



Center for Strategic  
and Budgetary  
Assessments

T E S T I M O N Y

# **The Project on National Security Reform: Challenges and Requirements**

Testimony Before the

**U.S. House of Representatives**

**House Committee on Armed Services**

**Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation**

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**President**

**Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments**

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## ***Introduction***

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to appear before you today, and to share my views on the Project on National Security Reform (PNSR). As we begin a new administration, we are sobered by the security challenges that have emerged in recent years: the attacks of 9/11; the deployment of U.S. troops to Iraq and Afghanistan; the erosion of barriers to nuclear proliferation; and the rapid rise of China and resurgence of Russia. Not surprisingly, there is considerable interest in what organizational changes the new administration might make in order to better meet these challenges. However, before undertaking such an enterprise, the new administration would be wise to craft a sound national security strategy to guide and inform any executive branch reorganization. Anything less would be putting the cart before the horse.

My testimony is intended to provide a context within which one might evaluate the Project's recommendations, rather than a detailed assessment of the project itself. Accordingly, following some brief observations on the Project's recommendations, my testimony centers on what I consider to be the root problem: our loss of competence in crafting good national security strategy. I will then suggest some modest steps to address the problem.

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First, let me applaud the effort of those involved in the Project on National Security Reform. Many very talented people have devoted considerable time to this project, and their efforts have yielded many valuable insights and recommendations. The range and depth of their efforts are most impressive. They have rendered an important service to the nation.

The Project's report, *Forging a New Shield*, is also remarkably (and admirably) candid in identifying several key assumptions regarding conditions that must be present for its recommendations to have their intended effect. It appears that several of these assumptions are likely to prove invalid. One is that "the recommendations made by the PNSR are adopted and implemented as a complete set." The authors believe that if this does not occur, then "the system will not function as intended."<sup>1</sup> But the number and range of recommendations make simultaneous adoption and implementation a practical impossibility. Indeed, the long history of distinguished panels and commissions suggests this is unlikely to occur. Another problematic assumption concerns the ability of "teams that are management and personnel intensive [to] make decisions quickly."<sup>2</sup> To the contrary, experience shows that groups have a tendency to make decisions slowly and often tend toward consensus (or "satisficing") rather than arriving at the optimum choice. It is also assumed that "departments and agencies will reward personnel who choose to invest in interagency expertise." Again, experience shows that individuals who fail to represent their "home" organization's interests risk becoming alienated from that

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<sup>1</sup> Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Sword* (Arlington, VA: November 26, 2008), p. 524.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the PNSR notes that "It will also be common for interagency teams, sometimes challenging one another, and sometimes challenged by Cabinet departments, to appeal conflicts for resolution by higher authority." One presumes the "higher authority" here is the president, since the issue will have risen above cabinet level. Thus it is not clear that the interagency teams will do more than replicate the current debates that occur between departments and agencies and that, at times, must be adjudicated by the president. Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Sword* (Arlington, VA: November 26, 2008), p. 515.

organization. Still another assumption is that interagency “teams can direct the activities of departments and agencies.”<sup>3</sup> Yet it is far from clear that such teams can overcome entrenched bureaucracies.

The PNSR’s recommendations are rooted in its assessment of the environment. While I generally agree with much of the Project’s diagnosis of the situation, there are some areas where its assessment is, in my opinion, overly dire. For example, the PNSR also argues that the problems we confront today are fundamentally different from those we confronted during the Cold War, an era during which we relied on the national security organizations put into place by the National Security Act of 1947. While I agree that the world has changed in many ways since then, I also believe the PNSR overstates the case in several important ways.

