

Desired End State: Decisive Victory Through Regime Change

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The fundamental paradox of the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) was overshadowed by the September 11th terrorist attacks. The American response to the attacks has reversed, at least for the moment, the fundamental premise of the QDR.

The premise of the QDR was the inexorable extension of American hegemony largely through unilateral initiatives focused on military power. Following September 11th, the Bush Administration has embraced a multilateral diplomacy unprecedented in recent history. But the paradox of American military power remains. The QDR found it far easier to articulate a vision of American military hegemony than to describe how this might be achieved with available resources. The report was filled with new and ambitious goals and virtually devoid of details as to what must be done anew so that these goals might be achieved.

The most widely heralded innovation of the QDR Report was the abandonment of the previous "two war" planning requirement. But upon closer inspection rather the opposite appears to be the case. The requirement to fight two nearly simultaneous major theater wars was the centerpiece of post-Cold War planning and the central focus of criticism of that planning. Some critics suggested that the force structure was inadequate to meet these requirements, while others suggested the threat had been inflated to justify excessive force structure.

The QDR Report states that "The new force-sizing construct specifically shapes forces to. . . [s]wiftly defeat aggression in overlapping major conflicts while preserving for the President the option to call for a decisive victory in one of those conflicts — including the possibility of regime change or occupation. . . . The United States is not abandoning planning for two conflicts to plan for fewer than two. On the contrary, DoD is changing the concept altogether by planning for victory across the spectrum of possible conflict." The construction "overlapping major conflicts" would appear to be little more than a reformulation of the previous two-war requirement. Indeed, far from reducing the previous requirement, the QDR Report raises the ante by stating decisive victory through regime change as the desired end state of at least one of the two wars. While regime change through occupation has reportedly been the objective of U.S. war planning on the Korean peninsula at least for the past several years, this marks the first time the United States has authoritatively stated war aims that went beyond restoration of the status quo ante-bellum, or the vague "termination on terms favorable" to the United States.

The two-war requirement was apparently modified through extension of the theaters in which such wars can be waged. Hitherto, North Korea, and either Iran or Iraq, were the stated adversaries for the two wars. The QDR Report states that U.S. forces must be capable of "precluding hostile domination of critical areas, particularly Europe, Northeast Asia, the East Asian littoral, and the Middle East and Southwest Asia." Upon close reading, it becomes clear that the only areas excluded from the zone of vital American interests are Russia, China, and Africa.

Another fundamental innovation in the QDR Report "... was to shift the basis of defense planning from a "threat-based" model that has dominated thinking in the past to a "capabilities-based" model for the future. This capabilities-based model focuses more on how an adversary might fight rather than specifically whom the adversary might be or where a war might occur." While the operational implications of this construct are obscure, it is difficult to avoid concerns that this new model will create open-ended force requirements divorced from those created by real-world adversaries. In the absence of reality-testing imposed by considering "whom the

adversary might be or where the war might occur" there would arise an unavoidable tendency to plan against largely conjectural adversaries whose capabilities are precisely those that would justify the parochial priorities of the services and defense contractors. The driving force in this new construct would appear to be the capabilities of American forces rather than a military postured to respond to actual threats.

The open-ended requirements levied by the QDR Report are further accentuated by the new strategy to "... dissuade other countries from initiating future military competitions... by maintaining or enhancing advantages in key areas of military capability. . . [D]issuasion will also require the United States to experiment with revolutionary operational concepts, capabilities, and organizational arrangements." Although the QDR Report refers generically to "other countries," there can be little doubt that this should be understood to mean China. Or rather, not the actually existing China of the year 2001, but the worst case China of the year 2020. During the Cold War the tendency toward worst-case Soviet threat assessments was always at least partially tempered by the existence of a real Soviet Union against which such assessments could be measured. Taken at face value, "dissuasion" presents a far more demanding and less constrained planning requirement. The United States must overmatch the full range of potential future Chinese military capabilities while China itself need only pursue some smaller subset of such capabilities.

The QDR Report was predictably focused on the new priority of homeland defense, and the enduring priority of ballistic missile defense. The high priority attached to these topics, however, substantially exceeded the sparse programmatic details contained in the report. It did state, however, that the Navy would "develop new concepts of maritime pre-positioning, high-speed sealift, and new amphibious capabilities for the Marine Corps. . . .DoD will accelerate the conversion of Trident submarines to guided missile submarines." Surely more program changes are in the works, on homeland defense, missile defense, and other programs. But only when these details are fleshed out will the significance of the Rumsfeld "transformation" come into focus.

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