

Executive Summary Background

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Planning for the Future: How and Why to Salvage the Pentagon's Quadrennial Defense Review

The Honorable James Talent and Mackenzie Eaglen

"If you want peace, prepare for war," Vegetius, a military scholar of the later Roman Empire, advised the rulers of Rome as they were thinking about how to prepare their military. Vegetius had lived through Alaric's sack of Rome, which had humiliated the once super-powerful Romans. This experience is a warning to current planners as well.

The Pentagon needs to heed this object lesson as it builds the next Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), the major defense strategy that delineates how the U.S. will structure its armed forces. The QDR should outline the Pentagon's threat assessments, military strategy, force structure proposals, and budgetary plans, and it should establish a road map for defense programs that will prepare for the next 20 years. Because defense policy is subordinate to foreign policy, the strategy should take its cue from the President's National Security Strategy.

Merely preparing for war is not enough; the United States must prepare well. Many policy analysts agree that the QDR has historically provided an inadequate and often tendentious blueprint for how to organize for tomorrow. Previous QDRs have been criticized for being too budget-driven, shortsighted, and politically motivated. They have repeatedly failed to identify priorities, consider the full spectrum of possible security threats, and outline programs and budgets consistent with the broader foreign policy objectives of America's leaders.

There are signs that the forthcoming QDR, due in February 2010, could be similarly shortsighted. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has indicated that he intends to reduce force structure to levels that are inconsistent with the nation's security commitments, focus investment on a limited number of threats, and mortgage future military capabilities to pay for today's battles under the flawed assumption that America will likely never again face a conventional enemy. Vegetius, with his charge to skillfully prepare for the unexpected, would never have condoned such excessive optimism, especially not in the face of the rise of sophisticated military powers potentially hostile to U.S. allies and interests.

A flawed QDR could be used for years to justify policies that lead to a weakened and underprepared military. A misguided strategy could, for example, lead to a repeat of the procurement holiday and defense cuts of the 1990s and harm America's ability to deter war or, if necessary, to fight and win.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
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However, Congress can still salvage the overall process. With some revisions, the QDR could become the trusted defense strategy that Congress originally intended. Congress has expanded QDR oversight by adding political appointees to the independent panel that reviews the strategy, but Congress should appoint the entire panel in the future—as opposed to the Secretary of Defense appointing a majority—to ensure that the group provides a truly unconstrained assessment. Furthermore, by correlating the QDR more closely with the White House’s official foreign policy guidance, increasing buy-in from Congress, ensuring that the process is not purely budget-driven, and addressing both short-term and long-term national security risks, Congress can avoid past mistakes and ensure that America not only prepares for war, but prepares well.

Salvaging the QDR Process. Historically, the QDR process has had many shortcomings. If the 2010 QDR turns out as critics fear, it will be yet another departure from Congress’s original intent in procedure, substance, and effect. However, Congress can still salvage the process for determining America’s defense strategy.

Congress should go back to the basics and consider changing next year’s defense authorization bill process so that the QDR:

- Follows from the National Security Strategy;
- Is informed by the budget process, but not driven by it;
- Evaluates both short-term and long-term risks;
- Considers the implications for the defense industrial base and its ability to carry out the strategy;

- Includes significant input from acquisition personnel on the feasibility of executing the strategy;
- Promotes the maintenance of a substantial margin of technological superiority;
- Expands, not reduces, the two-war construct; and
- Improves congressional buy-in, and Congress should establish a permanent national defense panel.

Conclusion. By most accounts, past QDRs have been flawed, unrealistic, and of little practical value, leading many to conclude the process is broken. Congress can salvage the QDR process through thoughtful revisions and by reinforcing these guiding principles. Ultimately, the QDR should encourage the President, Congress, and the Department of Defense to think strategically about the nation’s military and to prepare the military to fulfill its role as a deterrent of aggression, protector of liberty, and instrument of global security.

As Vegetius argued and history corroborates, if a nation’s leaders wish for peace, they should scrupulously and painstakingly prepare for war, taking nothing for granted. Congress needs to ensure that the QDR does the same.

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Background

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Abstract: *The Quadrennial Defense Review process is broken. Instead of establishing a road map for defense programs for the next 20 years, previous QDRs have been too budget-driven, purposefully shortsighted, and politically motivated. Congress can salvage the QDR process through thoughtful revisions and by reinforcing the guiding principles and intent of the original legislation. Congress should take particular care to protect the QDR process from arbitrary budget pressures and to provide for a truly independent judgment of the final QDR report by an outside panel.*

“If you want peace, prepare for war,” Vegetius,¹ a military scholar of the later Roman Empire, advised the rulers of Rome as they were planning and structuring their military. Vegetius had lived through Alaric's sack of Rome, which had humiliated the once super-powerful Romans. This experience is a warning to current planners as well.

The Pentagon should heed this lesson as it builds the next Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), the major defense strategy that looks forward 20 years and delineates how the U.S. will structure its armed forces. The QDR should outline the Pentagon's threat assessments, military strategy, force structure, and budgetary plans, and it should establish a road map for defense programs that will prepare for an uncertain future. Because defense policy is subordinate to foreign policy, the strategy must take its cue from the President's National Security Strategy (NSS).

Talking Points

- In February, the Pentagon will release the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), which will lay out the new defense strategy.
- Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has indicated he will use the QDR to justify a reduction in military force structure to levels that are inconsistent with the nation's security commitments, focus on a limited number of threats, and mortgage future military capabilities to pay for today's wars.
- The QDR's recommendations should drive the defense budget, not vice versa.
- Congress should revise the QDR after both the report and the independent analysis reach Capitol Hill. The QDR should take into account near-term and long-term threats, consider inherent risks, and define a realistic force sizing construct that enables the military to carry out the President's foreign policy strategy, or it should reduce the military's commitments.

