

Exploring the 2006 QDR

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Early February this year the US Department of Defense released the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report, summarising the results of last year's review and analysis of national strategy and force structure. Last year, this QDR was presented as the most radical restructuring of strategy and replanning of force structure for decades, sparking a public debate of unprecedented intensity. The resultant report clearly presents important changes, but radical proponents of force structure change were disappointed. No less importantly, the complexity of the QDR document and the strategic model it presents resulted in a flurry of often wildly contradictory media interpretations of what the document says. A Google News search of headlines in the aftermath of the QDR release was revealing: within the first two pages no two media reports even vaguely agreed on what the QDR actually proposed. This state of confusion was global.

The QDR document itself is not confusing; it is highly structured, well reasoned and well argued. It is, however, vastly more complex than earlier QDR documents, reflecting the complexity of the 21st Century global strategic environment.

At the root of the shifting strategic play is the reality of a multipolar world with multiple agendas and interests. The US has to confront several strategic fronts: the strategic impact of nascent Asian superpowers developing formidable conventional capabilities, the strategic impact of rogue nations like Iran and Korea developing strategic WMD capabilities, the impact of Islamo-fascist insurgent movements exemplified by Al Qaeda and its spawn, and the reality that public goodwill in the developing world often stands or falls on how much aid the US can deliver when dealing with natural disasters. These realities coincide with a period of radical technological advancement, especially in information and communications technologies.

The QDR thus attempts to develop a new approach in strategy and force structure planning to address this reality, departing from the decades-old strategic model of the Cold War, itself an outgrowth of World War II strategy and force structure.

In a sense, the current global situation bears similarities to the early 20th Century, with a pattern of perpetually shifting alliances and interests, massive economic and military growth in nascent powers, disruptive revolutionary movements, unstable nation states, and rapid technological evolution - a 'Moore's Law driven world'. The deeper distinction is that in a globalised world with nearly instantaneous transfer of information, crises of regional or local effect a century ago are paralleled by contemporary crises that have global impact.

THE PREFACE TO THE QDR REPORT PROVIDES A good summary of the shifting strategic realities. It identifies key shifts in emphasis, designed to deal with a reality of 'uncertainty and surprise':

* From a peacetime tempo to a wartime sense of urgency.

* From a time of reasonable predictability to an era of surprise and uncertainty.

* From single-focused threats to multiple, complex challenges.

* From nation-state threats to decentralized network threats from non-state enemies.

* From conducting war against nations to conducting war in countries we are not at war with (safe havens).

* From 'one size fits all' deterrence to tailored deterrence for rogue powers, terrorist networks and near-peer competitors.

* From responding after a crisis starts (reactive) to preventive actions so problems do not become crises (proactive).

* From crisis response to shaping the future.

* From threat-based planning to capabilities based planning.

* From peacetime planning to rapid adaptive planning.

* From a focus on kinetics to a focus on effects.

* From 20th century processes to 21st Century integrated approaches.

* From static defense, garrison forces to mobile, expeditionary operations.

* From under-resourced, standby forces (hollow units) to fully-equipped and fully-manned forces (combat ready units).

* From a battle-ready force (peace) to battlehardened forces (war).

* From large institutional forces (tail) to more powerful operational capabilities (teeth).

* From major conventional combat operations to multiple irregular, asymmetric operations.

* From separate military Service concepts of operation to joint and combined operations.

* From forces that need to deconflict to integrated, interdependent forces.

* From exposed forces forward to reaching back to CONUS to support expeditionary forces.

* From an emphasis on ships, guns, tanks and planes to focus on information, knowledge and timely, actionable intelligence.

