The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) and Defense Strategy: Issues for Congress

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Summary

By statute, the Department of Defense (DOD) is required, by Section 118, Title 10, U.S. Code, to submit to Congress a report based on its most recent Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) process, no later than the President submits his budget request for Fiscal Year 2015. The "2014 QDR" review process took place against the backdrop of key changes in the global strategic context, recent evolutions in U.S. strategic priorities, and a tighter fiscal context. The 2014 process also drew on a series of recent reviews and guidance documents—a 2011 DOD "comprehensive review" initially launched by Secretary of Defense Gates and continued by Secretary of Defense Panetta; the January 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance document (DSG), and the 2013 review process known as the Strategic Choices and Management Review (SCMR).

Statute prescribes that DOD, in each QDR process, "delineate a national defense strategy;" determine the force structure, modernization plans, and infrastructure required to implement that strategy; and craft an associated budget plan. Statute also spells out 16 items—as well as any other matter the Secretary considers appropriate—that the QDR report must address.

More broadly, a QDR process, and its associated report, may play any number of helpful roles: refining and updating defense strategic thinking; forging a shared vision within DOD of both priorities, and roles and missions; helping ensure a common view across the Executive Branch, of the role of DOD, in cooperation with other Departments and agencies, in support of broader national security strategy; facilitating Congressional oversight; communicating a sense of defense strategy to the American people, the taxpayers; and signaling intent abroad, to reassure Allies and partners and deter or dissuade potential foes.

In evaluating the 2014 QDR report and current defense strategy more broadly, Congress may choose to consider a number of issues:

- the role of the United States on the world stage;

- changes and trajectories in the global security environment;

- DOD's mission and geographic priorities;

- the extent and nature for U.S. global military presence;

- the extent and nature of U.S. international military partnerships;

- the strategic rationale for deterrence;

- the force planning construct (FPC), a shorthand statement of the number and type of missions the force is expected to be able to accomplish simultaneously, which is used to shape and size the force;

- the division of labor among Military Services and components in executing the strategy; and

- the nature and extent of the risks that defense strategy assumes.

Congress may also wish to consider the extent of DOD's compliance with the statutory mandate for the QDR, the appropriateness of the mandate itself; and DOD's tools and approaches for crafting strategy in general.

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Introduction

The Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) is a statutorily mandated strategic review process conducted by the Department of Defense (DOD) every four years. The review process generates an unclassified report, whose contents are also specified in law.

The most recent QDR process, conducted in late 2013, is expected to generate a QDR report that will be delivered to Congress at about the same time as the President's Fiscal Year 2015 budget request. The review process took place against the backdrop of ongoing evolution in the broader strategic environment, marked fiscal constraints, and recent adjustments in DOD's strategic direction heralded in its 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG) and its 2013 Strategic Choices and Management Review (SCMR) process.

In theory, a QDR process, its decisions, and its accompanying report might accomplish a number of things:

- Reassessing and refining DOD's strategic direction, including the ends, ways, and means required to meet DOD's mandate to "protect and defend" the nation;

- Ensuring, through a highly participatory process, that DOD's strategic vision is shared and uniformly understood across the Department;

- Building, through broad participation, a shared understanding within DOD of the most appropriate internal division of labor—for example, across Military Services, the Active and Reserve Components, and the Special Operations and conventional communities—for executing defense strategy;

- Generating sufficient internal guidance to inform force planning, force employment, and resourcing decisions;

- Synchronizing DOD strategic guidance vertically, with national-level strategic guidance such as the national security strategy, and horizontally with the strategies of other U.S. Government agencies;

- Facilitating Congressional oversight by clarifying and articulating the strategic thinking that underpins DOD requests for resources and authorities;

- Informing the American people—the voters and taxpayers who provide the resources—about DOD's strategic vision and intent;

- Shaping the global security environment—including assuring Allies and partners and encouraging potential adversaries to change their calculus—by communicating DOD's strategic vision and intent; and

- Generating a sufficiently rigorous discussion, within DOD, within the Administration, and between the Executive and Legislative Branches, of "risk" – potential hazards resulting from deliberate choices not to plan or resource against certain concerns—including the likelihood, imminence, and severity of impact on U.S. national interests of such potential hazards.

This report briefly reviews the statutory QDR mandate and characterizes the context for the 2014 QDR. Then it raises a series of issues that Congress may choose to consider in evaluating the QDR mandate, the 2014 QDR, and DOD's strategic direction more broadly.

QDR Mandate

The nature of the conduct of the QDR, the contents of the QDR report, and the terms of reference for the QDR's independent oversight body, the National Defense Panel (NDP), are prescribed by Section 118 of Title 10, U.S. Code.[1] The mandate requires that the review be conducted every four years, during the first year of every presidential administration. The review is required to take a 20-year outlook, and to be fiscally unconstrained by the concurrent President's budget request. The process is required to "delineate a national defense strategy"; to determine the force structure, modernization plans, and infrastructure required to implement that strategy; and to craft an associated budget plan.[2]

The mandate further requires that the Secretary of Defense submit a report based on that review to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees in the year following the year in which the QDR is conducted, no later than the date on which the President delivers his budget request to Congress. Legislation does not specify a classification level for the report. The QDR report is required to address 16 specific points, as well as any additional items the Secretary deems appropriate. These are:

> The results of the review, including a comprehensive discussion of the national defense strategy of the United States, the strategic planning guidance, and the force structure best suited to implement the strategy at a low-to-moderate level of risk;
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> The assumed or defined national security interests of the United States that inform the national defense strategy defined in the review;
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> The threats to the assumed or defined national security interests of the United States that were examined for the purposes of the review and the scenarios developed in the examination of those threats;

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[1] The original QDR mandate was provided by the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 1997, P.L. 104-201, §923. The requirement was amended and made permanent by the NDAA for FY2000, P.L. 106-65, and codified in Title 10, U.S. Code. The mandate has been further amended by the NDAAs for FY2002, FY2003, FY2007, FY2008, FY2010, and FY2012. For an in-depth treatment of the QDR mandate, as well as related mandates for national security strategic guidance, see CRS Report R43174, *National Security Strategy: Mandates, Execution to Date, and Issues for Congress*, by (name redacted).

