Game Changers in US Defense Strategy: An Examination of the Causes Behind the Increased Emphasis on Irregular Warfare Since 9/11

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Abstract
Despite the vast research devoted to the shifting focus of the defense strategy toward irregular operations and developing a counterinsurgency doctrine since September 11, 2001, little is known about the driving political forces behind the process. Most assume that the strategy has shifted because after ten years embroiled in two wars—Iraq and Afghanistan—the United States has learned that conventional operations do not work against unconventional enemies. While this is true, how and why the strategy is integrated at the policy level is less well understood. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to fill in this void. An examination of the Quadrennial Defense Reviews (QDR) from 2001, 2006, and 2010 provides solid evidence of the evolution of the defense strategy since 9/11. This study includes an overview of two major theories explaining decision-making in security studies—national interest and bureaucratic politics—which will then act as the lenses through which the doctrinal changes are investigated. Articles written on the respective QDRs coupled with an interview with Dr. Steven Metz, a leading expert in the field of national defense, round out the discussion of the driving forces behind the strategic shift to irregular warfare. This study concludes that both national interest and bureaucratic politics influenced the strategic shift since 9/11, albeit to varying degrees—national interest had the strongest effect in 2001, and then different components of the bureaucratic politics model intertwined with the national interest motivation as new “players” entered the “game” along the way. This investigation demonstrates that political prowess is just as important as the security environment when it comes to transforming the United States defense strategy.

Keywords
United States, defense strategy, irregular warfare, quadrennial defense review, Social Sciences, Political Science, Michael Horowitz, Horowitz, Michael

Disciplines
American Politics | Defense and Security Studies | Military and Veterans Studies | Policy History, Theory, and Methods

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Political Science
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ABSTRACT

Despite the vast research devoted to the shifting focus of the defense strategy toward irregular operations and developing a counterinsurgency doctrine since September 11, 2001, little is known about the driving political forces behind the process. Most assume that the strategy has shifted because after ten years embroiled in two wars—Iraq and Afghanistan—the United States has learned that conventional operations do not work against unconventional enemies. While this is true, how and why the strategy is integrated at the policy level is less well understood. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to fill in this void. An examination of the Quadrennial Defense Reviews (QDR) from 2001, 2006, and 2010 provides solid evidence of the evolution of the defense strategy since 9/11. This study includes an overview of two major theories explaining decision-making in security studies—national interest and bureaucratic politics—which will then act as the lenses through which the doctrinal changes are investigated. Articles written on the respective QDRs coupled with an interview with Dr. Steven Metz, a leading expert in the field of national defense, round out the discussion of the driving forces behind the strategic shift to irregular warfare. This study concludes that both national interest and bureaucratic politics influenced the strategic shift since 9/11, albeit to varying degrees—national interest had the strongest effect in 2001, and then different components of the bureaucratic politics model intertwined with the national interest motivation as new “players” entered the “game” along the way. This investigation demonstrates that political prowess is just as important as the security environment when it comes to transforming the United States defense strategy.
The United States has deployed its military abroad dozens of times since declaring war on Germany during World War I in 1917. The subsequent wars in which the United States got involved were all relatively similar in style. Army to army (or navy to navy) combat, trench warfare, tanks, and aerial bombardment all comprised the traditional strategies employed for the majority of United States military involvement—otherwise known as conventional war. From both World Wars to the Korean War, the United States was overwhelmingly successful as a conventional military power.

However, when confronted with a different type of enemy—the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong in the Vietnam War—the United States was utterly unprepared. Facing guerrilla campaigns and an insurgency in the midst of a jungle was like nothing the United States military had ever encountered. Furthermore, the US military was accustomed to focusing on the enemy’s army as the center of gravity—a term coined by Clausewitz, one of the most notable military theorists of all time—instead of the population, which should have been the objective in Vietnam. Even in 1961-1962 when the US Special Forces were experiencing success training the Vietnamese Forces—part of a population-centric COIN campaign—once the Special Forces command changed from the CIA to Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), the Special Forces’ strategy shifted away from the COIN-style they had been using under the CIA. Despite the fact that the United States should have further developed COIN and switched gears to combat this new type of war from the get go, the military and political elites refused to willingly give up the strategies that had made the US the most powerful actor internationally.
Thus, their response was too little, too late. The result was a United States withdrawal of troops and the dissolution of South Vietnam.¹

A counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign—like what should have been employed in the Vietnam War, and like what is being employed in the Iraq War, and the War in Afghanistan—falls under the heading of “irregular warfare” and is very different from a conventional campaign. In population-centric COIN, the center of gravity is the hearts and minds of the population, as compared to the army in conventional war.² Counterinsurgencies are more difficult to prepare for than conventional warfare. In conventional warfare, the enemy is clearly defined and the goal is to defeat the enemy through any means possible. However, COIN operations are more delicate. Actions are “constantly directed towards a political goal,” and the primacy of political over military power is key.³ More boots must be on the ground, working with the local populations, as opposed to remaining at a distance and striking from afar. In COIN, the focus is on “highly mobile and lightly armed infantry,”⁴ instead of rumbling tanks and explosive bombs. The importance of intelligence and information technology is paramount to success in irregular campaigns. While these are just some of the stark differences between irregular and conventional operations, they clearly demonstrate the incredible strategic shifts necessary in order to successfully combat this new type of warfare.

This glance back at history is important, because forty-plus years later in Iraq, the United States encountered a similar counterinsurgency for which it was, once again, unprepared. While the United States had the opportunity to reexamine its military strategy post-Vietnam, instead it

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⁴ Ibid, 65.
recoiled back to its old, conventional military capabilities. Understandably, the Soviet Union was the major threat for the United States after Vietnam, which necessitated a more conventional rather than an irregular strategy. However, the United States ignored the lessons learned in Vietnam instead of focusing on integrating the new style of warfare the military faced—an insurgency and guerrilla tactics. The elites in the United States military and government continued to build up firepower, and army-to-army capabilities. While conventional tactics were the correct response against a competitor like the Soviet Union, because the US failed to successfully integrate COIN into the doctrine, when an insurgency developed in Iraq after toppling Saddam’s regime in 2003, the United States did not have the necessary training or equipment to successfully (and in a timely manner) exert control. Instead, the DOD could have allocated at least a small portion of its budget to developing some irregular warfare capabilities during the Cold War period, so it would have had a stronger base from which to build on after 9/11.

However, in the time since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the United States has realized the importance of integrating COIN and irregular capabilities into the military doctrine. While it is clear that the United States policymakers and defense planners have recognized that the defense strategy must be transformed, a gap in the literature examining the motivating factors behind the process of transformation exists.

This paper aims to fill in this void. First, I will give an overview of the evolution of the US defense strategy to provide a context for the subsequent arguments. Second, I will review the literature behind two dominant arguments in security studies that attempt to explain how and why government policy changes—the national interest position and the bureaucratic politics model. Third, I will cover the evolution of the defense doctrine’s increased emphasis on
irregular warfare by examining the Quadrennial Defense Reviews (QDR) from 2001, 2006, and 2010. At the end of each corresponding chapter, I will then critique the QDRs using research and news released relating to the document. I will also, then, analyze how national interest and bureaucratic politics played a role in transforming the strategy. The paper culminates with my overall analysis and assessment of the past transformations and postulates how this can help us to understand defense transformation in the future, based on my argument that both national interest and bureaucratic politics, to constantly varying degrees, influence the changes in the defense strategy.
OVERVIEW – THE EVOLUTION OF THE DEFENSE STRATEGY

The United States National Security Strategy is a continuously evolving document. Compiled by the executive branch of the government, the purpose of the National Security Strategy is to address the major concerns the United States currently faces and may face in the near future, while also outlining how the current presidential administration plans to confront these issues. The National Security Strategy is broad, purposely not delving into the intricate details of each situation. Instead, those details are left up to the defense community, though the preferences of the defense department are subject to the will of the President.

Every four years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1996, the Department of Defense has compiled and released the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)—the first edition was released in 1997. Since then, Congress has mandated this report “by inserting Section 118 into Chapter 2 of title 10, United States Code, which states that every four years the Secretary of Defense will:

…conduct a comprehensive examination of the national defense strategy, force structure, force modernization plans, infrastructure, budget plan, and other elements of the defense program and policies of the United States with a view towards determining and expressing the defense strategy of the United States and establishing a defense program for the next 20 years.”

This government document examines the past, current, and future threats to the United States, while also making recommendations as to how the military should best confront these challenges. The National Security Strategy and QDR go hand-in-hand, as the QDR’s purpose is to discuss the technicalities of the National Security Strategy.

The research, compilation, and integration of the QDR are joint efforts between the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and the Joint Staff. The OSD is tasked with the “integration of the QDR effort, [and] the Joint Staff… gather[s] the data and formulate[s] the inputs from the individual Services, the combatant commands, and Defense Agencies into the end result.”

To research and compile the data for the QDR, in 2001, the Joint Staff was organized into eight panels—“Strategy and Risk Assessment; Force Generation, Capability and Structure; Modernization; Sustainment, Strategic Mobility and Infrastructure; Readiness; Transformation, Innovation and Joint Experimentation; Information Superiority; and Human Resources.” Furthermore, sensing the changing security environment, OSD posited that it would also form major issue panels to provide recommendations for future strategy decisions. These panels were tentatively identified as: strategy; force structure; capabilities and investment; information warfare, intelligence, and space; personnel and readiness support infrastructure; and joint organizations. The names of these six panels suggest that OSD had a sense of the direction in which military capabilities would have to develop in the Post-Cold War security environment.

During the Cold War, the United States military focused exclusively on major theater warfare (MTW). The United States built up its conventional military capabilities, fearing major combat operations against the Soviet Union. The international stage seemed to be balanced in a bipolar fashion, with the United States on one side and the Soviet Union on the other. To counter the threat posed by the Soviet Union, much of the United States military’s attention was focused on nuclear deterrence, containment, and on building up traditional military capabilities

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
(firepower, tanks, etc). However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States military had to determine whether the threat of MTW was still its top priority. The global security environment had drastically changed from bipolar to unipolar. The United States was now the sole superpower in the international system. Thus, it seemed like a shift in the defense strategy was imminent.

However, the United States was hesitant to make any changes to its strategy, which had worked so well for decades. The nations leaders were uncertain about the future, thus they relied heavily on the military doctrine that had allowed the United States to remain the dominant conventional military power. Despite this reluctance, in response to the impending need to redesign the defense strategy, “the Military Force Structure Act of 1996 ordered the first QDR and the Fiscal 2000 National Defense Authorization Act made the requirement permanent.” This Act exemplifies that Congress recognized that there were “emerging symmetric threats of terrorism, narco-trafficking, weapons of mass destruction, information warfare, environmental sabotage, anti-access operations, and other low intensity operations” that would require a doctrinal shift.

The QDRs are a key tool for examining this shift, and the evolution of the United States’ national defense strategy. Until the 2001 QDR, the focus was on MTW, although the possibility of small-scale contingencies (SSC)— the initial term that the defense community used to

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12 Jeffrey D. Brake, 5.
describe anything short of MTW—was acknowledged. Because the United States dominated the global security environment with its conventional capabilities, it did not see an overwhelming need to change. This attitude is similar to the adage, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Even the 2001 QDR did not emphasize the extent to which the defense strategy needed to be transformed—changes that now seem so obviously required. However, September 11, 2001 provided a sharp wake-up call for the United States and the defense planning community. These attacks initiated sweeping reassessments and reforms of the defense strategy and security environment by those in the military, defense, and policy arenas.

Although it is clear that the 9/11 attacks sparked this overall drastic shift in military strategy, discerning the factors that explain the changes in this strategy with regard to irregular warfare are not quite as clear. Therefore, this study aims to investigate this issue by specifically focusing on the QDRs of 2001, 2006, and 2010. Although the QDRs cover everything from working with international allies to improving the quality of life of service members, this study will concentrate on the shift from MTW capabilities to preparation for irregular warfare. However, more than just explaining what the main changes have been regarding irregular warfare, this study also examines why these changes have occurred, from a policy perspective. By understanding the development of the QDRs in these terms, one will be able to draw conclusions as to the future of American military strategy, and also the driving forces shaping the evolution of the defense doctrine.

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Before delving into the intricacies of the QDRs and the politics behind defense transformation, it is first necessary to understand not only the environment in which the United States operates, but also two very important foundational positions on decision-making in foreign policy. As globalization creates a more interconnected international system, states are interacting on an increasingly frequent basis. Whether through trading, international institutions, business transactions, or war, to name a few, states are continuously making decisions that have repercussions for other actors internationally. There is no question regarding the existence of this interaction, but there is constant debate around the issue of why states make certain foreign policy choices and decisions. There are two dominant theories in international relations to explain these decisions made by nation states and their governments—national interest and bureaucratic politics. The simpler scenario, national interest, is a realist perspective championed by notable theorists such as Hans Morgenthau and George Kennan. Morgenthau argues that the US makes decisions based on its desire to maintain its position “as a predominant power without rival,” or in other words, based on this compelling national interest. While this explanation is rather succinct, bureaucratic politics is quite a bit messier. Graham T. Allison is the key proponent of the bureaucratic politics model, which is based on the idea that a government is really made up of a multitude of “players.” Furthermore, the actions of a state are really based on “bargaining among players positioned hierarchically in the government, and this “bargaining and [the eventual] results are importantly affected by… in particular, organizational processes

The clear delineation between the national interest and bureaucratic politics models is the actor—for the national interest side, the state is the sole actor, while for the bureaucratic politics side, there is no unitary actor, but rather a countless number of actors within a multitude of organizations. Figure 1 (page 13) is a depiction of a baseline assessment of the interaction between national interests and bureaucratic politics in terms of US defense strategy. Meaning, at a theoretical level, if nothing had occurred to tip the scale in either direction, the scale would be balanced with both national interest and bureaucratic politics having equal influence. This shows the dominant factors taken into account on each side. However, this paper takes the debate to another level by examining why the defense strategy has evolved to focus more on irregular warfare— is it motivated by national interest or bureaucratic politics, or is it a combination of the two? Therefore, the scale theme is carried throughout the ensuing chapters, illustrating for the reader how the various motivating factors behind the defense transformation weighed on the QDR decisions of the respective year. These scales help demonstrate my culminating argument, that while one side may weigh more heavily for a given QDR, both sides (bureaucratic politics and national interest) still have an effect on the resulting policy. Although this is revealed throughout the subsequent chapters, is first necessary to review the literature on both the national interest explanation and the bureaucratic politics explanation, so that there is a broad understanding of how and why states make policy decisions.

