



The History and Politics of Defense Reviews

Raphael S. Cohen

For more information on this publication, visit www.rand.org/t/RR2278

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available for this publication.

ISBN: 978-0-8330-9973-0

Published by the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif.

© Copyright 2018 RAND Corporation

R® is a registered trademark.

Limited Print and Electronic Distribution Rights

This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law. This representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for noncommercial use only. Unauthorized posting of this publication online is prohibited. Permission is given to duplicate this document for personal use only, as long as it is unaltered and complete. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of its research documents for commercial use. For information on reprint and linking permissions, please visit www.rand.org/pubs/permissions.

The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest.

RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.

Support RAND

Make a tax-deductible charitable contribution at
www.rand.org/giving/contribute

www.rand.org

Preface

The 1993 Bottom-Up Review starts with this challenge: “Now that the Cold War is over, the questions we face in the Department of Defense are: How do we structure the armed forces of the United States for the future? How much defense is enough in the post–Cold War era?”¹ Finding a satisfactory answer to these deceptively simple questions not only motivated the Bottom-Up Review but has arguably animated defense strategy for the past quarter century. Indeed, over that period, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has labored under successive administrations to not only write a strategy but build a process that prioritizes threats; aligns resources accordingly; and seamlessly links ends, ways, and means together into a compelling narrative. And yet, few say they believe that any of the dozen major defense reviews over the past quarter century produced a satisfactory answer to this task.

This study, conducted in RAND Project AIR FORCE’s Strategy and Doctrine Program, asks: Why has the defense strategy process evolved in the way it has? Why, despite so much time and effort, do strategies so often come up short? And, most importantly, how can the process change to make for better strategy? This report traces the post–Cold War history of defense reviews from Base Force through the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review. It then borrows political scientist Robert Putnam’s framework of a two-level game to understand the political constraints on defense reviews and argues that these constraints limit the decision space in these reviews—producing a powerful, if ultimately disappointing, tendency to embrace the status quo. The report concludes with recommendations for the services and DoD at large about how to improve both the process and content of future defense strategy.

This research was sponsored by the Director of Strategy, Concepts and Assessments, Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategic Plans and Requirements (AF/A5S). It is part of a larger study, titled *Defense Strategic Processes: How the Force Planning Construct and Scenarios Inform the POM*, which assists the Air Force with preparing for the 2018 National Defense Strategy.

This report should be of value to the national security community and interested members of the general public, especially those with an interest in the history and politics behind the making of defense strategy.

RAND Project AIR FORCE

RAND Project AIR FORCE (PAF), a division of the RAND Corporation, is the U.S. Air Force’s federally funded research and development center for studies and analyses. PAF provides the Air Force with independent analyses of policy alternatives affecting the

¹ Les Aspin, *Report on the Bottom-Up Review*, Washington, D.C., October 1993, p. 1.

development, employment, combat readiness, and support of current and future air, space, and cyber forces. Research is conducted in four programs: Force Modernization and Employment; Manpower, Personnel, and Training; Resource Management; and Strategy and Doctrine. The research reported here was prepared under contract FA7014-16-D-1000.

Additional information about PAF is available on our website: www.rand.org/paf

This report documents work originally shared with the U.S. Air Force on May 12, 2017. The draft report, issued on September 1, 2017, was reviewed by formal peer reviewers and U.S. Air Force subject-matter experts.

Contents

Preface	iii
Figures and Tables	vi
Summary	vii
Acknowledgments	ix
Abbreviations.....	x
1. The Quixotic Quest for a “True” Defense Strategy	1
Definitions and Methodology	2
Overview and the Argument of the Report	4
2. The History of Defense Reviews	5
The Base Force (1989–1992)	5
The Bottom-Up Review (1993).....	8
Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces (1995)	12
The Quadrennial Defense Review (1997)	14
National Defense Panel (1997).....	19
The Quadrennial Defense Review (2001)	22
The Quadrennial Defense Review (2006)	26
The Quadrennial Defense Review (2010)	30
The Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel (2010).....	34
The Defense Strategic Guidance (2012).....	36
The Quadrennial Defense Review (2014)	39
National Defense Panel (2014).....	43
Understanding the “Unhappy Families”	45
3. The Politics of Defense Reviews	48
How Much Do Defense Reviews Matter?.....	48
Why Are Defense Reviews’ Impact Seemingly So Limited?	52
Should Defense Reviews Matter More?	60
Why Strategies Disappoint	63
4. Making the Most Out of the Game	64
How a Service Can Get the Most of the Process	64
How the Defense Department Can Get the Most of the Process	67
How the United States Can Get the Most out of the Reviews.....	71
Appendix. Defense Reviews and Predicting the Future	73
References.....	84

Figures and Tables

Figures

Figure 2.1. The Quad Chart	28
Figure 2.2. The “Michelin Man”	29
Figure 3.1. Budget Share by Military Department	51
Figure 3.2. Track Record of Predictions in Defense Reviews	62

Tables

Table 3.1. Strategies for Force-Sizing Constructs Versus Air Force Size	50
Table 3.2. The Small World of Defense Strategists (Experience with Three or More Reviews).....	57
Table A.1. Complete List of Statements to Compile Track Record of Predictions in Defense Reviews.....	73

Summary

The 1993 Bottom-Up Review (BUR) starts with this challenge: “Now that the Cold War is over, the questions we face in the Department of Defense are: How do we structure the armed forces of the United States for the future? How much defense is enough in the post–Cold War era?”² Finding a satisfactory answer to these deceptively simple questions not only motivated the BUR but has arguably animated defense strategy for the past quarter century. Indeed, over that period, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has labored under successive administrations to not only write a strategy but build a process that prioritizes threats; aligns resources accordingly; and seamlessly links ends, ways, and means together into a compelling narrative. And yet, few believe that any of the dozen major defense reviews over the past quarter century produced a satisfactory answer.

This report explains the history and politics of the major defense reviews of the past quarter century from the Base Force through the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). One former senior George W. Bush administration official with experience in multiple official and independent reviews, channeling Leo Tolstoy’s classic novel *Anna Karenina*, said that defense reviews are all “unhappy families, each [is] unique in [its] own way.”³ This report details these “unhappy families,” how they were produced, and what, if anything, they accomplished. While each review does have its own nuances and dynamics, as a group, they share at least five cross-cutting characteristics.

First, budget cuts—rather than geopolitical events—drive decisions, particularly over the short term. Reviews often failed to anticipate major geopolitical events just a few years out, and, even in the event of a crisis, policymakers were often disinclined to make major budgetary or programmatic shifts until months or even years had passed. By contrast, budget cuts tended to force policymakers to make more-immediate programmatic decisions.

Second, the senior leadership’s level of interest correlates with a review’s significance. Some Secretaries of Defense have viewed these reviews as vehicles to leave their mark on the department, while others have been less engaged. The more significant reviews have historically been associated with the former rather than the latter.

Third, and for similar reasons, reviews produced early in an administration tend to matter more than those produced later on because new administrations often are more inclined to use

² Les Aspin, *Report on the Bottom-Up Review*, Washington, D.C., October 1993, p. 1.

³ Interview with former senior defense official, February 21, 2017. Tolstoy begins his novel with the line: “All happy families resemble each other; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” See Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Nathan Haskell Dole, New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell, 1899, p. 1.

these reviews as ways to signal a new course. By contrast, second-term administrations often do not want to rock the boat.

Fourth, outside reviews tend to be more hawkish, both because of the members who are chosen to sit on these reviews and because these reviews are typically not constrained by budgets.

Finally, but most importantly, the review's impact depends as much on the political climate as it does on its analysis. Some of the most impactful reviews were both politically useful and analytically correct.

This report explores the politics behind the defense reviews. It starts by examining how much defense reviews actually shape policy and finds these reviews might matter less—in terms of shaping budgets, priorities, and programs—than one would presume. It then identifies three factors—structural constraints that limit decision space, a relatively closed circle of authors, and congressional reluctance to reallocate budgets—that curtail defense reviews' ability to implement sweeping changes. Finally, this report turns to the broader question of whether defense reviews should matter and argues that, given the United States' track record at predicting future threats, a constrained, if incremental, approach to policymaking could be an appropriate response.

This report concludes with recommendations about how the services, DoD, and the U.S. government as a whole can best use these reviews to their own advantages. For the services, it highlights the need for selecting the “right” representative; directly involving the service's senior leadership; explaining the services' needs in a simple, unclassified manner; and casting the service's recommendations in light of what the “boss” needs.

For DoD, the report's recommendations focus on keeping the review about a year into the administration, designing a relatively transparent force-sizing construct while building in additional slack to account for unpredicted events, leveraging outside reports to fight for additional resources, recognizing the trade-offs with senior leadership involvement, and understanding the limits of the medium.

Finally, for the U.S. government at large, this report highlights the importance of a defense review as the start of a dialogue about national priorities. In this sense, it may matter less whether any review comes up with definitive answers to the BUR's original questions, while the discussions that each of these reviews provoke in turn could have more importance.

Acknowledgments

This report would not have been possible without the help of dozens of people. First, I would like to thank Alan Vick for his guidance and leadership with this project, and Paula Thornhill, the Strategy and Doctrine program director, for helping guide this report. I would also like to thank Maj. Gen. Brian Killough, Nancy Dolan, and Scott Wheeler of the Air Force A-5 Strategy shop for sponsoring this research. Mara Karlin, Mark Cancian, and Michael McNerney provided thoughtful reviews of an earlier draft of this report and pushed me to refine a number of the arguments here. Maria Vega provided expert editing assistance, and Adwoa Amofa helped in the publication process. Above all, I would like to thank the senior defense officials and congressional staffers who volunteered their time and insights into the defense reviews over the past quarter century. While our interview protocols prevent me from thanking them by name, this report could not have happened without their support.

Abbreviations

BCA	Budget Control Act
BUR	Bottom-Up Review
C2	command and control
CAPE	Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation
CORM	Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces
CPT	Cyber Protection Team
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
DSG	Defense Strategic Guidance
FY	fiscal year
HASC	House Armed Services Committee
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NDP	National Defense Panel
ONA	Office of Net Assessment
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
PA&E	Program Analysis and Evaluation
QDR	Quadrennial Defense Review
QDR-IP	Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel
SASC	Senate Armed Services Committee
SCMR	Strategic Choices and Management Review
WMD	weapons of mass destruction

1. The Quixotic Quest for a “True” Defense Strategy

The 1993 Bottom-Up Review (BUR) starts with this challenge: “Now that the Cold War is over, the questions we face in the Department of Defense are: How do we structure the armed forces of the United States for the future? How much defense is enough in the post–Cold War era?”⁴ Finding a satisfactory answer to these deceptively simple questions not only motivated the BUR but has arguably animated defense strategy for the past quarter century. Under successive administrations, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has repeatedly tried to address these questions.

And yet, few believe that any of the dozen major defense reviews over the past quarter century produced a satisfactory answer. In a Senate hearing in December 2015, former Obama administration Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Michèle Flournoy testified that the flagship strategy document, the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), had devolved into “a very routinized, bottom-up staff exercise” that demands “hundreds of participants, thousands of man-hours, and really does not produce the desired result.”⁵ Instead, Flournoy argued, “we tend to get a lovely coffee table book that is a list of everything that is important.”⁶ Flournoy is not alone. Former Republican Senator James Talent and think tank analyst Mackenzie Eaglen noted, “there were always suspicions that the QDR process would be corrupted to justify the here and now rather than plan for the future.”⁷ Republican U.S. Representative Randy Forbes, former chairman of the Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces of the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), echoed, “unfortunately, it [the QDR] has become much more of a rubber stamp to justify and approve existing strategies.”⁸ In the most damning critique of all, think tank analyst Thomas Donnelly concluded: “In sum, the Quadrennial Defense Review process, from 1993 until now, has utterly failed to do what it was intended to do: provide a link among strategy, force-planning and defense budgeting. Indeed, with every QDR, the situation has gotten worse; the ends-means problem has grown.”⁹

Ultimately, the United States’ quixotic quest to craft a true “defense strategy” raises multiple questions: How did the defense strategy process evolve into what it is today? Why, despite so

⁴ Les Aspin, *Report on the Bottom-Up Review*, Washington, D.C., October 1993, p. 1.

⁵ U.S. Senate, “Hearing to Receive Testimony on Improving the Pentagon’s Development of Policy, Strategy, and Plans,” before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, December 8, 2015, p. 13.

⁶ U.S. Senate, 2015, p. 39.

⁷ Mackenzie Eaglen and James Talent, “America Needs a Permanent Independent Panel to Stress Test the Pentagon’s QDR Strategy,” *American Enterprise Institute*, November 29, 2012.

⁸ Sydney J. Freedberg, Jr., “Kill the QDR? Rep. Randy Forbes Says Still Time to Fix It—Exclusive,” *Breaking Defense*, January 25, 2013.

⁹ Thomas Donnelly, “Kill the QDR,” *Armed Forces Journal*, February 1, 2006.

much time and effort, do strategies so often come up short? And, most importantly, how can the process change to make for better strategy? This report examines each of these three questions, but, before doing so, several definitional and methodological points are in order.

Definitions and Methodology

At its most basic level, *strategy* is the process of linking ends with ways and means. In the national security space, the United States produces any number of strategies at every level of government. At the broadest level, the United States regularly releases the National Security Strategy, which concerns how the U.S. government as a whole will accomplish its objectives. Below that, there is the National Defense Strategy, produced by the Secretary of Defense, and the National Military Strategy, produced by the Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs, which concern how DoD and the U.S. military will accomplish their objectives in support of the National Security Strategy. From that point, there are a panoply of other strategic documents released by the armed services and subordinate commands, each explaining how its organization will align ends, ways, and means in support of national-level objectives.¹⁰

This report focuses on one subset of these strategy documents—specifically, defense reviews. Over the past quarter century, DoD—either because of congressional prodding or on its own accord—has regularly reexamined how the United States provides for the national defense. These reviews have tended to be wide in scope. For example, Congress mandated in the 1997 QDR that, “The review shall include 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 United States and establishing a revised defense program.”¹¹ Others have had a similarly comprehensive mandate. In a sense, they are, arguably, as close to a “true” defense strategy as DoD comes—spelling out in detail how the United States will align its military force structure and develop operational approaches to tackle national threats and achieve strategic objectives.

Defense reviews are produced in multiple ways for a variety of audiences. Some are developed within the bowels of the Pentagon. Others are directed by the Secretary of Defense and, on rare occasions, the President. Still other reviews are produced by outside experts, at least in theory, to give the review a more “nonpartisan” and “objective” flair. All reviews are intended for a range of audiences—for DoD and the military to guide their future actions, for Congress to signal resource needs, for allies and adversaries to signal the United States’ overall strategic

¹⁰ Raphael S. Cohen, *Air Force Strategic Planning: Past, Present, and Future*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1765-AF, 2017a, pp. 3–5.

¹¹ Public Law 104-201, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997, Section 923, paragraph (a), September 23, 1996.

direction, and, most broadly, for the U.S. people at large. While all reviews speak to all of these audiences, reviews sometimes weight their relative importance differently.

Given the multiplicity of processes and targeted audiences, this report draws from a variety of primary and secondary sources, as well as a series of interviews with former senior officials, to document how and why each review was developed and to assess its impact. When possible, it looks at what the review aimed to achieve relative to what it actually accomplished, as well as how it shaped the policy debate in the media.¹² In and of itself, criticism may not be a good metric for success. Arguably, the marks of a “good” strategy include prioritizing requirements and choosing winners and losers, and that approach inevitably invites criticism.¹³ Still, analyzing public criticism of each review can occasionally highlight the legitimate flaws in the document and its process. More importantly, the criticism of documents helps identify which reviews defined—for better or worse—an administration’s approach to defense policy, and which were peripheral. In that sense, the most stinging critique of all is that a defense review says nothing of importance.

Unfortunately, this approach to studying and evaluating defense reviews still has certain drawbacks. Admittedly, judging a review’s impact is a murky endeavor. These assessments are still more qualitative than quantitative in nature, and other researchers have approached the topic differently.¹⁴ Additionally, while the interviews with officials for this project sampled a wide range of perspectives—across administrations and from the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and congressional staff—resource constraints limited the overall sample size; therefore, fewer perspectives, particularly from the services and the Joint Staff, are represented in this report.

There are other unfortunate, if unavoidable, caveats to this work. First, defense reviews often contain a classified portion. Given the open nature of this report, only unclassified sources were used in its production. Second, time and resource constraints limited the number of interviewees for this project. While the report attempted to gain multiple perspectives on each review from the key players involved, there are still perspectives that are not fully represented. Finally, this report deliberately focuses more on the process than on the substance of the defense reviews. While the

¹² For similar attempts to assess the effect of doctrine, see Raphael S. Cohen, “A Tale of Two Manuals,” *Prism*, Vol. 2, No. 1, December 2011; and Cohen, 2017a.

¹³ Raphael S. Cohen, “Why Strategies Disappoint—and How to Fix Them,” *Lawfare*, March 19, 2017b.

¹⁴ For one particularly noteworthy approach to tackling this challenge, see Mark F. Cancian, Rick McPeak, Melissa Dalton, John Schaus, Colin McElhinny, Andrew Metrick, Hijab Shah, William Arnest, Stephanie Hartley, Alexa Hopkins, and Aftan Snyder, *Formulating National Security Strategy: Past Experience and Future Choices*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2017. This study focuses on whether the concepts proposed in a defense review that survive the administration could be seen as an alternative benchmark for success.

latter is an important topic unto itself, other RAND reports explore this topic in depth, while the process behind defense reviews has received comparatively little attention.¹⁵

Overview and the Argument of the Report

Over the next three chapters, this report explores how defense reviews evolved, why defense strategies so often come up short, and what changes we can make to improve the process. Chapter 2 traces the post–Cold War history of defense reviews from Base Force through the 2014 QDR. Chapter 3 explores the politics behind the defense reviews and how various factors—from the structure of the process to the personnel who hold the pen to the relationship between Congress and the executive branch—combine to limit the effects of these reviews. Finally, Chapter 4 details how the services, DoD, and the U.S. government at large can best advance their respective interests for defense reviews—no matter what form they may take—so that the next quarter century’s defense reviews are better than the last.

Ultimately, the central thesis of this report is that defense reviews are political at their core, as much as they are analytical documents. Understanding this basic insight helps explain why the strategy-making process has evolved the way it has, why they so often disappoint, and, most importantly, how the services, the Secretary of Defense and DoD at large, and the U.S. government can make the most of these documents.

¹⁵ For a highly detailed analysis of defense reviews, see Eric V. Larson, *Force Planning Scenarios, 1945–2016: Their Origins and Use in Defense Strategic Planning*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, forthcoming.

2. The History of Defense Reviews

A former senior Bush administration official with experience in multiple official and independent reviews once remarked that defense reviews are all “unhappy families, each [is] unique in [its] own way.”¹⁶ His characterization—an allusion to Leo Tolstoy’s classic novel *Anna Karenina*—is quite apt.¹⁷ Indeed, all the senior officials interviewed for this report recounted their own “battle scars” from every review from the BUR on, and almost no one felt entirely pleased with the end result.¹⁸ This chapter explores these “unhappy families” and what makes each of them unique. While each review has its own nuances, they share at least five cross-cutting characteristics: budget cuts—rather than geopolitical events—drive decisions, at least in the short run; the senior leadership’s level of interest correlates with a review’s significance; reviews produced early in an administration tend to matter more than those done later on; outside reviews tend to be more hawkish; and finally, but most importantly, the review’s impact depends as much on the political climate as it does on its analysis.

The Base Force (1989–1992)

As a defense review, the Base Force was unique. Although started before the Berlin Wall fell, it was arguably the first major defense review of the post–Cold War era.¹⁹ Unlike many later reviews that originated either from a congressional mandate or from senior civilian leadership’s initiative, the Base Force came largely out of the uniformed military side of DoD, driven by then–Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff GEN Colin Powell. Unlike later strategies, it also never produced a freestanding, glossy document, but rather an outline for the U.S. force structure that was later embedded in other documents.

The Base Force stemmed from two major shifts in the U.S. national security environment. First, internationally, the Soviet Union’s threat to Western Europe was declining, while other, more regional threats were increasing.²⁰ In 1989, Powell predicted that the Soviet Union would ultimately need to cut its defense budget by 40 percent, halve its manpower, and withdraw from

¹⁶ Interview with former senior defense official, February 21, 2017.

¹⁷ Tolstoy begins his novel with the line: “All happy families resemble each other; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” See Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Nathan Haskell Dole, New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell, 1899, p. 1.

¹⁸ Terminology of “battle scars” from interview with senior defense official, April 3, 2017.

¹⁹ Lorna S. Jaffe, *The Development of the Base Force 1989–1992*, Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, July 1993, p. 14.

²⁰ Jaffe, 1993, p. 3.

Eastern Europe.²¹ Second, the United States wanted to reap a peace dividend. As early as fall 1988, congressional and Office of Management and Budget staff debated as much as a 25-percent cut to DoD over the next five years.²² These cuts became reality in summer 1989, when the Gramm-Rudman Act limited the federal deficit to \$74 billion.²³ According to defense analyst John Gordon, “With these looming budget realities, there was no alternative but to reexamine the Department’s resources and structure.”²⁴

The Base Force built on early analytical work done by Joint Staff, Program and Budget Analysis Division of the Force Structure, Resource, and Assessment Directorate (J-8) in fall 1988.²⁵ Soon after becoming Chairman of the Joint Chiefs in fall 1989, Powell expanded this analytical effort and set up a joint planning group with a J-5 strategy division.²⁶ Together these sections—under Powell’s general guidance—produced what ultimately became the Base Force.

The Base Force called for a 10-percent cut in budget, 20-percent cut in manpower, and 25-percent reduction in force structure compared with fiscal year (FY) 1990 numbers.²⁷ The military’s focus also shifted from fighting large land wars in Europe against the Soviet Union to conducting expeditionary operations around the world wherever “the United States had vital, enduring interests.”²⁸ In all, the planned cuts left the Army with 12 active component and eight reserve component divisions, a 451-ship Navy with 12 carriers, 15 active and 11 reserve tactical fighter wings and three Marine divisions—for a total strength of 1.6 million active and 904,000 reserve component (both Reserve and National Guard) servicemen and women.²⁹ The plan also targeted modernization accounts, reducing the purchases of new equipment like the Air Force B-2 bomber and C-17 transport aircraft.³⁰

²¹ Jaffe, 1993, p. 14.

²² Jaffe, 1993, p. 9.

²³ John Gordon IV, *The Quadrennial Defense Review: Analyzing the Major Defense Review Process*, dissertation, George Mason University, Fairfax, Va., 2005, p. 10.

²⁴ Gordon, 2005, p. 10.

²⁵ Jaffe, 1993, p. 9.

²⁶ Jaffe, 1993, p. 14.

²⁷ Eric V. Larson, David T. Orletsky, and Kristin Leuschner, *Defense Planning in a Decade of Change: Lessons from the Base Force, Bottom-Up Review, and Quadrennial Defense Review*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-1387-AF, 2001, pp. 5, 15.

²⁸ Mark Gunzinger, *Shaping America’s Future Military: Toward a New Force Planning Construct*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2013, p. 2.

²⁹ Jaffe, 1993, p. 44.

³⁰ Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner, 2001, p. 27.

Importantly, Powell's review was as much a political move as an analytical effort. He chose the term "Base Force" to convey that his "proposed force structure represented a floor below which the United States could not go and carry out its responsibilities as a superpower, rather than a ceiling from which it could further reduce forces."³¹

Powell intended the Base Force for an external audience, rather than just a DoD internal one. With mounting congressional pressure to reduce defense spending, Powell hoped to preempt the debate and stave off even more draconian reductions in the future.³² To do so, he needed to sell the concept to his fellow four-stars, the senior defense civilian leadership, and, ultimately, to the President and Congress; therefore, he arranged briefings for each of these audiences.³³ He also gave a series of public speeches across the country—from a town hall in Los Angeles, to the Winter Night Club in Colorado Springs, Colorado, to the Washington Council on Foreign Relations—to explain his ideas to a wider policy audience and rally public support for the plan.³⁴

Powell's lobbying effort proved only partially successful. On the one hand, the Base Force became official policy. Then-Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney was initially skeptical of the cuts, but, ultimately, he agreed to Powell's budget cuts by June 1990.³⁵ President George H. W. Bush announced the cuts as official policy a few months later in a speech to the Aspen Institute in August 1990, right before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the start of Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm.³⁶ The Base Force was later mentioned by name in the 1991 National Security Strategy and figured prominently in the 1992 National Military Strategy.³⁷ Powell, however, failed to prevent future defense cuts. Rather, the Base Force ushered in a decade of major defense reviews, followed by more budget cuts and even smaller force structures.³⁸

Still, the Base Force started a discussion about the appropriate size for the military in a post-Cold War context. As RAND analysts Eric V. Larson, David Orletsky, and Kristin Leuschner concluded,

Many of the strategic assumptions underlying the Base Force would, with only modest adjustment, remain salient through the rest of the decade. Among the most important of these were the need for forces tailored to a post-Soviet, post-

³¹ Jaffe, 1993, p. 21. For similar accounts, see Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner, 2001; and Gunzinger, 2013, p. 2.

³² Jaffe, 1993, pp. 28–30.

³³ Jaffe, 1993, pp. 18, 22–24, 29–35.

³⁴ Jaffe, 1993, pp. 28–30.

³⁵ Jaffe, 1993, p. 35.

³⁶ George H. W. Bush, "Remarks at the Aspen Institute Symposium in Aspen, Colorado," The American Presidency Project, August 2, 1990.

³⁷ White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, Washington, D.C., August 1991, p. 31; Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the United States*, Washington, D.C., January 1, 1992, pp. 17–25.

³⁸ Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner, 2001, p. 123, Table 5.

Cold War world and the focus on a regionally based strategy that emphasized deterrence, forward presence and crisis response.³⁹

The Bottom-Up Review (1993)

The most influential defense review of the post–Cold War period was also the first of its kind—the BUR. According to Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, “a department-wide review needed to be conducted ‘from the bottom up’ because of the dramatic changes that have occurred in the world as a result of the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union.”⁴⁰ As a congressman, Aspin argued that “American concern about economic threats means that the new American force must be a less expensive one” and that a new military “must be created from the bottom up, not just by subtracting 25 or 30 or 50 percent from the old Cold War structure.”⁴¹ Therefore, unlike the Base Force, the BUR was led by Aspin himself and produced not just a concept but its own freestanding strategy document.

The BUR, however, also coincided with the start of the Clinton administration and served a political purpose. According to Aspin’s critics, the BUR provided the intellectual justification for his plans to cut defense spending—policies he advocated during his later years in Congress.⁴² Aspin’s supporters counter that the report’s intent was just the opposite. Noting his earlier support for the Reagan defense buildup and his support for the Gulf War, they cast him as a pro-defense Democrat who wanted to make the strongest intellectual case for defense spending in the post–Cold War environment.⁴³

While many dispute his motivations, few contest Aspin’s personal interest in the subject. An economist with degrees from Yale, Oxford, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Aspin served as a systems analyst in then–Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara’s Pentagon during the 1960s.⁴⁴ After being elected to Congress in 1970, Aspin rose to prominence criticizing wasteful military spending, eventually becoming HASC chairman in 1985.⁴⁵ As one former senior defense official remembers, Aspin “loved defense analysis” and took a personal interest in the BUR when he became Secretary of Defense in 1993.⁴⁶

³⁹ Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner, 2001, p. 39.

⁴⁰ Aspin, 1993, p. iii.

⁴¹ John T. Correll, “The Legacy of the Bottom-Up Review,” *Air Force Magazine*, Vol. 86, No. 10, October 2003, p. 55.

⁴² Correll, 2003, p. 54.

⁴³ David E. Rosenbaum, “Les Aspin, 56, Dies; Member of Congress and Defense Chief,” *New York Times*, May 22, 1995; Interview with a former senior defense official, January 17, 2017.

⁴⁴ Rosenbaum, 1995.

⁴⁵ Rosenbaum, 1995.

⁴⁶ Interview with a former senior defense official, January 17, 2017.

The BUR kicked off in March of that year, and its results were published eight months later, in October 1993.⁴⁷ Foreshadowing the process in later reviews, Deputy Secretary of Defense John Deutch led an executive steering committee that oversaw the review, with a larger staff effort run by Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Frank Wisner.⁴⁸ Unlike the Base Force, which was mostly developed by the Joint Staff, the BUR included members of the services, the Joint Staff, and the OSD. Despite such inclusiveness, the process was still marred with friction, starting at the top: Powell was still Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and wanted to defend the Bush administration's Base Force, while Aspin—as the former top Democrat on the HASC—came into the review critiquing it.⁴⁹ This tension, arguably, foreshadowed some of the controversy surrounding the review.

