The Near Enemy and the Far
The Long War, China, and the 2006 US Quadrennial Defense Review

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QDR 2006 OVERVIEW

On 6 January 2006, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld submitted the Pentagon's third Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR).[1] Mandated by congress in 1996, these reviews are supposed to show how the US Department of Defense (DOD) will provision and enact the nation's military strategy. The 2006 iteration is the first to fully reflect DOD's post-9/11 innovations and the first to encapsulate the putative lessons of the Iraq war. Nonetheless, it came and went with little controversy or even notice. The quiet passing of the 2006 QDR belies its provocative content, which sets America and its armed forces on a high-risk and costly road – one more likely to lead to calamity than security. Critics of the Bush administration may find comfort in the belief that the influence of neoconservatives is waning, but the 2006 QDR will be part of their lasting legacy. Its influence on thinking and planning inside the US armed forces will not soon pass

The 2006 QDR advances two new strategic vectors to guide the armed forces in their development efforts – but both are ill-conceived: (1) the so-called "long war" against Islamic radicalism; and, (2) an increased emphasis on shaping the behavior of China by means of military "dissuasion". The practical effect of the first vector is to embed defense planning in an unusually broad and open-ended wartime framework. The second vector imposes an overlapping "cold war" frame, raising the prospect that what lies at the end of the present "long war" is more of the same.

As I will argue later, neither vector accurately portrays the military threat to US interests or maps a realistic path to enhanced security.   Indeed, the administration's strategic imperatives are more likely to precipitate the dangers they purport to guard against – and there is no surer sign of strategic bankruptcy than that. At heart, this is a failure at the level of national security strategy. The QDR simply serves to convey it to the center of the defense planning process. But the QDR also fails in its assigned purpose – which is to align strategy, missions, assets, and budgets. Secretary Rumsfeld sets ambitious new goals for the US armed forces, but fails to show how the programmed forces fit the strategy or how the proposed budget can support the force.

Future missions

In accord with the goals of the "long war", the QDR adds significantly to US military missions in the areas of counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency, stability operations, and nation-building. Similarly, it makes a bid for significantly expanding the armed forces' responsibilities and authority in the areas of intelligence gathering, covert operations, and foreign security relationships. There is no corresponding contraction in the Pentagon's traditional or conventional military missions, however. Indeed, by explicitly linking these more closely with concerns about China, the QDR insulates them from retrenchment.

Looking to the future, the QDR usefully divides proposed military activities into two categories: "steady-state" and "surge".   Steady-state activities include:

- Conducting multiple, irregular missions of varying duration. These comprise counter-terrorist operations as well as smaller-scale counter-insurgency, stability, and nation-building missions – as in Afghanistan and Columbia.

- Maintaining global presence in order to dissuade, deter, and defend against threats to the US homeland, US allies, and US overseas assets;

- A special emphasis on detecting and interdicting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD); And,

- Increased interactions with a growing roster of security partners for the purposes of reassuring them, building their military capabilities, and creating closer working relationships.

Compared with the previous QDR, the most notable addition in this task list is the imperative for continuous irregular missions.

Of course, the steady-state missions named above do not exhaust the services' roster of routine activities. In addition, they will have to generate, train, and sustain the nation's armed forces - an imperative that encompasses not only the reproduction of ready units, but also their transformation. Transformation activities, loosely defined, include reconfiguring America's global base posture, developing new capacities for irregular warfare, improving inter-service cooperation, and building "network centric" armed forces. The Army, in particular, will have to train to a new tactical structure. And all the services will have to integrate new generations of "big ticket" platforms.

The QDR's second category of activities – the so-called "surge" missions – include:

- Helping to manage the consequences of domestic WMD attacks and other catastrophic events;

- Conducting large-scale protracted counterinsurgency, stability, transition, and reconstruction operations; and,

- Waging two nearly simultaneous conventional campaigns with the aim of "regime change" in one of the campaigns.

