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**The Quadrennial Defense Review:
Improving the Process to Improve the Product**

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THE QUADRENNIAL DEFENSE REVIEW: IMPROVING THE PROCESS TO IMPROVE THE PRODUCT

*To speak or not to speak, to do or leave undone the indispensable virtues—prudence
and firmness—one for choosing a course, the other for pursuing it
—Gorgias, Greek rhetorician*

INTRODUCTION

The above quote, taken from Secretary of Defense William Cohen's cover letter that accompanied the May 1997 Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review, might leave one with the impression that those responsible for that undertaking were driven by purely noble motives. Rather than accepting such a lofty notion at face value, we must probe more deeply to reveal the process at work during the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). This is especially appropriate since more than a year has passed since the completion of the QDR and the follow-on report by the National Defense Panel (NDP). We can now view the results with some perspective. In addition, lessons learned from the 1997 reviews can help guide the next review cycle, scheduled for 2001.

While many in Congress may have held out high hopes that the QDR and NDP would produce meaningful recommendations for change to meet the nation's future security requirements, the results have been disappointing. This paper will seek to explain that the shortcomings in the products from the QDR and NDP were, perhaps predictably, largely a result of the bureaucratic structure of the process used to conduct these two much-publicized defense reviews. Furthermore, this paper will offer recommendations for an alternative structure for the next QDR to increase the freedom and independence of its operations. This will improve the chances that the next review will take a truly "fresh look" at defense and yield a more relevant report.

BACKGROUND

While there are many issues that compete for the nation's interest and limited resources, defense is arguably the most important issue our political leaders must wrestle with. Adequate national security is fundamental to our survival and indeed our prosperity. However, we cannot afford to waste money while there are so many pressing domestic problems such as health care and Social Security. It is important to note that defense spending, as a percentage of Gross National Product (GNP), is lower now than at any time since the Great Depression. Since 1985, when the nation spent seven percent of its GNP (and 28 percent of the Federal budget) on defense, expenditures have declined from \$400 billion (in constant 1997 dollars) to \$250 billion.¹ Projections for defense spending are essentially flat through FY 2003, with the DoD expected to absorb slightly less than three percent of our Gross Domestic Product in FY 1999.² Nevertheless, defense will continue to consume roughly 15 percent of the Federal budget,³ and even this reduced level of spending remains a frequent target of defense critics.

The end of the Cold War and absence of a clear and present danger—in the form of a peer competitor—has focused renewed debate over how much America should spend on defense. To help guide decision makers in their deliberations, Republican Senator Dan Coats of Indiana and Democratic Senator Joe Lieberman of New Jersey set the wheels in motion in late 1996 for a major defense review.

¹ William S. Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 1997), iii-iv.

² *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 1999*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), March, 1998), 4, 7, 10, 201.

³ *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 1999*, (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), March, 1998), 10.

On 23 September 1996, the Congress passed the “Armed Forces Force Structure Review Act of 1996 ”⁴ This legislation established a requirement for the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to complete a comprehensive Quadrennial Defense Review by May 15, 1997 In addition, the legislation provided for an independent National Defense Panel, which was to provide an interim report to Congress by March 14, 1997, an assessment of the Secretary of Defense’s QDR report by May 15, and a final NDP report to the Secretary of Defense by December 1, 1997 The Secretary would then have two weeks to formally review the NDP report before forwarding it, along with his comments, to Congress Although this rapid turnaround time may seem too short, it is significant to note that throughout the QDR and NDP processes there was active communication between the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the NDP Thus, neither the findings in the Secretary’s QDR report in May nor the recommendations in the NDP’s report in December came as a surprise to the other group

The intent of the legislation was to have the Department of Defense and the NDP perform separate, yet complementary, examinations of the nation’s future defense requirements, including a recommended security strategy for the early 21st century Both groups were tasked to address force structure and modernization requirements, as well as infrastructure and other elements of the defense budget While the intent of the legislation may have been clear to Congress, the Department of Defense and its military departments quickly determined that the QDR was all about resources and the future role each Service would play in national security

