

Re-Envisioning Defense:

An Agenda for US Policy Debate and Transition

Project on Defense Alternatives

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SUMMARY

The United States is entering a critical period of policy transition. Beginning with the advent of a new administration in Washington, and continuing through the end of 2010, all of America's national security and defense planning guidance will be revised. Certainly the need for change is manifest.

Recent defense policy evinces a disturbing paradox: it has been delivering less and less security at ever increasing cost. And, on a world scale, a process of global re-polarization and re-militarization is underway. If unchecked, this portends a return to conditions reminiscent of the Cold War, which would add impetus to weapon proliferation, arms races, and conflicts.

Reviewing current US policy, we have identified 25 concerns or areas of concern that relate to the problems noted above. These might form an agenda for policy discussion and reform. From these we have distilled a "short list" of three overarching topics or concerns that, taken together, capture the fundamental problems in current policy. Alternatives addressing these three core concerns can provide guidance for understanding and addressing the rest.

THREE CORE CONCERNS

Core concern 1. Security policy vision: How do we understand and hope to attain security?

This entails our assessment of the security environment and its dynamics as well as our security interests, goals, concerns, and strategy. Presently, the "war on terrorism" provides the principal organizing theme for US security policy, which puts America on a permanent war footing. Is this the optimal frame for addressing post-Cold War security challenges?

An alternative approach might emphasize non-military means and broad multilateral cooperation in mitigating and redressing the sources of stress and instability in the international system. Such an approach would not turn principally on waging and winning wars or pursuing strategic advantage in a contest of nation-states. Instead, it would turn on building broad

cooperation and winning the confidence of people in troubled regions. Focal concerns might include water, food, energy, and health security, global warming, economic development, and the management of globalization.

Core concern 2. The role of force and the armed forces in US foreign and security policy.

Since the Cold War's end, the role of the US military in the world, and the role of force in US policy, have grown more prominent. The outcome of this increased activity has not been encouraging, however. It has done more to add to instability than resolve it. And it has proved fabulously expensive in terms of both lives and treasure. Any adequate alternative to recent defense policy must provide new guidance on the use of force and the role of the military.

Core concern 3. The "fit" between America's defense posture and the global security environment.

America's military posture is not well-adapted to today's security challenges. And this contributes to its problem of sustainability. Adjusting the nation's defense posture to more closely fit the security environment would simultaneously render that posture more "sustainable". And this might turn the defense policy paradox "on its head" – yielding greater security at lower cost.

TOPICS FOR POLICY DEBATE AND REFORM

The 25 areas of concern that we have identified in US policy are listed below. They can be divided into eight categories:

- Policy on strategic warfare
- Counter-proliferation, counter-terrorism, and homeland security
- Policy on major military operations, conventional and irregular
- Peacetime military engagement
- The US stance on international law and arms control
- Civil-military relations: The growing influence of the Pentagon
- Defense budget, acquisition, and management issues
- Country-specific controversies

Policy on Strategic Warfare

1. Nuclear weapons modernization, missile defense, and the "new (offensive) deterrence"
2. Prompt global strike: The advent of conventional strategic warfare
3. Seizing the "new high ground": the weaponization of space

Counter-proliferation, counter-terrorism, and homeland security

4. Offensive counter-proliferation (OCP): Arms control by bombardment?
5. Counter-terrorism & homeland security: Search for a sensible strategy

Major regional military operations, conventional and irregular

6. Preparations for major wars reflect unnecessarily ambitious goals
7. “Shock and awe” strategy and attacks on civilian-military targets
8. Counter-insurgency, peace and stability operations, nation-building: renewed enthusiasm despite Iraq experience.

Peacetime military engagement

9. Global military presence & base posture: cover the earth?
10. Military cooperation, assistance, and arms transfers programs: uncertain effects.

US stance on international law and arms control

11. Adherence to international law and legal institutions
12. The role of negotiated arms control in US security policy

Civil-military relations: The growing influence of the Pentagon

13. DOD’s domestic “perception management” efforts
14. DOD’s drive for expanded “authorities” and greater freedom of action

Defense budget and acquisition issues

15. DOD’s broken financial and inventory accounting system.
16. Pork-barrel spending: the Pentagon budget as “gravy train”
17. DOD’s broken weapon procurement system
18. Military transformation: To what end? How much of what is enough?
19. Setting the defense budget – forever more than \$600 billion?

Country-specific issues

20. Iraq withdrawal: soon or never?
21. Resolving the Iran and North Korea nuclear issues
22. Afghanistan war & Pakistan instability
23. Israel-Palestine and Lebanon conflict
24. Relations with China and Russia.
25. Increased military activity in sub-Saharan Africa and South America

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