The two-war standard has been a consistent feature of America's post-Cold War defense strategies, although the Bush administration added the goal of regime change in 2001. The 2006 QDR adds the goal of conducting a major counter-insurgency campaign. This could count as one of the wars described in the "two war" construct. Nonetheless, adding insurgencies to the big war mix does impose new requirements because military units and assets are not fully fungible across different types of conflict. Thus, the two-war rule now encompasses four types of large-scale operations (as well as mixed cases):

- Wars like the Afghan and Kosovo conflict in which air power plays the primary role;

- Conflicts like the conventional phase of the 2003 Iraq war, which involve large numbers of mechanized units together with air power fighting a traditional form of air-land battle;

- Operations like the current counter-insurgency and nation-building effort in Iraq, which are heavily-dependent on dismounted troops and Special Operations Forces; and,

- A major Navy-centric conflict – such as defense of Taiwan – which also would draw heavily on US Air Force assets.

Are planned force enhancements sufficient to support another quantum leap in activity? For that matter: Are they sufficient to close the existing gap between missions and capabilities apparent in Iraq? The force development program set out in the QDR leaves considerable room for doubt.

The implications of the Iraq war

The difficulties encountered in Operation Iraqi Freedom provide a good indicator of the challenge the armed services may face as they attempt to implement the QDR's strategic imperatives. And the QDR's treatment of the Iraq experience is an indicator of how Secretary Rumsfeld thinks DOD should manage such difficulties in the future.

Reasonable people can disagree about the wisdom or necessity of the Iraq war, but no one can reasonably deny that the effort has turned out to be a "long, hard slog", as Rumsfeld belatedly observed. Together with other commitments, the war has required Marine units to deploy at rates more than 25 percent higher than what the service considers acceptable for long periods. Active Army units have been exceeding their deployment standards by 60 percent. These rates would have been even higher but that DOD leaned heavily on National Guard and Reserve units, deploying as many as 80,000 reserve personnel overseas at one time for tours averaging 342 days. The stress on equipment is equally great, with utilization rates in Iraq exceeding peacetime standards by two- to ten-fold -- a pace that quickly eats into service life.[2]

What is most sobering about the effort poured into Iraq and Afghanistan, however, is that it has not yet brought peace, stability, or development to either place. This lends credence to former Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki's early estimate that victory in Iraq would require many more thousands of soldiers than were deployed. But a more fundamental requirement is a counter-insurgency doctrine that works, which the Pentagon has not yet demonstrated. And, of course, it is possible that no such method exists for cases in which an insurgency draws on genuine popular opposition to foreign occupation.

The QDR is not entirely immune to recognizing the difficulties that the Iraq case poses. It allows that:

> Operational end-states defined in terms of `swiftly defeating' or `winning decisively' against adversaries may be less useful for some types of operations...such as...conducting a long-duration, irregular warfare campaign.[3]

This is a welcome retreat from the notion that the US military had developed a new method of fast, decisive, and low-risk warfare, which the Pentagon peddled during the run-up to the Iraq war. Still, this concession to reality provides only cold comfort because it does not involve an adjustment of either strategic ambitions or resource allocation. Instead, it suggests that policymakers simply lower their expectations of easy victory. This reflects no strong commitment to avoid or surmount "long hard slogs" in the future.

Force development plans

Some congressional critics see in the Iraq experience good reason to increase the number of US armed forces personnel by 30,000 to 85,000.[4] This seems a minimal degree of adjustment, if the nation is to stay its present course. The administration sees requirements differently, however, as the QDR makes clear. DOD is actually planning to reduce the military rolls by 40,000 – 75,000 troops. This will bring the size of the armed forces down to the target level set by the Clinton administration: approximately 1.35 million active-component personnel.

