A Balanced Force Structure To Achieve a Liberal World Order

by Mackubin Thomas Owens

Mackubin Thomas Owens (mackubin.owens@nwc.navy.mil) is an associate dean of academics and a professor of national-security affairs at the Naval War College in Newport, R.I. He is writing a history of U.S. civil-military relations. This article is based on his presentation at FPRI's conference, "The Future of American Military Strategy," held in Philadelphia on December 5, 2005.

Abstract: *In addition to preexisting threats such as the rise of China, the United States now faces a protracted struggle against Islamist terrorists. The military component of the nation's security strategy requires a balanced force that can be employed across the spectrum of conflict. The Iraq War has shown the "1-4-2-1" force-sizing construct—maintaining a force able to defend the homeland, operate in and from four forward regions, simultaneously defeat two regional adversaries, and achieve a result such as regime change in one of them—to be unattainable. But by spending 4.5 percent of GDP on defense and with the right force mix, America will be able to lead coalitions against terrorists, restore order to unstable regions, do peacekeeping in regions of vital interest, deter aggression, and win a war if deterrence fails. The benefits of the resulting world order far outweigh the costs.*

In 1990, University of Chicago political scientist and realist John Mearsheimer wrote an article for *The Atlantic* entitled "Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War." For it was clear even then that strategy-making and force-planning during the Cold War were relatively simple because we knew the enemy. Planners could be reasonably sure that the future would more or less resemble the present, albeit with more technology.

During the Cold War, U.S. force structure was driven by three planning cases: (1) strategic nuclear attack and (2) a Warsaw Pact attack against NATO, in both of which cases the Soviet military loomed large; and (3) non-NATO contingencies—the "rest of the world." With the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S. defense planners found themselves on *terra incognita*. They floundered, trying to justify defense expenditures despite the collapse of the USSR. As it happened, Saddam Hussein stepped forward and invaded Kuwait in August 1990, thus permitting the planners to argue that emerging regional threats had

superseded the global Soviet threat. Indeed, for the next decade, the main determinant of U.S. force structure was the requirement to be able to wage "nearly simultaneously" two major-theater wars (2-MTW)—i.e., wars approaching the intensity of Operation Desert Storm, the campaign that drove Saddam from Kuwait in the winter of 1991.

However, during the 1990s, the 2-MTW model became little more than a bureaucratic tool for maintaining Service and regional combatant commanders' claims to the defense budget and for protecting favored Service and combatant commanders' programs. Critics labeled the model an obstacle to force "transformation," and Eliot Cohen, a prominent defense intellectual, noted that it would impede developing a new military strategy.[1]

When George W. Bush assumed the presidency in 2001, he committed his administration to a policy of reducing U.S. military missions abroad and freeing up resources to transform the force from a Cold War military to one capable of dealing with a broad array of challenges in the future. The 9/11 attacks meant that the United States would have to undertake military transformation while it was also fighting a war. At the same time, the attacks complicated the vision of the future. Before 9/11, U.S. planners had focused on an emerging China as a possible future adversary; 9/11 made it clear that the United States now faced a protracted struggle against an enemy who was exploiting irregular warfare—i.e., terrorism and guerrilla tactics. The force structure that the United States will require in the future depends on the strategy it pursues to protect its interests.

The New Security Environment

The Chinese Threat

At one end of the threat spectrum is the potential one posed by the rise of China. Indeed, the similarities between the British-German relationship at the turn of the twentieth century and the U.S.-Chinese relationship today are compelling. In the earlier case, Germany, then only lately unified but economically vibrant and possessing the dominant army on the continent, chose to construct a first-class navy and pursue world power. This decision disrupted the balance of power in Europe and contributed in large measure to the drift toward world war. Similarly, China has experienced great economic growth in recent years and has devoted a substantial portion of its GDP to defense, including naval modernization. While the scope of Chinese naval modernization is nothing like Tirpitz's attempt to challenge the Royal Navy before the Great War, China's course could bring it into conflict with the United States some time in the near future.

[1] Eliot Cohen, "Defending America in the Twenty-first Century," *Foreign Affairs*, Nov./Dec. 2000.

In pursuit of its goal of becoming a world power, China has sought to counter U.S. maritime power in the Western Pacific, especially to thwart any U.S. intervention on behalf of Taiwan and to extend its own strategic reach south into Southeast Asia and east into the Pacific Ocean. Some analysts believe that China plans to have a "blue-water" naval capability by 2020, enabling it to project power out to a line running from the Kuril Islands in the North Pacific through the Mariana Islands to Papua New Guinea in the South Pacific. In the meantime, the PRC is enhancing its ability to defend the Chinese littoral and enforce its claim of sovereignty over Taiwan.[2]

To make U.S. intervention in East Asia more difficult and risky, China is investing heavily in naval platforms with long-range weapons. It is constructing a domestic shipbuilding and aircraft production base, and meanwhile has taken delivery of modern, 6,000-ton Sovremenny-class destroyers from Russia, equipped with the SS-N-22 "Sunburn" supersonic anti-ship missile. It has also bought Russian SU-27 fighters and SU-30 ground-attack aircraft, and it is seeking to expand its amphibious lift capability.