[2] Specifically, the review is required (1) to delineate a national defense strategy consistent with the most recent National Security Strategy prescribed by the President pursuant to §208 of the National Security Act of 1947 (Title 50, U.S. Code §404a); (2) to define sufficient force structure, force modernization plans, infrastructure, budget plan, and other elements of the defense program of the United States associated with that national defense strategy that would be required to execute successfully the full range of missions called for in that national defense strategy; (3) to identify (A) the budget plan that would be required to provide sufficient resources to execute successfully the full range of missions called for in that national defense strategy at a low-to-moderate level of risk, and (B) any additional resources (beyond those programmed in the current future-years defense program) required to achieve such a level of risk; and (4) to make recommendations that are not constrained to comply with and are fully independent of the budget submitted to Congress by the President pursuant to §1105 of Title 31, U.S. Code. See §118(b), Title 10, U.S. Code.

The assumptions used in the review, including assumptions relating to (A) the status of readiness of United States forces; (B) the cooperation of allies, mission-sharing and additional benefits to and burdens on United States forces resulting from coalition operations; (C) warning times; (D) levels of engagement in operations other than war and smaller-scale contingencies and withdrawal from such operations and contingencies; (E) the intensity, duration, and military and political end-states of conflicts and smaller-scale contingencies; and (F) the roles and responsibilities that would be discharged by contractors;

The effect on the force structure and on readiness for high-intensity combat of preparations for and participation in operations other than war and smaller-scale contingencies;

The manpower, sustainment, and contractor support policies required under the national defense strategy to support engagement in conflicts lasting longer than 120 days;

The anticipated roles and missions of the reserve components in the national defense strategy and the strength, capabilities, and equipment necessary to assure that the reserve components can capably discharge those roles and missions;

The appropriate ratio of combat forces to support forces (commonly referred to as the 'tooth-to-tail' ratio) under the national defense strategy, including, in particular, the appropriate number and size of headquarters units and Defense Agencies, and the scope of contractor support, for that purpose;

The specific capabilities, including the general number and type of specific military platforms, needed to achieve the strategic and warfighting objectives identified in the review;

The strategic and tactical air-lift, sea-lift, and ground transportation capabilities required to support the national defense strategy;

The forward presence, pre-positioning, and other anticipatory deployments necessary under the national defense strategy for conflict deterrence and adequate military response to anticipated conflicts;

The extent to which resources must be shifted among two or more theaters under the national defense strategy in the event of conflict in such theaters;

The advisability of revisions to the Unified Command Plan as a result of the national defense strategy;

The effect on force structure of the use by the armed forces of technologies anticipated to be available for the ensuing 20 years;

The national defense mission of the Coast Guard;

The homeland defense and support to civil authority missions of the active and reserve components, including the organization and capabilities required for the active and reserve components to discharge each such mission;

Any other matter the Secretary considers appropriate.[3]

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[3] See §118(d), Title 10, U.S Code.

The QDR statutory mandate also requires that each QDR process be accompanied by the work of an independent National Defense Panel (NDP), which must be composed of ten recognized national security experts appointed, two each, by the Secretary of Defense, and the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees. The NDP is tasked to review the terms of reference of the QDR process; to assess the assumptions, strategy, findings, and risks in the QDR report; to conduct an independent assessment of possible force structures; to compare the resource requirements of its own alternative force structures with the QDR's budget plan; and to make recommendations to Congress. The panel is required to submit its report to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees not more than three months after DOD submits to them the QDR report.[4]

Context for the 2014 QDR

The 2014 QDR has taken place against the backdrop of an increasingly complex global security environment, tightening fiscal constraints, and a recent history of U.S. policy choices designed to address both of those dynamics.

In April 2011, President Obama directed DOD to identify $400 billion in "additional savings" in the defense budget, as part of a broader effort to achieve $4 trillion in deficit reduction over twelve years. The President stressed that the cuts should be strategically-driven, based on "a fundamental review of America's missions, capabilities, and our role in a changing world."[5] In May 2011, then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates stressed that the review would help "ensure that future spending decisions are focused on priorities, strategy, and risks, and are not simply a math and accounting exercise". In August 2011, then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta confirmed that DOD was continuing to implement the President's April guidance by conducting a "fundamental review". It would address core strategic questions such as "What are the essential missions our military must do to protect America and our way of life? What are the risks of the strategic choices we make? What are the financial costs?"[6]

In January 2012, DOD released the Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG), which was intended to provide the foundation for DOD's priorities, activities, and budget requests for the following ten years. The DSG took into account the need for cost savings, as directed by the President in April 2011. It also addressed the need to refine DOD's strategic focus in response to changes in the

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[4] See Title 10, U.S. Code, §118(f). For further background see CRS Report R43174, *National Security Strategy: Mandates, Execution to Date, and Issues for Congress*, by (name redacted).

[5] See President Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on Fiscal Policy," The George Washington University, Washington, DC, April 13, 2011, available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/04/13/remarks-president-fiscal-policy. The effort constituted a search for "additional" savings because DOD had just completed a significant internal search for savings. In spring 2010, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates had instructed Military Services to identify $100 billion in savings, and in January 2011, he announced that Services had done so. Services were allowed to reinvest the savings in high-priority requirements; of that total, they used some $28 billion to meet operating expenses. Secretary Gates also announced that a further $54 billion in savings had been identified across the defense enterprise as a whole. See Secretary Robert Gates, Statement on Department Budget and Efficiencies, January 6, 2011, available at http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1527.

