

U.S. Defense Policy and Strategy

EG. Hoffman

To guide the development of the Armed Forces, the new team at the Pentagon will need an updated force design mechanism to size and shape that force. This chapter offers options and guidance for two major components of U.S. defense policy: alternative force design constructs and design principles. These force constructs are not the strategy itself, but they are the requisite building blocks and guidance that defense policymakers use to shape the desired force and explain that force in its requests for the funding required from the American people.

The need for a well-crafted U.S. defense strategy has never been greater since the end of the Cold War.¹ Today the United States confronts revisionist powers in three different regions (Russia in Europe, China in Asia, and Iran in the Middle East) that impinge on its vital interests and close allies. North Korea remains in a class by itself, an isolated but dangerous threat to two U.S. allies. In different ways, each of these powers is undermining and seeking to alter a U.S.-led, rules-based international system that enabled a lengthy era of stability and shared economic prosperity. The scale of the challenge they pose substantially exceeds that of the failed states and violent extremist organizations that have occupied policy during the past 15 years.

Any new administration will face a host of challenges, arguably with instruments and tools that, at least initially, are not well suited to the complex tasks at hand.² Currently our defense enterprise is facing an expanding mission range and increasingly constrained resources. Our present strategy hinges on sustaining deterrence but without the same degree of military dominance enjoyed in the past and with an admitted declining margin of technological superiority, producing appreciably increased risk.³ As Andrew Krepinevich has noted, “All other factors being equal, the decline in resources projected to be devoted to defense relative to those being invested by the revisionist powers suggest the United

States is accumulating risk to its ability to preserve security interests at an alarming rate, one that even a well-designed strategy may be unable to offset.⁷⁴

U.S. defense policy and strategy, of necessity, must account for many factors and incorporate many competing elements. They must incorporate the Nation's defined interests, its geographical realities and territorial security, overarching grand strategy, alliance structure, and war plans and existing doctrine. Just as important, our strategy must account for potential challengers to U.S. interests, as well as the opportunities presented by ever-evolving technology trends. Finally, policymakers must be cognizant of the strategic planning, acquisition, and personnel systems that shape the fundamental outputs of policy and defense strategy.

At present, there is a growing deficit between our strategic aspirations and the resources allocated to obtain them.⁵ The outlook on future requirements that shapes today's force planning is framed less by a realistic view of the challenges looming ahead and more by current fiscal constraints. Though defense resources appear high relative to past periods, a closer look shows less real capability due to rising personnel costs and unsustainable trends in our acquisition plans.⁶ Additionally, the U.S. defense budget supports a substantial overhead in terms of staffs, bases, and infrastructure. The result is that American taxpayers are spending in constant dollars as much as they were at the height of the Ronald Reagan-era buildup, but for a force structure at least 30 percent smaller.⁷ While many elements are more capable than previous platforms and formations, quantity counts for something, too. Moreover, the relative power advantage that the United States has enjoyed is steadily declining, and defense leaders have publicly recognized the need to address the erosion of the technological edge that undergirds U.S. military superiority.⁸

Effective strategy is the result of carefully aligning policy goals to realistic objectives with the resources necessary to obtain them.⁹ This strategic coherence, achieving the right balance between ends, ways, and means, is the most critical consideration in strategy. At the same time, resource constraints—limited means—are a constant reality in modern force planning and are more acute during periods of downsizing.¹⁰ This conundrum is driving the search for more innovative “ways” in U.S. defense strategy.

To guide the development of the force of the future, the Pentagon will need an updated force design mechanism to size and shape that force. Accordingly, this chapter focuses on two major components of U.S. defense policy: force design (sizing/shaping) constructs and design principles. In the context of these two elements, this chapter offers alternatives to our existing strategic framework and evaluates each of

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them. These force constructs are not the strategy itself, but they are the requisite building blocks and guidance that defense policymakers use to shape the desired force and explain that force in its requests for the funding required from the American people.¹¹

Strategy and Force Design

Ever since the Berlin Wall fell, U.S. defense policy has had to continuously adapt its strategy and force planning mechanisms both to better define the size of the force needed to execute our strategy and to determine what kind of forces were best suited for an evolving security environment. Both the overall size of the force and its *shape* are important outputs of defense policy. Force planners speak of the *capabilities* (the kind of force in terms of land, sea, air, or space power) we can bring to bear and the overall *capacity* (how much) of each. To assess the risk involved in force design, policymakers employ various force planning constructs that usually center on the number and scale of conflicts (major regional wars or lesser contingencies) plausibly expected to be deterred or responded to. They must also make assumptions and estimates about the length of such wars and whether they might occur simultaneously.

