Choices for the Quadrennial Defense Review

by Kori Schake

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President Obama's defense team is beginning the congressionally mandated Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) in an unusual set of circumstances: a financial crisis of epic proportions sure to substantially reduce the Defense baseline and war funding; a Republican holdover Secretary of Defense widely acclaimed for his management of the war in Iraq but who has left no imprint on the Department's spending in his two years at the helm; a National Defense Strategy issued by the same Defense Secretary under the previous administration that has radical implications for the size and shape of the American military, and a Congress unlikely to adopt the administration's recommendations for programmatic changes. These circumstances will frame the debate over strategy and force structure in the QDR.

This article suggests that because of the 2008 National Defense Strategy, Secretary Gates' strategy for shaping the mid-term Department of Defense spending program is already focused on the wrong set of questions for defining U.S. defense policy. His emphasis on institutionalizing counterinsurgency sounds remarkably like fighting the last war, and too little effort has been directed toward redressing those vulnerabilities in American military power most likely to produce losses in future wars. We are already reasonably good at counterinsurgency, as a result of the Iraq war, and U.S. equipment has been adapted relatively quickly despite a balky Pentagon bureaucracy. Gates offers a conservative approach that will make other, harder adaptations—like handling cyberattacks—more difficult in the future because DoD is the only agency of the U.S. government that has an effective downstream planning process and it will align to his strategic direction to focus on counterinsurgency.

If Secretary Gates proceeds on the trajectory he has outlined, the result will be the loss of a promising opportunity. While the QDR process is much derided (and rightly so) as too often political spin rather than serious defense analysis, the current QDR could redirect effort in strategically significant ways, taking advantage of the much more tightly constrained resource environment...
rather than being hostage to it. By asking different questions, Secretary Gates could profoundly reshape our approach to defense policy, and place the Department on a sound and sustainable footing for the mid-term—which is exactly the task for which Congress requires the Executive to produce a QDR.

The fundamental questions DoD should be asking for this Quadrennial Defense Review are: (1) is counterinsurgency the basis for major redirection of U.S. defense strategy and requirements? (2) should the capabilities-based planning construct continue to be the basis of force planning? (3) should the Title X equipping authority of the Services remain in place? (4) should the military take on more non-military functions? and (5) what should our nuclear force posture be?

Undergirding all these choices is the profound need for DoD to devise a campaign plan for securing Congressional support. They do not currently have the heft to deliver funding for a new direction in defense strategy or major program cancellations.

The Gates Record

Secretary Gates has returned the Defense Department to a well-managed large business. He has had a clear priority—the war in Iraq—that is both well understood within the Department and supported by its “board of directors,” the Congress. He has focused on the strategic, allowing subordinates to implement his decisions, a welcome reprieve from the second-guessing to which his predecessor, Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, subjected the choices of practically every lieutenant colonel in the planning process. He respects the expertise of the military while insisting on his prerogative to set the Department’s course. He replaced the Secretary of the Army, the head of Walter Reed Medical Center, the Secretary of the Air Force and Air Force Chief of Staff. Even the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were quietly retired, and he quickly fired two combatant commanders, one for calling into question the President’s policy toward Iran, another evidently for not calling into question the President’s policy on Afghanistan. Where Secretary Gates is not expert, he has sought outside counsel, forming the Schlesinger Commission on nuclear security and the Punaro Commission on reserve affairs, and utilizing the Defense Policy Board to greater effect. The Pentagon has breathed a huge sigh of relief after the erratic and friction-filled Rumsfeld years.

What Secretary Gates has not yet done is put his stamp on the medium-term spending plans that shape America’s defense effort. With the important exception of his emphasis on MRAP (mine resistant ambush protected) vehicle acquisition, he submitted two budgets and several supplemental spending requests that were straight line extensions of previous spending. He simply did

1 In his defense, Secretary Gates anticipated a two-year term and believed those choices properly left to his successor.
not make hard choices. While questioning the need for some systems, he has continued to fund them. Even in the case of the badly mismanaged Air Force tanker buy, Secretary Gates had his hand forced by legal and Congressional challenges. After the election last fall, he developed a fiscal year 2010 budget that would have increased defense spending to $584 billion, a significant jump over even the Bush administration’s sustained 7 percent per year spending increases.

While the fall 2008 spending program was never submitted to Congress or the incoming administration, it was widely circulated in defense circles, providing the basis by which analysts are now describing the Obama administration’s $533.7 billion fiscal 2010 budget as a reduction in defense spending. DoD Deputy Comptroller Kevin Scheid recently suggested that the fiscal 2010 budget will likely only be reduced 2–3 percent, further extending the status quo.2 Budgetarily, Secretary Gates has sustained the upward trajectory of spending without changing its content.