[6] See Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Remarks at the American Enterprise Institute, Washington, DC, May 24, 2011, available at http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1570; and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, Meeting our Fiscal and National Security Responsibility, August 3, 2011, available at http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2011/0711_message1/.

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global security environment and the end of the decade of warfare that followed the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Broadly, the DSG called for:

- a shift in DOD's geographical priorities toward Asia and the Pacific region, while retaining emphasis on the Middle East;

- a shift in the balance of priority missions toward power projection and away from stabilization operations;

- a shift toward greater reliance on advanced capabilities including Special Operations Forces (SOF), new technologies such as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) and unmanned systems, and cyberspace capabilities; and

- corresponding changes in force structure.[7]

But by the time it was issued, the DSG was already behind the fiscal curve. In 2011, Congress had enacted, and the President had signed into law, the Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011, P.L. 112-25, a dramatic effort to reduce the national deficit, which required overall reductions in defense spending for ten years and prescribed further mandatory annual cuts, through the mechanism of sequestration, should agreement not be reached regarding reducing the deficit. Most observers agree that the BCA was designed to force further tough decision-making in a more constrained fiscal climate, rather than to establish a sensible plan of action, *per se*. Yet early efforts to alleviate the pressure of fixed caps and sequestration restrictions, by striking some form of grand bargain, failed to yield results. While the DSG was crafted to facilitate achieving $487 billion in cost savings over ten years, it was not designed to account for the additional annual cuts that might be imposed through sequestration.

In March 2013, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel launched the Strategic Choices and Management Review (SCMR, commonly pronounced "skimmer"), an internal review process designed to explore the implications for DOD of continued budget reductions. The SCMR considered three fiscal scenarios: the President's FY2014 budget projection; the BCA's topline caps and restrictions; and an "in-between" scenario. The review examined three broad substantive areas—management efficiencies and overhead reductions; compensation reforms; and changes to force structure and modernization plans. In briefing the major lessons from the SCMR, and in other contexts, DOD senior officials argued that the BCA topline caps and sequestration restrictions would "break" the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG). They also noted that even the most drastic options under consideration in the SCMR's three substantive categories would help DOD meet the BCA's annual topline caps only toward the end of the BCA's ten-year application.[8]

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[7] See Department of Defense, Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense, January 2012, available at http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf, hereafter "DSG". For in-depth analysis, see CRS Report R42146, *In Brief: Assessing the January 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG)*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted).

[8] See DOD press briefing by Secretary Hagel and Admiral Winnefeld, Washington, DC, July 31, 2013, available at http://www/defense/gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=5280; Deputy Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff James A. Winnefeld, Jr., Prepared Testimony, House Armed Services Committee hearing, "Initial Conclusions Formed by the Defense Strategic Choices and Management Review", Washington, DC, August 1, 2013, available at http://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20130801/101242/HHRG-113-AS00-Wstate-CarterA-20130801.pdf; and interviews with DOD officials, 2013. The SCMR was not based on a statutory mandate, and DOD did not release a report based on the review.

In December 2013, the Bipartisan Budget Act, P.L. 113-67, amended the BCA to raise the topline budget caps for FY 2014 and FY 2015, offsetting the cost of that change by extending the application of the BCA for two additional years, FY 2022 and FY 2023. The new annual levels for FY 2014 and FY 2015, while above the original BCA caps, are below the President's original FY2014 request. The change offers DOD some stability and relief for the next two fiscal years—together with the opportunity, or temptation, to delay some particularly tough decisions. It would also appear to address, in part, the view expressed by some DOD officials, that having greater flexibility to balance the required cost savings over ten years, instead of being required to absorb the reductions uniformly each year, would give DOD more options and allow it to make more strategically-informed decisions. But the change also preserves the uncertainty associated with the out years, which are currently still subject to the original BCA topline caps and restrictions. Not surprisingly, some DOD officials have wondered for which potential fiscal future it would be most prudent to plan; in practice, DOD has planned for several potential fiscal futures.[9]

Issues for Congress

In conducting oversight activities regarding DOD's 2014 QDR, the QDR statutory mandate, and U.S. defense strategy in general, Congress may choose to consider the following issues.

U.S. Role on the World Stage

Most U.S. strategic guidance documents underscore the need for U.S. "leadership" on the world stage. But leadership can be used toward a great variety of different ends, and exercised in a great variety of ways—none are givens, and all require choices. Further, in practice, approaches toward exercising leadership are generally predicated, explicitly or otherwise, on some theory of how power operates in the global arena. Yet leading experts disagree vehemently about the respective importance of personalities, perceptions, military capabilities, economic strength, norms, and other factors.

Key questions concerning the role of the U.S. on the world stage might include the following:

- To what extent, in what arenas, and at what cost, should the U.S. aspire to "lead" on the world stage? To what broad ends should such leadership be exercised?

- Which tools are most germane to the effective exercise of leadership?

- How important is any such leadership to U.S. national security? How much of a risk to that national security would incorrectly crafting a U.S. leadership role pose?

- What role, exactly, does the effective exercise of defense strategy play in ensuring that the U.S. Government can play its chosen leadership role?

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[9] See CRS Report R43323, *Defense: FY2014 Authorization and Appropriations*, by (name redacted) and (name redacted); interviews with DOD officials, 2013 and 2014; and Secretary Chuck Hagel, FY 2015 Budget Preview, February 24, 2014, available at http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/.

Security Environment

Most U.S. strategic guidance documents begin with a baseline assessment of the current global security environment and expected future trajectories. Most observers today would point to growing uncertainty and an expanding array of potential threats of various kinds—a more complex picture compared not only with the Cold War era but also with the last decade of concerted focus on violent extremism in the broader Middle East.

Critical to defense strategy, and to national security strategy in general, is the linkage between the key trajectories in the global security environment and U.S. national interests. Statute requires that the President submit to Congress an annual report on national security strategy (NSS), which must include "the worldwide interests...that are vital to the national security of the United States."[10] Observers suggest the utility of analyzing the specific U.S. interests on which each key dynamic in the global security context might have an impact; the likelihood of any such impact; the imminence of any such impact; and the severity of any such impact, including both its depth and its permanence.