During the Cold War, there was a general consensus about force size and threats. But after the devolution of the Soviet Union, new constructs became the critical building blocks of any defense strategy going back to the Base Force designed by General Colin Powell, USA, after Operation *Desert Storm* and the subsequent Bottom-Up Review of the early Bill Clinton administration.¹² These both employed a “two war” construct in defining a post–Cold War American military.¹³

The “two-war” model was criticized for its emphasis on maintaining force capacity without consideration of a larger strategy to prevent wars.¹⁴ A desire for a “peace dividend” generated a brief adoption of a win-hold-win framework that reduced the need for large forces by dropping the requirement for two overlapping campaigns. Criticism of this motivated Congress to establish a commission in 1997 to assess post–Cold War defense planning. This commission concluded that the “the two-theater construct has been a useful mechanism for determining what forces to retain as the Cold War came to a close, [and] to some degree, it remains a useful mechanism today.”¹⁵

Around the same time, the Hart-Rudman Commission criticized the two major theater war (MTW) yardstick for “not producing the capabilities needed for the varied and complex contingencies now occurring and likely to increase in the years ahead.” It called for forces for stability operations and homeland security, different from those designed for ma-

for theater war.¹⁶ The Pentagon established a working group to explore force-sizing yardsticks and risk assessment techniques prior to the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR).¹⁷

The George W. Bush administration's approach, called the "4-2-1 strategy," emphasized forward deterrence in four defined regions: Europe, Mideast and Southwest Asia, Northeast Asia, and East Asia.¹⁸ This framework defined a force required to be able to "swiftly defeat" two different opponents but "win decisively" in one of those conflicts. Winning "decisively" included the capacity to enforce a regime change instead of simply defeating the adversary's military.

The Barack Obama administration's first effort in this area was the 2010 QDR, which employed a sophisticated framework for shaping and sizing the future force.¹⁹ Department of Defense (DOD) planners employed several scenario combinations to represent the range of likely and/or significant challenges and tested its force capacity against them. The QDR concluded that it was "no longer appropriate to speak of 'major regional conflicts' as the sole or even the primary template for sizing and shaping U.S. forces."²⁰

The Pentagon's Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG) of 2012 attempted to square defense planning with major reductions mandated by the Budget Control Act.²¹ The DSG altered the "win two wars" framework by defining a force that could conduct a large-scale operation in one region, "*capable of denying the objectives of—or imposing unacceptable costs on—an opportunistic aggressor in a second region.*"²² This "win/deny" framework has been the major shaping tool for several budget cycles.²³

However, the likelihood that the United States would find itself in two significant wars at once is not really the question that many strategists and defense policymakers actually consider. Instead, their focus is on deterring and preventing conflict. Both the international order and our alliance system are predicated upon U.S. core capabilities and their credibility. America's treaty commitments and alliance systems, and a projected environment of great power tension, augur clearly for the capacity to successfully engage in more than one conflict.²⁴ There is no shortage of possible combinations of crises in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East that would directly impact our core interests and require a response.²⁵

Constrained by reduced forces, the United States will find it difficult to play its historical role as a guarantor of a stable global system, a rules-based international and economic order that has widely benefited much of the world. The various regional chapters in this volume give additional credence to foreseeable demands for U.S. engagement and support. Given that conflict in the 21st century appears to be both increasing in frequency and lethality (compared to the last 25 years),

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demand for U.S. forces is increasing, and the potential exists for longer duration conflicts.²⁶ Our policy and force design should recognize and strive to resolve this demand signal.

Force Design Options

Having established the evolution of past U.S. force designs, this section turns to the future. The option set explored here is framed by an assumption about resources that should be explicitly laid out. While the evolving strategic environment poses rising tensions between regional powers and revanchist regimes, U.S. domestic political forces will constrain the allocation of resources for security. The U.S. debt load is approaching 100 percent of gross domestic product, and the national interest payments will at some point rival our defense budget. U.S. demographics will continue to exert upward pressure on domestic spending for social security and medical insurance. Moreover, the recent electoral campaign gave scant evidence that the U.S. taxpayer is willing to sacrifice existing entitlement programs in support of protracted policing of the world or global hegemony. Hence, defense policymakers should not expect significant additional funding and will need to ruthlessly attack inefficiencies in overhead, acquisition, and personnel practices to preserve force levels and readiness as a matter of priority.