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Merely preparing for war is not enough; the United States must prepare well. Many policy analysts agree that the QDR has historically provided an inadequate and often tendentious blueprint for how to organize for the future. Previous QDRs have been criticized for being too budget-driven, shortsighted, and politically motivated. They have repeatedly failed to identify priorities, consider the full spectrum of possible security threats, and outline programs and budgets consistent with the broader foreign policy objectives of America's leaders.¹

There are signs that the forthcoming QDR, due in February 2010, will be similarly shortsighted. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has indicated that he will reduce force structure to levels that are inconsistent with the nation's security commitments, focus on a limited number of threats, and mortgage future military capabilities to pay for today's battles under the flawed assumption that America will likely never again face a conventional enemy. Vegetius, with his charge to prepare for the unexpected, would never have condoned such excessive optimism, especially not in the face of the rise of sophisticated military powers that are hostile to U.S. allies and interests.

A flawed QDR will lead to a weakened and underprepared military. A misguided strategy could justify a repeat of the procurement holiday and defense cuts of the 1990s and harm America's ability to deter war or, if necessary, to fight and win.

However, Congress can still rescue the overall process. With some revisions, the QDR could become the trusted defense strategy that Congress originally intended. Congress recently expanded QDR oversight by adding political appointees to the panel that reviews the strategy, but Congress should appoint the entire panel—as opposed to the Secretary of Defense appointing a majority—to ensure the group provides a truly independent assessment. Furthermore, by correlating the QDR more closely with the White House's foreign policy guidance, increasing buy-in from Congress, ensuring that the process is not purely budget-driven, and addressing both short-term and long-term national security risks, Congress can avoid past mistakes and ensure

that America not only prepares for war and peace, but prepares well.

Determining Defense Strategy

Any discussion of how to build an appropriate Pentagon strategy should begin with the President's foreign policy strategy, which follows from the nation's vital interests rather than vice versa. America's military power should match the commitments that America's military is expected to keep, which in turn are dictated by how America's political leaders, over time, define the nation's interests and responsibilities.

Policymakers need to understand the global role that America has played since World War II. America was never an isolationist power, but for its first 150 years, U.S. leaders were content to play a predominant role in the Western Hemisphere while allowing European powers to take the lead in global affairs. That regional policy was continued even after World War I ended European dominance, but this arrangement proved unsuccessful, leading to World War II, the deaths of tens of millions of people, severe economic and political instability in Europe, and the rise of the totalitarian Soviet Union.

The rise of information technology has made the U.S. increasingly dependent on globally integrated and vulnerable financial, energy, and communications networks, leaving fewer areas of the world that America can safely ignore.

With the advent of nuclear weapons, it became clear that a third world war could threaten the very existence of humankind. Under these circumstances, America's leaders decided that the U.S. needed to play a more comprehensive and active global role with a view toward anticipating and managing threats, protecting freedom, and preventing another general war. This has been America's strategic mission since 1945. While the collapse of the Soviet Union was a significant operational success for the United States, it did not change America's strategic leadership role. In fact,

1. Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus (c. 383–450 A.D.).

A de facto bipartisan consensus regarding America's duties continues to provide evidence that strong American leadership is necessary to protect the nation's vital interests.

the U.S. has been even more active in world affairs since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Moreover, the rise of information technology has made the U.S. increasingly dependent on globally integrated and vulnerable financial, energy, and communications networks, leaving fewer areas of the world that America can safely ignore. As the 2006 QDR cautions,

Globalization enables many positive developments such as the free movement of capital, goods and services, information, people and technology, but it is also accelerating the transmission of disease, the transfer of advanced weapons, the spread of extremist ideologies, the movement of terrorists and the vulnerability of major economic segments.²

The review also cautions that terrorist networks “use the very instruments of globalization—the unfettered flow of information and ideas, goods and services, capital, people, and technology—as their preferred means of attack.”³ As a result, the U.S. is increasingly vulnerable to threats emanating from distant regions.

Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton would have preferred the U.S. to play a subordinate role in the Bosnian conflict. However, that proved impossible when genocide in the Balkans threatened the stability of Europe, America's relationship with the Muslim world, and the credibility of American leadership. The lesson is that a definition of America's vital interests must minimally include:

- Defending against and deterring strategic attacks on the U.S., including its people, territory, institutions, and infrastructure;
- Protecting Americans against threats to their lives and well-being, short of strategic attacks;
- Containing and defeating terrorism as a form of warfare;
- Monitoring and restricting criminal networks and terrorist organizations in Africa, South America, the Middle East, and Central Asia;
- Preventing wars and atrocities across the globe;
- Protecting U.S. allies from aggression;
- Preventing the rise of a dominant hostile power in East Asia, Europe, or the Persian Gulf;
- Preserving U.S. security interests in the Western Hemisphere;
- Maintaining access to foreign trade; and
- Retaining unencumbered access to resources.

Many Americans across the political spectrum are uncomfortable with the primary role the United States continues to play in world affairs, yet no President of either political party has backed away from America's global leadership role. Nor has any recent President significantly reduced America's commitments by treaty or interest around the globe. Judging by the number and expanded scope of U.S. military missions over the past 15 years, the exact opposite holds true.

A de facto bipartisan consensus on America's duties continues to provide evidence that strong American leadership is necessary to protect the nation's vital interests. As long as America undertakes a comprehensive role in guiding the international order toward peace and freedom, the nation's leaders must sustain the power necessary to accomplish that mission.

Learning from Past QDR Shortfalls

Congress created the Quadrennial Defense Review to address the need for a more comprehensive, farsighted, and strategy-based assessment of future military requirements, but the QDR process has largely come undone. Over time, the QDR's

2. U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, February 6, 2006, p. 24, at <http://www.defenselink.mil/qdr/report/Report20060203.pdf> (December 3, 2009).

3. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

analytical supporting process has dramatically improved, but the outcome has diminished in usefulness, relevance, and longevity impact.

The QDR's Origins and Purpose. At the end of the Cold War, the Pentagon conducted a number of studies to reevaluate and reshape American military strategy and force structure. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Washington reached the excessively optimistic conclusion that a lasting peace would ensue. The Clinton Administration translated this idealistic view into a reappraisal of U.S. defense policy and proceeded to reduce defense spending to less than 3 percent of gross domestic product, institute a procurement holiday, and cut the force by one-third. In testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, Defense Secretary Les Aspin acknowledged that the Clinton defense budget largely underfunded the force.⁴ The strategic reviews issued by the Department of Defense during this period were widely criticized as being gerrymandered to validate arbitrary budget cuts.

Dissatisfied with the reports, Congress began to argue for a more comprehensive, farsighted, and strategy-based assessment of future military requirements. To address this need, Congress established the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces (CORM) through the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year (FY) 1994.⁵ The commission recommended instituting a comprehensive strategy review at four-year intervals at the start of each Administration.

In 1996, Congress responded to the commission's recommendation by passing the Military Force Structure Review Act of 1996,⁶ which directed the Secretary of Defense to undertake the first Quadrennial Defense Review in 1997. The act also authorized the one-time establishment of an

outside National Defense Panel (NDP)⁷ to perform an independent review and critique of the Pentagon's findings, and it called for an additional assessment by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The act called for the QDR to include "a comprehensive examination of defense strategy, the force structure of the active, guard, and reserve components, force modernization plans, infrastructure, and other elements of the defense program and policies in order to determine and express the defense strategy of the United States and establish a revised defense program through the year 2005."⁸ The legislation specified that the report should discuss a number of areas, including:

- Defense strategy and the optimum force structure to implement it;
- National security threats and scenarios;
- The effects of preparations for and participation in peace operations and nonwar military operations on force structure;
- Technological development impact on force structure;
- Manpower and sustainment policies under the defense strategy to support engagement in conflicts lasting more than 120 days;
- Airlift and sealift capabilities required;
- Forward presence, pre-positioning, and other anticipatory deployments necessary under the defense strategy for conflict deterrence and adequate military response to anticipated conflicts; and
- The extent to which resources must be shifted among two or more theaters under the defense strategy.⁹

4. Les Aspin, testimony before Committee on Armed Services, U.S. House of Representatives, 1993. See also Baker Spring, "Clinton's Defense Budget Falls Far Short," Heritage Foundation *Background Update* No. 217, March 15, 1994, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/bu217.cfm>, and "Calling the Pentagon's Bluff on Defense Review," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 1124, May 19, 2007, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/MissileDefense/bg1124.cfm>.

5. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1994, Public Law 103-160, §§ 951-960.

6. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997, Public Law 104-201, §§ 921-926.

7. *Ibid.*, §§ 923.

8. *Ibid.*, §§ 924.

9. *Ibid.*, §§ 923.

The 1997 QDR. Defense officials were directed to prepare the first QDR by May 1997, just five months after the arrival of the new Secretary of Defense, William Cohen. The report kept the force sizing construct of maintaining the military's ability to "execute two nearly simultaneous major theater wars with moderate risk"¹⁰ as well as engage in smaller-scale operations and prepare for an uncertain future.

At the time, however, U.S. military endstrength was already insufficient to enable the military to fight and win in two simultaneous major theater wars, and troop levels declined by another 53,000 over the next four years.¹¹ The report failed to call on Congress to allocate the resources necessary under the strategy and instead justified future decreases in military funding by cautioning that "the nation is unlikely to support significantly more resources for national defense" and that "we may yet face pressures to lower DoD's share of federal expenditures."¹²

The NDP, chaired by Philip Odeen and composed of retired military officers and civilian defense experts, criticized the QDR for failing to set priorities and adequately link force structure and budget plans. The NDP report objected that the QDR had imposed unnecessarily stringent fiscal constraints while adding missions, creating a strategy-resource mismatch. The NDP called for additional defense funding to address what it described as "an annual budget wedge of \$5 to 10 billion."¹³

The 2001 QDR. Congress directed the Department of Defense to submit the second QDR by September 30, 2001, lengthening the timeframe from five months to nine months after the start of the new Administration. The strategy, which was started by

the outgoing Clinton Administration, began as a peacetime review that assumed the United States was entering another period of relative calm. It largely underestimated the terrorist threat and assumed that the U.S. would not need to participate in a land war in Asia for many years.

After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the QDR was hastily revised. Under the direction of Donald Rumsfeld, the new Secretary of Defense, the QDR established a new force sizing construct, referred to as "1-4-2-1." It called for forces that could:

- Defend the homeland;
- Extend deterrence in four regions (Europe, North-east Asia, the East Asian littoral region, and the Middle East or Southwest Asia);
- "Swiftly defeat aggression" in two major contingency operations (MCOs) simultaneously; and
- Preserve the ability to achieve "decisive victory" in at least one of those contingencies and if necessary occupy an enemy's capital city and replace its regime.¹⁴

The 2001 QDR also focused more heavily than the 1997 QDR on threats to the homeland and emphasized the value of flexibility and the role of the Special Operations Forces. It also stressed the importance of balancing investments to deal with current threats against the need to prepare for future threats.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Henry H. Shelton also directed a defense strategy assessment as part of the 2001 QDR process. In the final report, General Shelton noted that "increases in missions and requirements" over the previous decade "coupled with decreases in structure and

10. U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review 1997*, May 2009, Sections III and IV, at <http://www.fas.org/man/docs/qdr/index.html> (December 7, 2009).