As its intellectual premise, the BUR argued that “prudence” required “the United States to maintain sufficient military power to be able to win two major regional conflicts that occur nearly simultaneously.”⁵⁰ As the two major regional conflicts, the BUR selected a second Iraq War (in which Iraq invaded Kuwait and Saudi Arabia) and a Korean conflict (in which North Korea invaded the South) as “illustrative” cases to help size the force.⁵¹ Next, the BUR outlined, in rough terms, what size force would be required to win one conflict; win one conflict and hold in another; win both simultaneously; and, finally, win both simultaneously, while also conducting a smaller operation.⁵² The remainder of the report went through the types of forces (e.g., theater air forces) and issue areas (e.g., acquisition), analyzing their challenges in the post-Cold War world, and queuing up the programmatic and policy decisions that needed to follow from the analysis.⁵³

In the end, the BUR recommended steep cuts in force structure across the services on top of the Base Force reductions. It reduced the Air Force to 13 active fighter wings and seven reserve fighter wings; the Army to ten divisions (active) and five divisions (reserve); the Navy to 11 aircraft carriers (active), one reserve, and 348 ships.⁵⁴ Additionally, and of particular relevance to the Air Force, while the report bracketed many of the nuclear questions to a separate review, it decided to delay modernizing the space launch infrastructure.⁵⁵

⁴⁷ Aspin, 1993, p. iii.

⁴⁸ Cancian et al., 2017, pp. 96–97.

⁴⁹ Cancian et al., 2017, pp. 96–97.

⁵⁰ Aspin, 1993, p. 7.

⁵¹ Aspin, 1993, p. 14.

⁵² Aspin, 1993, p. 30.

⁵³ Aspin, 1993, p. 35.

⁵⁴ Aspin, 1993, p. 28.

⁵⁵ Aspin, 1993, pp. 26, 63.

Needless to say, the BUR—and the defense cuts that followed—drew criticism from all corners. A year after the BUR’s publication, the *Los Angeles Times* summed up with the following:

But today, the bottom-up review has become a liability, derided by outside defense experts of all stripes and given only a lukewarm embrace by the Department of Defense’s new management. Liberals complain that the review’s central recommendation—that the United States maintain a large enough force to fight two major regional wars “nearly simultaneously”—is merely a holdover from Cold War days and is out of sync with the relatively low-intensity conflicts that have broken out in Rwanda, Haiti and elsewhere. Conservatives charge that the Administration’s defense budget is nowhere near sufficient to finance the force that the review says would be needed.⁵⁶

The conservative Heritage Foundation blasted the “fatally flawed” report because it was “based on faulty assumptions concerning the mission of the armed forces,” specifically that the United States should primarily focus on peace enforcement operations in the post–Cold War period.⁵⁷ The libertarian CATO Institution, by contrast, called the report “fraudulent” and a “highly politicized document designed to exaggerate the threat environment and preserve as much as possible of the Pentagon’s budget and force structure.”⁵⁸ And *Air Force Magazine* argued that the BUR “was an exercise to justify a blind budget cut.”⁵⁹

Others criticized the document on analytical grounds. Defense analyst John Gordon suggested that the BUR “offered no real new defense concepts and essentially maintained a smaller version of the Cold War military.”⁶⁰ RAND’s Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner suggested that the BUR exaggerated the force’s true capability.

In short, BUR policymakers stated their aim to accomplish with a smaller force what the Base Force could do only with great difficulty, and placing it near the breaking point—providing a capability to fight two near simultaneous major conflicts.⁶¹

They note that, in February 1992, Powell testified to this effect.⁶² The team also criticized the report for failing to factor in normal peacetime operations’ significant drain on resources,

⁵⁶ Art Pine, “Military: Pentagon’s ‘Bottom-Up Review’ Appears to Be Down and Out,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 23, 1994.

⁵⁷ Baker Spring, John Luddy, and Lawrence DiRita, “Thumbs Down to the Bottom-Up Review,” Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, Background series, No. 957, September 24, 1993.

⁵⁸ David Isenberg, *The Pentagon’s Fraudulent Bottom-Up Review*, Washington, D.C.: CATO Institute, Policy Analysis No. 206, April 21, 1994.

⁵⁹ Correll, 2003, p. 53.

⁶⁰ Gordon, 2005, p. 23.

⁶¹ Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner 2001, p. 55.

⁶² Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner 2001, p. 13.

amounting to as much as a major regional contingency.⁶³ Finally, Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner doubted whether the BUR could achieve its promised \$91 billion in savings.⁶⁴

Ultimately, the criticism took a toll on the Clinton administration. Aspin did not survive as Secretary of Defense much longer after the publication of the BUR. Inside the Clinton administration, Aspin was viewed as “indecisive and basically a disappointment.”⁶⁵ Aspin also—rightly or wrongly—became the “fall guy for the stumbles of the Clinton administration on Bosnia, Somalia, and Haiti.”⁶⁶ He was blamed for the “Black Hawk Down” incident—in which 18 U.S. service members died after two helicopters were shot down in a failed attempt to capture Somali warlord Mohammed Farah Aidid—because Aspin had refused an earlier request to send armor to Somalia.⁶⁷ Ultimately, Aspin resigned in December 1993, less than a year after taking office.⁶⁸ A year and a half later, in May 1995, Aspin died after having a stroke at the age 56.⁶⁹

Aspin’s BUR, however, lived on. Somewhat ironically, in the nearly quarter century since its publication, the BUR’s reputation has seen a revival. As one former Republican HASC staffer who helped lead the charge against the BUR at the time noted, the report is now viewed as “the high-water mark for strategy.”⁷⁰ A former director for Defense Transformation, Force Planning and Resources on the National Security Council who later became an analyst at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, Mark Gunzinger similarly said, the “Bottom-Up Review [BUR] may have been the last time the Pentagon created a new vision for how the U.S. military should prepare to meet the nation’s security challenges.”⁷¹ And the 2010 QDR Independent Panel (QDR-IP), in a mark of revisionist history, even proclaimed, “The initial BUR was considered a success. Of course, there was much debate about the conclusions, but Congress thought the process was worthwhile and mandated that it be repeated every four years.”⁷²

As controversial as the two-war standard was, it proved simple and compelling. The services and defense hawks came to view the standard as a useful “floor” to defend their force structure in subsequent budget debates.⁷³ Even the BUR’s stated force—which conservatives criticized for

⁶³ Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner 2001, p. 80.

⁶⁴ Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner 2001, p. 57.

⁶⁵ Rosenbaum, 1995.

⁶⁶ John Barry, “The Collapse of Les Aspin,” *Newsweek*, December 26, 1993.

⁶⁷ Barry, 1993.

⁶⁸ Rosenbaum, 1995.

⁶⁹ Rosenbaum, 1995.

⁷⁰ Interview with a former Republican congressional staffer and defense analyst, February 1, 2017.

⁷¹ Gunzinger, 2013, p. ii.

⁷² Stephen J. Hadley and William J. Perry, *The QDR in Perspective: Meeting America’s National Security Needs In the 21st Century the Final Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2010, p. iii.

⁷³ Gordon, 2005, p. 165.

being too low at the time—became the numbers that later independent defense reviews turned to as their recommended bottom limit for reasons that shall be explained later in this report.

Finally, the BUR set the precedent for department reviews. Whatever its virtues and faults, the BUR started a trend of comprehensive, publicly released documents explaining DoD’s answer to two basic questions: “How do we structure the armed forces of the United States for the future? How much defense is enough in the post–Cold War era?”⁷⁴ Trying to find the right answer to these questions would animate much of the debate for the next quarter century.

Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces (1995)

The ink was barely dry on the BUR when Congress directed yet another defense review—the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces (CORM)—in the FY 1994 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).⁷⁵ Rather than asking, “How much defense is enough in the post–Cold War era,” the commission focused on who does what, or, as CORM Chairman John White more accurately rephrased it, “how do we ensure that the right set of capabilities is identified, developed and fielded to meet the needs of unified commanders.”⁷⁶ Specifically, the CORM’s role was to

- (1) review the efficacy and appropriateness for the post-Cold War era of the current allocations among the Armed Forces of roles, missions, and functions; (2) evaluate and report on alternative allocations of those roles, missions, and functions; and (3) make recommendations for changes in the current definition and distribution of those roles, missions, and functions.⁷⁷

Underneath this relatively innocuous language lay deep-seated congressional frustration. In 1992, Senator Sam Nunn, a Democrat from Georgia and chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), addressed the Senate in a speech titled “DOD Must Thoroughly Overhaul the Services’ Roles and Missions.” He explained,

As former Senator Barry Goldwater frequently said, we are the only military in the world with four air forces. We have a Marine Corps and an Army with light infantry divisions. Both the Navy and the Air Force design, build, test, and field cruise missiles. Both the Navy and the Air Force build and operate satellites. Each of the military departments has its own huge infrastructure of schools, laboratories, industrial facilities, testing organizations, and training ranges. We

⁷⁴ Aspin, 1993, p. 1.

⁷⁵ John White, preface in Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, *Directions for Defense: Report of the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 1995, p. i.

⁷⁶ White, 1995, p. vii.

⁷⁷ Public Law 103-160, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1994, November 30, 1993.

have at least three, and in some instances four separate Chaplain Corps, Medical Corps, Dental Corps, Nursing Corps, and Legal Corps.⁷⁸

According to Nunn, “This redundancy and duplication is costing billions of dollars every year.”⁷⁹ From Nunn’s perspective, while the BUR began to answer what type of force the United States needed in the post–Cold War world, it failed to address any of these underlying concerns.

The CORM opened its offices in Rosslyn, Virginia, in spring 1994.⁸⁰ Before becoming CORM chairman, White was a former deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget during the Carter administration and later became the Deputy Secretary of Defense during the Clinton administration under Secretary of Defense William Perry.⁸¹ Its ten other members included retired general officers from all four services and from the Army National Guard, as well several notable civilians, including Federal National Mortgage Association executive (and later Clinton administration Office of Management and Budget Director) Frank Raines and then–former Secretary of Defense Aspin (although Aspin died before the commission published its findings).⁸² The CORM had a relatively large budget, as independent panels go—about \$17 million—and labored for about a year hearing testimony and developing its findings.⁸³

The CORM’s ultimate report, *Directions for Defense*, came out in May 1995.⁸⁴ Unlike the Base Force or the BUR that came before it or the QDRs that came afterward, the report did not assess threats, develop a force-sizing construct, or analyze what resources and capabilities DoD needed to develop in response. Rather, the CORM focused on how the services should work together. It devoted sections to how DoD should streamline logistics support, acquisition, housing, and other areas to avoid duplication. Led by Raines, the committee pushed for increased privatization as a cost-saving measure.⁸⁵ It also made some smaller, specific recommendations of interest to the Air Force in particular: The CORM made the service the executive agent for combat search and rescue, recommended that the Air Force take the lead in “acquiring and operating multiuser space systems,” and centralized much of operational airlift under the service as part of the transportation command.⁸⁶ That said, the committee shied away from addressing Nunn’s major criticisms about the U.S. military having four air forces, two light ground forces,

⁷⁸ Sam Nunn, “DOD Must Thoroughly Overhaul the Services’ Roles and Missions,” address to the U.S. Senate, reprinted in *AIR FORCE Magazine*, July 2, 1992.

⁷⁹ Nunn, 1992, p. 2.

⁸⁰ Gordon, 2005, p. 30.

⁸¹ Eric Schmitt, “New Report on Long-Sought Goal: Efficiency in Military,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1995.

⁸² Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, *Directions for Defense: Report of the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 1995.

⁸³ Schmitt, 1995.

⁸⁴ Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, 1995.

⁸⁵ Bradley Graham, “Consensus is Building to Privatize Defense Functions,” *Washington Post*, March 20, 1995a.

⁸⁶ Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, 1995, p. ES-5.

and three or four separate Chaplain Corps, Medical Corps, Dental Corps, Nursing Corps, and Legal Corps.

Directions for Defense received mixed reviews. As the *New York Times* recounted, “Capitol Hill’s reaction to the report was decidedly tepid. Senator Strom Thurmond, the South Carolina Republican who heads the Armed Services Committee, thanked the commission for delivering the report on time, and left it at that.”⁸⁷ Gordon explained, “When the final CORM report was issued on May 24, 1995, many regarded it as a watered-down product that did not make the ‘tough calls’ required to eliminate unneeded expensive duplication of effort among the Services.”⁸⁸ The common criticism was that “the commission’s 11 members—all civilians but five of them retired military officers—had fallen captive to the interests of the military branches in not eliminating more duplication” and that DoD had already adopted most of the CORM’s recommendations by the time the report came out.⁸⁹

Still, some of the CORM’s findings did have a lasting impact. Its recommendations for increased privatization and use of the reserve component were ultimately adopted. Perhaps most important for the course of defense strategy, the CORM recommended a “comprehensive strategy and force review at the start of each new administration—a Quadrennial Strategy Review.”⁹⁰ Specifically, the CORM suggested that the review cover

international political changes and economic trends, changes in threats and military technology, evolving opportunities for using military force to shape the security environment, resources available for defense, possible adjustments to existing national security policy or strategy, and a diverse set of military force and program options.⁹¹

And while it was not known at the time, this suggestion led to the QDR and helped shaped the course of defense reviews for the next two decades.

The Quadrennial Defense Review (1997)

In the “Republican Revolution” of 1994, the Republican Party won a landslide in the midterm elections, taking control of both chambers of Congress. As part of Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich’s “Contract with America,” the Republican majority pledged a “restoration of the essential parts of our national security funding to strengthen our national defense and

⁸⁷ Schmitt, 1995.

⁸⁸ Gordon, 2005, p. 31.

⁸⁹ Schmitt, 1995.

⁹⁰ Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, 1995, p. 4–9.

⁹¹ Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, 1995, p. 4–9.

maintain our credibility around the world.”⁹² For some in the Republican Congress, the deep cuts in defense spending under the Clinton administration were draconian and divorced from strategic reality.⁹³ The HASC, in particular, believed that the United States needed a new strategy to baseline the force for the new age.

The HASC, however, could not write this new strategy itself. When the Republicans took over, they slashed the professional staff of the committee almost in half and, therefore, they simply lacked the manpower.⁹⁴ As a result, in the FY 1997 NDAA, Congress adopted the CORM’s recommendation and mandated that the Secretary of Defense produce a QDR that would “include a comprehensive examination of the defense strategy, force structure, force modernization plans, infrastructure, and other elements of the defense program and policy with a view toward determining and expressing the U.S. defense strategy.”⁹⁵ As one senior congressional staffer reminisced, a strategic review gave an “opportunity for DoD to do the ‘right thing’ and give a budget that’s truly based on the needs of the nation.”⁹⁶

The 1997 QDR looked very different than the BUR or the CORM. Many of the broad contours of Clinton administration’s defense policies were already in place at the time of the review, which took place at the start of the second term. Unlike the BUR, the 1997 QDR lacked similar senior-level engagement. On the military side, Chairman of Joint Chiefs GEN John Shalikashvili took an interest in the QDR—not necessarily to drive it but more to constrain the process, “effectively ruling out any major changes to the status quo, regarding force structure, roles and missions and service budget shares.”⁹⁷ On the civilian side, Secretary of Defense William Cohen was still new to his position and, unlike Aspin, did not have a deep personal interest and background in defense analysis. Walter Slocombe, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, also did not personally direct the project and, instead, chose to delegate the project to Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Requirements Edward (Ted) L. Warner III.⁹⁸

A retired Air Force intelligence officer, Warner had spent the past decade at the RAND Corporation as a senior defense analyst before assuming his new post at DoD in 1993.⁹⁹ As such, he served as the intellectual bridge between the BUR and the QDR. He also helped shape a generation of individuals who would play key roles in defense strategies—including David

⁹² U.S. Republican Party, “The Republican ‘Contract with America,’” (September 27, 1994), reprinted in Lori Cox Han and Diane J. Heith, *Presidents and the American Presidency*, Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2012.

⁹³ Interview with a former Republican congressional staffer and defense analyst, February 1, 2017.

⁹⁴ Interview with a former Republican congressional staffer and defense analyst, February 1, 2017.

⁹⁵ Public Law 104-201, 1996.

⁹⁶ Interview with a former Republican congressional staffer and defense analyst, February 1, 2017.

⁹⁷ Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner 2001.

⁹⁸ Interview with a former defense official, February 13, 2017.

⁹⁹ “Edward L. Warner III,” Elemental Cremation and Burial, webpage, November 19, 2014.

Ochmanek (a RAND alumnus who served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy during the BUR), Flournoy (who served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy during the 1997 QDR), and Andrew Hoehn (whose served as Principal Director for Strategy during the 1997 QDR).¹⁰⁰ All of these individuals would figure prominently in subsequent defense reviews during the Bush and Obama administrations.

In what would later set the stage for the process used in subsequent reviews, Warner led the project with then-Director of Program Analysis and Evaluation (PA&E) William J. Lynn III and Air Force Lt Gen David McCloud, who was then-Director for Force Structure, Resources and Assessment (J-8) on the Joint Staff.¹⁰¹ Underneath them, multiple working groups—involving hundreds of people—helped shaped the review in what was described as “more of a bottom up process” than the BUR.¹⁰² While OSD’s strategy office and the Joint Staff wrote the draft, the combatant commands and the services reviewed and made substantive changes to the report.¹⁰³ Most of the work on the report, however, took place on a relatively compact six-to-eight-week schedule during spring 1997.¹⁰⁴

The 1997 QDR also included a new process feature that would become part of all future QDRs. In the 1997 NDAA, Congress mandated that the Chairman of Joint Chiefs provide an assessment of the strategy as an appendix to the report.¹⁰⁵ In theory, this assessment served as an independent and impartial look at DoD’s strategy process and findings. In practice, however, these assessments usually endorsed the strategy at hand, as we shall see.

Substantively, Warner and his team wrestled with several pressing issues—starting with the force-planning construct. Despite the simplicity of the BUR’s two major regional contingencies construct, it seemed ill-suited to operational reality. At the time, the United States had intervened in Somalia, Haiti, and the Balkans, while the Air Force patrolled Iraqi skies as part of Northern and Southern Watch—none of which was accounted for in the two-war construct.¹⁰⁶ According to Joint Staff analyses at the time, these low-intensity, long-duration operations accounted for most of the demands on the force at the time.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ Ted Bowman, “Flournoy Brings Pragmatism to Key Pentagon Post,” *NPR*, March 27, 2009.

¹⁰¹ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 9, 2017; John Y. Schrader, Leslie Lewis, and Roger Allen Brown, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2001: Lessons on Managing Change in the Department of Defense*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, DB-379-JS, 2003, p. 14.

¹⁰² Interview with a former senior defense official, March 23, 2017.

¹⁰³ Interview with a former senior defense official, March 23, 2017.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 9, 2017.

¹⁰⁵ For the requirement that the chairman offer an assessment of the QDR, see Public Law 104-201, 1996, Section 923.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with a former senior defense official, March 23, 2017.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 9, 2017.

Moving away from the two-wars scenario, however, proved politically difficult. While the authors of the 1997 QDR thought about alternatives, different constructs often stoked bureaucratic infighting because different services and parts of DoD stood to gain or lose depending on the contingency.¹⁰⁸ In the end, the 1997 QDR authors concluded that changing the construct proved too bureaucratically difficult and wrote,

As a global power with worldwide interests, it is imperative that the United States now and for the foreseeable future be able to deter large-scale, cross-border aggression in two distant theaters with overlapping time frames, preferably with regional allies.¹⁰⁹

However, they added that “the U.S. military must be prepared to successfully conduct multiple, concurrent smaller-scale contingency operations worldwide,” and to the report’s credit, considered how some of these smaller operations stressed the force—particularly with low-density, high-demand capabilities but more generally as well.¹¹⁰

Ultimately, the force-sizing construct, arguably, mattered less than the overall DoD budget. In his introduction to the report, then-Secretary of Defense Cohen argues that one of three major differences between this review and its predecessors was that “our program is going to be *fiscally executable*.”¹¹¹ According to Cohen, DoD previously raided modernization accounts “to pay current bills,” but no longer.¹¹² While the review was not “a budget exercise,” it was “fiscally informed.”¹¹³ The alternative force posture section explicitly states that “absent a marked deterioration in world events, the nation is unlikely to support significantly more resources for national defense. Indeed, we may yet face pressures to lower DoD’s share of federal expenditures.”¹¹⁴ And so, DoD needed to stretch the existing budget—then roughly \$250 billion—as far as possible.¹¹⁵

In practice, “fiscally executable” translated into reductions for all of the services. While the review did not touch the top-level force structure numbers—in terms of Army divisions, Air Force wings, and Navy carrier and amphibious warfare groups—the other numbers tell a different story.¹¹⁶ The Army took a 15,000-man (3-percent) reduction in its active-duty size and

¹⁰⁸ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 9, 2017.

¹⁰⁹ DoD, *The Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review*, Washington, D.C., May 1997, p. 12.

¹¹⁰ DoD, 1997, pp. 12, 48–49.

¹¹¹ DoD, 1997, p. vi. Emphasis in the original.

¹¹² DoD, 1997, p. vi.

¹¹³ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 9, 2017.

¹¹⁴ DoD, 1997, p. ii.

¹¹⁵ DoD, 1997, p. 19.

¹¹⁶ DoD, 1997, p. 30.

45,000 men (almost 8 percent) from its reserve component.¹¹⁷ The Air Force sustained even deeper cuts to its active-duty force (26,900 men or 8 percent) and lost roughly 20 percent of its F-22 Raptor fighter buy.¹¹⁸ The Navy lost roughly 10 percent of its surface combatants, roughly 30 percent of its attack submarines and 45 percent of its intended F/A 18E/F procurement.¹¹⁹ Even the Marine Corps—the smallest of services—was not left untouched, taking reductions to its MV-22 Osprey program.¹²⁰

Ultimately, as one RAND study found, the 1997 QDR was “a damage-limiting exercise. There was little expectation of any gain and a high risk of major losses.”¹²¹ Defense analyst David Isenberg argued, “Although during the review, defense officials insisted that there would be no ‘sacred cows,’ the QDR left unchallenged key tenets of U.S. security policy.”¹²² Defense analyst Mark Gunzinger similarly argued that “the Pentagon pursued a ‘BUR-light approach’” that broke little new ground.¹²³

According to individuals who worked on it, the 1997 QDR did not want “to rock the boat or introduce too many new concepts.”¹²⁴ Despite the fact that Shalikashvili lauded the 1997 QDR in his congressionally mandated assessment of the strategy for its “innovative thinking,” in reality, the 1997 QDR was a classic second-term administration document designed more to justify the status quo than to signal large-scale shifts.¹²⁵ In an interview shortly after its release, journalist Jim Lehrer pointedly asked Cohen and Shalikashvili, “Isn’t it just kind of more of the same, in other words, a few less troops, a few less pieces of equipment? Conceptually, is there anything new about this?”¹²⁶ Indeed, DoD staffers often struggled to explain what new concepts actually came from the review.¹²⁷ Even Cohen admitted as much. In remarks at the Brookings Institution,

¹¹⁷ DoD, 1997, p. 29. For the base numbers for the end-strength percentages, see Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner, 2001, p. 103.

¹¹⁸ DoD, 1997, p. vii. The Air Force went from 438 to 339 aircraft. For the base numbers for the end-strength percentages, see Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner, 2001, p. 103.

¹¹⁹ DoD, 1997, p. vii. The review mandated reductions from 128 down to 116 surface combatants; from 73 to 50 attack submarines; and from 1,000 to 548 F/A 18E/Fs.

¹²⁰ DoD, 1997, p. vii.

¹²¹ Schrader, Lewis, and Brown, 2003, p. 6.

¹²² David Isenberg, *The Quadrennial Defense Review: Reiterating the Tired Status Quo*, Washington, D.C.: CATO Institute, Policy Analysis, No. 317, September 17, 1998, p. 1.

¹²³ Gunzinger, 2013, p. 5.

¹²⁴ Interviews with a former senior defense official, February 9, 2017.

¹²⁵ DoD, 1997, p. 109.

¹²⁶ Gordon, 2005, p. 171.

¹²⁷ Gordon, 2005, p. 172.

he argued that he did not want a new force-sizing construct because the two-war standard “signals our resolve to friends and foes alike.”¹²⁸

From the congressional perspective, the document failed to live up to its desired goal—to give an honest assessment of threats and then build a budget around it. Republican U.S. Representative Spencer Floyd, chairman of the House National Security Committee, remarked that the review was a “budget-driven assessment of how much strategy we can afford rather than what our strategy should be.”¹²⁹ As one Republican staffer put it more candidly, the report was a “giant FU to Congress.”¹³⁰ In his defense, Cohen did try to use the QDR to at least draw a line on defense cuts and push for future modernization programs—declaring that the “peace dividend was over” and “the time has come to leap our forces into the future.”¹³¹ Ultimately, whatever its strengths or faults, the 1997 QDR started an increasingly institutionalized process for strategy-making over the next two decades.

National Defense Panel (1997)

Along with the QDR, the NDAA directed that the “Secretary of Defense shall establish a nonpartisan, independent panel to be known as the National Defense Panel” (NDP) to review the QDR and provide “an independent assessment of a variety of possible force structures of the Armed Forces through the year 2010 and beyond,” based on the threats confronting the United States.¹³² The genesis of the idea behind the NDP, however, was somewhat different than the QDR. While the QDR grew out of a recommendation by the CORM, Congress developed the idea for the NDP on its own as another way to influence the QDR and, more broadly, the executive branch’s defense policies.¹³³ However, just as the 1997 QDR set in motion a series of processes that continued for the next two decades, the NDP started trends that persisted in later independent defense reviews—specifically, the 2010 QDR-IP and the 2014 NDP.

The NDP officially stood up in December 1996, but it got off to a rough start. It took two months, until February 1997, for all panelists be chosen—a mixture of retired four-star general officers from the Army, Air Force, and Navy; Bush administration political appointees; and think tank analysts—thanks to tension between Capitol Hill and the Secretary of Defense over

¹²⁸ Bradley Graham, “Ability to Fight in Two Spots Remains Priority, Cohen Says,” *Washington Post*, May 13, 1997.

¹²⁹ Philip Shenon, “Troop Cuts Likely to be Main Result of Major Review,” *New York Times*, April 29, 1997.

¹³⁰ Interview with a former Republican congressional staffer and defense analyst, February 1, 2017.

¹³¹ Michael Kilian, “Peace Dividend’ Over, Defense Chief Declares,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 17, 1997; Graham, 1997.

¹³² Public Law 104–201, 1996.

¹³³ John Tedstrom and John G. McGinn, *Planning America's Security: Lessons from the National Defense Panel*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-1049-OSD, 1999, p. 2.

selecting the members.¹³⁴ Staffing the NDP proved an even more tedious process and was not fully completed until June 1997.¹³⁵ Even then, the NDP still lacked the analytical capability to truly develop and assess alternative force structures.¹³⁶

The NDP did, however, critique the draft 1997 QDR. In a memorandum to Cohen dated April 8, 1997, NDP Chairman Philip Odeen warned that the methodology was flawed and much of the intellectual groundwork for the review suffered from a “fairly narrow conventional focus” on Operation Desert Storm and Korean War scenarios.¹³⁷ He also criticized the review’s “fairly short term” time horizon and its lack of focus on infrastructure cuts, special-access programs, and strategic nuclear forces.¹³⁸ Finally, Odeen pushed the QDR to look for more-innovative solutions to solve DoD’s budget woes—from leveraging the reserve component to other interagency partners, such as the United States Agency for International Development and the State Department.¹³⁹

The panel’s actual report, published in December 1997, partially addressed these perceived gaps. Looking into the then-distant future (2020), it considered four possible worlds—ranging from a scenario in which U.S. hegemony remains supreme to a breakdown into global chaos—and attempted to tease out the relevant security challenges from them.¹⁴⁰ It then laid out some of the national security challenges confronting the United States—from homeland defense to space operations to projecting military power abroad.¹⁴¹ Finally, it made some general recommendations for future force capabilities, defense infrastructure, and organizational reforms—although it stayed mostly above the level of recommending specific programs, numbers of platforms, or fixed budget numbers.¹⁴²

¹³⁴ Tedstrom and McGinn, 1999, p. 5. For example, Senator John McCain blasted Cohen’s selection of panelists, saying “the selection of forward-thinking members for the NDP was critical, and, quite frankly, the administration missed the mark—with a few notable exceptions. . . . Furthermore, I had previously expressed my concerns regarding the appointment of Mr. Phil Odeen as chairman of the NDP. While Mr. Odeen is well respected for his intellect and work on previous commissions, his past experience does not support the very broad-ranging goals of the NDP.” See John McCain, “McCain Critical of Defense Budget,” press release, February 12, 1997. In the end, the panelists were Odeen; Richard Armitage; Gen Richard Hearnay, Marines (Ret.); ADM David Jeremiah, Navy (Ret.); Robert Kimmit; Andrew Krepinevich; Gen James McCarthy, Air Force (Ret.); Janne Nolan; and GEN Robert RisCassi, Army (Ret.).

¹³⁵ Tedstrom and McGinn, 1999, p. 19.

¹³⁶ Tedstrom and McGinn, 1999, p. 5.

¹³⁷ Philip A. Odeen, “Interim NDP Comments on the QDR,” memorandum to Secretary of Defense William Cohen, Washington, D.C., April 8, 1997a, p. 1.

¹³⁸ Odeen, 1997a, pp. 1–2.

¹³⁹ Odeen, 1997a, p. 2.

¹⁴⁰ Philip A. Odeen, *Transforming Defense: National Security in the 21st Century*, Arlington, Va.: Report of the National Defense Panel, December 1997b, pp. 8–9.