Somewhat surprisingly, Secretary Gates preempted the new administration’s defense program by publishing a 2008 National Defense Strategy and excerpting it in Foreign Affairs just as the president was being inaugurated. The Strategy contains significant departures from policies candidate Obama supported on the campaign trail, allowing devoted Pentagon watchers to keep score across his tenure of where Secretary Gates will concede and where he will influence the new team. More importantly, it strongly prejudices the strategy component of the upcoming Quadrennial Defense Review, because it will be difficult for this same defense secretary to accept and argue for a radically different approach nine months later.

This track record suggests that Secretary Gates will run a Quadrennial Defense Review that may not ask the right fundamental questions about the size, shape, and focus of the U.S. defense program. His tendency has been to request consistently large funding, provide minimum direction over Service spending programs, and not to struggle against unrequested Congressional additions. This does not produce a cohesive or cost effective underlying defense program.

Given the prospect of much lower defense spending, both because of competition for resources with the Obama administration’s domestic agenda and the eventual constraint on borrowing likely to result from the profligacy of government spending aimed at affecting the economic crisis, the program Secretary Gates outlined in his Foreign Affairs article and fiscal 2010 budget are certain to be unaffordable. Secretary Gates acknowledged as much in his January 2009 congressional testimony.3

2 Kevin Scheid, quoted in “Budget Cut Foreseen for FY 2010. Deputy DoD Comptroller: Wait Until FY-11 for Major Changes,” Inside the Pentagon, March 12, 2009. This article was written before Secretary Gates’ release of the FY 2010 budget.

Moreover, the president and prominent members of Congress are agitating against defense contracting practices as wasteful. Critics outside the Pentagon have been energized by the Government Accountability Office's April 2008 report concluding that 95 major DoD programs were over budget by a staggering $295 billion. Senators Carl Levin (D-Mich.) and John McCain (R-Ariz.), the ranking members of the Senate Armed Services Committee, have introduced legislation requiring more fixed-price contracting and other reforms aimed at reining in procurement overruns. In a March 4 speech, President Obama complained about defense contractors getting a "blank check" from the Department. All this suggests more stringent oversight and less money coming into Defense.

**DoD By the Numbers**

Last year, Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff attempted to build support for pegging defense spending at a sustained four percent of GDP (a position one imagines he is now relieved was not taken up, since the dramatic contraction of the economy since September 2008 would require about a 10 percent reduction in defense spending, with a bleak near-term outlook for increases). While respected defense analysts like Thomas Donnelly and Frederick Kagan argue that defense spending should rise significantly, they are a lonely minority.

For different reasons, both 2008 presidential candidates would likely have cut defense spending: McCain in order to balance the budget, an even higher priority for preserving American strength than his longstanding support for high defense spending; and Obama because of a domestic policy agenda that will crowd out defense unless it accepts unsustainably high levels of debt accumulation.

The simple magnitude of U.S. defense spending relative to the rest of the world calls into question the argument that DoD needs continued banner spending at the post-9/11 rates. Our country accounts for more than 50 percent of the entire world's defense spending. We spend more than the next 22 countries combined, and 20 of those next spenders are American allies or friends.

Moreover, U.S. spending has nearly doubled since 2000; yet do we really need a military twice as good—or at least twice as expensive—as the one we had nine years ago to face this threat portfolio? It would be a difficult

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argument to carry, even without pressure to free up spending for other national needs.

The evidence likewise argues the U.S. military is not underfunded. It spends nearly $200 billion per year on research, development, testing, evaluation and procurement. DoD has an acquisition program portfolio (accounting for costs across the life cycle of weapons systems) of $1.7 trillion. The cost of equipment for each individual soldier has quadrupled since 2000, and the improvement shows in any snapshot of American forces in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Finally, it is impossible to argue that the U.S. military is underfunded relative to the other departments of government with national security responsibilities. Our military has been forced to undertake numerous non-military responsibilities in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere because the non-military departments are too institutionally weak to do what needs doing in our country’s interests. Looking across the Departments of State and Treasury reveals a culture of underfunding for their responsibilities that simply has not existed in the American military since the Carter administration. There is a serious argument to be made that reducing defense spending is justified to transfer resources more urgently needed in other departments to balance our civilian and military capabilities more soundly—an improvement Secretary Gates has repeatedly supported.

But even if the current budget is expansive, without major adjustments, it is insufficient to carry out the promise that candidate Obama made to relieve the strain on our ground forces by increasing the Army and Marine Corps end strength by 90,000 soldiers and Marines. Each additional 10,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen, or Marines costs about $1.2 billion per year at current rates; increasing costs of health care and other benefits are likely to ramp up those costs with time. If President Obama carries through on this commitment, at a minimum the personnel increases will add $10.8 billion to the DoD topline, in perpetuity.