Table 1. Alternative Strategies and Force Sizing/Shaping Constructs				
	Selected Partnership: "Win + Deny"	Enduring Engagement: "1 + 2"	Forward Cooperative Security	Decisive Force: "Win 2 MTW"
Reassurance	Reduced	Reduced further	Limited to naval force	Enhanced
Deterrence	Moderate	Reduced	Reduced to a degree	Enhanced
Warfighting Capacity	Unbalanced	Reduced to enhance stability	Higher for naval expeditionary forces	Maximized for joint operations
Forward-Deployed Posture	Reduced	Forward	Forward naval forces in three hubs	Adapted to better support NATO
Role of Reserve	Operational Reserve	Less reliant on Guard	Operational Reserve	Strategic Reserve
Investment Priorities	Naval forces and aerospace power projection, BMD	Ground forces but add building-partner capacity and nonmilitary skills	Naval forces, submarines, unmanned ISR	Balanced in three major domains
Total Costs (in USD billions)	\$535–\$550	\$500	\$550	\$600

Table 2. Illustrative U.S. Military Force Composition

	Selected Partnership: "Win + Deny"	Enduring Engagement: "1 + 2"	Forward Cooperative Partnership	Decisive Force: "Win 2 MTW"
Navy Ships Carriers Attack Submarines Surface Combatants/ Amphibious	282 11 40 88/29	240–250 9 Less than 40 78/18	346 9 <i>Ford</i> -class, 3 <i>America</i> -class 48 118/33	308 12 55 120/38
Air Force Fighter/ Attack (4 th - and 5 th - Generation Planes)	1,050 (648/402)	915 (568/347)	721 (440/281)	1,150 (748/402)
Army Divisions Active/Reserve End Strength (thousands)	8 440/530	10 490/430	6 <400/450	12 540/490
Marine Regiments Active Strength (thousands)	7 175	7 167	6 180	9 186
Special Operations	Baseline: 63,000	Increased 10 percent	Reduced 10 percent	Reduced 15 percent
Strategic Deterrent	Triad, 14 SSBNs	Triad, 12 SSBNs	Dyad	Triad, 12 SSBNs, nonstealthy bomber
Budget (in USD billions)	\$535–\$550	\$535	\$550	\$600+

While there is some value in defining a much larger military force that would allow the United States to be everywhere and fulfill all possible missions, there is greater value in helping the next team of defense policymakers with clear priorities about where to apply funding resources. Resource constraints, uncertainty, and risk are the constants of strategic planning, and we cannot escape them. Thus the option set of strategy/force designs examined here range from the Budget Control Acts levels of around \$500 billion to just above \$600 billion per year.

The following portion of this chapter evaluates the Obama administration’s strategy and force levels against three alternative defense strategies and force design constructs. The outlines of each strategy are detailed and assessed, a summary of which is presented in table 1. Illustrative force structure mixes for each of the options are presented in table 2.²⁷

Selective Partnership (Win/Deny)

The Obama administration sought to sustain America’s leadership role, adapt to strategic competition in Asia, and enhance partnership capabilities where needed. Its defense strategy has been one of selective partnership because the regional priorities and resource constraints imposed on DOD required priorities, and the 2015 National Securi-

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ty Strategy details specific regional priorities, and heavily emphasized partnerships. The planning force construct employed over the last 8 years justified enough ground combat power for forward engagement and one war, and an Air Force and Navy capable of fully contributing in one major war while providing the punishing strike assets to deny an aggressor state in the second scenario. This construct is aimed at the ability to conduct two nearly simultaneous wars, and it provides a limited degree of both reassurance to allies and deterrence to opportunistic aggressors. However, it does this to a lesser degree than did U.S. defense strategies prior to 2010 since it reduces conventional combat power and forward presence levels in Europe. Additionally, because it generates a joint force limited to defeating an opponent in only one theater, U.S. allies/partners are less reassured. They have to be wary of their position should their region be challenged after the United States has had to react to another crisis elsewhere. The force structure derived from this force-sizing construct is displayed in the “Win/Deny” option in the first column in table 2. This planning construct remains the basis for U.S. defense policy, but it is somewhat challenged by sequestration and underfunding.