11. U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller), *National Defense Budget Estimate for FY 2009 Budget*, p. 205, Table 7-5, at http://comptroller.defense.gov/defbudget/fy2009/FY09Greenbook/greenbook_2009_updated.pdf (December 8, 2009).

12. *Quadrennial Defense Review 1997*, May 2009, Section IV, at <http://www.fas.org/man/docs/qdr/msg.html> (December 7, 2009).

13. Report of the National Defense Panel, December 1997, at <http://www.fas.org/man/docs/ndp/exec.htm> (December 7, 2009).

14. U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, September 30, 2001, p. 17, at <http://www.comw.org/qdr/qdr2001.pdf> (December 3, 2009).

procurement [had] stretched elements of the force and resulted in imbalance between strategy, force structure, and resources.” He argued that the defense strategy outlined in the 2001 QDR was a change in the right direction and that it would “adequately address the current and emerging challenges of the strategic environment” if “matched with resources over time.”¹⁵

However, critics complained that the report still largely reflected the pre-9/11 strategic environment. No NDP was planned this time, but Congress established the U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century to review the National Security Strategy. The commission’s report focused on assessing threats to the homeland and, like the previous National Defense Panel, questioned the justifications for the two-war force planning construct. During the 2001 QDR process, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff also directed his own independent panel, led by Michèle Flournoy, to conduct a defense strategy assessment. The result was a report entitled “QDR 2001 Strategy-Driven Choices for America’s Security.”¹⁶

QDR 2006. The third QDR was written in February 2006, just over one year into the second term of the Bush Administration. The strategy was unique in that it was the first QDR written during wartime. It heavily emphasized the requirements of the global war on terrorism and shifted the focus from “traditional” wars to asymmetric or irregular conflicts.¹⁷ The QDR maintained the force planning metric of being able to fight two major contingency operations simultaneously, although with some variation. For example, the 1–4–2–1 approach of the 2001 QDR was replaced with a plan to structure the military to provide surge capability and “be prepared in one of the two campaigns to remove a hostile regime, destroy its military capacity and set

The 2006 QDR, like the previous two reviews, was excessively budget-constrained and failed to address a growing funding gap.

conditions for the transition to, or for the restoration of, civil society.”¹⁸

Despite again adding to the military’s missions, the QDR did not call for an increase in military end-strength or funding. Instead, it called for personnel cuts, increasing only the number of Special Operations Forces. In addition, Pentagon leaders decided that the QDR’s recommendations should be resource-neutral and proposed to pay for any new directives by cutting other programs. As a result, the 2006 QDR, like the previous two reviews, was excessively budget-constrained and failed to address a growing funding gap that was increasingly being filled by emergency supplemental spending bills. Because it was treated as a zero-sum budget game, the major participants fought hard to protect their particular programs from being cut at the expense of engaging in an honest and disinterested strategic debate. Furthermore, there was no independent panel to broaden the public debate, offer Congress an alternative assessment, or hold the Department of Defense to account.

The Forthcoming QDR’s Force Planning Construct

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates is preparing the Pentagon’s upcoming QDR, which is scheduled for release in February 2010. According to a preliminary Pentagon fact sheet,¹⁹ the QDR will consider threats posed by extremist movements, the spread of WMDs, the rise of sophisticated military powers, and failing or failed states, as well as air, sea, space,

15. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

16. Michèle A. Flournoy, ed., *QDR 2001: Strategy-Driven Choices for America’s Security* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2001).

17. U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, February 6, 2006, pp. 1 and 11, at <http://www.defenselink.mil/qdr/report/Report20060203.pdf> (December 3, 2009).

18. *Ibid.*

19. U.S. Department of Defense, “2010 QDR Terms of Reference Fact Sheet,” April 27, 2009, at <http://www.defenselink.mil/news/d20090429qdr.pdf> (December 4, 2009).

and cyberspace threats. It will also emphasize other trends that may pose threats to national security, including the global economic downturn and the effects of climate change.

The fact sheet signals that the 2010 QDR will prioritize the development of capabilities to prevail in irregular warfare—likely at the expense of many conventional capabilities. More worrying, there are indications that the forthcoming QDR will rationalize further cuts to major programs—in addition to those already made in President Obama’s FY 2010 defense budget—in the absence of a foreign policy strategy. President Obama’s budget projections show flat or slightly declining defense budgets from FY 2011 to FY 2014.²⁰

If the QDR is being developed under this constraint, the gap between defense strategy and resources will likely only widen in the future. A reduction in force size and investment will make America’s military less flexible. A larger and more technologically superior force allows for responses to unforeseen events and decisions. A larger force and a larger arsenal of weapons systems allow for rapid accommodations to policy shifts that a limited force simply cannot achieve as quickly or without bearing unnecessary and significant risk.

For example, shifting circumstances in Asia may necessitate agile policy shifts over the next decade. In Japan, the previous government was a close U.S. ally, but the new government is less amenable. Policymakers may need to adopt a new approach to address the potential challenges posed by China’s military ambitions. If this were to require more comprehensive systems or a larger presence in the Pacific, a flexible military that is robustly sized and equipped could more easily and effectively hedge against uncertainty. No QDR can foresee every development, but the long-term strategy should assume that unpredictable events and shifts will occur. After all, this was the purpose of the expanded missions and mandates adopted in the 2001 and 2006 QDRs.

If Secretary Gates reduces force structure in the upcoming QDR instead of increasing it to match America’s commitments, he will be significantly altering the long-standing U.S. defense posture without a guiding foreign policy strategy from the White House or rigorous independent oversight. The Administration’s failure to issue a National Security Strategy, Future Years Defense Plan, 30-year shipbuilding plan, or long-term aviation plan is rightly fueling congressional fears that many large and permanent defense decisions are being made without sufficient debate and without due consideration of the consequences.