‘One of the Most Pointless and Destructive Exercises Imaginable’

Earnest, good-government types, who populate the Project on National Security Reform and the Beyond Goldwater Nichols study routinely argue for creating a national security planning process. With minor variations, most recommend a process that would begin with a National Security Strategy (NSS). This NSS would outline the president’s priorities and drive development of government-wide spending plans. Having the NSS as strategic guidance, departments would translate these priorities into operational plans for staffing and programs in line with the president’s priorities, supervised by the National

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8 Anthony Cordesman, speaking at National Defense University, March 10, 2009.
Security Council and the Office of Management and Budget. Components with legal obligations or subordinate planning processes could then issue more detailed guidance; an example of this being the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's releasing the National Military Strategy.

The problem with this imaginary universe, of course, is that the National Security Council staff never issues the NSS in a timely enough fashion for it to guide either budget development or downstream planning documents like the defense and diplomatic strategies. New administrations often do not want to quickly jettison campaign promises and rhetoric for sounder governing policies, and often have been out of power for some duration and simply need time to get educated and consider difficult choices. By the time “strategies” appear, determinative budgetary decisions have already been promulgated.

Nor does the National Security Strategy usually provide useful guidance. With the notable exceptions of the Truman administration’s NSC-68 strategy of containment, or the Eisenhower administration’s Basic National Security Policy of 1954 that shifted emphasis toward non-military means of affecting change in the Soviet Bloc, they are seldom illuminating.

The Bush administration’s 2002 National Security Strategy, which received great attention for emphasizing preemption, actually argues very persuasively for a different strategy than the administration carried out. In fact, most National Security Strategies are Christmas trees with every feel-good ornament hanging upon them rather than serious-minded descriptions of our national interests, the threats to those interests, our means of addressing those threats, and prioritization of effort.

One final discouragement: only the Eisenhower administration was disciplined enough to align its government spending plans to the Strategy as a matter of routine business and rigorously police departments for concurrence with the president’s decisions.

It could be that the Obama administration will prove to be the equal of Eisenhower’s in the crisp staff work of good management and that it will initiate a national security planning process to align resources to priorities. There is little evidence in the administration’s chaotic production of spending bills, however, to suggest that this will hold true. In all likelihood, earnest reformers will be disappointed, and the departments will need to fend for themselves, doing the best they can to take candidate Obama’s policy pronouncements and the early spending instruction from the new administration to grope toward defense and diplomatic strategies that approximate the president’s priorities.

Since no national security department has a budget anywhere near the magnitude of DoD’s Secretary, Gates’ review of our defense strategy and its translation into forces and equipment will in effect be our national security strategy. The Quadrennial Defense Review affords the secretary an opportunity to revisit the fundamental drivers of our defense program, put it on
sounder financial footing, and set an innovative and sustainable course for the future that would be a commendable legacy.

2006 Quadrennial Defense Review

One needn't go as far as Anthony Cordesman in describing Secretary Rumsfeld's 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review, as "a pointless exercise" to question the usefulness of QDRs in general. The last Rumsfeld QDR opened with the statement that "the QDR is not a programmatic or budget document." This is flatly untrue. The QDR's purpose is to provide a medium-term defense program for Congressional review and subsequent grading of DoD budgets.

The 2006 QDR spends an inordinate amount of effort cataloging achievements since 2001, with vacuous jargon such as "tailorable capabilities for deterrence" or calling for a shift from "from 20th century processes—to 21st century integrated approaches." When it is not talking nonsense, it is inaccurate; for example, in caviling the need to move the U.S. military from static defense and garrison forces to mobile, expeditionary operations. This would come as a surprise to the Marine Corps, which has been expeditionary since established, and the Army, which is more expeditionary than the ground forces of any other nation and has for decades championed maneuver warfare as superior to static defense.

The objectives outlined in the 2006 QDR are often too diffuse for sensible defense planning, such as "shaping the choices of countries at the crossroads." Some of the most basic force planning assumptions are open to question, both doctrinally and by the metric of the Bush administration's own choices. An illustrative example is the statement that "in conducting follow-on analyses and assessments to determine more fully the implications of this guidance, U.S. operational and force planning will consider a somewhat higher level of contributions from international allies and partners, as well as other Federal agencies, in surge operations ranging from homeland defense to irregular warfare and conventional campaigns."

Even where the Rumsfeld QDR got the concept right, such as emphasizing the importance of "minimizing costs to the United States while imposing costs on adversaries, in particular by sustaining America's scientific and technological advantage over potential competitor," his defense program did not support its objectives.