Key questions concerning the global security environment might include the following:

- What is the most helpful way to characterize fundamental U.S. national security interests? Is the shorthand, "people, territory, and way of life" sufficient, or is something more specific required? When might an interest be considered "vital", what distinguishes such interests from those that are merely "important," and how helpful, if at all, is that distinction?

- What is the most helpful way to frame the broad array of global security threats and concerns the U.S. faces, in order to facilitate decision-making about countering them? How helpful are the concepts of "likelihood," "imminence," and "severity"?

- How far out into the future is it necessary—and also meaningful—to look, in the arena of national security? How much confidence should one have in a 20-year outlook, such as the QDR is required to adopt?

- What internal mechanisms can be used to guard against the common tendency to minimize, perhaps subconsciously, the scope of the problem to better accord with the constrained resources available to meet it?

Mission Priorities

Most strategic reviews consider and outline the kinds of missions necessary for DOD to "protect and defend" the nation. The 2012 DSG listed ten "priority missions," though not explicitly in priority order.[11] Many observers suggest that explicit prioritization is necessary in order to help military services and components understand, and execute, based on intent; and that prioritization

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[10] See Title 50, U.S. Code, §3043(b).

[11] The ten included, in the order listed (though not numbered) in the DSG: "counter terrorism (CT) and irregular warfare; deter and defeat aggression; project power despite anti-access/area denial challenges; counter weapons of mass destruction (WMD); operate effectively in cyberspace and space; maintain a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent; defend the homeland and provide support to civil authorities; provide a stabilizing presence; conduct stability and counterinsurgency operations; and conduct humanitarian, disaster relief, and other operations." See DSG, 2012.

may also be helpful in order to provide a clear basis for external audiences, including Congress, to understand the rationale for tough decisions.[12]

Many observers also suggest that missions do not exist, as a rule, in splendid isolation from one other—for example, forward presence and engagement of all kinds may directly bolster homeland defense, by discouraging or forestalling threats long before they reach U.S. territory. Most observers would add that the responsibilities for each priority mission may not apply equally to all military services—service roles are distinct, and the relative weight of each mission is likely to vary by service. Finally, while all priorities may be portrayed as equal, some are clearly "more equal than others"—in the sense of those priorities that DOD chooses to actually size the force against. The DSG, for example, asserted that DOD would size against four of the ten priority missions—counter-terrorism, deterring and defeating aggression, countering weapons of mass destruction, and homeland defense.

Key questions concerning mission priorities might include the following:

- To what extent, and in what ways, have U.S. interests, or the global strategic environment, changed significantly enough in the last two years to warrant changes in DOD's priority missions? If fiscal constraints are the primary driver for a strategic update, where amidst the ten DSG's priority missions is there room to assume additional risk?

- At what point of fiscal pressure, if any, should DOD step back and fundamentally reconsider what it means to "protect and defend"?

- To what extent is mission prioritization clearly and commonly understood throughout DOD? To the extent that overall prioritization may have different implications for each military service and agency, to what extent are those variations clearly and commonly understood?

- How important, and in what ways, are those "priority" missions that DOD chooses not to size the force against?

- What signals do DOD's articulated priority missions send to major stakeholders outside DOD—to other U.S. Government agencies, to Allies and partners, and to potential adversaries? For example, how would greater emphasis on homeland defense likely be understood—as another way of emphasizing defense in depth, starting with military engagement around the world, or as a shift toward retrenchment?

Geographic Priorities

Many national security strategic guidance documents point to some geographic areas of particular concern or opportunity—but fail to strictly prioritize regions of the world. The 2012 DSG signaled geographic prioritization more emphatically than most guidance documents—with a strong new emphasis on Asia and the Pacific region, some continued attention to the Middle East, and a reasonably explicit intent to decrease the scope and scale of U.S. commitment and

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[12] Explicit prioritization may be provided in classified, internal guidance documents; but that does not directly facilitate external communications.

engagement everywhere else. DOD officials have suggested that the 2014 QDR debates explored the possibility of assuming greater risk in some regions.[13]

Key questions concerning geographic priorities might include the following:

- Are current priorities about right—Pacific first, Middle East decidedly second, everything else a distant third?

- Under increased fiscal pressure, what room is there, if any, to further pare back global engagement, in scope or scale, compared to the 2012 DSG?

- How can unlike geographic priorities best be balanced—in particular the longer-term, potentially profound challenges and opportunities of the Pacific region, and the pressing, near-term tensions and violence in the Middle East?

Presence

Presence is potentially one of the most powerful sets of tools that DOD can employ in order to shape events on the world stage, and the term appears frequently in strategic guidance documents. But "presence" can refer to a number of different things, and its strategic logic—how it generates effects—is assumed more often than it is spelled out, making it more difficult to make informed policy and resourcing decisions. Moreover, some observers have suggested that BCA topline caps and sequestration restrictions should force an *a priori* reconsideration of the extent and nature of DOD's global presence.

In theory, from a strategist's perspective, a debate about presence should begin, not with an adjudication of the number of forward-stationed troops, but rather with a determination of the strategic rationale for presence—that is, why should DOD engage around the world? Proponents generally propose some combination of these elements: providing closer proximity, and thus shorter timelines, to support possible future contingencies; helping guarantee access to and through other countries as needed; deterring potential aggressors and constructively shaping the choices of state and non-state actors; fostering the capabilities, capacity, and will of Allies and partners; and building relationships as means for exercising influence on the world stage. Defense strategy might balance the relative priority of these various desired effects in any number of ways.

