



Strategic Vision Workshop

National Grand Strategy – A Constellation of Choices

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The United States Army War College (USAWC), in support of the Army Staff and in cooperation with national security faculty and researchers at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Security Studies Program, and Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, conducted a series of workshops from 7-10 April 2008 entitled *Strategic Vision Workshop: National Grand Strategy*. The Strategic Vision Workshop was organized to assist the Department of the Army in the understanding of Grand Strategy and future policy options that will prepare the Army to meet challenges in a world of persistent conflict.



The premise behind the workshop is the idea that Strategy is all about choices a nation makes given a particular strategic environment. Trends shaping America's strategic environment point toward an era that some have labeled "persistent conflict." The future is expected to be one of protracted confrontation among state, non-state, and individual actors that will use violence to achieve political, religious, and other ideological ends. Furthermore, these confrontations will be exacerbated by major shifts in wealth brought on by globalization, significant disruptions in the status quo resulting from major technology advancement, growing radicalism, massive population growth, competition for resources, climate change/natural disasters, and the threat of ungoverned spaces. This environment will force the United States to make difficult strategic choices. The workshop explored the various choices available to the U.S. through the use of the elements of national power as depicted in the D-I-M-E model (Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic). What follows is a brief exposition of the choices discussed during the workshop.

DIPLOMATIC

There are few national security experts who think the U.S. should revert to isolationism. Engagement is seen as a necessary condition in U.S. Grand Strategy, therefore, this strategic choice has already been made. Complementing this engagement strategy is the conviction that the U.S. must pursue a strategy of multilateralism. These views are popular with most theorists, with the only real debate centering on defining the conditions when the U.S. should engage and the purpose(s) for such an engagement. Given the future strategic environment described above, the requirements for collective assistance by other nation-states appears even more strong than it has in the past.

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A distinguishing and particularly troubling feature of this future environment is the rise of non-state/entity-based players that are competing against “pure-Westphalian” nation-states. Some even argue that the traditional role the nation-state has played during the last 300 years is threatened. Certainly, non-state actors have the potential to be “super empowered” by such developments as globalization and the diffusion of technology. Without exception, modern nation-states appear particularly vulnerable to exploitation by various non-state/entity-based players. Ideally, the U.S. wishes a future where nation-states remain the center of world governance. This has the potential of becoming a very difficult task, and the U.S. must carefully consider its choices.

To that end, the first and perhaps most critical choice the U.S. must make centers around the role it takes on in this new environment. The U.S. supports the belief that free people, led by a democratically elected government, are more likely to be increasingly at peace with their neighbors as their institutions mature. A recent Army strategic seminar identified three roles as options for the U.S. to pursue. The first option was characterized as the “facilitator of good governance.” This option pursues the strengthening of global institutions, such as the United Nations which is seen as a key player in facilitating world order through good governance.

A second option was for the United States to pursue a diplomatic strategy as the “leader of global order.” In this role the U.S. could be viewed as the “world’s policeman.” Pursuing this strategy assumes that the world is unipolar with the U.S. as the undisputed leader. This strategy does not imply that the U.S. always pursue unilateral actions, in fact it argues for robust engagement and multilateralism first and unilateralism only as a last (but always available) option.

The third and final option was for the U.S. to be a “balancer through selective engagement.” In this strategy, the U.S. recognizes that its interests cannot be everywhere. There has to be a balance in what pursuits warrant U.S. engagement. This option is compelling because it recognizes the reality of resource constraints, and the attendant requirement for the U.S. to be selective in its engagement criteria. Although compelling, this strategy is the most difficult to define, and it returns to a perennial question which is, when should the U.S. engage and for what purpose. It is here where national values and interests must intersect in order for the U.S. to justify its engagement. However, even if values and interests intersect, engagement may not always be the wisest of choices for the U.S., which is where selective engagement becomes an additional choice in what begins to look like a “constellation of choices” that can be considered.