Enduring Engagement (Win 1+2)

Another option, offered by Michael O’Hanlon of the Brookings Institution, proposes a revised yardstick for the Pentagon to use to base both the shape and the size of the Army. O’Hanlon’s framework accounts for one major war, with two simultaneous prolonged smaller conflicts. These could be a protracted stabilization mission, a long counterinsurgency campaign, or an international response to a major disaster. He refers to this as a “1+2” planning paradigm. This framework emphasizes the role of land power in obtaining political objectives and in producing sustainable results in failed states, postconflict stabilization tasks, and major disasters.

O’Hanlon estimates the United States would require at least 20 ground maneuver brigades (Army brigades and Marine regiments) for the major conflict and no less than 18 additional brigade equivalents to handle each of the two smaller conflicts and their rotation base. Thus, he calculates a planning force of 56 active brigades. He is not optimistic about allied partners augmenting U.S. capacity or about the National Guard responding to the threats/scenarios in a timely manner. O’Hanlon notes, “The notion that even with a few months of full-time training, they can reliably be expected to perform as well as active duty units in the early going of a future military operation is suspect.”²⁸

This planning construct does an excellent job of focusing on the most likely scenarios that we could face and offers greater specialization for the full spectrum of conflict.²⁹ The character of the “+2” crises explains the size and desired capabilities for land forces and would no doubt shape the required airpower support (a greater emphasis on close air support, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems, remotely piloted strike, and logistics) that the joint force has enjoyed from its aerospace assets in Iraq and Afghanistan. Reduction in short-legged, fifth-generation fighters could pay for these increases.

This option provides a more robust capacity for a global and protracted conflict against violent extremist organizations with additive special operations forces assets for persistent but low footprint forms of warfare.³⁰ Countering unconventional modes of conflict would be a principal role for U.S. Special Operations Command in this option.³¹ It would include a sizable increase to special forces above the current baseline of 63,000 Active troops and 12,000 civilians/contractors.³² Using this alternative planning paradigm, both reassurance and deterrence are reduced further by the reduction of high-end joint warfighting capacity. No doubt, some allies would not be convinced that our strategy satisfied their security concerns.

This force design covers the most likely scenarios but falls short in generating forces for the most dangerous ones. It would be better balanced between traditional military warfighting and nontraditional conflict stabilization tasks, with specialized forces designed, trained, and equipped for their specific tasks. However, the risk generated by force specialization is the loss of versatile combat forces. Table 2 illustrates more specific potential Service end strength and major formation changes to support this option.

Forward Cooperative Security

As its name suggests, this strategy operates forward with alliances and partners to leverage cooperative and preventive actions to preclude conflicts before they occur.³³ In direct contrast with the previous option, it emphasizes forward-deployed naval power to generate and sustain preventive actions and promote true partnerships. This strategy exploits command of the commons to both generate and sustain freedom of action for our alliances and partners.³⁴ Maritime forces would operate forward, ready to control the global commons and critical international chokepoints and trade links.³⁵ Given its emphasis on maritime power, a larger Navy would be the principal element of this strategy—one sized at roughly 346 ships, per the recommendations of the independent National Defense Panel. Both the surface Navy and the attack submarine

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force would be our principal instrument of regional deterrence, including a robust ballistic missile defense–capable surface force.³⁶

The force design implications of this strategy include:

- prioritization of naval assets to generate both strategic and operational freedom of action in priority regions and the ability to exploit the global commons to shift resources flexibly
- exploitation of the undersea warfare competition by increasing our attack submarine force
- prioritization of long-range maritime and aerospace power projection platforms to generate and sustain access to critical regions and flashpoints; carrier-based assets (9 large nuclear *Ford*-class and 3 smaller *America*-class carriers) would emphasize long-range unmanned systems³⁷
- maintenance of a mobile crisis response posture (Marine Expeditionary Units or airborne) exploiting freedom of maneuver and action wherever needed
- preservation of strategic mobility to project a decisive joint combined arms force from the continental United States.

This option might be thought of as the “prevent forward/win by surge” strategy. This strategy focuses on assuring access to key regions and maintaining the global commons. This option generates deterrence and reassurance through the routine deployment of credible naval power projection assets and through increased undersea warfare capacity with additional strike capabilities.³⁸ Rather than being sized to fight wars, this strategy is more preventative but still retains a potent and modernized single MTW capacity. It affords more flexibility in posturing forces in regions where land forces might be politically or military vulnerable. But reduced land forces might be perceived as less credible in terms of commitment and deterrence. The basic building blocks are displayed in the third column of table 2.