Condoleeza Rice, former Secretary of State for President George W. Bush, wrote an influential piece in Foreign Affairs entitled, “Rethinking the National Interest: American Realism for New World.” In this article, she argues that just as the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 swept the United States “into a fundamentally different world,” the attacks of September 11, 2001 were a strategic shock that put into question how far the United States would go to defend its national interest. But, what exactly are national interests?

Realists, such as Morgenthau, posit that the US bases its policymaking decisions on whether the choice is good or bad for the United States, to put it in layman’s terms. While this is relatively simple to understand, complicating matters is the fact that there is often debate as to whether moral abstractions and national interest coincide. Morgenthau and other realists such as George Kennan are adamantly opposed to this idea. They argue that morals interfere with

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foreign policy. Kennan believes that although democracy might be something practiced in the United States, the United States should not crusade around the world, motivated by morality, democratizing and spreading its values. As a democracy, the United States has most often followed the will of the people, but Kennan believes that it is in the nation’s interest to leave policy and decision-making up to the government and professionals, as he is distrustful of the public’s ability to make informed and sound choices. Kennan explains that, “The interests of the national society for which government has to concern itself are basically those of its military security, the integrity of its political life, and the well-being of its people. These needs have no moral quality.”

However, Condoleeza Rice firmly believes that “promoting democratic development” is a “top priority” for the United States, and it should be. Rice believes that promoting democracy will create partnerships for the US, and in critical regions, like Afghanistan, this is of the utmost importance. Moreover, Joseph S. Nye, Jr., former Dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, argues that in a democracy, there is no difference between a “morality-based and an interest-based foreign policy.” Therefore, because the United States is democratic, “if an informed public disagrees, experts cannot deny the legitimacy of public opinion.” Rice and Nye both provide viable counterarguments to those of Morgenthau and Kennan.

Regardless of whose view one sides with, it is clear that national interest influences foreign policy-making. It is difficult to deny the fact that the US desires an international order in

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19 Rice, 9.
21 Ibid.
which democracies are the most prevalent type of government, because, as first argued by Immanual Kant in his writing on the possibility for perpetual peace, democracies are less likely to fight each other.\textsuperscript{22} Therefore, whether influenced by morality or not, the US seeks a world with similar global interests—and most would argue that those who attacked the US on 9/11 have both conflicting interests with United States and seek to prevent the US from acting based on its own interests. The subsequent question is whether policies are made solely because of national interest. For example, did the United States think a shift in the defense strategy was necessary because it was, in Morgenthau’s terms, the good choice given the circumstances? Or rather, did the US shift its focus away from conventional operations towards irregular warfare because of something else, namely bureaucratic politics?

**BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS**

A central component of the bureaucratic politics model of decision-making in foreign policy is the idea that a nation is not a unitary actor. In actuality, a nation is made up of a multitude of organizations, institutions, and people that all have an influence on foreign policy. While champions of the bureaucratic politics model agree that “all participants in the national security decision-making process profess to be pursuing the national interest and much of the time they believe that they are,” unlike the national interest proponents, the players “often have differing notions about what the national security interest is.”\textsuperscript{23} Graham T. Allison explains the bureaucratic politics model as if it were a game consisting of “bargaining among players positioned hierarchically in the government,” whose “results are importantly affected by…in


particular, organizational processes and shared values.” These players take into consideration their “conceptions of national security” as well as their “organizational, domestic, and personal interests” when determining their position on a variety of policies.\(^{25}\)

The most influential players in the bureaucratic politics paradigm are the senior members of the government, and in this case, those in the national security policy arena. Obviously, the most influential player in the foreign policy process in the president—“the president will almost always be the principal figure determining the general direction of actions.” Many “senior participants look to the president,” because as Halperin and Clapp note, he “serves as the surrogate for the national interest.”\(^{27}\) However, the president and senior players are not alone in the foreign policy process. Around them, there are also “junior player,” which include “congressional influentials, members of the press, [and] spokesmen for important interest groups,” among others.\(^{28}\) All of the players, regardless of their position, determine their stance on a policy by calculating “how the resolution of the issue may affect his [or her] interests.”\(^{29}\) For example, a senior military officer may support a COIN strategy in Iraq after experiencing, first hand, the ineffectiveness of a prolonged conventional campaign.

In this bureaucratic politics “game” as Allison describes it, the most important tool for players is skillful bargaining. If a player holds a powerful position regarding the policy at hand, in addition to adept bargaining abilities, then he or she has a higher probability of success. Bargaining advantages most often stem from “control of implementation, control over information that enables one to define the problem and identify available options, persuasiveness

\(^{24}\) Allison, 43.
^{25}\) Ibid.
^{26}\) Halperin and Clapp, 16.
^{27}\) Ibid.
^{28}\) Ibid, 47.
^{29}\) Ibid.
with other players, and the ability to affect other players objectives in other games.”\textsuperscript{30} Compromise, related to bargaining, is also an ever-present part of the ultimate policy decision. Compromises are also often a result of actions that take into account the standard operating procedures (SOP) of the large organizations involved.

The actors involved in the bureaucratic politics model are either the members of organizations, or they are the organizations themselves. The organization’s mission influences its outlook on each decision. For example, “career Army officers” believe that ground combat is the “essence of the Army,” while Congressional members’ interests are often motivated by the need to represent domestic constituents. Therefore, each organization and its respective members’ interests will vary depending on their position. Moreover, these actors (whether the organization or its members) must work within the various constraints that are inherent to the design of the model. SOP are important considerations, because they influence the “information available to the central players, the options senior players consider, and the actual details of whatever is done by the government.”\textsuperscript{31} While large organizations would not be able to function as efficiently without SOP, the standardization can also interfere when a situation calls for a specific, tailored response.

SOP also fall under the so-called “rules of the game.” While the Constitution establishes “the basic framework,” Congress can also influence the rules by creating and passing legislation that affects how decisions can be made. However, Congress is not the only one with the power to alter the rules of the game. The president can also manipulate the process by “reorganizing the executive branch of the government.”\textsuperscript{32} While these congressional and presidential powers

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, 50.  
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 55.  
\textsuperscript{32} Halperin and Clapp, 107.
are present, more often than not, rules of the game “develop over time...from the operational habits and traditions that evolve in bureaucratic organizations.”33 For example, traditionally the Vice President did not have a prominent role in foreign policy—but after the Cold War, the position became significantly more than symbolic. This increased prominence is not something that has been written into law; rather it developed over the years and is now expected. This is also an example of how personal relationships greatly affect changes in the rules, especially relationships with the president. Those closest to the president obviously have a more powerful role in decision-making. For example when dealing with the national security issues after 9/11, President Bush turned to his Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, to implement his vision. Thus, the shift in policy and the decisions to go to war were strongly influenced by advice and conversation between Secretary Rumsfeld and President Bush.34

Based on Allison’s breakdown of the bureaucratic politics model, he offers “general planning precepts” regarding the United States government—akin to advice for those in the policymaking arena, based on his theory. While Allison lists eleven pieces of advice, by highlighting a few, it is possible to gain an overall sense of his “politicking” insight. Number five on his list states, “Be prepared to modify your choice of outcome, or your declared prediction of the consequences of that outcome, in order to induce others to cooperate. Take into account, however, that these modifications may (or may not) affect the nature of your game with third parties.” There is no doubt from this statement that Allison heavily emphasizes the centrality the role of strategizing in policymaking.

In number ten, Allison advises, “Design proposals so that people can agree for different reasons. (Use arguments that appeal to one side and offend others only in private).” Can a

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid, 113.
statement get more strategic than that? In terms of interests, Allison recommends, “Recognize that stands on issues are determined by calculations of multiple interests of which national security interests are only one. Therefore, only in cases where national security arguments are clearly dominant are they likely to change a player’s stance on a particular issue.” This is useful for those in the national security realm who must convince others outside of their department or organization to get onboard with a specific policy.

The Vietnam War can be used to demonstrate this intersection between war and politics. Furthermore, it is also a prominent example of how the population in a democracy, like the United States, can have a strong influence on political outcomes—as previously noted in the case of pressure on Congressional members’ to represent their constituents, but also in the case of the president who acts on behalf of American interests. The Vietnam War example is linked to the bureaucratic politics model and the preceding piece of advice from Allison, because each party involved had different objectives, interests, and concerns on the table. Those who were directly involved in the military strategizing had certain objectives—halting the spread of Communism by defeating the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong (although each military figure had a different assessment and resulting strategy). The American population had a different mindset—they perceived the war as going poorly as the years progressed, thus they were unwilling to accept the casualties, and wanted to pull American troops out of Vietnam.  

35 These two views could even be classified as each player’s conception of national interest—the military vs. the American population. The military policymakers involved wanted to achieve their military objectives by pushing specific policies and strategies, while the policymakers who were responsible for

representing their constituents wanted to keep the war under the radar and undeclared, with the intention of trying to stir up as few negative sentiments as possible. Although everyone knows the outcome of this situation and this war, it is a perfect instance representing Allison’s bureaucratic politics model, and even how there is often an intricate interplay between national interest and bureaucratic politics. Because the people, not national security, were the forefront interests for the non-military policymakers involved, when it came time to make decisions, they were not as willing to bend to the military’s will. This was clearly an instance of bureaucratic politics at work.

Another piece of advice that Allison offers is, “Assume that others will give you information that they think will lead you to do what they want, rather than information that you would prefer to have.”36 Basically, Allison tells policymakers to always have their guard up. Just as you have your own best interest in mind first and foremost, so does everyone else you are dealing with—regardless of what they may tell you.

Allison’s breakdown of decision-making within government makes everything seem very messy, and the truth is, politics is messy. While his bureaucratic politics model may seem complicated, it actually does an effective job of breaking down the actors into players and the policies into games. Furthermore, by examining the “Planning Guide”37 that Allison provides, one can begin to break down how each member involved in the policy decisions, theoretically, should go about getting what he or she wants.

While the differences among the various actors in the political system are what “fuel bureaucratic politics,” there is also a “foundation of shared assumptions about basic values and

36 Ibid, 73.
37 Ibid.
facts” that “provide common answers” to various, pertinent questions. These shared assumptions are where bureaucratic politics and national interest intersect. The mutual understanding of what constitutes our nation’s interests shape most of the attitudes of the actors in the game. Examples of past shared assumptions are: “The United States should act to halt the spread of Communism; [and] Good relations with Japan are important to US security interests.” An example of a current shared interest would be preventing another attack on US soil and prevailing in the new security environment fraught with unconventional challenges. These unifying interests help shape the way that decisions are made in a bureaucracy. Therefore, it is clear that both national interest and bureaucratic politics play vital roles in shaping policy, and in this case, the national defense strategy.

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38 Ibid, 56.
39 Ibid.

This report represents not so much an end but a beginning. Even as this report is concluded, the Department of Defense is engaged in the process of reviewing and implementing the directions set forth here through the Defense Department's military planning and resource allocation processes. These efforts, in turn, will allow the Defense Department leadership the opportunity to build upon and refine the decisions taken as the result of this review.

-- Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense, 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review

The most apparent doctrinal change in the 2001 QDR is the shift away from preparations for major theater warfare (MTW). The MTW-based strategy, the strategy on which the defense doctrine had been based for decades, is based on a force planning structure in which the United States is able to “deter and defeat large-scale, cross border aggression in two distant theaters” simultaneously. MTW entails three specific tenants: the United States must be able to rapidly defeat the enemy in two theaters, “from a posture of global engagement,” while also planning and preparing for an adversary to use unconventional or asymmetric tactics. The focus on MTW was the result of threat-based planning, in which the United States prepared for war against a specific opponent, like the Soviet Union during the Cold War. This threat-based model began with an intelligence assessment of the enemy’s capabilities (military and otherwise), and then a plan was tailored to meet what the United States would expect from that enemy if a confrontation were to occur. This is in stark contrast to capabilities based planning (a more flexible, strategy driven model) and irregular warfare, which, in Department of Defense Directive 3000.07, is

41 Ibid.
defined as, “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s). Irregular warfare favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capacities, in order to erode an adversary’s power, influence, and will.”⁴² Beginning with an examination of the 2001 QDR, the development of the irregular warfare strategy, and the simultaneous move away from MTW planning is clear.

As mandated by Congress, the QDR must be complete and released by September of the requisite year. One factor that makes the 2001 QDR such a compelling historical document is the fact that it was originally compiled before the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. However, due to the incredible impact of this event—not only on the American people, but also on the entire country and international security environment—the Department of Defense and Joint Staff swiftly revised the QDR and released it shortly after the attacks on September 30, 2001. Therefore, this document provides a snapshot of where the United States defense doctrine was at the time of the attacks, and this revised version is the focus of this chapter. Moreover, the 2001 QDR also demonstrates what the defense community deemed as the most likely future security challenges and composition of warfare as of September 2001, before entering two wars unlike any the United States had seen before. From this QDR, it is evident that the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) acknowledged the threat of a new type of warfare and the need to develop new capabilities, especially those focused on small-scale contingencies (which, in this QDR, most closely aligns with how the Department described operations most closely resembling COIN operations).

However, it is also clear that much of what is posited is not based on experience (as it is in the 2006 and 2010 QDRs), but rather trends and speculation, because most of the QDR was

written pre-9/11. Despite the fact that President Bush strongly supported revolutionizing the defense strategy, and appointed Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense to carry out his vision, it is significant that the terms, “counterinsurgency” and “irregular” are not mentioned anywhere in the 2001 QDR. This is a defining characteristic, which speaks directly to just how unprepared for the changing security environment the defense planning community was in 2001. Nonetheless, the seeds of transformation are planted in this document, and examining not only its contents but also the motivating factors behind its creation provides a benchmark from which to begin the discussion of the evolution of the irregular warfare strategy since 9/11.

*America’s Security in the 21st Century*

Following the 9/11 attacks, Americans realized that they no longer lived in a world in which their country was untouchable. Terrorists could hijack *American* planes and kill *Americans* on *American* soil. The security environment had changed. Therefore, the first chapter of the 2001 QDR addresses this change. While acknowledging that a great deal of uncertainty is inevitable when trying to plan for future threats, the QDR still recognizes that the “United States is likely to be challenged by adversaries who possess a wide range of capabilities, including asymmetric approaches to warfare.”

43 The QDR also notes that weak and failing states pose significant and increasing challenges to America’s security. This has an impact on the development of a COIN doctrine, because the types of conflicts where the COIN doctrine is especially necessary occur most often in these weak and failing states. Threats from these states arise because of “the inability of some states to govern their societies, safeguard their military armaments, and prevent their territories from serving as sanctuary to terrorists and criminal

organizations.” As a result, terrorists from organizations like Al Qaeda have the means and resources to carry out devastating attacks. The 9/11 attacks were an unfortunate wake-up call for the defense planning community, and the 2001 QDR shows the beginnings of a transformation to a military doctrine and strategy that account for the proliferation of threats posed by non-state actors. However, this section, *America’s Security in the 21st Century*, of the 2001 QDR still lacks a complete realization of just how much the security environment has changed since the Cold War.