¹⁴¹ Odeen, 1997b, pp. 23–42.

¹⁴² Odeen, 1997b, pp. 43–87.

The NDP's report received mixed reviews. Gordon offers a stinging assessment of the NDP's performance:

The NDP report barely mentioned the QDR. Given the fact that the legislation specifically required the NDP to assess DoD's report, the lack of direct reference to the QDR is striking. There is no assessment in the NDP report of the QDR's assumptions, analytical process, or conclusions. In a sense, the NDP was a failure since it did not explicitly evaluate the QDR or provide a clear alternative to the direction provided by DoD's official report.¹⁴³

In sum, the NDP failed to do its job.

Other analysts took a more charitable view. Isenberg credits the NDP for questioning some of the QDR's basic assumptions about the threat and DoD's approach to modernization.¹⁴⁴ Former Reagan administration Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Frank Gaffney praised the NDP's focus on future-oriented space weapons and argued that "whatever one thinks of the rest of the NDP report, it has rendered a distinct public service with respect to its recommendations concerning space control."¹⁴⁵

For his part, Cohen gave the NDP a positive, if somewhat muted, endorsement. Specifically, Cohen praised the NDP's focus on "a future in which terrorism, information operations, and weapons of mass destruction play a more prominent role, even posing direct threats to the U.S. homeland."¹⁴⁶ This focus helped bolster Cohen's case for modernization. Importantly, Cohen did not address the NDP's critique of the QDR.

The most common reaction to the report, however, was apathy. RAND analysts John Tedstrom and John McGinn note that while the NDP's report and accompanying testimony was "well received" by Congress, "the panel's message was almost drowned out by a combination of bad timing, bureaucratic shortfalls, and an unreceptive media."¹⁴⁷ Compared with ongoing tensions with Iraq and other stories, the NDP's report seemed relatively dull—and, because the NDP's staff disbanded shortly after publication, there was also no major attempt to drum up public interest.¹⁴⁸

In hindsight, the NDP arguably set the tone for what outside reviews can reasonably achieve. Ad hoc organizations without robust full-time staffs rarely can mimic the same in-depth analytics of internally produced reviews. Still, they can serve a useful political function, occasionally

¹⁴³ Gordon, 2005, p. 179.

¹⁴⁴ Isenberg, 1998, p. 21.

¹⁴⁵ Frank Gaffney, "National Defense Panel Implicitly Assails Clinton's Decision to Veto Programs Needed to 'Deny Enemies the Use of Space,'" *Foreign Policy*, December 3, 1997.

¹⁴⁶ Tim Weiner, "2-War Strategy Is Obsolete, a Defense Panel Contends," *New York Times*, December 2, 1997.

¹⁴⁷ Tedstrom and McGinn, 1999, p. 10.

¹⁴⁸ Tedstrom and McGinn, 1999, p. 10.

injecting new ideas and shaping the public debate. To a degree, the NDP accomplished the latter function. More importantly, it set the precedent for the independent reviews to come.

The Quadrennial Defense Review (2001)

On September 23, 1999, then-presidential candidate George W. Bush addressed the corps of cadets at the Citadel in the South Carolina and outlined his views on defense policy. He argued that the United States was in the midst of “a revolution in the technology of war” and that “power is increasingly defined, not by mass or size, but by mobility and swiftness. Influence is measured in information, safety is gained in stealth, and force is projected on the long arc of precision-guided weapons.”¹⁴⁹ He pledged to order a “comprehensive review of our military” that would “challenge the status quo and envision a new architecture of American defense for decades to come.”¹⁵⁰ Ultimately, Bush’s speech became the intellectual underpinnings of the 2001 QDR two years later.

Bush chose Donald Rumsfeld as his defense secretary. Rumsfeld had already served as Secretary of Defense in the Ford administration and embraced the vision that Bush laid out in his Citadel speech.¹⁵¹ From his standpoint, Rumsfeld thought that previous reviews were not intellectually honest about what the U.S. military could and could not do. “We have not had the forces for the strategy, and the strategy didn’t fit our forces. It’s important to elevate [that concern] and acknowledge it.”¹⁵² Therefore, he wanted to leave his mark on DoD by transforming the military to meet the challenges of the 21st century.¹⁵³ The 2001 QDR offered Rumsfeld a platform to lay out the framework for this revolution. Rumsfeld’s personal interest in the review, however, was spurred on by more than just a desire to secure his legacy. Rumsfeld’s predecessor (Cohen) warned him not to get steamrolled by the bureaucracy, like Cohen thought he himself had been in the 1997 QDR.¹⁵⁴

Cohen’s warning about being boxed in by the bureaucracy was not without merit. By the time Rumsfeld became Secretary of Defense, the 2001 QDR was already well under way. DoD began preparing for the review as early as 1999.¹⁵⁵ Once he came into office, Rumsfeld changed course. He started by commissioning Andrew Marshall and the Office of Net Assessment

¹⁴⁹ George W. Bush, “A Period of Consequences,” speech presented at The Citadel, South Carolina, September 23, 1999.

¹⁵⁰ Bush, 1999.

¹⁵¹ Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir*, New York: Sentinel, 2011, p. 294.

¹⁵² Michael Kilian, “Rumsfeld Plans Redesign of U.S. Defense,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 10, 2001.

¹⁵³ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 9, 2017; interview with a former senior defense official February 17, 2017.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 9, 2017; interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017; Cancian et. al, 2017, p. 105.

(ONA)—the Pentagon’s internal think tank—to write a series of papers to help frame the review.¹⁵⁶ Unhappy with the result, Rumsfeld then set up a series of panels—staffed by outside experts—to review parts of DoD and report on what had changed since he was last Secretary of Defense.¹⁵⁷ Rumsfeld also established a Senior Level Review Group consisting of himself, the service chiefs, and a handful of other key staffers who met three to four times a week to oversee all the department’s major decisions.¹⁵⁸

While most of these initiatives arguably were well-intentioned attempts to be both comprehensive and inclusive, they ended up backfiring. On a very basic level, many in the rank and file felt like their previous work on the review was for nothing. As one military officer bitterly recounted, “We had been working 12 hours a day since the summer 2000, and it was almost all wasted effort. The new OSD leadership had a different idea of what it wanted.”¹⁵⁹ The panels also proved slow and cumbersome. The official QDR process only kicked off in late spring 2001—after the senior military leadership voiced concern that the report would not be completed in time.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, some officials in the services eventually viewed the panels with suspicion and believed that Rumsfeld was using the panels to spy on them.¹⁶¹ Other complained that the panels had basically “frozen out” the Joint Staff efforts to prepare for the review.¹⁶²

Even the Senior Level Review Group—designed to incorporate the chiefs and “find ways to ask them for their collective judgment”—backfired because the meeting schedule wreaked havoc on the chiefs’ schedules.¹⁶³ Within OSD, Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense Stephen Cambone, the chair of Executive Working Group and one of the driving forces behind the QDR’s analysis, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz often clashed.¹⁶⁴ To further

¹⁵⁶ Cancian et al., 2017, p. 105.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 9, 2017.

¹⁵⁸ Rumsfeld, 2011; interview with a former senior defense official, February 9, 2017.

¹⁵⁹ Gordon, 2005, p. 205.

¹⁶⁰ Accounts vary; however, when the process officially began, it was sometime between April 2001 and June 2001. Interview with a former senior defense official, February 9, 2017; interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017.

¹⁶¹ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 9, 2017; interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017. By contrast, supporters of the review argue that the military’s negative response to it had more to do with budgets than anything else. National Defense University professors Hans Binnendijk and Richard Kugler, for example, argued:

This anxiety [about the panels] partly stemmed from bureaucratic concern at being excluded from the initial strategic reviews, but it also reflected deeply held substantive reservations: The armed services were disappointed to discover that due to national budget constraints, the new Republican team was not planning to fund significantly bigger defense budgets (Hans Binnendijk and Richard Kugler, “Sound Vision, Unfinished Business: The Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2001,” *Fletcher World Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 1, Winter–Spring 2002, pp. 126).

¹⁶² Schrader, Lewis, and Brown, 2003, p. 18.

¹⁶³ Rumsfeld, 2011, p. 291; interview with a former senior defense official, February 9, 2017.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017; Cancian et al., 2017, p. 106.

complicate matters, as Rumsfeld became increasingly unpopular with the military brass, he stepped back from the process, and some believed he was “on political death watch” by late summer and unlikely to last the year in his position.¹⁶⁵

Some of this civil-military tension in the 2001 QDR’s creation can be seen by reading between the lines of the document itself. In his assessment of the 1997 QDR, Shalikashvili concludes by praising the report for its “innovative thinking” and giving it his “full support” (both in bold no less).¹⁶⁶ By contrast, in the 2001 QDR, then–Chairman of the Joint Chiefs GEN Henry Shelton simply concludes with the more muted, “The Services, Combatant Commanders and Joint Staff have worked with OSD to ensure that this QDR is founded on strategic requirements. The QDR provides a vision for how our forces will be employed now and into the future.”¹⁶⁷

Importantly, for all of Rumsfeld’s changes to the strategy process, many of the people wielding the pen remained the same as for the 1997 QDR. While many of the senior rungs of the Pentagon, including Warner and Flournoy, had left, Hoehn—the Principal Director for Strategy during the 1997 QDR—had assumed the role of Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, and one of his key deputies, Jim Thomas, was also a career civil servant who worked on the 1997 QDR.¹⁶⁸ While their presence could not resolve any of the debates, especially among the senior leadership, it still offered a degree of intellectual continuity across reviews.

In the end, the principals were still haggling over the details of the QDR when the September 11, 2001 (9/11), terrorist attacks occurred. On September 12, 2001, Rumsfeld turned to Hoehn on the steps of the still-smoldering Pentagon and told him to finish up the review. With a war to fight, Rumsfeld wanted to “clear the decks” of other bureaucratic requirements, such as defense reviews. As a result, Hoehn took home the draft QDR that weekend and tweaked it for the post-9/11 world. The report was published shortly thereafter on September 30, 2001.¹⁶⁹

Substantively, the 2001 QDR broke from its predecessors in several key ways. Rumsfeld feared that the bureaucracy would offer up the same worn-out solutions if it planned against scenarios, so he pushed for “capabilities-based” instead of “threat-based” planning.¹⁷⁰ By planning for a range of missions stressing a multitude of capabilities, DoD would be forced to consider a broader range of options than scenarios allowed. For similar reasons, the 2001 QDR also changed the force-sizing construct. Instead of two major theater wars, it based itself on four missions: defending the United States; deterring adversaries in Europe, North Asia, East Asia,

¹⁶⁵ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017.

¹⁶⁶ Cohen, 1997, p. 109.

¹⁶⁷ DoD, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington, D.C., September 30, 2001, p. 70.

¹⁶⁸ U.S. House of Representatives, “Jim Thomas,” webpage, undated.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 9, 2017.

¹⁷⁰ DoD, 2001, p. iv; interview with a former senior defense official, February 9, 2017.

and the Middle East; conducting major combat operations in two theaters (and occupying territory in one); and, finally, doing an unspecified set of smaller contingencies.¹⁷¹

The document also stressed military “transformation,” making the force “lighter, more lethal, more maneuverable, survivable, and more readily deployed and employed in an integrated fashion.”¹⁷² From an institutional standpoint, this focus put the conventional Army at a disadvantage. Legacy systems—such as the heavy Crusader mechanized artillery piece designed for fighting the Soviet forces in a land war in Europe—came under particular scrutiny.¹⁷³ The Army was also pressured to reduce its end strength and become the smaller, lighter force that Rumsfeld and Bush envisioned. Adding to the Army’s woes, its Chief of Staff GEN Eric Shinseki had a rocky personal relationship with Rumsfeld, contributing to the service’s challenges in advancing its interests.¹⁷⁴

The Air Force, by contrast, arguably had the strongest hand to play. Rumsfeld’s focus on speed, long-range strike capabilities, and low footprint should have played into the Air Force’s core strengths. The Air Force, however, focused on protecting the fifth-generation F-22 Raptor fighter.¹⁷⁵ According to multiple observers, this proved a mistake. Coming out of the Kosovo War a few years earlier, many in Congress and OSD were skeptical about the need for an advanced fighter aircraft.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, the Air Force’s advocacy for short-range fighters clashed with Rumsfeld’s vision of long-range strike capabilities.¹⁷⁷ If the Air Force had instead pushed for long-range bombers, some believe the service may have gotten more traction.¹⁷⁸

In the end, neither the Army nor the Air Force came out a clear winner or loser. For all the time and effort put into the process, the 2001 QDR fell flat for two reasons. The first—poor timing—was beyond anyone’s control. With the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the strategic environment and DoD’s focus shifted away from transformation to warfighting, overshadowing the principal theme of report. As Foreign Policy Research Institute defense analyst Michael Noonan noted, “the assumptions and recommendations of the QDR 2001, released shortly after 9/11, were poorly suited to the new realities.”¹⁷⁹ Theoretically, Rumsfeld could have asked Congress for an extension and rewritten the QDR to reshape DoD for the “Global War on Terrorism.” Instead, he chose expediency.

¹⁷¹ DoD, 2001, pp. 17–21.

¹⁷² DoD, 2001, p. 32.

¹⁷³ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 9, 2017.

¹⁷⁴ Correspondence with a defense think tank analyst, October 5, 2017.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with former senior defense officials, February 9, 2017; interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017.

¹⁷⁹ Michael P. Noonan, “The Quadrennial Defense Review and U.S. Defense Policy,” *Orbis*, Spring 2006, pp. 584–586.

The second major weakness of the QDR fell more under Rumsfeld's remit—specifically, the lack of real programmatic changes.¹⁸⁰ National Defense University professors Hans Binnendijk and Richard Kugler, for example, noted, “The new strategy articulates a sound strategic vision, but for all its conceptual strengths, it does not offer a well-developed roadmap for implementation at home and abroad.”¹⁸¹ While Rumsfeld and his successor, Robert Gates, eventually cut a host of Army and Air Force programs for failing to be transformational, including Crusader, all these programs survived the QDR process. For all Rumsfeld's willingness to push, the review—as a consensus-driven document—proved unadept in its efforts at making big decisions and proved “a sign of failed [process].”¹⁸²

The Quadrennial Defense Review (2006)

By the time the 2006 QDR kicked off in fall 2004, the United States found itself in a dramatically different strategic position than just a few years earlier.¹⁸³ The Global War on Terrorism was at its height and the U.S. military was fighting two difficult and increasingly controversial wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. While transforming the military still remained a priority at least on paper, counterinsurgency and not losing the current wars were front and center.¹⁸⁴

The players behind the review also changed. Wolfowitz was gone, and while Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England took an interest in the review, Rumsfeld—coming to the end of his tenure as Secretary of Defense—“did not want to rock the boat” with anything in the 2006 QDR.¹⁸⁵ Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman also prioritized other obligations over the QDR.¹⁸⁶ Instead, much of the work fell to Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Ryan Henry and Jim Thomas, who became Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Resources and Plans and Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy (respectively) after Hoehn departed for the RAND Corporation.¹⁸⁷ As with previous reviews,

¹⁸⁰ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017.

¹⁸¹ Binnendijk and Kugler, 2002, p. 132.

¹⁸² Interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017.

¹⁸³ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 21, 2017.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 10, 2017; interview with a former senior defense official February 17, 2017; and interview with a former senior defense official, March 27, 2017.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 10, 2017; interview with a former senior defense official February 17, 2017; and interview with a former senior defense official, March 27, 2017.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 21, 2017; and interview with a former senior defense official March 27, 2017.

Henry and Thomas also worked closely with the PA&E and the Joint Staff.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, the sense among those who worked on this QDR was that it was “basically, a big report to Congress,” rather an opportunity to fundamentally reshape defense policy.¹⁸⁹

This lack of senior-leader attention, arguably, limited the scope of the ultimate report. While Henry wanted “to ensure that the QDR can . . . be an engine of continued transformation” building on the work of the 2001 QDR, this did not happen.¹⁹⁰ For example, some inside OSD’s strategy office wanted to look at how DoD’s budget aligned with the strategy, but the services resisted for fear of ceding control of their budgets to OSD.¹⁹¹ Similarly, proposals—such as to shift the Navy to more submarines, the Air Force to more long-range strikes, the Army to more trainers, and the Marine Corps away from amphibious warfare—met stiff opposition at the four-star level. Without Rumsfeld forcing the issue, these initiatives ultimately faded.¹⁹² Even Henry acknowledged that some “issues may not be ripe for decision in February 2006 when the QDR is transmitted to Congress, so it may be appropriate to develop work plans and decision roadmaps that would go on past the formal QDR process.”¹⁹³ As Flournoy, then a defense analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, remarked, the “lack of ownership at the top . . . constrained the extent to which the review was able to get senior leaders to make tough decisions.”¹⁹⁴

Without senior-level leadership forcing hard decisions, many of the 2006 QDR’s major new policy proposals came from circumventing the process, rather from the bureaucracy itself. Special operations forces saw a 15-percent increase.¹⁹⁵ The Air Force was tasked to “develop a new land-based, penetrating long-range strike capability” by 2018, while the Navy’s Unmanned Combat Air System also received a significant boost.¹⁹⁶ More importantly, however, these ideas were developed by the review’s “red team”—a semi-independent team that looked out for ONA.¹⁹⁷ Led by ONA Director Andrew Marshall and Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments analyst (and future Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low

¹⁸⁸ Interviews with a former senior defense official, February 21, 2017; and interview with a former senior defense official March 27, 2017.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 21, 2017.

¹⁹⁰ Ryan Henry, “Defense Transformation and the 2005 Quadrennial Defense Review,” *Parameters*, Vol. 35, No. 4, Winter 2005–2006, p. 5.

¹⁹¹ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 10, 2017.

¹⁹² Interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017.

¹⁹³ Henry, 2005, p. 8.

¹⁹⁴ Michèle A. Flournoy, “Did the Pentagon Get the Quadrennial Defense Review Right?” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 2, Spring 2006, p. 80.

¹⁹⁵ DoD, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington, D.C., February 6, 2006, p. 5.

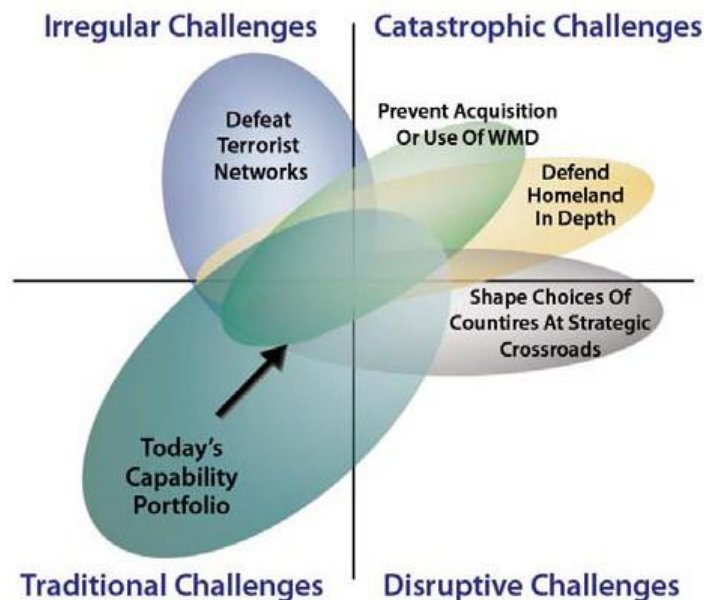
¹⁹⁶ DoD, 2006, p. 46.

¹⁹⁷ Natalya Anfilofyeva, “DOD Begins QDR without Red Team, Increasing Attention on NDP,” *Inside Defense*, September 26, 2013; interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017.

Intensity Conflict) Michael Vickers, the red team focused on antiaccess threats and developed some highly controversial proposals, including cutting one-third of short-range fighter aircraft.¹⁹⁸ As Flournoy remarked, “the review’s generally modest programmatic recommendations are contrasted with the more sweeping vision offered by a Pentagon-commissioned ‘red team.’”¹⁹⁹

Perhaps the most memorable aspect of the 2006 QDR was its depiction of threats in a neat two-by-two matrix measuring the respective likelihood and vulnerability posed by different threats. Layered on top of this “quad chart” (see Figure 2.1) were Rumsfeld’s four focus areas: (1) “defeat terrorist networks,” (2) “prevent acquisition or use of WMD [weapons of mass destruction],” (3) “defend the homeland in depth,” and (4) “shape choices of countries at strategic crossroads” (e.g., China and India).²⁰⁰ To the chart’s supporters, the framework offered simplicity. *Washington Post* journalist David Ignatius, for example, proclaimed in his regular column that the quad chart was “a powerful intellectual weapon” that showed how “the imminent danger to America came from [al-Qa’ida], not from a rising conventional nuclear power such as

Figure 2.1. The Quad Chart



SOURCE: DoD, 2006, p. 19.

¹⁹⁸ Stephen Daggett, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2010: Overview and Implications for National Security Planning*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, R41250, May 17, 2010, p. 24; White House, “Michael George Vickers—Department of Defense,” webpage, undated.

¹⁹⁹ Flournoy, 2006, p. 76.

²⁰⁰ DoD, 2006, p. 19.

China.”²⁰¹ Others, however, countered that the framework was less simple than it seemed. Flournoy, for example, argued,

As more and more questions were tucked into the framework of the four core challenges, the review’s scope expanded to include dozens if not hundreds of issues, ranging from the future of the military health system to reforming the acquisition process to overhauling professional military education; ultimately, the review lost its strategic focus.²⁰²

The 2006 QDR did notch some smaller, if less apparent, successes. Unlike the 2001 QDR, the 2006 QDR tied its objectives to “roadmaps” for the services, the Joint Staff, and OSD that could turn policy into action.²⁰³ The 2006 review also earned notoriety for its force-planning framework—nicknamed the “Michelin Man” for its graphical similarity to the cartoon figure in the Michelin tire commercials—that showed how the military must prepare for a range of missions, including homeland defense, irregular warfare, and conventional campaigns (see Figure 2.2).²⁰⁴ Even the critics admitted, “The new force-planning framework should also be praised for reintegrating notions of peacetime engagement, as well as shaping into U.S. defense policy.”²⁰⁵

Figure 2.2. The “Michelin Man”



SOURCE: DoD, 2006, p. 38.

²⁰¹ David Ignatius, “Grand Vision vs. Patchwork,” *Washington Post*, October 7, 2005.

²⁰² Flournoy, 2006, p. 72.

²⁰³ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 21, 2017.

²⁰⁴ DoD, 2006, p. 38; Gunzinger, 2006, p. 9.

²⁰⁵ Flournoy, 2006, p. 74.

For the most part, the consensus among the defense policy analysts was that the 2006 QDR ducked the hard questions.²⁰⁶ Defense analyst Benjamin Schreer argued, “If strategy is ultimately about making choices, the QDR utterly failed in that it did not provide a vision that links challenges, capabilities and budget in a coherent way.”²⁰⁷ Similarly, Air Force Association analyst John Correll argued, “It made no wholesale shift of end strength or resources from one service to another. It left key development programs alive, although reduced and stretched.”²⁰⁸ Similarly, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment president Andrew Krepinevich, who helped with the QDR, admitted, “In a sense, a lot of these tough choices are kicked down the road.”²⁰⁹ Flournoy may have put it best:

Overall, the 2006 QDR fell far short of its objectives. Rather than being “a fulcrum of transition to a post–September 11 world” or “the most fundamental review of the U.S. military posture since the dawn of the Cold War,” as was originally anticipated, the QDR made only a few significant adjustments to the U.S. defense program. At the end of the day, much of the strategy was lost somewhere in translation.²¹⁰

To a degree, DoD senior leadership acknowledged that the review avoided big decisions. In his generally laudatory assessment, then–Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Peter Pace argued, “We cannot accurately characterize the security environment of 2025; therefore, we must hedge against this uncertainty by identifying and developing a broad range of capabilities.”²¹¹ In other words, because the future is unknowable, DoD needs to try to do everything. Even the normally combative Rumsfeld seemed resigned to the fact that the QDR would not dramatically reshape DoD, calling it “a waypoint along a continuum of change that began some years past and will continue some years hence.”²¹²

The Quadrennial Defense Review (2010)

The 2010 QDR presents a hybrid case of a first- and second-term defense review. On the one hand, like the BUR and the 2001 QDR, it had some of the markings of a first-term administration defense review. Obama defense officials were still settling into office and the review provided—according to some of its participants—an opportunity for “storming and forming” the policy

²⁰⁶ Noonan, 2006, p. 589.

²⁰⁷ Benjamin Schreer, “Dead Upon Arrival? The Quadrennial Defense Review Report,” *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 151, No. 2, April 2006, p. 34.

²⁰⁸ John T. Correll, *In the Wake of the QDR: The Quadrennial Defense Review and its Consequences*, Arlington, Va.: Air Force Association, 2006, p. 26.

²⁰⁹ David S. Cloud, “Pentagon Scales Back Review of Military Strategy,” *New York Times*, February 1, 2006.

²¹⁰ Flournoy, 2006, p. 81.

²¹¹ DoD, 2006, p. A-6.

²¹² Cloud, 2006.

process.²¹³ At the same time, however, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates was a holdover from the Bush administration. As a result, Gates made a host of major programmatic decisions—which included ending the production of the Air Force’s F-22 Raptor, restructuring and ultimately ending the Army’s Future Combat System, and terminating the Marine Corps VH-71 presidential helicopter—in 2009, long before the review concluded or even fully spun up.²¹⁴ In this sense, some observers believed that the FY 2010 budget submission was a more important (or at least more consequential) strategy document than the actual 2010 QDR.²¹⁵

Aside from Gates himself, the 2010 QDR featured many veterans of previous reviews. While the senior Bush administration political appointees were gone, President Barack Obama appointed 1997 QDR veteran Flournoy as the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, who ran the review along with then–Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Gen. James Cartwright.²¹⁶ Kathleen Hicks, a fellow Center for Strategic and International Studies alumna who had served in various capacities in the Office of Under Secretary of Defense for Policy from 1993 to 2006 (including working with Ochmanek and Hoehn), was Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Force Development.²¹⁷ Even at the lower rungs, the 2010 QDR maintained some continuity. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy Amanda Dory—a career civil servant—had previously worked on the 2006 QDR.²¹⁸ Even the newly appointed Principal Director for Strategy, Daniel Chiu, had previously worked on defense planning issues at the Institute for Defense Analyses.²¹⁹

Unsurprisingly, given the overlap in personnel, the 2010 QDR bore similarities to the 1997 QDR—with working groups formed around functional areas, such as a high-end adversary team, irregular warfare, and homeland defense.²²⁰ While there was broad representation across DoD, most of the analytical work fell to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, the Joint Staff, and the Office of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation (CAPE).²²¹ Disputes between members were kicked up to various steering groups, then to the Deputy Secretary of Defense and Vice

²¹³ Interview with a former senior defense official, March 23, 2017.

²¹⁴ Robert Gates, “Defense Budget Recommendation Statement,” Arlington, Va.: U.S. Department of Defense, April 6, 2009; interview with a former senior defense official, February 13, 2017.

²¹⁵ Interview with a senior general officer, January 16, 2017.

²¹⁶ Center for a New American Security, “Michèle Flournoy,” webpage, undated.

²¹⁷ Center for Strategic and International Studies, “Kathleen H. Hicks,” webpage, undated.

²¹⁸ DoD, “Amanda J. Dory,” webpage, undated-a.

²¹⁹ Institute for Defense Analyses, “Daniel Y. Chiu,” webpage, undated.

²²⁰ Interview with a former senior defense official, March 23, 2017; interview with a former senior defense official, April 3, 2017.

²²¹ Interview with a former senior defense official, January 17, 2017. In 2009, the Weapon Systems Acquisition Reform Act created the CAPE organization and the position of Director of Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation for DoD. That same legislation transferred the staff of PA&E to CAPE.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and, ultimately, to Gates for a decision.²²² Although his memoirs make scant mention of the 2010 QDR, according to firsthand accounts, Gates was relatively engaged from the start to finish.²²³

Substantively, the 2010 QDR also bore similarities to the Bush-era QDRs. Although the 2010 QDR abandoned the 2006 QDR's Michelin Man, it assessed the force against a variety of different scenarios, including conflict with two regional aggressors and also long-range deterrence, counterinsurgency, and extended support to civil authorities in the United States.²²⁴ It also shared the 2006 QDR's focus on prioritization of irregular warfare, special operations forces, and intelligence.²²⁵ Gates notes in his memoirs that "both the budget and the QDR sent a message that prevailing in the wars we were already in had to be our highest priority."²²⁶ As if to reinforce this point, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs ADM Michael Mullen similarly begins his assessment of the QDR with a discussion titled "Winning Today's Fight: Vital Interests in the Middle East and South Asia."²²⁷

As with the 2001 and 2006 QDRs, however, the 2010 QDR also pushed more-conventional capabilities. It included a focus on ways to "deter and defeat aggression antiaccess environments"—signaling out North Korea, Iran, and China as potential adversaries, themes that Mullen echoed in his assessment of the QDR.²²⁸ And like the 2006 review, the 2010 QDR reached similar conclusions about some of the same solutions—such as a renewed emphasis on long-range strike capabilities.²²⁹

Finally, like its predecessors, the 2010 QDR was met with widespread criticism. The political right accused the review of underplaying threats and not addressing them well. Talent and Eaglen, both then at the conservative Heritage Foundation, argued that

The Pentagon's QDR does not adequately identify the panoply of risks confronting the United States. Further, the Pentagon's strategy does not address the elephant in the room: The U.S. military is already too small and its equipment is already too old to fully answer the nation's call today, much less tomorrow.²³⁰

²²² Interview with a former senior defense official, April 3, 2017.

