

Background

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Beyond the Rainbow Plans: Military Industrial and Mobilization Planning in an Uncertain Century

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With unfettered access to the global industrial base, the United States can respond effectively to virtually any challenge worldwide, but if the world were a different place, a U.S. response might be much less certain.

Great powers should plan for the unthinkable, and there is a U.S. precedent for how to do this. In the years preceding World War II, the U.S. military abandoned its practice of maintaining war plans focused on the status quo. Instead, it shifted to thinking about future scenarios involving significant disruptions in geopolitical affairs. Their effort, which produced the Rainbow War Plans, paid off by helping to guide the United States in mobilizing its economy and manpower for the titanic struggle against the Axis Powers.

To ensure that the United States has the right industrial and mobilization policies for the unpleasant futures that it may face, the government needs a Rainbow-style planning effort to inform the Administration's preparations for an uncertain future. These plans should be used to generate requirements for the programs and policies needed to deal with radically different futures: programs and policies that can be implemented when strategic warning signs make it apparent that the unthinkable is about to happen. Meanwhile, Congress and the Administration should create the institutions needed to nurture imaginative and dynamic planning that can address potentially unprecedented national security challenges.

Talking Points

- The United States must have a new way of planning to generate requirements for the programs and policies needed to deal with unprecedented national security challenges: programs and policies that can be implemented when strategic warning signs make it apparent that the unthinkable is about to happen.
- A solution like the Rainbow Plans created immediately before World War II requires creative thinking about the unthinkable, planning for unprecedented future events that could present real threats, and preparing possible solutions to meet U.S. security responsibilities at home and abroad.
- To create a 21st century Rainbow Plan, three components are key: restructuring the Unified Command Plan, creating a National Security/Homeland Security University, and forming an Office of Domestic Mobilization within the Department of Homeland Security.

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Defense Industrial Base Planning Today

Over the past half-century, the United States has maintained the industrial support that it needs to sustain its military. The nature of that support, however, has changed a great deal. The World War II arsenal of democracy—the massive American industrial capacity of steel, chemicals, and manufacturing that churned out the ships, planes, tanks, and ammunition to defeat Germany and Japan—is long gone. Likewise, the Cold War military-industrial complex that produced sophisticated weapons has consolidated and been transformed.

Today, America's preeminence as a manufacturer of military goods is challenged in many fields. In addition, the American military relies on materials, manufacturing, and services from around the world.

In 2005, a research project led by The Heritage Foundation examined the state of the U.S. defense industrial base and industrial base and mobilization planning.¹ The following were among its findings:

- **The defense industrial base has evolved.** Military needs have shifted from companies that manufacture traditional weapon systems like tanks and planes to corporations that provide a vast spectrum of goods and services, including everything from information technologies and telecommunications to custodial services. In addition, many traditional military services, such as logistics support, are provided by private-sector firms.
- **America's defense industrial base is global.** Even weapon systems that are manufactured in the United States may contain many parts manufactured overseas. In addition, many companies are transnational, with concerns, manufacturing, and support facilities located all around the world. In some cases, the United States buys goods and services from companies that are exclusively foreign.
- **Global access is key.** As long as the United States retains access to the global industrial base, it can likely meet many of its current and emergency needs to support military operations worldwide. U.S. policies that promote free trade, encourage competition, insist on transparency, and facilitate outsourcing are the best means to ensure the necessary access to the global industrial base to support the American way of war.

There is little question that today's military has the support that it needs to fight. What the Heritage Foundation report did not examine was the challenge of ensuring U.S. competitiveness and access to the global industrial base in a world very different from the one existing today. It is less clear how the United States would retain its capacity to conduct military operations worldwide in a future in which an enemy had a significant ability either to deny America access to the global economy or to strain its ability to mobilize resources.

Arguably, few institutions in the U.S. government are prepared to plan for the unthinkable. The National Security Council (NSC) serves as a forum for interagency coordination and policy planning, but it does not address operational challenges such as industrial base mobilization in any significant measure. Nor does it spend much time on "far-future" scenarios: challenges that may appear five or more years down the road. The Federal Emergency Management Agency used to maintain an office that periodically assembled representatives from various government agencies to examine wartime mobilization needs as part of its civil defense mission.² That function, however, was abandoned after the Cold War. The Department of Defense secretariat includes an office for industrial policy, but it focuses on current defense needs.³ The U.S. government does not currently maintain a capacity to undertake integrated planning for radically different futures.