INFORMATION

The informational element of national power is perhaps the most difficult challenge in a free society. In a mature democratic society like the U.S., freedom of information is viewed as a fundamental right. Any effort to restrict or deny that right would most certainly be seen as a threat to the credibility of the government and the Nation. This challenge is made worse by an opponent who has no constraints in his use of misinformation. Despite our opponents’ advantage in this area, we must continue to resist the temptation to restrict and or deny the freedom of information in a general sense. To do otherwise would run counter to one of our Nation’s core values that define us. Moreover, this would in essence accomplish the strategic objectives of extremists, which are not only to de-legitimize the U.S. as the world’s leading democracy, but to also render a significant blow against democratic nation-states in general.

A by-product of this challenge forces us to determine how the U.S. communicates to the world the character of the conflict. Some view the war on terrorism as being a “war of identity.” This presupposes that the U.S., representing western values, is at war with Islam and the values derived from its historic religion. Muslim societies that interpret the war on terror as being a “war of identity” consider themselves under siege by the presence of the U.S. and western powers on Muslim soil. For them, it is a war against occupation and outside oppression. This makes it very difficult to achieve any long-lasting effects in countering extremists active in that region of the world.

An alternative way of interpreting the character of this conflict might involve describing the conflict as a “reestablishment of global order.” If the stated goals of al Qaeda are to resurrect the Caliphate, the character of this conflict becomes one of reestablishing global order. However, it has to be communicated to the Muslim world that the current global order is not meant to suppress Islam. In essence, the message must transition from one of “war on terrorism” to a “war within Islam.” itself.

Certainly, a great debate exists within Islam as to the true meaning of the Islamic faith as interpreted by the Koran. Ultimately the conflict within Islam must be solved by Muslims. The U.S. cannot make the choices for Islam, but they can

assist in the outcome by helping define the real problem, and they can avoid giving the extremists opportunities to point at the U.S. as the real enemy.

American society clearly has a hard time understanding what its role is in supporting this global war against extremist ideologies. The post 9/11 message Americans received was to “go to the mall,” not “go to the ramparts.” Americans understand that anything worth fighting for is going to require sacrifices. However, except for the roughly 2 million Americans that are directly or indirectly impacted by the war, the rest have not been asked to sacrifice anything. This becomes problematic if Americans need to be prepared for the long haul in this conflict. If we truly are in a period of “persistent conflict,” convincing Americans that persistent conflict exists is extremely difficult since they have not been asked to sacrifice anything for the current struggle. Therefore, as important as it is for Muslim societies to understand the character of this conflict, it is equally important for the American society to understand it.

ECONOMIC

Economic prosperity for the U.S. is indisputably one of the most vital interests in U.S. Grand Strategy. This will require strategic choices that place the U.S. in a position of economic dominance in an increasingly globalized world. Globalization is a choice that has already been made, therefore, any discussions leading to protectionism within the U.S. economy is anathema to the maintenance of open markets. Furthermore, promotion of free markets abroad becomes top priority for U.S. engagement. By promoting open and free markets the U.S. enhances prosperity at home and abroad.

The issue of climate change has also elevated the need for post-industrial nations to seek alternative sources of energy that burn cleaner and aren't harmful to the environment. Therefore, choices facing the U.S. in the 21st century include extending/expanding the hydrocarbon economy or leading a new energy era. There is little disagreement that the hydrocarbon economy will remain dominant until technological breakthroughs makes alternative energy sources more economical for the world to pursue. However, everyone agrees that the international community must take positive steps towards reversing the effects of excessive hydrocarbon usage.

The U.S. is perhaps in the best position to lead the new energy era. However, the costs associated with pursuing this endeavor are poorly understood by those who advocate that we lead the effort. It is conceivable that while the U.S. dedicates significant resources in developing alternative energy means, other states would reap the benefits as the U.S. pays the costs. Nations that take up the mantle for change will incur the greatest costs while other nations become “free riders.” Even so, this may be a choice that will be unavoidable for the U.S. to make given the worldwide rise in demand for energy.