For example, the PNSR asserts that the environment we face today is far more challenging and complex than that of the Cold War era. To make the point, it cites Secretary of Defense Robert Gates’ remarks:

I recall Henry Kissinger in 1970. There had been the Syrian invasion of Jordan. I think something was going on in Lebanon. And we had discovered the Soviets were building a submarine base in Cuba. I always thought Kissinger managing two or three crises at the same time was an act of legerdemain. I tell you: that was amateur night compared to the world today.<sup>4</sup>

What Secretary Gates failed to mention, however, is that at that time:

- The United States had suffered over 40,000 combat deaths in Vietnam—roughly *ten times* the number suffered to date in both Afghanistan and Iraq—triggering an ongoing series of large-scale demonstrations in the United States;
- The United States had invaded Cambodia, setting off mass domestic protests in the United States (to include the Kent State incident);
- Soviet pilots were flying combat missions over the Suez Canal as part of an undeclared War of Attrition with Israel; and

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<sup>3</sup> Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Sword* (Arlington, VA: November 26, 2008), pp. 525-26. The report asserts that departments and agencies “will cooperate willingly with the teams, much the way the military services now are eager to contribute to combatant commanders conducting priority missions.” This assertion fails in the face of evidence to the contrary. To a significant extent, commanders such as General David Petraeus have succeeded in their important missions *in spite of* the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Indeed, the Goldwater-Nichols reforms of 1986 accord field commanders and the military Service chiefs different priorities, with the former charged with accomplishing their mission (i.e., defeating the enemy), while the latter are charged with preserving their institution (i.e., not “breaking” the Army). These objectives can often be incompatible. For example, the Surge proposed by Gen. Petraeus to defeat the enemy in Iraq risked “breaking” the Army through its deployment of Army forces far in excess of what the Service set as an acceptable rotation rate.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Gates, interview with John Barry, “That Was Amateur Night,” *Newsweek*, October 25, 2008. Cited in Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Sword*, p. 496.

- The Soviet Union was engaged in a massive nuclear arms buildup—unconstrained by any arms control agreements—that posed a direct, existential threat to the survival of the United States and its allies.

I daresay that despite the challenges confronting us today, few would gladly trade them for the situation we confronted nearly forty years ago. As the PNSR admits, “no single challenge rises to the level of the Cold War’s potential “doomsday” scenario . . . .”<sup>5</sup>

If the challenges we confront are not fundamentally more severe, are they fundamentally different? If so, this alone could establish the need for major reform of our national security structure.

The challenges we confront today are quite different in form from those we confronted during the Cold War, and greater in scale from those we confronted during the decade following the Cold War’s end. The rise of radical Islamism and other transnational threats (e.g., drug cartels) and their growing access to highly destructive capabilities, the proliferation of nuclear weapons (and other weapons of mass destruction) to states in the developing world, the rise of China, and global warming are different in many ways from past challenges.

Drawing upon this, the PNSR makes the case that:

It is clear, then, that most major challenges can no longer be met successfully by traditional Cold War approaches. We cannot prevent the failure of a state or mitigate the effects of climate change with conventional military forces or nuclear weapons. The national security challenges inherent in a widespread international financial contagion or a major pandemic do not lend themselves to resolution through the use of air power or special operations forces.<sup>6</sup>

In a report that is remarkable in so many respects, this statement stands out as somewhat disingenuous. Military forces could not address any of these types of challenges during the Cold War either, although they did, in a number of cases, prove essential to preventing a state from becoming a failed state or succumbing to subversion.<sup>7</sup> During the Cold War the United States employed other instruments of national power, depending upon the situation. Economic power was crucial to the success of the Marshall Plan, and economic coercion helped bring about an end to the Suez Crisis of 1956. Major development programs, like the Kennedy administration’s Alliance for Progress, were initiated. Diplomatic power was employed to create the most formidable network of alliances the world has ever seen. During this period we witnessed a series of influenza outbreaks, such as the Asian Flu and Hong Kong Flu, that killed tens of thousands. Alas, we were not prepared then, nor are we now, for the kind of pandemic influenza (the “Spanish Flu”) that killed millions at the end of World War I.

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<sup>5</sup> Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Sword*, p. v.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vi.

<sup>7</sup> Examples where the U.S. military was instrumental in preventing state failure or combating subversion are Greece (late 1940s); the Philippines (early 1950s); the Dominican Republic (1965); and Bolivia (1960s).