1. Jack Spencer, ed., *The Military Industrial Base in an Age of Globalization* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2005), at www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/industrial_base_book.cfm.

2. Over the course of the 20th century, responsibility for civil defense and mobilization planning has shifted back and forth between civilian and military agencies. See Donald W. Mitchell, *Civil Defense: Planning for Survival and Recovery* (Washington, D.C.: Industrial College of the Armed Forces, 1963), pp. 17–37.

The Road to Rainbow

During the interwar period, the U.S. government had similar shortfalls. There was little capacity to think deeply about scenarios that differed radically from the present.

The Army and Navy staffs did participate in joint planning for future conflicts, and this effort produced the color plans. Each plan, identified by a specific color, described how the United States might fight a war against another power. The plans provided a justification for military forces, their positioning around the world, and the requirements for mobilizing additional troops and ships in wartime. However, the State Department refused to participate in the process, to offer political guidance, or to set strategic objectives, arguing that would undercut civilian leadership in the policymaking process.⁴

Thus, the Army and Navy largely limited themselves to planning wars against “representative” enemies, which served as notional opponents, rather than realistically portraying how the world might change in the future. For example, the United States maintained a war plan for fighting Great Britain—its most likely ally in any potential global conflict—until 1939. As a result, over the years the plans became static and gradually divorced from reality.

In the late 1930s, recognizing that their efforts were increasingly irrelevant to how the future was unfolding, the services determined to revise the process, replacing the color plans with the Rainbow Plans. The Rainbow Plans looked at disruptive scenarios: global challenges that were realistic and that would strain the capacity of the U.S. military and the country to respond. In contrast to the color plans, the Rainbow Plans envisioned that the United States might have to fight a two-front war combating major

belligerent powers at the same time. In turn, the plans recognized that to counter such unprecedented threats, the United States would have to fight as part of a coalition, allying itself with other world powers.⁵

Rainbow planning ushered in a renaissance of strategic thinking. The best and brightest served in the war plans divisions on the Army and Navy staffs. At the same time, the service war colleges mentored a new generation of strategic thinkers, testing concepts and ideas for the service staff. The Naval War College war games served to train future commanders for global conflict, while the Army War Colleges courses on coalition warfare prepared officers for the dynamics of fighting side-by-side with other countries that have different cultures, goals, and capabilities.⁶

The Rainbow Plans not only provided the foundation for joint U.S., British, and Canadian staff talks for battling both Japan and Germany during World War II, but also trained a generation of Navy and Army officers in the strategic challenges of mobilizing, deploying, and leading forces of a size and scope that was all but unimaginable during the interwar years. The Rainbow Plans prepared leaders to think about the unthinkable, and when the unthinkable happened, they were ready for the challenge.

Over the Rainbow

Today, America’s military could likely adjust to almost any threat. The United States has the capacity to draw on its own vast resources, those of friendly and allied nations, and a global industrial base capable of providing many critical goods and services. As long as the United States enjoys virtually unlimited access to the free flow of goods, peoples, services, and ideas, there is little reason to think about dramatic changes in an American way of war that depends on a global industrial base.

3. Suzanne Patrick, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Industrial Policy, U.S. Department of Defense, “Options for Maintaining a Robust, Adequate and Efficient Industrial Base,” keynote remarks at The Heritage Foundation, Washington, D.C., February 23, 2005, at www.acq.osd.mil/ip/speeches/heritage_foundation_23Feb05.pdf (June 28, 2006).
4. Mark A. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 2.
5. Steven Ross, “American War Plans,” in B. J. C. McKercher and Roch Legault, eds., *Military Planning and the Origins of the Second World War in Europe* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001), pp. 145–166.
6. Henry G. Gole, *The Road to Rainbow: Army Planning for Global War, 1934–1940* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2003), pp. 17–38.

Indeed, the United States would be ill-advised to abandon its policies of free trade, democracy promotion, and coalition building. These represent the right approach to maintaining a free, prosperous, and safe America in the world in which we live.⁷

On the other hand, if the future becomes a very different place, the United States needs to be prepared to adapt and compete. The Pentagon explicitly recognized this challenge in its 2005 Quadrennial Defense Review, which introduced a new threat matrix with quadrants representing different “security environments.”⁸ The U.S. government, like the Rainbow planners, needs the means to develop policies and options to respond to such uncertain futures.

