have great aspirations and global interests. Making certain that the world's oceans and important littoral environments remain conducive to unfettered trade and travel is vital. Likewise, ensuring that space and cyberspace can be peacefully utilized by all who desire to communicate and conduct legitimate commerce will be essential. The preservation of peace and stability in the global commons is no small task and can no longer be taken for granted in a century that will witness dramatic structural change. The hard and soft power tasks associated with this challenge are immense, undergirding all of America's choices and aspirations in a changing world.

Alongside a renewed focus on stability within the global commons should be the realization that in a world system undergoing profound change, there will be some shocks and discontinuities that will increase the pace of decline and severity of problems associated with weak and failing nations. It is in the interest of the United States to take an active role in aiding critical nations to endure difficult external and internal pressures. American

interests are intimately affected, for example, if Pakistan or North Korea were to experience state failure. Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and Iraq are other countries where instability or civil war would threaten US interests. While America cannot and should not guarantee the survival of weak regimes in important regions, particularly if the governments are autocratic in nature, policymakers need to understand that robust development, economic, and military assistance missions will be a critical element of a grand strategy designed to sustain the twenty-first century international system.

America's Defense Priorities

A changing international system and operating environment coupled with a requisite shift in American grand strategy will have important implications for the Department of Defense (DOD). It should be noted, however, that of all the major national security institutions, DOD has done the best job in adapting to the changing global environment. It is during times of war that innovation cycles tend to shorten and improve, and this has surely been the case at the Pentagon. It is time, however, to step back and assess how DOD can best shift priorities to prepare for the future.

At the strategic level, the Pentagon and the military services have been relatively successful in perceiving how the future security environment will impact strategic and operational requirements for the US defense establishment. From a maritime strategy which recognizes that future adversaries are likely to employ hybrid forms of warfare, to innovative Army doctrine such as Field Manual (FM) 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, and FM 3-07, *Stability Operations*, the services have recognized several of the key characteristics that will drive future defense priorities. Moreover, the *2008 National Defense Strategy* (NDS) impressively articulated a nuanced understanding of the need to devote attention to issues encompassing the global commons, energy security, and building capacity with partners and allies. Perhaps most importantly, the NDS addressed the imperative of balancing risk in several dimensions, an issue that will be central in an era of economic strain.²¹

All too often, however, innovation and strategic clarity at the service level or emerging doctrine fail to translate into clear resource shifts. For example, while the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review called for increased investment in unmanned aerial vehicles, Secretary Gates acknowledged his

frustration in April 2008 when he publicly criticized the slow pace of change during a speech to students at the Air War College: “I’ve been wrestling for months to get more intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets into the theater. Because people were stuck in old ways of doing business, it’s been like pulling teeth.”²² All services have shortcomings related to how effectively and quickly they can adapt to new requirements, and while this is not always indicative of resistance to change, the military collectively can do better in preparing for the future.

For the Navy, the near- to mid-term future will require the maximum possible capability to conduct littoral operations. The dramatic increase in piracy targeting merchant ships in the Gulf of Aden highlights the need for more capacity to patrol and protect key shipping lanes and chokepoints. The new Littoral Combat Ship, with its speed, maneuverability, and shallow draft, will be a useful addition to the fleet. Also, the Navy needs to make preparations for a future in which carrier-based unmanned combat aerial vehicles constitute a fairly high percentage of aviation assets. The range and persistence that Unmanned Combat Air System (UCAS) platforms will provide would dramatically increase the capacity of aircraft carriers to support a wide range of surveillance and combat requirements across a variety of missions. Especially in light of the development of new threats such as hypersonic cruise missiles, it only makes sense that the Navy embrace technologies enabling increased capacity to support ground operations from farther offshore.²³ The impressive performance of the Navy’s Aegis missile system during the 2008 launch to destroy a failing US satellite demonstrated that the Navy can and will continue to play a critical role in providing a variety of missile-defense capabilities. Finally, the Navy should continue to enhance capabilities that hedge against a future in which America’s adversaries employ anti-access and sea-denial strategies utilizing advanced technology.

Future priorities for the Air Force are likely to remain enhancing capabilities that increase mobility, persistence, and precision. While the Air Force has suffered something of an identity crisis in recent years, the fact remains that it plays an indispensable role in ensuring that the joint force can see, move, and strike. Near- to mid-term priorities for the Air Force will continue to focus on ensuring that the service can acquire new airlift and refueling platforms, while substantially increasing investment in unmanned aerial systems. The current operating environment demonstrates that sustained ground operations are likely to last far longer than initial

estimates, requiring the ability to support forward-deployed forces for long-duration missions. Like the Navy, the Air Force should consider significant investment in UCAS technology, as the future will demand platforms that can loiter for long periods over extended distances. Given budget pressures, the Air Force should consider taking more risk in its short-range tactical fighter programs, including limiting F-22A Raptor procurement to 183 planes and slowing the production rate of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.²⁴ Finally, given the increased importance of building the capacity of foreign militaries, the Air Force would be wise to invest in simpler, lower cost platforms for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance and combat air support such as the propeller-driven RC-12 or a new light-attack aircraft (OA-X). Use of these platforms will help build partner capacity at a fraction of the cost of more advanced and largely unnecessary systems.²⁵

America's ground forces will continue to be stretched beyond what is prudent given the limitations of the all-volunteer force. The nation is taking unacceptable risk by having such a large percentage of its ground forces deployed and unable to respond to unexpected situations. The Army appears to be on track to increase its end-strength to 547,000 soldiers, and the Marine Corps will soon complete its expansion to 202,000 Marines. These increases were necessary given the continued strain operations in Iraq and Afghanistan pose in the near- to mid-term. Proposals to further increase ground force size should be closely scrutinized, however, in favor of ensuring that each service first gets the shape of the force correct. For example, even with an increased end-strength, the Army remains wedded to fielding a number of heavy brigades outfitted with the Future Combat System (FCS), the Army's largest vehicle modernization program with a price tag of at least \$160 billion.²⁶ FCS is a risky modernization effort, considering that many of the technologies remain unproven. In 2008, the Government Accountability Office concluded that "it is not clear if or when the information network that is at the heart of the FCS concept can be developed, built, and demonstrated."²⁷ Although the Army is wise to focus on ensuring that brigades are capable of operating across the spectrum of operations, given fiscal constraints it may be prudent to take some additional risk and add training and equipment geared more toward irregular warfare and stability operations.