In spite of all this, Secretary Rumsfeld did a decent job of supporting the shift toward counterinsurgency capabilities: a 15 percent increase in special operations forces; 3,700 additional psychological operations and civil affairs personnel (an increase of 33 percent); doubling unmanned aerial

10 Ibid., p. 38.
11 Ibid., p. 3.
vehicle spending; and a greater emphasis on irregular warfare. Which is to say, much of what Secretary Gates claims needs to be done in changing the direction of effort is already underway.

And the 2006 QDR did some things well. For example, it emphasized the main things the United States must do: protect the homeland (which it identified as primarily a National Guard and Coast Guard function); respond to attacks; defeat an adversary state or coalition; keep pressure on terrorist networks; and minimize our own and adversary loss of life. The 2006 QDR also tracked these mission areas into specific capabilities the United States must improve, e.g. detecting and interdicting threats at a distance; persistent surveillance; reliable communications; assured mobility; global strike; and dominance in conventional and irregular land warfare. Unfortunately, Secretary Rumsfeld’s management deficiencies prevented the solid elements of his conceptual approach from being taken seriously, even by his successor.

2008 National Defense Strategy

Anticipating it as a legacy document, Secretary Gates developed a National Defense Strategy in the waning days of the Bush administration. It was seen by many in both presidential campaigns as a hostile act designed to limit their choices, especially with the injunction that “the Department of Defense must set priorities and consider inescapable tradeoffs and opportunity costs” from an outgoing Secretary whose budgets had not considered tradeoffs inescapable or weighed with particular care the opportunity costs of his budgets’ focus.12

The strategy is a paean to “balance,” by which Secretary Gates means connecting the immediate priorities on which he has spent his two years as Secretary to the longer-term priorities he has not addressed: current conflicts vs. other contingencies, counterinsurgency vs. high-end conventional wars, and a “culture” problem that “hamper(s) their ability to do what needs to be done.” The latter point expresses his justifiable frustration with Pentagon bureaucracy that impedes rapid procurement of innovative new war material.

But Secretary Gates has, in fact, set a course for the QDR strategy that is not balanced between capabilities, but strongly weighted toward counterinsurgency. In judging that “the most likely catastrophic threats to the U.S. homeland...are more likely to emanate from failing states than from aggressor states,” he has set in motion a substantial revision to American defense strategy that goes much further than institutionalizing counterinsurgency warfare capabilities or wrestling with the means of fighting and winning hybrid wars.

No president can relegate catastrophic threats to the homeland to second place in the hierarchy of defending our national interests. Preventing failing states from becoming threats will require a much different emphasis in the number and type of our military forces and in the balance among them.

Constructing a State Department capable of being a genuine peer to the Defense Department, consistently engaged and able to rapidly deploy to failing states to affect their course would require roughly $80 billion per year. We will need to recruit a new generation of foreign service officers and assistance professionals willing to endure the dangers of operating independently in war zones and innovative enough to find new, more creative approaches to diplomacy. We will need to have enough professionals to staff new posts (there are more than 200 cities of over a million people in the world in which the State Department has no representation). We will need to design a professional development trajectory that tests for and increases skills as responsibilities expand. We will have to create a national diplomatic university, to which the most talented diplomats would be assigned for a year, along with diplomats from countries we want to partner with and affect, to study history, economics, and craftsmanship. Currently, the State Department provides little training to diplomats (except for languages) and offers scant opportunity for further education.

These tasks will take years, but are essential if we accept Secretary Gates' characterization of the threat. If the failure of weak states is the threat we ought to be most concerned about, then we must rethink our national approach and weight it much more heavily toward non-military means of building states' capacities for governance.

The National Defense Strategy does not carry through on Secretary Gates' point, though. In fact, it does not prioritize activity very much at all. In arguing for balance, it continues the existing force-sizing construct that our defense establishment needs to achieve full-spectrum dominance, fight conventional wars, counterinsurgencies, improve the capabilities of partners, return nuclear missions to a place of prominence, reinvigorate the institution to improve purchasing practices so that large-scale, long-term procurements do not rapid fielding of improvements.

The Myth of Unconventional Warfare

While advocating greater emphasis on counterinsurgency missions, Secretary Gates has proved himself a remarkably conventional thinker in terms of the structure and functions of the Department of Defense. He is likely to pose the force structuring question as whether to fund "traditional" missions at the expense of improving the counterinsurgency (typically associated with special operations forces) capabilities that have proven so effective in recent wars. This is a false choice.
The fact is that all warfare is "unconventional" when confronting a thinking adversary. We should expect our enemies to attack what they consider our weakest links. No sensible enemy would do otherwise, because the record of forces that fight America's strengths isn't an enviable one. Our challenge is to know our own weaknesses well enough to focus our efforts on making it more difficult for enemies to exploit them.

