
National Security in the 21st Century: The Challenge of Transformation

By THE NATIONAL DEFENSE PANEL



U.S. Air Force (Val Gempis)

The United States is at a critical crossroads. The world of today bears little resemblance to the recent past, and the world of tomorrow promises very different security challenges. While our military superiority seems unassailable, there is no guarantee that competitors will not emerge and put national interests at risk in the future. In the meantime the old world order has shifted, new nations

have been born, non-state actors have become key players, economic power is ever more prominent, and technology is advancing at an increased pace. These dynamics have led to entirely new dimensions in the character of warfare. We are thus faced with transforming national security structures while not precipitously abandoning central military capabilities that have kept us secure over the last quarter century. We ignore this summons at the Nation's peril.

To help meet the challenge Congress passed the Military Force Structure Review Act of 1996 which required the Department of Defense to un-

The article was contributed by the National Defense Panel whose members are identified herein.

dertake “a comprehensive examination of the defense strategy, force structure, force modernization plans, infrastructure, budget plan, and other elements of the defense program and policies with a view toward determining and expressing the defense strategy of the U.S. and establishing a revised defense program through the year 2005.”

The result of that effort was the *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review* which was released in May 1997. It embraced *Joint Vision 2010* as a template for transformation and offered a strategy of shape-respond-prepare allowing for the near simultaneous conduct of two major theater wars as well as smaller scale contingencies. It assumed an annual DOD budget of \$250 billion extended over time and recommended no major changes in the “above the line” force structure (divisions, air wings, Marine expeditionary forces, and carrier battle groups).

The Panel

As a follow-on to the Quadrennial Defense Review, Congress—in the same act that guided the review—mandated that an independent body known as the National Defense Panel undertake to further study strategies and structures to meet

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future challenges. In the words of this legislation, the panel should conduct “an independent, nonpartisan review of the force structure that is more comprehensive than prior assessments, extends beyond the Quadren-

nal Defense Review, and explores innovative and forward-thinking ways of meeting such challenges.” Given the scope of the challenge and the panel’s view that only an open and informed process can produce the correct solutions, this article describes our efforts so far to meet its charge and give a preliminary idea of the direction the final report will take.

The report of the National Defense Panel will be forwarded to Congress in December 1997. In recent months we have gathered information and deliberated on national security issues which the panel is charged to review. We traveled to Europe and Asia to meet with the commanders in chief, their staffs, and many of their subordinate commanders. At the same time we met with allied and regional leaders and got their ideas on the future of U.S.-regional relations.

In turn we met with senior DOD officials, the Chairman and Joint Staff, service chiefs, and leadership of the Reserve components; visited political-military exercises and wargames and listened to the findings of participating experts; and received briefings from future-oriented components of every service on various forward-looking

concepts. We also conferred with the National Security Council, Department of State, and intelligence community. And we have consulted with members of Congress and their staffs.

Simultaneously we set our staff to work—augmented by experts and visionary thinkers drawn from various disciplines—to develop a process that analyzed global and regional trends across a range of political, demographic, economic, cultural, technological, military, and transnational phenomena. From that we conceptualized outcomes that may characterize the world in 2020 (a date far enough in the future to free us from current programs and paradigms).

We considered four hypothetical points in this range: a world much like today extrapolated forward to 2020; a more benign one in which stability and international cooperation are the order of the day; a world in which regional competitors

National Defense Panel

Philip A. Odeen [Panel Chairman]; President and CEO, BDM Corporation; served on the National Security Council Staff and the Defense Science Board

The Honorable Richard L. Armitage; President, Armitage Associates; served as both Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs and U.S. Ambassador to the Newly Independent States

General Richard D. Hearney, USMC (Ret.); Managing Director, McDonnell Douglas-Europe; served as Assistant Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps

Admiral David E. Jeremiah, USN (Ret.); President and CEO, Technology of Strategies and Alliances; served as Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and as commander in chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet

The Honorable Robert M. Kimmitt; Partner, Wilmer, Cutler and Pickering; served as U.S. Ambassador to Germany and as Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs

Andrew F. Krepinevich, Jr.; Director, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments; served in the Office of Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense

General James P. McCarthy, USAF (Ret.); Olin Professor of National Security, U.S. Air Force Academy; served as deputy commander in chief, U.S. European Command

Janne E. Nolan; Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution; served with the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and with the Senate Armed Services Committee

General Robert W. RisCassi, USA (Ret.); Vice President, L-3 Communications Corporation; served as commander in chief, United Nations and U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command and as Vice Chief of Staff, U.S. Army



F-16 being cleared for take off.

U.S. Air Force (William B. Fallin)



Amphibious assault, Mogadishu.

U.S. Air Force (Joanna Spitzer)

increase in strength and introduce new challenges to global order; and a chaotic one in which instability, intense competition, and violence are the norm. In light of discernible trends and possible future worlds derived from them, we scrutinized various grand strategies that the United States could undertake to ensure its interests and goals were still attainable in the first half of the next century. Again we received advice from many experts and innovative thinkers both in and out of government. All this helped bring us to the central focus of determining what defense capabilities will be vital in the future.

Transformation Strategy

While we have yet to conclude the exact findings of our study, it has become increasingly apparent that a transformation strategy is needed

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to get beyond today's security structures to those the Nation will require by 2020. Though we are currently in a far more favorable strategic environment than during the Cold War because of a significant superiority over any prospective near-term competitor, the longer term is less certain.