Finally, The U.S. will have to make strategic choices on its spending priorities. Choices will be made between security and non-security related programs. It would be short-sighted for the U.S. to reduce security spending considering the challenges the Nation will face in the foreseeable future; however, in order for America to remain dominant, choices must be made in increasing the priority in non-security sectors. These non-security sectors build upon our Nation's foundation for becoming a dominant world power. If we do not invest in ourselves, the U.S. will risk losing its strategic position.

MILITARY

Grand Strategy is inextricably tied to security. Discussions regarding this element of national power suggested that many of the military strategic choices briefed during the workshop have already been made. For example, none disputed the need for maintaining the All Volunteer Force (AVF). The debate surrounding the AVF tended to focus on roles and missions and at what point does the force reach a point of strategic overreach. Given the strategic environment and the trends associated with that environment, many experts contend that the military was being asked to do more than the AVF could reasonably manage. Therefore, the real choices available to mitigate the risk of overextending the AVF primarily involve how the executive branch organizes itself to meet 21st century challenges.

Additional choices discussed during the workshop were viewed not so much as Grand Strategy choices, but rather more in the lines of National Military Strategy. These included the choice between continental U.S. (CONUS) based Expeditionary vice Forward Based Forces. The point was made that choosing not to permanently station U.S. forces in a particular region can have the negative effect of sending unwanted signals to allies. CONUS-based Expeditionary Forces takes into account these concerns by exempting certain regions that are home to key Strategic Logistics Operations Centers (SLOC), giving the U.S. greater capability to project military power abroad.

The additional choices discussed were interrelated: Maintain a Large Standing Army vice an Expandable Force; Full Spectrum Force vice Special Purpose Force; and Progressive Mobilization vice Rotational Readiness. It was felt that these choices either have already been made or are too risky to consider. The choice of maintaining a Large Standing Army has also been decided based on the recent increase of the Army to meet the Nation's commitments. The only real choice remaining appears to be whether the force will remain a Full Spectrum Force or become a Special Purpose Force.

The preferred choice is maintaining a Full Spectrum Force. The U.S. faces an adversary who adjusts his methodology asymmetrically to counter our strengths. Building Special Purpose Forces will guarantee that the next threat the U.S. will face will be opposite of its strengths. The example used was the post-Vietnam Army. Senior leaders could have decided to organize and train the Army to be effective in unconventional wars, but with the Soviet Union being the most dangerous threat on the horizon, decisions were made to make a force capable of meeting conventional threats. Furthermore, since no one has a crystal ball to the future, it would be foolhardy to build a force that is structured to fight the last battle.

The challenge in maintaining Full Spectrum Forces lies with the imbalance associated with current commitments. Given the uncertainty of future threats and the speed in which these threats can manifest themselves, returning to a Progressive Mobilization Force is no longer appropriate. Rotational Readiness allows the force to meet operational readiness over a span of time congruent to its employment timeline. However, in order for Rotational Readiness to work in maintaining capable Full Spectrum Forces, the U.S. will probably have to reduce its strategic aspirations. Current commitments are preventing the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) model from effectively preparing the Army in meeting Full Spectrum Threats.

CONCLUSION

The Strategic Vision Workshop was rated by all participants as highly successful in meeting its objectives of assisting the Army Staff and furthering professional relationships between the Army and academia. The professional exchange of ideas increased understanding between institutions who have dedicated themselves towards the study of Grand Strategy.

Each academic institution approached the development of Grand Strategy differently while providing "outside the Army" perspectives. These perspectives will further enhance the Army Staff's ability to formulate recommendations of Grand Strategy that the Army Chief of Staff can use in providing professional advice to the National Command Authority. Therefore, workshops such as this one are invaluable in promoting and preserving open dialogue between Army and academic institutions.

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