⁴ Public Law 104-201-Sept 23, 1996 (Washington, D C U S Government Printing Office, 1996) 110 Statute, 2624-2629

BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS

One should not be too surprised that the QDR devolved into a “turf battle” over future roles and missions—and money. Graham Allison and Morton Halperin offer the compelling argument that government decisions are not reached through a single rational choice, but rather are the result of the “pulling and hauling” of separate organizations within the government.⁵ This perspective goes a long way in explaining the behavior of each of the military Services as well as the actions of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), which had overall control of the QDR process.

OSD got underway late in 1996 and organized the QDR into seven functional groupings, or “Panels,” that focused on particular aspects of national defense. These Panels included 1) Strategy, 2) Modernization, 3) Force Assessment, 4) Readiness, 5) Infrastructure, 6) Human Resources, and 7) Information Operations—Intelligence. Logically, one would regard the work of the Strategy Panel to be the foundation for the work of the other Panels. However, OSD insisted that all seven Panels proceed in tandem. While there was some exchange of information between Panels, a common critique was that the work of the Strategy Panel should have been completed prior to the other Panels beginning their work. One explanation for this seemingly illogical approach was the desire on the part of OSD to keep the debate over the QDR out of the public domain until the entire report was submitted to Congress. There was concern within OSD that if the strategy was completed early, it would be subject to external criticism that might cripple the rest of the effort.

⁵ Graham T. Allison and Morton H. Halperin, “Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications,” *World Politics: A Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 40 (Summer 1972), 43.

OSD's bureaucratic interest was in putting out a completed product that would withstand the inevitable assaults from various factions within and outside of government. At least of equal importance to OSD, as the Administration's representative, was to provide big cost savings. Therefore, OSD's organizational imperative was to deliver a strategy and force structure that would keep spending flat at about \$250 billion. Thus, the QDR essentially became a "cut drill" to save billions of dollars. To do that, OSD had to keep a tight lid on any QDR information to avoid providing ammunition to outside critics, especially those in Congress who might not share the Administration's desire for defense cuts. Thus, all of the other Panels began their work of analyzing and making recommendations on force structure, modernization, readiness, etc. in the absence of a completed strategy. What should have been a sequential process, with strategy in the forefront, became instead a parallel process. In contrast to the QDR, the New Look defense review completed during the Eisenhower administration offers an example of how a sequential defense review can be structured.⁶

It is also worth noting that the enabling legislation directed that the QDR look out only through the year 2005, while it asked the NDP to look to the year 2010 and beyond.⁷ Why did Congress make this distinction? Perhaps the best explanation is that the QDR was to be more centered on the immediate budget process, with a correspondingly shorter time horizon, while the NDP was to take a longer-range and more visionary approach. However, the shorter-range perspective of the QDR created certain problems. For example, since the lead-time to develop and procure advanced weapon systems is often

⁶ Major Patrick M. Condray *Charting the Nation's Course: Strategic Planning Processes in the 1952-53 "New Look" and the 1996-97 Quadrennial Defense Review*, Masters Thesis, School of Advanced Airpower Studies, (Maxwell AFB, AL, June 1998), 40.

15 years or more, the narrowly focused QDR was somewhat handicapped in its ability to make recommendations for fundamental, long-term changes

To counter criticism that the 1993 Bottom Up Review (BUR) had been closed process, the QDR was billed as more open. During a QDR briefing at the CINC Conference held in Washington D C on 29-30 January 1997, Army Major General Hamilton, the Deputy Director of the Joint Staff's J-8 Directorate (Force Structure, Resources & Assessment), told the CINCs that the QDR process was "inclusive, collaborative, and responsive."⁸ The Joint Staff's J-8 organization was responsible, along with OSD's Program Assessment and Evaluation (PA&E), for integrating the efforts of the seven Panels. However, the tight timeline for delivering the report, along with the departure of William Perry as Secretary of Defense and his replacement by William Cohen, served to make a thoughtful examination of alternative defense strategies less likely. Therefore, the openness advertised by General Hamilton was more promise than reality.