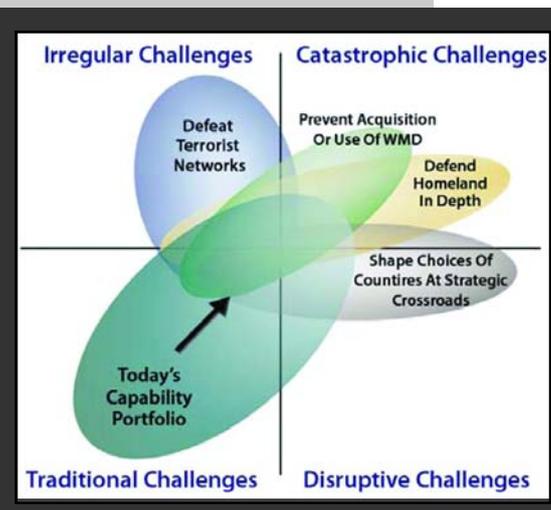
* From massing forces to massing effects.

* From set-piece manoeuvre and mass to agility and precision.

* From single-Service acquisition systems to joint portfolio management.

* From broad-based industrial mobilization to targeted commercial solutions.

* From Service and agency intelligence to truly Joint Information Operations Centers.



The QDR envisages a four pronged strategy for future operations and force structure planning. In many respects this will involve using existing capabilities in different ways, rather than replacing the legacy force structure en masse.

The biggest new programs announced in the QDR are in air and strategic power with a new land-based, penetrating long-range strike capability to be fielded by 2018 while modernising the current bomber force. By 2008 deployment will be of an initial capability to deliver precision-guided conventional warheads using long-range Trident Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBM). The Northrop Grumman Quiet Supersonic Platform (QSP) research program investigated ways of mitigating the Sonic Boom of a fast-flying bomber and some of its features may be found on the new USAF long-range strike capability. (Northrop Grumman)



The US Navy's submarine fleet will ramp-up its re-capitalisation with the new Virginia-class to be delivered at an increase rate of two per year by 2012. The new Virginias, with increased optimisation for littoral warfare, will join the two Ohio-class ballistic missile submarines converted to launching platforms for special forces and Tomahawk land attack missiles. (Journalist 2nd Class Christina M. Shaw, US Navy)

- * From vertical structures and processes (stovepipes) to more transparent, horizontal integration (matrix).
- * From moving the user to the data to moving data to the user.
- * From fragmented homeland assistance to integrated homeland security.
- * From static alliances dynamic partnerships.
- * From predetermined force packages to tailored, flexible forces.
- * From the U.S. military performing tasks to a focus on building partner capabilities.
- * From static post-operations analysis to dynamic diagnostics and real-time lessons learned.
- * From focusing on inputs (effort) to tracking outputs (results).
- * From Department of Defense solutions to interagency approaches.

ACHIEVING THIS SHIFT IN EMPHASIS IS A VERY ambitious goal but clearly one that is achievable over time. What is clear is that the biggest shifts and changes required are in the areas of: how problems are thought about; how force is applied to get results; how forces are structured, organised, and deployed; how information is gathered, used and distributed; and how alliances are formed and dissolved.

This shift in emphasis is groundbreaking, insofar as it presents a departure from the historical paradigm in much of US strategic thinking, where 'panacea strategies' were sought - in a sense 'one size fits all problems' solutions. The QDR brings an acknowledgement of what many in the strategy community have long argued: that strategies and applied force must be adaptively 'tailored' to specific threats or opponents in combat. The deeper reality is that strategy and force application must evolve quickly and evolve to adapt to opponents faster than opponents can themselves adapt.

Looking deeper into the QDR, the new strategic construct identifies four key priorities as the focus of the QDR and future strategy:

- * Defeating terrorist networks.
 - * Defending the homeland in depth.
 - * Shaping the choices of countries at strategic crossroads.
 - * Preventing hostile states and non-state actors from acquiring or using WMD.
- These priorities are reflected in planning for future force structure and organisational constructs.

THE QDR REPORT PUTS CONSIDERABLE FOCUS on the detail of the Global War on Terror (GWOT), or the first of the four-pronged priority list. This is also why so many media interpretations misread the aims of the document and underlying strategy. Key evolutionary changes in the US approach to fighting the GWOT can be summarised thus:

- * Bolstering the capacity to build capabilities in partner nations (Afghanistan, Iraq and others) to shift warfighting burdens from US and Coalition forces to local forces. The rationale is that success in counterinsurgency is driven by nations under attack defending themselves rather than relying on expeditionary forces from Western nations.
- * Early preventive measures to pre-empt problems developing into conflicts.
- * 'Increasing Freedom of Action' to provide US commanders with more options.
- * 'Shifting Cost Balances' to US advantage by changing the asymmetric cost advantages terrorists enjoy in fighting conventional forces.