²²³ Robert Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014, pp. 456–457; interview with a former senior defense official, January 17, 2017.

²²⁴ DoD, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington, D.C., February 2010, pp. 42–43; interview with a former senior defense official, January 17, 2017. The exact scenarios—along with much of the analysis—were kept classified.

²²⁵ DoD, 2010, pp. 21–23.

²²⁶ DoD, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014*, Washington, D.C., March 4, 2014, p. 457.

²²⁷ DoD, 2010, p. 101.

²²⁸ DoD, 2010, pp. 31, 103.

²²⁹ DoD, 2010, p. 32.

²³⁰ Mackenzie Eaglen and James Talent, *Shaping the Future: The Urgent Need to Match Military Modernization to National Commitments*, Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, Background No. 2488, November 4, 2010, p. 4.

Indeed, this became the principal argument of the 2010 QDR-IP—on which both Talent and Eaglen served—as discussed in the subsequent section.

By contrast, the political left accused the QDR of “failing to match resources with priorities.”²³¹ Lawrence Korb, Sean Duggan, and Laura Conley of the liberal Center for American Progress argued that the QDR failed to fully account for climate change, address the rising costs of military personnel, and reallocate resources away from “threats from a bygone era.”²³² Lexington Institute defense analyst Daniel Gouré similarly commented,

So, the 2010 QDR is thoughtful, balanced and internally consistent. It is also irrelevant. It fails to recognize the dominant reality of our time which is that the United States is out of money. . . . The QDR is irrelevant because it fails to make any significant strategic choices. It is merely rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic into a more pleasing configuration.²³³

Even Gates acknowledges that while he “tried hard” to avoid “the blandness that typically characterizes documents based on bureaucratic consensus” and the pitfall of producing a strategy detached from budget realities, he achieved only “incomplete success” in 2010.²³⁴

According to the QDR’s critics, the lack of budget pressure contributed to the lack of clear priorities. As Korb, Duggan, and Conley argued,

Indeed, there is no incentive for DoD to prioritize because the administration’s FY 2011 defense request, which was developed and released simultaneously with the QDR, increased the baseline budget by nearly \$20 billion—or 1.8 percent above the rate of inflation. . . . In this situation, there is no realistic downward pressure on the department to make difficult trade-offs.²³⁵

Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment analysts and former George W. Bush administration political appointees Gunzinger and Thomas similarly note that while “this QDR follows the sharpest economic downturn since the Great Depression,” DoD was spared much of the budgetary pain.²³⁶ “The result is that the preexisting strategy-to-program mismatch will persist, as well as a program-funding mismatch, preventing a badly needed reallocation of resources to higher priority mission areas identified in the QDR,” they wrote.²³⁷

²³¹ Lawrence Korb, Sean Duggan, and Laura Conley, “Quadrennial Defense Review Fails to Match Resources to Priorities,” Center for American Progress, February 4, 2010.

²³² Korb, Duggan, and Conley, 2010.

²³³ Daniel Gouré, “2010 QDR: Thoughtful, Reasonable and Irrelevant,” Arlington, Va.: Lexington Institute, January 28, 2010.

²³⁴ Gates, 2014, p. 456.

²³⁵ Korb, Duggan, and Conley, 2010.

²³⁶ Mark Gunzinger and Jim Thomas, *The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review: An Initial Assessment*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, Background, February 2010, p. 2.

²³⁷ Gunzinger and Thomas, 2010, p. 11.

Gates, by contrast, vigorously defended his review from the charges of failing to embrace fiscal reality by the left or strategic reality on the right. He argued that both the 2010 QDR and his budget were “shaped by a bracing dose of realism—realism with regard to risk, realism with regard to resources.”²³⁸ Countering the critique that his plan would leave DoD unprepared to fight future conflicts, he noted that half of the 2010 budget still focused on weapons for conventional threats.²³⁹ As for the claims of his failure to account for fiscal reality, Gates also noted his attempts to cancel key weapon programs (albeit before the QDR) and rein in cost-overruns in others, such as the Joint Strike Fighter. He also pointed to the fact that Congress saved some weapon programs—such as the C-17 transport aircraft and the alternate engine for the F-35—from the chopping block.²⁴⁰ Ultimately, if the 2010 QDR and the budget fell short of addressing fiscal reality, Congress was at least partially to blame.

The Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel (2010)

While DoD labored on the QDR, Congress had its own ideas about the direction of strategy. Since the 1997 QDR, Congress—and, specifically, the HASC—had grown increasingly disappointed with the process and wanted to get a “true strategy,” based on a frank assessment of U.S. security needs rather than simply a justification of the status quo.²⁴¹ Republican defense hawks worried that the Obama administration would use the QDR to cut defense in favor of domestic priorities. Consequently, they decided to revive a concept from the 1997 NDP—an independent panel to review the QDR’s work—but unlike the 1997 NDP, Congress would choose the members.²⁴²

The QDR-IP—as it became known—was stood up under the leadership of Stephen Hadley, who had been National Security Adviser for the George W. Bush administration, and William Perry, the former Clinton administration Secretary of Defense. While the congressional legislation called for a total of eight panel members (two appointed by the chairmen and ranking members of the HASC and SASC), the actual QDR-IP’s panelists grew to 20 members not including the chairmen—including former general officers, senior policymakers, and defense analysts—but with a rather small staff.²⁴³ According to multiple participants in the process, the

²³⁸ Christopher Drew and Thom Shanker, “Gates Shakes Up Leadership for F-35,” *New York Times*, February 1, 2010.

²³⁹ Drew and Shanker, 2010.

²⁴⁰ Drew and Shanker, 2010.

²⁴¹ Interview with a former senior congressional staffer, February 1, 2017.

²⁴² Interview with a former senior congressional staffer, February 1, 2017.

²⁴³ Hadley and Perry, 2010, p. 130. Ultimately, Stephen J. Hadley and William Perry chaired the panel. The other members were Richard Armitage, J. D. Crouch, Charles Curtis, Rudy deLeon, Joan Dempsey, Eric Edelman, Sherri Goodman, David Jeremiah, George Joulwan, John Keane, Richard Kohn, John Lehman, Alice Maroni, John Nagl, Robert Scales, James Talent, Paul Van Riper, and Larry Welch.

organization was top-heavy, with the multitude of panelists making the process unwieldy and the lack of staff limiting its analytical capability.²⁴⁴

The QDR-IP's structure, in turn, shaped the panel's ultimate report. Early on, the panelists believed that they lacked the staff to match the actual QDR's scenario-based modeling and in-depth programmatic analysis.²⁴⁵ As one staff member put it, we "can't out-PA&E [the] PA&E."²⁴⁶ Instead, the panelists interviewed DoD's senior military and civilian leadership. At least one panelist recounts that then-Chief of Naval Operations ADM Gary Roughead made a particular impression when he stated that he could not sustain his presence in Asia based on the current ship-building levels.²⁴⁷ By contrast, the other service chiefs seemed to be "pulling their punches," presumably so as not to get crosswise with their civilian masters.²⁴⁸ By contrast, from the perspective of one of the people who testified before the QDR-IP, the panelists and the staff's questions seemed superficial and "at the 40,000-foot level."²⁴⁹

Turning testimony into concrete, unanimous policy recommendations proved more problematic. In the end, many of the QDR-IP's recommendations were driven by a comparatively small subset of the actual panelists.²⁵⁰ Without a robust force-modeling capability, the QDR-IP settled on the BUR's force-size numbers as the floor for each of the services, on the basic assumption that the world had only grown more dangerous since the BUR was published in 1993.²⁵¹ Adopting the BUR's numbers also made internal political sense: They were higher than present 2010 figures (making the Republican defense hawks on the QDR-IP happy) but also resonated with Perry as a Clinton administration alumni.²⁵²

Unsurprisingly, given that QDR-IP was as much a political document as an analytical one, views of the document sharply diverged across the political spectrum. For those in favor of a smaller defense budget, the QDR-IP was "awful" and abounded with "intellectual laziness" because "it recommended buying more of pretty much every weapon system or at least replacing

²⁴⁴ Interviews with participants in the QDR-IP, February 1, 2017; February 21, 2017.

²⁴⁵ Interviews with participants in the QDR-IP, February 21, 2017; March 27, 2017.

²⁴⁶ Interviews with a participant in the QDR-IP, February 21, 2017. PA&E—later CAPE—is charged with providing "timely, insightful and unbiased analysis on resource allocation and cost estimation problems to deliver the optimum portfolio of military capabilities through efficient and effective use of each taxpayer dollar." (CAPE, "Home," webpage, undated).

²⁴⁷ Interview with a participant in the QDR-IP, March 27, 2017.

²⁴⁸ Interview with a participant in the QDR-IP, March 27, 2017.

²⁴⁹ Interview with a former senior defense official, January 17, 2017.

²⁵⁰ Interviews with a participant in the QDR-IP, February 21, 2017.

²⁵¹ Hadley and Perry, 2010, p. 47; interview with a participant in the QDR-IP, February 1, 2017; interview with a participant in the QDR-IP, February 21, 2017.

²⁵² Interview with a participant in the QDR-IP, March 27, 2017.

the current inventory on a one-to-one basis.”²⁵³ One defense analyst, writing in the left-leaning *Huffington Post*, put it more colorfully in an article titled “More Swill from the Pentagon Budget Busters.”²⁵⁴ Of course, defense hawks viewed the QDR-IP in a very different light—as a useful battering ram to push for larger defense budgets now cloaked in a bipartisan mantle. Conservatives—from pundit Charles Krauthammer to U.S. Representative Duncan Hunter—often turned to QDR-IP’s numbers as intellectual leverage against defense cuts or as fodder in the 2012 presidential campaign.²⁵⁵ In this sense then, the QDR-IP could be considered a success.

The Defense Strategic Guidance (2012)

In the history of defense reviews, the Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG) of 2012 is unique. For the first time since the BUR 20 years earlier, the executive branch undertook this review—not because of a congressional directive but on its own initiative. Processwise, it was a top-down document, written at the most-senior ranks of DoD and the White House. The DSG was also considerably shorter—by a factor of more than tenfold—than most QDRs. Finally, it made clear decisions about priorities in a way few of its predecessors ever did.

The direct impetus for the DSG was the Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011, which mandated deep, automatic cuts to both defense and domestic spending as part of deficit-reduction measures if Congress could not agree on an alternative budget solution.²⁵⁶ The cuts meant that DoD could not afford the current military posture. The United States also appeared to be at a geostrategic crossroads. As President Obama wrote in the introduction,

Our Nation is at a moment of transition. Thanks to the extraordinary sacrifices of our men and women in uniform, we have responsibly ended the war in Iraq, put al-Qa’ida on the path to defeat—including delivering justice to Osama Bin Laden—and made significant progress in Afghanistan.²⁵⁷

The question was what came next.

Obama took a personal interest in this question. Unlike the QDRs, the DSG largely bypassed the layers of bureaucracy. Instead, Obama hosted a series of meetings with then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, Deputy Secretary of Defense Ash Carter, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Flournoy, the Joints Chiefs of Staff, and the Combatant Commanders to talk through a

²⁵³ Greg Grant, “Independent QDR Panel Recommends Buying More of Everything, Increasing Defense Budget,” *Defense Tech*, July 29, 2010.

²⁵⁴ Winslow T. Wheeler, “More Swill from the Pentagon Budget Busters,” *Huffington Post*, August 5, 2010.

²⁵⁵ Duncan Hunter, “Defense Cuts Hurt U.S. in Long Run,” *Politico*, November 16, 2011; Charles Krauthammer, “Obama Lost the 3rd Debate,” *Orange County Register*, October 26, 2012.

²⁵⁶ Interview with a former senior defense official, March 23, 2017.

²⁵⁷ DoD, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, Washington, D.C., January 2012, p. i.

new approach.²⁵⁸ No other defense review in the past quarter century arguably had more direct presidential involvement. And when the DSG was ultimately published, it included a signed letter of introduction from Obama himself—an unprecedented move for a sitting president. According to some observers, the DSG simply would not have been possible without this level of direct presidential involvement in forging consensus and in underwriting the political risks associated with its decisions.²⁵⁹

The DSG made several big decisions. First, it directed that the United States “will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region” and away from Europe and the Middle East.²⁶⁰ Second, it changed the two-war standard—part of the force-sizing construct since the BUR—to “secur[ing] territory and populations and facilitat[ing] a transition to stable governance” in one region, while “denying the objectives of—or imposing unacceptable costs on—an opportunistic aggressor in a second region.”²⁶¹ Third, the DSG called for a tacit reduction of ground forces, claiming that “U.S. forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations.”²⁶²

In the end, the DSG got many of its major assumptions wrong. It assumed, for example, that European countries were—and would remain—“producers of security rather than consumers of it,” just a couple years shy of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.²⁶³ Similarly, it assumed the United States could “transition out of Iraq and draw down in Afghanistan,” neither of which proved to true.²⁶⁴ More broadly, the DSG assumed that the United States could avoid “prolonged stability operations” and concentrate on Asia—arguably, both heroic assumptions.²⁶⁵

In other cases, the DSG was simply inarticulate. This may be most evident in its reformulation of the two-war force-sizing construct. The shift to securing territory in one region, while “denying the objectives of or imposing unacceptable costs” on an adversary in another

²⁵⁸ Interview with a former senior defense official, March 23, 2017.

²⁵⁹ Interview with a former senior defense official, March 23, 2017; Cancian et al., 2017, p. 115. Other defense officials counter that this move may have perversely, if advertently, raised the expectations for senior-level involvement in future defense reviews, making it harder to gain consensus when the President and Secretary of Defense are less engaged. Correspondence with a former senior defense office, September 29, 2017.

²⁶⁰ DoD, 2012, p. 2.

²⁶¹ DoD, 2012, p. 4.

²⁶² DoD, 2012, p. 6.

²⁶³ DoD, 2012, p. 3.

²⁶⁴ DoD, 2012, p. 7.

²⁶⁵ In their defense, some the policymakers who crafted the document argue that no one could have foreseen some of these turns in geostrategic events (interview with a former senior defense official, May 23, 2017). In academic circles, the question of whether the United States could adopt a less-activist foreign policy is far more in dispute than in policy circles. For an example of the argument in favor of an American foreign policy that avoids long-term, large-scale stability operations, see Micah Zenko and Michael A. Cohen, “Clear and Present Safety,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 2, March–April 2012, pp. 79–93; Barry R. Posen, “Pull Back: The Case for a Less Activist Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 1, January–February 2013, pp. 116–128; John J. Mearsheimer, “America Unhinged,” *The National Interest*, Vol. 129, January–February 2014, pp. 9–30.

region was the brainchild of then–Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff ADM James Winnefeld.²⁶⁶ In theory, the change merely codified what had been long true: The United States could not simultaneously defeat two major powers in large-scale ground wars and, instead, needed to settle for less maximalist objectives.²⁶⁷ The shift in terminology, however, caused—as Brookings Institution defense analyst Michael O’Hanlon noted—“considerable confusion.”²⁶⁸ Even two years later, many inside the Pentagon, let alone the general public, still did not know “what this administration or the Pentagon considers an adequate ground combat force for the nation.”²⁶⁹

Finally, when the end-state was clear, some suggest that the DSG’s process complicated its implementation. Because the DSG—unlike the QDR—privileged speed over inclusivity, the bureaucracy was sometimes left wondering how to execute the guidance. One former defense official noted that “while [the process] enabled timely senior leader decisions, it also resulted in real problems implementing the DSG’s signature initiative—the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region—because few in DoD knew the contours and metrics behind it.”²⁷⁰ Similarly, unlike the QDRs, the DSG avoided any mention—let alone tasking—of the services by name, leaving its overarching guidance open to interpretation. In some cases, such as the Air Force, the service could reasonably justify many of its preexisting priorities—such as the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, next-generation bomber, and KC-46 refueling tanker—under the DSG’s general guidance to focus on antiaccess/area denial threats.²⁷¹ In other cases, the lack of clarity opened the way for bureaucratic infighting, especially once presidential attention turned elsewhere. As noted in the next section, this was particularly true when DoD later tried to implement some the DSG’s measures—specifically regarding no longer sizing for long-term stability operations.

Despite these issues, many consider the DSG as the high point for defense strategy during the Obama administration and one of the more influential documents of the post–Cold War period. For better or worse, the pivot, or rebalance, to the Asia-Pacific region defined a pillar of the

²⁶⁶ DoD, 2012, p. 4; interview with a former senior defense official, January 17, 2017.

²⁶⁷ Interview with a former senior defense official, January 17, 2017.

²⁶⁸ Michael O’Hanlon, “Sizing U.S. Ground Forces: From “2 Wars” to “1 War + 2 Missions,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 1, Spring 2014, p. 152.

²⁶⁹ O’Hanlon, 2014, p. 153.

²⁷⁰ Correspondence with a former senior defense official, September 29, 2017.

²⁷¹ See DoD, 2012, pp. 2, 8. In February 2012, a month after the DSG’s publication, the Air Force published a service-specific companion piece, which reiterates its budget priorities (see Michael Donley and Norton Schwartz, “Air Force Priorities for a New Strategy with Constrained Budgets,” U.S. Air Force, February 1, 2012, p. 4). Interestingly, none of the DSG’s new initiatives—such as the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region, the new defeat-denied force-sizing construct, or the shift away from prolonged stability operations—are mentioned in this Air Force document by name.

administration's foreign policy.²⁷² While they disagreed with many of the DSG's findings, even Republican policymakers privately credit the document for getting some of the big foreign policy brushstrokes—especially about the increasing importance of Asia—correct.²⁷³ Moreover, they credit the DSG with providing meaningful guidance about what the military should and should not plan for, a rare feature in defense reviews.²⁷⁴ In this respect, the DSG counts in the success column.

The Quadrennial Defense Review (2014)

Unlike the DSG, the 2014 QDR was marked by relatively little senior-level interest and White House involvement.²⁷⁵ Many DoD senior leaders, likewise, were less enthused about conducting yet another defense review. From their standpoint, the DSG's broad strategy still held true and the 2013 Strategic Choices and Management Review (SCMR) outlined the specifics of how DoD would respond to the BCA's cuts.²⁷⁶ For many, the QDR seemed a duplicative effort at best.

Still, DoD was legally required to produce a QDR, and there were also some substantive benefits for conducting another review. It provided an opportunity to flesh out the DSG's relevance (particularly toward China and other major threats), to clean up continued confusion over the DSG's force-sizing construct of “defeat and deny,” and to explain the impact of BCA on the force.²⁷⁷ In this sense, QDR became—in the words of one senior defense policymaker—“a platform to fight budget battles.”²⁷⁸

Despite some personnel turnover, the 2014 QDR still enjoyed intellectual continuity from previous reviews. With the end of the first term of the Obama administration, many of the senior defense policy hands—including Flournoy and Hicks—returned to the private sector. Their replacements, however, often came from within the administration. Christine Wormuth had been

²⁷² See, for example, Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, “Far Eastern Promises,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 3, May–June 2014, pp. 106–116; Robert Ross, “The Problem with the Pivot: Obama's New Asia Policy Is Unnecessary and Counterproductive,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 6, November–December 2012, pp. 70–82.

²⁷³ Interview with a former senior defense official, March 27, 2017.

²⁷⁴ Interview with a former Republican congressional staffer and defense analyst, February 1, 2017.

²⁷⁵ Some argue that the DSG had the unintended effect of increasing expectations about the level of presidential interest. Consequently, when this level of presidential engagement was not forthcoming during the 2014 QDR, the competing factions within DoD had a freer hand to pursue their own interests, thereby intensifying the bureaucratic challenges of the review. Correspondence with a senior defense official, September 29, 2017.

²⁷⁶ Interview with a former senior defense official, January 17, 2017; interview with a former senior defense official, April 3, 2017.

²⁷⁷ Interview with a former senior defense official, April 3, 2017.

²⁷⁸ DoD, 2014, p. 64; interview with a former senior defense official, April 3, 2017. In his assessment of the QDR, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs GEN Martin Dempsey uses this QDR in precisely this way—to underscore the risks of the BCA and sequestration.

Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and U.S. Security Affairs in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy and Senior Director for Defense Policy and Strategy on the National Security Council staff during the Obama administration. Wormuth then became Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Force Development in August 2012 and Under Secretary of Defense of Defense for Policy in June 2014.²⁷⁹ At the lower ranks, Chiu, the former Principal Director for Strategy, was promoted to Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, while Clinton strategy veterans Ochmanek and Bob Scher served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Development and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Plans, respectively.²⁸⁰

With sequestration now in full swing, the fight for resources proved particularly ferocious. In order to secure as much budgetary relief as possible, the Joint Staff and the services wanted to portray as bleak a situation as possible and questioned every analytical assumption, such as the ability to swing forces between two theaters in a two-war scenario, which could result in them losing resources.²⁸¹ From their perspective, political appointees in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy did not want the President or Secretary of Defense in a position in which they would have to publicly admit an inability to support a two-war construct.²⁸²

The Army fought the QDR particularly hard. With the DSG's guidance to no longer size for long-term, large-scale stability operations, much of the analytical basis for Army force structure disappeared. CAPE (the successor to PA&E), in particular, floated plans to reduce the service's active component end strength to 420,000, if not lower—some 170,000 fewer soldiers than the Army's authorized strength at the height of the Iraq War (although there is some dispute about how seriously this reduction was considered). As a result, Chief of Staff of the Army GEN Raymond Odierno fought every assumption—such as how many troops it requires to secure suspected WMD sites to what sort of postwar stabilization requirement would follow many of the scenarios—in an attempt to protect Army structure.²⁸³

The other services, by contrast, proved less combative. The pivot to the Asia-Pacific region—especially its *de facto* focus on China and the more high-end, antiaccess/area denial type of threats—favored the Navy's and Air Force's equities, given that those theaters' maritime and air-centric terrain, respectively.²⁸⁴ The review ultimately reiterated DoD's commitment to three

²⁷⁹ DoD, "Christine E Wormuth," webpage, undated-b.

²⁸⁰ Institute for Defense Analyses, undated.

²⁸¹ Interview with a former senior defense official, April 3, 2017.

²⁸² Interview with a former senior defense official, April 3, 2017.

²⁸³ Interview with a former senior defense official, April 3, 2017. Other former senior defense officials argued that the realistic floor for the Army's end strength was only 420,000, not 335,000 (correspondence with a former senior defense official, September 29, 2017). No matter the precise number, the overall point—that steep cuts in the Army's proposed end strength led it to fight the QDR's assumptions—remains the same.

²⁸⁴ DoD, 2014, p. 6; correspondence with a former senior defense official, September 29, 2017.

key Air Force modernization priorities, specifically the F-35 joint strike fighter, the KC-46A next-generation tanker/cargo aircraft, and a new long-range strike bomber.²⁸⁵ Conversely, the Marine Corps also faced the prospect of significant end-strength reductions (albeit less draconian). However, instead of fighting the cuts like the Army did, the Marine Corps decided to get out ahead of the reductions and proactively offer a plan for how it would absorb the budget cuts.²⁸⁶

Ultimately, the 2014 QDR proved to be a compromise. From the beginning of the document, it highlights “significant impacts from the \$487 billion, ten-year cut in spending due to caps instituted by the Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011.”²⁸⁷ While it recommended cuts across all the services, they were not as severe as some originally suggested. Even under sequestration, the active component Army would only shrink to between 440,000 and 450,000 soldiers.²⁸⁸ Despite the earlier misgivings about the defeat-and-deny major regional contingency, the 2014 QDR maintained it as a force-planning construct, which it tried and ultimately failed to clarify.²⁸⁹ Similarly, like the DSG outlined, the rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region also figured prominently—although China itself received only a handful of passing references. The most noteworthy addition in the 2014 QDR was labeling climate change as a threat and committing DoD to help combat it.²⁹⁰

The most striking aspect of the 2014 QDR was what was absent—specifically, any portrayal of Russia as a geopolitical threat and the return of great-power security conflict in Europe. Instead, the QDR portrays Russia in somewhat muted tones.

The United States is willing to undertake security cooperation with Russia, both in the bilateral context and in seeking solutions to regional challenges, when our interests align, including Syria, Iran, and post-2014 Afghanistan. At the same time, Russia’s multidimensional defense modernization and actions that violate the sovereignty of its neighbors present risks. We will engage Russia to increase transparency and reduce the risk of military miscalculation.²⁹¹

Similarly, while Dempsey specifically called out the risk of interstate war in East Asia and instability in the Middle East as continued threats to U.S. national security, he made no mention

²⁸⁵ DoD, 2014, p. 28.

²⁸⁶ Interview with a former senior defense official, April 3, 2017.

²⁸⁷ DoD, 2014, p. iii.

²⁸⁸ DoD, 2014, p. ix.

²⁸⁹ DoD, 2014, p. 22. Perhaps the ultimate sign that the QDR failed to fully explain the force-sizing construct of defeat and deny was that, by 2016, the new Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter, switched to talking about sizing off of the five major threats—China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and terrorism (sometimes referred to as the “4 + 1 model”). Lisa Ferdinando, “Carter Outlines Security Challenges, Warns Against Sequestration,” *DOD New, Defense Media Activity*, March 17, 2016.

²⁹⁰ DoD, 2014, pp. 8, 25.

²⁹¹ DoD, 2014, p. 5.

of Europe or Russia in his assessment of future risks to U.S. national security.²⁹² And yet, just as the QDR hit the press, Russia invaded Crimea. As one defense civilian policymaker put it, “We didn’t appreciate how fundamental it [the invasion of Crimea was].”²⁹³ And like with the 2001 QDR and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Russia’s invasion of Crimea did not prompt a new QDR, a new strategy review, or even much consideration of either of those as a possibility.²⁹⁴

Overall, the 2014 QDR attracted less attention than its predecessors. On the left, it earned plaudits for labeling climate change as a national security challenge.²⁹⁵ National War College professor and former George W. Bush administration Deputy Assistant of Secretary of Defense for Stability Operations Joseph Collins gave the document a half-hearted two cheers: “The first cheer is for matching the threat, the force, and the strategy” and the second cheer for the QDR is for how “time after time, the review reminded the reader (and the Congress) what would happen to our force if sequestration again comes into play.”²⁹⁶

Others were less charitable. Former George W. Bush National Security Council staffer Kori Schake labeled the 2014 QDR as “a budget document, not a strategy document.”²⁹⁷ Some analysts questioned whether the force described in the document could achieve the grand objectives—laid out in the DSG—like the pivot to Asia.²⁹⁸

Ultimately, few believe that the 2014 QDR broke much, if any, intellectual ground. Even some of DoD’s public statements characterized the document as more an incremental shift than a full-scale break from its predecessors. Indeed, when Wormuth rolled out the document to the public, she stated, “This QDR is an evolution in the defense strategy process we’ve had,” and “talks about how the strategy needs to evolve and how the department needs to rebalance in an era of fiscal restraint.”²⁹⁹ As a strategy document produced midway through a second term of an administration with little senior leadership interest, there was not much appetite to forge a new path on defense strategy. Instead, it prioritized Congress—as opposed to either DoD or the United States’ allies and adversaries—as its primary audience, and became a yet another turn in the ongoing battle over the defense budget.

²⁹² DoD, 2014, p. 61.

²⁹³ Interview with a former senior defense official, April 3, 2017.

²⁹⁴ Interview with a former senior defense official, January 17, 2017.

²⁹⁵ John Castellaw and David Titley, “The US Military Leads on Climate Change,” *The Hill*, March 11, 2014.

²⁹⁶ Joseph J. Collins, “Two Cheers for the QDR,” *Armed Forces Journal*, April 6, 2014.

²⁹⁷ Kori Schake, “This QDR Is a Budget Document, Not a Strategy Document,” *War on the Rocks*, March 6, 2014.

²⁹⁸ Zachary Keck, “Can the US Afford the Asia Pivot?” *The Diplomat*, March 5, 2014.

²⁹⁹ Jim Garamone, “Quadrennial Defense Review Charts Strategy Evolution,” American Forces Press Service, March 4, 2014.