Within planned reductions, DOD will re-assign 13,000 personnel to the Special Operations Forces (SOF), adding to the current cohort of 52,000 SOF troops. The Pentagon also hopes to become more efficient in how it utilizes personnel by altering the labor division between the active and reserve components and by freeing 70,000 troops from their current stations in Europe and Asia for use elsewhere. Finally, the Army will re-organize its units in order to boost the number of active-component maneuver brigades from 33 to 42. (In recent years, as many as 20 active Army brigades have been deployed overseas simultaneously.)

While the increase in SOF personnel is clearly relevant to the growing emphasis on irregular operations, other initiatives are less convincing. The QDR directs the Army to improve the competency of its regular troops in special operations skills. But given the high tempo of current activities, it is unclear how this might be accomplished without degrading other skills. And, as noted above, neither the Army nor the Marine Corps has yet demonstrated a reliable, winning formula for counter-insurgency operations.

With regard to unit stress: re-dividing the Army's assets can increase the brigade count, but the brigades will be weaker than before – at least until new technologies and fighting techniques are integrated and proven effective.[5] Nor is it clear that the renovation is sufficient to close the number gap. Reassembling assets into 42 brigades will not allow the Army to meet its current level of worldwide commitments at a sustainable rate of deployment.

Turning to plans for equipment modernization: although spending authority for defense research, development, and procurement is slated to rise above $170 billion per annum by Fiscal Year 2008, relatively little of this has any special relevance to counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism operations. One exception highlighted in the 2006 QDR is the plan to purchase 322 remotely-piloted aerial vehicles by 2011, which will nearly double the size of the current fleet.

The QDR is more generous in supporting the development of capabilities for prompt global strike, which are especially relevant to efforts at coercive diplomacy and offensive counter-proliferation. Initiatives in this area include the conversion of Trident submarines to a conventional role, the arming of Trident missiles with conventional warheads, and the early fielding of a new long-range bomber.

Viewing planned defense procurement as a whole makes clear that spending on fairly traditional "big ticket" platforms continues to dominate. Prominent among these are tactical aircraft programs, the Army's Future Combat System (FCS), and new classes of destroyers, submarines, and aircraft carriers. Apart from the Army FCS, there is little evidence in this of the administration's early pledge to "skip a generation" of weapon systems and pursue a more radical transformation of the armed forces.

Least impressive is the progress toward and plans for improving inter-service cooperation and assembling a "network centric" military to succeed the present "platform-centric" one. Thus, while the QDR sets a radical course of strategic action, it marks a setback for those who have imagined an innovative restructuring of the armed forces.

The fact that much of the US defense dollar is being devoted to traditional forces and their modernization does not mean that developments in these areas will be inconsequential, however. During the next five to 10 years, the US military's capacities to deliver accurate firepower will increase substantially with the addition of smaller bombs, new submunitions, and new launching platforms. These will be able to put at risk simultaneously four or more times as many targets as today. And the average standoff distances from which platforms deliver their fire should more than double. As a result, fewer platforms will be required to conduct large-scale bombing and missile campaigns, making it easier to prosecute several of them at once – or one of enormous intensity.

America's growing capacity to deliver an avalanche of fire and steel will not make "winning the peace" any easier, though – especially where insurgencies are involved. Of continuing relevance will be the paradox illustrated in Iraq. There, successful precision attack was just an entre to utter and seemingly intractable chaos.

Is there a mismatch?

So where does this leave us regarding the concordance between proposed missions and the QDR's force development plans?

Unfortunately, the 2006 QDR continues a trend evident since the mid-1990s of providing less of the type of quantitative data needed to assess accurately the match between assets and proposed missions. Such data might illustrate how DOD would allocate forces to undertake different combinations of routine and surge tasks – and also show how these forces might stack-up against prospective foes. Lacking this, only broad generalization is possible. But recent experience and current plans give good reason to believe that the United States will continue to lead the world by a substantial margin in the area of conventional warfare. Of course, this does not mean that the United States can win all prospective conflicts of this sort at an acceptable cost. Scale, circumstance, and the quality of one's opponent matter. Or, to put the issue bluntly: China is not Iraq. The QDR also leaves doubts about the nation's capacity to successfully prosecute large-scale counter-insurgency campaigns or to create stable

democracies by military means. Nothing in recent experience or in current Pentagon planning provides good reason for confidence on this score.