In turn, "presence" might plausibly be achieved by any of a number of different approaches: permanent versions of presence in which units are based overseas; continual versions of "rotational presence" in which units rotate in-and-out, back-to-back; limited versions of rotational presence in which units deploy periodically, or partially, or both; and virtual versions of presence ranging from the ability to collaborate remotely through, for example, simulations, to the ability to strike globally.

The 2012 DSG introduced some major adjustments to the ways that DOD maintains presence—in particular, through a strong emphasis on "rotational presence" rather than permanent forward presence. Some observers have wondered whether efforts to scale back DOD global force posture and engagement are differentiating sufficiently among the various effects that different forms of

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[13] Interviews with DOD officials, 2013.

presence are best able to generate, and taking sufficient account of the risks associated with scaled-back presence.

Key questions concerning presence might include the following:

- Why if at all is it important for DOD to maintain forward presence around the world? Which of those reasons are most important? Where is it most important to maintain such presence?

- To what extent if any should various forms of presence be considered fungible with each other? What risks, if any, are associated with substituting less robust for more robust forms of presence and engagement? How valid is the familiar observation that "virtual presence is actual absence"?

- How unified and coherent is DOD thinking in distinguishing among the various possible forms of presence, their respective appropriateness for generating certain kinds of effects, and the risks associated with any substitutions?

- Is presence best thought of as a burden on, or a form of support to, a host nation? Is presence a U.S. "ask", or theirs, or both?

Partnership

The 2012 DSG, and other recent U.S. published strategies as well as internal guidance documents, have all stressed the importance of international partnerships—or "building partner capacity" (BPC).[14] Yet this rhetorical enthusiasm has been largely unmatched by conceptual clarity regarding the specific effects that BPC should be designed to achieve, the modalities for assessing those effects, the anticipated timeline and costs for achieving those effects, or the associated risks.

Among proponents—practitioners and observers—two lines of thinking, not mutually exclusive, have emerged, concerning the potential value of partnership. One line of thinking stresses effects—BPC's potential to extend U.S. reach in an ever more complex global security environment. The other line of thinking among partnership proponents stresses cost savings—in a word, "they do more, we do less." These themes are not incompatible, but they are often blurred even in internal debates. Meanwhile, skeptics suggest that whatever the value of BPC may be, it is a luxury that DOD, in a tougher budget climate, might no longer be able to afford.

Complicating the debate further is the fact that international partnerships can take many different forms, from start-from-scratch generation of host nation security forces and institutions, as in Iraq and Afghanistan; to building capacity and/or fostering specific capabilities in developing partners; to encouraging interoperability, and the political will to match it, in key Allies and close partners. In addition, partnership can be conducted bilaterally, which may have the value of simplicity; or under the rubric of formal alliances such as NATO, which may add the value of tested procedures, standing command and control mechanisms, and interoperable capabilities, as well as collective name recognition that may be helpful in shaping the choices of others. Those two approaches— bilateral and Alliance—may suggest different resourcing decisions in some instances, but in theory, they also have the potential to be mutually reinforcing.

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[14] See CRS Report R42516, *In Brief: Clarifying the Concept of "Partnership" in National Security*, by (name redacted).

Some observers suggest that at a time of undiminished and quite various global security challenges, together with significant fiscal constraints that are likely to persist for some time, it makes sense to aim for "smart partnership." One basic premise, it is proposed, would be that if the U.S., as a rule, does intend to conduct future military operations with international partners, it would be sensible to invest ahead of time in combined effectiveness. And another basic premise might be that, given resource constraints, the U.S. should make careful, explicit choices about its partnership investments—a tailored rather than an omnivorous approach—based on prioritized desired effects, and associated costs, timelines and risks.

Key questions concerning partnership might include the following:

- How exactly might building the capacity and capabilities of U.S. partners lead, through their actions, toward outcomes that help protect U.S. national security interests? How important is partnership to the implementation of defense strategy?

- Should the importance of BPC increase or diminish under increased fiscal pressure? How should the opportunity costs associated with scaling back partnership activities—for example, potential loss of access, or loss of influence—best be gauged?

- Should the goal of partnership be to save money? To extend U.S. reach and meet a greater array of global security challenges? To influence regional and global rules and norms? Or some combination?

- Would it be helpful, for decision-making, analysis, and oversight, to more clearly differentiate, in the vocabulary commonly used, among different major categories of partnership activities? Illustratively, might these include activities aimed at comprehensively building host nation forces as part of major contingency operations; or fostering interoperability and shared will with particularly close counterparts with whom the U.S. envisages conducting combined operations; or cultivating specific capabilities in partners who may apply them unilaterally, or under the rubric of regional organizations?

- How exactly should DOD's vision for partnership be reflected in resourcing decisions?

- To what extent might partnership activities help prevent conflicts, or mitigate their impact? What is the best way to assess any of these outcomes?

- How important is the political will of U.S. Allies and partners—in addition to their capacity and capabilities—in determining whether they will choose to act in ways that protect U.S. interests? How, if at all, can the U.S. most effectively shape and influence that will?

- What is the most appropriate way to understand, and evaluate, the risks associated with U.S. partnership investments? Given that Allies and partners are highly unlikely to do exactly as the U.S. wishes, in every circumstance, how much "divergence" might be considered acceptable?

- In particular, how important is it to invest in the NATO Alliance—and in what ways—versus investing specifically in the most capable states with whom the U.S. is most likely to conduct future coalition operations? To what extent might those two sets of investments be mutually reinforcing?

- What might genuinely "smart partnership" look like?

Deterrence

Most strategic guidance documents highlight a critical role for "deterrence"—after all, it is far less costly in every sense to prevent wars than to prosecute them. The concept of deterrence concerns ensuring that potential adversaries do not take certain steps, which they might otherwise be inclined to take, and typically relies on assumptions about cost/benefit analyses by those potential adversaries. The concept may apply to both nuclear and non-nuclear arenas. In the academic community, leading experts have long disagreed, sometimes vehemently, about when and how deterrence works. But strategic guidance often takes for granted the existence of a simple, shared understanding of the logic of deterrence.