A larger and more technologically superior force allows for faster and more flexible responses to unforeseen events and decisions.

Despite calls by some Members of Congress to reestablish the National Defense Panel to assess the QDR’s recommendations, the conference report for the final defense authorization bill directed the establishment of a semi-independent, bipartisan watchdog body. As The Heritage Foundation has argued, an outside panel would provide Congress with “an essential alternative assessment to guide its oversight of the Department of Defense and hedge against one-track thinking in the Pentagon.”²¹ Ideally, a National Defense Panel would have replaced the Independent Panel that Congress established after the 2006 QDR and expanded for the 2010 QDR. Originally, all of the panelists were to have been appointed by the Secretary of Defense, which would not have produced a wholly separate report. Thankfully, Congress recently broadened the panel’s composition and mandate to include congressional appointees and a more detailed assessment of the Pentagon’s strategy. Once the Independent Panel submits its final report, Members of Congress should begin public hearings to

20. U.S. Office of Management and Budget, *Historical Tables, Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2010* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2009), Table 5.1, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/historicals/> (December 7, 2009).

21. Mackenzie Eaglen, “Fiscal Year 2010 Defense Authorization Bill: Conference Issues and Recommendations,” Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 2577, August 5, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/wm2577.cfm>.

review both the QDR and the panel's report and to begin discussing the most effective ways to reform the QDR process.

Secretary Gates has indicated that the 2010 QDR will defend the Administration's budget and program cuts, and reduce force structure and core capabilities to levels that are inconsistent with the most recent NSS on record and with America's current security commitments around the globe by treaty and interest. For many years, policymakers have underfunded the military while increasing deployments and expanding its missions. The forthcoming QDR seems set to continue that trend. Congress must reevaluate the QDR process from start to finish and revamp the overall process to provide a stronger, more useful product.

Salvaging the QDR Process

Historically, the QDR process has had many shortcomings. If the 2010 QDR turns out as many fear, it will be yet another departure from Congress's original intent in procedure, content, and effect. However, Congress can still salvage the process for determining America's defense strategy. Congress should go back to the basics and consider making the following changes in next year's defense authorization bill process.

Reform #1: The QDR must follow from the National Security Strategy.

Ultimately, the QDR's findings must be derived from the fiscal policy and National Security Strategy of the new Administration. These essential policy instruments should be used to set the stage for the QDR's delivery. The review itself should define the essential programmatic building blocks of the overall defense structure and ensure that adequate resources will be devoted to maintaining and, where necessary, creating these building blocks.²² Too often, the requirements of the budget calendar have marginalized the more deliberate policymaking process. As any incoming Administration turns

Secretary Gates has indicated that the 2010 QDR will justify the Administration's budget and program cuts and will reduce force structure and core capabilities.

its attention to this essential task, it needs to ensure that the policy process is the driving force in defense planning.

The National Security Strategy, the guiding foreign policy vision developed by the White House, is an essential, mandatory precursor to the Pentagon strategy review. The National Security Strategy is a broad strategy document issued periodically by the executive branch for Congress. In the NSS, the President identifies America's major national security priorities and broadly outlines how the Administration plans to address them. The legislative basis²³ for the document should be amended to require the executive branch to produce the NSS no later than six months into each new Administration, around the end of June. Importantly, Congress must enforce the requirement that the NSS precede the QDR by at least several months to allow time for a rigorous debate on the President's foreign policy and defense agenda and on the roles that it ascribes to the nation's military.

Taking guidance from the NSS and QDR, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff should then issue the National Military Strategy (NMS) approximately three months after the QDR's release. Federal law requires the Pentagon to issue the NMS no later than "February 15 of each even-numbered year."²⁴ Not only is it helpful for the NMS to follow the other strategies, but this timeline would also ensure that all three major security strategies—NSS, QDR, and NMS—are released consecutively and in time to influence the President's second budget request, which is submitted to Capitol Hill in early February of the President's second year in office. Congress should amend the statute to allow for a later release date, early in the second year of each Administration.

22. Baker Spring and Mackenzie Eaglen, "Quadrennial Defense Review: Building Blocks for National Defense," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 2234, January 28, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/bg2234.cfm>.

23. Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, Public Law 99-433.

24. 10 U.S. Code § 153(d).

In delineating a comprehensive military strategy consistent with the President's NSS, together the QDR and NMS should:

- Identify potential threats to U.S. national security and national interests and describe the security environment in which the nation's military will operate;
- Establish U.S. military objectives and explain the strategies that will be developed to achieve them;
- Assess force readiness and the adequacy of U.S. military capabilities; and
- Explain how the U.S. military will interact with the other instruments of national power—including intelligence and diplomacy—and with the militaries of U.S. allies and partners.

Ultimately, the President should use the NSS to clearly articulate the nation's broad foreign policy objectives. The QDR should translate the National Security Strategy into long-term guidance for military strategy, programs, and budgets. The more detailed and focused National Military Strategy should then undertake a conscientious and comprehensive assessment of the full spectrum of national security risks and of the military's capabilities and requirements.

Reform #2: The QDR should be informed by the budget process, but not driven by it.

Because of the relentless demands of the budget calendar, the new Administration needs to set the stage for proper delivery of the QDR by creating a buffer between the demands of the budget calendar and the strategy policy process. Strategy always changes faster than force structure. Paring defense budgets to what Washington wishes to spend can be justified by adopting a more modest and restrained strategy. When demands change, as with the outbreak of the Korean War, strategy can be modified, but fielding forces adequate to implement abrupt changes in strategy can take years. In the meantime, the cost of being unprepared is often measured in the lives of the men and women in the armed forces and compromised national security.