"Fourth-generation" Threat

At the other end of the spectrum lies what some have called "fourth-generation warfare," in which our opponents rely on asymmetric, low-tech tactics and networks of people rather than state-of-the-art weapon systems.[3] The source of such conflicts is what Thomas Barnett has called the "Non-integrating Gap," the part of the world where "globalization is thinning or just plain absent," in contrast to the "Functioning Core," where "globalization is thick with network connectivity, financial transactions, liberal media flows, and collective security" (see Figure 1).[4] Barnett argues that "bin Laden and Al Qaeda are pure products of the Gap—in effect, its most violent feedback to the Core."

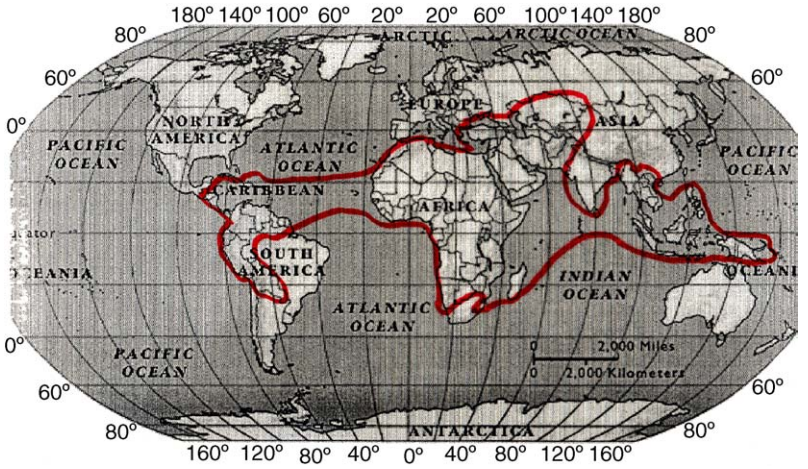
For Barnett, the key to future global security and prosperity is the requirement of the Core to "shrink" the Gap. A policy of containment is not enough: that approach further reduces what little connectivity the Gap has with the Core and renders it more dangerous to the Core over the long haul. Many agree with Barnett that the Core must export security into the Gap, providing the stability necessary for the regions within to achieve "connectivity" with the rest of the world and thereby position themselves to benefit from globalization. Otherwise, the Gap will continue to export terrorism to the Core, as it has been doing over the last decade.

[2] Capt. Chen Yunkang and Lt. Commander Chai Wenchung, "A Study of the Evolving PRC Naval Strategy," *China Mainline* (Taipei), Sept. 1, 1997; and Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2000).

[3] Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century* (New York: Zenith Press, 2004).

[4] Thomas Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Putnam, 2004), reviewed in this issue of *Orbis*.

Figure 1. Thomas Barnett's Gap.



Imperial Defense vs. Peer Competitor

The United States' defense dilemma is similar to the one Britain faced at the end of the nineteenth century, when it had to decide whether to focus on defense of its empire, relying on the Royal Navy and colonial troops, or revamping its defenses to deal with the possibility that it might have to fight Germany's army on the continent. Great Britain chose defense of its empire and paid a high price for this decision in World War I. Unfortunately, today, Washington cannot choose to confront one threat and not another; it must be able to confront them all. The Department of Defense has categorized the threats to U.S. interests as:

- *Traditional* challenges characterized by state-centric conventional warfare;
- *Irregular* challenges characterized by unconventional methods—e.g., terrorism and guerrilla warfare;
- *Catastrophic* challenges involving the acquisition, possession, and use of WMD or weapons of mass effect; and
- *Disruptive* challenges—the development and use of breakthrough technologies to negate current U.S. advantages in key operational domains.[5]

Barnett and other critics of U.S. defense policy contend that the main reason the United States was surprised on 9/11 was that defense planners were focused on China. They also contend that even in the wake of 9/11, the United

[5] DoD, *The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, Mar. 2005, p. 2.

States continues to prepare for the high-tech wars against other conventional powers we would prefer to fight rather than the real wars against terrorists and guerrillas we will actually have to fight. But the United States must avoid the mirror-image error of now focusing so exclusively on irregular threats that it will be unable to deal with a future strategic challenger, e.g., China. The United States must choose a strategy that takes all four challenges into account, and determine U.S. force structure accordingly. Above all, it must avoid "strategic monism," a primary reliance on a single strategic concept, weapon, service, or region.[6]

A Strategy of Primacy

U.S. interests are straightforward: keeping the nation and its citizens safe and free. The best way to do this is to maintain a world order characterized by economic liberalism and an expanding number of liberal democracies. The United States has sought to support and expand such a liberal world order since World War II, and it still finds itself in the business of underwriting global security.