Decisive Force: Win Two MTWs

This option maximizes the joint force’s capacity to conduct high-intensity, sustained, combined arms warfare. It incorporates the assessments of various think tanks that the U.S. military is undersized.³⁹ This option is designed to maximize reassurance and conventional deterrence for in-

terstate warfare. It provides for a balanced and conventionally oriented joint warfighting force with robust capacity. It would be an inherently versatile force with the proper doctrine and training for full-spectrum operations.

Capable and balanced joint forces represent the ultimate in conventional deterrence and reassurance of our treaty partners. Land power is an essential element of that joint force and while not the principal force in every scenario, it is critical to strategic results in all campaigns waged on land. While the Pacific may be thought of as a maritime theater, “in reality, U.S. land forces . . . are vital to the nation’s capabilities in the Pacific.”⁴⁰ The option does not deny the critical need for potent naval and air forces but rather emphasizes the value of balance.

This option would reverse recent trends in cutting back on land power. U.S. defense policy has designed and resourced an Army capable of fighting one major regional contingency, but it would take months to generate sufficient forces to win a second.⁴¹ If sequestration and current budget plans hold, the Active Army will be driven to a ceiling of 420,000 and the Marine Corps below 170,000, yielding a land force of some eight Army and two-and-one-third Marine division equivalents.⁴² At this level of manning, most Army divisions will not be full strength. This force falls far short of what is projected as needed to fight and decisively win two MTWs.

Many defense analysts have become comfortable with the four to five Army divisions allocated to an MTW from the 1990s Base Force models and similar analyses. One should keep in mind that these planning yardsticks were framed in the early days of the post-Cold War era when America’s military power was at a zenith and when significant rivals did not exist. Moreover, these frameworks were developed for opponents in an age before the diffusion of advanced military capabilities to middle powers occurred. Both past historical experiences of major wars and projections into the future suggest that larger ground formations, no less than six Army divisions and a reinforced Marine expeditionary force per MTW, would be needed in pacing scenarios in Asia.⁴³

While the current plan reduces the Army from 5 to 3 heavy divisions—and reduces the readiness levels and manning of the Army—this option builds up to 12 divisions.⁴⁴ At least five of the Active Army divisions would be “heavy” or armored. This option yields important political dividends, reassures allies and partners, and makes conflict less likely.

This force is also better postured to cope with an MTW that persists beyond 6 months, providing divisions that can be rotated in. Should either conflict persist beyond 12 months, the Nation’s strategic reserve in the form of the National Guard can be employed. Land power will

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be a component of the force required to win those two conflicts as well as transition to a sustainable, stable peace. They are an essential part of our joint warfighting portfolio, completely essential to securing strategic effects that U.S. policymakers will ultimately require.⁴⁵

Unlike the first three options, the two-MTW decisive force option generates sufficient credible combat power forces to reestablish some additive forces outside the continental United States. Additional Army end strength for the two divisions would not necessarily come at the expense of current major procurement programs. Such an increase is affordable (at an expense of roughly \$6 billion per division). Greater attention to defense reforms in acquisition, personnel/ compensation, and overhead reduction could provide the resources to sustain an adequate force structure of this size.

Principles

A new administration should consider a number of key principles in its force design and development efforts. These principles are not an exclusive list but offer guidance to steer the U.S. military as it adapts to the rapidly changing strategic environment.

Embrace Uncertainty

The ability of U.S. strategists to predict the time, place, and character of wars has been “uniformly dismal.”⁴⁶ When one considers general principles about force planning, one cannot escape the conclusions of Colin Gray:

We will certainly be surprised in the future, so it is our task now to try to plan against the effects of some deeply unsettling surprises. The key to victory here is not the expensive creation of new conceptual, methodological, or electro-mechanical tools of prediction. Rather it is to pursue defense and security planning on the principles of minimum regrets and considerable flexibility and adaptability.⁴⁷

Minimizing regrets is not achieved with better computer-aided powers of prediction or by maximizing investments in a narrow or specific warfighting area. We cannot predict the future with consistent accuracy, and we should not be tempted to believe there is some wonderful methodology that enables American planners to gaze deep into the 21st century with precision.