Another matter of concern is the fit between DOD plans and its proposed budget. Currently the Pentagon plans to spend $2.5 trillion during the next five years – not counting the incremental cost of operations. But a 2006 report by the Congressional Budget Office concluded that DOD budgets may actually underestimate requirements by more than $60 billion per year – and this on the assumption that the incremental cost of operations declines from the current $120 billion per year to less than $25 billion.[6]

Federal fiscal trends pose a more fundamental problem: even at current spending levels, the QDR's ambitions are not easily reconciled with bringing the national debt under control while also meeting pending demands on social security and medicare.[7] Of course, this type of dilemma has dogged US national leadership persistently since the 1980s. But it gains greater urgency if the nation is on the cusp of a new era of war, as the QDR contends. In this light, Secretary Rumsfeld's determination to just keep slogging along suggests an unusual willingness to run risk. At minimum, what is due is a closer look at where the administration's national security strategy proposes to take the nation and why.

THE LONG WAR

The 2006 QDR marks a transition from the "global war on terrorism" (GWOT) to the "long war" against Islamic extremism as the policy frame for responding to the 11 September 2001 attacks. The notion that the West must wage a long war against radical Islam or Islamic extremists is not new, however. It has been a staple of neo-conservative thinking since Fall 2001, at least.[8] But the proposition took some time to wend its way to the center of US military planning. Inside the services, an influential advocate of the "long war" has been General John Abizaid, the head of Central Command, who has been energetically briefing top military and political leaders on the notion since early 2005.

Convergence on the "long war" as a policy framework has also been facilitated by four years of combat and contention with diverse Islamic militants in Afghanistan and Iraq. In a sense, the "long war" concept re-imagines the US counter-terrorism effort through the lens of the Iraq war experience. This is all the more curious because the Iraq war, which began as a counter-proliferation exercise, was later re-scripted to be the "central front" in the war on terrorism.

From the start, the GWOT framework also drew criticism from outside of neoconservative circles. The most trenchant questioned the logic of proposing to wage war on something that was not a political entity, but a tactic or means of warfare.[9] Not only was the putative target unbounded, but neutralizing its source conditions might not be possible through the application of any amount of military power. This made a mash of strategy, which at minimum requires that the target and goals of a war be well-defined. Strategy also requires that the causal chain by which war or forceful action is supposed to achieve its goals must be rigorous, plausible, and clear. These were demands that the GWOT framework could not meet.

Unfortunately, the new formulation does not significantly redress the weaknesses of the old. Although it narrows the focus of military effort in some respects, it broadens it in other ways that promise to increase the number and scale of ill-conceived US interventions abroad. Moreover, in some respects, it too easily gives the impression of being a crusade against Islam or Islamic power – to the benefit of

extremist propaganda. The obvious alternative, then and now, is to limit the scope of combat operations to the destruction of the core Al Qaeda network.

Upon close examination, the "long war" defines an agenda and scope of action for the US military that is virtually indeterminate – excepting that it co-extends with the Muslim world. Identifications of the enemy tend to be categorical, rather than specific, and the criterion for inclusion in the enemy camp tends to be subjective, unstable, and fuzzy at the edges. This runs the obvious risk of dissipating American efforts and precipitating threats where none presently exist.