The main criticism of past QDRs is that they have been largely budget-driven. As a consequence, they

have lacked credibility and failed to achieve their main goal: formulation of scrupulous, farsighted, comprehensive strategy outlines based on U.S. national interests and the security environment, not on other political or budget considerations. Faced with a zero-sum budget outlook, the past three Secretaries of Defense have been incapable of prioritizing particular capabilities and programs over others and have instead opted to impose across-the-board cuts to satisfy policymakers' efforts to protect their cherished programs.

To enable the Secretary of Defense to make the necessary choices and set priorities, the QDR should envision a stretched budget and craft a relatively unconstrained defense agenda. In a separate and subsequent process, Congress, fiscal policymakers, and appropriators should draw up sufficient, yet prudent budgets that balance QDR requirements with strategic and budgetary considerations.

Reform #3: The QDR should evaluate both short-term and long-term risks.

Defense strategies should consider an exhaustive list of possible threats and, most importantly, consider both current and potential future foes as part of the exercise. This axiom is especially relevant today. While the U.S. is heavily engaged in counterinsurgency operations overseas, policymakers will be tempted to simply believe that other risks may never materialize by accepting the assumption that no other nation will attempt to challenge the U.S. using traditional forms of military power. This assumption is unjustified given China's growing power and Russia's invasion of Georgia in August 2008. It is also unrealistic because what Washington chooses to invest in or not invest in will provide incentives for others to build up where the United States is pulling back. However, the danger that political leaders will indulge in this assumption is great because any resulting risks would likely be realized, if at all, after the leaders have left office.

In this context, recent history is enlightening. For example, operating under the false belief that putting large numbers of boots on the ground would be unnecessary in the post-Cold War world, Congress and the Clinton Administration cut the

While outfitting the military to fight today's wars and assuming that other risks are unlikely may be tempting, it is akin to mortgaging the future to pay for the present.

size of the force, including the Army, by more than one-third in the 1990s. Less than a decade later, the nation was involved in two substantial ground wars, which continue to strain the Army's resources even today. Two years ago, Secretary Gates authorized a permanent increase in Army endstrength. The expense of reconstituting the Army, together with the human and monetary costs of overworking the force for the past 15 years, is far greater than the cost of simply maintaining the Army at adequate force levels in the first place.

Today's planners are claiming—with the same level of certainty with which they incorrectly argued the opposite proposition in 1993—that the military should focus on ground wars, particularly irregular and counterinsurgency conflicts, and that traditional air and naval assets will likely be redundant. The truth is that America continues to face myriad risks and needs to maintain a similarly broad set of capabilities to confront them. While outfitting the military to fight today's wars and assuming that other risks are unlikely may be tempting, it is akin to mortgaging the future to pay for the present. Secretary Gates emphasizes fighting nontraditional enemies and performing counterinsurgency operations, but downplays the risk of a traditional conventional conflict in the future. The assumption that America will not need to fight a traditional conventional war in the next 20 years is at best difficult to justify.

The QDR should consider the full spectrum of potential threats to U.S. national security, including those that may not seem immediate or most likely. Preparing only for the danger of the moment would be a mistake. History has repeatedly demonstrated that the only predictable feature of war is its unpre-

dictability. When Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933, German troops were training with sticks. Six years later, they were threatening to take over the world. Responding to that rapid threat required massive and nimble U.S. defense investments.

Preparing and maintaining readiness is no less urgent in today's technologically advanced and globally interconnected world in which enemies can arm themselves even more rapidly or crudely counter U.S. systems. High readiness levels require robust National Guard and Reserve forces that can provide national surge capacity when needed, and it entails investment in a wide range of dual-use, multi-mission platforms.²⁵ Policymakers should reject the QDR's premise that defense is a zero-sum game and refuse to rob the future military to pay for today's capabilities.

Reform #4: The QDR should promote maintaining a substantial margin of technological superiority.

The U.S. should not only prepare for the full spectrum of risks, but also maintain substantial safety and technological superiority margins. Seeking to have “just enough” of any important capability would be foolish. Planning is never perfect, but the cost of being too strong is far less than the cost of weakness.

For example, if the U.S. buys slightly more airlift capacity than it needs today, the downside is paying for assets that go unused. However, if America has less airlift capacity than it needs tomorrow, the cost

In the long run, supplying sustained funding to the military and providing for regular, modern upgrades is far more cost-effective than allowing the force to become hollow and then rebuilding it from tatters.

will be measured in higher casualties, protracted engagements, and the possible sacrifice of a vital national interest. In the long run, supplying sustained and predictable funding to the military and

25. For specific information about the army's future requirements, see Mackenzie M. Eaglen, “Maintaining Full-Spectrum Capabilities in an Operating Environment of Hybrid Threats: The Army's Future Requirements,” Heritage Foundation Lecture No. 1134, September 10, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/hl1134.cfm>.

providing for regular, modern upgrades is far more cost-effective than allowing the force to become hollow and then rebuilding it from tatters. This is particularly true if the industrial base to rebuild a military capability has disappeared. The United States built its last bomber more than a decade ago, and that plant is now a Wal-Mart. The time, cost, and consequences of building capabilities after the nation has permanently shed them are higher than what policymakers should be prepared to bear.

Another reason the U.S. must maintain military primacy is that the military's missions are not only to fight but also to deter conflict. America decisively won Operation Desert Storm because it brought overwhelming—not just sufficient—power to bear. Clear victory in that conflict is one reason why no other country has since chosen to engage the U.S. in a direct, high-intensity conflict. Similarly, a missile attack is less likely if America deploys a comprehensive, layered missile defense system. China is less likely to use aggressive means to reunify with Taiwan if U.S. air and naval assets can unquestionably protect the island. Russia will be less adventurous in the former Soviet republics if its leaders feel that NATO is more than prepared for any contingency.