As Professor Gray noted, “Expect to be surprised. To win as a defense planner is not to avoid surprise. To win is to have planned in such a manner that the effects of surprise do not inflict lethal damage.”⁴⁸ Tradeoffs and resource constraints are crucial to the exercise of strategy, but so is the recognition of risks and uncertainty.

Prepare for Longer and Harder Wars

Avoiding “lethal damage” by surprise also involves assessment about the character of future wars. As noted by former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Martin Dempsey in his QDR risk assessment 2 years ago, we need to prepare for more difficult conventional fights.⁴⁹ The Chairman reinforced that assessment in the National Military Strategy, warning that “we are more likely to face prolonged campaigns than conflicts that are resolved quickly . . . that control of escalation is becoming more difficult and more important.”⁵⁰ The “Army for the Future” report concluded that under the planning assumptions directed by the Pentagon and with the current fiscal year 2017 programmed force, “the Army is, in fact, neither sized nor shaped for conducting any kind of large-scale, long duration mission at acceptable risk.”⁵¹ This confirms other analyses by RAND.⁵²

Deterring rising competitors will also be harder, and there is more to deterring a major state such as China than buying a lot of robots or fifth-generation aircraft.⁵³ Our potential adversaries know our vulnerabilities, they are adaptive, and they will construct combinations that will outmatch some of our own capabilities.⁵⁴

Emphasize Force Design Versatility

Versatility is based on a breadth of competencies versus a collection of specialized organizations or players. It is difficult for general purpose forces to achieve full-spectrum coverage, but having forces prepared for high-intensity combat is the critical task. Some specialized units that are ready on day one for unique circumstances may also be required. Versatility is dependent on adequate resources, the time to absorb a wide array of scenarios, and investments in education and flexible doctrine so that leaders are both mentally prepared to apply best practices for the scenarios they are expected to be prepared for and have the requisite critical thinking skills to react to new contexts. Agility is a measurement of how easily and how quickly an organization can shift between competencies and execute them equally well.⁵⁵ In the past, we measured agility across the conflict spectrum in increments of months. We (and our allies) cannot afford the luxury of months anymore.

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Given that we cannot predict the place or nature of future military engagements, as former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has noted, “We must place a premium on acquiring equipment and providing training that give our forces the most versatile possible capabilities across the broadest possible spectrum of conflict.”⁵⁶ Thus versatility is not merely desirable but essential when enemies are either vague or proliferating, when the time and place of the contest is uncertain, and when technologies are in dynamic flux. The core competencies required for high-intensity combined arms warfare are the essential foundation for generating versatility. This is not “Cold War” thinking, but a sober realization of the fact that high-intensity, major theater war poses the greatest challenge to core U.S. interests and thus deserves the highest prioritization.

Ensure Force Balance

One of the principal elements of a sound joint force design is a balanced force capable of generating options for decisionmakers in many contexts, and at the operational level, generating dilemmas for our opponents.⁵⁷ We may no longer have the overall size of the force we need to execute our national strategy at low risk, but we should be able to preserve a high-quality and balanced force as our hedge against uncertainty.⁵⁸

Technology cannot significantly offset the need for a balanced joint force, nor can it guarantee short wars.⁵⁹ Our forces have to cover a wide range of missions and forms of terrain, and they have to be rugged and reliable instead of exquisite and expensive. Of late we have been succumbing, almost subconsciously, to buying fewer numbers of more expensive platforms.⁶⁰ The end result is a kind of self-defeating approach in which we generate a smaller force structure unable to sustain desired forward presence tasks and impose more costs on ourselves than our adversary.

Certainly advanced forms of technology can benefit U.S. military performance in all domains, enhancing command and control, intelligence, undersea warfare, missile defense, and so forth. Over the last generation, America’s prowess in precision strike operations has been materially improved. But rarely have we applied the same level of investment toward enhancing its land power forces. For example, the U.S. Army’s modernization and research accounts are dramatically lower.⁶¹

A survey of the world’s trouble spots suggests that land warfare has more of a future than many now seem to believe. This does not suggest that we should not pursue strategic technological breakthroughs; we should explore innovation in all forms in a dedicated effort to arrest the erosion of our military edge.⁶² It just means that we need to pursue more than one domain in our option set.