RADICAL FORCE STRUCTURE CHANGES ARE NOT envisaged to accommodate this aspect of the strategy, which is a very divergent view to that held by many zealous advocates of ADF force structure changes. All key changes are incremental:

- * Human intelligence to discern the intentions of the enemy.
- * Persistent surveillance to find and precisely target enemy capabilities in denied areas.
- * Capabilities to locate, tag and track terrorists in all domains, including cyberspace.
- * Special Operations forces to conduct direct action, foreign internal defense, counterterrorist operations and unconventional warfare.
- * Multipurpose forces to train, equip, and advise indigenous forces; deploy and engage with partner nations; conduct irregular warfare; and support security, stability, transition, and reconstruction operations.
- * Capabilities and organizations to help fuse intelligence and operations to speed action based on time-sensitive intelligence.
- * Language and cultural awareness to facilitate the expansion of partner capacity.
- * Non-lethal capabilities.
- * Urban warfare capabilities.
- * Prompt global strike to attack fleeting enemy targets rapidly.

- * Riverine warfare capabilities to improve the ability of U.S. forces to work with the security forces of partner countries to deny terrorist groups the use of waterways.

- * The ability to communicate U.S. actions effectively to multiple audiences, while rapidly countering enemy agitation and propaganda.
- * Joint coordination, procedures, systems and, when necessary, command and control to plan and conduct complex interagency operations.
- * Broad, flexible authorities to enable the United States to rapidly develop the capacity of nations to participate effectively in disrupting and defeating terrorist networks.

UNDER THE TITLE OF 'DEFENDING THE Homeland in Depth' the QDR envisages three key aims for the US services. The 'lead' aim envisages military operations to 'dissuade, deter, defeat' external attacks on the US. The 'support' aim envisages support of civil agencies and law enforcement to deal with terrorists, consequences of attacks and natural disasters. The 'enable' aim is focused on sharing information and techniques with other US agencies and allies. New measures in this area are also incremental:

- * Joint command and control for homeland defense and civil support missions, including communications and command and control systems that are interoperable with other agencies and state and local governments.
- * Air and maritime domain awareness capabilities to provide increased situational awareness and shared information on potential threats through rapid collection, fusion and analysis.
- * Capabilities to manage the consequences of major catastrophic events.
- * Broad-spectrum medical countermeasures to defend against genetically engineered or naturally mutating pathogens for which there are no current defenses.
- * Tailored deterrence, including prompt global strike capabilities to defend and respond in an overwhelming manner against WMD attacks along with air and missile defenses and other defensive measures to deter attacks by demonstrating the ability to deny an adversary's objectives.
- * New or expanded authorities to improve access to Guard and reserve forces for use in the event of a man-made or natural disaster.

PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THE FOUR prongs in the new US strategy is found under the unassuming label of 'Shaping the Choices of Countries at Strategic Crossroads'.

This encompasses the very broad objective of influencing or deterring nations that are in a state of economic, strategic or political flux. These include nations in Latin America, the Middle East and Asia, but especially the three large players, China, India and Russia.

The strategic discussion in this part of the QDR makes specific reference to Russian exports of weapons technologies, and to China's large scale military expansion and modernisation.

The thrust of this aspect of US strategy is thus to '... seek to ensure that no foreign power can dictate the terms of regional or global security. It will attempt to dissuade any military competitor from developing disruptive or other capabilities that could enable regional hegemony or hostile action against the United States or other friendly countries, and it will seek to deter aggression or coercion. Should deterrence fail, the United States would deny a hostile power its strategic and operational objectives.'

The envisaged force structure changes identified are the largest and in terms of capital equipment, costliest, in the QDR document:

- * Persistent surveillance, including systems that can penetrate and loiter in denied or contested areas.

- * The capability to deploy rapidly, assemble, command, project, reconstitute, and re-employ joint combat power from all domains to facilitate assured access.