National Defense Panel (2014)

As in 2010, Congress mandated an independent study to accompany the QDR in 2014. Reverting back to its original 1997 name, the 2014 NDP shared many similarities with the QDR-IP. Neither Congress nor the executive branch had changed hands, so the overall intent of the NDP—as a Republican check on the Obama administration’s defense policies—remained. Some of the personnel also remained the same: One of the two chairmen (William Perry), two of the panelists (Eric Edelman and Talent), and many of the staff served on both reviews.³⁰⁰ Like the QDR-IP, the 2014 NDP also lacked the resources to duplicate the actual 2014 QDR’s modeling and, if anything, had less interaction with the services than in 2010.³⁰¹

At the same time, there were some key differences in the composition between the QDR-IP and the 2014 NDP. First, the number of panelists was cut from 18 members plus two chairmen down to eight members plus two chairmen—simplifying some of the structural challenges.³⁰² At the same time, unlike in the QDR-IP, there were now Obama administration veterans on the panel, including Flournoy and former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs James Cartwright.³⁰³ This, in turn, created more of a schism among the panelists between those interested in critiquing the administration’s policies and those interested in defending them.³⁰⁴

The NDP began work in 2013, running almost concurrently as the actual QDR and allowing some interchange between the NDP panelists and the formal QDR. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, given that the HASC and SASC chose its members, the NDP panelists agreed about the harmful effects of the BCA, specifically on the nuclear triad.³⁰⁵ The NDP’s report starts by calling the BCA “a serious strategic misstep,” and warning that the budget cuts “will lead to an America that is not only less secure but also far less prosperous.”³⁰⁶ It later advocates protecting the nuclear deterrent “from the malign combination of neglect and political whiplash it has endured since the end of the Cold War in favor of a predictable and consistent funding and authorizing horizon.”³⁰⁷

³⁰⁰ William J. Perry and John P. Abizaid, *Ensuring a Strong U.S. Defense for the Future: The National Defense Panel Review of the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review*, Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2014.

³⁰¹ Interview with an NDP participant, February 1, 2017.

³⁰² Interview with an NDP participant, February 1, 2017. The chairmen were William J. Perry and GEN (USA, ret.) John Abizaid and the members were Gen James Cartwright, Marines (Ret.); Eric Edelman; Flournoy; LTG Francis Kearney, Army (Ret.); LTG Michael Maples, Army (Ret.); Jim Marshall; Gen Gregory Martin, Air Force (Ret.); and Talent.

³⁰³ Perry and Abizaid, 2014.

³⁰⁴ Interview with an NDP participant, February 21, 2017.

³⁰⁵ Interview with an NDP participant, February 1, 2017; interview with an NDP participant, February 21, 2017.

³⁰⁶ Perry and Abizaid, 2014, p. 1.

³⁰⁷ Perry and Abizaid, 2014, p. 51.

As in the QDR-IP, the NDP also produced target sizes for the services—although even some of the participants admitted that the numbers were “fairly superficial.”³⁰⁸ Using the last Gates-era defense budget and the BUR’s numbers as rough goal posts, the NDP panel recommended a Navy somewhere between 323 and 346 ships.³⁰⁹ Figuring that the world was not any safer than before the 9/11 attacks, the NDP recommended an active component of end strengths of 490,000 soldiers and 182,000 Marines.³¹⁰ Finally, the NDP recommended that the Air Force should be larger, but it could not come to a conclusion about appropriate size for the service—despite having a former Air Force general on the panel.³¹¹

The NDP members also had another task. In a meeting, then–Secretary of Defense Charles “Chuck” Hagel asked the NDP members to look at whether DoD was investing in the right equipment and technologies.³¹² Hagel was worried that an internally produced QDR could not critically examine the services’ “pet” programs, and he therefore asked for an outside opinion.³¹³ The NDP, however, did not provide a detailed list of which programs should be ramped up, sustained, or cut, but rather provided general “vectors for current and future modernization”—from more high-end intelligence platforms equipped with “protected communications, autonomous control systems, and multi-aircraft control architectures” to more *Virginia*-class submarines and long-range strike platforms.³¹⁴

Published in summer 2014, the NDP was well received by the Washington defense pundit community, largely because of its forceful stance against the BCA. The managing editor of the popular online defense magazine *War on the Rocks*, John Amble, described the report as “an important contribution to an important debate about what we need and what we can afford. But that debate is far from over.”³¹⁵ Lexington Institute scholar Daniel Gouré argued, “The 2014 NDP report is a clear and hard-hitting critique of the Obama administration’s defense strategy, as well as Congress’s unwillingness to adequately resource the U.S. military.”³¹⁶ Hudson Institute fellow Bryan McGrath wrote an article provocatively titled “The Adults Are Heard From: National Defense Panel 2014,” observing that “most importantly, though, it represents the CONSENSUS view of a bipartisan group of defense and national security experts that we are

³⁰⁸ Interview with an NDP participant, February 1, 2017.

³⁰⁹ Perry and Abizaid, 2014, p. 3.

³¹⁰ Perry and Abizaid, 2014, p. 4.

³¹¹ Interview with an NDP participant, March 27, 2017.

³¹² Interview with an NDP participant, March 27, 2017.

³¹³ Interview with an NDP participant, March 27, 2017.

³¹⁴ Perry and Abizaid, 2014, pp. 41, 43.

³¹⁵ John Amble, “National Defense Panel: Budget Can’t Support 2014 QDR,” *War on the Rocks*, August 1, 2014.

³¹⁶ Daniel Gouré, “National Defense Panel Report Rightly Criticizes Administration and Congress,” Arlington, Va.: Lexington Institute, August 1, 2014.

moving toward a ‘high-risk’ military force as the result of dangerous cuts in defense spending.”³¹⁷

The praise, however, was far from universal. One senior policymaker serving inside DoD at the time argued that the NDP was a “joke” and just “outsiders grading our homework.”³¹⁸ Moreover, from that policymaker’s perspective, the NDP failed to consider the resource constraints facing DoD, and many of its recommendations simply were not practical.³¹⁹ Similarly, American University scholar Nora Bensahel argued, “In today’s political and budgetary climate . . . [the] panel’s decision to ignore budget realities means that it lost its opportunity to offer the Defense Department practical and innovative recommendations for the future.”³²⁰

Ultimately, the NDP—like the earlier outside defense reviews—was ultimately less of an analytical document (i.e., backed by exhaustive research and modeling) and more of a political statement about where the U.S. defense priorities should be and how they should ideally be resourced.

Understanding the “Unhappy Families”

Defense reviews are, indeed, unhappy families, each one unique.³²¹ No two reviews have been completely alike, only a few of them have yielded major changes in defense policy, and all them have been filled with contention and discord. And yet, they share the following five characteristics.

1. Budget Cuts Drive Hard Decisions in the Short Term, and Geopolitical Events Only Drive Decisions Over the Longer Term

Whether or not it is stated explicitly, defense reviews always have budget concerns looming in the background. Budget concerns, arguably, were the primary driving force behind many of the 1990s-era reviews, as well as more-recent documents, such as the 2014 QDR and, to a lesser extent, the 2012 DSG. In some cases, the prospect of budget cuts led the Pentagon to develop new force-sizing constructs, as with the Base Force and the BUR. Other times, looming budget cuts forced DoD to spell out what missions it would deemphasize in the future, as it happened in the 2012 DSG.

³¹⁷ Bryan McGrath, “The Adults Are Heard From: National Defense Panel 2014,” *Information Dissemination*, August 5, 2014. Emphasis in the original.

³¹⁸ Interview with a former senior defense official, April 3, 2017.

³¹⁹ Interview with a former senior defense official, April 3, 2017.

³²⁰ Nora Bensahel, “Why ‘More’ Is Not a Better Plan for U.S. Defense,” *Defense One*, September 3, 2014.

³²¹ Interview with former senior defense official, February 21, 2017.

By contrast and somewhat more surprisingly, geopolitical events have less of an effect on defense reviews, particularly in the short term. The 9/11 terrorist attacks prompted Rumsfeld to speed up the publication of the 2001 QDR, rather than fundamentally rethink its central findings. Similarly, Russia's actions in Ukraine did not force any major changes in the 2014 QDR, and even the authors admit to underappreciating the significance of these events as they unfolded. Ultimately, major geopolitical changes can take longer—sometimes even years—to become sufficiently clear for policymakers to actually shift defense policy.

2. Senior--Level Interest Lies at the Heart of Successful Reviews

Secretaries of Defense have shown varied levels of interest in the process over the years. Typically, Aspin, Rumsfeld (at least early in the 2001 QDR), and Gates (in 2010) are commonly cited as being on the more-involved end of the spectrum, while Cohen, Rumsfeld (in 2006), and Hagel (in 2014) were less interested. Only on rare occasions—such as the DSG of 2012—is the President personally interested in a defense review. That said, when the senior leadership is directly involved with the review, it tends to yield better (or at least more consequential) results. Unsurprisingly, the most commonly lauded strategies—such as the BUR and DSG—also had the most interest from senior leadership, while those that were less memorable often had a disengaged Secretary of Defense.

3. Early Reviews Tend to Matter More

Many former officials believe that the first defense strategy review of an administration is the most consequential.³²² For the Clinton administration, the BUR is often considered more influential than the 1997 QDR. For the Bush administration, the 2001 QDR—for all its faults—is considered comparatively more influential than the 2006 QDR. The Obama administration followed a somewhat different path, because the DSG is generally considered to be a more influential document than either the 2010 QDR or the 2014 QDR, mostly thanks to the direct involvement of the President. Even then, however, the DSG was a first-term administration document.

4. Outside Reviews Tend to Be More Hawkish and Less Analytical

Outside reviews tend to be more aggressive than those produced inside DoD. As Isenberg described the 1997 NDP,

While the idea of an independent assessment is laudable, the NDP's broad mandate made it vulnerable to misuse. It was directed to develop military responses to virtually every potential threat to U.S. interests and to estimate the costs of dealing with them; thus, it had the potential to become a tool of hawkish

³²² This belief was stated by at least three times, unprompted. Interviews with former senior defense officials, February 21, March 23, and April 3, 2017.

members of Congress seeking to raise the Pentagon budget by creating a higher baseline of threats and costs.³²³

The same could also be said of QDR-IP, and it may be true of the 2014 NDP to a lesser extent—both documents called for considerably larger defense budgets than either the 2010 or 2014 QDRs.

At the same time, outside reviews also tend to be less-analytical documents. Produced by comparatively tiny staffs—most of whom are part time—these reviews suffer from authors’ lack of access to the same resources enjoyed by those working inside the Pentagon.

5. Defense Reviews Are Political as Well as Analytical Documents

Finally, defense reviews need to be understood as political documents, as much as they are analytical products. Arguably, the most-venerated reviews succeed because they strike a political chord. For example, the BUR’s two-war standard resonated not necessarily because it accurately captured the demands on the U.S. military but because it was simple and easy to explain. Its recommended force sizes also later saw revival in QDR-IP, not because of its analytical depth but because defense hawks found it useful in pushing back against budget cuts during the Obama administration. Similarly, while the DSG got many of its key assumptions about the strategic environment wrong, it captured a couple of big ideas—such as the pivot to Asia—that set the stage for broader U.S. policy, and therefore it is also considered a success.

Ultimately, understanding the politics behind the defense reviews is as important as the actual substance of these reports. After all, politics account for why many of these variables—from budgets to levels of senior leadership interest to timing—matter in the ways that they do. In the next chapter, we turn to how the politics of defense reviews explain each of these five common characteristics.

³²³ Isenberg, 1998, p. 5.

3. The Politics of Defense Reviews

Behind every defense review, there is politics. Sometimes the political strategies play out in full public view. As we saw in Chapter 2, defense strategy reviews often serve as political footballs in the battle over DoD's topline budget. Beneath the surface and partially shrouded from public view, another political game plays out—between various bureaucratic actors fighting to protect, if not increase, their equities. In this chapter, we turn from the history to the politics of defense reviews—specifically, the factors that shape and limit the options that come out of the defense reviews. First, we start by asking how much defense reviews actually matter in terms of shaping policy and find, somewhat surprisingly, that defense reviews might matter less—in terms of shaping budgets, priorities and programs—than one might assume. We then explore how three factors—specifically, structural constraints on the strategy process, the small pool of authors who write these documents, and congressional reluctance to shift budgets—limit defense reviews' impact. Finally, we turn to the broader question of whether defense reviews matter more and argue that, given the United States' track record at predicting future threats, a constrained, if incremental, approach to policymaking could be an appropriate response. Ultimately, this chapter argues that the politics of defense reviews prevents any given review from dramatically changing U.S. defense policy, but that small shifts might be what best serves the interest of the United States.

How Much Do Defense Reviews Matter?

The first question in understanding the politics behind defense reviews is, how much do these reviews actually matter? As we saw in Chapter 2, defense reviews tie up a fair number of man-hours and amount of resources both inside and outside of DoD. These measures, however, are inputs rather than outputs. Defense strategies also attract a fair bit of media attention, if primarily from Washington's pundit class. However, as we saw in Chapter 2, this coverage is often negative—suggesting that the strategy is not new or useful—sometimes not even worthy of the title. That said, as discussed in Chapter 1, good strategies—ones that prioritize requirements—are usually controversial and, as a result of the amount of ink spilled on critiquing these strategies, also do not capture their true impact.

The most basic measure of how much these reviews matter in a concrete sense is the extent to which the analysis actually shifts budgets, starting with how much the force-sizing construct resizes and shapes the force. As think tank analyst Gunzinger notes, “There is a great deal of commonality between the multiple force-planning constructs adopted by the Pentagon since the

end of the Cold War.”³²⁴ Since the Base Force and the BUR, all of the subsequent defense reviews have retained the two-war standard with the exception of the DSG and 2014 QDR—although even this is debatable. Instead, subsequent defense reviews simply added additional tasks to the force-sizing construct, from counterterrorism to homeland defense.³²⁵

At the same time, as successive reviews increased the demands, the services shrank in size. For example, Table 3.1 maps the force-sizing constructs to their recommended size relative to the Air Force—in all of the internally produced reviews (excluding the 1997 NDP, 2010 QDR-IP, and 2014 NDP)—from the Base Force forward. While different reviews have relied on different units of measurements (aircraft, squadrons, and wings), Table 3.1 suggests that *more requirements do not actually produce a larger force*. If anything, the converse seems to be true: Ironically, the more taxing the demands, the smaller the force. The same story also plays out for the other services, all despite an increasingly ominous threat situation.³²⁶

Of course, there are good reasons why the size of the force shrank during this period. Increasing capability through enhanced technological sophistication of the force offset some the declines in capacity, although there are arguably limits to this line of argument.³²⁷ More broadly, as the Soviet Union slowly faded into the strategic background, the United States did not face the same existential threat as it once did. At the same time, as detailed in Chapter 2, other budget priorities often curtailed the size of DoD’s budget. Whatever the reasons, the point remains that the actual size of the U.S. military was driven during this period by factors beyond the force-sizing construct detailed in the reviews.

³²⁴ Gunzinger, 2013, p. 18.

³²⁵ Gunzinger, 2013, p. 18.

³²⁶ For example, the Base Force recommended a force of 12 active, six reserve, and two cadre divisions for the Army and 450 ships, 11 active and two reserve air wings for the Navy (Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1992, p. 19). By contrast, today’s Army does not count combat power by divisions, but has approximately 200,000 fewer active-duty troops, while the Navy has presently 275 ships. See K. K. Rebecca Lai et al., “Is America’s Military Big Enough?” *New York Times*, March 22, 2017.

³²⁷ Most notably, Obama administration Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus often lambasted the argument that more advanced ships compensated for the decline in the Navy’s size, and he argued “quantity has a quality all its own if you want capability.” Ray Mabus, “Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus, Secretary of the Navy,” 27th Annual Emerging Issues Forum: Investing in Generation Z, Raleigh, N.C., February 7, 2012; Tyrone C. Marshall, Jr., “Naval Forces More Critical Than Ever, Navy Secretary Says,” *DoD News*, March 27, 2014.

Table 3.1. Strategies for Force-Sizing Constructs Versus Air Force Size

Base Force		1993 BUR	1997 QDR	2001 QDR	2006 QDR	2010 QDR	2012 DSG	2014 QDR
Force--sizing construct	Multiple regional crises	2 major regional conflicts	2 major theater wars + multiple concurrent smaller--scale contingency operations worldwide	1x defend U.S. + 2 major contingency operations + 4x regions with U.S. forward deterrence + smaller--scale contingencies	1x defend U.S. + 2 conventional operations + 1x large--scale, long--duration irregular warfare campaign	2x major regional wars or 1x major regional war + 1x major stabilization operation + support to civil authorities in U.S. or 1x major stabilization operation + 1x deterrence operation + 1x medium counterinsurgency operation + support to civil authorities in U.S.	1x defeat in one theater + 1x deny objectives in one theater + conduct counterterrorism, homeland defense, support for civil authorities, humanitarian support, operate in space and cyberspace, provide a stabilizing presence	1x defeat in theater + 1x deny/impose unacceptable cost in another + homeland defense + conduct counterterrorism + forward presence
Time Frame	NS	1999	FY 2003	2001	NS	FY 2011--FY 2015	NS	FY 2019
Fighters (AC/RC)	15 AC/11 RC wings* (1,872 aircraft)	13 AC/7 RC wings* (1440 aircraft)	12+ AC/8 RC wings* (1,440 aircraft)	46 AC/38 RC squadrons	86 combat wings (fighter, bomber, ISR, C2, Mobility, Air Operations Centers, Space/Missile, etc.)	NS	NS	26 AC/22 RC squadrons (971 aircraft) ^c
Air superiority	NS	NS	NS	NS		6 wings (432 aircraft) ^P	NS	
Theater strike	NS	NS	NS	NS		10--11 wings (720--792 aircraft) ^P	NS	
Bombers	NS	184 aircraft	187 aircraft	112 aircraft		5 wings (96 aircraft total) ^P	NS	9 squadrons (96 aircraft)
Air defense	NS	NS	4 squadrons	4 squadrons		NS	NS	NS
ISR wings	NS	NS	NS	NS		8 wings (380 aircraft) ^P	NS	280 aircraft ^c
Cyberspace and space	NS	NS	NS	NS		10 wings	NS	Reorganized ⁺
C2	NS	NS	NS	NS		3 wings/5 AOCs (27 aircraft) ^P	NS	27 aircraft
Refueling	NS	NS	NS	NS		30--32 wings (990--1,056 aircraft) ^P	NS	443 aircraft ^c
Tactical airlift	NS	NS	NS	NS			NS	300 aircraft ^c
Strategic airlift	NS	NS	NS	NS			NS	211 aircraft ^c

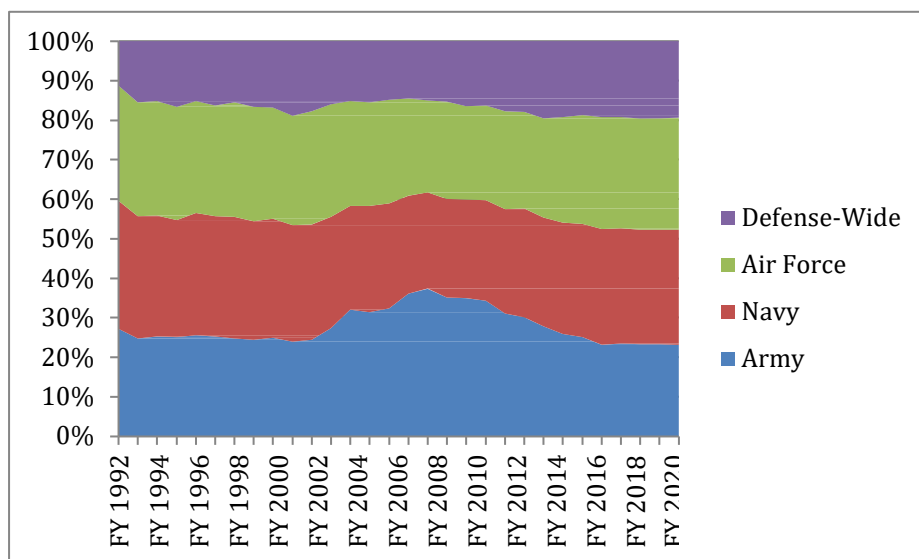
SOURCE: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1992, p. 19;; Aspin, 1993, p. 28, Figure 7;; DoD, 1997, p. 56;; DoD, 2001, p. 22;; DoD, 2006, pp. 37--38, p. 47;; DoD, 2012, pp. 4--6;; DoD, 2014, p. 40.

NOTES: * = Aircraft numbers not stated explicitly in the text, but estimated at 72 aircraft per wing; + = Cyber forces are grouped together rather than by service (13 National Mission Teams with 8 National Support Teams; 27 Combat Mission Teams with 17 Combat Support Teams; 18 National Cyber Protection Teams [CPT]; 24 Service CPTs; 26 combatant command and DoD Information Network CPTs); ^c = combat-coded aircraft; ^P = primary mission-coded aircraft; AC = active component; AOC = air operations center; ISR = intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; NS = not specified in the source; RC = reserve component.

Defense reviews also marginally affect the distribution of resources between the services. In an April 8, 1997, memorandum to Secretary of Defense Cohen, Chairman of the 1997 NDP Odeen noted, “Despite our extensive discussion of strategic considerations with your senior staff, analyses appear focused on budget cuts, largely by service and percentage based—and apparently not driven by strategic consideration.” He then warned that this “may erode public confidence in the review.”³²⁸

However, Odeen’s criticism applies to more than just the 1997 QDR. Over the course of the post–Cold War period, each of the three military departments commanded roughly equal shares of DoD’s budget—no matter what any defense review said—and are projected to continue to do so in the future (see Figure 3.1). In other words, despite the 2001 QDR’s focus on long-range strike capabilities (an Air Force mission) and the 2012 DSG’s and 2014 QDR’s rebalance to Asia (traditionally an air-and-maritime-centric theater), there seems to be limited evidence that any of these strategies succeeded in shifting budget share away from the Army and toward the Air Force and the Navy. To the contrary, the only major exception in proportional shifting of resources occurred during the mid-2000s, during which both the Air Force and the Navy ceded some of their budget share to the Army. This imbalance was primarily due to the ground-centric nature of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars—not to any farsighted strategic bet in a defense review—and the equilibrium later returned in subsequent budgets.³²⁹

Figure 3.1. Budget Share by Military Department



SOURCE: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2017*, Washington, D.C., March 2016.

³²⁸ Odeen, 1997a.

³²⁹ Interview with a senior defense official, February 21, 2017.

Similarly, while defense reviews often look at the department equipment purchases and recommend either speeding or truncating the buy, surprisingly few big programmatic decisions—such as whether to start or cancel a program altogether—were made during a defense review in the past several decades. Despite the 2001 QDR’s focus on transformation and rapid deployment, the Army’s Crusader artillery system—a system that Rumsfeld described as the “antithesis of agility and deployability”—still survived the 2001 QDR, only to be cut in May 2002.³³⁰ The Army’s advanced Comanche helicopter also survived the 2001 QDR, only to be cut in 2004.³³¹ In the 2006 QDR, there was an active debate about whether to keep all three fighter modernization programs (F-18, F-22, and F-35). However, despite the QDR’s overall emphasis on counterinsurgency and ground forces, all three programs survived.³³² Eventually, Gates ended the Air Force’s F-22 Raptor, restructured and ultimately ended the Army’s Future Combat System, and terminated the Marine Corps VH-71 presidential helicopter—in 2009, well before the 2010 QDR kicked into high gear.³³³ According to some observers, Gates decided to announce his major programmatic cuts in 2009 (before the 2010 QDR), in part because he knew that the QDR process was ill-suited to those types of decisions.³³⁴

Ultimately, the lack of major decisions in most reviews—in terms of major shifts to force structure, budget share, or programs—all underscore a basic point: More often than not, these defense reviews codify broader shifts already under way, rather than drive major changes. Moreover, while the words within these strategies can vary considerably across reviews, the actual policies and budgets tend to shift incrementally and in relatively small ways, rather than in any dramatic fashion. This, in turn, raises the question: What about the politics of defense reviews makes their impact so limited?

Why Are Defense Reviews’ Impact Seemingly So Limited?

To understand defense reviews’ seemingly limited impact, we need to understand their underlying politics. Defense strategies are produced within tight structural constraints. Reviews are consensus documents and need to speak to a variety of constituencies both inside DoD and in the broader policy sphere, functionally limiting the range of possible policy options. Even if these structural constraints could be overcome, defense strategies tend to be written by a relatively narrow set of people. Despite the fact that thousands of people may touch these documents before they are ultimately published, only a handful of people actually drive their content—lending broad intellectual continuity across reviews. Finally, even if a review

³³⁰ Interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017; Rumsfeld, 2011, p. 651.

³³¹ “Army Cancels Comanche Helicopter,” CNN.com, February 23, 2004.

³³² Interview with a former senior defense official, February 21, 2017; Correll, 2006, p. 12.

³³³ Gates, 2009; interview with a former senior defense official, February 13, 2017.

³³⁴ Interview with a former senior defense official, April 3, 2017.

recommends shifting course, reallocating resources also requires convincing Congress—and, despite the fact that Congress likes the idea of strategy in the abstract, it is often reluctant to reallocate resources for strategic reasons. Together, these three factors reduce the chances that any particular defense review will actually succeed in dramatically shifting strategy.

Understanding Structural Constraints: Defense Reviews as Imperfect Two--Level Games

Defense reviews are produced within a constrained structure. In his classic essay, “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two Level Games” published three decades ago, Robert Putnam wanted to understand how domestic and international politics shaped the international economic treaties and developed a model he termed *a two-level game*. In his framework, the Level I game consisted of the international negotiations to produce a treaty acceptable to all parties, while Level II consisted of the domestic political debate to ratify that agreement.³³⁵ Putnam termed the range of policy options acceptable to both the international actors and still palatable to a states’ domestic constituency as the “win set.” The larger the win sets are, the more room that trade negotiators have to maneuver and the more likely they are to successfully produce a treaty.³³⁶

Defense reviews function similar to Putnam’s two-level game because defense reviews must navigate two overlapping but separate debates to engage different audiences. Like Putnam’s Level I, the first debate occurs largely over big-ticket defense policy concerns where DoD is but one of many actors. The most important of these debates is over “how much defense is enough” (to borrow the phrasing from Chapter 1) or over the overall size of the defense budget. DoD, of course, has a voice in this debate, but so do the White House, Congress, and other actors. In this debate, defense reviews serve primarily as an advocacy document—explaining the department’s priorities and justifying its resources.

At the same time, there are a host of other debates—often about how DoD accomplishes its given tasks—that play out almost exclusively within DoD and feature relatively few external actors.³³⁷ This does not necessarily mean that these debates are any less political; rather, the key policy fights often lie between different factions, such as OSD, the Joint Staff, the combatant commands, and the services—each trying to advance its own bureaucratic interests.

Because defense reviews tend to be consensus documents, they need to speak to both the “inside” and the “outside” debates, creating a dynamic similar to Putnam’s two-level game. These two debates are inextricably linked to each other: What the Pentagon needs to perform its

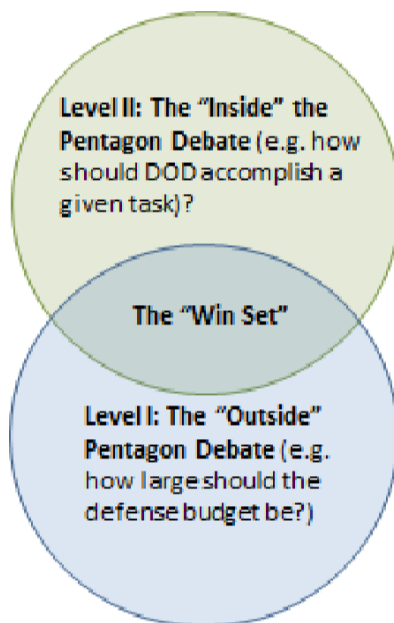
³³⁵ Robert D Putnam, “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games,” *International Organizations*, Vol. 42, No. 3, Summer 1988, p. 436.

³³⁶ Putnam, 1988, p. 437.

³³⁷ Title 10 specifically, for example, charges the Secretary of Defense with developing force-planning scenarios and constructs, prioritizing threats, and developing strategies to counter threats (see U.S. Code, Title 10, Armed Forces, Subtitle A, General Military Law, Part I, Organization and General Military Powers, Chapter 2, Department of Defense, Section 113, Secretary of Defense).

given tasks (the Level II game) should help inform how large the Pentagon’s budget is (Level I game), while how much defense the nation can afford (the Level I game) should help determine how the Pentagon performs its tasks (the Level II game). This relationship can even be depicted graphically by two overlapping circles, with the overlap (or win set) representing the policy space where one can reach consensus between the different levels (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2. Defense Reviews as a Two-Level Game



The need to be inside the win set (or the competing factions) limits the decisions that can be made during these defense reviews. For example, during the 2014 QDR, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy sought to dramatically reduce Army force structure as part of the implementation of the 2012 DSG. Needless to say, the Army—and, in particular, then–Chief of Staff of the Army Odierno—pushed back hard. According to some observers, the Pentagon senior leadership worried that Odierno would take his public fight to Capitol Hill, risking a political headache for the administration. In the end, Deputy Secretary of Defense Carter decided to back off—figuring the prospective gains would not be worth the fight.³³⁸

This two-level game model also explains many of the trends identified in Chapter 2. For example, it explains why more-contentious, impactful reviews tend to be associated with budget cuts rather than booms. When the Level I circle shrinks, the win set also shrinks, creating more contentious bureaucratic debates about how to allocate the remaining resources.