Strategy

In general, strategy serves three purposes. First, it relates ends of policy to the limited resources available to achieve them, and it implies an adversary who actively opposes the achievement of the ends. Second, strategy helps clarify the ends of policy by helping establish priorities. Without establishing priorities among competing ends, all interests and threats will appear equal. In the absence of strategy, planners will find themselves in the situation described by Frederick the Great: "He who attempts to defend too much defends nothing." Finally, strategy conceptualizes resources as means in support of policy. Resources are not means until strategy provides some understanding of how they will be organized and employed. This is the logical link between strategy and force planning: defense budgets and manpower are resources. A strategic vision helps to transform these raw resources into such military means as divisions, wings, and fleets.[7]

To be successful, strategy-making must be an iterative process. To paraphrase British strategist Colin Gray, strategy is the product of the dialogue

[6] On strategic pluralism and strategic monism, see Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 400, 418–27; Huntington, *The Common Defense: Strategic Programs in National Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), p. 264; and Gordon Keiser, *The U.S. Marine Corps and Defense Unification, 1944–47: The Politics of Survival* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1982), pp. 121–2.

[7] I am indebted to Robert S. Wood, former Dean of the Naval War College's Center for Naval Warfare Studies, for this formulation.

between policy and national power in the context of the overall international security environment.[8] As factors such as technology and resource availability change, strategy must adapt.

In this post–Cold War era, no matter what U.S. strategy has been declared to be, it is in practice best described as *primacy*, which is predicated on the idea that the key to future peace and prosperity is for the United States to maintain the power position it held at the end of the Cold War.[9] The twin objectives of primacy are to underwrite a liberal world order by providing security while preventing the emergence of a new rival along the lines of the former Soviet Union. The basis of primacy is hegemonic stability theory, which holds that (1) order in world politics is typically created by a single dominant power, and (2) the maintenance of order requires continued hegemony.[10] Under this theory, a decline in relative U.S. power could create a more disorderly, less peaceful world.

The object lesson for the United States is the decay of *Pax Britannica* that many believe was the necessary, if not sufficient, condition for the two world wars. As British hegemony declined, smaller states that previously had incentives to cooperate with Britain "defected" to other powers, causing the international system to fragment and leading to depression and war.[11] The decline of American power could lead to a similar outcome.

Primacy can be caricatured as a "go-it-alone" approach in which the United States intimidates both friends and allies, wields power unilaterally, and ignores international institutions. But the United States pursues what can be characterized as a "benevolent" primacy, one that is in keeping with its liberal political traditions but recognizes the world as a dangerous place in which peace is maintained by the strong. This form of primacy is based on the assumption that U.S. power is good not only for the United States itself but also for the rest of the world. The argument is that the United States can be fully secure only in a world where everyone else is also secure. Such a world order is possible only if the United States is willing and able to create and maintain it.

A strategy of primacy through U.S. global leadership does not require unilateral U.S. action everywhere. Realistic primacy depends on the interaction of Churchill's "sinews of peace," arms and alliances. To employ a common

[8] Colin Gray, "Inescapable Geography," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, June/Sept. 1999, p. 169.

[9] Barry R. Posen and Andrew L. Ross, "Competing Visions for US Grand Strategy," *International Security*, Winter 1996/97.

[10] Ethan Barnaby Kapstein, *The Political Economy of National Security: A Global Perspective* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992), p. 3.

[11] Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Gilpin, *Global Political Economy: Understanding the International Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Joseph Greico, *Cooperation Among Nations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); and Charles Kindleberger, *The World in Depression: 1929-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

analogy, the United States is not so much the world's policeman as it is the world's sheriff, who organizes the posse to maintain order: alliances, coalitions, and the various international institutions that create, at least in some parts of the world, an international society, the *sine qua non* of cooperative security.[12] And it does not mean that all regions of the world are of equal importance to the United States.

Primacy and the Logic of Force Planning

Primacy is a *grand* strategy, one that employs all of the instruments of national power: diplomacy, economic statecraft, and military force or the threat of force.[13] The military component of primacy requires a *balanced force* that can be employed across the spectrum of conflict and prevail under diverse circumstances against adversaries employing a variety of strategies. These forces must be able not only to prevail in war, but also reassure friends and allies and generally influence actors in those parts of the world of the greatest importance to the United States, especially Europe and Asia.

These forces must be capable of operating jointly in all operational environments: land, sea, air, space, and across cyberspace. While remaining of sufficient size and composition both to fight and win major theater wars and carry out constabulary operations, this force structure must also be flexible enough to exploit new technologies, doctrine, organization, and operational concepts in order to maintain military preeminence in the future.

Force planning is a complex art intended to ensure that today's operational and strategic demands are being met while preparing for a future that may not resemble the present. The objective of force planning is to create a future force structure of the right size and composition (force mix) to achieve the nation's security goals. The force planner must answer two questions: what capabilities are needed to support the strategy, and what is the appropriate size of the force—in other words, how much is enough? He or she identifies the military requirements of the strategy and the operational challenges that must be overcome, which will drive the acquisition of forces and equipment. Throughout the process, the planner must evaluate any risk that may be created by a potential ends-means mismatch.

The military requirements of primacy. Primacy requires a good deal from the military. Of course, the primary military task of any U.S. strategy is to defend America's territory and strategic approaches against attack, seizure, or

[12] Colin S. Gray, *The Sheriff: America's Defense of the New World Order* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004).