- * Prompt and high-volume global strike to deter aggression or coercion, and if deterrence fails, to provide a broader range of conventional response options to the President. This will require broader authorities from the Congress.

- * Secure broadband communications into denied or contested areas to support penetrating surveillance and strike systems.

- * Integrated defenses against short-, intermediate- and intercontinental-range ballistic and cruise missile systems.

- * Air dominance capabilities to defeat advanced threats.

- * Undersea warfare capabilities to exploit stealth and enhance deterrence.

- * Capabilities to shape and defend cyberspace.

- * Joint command and control capabilities that are survivable in the face of WMD-, electronic-, or cyber-attacks.



To fight the long war in Iraq, Afghanistan and against terrorist forces around the world the US Army will be converted from a divisional structure to modular brigades, with 42 Brigade Combat Teams (BCT) and 75 supporting brigades in the active army, 28 BCTs and 136 support brigades in the National Guard and Reserve. (US Army)



Sailors from SEAL Delivery Vehicle Team Two (SDVT-2) prepare to launch a SEAL Delivery Vehicles (SDV) from a Dry Deck Shelter on the back of USS Philadelphia. The SDV provides US special forces with a discrete way of landing forces from ship to shore. The US will increase the number of special forces battalions and SEAL Teams by 1/3 and integrate US Marines into the joint Special Operations Command (SOCOM) for the first time. SOCOM will gain new riverine warfare and UAV capabilities and Psychological and Civil Affairs units will be increased by 1/3 boost. (Chief Photographer's Mate Andrew McKaskle, US Navy)

THE FINAL MAJOR AREA IN THE QDR FOCUS IS 'Preventing the Acquisition or Use of WMD'. This addresses not only rogue states such as Iran and North Korea, but also nations with WMD inventories that face instability and internal problems. While the strategy outlines both 'preventive' and 'responsive' dimensions to the problem, significant investments will be made into capabilities for the latter.

- * Special operations forces to locate, characterize and secure WMD.

- * Capabilities to locate, tag and track WMD, their delivery systems and related materials, including the means to move such items.

- * Capabilities to detect fissile materials such as nuclear devices at standoff ranges.

- * Interdiction capabilities to stop air, maritime, and ground shipments of WMD, their delivery systems and related materials.

- * Persistent surveillance over wide areas to locate WMD capabilities or hostile forces.

- * Human intelligence, language skills and cultural awareness to understand better the intentions and motivations of potential adversaries and to speed recovery efforts.

- * Capabilities and specialized teams to render safe and secure WMD.

- * Non-lethal weapons to secure WMD sites so that materials cannot be removed.

- * Joint command and control tailored for the WMD elimination mission.

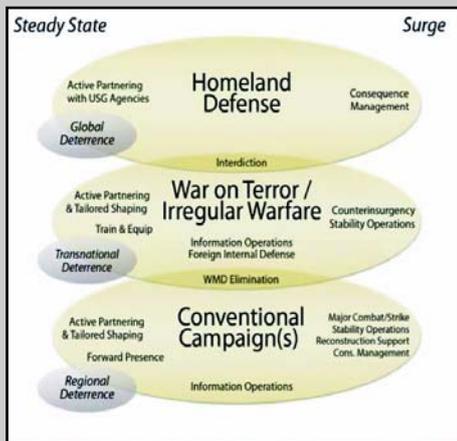
- * The capability to deploy, sustain, protect, support and re-deploy special operations forces in hostile environments.

- * The capability to shield critical and vulnerable systems and technologies from the catastrophic effects of EMP.

The consequences of the QDR will be seen in a wide range of incremental changes to US force structure.

The long term importance of the QDR lies in its dramatic departure from many well established ideas in strategy and force structure planning, many long overdue for change. What is clear is that many of simple-minded 'truisms' often uttered in Australia about US strategy and force structure are largely obsolete.

Editor's Note: details of QDR related force structure changes will be analysed in other DefenceToday articles.



The QDR identifies the significant value of long term use of allied forces, with US forces providing especially surge capabilities in contingencies.