

"The Pentagon's Revenge" or Strategic Transformation: The Bush Administration's New Security Strategy

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The Bush administration recently published two strategic policy reviews regarding US national security policy, the White House's "National Security Strategy" and the Pentagon's "Quadrennial Defense Review" (QDR). Both are the products of in-depth and extensive planning processes, which required considerable time and effort on the part of the national security machinery, including the administration's senior officials.

The New Strategic Environment: The Middle East at the Center

The administration's new strategic thinking reflects its recognition of the profound changes that have occurred in the global arena since 9/11. The new strategic environment is perceived to be characterized, first and foremost, by the asymmetrical threats stemming from rogue states and terrorist networks, driven by nihilistic ideologies bent on massive destruction at all costs and pursuing WMD capabilities. The administration fears that this wedding of extremist ideology and destructive capabilities, of a

magnitude that was once the exclusive domain of major powers, may make these players undeterrable and as such an unprecedented threat to the US and its allies. The new threats are held to stem primarily from Muslim extremism and other factors in the Middle East that have become the focus of US strategic thinking, much as the Soviet Union was in past decades. The administration views a nuclear Iran as the greatest threat and emphasizes, without further elaboration, that the success of diplomatic efforts is essential, if confrontation is to be avoided. The good news, from its point of view, is that the administration does not foresee a significant threat to the United States from a "peer power," despite its increasing concern over China's growing military capabilities.

The Strategic Response: Continuity and Change

The overall outline of the new strategic environment was already apparent to the administration four years ago when preparing the forerunners to the recent reviews, and they thus reflect a large degree of continuity. The strategy has four main objectives: homeland defense, defeating terrorism, preventing WMD proliferation, and developing cooperative agendas with other "centers of global power," primarily China, Russia, and India. To this end, the administration favors a multidimensional and integrative approach:

The "Global War on Terror" remains the foremost priority. The new strategic approach focuses primarily on the threats posed by terrorism and WMD and thus, above all, on home-

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land defense. Victory in both Afghanistan and Iraq is still viewed as essential to the success of the overall war on terror. Nevertheless, no new recommendations of note are presented for achieving this goal beyond implementation of "The National Strategy for Victory in Iraq," which the White House published several months ago and which is predicated on a broad and integrated series of military, economic, and political measures.

Democratization and reform are key. Despite widespread criticism, the administration continues to stress the importance of democratic, socio-economic, legal, and governmental reforms as the basis for an effective, long-term strategy for dealing with the threats of the new era. It acknowledges that the rise of Hamas poses a serious challenge to its approach, and its increasing awareness of the difficulties inherent in the processes of democratization has led to a generally more cautious and level-headed approach, unlike the marked self-confidence it displayed in the past. As a consequence, the administration now stresses the need for "tailored" processes of reform, suited to the unique circumstances of each country and US interests therein. It further emphasizes that stable democratization entails the internalization of an entire range of values, not merely the holding of elections. Nevertheless, its "generational commitment" to democratization has assumed an even more prominent role in its thinking.

Multilateralism resurgent – but a willingness to go it alone. The core of

the 2002 National Security Strategy, completed shortly after 9/11, was its conclusion that in the new global environment, the US can no longer allow itself the luxury of simply responding to threats after they have materialized and will be forced, in some cases, to take unilateral preemptive action. This approach, which was subsequently used to justify the decision to invade Iraq, aroused widespread opposition in the US and around the world, and was perceived as a seeming expression of the administration's intent to forsake tra-

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ditional American norms and act as a global "Robocop." In practice, the change was more one of tone than substance, for none of Bush's predecessors had ever precluded the possibility of preemptive action, but in the highly charged political atmosphere at the time, perception was more important than precision. In any event, the administration's lessons from Iraq are evident in its new strategy. While it does reaffirm the right to act unilaterally when necessary, the primary emphasis is now on multilateral approaches to conflict resolution and

the management of relations with international powers and institutions. Indeed, the administration has begun practicing what it preaches, as evinced by the multilateral approach it has adopted together with the EU-3 regarding Iran, France regarding Syria/Lebanon, and the six-party group dealing with North Korea.