[13] For an excellent definition of grand strategy, see Edward Mean Earle, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943), p. viii. See also, Paul Kennedy, ed., *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

interdiction. Primacy does this by protecting against a terrorist attack or missile strike against U.S. territory and threatening the sanctuaries of would-be attackers.

Thus U.S. forces are required to project and sustain power at great distances from the continental United States. Primacy also requires that U.S. forces shape the security environment by means of forward presence, reassuring friends and allies and deterring adversaries. In the event that deterrence fails, primacy requires that American forces be able to defeat an adversary in one or more theaters, whatever means the adversary might use. At the same time, primacy places a great deal of emphasis—and this is controversial—on constabulary operations. Finally, primacy requires that planners keep an eye on the future by constantly seeking to transform the force.[14]

Operational challenges. The most important of these obstacles include confronting a wide range of adversaries and means in a complex battlespace; maintaining our own information security while degrading the adversary's; achieving intelligence fusion; dealing with WMD; overcoming the "tyranny of distance" and the absence of forward bases to project power; contending with the likely adoption of asymmetrical anti-access strategies by potential adversaries as militarily useful technology proliferates; and contending with mass population problems such as urban centers, refugees, and epidemics.

Areas of military competition. The most critical step in this approach is determining the areas of military competition that must be pursued. For instance, to project power against an adversary's sanctuary, the United States must be able to dominate the world's commons, especially the sea and space. It must prevail in asymmetric information and space operations, i.e., space warfare and independent, integrated information warfare; simultaneous execution of operations at intercontinental distances (i.e., long-range precision strikes); missile defense; exploitation of stealth technology (e.g., operations based on stealthy, extended-range, unmanned air warfare); deep-strike, non-linear ground operations; and submersible, sea-based power projection, both strike and amphibious.[15] As recent experiences in Iraq indicate, the United States does not always get to choose the area of military competition. Moreover, U.S. forces need to improve their proficiency against irregular threats—i.e., guerrillas and terrorists.

Operational concepts. The current operational concepts designed by the different military services or joint agencies to overcome the operational

[14] For the methodology described here, see Michele A. Flournoy and Kenneth F. Mackenzie, Jr., "Sizing Conventional Forces: Criteria and Methodology," Chapter 6 of Michele A. Flournoy, ed., *QDR 2001: Strategy-Driven Choices for America's Security* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2001).

[15] See, e.g., Michael Vickers, *Warfare in 2020: A Primer* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 1996), p. 1.

challenges and permit the United States to dominate the areas of military competition demanded by primacy include:

- The Navy's *Seapower 21*, consisting of Sea Strike, Sea Shield, Sea Base, and Force Net, the C^{4}ISR system that links all the components together and enables the Navy to dominate the maritime commons.
- The Army's *Operational Maneuver from Strategic Distances*, designed to transform the Army into a more rapidly deployable force, yet capable of sustained operations in a theater of operations.
- The Air Force's *Global Reach-Global Power* envisions the use of long-range precision strike to hold a multitude of at-risk targets.
- The Marine Corps' *Expeditionary Maneuver Warfare*, in conjunction with *Seapower 21*, permit naval operations across the spectrum of conflict.
- The joint Persistent Global Surveillance in Space.
- Distributed Operations (DO), or the employment of small units to infiltrate a battle area and call in indirect fires to destroy the enemy. DO permits a U.S. force to conceal its center of gravity, conduct simultaneous surprise attacks, gather intelligence, and converge on an enemy from all sides.

Required capabilities. A military force capable of carrying out the extensive demands of the primacy strategy should be joint and highly integrated, expeditionary, networked to ensure situational awareness in all environments, decentralized, flexible and adaptable, i.e. *modular* (capable of "plug and fight"); and lethal, able to achieve decision superiority and full-spectrum dominance with reduced support infrastructure.

How much is enough? Force sizing is typically based on theater war requirements. Planners determine the desired outcome in a theater war against an opponent possessing demanding capabilities. Using dynamic war games based on accepted war-fighting models, the planners determine the forces necessary at the outset of the campaign to achieve the end state with acceptable risk. The total force structure is that needed for however many theaters the planners believe must be addressed simultaneously or nearly simultaneously. Over World War II and the Cold War this was thought to be first 2-1/2 and then 1-1/2 wars; in the 1990s, the Bottom-Up Review and then the 1997 *Quadrennial Defense Review* used a 2-MTW metric for the Base Force.

The 2001 *QDR* adopted a modified version of the 2-MTW standard. The so-called 1-4-2-1 construct requires a force able to defend the U.S. homeland, operate in and from four forward regions, swiftly and simultaneously defeat two regional adversaries, and achieve a more decisive and enduring result such as regime change in one of those regions. At the same time, the force is supposed to continue to pursue the war on terror and be able to conduct stability operations of the sort now ongoing in Iraq. Of course, it is the costs

and strains of these operations in Iraq that have made this 1-4-2-1 construct completely unrealistic and unattainable.