One common point of reference is the U.S. approach to nuclear deterrence during the Cold War—a simpler global strategic context with only one peer-competitor adversary, the Soviet Union. The U.S. approach to strategic deterrence generally relied on maintaining a nuclear arsenal sufficient to ensure a second-strike capability, on the premise that the anticipated costs, up to and including mutual assured destruction, would affect the calculus of those who might otherwise be inclined to attack the United States with nuclear weapons. The United States relied not only on platforms but also on communicated policy, and on Soviet perceptions of capability and intent.

Further complicating the picture, during the Cold War, the U.S. Government sought to use its nuclear arsenal to "extend" deterrence abroad, using a credible threat of retaliation, by all means necessary, including the use of nuclear weapons, to forestall attacks against U.S. Allies. In the post-Cold War world, U.S. policy continues to support "extended deterrence," now generally understood to refer to U.S. reliance on a mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities to assure a wider array of Allies and partners, and to deter nuclear and conventional attacks against them.

Observers agree that the global context has changed significantly since the Cold War, and that Cold War mental models—which persist, if subconsciously, in some quarters—require refinement. Today's nuclear arena alone includes a far broader array of actors, including some nuclear states and other state and non-state entities with nuclear aspirations, who may have widely varying notions of "unacceptable costs." In non-nuclear arenas, there may be even less of a consensus regarding the combination of capabilities and demonstrated will that would be most likely to change a given potential adversary's calculus, in a given set of circumstances. At the very least, it seems unlikely that simple math—for example, counting warheads or delivery systems—is a sufficiently robust tool for calculating deterrence requirements.

The 2012 DSG, while underscoring the importance of deterrence, begged more questions than it resolved. It suggested tantalizingly that "it is possible that our deterrence goals can be achieved with a smaller nuclear force," without articulating the rationale behind that possibility. And it argued more broadly that "credible deterrence results from both the capabilities to deny an aggressor the prospect of achieving his objectives and from the complementary capability to impose unacceptable costs on the aggressor," without tackling key questions including what mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities might prove sufficient, and what would, in each circumstance that might arise, constitute "unacceptable costs."

Key questions concerning deterrence might include the following:

- To what extent are current U.S. approaches to nuclear deterrence undergirded by a clear theory of deterrence? Can a single strategic logic apply to deterring use by current nuclear powers, and to deterring acquisition by aspirant states and non-state actors? How might nuclear deterrence theory best grapple with the problems posed by the existence of more than one nuclear near-peer competitor? Or with the differences in respective U.S., Chinese, and Russian "escalation ladders"?

- How effective can conventional weapons be in deterring potential nuclear attacks?

- To what extent, if any, has the likelihood of nuclear use, and/or the severity of impact from any such use, diminished? Would any such changes justify assuming greater risk in this arena?

- How can a potential adversary's mind be changed? What combination of military capabilities, nuclear and conventional; economic strength; political will; international partnerships; and other qualities would be required? Is U.S. understanding of the perceptions of potential adversaries sufficient to meaningfully make this calculus?

- To what extent if any can a broad formula of non-nuclear deterrence be applied to all potential adversaries and sets of circumstances? How germane if at all is the idea of a potential adversary's calculated costs?

- How can the U.S. best test its assumptions about deterrence, given that only "failure" can provide unassailably clear test results?

Force Planning Construct

As a rule, QDRs revisit and update DOD's force planning construct (FPC)—a shorthand statement of the number and type of missions the force is expected to be able to accomplish simultaneously, which is used to shape and size the force.

Many observers would agree that the greater the clarity of an FPC, the greater its utility. The well-known "1-4-2-1" construct, introduced by the 2001 QDR, had the great value of parsimony.[15] The FPCs put forward in the 2006 and 2010 QDRs were more complex, allowing for multiple possible combinations of simultaneous contingencies in addition to steady-state activities. Both preserved DOD's ability to do more than one big thing at a time but argued that both sustainable durations and associated risks would depend on the particular combination of contingencies.[16]

The FPC in the 2012 DSG called for a future force shaped and sized to conduct simultaneously one effort to defeat an adversary—a combined arms campaign across all domains, including a large-scale ground operation—and a second effort, to deny an aggressor's objective or impose unacceptable costs, as well as smaller additional missions, with "acceptable" risk. Some outside observers raised concerns that the DSG had abandoned the requirement to do two big things at a time. Internally, some DOD officials expressed concern that the second effort was quite poorly, or

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[15] "1-4-2-1" meant that the force should be able to defend the homeland; operate in and from four forward regions of the world; swiftly defeat adversaries in two overlapping military campaigns while preserving the option to win decisively one of those campaigns; and conduct humanitarian operations. See DOD, QDR Report, September 30, 2001.

[16] See DOD, QDR Report, February 2006; and DOD, QDR Report, February 2010.

at any rate not uniformly, understood throughout DOD; and that the FPC would be difficult to execute, even without the additional annual topline caps that might be imposed through sequestration, without significant risk to the force and risk to mission.[17]

Key questions concerning any force planning construct might include the following:

- How clearly and universally understood, within DOD, is the FPC?

- How genuinely "simultaneously" can the major components of the FPC be executed?

- How, and how well, does the FPC account for steady-state activities such as presence, partnership, and deterrence? To what extent does it assume that those activities would become "force providers" in the event of major contingencies?

- What risks to the force, and risks to mission, does the FPC accept?

Total Force

Observers and practitioners generally agree that the tighter the fiscal constraints, the more imperative it becomes for DOD to strike an appropriate balance of roles and responsibilities across the Total Force, in order to eliminate harmful gaps and unnecessary redundancies, and to forge efficiencies through stronger integration of effort. While responsibilities for some activities are obvious, statutorily mandated, or both, many other arenas require choice, because responsibilities could theoretically be distributed in number of different ways, among various actors, to achieve the desired effects. While QDRs and other strategic reviews sometimes link activities with actors, they are typically less robust in correspondingly "de-linking" actors from activities as needed, and may raise as many questions as they resolve.