The "long war" as the administration sees it

According to the 2006 QDR, the target of the long war comprises global terrorist networks (like Al Qaeda), associated movements, their murderous ideology, and their supporters, including state sponsors (such as Syria and Iran). The QDR also identifies the enemy as "Islamist terrorist extremism" whose modus is to use "terror, intimidation, propaganda, and violence to advance radical political aims." These aims include "subjugat[ing] the Muslim world under a radical theocratic tyranny," "perpetuat[ing] conflict with the United States and its partners," and "oppos[ing] globalization and the expansion of freedom it brings."[10]

These views substantially echo those that General Abizaid presented to the Senate Armed Services Committee in a September 2005 briefing.[11] Abizaid further elaborated the list of enemy objectives to include: advocating jihad, driving the US and Zionists from the Mid-east, overthrowing apostate governments, establishing Islamic Law, and reviving the Caliphate.

President Bush offered a more expansive description of the war in an October 2005 speech before the National Endowment for Democracy.[12] He identified the war's target in ideological terms variously as "Islamic radicalism," "Militant jihadism," and "Islamo-fascism". Under these rubrics he included "borderless terrorist organizations" like Al Qaeda, unaffiliated local cells, and regional groups including "paramilitary insurgencies and separatist movements in places like Somalia, the Philippines, Pakistan, Chechnya, Kashmir, Algeria."

The President also specified the Caliphate as a "radical Islamic empire" spanning from Spain to Indonesia.   And he enunciated a key goal of the long war: "to deny the militant's control of any nation" which could serve as a base for their efforts. This, then, is a rationale for involving the US military in local counter-insurgency and pacification operations spanning the globe. A long war, indeed.

The enemy litmus

Apparent in all the treatments mentioned above is a tendency to define the war's target not in terms of a distinct political or military entity – nor even a cohesive network – but rather in terms of adherence to a fluid set of beliefs, goals, and modes of action. The 2006 QDR especially distinguishes itself by "ideologizing" the threat, that is: by using ideological ascriptions to mark it.

Actually, what is set out in the QDR and elsewhere are lists of putative threat signifers – words, phrases, and concepts such as Caliphate, Jihad, and Islamic Law. Unfortunately, under various interpretations, some or all of these enjoy at least mild ascent among a very substantial percentage of the world's

Muslims – the vast majority of whom are not insurgent, violent, or even especially political. But it may not escape their attention that important tenets of Islam, like *Sharia,* now figure centrally in US threat assessment and military strategy.

The QDR further qualifies the enemy (or, at least, its core) as using terrorism, violence, and intimidation to achieve its political aims. This narrows the focus of the effort, but still carries it far beyond Al Qaeda and its partners.   The "long war" narrative makes clear that it encompasses not just terrorist organizations, but insurgencies, civil conflicts, and separatist and anti-government movements.

In many conflicts with an Islamic element – for instance, in Chechnya, the Phillippines, Israel-Palestine, Indonesia, Xinjiang, and Kashmir – local conditions and real grievances play a major or even principal part in driving violence. Here, Islam may serve only as the idiom of militancy, not its source. At any rate, knowing that a movement opposes what it calls an "apostate" government or that it seeks to advance, among other things, some form of Islamic law does not tell us much about its relationship to US and regional security.

Put simply: where strategy demands discrimination, the long war shows none. It is a mistake to sweep the conflicts named above into the same basket as Al Qaeda's anti-US operations. Doing so clouds our appreciation of their individual character and indigenous dynamics. And this makes it harder to gauge the value, feasibility, and cost of any prospective US involvement.

Imagining insurgency

Central to the long war framework is the assertion of a unitary challenge, a "global islamic insurgency," that is worthy of comparison to America's Cold War and Second World War foes. While compelling in *PowerPoint* presentations, the "global Islamic insurgency" turns out to be an artifact of method and madness. It does not exist except as a construct in the minds of jihadi fanatics, a coterie of neoconservative thinkers, and the authors of the QDR.

What does exist is a number of separate local insurgencies with a strong Islamic element. Seven of these are substantial in size and intensity, but none are simply wars of Islamic assertion. In most cases the linkages among them are not thickly-matted, robust, or vital to their functioning. So, for instance, foreign fighters constitute a small percentage of the Iraq insurgency and most are neophytes, not seasoned itinerant warriors.[13] Among the insurgent movements and organizations, differences of belief, program, and composition are as prominent as similarities. The "long war" concept has the unfortunate effect of bleaching out these differences.