Transformation

Some promoters of transformation believe that the key to success on the future battlefield is emerging technology, especially information technology. They hold that rather than maintaining an unnecessarily large force structure with incrementally improved "legacy" systems such as tanks, bombers, and aircraft carriers, the military should be reducing force structure and "skipping a generation" of weapons. This way, it could invest in "leap-ahead" technologies that will supposedly eliminate "friction" and the "fog of war," providing the commander and his subordinates with nearly perfect "situational awareness."[16] However, the military contends that tossing out proven systems in favor of technologies that in many cases are still on the drawing board (and are likely to remain there for some considerable time to come) is imprudent. They also argue that the push to cut force structure doesn't make sense when worldwide demands on U.S. forces are increasing.

A transformed military is a valid objective, but the Iraq War illustrates the limits of transformation. Before the war, many advocates of transformation were using the concept as a rationale for cutting the size of the military below what is necessary to carry out its current functions. Others were using it as a way to reduce defense spending—the "cheap hawk" syndrome.[17] Still others were using the systems required by transformation to cancel existing programs, just as some members of Congress during the Cold War tried to use the promise of the B-2 to kill the B-1.

Transformation is an organizational response to the possibility that revolutionary, discontinuous changes in warfare are occurring. But the Iraq War again demonstrates that real military transformation is not an all-or-nothing proposition. Transformation in practice has meant combining legacy weapons and emerging systems to enhance U.S. forces' efficiency and effectiveness. One example of this is the marriage of "legacy" airframes to a high-tech bomb-guidance kit to make the joint direct-attack munitions, which permit astoundingly accurate high-level bombing. Another is the "networking" of existing forces, which vastly increases the speed of command, thereby compressing operational-cycle rates.

[16] See, e.g., former vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral William Owens, "System-of-Systems: US' Emerging Dominant Battlefield Awareness Promises to Dissipate 'Fog of War'," *Armed Forces Journal International*, Jan. 1996; and David Alberts, "The Future of Command and Control with DBK [Dominant Battlespace Knowledge]," in Stuart E. Johnson and Martin C. Libiki, eds., *Dominant Battlespace Knowledge* (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1995), p. 93.

[17] Harvey Sicherman, "Cheap Hawks, Cheap Doves, and the Pursuit of Strategy," *Orbis*, Fall 2005.

Future Force Structure

Army

Until recently, conventional wisdom held that the heavy formations of the Army would be sacrificed to pay for transformation. Those who took this position argued that standoff and precision-strike weapons delivered from the air or from space would reduce the importance of land power in combat operations. They contended that the future of land forces was the "Afghan model" of DO, the use of Special Operations Forces as spotters to call for and adjust precision strikes.[18] But in Iraq, conventional ground forces have demonstrated a remarkable flexibility, engaging Iraqi forces across the entire spectrum of conflict, from armored units to guerillas.[19]

Before the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, some made the argument that air power could substitute for land power. But in fact, the relationship between land power and air power is akin to the blades of a pair of scissors: both are necessary if the scissors are to cut. It is agreed that land forces must be rendered more easily deployable, but rather than radically reducing the size of the Army and changing its structure before proven new systems become available, the Army needs to expand. Although it is generally accepted that the Army is currently too small for what it is being asked to do, proposals for expansion do not go far enough. This is especially true as our adversaries shift to irregular threats, which can only be combated by boots on the ground. The current Army plan calls for an increase in brigade combat teams (BCTs) from 33 to 43. But in order to fully meet all of its requirements under the 1-4-2-1 force-sizing construct, the Army needs 48 BCTs. The current plan for an Army National Guard force structure of 34 BCTs is acceptable, but these units should be focused primarily on homeland defense.

The current Army force structure resembles a dumbbell with heavy forces on one end and light forces on the other. The former are lethal and capable once in the theater of operations, but slow to deploy, while the latter are responsive but lack lethality The Army is attempting to redress this imbalance by creating "medium" weight units such as the Stryker brigades.

Marine Corps

Although it is a naval service (one that comes from the sea and returns to the sea), the Marine Corps also makes a substantial contribution to U.S. land combat power. The Marine Corps is in the process of reinventing itself for the third time in seventy years. During the interwar period, the Marines moved

[18] See ch. 2 of Michael O'Hanlon, Defense Strategy for the Post-Saddam Era (Brookings, 2005).

[19] Max Boot, "The New American Way of War," *Foreign Affairs*, July/Aug. 2003.

from providing "colonial infantry" to preparing to conduct amphibious assaults against a defended beach in order to seize advanced naval bases in support of a naval campaign, which they did during World War II.

During the Cold War, the Marine Corps reinvented itself as an expeditionary "force in readiness," capable of responding with customized, task-organized forces to any crisis across the spectrum of conflict—including contingencies that could arise at any time, in any place. The Marine Corps' new strategic concept complemented that of the U.S. Army, which centered on the requirement to fight and win the nation's land wars.

The future Marine Corps will probably be a hybrid force. One part of the new Corps will return to the task of providing "colonial infantry," focusing on irregular threats and operating in close cooperation with Special Operations Forces to execute both direct-action and foreign internal-defense missions. Another part will continue to refine procedures for forcible entry from the sea.