The U.S. military has gotten good at fighting insurgencies. It is legitimate to ask why we did not better anticipate the kinds of wars we have fought in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, it is a mistake to extrapolate from that to a defense strategy and force structure that predicts future wars will be like the ones we have now demonstrated the ability to win.

Our next enemies are likely to be impressed with the speed at which the U.S. military has adapted. They are likely to marvel at the equipment we field for individual soldiers and the cost we pay to develop and rapidly push it into the force. They are likely to be stunned at the speed with which we can integrate intelligence and operations, organize and conduct complex campaigns.

They are likely to be impressed with the American public's willingness to accept casualties and fight long wars when they believe it is in our national interest. In 2002, it would have been a long-odds bet that our country would persevere this long at this cost in Iraq and Afghanistan, but it is an indicator of national strength that we have, and that even when wanting the war in Iraq over, Americans want it over successfully, on terms that preserve what has been hard won. The jihadist narrative that America is so corrupted and soft that it would collapse when targeted has been proven wrong.

But our enemies are likely to be tempted by significant vulnerabilities in our forces, as well, and it is to these that the quadrennial defense review should attend.

The Platform-Centric Defense Budget

Secretary Gates acknowledged in his January 2009 Budget testimony that five programs account for half the growth in weapons spending: the Army's Future Combat Systems (FCS), the Navy's Virginia-class attack submarines, the Joint Strike Fighter, satellite launch, and chemical weapons destruction.\(^{13}\) Anticipatory debates on defense spending have already targeted the Air Force's F-22, the FCS, and the Navy's DDG-1000 destroyer. While these are big ticket items in the budget, and perhaps do deserve elimination, to focus on the platforms casts the mandate too narrowly and understates the urgent need for a defense strategy and spending review.

The last two QDRs did not advance thinking on the defense challenges or align our resourcing to accelerate our advantages and address our vulnerabilities in cost-effective, sustainable ways. The Pentagon's pride in commending the process of the 2008 QDR as its main achievement speaks volumes about the intellectual vacuity of the conclusions and the dysfunctional command climate of the Rumsfeld Pentagon.

In former Secretary Rumsfeld's defense, the QDR he pursued in 2001 had that ambition. His original plan would have cut two divisions from the Army and ushered in a force restructuring that prejudiced ground forces toward the special operations model. It would have shifted considerable effort away from ground operations toward synthesis of space-based capabilities to strike fast across great distances with small force packages. That he chose General Richard Myers, the Space Commander, to be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is indicative of the kind of military advice Rumsfeld believed he needed. Transformation would create an American military in which force concentration could be substituted for by using speed, information, and precision in "effects-based" operations.

As it turns out, the United States is extremely fortunate that the Rumsfeld program was not put into effect. The Joint Forces Commander has declared effects-based operations an intellectually bankrupt concept our forces are incapable of carrying out. Current operations are straining our ground forces to the limit without any reductions. Moreover, the Army's modular structuring may prove a wholesale mistake: the war in Iraq and Afghanistan suggest pulling a modular force together into a cohesive whole and the types of operations commanders want to conduct require greater support from division-level headquarters.

But critics who argue that the wars we are fighting refute Rumsfeld's ideas on transformation are wrong. Much of what he identified as our central advantages and central weaknesses actually has been validated: our space infrastructure is too weak for the increasing demands we place on it; integrating battlefield information with long-distance precision strike allows U.S. forces to react with a dominating speed; and persistent surveillance is revolutionizing our operations.

Secretary Gates risks setting a course to focus on countering insurgency that will likely come at the expense of these capabilities when budget trade-offs need to be made. His approach, as outlined in the National Defense Strategy, is likely to perfect our counterinsurgency capability, but seeing the excellence we have developed because of the counterinsurgencies we are fighting, even insurgents will probe for other vulnerabilities—and all our wars will not be fighting insurgents or weak and failing states.

Instead of using the counterinsurgency frame of reference to set DoD's mid-term course, Secretary Gates would do better to consider addressing a different set of questions.
Capabilities-Based Planning vs. Baselining Our Enemies

Most defense strategies begin by identifying threats. The Bush administration undertook a revolutionary shift in defense planning by basing our defense structure on capability portfolios the United States would need against any adversary. It developed partly out of "political correctness"—the imperative to avoid naming the countries whose behavior and forces we need to protect our interests against—and partly out of devotion to the philosophical elegance of pure requirements unconnected to threats. Such devotion to the Platonic ideal would be admired by classicists; however, it is not a cost-effective way to budget scarce resources.

