The Quadrennial Defense Review:
Are Secretary Rumsfeld's Priorities Valid?

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Our meeting today is focused on a matrix of potential threats generated by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's staff last year to assist the Defense Department in identifying future military needs and investment priorities. The matrix asserts that the likelihood of conventional warfare is declining while the likelihood of unconventional conflict is rising. It identifies three categories of unconventional danger:

- "Irregular" threats such as terrorism and insurgency;

- "Catastrophic" threats involving the use of weapons of mass destruction; and

- "Disruptive" threats where technology breakthroughs deprive America of military advantage.

It is tempting to see this compendium of concerns as little more than a response to the surprises of the last four years, but that is not the right way to look at the Pentagon's threat assessment or the military priorities that flow from it.

Basis of Bush Administration's Security Posture

The Bush Administration's security posture is based upon a longstanding plan that few outsiders seem to grasp. President Bush has discussed in public some of the thinking in that plan, and I'd like to read you an extended excerpt of what he said:

> We see the contagious spread of missile technology and weapons of mass destruction. We know that this era of American pre-eminence is also an era of car bombers and

Talking Points

- The QDR framework identifies as core challenges building partnerships to combat terrorism and insurgency, defending the homeland in depth, shaping the behavior of emerging military powers, and preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

- The first important gap in the new defense paradigm is that policymakers seem overly sensitive to some new dangers and insensitive to others: the ebbing away of America's advanced technology edge and the U.S. economy's increasing dependency on offshore sources of oil.

- The assumption of conventional military superiority appears to be based on an illusion. Failure to adequately fund armor, air power, and sea power inevitably encourages troublemakers.

- Pentagon policymakers' emphasis on information technologies is shifting the field of military competition into an arena where many other countries can compete.

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plutonium merchants and cyber terrorists and drug cartels and unbalanced dictators—all the unconventional and invisible threats of new technologies and old hatreds....

Once a strategic afterthought, homeland defense has become an urgent duty. For most of our history, America felt safe behind two great oceans. But with the spread of technology, distance no longer means security. North Korea is proving that even a poor and backward country, in the hands of a tyrant, can reach across oceans to threaten us....

We will defend the American homeland by strengthening our intelligence community—by focusing on human intelligence and on the early detection of terrorist operations both here and abroad. And when direct threats to America are discovered, I know that the best defense can be a strong and swift offense—including the use of Special Operations Forces and long-range strike capabilities....

Our heavy forces must be lighter. Our light forces must be more lethal. All must be easier to deploy. And these forces must be organized in smaller, more agile formations, rather than in cumbersome divisions.

You're probably wondering why I'm quoting the President at such length, given how widely held those views have become since 9/11. The reason I'm quoting him is that he said those things in 1999:

- A year before he was elected President.
- Two years before 9/11.
- Four years before Iraq.

You see, there always was a plan—a set of beliefs that all of Mr. Bush's defense advisers shared. Their beliefs shaped the defense posture of the Bush Administration at least as much as 9/11 and Iraq did. So it was important when Bush said elsewhere in his speech at the Citadel on September 23, 1999, that:

As President, I will begin an immediate, comprehensive review of our military—the structure of its forces, the state of its

strategy, the priorities of its procurement—conducted by a leadership team under the Secretary of Defense. I will give the Secretary a broad mandate—to challenge the status quo and envision a new architecture of American defense for decades to come.

That sounded like campaign rhetoric in 1999, so the media didn't pay much attention. They didn't get it in 2001, when the newly installed Defense Secretary conducted a "strategic review" in advance of that year's QDR that largely excluded senior military officers. They didn't get it in 2002 when Secretary Rumsfeld presided over a "major weapons review" that questioned the need for signature weapon systems such as the Army's Comanche helicopter and the Air Force's F-22 fighter. And they still don't get it today:

- Even though the assumptions underpinning the 2005 Quadrennial Defense Review are almost identical to the reasoning that candidate Bush used in that speech six years ago, and

- Even though almost everything Rumsfeld has done in the intervening period reflects the priorities set forth in Bush's original vision.

It must be some sort of commentary on the way we collect and report news in this country that, despite nearly continuous discussion of military transformation since Bush and Rumsfeld took office, so few people understand the plan that underpins their policies. But the plan is there, and it has stayed on track despite all the tumult and distraction of the President's first term:

- When senior military leaders resisted its goals, they were sidelined or removed.