As a start, the following are five illustrative future disruptive planning scenarios that might serve as a basis to prepare for thinking the unthinkable.

An Alliance of Near-Great Powers Against the Superpower. In such a future, two countries with significant resources could join forces and coordinate their efforts to establish a world-dominating position that would present a formidable challenge to the United States. For example, it is worth considering a scenario in which China and Russia pool their resources to become a military-industrial giant that exercises spheres of security influence over adjacent territories, controls the major routes of commerce and energy supplies, and establishes a military capacity to deter intervention by outside powers, particularly the United States.⁹

A Socialist Latin America. The United States has never faced a major strategic threat from South America, but U.S. policymakers cannot assume that the Southern Hemisphere will always remain stable.¹⁰ A challenge could come from an alliance of governments in the region that is completely antithetical to

U.S. interests and determined to undermine U.S. sovereignty. This threat might take the form of a witch’s brew of protectionist trade initiatives, manipulation of energy supplies, disruptive migration policies, narcotics trafficking, racism, and military alliances with overseas powers. Such a bewildering combination of threats might undermine U.S. competitiveness.

A Simultaneous Meltdown of North Korea and Cuba. Not all failed or failing states are equal with regard to U.S. vital national interests. North Korea and Cuba are at the top of America’s list of concerns. Both are run by corrupt dictators whose regimes might not outlast their mortality. If either collapsed, the United States might feel compelled either to lead or to provide significant support for stability operations to avert a humanitarian crisis, establish order and a legitimate government, and create the foundations for a sound economy. As operations in Iraq have demonstrated, these tasks can be far from simple. If both the North Korean and the Cuban governments fell within a year, supporting reconstruction in both countries would be the largest challenge faced by the United States since World War II. It could conceivably overtax the capacity of the U.S. economy to support effective reconstruction.

Disruption of Global Networks. The global networks that carry people, goods, and services make the world what it is today. Massive interference with global trade and travel caused by problems such as an endemic plague, a worldwide Internet crash, or the prolonged closure of major sea and air ports worldwide would create an unprecedented challenge, particularly if it occurred concurrently with any requirement to employ U.S. forces.¹¹

Resource Wars. The economies of many regions of the world are particularly fragile. Significant dis-

7. James Jay Carafano and Paul Rosenzweig, *Winning the Long War: Lessons from the Cold War for Defeating Terrorism and Preserving Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2005), pp. 9–10.
8. James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., Baker Spring, and Alane Kochems, “Getting It Right: A Congressional Guide to Grading the 2005 Quadrennial Defense Review,” Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 1905, December 15, 2005, at www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/bg1905.cfm.
9. Richard Weitz, “Why Russia and China Have Not Formed an Anti-American Alliance,” *Naval War College Review*, Autumn 2003, pp. 49–57, at www.usnwc.edu/press/Review/2003/Autumn/pdfs/art3-a03.pdf (June 28, 2006).
10. Stephen Johnson, “U.S.–Latin America Ties Need Commitment and Strategy,” Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 1920, March 13, 2006, at www.heritage.org/Research/LatinAmerica/bg1920.cfm.

ruptions in resources could create an almost immediate, unprecedented social, economic, or military crisis. It is worth considering how the United States might need to respond to situations in which regional powers seek to monopolize the use of critical resources, such as energy or fresh water supplies.¹² The scale and scope of such a regional crisis might exceed the capacity of the U.S. to respond effectively, particularly if its own sources of energy imports were threatened.

Today's government planners do not grapple much with these types of scenarios. However, they should be worrying about these types of challenges that might strain America's capacity to meet its worldwide security responsibilities or that might present real threats to U.S. access to the global industrial base, undermining the American way of war.

Preparing for Future Planning

Not only do planners need to be encouraged to "think outside the box," but they, like the Rainbow planners, also require institutions to nurture this kind of planning and to educate leaders in the challenge of making decisions in an unprecedented future. These institutions must be capable of transcending the traditional spheres of military, economic, diplomatic, and social policy. This will require an unprecedented degree of interagency cooperation.

Three initiatives could foster this kind of planning: restructuring the Unified Command Plan, founding a National Security and Homeland Security University, and creating an Office of Domestic Mobilization.