*Strategic Tenets*

This section of the QDR describes the strategic principles that “comprise the essence of U.S. defense strategy” in 2001. The QDR acknowledges that future risks include the possibilities of unconventional warfare, but it also continues to insist that “the possibility of a major war” still exists. Despite still focusing on MTW, the QDR notes that the Department of Defense is “in the process of building” a new defense strategy “to better manage the risks the United States faces.” The central tenet of the 2001 QDR is a shift from a threat-based approach to a capabilities-based approach. Because of the future is inherently uncertain, a capabilities-based strategy is conceived on the belief that although the U.S. cannot predict the specific adversary it will confront, it can “anticipate the capabilities that an adversary might employ” which “broadens the strategic perspective.”

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44 Ibid, 5.  
46 Ibid.  
47 Ibid.  
48 Ibid, 14.
**Paradigm Shift in Force Planning**

Because the 9/11 attacks initiated a transformation of defense planning and the military, the 2001 QDR highlights the introduction of this change. The new plan still emphasizes the importance of preparations for “conventional cross-border invasions,” such as the two-MTW construct, but it also focuses on developing capabilities for smaller-scale contingencies. This is the first intimation of a balancing strategy, which is further incorporated in subsequent reports. Within the Paradigm Shift in Force Planning section, there is a Smaller Scale Contingencies heading (although a section on Major Combat Operations directly precedes it). The Smaller Scale Contingencies subsection postulates what this type of challenge will entail, but because the U.S. had yet to go to war with Iraq or Afghanistan, the QDR did not have current, concrete experiences from which to draw. However, the document does acknowledge that this type of conflict would require a “larger base of forces” and “long-standing commitments.”

**Creating the U.S. Military of the 21st Century**

Although not explicitly stated, the roots of understanding that a new military doctrine is needed are firmly planted in the 2001 QDR. This is especially evident in the first paragraph of Section V, which states:

Transformation results from the exploitation of new approaches to operational concepts and capabilities, the use of old and new technologies, and new forms of organization that more effectively anticipate new or still emerging strategic and operational challenges and opportunities and that render previous methods of conducting war obsolete or subordinate.

Furthermore, Section V explicitly mentions that transformation can encompass changes that range from military operations to the “displacement of one form of war with another.”

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49 Ibid, 21.
50 Ibid, 29.
51 Ibid.
Moreover, the QDR notes that the process of transformation begins with small segments of the force, but if the shift is among a “critical mass” then it can “produce disproportionate strategic effects.”

QDR Critique

Although the Department of Defense addresses the necessity of updating the military’s strategy in the new security environment, the 2001 QDR focuses more on the increased importance of information technology and intelligence than developing an irregular warfare centered doctrine. An irregular warfare strategy does involve increased intelligence capabilities (as the 2006 QDR and 2010 QDR so aptly demonstrate), but it also focuses on major tactical differences, which are not a part of a two-MTW construct. From the previous examination, it is evident that the 2001 QDR does not directly highlight and integrate the major components of irregular warfare. While the 2001 QDR does begin to emphasize a necessary military transformation, the defense planners at the time were not exactly sure what types of threats the United States would face. Thus, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld had a harder time selling his transformation ideas prior to the 9/11 attacks, because the US perceived that its conventional capabilities were not only a deterrent to potential adversaries, but that they also would allow the US to swiftly, and successfully counter threats if the need arose. However, the 9/11 attacks sparked recognition among Americans, politicians, and those in the military that shifting to preparations for this new security environment was no longer a choice—it had to be done. The opposition to “improving American military capability” that Rumsfeld initially experienced was

\[52\] Ibid.
“politically unpalatable” after 9/11. Consequently, the challenges that the US military faced in the Iraq War and the War in Afghanistan—lessons learned that are in the subsequent QDRs—are what ultimately confirmed the realization that the DoD needed to update the defense strategy to account for irregular warfare.

Analysis of QDR: National Interest vs. Bureaucratic Politics

Retracing history for a moment, Frank G. Hoffman, a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute and a former analyst at the Pentagon, notes that when the Bush Administration came to office in 2001, it supported the idea that the defense strategy “needed to be transformed.” Yet, despite its focus on improving technological capabilities, the Administration’s agenda still concentrated on the perceived conventional, state-based threats. Even though state-based threats still garnered much attention in the 2001 QDR, the decision to begin transforming the strategy supports Allison’s bureaucratic politics model—Bush came into office and, holding the most powerful position in the country, chose to work specifically with his allies in the DOD to push forth an agenda based on DOD objectives and his own beliefs and advice from those around him. Bush could have chosen to either go the diplomatic route by working with the State Department or he could have appointed a different Secretary of Defense with a different policy perspective than Rumsfeld. However, the deliberate political decisions that he made greatly influenced the direction of the strategic transformation, which aligns with the bureaucratic politics model.

The irregular warfare strategy received a jumpstart, as “the 9/11 attacks punctured the

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illusions and misguided priorities inherent to the initial conception of transformation,"\(^5^5\) which initiated a swift redrafting of the 2001 QDR. While the attention devoted to irregular warfare, according to Hoffman, was “inspired by the ideologies that spawned Islamist terrorism and Osama bin Laden,” the defense planning community seemed to recognize after 9/11 that this new form of warfare was “a natural reaction to globalization and America’s overwhelming superiority.”\(^5^6\) Therefore, OSD realized that irregular warfare would not end with the defeat of Islamist terrorism; hence, at least some of the motivation for the doctrinal changes can be attributed to the United States’ new national interest.

Building on this newly perceived national interest, in “America’s Defense Transformation: A Conceptual and Political History,” Steven Metz, a professor at the Strategic Studies Institute US Army War College, argues that the American defense transformation “is the story of conceptualizers and implementers proposing ideas, cultivating a revolutionary cadre, then attempting…to convince those with influence to enact and institutionalize the change.”\(^5^7\) This aligns with Allison’s bureaucratic politics model. Metz states that the “conceptualizers soon develop allies within the military” and eventually convince the DoD and Congress that the United States must transform its strategy.

Backtracking for a moment to provide evidence for his argument, Metz notes that while on the campaign trail, President Bush’s “thinking reflected the concern among Republicans that Clinton had allowed the US military to atrophy,” which is partially to blame for Bush strongly emphasizing the need to “expand transformation.”\(^5^8\) To ensure his policies would slide through with ease, while still president-elect, Bush selected his Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld,

\(^{55}\) Ibid, 397.
\(^{56}\) Ibid.
\(^{57}\) Metz, 3.
\(^{58}\) Ibid, 9.
“with the intention of overcoming bureaucratic resistance within the Pentagon.”

Then, at his inauguration ceremony, Bush stated that “we will begin creating the military of the future...that is defined less by size and more by mobility and swiftness...” Continuing to show evidence that the right people in prominent positions are more effective at pushing their policies through, in May 2001 Bush later talked of his desire for “officers willing to think big thoughts and look at problems with a fresh eye [and] entrepreneurial leadership.”

Advancing Bush’s transformational outlook, Metz highlights that Secretary Rumsfeld initiated reviews examining which departments of the military and defense needed reforming or even termination. However, his approach began to generate “opposition from the services and their allies in Congress,” while also creating tension “between the uniformed military and civilian officials.”

This tension seemed to dissipate after September 11, 2001—as both military and civilian officials realized that the United States’ focus on conventional state-to-state warfare truly needed swift updating. The result was the quickly rehashed version of the 2001 QDR, which originally lacked sufficient attention to terrorism and non-state threats, but as of September 30, 2001 “began to push state enemies from the center of American strategy.” According to Metz, the resulting QDR and its shift to capabilities-based planning (a major change from the threat-based conventional strategy previously described) showcased Rumsfeld’s approach to transformation—focusing more on “changing ideas, perceptions, modes of thinking, and organizational cultures” than specific systems.

The above explanations highlight that the defense transformations emphasized by the

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59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid, 10.
62 Ibid, 10.
63 Ibid, 11.
64 Ibid, 12.
2001 QDR reflect influences from both the national interest and bureaucratic politics models. In a 2003 conference on Security Transformation brief compiled by Metz, he notes that several years prior, “the general wisdom was that organizational and psychological impediments to transformation were so great that only a committed and powerful Secretary of Defense with the full support of the President could burst through them.” As demonstrated above, specific people in powerful positions—Bush as President and Rumsfeld as the Secretary of Defense—promote policies aligned with at least one of their visions (in this case, Bush’s). Then, regarding the defense strategy and national security, these visions are based on conceptions of the national interest. Figure 2 depicts this breakdown of how each factor weighed in the creation of the 2001 QDR. Imagine if after 9/11, the United States continued to proceed down the strategic path that had been established during and after the Cold War. There is no logic, and it is certainly not in the nation’s interest, to continue a strategy after it has become outdated. Because conceptualizers in prominent positions (bureaucratic politics) supported change and recognized that transformations were required (national interest), with the terrorist attacks as the dominant impetus, the defense strategy was catapulted to a new level emphasizing irregular warfare like never before.

Figure 2

NATIONAL INTEREST
- 9/11 attacks: impetus

BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS
- President Bush

2001
QUADRENNIAL DEFENSE REVIEW 2006: THE PARAMOUNT YEAR OF TRANSFORMATION

We are at a critical time in the history of this great country and find ourselves challenged in ways we did not expect. We face a ruthless enemy intent on destroying our way of life and an uncertain future security environment. The War on Terrorism – a war of long duration – differs from the kind of conflict for which the Department traditionally prepared. Our focus is increasingly on the search for small cells of terrorists and on building the capacity of our partners. However, we must also retain the capability to conduct sustained conventional combat operations and to protect the homeland... The recommendations of this report address the current fight and the full range of missions prescribed in the National Defense Strategy, while hedging against an uncertain future. The 2006 QDR tackles the most pressing needs of the Department in a strategically sound and fiscally responsible manner. As a result our Armed Forces stand ready to protect the United States, prevent conflict and surprise attack, and prevail against adversaries wherever they may be found.

--Peter Pace, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review

Four and a half years after the United States Army began Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, OSD-Policy released the 2006 QDR on February 6, 2006. Much had changed since the previous QDR. While initially the United States rolled into the Middle East exuding a seemingly unshakable confidence, by 2006 it became apparent that this was a war unlike any other the United States had ever faced. As if the treacherous, mountainous terrain of Afghanistan was not enough, the United States was also operating in a country without a legitimate central government, which had resulted in domestic turmoil since at least the beginning of the twenty-first century. To make matters worse, the United States soon realized its conventional tactics would not work to defeat an enemy hiding amongst the population, utilizing everything from violence to propaganda designed to “elicit psychological reactions and
communicate complex political messages” to both the Afghanis and the United States. Therefore, the time between the 2001 and 2006 QDRs allowed defense planners in the United States to reassess their game plans, and as stated by Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld in the 2006 QDR, “the ideas and proposals in this document are provided as a roadmap for change, leading to victory.”

The 2006 QDR decisions were, in part, motivated by what was going on in the global war on terror (GWOT). Whereas the QDRs provide an excellent roadmap of the transformations in the defense strategy over time, other documents analyze the QDRs recommendations, in addition to others that further emphasize the motivating factors behind the policy changes. For example, in February of 2006, the DoD released the National Military Strategic Plan of the War on Terrorism. This document highlights that at the time of the release of the 2006 QDR, the major motivating factors behind the strategic shifts towards irregular warfare are mostly attributed to the realization that the security environment had drastically changed—basically a national interest argument. Another report released by the Heritage Foundation examines the proposed transformations in the 2006 QDR, and also supports the notion that the increased emphasis on irregular warfare preparations is motivated by national interest. This report explicitly states that, “modernization should focus on providing capabilities to secure U.S. vital national interests.”

While these two examples are just a sample of the existing literature examining why irregular warfare had become the focus of the defense planning community in 2006, they show that the overarching motivating factors behind the 2006 QDRs strategic shifts are the lessons learned since 9/11 coupled with a concern for the nation’s interest at the time.

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This chapter will examine the components of the 2006 QDR that exemplify the defense planning community’s increased emphasis on irregular warfare. After a descriptive overview of the various sections of the 2006 QDR that highlight irregular warfare developments since the 2001 QDR, the chapter will conclude with an analysis of what caused these changes. As mentioned above, an argument will be made that, in the case of the 2006 QDR, national interest was the main motivating factor behind the Department of Defense’s continuing transformation, although bureaucratic politics did play a role.

Preface

Immediately, the Preface asserts that it is easy to view this document as a new beginning. However, it is firmly stated that rather than a new beginning, “this study reflects the reality that the Department of Defense has been in a period of continuous change for the past five years.” 68 At the time of its release, Secretary of State England stated that the document is “more a ‘midcourse correction’ than a major shift in defense policy.” 69 However, despite the fact that the revised 2001 QDR recognized that the security environment had changed, it did not dive deeply into what a successful irregular warfare doctrine entails—the experience and research did not really exist prior to the terrorist attacks on September 11th. Acknowledging the fact that before the September 11 attacks the United States was still “savoring victory in the Cold War,” the 2006 QDR states that since 2001, the defense community has been experiencing a tremendous transformation so as to better confront the adversaries of the twenty-first century. This shift to

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meet the new strategic environment accounts for the “uncertainty and surprise,” which the United States is facing in this new era.

It is important to note that although the United States initially went into Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks in search of Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda, by March 2003, President Bush had also declared war on Iraq. Despite the fact that the United States was initially very successful in the major combat operations phase in Iraq—defeating Saddam’s armed forces by May 1, 2003—the US military was not prepared for “increasingly frequent attacks from guerrillas or insurgents, especially from roadside bombs.” Hence, the United States faced an insurgency and guerrillas in both Afghanistan in Iraq, which necessitated a strategic reassessment.

Introduction

Succinctly stated, “This war requires the U.S. military to adopt unconventional and indirect approaches.” In order to defeat “highly adaptive adversaries,” the United States cannot solely use overwhelming firepower and intimidation tactics. Counterinsurgencies, what the United States is now fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, must be approached differently. Although the military must retain its traditional warfare dominance, it must also be prepared to face the “non-traditional, asymmetric challenges of this new century.”

Fighting the Long War

President Bush deserves credit for acknowledging, just nine days after the terrorist attacks, that “Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other

70 QDR 2006, VI.
72 QDR 2006, 1.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid, 3.
However, despite this correct assumption that the United States was entering uncharted territory, the defense community had yet to pinpoint the specific strategies and tactics necessary to emerge victorious. Yet, the 2006 QDR correctly emphasizes that in a successful counterinsurgency, force alone will not result in an American victory.