Two-level game dynamics also underscore why invested leadership is such a key ingredient to a successful defense review. Without senior-level leadership involvement in the process, the Joint Staff, the services, OSD, and others can veto decisions, restricting choices to only a handful

³³⁸ Interview with a former senior defense official, April 3, 2017.

of issues where no single actor has a vital equity at stake. By contrast, if the senior leadership is engaged in the process—as happened with the BUR and the DSG—the process can overcome some of these bureaucratic obstacles. As a result, the size of the Level II circle expands, creating a larger win set and more room for defense review to make decisions.

Less intuitively, these structural dynamics also help explain why first-term defense reviews often are considered to be more influential than the later reviews. As RAND analysts Schrader, Lewis, and Brown noted for first-term defense reviews:

There is a chicken-and-egg dimension to defense strategy development. Clearly, the President determines ‘whither defense,’ but reviews can begin in the Pentagon and rise to the President for codification, they can start with a new strategy document from the White House with the details of implementation left to the Pentagon leadership, or, as has been the case in recent history, Congress can direct that a review be performed.³³⁹

The fact that defense reviews are not necessarily directed from the top down also can be viewed as an opportunity for DoD. While the Pentagon leadership may not want to get out too far ahead of the White House, Pentagon officials have a freer rein to chart their own course early in the administration.

Over time, the Pentagon leadership is constrained by the overhang of past policy choices and the Level II trade space contracts. As Isenberg remarked about the 1997 QDR,

Given the political constraints laid on it by the administration, the QDR never really had much of a chance. The Pentagon was asked to do a review of a national military strategy. As professionals, [Pentagon officials] followed orders. But such a review is only one component of a national security strategy, which is the responsibility of the White House, not the DoD.³⁴⁰

In Isenberg’s opinion, the 1997 QDR did the best it could within the left and right limits given to DoD by the White House, but that made for a more limited review. Other second-term reviews also developed in the shadow of previous policy choices. For example, the 2006 QDR built off the 2001 QDR’s focus on the revolution in military affairs. Similarly, the 2014 QDR flushed out decisions already made in the DSG. In both cases, breaking new ground became more difficult.

Small Circle of Strategists

Aside from the structural constraints, there are other reasons why there seems to be so much continuity across the defense reviews—starting with the fact that they often tend to be written by the same people. While hundreds, if not thousands, of people help or review various aspects of these strategies, the core group—those who serve in key leadership or staff positions—tend to be fairly small and feature the same recurring cast of defense strategists. In fact, it is possible to

³³⁹ Schrader, Lewis and Brown, 2003, p. 3.

³⁴⁰ Isenberg, 1998, p. 13.

trace an intellectual thread from Warner in the early Clinton administration through today, as staffers worked their way up. Over the past several decades, there are multiple examples of career civil servants eventually shifting into political appointee roles and assuming positions of more responsibility. Table 3.2 provides an illustrative—although not comprehensive list—of this phenomenon of individuals who have played key roles with three or more reviews.

In fact, the small circle of strategists is actually even smaller than it appears at first, because many of those listed in Table 3.2 (as well as some who fall just below the arbitrary three-review mark) work for a handful of defense think tanks. At the top of the list, the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, traditionally, has played an outsized role in these reviews. Its former and current presidents—Krepinevich (1997 and 2014 NDS member) and Thomas Mahnken—have served with distinction on a variety of defense strategies, as have a number of its current and former staff members, including Jim Thomas and Eric Edelman. The center-right American Enterprise Institute’s James Talent, Makenzie Eaglen, and Thomas Donnelly help spearhead the QDR-IP and the 2014 NDP. Other think tanks also have played important, although lesser, roles. The current Trump administration Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy Elbridge Colby worked at the Center for New American Security, the think tank cofounded by Obama and Clinton administration appointees Flournoy and Kurt Campbell. Bush administration Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy Hoehn and Clinton and Obama defense official Ochmanek work at RAND. The Center for Strategic and International Studies, similarly, is home to Obama administration appointees Hicks and Cartwright.

The relatively small community of defense strategists helps explain why external defense reviews, despite being set up to provide a fresh look free from bureaucratic DoD constraints, rarely recommend dramatic changes to defense policy. Indeed, both the CORM and 1997 NDP shied away from recommending dramatic cuts in a particular service’s equities.³⁴¹ Similarly, while both the QDR-IP and 2014 NDP recommended larger forces, particularly with the Navy, they also tended to shy away from picking winners and losers among the services. Instead, both reviews defaulted to tradition and largely adopted the BUR’s figures. In hindsight, this middle-of-the-road approach makes sense. Not only are these independent reviews not staffed to conduct a full-blown independent analysis, but their membership tends to be drawn from former officials, giving these reports a de facto conventional bias. Ironically, as we shall see later on in this chapter, given the challenges and risks of dramatically changing courses in organizations as large as DoD, this conventional bias may actually be the preferred course of action.

³⁴¹ For example, Hoehn served as OSD’s lead to the CORM, and Krepinevich served as a member of the 1997 NDP.

Table 3.2. The Small World of Defense Strategists (Experience with Three or More Reviews)

Individual	BUR	1997 QDR	1997 NDP	2001 QDR	2006 QDR	2010 QDR	2010 QDR--IP	2012 DSG	2014 QDR	2014 NDP	2017 NDS	2017 NDP	
Cartwright, James		DD J8					VCJCS			Member			
Chiu, Daniel Y.						PD--Strategy		DASD--Strategy	DASD--Strategy and Force Development				
Edelman, Eric					USDP		Member			Member		Member	
Flournoy, Michèle	PD--Strategy	DASD--Strategy		NDU Support Lead		USDP		USDP		Member			
Hicks, Kathleen	Staff	Staff		Staff		DUSDP--SCP		DUSDP--SCP				Member	
Hoehn, Andrew	Staff	PD--Strategy		DASD--Strategy									
Keane, John				VCSA			Member					Member	
Mahnken, Thomas					Author/later DASD--Strategy		Staff			Staff		Member	
Ochmanek, David	DASD--Strategy					DASD--Force Development		DASD--Force Development	DASD--Force Development				
Perry, William		SECDEF ^a					Chair			Chair			
Sher, Bob	Staff	Staff							DASD--Plans				
Thomas, Jim	Staff	Staff		Staff	DASD--Resources and Plans/Strategy (Acting) Staff								
Wormuth, Christine		Staff		Staff			PDAS--HS/ASA		DUSDP--SCP/ later USDP				

NOTES: DASD = Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense; DD J8 = Deputy Director for Force Structure and Requirements, J-8 (Joint Staff); DUSDP-SCP = Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Capabilities and Plans; NDU = National Defense University; PDAS-HS/ASA = Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Homeland Security and American Security Affairs; PD = Principal Director; USDP = Under Secretary of Defense for Policy; VCJCS = Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; VCSA = Vice Chief of Staff of the Army. ^a = stepped down before publication of the report.

The small circle of strategists also shapes the development of defense reviews in more indirect ways. Not only do the same people often write these documents, but, when the balance of power shifts in Washington, they often write the analyses critiquing the current administration's strategies, creating a circular dynamic in which authors become critics until the wheel turns and the roles reverse again. While these reviews theoretically aim at a defensewide audience, the actual target audience—who will read and publicly comment—is also likewise relatively small.

The relatively small intellectual circle of defense strategists should be neither surprising nor necessarily concerning. Every academic discipline has its experts who know and regularly interact with each other, and defense strategy should be no different. It is equally unsurprising that a handful of think tanks tend to be well represented on defense strategy reviews, given that one of these institutions' primary purposes is to help develop defense strategy. Moreover, there is an inherent logic to staffing independent reviews with veterans of previous defense strategies, rather than with neophytes, if only to avoid reinventing the wheel. Still, these dynamics reinforce the intellectual continuity across reviews.

The Limited Congressional Role

Even if a defense review recommended shifting course, any dramatic shifts in defense strategy—especially if it meant a shift in resources—would require the support of Congress, but the congressional will for shifting resources for strategic reasons is relatively limited. Congress, of course, likes the idea of a strategy-driven budget in the abstract. After all, many defense reviews originated with a congressional directive and DoD often views Congress as one of the primary targets of these reviews. As Gordon writes about the first QDR,

To the extent that they could, each of the Services wanted to shape DoD's response to Congress, generally with the intent of minimizing the amount of damage that could be done to their force structure, modernization plans and manpower.³⁴²

Similarly, Flournoy argues that QDRs need to “prepare the battlefield on Capitol Hill.”³⁴³

That said, Congress only rarely addresses strategy itself. Lawmakers often will move funds around for programmatic reasons (i.e., if a program is over cost or not executing its budget) and to protect the industrial base (e.g., keeping equipment purchases at certain levels in order to keep a production line open).³⁴⁴ And yet, as one former senior Republican HASC staffer put it, “while Congress would like to do strategy, it rarely has the political will to reallocate resources for purely strategic reasons.”³⁴⁵ Some of this reluctance is because of lack of expertise

³⁴² Gordon, 2005, p. 158.

³⁴³ Flournoy, 2006, p. 79.

³⁴⁴ Interview with a senior Republican congressional staffer, February 2, 2017.

³⁴⁵ Interview with a senior Republican congressional staffer, February 2, 2017.

(congressional committee staff are a fraction the size of DoD’s policy shop), but it also has to do with politics. Even when there is widespread consensus about a given point of strategy, Congress will shift the funds only rarely because it often struggles with identifying the bill-payers. As the former senior Republican HASC staffer recalled, for example, while many on the HASC realized the need to build additional submarines to counter a rising China during the early 2010s, they could not find the funds because it would require shifting resources from elsewhere and upsetting a delicate political balance.³⁴⁶

There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. Historically, Congress has directed major changes to the armed forces structure, such as with the Goldwater-Nichols Act (1986) empowering the combatant commands and mandating more joint service integration. During the 1990s, the Republican-controlled Congress pushed the Clinton administration to embrace missile defense, a traditional cornerstone of Republican defense policy dating back to the Reagan administration.³⁴⁷ More recently, some members of the House of Representatives and the Senate have taken a personal interest in aspects of defense strategy. For example, former New Hampshire Senator Kelly Ayotte—the wife of an Air Force A-10 “Warthog” ground attack aircraft—blocked the Air Force’s plans to retire the aircraft.³⁴⁸ Similarly, U.S. Representative Randy Forbes—who represented a district just outside of the Norfolk Naval Base in Virginia—helped block a Navy plan to retire 11 of its cruisers.³⁴⁹ Similarly, in January 2017, McCain (who was SASC chairman) published his own mini-defense review, titled *Restoring American Power*, which included detailed recommendations about size and structure for all four services and other such key areas as space, cyber, and nuclear forces.³⁵⁰

Still, for the most part, Congress defers to DoD—and, more broadly, the executive branch—on defense strategy. Despite the fact that McCain’s paper concludes with the statement that “as a co-equal branch of government, the Congress shares responsibility with the President for our national defense,” even McCain’s paper borrows heavily from the executive branch.³⁵¹ For

³⁴⁶ Interview with a senior Republican congressional staffer, February 2, 2017.

³⁴⁷ Bradley Graham, “Congress to Push for a National Missile Defense,” *Washington Post*, September 5, 1995b.

³⁴⁸ In an interview with the *Boston Globe*, Ayotte explained, “My husband obviously flew the A-10, so I am very familiar with the airframe because of that. It obviously made me acutely aware of what the A-10 can do.” She argued that the A-10 filled a critical close air support niche and that “if there was an equivalent to give that kind of close air support to our troops I wouldn’t be making the same argument” (see Bryan Bender, “Kelly Ayotte Thwarting Effort to Retire Old Air Force Jet,” *Boston Globe*, October 23, 2014).

³⁴⁹ J. Randy Forbes, “Lay-Up Plan Jeopardizes Some of the Navy’s Best Ships,” *Navy Times*, April 19, 2016.

³⁵⁰ John McCain, *Restoring American Power: Recommendations for the FY 2018–FY 2022 Defense Budget*, January 16, 2017.

³⁵¹ McCain, 2017, p. 20; interview with a senior Republican congressional staffer, February 2, 2017.

example, it defers on the size of the Navy to an estimate by the Chief of Naval Operations and on its recommended Marine Corps size to the 2010 QDR.³⁵²

Congress has a much louder voice in determining the size of the budget. As the keeper of the purse strings, Congress ultimately wields considerable power over the topline budget. In fact, McCain's *Restoring American Power* paper implicitly makes this argument. It concludes with a section on "Actions for Congress," which is devoted not to legislating a particular structural change or purchase of any particular platform, but rather with a plea to repeal the BCA and increase the DoD's topline.³⁵³

Should Defense Reviews Matter More?

The final—if somewhat more philosophical—question is whether defense reviews should matter more. To phrase the question somewhat differently, if defense reviews have a status quo bias, is this necessarily a bad thing? Defense analysts often expect these reviews to define the United States' "grand strategy" and chart a course for decades out. For example, think tank analyst Mackenzie Eaglen and Senator James Talent criticized the 2010 QDR for "lack[ing] long-term vision and serv[ing] largely as an analytical justification for current defense plans and programs."³⁵⁴ And others leveled similar criticisms against earlier reviews.³⁵⁵ Implicit in this criticism is that the United States can effectively forecast future demands to be able to plan better today to develop such a "long-term" vision. This assumption, however, may not hold true. Defense reviews' track records at predicting the future has been decidedly mixed: While they can foresee long-term trends, they cannot predict how and where the United States might need to employ military force.

Multiple defense policymakers and analysts have lamented DoD's inability to forecast future force demands. Gordon, for example, noted that while the 1997 QDR was supposed to project out 15 years, it failed to foresee 9/11. "In retrospect, in the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001, we can see the difficulty of making an accurate strategic forecast so many years beyond the present."³⁵⁶ Ryan Henry, then–Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Policy and the point person for the 2006 QDR, similarly admitted, "Within the next decade, U.S. forces will be engaged somewhere in the world where they're not engaged today. We're clueless on where that's going to be, when that's going to be, or in what manner they're going to be engaged."³⁵⁷

³⁵² McCain, 2017, pp. 9, 11. Of note, the force-sizing construct for the Army came from "outside recommendations" (McCain, 2017, p. 14). There was no force-sizing construct given for the Air Force.

³⁵³ McCain, 2017, p. 20.

³⁵⁴ Eaglen and Talent, 2010, p. 2.

³⁵⁵ For example, others leveled the same accusation against the BUR. See, for example, Correll, 2003, p. 53; and Gordon, 2005, p. 23.

³⁵⁶ Gordon, 2005, p. 157.

³⁵⁷ Correll, 2006, p. 29.

And former Secretary of Defense Gates—who was Director of the Central Intelligence Agency in the President George H. W. Bush administration—famously quipped,

And I must tell you, when it comes to predicting the nature and location of our next military engagements, since Vietnam, our record has been perfect. We have never once gotten it right, from the Mayaguez to Grenada, Panama, Somalia, the Balkans, Haiti, Kuwait, Iraq, and more—we had no idea a year before any of these missions that we would be so engaged.³⁵⁸

A closer analysis of the strategic predictions in defense reviews tells a more-nuanced story. Most defense reviews—including the external ones—shy away from making firm predictions about the strategic environment in print. Building a data set of all the strategic predictions contained in the defense from the BUR onward reveals few verifiable statements about the future geopolitical environment—a half-dozen or so on average per review with several dozen in total.³⁵⁹ Most of the predictions tend to be vague, unfalsifiable, caveated statements—announcements of future U.S. defense policy (e.g., stationing changes, force-structure changes) or else technological projections—rather concrete forecasts about the future operating environment.³⁶⁰

That said, of the predictions that reviews do make, most of them are correct (see Figure 3.2). For the most part, predictions consist of long-term trends. For example, the BUR claimed, “We also expect that the United States will often be fighting as the leader of a coalition, with allies providing some support and combat forces,” and this proved true, at least for the next decade, if not longer.³⁶¹ The December 1997 NDP correctly projected, “The geopolitical revolution . . . will see the emergence of China as a major regional and global actor” by 2020.³⁶² Even more-specific claims have largely proven correct. For example, the 2006 QDR correctly predicted that

China is likely to continue making large investments in high-end, asymmetric military capabilities, emphasizing electronic and cyber-warfare; counter-space operations; ballistic and cruise missiles; advanced integrated air defense systems; next generation torpedoes; advanced submarines; strategic nuclear strike from

³⁵⁸ Robert Gates, “Speech to the United States Military Academy,” U.S. Department of Defense, West Point, N.Y., February 25, 2011.

³⁵⁹ The Base Force was not included because it was more of a concept embedded in other strategy documents than a stand-alone strategy in and of itself.

³⁶⁰ Examples of vague, unfalsifiable, and caveated statements include such platitudes as “new types of threats will develop and will arise with little warning” in the 1995 CORM report (see Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, 1995) or “Although U.S. military forces enjoy superiority in many dimensions of armed conflict, the United States is likely to be challenged by adversaries who possess a wide range of capabilities, including asymmetric approaches to warfare, particularly weapons of mass destruction” (see DoD, 2001, p. 3).

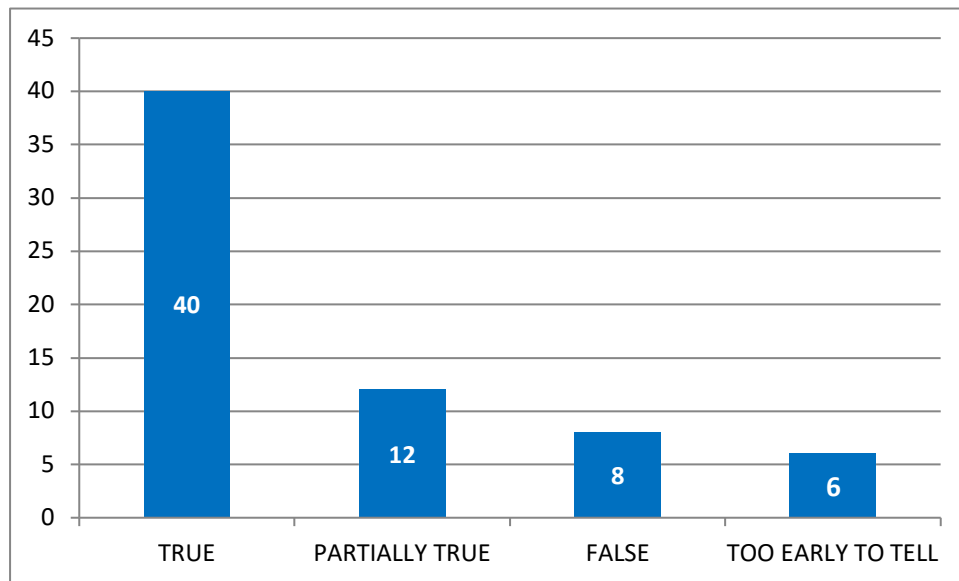
³⁶¹ Aspin, 1993, p. 15.

³⁶² Odeen, 1997b, p. 5.

modern, sophisticated land and sea-based systems; and theater unmanned aerial vehicles for employment by the Chinese military and for global export.³⁶³

Ultimately, when it comes to long-term trends, defense reviews get the broad brushstrokes correct.³⁶⁴

Figure 3.2. Track Record of Predictions in Defense Reviews



NOTE: All predictions were assessed against a five-year time horizon, unless the defense review specified another time frame (e.g., “by 2020” or “over the next 10 to 15 years”). For more, see the appendix.

The problem for defense reviews is less that they get the long-term trends wrong, and more that these long-term trends matter less in determining how and where the U.S. military employs its forces than one-off shocks. Most of the major geopolitical events of the post–Cold War Period—such as the 9/11 attacks (and subsequent Global War on Terrorism), the second Iraq War (and the need to mount a counterinsurgency effort), the Arab Spring, and the rise of the Islamic State or Russia’s aggression in Ukraine (and the return of great power security challenges to Europe)—were simply not mentioned in defense reviews. Therefore, ironically, the defense reviews’ track record on the one hand is fairly good (most of what they say will happen actually turns out to be true) but also irrelevant (in the sense that what actually drives force employment is simply not mentioned). Unsurprisingly, as noted in Chapter 2, budgets—rather than geopolitics—often loom larger for defense reviews, particularly in the short term, because the former are comparatively more predictable.

³⁶³ Rumsfeld 2006, pp. 29–30.

³⁶⁴ For more information, see the Appendix.

The United States' inability to accurately forecast where or how forces might be employed leads to an argument for a balanced force: building a force capable of doing many things decently (rather than any one task well) and making a series of incremental changes to adjust to shifting long-term trends, rather than making any particularly large bets in the short term. In this sense, the conservative bias might be less harmful than one would presume. For example, the United States would arguably have faced even greater challenges in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, if Rumsfeld had fully implemented the 2001 QDR's vision of transformation—complete with dramatically smaller land forces. In some sense, the structural constraints on defense reviews—as frustrating as they might be—may serve as a useful check and balance on strategy.

Why Strategies Disappoint

Almost by design, few defense reviews actually shift strategy. As noted in Chapter 2, the critique that the “strategy review is not really strategic” and that the document fails to properly aligns means with ends echoes across almost every defense review of the past quarter century, no matter whether the document was produced under the Clinton, Bush, or Obama administrations. To a degree, the criticism is valid. Defense reviews are political documents as much as they are analytical products and, therefore, are subject to a host of political constraints.

These political constraints limit what any defense review can achieve. The same document's need to perform multiple different tasks and appease a variety of different factions limits its intellectual freedom of movement. Moreover, defense reviews tend to be written by a relatively insular community for that same subset—further reinforcing a degree of intellectual continuity. And even if the defense strategy recommended sweeping changes, these changes would still need to be approved by Congress—and Congress is often reluctant to reallocate resources for purely strategic reasons. As the fate of the DSG shows, breaking with conventional wisdom required the attention of the President himself and even then was only partially successful.

These constraints on defense reviews, however, may not be a bad thing. Defense reviews can still serve a useful function, socializing policy shifts across DoD and the broader defense community and heralding smaller, more-incremental changes in the years to come. More importantly, if somewhat ironically, constrained defense strategy may also end up making for better strategy. Given DoD's relative inability to accurately forecast the strategic demands years (much less, decades) out, incremental changes, rather than dramatic policy shifts, might be a more prudent outcome.

Therefore, if defense reviews are about the politics and can still play a useful—if limited—function, then the players need to understand how to play the political game to their advantage. We turn to that question in Chapter 4.

4. Making the Most Out of the Game

A former senior defense official with experience in multiple reviews once remarked that QDRs “are like graduate school. You get out of it what you put into it.”³⁶⁵ The statement is partially true. Whether it is a Secretary of Defense wanting to make a lasting impact on the future course of defense strategy or a service wanting to protect its equities, different actors may come to defense reviews with different goals in mind. Their ability to achieve them, however, depends on a variety of factors—some of which they can control and others they cannot, such as external geopolitical events or the budget environment. Insofar as actors can control the outcomes, they need more than just sound analysis but also a degree of political deftness. Therefore, in this final chapter, we turn to the question of how to manipulate the political space surrounding a defense review to varying actors’ advantages.

How a Service Can Get the Most of the Process

Successful service participation starts with an understanding that defense reviews are political documents, as well as analytical ones. Navigating the external and internal audiences of defense reviews can sometimes put a service at risk of arguing at cross-purposes with itself. After all, if the service wants to push for additional resources, then one way would be to paint as grim a picture as possible for Congress and the executive branch as a plea for additional resources. At same time, a service also has the incentive to paint itself as capable—or at least as central as possible—to any possible future contingency to avoid ceding a mission set (and resources) to its sister services.³⁶⁶ Ultimately, successfully navigating this complex terrain requires not only a strong analytical backing but also a degree of political awareness.

Select the “Right” Representative

For a service, success in a defense review arguably starts with finding the right representative. After all, the services are never the primary authors. As seen in Chapter 2, more often than not, this task falls to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, the Joint Staff, and the

³⁶⁵ Interview with a former senior defense official, April 3, 2017.

³⁶⁶ The Army provides the best recent example of a service coming close to falling into this trap. On the one hand, the Army argued that readiness had suffered thanks to budget cuts and rising personnel costs. In 2015, Odierno told the Senate Appropriations Committee: “Today, just 33 percent of our brigades are ready, when our sustained readiness rate should be closer to 70 percent” (see David Vergun, “Odierno: Brigade Readiness Half What It Should Be,” Army News Service, webpage, March 11, 2015). Odierno had used a variant of this argument in the past. In 2013, he claimed that the Army had only two ready brigades thanks to sequestration cuts (see Jeremy Herb, “Army: Only Two Brigades Ready to Fight,” *The Hill*, October 21, 2013). At the same time, the Army was locked in a struggle with OSD over its end strength, with the latter arguing that the Army’s size was neither affordable nor necessary as articulated in the DSG and the 2014 QDR.

PA&E/CAPE, with the services serving as contributors and reviewers but not the ones wielding the pen. This places a premium on selecting a service representative who has the diplomatic skills to effectively advocate for its position, as well as carefully choosing whom the service details to OSD. There are different approaches on how to develop this competency. The Army has a dedicated representative year-round to the QDR office devoted to this task. The Marine Corps groomed its representative for the 2010 QDR with a rotation in OSD during the 2006 QDR—which proved useful preparation when the representative had to negotiate with the office over key Marine equities, such as the appropriate number of amphibious assault ships.³⁶⁷

By contrast, selecting the wrong representative in the QDR can have negative consequences. Some analysts attribute the Army’s struggles compared with its sister services during the 2001 QDR to the personality of its then–Chief of Staff GEN Eric Shinseki.³⁶⁸ Indeed, the *New York Times* went so far as to label the service as “the least [politically] deft of the armed services” and noted that Shinseki’s “conservative” approach to “politicking and public relations” had hurt his ability to advance his agenda.³⁶⁹ Similarly, some former defense officials pointed to the Air Force selection of an overly confrontational and parochial representative in 2006 QDR as ultimately undermining its case during the review.³⁷⁰ Especially given that the demands of the land-centric Iraq and Afghanistan wars meant that DoD was already inclined to be more partial to Army and Marine priorities over Air Force and Navy priorities, the Air Force’s choice of representative only further alienated OSD.³⁷¹ Ultimately, successful participation needs more than just a proficient operator; it requires, in some sense, a politician.

Keep the Service Chiefs Directly Involved

Successful service participation also requires direct attention from the service chiefs. Not only do service chiefs carry more weight inside the Pentagon than a more-junior general officer does, they are also directly involved in fighting for the service’s budget on Capitol Hill. In other words, they bridge the debates inside and the outside the building in ways that few others do. The Marines may offer the best practice: Rather than being buried in layers of bureaucracy, the two-star QDR representative is granted direct and unfettered access to the Commandant.³⁷² Unsurprisingly, defense policy officials routinely cite the Marine Corps as being the most-effective service in these reviews and credit this effectiveness with a series of small victories for

³⁶⁷ Interview with a former senior general officer, January 16, 2017.

³⁶⁸ Correspondence with a defense think tank analyst, October 5, 2017.

³⁶⁹ Thom Shanker, “Army Chief Seeks Changes to Improve Lives,” *New York Times*, May 29, 2001.

³⁷⁰ Interview with a former senior general officer, January 16, 2017; interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017.

³⁷¹ Interview with a former senior general officer, January 16, 2017; interview with a former senior defense official, February 17, 2017.

³⁷² Interview with a former senior general officer, January 16, 2017.

the service—such as mostly avoiding Rumsfeld’s ire about transformation during the 2001 QDR, getting an additional amphibious warfare vessel during the 2010 QDR, gaining more leeway from OSD to manage end-strength reductions during the 2014 QDR and reducing overall congressional appetite to interfere with the service’s major procurement programs.³⁷³

Explain the Services’ Needs in a Simple, Direct, Unclassified Manner

Since the BUR, the methodology behind the reviews has become increasingly sophisticated but also increasingly opaque—at least in the public document. Indeed, the BUR was the last time a review clearly identified the forces needed to handle two threats (Iraq and North Korea) and, from there, a sum total for the entire force. While these numbers proved highly controversial, the methodology behind them was explicit. In subsequent QDRs, the exact scenarios—and the modeling and analysis behind them—were classified, allowing for more-sophisticated analysis but less transparency.³⁷⁴

This lack of transparency proves problematic because much of the external debate—especially about how much defense is enough—plays out in public. It can also hurt a service’s effectiveness in external defense reviews. These reviews generally offer more receptive audiences to giving DoD additional resources but lack the same access as the QDR to complex, classified modeling. For example, the 2010 QDR-IP and 2014 NDP struggled to develop compelling (if somewhat simplified) justifications for all the services’ sizes and structures—particularly those of the Air Force. In the end, both external reviews gave up and adopted the BUR’s force structure, arguing that threat has only increased since the early 1990s.³⁷⁵ These external reviews present an opportunity for services to advocate additional resources, especially given that these reviews are not constrained by fixed topline budget figures. However, to do so, the services need to justify any additional funding in a simple, compelling, and unclassified manner.

Try to Solve the Boss’s Problems

Finally, and most importantly, services should at the very least understand—if not actively try to solve—the administration’s (and, more specifically, the Secretary of Defense’s) problems and priorities, and how to leverage them. This is not always the case. As Gordon remarked,

When a defense review (such as a QDR) is directed by an outside agency like Congress, the Services approach the event with a wary attitude. This is understandable. When the QDR takes place each of the Services has spent years negotiating for its budget, force structure, modernization plan, and end strength.