The challenge confronting the Armed Forces is not just whether they can win two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts in the near term. It is whether the military—indeed the entire national security apparatus—can anticipate

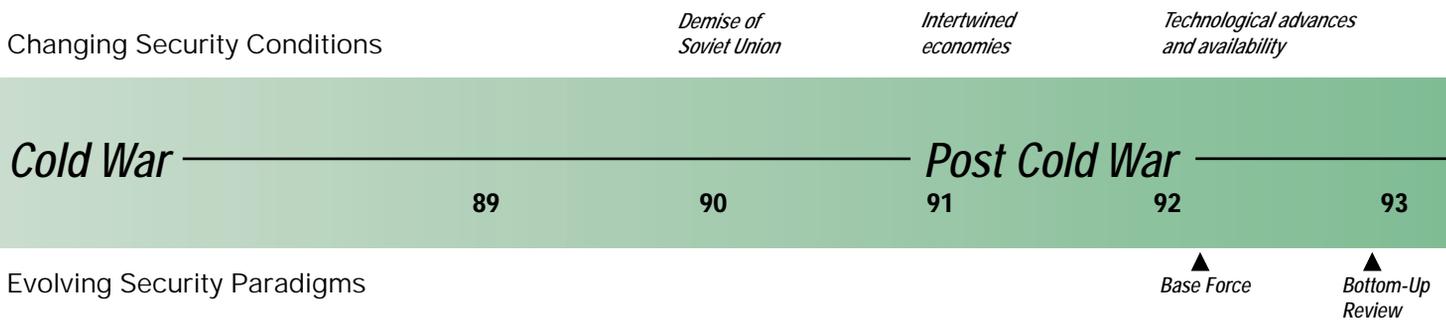
the nature of future wars and transform itself to prevent, and if necessary, win them. And in parallel, the military must be prepared to respond to situations short of war—from peacekeeping to countering terrorism—where its unique skills are required to support national security interests.

The future is unknowable. But that is no excuse for inaction. A more prudent course—the essence of a transformation strategy—is to experiment, develop diverse and sometimes competing operational concepts, make the necessary preliminary investments, and then play out the options. At some point when we can determine more precisely what our potential opponents are doing, how technology is developing, and where our key interests lie, we can reshape our forces and exploit those developments that promise success.

As the panel continues its deliberations on emerging challenges, the security structures that best deal with them, and barriers and enablers to a better strategic future, it will explore:

- the altered conditions of conventional, unconventional, and nuclear warfare in light of technological, cultural, political, and economic developments
- operations in space, to include making it more accessible while defending our assets and capabilities there and on the ground, and the potential for commercial integration and exploitation
- information systems and enhanced capacities of network centric computing which link disparate platforms and systems for synergistic effect
- power projection and counters which an enemy might invoke to limit our access and thus our strategic consequence

Meeting the security challenges of a new century. . . a decade of debate and evolution



- developments in urban warfare vis-à-vis demographic trends affecting growth and human profile of urban areas and the importance of cities as political, financial, cultural, and psychological centers of gravity

- transnational developments in organized crime, drug trafficking, resource scarcities, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction

- homeland protection against asymmetries such as chemical/biological terrorism and information/infrastructure attack

- the role of Reserve forces in enhancing U.S. security and interests at home and abroad.

In short, we are considering the entire range of security issues, the changing character of war, the shifting balance of international power, and the increasing complexity of a security apparatus that extends well beyond the scope of traditional military concerns.

Enlarging the Debate

The panel understands that it cannot solve this array of issues by itself. It realizes that the change which may be in order must be informed by an intense debate that leads to correct policy decisions. But by formulating appropriate questions and proposing answers we hope to contribute to that debate. Those questions include:

- What does an era of dynamic strategic and technological change mean for future military capabilities?

- Which regions and global trends must be monitored to ensure change does not translate operationally into surprise?

- How should shaping opportunities and lesser conflicts be balanced with preparations and capabilities required to fight and win the Nation's wars?

- Given that the future is in many ways unknown and unknowable, how do we guarantee the agility and flexibility to adapt to changing conditions in time?

- How do we balance the ability to respond to contingencies with the experimentation and investments required to address tomorrow's exigencies?

- What changes should be made to insure that our national security apparatus (beyond DOD itself) be reorganized to better address contingencies and prevent future conflicts (or win should we fail to deter them)?

Ours is not an effort to size the force precisely and define its structure in detail. That is not possible given the uncertainties that we will confront twenty years out. Nor can we create specific plans for the experimental and developmental efforts required. Indeed, with appropriate political guidance, that is the responsibility of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and military services. The National Defense Panel can, however, establish the context within which to frame the defense component of 21st century national security. The panel hopes to enlarge the debate by addressing the scope, direction, and pace of change necessary while simultaneously preserving the essential structures to meet contemporary challenges. We hope to identify the kinds of capabilities that will make America as militarily strong in the 21st century as it was in the 20th century but with less risk and bloodshed. The panel aspires to contribute to a shift away from Cold War paradigms and toward a new national security consensus—one that will ensure the Nation's continued strength and role as a world leader. **JFQ**

Spread of global information systems

Continued small scale contingencies

Transnational challenges (environment, crime, etc.)

94

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96

97

98

21st Century

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Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces

▲
Joint Vision 2010

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Quadrennial Defense Review

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National Defense Panel

Future National Security Directions and Military Contributions