As OSD was standing up its Panels, the Services likewise sprang into action to support the OSD effort. More importantly, each Service was clearly motivated to put forth the maximum effort to further its own institutional interests. This led to sharp and often bitter disagreements between the Services over cuts in personnel and future modernization. One of the more visible expressions of this conflict was the Navy and Air Force battle over fighter aircraft modernization. The QDR's Modernization Panel struggled with the task of trying to support three new fighter programs, the Navy's F/A-18E/F, the Air Force's F-22, and the Joint Strike Fighter—an aircraft with variants for the

⁷ Public Law 104-201-Sept 23, 1996 (Washington, D C U S Government Printing Office, 1996) 110 Statute, 2624, 2626

Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps The challenge was to try to find money to fund all three programs (and thus keep each Service happy), or make the politically and bureaucratically difficult choice of narrowing the field of new fighter aircraft to save taxpayer dollars

Both the Air Force and the Navy were in need of new jet fighters to replace their existing fighter inventory The Navy's mismanagement of its A-12 stealth fighter program during the Bush administration caused Secretary of Defense Cheney to cancel the entire program Desperate to find a near-term successor for its aging F-14s, the Navy decided to procure the F/A-18E/F The Navy feared that without a replacement aircraft early in the next century, they would not be able to keep its carrier decks full of planes, thus undermining support for the existing fleet of 12 carriers

The Navy supported the F/A-18E/F because this newer version of the existing F/A-18C/D could be produced and delivered several years sooner than either the more advanced Joint Strike Fighter or a potential naval variant of the Air Force's F-22 Also, since the F-22 was an "Air Force program," the institutional Navy resisted getting involved—a prime example of the bureaucratic model at work The Navy made its decision to press ahead with the F/A-18E/F despite the fact it represented only a marginal performance improvement over the older version The Government Accounting Office further pointed out that the F/A-18E/F could not be considered a "stealth platform" since it carried external fuel tanks and external weapons—unlike the stealthy F-117, F-22, or B-2⁹ This point is significant since a decade earlier the Navy had argued the need for the A-12 was driven by the requirement for a stealth fighter for its carriers Now, the Navy

⁸ Maj Gen Hamilton, Vice Director, J-8, *QDR Briefing to CINC Conference 29-30 January 1997*, slide 2

⁹ GAO Report, *F/A-18 E/F Marginal Improvement at High Cost*, (Washington, D C , June 1996), 37

was willing to disregard this previously stated imperative. Indeed, as the GAO highlighted in its report, the requirement for stealth capability was a stated need for “first day of the war” survivability for the Navy’s own version of the Joint Strike Fighter.¹⁰ This inconsistent reasoning, however, failed to kill the F/A-18E/F. Finally, the Marine Corps decided to back out of the F/A-18E/F program, preferring to wait for its variant of the Joint Strike Fighter. Despite all of this, the Navy was successful in its intense lobbying effort to keep the controversial F/A-18E/F program, although in reduced numbers.

The Air Force’s F-22 also came under attack as being too costly. Nevertheless, the Air Force felt confident that the superior performance capabilities of the F-22 justified the expense. Then, late in the QDR process, Secretary Cohen called in the Service Chiefs to ask them to make sacrifices to help trim the defense budget. Air Force Chief of Staff, General Ron Fogleman, reluctantly agreed to give up one wing of the planned four wings of F-22s, a reduction from 438 aircraft to 339.¹¹ This voluntary surrender of 25 percent of the F-22 buy delighted Cohen who then tried to get the other Service chiefs to make a comparable offering. But they weren’t biting. Army Chief of Staff, General Dennis Reimer, continued to chant the Army’s mantra of “485,000 pairs of boots on the ground.” The Navy likewise refused to budge from its insistence on 12 carriers, and the strong Congressional support for the Marines meant they were largely immune from cuts.