This section, *Fighting the Long War*, begins with harping on the successes to date that the US has had in both Afghanistan and Iraq. When the United States military entered Afghanistan, it swiftly ousted the Taliban. Proving its superiority when it comes to traditional warfare, the US partnered with indigenous Afghan forces on the ground and, according to the 2006 QDR:

-Demonstrated the ability of the U.S. military to project power rapidly at global distances; to conduct operations far inland; to integrate air, ground, special operations, and maritime forces into a joint force; to provide humanitarian relief; and to sustain operations with minimal local basing support.

Although the conventional strategy may have worked initially, as noted above, the QDR then moves on to describing the successes in Iraq before ever mentioning the immense challenges that developed after the Taliban was overthrown. Consider the fact that even a New York Times article mentioned that a 2006 report released by American officials in Iraq highlighted that, “the insurgency in Iraq is now self-sustaining financially, raising tens of millions of dollars a year from [illegal activities]… that the Iraqi government and its American patrons have been largely unable to prevent.” Furthermore, the article goes on to state that the vitality of the insurgency shows “how little the American authorities in Iraq know — three and a half years after the invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein — about crucial aspects of insurgent operations.”

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75 Ibid, 9.
76 Ibid, 10.
Therefore, the fact that *Fighting the Long War* makes no mention of the trials and tribulations encountered by American troops proves that the defense planners were still reluctant to relinquish their traditional strategy for a twenty-first century approach.

In the subsection, *The Fight Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq*, the 2006 QDR finally mentions strategies that coincide with counterinsurgency operations. The QDR states that because of the irregular nature of adversaries, the United States has found itself having to take an indirect approach—working with others, unbalancing the enemy rather than attacking them “in the manner they expect,”78 and combating the enemy both physically and psychologically. Moving from elaborating on this indirect approach, the QDR notes that US forces must “have greater language skills and cultural awareness.”79 To accomplish this goal, “in 2004, the Department of Defense launched the Defense Language Transformation Initiative.”80 Language acquisition and cultural awareness were traditionally not a part of conventional operations. However, with the changing form of warfare, it is becoming just as crucial as weaponry. Therefore, the acknowledgement and official creation of this initiative shows the transformation of the US defense planning community.

A noteworthy subsection, *Operational Lessons Learned*, warrants examination as well. First, “having the authority and resources to build partnership capacity”81 is crucial to COIN operations. According to Army Field Manual 3-24.2, the goal of counterinsurgency operations is a “legitimate Host Nation government that can provide effective governance.”82 Building partnership capacity is a crucial step on the way to this goal. Importantly, the QDR also

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78 QDR 2006, 11.
79 Ibid, 15.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid, 17.
recognizes that the threats faced in Afghanistan and Iraq are not isolated incidents and will likely occur in the future. Therefore, the QDR states that military and other agencies must institutionalize these strategies. Furthermore, this section highlights “increasing freedom of action” as something that must continue. Because of the inherent uncertainty in counterinsurgency operations, the QDR notes that the US military and its partners must have the freedom to alter its actions depending on the strategic environment in which they are operating. While these two operational lessons learned are important, there is still no mention of how lessons from Iraq can translate into improvements in Afghanistan. Although the Iraq War was ongoing, it was progressing ahead of the War in Afghanistan. Knowledge and experience could have been translated from one theater to the other, but there was no mention of that in this section. This omission suggests that the defense community as a learning institution was still developing and understanding this new type of warfare as of the 2006 QDR. However, this section initiates the theme of beginning to integrate lessons learned into the developing irregular warfare doctrine, which is, arguably, the most noteworthy improvement and difference from the 2001 QDR.

Operationalizing the Strategy

Once again highlighting the future of warfare as asymmetric and irregular, this section identifies how the defense planning community intended to operationalize the National Defense Strategy. The QDR notes that the Department of Defense needs to take both immediate measures for the near-term risks, while also preparing for long-term implications. Most importantly, the 2006 QDR emphasizes the need to build the capacity of partners and allies while also fostering cooperation. “Defeating Terrorist Networks” is the first goal highlighted in this section. Similar to the rest of the QDR, the emphasis is on the fact that terrorists are “not
traditional conventional military forces, but rather distributed multi-national and multi-ethnic networks."83 Yet, this section is the first time the QDR points out the tactics used by terrorists—“intimidation, propaganda, and indiscriminate violence,” while also aiming to “exhaust the will of the United States and its allies and partners.”84 This section effectively covers Al Qaeda’s strategies, methods, and goals, albeit broadly, which shows that the defense planning community appreciates the importance of uncovering and deeply understanding the adversary in this type of warfare.

Necessary measures to defeat terrorist networks “require the creation of a global environment inhospitable to terrorism.”85 Demonstrating that the time between the 2001 and 2006 QDRs was productive, this document clearly states, “Just as these enemies cannot defeat the United States militarily, they cannot be defeated solely through military force.” This war is more than just a “battle of arms,” it is a “battle of ideas.”86 Furthermore, because the enemy is a diffuse network, there is no one size fits all approach. Therefore, the QDR correctly notes that the US must tailor its approach “to local conditions.”87 Elaborating on this point, the 2006 QDR lists various capabilities, from policing cyberspace to joint coordination to developing the military’s urban warfare capacity, as crucial to operationalizing the National Defense Strategy. Overall, this section covers key elements of COIN operations, and shows that the defense community has learned a great deal since the release of the 2001 QDR.

This strategic development from 2001 to 2006 is directly stated in the subsection, “Refining the Department’s Force Planning Construct for Wartime.” The 2006 QDR notes that

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84 Ibid.
85 Ibid, 22.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
the previous QDR directed the military to reorient its capabilities and structure to better combat irregular and asymmetric warfare. While the 2006 QDR recognizes that these shifts were correct, it also states, “at the same time, lessons learned from recent operations suggest the need for some refinement of the construct to take better account of wartime demands.”

Subsequently, the QDR divides its future roles and engagements into three areas: Homeland Defense, War on Terror/Irregular (Asymmetric) Warfare, and Conventional Campaigns. For the purposes of this paper, the focus will be on the section, “Prevail in the War on Terror and Conduct Irregular Operations.” The Department divides this mini-section into two, very brief bullet points—“Steady-state” and “surge.” In both sections, the descriptions are broad, but show the Department’s increased awareness of what is necessary to fight an irregular campaign. Furthermore, the division into “steady-state” and “surge” demonstrates the lessons learned from Iraq—after a surge, a continued presence is necessary, and another surge may need to follow.

Reorienting Capabilities and Forces

This section of the 2006 QDR highlights how the DOD is continuing to transform the forces, which “is in keeping with Secretary Rumsfeld’s transformation goals of a smaller, more lethal army.” Utilizing the Joint Staff’s Operational Availability (OA) Studies, the QDR has determined that although the current size of the forces are adequate to meet present and future demands, the OA highlights the “need to continue re-balancing the mix of joint capabilities and forces.”

Reorienting Capabilities and Forces is divided into 10 subsections: Joint Ground Forces; Special Operations Forces (SOF); Joint Air Capabilities; Joint Maritime Capabilities; Tailored Deterrence/ New Triad; Combating WMD; Joint Mobility; Intelligence, Surveillance,

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88 Ibid, 36.
89 Ibid, 37.
90 Steven Kosiak, et al.
91 QDR 2006, 41.
Reconnaissance (ISR); Achieving Net-Centricity; and Joint Command and Control. Furthermore, each subsection is divided into “Vision,” “Progress-to-Date,” and “QDR Decisions.” For the purposes of the focus of this chapter, only the portions relating to irregular warfare will be explored.

Joint ground forces are crucial for successful COIN operations. The QDR envisions a force that is “self-sustaining,” and is capable of working as a large formation, but also smaller units. The forces must also be able to persist through the extended duration necessitated by irregular operations. Moreover, the joint ground forces need to “understand foreign cultures,” which will come in handy not only when working among the population but also when training and advising foreign security forces.

Between the 2001 QDR and the 2006 QDR, the Army has progressed towards these goals. The Army has reorganized “its combat and support forces into modular brigade-based units – including brigade combat teams (BCTs).” The Army is also redirecting funds to further develop unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), a critical component of COIN operations. According to Col. Daniel Ball, chief of G-3 aviation, United States Armed Forces Command, “While in theater, UAVs perform counter-improvised explosive device missions in addition to scouting duties.” However, Ball and other panelists agreed at the Association of the United States Army's Aviation Symposium and Exposition on Jan. 8, 2009 that although the “UAVs are an

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92 Ibid, 42-61.
93 Ibid, 42.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
incredible advance in technology,”\textsuperscript{97} there is still no substitution for boots on the ground.

The Marine Corps has also made progress towards the joint ground forces objectives enumerated in the QDR. According to the 2006 QDR:

Since 2001, the Marines Corps has realigned its force structure to address lessons learned in recent operations, [which has resulted in a]12% increase in infantry capacity, and related intelligence support to infantry units, an additional Active Component rotary wing aircraft squadron, a 25% increase in light armor units, a 38% increase in reconnaissance capacity, 50% more Joint Fire Liaison Teams and a 30% increase in reserve intelligence structure.\textsuperscript{98}

The Marine Corps also developed special units for training foreign security services, as well as training each individual Marine to be capable of making low-end decisions, which allows for more freedom at the tactical level. The QDR highlights several objectives to further these developments in the joint ground forces. The QDR underscores several objectives to further these developments in the joint ground forces, from increasing the number of modular brigades to jointly training personnel for air and ground operations/use of UAVs.

In terms of special operations forces, the QDR envisions a force that is “rapidly deployable, agile, flexible, and tailorable to perform the most demanding and sensitive missions worldwide.”\textsuperscript{99} The goal is for joint ground forces to take over much of what SOF currently perform, so as to free up the SOF for “more demanding and specialized tasks, especially long-duration, indirect, and clandestine operations in politically sensitive environments and denied areas.”\textsuperscript{100} The SOF will be central to COIN operations; COIN, or in this section, “long-duration operations,” stresses the importance of personal relationships with the indigenous populations and security forces, which ties directly to the need for the SOF to be skilled in the language,

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{98} QDR 2006, 42.
\textsuperscript{99} QDR 2006, 43.
\textsuperscript{100} QDR 2006, 44.
culture, and the geography of key operational regions.

Between the 2001 and 2006 QDRs, the progress in SOF, according to the Department of Defense, was impressive—largely attributed to the “81% increase in the baseline budget.”\(^{101}\) Aligning with the tremendous increases in funding, the SOF have also developed in other areas that are directly linked to COIN operations—especially relating to intelligence. The Army Special Forces have also increased their active duty personnel, which shows the realization that special forces will be the future of the United States military.

To build on the progress-to-date, the 2006 QDR states that the SOF must continue to increase its manpower, while also continuing to train for unconventional warfare. Furthermore, the Department of Defense intended to: expand the Psychological Operations and Civil Affairs units; establish a Marine Corps Special Operations Command; Increase SEAL Team force levels; and establish a SOF UAV squadron.\(^ {102}\) There is no question that the addition of these units and objectives is due to the lessons learned since 2001 about the importance of transforming the defense strategy to account for irregular warfare.

Building off of the discussion of joint ground forces and SOF, the section on Joint Mobility directly coincides with the development of the COIN doctrine between the 2001 and 2006 QDRs. The Department of Defense envisions a force that is capable of fully integrating “across geographic theaters and between warfighting components… with response time measured in hours and days rather than weeks.”\(^ {103}\) To achieve this mobility, the Department envisions transforming the force structure so that more operational decisions can be made on the

\(^{101}\) Ibid.

\(^{102}\) Ibid, 45.

\(^{103}\) Ibid, 53.
front lines.\textsuperscript{104} This shift most clearly demonstrates the “transition from a Cold War-era garrisoned force,” and will hopefully “reduce the forward footprint of the joint force,” a crucial factor for a counterinsurgent.\textsuperscript{105}

Surprisingly, the QDR’s description of the progress-to-date focuses on the upgrades to aircrafts, as does the description of the 2006 QDR’s decisions, with little mention of anything else besides continued studies to reassess developments. Mobility is a crucial element for both the insurgent and the counterinsurgent in a COIN campaign. Mobility is more than getting troops into the field; it is also about what goes on once the troops are on the ground. However, the QDR seems to lack this detail in the subsection on joint mobility, even if it is circuitously mentioned in other sections. In the section on Joint Mobility, it seems that both aspects of mobility should be included.

Moving on from mobility, arguably, intelligence is the most important aspect of a successful counterinsurgency. As noted by the Commanding General of the US Army’s 1\textsuperscript{st} Armored Division in Iraq, Major General Martin Dempsey, in November 2003, “Fundamentally, here in Baghdad we do two things: we’re either fighting for intelligence or we’re fighting based on that intelligence.”\textsuperscript{106} The 2006 QDR recognizes the centrality of intelligence in the ISR subsection. The Department envisions a system in which all functions and operations are integrated all the way to the tactical level, while also better connecting intelligence collection systems. To do this, the QDR emphasizes that intelligence data collected in the theater must move to the users, “rather than deploying users to the theater.”\textsuperscript{107} Further transformations will

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} 2006 QDR, 55.
change how ISR needs are defined—by sensor type of intelligence needed. The reasoning behind this shift is to “facilitate the substitution of one capability for another,” which will also “improve the ability to integrate data horizontally across sensor inputs,” making the information more readily available to a wider array of users. In addition to intelligence, the “S” of ISR stands for “surveillance,” and the 2006 QDR envisions the United States continued superiority in this field—by remaining “at least one technology generation ahead” of foreign competitors.

As of the 2006 QDR, the progress-to-date specifically mentions the “critical role that intelligence capabilities, including those in space, play in supporting military operations, policy and planning and acquisition decisions.” To transform the Department and the military into even more of an ISR powerhouse, the Department established the position of Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, as well as the Executive Agent for Space. Moreover, the integration of intelligence not only with operations but also across disciplines has been an area garnering much focus between 2001 and 2006. From Joint Intelligence Operations Centers to Intelligence Campaign Plans for all theaters, the Department is reorganizing and reallocating resources to better prepare for the intelligence needs of the present and future. Along the same lines, a Military Intelligence Program was created along with an “enhanced Defense Civilian Intelligence Personnel System.”

While the above changes began between 2001 and 2006, many still ongoing as of the release of this document, the 2006 QDR enumerates several important decisions to further expand, advance, and utilize intelligence. Increasing the capacity of defense human intelligence (HUMINT) to identify and penetrate terrorist networks is the first and foremost goal listed.