This kind of Marine Corps will need the "high-mobility triad" of the MV-22 Osprey, the expeditionary fighting vehicle, and the air cushion landing craft. The Navy will need to continue to procure amphibious lift and to transition to the future maritime pre-positioning force.

Events in Afghanistan and Iraq indicated that land forces will make their most important contributions in the area of irregular challenges. Both the Army and the Marines should therefore be doing whatever possible to improve counterinsurgency, counterguerrilla, and counterterrorist doctrine and training.

Navy

The United States is unique in being able to project a full array of overwhelming and sustainable military power over vast distances. It can do this because the Navy dominates the world's great commons, the sea.[20] U.S. naval forces can conduct amphibious operations and launch precision strikes against land targets employing air, cruise-missile, and vertical launch system (VLS) missile assets. American seapower can threaten the sanctuary of America's enemies. And, as Colin Gray has remarked, if the United States is to be a land power anywhere other than in North America, it must first be a seapower.

Most of America's power projection depends on the sea, and equipping and supplying our forces requires command of the seas. The centerpiece of U.S. Naval force structure is the aircraft carrier and its associated battle group. The Navy has approximately 290 ships, including 11 large-deck carriers; 35 amphibious ships, among which are 12 VTOL/STOVL carriers; and 70 battle-force surface combatants. Although the number of vessels has declined, the combat power of today's Navy is substantially greater than that of the nearly 600-ship Navy of the 1980s (see Table 1). This is a great deal of naval

[20] See, e.g., Barry Posen, "Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of U.S. Hegemony," *International Security*, Summer 2003.

Table 1. U.S Navy's Combat Power, 1989 vs. 2006

	1989	2006
Aircraft carriers	The theoretical daily strike capacity for the U.S. fleet of 15 deployable carriers was 2,430 aim-points	11 deployable carriers; approximately 7,700 aim-points
Surface combatants	104 combatants carried 1,525 VLS cells and 7,133 missiles	70 combatants carry 6,827 VLS cells and 7,443 missiles
Submarines	89 SSNs carried 132 VLS cells and 2,317 torpedo-tube launched weapons	53 SSNs/4 SSGNs carry 1,000 VLS cells and an additional 1,377 torpedo-tube launched weapons

power, but some have questioned the relevance of a carrier-centric Navy in today's security environment.

The Navy of the future may have to confront China as well as carry out operations in support of the war on terror. Accordingly, it must be able to do three things:

1. *Provide sea-based power projection and regional deterrence*, which task requires a large number of strike platforms and maneuver-support platforms.
2. *Assure access to contested or denied areas*, which requires standoff weapons, unmanned systems, and stealthy platforms capable of extended-range operations in a high-threat environment.
3. *Provide global presence in support of the war on terror*, which requires large numbers of cheap, lightly manned combatants, backed up by a global maritime surveillance network capable of mounting a close blockade of littorals that might harbor terrorists; cost-effective global patrol and maritime interdiction platforms; and persistent overt and covert strike, Special Operations Forces, and light maneuver support platforms.

The carrier-centric force provides the means to fulfill the first two tasks, but the Navy needs to develop new systems to fulfill the third. It has been talking about enhancing its ability to operate close to the world's littorals for fifteen years, but has not pressed hard enough for appropriations for this. It should supplement its carrier-centric fleet with a large number of "littoral-control ships," vessels with hulls between 150–200 feet in length.[21]

Air Force

In the wake of the first Gulf War in 1991, some advocates of air power advanced the notion that air power can be independently decisive. This

[21] For a force structure capable of dealing with traditional, irregular, catastrophic, and disruptive, see Robert Work, *Winning the Race: A Naval Fleet Platform Architecture for Enduring Maritime Supremacy* (Washington, D.C.: CSBA, 2005).

perspective lay at the heart of the claim that improvements in technology would make it possible to achieve a rapid and relatively bloodless victory in Afghanistan by means of an overwhelming air campaign supplemented by a very small ground force.

Not even the most vociferous advocate of boots on the ground would deny that air power provides tremendous leverage in warfare. No soldier advocates a return to the days when the United States did not possess the air supremacy it does today. In addition, the improved accuracy of weapons enabled the Coalition forces in Iraq to launch an air assault unprecedented in scope and magnitude, while avoiding not only civilian casualties but also damage to the infrastructure upon which civilians depend.

Before the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, many transformation advocates had targeted naval power in general and the aircraft carrier in particular, which they characterized as the quintessential legacy system, for elimination. But since 9/11, the carrier has proven to be an effective and flexible platform for launching manned aircraft, especially when only a limited number of land bases are available in a region, as in Afghanistan and Iraq. For instance, naval aviation filled the gap created by Turkey's decision to prohibit the use of the Incirlik base in southeast Turkey for combat missions.

The United States should therefore shift from reliance on short-range fighters that require in-theater bases for strike operations to a combination of stealthy bombers and carrier-based assets. This will reduce the political risks associated with the use of airpower that plagued the United States in Iraq in 2003 and increase the flexibility of the air instrument.

