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Thinking for the Long War: Strategic Planning and Review for the Department of Homeland Security

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America must consider more deeply the requirements for fighting and winning the long war.¹ Congress needs comprehensive assessments of the nation's homeland security programs and an independent review that evaluates how national defense and homeland security programs fit within the context of the overall interagency national security effort.

I would like to (1) review the lessons that can be drawn from other government post-Cold War efforts to conduct strategic assessments; (2) make recommendations for the next steps in conducting national security assessments; and (3) offer specific proposals for the homeland security component of these reviews.

Lessons from the Pentagon

Established in 1996, the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) requires the Pentagon every four years to provide to Congress a comprehensive assessment of defense strategy and force structure; program and policies; and modernization, infrastructure, and budget plans—outlining future requirements for the following eight years.² The QDR has become a touchstone in the debates about restructuring the military and identifying the capabilities that will be needed for the new national security environment of the 21st century. This effort offers lessons for considering how to establish a similar strategic review process for homeland security.

Lesson #1: Understand what strategic assessments are and are not.

The QDR process is not a substitute for political decision-making. QDR reports have been highly polit-

Talking Points

- Nowhere is the need for a detailed assessment on the scale of the Quadrennial Defense Review more important than in the area of homeland security.
- Congress needs comprehensive assessments of the nation's homeland security programs and an independent review that evaluates how national defense and homeland security programs fit within the context of the overall interagency national security effort.
- In addition to defense and homeland security, attention should be given to U.S. public diplomacy and foreign assistance programs, the defense industrial base, the intelligence community, and the use of space for national security purposes.
- In the long term, sound strategic thinking is perhaps the most important tool that America can bring to bear for fighting and winning the long war. Timely and comprehensive strategic assessments are an important part of this process.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
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icized documents used to justify force structure choices, defend future investments, and promote changes in policy. Indeed, strategy reviews have always been used to foster political agendas. NSC-68, Project Solarium, and the Gaither Commission Report, for example, were all early Cold War attempts not just to assess force structure and strategic requirements, but also to serve political agendas for shifting priorities or advocating action.³

The tradition of defense assessments after the Cold War changed little. The first QDR was, in fact, the fifth major defense review conducted following the fall of the Berlin Wall. In fundamental respects, the QDR process differed little from other post–World War II efforts to justify war military requirements.

The QDR does not take politics out of strategy and resource decision-making—either inside or outside of the Pentagon. Implementing the QDR, for example, resulted in divisive political infighting among the services.⁴ After all the analysis is done, hard choices still have to be made and debated.

What the QDR accomplished, unlike previous Cold War strategic assessments, was to add some transparency to the process and offer a routine platform for dialogue between Congress and the Administration. Creating an iterative process is the greatest virtue of the QDR. Periodic reviews offer two advantages:

- They encourage the armed forces to think deeply about how to match strategy, requirements, and resources; justify their judgments; and institutionalize the capability to make these assessments.⁵
- They provide an audit trail for congressional and other government leaders to assess long-term defense trends.

Most important, the QDR provides a means for government to conduct and Congress to consider strategic assessments in a disciplined and systematic manner.

Lesson #2: Timing is everything.

There is no optimum time for a strategic assessment. The QDR is scheduled to be conducted in the initial year of a presidential term.

The first QDR was required five months after the Administration took office. The 2003 National Defense Authorization Act shifted the due date to the year following the year in which the review is conducted, but not later than the date on which the President submits the budget for the next fiscal year to Congress. This timing compels a new Administration to lay out a strategic framework for how it plans to address future requirements. Congress can also compare the QDR to the Administration's budget submission to assess whether the Pentagon's

1. For a discussion of the elements of good long war strategy, see James Jay Carafano and Paul Rosenzweig, *Winning the Long War: Lessons from the Cold War for Defeating Terrorism and Preserving Freedom* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2005).
2. The Quadrennial Defense Review was first mandated in 1996 by the Defense Authorization Act (Military Force Structure Review Act of 1996). Title 10, Section 118 of the United States Code specifies: "The Secretary of Defense shall every four years, during a year following a year evenly divisible by four, conduct a comprehensive examination (to be known as a 'quadrennial defense review') of the national defense strategy, force structure, force modernization plans, infrastructure, budget plan, and other elements of the defense program and policies of the United States with a view toward determining and expressing the defense strategy of the United States and establishing a defense program for the next 20 years. Each such quadrennial defense review shall be conducted in consultation with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff."
3. See, for example, Ernest R. May, ed., *American Cold War Strategy: Interpreting NSC 68* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).
4. See, for example, comments on the 1997 review in John Y. Schrader, Leslie Lewis, and Roger Allen Brown, *Quadrennial Defense Review 2001: Lessons on Managing Change in the Defense Department* (Santa Monica, Cal.: Rand, 2003), p. 6, at www.rand.org/pubs/documented_briefings/2005/DB379.pdf.
5. One of the key findings of the first QDR in 1997 was that the Pentagon lacked the analytical capabilities for examining all the strategic issues that were required to be reported on to the Congress. See John Y. Schrader, Leslie Lewis, and Roger Allen Brown, *Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR): A Retrospective Look at Joint Staff Participation* (Santa Monica, Cal.: Rand, 1999), p. 49, at www.rand.org/pubs/documented_briefings/DB236/DB236.sec5.pdf. For subsequent reviews, the Defense Department, the Joint Staff, and the services developed more sophisticated analytical assessments and staffed permanent offices to prepare for and conduct strategic assessments.