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108 Ibid, 55.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid, 56.
111 Ibid.
Expanding signals intelligence (SIGINT), executing a new imagery intelligence method including the Space Radar program, and integrating and balancing all ISR capabilities among the forces are just some of the 2006 QDR decisions, which highlight the increased emphasis and necessity of advanced and up-to-the-second intelligence in irregular warfare.\textsuperscript{112}

\textit{Developing a 21st Century Total Force}

Building from recent operational experiences, the Department’s goals are to create a Total Force that is capable of prevailing “in a long, irregular war while deterring a broad array of challenges.” To achieve this, unity of effort and joint operations are key. The military must be highly adaptable in order to overmatch any opponent, rather than preparing for a fair fight. In the reconfigured Total Force, the focus is on all four elements—active, reserve, civilians, and contractors. After 2001, it seemed clear that a forces and strategic reorientation were in order, but the 2006 QDR gives a succinct explanation worth noting as to why the forces continue to require reorganization—“The traditional, visible distinction between war and peace is less clear.”\textsuperscript{113} This means that all components of the Total Force construct must be operationalized, so that they may be called upon at a moment’s notice.

Drawing from this Total Force concept, the QDR emphasizes joint training to “prepare for complex, multinational and interagency operations in the future.”\textsuperscript{114} This coincides with the COIN doctrine, because the defense community cannot be sure as to what the adversary will look like, so preparations for an array of situations within the realm of irregular warfare are key. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, language and cultural training are vital to COIN operations. To accomplish this, the Department will “recruit and train native and heritage

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, 57.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, 76.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, 77.
translators”\textsuperscript{115} for both the Active and Reserve military, while also providing incentives to
military personnel with proficiency in a foreign language and grants to US schools to expand
non-European language instruction.\textsuperscript{116} The Total Force reorganization, without a doubt,
demonstrates lessons learned and the Department’s commitment to updating the strategy and
force to be better equipped for the challenges of the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century.

\textit{Achieving Unity of Effort}

Harking back to World War II when the military had to join forces to defeat an
overwhelming adversary and prevent the spread of an ideology, the present new security
environment requires the military and every government agency to unify efforts towards yet
another shared strategy and goal. The 2006 QDR blatantly states that the major threat from the
Cold War of inter-state conflict is increasingly a priority of the past. The major threats today
come from “intra-state violence,” and “informal networks of non-state actors.”\textsuperscript{117} This shift in
adversary warrants a shift in strategy. Furthermore, advances in technology necessitate a new
approach. With this shift in the security environment, the Department has recognized that
conventional operations cannot defeat unconventional enemies.

A central component of this new strategy is nation building—eliminating the havens from
which terrorists can operate. This goes hand-in-hand with the aforementioned, building
partnership capacity. In order to accomplish this lofty goal, there must not only be interagency
cooperation within the United States, but also international cooperation as well. To accomplish
the interagency aspect, the Department is shifting its approach from “Department-centric” to

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, 78.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid, 79.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, 83.
\end{flushleft}
“inter-agency solutions.” Moreover, the QDR states that ensuring communication between the field and Washington is critical. Learning from what happens on the ground will help the agencies adapt their strategies to better combat adversaries as circumstances arise.

In line with increasing international cooperation, the 2006 QDR strongly emphasizes the importance of working with allies to “influence the global environment.” The role of NATO is key, and the QDR explains how the organization is evolving and expanding to further meet international security challenges. However, the QDR notes that the US must work outside its comfort zone, and therefore outside of NATO, in more remote regions in order to eliminate the threat posed by terrorists. Learning from “operational experiences” between 2001 and 2006, the QDR recommends that the US government allow “greater flexibility” when partnering “directly with nations” to defeat terrorists. This also leads to the need to transform foreign assistance, which is another critical aspect of a COIN strategy—“enabling partners to govern and police themselves effectively.” From foreign aid to training and educating foreign leaders, the QDR notes that these types of assistance, among others, are “critical to strengthening partnerships and building personal operations.” Hence, “they are integral to successful irregular operations.”

QDR Critique

The above overview of the irregular warfare components of the 2006 QDR should make it glaringly obvious that the most significant changes in the 2006 document are due to lessons learned since 2001. In order to emphasize and demonstrate the implications of these lessons learned, the “Quad Chart,” was developed—a version of which was included in the 2006 QDR.

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118 Ibid, 86.
119 Ibid, 88.
120 Ibid, 89.
121 Ibid, 90.
122 Ibid, 91.
In a personal interview, Metz noted that the design of this chart was so influential in policymaking circles, because, as the phrase goes in the defense community, “it made things brief well.” The chart (depicted in **Image 1**) made it easier for those less familiar with exact details and circumstances to understand the new challenges that the United States is and would be facing. The chart “showed up regularly in the news,” and a *Washington Post* columnist called it “a powerful intellectual weapon.” The Quad Chart is divided into four sections: Irregular, Catastrophic, Traditional, and Disruptive. Two arrows indicating “vulnerability” and “likelihood” separate the quadrants. Compared to the pre-9/11 security environment in which the US was preparing for traditional threats, those are now in the quadrant indicating low vulnerability and low likelihood. In contrast, catastrophic and irregular are in the high likelihood quadrants—high vulnerability and lower vulnerability, respectively. While threats in the Quad Chart overlap—“Our adversaries in Iraq…presented both traditional and irregular challenges, [and] terrorist groups like al Qaeda are irregular threats but also seek catastrophic capabilities”—the ability for the defense community to lay out the security environment in this way was a remarkably effective development that helped to further the defense transformation towards the current and future irregular and catastrophic challenges.

Furthermore, articles published around the time of the QDR’s release also provide enlightening discussion of the document. For example, a *Washington Post* article evaluates the 2006 document while also drawing comparisons to the 2001 QDR. The article notes that despite the ambitious calling for forces to be able to defeat two adversaries simultaneously (preparing for uncertainty in the new security environment), the QDR does not call for any “net increases in

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123 Metz, Skype Interview.
125 Ibid, 16.
troop levels.”

This is surprising considering the attention devoted in the QDR to counterinsurgency operations, which according to David Galula require enough troops on the ground working among the population in order to gain their trust and confidence. It seems quite impossible to fight a successful counterinsurgency and another threat without any increase in troops. Michele Flournoy, the current Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, agreed in 2006, and Max Boot, a defense analyst, seemed outraged when he wrote in *The Los Angeles Times*, “Why is the Pentagon still throwing money into high-tech gadgets of dubious utility while ignoring the glaring imperative for more boots on the ground?”

Despite the overall reduction in troop levels, the QDR correctly stipulates a “15 percent increase in US SOF...one-third increase in Army Special Forces battalions,” and an increase in Navy SEAL teams. All of these establishments will train specifically for irregular operations, “especially long-duration, indirect and clandestine operations in politically sensitive environments and denied areas.” These threats are also all emphasized in the Quad Chart, but in a more concise format, which demonstrates the ease with which the chart makes understanding the new security environment. From this discussion, it is clear that hindsight is 20/20, and we can now see that an overall troop reduction during COIN operations is not advisable for a number of reasons—from the amount of stress it puts on service members and their families to the fact that COIN requires lots of boots on the ground to be successful. However, in this stage of the process of transformation, the defense community was still determining the best route without being able to predict what the US would face in the future.

David Von Drehle, then columnist and now Editor-at-Large for *Time Magazine*, is also

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126 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
critical of Rumsfeld and the 2006 QDR in a *Washington Post* article entitled, “Rumsfeld’s Transformation; There’s Been a Small Change in Plan.” According to Von Drehle, the QDR speaks of Special Forces like they are superheroes that will “sneak into dangerous countries” and eliminate threats. However, he notes that there “was no explanation of how these thoroughly modern missions connect with the many billions of dollars programmed for more dogfighting jets and a doubling of submarine production.”

Furthermore, despite the fact that the Iraq War “remain[ed] the urgent focus of America’s largest deployed force,” it was not central to the 2006 QDR plans. To Von Drehle, the QDR did not adequately tie together former plans and funds with current and proposed developments. At the same time that Von Drehle argued that “strategic plans are supposed to soar far above tactical specifics,” Sen. John W. Warner (R-Va.), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee in 2006, brought up “that the civilian agencies are just about AWOL” regarding the strategic planning in Iraq. This seems to suggest that, as explained below and in subsequent sections of this paper (also highlighted by Metz, Halperin, and Clapp), the policy decisions often skipped bureaucratic channels because of the resident and Secretary of Defense’s vested interests in the strategy and outcomes. Therefore, there was less need to consult or listen to opinions from junior players—hence them being AWOL—because those in the most powerful positions had already spoken.

Although Von Drehle is critical of the 2006 QDR, Newt Gingrich, appointed by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to the Defense Policy Board in 2001, describes the achievements of the 2006 QDR as “remarkable.” In a 2006 *Washington Post* article by Gingrich, he states that

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130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
the QDR “has to be seen in the larger context of change throughout the Defense Department”—attempting to modernize the military “into a more effective organization” to combat the “long war.”

He feels that the QDR proposes “an extraordinary level of change, and the QDR is best seen as one more building block in this new architecture of 21st-century American security,” which is a seemingly fair assessment. However, Gingrich’s position can also be taken as an example of how politics influences decision-making, given that he was appointed to his position by Secretary Rumsfeld, making it obvious that he would defend DOD policies that are under scrutiny. Yet, the points raised by Gingrich are consistent with a theme on which Metz harped on throughout our interview—the defense transformation “was more of a gradual clarification of thinking.” According to Metz, “immediately after 9/11, there were a lot of attitudes and ideas and emotions, but it took a couple of years to really turn this into something rigorous.”

This is where Metz believes the Quad Chart had its biggest impact. Then, four years later, a new Defense Secretary released the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review, the next major building block, which continued the evolution of the defense strategy’s emphasis on irregular warfare since 9/11.

**Analysis of QDR: National Interest vs. Bureaucratic Politics**

There is no doubt that there was a tremendous increase in attention and resources devoted to irregular warfare and combating terrorism in the 2006 QDR. After four years in office, Secretary Rumsfeld clearly had time to assess the situation and direct the composition of a report accordingly—unlike the 2001 QDR, which was released in “hastily redrafted form days after the

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133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
135 Metz, Skype Interview.
2001 strikes.”\textsuperscript{136} However, one would assume that the United States would follow its own proposed transformations once in theater, yet the invasion of Iraq stands out as a glaring contradiction—“Bush and Rumsfeld opted for a more conventional campaign.”\textsuperscript{137} Despite the fact that the initial invasion relied on “the basic military strategy of the twentieth century,” Metz notes that it was “augmented by vast improvements in jointness, operational speed, precision, and battlefield awareness.”\textsuperscript{138} Given, these enhancements are concessions to the transformations for which Bush advocated and which Rumsfeld began developing, but the initial phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom shows the defense community’s reluctance to relinquish a strategy that had placed the United States’ military far above the rest. As the War in Iraq morphed into combating an insurgency, the United States truly received a wake up call— the country needed to trade in its conventional strategy for one centered on irregular warfare. This is where the Quad Chart “helped people conceptualize” what needed to be done (Image 1). As explained by Metz:

\begin{quote}
People would put the chart up and say, ‘listen, 95\% of what we have to deal with is in this corner of the Quad Chart, but 95\% of our spending is in another one.’ That was the point at which it made sense for defense leaders to begin to say, ‘We need to bring our spending, our programs, and even our force structure more in tune with what we see as the threat environment.’\textsuperscript{139}
\end{quote}

This Quad Chart is not only an example of a major development between 2001 and 2006, but it is also an example of the great attention devoted to ensuring that a policy has supporters. Consequently, the Quad Chart shows the intersection between national interest and bureaucratic politics, because despite the fact that the US was embroiled in GWOT for five years at this point,

\textsuperscript{137} Metz, 14.
\textsuperscript{138} Metz, 15.
\textsuperscript{139} Metz, Personal Interview.
the Defense Department still needed to garner support and convince politicians that the strategy made sense.

**Image 1**

![Diagram of security challenges](image)

To truly institutionalize this new defense policy, Halperin and Clapp highlight that senior players “must be persuaded that [a proposal] is in the interest of the country.” While this directly confirms Metz’s explanation of the Quad Chart above, the decision to focus on irregular warfare was also chosen because of two other factors. First, because of an effective argument noting the linkage to national security (even if other players would choose an alternate option, they are convinced because of a shared interest, national security). Second, because Rumsfeld and Bush continued to emphasize the need to make this shift in defense strategy, they not only appointed officials that supported their type of policy, but their intense attention to the matter made it almost impossible for an alternate view to garner much attention.

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140 Halperin and Clapp, 141.
This issue of officer selection aligns with Allison’s bureaucratic politics model. Rumsfeld intended to place officials who shared his vision in the highest positions, which is why he brought General Peter Schoomaker—“an officer whose background was in special operations and irregular warfare”—out of retirement “to become the Army Chief of Staff in 2003.”

Especially after 2003, the Department emphasized specific transformations focusing on “a long war, a war that is irregular in nature.” This not only reflects the visions of Bush (which he imposed on Rumsfeld) and those he placed in high ranking positions—confirming the bureaucratic politics argument—but also the lessons learned from experience in the war on terrorism—confirming the national interest argument. Metz highlights that by the time of the 2006 QDR’s release, the revolution had been institutionalized. By strategically placing officials supporting transformation into high-ranking positions, President Bush established a “new generation of military and political leaders” with “vested interests” in transformation.

It is hard to make the above argument for bureaucratic politics without further acknowledging the driving force behind the situation—national interest. There is no doubt that, as the Quad Chart so vividly displays it, the events of 9/11 redesigned the interests of the United States. No longer is the top national priority another competitor nation state as it was during the Cold War with Russia. Instead, according to the QDR, the “most pressing problems” are all related to irregular and unconventional threats and adversaries. Therefore, the best way to understand the defense transformation as of 2006 is by taking into account both bureaucratic politics and national interest, which is depicted in Figure 3. The DOD and the President’s perception of the national interest had sharpened by this time. The most powerful, senior players

141 Metz, 16.
142 Metz, 17.
143 Metz, 20.
144 Correll, 16.
in the game strongly believed that the national interest had changed, and as a result, they forced the defense community—both civilian and military—to reshape the strategy and force structure to meet these new challenges. Then, four years later in the 2010 QDR, the institutionalization of irregular warfare continued.