To respond effectively to these challenges, employing our full range of national capabilities, the PNSR contends that “in the case of the national security system, teams could be created to confront challenges such as nuclear proliferation in the Middle East or Northeast Asia, extremist Islamic terrorism, Colombian drug trafficking, energy security, global warming, etc.”<sup>8</sup> However, teams such as these *were created* during the Cold War period to address challenges that cut across departments and agencies. One of the most notable of these was the Special [Interdepartmental] Group (Counterinsurgency) (SGCI) established by President John F. Kennedy to contend with communist-supported subversive “wars of national liberation” in the developing world.<sup>9</sup> I second the Project’s recommendation that greater use might be made of such groups to address the most high-priority issues that cut across department and agency lines.

The PNSR also advocates creating “crisis task forces” that can deal with the immediate demands of a crisis, and provide “an integrated chain of command.” For example, the task force might be directed by a U.S. ambassador assigned to a state on the verge of collapse, or by the regional U.S. military commander. This makes great sense. Again, however, this was not unheard of during the Cold War. For example, when President Lyndon Johnson sent retired General Maxwell Taylor to South Vietnam as U.S. ambassador during the crisis period that ran from the Tonkin Gulf incident to the decision to deploy major U.S. ground combat forces, Taylor was (at least on paper) given total responsibility for all U.S.-related operations in South Vietnam, running a “mini-NSC” establishment in Saigon.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the ultimate “crisis task force” was the Executive Committee, or “ExCom,” organized by President Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, and which he himself chaired. While crisis task forces were not unknown during the Cold War, neither were they always successful.

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Having recommended a wide range of structural and process changes, the PNSR also states that “The changes presidents typically make are superficial and have little impact on the actual performance of the system.”<sup>11</sup> This is somewhat hard to believe, since any restructuring of the government’s national security establishment should be to the president’s benefit. Moreover,

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<sup>8</sup> Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Sword*, p. 512.

<sup>9</sup> The Communists’ aim was to destabilize regimes to the point where they could seize control. The SGCI was co-chaired by General Maxwell Taylor and Robert Kennedy, and comprised key senior members from the relevant departments and agencies involved in counterinsurgency operations, to include State, Defense, the CIA, and the U.S. Information Agency. General Taylor was the president’s special military advisor, and Robert Kennedy the attorney general (and the president’s brother). The co-chairs enjoyed easy access to the president and his full support. Nevertheless, the SGCI proved unable to integrate the efforts of its constituent departments and agencies. See Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 31, 33-36, 271, 275.

<sup>10</sup> Taylor established a Mission Council that combined the embassy’s country team and MACV—the U.S. Military Assistance Command (Vietnam)—and which he chaired. The effort ultimately failed, in large part because key officials—Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, and General William Westmoreland, commander of MACV—all had independent ways of making their views known to the president. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, pp. 95-97, 131-63.

<sup>11</sup> Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Sword*, p. 493.

different presidents have altered the system in ways that suited their individual leadership styles and approaches to decision-making. What worked best for President Nixon would not likely have worked best for President Carter or President Reagan, each of whom restructured their NSC staff and processes in ways that they believed optimized their effectiveness. Even if the PNSR's conclusion that these changes were superficial and of little consequence is true, it seems presumptuous to believe that any president, regardless of his or her expertise in national security affairs and approach to leadership and decision-making, would accept its myriad recommendations without modification. Yet that is exactly what the PSNR report states to be necessary for its system to work as intended. This also begs the question of whether such a system, even if it worked as intended, would function in a way that is useful to the incumbent president.

Furthermore, although some changes presidents make may be of little significance, others are of great consequence. As I will elaborate upon presently, President Eisenhower's NSC organizational and process structure provides what may be the best model for accomplishing the *two objectives that are most crucial in the government's efforts to provide for the national security: crafting good strategies and ensuring they are faithfully executed*. That NSC structure, to include its Planning Board, was dismantled by President Kennedy. As Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's NSC Advisor, notes

The Planning Board was a very important instrument, the elimination of which has handicapped the US government ever since then. Because the consequence is that we don't have overall national security planning...<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, I am skeptical that the PNSR's call to add more layers of government to the Executive Branch is the most effective remedy to what ails us, especially as there is no corresponding reduction in the current organizational structure. One might expect, at a minimum, a cut in the sub-organizations within departments and agencies whose relevance is much reduced in this new national security era. Yet they remain, standing as potential obstacles to the new ways of doing business advocated by the Project.