³⁷³ Interview with a former senior general officer, January 16, 2017; interview with a former senior congressional staffer, February 2, 2017; interview with a former senior defense policy official, April 3, 2017; correspondence with a defense think tank analyst, October 5, 2017.

³⁷⁴ Interview with a senior defense official, January 17, 2017.

³⁷⁵ Interview with for QDR-IP and NDP participants, February 1, 2017, and March 27, 2017.

Each Service feels that it is more knowledgeable about its needs and mode of operations than any outsider.³⁷⁶

Warranted or not, this attitude often proves counterproductive.

The 2001 QDR best demonstrates the importance of this lesson. One panel member on Rumsfeld's 2001 QDR characterized the services as "obstructionist. Very difficult and uncooperative. They obviously were suspicious of what the panels were doing and distrusted the whole process."³⁷⁷ For the Air Force, in particular, this proved a mistake. Rumsfeld's focus on transformation, agility, and long-range, precision strike capabilities should have played to the service's strengths. The Air Force likely could have come away with additional capabilities—such as more B-2 bombers—had the service better understood its boss.³⁷⁸ Instead, the Air Force focused its efforts on defending the F-22 Raptor, a relatively short-range air superiority platform, and their plea fell largely on deaf ears.³⁷⁹

The 2014 QDR provides a contrasting example. Thanks to budgetary pressures and Obama's decision during the 2012 DSG not to plan for long-term, large-scale stability operations, both the Army and the Marine Corps faced pressure to downsize. Whereas the Army fought the cuts tooth-and-nail, the Marine Corps understood the budgetary pressure and briefed OSD on its plan for implementing any reductions—allowing the service to set the agenda, rather than having it imposed.³⁸⁰

How the Defense Department Can Get the Most of the Process

As previous research has demonstrated, strategies may be truly successful at select points in history—when "policy windows" open, large organizations are more receptive to change and leaders can use strategy documents as a unique chance to shape a new direction.³⁸¹ Particularly for a new Secretary of Defense and a new presidential administration, this prompts the logical follow-on questions: When do policy windows open, and how can we know when they exist? Arguably, the answer lies in thinking about the structural constraints on defense reviews and the size of the win set in the two-level game.

From the macro-defense strategy standpoint, if the aim is to increase a defense strategy's impact, then the initial task must be to maximize the win set or political space to maneuver. This can be accomplished either by growing the Level I game (essentially pushing for additional

³⁷⁶ Gordon, 2005, p. 77.

³⁷⁷ Gordon, 2005, p. 207.

³⁷⁸ Interview with a senior defense official, February 9, 2017.

³⁷⁹ Interview with a senior defense official, February 9, 2017; interview with a senior defense official, February 17, 2017.

³⁸⁰ Interview with a senior defense official, April 3, 2017.

³⁸¹ Cancian et al., 2017, pp. 62–63.

resources so that those resources can be directed to new priorities), the Level II game (through senior leadership involvement so that existing resources can rebalanced between factions), or by some combination of the two. No matter how it is accomplished, the larger the win set, the larger the political window, and, therefore, the more political space available to make big decisions.

Target the Defense Review for Early in the Administration but After the Political Appointees Are in Position

Timing the review correctly is one way to ensure as large a win set as possible. As explained in Chapter 3, reviews early in an administration often matter more because policymakers tend to have a freer hand to chart new territory than they do for second-term administration documents. Moreover, the sooner the defense review is complete, the sooner it can begin translating the new policy in the budget cycle. Previous studies suggested removing the congressional requirement for second-term administration defense reviews altogether because the “second QDR is unlikely to auger [sic] a radical departure from its chosen path.”³⁸² For the most part, this report agrees with this recommendation.

It is possible, however, to start the review too soon. For the review to have meaning, it must reflect the new administration’s priorities. Consequently, beginning a defense review before the new administration’s political leadership is in place risks either wasted bureaucratic effort (as occurred in the 2001 QDR) or the new political leadership being hemmed in by the bureaucracy (as happened with Secretary Cohen in the 1997 QDR). Consequently, a defense review should start only after most of the political appointees—particularly those in the key leadership roles—have settled into their positions but while the administration still has some policy flexibility.

Force--Sizing Constructs: Combining Simplicity, Stickiness, and Slack

On a more-substantive note, the history of the defense reviews also teaches three lessons about crafting the intellectual heart of every defense review—the force-sizing construct.³⁸³

First, keep it simple. One of the reasons why the BUR’s two-war standard resonates today is not because it was analytically correct. To the contrary, the 2006 QDR’s Michelin Man framework better depicted the range of missions that the United States needed to perform and the 2012 DSG’s defeat-and-deny framework probably better captured the United States’ true capabilities, especially against more-capable adversaries. And yet, what the two-war framework lacks in precision, it compensates for in parsimony—conveying what the U.S. military is designed to do in layman’s terms. As a result, the two-war framework still echoes as the intellectual basis for U.S. force development today in ways that neither 2006 QDR nor the 2012 DSG do.

³⁸² Flournoy, 2006, p. 82.

³⁸³ For a highly detailed analysis, see Larson, forthcoming.

Second, recognize force-sizing constructs are “sticky.” For better or worse, some policy ideas become fixed in the minds of policymakers, and the two-war standard has stuck. Whenever there have been attempts to move away from the two-war standard—first with the 1997 QDR or, more recently, with the 2012 DSG—a political fight has ensued both inside and outside of the Pentagon. More often than not, most administrations opted to add to the two-war requirement (as in the 1997, 2001, 2006, and 2010 QDRs) rather than replace it outright. Consequently, if a future administration should choose to move away from the two-war standard, it should expect a fight.

Finally, anyone developing a force-sizing construct should recognize the United States’ track record at strategic predictions and plan accordingly. As discussed in Chapter 3, while defense reviews often can successfully identify long-term trends, these reviews cannot predict how the United States might be required to use military power even a few years out. As a result, DoD should build additional slack capacity into whatever force-sizing construct it ultimately adopts, knowing that reality seldom fits neatly within the plan.

Leverage Outside Reports to Fight for Resources, But Do Not Outsource Hard Choices

Pentagon insiders often view outside reviews as “outsiders grading our homework” or else as ways around making hard decisions themselves.³⁸⁴ In truth, outside panels do neither of these functions well. Even by the admission of the people who worked on them, the CORM, 1997 NDP, QDR-IP, and 2014 NDP were, arguably, not analytically deep documents. In fairness, none of these outside reviews was resourced sufficiently to rival the analytical capability found inside the Pentagon. At the same time, without needing to conform to budget limits, there is nothing to force these outside panels to make unpopular decisions. They can—and often do—shy away from making hard choices about resource prioritization, choosing instead to select an all-of-the-above option and push for additional resources to cover the bill.

Over the years, several ideas have been floated to maximize the value of these outside reviews—from having them report before or concurrently (rather than after) with the QDR (to allow them to better shape the QDR’s findings) to forcing them to operate within a fixed budget.³⁸⁵ In some ways, these proposals miss the principal value of these external reviews—helping build a bipartisan consensus of what the department *should* ideally look like, not necessarily as practical roadmaps for policy. To the extent that these documents have ultimately informed the policy debate, they have had modest success.³⁸⁶ For those at the helm of DoD, the

³⁸⁴ Interview with a former senior defense official, April 3, 2017.

³⁸⁵ Tedstrom and McGinn, 1999, pp. 15–16.

³⁸⁶ For example, in 2012, the Mitt Romney presidential campaign embraced the QDR-IP’s assessment for ship numbers. In the 2016 campaign, both the Trump and Clinton campaigns were reported to have drawn from the 2014 NDP’s work. See John Lehman and James Talent, “Press Release—Sen. Jim Talent and Former Navy Sec. John Lehman: Mitt Romney Will Restore the U.S. Navy,” press release, *Portland Press Herald*, February 6, 2012;

key is to understand what these external reviews can and cannot do: They will not solve DoD's analytical challenges or provide a way around making hard decisions, but they can be useful tools to push for additional resources.

Keep the Boss Involved or Accept the Consequences

At the end of the end of the day, there is no substitute for direct senior leadership engagement. Even with that engagement, overcoming a reversion to the mean proves difficult, but without direct leader engagement at the Secretary of Defense level—as the 1997, 2006, and 2014 QDRs demonstrate—overcoming the status quo bias built into reviews proves next to impossible. Given the varying competing demands on their time, not all Secretaries of Defense want to invest the time and energy into defense reviews. Moreover, there have been cases—such as Aspin in 1993 or Rumsfeld in 2001—where the secretary's personal involvement in the strategy process may have benefited the defense review but did not necessarily lead to successful management of DoD overall. Still, if a future Secretary of Defense chooses to delegate running the defense review, he or she should do so clear-eyed, knowing full well that the ultimate outcomes will likely be more constrained as a result.

Understand and Accept the Limitations of the Forum

Finally, future DoD leaders should understand and accept the limitations of defense reviews as a medium for decisionmaking. Time and again, Secretaries of Defense—be it Rumsfeld cutting the Crusader artillery system and Comanche helicopter or Gates ending the F-22 fighter and Future Combat System programs—have found that smaller forums were better suited for these hard programmatic decisions.

Similarly, defense reviews also do not often yield big new ideas generated from the bottom up. For the reasons discussed in Chapter 3, there is powerful status quo bias at play with most defense reviews. Successful reviews recognize this fact and try to deliberately inject creativity into the process—through engaging outsider experts early and often or by establishing a dedicated, semi-independent internal red team, as occurred with the ONA effort during the 2006 QDR. Breaking free of the status quo bureaucratic shackles, however, often proves challenging. In the end, the 2006 QDR proved a more-conservative document than the red team's report, and it is worth noting that the 2012 DSG—which was probably the best recent example of a review yielding big new ideas—was the product of an ad hoc process, among a select group of principles—not the product of a full-blown defense review.

These reviews may still have value for Secretaries of Defense, but of a different sort—molding his or her team and gaining consensus from the sprawling bureaucracy.³⁸⁷ In this

Jeremy Herb and Connor O'Brien, "Trump Turns Defense Hawk," *Politico*, September 7, 2016; William Hartung, "How Much Would a Clinton Administration Spend on The Pentagon?" *Huffington Post*, September 20, 2016.

³⁸⁷ Interview with a former senior defense official, April 3, 2017.

respect, these defense reviews can have a key (although somewhat less grand) role—less in serving as a forum for key defense strategy decisions, but more in socializing and codifying decisions already made in different forums.

How the United States Can Get the Most out of the Reviews

After mounting criticism of the QDR over its two decades in existence, Congress changed the strategy process yet again. Back in 2006, Donnelly, the former HASC staffer turned defense analyst at the *American Enterprise Institute*, remarked:

After four attempts (if you include the 1993 “Bottom-Up Review,” or BUR), it is fair to conclude that the process has outlived its utility. It’s not that the 2005 QDR is so awful; it hasn’t been officially released, but its basic conclusions are common knowledge . . . It’s time to call an end to an exercise that isn’t producing the desired result.³⁸⁸

It took another decade, but Congress ultimately reached the same conclusion. In 2017, Congress replaced the QDR with the National Defense Strategy.³⁸⁹

The new National Defense Strategy retains many of the same basic requirements as the QDRs. The document still needs to detail DoD missions, the assumptions about the strategic environment, an overview of force size and shape, and DoD’s plan for investing its resources for the next five years.³⁹⁰ The National Defense Strategy, however, also contains some new features. Most notably, the new strategy will be classified, theoretically allowing for a freer, franker discussion than in the publicly available QDRs.³⁹¹

While it is too early to judge the success of this new defense strategy document, the political dynamics of defense reviews remain unchanged. While the classification of the document removes some of the previous defense strategies’ need to engage the public, allies, and adversaries, the National Defense Strategy will still need to speak to multiple audiences—including Congress, the White House, and the rest of DoD—and serve multiple and often competing purposes. There still is a limited circle of strategists who write these documents. Lastly, there remains the same congressional reluctance to make major shifts. Therefore, it remains a question whether a new strategy document can actually avoid the pitfalls that earlier reviews faced.

Still, whatever their faults, defense reviews are useful in that they drive the conversation. The debates—about how much defense is enough and what the military is being asked to do—are not only inevitable but also healthy for the Air Force, DoD at large, and U.S. democracy as a whole.

³⁸⁸ Donnelly, 2006.

³⁸⁹ Joe Gould, “QDR Dead in 2017 Defense Policy Bill,” *Defense News*, April 25, 2016.

³⁹⁰ Public Law 114–840, National Defense Authorization Act in Fiscal Year 2017, Section 941.

³⁹¹ Public Law 114–840, Section 941.

The answers to these questions, after all, not only shape U.S. defense and fiscal policies but go to the heart of fundamental questions of U.S. civil-military relations, the United States' national priorities, and the United States' role in the world. Therefore, whatever form defense reviews ultimately take in the next quarter century, the United States can get the most from ensuring that this dialogue happens. Indeed, the long history and complex politics of defense reviews suggest the United States' quixotic quest for a true defense strategy will likely continue to evolve over the next decades, just as it did in the past 25 years. Ultimately, the quest may be just as important as the end result.

Appendix. Defense Reviews and Predicting the Future

Table A.1 is a complete list of statements used to compile Figure 3.2 in Chapter 3. Coding was based on a five-year window, unless a different time frame was specified in the source.

Table A.1. Complete List of Statements to Compile Track Record of Predictions in Defense Reviews

Source	Claim	Verdict	Explanation
The Commission on Long-Term Integrated Strategy (see Fred C. Iklé and Albert Wohlstetter, <i>Discriminate Deterrence: Report of the Commission on Long-Term Strategy</i> , Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988)	"China, perhaps Japan and other countries, will become major military powers." (p. 1)	Partially true	China did;; Japan less so.
	"Our difficulties of access may worsen as a result of Third World conflicts that jeopardize U.S. bases or lead to Soviet expansion in areas previously free of Soviet forces." (p. 1)	False	U.S. access expanded, and the Soviet Union collapsed.
	"If Soviet military research continues to exceed our own, it will erode the qualitative edge on, which we have long relied." (p. 1)	False	The Soviet Union collapsed, as did Soviet military research.
	"Japan's economy is now the second largest in the world and is apt to continue growing." (p. 6)	False	Japan's economy slowed.
	"Over the next 20 years, the Chinese economy may well grow faster than those of the United States, Europe or the Soviet Union." (p. 6)	True	China did grow faster than the United States and Europe in aggregate.
	"[Soviet] Failure might drive the regime to seek legitimacy in military successes abroad." (p. 8)	False	Ultimately, the Soviet Union did fail, but it did not trigger diversionary war as feared.
	"In combination with the USSR's growing ethnic tensions, economic failure might even trigger efforts by some parts of the Soviet empire to loosen their bonds." (p. 8)	True	The Soviet Union's bonds did "loosen," and the country collapsed only a few years later.

Source	Claim	Verdict	Explanation
	"U.S. forces will not in general be combatants" in third world conflicts. (p. 16)	Partially true	This depends on the definition of "in general" and "combatant." The 1990s saw interventions in third-world conflicts. The United States intervened in some of these conflicts (e.g., Balkans, Haiti, and Somalia), but not others (e.g., Rwanda), and usually under humanitarian guise, rather than as a combatant.
1993 BUR	"Dangers posed by nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD)—that is, biological and chemical weapons—are growing." (p. 5)	Partially true	North Korea did have a nuclear program, but Iraq's WMD program was crippled by the Iraq War (counterproliferation efforts were relatively successful).
	"In this new era, U.S. military forces are more likely to be involved in operations short of declared or intense warfare." (p. 8)	True	The U.S. military was involved in operations in Bosnia and Kosovo, despite no formal declarations of war in either incident.
	"Our values are ascendant. Peaceful resolution of disputes is more likely as democracy spreads." (p. 9)	Partially true	Debatable claim: There is evidence for the so-called "democratic peace theory," but there actually has been more conflict during unipolar age (see Nuno P. Monteiro, "Unrest Assured: Why Unipolarity Is Not Peaceful," <i>International Security</i> , Vol. 36, No. 3, Winter 2011–2012, pp. 9–40.)
	"In the future, there are likely to be many occasions when we are asked to intervene with military force overseas." (p. 9)	True	The U.S. military deployed on a variety of small-scale interventions throughout the 1990s.
	"Sustaining a healthy free trade regime and, within that, expanding U.S. exports and reducing trade imbalances will be key to our future economic growth." (p. 10)	Partially true	The U.S. economy has become increasingly service-focused, rather than manufacturing-oriented.
	"We also expect that the United States will often be fighting as the leader of a coalition, with allies providing some support and combat forces." (p. 15)	True	The United States led coalitions in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq.
	"In Europe, we will continue to provide leadership in a reinvigorated North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)." (p. 23)	True	Despite some debate, NATO remained active and even expanded, long after the Soviet Union disbanded.

Source	Claim	Verdict	Explanation
	“With the demise of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, the threats that U.S. combat aircraft will face over the next decade are likely to be less intense than was the case during the Cold War.” (p. 36)	True	While Serb and Iraqi forces engaged U.S. combat aircraft during operations in the 1990s and through the Iraq War, the United States did not face an equivalent of the Soviet air force.
1995 CORM	“Regional threats will continue and instabilities will threaten international stability and U.S. interests for a host of national, ethnic, religious, and economic reasons.” (p. 1-7)	True	Kosovo, among other incidents, seems to validate this trend.
	“Peace operations, other operations to promote to promote international stability, and humanitarian and disaster relief efforts will continue to place demands on US forces.” (p. 1-8)	True	Kosovo, among other incidents, seems to validate this trend.
	“Lack of imminent threats and major enemies may result in reduced public support for defense needs.” (p. 1-8)	True	The United States experienced downward pressure on the defense budget until the Global War on Terrorism.
	“We cannot ignore the possibility that former Soviet states, still armed with nuclear weapons, could emerge as major threats.” (p. 1-8)	Partially true	The complete statement says within 20 years, so Russia's actions in Crimea and Ukraine, may count. That said, the other Soviet states, including Ukraine, gave up their nuclear arsenals and did not pose a threat.
1997 QDR	“Between now and 2015, it is reasonable to assume that more than one aspiring regional power will have both the desire and the means to challenge U.S. interests militarily.” (p. 3)	Partially true	This depends on how a person describes Iraq's actions in the run-up to the 2003 Iraq War, Iran's actions in the Middle East, or, more recently, China's actions in the South China Sea. That said, more often than not, this competition has been more indirect than the QDR presumed.
	“Increasingly capable and violent terrorists will continue to directly threaten the lives of American citizens and try to undermine U.S. policies and alliances.” (p. 4)	True	The 9/11 terrorist attacks validate this prediction.

Source	Claim	Verdict	Explanation
	“Uncontrolled flows of migrants will sporadically destabilize regions of the world and threaten American interests and citizens.” (p. 4)	True	Kosovo, among other incidents, seems to validate this trend.
	“The security environment between now and 2015 will also likely be marked by the absence of a ‘global peer competitor’ able to challenge the United States militarily around the world as the Soviet Union did during the Cold War.” (p. 5)	True	While China and Russia pose a new threat to the United States, they still are more regional—rather than global—competitors.
	“It is likely that no regional power or coalition will amass sufficient conventional military strength in the next 10 to 15 years to defeat our armed forces, once the full military potential of the United States is mobilized and deployed to the region of conflict.” (p. 5)	True	The United States was not defeated—at least on a conventional level—by a regional adversary during this time frame.
	“Russia’s military forces will either undergo substantial change, including additional downsizing and reorganizing, or face a continued process of progressive deterioration.” (p. 5)	True	Ultimately, Russia did reorganize its forces.
	“China is likely to continue to face a number of internal challenges, including the further development of its economic infrastructure and the tension between a modern market economy and authoritarian political system, that may slow the pace of its military modernization.” (p. 5)	Partially True	China does indeed face a variety of internal challenges, but it also has continued to modernize its military.
	“Based on recent experience and intelligence projections, the demand for smaller-scale contingency operations is expected to remain high over the next 15 to 20 years.” (p. 11)	True	The Iraq and Afghanistan wars, as well as the smaller operations in the Global War on Terrorism, validate this prediction.

Source	Claim	Verdict	Explanation
	"In particular, the threat or use of chemical and biological weapons (CBW) is a likely condition of future warfare, including in the early stages of war to disrupt U.S. operations and logistics." (p. 3)	False	Despite U.S. fears, chemical and biological weapons were not used against U.S. forces in the manner described over the period.
1997 NDP	"The ethnic and national pressures for independence and sovereignty that the collapse of the former Soviet Union released may well continue over the next several decades." (p. 5)	True	Kosovo validates this prediction.
	"The geopolitical revolution ... will see the emergence of China as a major regional and global actor." (p. 5)	True	China has become a major regional actor.
	"We envision a reconciled, if not unified, Korean peninsula—an eventuality that has significant security implications for the United States, as well as for our relations with Japan and China." (p. 6)	False	Twenty years later, North Korea continues to be a threat.
	"Access to oil in the Gulf, the Caspian Sea, and elsewhere will likely remain critical to global economic stability."	Partially true	Shale revolution has mitigated this to some extent.
	"Widely available national and commercial space-based systems providing, imagery, communication, and position location will greatly multiply the vulnerability of fixed and, perhaps, mobile forces as well." (p. 13)	True	Terrorists' use of commercial imagery seems to validate this assumption.
	"[O]ur enemies will seek to use commercial remote-sensing and communications satellites, along with space-based timing and navigation data, to accurately target U.S. forces with high degrees of accuracy" by 2020. (p. 14)	True	Terrorists' use of global positioning system validates this prediction.
	"[I]ncreasing likelihood of military operations in cities" by 2020. (p. 14)	True	Multiple urban battles in Iraq's Baghdad, Fallujah, Mosul, and elsewhere prove this prediction.

Source	Claim	Verdict	Explanation
2001 QDR	“Although the United States will not face a peer competitor in the near future, the potential exists for regional powers to develop sufficient capabilities to threaten stability in regions critical to U.S. interests.” (p. 4) “In the future, it is unlikely that the United States will be able accurately to predict how successfully other states will exploit the revolution in military affairs, how rapidly potential or actual adversaries will acquire [chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and explosives] CBRNE weapons and ballistic missiles, or how competitions in space and cyber space will develop.” (p. 7)	True	Iranian actions in Iraq, among other cases, seem to validate this prediction.
	“In addition to exploiting space for their own purposes, future adversaries will also likely seek to deny U.S. forces unimpeded access to space.” (p. 31)	True	The United States being caught off guard by North Korean CBRNE and space programs seems to validate this prediction.
	“Adversaries will also likely seek to exploit strategic depth to their advantage.” (p. 31)	True	This is true of Russia and other adversaries.
2006 QDR	“The United States is a nation engaged in what will be a long war.” (p. v)	True	Afghanistan is the longest war in U.S. history.
	“As freedom and democracy take root in Iraq, it will provide an attractive alternative to the message of extremists for the people of the region.” (p. 10)	False	Iraqi democracy remains fragile at best and Iraq’s trajectory did not lessen extremism in the region or provide an “attractive alternative” as suggested.
	“Democracy is emerging in Iraq, giving political voice to people who suffered for decades under a ruthless tyranny.” (p. 28)	Partially true	Iraq did become more democratic, but it arguably did not become a democracy, given the sectarian violence, the rise of the Islamic state, and terrorism.

Source	Claim	Verdict	Explanation
	Russia “is unlikely to pose a military threat to the United States or its allies on the same scale or intensity as the Soviet Union during the Cold War.” (pp. 28–29)	Partially true	Russia did not militarily threaten U.S. allies “on the same scale” as the Cold War, but it did invade Georgia, a U.S. partner, only a few years later.
	“China is likely to continue making large investments in high-end, asymmetric military capabilities, emphasizing electronic and cyber-warfare;; counter-space operations;; ballistic and cruise missiles;; advanced integrated air defense systems;; next generation torpedoes;; advanced submarines;; strategic nuclear strike from modern, sophisticated land- and sea-based systems;; and theater unmanned aerial vehicles for employment by the Chinese military and for global export.” (pp. 29–30)	True	China made many of these investments.
2010 QDR	“The United States will remain the most powerful actor but must increasingly work with key allies and partners if it is to sustain stability and peace.” (p. 7)	True	The United States relied on European allies in Libya and Afghanistan, and a variety of allies in the campaign against the Islamic State.
	“we must expect that for the indefinite future, violent extremist groups, with or without state sponsorship, will continue to foment instability and challenge U.S. and allied interests.” (p. 20)	True	The continued campaign against al-Qa’ida and the Islamic State validate this trend.
	“U.S. air forces in future conflicts will encounter integrated air defenses of far greater sophistication and lethality than those fielded by adversaries of the 1990s.” (p. 31)	True	Although this has not been tested yet in practice, it agrees with most of the assessment of Russian and Chinese air defense capabilities in particular, as well as other adversaries.
	“In the near term to midterm, substantial numbers of U.S. forces will likely be operating in Afghanistan and U.S. forces in Iraq will continue a responsible drawdown.” (p. v)	Partially True	U.S. troops remain in Afghanistan. The United States also executed a drawdown in Iraq, although troops returned there later to combat the Islamic state.

Source	Claim	Verdict	Explanation
2010 QDR-IP	"Salafist-jihadi movements, wedded to the use of violence and employing terror as their primary strategy, will remain both an international threat to the global system and a specific threat to America and its interests abroad." (p. 26)	True	The rise of the Islamic State validates this trend.
	"While the United States will likely remain the preeminent power, its superiority (including its military superiority) relative to others is diminishing." (p. 26)	True	The growth of Chinese and Russian military power, in particular, validates this trend.
	"An Iranian threat, in turn, will compel these states to both accommodate Iran and consider their own nuclear and advanced conventional programs, particularly if there is doubt about U.S. capacity and commitment." (p. 27)	True	There are periodic reports of Sunni Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, investing in a host of advanced capabilities in response to the Iranian threat (see Mark Urban, "Saudi Nuclear Weapons 'On Order' from Pakistan," BBC News, November 6, 2013).
	"[Al-Qa'ida], Hezbollah, and other radical, violent Islamist movements will continue to threaten U.S. security, even after our forces complete current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan."	True	These groups remained active after the Iraq withdrawal in 2011.
	"We emphasize that the current operational tempo will likely continue at least until 2015 and the force structure we recommend is vital for the Department to stabilize force rotations and dwell times at home in support of our troops and their families." (p. 59)	False	Deployments decreased during this time although it did not go away entirely (see Tim Kane, <i>The Decline of American Engagement: Patterns in U.S. Troop Deployments</i> , Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institute, Economics Working Paper 16101, January 11, 2016.)
2012 DSG	"States such as China and Iran will continue to pursue asymmetric means to counter our power projection capabilities, while the proliferation of sophisticated weapons and technology will extend to nonstate actors as well." (p. 4)	True	The judgment partially hinges on the definition of a "sophisticated weapon," but China and Russia certainly pursued asymmetric means to balance U.S. power, as well as certain nonstate actors (such as the Islamic State).

Source	Claim	Verdict	Explanation
	"More broadly, violent extremists will continue to threaten U.S. interests, allies, partners, and the homeland. The primary loci of these threats are South Asia and the Middle East." (p. 1)	True	The continuation of the Islamic State proves this prediction.
	"Responsibly draw down" from Iraq and Afghanistan. (p. 1)	False	U.S. forces remained in Afghanistan;; U.S. forces returned to Iraq.
	"The demise of Osama bin Laden and the capturing or killing of many other senior al-Qa'ida leaders have rendered the group far less capable . . . the United States will continue to take an active approach to countering these threats." (p. 1)	True	The rise of the Islamic State proves this prediction.
	"We will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region." (p. 2)	Partially true	The United States did move some forces, but the Middle East and Europe demanded, if anything, more attention after the "rebalance."
	"Most European countries are now producers of security rather than consumers of it." (p. 3)	False	The statement did not foresee Russia in Ukraine.
	"Achieving our core goal of disrupting, dismantling, and defeating al-Qa'ida and preventing Afghanistan from ever being a safe haven again will be central to this effort." (p. 4)	False	The statement did not foresee the rise of the Islamic State.
2014 QDR	"As the United States completes its transition in Afghanistan and looks to the future, the international security environment remains uncertain and complicated." (p. 3)	False	The United States did not leave Afghanistan.
	"As nations in the region [Asia] continue to develop their military and security capabilities, there is greater risk that tensions over long-standing sovereignty disputes or claims to natural resources will spur disruptive competition or erupt into conflict, reversing the trends of rising regional peace, stability, and prosperity." (p. 4)	TBD	The five-year time frame for assessment has not elapsed.