**Figure 3**
QUADRENNIAL DEFENSE REVIEW 2010: REFINING AND UPDATING THE STRATEGY – THE RESULT OF KEY PLAYER SUBSTITUTIONS

This Quadrennial Defense Review represents an important step toward fully institutionalizing the ongoing reform and reshaping of America’s military—shifts that rebalance the urgent demands of today and the most likely and lethal threats of the future. This is truly a wartime QDR. For the first time, it places the current conflicts at the top of our budgeting, policy, and program, priorities… In addition, the QDR recognizes that we must prepare for a broad range of security challenges on the horizon… Given this threat environment, the United States needs a broad portfolio of military capabilities with maximum versatility across the widest possible spectrum of conflict.

-- Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense, 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review

One of the most interesting aspects that arises from examining the 2010 QDR is the fact that it is the first QDR released under a new presidential administration. Moreover, both the 2001 and 2006 QDRs were under a Republican president, while the 2010 document is the first QDR released since the terrorist attacks under a Democratic president, Barack Obama. Adding even more of a chance for major strategic shifts, the 2010 QDR is the first released under a new Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates. Therefore, the examination of the 2010 QDR provides a fruitful glimpse into not only the evolution of the defense strategy towards irregular warfare, but also how a new presidential administration affects the national security decisions that are made.

Between the 2006 QDR and the 2010 QDR, the War in Iraq progressed through several stages. In 2007, President Bush announced “The Surge,” an additional 20,000 troops to the frontlines of Iraq to combat the insurgency that had developed. In Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in 2008, then commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan, General David McKiernan, announced that he would need more troops in order to fight a “counterinsurgency battle that could
get worse before it gets better.”

Although President Bush granted him 10,000 troops, that was not enough to conduct successful COIN operations. When President Obama came into office, he made the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan a top priority. After months of deliberation, Obama finally made the decision in December 2009 to send 30,000 additional troops to Afghanistan for yet another surge. Then, on August 31, 2010, six months after the release of the 2010 QDR, President Obama announced the end of major combat operations in Iraq.

While troops still remain in Iraq, there is no doubt that attention has shifted to operations in Afghanistan—mostly due to Obama’s belief that Afghanistan is the war America should have been fighting all along. President Obama appointed General Stanley McChrystal as commander of operations in Afghanistan in May of 2009. His counterinsurgency strategy quickly became front-page news when his blunt 66-page report on the situation in Afghanistan landed on Obama’s desk in September 2009. Among his arguably bleak assessment, McChrystal described NATO forces as “poorly configured for counterinsurgency.” Therefore, to truly follow his more COIN centric strategy—“emphasizing the importance of protecting civilians over just engaging insurgents, restricting airstrikes to reduce civilian casualties, and sharply expanding the Afghan security forces and accelerating their training”—his report included a request for more troops. Eventually President Obama and his team concluded that more troops would be necessary for success in Afghanistan—hence the aforementioned surge.

However, a crucial turning point in OEF occurred when a Rolling Stone magazine released

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147 Barack Obama, Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the End of Combat Operations in Iraq, Washington, DC, August 31, 2010.


149 Ibid.
an interview with General McChrystal in June 2010, in which McChrystal and his aide spoke poorly of Vice President Biden and other members of Obama’s administration. President Obama subsequently released General McChrystal of his command. The President then appointed General David Petraeus, former Commander of Multinational Forces in Iraq and also 10th Commander of US Central Command, as the Commander of the International Security Assistance Force and Commander of US Forces in Afghanistan. While the reasoning behind this change in command and its effects will be examined in later sections of this paper, it is important to note that General McChrystal’s strategy for Afghanistan adheres almost exactly to what David Galula outlines in “Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice,” essentially the manual on fighting a counterinsurgency campaign. Furthermore, Andrew F. Krepinevich fully supports the COIN strategy proposed by the Obama Administration, then executed by General McChrystal, and now General Petraeus. Krepinevich’s backing of the current COIN strategy is important, given his decorated background—“a 21-year career in the Army, prior service in the Department of Defense’s Office of Net Assessment, and on the personal staff of three secretaries of defense, along with the fact that he currently serves on Joint Forces Command’s Transformation Advisory Board and the Secretary of Defense’s Defense Policy Board.”

Moreover, his book, *The Army and Vietnam*, is widely held as one of the foremost texts on what went wrong with policy and strategy in the Vietnam War, which as previously mentioned, can be attributed a failure to fully develop and utilize a population-centric COIN strategy. So the fact that Krepinevich supported President Obama and General McChrystal’s strategy is significant, and much of this strategy is woven into the 2010 QDR. This chapter examines, in depth, the COIN and irregular warfare components of the 2010 QDR. It then concludes with a critique of the document’s strategic modifications for the current and future security environment, as well as an analysis of the motivating factors that shaped the defense transformation leading up to the 2010 QDR’s release.

The 2010 QDR is “strategy-driven.”\textsuperscript{151} The 2010 QDR correctly identifies that “the United States currently faces a complex and uncertain security landscape,”\textsuperscript{152} where globalization has drastically affected the ability of non-state actors to “gain influence and capabilities.”\textsuperscript{153} Bolstering the strength of weak states is a key component of preventing non-state actors from gaining control and wreaking havoc on the international environment. Coming to the aid of weak states, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, is also a crucial aspect of COIN. Therefore, because of America’s superpower status, it is a “steward of the power and influence that history, determination, and circumstance have provided.”\textsuperscript{154}

As part of the defense strategy, the Department identifies “four priority objectives: prevail in today’s wars, prevent and deter conflict, prepare to defeat adversaries and succeed in a wide range of contingencies, and preserve and enhance the All-Volunteer Force.” However, only the first three objectives will be examined, as the fourth does not pertain to this study. In addition, as stated in the QDR’s introduction:

This QDR report and the preceding months of deliberation served two purposes: first, to establish the Department’s key priority objectives, providing context and recommendations regarding capability development and investment portfolios; and second, to communicate the Secretary’s intent for the next several years of the Department’s work.\textsuperscript{155}

For the purposes of this paper, the sections labeled \textit{Defense Strategy} and \textit{Rebalancing the Force} will provide ample evidence showing how the Department of Defense has developed, and is continuing to develop, its strategy to confront irregular warfare.

\textsuperscript{151} QDR 2010, 1.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid, iii.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid, iv.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid, 1.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid, xv.
Defense Strategy

In order to address the array of global challenges that the US will continue to face, the 2010 QDR articulates that the US must remain actively engaged in the world, and must continually commit a substantial effort internationally, especially by partnering with allies and other nations towards common goals and interests (continuous with the 2006 QDR). Along these lines, the United States is currently engaged as a country at war, and the outcomes of both conflicts will unquestionably shape the future security environment.

The QDR outlines current operations, especially those in Afghanistan. Notably, the first specific strategic choices mentioned in the document are the recognition that in order to defeat Al Qaeda, the US and its partners must focus on “securing key population centers, training competent Afghan security forces, and partnering with them as they fight for their country’s future.”\(^\text{156}\) As previously mentioned, these are all absolutely crucial components when combating an insurgency, and the fact that they are first in the QDR shows the United States is still paying significant attention to lessons learned. Furthermore, the QDR goes on to describe that a working relationship and partnership with Pakistan is another important piece of the puzzle, as the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan is a known haven for Al Qaeda, among other notable challenges and concerns.

With regard to Iraq, the 2010 QDR first highlights that the “critical shift toward a population-centered counterinsurgency strategy [has] helped enable the Iraqi government to take the lead in protecting its people and providing essential services.”\(^\text{157}\) Four years prior when the Department released the 2006 QDR, the United States was facing its toughest challenges yet in the Iraq War. At the time of the release of the 2010 QDR, the United States was in the middle of

\(^{156}\) Ibid, 6.

\(^{157}\) Ibid, 6.
a major withdrawal of US forces from Iraq. Therefore, the Iraq War provides background and lessons from which to base the future strategy, as outlined in the 2010 QDR.

Progressing through this section of the QDR’s emphasis on COIN, it is important to note that monitoring geopolitical trends is an important part of COIN operations. As globalization increases, “global political, economic, and military power”\textsuperscript{158} continually shift and diffuse, making not only state actors, but also non-state actors, warrant attention by the United States. Technological innovations have made non-state actors more influential, and they now are just as great a threat as state actors during the previous century. Therefore, the defense strategy outlined in the 2010 QDR identifies methods to address the challenges created by globalization.

The 2010 QDR highlights the increasing complexity of warfare—which is also largely affected by globalization—while also introducing the term, “hybrid,” intended to show that US forces must prepare for a wide range of contingencies. From state actors to non-state actors, and from terrorist to criminal networks, possible adversaries are everywhere. Furthermore, the hybrid nature of warfare also refers to the global commons, “domains or areas that no one state controls but on which all rely.”\textsuperscript{159} Therefore, the US must prepare for everything from an insurgency, to cyber attacks—insinuating that weak states pose just as much, if not more, of a threat when compared to strong states.

The QDR then moves into enumerating the previously noted four objectives of the defense strategy, “in order to defend and advance our national interests.”\textsuperscript{160} First, “Prevail in Today’s Wars,” describes the goals and strategies that the US has and will employ in order to

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{158} Ibid, 7.\hfill \textsuperscript{159} Ibid, 8.\hfill \textsuperscript{160} Ibid, 11.}
disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Department has clearly learned the importance of a true population-centric COIN strategy, as “denying the Taliban access to and control of key population and production centers and lines of communication,”161 is among the first goals described. Furthermore, other components of the strategy include: bringing the Taliban down to a level “manageable by the Afghan National Security Forces,” and “building the capacity of the Afghan government.”162 To accomplish these objectives, the Department recognizes the need for more troops deployed to the most sensitive regions of Afghanistan to secure the population, while also establishing a government presence in these regions. It also states that because of the treacherous terrain, the Department must devote significant resources to developing, improving, and increasing the amount of “fixed- and rotary-wing lift, aerial delivery, unmanned aerial systems,”163 and an array of other important assets.

While the above areas of focus deal with Afghanistan, the Department also highlights the steps moving forward in Iraq. Although the US was to execute a troop drawdown, troops would still remain in Iraq—mostly in training and advising positions. By the time of the drawdown, the US was acting as an enabler to the Iraqi Security Forces. It is clear from the aforementioned QDR highlights that by 2010, the US had paid attention to the lessons learned from both wars, and thus had a clearer understanding of what successful COIN operations entailed.

While the second objective, “Prevent and Deter Conflict,” does not blatantly address COIN and irregular warfare, many of the highlighted points are consistent with prevailing in the current security environment, in which both COIN and irregular warfare are central factors. From

161 Ibid.
162 Ibid.
163 Ibid.
assisting and training partners to “projecting a global defense posture composed of joint, ready forces forward-stationed and rotationally deployed to prevail across all domains…” the Department integrates aspects that are central to both COIN and irregular warfare within the second objective.¹⁶⁴

The third objective, “Prepare to Defeat Adversaries and Succeed in a Wide Range of Contingencies,” explains, “If deterrence fails and adversaries challenge our interests with the threat or use of force, the United States must be prepared to respond in support of US national interests.”¹⁶⁵ This statement is worth highlighting for the examination of national interests as a motivating factor behind the strategy in 2010 that will be explored in the Analysis section of this chapter. The Department correctly notes that challenges—from Al Qaeda to cyberspace to Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)—could likely form many combinations, thus the US must be capable of employing “a hybrid mix”¹⁶⁶ of responses along with its allies and partners.

Rebalancing the Force

The 2010 QDR, as compared to previous QDRs, makes a more specific shift towards preparations for irregular warfare. Force planning now focuses on: COIN and counterterrorism operations, building the “security capacity of partner states,” deterring and defeating “aggression in anti-access environments,” preventing proliferation and countering WMDs, and operating “effectively in cyberspace.”¹⁶⁷ Because of the obvious uncertainty that is an inherent part of irregular warfare, the Department highlights that US forces must possess flexibility and

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 14.
¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 15.
¹⁶⁶ Ibid.
¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 19.
adaptability “so that they can confront the full range of challenges that could emerge from a complex and dynamic security environment.”\textsuperscript{168}

Preparations for “COIN, stability, and counterterrorism (CT) operations” encompass a large proportion of the US force’s attention in this complex security environment. From “densely populated urban areas and mega-cities, to remote mountains, deserts, jungles, and littoral regions,”\textsuperscript{169} the 2010 QDR correctly places these challenges and potential threats at the forefront. US forces must not only possess the combat capabilities in these various regions, but they must also be able to support local authorities and aid in stability operations—all a part of waging an effecting COIN campaign. Moreover, the 2010 QDR demonstrates how the Department has increased its understanding of this irregular security landscape by stating that, “Stability operations, large-scale counterinsurgency, and counterterrorism operations are not niche challenges or the responsibility of a single Military Department, but rather require a portfolio of capabilities as well as sufficient capacity from across America’s Armed Forces and other departments and agencies.”\textsuperscript{170} The Department correctly recognizes that the threats from non-state actors and extremists will likely continue into the “indefinite future.”\textsuperscript{171} Therefore, the US must continuously “institutionalize the lessons learned”\textsuperscript{172} from past and current engagements, like Iraq and Afghanistan, in order to be able to confront and defeat potential threats.

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid, 20.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid, 21.
From these lessons learned, the 2010 QDR has created a list of enhancements, which the Department intends to focus on and incorporate into regular training and combat operations. This list includes:

- Increase the Availability of Rotary-Wing Assets
- Expand manned and unmanned aircraft systems (UASs) for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR)
- Expand intelligence, analysis, and targeting capacity
- Improve counter-IED capabilities
- Expand and modernize the AC-130 [gunship] fleet
- Increase key enabling assets for SOF
- Increase COIN, stability operations, and CT competency and capacity in general purpose forces
- Expand civil affairs capacity... to assist partner governments in the fields of rule of law, economic stability, governance, public health and welfare, infrastructure, and public education and information
- Increase regional expertise for Afghanistan and Pakistan
- Strengthen key supporting capabilities for strategic communication

All of the above enhancements demonstrate the tremendous amount of resources that have been devoted to researching and identifying COIN, stability, and CT strategies and techniques. The enhancements also show the true evolution of the defense strategy—from a document focused on MTW to a document focused on irregular warfare—between 2001 and 2010.

The second subsection of Rebalancing the Force is entitled, “Build the Security Capacity of Partner States.” A main component of irregular warfare is actively working with other states in order to not only create US partners and allies, but to also strengthen the weak states enough so that they can prevent state collapse, while also eliminating areas from which violent extremists and terrorists can operate. The 2010 QDR highlights that “the most dynamic [security cooperation activity] in the coming years will be security force assistance (SFA) missions.” These missions entail practical efforts “in host countries,” with the intention of “train[ing], equip[ing], advis[ing], and assist[ing] those countries’ forces” so that they can provide protection for their own populations, resources, and territories. These SFA missions are crucial in

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173 Ibid, 21-25.
order to wage successful operations against terrorists that seek safe havens in weak states that cannot effectively patrol and protect the population within their own borders. Moreover, these SFA missions are ongoing in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as in other countries in South American and Africa—demonstrating that the US is preparing for irregular warfare to remain a focus even after combat operations end in the current wars.