Having addressed what may prove to be some concerns associated in the PNSR's efforts, let me elaborate upon two areas in which I believe the Project has rendered a great service to the nation. The Project's report notes that in our current system "strategy has become a short-term, neglected activity, required capabilities are not being built, and the conduct of foreign relations is skewed by the imbalance in the nation's ability to wield military and civilian elements of power." It goes on to state that "Strategic direction . . . is weak and resisted by the system in any case."<sup>13</sup> Finally, it concludes that the "President's Security Council and staff . . . [should] focus on overarching policy, grand strategy, and strategic management while maintaining a capacity

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<sup>12</sup> "The NSC at 50: Past, Present, and Future," October 31, 1997, [http://www.cfr.org/publication/64/nsc\\_at\\_50.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/64/nsc_at_50.html) (transcript). Cited in Aaron L. Friedberg, "Strengthening Strategic Planning," *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2007-08, p. 52.

<sup>13</sup> Project on National Security Reform, *Forging a New Sword*, p. 492.

for well-informed operational and crisis decision-making.”<sup>14</sup> The balance of my testimony will focus on these important issues, and offer some suggestions as how we might best address them.

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A number of prominent American strategists, in addition to the PNSR, have reached the general conclusion that the United States Government’s capacity to craft national security strategy at anything approaching an acceptable level of competence is highly suspect.<sup>15</sup> Why is the United States government’s ability to develop strategy so deficient? What are the principal barriers to success in this area? What might be done to overcome them?

### ***What is Strategy?***

Although many definitions of the word have been offered, prominent military theorists such as Carl von Clausewitz, Basil Liddell Hart, Bernard Brodie, Richard Betts, and Colin Gray agree that strategy is in essence a “how-to” guide for employing limited means effectively to achieve a stated goal.<sup>16</sup> More specifically, strategy involves “identifying or creating asymmetric advantages in competitive situations that can then be exploited to help achieve one’s ultimate objectives despite the active, opposing efforts of one’s adversaries or competitors to achieve theirs.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, a sound strategy leverages one’s asymmetric advantages to impose disproportionate costs upon the competition, making it unfeasible for one’s rivals to compete effectively.

The importance of identifying and exploiting asymmetric advantages has been emphasized by a number of highly regarded strategists from both the military and the private sector. Richard Rumelt, one of the leading thinkers in the field of business strategy, notes that a strategist’s job is “to identify, create, or exploit some kind of an edge.”<sup>18</sup> Business strategist Kees Van der Heijden concurs: “Success can only be based on being different from (existing or potential) competitors.”<sup>19</sup> These differences, or asymmetries, are the source of competitive advantage; successful strategists must exploit them in order to develop the best possible

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 499.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Aaron L. Friedberg, “Strengthening Strategic Planning,” *The Washington Quarterly*, (Winter 2007-08); and Barry D. Watts, “Why Strategy? The Case for Taking it Seriously and Doing it Well,” unpublished paper, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 181; B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Meridian, 1991), p. 321; Bernard Brodie, “Why Were We So (Strategically) Wrong?” *Foreign Policy*, (Winter 1971-72), p. 151. Cited in Marc Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?” *International Security*, (Fall 2000): p. 6; Colin S. Gray, *Modern Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 17; and Watts, “Why Strategy? The Case for Taking it Seriously and Doing it Well,” p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Watts, “Why Strategy? The Case for Taking it Seriously and Doing it Well,” p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Barry D. Watts, “Memorandum for the Record,” *Strategy Seminar*, (Washington, DC: Center for Strategy & Budgetary Assessments, 2007), p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Kees Van der Heijden, *Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), p. xv.