Also real and consequential are several clusters of Islamic terrorist cells that routinely operate regionally or globally.[14] These form a loose network whose most prominent and influential portion is the cluster around Osama bin Laden. Between 15 September 2001 and 15 May 2006, members of this network have conducted approximately 50 attacks on international targets (outside Afghanistan and Iraq) causing about 800 fatalities – although most of these were not directed or even significantly resourced from a center.[15] Al Qaeda and kindred groups often participate or originate in the local insurgencies and draw recruits from them. But these internationalists are not leading the insurgencies and their focus on fighting distant enemies is often at odds with local concerns.

To give substance to the assertion of a "global Islamic insurgency", the long war narrative depends heavily on parroting the grand schemes of Osama bin-Laden, his Egyptian collaborator Ayman al-Zawahiri, and other Islamic extremists. For instance, General Abizaid's September 2005 briefing to the Senate Armed Services committee reproduces a graphic from an extremist website that maps the imagined march of the insurgency across the globe toward its millenarian end: the world Caliphate. It is as though bin-Laden and al-Zawahiri were Hitler or Stalin directing hundreds of divisions to our gates. This view utterly misconstrues the actual dynamics of their influence and distracts from the type of real and present dangers they pose.

CHINA IN THE QDR: DISSUASION OR CONFRONTATION?

According to the QDR one of the key priorities of US defense policy is "shaping the choices of countries at strategic crossroads" by means of dissuasion.   In this regard, the QDR breaks new ground by marking China as the nation with "the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States." What is important here is not the statement of fact , which is obvious, but the official declaration of concern, which is portentous. More important, the QDR clearly links its concern about China with a need to develop "forces capable of sustained operations at great distances into denied areas."[16] Officially and publically clarifying that war with China is a planning factor is meant to communicate that something has changed.

China also figures centrally – and explicitly – in US plans to reposition its forces globally. Currently underway is a multi-billion dollar effort to improve military headquarters and bases in the Pacific. This includes preparing Guam to receive B-1 and B-2 bombers. And the US Navy will assign to the area an additional aircraft carrier battle group and several additional submarines, including newly-converted Trident cruise-missile boats. On the diplomatic front, new alliance and defense assistance arrangements with both Japan and India have China as a key focus of concern. And Japan, with US encouragement, is developing its security ties to Taiwan – for the first time citing China-Taiwan tensions as a matter of Japanese national security interest. Commensurate with these developments, the US armed forces are also increasing the scale, extent, and frequency of military exercises, both solely and with other nations.

By explicitly elevating China as central to US defense preparations and activity, the QDR presumably does not mean to precipitate, signal, or seal a dedicated military competition. But success in this hinges on maintaining the distinction between dissuasive and deterrent uses of military power.   Dissuasion supposedly offers a way to manage those international relationships that have a potential for confrontation but that have not yet become adversarial.

Effective acts of dissuasion weigh against a proscribed behavior (or path of development) by establishing that it is unlikely to succeed at an acceptable cost. But dissuasion is not supposed to involve explicit threats of conflict or retaliation. Instead, it entails a material expression of interest in a specific situation or outcome.   The aim is to communicate implicitly that an undesirable competition or contest is likely to ensue if another nation or actor persists along the proscribed course of action.

In a sense, dissuasive acts "stake a claim". Indeed, the practice of marking a claim in a land rush is an exemplary dissuasive act. Once a land parcel has been "staked" by an individual, other individuals desiring that parcel must re-calculate the costs of acquiring it to include the prospect of confrontation

with the first claimant. But claim-staking does not itself announce that one actor sees the other as a threat.