programmatic decisions match the rhetoric in the strategic assessment provided in the QDR report.

While having an Administration conduct a strategic assessment early on offers the advantage of laying out a blueprint for future defense needs, front-loading the QDR creates difficulties. The incoming Administration is often forced to begin its review before key political appointees have been nominated and confirmed by the Senate. For the 2001 review, for example, the Defense Department had no top management officials in place until May 2001, and this significantly delayed the issuance of leadership guidance for the review process.⁶

There is also a tendency to rationalize strategic requirements to match short-term budget priorities and push the most difficult choices into the out years, creating an unrealistic bow wave of projected spending and requirements. Another concern expressed with both the 1997 and 2001 reports was that reporting requirements were too tight to allow for sufficient time for in-depth analysis.

On the other hand, deferring the QDR assessment to later in a presidential term when an Administration is more seasoned has shortfalls as well. It leaves less time to institutionalize decisions implied by the QDR by embedding them in the President's budget submissions and Defense Department programs and policies. In addition, if the QDR occurs closer to the end of a presidential term, it is more likely to become embroiled in presidential election politics. Finally, if the QDR comes very late in a presidential term and is passed off to a new Administration for implementation, in all likelihood, it will be largely ignored.

The notion of requiring more frequent periodic reports seems most problematic of all. Long-term strategic needs rarely change dramatically enough to justify recurring assessments in a single presidential term. In addition, Congress should be sensitive to the resources demanded to produce strategic

assessments. The more reports, the more frequently they occur, and the more time available to produce them, the more government resources will have to be diverted to these bureaucratic tasks. Excessive effort is both counterproductive and wasteful.

The best option is to require that strategic assessments be conducted in the first year of a presidential term in order to set the direction for how an Administration plans to match meeting strategic challenges with the resources required to address those challenges. Assessments should be submitted well before the mid-term of an Administration.

Lesson #3: Put requirements in context.

From the outset, the question of what to include in the QDR engendered significant debate. For the first QDR, Congress mandated 12 specific requirements. Simply listing topics to be covered, however, did not result in a report that was comprehensive or ensure that the analysis of alternatives to meet future requirements was sufficiently exhaustive.

For example, one issue required to be covered in the 1997 review, an assessment of the Reserve Components, was simply deferred for follow-on study. Indeed, the most significant criticism of the 1997 report was that, despite the extensive reporting requirements mandated by Congress, the Pentagon dodged almost completely the central task of the QDR: to explain how future needs would be squared with anticipated declines in defense spending.⁷

In addition, from the outset, one recognized limitation of the QDR process was that the reviews focused narrowly on defense needs. For example, the Defense Department gave scant recognition to the demands of homeland security before 9/11. The inclusion of a section on homeland defense in the 2001 QDR came in response to the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. In addition, no report has ever adequately addressed the challenges involved in conducting interagency operations.⁸

6. U.S. General Accounting Office, *Quadrennial Defense Review: Future Reviews Can Benefit from Changes in Timing and Scope*, GAO-03-13, November 2002, p. 20, at www.gao.gov/new.items/d0313.pdf.

7. Jim Courter and Alvin Bernstein, "The QDR Process: An Alternative View," *Joint Force Quarterly*, Summer 1997, p. 21.

8. James Jay Carafano, "Not So Much About Homeland Security—What's Missing from the Pentagon Vision for Its Future Role in Safeguarding U.S. Soil," remarks presented at the National Defense University, December 16, 2006, at www.ndu.edu/inss/symposia/joint2006/carafano.pdf.

To address the inability of the QDR to assess broader issues, in conjunction with the first report, Congress established a National Defense Panel—an independent, bipartisan group of nationally recognized defense experts—to review the QDR and offer an independent appraisal longer-term of national security demands. The NDP made the case for military transformation, restructuring the military from a Cold War force to one more suited for the diverse dangers of the post-Soviet security environment.⁹

The NDP was a one-time requirement. In 1998, Congress authorized another review—the National Security Study Group, later known as the Hart–Rudman Commission.