For the US Marine Corps and special operations forces, the biggest issues relate to the possibility that current operations are causing traditional

skill-sets to atrophy. For example, Marine Corps Commandant General James T. Conway is correct to voice concern that sustained ground operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are eroding the Corps' ability to disembark ground forces from the sea, a key capability required in an environment where the ability to conduct complex expeditionary operations in urbanized littoral environments is likely.²⁸ This capability will require equipment and concepts of operations that enable Marine Air-Ground Task Forces to project and sustain combat power ashore in the face of an increasingly lethal antiship missile threat. While US special operations forces are experiencing a period of historic expansion, there are a number of strategists who are concerned that capabilities geared toward the indirect approach—unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, civil affairs, and psychological operations—are relatively under-resourced and under-utilized.²⁹ The ability to recruit, train, and retain highly skilled soldiers with critical language skills and cultural expertise is vital if the United States is to succeed in the irregular warfare missions likely to drive future demand.

Finally, the emerging domains of space and cyberspace should be among the top priorities for the new administration's leadership. According to a report issued by the Council on Foreign Relations, China's antisatellite missile test in 2007 created the largest manmade debris field in space and heralded "the arrival of an era where space is a potentially far more contested domain than in the past, with few rules."³⁰ The US Strategic Command operates the Joint Functional Component Command for Space and is the coordinating authority for all US military space assets, charged with developing concepts of operations for ensuring that America can protect its ability to freely operate in space.³¹ As rising powers attempt to field space-based assets, national leadership should provide not only the right guidance to the US military for strategy and capability development, but also pursue the direct diplomacy necessary to reduce the possibility of conflict in space. Similarly, in cyberspace the frequency and severity of cyber attacks has increased, with Russia and China showing clear progress and determination to pursue robust offensive cyber capabilities.³² There is a pressing need to develop offensive as well as defensive capabilities to ensure that the United States can protect its vital Internet-based infrastructure while placing an adversary's assets at risk.

Strategic Reviews

A changing international system coupled with a rapidly evolving operating environment requires that the Department of Defense make hard choices and assume the risk necessary to prepare for the future. Several impending constraints and mandatory reviews will present challenges as well as opportunities to ensure that America's military remains properly postured and prepared. There are several ways the Pentagon's civilian leadership can act as responsible stewards during the first year of the new administration.

First and most obvious, the years of unrestrained defense spending increases are expected to come to an end; the ongoing economic crisis will demand hard choices regarding the allocation of increasingly finite defense dollars. This is not a new phenomenon, as NSC 68 argued in 1950 that "free society is limited in its choice of means to achieve its ends."³³ The military will need to come to the table with options for policymakers concerning how best to retain core capabilities while being frank in assessing the need to assume risk in other areas.³⁴ Budget and program reviews for fiscal year 2010 as well as the out-years in the defense plan should be utilized to get the defense budget back on track in what will almost certainly be an era of fiscal restraint.

Second, both the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) and the Nuclear Posture Review are processes, almost a year in length, that should be used to shape DOD's strategy and investment portfolio. These reviews should also be utilized to help influence and shape the next *National Security Strategy* document and other interagency reviews. During a period of systemic change in the international environment, policymakers at the White House, on Capitol Hill, and throughout government agencies need to be aware of how DOD views the future, to include any challenges and constraints. At the Pentagon, in order for the QDR to be successful, senior leaders need to take an active role ensuring that the process is not only strategy driven, but also resource constrained. The leadership needs to guard against the QDR devolving into a thinly veiled competition for resources.

Finally, as part of the QDR, a force-planning construct should be developed that clearly delineates what is expected of US military forces related to homeland defense; major force-on-force conflicts that include regime change; stability and reconstruction operations; persistent foreign internal defense; and protecting American interests throughout the global

commons. Recent conflicts have called into question the long-standing requirement for the US military to plan for two nearly simultaneous major combat operations of the type required for regime change in the Middle East or East Asia.³⁵ A new force-planning construct needs to acknowledge that military forces, particularly ground forces, are far less fungible than previous QDRs assumed. Put another way, a new force-planning construct cannot assert that forces deployed as part of long-term, steady-state advising or partnering missions will be able to be reset and shift rapidly to major combat operations.

The Great Task

After more than seven years of combating global terrorism, the contours of the future security environment are becoming increasingly clear. The international system is beginning to undergo a fundamental shift—a third turning—away from a unipolar world order toward one characterized by the presence of several great powers and increasingly powerful nonstate actors. The future operating environment will feature an increase in hybrid forms of warfare as well as increasing tensions throughout the global commons. Such a future requires America to employ a grand strategy focused on sustaining a global system capable of accommodating these profound changes, which requires the US military to invest in capabilities that can concurrently address hybrid challenges and conflict in the commons, while maintaining an ability to work by, with, and through allies and partners. All these tasks need to be accomplished while ensuring that the foundations of America’s economy remain sound. Crafting a defense strategy that can overcome the challenges of today while preparing for tomorrow will be a difficult and onerous task, but America’s defense community has risen to the challenge before, and there is little reason to doubt that it can do so again.

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