The 2010 QDR enumerates the following initiatives in order to support the SFA missions:

- Strengthen and institutionalize general purpose force capabilities for security force assistance;
- Enhance linguistic, regional, and cultural ability;
- Strengthen and expand capabilities for training partner aviation forces;
- Strengthen capacities for ministerial-level training;
- Create mechanisms to facilitate more rapid transfer of critical material; and
- Strengthen capacities for training regional and international security organizations.\(^\text{175}\)

The central purpose behind these initiatives is bolstering the capacity of states that are, or could likely become, safe havens for violent extremists and terrorists. As has been demonstrated throughout this study, working with these states is front and center in an effective COIN strategy, a dominant component of combating irregular wars in the 21\(^{st}\) century.

The third subsection of *Rebalancing the Force* entitled, “Deter and Defeat Aggression in Anti-Access Environments,” centers on the notion that “anti-access strategies seek to deny outside countries the ability to project power into a region, thereby allowing aggression or other destabilizing actions to be conducted by the anti-access power.”\(^\text{176}\) While North Korea and Iran are obvious examples of states that currently fit into this category, Middle Eastern countries are vulnerable and experience much turmoil. Therefore, the 2010 QDR notes that the US must

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\(^{175}\) Ibid, 30.

\(^{176}\) Ibid, 31.
continue to project power globally in order to deter and, if needed, defeat the threats posed by these states.

The next subsection in *Rebalancing the Force* that pertains to this study, “Operate Effectively in Cyberspace,” is a new and critical consideration included in the 2010 QDR. The Department notes, “Although it is a manmade domain, cyberspace is now as relevant a domain for DoD activities as the naturally occurring domains of land, sea, air, and space.”\(^{177}\) Cyberspace, especially the Internet, is the perfect means by which terrorists and extremists can spread their ideology and recruit members. Furthermore, because of its overwhelming nature, it is incredibly hard for any state, government, or other entity to monitor or police. As a result, the 2010 QDR enumerates “steps [that the Department is taking] to strengthen its capabilities in the cyberspace,”\(^{178}\) therefore strengthening its irregular warfare capabilities. These steps include:

“Develop a comprehensive approach to DoD operations in cyberspace; Develop greater cyberspace expertise and awareness; Centralize command of cyberspace operations; and Enhance partnerships with other agencies and governments.”\(^{179}\) Based on the brevity of this section, it is clear that the Department is still in the early stages of understand what strategies and tactics are most effective when dealing with cyberspace. This area is what makes irregular warfare so distinct from conventional warfare. In no other war—think, WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam—was a domain as abstract and large as cyberspace a remote factor for consideration. Therefore, the Department is in the beginning stages of researching, developing, and utilizing means of combating warfare in the current and future technological age.

\(^{177}\) Ibid, 37.

\(^{178}\) Ibid, 38.

\(^{179}\) Ibid.
Rebalancing the Force culminates with a subsection on “Guiding the Evolution of the Force.” Much of this subsection is a reiteration, in a broader context, of what the 2010 QDR previously mentions. The above tenets will direct the evolution of the force. However, unlike previous defense reviews that “have called for the nation’s armed forces to be able to fight and win two major regional conflicts”—against state adversaries using conventional force—“in overlapping time frames,” this QDR utilizes “several scenario combinations to represent the range of likely and/or significant challenges anticipated in the future and test[s] its force capacity against them.”\(^{180}\) This is one of the clearest examples of how the defense strategy has shifted since 9/11. No longer is the US solely preparing for “major regional conflicts” that dominated the radar since the end of the Cold War. Consequently, the Department’s “force planning stresses the importance of fielding forces that are versatile and that, in aggregate, can undertake missions across the full range of plausible challenges.”\(^{181}\)

**QDR Critique**

As the third examined QDR, it is clear that as the decade progressed, the Defense Department’s vision of the future warfare environment sharpened. As a result, it is now more adept in identifying priorities and explaining their importance. In terms of this new environment, the 2010 QDR introduced new terminology (as discussed in the previous description of the QDR section, Defense Strategy) that was not a part of the 2001 or 2006 documents—“hybrid warfare” and “fourth generation warfare.” According to a *New York Times* article reviewing the Pentagon’s shift in war planning strategy:

\(^{180}\) Ibid, 42.
\(^{181}\) Ibid, 43.
Driving both sets of developments are lessons learned from the past six years, when the United States has been fighting two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, yet is stretched to be ready for potentially significant operations elsewhere, Pentagon officials say, such as against Iran, North Korea or even China and Russia. Conflicts with any of those countries would also be expected to present a hybrid range of challenges.\textsuperscript{182}

This is a major shift from the past, when the US strategy focused on the ability to combat two major theater wars simultaneously. Now, the focus has shifted. Just by looking at the Department of Defense’s budget for Research, Development, Test and Evaluation for FY2010 it is clear that the DOD understood the unquestionable need for a shift in strategy. The budget allocated more than $11.5 billion for this area alone.\textsuperscript{183} The US used this funding for research and development aimed at improving irregular warfare capabilities, while “past spending priorities focused almost exclusively on conventional weapons like rockets and fighter jets.”\textsuperscript{184} However, this drastic transformation, as previously noted, does not come cheap, and during the tough economic times that the US was (and still is) experiencing, critics are quick to point out that the QDR might be too ambitious.\textsuperscript{185}

Even though this may be the case, Defense Secretary Gates was “among the most vociferous advocates” for a strategy emphasizing major shifts towards irregular warfare. Despite this, the 2010 QDR “contains no reference to irregular warfare as a central organizing concept.” “Central organizing concept” is the key phrase, and instead, as demonstrated throughout this


\textsuperscript{183} “RDT&E PROGRAMS (R-1), Department of Defense Budget Fiscal Year 2011,” \textit{Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)}, February 2010.


\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
chapter, the 2010 QDR “postulates an uncertain, fluid conflict environment posing a plethora of threats.”

Although this is arguably akin to preparing for irregular warfare, in a way, as Roy Godson and Richard H. Shultz, Jr. contend, it is more like creating a “QDR for all seasons.” Additionally, critics such as the now former House Armed Services Committee (HASC) Chairman Ike Skelton (D-MO) questioned, while in office, the effectiveness and plausibility of creating and training a “force that is capable of being all things to all contingencies.”

Moreover, despite the plethora of threats, the only non-state actor that the 2010 QDR “gives attention to is ‘Al Qaeda’s terrorist network.’ ” Instead of identifying trends, Godson and Shultz note that the QDR focuses on “uncertainty” and a multitude “of different conflict possibilities.” They argue that the QDR forecasts could have directly identified patterns in irregular warfare, which are unquestionably present, considering “over half of the world’s approximately 195 states are weak, failing, or failed”—making them more than likely targets for “decentralized armed groups” within their borders, and thus, likely scenarios for irregular warfare. Godson and Shultz point out that noting specific trends would have helped “to connect the dots,” creating a more effective game plan. However, the opposite could also be true, in that recognizing uncertainty could be a good thing, if the challenges are, indeed, uncertain.

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187 Ibid.

188 Ibid.

189 Ibid.

190 Ibid, 54.
Other critics of not only the QDR but also the Defense Department argue that the US already dominates, by far, “virtually every domain of warfare.”\(^{191}\) Therefore, as posited by Gordon Adams and Matthew Leatherman in *Foreign Affairs*, the exorbitant defense budget, regardless of the changing security environment, is unnecessary, especially given the hard economic times that the country is currently facing. Furthermore, they agree with Godson and Shultz in that, “Dismantling the Al Qaeda network and dealing with cyber-security should be our top military priorities.”\(^{192}\) Meaning, that for the time being, the US is so far ahead of the rest of the world in terms of defense capabilities, that it can afford to make substantial cuts in the areas of the budget dealing with conventional capabilities. Adams and Leatherman argue that there is no need for the US to spend “over $700 billion on national defense” (projected for 2011), which is “twice as much as it spent in 2001, more in real dollars than for any year since the end of World War II, and as much as is spent by the rest of the world's militaries combined.”\(^{193}\) Instead, Adams and Leatherman propose that if the Department dramatically cut funding, staff, and resources in the areas which the US is overwhelmingly ahead—conventional combat and sea capabilities among the top contenders—Gates and his department could actually prioritize the missions that the US is most likely to face in the future, like cybersecurity, terrorist networks, and asymmetrical and irregular warfare.

Thus it is clear that the 2010 QDR is not without its critics, but then again, what government decision ever is? The overarching theme of the critical assessments of the QDR is that instead of accepting that the US now needs to shift its focus *away* from conventional


\(^{192}\) Ibid.

\(^{193}\) Ibid.
operations towards irregular warfare, the Defense Department is just adding unconventional/irregular preparations, while still continuing to bolster its traditional capabilities. While both sets of critics may be correct in evaluating the document as a “QDR for all seasons,” there is still a noticeable shift in the language of the 2010 QDR, focusing on capabilities necessary in irregular warfare more than ever before (notwithstanding the term is not even mentioned until The Chairman’s Assessment of the Quadrennial Defense Review on page 102 out of 105 of the report—and that is the only time the word is used). However, the theme reverberates throughout the QDR, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan provide tangible proof that the strategy has shifted away from conventional operations towards asymmetrical warfare, and only time and other motivating factors (national interest and bureaucratic politics) will reveal whether the strategic evolution between 2001 and 2010 will continue into the future security environment.

**Analysis of QDR: National Interest vs. Bureaucratic Politics**

Examining the 2010 QDR decisions through the lenses of these motivating factors—national interest and bureaucratic politics—provides an enlightening glimpse into the rationale behind the document. As noted in the introduction of this chapter, one of the most apparent differences between the 2010 QDR and its predecessors is that it was released under a new presidential administration. The bureaucratic politics model illuminates the effects that a president has on national security decisions, as well as the factors that a president takes into consideration when determining his stance on an issue. Just as with the 2001 QDR—when Bush came into office and, holding the most powerful position in the country, chose to work specifically with his allies in the DOD to push forth an agenda based on DOD objectives and his own beliefs and advice from those around him—President Obama made similar, deliberate
political decisions that influenced the direction of the strategic transformation, which aligns with the bureaucratic politics model. Not only did President Obama choose to actively consult with the defense community more than the State Department on strategic decisions, but he also took domestic political concerns into account when determining policy, which is something that Halperin and Clapp note is a factor in the bureaucratic politics model.

For example, President Bush nominated Robert Gates for the position of Secretary of Defense in late 2006 after Rumsfeld resigned. Then, President Obama chose to keep Gates onboard after his election in 2008, which was the “first time a Pentagon chief [had] been carried over from a president of a different party.”\textsuperscript{194} There is no doubt that President Obama’s decision was at least in part motivated by domestic politics. Retaining Gates would show Obama’s dedication to bipartisanship in the government. Furthermore, Obama’s decision “generated praise from the military establishment and Capitol Hill,”\textsuperscript{195} which definitely started President Obama off on the right foot. However, his decision was not without its critics. Some said keeping a Republican Secretary of Defense suggested that Democrats are viewed as too weak to manage the military, while others questioned how Obama could campaign on an anti-Iraq war platform and then “keep around the guy who’s been in charge of it for the last two years.”\textsuperscript{196} Despite this, the 2010 QDR released under Gates shows the continuity from the policy choices made during the Bush Administration to the decisions under President Obama. Hence, the decision to retain Gates furthers the bureaucratic politics argument—Gates would help Obama


\textsuperscript{195} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.
gain legitimacy in the military realm and also support among Republicans, both of which he was struggling to attain domestically.

While the retention of Gates as Secretary of Defense was a swift domestic political move for Obama, his staunch belief that the US must begin to withdraw troops from Iraq clearly separated him from his predecessor. Bush’s approval ratings were continuing to fall by the end of his presidency—reaching 34%, according to a January 2009 Gallup poll. While these approval ratings cannot solely be attributed to the War in Iraq (the other reasons are not the focus of this paper), there is no doubt that the prolonged War in Iraq garnered much negative sentiment from the American people. Therefore, the 2010 QDR outlined a troop drawdown in Iraq, which not only distanced Obama’s policy from that of Bush, but it also appeased American interests. The national interest argument makes no mention of domestic political influences such as these.

Moreover, the national interest (in terms of national security) had been solidified by 2010, but the specific steps taken to act in the nation’s interest are, technically, always up for debate, especially when a new administration takes office. However, Obama’s vision weighed most heavily on the direction that the defense strategy ultimately took in 2010, due his overwhelming influence as the senior-most player in the game. Adding more power to this vision, Gates personal beliefs aligned with President Obama’s focus on the course of transformation. All of these factors are summarized and displayed in Figure 4. Thus, the two most powerful players in the game had no problem continuing the push for developing irregular warfare, demonstrating how the bureaucratic politics model can help to explain the evolution of the defense strategy since 9/11.

Figure 4

- **BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS**
  - Lessons learned
  - New administration
  - New senior players

- **NATIONAL INTEREST**
  - Security environment
  - Prevent attack on US soil

2010
ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT

Based on the understanding of both the national interest and bureaucratic politics arguments, along with the analyses of the 2001, 2006, and 2010 QDRs, there is no doubt that both national interest and bureaucratic politics have shaped and will continue to shape the national defense strategy. From the aforementioned examinations, my overall argument is that there is always an initial impetus—most often a change in the national interest—that provides the spark for a drastic change in the defense strategy. In this case, a shift in the perceived national interest due to the 9/11 attacks played this role. However, “participants in the foreign policy process” each have their own perceptions of what decisions are best suited based on this national interest. Therefore, they each have their own opinions as to “what is required for national security as they define it.” As these players, “become aware that their own view of national interests, shaped as it is by organizational, presidential, or personal interests, is not necessarily shared by other participants,” they seek to influence the game to favor their stance. The resulting defense strategy stems from the strategic bargaining that occurs within the political realm. A particular actor “wins” by effectively utilizing and navigating various factors inherent to the game—from their position among the other players to their ability to make the best case for their conception of (and way to solve) the issue at hand. In terms of the post 9/11 defense strategy, President Bush, occupying the most influential position in the game, surrounded himself with policymakers and defense planners that would implement his idea of an irregular warfare strategy. With the terrorist attacks as the impetus, these players had few obstacles, initially, when it came to garnering support for defense transformation, and therefore began

198 Halperin and Clapp, 139.
199 Ibid.
enacting the plans accordingly. Using the QDRs reviewed in this paper as benchmark years, I also argue the following: the 2001 QDR was heavily influenced by the aforementioned impetus of the attacks and also the senior players, notably President Bush, involved at the time; the direction of the 2006 QDR was shaped mostly by lessons learned in the field and the ideas/interests of senior players; and the 2010 QDR was influenced mostly by a change in the presidential administration (resulting in a new vision) and various changes in those involved in the defense policy game. Thus, both national interest and bureaucratic politics have shifted the post 9/11 defense strategy towards irregular warfare.