At present, the United States has 20 USAF air-wing equivalents organized into 10 Air Expeditionary Forces, 11 carrier air-wing equivalents, and three Marine air-wings. Carrier air-wings should be reduced from 11 to 10. The number of USAF and Marine air-wings should remain the same, but the number of bomber wings should be increased and Air Force tactical fighter-wing equivalents reduced to offset this.

Nuclear Forces

The original objective of the U.S. nuclear weapon arsenal was to deter not just nuclear war with the Soviet Union, but all war. Our communist adversaries found that if the nuclear threshold remained high, they could operate beneath it. The clearest example of such an asymmetric response occurred in reaction to the "New Look" defense policy of the Eisenhower administration, which relied primarily on long-range strategic nuclear air power—"peoples' wars" or "wars of national liberation." The Kennedy administration replaced the New Look with Flexible Response. But even under this policy, had the Soviets ever come to believe that they could operate beneath the nuclear threshold with impunity, they might have gambled that a massive conventional assault in Europe could succeed. During the Reagan

presidency, the United States deployed a number of systems that critics denounced as provocative. In fact, these systems enhanced deterrence, signaling to Moscow that the United States possessed both the capability and the will to use nuclear weapons.

Since the end of the Cold War, defense planners have questioned whether deterrence will work against likely adversaries in the future. The Bush administration's December 31, 2001, *Nuclear Posture Review* attempted to deter such actors by developing very low-yield nuclear warheads. They assumed that weapons in the current nuclear arsenal are too powerful to be used against even an adversary who employs WMD.

While enhanced conventional weapons such as fuel-air explosives can generate extremely high over-pressures capable of destroying hardened and some deeply buried targets, the array of targets such weapons can threaten is limited. An adversary, assuming that U.S. policymakers will judge the use of high-yield nuclear weapons to be disproportionate, has an incentive to harden and bury installations so that they cannot be destroyed by enhanced conventional means. The only way to threaten such targets would be to use lower-yield nuclear weapons delivered by extremely accurate means.

Traditional nuclear deterrence can be achieved with a force of 10 Trident submarines with a capacity of 240 D5 missiles armed with 8 W88 warheads each. In addition, to deter rogue states and non-state actors, the United States may wish to develop and deploy low-yield warheads capable of deep-earth penetration.

Special Operations Forces

Special Operations Forces (SOF) have come into their own. Their performance in Afghanistan and Iraq vindicates the judgment of Congress in the 1980s to establish a separate special operations command with its own budget. Because of the nature of SOF work, most Americans are not aware of their many accomplishments in these wars.[22]

Indeed, some have suggested that SOF represent the wave of the future for land forces. But these forces are already stretched thin as they attempt to meet today's requirements. To do more would mean that their force structure would have to be expanded. That would be counterproductive: SOF must remain small to remain special. And since these forces are recruited from the Services, the latter cannot be cut in order to increase the former—a reduction in the conventional force shrinks the pool of recruits for SOF.

The DoD has already begun to direct the Marine Corps to provide an element to SOF. Bifurcating the Marines as suggested above would permit the Marine Corps to significantly supplement these Forces.

[22] Robert Kaplan, *Imperial Grunts* (Random House, 2005) and Linda Robinson, *Masters of Chaos: The Secret History of the Special Forces* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

Space Forces

Space is currently the major enabler for all other components of the U.S. force structure. The United States uses space for communications, surveillance, and navigation. Militarily important space systems include communications satellites; imaging satellites (electro-optical, infrared, and radar); navigation satellites such as global-positioning systems; and signals intelligence. Military space missions fall into four categories. *Space support* operations maintain space control and support of land-force missions. The most important of these is launching and deploying space vehicles; *force enhancement* missions significantly increase the ground forces' combat potential; *space control* operations provide freedom of action in space for friendly forces while, when directed; and *force application* missions use space as an operational domain similar to the sea.

Force application is the most controversial mission. The 2005 *QDR*, which is expected to be released in February 2006, reportedly places space (and cyberspace) in the category of "global commons," suggesting significant changes to investment priorities.[23] Critics of U.S. military space policy warn against "weaponizing" space, which they claim would generate costly and destabilizing arms races. Given the critical importance of space, primacy requires that all aspects of space power, including force application, be expanded.

Transformation: Technology, Doctrine, and Training

While one hears less about it since the Iraq War, the United States still relies heavily on technology to implement the "American way of war." The 2003 *Transformation Planning Guidance* states:

> Information age military forces will be less platform-centric and more network-centric. They will be able to distribute forces more widely by increasing information sharing via a secure network that provides actionable information at all levels of command. This, in turn, will create conditions for increased speed of command and opportunities for self-coordination across the battlespace.

The problem with technocentric thinking is that it can lead to a dangerous deemphasis of other factors critical to military success, especially force structure, doctrine, and training.