The voluntary Air Force cut in the F-22 did not spare the Service from additional reductions. Indeed, the final QDR report produced a relatively larger share of cuts for the

¹⁰ GAO Report, *F/A-18 E/F Marginal Improvement at High Cost*, (Washington, D C June 1996) 37

Air Force than for the other Services. Specifically, the Army was allowed to retain its 10 active duty divisions and take a reduction of just 15,000 personnel from its active force. The Army did offer up a 45,000 person cut in its Reserve component (Army National Guard and Army Reserve) to save dollars.¹² This led to acrimonious charges from the Army National Guard that the active Army had betrayed them. The author witnessed the August 1997 annual meeting of the National Guard Association of the United States in Albuquerque, New Mexico. When General Reimer was introduced as a guest speaker, he was greeted with scattered booing from the crowd.¹ The conflicting institutional interests of the active Army and Army National Guard were exposed and laid bare by the QDR. The Army and Army Guard are still trying to heal the wounds.

For its part, the Navy succeeded in retaining its 12 carriers and 10 active air wings.¹³ The Navy took a reduction of 18,000 active duty personnel and 4,100 from its Reserves—a testament to the Navy’s ability to ward off major challenges to its force structure. The Marines sustained a token active duty decrease of 1,800 along with 4,200 from its Reserves. The Air Force, in addition to the 25 percent reduction in the F-22 buy, took a cut of 26,900 from its active force. Compared to the other Services, the Air Force’s active duty losses were larger, both in terms of absolute numbers as well as in percentage terms.¹⁴

This result came as a genuine shock to some in the Air Force since they had been largely triumphant during the deliberations of the Strategy Panel and had succeeded in

¹¹ William S. Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 1997), vii.

¹² William S. Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 1997), 29.

¹³ William S. Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 1997), 29.

getting language on “Halt Phase” warfare included in the QDR report. Indeed, the Air Force considered the language on the Halt Phase as a major “win.” The new emphasis on rapidly halting enemy aggression, the Air Force believed, would increase the importance of airpower and lead to a greater share of the defense budget devoted to the Air Force. Therefore, the Air Force’s victory in the early battles over defense strategy became somewhat hollow since QDR force structure and modernization decisions were largely divorced from strategy. As noted earlier, this result was at least partly due to the parallel process, rather than a more logical sequential process, which was employed during the QDR. This is also an observation shared by the NDP as stated in their assessment of the QDR delivered in May 1997. The NDP was generally pleased with the QDR strategy, but stated that “Program decisions and priorities would benefit from a much tighter linkage with this strategy.”¹⁵

The record shows that contrary to the expectations of Congress’ enabling legislation, the QDR did not produce sweeping, innovative recommendations. Rather, the bureaucratic process, coupled with the institutional imperatives of OSD and the Services, produced a set of force structure and modernization decisions that reflected the overriding desire of OSD to produce savings, while each Service attempted to retain as much budget share as possible. While these deficiencies could almost be predicted for the QDR, the NDP should have been better structured to exhibit more independent and creative thinking.

¹⁴ William S. Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 1997), 30.

¹⁵ National Defense Panel, *Assessment of the May 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, D.C.: May 15, 1997), 1.

THE NATIONAL DEFENSE PANEL

Despite the inherent deficiencies in the OSD-led QDR, the “independent” National Defense Panel should provide an objective forum for examining our defense requirements. But did it? The legislation specified that the Secretary of Defense, “in consultation with the chairman and ranking member of the Committee on Armed Services of the Senate and the chairman and ranking member of the Committee on National Security of the House of Representatives”¹⁶ will appoint a chairman of the NDP and eight other members. This was to be done not later than 1 December 1996, but due to the late arrival of Secretary Cohen, the NDP members were not in place until the end of February 1997. This made their interim review of the QDR on 14 March 1997 somewhat shallow.