"Soft power" resurrected. In a somewhat Clintonesque tone, absent in the administration's previous statements and thinking, the new approach stresses economic growth, international trade, Third World development, and globalization as primary vehicles for the promotion of international stability. Stemming from the realization that underdeveloped countries and ungoverned regions provide fertile ground for extremism and terror, the administration has been forced to reevaluate its earlier aversion to "nation building" and devote considerable attention to it. Similarly, stabilization and reconstruction missions, such as those underway in Afghanistan and Iraq, now play a central role in security planning and were even defined recently as being of equal importance to traditional military missions.

"Rumsfeld's Revolution" or "The Pentagon's Revenge"?

When viewed in light of the major initiatives Rumsfeld undertook in the administration's early years, QDR '06 appears to be mostly a matter of continuity, for two conflicting reasons. On the one hand, significant strides have been made in realizing Rums-

feld's vision of "transforming" the armed forces into a far lighter, more mobile, and lethal expeditionary-type force, thus negating, or at least reducing, the need for further major change at this point. On the other hand, lingering reservations, if not

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outright opposition, regarding some of Rumsfeld's changes and failure to heed some recommendations regarding the war in Iraq that originated in "the Building" (the Pentagon, to the savvy) continue to have an effect. Just as it takes time to change an aircraft carrier's course, it can take far longer to gain "the Building's" support for major reforms and indeed prove well nigh impossible, as previous secretaries of defense have discovered, much to their chagrin. In fact, Rumsfeld has enjoyed considerable success in implementing his reforms until now, but tough battles remain regarding the direction and pace of change, and protracted bureaucratic wars over responsibilities, doctrines, resources, weapon systems, and, yes, power, are inevitable. To some, the limited change envisioned in the new QDR thus constitutes "the Building's

revenge," capitalizing on Rumsfeld's now weakened political stature.

The war on terror and WMD, driven first and foremost by the need to ensure homeland security, has engendered important conceptual and structural changes in recent years, some even far-reaching, which the new QDR and National Security Strategy have reaffirmed.

■ **The "1-4-2-1 strategy."** Ever since the early 1990s, senior Pentagon officials, as well as outside critics, have maintained that the post Cold War US ORBAT (size and structure of a military force), some 60 percent of its previous strength, is simply insufficient to meet the requirements of the declaratory 1-4-2-1 strategy. Under this strategy, the US must maintain the capability to defend *one* theater (the homeland); intervene in *four* primary theaters (Europe, the Middle East, east and northeast Asia); win "decisively" and "almost" simultaneously in *two* "medium" sized regional wars; and conduct *one* additional humanitarian or limited operation. In reality, the administration began backtracking from this approach in QDR '01, which stated that the US would retain the ability to fight in two theaters simultaneously, but would only have the ability to conduct defensive operations in the second, pending "decisive" victory in the first. In the new QDR, the administration has further backtracked from the 1-4-2-1 strategy, stating that in the case of a protracted and difficult irregular war, such as in Iraq, the armed forces would be able to engage in just one theater. On the

other hand, it has lifted the previous focus on the four primary theaters mentioned above and now stresses the ability to intervene anywhere in the world.

■ **The size of the ORBAT and defense budget.** The QDR maintains, in what appears to be more of a political dictate than the Pentagon's true assessment, that the current ORBAT satisfies both all existing and anticipated needs. Critics argue otherwise and point to the marines' and especially the army's personnel shortfalls and, to a lesser extent, dwindling stockpiles, as evidence of an over-extended force that may encounter difficulties in carrying out its missions. Notwithstanding the enormous defense budgets of recent years, as well as the slightly smaller ones projected in coming years, they maintain that

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the planned budget is simply insufficient to meet the growing demands, even if increased somewhat.

■ **Military "transformation."** The QDR reaffirms the Pentagon's policy of transformation and modularization of the armed forces, especially conversion of the army from a divi-

sion-based ORBAT to one based on independent and mobile brigades for rapid deployment abroad. From a doctrine based on the concentration of massive, static forces, transformation stresses light and highly mobile expeditionary formations, tailored to specific missions, focused on achieving "effects" (planned damage), and deployed mostly in the US, rather than forward bases abroad. From "platform-centric" warfare, it focuses on information, communications, and intelligence, i.e., "network-centric" warfare, and on joint operations by highly integrated forces. The QDR reduces the planned number of modular combat brigades by seven, to seventy, but calls for a significant increase in special forces and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and

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further improvement in command, control, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR4) capabilities. Approximately one third of all US bases abroad will be closed, as previously decided, and the forces redeployed back to the continental US. A small number of bases in the United States will also be closed.