In an important article after the first Gulf War, Stephen Biddle argued that the main cause of the one-sided coalition triumph in the Gulf War of 1991 was not technology *per se* but the skill differential between the coalition forces and those of Iraq. He demonstrated that the allies' technological edge served primarily to punish Iraqi operational and tactical errors, thereby magnifying

[23] Jason Sherman, "Quadrennial Review to Direct the Creation of a New Space Power Theory," *Inside Defense*, Sept. 27, 2005.

the skill differential between the two sides.[24] More recently, Biddle has pointed out that "since at least 1900, the dominant technological fact of the modern battlefield has been increasing lethality." To execute missions on such a battlefield, a military force must reduce its exposure. Since 1918, the central means of doing so has been what Biddle calls "modern system force employment"—a "tightly interrelated complex of cover, concealment, dispersion, suppression, small-unit independent maneuver, and combined arms at the tactical level" and "depth, reserves, and differential concentration at the operational level of war." When fully implemented, "the modern system damps the effect of technological change and insulates users from the full lethality of their opponents' weapons." But not all states can master the modern system, which is complex and poses painful political and social tradeoffs. For instance, an autocratic state may not be willing to permit the decentralization and freedom of action to its junior officers that the modern system requires. Thus, the major military "gap" of the future will between those states that have mastered the modern system and those that have not.[25]

Biddle's analysis has important implications for defense policy: for visions of future war, defense budget priorities, force structure, weapon development and acquisition, campaign assessment, and military doctrine. The most important one is that the doctrine and force structure that technocentric thinkers demand could actually *reduce* U.S. military capability because the emerging battlefield is a further extension of the one for which traditional approaches were designed. Future war is not a radical departure from historical precedents, but a continuation of trends and relationships that have been evolving for a century and a half.

The radical restructuring of U.S. force structure from a balanced force of air, land, naval, and space capabilities to one that relies primarily on long-range air- or ship-delivered precision strikes would be very risky. Such an unbalanced force structure might work fine against an opponent that has not mastered the modern system of force employment but it would be at a severe disadvantage against one that has. The United States must guard against over-reliance on technology at the expense of those factors that enhance soldierly excellence, such as high recruiting standards, quality training, and operational readiness.

Alliances

Primacy's central requirement is having the ability to shape the security environment in order to defeat Islamist terrorists, sustain a stable, liberal

[24] Stephen Biddle, "Learning the (Wrong) Lessons from the Gulf War," *Wall Street Journal*, Sept. 3, 1997.

[25] Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 1–13, 28–77.

international order, and prevent the emergence of a hostile global competitor. Geography is the main constraint on the United States in meeting this requirement. Since most threats to international order have arisen on the Eurasian land mass, the United States must be able to influence actors there. To do so requires dealing with the "tyranny of distance." Therefore, a cornerstone of primacy is to maintain bilateral and multilateral relations with allies and friends on the littorals of Eurasia.

Sometimes it will be sufficient to project power by means of long-range precision strikes; other times it will be necessary to actually employ land forces, relying on sea-basing or a system of small expeditionary bases. Constabulary operations are also important in drawing allies into a cooperative security system and defeating irregular threats. If the United States is to deter war, it must possess a credible war-fighting capability, and it will certainly require this capability if deterrence fails.

Conclusion

Primacy is a militarily demanding strategy. The United States must be able to lead coalitions against terrorists, restore order to unstable regions, do peacekeeping in regions of vital interest, deter aggression, and win a war if deterrence fails. Primacy requires flexibility and a force structure able to respond to contingencies across the entire spectrum of conflict. These forces must be able to execute both nuclear and conventional deterrence, undertake constabulary operations, project power to areas of importance, and assure homeland defense.

This strategy will require a higher level of defense spending than in the recent past, but primacy remains a bargain nonetheless. After all, U.S. military forces essentially provide an international "public good" by underwriting the security upon which global stability depends. If the U.S. forces that provide this public good are stretched thin because they are under-funded, the result may be a decline in stability and prosperity. World War I illustrated how rapidly the world order can collapse.

Given the contribution of U.S. military power to a global prosperity which benefits the United States disproportionately, it seems reasonable to suggest that the United States should spend at least 4.5 percent of GDP on defense. Two decades ago, much was made of Paul Kennedy's thesis of imperial overstretch and his argument that defense spending was dragging the United States down relative to the other industrial powers.[26] The stagnation of the economies of other industrial powers, especially Europe and Japan, took much of the wind out of this argument. But there is another flaw in the thesis that we should take into account when considering the U.S. defense burden.

[26] Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books, D. C. Heath, 1987).

While Kennedy contended that Great Britain was the victim of imperial overstretch, one can argue that it was the onset of a war Britain could not prevent, not imperial overstretch, that led to Britain's decline. In short, it was World War I, not the expenditures to maintain the empire, that doomed the British empire. In light of this observation, the U.S. defense burden is significant, but the benefits of the resulting world order far outweigh the costs.

One obvious benefit of bearing this burden is the prevention of major war. Four and a half percent of GDP is a small price to pay considering the alternatives. During the peak years of World War II, U.S. defense spending constituted 38.6 to 40 percent of GDP, not to mention the lives of some 400,000 Americans lost over the course of the war. Clearly, the cost of preventing war is far less than the cost of fighting one. And prevention of war is the main objective of primacy.