What is highly significant is the composition of the NDP, which ensured that it would be anything but “independent.” First, Chairman Phil Odeen was the President and CEO of BDM, a large defense contractor. Former Ambassador Richard Armitage had strong ties to the US Navy as did, quite obviously, retired Admiral David Jeremiah. Retired General Richard Hearney was a former Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps. Former Ambassador Robert Kimmitt was a brigadier general in the US Army Reserve while Andrew Krepinevich was a retired Army lieutenant colonel. Retired Army General Robert Riscassi was also a former CINC of US Forces Korea. General James McCarthy was retired from the Air Force. Only Janne Nolan, a Senior Fellow at Brookings, could be considered a “neutral player.” Thus, the lineup for the NDP had three members of the Sea Services, three from the Army, and only one from the Air

¹⁶ Public Law 104-201-Sept 23, 1996 (Washington D C U S Government Printing Office 1996), 110 Statute, 2626

Force The ultimate results from the NDP must be viewed with the composition of the Panel in mind

The fact that almost every member of the NDP had a prior link to a particular Service meant that genuine independent thought was difficult, if not impossible, to achieve For example, General McCarthy found himself virtually alone when advocating airpower solutions to US defense requirements Perhaps nothing illuminates this point so dramatically as the striking omission from the NDP report of any mention of Halt Phase warfare The NDP collectively and deliberately chose to ignore this element of the QDR strategy because Panel members understood that acknowledging the need to rapid halt aggression would favor airpower and the Air Force

The initial collegial working relationship within the NDP gradually became more strained as time went on This was not only due to the composition of the Panel itself, but was also a result of the makeup of the NDP's staff Each Service furnished officers to the NDP to assist the members with their duties Although the NDP staffers worked in business suits that eliminated the outward signs of allegiance, these dutiful servants of the NDP maintained fierce loyalty to their respective Service Not surprisingly, their real task was to help guide the NDP to make decisions favorable to the organization from which they came

The importance of this staff function should not be underestimated The staff, including highly capable officers with the rank of colonel or Navy captain, prepared briefings for the NDP and was tasked to write the final report Although the Panel members themselves had to make the final approval, the power of the pen was significant The staff wrote successive drafts of the final report during the last weeks of

the Panel's work in October and November 1997. Staffers from each Service labored tirelessly to insert language favorable to their parent Service. However, in the end, the Army proved to be the most successful by eliminating the threatening halt phase references contained in the QDR report. The long reach of the Services had extended into the very NDP that Congress had charged with being "independent." The net result of the NDP was somewhat anticlimactic. Congress held hearings in early 1998 to take testimony from the Panel members, but nothing substantive came of the NDP's work.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One might be tempted to despair over the failure of either the QDR or the NDP to fashion meaningful, long-term changes in America's defense posture. The competing bureaucratic interests that were so much in evidence during the QDR and NDP processes clearly interfered with objective analysis of the nation's defense needs. However, there is reason to hope the next review will develop more useful recommendations.

One such encouraging development is the creation of the 21st Century National Security Study Group. A product of outgoing Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, the study group boasts former Senators David Boren of Oklahoma and Warren Rudman of New Hampshire as co-chairmen. Secretary Cohen recently asked Gingrich to join the group, and Newt agreed.¹⁷ This group has 18 months—considerably longer than either the QDR or NDP—to craft a new national security strategy, along with alternatives. Unlike the NDP, retired military officers do not dominate this study group. The 21st Century National Security Study Group has even included the respected historian

¹⁷ Christopher J. Castelli, "Gingrich to Join National Security Study He Championed on Capitol Hill," *Inside the Pentagon*, December 10, 1998, 1.

Stephen Ambrose as a member. The output from this study will likely be more coherent, and far less tied to parochial Service interests.

As previously argued, the composition of the NDP, with its disproportionate Army and Navy representation, served to weaken the intended independence of this body. While one must acknowledge that no one is free of bias, the approach taken in forming the 21st Century National Security Study Group is a positive step. To answer those who might be critical of not having a defense review dominated by retired generals and admirals, we can also look to the outstanding results produced by the Packard Commission in 1986.