Source	Claim	Verdict	Explanation
	"Competition for resources, including energy and water, will worsen tensions in the coming years and could escalate regional confrontations into broader conflicts—particularly in fragile states." (p. 5)	TBD	The five-year time frame for assessment has not elapsed.
	"Even as Iran pledges not to pursue nuclear weapons, Iran's other destabilizing activities will continue to pose a threat to the Middle East, especially to the security of our allies and partners in the region and around the world." (p. 5)	True	Iran continued its missile program, as well as supporting its regional proxy groups in the region.
	"While most European countries today are producers of security, continued instability in the Balkans and on the European periphery will continue to pose a security challenge." (pp. 5–6)	Partially true	The statement's validity partially depends on the definition of the "European periphery," but it seems to underplay Russia's threats not only to Ukraine but the second-order effects of threat to much of Eastern Europe.
	"In the coming years, countries such as China will continue seeking to counter U.S. strengths using antiaccess/area-denial approaches and by employing other new cyber and space control technologies." (p. 6)	True	Chinese investments seem to confirm this trend.
	"Terrorists remain willing and able to threaten the United States, our citizens, and our interests—from conducting major and well-coordinated attacks to executing attacks that are smaller and less complex." (p. 8)	True	Attacks by the Islamic State and other groups seem to confirm this statement.
2014 NDP	"By 2020, the Chinese will have a Navy of close to 350 ships, composed mostly of modern vessels outfitted with large numbers of advanced antiship missiles." (p. 16)	TBD	The time frame has not elapsed.
	"United States can no longer simply assume that Europe will be a net security provider." (p. 19)	True	Russia's actions in Ukraine seem to validate this statement.

Source	Claim	Verdict	Explanation
	"This trend is particularly acute in East Asia, as China's [antiaccess/area denial] systems, particularly its long-range and increasingly precise ballistic and cruise missiles, will be difficult to counter with current or planned forces and pose serious threats to U.S. and allied airbases as well as U.S. naval forces." (p. 21)	True	Chinese investments seem to confirm this trend.
	"These [technological] trends will likely continue to allow non-state actors and even individuals to prosecute more aggressive terrorist and criminal operations with attendant increases in violence." (p. 21)	TBD	The specific prediction about terrorist use of cyber- and bioweapons against the United States has yet to occur.
	"The proliferation of guided munitions will increase the lethality of future conflicts." (p. 22)	TBD	The five-year time frame for assessment has not elapsed.
	"[O]ver time, dominance in undersea warfare will be the <i>sine qua non</i> for maintaining stability and security in key maritime theatres and for defeating high-end military threats if necessary." (p. 43)	TBD	The five-year time frame for assessment has not elapsed.

NOTE: TBD = to be determined.

References

- Amble, John, “National Defense Panel: Budget Can’t Support 2014 QDR,” *War on the Rocks*, August 1, 2014. As of May 15, 2017:
<https://warontherocks.com/2014/08/national-defense-panel-budget-cant-support-2014-qdr/>
- Anfilofyeva, Natalya, “DOD Begins QDR Without Red Team, Increasing Attention on NDP,” *Inside Defense*, September 26, 2013. As of May 10, 2017:
<http://csbaonline.org/about/news/dod-begins-qdr-without-red-team-increasing-attention-on-ndp>
- “Army Cancels Comanche Helicopter,” CNN.com, February 23, 2004. As of June 1, 2017:
<http://www.cnn.com/2004/US/02/23/helicopter.cancel/>
- Aspin, Les, *Report on the Bottom-Up Review*, Washington, D.C., October 1993. As of April 4, 2017:
<http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA359953>
- Barry, John, “The Collapse of Les Aspin,” *Newsweek*, December 26, 1993. As of July 31, 2017:
<http://www.newsweek.com/collapse-les-aspin-190744>
- Bender, Bryan, “Kelly Ayotte Thwarting Effort to Retire Old Air Force Jet,” *Boston Globe*, October 23, 2014.
- Bensahel, Nora, “Why ‘More’ Is Not a Better Plan for US Defense,” *Defense One*, September 3, 2014. As of May 15, 2017:
<http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2014/09/why-more-not-better-plan-us-defense/93080/>
- Binnendijk, Hans, and Richard Kugler, “Sound Vision, Unfinished Business: The Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2001,” *Fletcher World Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 1, Winter–Spring 2002, pp. 123–139.
- Bowman, Ted, “Flournoy Brings Pragmatism to Key Pentagon Post,” NPR, March 27, 2009. As of August 11, 2017:
<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=102416426>
- Bush, George H. W., “Remarks at the Aspen Institute Symposium in Aspen, Colorado,” The American Presidency Project, August 2, 1990. As of May 17, 2017:
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=18731>
- Bush, George W., “A Period of Consequences,” speech presented at The Citadel, South Carolina, September 23, 1999. As of April 21, 2017:
http://www3.citadel.edu/pao/addresses/pres_bush.html

Campbell, Kurt M., and Ely Ratner, “Far Eastern Promises,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 3, May–June 2014, pp. 106–116.

Cancian, Mark F., Rick McPeak, Melissa Dalton, John Schaus, Colin McElhinny, Andrew Metrick, Hijab Shah, William Arnest, Stephanie Hartley, Alexa Hopkins, and Aftan Snyder, *Formulating National Security Strategy: Past Experience and Future Choices*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2017. As of October 13, 2017: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/formulating-national-security-strategy>

CAPE—See Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation.

Castellaw, John, and David Titley, “The US Military Leads on Climate Change,” *The Hill*, March 11, 2014. As of May 15, 2017: <http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/energy-environment/200412-the-us-military-leads-on-climate-change>

Center for a New American Security, “Michèle Flournoy,” webpage, undated. As of August 14, 2017: <https://www.cnas.org/people/mich%C3%A8le-flournoy>

Center for Strategic and International Studies, “Kathleen H. Hicks,” webpage, undated. As of August 14, 2017: <https://www.csis.org/people/kathleen-h-hicks>

Cloud, David S., “Pentagon Scales Back Review of Military Strategy,” *New York Times*, February 1, 2006. As of October 17, 2017: <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/01/politics/pentagon-scales-back-review-of-military-strategy.html>

Cohen, Raphael S., “A Tale of Two Manuals,” *Prism*, Vol. 2, No. 1, December 2011, pp. 87–100.

———, *Air Force Strategic Planning: Past, Present, and Future*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1765-AF, 2017a. As of April 6, 2017: http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1765.html

———, “Why Strategies Disappoint—and How to Fix Them,” *Lawfare*, March 19, 2017b. As of April 6, 2017: <https://www.lawfareblog.com/why-strategies-disappoint%E2%80%94and-how-fix-them>

Collins, Joseph J., “Two Cheers for the QDR,” *Armed Forces Journal*, April 6, 2014. As of May 15, 2017: <http://armedforcesjournal.com/two-cheers-for-the-qdr/>

- Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, *Directions for Defense: Report of the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 1995. As of February 12, 2018:
<http://oai.dtic.mil/oai/oai?verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA295228>
- Correll, John T., “The Legacy of the Bottom-Up Review,” *Air Force Magazine*, Vo. 86, No. 10, October 2003, pp. 54–59. As of April 6, 2017:
<http://www.airforcemag.com/MagazineArchive/Documents/2003/October%202003/1003bur.pdf>
- , *In the Wake of the QDR: The Quadrennial Defense Review and Its Consequences*, Arlington, Va.: Air Force Association, 2006. As of April 26, 2017:
<https://secure.afa.org/Mitchell/reports/0906qdr.pdf>
- Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation, “Home,” webpage, undated. As of July 25, 2017:
<http://www.cape.osd.mil/>
- Daggett, Stephen, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2010: Overview and Implications for National Security Planning*, Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, R41250, May 17, 2010. As of August 1, 2017:
<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R41250.pdf>
- DoD—See U.S. Department of Defense.
- Donley, Michael, and Norton Schwartz, “Air Force Priorities for a New Strategy with Constrained Budgets,” U.S. Air Force, February 1, 2012. As of October 16, 2017:
<https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/budget/fy2013/usaf/afd-120201-027-fy13-priorities.pdf>
- Donnelly, Thomas, “Kill the QDR,” *Armed Forces Journal*, February 1, 2006. As of May 9, 2017:
<http://www.aei.org/publication/kill-the-qdr/>
- Drew, Christopher, and Thom Shanker, “Gates Shakes Up Leadership for F-35,” *New York Times*, February 1, 2010. As of October 17, 2017:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/02/us/politics/02pentagon.html>
- Eaglen, Mackenzie, and James Talent, “Shaping the Future: The Urgent Need to Match Military Modernization to National Commitments,” *Heritage Foundation Backgrounder*, No. 2488, November 4, 2010. As of May 10, 2017:
<http://www.heritage.org/defense/report/shaping-the-future-the-urgent-need-match-military-modernization-national-commitments>
- , “America Needs a Permanent Independent Panel to Stress Test the Pentagon’s QDR Strategy,” *American Enterprise Institute*, November 29, 2012. As of April 3, 2017:

<https://www.aei.org/publication/america-needs-a-permanent-independent-panel-to-stress-test-the-pentagons-qdr-strategy/>

“Edward L. Warner III,” *Elemental Cremation and Burial*, webpage, November 19, 2014. As of August 11, 2017:

<http://www.elementalnw.com/edward-l-warner-iii/>

Ferdinando, Lisa, “Carter Outlines Security Challenges, Warns Against Sequestration,” *DoD News, Defense Media Activity*, March 17, 2016. As of October 17, 2017:

<https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/696449/carter-outlines-security-challenges-warns-against-sequestration/>

Flournoy, Michèle A., “Did the Pentagon Get the Quadrennial Defense Review Right?”

Washington Quarterly, Vol. 29, No. 2, Spring 2006, pp. 67–84. As of February 13, 2018:

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/194593/pdf>

Forbes, J. Randy, “Lay-Up Plan Jeopardizes Some of the Navy’s Best Ships: Forbes,” *Navy Times*, April 19, 2016. As of October 18, 2017:

<https://www.navytimes.com/opinion/2016/04/19/lay-up-plan-jeopardizes-some-of-the-navy-s-best-ships-forbes/>

Freedberg, Sydney J., Jr., “Kill the QDR? Rep. Randy Forbes Says Still Time to Fix It—Exclusive,” *Breaking Defense*, January 25, 2013. As of June 23, 2017:

<http://breakingdefense.com/2013/01/kill-qdr-randy-forbes-still-time-to-fix-exclusive/>

Gaffney, Frank, “National Defense Panel Implicitly Assails Clinton’s Decision to Veto Programs Needed to ‘Deny Enemies the Use of Space,’” *Foreign Policy*, December 3, 1997. As of May 16, 2017:

<https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/1997/12/03/national-defense-panel-implicitly-assails-clintons-decision-to-veto-programs-needed-to-deny-enemies-the-use-of-space-2/>

Garamone, Jim, “Quadrennial Defense Review Charts Strategy Evolution,” *American Forces Press Service*, March 4, 2014. As of October 17, 2017:

<http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=121764>

Gates, Robert, “Defense Budget Recommendation Statement,” Arlington, Va.: U.S. Department of Defense, April 6, 2009. As of May 10, 2017:

<http://archive.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1341>

———, “Speech to the United States Military Academy,” U.S. Department of Defense, West Point, N.Y., February 25, 2011. As of June 5, 2017:

<http://archive.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1539>

———, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014.

- Gordon, John, IV, *The Quadrennial Defense Review: Analyzing the Major Defense Review Process*, dissertation, George Mason University, Fairfax, Va., 2005.
- Gould, Joe, “QDR Dead in 2017 Defense Policy Bill,” *Defense News*, April 25, 2016. As of June 11, 2017:
<http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/2016/04/25/qdr-dead-2017-ndaa-thornberry/83517078/>
- Gouré, Daniel, “2010 QDR: Thoughtful, Reasonable and Irrelevant,” Arlington, Va.: Lexington Institute, January 28, 2010. As of May 10, 2017:
<http://www.lexingtoninstitute.org/2010-qdr-thoughtful-reasonable-and-irrelevant/>
- , “National Defense Panel Report Rightly Criticizes Administration and Congress,” Arlington, Va.: Lexington Institute, August 1, 2014. As of May 15, 2017:
<http://www.lexingtoninstitute.org/national-defense-panel-report-rightly-criticizes-administration-and-congress/>
- Graham, Bradley, “Consensus Is Building to Privatize Defense Functions,” *Washington Post*, March 20, 1995a. As of August 10, 2017:
https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1995/03/20/consensus-is-building-to-privatize-defense-functions/2d55eab1-1d08-462e-b0c9-e8b11ee0fd6b/?utm_term=.ab4fc5877d4c
- , “Congress to Push for a National Missile Defense,” *Washington Post*, September 5, 1995b. As of October 18, 2017:
https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1995/09/05/congress-to-push-for-a-national-missile-defense/54258fd7-2a75-42bf-aaf1-649a002a9b34/?utm_term=.c45a9bf9e495
- , “Ability to Fight in Two Spots Remains Priority, Cohen Says,” *Washington Post*, May 13, 1997. As of October 16, 2017:
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/govt/admin/stories/cohen051397.htm>
- Grant, Greg, “Independent QDR Panel Recommends Buying More of Everything, Increasing Defense Budget,” *Defense Tech*, July 29, 2010. As of May 11, 2017:
<https://www.defensetech.org/2010/07/29/independent-qdr-panel-recommends-buying-more-of-everything-increasing-defense-budget/>
- Gunzinger, Mark, *Shaping America’s Future Military: Toward a New Force Planning Construct*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2013. As of April 26, 2017:
http://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA_ForceStructure-Report-web.pdf
- Gunzinger, Mark, and Jim Thomas, *The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review: An Initial Assessment*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments,

- Backgrounder, February 2010. As of May 11, 2017:
<http://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/2010.02.01-The-2010-Quadrennial-Defense-Review.pdf>
- Hadley, Stephen J., and William J. Perry, *The QDR in Perspective: Meeting America's National Security Needs in the 21st Century—The Final Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2010. As of May 11, 2017:
<https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/qdr/qdrreport.pdf>
- Hartung, William, “How Much Would a Clinton Administration Spend on the Pentagon?” *Huffington Post*, September 20, 2016. As of October 13, 2017:
https://www.huffingtonpost.com/william-hartung/how-much-would-a-clinton_b_12102118.html
- Henry, Ryan, “Defense Transformation and the 2005 Quadrennial Defense Review,” *Parameters*, Vol. 35, No. 4, Winter, 2005–2006, pp. 5–15.
- Herb, Jeremy, “Army: Only Two Brigades Ready to Fight,” *The Hill*, October 21, 2013. As of August 8, 2017:
<http://thehill.com/policy/defense/329665-top-army-general-only-2-brigades-ready-to-fight>
- Herb, Jeremy, and Connor O'Brien, “Trump Turns Defense Hawk,” *Politico*, September 7, 2016. As of October 13, 2017:
<http://www.politico.com/story/2016/09/trump-turns-defense-hawk-227855>
- Hunter, Duncan, “Defense Cuts Hurt U.S. in Long Run,” *Politico*, November 16, 2011. As of May 11, 2017:
<http://www.politico.com/story/2011/11/defense-cuts-hurt-us-in-long-run-068504>
- Ignatius, David, “Grand Vision vs. Patchwork,” *Washington Post*, October 7, 2005. As May 9, 2017:
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/07/AR2005100700495.html>
- Iklé, Fred C., and Albert Wohlstetter, *Discriminate Deterrence: Report of the Long-Term Strategy Commission*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1988.
- Institute for Defense Analyses, “Daniel Y. Chiu,” webpage, undated. As of August 14, 2017:
<https://www.ida.org/en/AboutIDA/IDA%20Leadership/Directors/Chiu.aspx>
- Isenberg, David, *The Pentagon's Fraudulent Bottom-Up Review*, Washington, D.C.: CATO Institute, Policy Analysis No. 206, April 21, 1994. As of April 6, 2017:
<https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/pentagons-fraudulent-bottom-review>

- , *The Quadrennial Defense Review: Reiterating the Tired Status Quo*, Washington, D.C.: CATO Institute, Policy Analysis No. 317, September 17, 1998. As of April 28, 2017:
<https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa-317.pdf>
- Jaffe, Lorna S., *The Development of the Base Force 1989–1992*, Washington, D.C.: Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, July 1993. As of May 17, 2017:
http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/History/Monographs/Base_Force.pdf
- Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the United States*, Washington, D.C., January 1, 1992. As of May 17, 2017:
<http://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nms/nms1992.pdf?ver=2014-06-25-123420-723>
- Kane, Tim, *The Decline of American Engagement: Patterns in U.S. Troop Deployments*, Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institute, Economics Working Paper 16101, January 11, 2016. As of December 4, 2017:
http://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/16101_-_kane_-_decline_of_american_engagement.pdf
- Keck, Zachary, “Can the U.S. Afford the Asia Pivot?” *The Diplomat*, March 5, 2014. As of May 15, 2017:
<http://thediplomat.com/2014/03/can-the-us-afford-the-asia-pivot/>
- Kilian, Michael, “‘Peace Dividend’ Over, Defense Chief Declares,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 17, 1997. As of October 16, 2017:
http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1997-05-17/news/9705170222_1_quadrennial-defense-review-base-closings-defense-secretary-william-cohen
- , “Rumsfeld Plans Redesign of U.S. Defense,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 10, 2001. As of October 17, 2017:
http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2001-08-10/news/0108100217_1_missile-defense-system-defense-secretary-donald-rumsfeld-base-closures
- Korb, Lawrence J., Sean Duggan, and Laura Conley, “Quadrennial Defense Review Fails to Match Resources to Priorities,” Center for American Progress, February 4, 2010. As of May 10, 2017:
<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/news/2010/02/04/7357/quadrennial-defense-review-fails-to-match-resources-to-priorities/>
- Krauthammer, Charles, “Obama Lost the 3rd Debate,” *Orange County Register*, October 26, 2012. As of May 11, 2017:
<http://www.ocregister.com/2012/10/26/charles-krauthammer-obama-lost-the-3rd-debate/>

- Lai, K. K. Rebecca, Troy Griggs, Max Fisher, and Audrey Carlsen, “Is America’s Military Big Enough?” *New York Times*, March 22, 2017. As of June 20, 2017:
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/03/22/us/is-americas-military-big-enough.html>
- Larson, Eric V., *Force Planning Scenarios, 1945–2016: Their Origins and Use in Defense Strategic Planning*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, forthcoming.
- Larson, Eric V., David T. Orletsky, and Kristin Leuschner, *Defense Planning in a Decade of Change: Lessons from the Base Force, Bottom-Up Review, and Quadrennial Defense Review*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-1387-AF, 2001. As of May 11, 2017:
https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1387.html
- Lehman, John, and James Talent, “Press Release—Sen. Jim Talent and Former Navy Sec. John Lehman: Mitt Romney Will Restore the U.S. Navy,” press release, *Portland Press Herald*, February 6, 2012. As of October 13, 2017:
http://www.pressherald.com/2012/02/06/as-president-mitt-romney-would-restore-revitalize-navy_2012-02-06/
- Mabus, Ray, “Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus Secretary of the Navy,” 27th Annual Emerging Issues Forum: Investing in Generation Z, Raleigh, N.C., February 7, 2012. As of October 10, 2017:
<http://www.navy.mil/navydata/people/secnav/Mabus/Speech/emergingissuesfinal.pdf>
- Marshall, Tyrone C., Jr., “Naval Forces More Critical Than Ever, Navy Secretary Says,” *DoD News*, March 27, 2014. As of October 10, 2017:
<http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=121921>
- McCain, John, “McCain Critical of Defense Budget,” press release, February 12, 1997. As of May 17, 2017:
<https://www.mccain.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/1997/2/post-84b09ac5-d90a-426a-a1d5-a0eb72b24031>
- , *Restoring American Power: Recommendations for the FY 2018–FY 2022 Defense Budget*, January 16, 2017. As of May 26, 2017:
https://www.mccain.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/25bff0ec-481e-466a-843f-68ba5619e6d8/restoring-american-power-7.pdf
- McGrath, Bryan, “The Adults Are Heard From: National Defense Panel 2014,” *Information Dissemination*, August 5, 2014. As of May 15, 2017:
<http://www.informationdissemination.net/2014/08/the-adults-are-heard-from-national.html>
- Mearsheimer, John J., “America Unhinged,” *The National Interest*, Vol. 129, January–February 2014, pp. 9–30.

- Monteiro, Nuno P., “Unrest Assured: Why Unipolarity Is Not Peaceful,” *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 3, Winter 2011–2012, pp. 9–40.
- Noonan, Michael P., “The Quadrennial Defense Review and U.S. Defense Policy,” *Orbis*, Spring 2006, pp. 584–586.
- Nunn, Sam, “DOD Must Thoroughly Overhaul the Services’ Roles and Missions,” address to the U.S. Senate, reprinted in *AIR FORCE Magazine*, July 2, 1992. As of June 13, 2017: <http://www.airforcemag.com/MagazineArchive/Documents/2006/June%202006/0606keeperfull.pdf>
- Odeen, Philip A., “Interim NDP Comments on the QDR,” memorandum to Secretary of Defense William Cohen, Washington, D.C., April 8, 1997a.
- , *Transforming Defense: National Security in the 21st Century*, Arlington, Va.: Report of the National Defense Panel, December 1997b.
- Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2017*, Washington, D.C., March 2016. As of May 30, 2017: http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2017/FY17_Green_Book.pdf
- O’Hanlon, Michael, “Sizing U.S. Ground Forces: From “2 Wars” to “1 War + 2 Missions,”” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 1, Spring 2014, pp. 151–164.
- Perry, William J., and John P. Abizaid, *Ensuring a Strong U.S. Defense for the Future: The National Defense Panel Review of the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review*, Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2014. As of May 15, 2017: https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Ensuring-a-Strong-U.S.-Defense-for-the-Future-NDP-Review-of-the-QDR_0.pdf
- Pine, Art, “Military: Pentagon’s ‘Bottom-Up Review’ Appears to Be Down and Out,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 23, 1994. As of April 6, 2017: http://articles.latimes.com/1994-08-23/news/mn-30316_1_cold-war
- Posen, Barry R., “Pull Back: The Case for a Less Activist Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 1, January–February 2013, pp. 116–128.
- Public Law 103-160, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1994, November 30, 1993.
- Public Law 104-201, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997, Section 924, September 23, 1996.
- Public Law 114-840, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Section 941, November 30, 2016.

- Putnam, Robert D., “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games,” *International Organizations*, Vol. 42, No. 3, Summer 1988, pp. 427–460.
- Rosenbaum, David E., “Les Aspin, 56, Dies; Member of Congress and Defense Chief,” *New York Times*, May 22, 1995. As of April 6, 2017:
<http://www.nytimes.com/1995/05/22/obituaries/les-aspin-56-dies-member-of-congress-and-defense-chief.html?pagewanted=all>
- Ross, Robert, “The Problem with the Pivot: Obama’s New Asia Policy Is Unnecessary and Counterproductive,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 6, November–December 2012, pp. 70–82.
- Rumsfeld, Donald, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir*, New York: Sentinel, 2011.
- Schake, Kori, “This QDR Is a Budget Document, Not a Strategy Document,” *War on the Rocks*, March 6, 2014. As of April 3, 2017:
<https://warontherocks.com/2014/03/this-qdr-is-a-budget-document-not-a-strategy-document/>
- Schmitt, Eric, “New Report on Long-Sought Goal: Efficiency in Military,” *New York Times*, May 25, 1995. As of May 18, 2017:
<http://www.nytimes.com/1995/05/25/us/new-report-on-long-sought-goal-efficiency-in-military.html>
- Schrader, John Y., Leslie Lewis, and Roger Allen Brown, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2001: Lessons on Managing Change in the Department of Defense*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, DB-379-JS, 2003. As of June 20, 2017:
https://www.rand.org/pubs/documented_briefings/DB379.html
- Schreer, Benjamin, “Dead Upon Arrival? The Quadrennial Defense Review Report,” *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 151, No. 2, April 2006, pp. 34–37.
- Shanker, Thom, “Army Chief Seeks Changes to Improve Lives,” *New York Times*, May 29, 2001. As of October 18, 2017:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/29/us/army-chief-seeks-changes-to-improve-lives.html>
- Shenon, Philip, “Troop Cuts Likely to Be Main Result of Major Review,” *New York Times*, April 29, 1997. As of April 26, 2017:
<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/04/29/us/troop-cuts-likely-to-be-main-result-of-major-review.html?pagewanted=all>
- Spring, Baker, John Luddy, and Lawrence DiRita, “Thumbs Down to the Bottom-Up Review,” Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, Backgrounder Series, No. 957, September 24, 1993. As of April 6, 2017:
<http://www.heritage.org/defense/report/thumbs-down-the-bottom-review>
- Tedstrom, John, and John G. McGinn, *Planning America’s Security: Lessons from the National Defense Panel*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, MR-1049-OSD, 1999. As of May

16, 2017:

https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1049.html

Tolstoy, Leo, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Nathan Haskell Dole, New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell, 1899.

Urban, Mark, “Saudi Nuclear Weapons ‘On Order’ from Pakistan,” BBC News, November 6, 2013. As of December 11, 2017:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-24823846>

U.S. Code, Title 10, Armed Forces, Subtitle A, General Military Law, Part I, Organization and General Military Powers, Chapter 2, Department of Defense, Section 113, Secretary of Defense. As of June 22, 2017:

<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/search/pagedetails.action?packageId=USCODE-2011-title10&granuleId=USCODE-2011-title10-subtitleA-partI-chap2-sec113>

U.S. Department of Defense, “Amanda J. Dory,” webpage, undated-a. As of October 13, 2017: <https://www.defense.gov/About/Biographies/Biography-View/Article/602696/amanda-j-dory/>

———, “Christine E. Wormuth,” webpage, undated-b. As of August 14, 2017:

<https://www.defense.gov/About/Biographies/Biography-View/Article/602788/christine-e-wormuth/>

———, *The Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review*, Washington, D.C., May 1997. As of April 19, 2017:

<http://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/quadrennial/QDR1997.pdf?ver=2014-06-25-110930-527>

———, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington, D.C., September 30, 2001. As of April 24, 2017:

<http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/qdr2001.pdf>

———, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington, D.C., February 6, 2006. As of May 9, 2017:

<http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/QDR20060203.pdf>

———, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington, D.C., February 2010. As of May 10, 2017:

https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/QDR/QDR_as_of_29JAN10_1600.pdf

———, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, Washington, D.C., January 2012. As of May 11, 2017:

http://archive.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf

- , *Quadrennial Defense Review 2014*, Washington, D.C., March 4, 2014. As of May 15, 2017:
http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/2014_Quadrennial_Defense_Review.pdf
- U.S. House of Representatives, “Jim Thomas,” webpage, undated. As of August 11, 2017:
<http://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS28/20131211/101579/HHRG-113-AS28-Bio-ThomasJ-20131211.pdf>
- U.S. Republican Party, “The Republican ‘Contract with America,’” (September 27, 1994), reprinted in Lori Cox Han and Diane J. Heith, *Presidents and the American Presidency*, Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2012. As of April 21, 2017:
<http://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780195385168/resources/chapter6/contract/america.pdf>
- U.S. Senate, “Hearing to Receive Testimony on Improving the Pentagon’s Development of Policy, Strategy, and Plans,” before the Senate Committee on Armed Services, December 8, 2015. As of April 3, 2017:
<https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/15-92%20-%2012-8-15.pdf>
- Vergun, David, “Odierno: Brigade Readiness Half What It Should Be,” Army News Service, webpage, March 11, 2015. As of August 8, 2017:
<https://www.army.mil/article/144302>
- Weiner, Tim, “2-War Strategy Is Obsolete, a Defense Panel Contends,” *New York Times*, December 2, 1997. As of October 17, 2017:
<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/12/02/us/2-war-strategy-is-obsolete-a-defense-panel-contends.html>
- Wheeler, Winslow T., “More Swill from the Pentagon Budget Busters,” *Huffington Post*, August 5, 2010. As of May 11, 2017:
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/winslow-t-wheeler/more-swill-from-the-penta_b_671640.html
- White House, “Michael George Vickers—Department of Defense,” webpage, undated. As of August 1, 2017:
https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/results/leadership/bio_1231.html
- , *National Security Strategy of the United States*, Washington, D.C., August 1991. As of May 17, 2017:
<http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/1991.pdf>
- White, John, preface in Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, *Directions for Defense: Report of the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 1995. As of May 18, 2017:
<http://edocs.nps.edu/dodpubs/topic/general/ADA295228.pdf>

Zenko, Micah, and Michael A. Cohen, “Clear and Present Safety,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 2, March/April 2012, pp. 79–93.

Defense reviews are political documents, as much as they are analytical ones. This report examines three main questions. First, why has the defense strategy process evolved in the way it has? Second, why, despite so much time and effort, do strategies so often come up short? Finally, and most importantly, how can the process change to make for better strategy? Using a mixture of primary and secondary sources and firsthand interviews, this report first traces the history of major defense reviews in the post– Cold War period from the Base Force through the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review. The report then explores the politics behind these reviews to explain the structural, personnel, and political reasons why these defense reviews often embrace the status quo, and predicts what

factors—from budgets to timing to senior-level involvement—may allow a review to develop more-innovative findings.

The report concludes with a series of recommendations for the services, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the U.S. government at large to get the most out of these defense reviews. Ultimately, this report argues that defense reviews at their core are as much the product of political compromises as they are objective analysis. Consequently, understanding the politics behind defense reviews can help explain how they evolve, what their limitations are, and how to maximize the process in the future.



PROJECT AIR FORCE

www.rand.org

\$30.00

ISBN-10 0-8330-9973-6
ISBN-13 978-0-8330-9973-0