Both reviews highlighted the limitations of the QDR, which focused almost exclusively on Pentagon priorities and did not adequately address integration with other national security instruments or concern for non-traditional threats. The Hart–Rudman Commission, for example, in a report released eight months before the 9/11 attacks, emphasized the growing danger of transnational terrorism and proposed the establishment of a National Homeland Security Agency.¹⁰ Both the NDP and the Hart–Rudman Commission added new dimensions to the debate over future national security needs.

The QDR is not adequate for a post-9/11 assessment of all of the nation's critical national security instruments. A separate systematic review of homeland security would be a welcome addition but by itself would be inadequate. An independent “second opinion” of both that also provides an umbrella overarching analysis of long-term security needs is required to give Congress a full and complete strategic assessment of future security capabilities.

The Next Steps for National Security

Congress should address the shortfalls in the strategic assessments it requires. Congress needs a comprehensive review of homeland security programs and an independent analysis of how defense and homeland security efforts fit within the overall nation-

al security effort. In addition to defense and homeland security, attention should be given to U.S. public diplomacy and foreign assistance programs, the defense industrial base, the intelligence community, and the use of space for national security purposes.

Specifically, Congress should:

- **Establish a requirement for periodic reviews of homeland security.** Congress should require the Department of Homeland Security to conduct quadrennial reviews of future DHS capability requirements.
- **Create a one-time National Security Review Panel.** In parallel with the first Quadrennial Security Review (QSR), Congress should establish a nonpartisan National Security Review Panel (NSRP). The NSRP should be charged with providing an independent assessment of the QSR as well as providing an overall assessment of national security programs and strategies. The NSRP should place particular emphasis on evaluating the compatibility of the QSR and QDR and the state of other essential security instruments such as public diplomacy, the defense industrial base, and the use of space for national security purposes.

Congress should determine the most efficient and expedient method to conduct the NSRP's review. This review could be conducted by Congress, or Congress could authorize an independent commission to conduct the review.

Homeland Security Assessments

Nowhere is the need for a detailed assessment on the scale of the QDR more important than in the area of homeland security. “DHS 2.0: Rethinking the Department of Homeland Security,” a comprehensive report by The Heritage Foundation and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, clearly established the need for Congress to reevaluate DHS roles, missions, and resources and how these efforts fit into the context of other federal domestic security efforts.¹¹

9. John Tedstrom and John G. McGinn, *Planning America's Security: Lessons from the National Defense Panel* (Santa Monica, Cal.: Rand, 1999), pp. 2–3.

10. United States Commission on National Security/21st Century, *Road Map for National Security: Imperative for Change*, February 15, 2001, p. viii, at www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/nssg/phaseIIIfr.pdf.

Much has been done through the department's Second State Review and by Congress over the past year, but there is more still to be accomplished. Specific recommendations for the QSR include:

- **Require the first full QSR well before the mid-point of the next Administration.** At this point, there is little utility in this Administration's conducting a "full-blown" review. Starting this process will demand significant resources that could detract from other missions. In the end, there would be scant time to implement its findings. Rather, Congress should require the Administration to report back in six months with a more modest preliminary assessment that should include recommendations for how the QSR should be conducted and what steps it has taken to establish the staff, analytic capabilities, and processes necessary for a substantive QSR and NSRP review.
- **Establish a dialogue between Congress and DHS.** Congress should not be overly specific in QSR requirements. Rather than establishing a long laundry list of reporting tasks, it would be more fruitful for Congress to issue a broad generic mission statement including a review of management, roles and missions, authorities, and resources. Congress should then require the DHS early in the QSR process (no

later than May of the first year of the Administration) to report back to Congress on what it intends to cover in the review. This report would serve to initiate a dialogue between the Administration and Congress. In addition, it would be useful for the Administration to provide an in-progress review of its efforts in the September–October period.

- **Require an interagency effort.** In conducting the QSR, the DHS should be required to solicit the input of other key relevant agencies and assess its ability to act with them in the performance of homeland security missions, as well as support other essential national security tasks.

Conclusion

In the long term, sound strategic thinking is perhaps the most important tool that America can bring to bear for fighting and winning the long war. Timely and comprehensive strategic assessments are an important part of this process.

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11. James Jay Carafano and David Heyman, "DHS 2.0: Rethinking the Department of Homeland Security," Heritage Foundation Special Report No. 2, December 13, 2004, at www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandDefense/sr02.cfm.