Led by industrialist David Packard, this Commission made recommendations that laid the foundation for the watershed Goldwater-Nichols Act, which strengthened the authority of combatant commanders and greatly invigorated the Joint Staff.¹⁸ The esteemed 15-member Panel that served under Packard included only four retired officers of flag rank: General Robert H. Barrow of the Marines, General Paul F. Gorman of the Army, Navy Admiral James L. Holloway, and Air Force General Brent Scowcroft.¹⁹ The Packard Commission also included in its membership future Secretaries of Defense Frank Carlucci and William Perry as well as future CIA Director James Woolsey. This eminently qualified Commission made the case for strengthening the office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,²⁰ establishing powerful regional Commanders in

¹⁸ Public Law 99-433-Oct 1, 1986 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985), 100 Statute.

¹⁹ *A Quest for Excellence: Final Report to the President by the President's Blue Ribbon Commission on Defense Management*, (Washington, D.C., June 30, 1986).

²⁰ *A Quest for Excellence: Final Report to the President by the President's Blue Ribbon Commission on Defense Management*, (Washington, D.C., June 30, 1986), xix, xx, 37.

Chief (CINCs),²¹ as well as several specific recommendations for acquisition reform²²

From this history, we can be encouraged about the ability of an independent body to seek out information from competent military sources as they conduct their review while, at the same time, not being forced into positions that favor a particular Service. The key is to ensure bright, knowledgeable individuals are brought together without the strong Service connections that characterized the NDP. DoD officials may genuinely want to make substantive changes to force structure and spending priorities, but the internal political and bureaucratic dynamics may make such steps nearly impossible. Therefore, DoD might embrace creative recommendations coming from a respected study group outside the department.

With the above thoughts in mind, the following recommendations are offered for the 2001 QDR:

1. Structure a sequential process that builds from the previous strategy work of the 1997 QDR and the results of the 21st Century National Security Study Group, whose final report is due by February 2001.
2. Adopt the recommendation of the GAO to upgrade the quantitative models used to assess force structure alternatives, and separately model changes to air, ground, and naval forces.²³
3. Extend the length of time allotted to complete the QDR from five months to at least eight to ten months.

²¹ *A Quest for Excellence: Final Report to the President by the President's Blue Ribbon Commission on Defense Management*, (Washington, D. C., June 30, 1986), xx, 38.

²² *A Quest for Excellence: Final Report to the President by the President's Blue Ribbon Commission on Defense Management*, (Washington, D. C., June 30, 1986) 52-71.

²³ Government Accounting Office, *Quadrennial Defense Review: Opportunities to Improve the Next Review*, (Washington, D. C., June 25, 1998), 5-6.

- 4 Expand the time horizon for the next QDR to the 2025 timeframe to broaden the perspective of the study
- 5 Rather than requiring Service consensus, allow each Service to make its own force structure and modernization recommendations, then task OSD and the Joint Staff to evaluate the efficacy of the Services' proposals

For the NDP of 2001, the following suggestions are offered

- 1 Insist on recruiting to the NDP a diverse mixture of very high-caliber individuals from academia, industry, and a limited number from government and the military The membership of the Packard Commission and the 21st Century National Security Study Group could serve as models for the next NDP
- 2 Prohibit active duty or Reserve officers from serving as staff assistants on the NDP, for reasons previously noted
- 3 Ensure that Service and OSD perspectives are reviewed by the NDP, but are not inserted into the NDP process by persons with close ties to a particular branch
- 4 Require the NDP (as the 1997 NDP failed to do) to assess alternative force structures to discover which force elements (land, sea, and air) provide greater utility in the types of conflict the United States is likely to face through the 2025 period

The above recommendations will not make the next QDR or NDP perfect, but they will go a long way toward the goal of creating more objective, fact-based review processes That goal is certainly worth chasing, for the security needs of the United

States will remain a crucial issue. New threats and opportunities are bound to confront the nation in the new century. We must take great pains to craft the best possible framework for the review process so that we can produce the best possible result for America.