Overall, a premium should be placed on forces that can do more than one thing. Therefore, providing flexibility across all domains should be foremost among the decision criteria we apply to our future military.⁶³ Airpower, by itself, will again prove effective but not decisive in isolation. U.S. force planning should hedge by providing general capabilities and organizational agility that allow both strategic and operational adaptations to unanticipated developments.⁶⁴ We should seek to invest to ensure that the joint force is as dominant on the ground as our sea and air Services currently are in their respective domains.⁶⁵

Recommendations

In order to better shape and size the force of the future, a number of recommendations are offered.

Reestablish a “Win Two Modern MTW” Force Construct

To reflect the principle of prudence and awareness of the evolving strategic environment, the Pentagon should return to a clearer “win two modern wars” construct and plan to do so with balanced combined arms forces. The “modern” in this construct highlights the need, per the Force of the Future initiative, to build a force for the 21st century that would include accelerated efforts to develop competitive capabilities that offset our lost materiel edge in critical domains. In recognition of coalition contributions and fiscal constraints, the Pentagon should frame its conventional force capacity within a framework that incorporates the roles of allies in Asia and Europe, or what might be called a “win one unilaterally, win one in coalition” yardstick. We should think in terms of our coalition partners, yet be honest about what our allies can actually deliver in terms of hard power.⁶⁶ This construct matches our strategic interests but recognizes the limits of our resources and capacity. It also precludes weak coalition partners from presuming that they do not have to invest in their own security capacity by relying upon U.S. taxpayers for their defense. The illustrative force structure to fulfill this option is contrasted with the current plan in table 3.

The joint force would be balanced for combined arms warfare, including 10 carriers and a slightly larger Navy of 290 ships. The Department of the Navy has plans for a larger fleet but underfunds its own shipbuilding accounts.⁶⁷ We should shore up that funding, exploiting long-term contracts to drive increased efficiency into the shipbuilding plans. Consideration should also be given to expanding naval forward presence without having to invest in so many vessels for rotational deployments.⁶⁸

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Table 3. Comparison of Current Forces with “Win 2 MTW” Design Construct		
	Current Forces	Win 2 MTW
Navy Ships	282	290
Carriers	11	10
Attack Submarines	40	48
Surface Combatants/Amphibious	98/30	100/33
Air Force Fighter/Attack Aircraft (4 th - /5 th -Generation)	1,050 (648/402)	820 (432/388) Additional UAV
Army Divisions Active/Reserve End Strength (thousands)	8 equivalent 440/530	10 fully manned 490/460
Marines Regiments Active End Strength (thousands)	7 176	7 182
Special Operations	Baseline	Baseline military but 20 percent fewer contractors
Strategic Deterrent	Triad, 14 SSBNs	Dyad, 10 <i>Ohio</i> -class replacement submarines; nonstealthy bomber with long-range standoff weapon
Defense Budget (in USD billions)	\$535	\$550

The illustrative force would sustain a robust and unsurpassed Air Force with both fourth- and fifth-generation fighters. There are arguments that our technology edge is eroding and that we are facing the receding frontiers of U.S. dominance in comparison to rising competitors.⁶⁹ Yet any holistic analysis of U.S. capabilities and capacity would show how far ahead we are in terms of aerospace and naval forces, including our command and control, human capital, training, experience, and systems integration. While continued investment in aerospace superiority is needed, greater attention to unmanned systems is warranted over short-legged manned systems. The notion that further cuts to ground forces provide the best candidates for savings for offsetting resources for increase aviation capability is not well grounded when exploring the full range of scenarios.⁷⁰

The programmed land combat force structure for 2020 is not adequate to the strategic objectives assigned by the current strategy, and it incurs higher risk. A modernization bow wave just beyond the current budget profile reinforces this assessment. Delaying modernization within DOD is possible. However, we need to manage the industrial base carefully and understand that we face the emergence of larger powers with greater access to modern capabilities. Delayed modernization may not deter rising powers, reassure friends, or posture us to respond appropriately. At present, Army research funding is paltry, and the lack of any new land combat systems in development that carry the Army forward against credible opponents in the 21st century is a mounting concern.⁷¹

The illustrative force design includes a total of 10 fully manned Active-duty Army divisions, including 5 heavy divisions. The costs of increasing our conventional force deterrent could be offset by savings generated by personnel reforms, base closures, overhead reductions, and better acquisition decisions. The resources to support additional land power would come from these reform initiatives. Further savings would be allocated from more targeted investments in strategic forces.