The 2012 DSG encouraged greater reliance on special operations forces (SOF), compared with conventional forces. Some proponents of that shift pointed to strategic imperatives, arguing that SOF's abilities to strike, and to partner with other security forces around the world, are particularly appropriate for meeting emerging global security challenges. Other proponents stressed fiscal imperatives, arguing that reductions in overall endstrength place a higher premium on cultivating the most capable U.S. forces. Skeptics have stressed, variously, the long lead times required to grow effective SOF; the stress on the SOF force that generating greater capacity might impose; and the array of critical, complementary roles, not least the command and control of complex operations and the provision of enablers, that conventional forces typically play in contingencies. The DSG largely left it to each service to determine the implications for conventional forces of greater reliance on SOF, and to craft an appropriate future SOF/conventional balance. Subsequently, many DOD officials have noted much greater emphasis on "interdependence," but some have suggested that there is still work to be done in clarifying the SOF/conventional division of labor—for example, in arenas such as command and control, and security force assistance.

The DSG also called broadly for increasing DOD's reliance on the Reserve Component (RC), including further institutionalizing its use as an operational reserve. But the DSG largely left it to each military service to determine the implications for the Active Component (AC), given greater

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[17] See DSG, 2012; and interviews with DOD officials, 2012 and 2013.

reliance on the RC, and to craft an appropriate future AC/RC balance. While many facets of AC/RC roles and missions are specified in statute, fundamental choices remain, for example regarding force structure.

Key questions concerning roles and missions might include the following:

- Ideally, given changes in the global security landscape and fiscal realities, how would integration of effort, and the balance of roles and responsibilities, between SOF and conventional forces further evolve?

- To what extent, if any, should greater reliance on SOF be viewed as a tool for mitigating risk amidst greater fiscal constraints?

- How should SOF reliance on conventional force support best be characterized, in scope and scale, and what do those characterizations imply for resourcing both forces?

- How should the overall requirement for DOD's global engagement best be characterized, and how might the efforts of various SOF and conventional forces—for example, SOF regional engagement, naval presence, and the Army's regionally aligned forces—best complement each other under that rubric?

- What lessons has the last decade or so of sustained warfighting taught about SOF/ conventional integration? To what extent have all relevant communities learned the same lessons?

- Ideally, given changes in the global security landscape and fiscal realities, how would integration of effort, and the balance of roles and responsibilities, between the active and reserve components further evolve?

- What are the most important criteria to consider in refining the AC/RC total force mix, in order to ensure that the active and reserve components best complement each other in support of defense strategy? How should respective costs be calculated, given varying terms of service, and varying responsibilities for overhead? How should respective effectiveness in various mission areas best be evaluated?

- To what extent if any should greater reliance on the RC be viewed as a tool for mitigating risk amidst greater fiscal constraints?

- What risks if any does increased reliance on mobilization, as a critical element of any protracted contingency operation, help mitigate? What risks if any does it introduce?

- What lessons have been learned, from the last decade or so of sustained warfighting abroad and some major contingencies at home, about AC/RC integration and division of labor? To what extent have all relevant communities learned the same lessons?

- How important is it to resolve, in the near term, any lingering uncertainties regarding SOF/conventional and/or AC/RC integration and division of labor? To what extent, if any, do lingering uncertainties, and sometimes tensions, introduce risk to mission or to the force? Who is best placed to play an "honest broker" role, facilitating the search for an optimal systemic-level balance for the Total Force? How actively if at all should Congress participate in these debates?

Competition of Ideas

As a rule, QDR processes to date have sought, in one way or another, to introduce a competition of ideas into the process, through the efforts of some form of independent panel.[18]

One role that such a panel can play is internal—"grading the homework" of the formal process as it goes. That might include challenging assumptions, identifying gaps, and helping refine the practical modalities of the process. Playing such a role most effectively would require, as a rule, unfettered access to the mechanics as well as the ideas of the formal process. The main goal of an internal competition is strengthening the formal process and improving its output. The "red team" created to support the 2006 QDR—without a statutory mandate—roughly followed this internal model, by closely tracking the formal QDR process and directly engaging, and pushing on, its big, emerging ideas.[19]

The other basic role that such a panel can play is external. In its most ambitious form, this might mean crafting a complete alternative approach—from strategic vision, to objectives and assumptions, detailed force structure, and resourcing plans, together with associated risks—and making those results available to Congress and other external audiences. Playing such a role effectively would require substantial time, relevant expertise, and sufficient staffing. The main goal of such an external competition is to establish a coherent, provocative counterpoint to the formal process, in order to spur debate and encourage better follow-on decision-making. To date, external panels have typically found that crafting a comprehensive alternative—including strategic assessment, force structure, and cost—is beyond the scope of the time and resources available.[20] Yet even an alternative set of big ideas may serve as a useful catalyst to the debates.

Key questions concerning a competition of ideas might include the following:

- How important is a competition of ideas for any QDR process? To what extent does DOD need an external catalyst to spur its own strategic thinking?

- To what extent should the goal of a competition of ideas be to "grade the homework" of the formal process and thereby to improve its outcome? What support mechanisms—such as access—would be necessary to help ensure that an outside panel could play such a role?

- To what extent should the goal of a competition of ideas be to offer a provocative, alternative approach to help spur more effective oversight and better future decision-making? To what extent might this goal be supported by soliciting input from an independent panel early in, or prior to, the formal review process, to help frame the broader debates?

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[18] For background, see CRS Report R43174, *National Security Strategy: Mandates, Execution to Date, and Issues for Congress*, by (name redacted).

[19] Interviews with DOD officials, 2005, 2006.