Restructuring the Unified Command Plan. The Administration needs to create a place where this collaborative interagency process and planning can occur.¹³ Today, the Pentagon maintains a Unified Command Plan (UCP), a network of regional mili-

tary commands that conduct planning and manage operations in theaters around the world. For example, Central Command (CENTCOM) oversees activities in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The UCP is still organized primarily to provide global command for the last war. In addition, even though each geographic command contains a joint interagency coordination group to organize regional activities, there is little cooperation or planning with outside organizations or departments. Furthermore, combatant commanders tend to compete with the ambassador (and the ambassador's country team, which incorporates all civilian, military, and intelligence personnel assigned to the embassy) in each country in the commander's area of responsibility. Combatant commanders cannot partner with the State Department at the regional level either, because the State Department's regional desks cover geographical areas that are different from the UCP's areas of responsibility.

It is time to replace the UCP with an organizational structure that better supports the nation's security needs. That organization should emphasize facilitating interagency operations around the world while still facilitating effective joint combat action. A new structure, the U.S. Engagement Plan (US-Plan), should be crafted at the direction of, and in response to, the National Security Council rather than the Pentagon.

A US-Plan could be structured as follows. Military commands for most of the world would be replaced by Joint Interagency Groups (InterGroups). InterGroups should be established for Latin America, Africa and the Middle East, and South and Central Asia. Each InterGroup would have a mission set specific to its area. For example, the Latin America InterGroup, might focus on drug, human, and arms

11. For example, see Madeline Drexler, *Secret Agents: The Menace of Emerging Infections* (Washington, D.C.: John Henry Press, 2001), pp. 158–200.
12. For example, see Jan Kinner, "When the Water Runs Out," in Karl P. Magyer and Bradley S. Davis, eds., *Global Security Concerns: Anticipating the Twenty-First Century* (Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.: Air University Press, March 1996), pp. 163–182, and Martha Caldwell Harris, "The Globalization of Energy Markets," in Ellen L. Frost and Richard L. Kugler, eds., *Global Century*, Vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2001), pp. 271–281.
13. James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., "Missions, Responsibilities, and Geography: Rethinking How the Pentagon Commands the World," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 1792, August 26, 2004, at www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/bg1792.cfm.

trafficking; counterterrorism; civil–military relations; and trade liberalization. Each InterGroup should include a military staff tasked with planning military engagements, warfighting, and post-conflict operations. In the event that military operations are required, the military staff could be detached from the InterGroup (along with any required supporting staff from other agencies) to become the nucleus of a standing Joint Task Force (JTF). Using this model, operations in Iraq and Afghanistan would have been commanded by a JTF.

National Security and Homeland Security University. Having established a place for operational action and planning, the InterGroups will need a professional development system to provide personnel qualified to work there. Such a system will require a program of education, assignment, and accreditation that cuts across all federal agencies with national security responsibilities. This has to start with a professional school that teaches inter-agency skills, but no suitable place currently exists in Washington, academia, or elsewhere. The government will have to establish it.

Office of Domestic Mobilization. Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. government has lacked a suitable office to serve as a focal point for traditional civil defense and industrial base mobilization issues. This capability should be reestablished within the Office of the Under Secretary for Preparedness in the Department of Homeland Security. It would serve as the counterpart to the industrial base planning activities within the Office of the Under Secretary for Policy in the Defense Department.

Thinking the Unthinkable

The age when only great powers could bring great powers to their knees has passed. Global chal-

lenges may arise from untraditional sources and may prove formidable. Responding to these threats and ensuring that the United States can mobilize the resources that it needs to meet them will require planners who have spent time thinking the unthinkable.

It would be prudent for the Administration and the Congress to develop this cadre. To this end, they should:

- **Scrap** the Pentagon's UCP and employ inter-agency staffs to address potential future regional challenges,
- **Establish** a National Security and Homeland Security University and a personnel system to provide staffs that are skilled in interagency planning, and
- **Create** an Office of Domestic Mobilization within the Department of Homeland Security.

Conclusion

Planning for an unpleasant future helped to prepare the United States for World War II. A similar effort today might better steel Americans for some other unprecedented future difficulty. The “new” Rainbow Plans should be used to generate requirements for the programs and policies needed to deal with radically different futures: programs and policies that can be implemented when strategic warning signs make it apparent that the unthinkable is about to happen.

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