Reinvigorate Mobilization Planning

Our strategy should not assume short wars, a frequent optimistic flaw in American planning.⁷² Several notable scholars and military experts have recently noted the need to once again think in terms of national mobilization for manpower, unique civilian skills in cyber security, or industrial surge.⁷³ There are traditional elements of the U.S. industrial base that warrant special attention, and there are breakthrough technologies, particularly additive manufacturing, that should substantially impact our ability to convert commercial production capacity from domestic to military applications if properly designed.

Drop the Strategic Triad

Funding the modernization of our strategic deterrent will have to be carefully managed given the large bow wave of modernization projects such as the *Ohio*-class replacement and long-range bombers. Upgrades to the U.S. strategic deterrent will be nearly \$200 billion over the next decade and could approach \$700 billion over the next 25 years.⁷⁴ The United States cannot afford to simply rebuild and modernize its nuclear enterprise on a platform-for-platform basis. Although affordable in a relative sense, the funding is not available to buy new bombers, modernize human capital, update testing and warheads, and completely replace the ballistic missile submarine fleet.⁷⁵

Some efficiencies are going to have to be gained, and some risk absorbed. Human capital and warhead reliability are not the places to take that risk. The redundancy built into the nuclear triad delivery mix is the more feasible place, probably with land-based missiles.⁷⁶ Senior former DOD officials have offered up these as a possible reduction.⁷⁷

Hedge Risk with National Guard Enhancements

The United States should maximize the use of the Reserves wherever feasible and suitable.⁷⁸ An increased reliance on the National Guard is not without additional costs and higher risks given the time required to bring Reserve Component assets up to combat standards (large-scale combined arms maneuver in particular). Assessments of how much risk

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we incur by counting on the National Guard should be made with an eye to defining required response timelines and for considering Guard readiness investments to meet these timelines.⁷⁹ Increased use of hybrid units (comprised of higher levels of full-time personnel), greater access to advanced training facilities and simulators, and additional paid drill time may be needed.⁸⁰ Policymakers should carefully evaluate the readiness levels and risks associated with reliance upon the National Guard. It may be more realistic to assign the Guard as the Nation's strategic reserve, with designated units provided to specifically defined mission sets and adequate equipment/training resources, to meet obtainable and objective readiness standards.

Demand Challenging Operational Scenarios to Promote Force Development

Defense planners seek to provide current and future occupants of the White House with the options and tools needed to respond to multiple crises and other rising forms of risk. In addition to this accumulating risk, it should be acknowledged that while the United States arguably deterred its most demanding tasks, it has never accurately predicted the character of future conflicts. DOD force design analysis should incorporate a rigorous evaluation of the potential crises we may face and should include the contributions of allies. Internal processes should also examine the key scenarios employed to evaluate risk and shape the force with equal rigor.⁸¹ Efforts to reshape the force should be aggressively pursued, but they must be grounded in prudent war games and experimentation, not just aspiration.⁸²

Conclusion

The future is always *terra incognita* to defense planners; uncertainty about the specifics of time, place, and adversary are the eternal constants of security planning.⁸³ Certitude is a chimera, but risk must be prudently prepared for; it cannot be ignored or wished away. We have only history and educated thinking to guide our forecasts.

We cannot assert certainty or gamble America's future security entirely on a single dimension or domain of warfare. Our opponents have a say in the character, frequency, and intensity of tomorrow's wars.⁸⁴ Future policymakers should not be simplifying potential opponents' strategic calculus and allow them to dedicate their preparations for fighting the U.S. Armed Forces with only a singular approach. This is why strategic balance is so valuable.⁸⁵ As our leaders have noted, we cannot invest in silver bullets.⁸⁶ In short, some analytical humility is in order as we

face several possible strategic shocks.⁸⁷ The design of tomorrow's military should reflect that reality and rely on strong balanced forces that can fight and prevail in all warfighting domains in prolonged conflict. Even more than victory in war, such a force will make conflict less likely in the first place—an effect well worth the cost.



The author gratefully acknowledges invaluable assistance from Dr. R.D. Hooker, Jr., and Dr. T.X. Hammes at the National Defense University (NDU), Dr. David Johnson at RAND, Paul Scharre at the Center for a New American Security, Bryan McGrath at the Hudson Institute, Colonel Pat Garrett, USMC (Ret.), and Mark F. Cancian at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Alan Dowling, a research associate at NDU and Colgate University, also made valuable insights.

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