■ **A new "strategic triad."** Instead of the nuclear triad of the Cold

War (land-based missiles, bombers, and submarines), the administration has devised a new strategic triad that now includes both conventional and nuclear weapons, active and passive defenses against ballistic missiles and WMD, and a "responsive infrastructure," which will enable the US to restore the nuclear capabilities it dismantled in accordance with past disarmament agreements with Russia. The administration plans to devote heightened efforts to its non-proliferation policy, i.e., to diplomacy-based means of combating WMD threats, such as the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program to safeguard and dismantle WMD stockpiles in the former Soviet Union and elsewhere. Similarly, greater resources will be invested in counter-proliferation measures, such as the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and Cargo Security Initiative (CSI), designed to intercept WMD and terror-related shipments. Greater emphasis is also being given to enhanced international cooperation in the fields of intelligence and law enforcement, as a means of preventing terrorism and WMD proliferation.

■ **Capability-based planning.** The new QDR retains the "capability-based" planning approach adopted by its predecessor, as opposed to the traditional "threat-based" one. Critics maintain that the capability-based approach fails to ensure effective calculation of alternative military options and that its advantages are limited

primarily to the planning methodology, which requires assessment of a broader range of potential threats.

■ **Structural changes.** The new federal Department of Homeland Security, with its enormous size and budget, is considered the most important structural change made to the

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executive branch since the establishment of the Department of Defense and the National Security Council in 1947. Notwithstanding the magnitude of the structural change and actual efforts expended, DHS is still in its formative stages and has yet to find its place in the national security decision-making system. At the same time, the Pentagon established a new sub-department responsible for Homeland Defense and a Northern Command, and has significantly upgraded the roles of the Special Forces Command and Strategic Command. The structure of the intelligence community has also undergone substantive reform.

Conclusions and Implications for Israel

After more than four years of the Global War on Terror, the administration can take credit, at least so far, for having achieving its foremost objective – preventing a further terror attack in the US, and for the significant changes it has made to US strategic doctrine. Its policies have led to the downfall of the Taliban and Saddam regimes, inflicted a heavy blow to al-Qaeda, ended the Iraqi and Libyan WMD threats, changed international attitudes towards terror and WMD, and weakened the radical camp in the Middle East.

At the same time, fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq continues, al-Qaeda is regrouping, Iraq has become a center of terrorism, and the ongoing morass is making it even harder for the US to deal effectively with other threats, including Iran. A Shiite regime in Iraq is likely to have a detrimental effect on the regional balance of power and instead of acting as a positive democratic example, may actually strengthen extremist elements in the region. Most seriously, Iran may conclude that only "the North Korean model" (achieving nuclear capabilities at the risk of international isolation) can ensure its security and thus adopt a tougher stance. Failure in Iraq will appreciably strengthen all the "dark forces" in the region, including the fundamentalists, terrorists, and WMD proliferators.

For Israel, the administration's national security strategy, as well as its actual achievements to date,

poses both advantages and dangers. The end of the Iraqi and Libyan WMD threats and the weakening of the radical camp greatly enhance its strategic position. Furthermore, the significant confluence of interests the US and Israel share today provides an opportunity to formulate a wide-ranging joint strategic agenda and relieves various US pressures, for example, for Israel to hold negotiations with those involved in terrorism (Hamas and Syria). On the other hand, it also leads to joint errors, such as acquiescence to Hamas's participation in the Palestinian elections. Worst of all, if the morass in Iraq does indeed prevent the US from thwarting Iran's nuclear aspirations, Israel's bottom line from the war in Iraq will be negative, despite the major strategic advantages so far.

Israel's new government should initiate a discrete dialogue with the administration, unprecedented in depth and frankness, and consider adopting new approaches and modes of cooperation, including options heretofore considered unviable. These would include, inter alia, a coordinated joint effort to turn Israel's possible disengagement from the West Bank into the basis for a broader and long-term agreement, contingent on a major international quid pro quo, as well as provision of American security guarantees to Israel vis-à-vis Iran's nuclear program.