

# Executive Memorandum

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## Principles for the Next Quadrennial Defense Review

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Congress mandates that the Pentagon conduct a Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) every four years. This exercise is meant to define a 20-year road map that addresses the Pentagon's strategy toward force structure, force modernization, infrastructure, and budget. The first QDR, in 1997, was largely criticized for being a budget-driven process that failed to realistically connect the Pentagon's objectives with the means at its disposal. The second QDR, in 2001, is viewed in a better light, and it provided the intellectual basis for the Pentagon's transformation agenda.

For the 2005 QDR to be successful, it must provide a framework to move beyond conceptualizing transformation and begin its implementation. The following principles should guide the process:

- **Budget prospects should not drive the QDR.** Growing deficits have already prompted some in Congress to suggest that defense spending should be cut. Growing deficits, however, should have no bearing on analyses of how much money the nation needs to defend itself. The quickest way to ensure that the QDR is irrelevant is to compel Pentagon analysts to force their conclusions into predetermined budget constraints. Instead, those conducting the QDR should be directed to carry out their

analysis based on the assumption that, while resources are not limitless, robust defense budgets will be sustained.

- **Combat platforms and systems must be weighted equally.** A serious discussion about long-term platform investment must be reintroduced into the transformation discussion. The entrenched interests associated with specific big-ticket programs have created significant resistance to major programmatic changes. The result has been a transformation debate that focuses heavily on systems integration while not sufficiently address-

ing platforms and programs. An effective strategy must include both systems (e.g., networks and sensors) and platforms (e.g., planes, ships, and tanks). In some cases, existing capabilities may be sufficient and simple reconstitution efforts will suffice. In others, new and improved platforms might be the answer, and a platform modernization program could be sufficient. In both

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- Budget prospects should not drive the QDR.
  - Platforms and systems must be weighted equally.
  - Strategic systems remain central to long-term national security.
  - The war on terrorism should influence, but not drive, long-term decision making.
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This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
[www.heritage.org/research/nationalsecurity/em954.frm](http://www.heritage.org/research/nationalsecurity/em954.frm)

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scenarios, platform transformation should wait until truly cutting edge technologies become available. However, in other cases, now is the time to begin cutting back some capabilities and investing in new transformational platforms.

- **Capabilities, force structure, and responsibilities must be balanced.** The United States has well over 2.5 million people in its armed forces, counting both active and Reserve components. Yet it is having a difficult time sustaining a force of 135,000 personnel in Iraq over an extended period. The United States maintains a very small standing force for the many responsibilities that it assumes. Therefore, when the nation is called to war, as it was after September 11, the force is going to feel some strain. However, that is not an excuse to accept overstretched forces. If the United States wants to maintain a small standing armed force that is flexible enough to take on the many challenges of the 21st century, it must ensure that it clearly defines what capabilities it needs, the force structure to produce those capabilities, and the responsibilities for which the U.S. must be held accountable. This means defining the role of the military in homeland security, rejecting interventions that have little to do with vital U.S. national interests, creating a Reserve component that is built around more frequent deployments, and recognizing that America's armed forces must be better prepared for post-conflict operations.
- **Strategic systems remain central to long-term national security.** Although most national security policy debate focuses on the threat of terrorism and the possibility of terrorists obtaining weapons of mass destruction, more traditional state-based threats still exist. China is engaged in a robust strategic modernization effort, Russia maintains a large nuclear arsenal, Pakistan and India are proven nuclear powers, North Korea likely has a few nuclear weapons, and Iran is not far behind. For this

reason it is imperative that the United States continues to develop and deploy effective ballistic missile defenses and maintains a safe, reliable, and credible nuclear deterrent. However, to be effective, the United States cannot rely on its gargantuan and largely irrelevant Cold War nuclear deterrent. As with its conventional forces, it must also transform its strategic forces.

- **The war on terrorism should influence—but not drive—long-term decision making.** The armed forces must be prepared for many 21st century missions, and the war on terrorism is just one mission. One risk of conducting long-term analysis during a conflict is that the conflict could disproportionately influence the analytical conclusions. While the war on terrorism should influence the QDR, it should not drive the review. The war on terrorism indicates the types of capabilities that the U.S. may need in the future, but it alone does not define what those capabilities should be. The next QDR should be about building a force that is relevant for the next half century, not about finishing a war that has already begun. Although it is unclear who or what may threaten the United States during the next 50 years, the U.S. will clearly need a very flexible force that can take on any number of diverse threats.

The Quadrennial Defense Review is meant as a long-term analysis of the nation's defense requirements. This is precisely the sort of guidance that is now needed to advance the Pentagon's stated transformation agenda. Transformation is not about the war on terrorism, peacekeeping in the Balkans, or any other current operation. It is about the force that the United States should have in 20 years. By following the principles stated above, the QDR can provide that guidance.

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