approach for achieving their desired objective. This view is seconded by British General Rupert Smith, who states that “the essence of the practice of war is to achieve asymmetric advantage over one’s opponent; an advantage in any terms, not just technological.”<sup>20</sup>

This suggests an alternative purpose for engaging in the process of strategy crafting. As Van der Heijden observes, “the ultimate purpose of strategizing . . . is to gain a new and original unique insight into where the . . . environment is going in the future, in an area where the strengths of the organization can be utilized.”<sup>21</sup> Put another way, the real value of strategic planning is not in delivering an end product, a “final authoritative edition” of a strategy report, but rather in developing insights as to where asymmetric advantages lie. These can then be exploited by policymakers as they plot their course. President Dwight D. Eisenhower understood this, as revealed in his observation that “Plans are useless . . . planning is indispensable.”<sup>22</sup>

By way of explanation, Eisenhower stated that “the secret of a sound, satisfactory decision made on an emergency basis has always been that the responsible official has been ‘living with the problem’ before it becomes acute.”<sup>23</sup> Thus the development of a strategy document to serve as a guide for the nation’s leaders, important as it is, is not the principal aim of strategic planning. Rather, strategic planning is a continuous process that ensures that national security leaders are informed of sources of asymmetric advantage they can exploit in order to achieve stated goals or to modify their strategy as necessary. Because of the constantly evolving character of the global security environment, the planning function is essential: national strategy must be reevaluated and refined regularly as our knowledge of the competitive environment and prospective asymmetric advantages changes.<sup>24</sup>

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Given this description of strategy and strategic planning, what are the barriers to their successful accomplishment?

### ***Barrier One: Failure to Understand Strategy***

There is a longstanding tendency in the U.S. Government to equate strategy with a list of desirable outcomes. When this occurs, there is little discussion of what barriers stand in the way of achieving these goals, or how these barriers might be overcome, given the limitations on available resources. Thus, rather than working out how scarce resources can best be employed to achieve a challenging security objective, the mere statement of desire to meet the objective is deemed sufficient.

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<sup>20</sup> Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), p. 377.

<sup>21</sup> Van der Heijden, *Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation*, p. 55.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Nixon, *Six Crises* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1962), p. 235.

<sup>23</sup> Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, p. 89.

<sup>24</sup> Van der Heijden, *Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation*, p. 15.



For example, consider the Clinton administration's 2000 *National Security Strategy*, which concludes by describing its "strategy" almost purely in terms of desired outcomes:

Our strategy . . . is comprised of many different policies, the key elements of which include...:

- Encouraging the reorientation of other states, including foreign adversaries...
- Encouraging democratization, open markets, free trade, and sustainable development... [and]
- Preventing conflict.<sup>25</sup>

The problem is not limited to the Clinton administration or to civilian leadership. Take, for example, a Joint Chiefs of Staff document, *Joint Vision 2010*, published in 1996, which explains how the U.S. armed forces will achieve the "common goal" of a military that is "persuasive in peace, decisive in war, preeminent in any form of conflict."<sup>26</sup> This is to be realized through "information superiority" that enables "dominant maneuver," "precision engagement," "focused logistics," and "full-dimensional protection." In other words, the U.S. military has the goal of being completely aware of what is happening in a theater of war ("information superiority"), being able to move its forces, which are to be completely protected ("full-dimensional protection") wherever it desires ("dominant maneuver"), and to engage with unprecedented effectiveness ("precision engagement"), while always being fully supplied ("focused logistics").<sup>27</sup> Conspicuously absent is a discussion of how these sub-goals are to be realized. Nor is any mention made of potential enemy actions or resource limitations which could frustrate our efforts. Again, since "strategy" is reduced to the assertion that the conditions desired will be achieved, there is no need to consider resource limits or enemy action. In short, the need for strategy—identifying and exploiting asymmetric advantages—is assumed away.