Unfortunately, the 2006 QDR does not "speak softly" in outlining its dissuasive aims. Indeed, by naming China as a factor in war planning, it subverts the logic of dissuasion. Now, this certainly will influence politicking among China's national security elite – to the benefit of hawks. And it may help edge the US-China relationship toward open military competition. By contrast, the 2001 QDR, which introduced the administration's dissuasion strategy, did not mention China at all.

In assessing the US approach to China, it also is important to recognize that some forms of "claim-staking" can be provocative – especially if expressed by military means. The success of dissuasive acts in discouraging competition, rather than provoking it partly depends on what behaviors they target and what interests they engage. It would be relatively easy, for instance, to dissuade the Chinese from stationing a portion of their navy in the Caribbean. It is quite another matter to dissuade Chinese naval activism in the South China Seas. Energetic US countermoves would likely prompt acquiescence in the former case, but stiff competition in the latter.

Generally speaking, to the extent that dissuasive acts impinge on the internal affairs, sovereignty, core interests, or normal prerogatives of a target country, they are more likely to prompt resistance than compliance. Likewise, if the United States seems to be claiming extraordinary rights or privileges through dissuasive acts, the targeted nations will either resist complying or strive to alter the power balance between themselves and the United States.

US-Chinese differences over Taiwan clearly go to the heart of what the Chinese consider to be their core national interests and none of America's business. Nonetheless, in mutual assent to the "one China" principle, there is a *modus* for containing this difference. And it will hold as long as neither China nor Taiwan forecloses the prospect of their free and peaceful reunification.

A more fundamental issue is whether the United States can foresee accepting China as its coequal – first regionally, then globally.   Today, the answer is clearly no. The QDR's goal in shaping China is to integrate it as a "responsible stakeholder" in an international order led by the United States. This subordinate relationship is unacceptable to China and will become more so as its national power grows *vis a vis* that of the United States. And therein lies the prospect for dedicated confrontation. Exacerbating this is the tendency evident in the 2006 QDR (as well as its two predecessors) to equate US national security with the defense of US global primacy.   Thus, US national leadership tends to view a challenge to the latter as a threat to the former.

For the near-term, China's strategy is to lie low, build power, and not provoke the "hegemon". At present, the United States and its allies retain a quite substantial margin of superiority in the region, making any general confrontation an unenviable option for China. Although the economic and military gap is bound to narrow in the coming decades, the United States may be able to limit China's future options in other ways. But that depends on the outcome of America's "long war".

CONCLUSION

The requirements of potential conflict with China and those of the "long war" pull the Pentagon in almost diametrically opposed directions. Concerns about conventional air-land warfare, although

diminishing, pull in a third. If economy is a concern, then this is a nightmare. From the perspective of building bureaucratic consensus, however, the view is different: The new constellation of tasks and challenges puts every military service, branch, and asset fully to work. And it may support future claims on additional budget dollars.

There is a deeper logic that unites the two strategic vectors, however. It centers on emphasizing the maintenance of US primacy as an overarching goal and approaching the "long war" as integral to that effort. Essentially, the "long war" as presently conceived is not about simply disabling those terrorist groups or networks that threaten the United States with violence. It is about prompting or even compelling political and societal transformation throughout the Arab world.   The efforts to deal with "rogue states" and proliferation problems by means of "regime change" are also perfectly consonant with this.

If it could succeed, the "long war" would secure for America an important geostrategic flank – along with the world's most critical strategic asset: oil. Success also would gain America new allies, while denying them to potential competitors, and allow US bases and security partnerships to spread to the southern edge of Russia and the western borders of China. These accomplishments would better position the United States to extend against all challengers its tenure as sole superpower.

In practice, the Administration's geostrategic vision rests on an abiding faith in the utility of war and armed forces. And it, like the QDR, seems relatively insensitive to issues of cost, risk, and inadvertent effects. But most of all it begs the question that has haunted all three QDRs: Is primacy really worth the candle?

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