- When unplanned contingencies threatened its funding, supplemental appropriations were sought.

- When important precepts were confounded by experience, policymakers simply worked around the new realities.

But the plan stayed on track because the key players on the President's security team believed in it and he believed in them. So the threat matrix we are discussing today isn't really a reflection of what

the Administration has learned over the last four years: It's the latest way of expressing views already developed before 9/11.

Most of the big surprises of the last four years have confirmed the belief of Bush and his advisers that they were on the right track from the beginning. In a few minutes I will tell you what I think is missing from their plan, but before that, I want to describe to you how the Bush plan has translated into an analytical framework for this year's Quadrennial Defense Review.

Quadrennial Review Framework

The QDR framework is similar to our threat matrix, but instead of cross-referencing vulnerabilities with probabilities, it compares problems with resources. In the problem dimension, it identifies four core challenges likely to face the United States in the years ahead:

- The first is the need to build partnerships for combating terrorism and insurgency.
- The second is the need to defend the homeland in depth.
- The third is the need to shape the behavior of emerging military powers (meaning, for the most part, China).
- The fourth is the need to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

Clearly, these four core problems correspond closely to the Administration's threat matrix and to the concerns that President Bush described six years ago. For example, the first problem about partnering to defeat terrorism mirrors the "irregular" conflict quadrant in the threat matrix, and the fourth problem about preventing proliferation mirrors the "catastrophic" conflict quadrant.

In the resource dimension, these four problems are analyzed by six panels responsible for specific functional areas contributing to their resolution. The panels are referred to in Pentagon nomenclature as "integrated process teams," or IPTs.

- One team, led by the Deputy Secretary of Defense and the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, will look at the military's mix of capabilities for addressing the problems.

- A second team, led by Under Secretary for Intelligence Stephen Cambone and Air Force Vice Chief Michael Moseley, will look at joint enablers such as lift and intelligence.
- A third team, led by Under Secretary for Policy Douglas Feith and Lieutenant General Walter Sharp of the Joint Staff, will examine roles and missions.
- A fourth team, led by Under Secretary for Personnel David Chu and soon-to-be Vice Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Robert Willard, will look at manning the force.
- A fifth team, led by Navy Secretary Gordon England and Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno of the Joint Staff, will assess whether the department has all the legal authorities it requires.
- And the sixth team, headed by Kenneth Krieg of the program analysis shop and Air Force Lieutenant General Duncan McNabb, will analyze the adequacy of current Pentagon business practices.

So you end up with a matrix in which the four most important emerging military problems are scrutinized by six teams of functional experts, drawn from both inside and outside the Pentagon. I should mention that this framework is quite similar to the way in which Secretary Rumsfeld conducted his initial strategic review in the early months of 2001, except that active-duty military officers play a bigger role in the 2005 QDR.

But it isn't only in the structural features of this year's QDR that we see past is prologue for the Bush Administration. The official QDR guidance repeats ideas that have been embedded in the Administration's defense plan since the President first took office. For example, the participants are directed to seek ways of making the military faster, more flexible, more agile, more versatile, and more aware— precisely the values President Bush stressed at the Citadel in 1999.

With regard to specific types of military capability, the QDR guidance is favorably disposed towards:

- Space-based sensors,
- Wireless networks,

- Long-range strike systems,

- Unmanned vehicles, and

- Special operations forces.

On the other hand, it has little positive to say about air power or sea power, other than to stress the importance of eliminating redundancy by more fully "integrating" similar capabilities of the military services; and on the subject of coalition warfare—a core feature of the Clinton defense posture—the 2005 QDR guidance has almost nothing to say. NATO is missing in action in the terms of reference, which was not part of Bush's original concept but seems an inevitable consequence of our experience with allies in Iraq.

So the vision of the future that emerges from QDR planning documents is fully consistent with our threat matrix and with the paradigm that the Bush Administration has been laying out since its earliest days in office.

The security challenges that motivate this Administration are mainly non-traditional because it expects little difficulty in coping with the conventional challenges that may arise. It thinks that in areas like air power and sea power, the United States is so far ahead that it is wasting money while neglecting more pressing needs. Thus, the most recent version of the Pentagon's Strategic Planning Guidance states:

> The Department will seek to accept greater risk (i.e., reduce emphasis and investment) in areas in which the U.S. has a clear, sustained advantage across the planning period, in order to reduce risk (increase emphasis and investment) in areas in which the U.S. faces greater threats.