Capabilities-based planning is the contemporary equivalent of the Minimum Risk Force the Pentagon undertook during the Cold War as a protest against presidential spending caps. The MRF gave voice to everything the defense establishment believed it needed, a sweeping and unaffordable program. The purpose of that drill was to pressure presidents like Eisenhower to address the gap between his arbitrary cap on spending and all the equipment the Services believed they needed to defend the nation.

Rumsfeld's capabilities-based planning was even more intellectually specious, because it denied that adversaries had any effect on U.S. force size, equipment, and training. At least the MRF had the Soviet force in mind as it sought increased resources.

Secretary Gates would do well to return to planning that assesses threats to our interests, prioritizes those threats, and develops force packages to defeat them. Threats need not be states or named terrorist organizations, although we should not hesitate to name an aggressive Russia, China's military build-up and repressive policies, Iran's nuclear program, and destabilizing regional actors. We are just beginning to grapple with crucial threats, such as the spectrum of cyber warfare, from "gray" cyber attacks coordinated with military operations, to hijacking civilian infrastructure and producing kinetic destruction, to interference with space-based global positioning systems.

These are conceptual problems with sophisticated technical components that have huge implications for disrupting every aspect of U.S. military operations, and we need to understand the magnitude of the threats we face and develop the means to remediate them—not in a vacuum, but with intelligence forecasts, hedging against being wrong, and incorporating asymmetric national means of our own into the mix of U.S. responses.

Service Demands vs. Incentivizing Competition for Mission Areas

Because Title X of the U.S. Code assigns to the Services the responsibility to recruit, train, and equip military forces, our defense budget is really a conglomeration of the Service programs. The Service prerogative in those
areas was codified because the Goldwater-Nichols reforms of 1985 poached from the Services the operational conduct of wars. The near-term fighting and winning of the nation’s wars became the responsibility of the unified commanders, while the long-term building of the force remained with the Services. It was a good solution, one that pits interests with different perspectives on the problem in open competition. But our current division of labor may be lagging behind the advances in joint warfighting that Goldwater-Nichols set in motion. Gates has set out to determine “how to build . . . innovative thinking and flexibility into the rigid procurement processes at home. The key is to make sure that the strategy and risk assessment drive the procurement, rather than the other way around.”14

His initial conclusions seem to be to reduce capability and increase numbers in weapons purchases. Framing the problem as a quality versus quantity trade-off is unlikely to garner congressional or military support, especially for the major programs that define Service capabilities and budgets. Perhaps a better way to move forward would be to focus on the mid-course expansion of requirements in procurement programs.

The Services retain responsibility for establishing weapons requirements; DoD has blurred the line by establishing the Joint Requirements Oversight Council and other DoD management boards. Efforts to give greater weight in the process to the Joint Staff and Combatant Commanders have had some effect, but remain subject to Secretarial fiat. Secretary Gates is right that the system is “baroque.”

Major procurements are so technically complex and take so many years across development, testing, and fielding that DoD typically identifies additional needs and adds them on to the system in development. This spiraling of requirements is a main driver on cost expansion, and Senators Levin and McCain’s fixed-cost contracts do not address this problem. Secretary Gates’ 75-percent solution might contain the concurrent increase in requirements, if the military services and Congress could be persuaded.

What might improve the system even more would be to introduce competition for mission areas, perhaps with Combatant Commanders—the users of the force—allocating funds for development of equipment and force packages to meet identified needs. This would significantly diminish Service control by shifting them away from being “force providers” to a more entrepreneurial footing of bidders for mission areas.

For example, if successful execution of a particular war plan were critically dependent on fast arrival of dominant firepower, the Air Force might propose fighter aircraft flowed to adjacent airfields with air defenses included for the bases; the Navy might offer swarms of carrier-launched UAVs, and so on. The person charged with fighting that war would weigh the risks associated with each and fund the most promising.

This approach is likelier to get attention for innovative concepts, like the Marine Corps' exploration of unmanned aerial vehicles for logistics operations, because it marries the urgency of Combatant Commander needs with the interest of each Service in balancing preserving attention to core competencies with opening up to more creative approaches.

Congress must have a routine, integral role in any such system. Allowing rapid fielding of wartime equipment has been given a wide berth, but routinizing the practices that have allowed the rapid development and purchase of mine resistant, ambush protected (MRAP) vehicles or Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) programs are unlikely to meet standards of Congressional oversight. Secretary Gates might want to formally include Congress's Big Four into DoD review processes to minimize concerns about skirting legislative oversight with any fast-tracked procurement programs.