[20] See Philip A. Odeen, Chairman, "Transforming Defense: National Security in the 21st Century," Report of the National Defense Panel, December 1997 ("NDP"); and Stephen J. Hadley and William J. Perry, Co-Chairmen, "The QDR in Perspective: Meeting America's National Security Needs in the 21st Century," Final Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel, July 2010 ("QDRIP"). The original NDP, constituted to support the 1997 QDR, finding itself unable to conduct a full alternative assessment, crafted an alternative conceptual approach based on the need for "transformation". The QDRIP, established to support the 2010 QDR, did provide an alternative strategic assessment and force structure recommendation, but not comparative cost estimates.

- How helpful, if at all, would it be to constitute a standing independent panel to support DOD's QDR processes?[21] What value-added, if any, might a permanent institutional home, greater continuity of membership, and a longer time horizon provide to such a panel's efforts? To what extent, on the other hand, does the idea of a standing panel conflate the need to catalyze the QDR process, with the need for powerful, ongoing strategic "engines" within DOD itself?

Compliance with, and Appropriateness of, the QDR Mandate

For Congress—the collective authors of the statutory mandate for the QDR—one of the most fundamental oversight issues concerns compliance with that mandate. The conduct of the five QDR processes to date, and the contents of the QDR reports they have generated, have been prescribed by law. While DOD has broadly complied with the mandate, including the timelines for delivering the QDR report to Congress, its track record regarding more detailed compliance is mixed, particularly concerning responding to each of the items that DOD is required to address in the QDR report.

Still more fundamental may be the issue of whether the QDR mandate itself is "correct."

Some observers raise questions about the QDR's 20-year outlook. Practitioners and observers generally agree that fidelity is significantly greater in the near term, and weaker further out. They suggest that while it may be valuable to consider several different timelines, each time horizon would need its own set of caveats.[22] Some observers and practitioners point to the barnacle-like accretion over time of legacy legislative language and suggest that the list of specified items to be addressed in the QDR report is outdated. The legislative history shows that as new strategic concerns have arisen, some new items have been added, but older terminology and concepts no longer in general usage have far less frequently been removed.[23]

Other observers raise questions about the QDR's fixed four-year cycle. That timeline is relatively rigid. The review is required to take place regardless of whether changes in the global or domestic contexts suggest the need for an update. At the same time, "quadrennial" may not be frequent enough to adjust DOD's focus and priorities as circumstances change. Some note that the statutory mandate for national military strategy (NMS), codified in §153(b), Title 10, U.S. Code, might usefully point the way to greater flexibility. Based on recent amendments, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is required to submit an NMS every two years when he deems it necessary, and a simpler update when he does not. Still other observers wonder what separate and distinct value the QDR—and the national defense strategy (NDS) that it is required to delineate— provide, in addition to national security strategy, the NMS, and the array of internal, classified guidance documents that DOD uses to shape and direct the enterprise and the force.

Key questions concerning the QDR mandate might include:

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[21] To be clear, the current statutory requirement for the NDP is "permanent", in that such a body is required to be constituted for each QDR process. But the NDP is not "standing"; rather, its members are nominated, and the body dissolves, with each QDR process, and the NDP has no designated, enduring home base.

[22] The 2010 QDR did this explicitly, addressing both the near-term and the longer-term. See DOD, QDR Report, 2010.

[23] See CRS Report R43174, *National Security Strategy: Mandates, Execution to Date, and Issues for Congress*, by (name redacted).

- How well has DOD complied over time with the QDR statutory mandate? In what significant ways, if any, has compliance been insufficient?

- How helpful is a 20-year time horizon for the QDR? How might variation over that timeline be more clearly differentiated, to facilitate better oversight and debate?

- What would be the impact on internal DOD decision-making, Congressional oversight, and national defense if the QDR requirement were eliminated altogether?

- How important is the QDR for synchronizing strategy vertically, with the White House, and horizontally, with other U.S. Government agencies?

- What specific contribution do the QDR and its associated national defense strategy make, in relationship to the national security strategy, the national military strategy, and internal classified guidance?

- How important is the QDR as a strategic communications tool, for signalling intent to friends and potential foes around the world?

- How helpful is the QDR as a tool for oversight? To what extent might updating, revising, or streamlining the statutory mandate improve the QDR's utility for oversight purposes?

DOD and Strategy

Strategic review processes and strategy-making in general may make useful contributions in a number of ways, for example by fostering internal consensus, or by producing materials to be used in external communications. But perhaps the most fundamental contribution any review may make—and perhaps one of the most difficult things to do—is generating smart, rigorous strategic thinking. Some observers point to an enduring requirement for DOD to have an appropriate internal "strategic engine" to generate ideas, and to help ensure the strategic rigor of formal review processes such as the QDR as well as other internal strategy debates.

Key questions concerning DOD and strategy might include:

- To what internal entities, if any, has DOD given the mandate, time, and ability to focus on longer-term and bigger-picture strategic thinking? How effectively do such entities contribute to strategy debates and decision-making?

- To what internal entities, if any, has DOD given the mandate to help ensure the strategic rigor of formal review processes such as the QDR, and other internal strategy development processes, as they unfold? How essential is it that any such entities enjoy full, unfettered access to the debates, with no parochial equities of their own? How effectively do any such entities play the role of identifying gaps in the debates, pushing back on assumptions, and "helping DOD see itself"?

- To what internal entities, if any, has DOD given the mandate to trace the various ways that defense strategy, once issued, is actually understood throughout the Department at all levels, and to help evaluate whether those variations in understanding are acceptable, as myriad constituent parts of DOD implement the strategy?

- Former House Armed Services Committee Chairman Ike Skelton used to ask, "Where are today's Marshalls?," suggesting the need for at least a few strategic thinkers in the mold of General of the Army, Secretary of State, and Secretary of Defense George C. Marshall, Jr. How should DOD identify potential strategists, develop them, craft appropriate career paths for them, and ensure that their insights and abilities infuse DOD's decision-making processes?

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