Those areas of greater danger, policymakers believe, are the unconventional challenges listed in the threat matrix.

What's Missing?

What is missing from the Bush plan? I think a few things are, but let me start by conceding two points:

- *First,* all of the unconventional challenges that the threat matrix and QDR reference are real

strategic problems that the military must be better prepared to address.

- *Second,* Donald Rumsfeld has accomplished far more in the way of reorienting military plans and programs than most of us so-called experts predicted he would.

But, having said that, it seems to me that there are some important gaps in the logic of the new defense paradigm. First of all, policymakers seem overly sensitive to some new dangers and insensitive to others.

I could construct a case that the greatest long-term challenge to American security is the ebbing away of our edge in advanced technology to the countries of the Western Pacific. By that, I do not mean a sudden breakthrough in some emerging technology of the sort envisioned in the "disruptive" challenges quadrant of the Administration's threat matrix, but simply a gradual loss of technology leadership in many different areas. That trend is already well advanced and in fact has contributed to our massive trade deficit with the East, but Pentagon policymakers don't seem to have thought through its security implications.

Another danger that grows worse every year is the increasing dependency of our economy on offshore sources of oil. That trend, too, has been unfolding for some time, and it seems that as our dependency grows, the stability of our offshore sources of petroleum diminishes correspondingly. Venezuela, Nigeria, Russia, Saudi Arabia—do we see a pattern here? Nobody at the Pentagon seems to, so the security implications of our petroleum dependency are missing from the matrix.

A second set of problems associated with the Bush plan is that the assumption of conventional military superiority appears to be based on an optical illusion.

The reason that traditional threats seem muted is that America has invested heavily in conventional military capabilities, so, of course, our adversaries seek to compete in non-traditional areas where our advantage is less pronounced. But if the Bush Administration fails to adequately fund armor and air power and sea power, it is inevitable that troublemakers will eventually see an opportunity.

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For example, the Air Force's top-of-the-line F-15 fighter is so decrepit that it operates with flight restrictions to guard against metal fatigue. A good friend of mine was flying over Iraq when his F-15 lost all of its cockpit displays because the insulation on aged wiring had rotted away to a point where it was short-circuiting. Last year, the Air Force held its first air-combat exercises with India and was shocked when U.S. F-15s were repeatedly defeated by Indian pilots using newer equipment and innovative tactics.

Despite these worrisome indications, Secretary Rumsfeld wants to prematurely terminate production of the next-generation F-22 fighter at less than half of the Air Force's minimum stated requirement—even though the service says it cannot sustain global air dominance without sufficient numbers.

Every time I hear senior Pentagon officials say that we have assured air superiority for the foreseeable future, it makes me a little more uneasy because I remember that, even before Bush was elected, the Serbs were already shooting down U.S. fighters. I suspect our hold on global air dominance and maritime supremacy and armored warfare overmatch is much more tenuous than we realize.

A third defect, or missing piece, in the Bush plan is that Pentagon policymakers don't seem to grasp that their emphasis on information technologies is shifting the field of military competition into an arena where many other countries can compete.

Back when the space race and the nuclear balance dominated our strategic calculations, we knew there was only one military competitor that mattered—the Soviet Union—because other countries simply could not compete in the technologies that mattered. But when you shift to wireless networks and other digital applications as your dominant technologies, lots of countries can either catch up or figure out how to counter your advantages.

My favorite example of this problem came two years ago, when Pakistani police cornered a key al-Qaeda operative in Rawalpindi. They burst into his apartment and found him surrounded on the floor by half a dozen cell phones and laptop computers linked to the Internet.

As I remarked to a friend at the time, that instance convinced me that network-centric warfare is a real thing. Problem is, it isn't just real for us; it's a fungible set of skills that many nations or non-state actors can acquire. So even if I were to fully accept the Administration's threat matrix and its assumption of long-term conventional superiority, I'm not sure I could buy into its prescription for how to deal with emerging unconventional challenges.

No doubt about it: We're outspending everyone else on new military tactics and technology, but I'm not sure that, over the long run, that maintains America's military edge.

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This paper is part of The Heritage Foundation's Quadrennial Defense Review Project, a task force of representatives from research institutions, academia, and congressional offices studying the QDR process.