Refusing Non-Military Missions

Secretary Gates has often emphasized the need for a “whole of government” effort in our wars. He has stated that “what the military calls kinetic operations should be subordinated to measures aimed at promoting better governance, economic programs that spur development, and efforts to address the grievances among the discontented, from whom the terrorists recruit.” He even supports substantially increased funding for other national security departments.

The Obama administration is unlikely to propose budgets incorporating that capacity, and the Congress is unlikely to provide the funding. President Obama's fiscal 2010 budget increases State Department funding a mere 10 percent, nowhere near what would be required to even begin making State a genuine partner to Defense.

The 2007 military surge in Iraq was supposed to be matched by a “diplomatic surge” to back the American military out of the lead on governance, economics, and provision of basic services. Of the 300 civilians determined to be necessary (a woefully inadequate number, either to parallel the military's increase in force or by comparison to the required tasks), the Department of State could provide only 19, requesting DOD fill 129 of the slots and promising to contract out the remainder. The Obama administration's Afghanistan strategy is “second time farce” in lacking a meaningful identification of civilian components or where they will be resources from.

As a nation, we cannot develop and carry out strategies with integral political, military, and economic elements because our non-military capacities are too paltry to hold up their end of the deal. This is a significant impediment to

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15 Ibid.
the U.S. winning the wars we are fighting, and there is no reason to believe those needs will atrophy in the hybrid wars military theorists see on our horizon.

The end of the draft in 1973 presaged a volunteer military many feared would be used frivolously by presidents who did not have to incur the political price of invoking conscription. General Creighton Abrams is legendary in the Army for restructuring it after Vietnam, making it more difficult for the commander-in-chief to take the nation to war because he would have to take the costly political step of calling up reserves.

One might expect that mismanagement of the invasion of Iraq would cast a long shadow across intervention policy; it has not yet produced a better, more integrated effort in Afghanistan or a dramatic change in the culture of reticence non-defense departments have toward their responsibilities in carrying out the President's policies.

Rather than continue building expertise and force structure to undertake what are essentially non-military missions—such as public diplomacy, engagement with local government, building partner capacity for providing essential services, creation of civilian employment opportunities, undertaking drug eradication, and training police—the QDR should explore how to externalize these requirements to other departments. It should be possible for the DoD to impose on the president—any president—the requirement to pay the political price of having a government-wide unity of effort when America's sons and daughters are put at risk in military missions.

While civilian leaders may resent such a step, as they did—and have—even since General Abrams imposed it in the narrower military realm, the timing is propitious for pushing such an initiative. Washington is papered over with studies bemoaning the deficiencies of interagency capacity, our military continues to feel the strain of demands from the wars, and the Administration has committed itself to dramatic improvement in this area. The last thing President Obama, or any of us, want is an American military resentful that it alone is bearing the burden of grave national endeavors. The DoD should lead the way in helping size and cost the capacity essential to making our uses of military force successful.

**Revisiting the Triad**

The Schlesinger Commission on DoD nuclear weapons management condemns DoD for a distressing and widespread inattention to the nuclear mission. One indicator of the validity of the Commission's criticism is the fact

17 Task Force on Department of Defense Nuclear Weapons Management, 2009. The Schlesinger Commission issued two reports, the first specifically investigating Air Force practices after several incidents of mishandling, the second arguing for upgrading nuclear strategy and management in DOD. While Secretary Gates empaneled the commission, he has not implemented many of its recommendations.
that DoD conducts a nuclear posture review (NPR) separate from the QDR. This practice confirms the separate, exotic nature of nuclear missions in the Pentagon's hierarchy and prevents their requirements being understood as a mainstream part of the force. Our nuclear deterrent needs attention, and not just from an arms control perspective. Secretary Gates should recombine the QDR and NPR to ensure that the nuclear mission is once again considered integral to overall strategy and force posture.

Nuclear weapons experts have an understandable bias against risk. The magnitude of consequence associated with error in their field creates a healthy aversion to avoidable risk and bias in favor of maximizing means of achieving their critically important mission. But the "triad" of sea-based missiles, land-based missiles, and airplane dropped bombs is an arbitrary standard. For if surety of mission completion were the defining criteria, space basing would have been a more prominent concept (instead of arms controllers fencing off space from "offensive" weapons) and the United States would not have withdrawn nuclear weapons from surface ships or allowed the land-based short-range nuclear systems to disappear.

The nuclear triad has been a shibboleth for so long that it is difficult to recall its provenance. The triad was conceptualized in a time when communications with submarines were rudimentary; that time has long passed. The vulnerability of land-based nuclear forces has taken on a new permutation with the threat of terrorism, giving greater incentive for sea-basing and heightening concern about land-based and airplane delivered weapons.