However, the current superiority of America's capabilities should not lead U.S. military planners to be complacent. Military primacy is fleeting unless purposefully maintained through robust investment in next-generation technology and systems. Equipment ages and deteriorates due to wear and tear, and America's enemies are constantly developing new ways to challenge the U.S. On one end of the spectrum, more countries with sophisticated militaries are developing nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) that could soon reach the U.S. homeland. On the other end, terrorists constantly find creative ways to defeat U.S. advanced technology with cheap, primitive weapons, such as improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which have caused at least 1,780 military casualties in Iraq since July 2003.²⁶

America's enemies will likely exploit areas of weakness, attacking precisely those areas where the country is least prepared. As President Reagan clearly saw, weakness invites aggression and challenge.

To keep its global edge and to develop the abilities to defeat shifting threats ranging from IEDs to ICBMs, the U.S. military must maintain, modernize, and ultimately replace old weapons while simultaneously researching, designing, testing, and fielding next-generation systems. The average ages of most major weapons systems in use are startling, and many next-generation programs are being eliminated. Congress has acceded to most of the Administration's defense budget requests and voted to terminate or truncate more than one dozen major defense programs in the 2010 defense bills—predominantly for budgetary rather than strategic reasons. As a result, the military will lose vital capabilities along with the potential to develop them later as defense industries shut down production lines and hemorrhage skilled workers.

The QDR should address the military's pressing modernization needs and take into account the long-term implications of procurement freezes and underfunding of the defense industrial base. As Heritage has consistently argued, the QDR should direct the military to build basic capabilities across a broad range of areas to hedge against various risks.²⁷ America's enemies will likely exploit areas of weakness, attacking precisely those areas where the country is least prepared, but maintaining a broad range of capabilities will minimize these risks. As President Reagan clearly saw, weakness invites aggression and challenge.

In order to properly guide future defense investments, the QDR analysis must include substantial input from defense acquisition leaders, program managers, systems engineers, compliance manag-

26. iCasualties, "Iraq Coalition Casualties: Military Fatalities," at <http://www.icasualties.org/Iraq/Fatalities.aspx> (December 4, 2009).

27. Spring and Eaglen, "Quadrennial Defense Review: Building Blocks for National Defense."

ers, auditors, and other experts.²⁸ The QDR should also discuss at length the ability of the defense industrial base to respond rapidly to defense strategy changes.²⁹ Securing America's military dominance for the decades ahead requires an industrial base that can retain a highly skilled workforce with critical skill sets.³⁰

Reform #5: The QDR should expand, not reduce, the two-war construct.

The nation's threats and military missions have grown since the two-war force planning construct was first developed decades ago. North Korea has developed nuclear weapons, Iran has launched a sophisticated nuclear program, Russia and China are rapidly increasing and modernizing their militaries, and cyberattacks and bioattacks have become real challenges. If the two-war construct was necessary then, it is surely the bare minimum needed now.

The two-war concept, first formally articulated in the strategy documents of the early 1990s, dates back to World War II. It has taken on various guises, but never fundamentally changed. In fact, it has often been criticized as too backward-looking. The force planning tool is informed by past conflicts—including World War II, the Cold War, the Korean War, and the Gulf War—but it largely ignores other threats. The 1–4–2–1 strategy, which was adopted in the 2001 QDR and then dropped in 2006, is a more realistic force driver than the two-war concept although not the exact answer for today's security environment. At present, the U.S. has troops in Afghanistan, Iraq, Japan, South Korea, Guam, the Philippines, and the Horn of Africa among other places. What would the U.S. require in a conflict with China or Iran or to

respond to an attack on the U.S. homeland? A more comprehensive sizing construct that includes two major contingencies plus additional engagements along the conflict continuum is a better blueprint for preparing for these challenges.³¹

Abandoning the two-war construct in the QDR would justify a cutback in force levels. Yet statements by Administration officials and this year's defense budget debate indicate that Pentagon leaders plan to downsize the force planning concept even further. Secretary Gates has publicly questioned "whether that model makes any sense in the 21st century," declaring: "If there is one major aspect of the QDR that I have insisted that we try and get away from it is this construct that we've had, for such a long time, that we size our forces to be able to fight two major combat operations."³² The Administration's significant cuts in 2010 defense programs further demonstrate that President Obama and Secretary Gates are racing to downsize the force even before the various mandatory strategy reviews are completed.

The Obama Administration is eager to cut defense budgets to pay for exorbitant domestic spending programs and entitlements, not for strategic or security reasons.

The Administration will undoubtedly use any smaller force sizing construct to then rationalize sweeping cuts in force structure and programs. Planners will likely scale back military readiness requirements to meet current capabilities—or even further—to justify additional budget reductions. The Obama Administration appears eager to cut

28. Dov S. Zakheim, Senior Vice President, Booz Allen Hamilton, and former Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) and Chief Financial Officer, U.S. Department of Defense, interview by Mackenzie Eaglen and Jim Talent, September 18, 2009.

29. Aerospace Industries Association, "The Unseen Cost: Industrial Base Consequences of Defense Strategy Choices," Special Report, July 2009, at http://www.aia-aerospace.org/assets/report_industrial_base_consequences.pdf (December 3, 2009).

30. Mackenzie Eaglen and Eric Sayers, "Maintaining the Superiority of America's Defense Industrial Base," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 2276, May 22, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/NationalSecurity/bg2276.cfm>.

31. Eaglen, "Maintaining Full-Spectrum Capabilities in an Operating Environment of Hybrid Threats."

32. U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs), "Press Conference with Secretary Gates and Adm. Mullen," transcript, June 18, 2009, at <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4435> (December 3, 2009).

defense budgets to pay for exorbitant domestic spending programs and entitlements, not for strategic or security reasons.