While the exact elements making up the new defense strategy are not without their critics, there has been consensus since 9/11 regarding the fact that more attention needs to be devoted to irregular warfare than ever before. However, as previously indicated, at the time of the 2001 QDR, the focus was more on an RMA in information technology and its relations to warfare. The words, “irregular” and “counterinsurgency,” are nowhere in the 2001 document. Yet, within the first six months after the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration sat down and asked, “How do we make sense of this?” It was obvious that the security environment had changed. The administration “returned to a set of shared images about the threat of terrorism that were similar to those about the threat of communism during the cold war.” This is the shift in national interest noted above. Subsequently, defense planners, military personal, related policymakers, and the president began devoting substantial attention and resources to transforming the military to be able to effectively navigate a world in which irregular warfare trumped conventional operations—at least for the time being.

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200 Steven Metz. (March 2, 2011). Skype Interview.
201 Halperin and Clapp, 157.
From the overview of the 2001 QDR and the accompanying analysis and assessment in Chapter 5, it is clear that the impetus for transformation was an overall agreement on the national interest—prevailing in the new security environment fraught with unconventional challenges. However, the 2001 document, as highlighted in the corresponding chapter of this paper, was written pre-9/11 (and then revised). For that reason, the true motivation for change had not yet lit a fire underneath the defense community (and the American people), so the 2001 QDR was more speculation of the future rather than based on lessons learned from experience. Metz stated this in the interview when he said, “Come September 11, and all of a sudden the United States was really concerned with instability in places it had never thought about before… You had this amazing shift [and] all of a sudden it was the Army and the Marine Corps that were getting more money and [resources].” The motivation was national interest. After an attack on American soil by terrorists, it was hard to argue that nation states like China posed the most imminent threat to national security. Yet, the means by which the country began to go about altering its strategy and transitioning from a force prepared for major theater warfare to a rapidly deployable force capable of combating this multitude of unconventional challenges is where we see the application of the bureaucratic politics model.

Enter President Bush. Although the specifics pertaining to an irregular warfare strategy did not make up the 2001 QDR, it was still centered on shifting the focus of the defense strategy. This can partly be attributed to the fact that President Bush was a champion of defense transformation, and as Metz noted in the interview, “the extent to which the president is confident and willing to impose” his beliefs and orders is an important consideration and

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202 Metz, Skype Interview.
predictor of the next policy move.\textsuperscript{203} Although Metz stated that Bush’s confidence and willingness to enforce compliance with his vision increased over the course of his time in office, there is no doubt that his intense advocacy for defense transformation from the get go significantly influenced how strongly the Department of Defense pursued restructuring. Moreover, because Bush continued to increasingly support institutionalizing irregular warfare capabilities as time progressed, it did not really matter that the Army was “never enthusiastic about it.”\textsuperscript{204} Nor did it matter, as Metz recalls from his time in the Army, that “there were bureaucratic battles within the [Army between the] conventional warfare guys… and the counterinsurgency proponents.”\textsuperscript{205} Bush’s overwhelming power from his position as President overshadowed and overruled any opposition that may have arisen at the time. Therefore, at the time of the 2001 QDR, while the bureaucratic politics model does help us to understand the beginning process of adopting a new strategy, it applies in a less direct way. Instead of the politicking in government and strategic bargaining that characterizes much of the bureaucratic politics’ explanation, the part of the model pertaining to the 2001 QDR is in reference to presidential power. All other arguments went by the wayside if the president chooses to be significantly involved and has a powerful opinion favoring one side—in this case, defense transformation.

While this is true for the development of the defense strategy since 9/11, it is not always the case. An important consideration, as noted by Allison, Halperin, and Clapp is the personality of key players, in this case, the president’s. Back in the 1960s when John F. Kennedy became president, he “was committed to the need for a Flexible Response,” and “his first strategy was to

\textsuperscript{203} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid.
get the Army interested in counterinsurgency.” However, Kennedy lacked confidence when dealing with the Army, which is evident from his statement, “I know that the Army is not going to develop this counterinsurgency field and do the things that I think must be done unless the Army itself wants to do it.” The relationship between the Kennedy administration and the Army was also not one based on mutual respect. The Army believed that COIN was a fad and “just a small form of war.” As a result, Kennedy turned to Plan B, “appointing officers who had shown an interest in special warfare to important new posts.” Yet, they were seen by the Army as a “representative of the administration,” and thus “given only limited access to the army force.” When Kennedy eventually appointed Lieutenant General Paul D. Harkins, an army insider, in 1962, he hoped the Army would see it as a compromise, and thus spawn innovation. Contrary to Kennedy’s hopes, “General Harkins did not become interested in counterinsurgency,” and the president’s efforts to shift the defense strategy were to no avail.

The above example demonstrates that just because a president exhibits extreme involvement and backing of a specific issue or policy, there are other factors that come into play. As Allison states, other players’ perceptions of the president’s bargaining advantages and skills affect whether his vision becomes reality. In the case of President Kennedy, his relationship with the military negatively impacted their perception of his vision. Therefore, when he attempted to meddle in their “business,” they not only did not agree with him, but they also did not trust him. The above example also shows that while a President can hand-select officials with the intention of overcoming certain political disadvantages, the choice does not necessarily

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207 Ibid, 418.

208 Ibid, 418-419.

209 Allison and Halperin, 50.
guarantee implementation of the President’s vision. All of the pieces of the puzzle must align for the bureaucratic politics game to work in any one player’s favor, including the president.

In the instance of the post-9/11 defense strategy, President Bush not only possessed both qualities that Kennedy lacked—a working relationship with the military and hand-selected officials that would implement his vision—but he was also working in a very different environment. Terrorists had just attacked the US, and the defense community was utterly unprepared to counter such an unconventional adversary. These attacks prompted a wave of national pride, which opened the gates for President Bush’s policies, as opposed to Kennedy who was trying to change the military strategy during a time when no resounding threat existed to enhance his position. This juxtaposition of President Kennedy and President Bush’s attempts to shift the military strategy is a vivid illustration of just how intricate the policymaking process is, and just how crucial it is for each piece of the puzzle to be in the right place in order to enact a policy.

By the time 2006 rolled around and the next QDR was released, as previously stated in the respective chapter, the United States had gained experience from years of lessons learned in the field. These lessons learned translated to a even broader base of support for the institutionalization of irregular warfare capabilities, especially once the Quad Chart made the situation more comprehensible to those who were not members of the Department of Defense or the military. While the national interest side of the transformation was stronger than ever by 2006—firmly solidified by the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—how the strategy actually transformed into official policy can, once again, not fully be understood without giving attention to the bureaucratic politics behind the process.
The lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan had, arguably, the most influence on the direction of detailed components of the defense strategy. Merely scanning the 2006 QDR the words “lessons learned” appear fourteen times, whereas, in the 2001 document, the phrase is nonexistent. While they are eventually integrated at the highest policy level (the QDRs), Metz stated that these lessons learned had the most immediate effect at the tactical level—“the insurgency in Iraq would do something new and within a matter of weeks we would already have a countermeasure to it.” However, Metz noted, “senior policymakers and congressmen would make endless trips to the field and get briefed, and [as a result they] understood things better than they ever did [during previous wars].” They would hear, directly from those on the ground, what type of strategy was working, and what was not. They would see that non-state actors and IEDs posed greater risks in the current security environment than nation-states like Russia. They would hear what types of “intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance equipment” were making a tremendous difference to Marine captains in Afghanistan. Then, these Washington elites, such as the Secretary of Defense, would return to Washington and advocate for certain policies based on what they encountered in the field. In other words, these bureaucrats would use their politicking skills once back in Washington to advocate on behalf of what they deemed necessary in the interest of national security.

The information from the field is constantly pouring into the Pentagon through various channels. In order to make it into the QDRs, this intelligence must reach the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (OSD Policy), which is in charge of releasing the documents. OSD Policy has “both military officers and civilians who have constant contact with the military

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services [and] the joint chiefs,” which makes for a dynamic decision-making body. As an example of this close working relationship between civilian and military, Metz mentioned that his close friend worked in OSD Policy, and “he was an Army Lieutenant Colonel who had been in Iraq at the time.” He represents someone with “both the personal and institutional ties to make sure that the policymakers understand what’s going on in the field.” According to Metz, these lessons learned that are shared by those like his friend influence the path that the United States takes in order to get to its ultimate goal—preserving the nation’s interest. However, with so many different players in the policymaking game (harking back to Allison), what eventually makes it into the official QDR is a result of bargaining, convincing, and strategizing on behalf of the players involved.

The QDR from the year 2006 represents the greatest strategic shifts since 9/11—2001 was the year of initiation, 2006 was the paramount year of transformation, and 2010 was based on refining and updating the elements from the 2006 QDR. Between 2001 and 2006, there was a dramatic increase in scholarship, attention, and government funds devoted to researching this RMA, which turned strategy away from conventional operations. Those that held the most prominent positions backed this shift towards irregular warfare, as noted in the chapter on the 2006 QDR. These players’ ideas gained their distinction due to one of the following: 1) the players’ adept skills in the bureaucratic politics game, allowing them to rise to the top because they convinced others that they “had the answers,” or 2) because the players already occupied high positions (i.e. President Bush) and could drive the implementation of their ideas. While the events of 9/11 and thereafter in the Middle East changed the types of threats for which the US military was preparing, notable figures—such as President Bush, Secretary Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz (Under Secretary of Defense for Policy), Richard Myers (Chairman of Joint Chiefs of
Staff 2001-2005) and Peter Pace (Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff 2005-2007)—dictated the way irregular warfare became institutionalized.

By 2010, the US was a more skilled irregular warfare combatant than ever before. There was no disagreement about the shift from conventional to unconventional capabilities. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan proved that a COIN strategy may be difficult, but it was the correct response. The national interest had remained the same since 2001—prevail in the new security environment and prevent another attack on US soil. However, the players in the game had changed—a new president had taken office, and the secretary of defense had changed along with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and many others. While the new players kept the irregular warfare doctrine, the most powerful senior player, President Obama, had a very different vision than his predecessor. President Obama sought to distance himself from President Bush by ending the Iraq War, which he opposed from the beginning. At the same time, he also sought to shift American attention to the War in Afghanistan—where he felt the focus should have been all along. Along with this belief, the Commander in Chief made changes to the senior players involved and also to the strategy. General McChrystal became the Commander of US forces in Afghanistan, and President Obama authorized a troop surge and corresponding timeline for withdrawal. This quick change in policy can be directly attributed to a new administration (with a new vision) taking office. There is no doubt that Allison would use this as a prime example to prove the utility of his bureaucratic politics model.

It is unquestionable that an intricate interplay between national interest and bureaucratic politics has continued to shape the post-9/11 defense strategy. As previously described, the arrow was still aimed at protecting the national interest by continuing to focus on developing irregular warfare capabilities, but the new players in the game modified the path that the arrow
traveled to the target. Every time the players in the game change, new ideas, interests, experiences, and skills enter along with them. The ultimate objective remained the same starting with 9/11 and continuing to the present. However, the players in the game have changed—from the presidential administration to the commanders in Afghanistan—resulting in variations in the paths taken to get to the end result. Defeating Al Qaeda, prevailing in Afghanistan, preventing another attack on American soil, and developing irregular warfare (among others) all remained the ultimate goals for the country. However, as new players entered the game, they tweaked the “plays.” For example, Secretary Gates replaced General McKiernan in 2009 with General McChrystal, because Gates believed that, “‘fresh eyes were needed’ and that ‘a new approach was probably in our best interest.’” General McChrystal’s strategy for the US to successfully wage COIN operations in Afghanistan focused more on “protecting the country’s 30 million people than on fighting Al Qaeda and the Taliban.” This substitution shifted the route, but the overall defense policy (objective) stayed the same. Then, when President Obama replaced McChrystal with General Petraeus, it turned out that he stayed on course with McChrystal’s plans, because he actually “oversaw the writing of a 2006 US counterinsurgency manual that provided a blueprint for McChrystal's strategy in Afghanistan.” Thus, the overall objective remained the same throughout, but the various players tweaked how to get there.

It should be evident that the part of my argument pertaining to 2010 stands strong—the 2010 QDR was influenced mostly by a change in the presidential administration and various changes in those involved in the defense policy game. By 2010 the most important game changers were the players. The shift in national interest had already occurred long ago, and while

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211 Elisabeth Bumiller and Thom Shanker.
212 Dan Murphy.
213 Ibid.
it is not something to be ignored, its effects on the defense transformation by 2010 had become a foundational element. Because the national interest has remained constant, the continuation of the transformation is now better explained by a thorough understanding of the bureaucratic politics model.

However, there is no way that one can argue against the idea that both national interest and bureaucratic politics, albeit at varying degrees at various stages in the process, influence the trajectory of the defense strategy. From my examination of the post-9/11 defense transformation towards irregular warfare, we can see that national interest played the biggest role in the beginning—the terrorist attacks provided the spark that changed the national interest from a post-Cold War mindset that was state centered and focused on conventional military superiority to a post-9/11 mindset that was non-state centered and focused on irregular warfare superiority. However, in the time since the terrorist attacks, the varying players in the game and their perceptions of the situation and corresponding strategy played a very influential role in the exact route taken to the end zone. Therefore, adept politicking is an essential skill for anyone involved in defense decision-making. Everything from proven success to bargaining expertise, and from personality to relationships helps officials and their opinions move into the most prominent positions. Furthermore, a consistently important consideration is presidential involvement. The president heavily influenced every QDR examined—either directly or indirectly by means of the officials he appointed. While I see the presidential factor falling under the bureaucratic politics heading, it is influential enough—as this paper demonstrates—that it could even warrant an entirely separate examination. As the nation moves forward, I cannot foresee when a QDR will not be concentrated on irregular warfare. However, I am confident enough to say that the process of another transformation will occur in much the same way it did after 9/11. It will
begin with a drastic change in the United States’ national interest, which will then be followed by a significant restructuring of those involved in defense policy, by means of the tenets of the bureaucratic politics model. Hence, national interest and bureaucratic politics have not only shaped the evolution of the defense strategy since 9/11 towards irregular warfare, but they will also shape the evolution of the defense strategy for generations to come.
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