The Unified Command Plan assigns Strategic Command the mission of developing nuclear plans and conducting operations. However, the Strategic Command depends functionally on personnel trained in the Air Force and Navy. Yet the Air Force's stewardship of nuclear missions and forces calls into serious question whether that Service should continue to have responsibility for such a large proportion of the nuclear role.

We cannot know whether it is prudent to eliminate one wing of the triad without establishing circumstances in which we would use nuclear weapons and evaluating the costs and benefits of alternative means of delivery. We do not currently have a solid baseline and should establish one. Nuclear targeting and force structuring are often portrayed as science, just as politics are made respectable in scholarship as political science. The reason for both is similar: to mantle its practitioners in authority, elevate the discussion from the tawdriness of political deal making into the rarified air of conceptual analysis often ennobled with mathematical grammar. In neither case does it remove the politics, nor should it.

The currently operative nuclear posture review, released by the Bush administration in 2002, did not press the nuclear establishment particularly hard to reduce weapons. The time is now ripe to do so, for five reasons. First, we are genuinely threatened by the Russian arsenal—both the weapons in Russian control and the prospect of uncontrolled weapons leaking out.
Second, there are beginning to be concerns about the safety and reliability of our nuclear weapons. Establishing requirements for the arsenal will help determine whether new warheads will be necessary. Third, the Nonproliferation Treaty review conference is approaching and it will be difficult to sustain broad opposition to proliferation unless the main weapons states make a more credible gesture toward the disarmament they are obligated by the Treaty to pursue. Many Americans discount the importance of building global support via the NPT; but the NPT is the best bulwark we have against proliferation becoming seen as unobjectionable. Fourth, the Bush administration was cavalier in believing reductions did not need to be codified in verifiable treaties. We ought to correct that error. And fifth, the Obama administration wants to reduce the force. It is their prerogative to do so, and the nuclear establishment's responsibility to provide facts and analyses that inform their political decisions.

Bringing nuclear missions and forces into the mainstream of the QDR analysis would be an important signal addressing the Schlesinger Commission's concern about marginalization of nuclear matters. It would also accelerate the timeline for reaching conclusions on the size, structure, and service responsibility for nuclear forces that would benefit the military services scoping their forces and budgets in the QDR. And it would position the administration on a solid foundation in advance of expected nuclear arms reduction talks with the Russians.

**Lastly, But Most Importantly**

None of Secretary Gates' priorities or plans will matter unless he can deliver congressional support for their funding. The most elegant QDR will be pointless if it runs afoul of Congress, and most established procurement programs have established constituencies. Those constituencies and their representatives will be questioning why the government is shoveling money out in "stimulus" bills when it is shutting down manufacturing lines for defense equipment. The International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers are already organizing a "Save Our Raptor Jobs" claiming 95,000 jobs will be lost if the F-22 is cancelled, numbers difficult to ignore in a down economy especially for member of Congress facing re-election in 2010.18

A congressional strategy will be even more important for Secretary Gates while Democrats control both houses of Congress and the White House. Many congressional Democrats do not share the serious-mindedness exhibited by so many of the Obama administration's defense appointees. While Congressional Democrats may feel obligated to give the President his topline—it would be big news if they did not support a wartime President

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of their own party on defense—they may not feel bound to accept the specifics of Secretary Gates’ defense program.

In his January 2009 budget testimony, Secretary Gates asked lawmakers to “make tough choices about specific weapons systems and defense priorities based solely on national interests.” Secretary Gates surely did not mean to suggest his recommendations count as acting in the national interest while congressional priorities are parochial. However, he will have a very difficult case to make on programmatic cuts, because for the past two years he has advocated the very programs he is now telling Congress are expendable. Gates is now instructing Congress that the upcoming defense budget must “critically and ruthlessly separate appetites from real requirements,” but they will likely serve him up his own previous justifications for the very programs he proposes to cut.

Nor are they likely to be persuaded we need to have very different types of forces, better optimized to counterinsurgencies. Secretary Gates has said the United States is unlikely to fight another Iraq or Afghanistan soon. If you don’t support fighting wars with complex and long-duration nation building requirements, you’re unlikely to believe we need to redesign our military forces for that purpose. One need only think back to the congressional testimony of Ambassador Ryan Crocker and General David Petraeus justifying a new counterinsurgency strategy and concomitant surge of forces in Iraq to have a sense of the strong resistance the QDR could encounter.

Secretary Gates can sometimes sound preachy to members of Congress and their staffs. In arguing for nuclear modernization, for example, he wrote “Congress needs to do its part by funding the Reliable Replacement Warhead Program.” Such accusations are unlikely to win votes. And Secretary Gates will need to win votes, rather than just corral existing support.

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19 Gates Testimony.