The current and contemplated drastic defense cuts in the absence of a strategic rationale, substantive analytical justification, or mandatory budget and analytical documents lead many observers to conclude that the QDR process is primarily budget-driven. Dropping the long-standing two-war construct would further confirm this theory because no serious defense planner would deny that the United States might need to fight two wars at approximately the same time, particularly given the U.S. troop disposition around the globe, including in Korea, Europe, and the Middle East.

Current difficulties in the war in Afghanistan are also largely due to underfunding and minimalist troop commitments.

Before discarding the two-war construct, the Pentagon should analyze U.S. force commitments since the end of the Cold War. The history of U.S. military commitments strongly argues against reducing the force size any further.

A comparison between Operation Desert Storm in 1991 and Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 is illustrative. Operation Desert Storm is a classic example of a major combat operation. America's stunning military victory in the Gulf War was achieved through massive force commitments from both the United States and its allies. The coalition forces that expelled Saddam Hussein's military from Kuwait employed nearly 800,000 soldiers in more than 300 combat and combat support battalions, more than 225 naval vessels, and almost 2,800 fixed wing aircraft.³³ In 43 days of offensive operations, coalition air forces flew more than 112,000 sorties, delivering almost 87,000 tons of munitions. The American commitment to the coalition was by far the greatest, numbering nearly 540,000 personnel.

By contrast, in March 2003, the United States invaded Iraq with only 130,000 troops. The U.S. plan during Iraqi Freedom was to overwhelm Iraqi forces using a small ground force, rather than overwhelming might. The original goal was to finish the land offensive with no more than 250,000 troops on the ground. Although the U.S. and coalition forces successfully and swiftly removed Saddam Hussein's regime and defeated the Iraqi army, they were unable to maintain stability and prevent insurgency in the aftermath. By 2006, the operation had turned into a protracted war that seemed hopeless to many. It took the U.S. strategy shift and troop surge to turn the tide, gain the upper hand, and curtail the violence.

Current difficulties in the war in Afghanistan are also largely due to underfunding and minimalist troop commitments. America's leaders asked the military to engage in two major operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, but largely failed to commit adequate resources to translate the two-war construct into a reality. General Stanley McChrystal's assessment that he needed at least 40,000 more troops (optimally 60,000 to 80,000 for the maximum chance of success at the lowest risk to U.S. forces) to reduce the violence in Afghanistan and prevent al-Qaeda from returning to the country should be a lesson that planning around a minimalist force structure is unrealistic, costly, and can result in protracted and unnecessarily bloody conflicts. The successes of Operation Desert Storm and post-surge Operation Iraqi Freedom should serve as a general guide and encourage the adoption of a broader force planning standard.

The QDR should make recommendations not only for an adequate force size, but also for a comprehensive force structure. Military force structure should include five components. The first is the U.S. strategic force structure, including ICBMs, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, bombers, missile defenses, and air defenses. The remaining four components should correspond to the military services, specifically Air Force wings, Army brigade combat

33. U.S. Central Command, "Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm: Executive Summary," July 11, 1991, p. 1, at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB39/document6.pdf> (December 4, 2009).

teams, Marine Corps expeditionary forces, and Navy ships and aircraft.³⁴

Reform #6: The QDR should improve congressional buy-in, and Congress should establish a permanent national defense panel.

Congress should attend more carefully to the QDR and the broad debates around defense policy and strategy. Congress should focus on properly assessing risks to national security, overseeing an effective military strategy that will safeguard the nation and U.S. allies, and providing the resources to be prepared for any contingency.

Within the Pentagon, the QDR process includes interagency and even international partners, but almost entirely excludes Capitol Hill until the final document is published. The QDR process should seek to include Members of Congress and their staff early in the process to avoid immediate irrelevance once the report is published and to build momentum toward policy consensus when possible. Biennial QDR updates and ongoing reports from Pentagon leaders could improve congressional buy-in. Congress should also bolster its QDR oversight by establishing a permanent, independent National Defense Panel appointed solely by congressional leaders.

The Heritage Foundation has consistently argued that Congress should resurrect an expanded National Defense Panel, like the 1997 panel, and charge it to review and examine the QDR. During the recent markup of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 (H.R. 2647), the House Armed Services Committee agreed that an NDP should be established this year. Ultimately, Congress created a hybrid panel with NDP-like mandates and additional independent appointments in the final law. Congressional authorization of an independent panel is an important step toward ensuring a robust and transparent public debate on how America's military should be organized for the future. A National Defense Panel composed of an independent, bipartisan group of defense experts is the only viable mechanism for judging and testing the assumptions and recom-

mendations in the QDR and to ensure that Congress—and through it the American people—are engaged in the debate on national security strategy.

The major challenge in establishing an NDP is ensuring the recruitment of qualified, independent experts without any overt stakes in the review process. Another key challenge is ensuring the appointment of impeccably credentialed co-chairs who can direct the process effectively. Before Congress intervened, the law had stipulated that the Secretary of Defense would appoint the bulk of the panel's members. This is suboptimal because the outside panel should be wholly independent from the Department of Defense, which oversees the QDR process. Instead, leaders from both parties should select an equal number of participants and appoint a co-chair from each party. Although there should be room for dissent on the NDP, the co-chairs' goal should be to release a consensus report evaluating the QDR.

Conclusion

By most accounts, the QDR process is broken. Congress can salvage the defense strategy process through thoughtful revisions and by reinforcing the guiding principles laid out in its original legislative intent. Ultimately, the QDR should encourage the President, Congress, and the Department of Defense to think strategically about the nation's military and to prepare the military to fulfill its role as a deterrent of aggression, protector of liberty, and instrument of global security.

As Vegetius argued and history corroborates, if a nation's leaders wish for peace, they should scrupulously and painstakingly prepare for war, taking nothing for granted. Congress needs to ensure that the QDR does the same.

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34. See Spring and Eaglen, "Quadrennial Defense Review: Building Blocks for National Defense."