Strategy—real strategy—is often, perhaps typically, misunderstood; and doing it well is no easy task. But as the PNSR's report notes, it is indispensable, and never more so than in today's highly volatile security environment. As Van der Heijden notes, "The need for efficient strategic thinking is most obvious in times of accelerated change when the reaction time of the organization becomes crucial to survival and growth."<sup>28</sup> For the United States, the ability to react quickly and effectively in a highly uncertain world can be greatly enhanced by a well-developed strategy.

### ***Barrier Two: Failure to Understand the Enemy***<sup>29</sup>

There is another area in which lack of understanding poses a serious barrier to formulating effective national strategies. The failure to understand the enemy severely limits a

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<sup>25</sup> Clinton, *A National Security Strategy for a Global Age*, p. 67.

<sup>26</sup> General John M. Shalikashvili, *Joint Vision 2010* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 1996), p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>28</sup> Van der Heijden, *Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation*, p. 12.

<sup>29</sup> For national security challenges such as global warming, pandemic, or failed states, the term "problem" might be substituted for "enemy."

nation's ability to identify where its advantages lie and how best to exploit them. Consider an example from the Truman administration. After the Soviet Union detonated its atomic bomb, a revised U.S. strategic assessment—the famous NSC-68—moved away from the previous emphasis on Soviet subversion and political warfare, and instead stressed the role of military capabilities in countering the Soviet threat.<sup>30</sup> This change generated significant debate. Chip Bohlen, one of the so-called “Wise Men,”<sup>31</sup> argued that the Soviet leadership's top priority was to preserve their regime, and that this fact was being ignored by American leaders.<sup>32</sup> Bohlen's point was that differing assessments of Soviet motives—whether the Soviet leadership prioritized its expansionist objectives over its survival—had very different implications for strategy, and for how the United States would organize itself to respond to the Soviet threat. Ultimately, Bohlen's argument prevailed, and U.S. strategy retained a major focus on Soviet political warfare and subversion, while accepting a deterrent posture against the coming Soviet nuclear threat in the belief that Moscow would not start a war that could cause the regime to lose internal control.<sup>33</sup>

Unfortunately, the United States does not currently enjoy the kind of expertise regarding how its rivals think and operate that it did during the early stages of the Cold War. Developing a cadre of experts on militant Islamic groups, China, and other key states of concern (e.g., Iran) is an essential element of any serious effort at strategy formulation.

### ***Barrier Three: Non-Believers***

For many national security decision-makers, the importance of high-quality strategic planning is obvious. Others raise issues of feasibility. As Richard Betts points out, “Because strategy is necessary . . . does not mean it is possible.”<sup>34</sup>

Skepticism over the value of strategy and the possibility of doing it well is seen at the highest levels of America's national security establishment. For example, President Clinton's National Security Advisor, Sandy Berger, put little stock in the government's strategic planning efforts, declaring that “most ‘grand strategies’ were after-the-fact rationales developed to explain successful ad hoc decisions.” Berger went on to say that he preferred to “worry about today today and tomorrow tomorrow.”<sup>35</sup> This kind of skepticism is not limited to a particular individual, a particular administration, or even a particular party.

Despite such objections, the importance of strategic planning cannot be overstated. As Betts argues, “Without strategy, there is no rationale for how force will achieve purposes worth

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<sup>30</sup> Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), pp. 19-20.

<sup>32</sup> Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, p. 28.

<sup>33</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States 1951*, Vol. 1, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977), 177-78. Cited in Bowie and Immerman, 31.

<sup>34</sup> Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?” *International Security*, (Fall 2000): p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> R.W. Apple, “A Domestic Sort with Global Worries,” *New York Times*, (25 August 1999): A10.

the price in blood and treasure.”<sup>36</sup> Indeed, when lives and livelihoods are at stake, how can one rationalize *not* “worrying about tomorrow?” Betts also arrives at perhaps the best explanation for why strategy is often given short shrift: “Sensible strategy is not impossible, *but it is usually difficult.*”<sup>37</sup> [Emphasis added]

### ***Barrier Four: Failure to Recognize that Resources are Limited***

Developing national security strategy is a challenging task because in order to craft strategy based on asymmetric advantages, one must take into account the limitations on resources. Were there no limitations on resources, there would be no need for strategy, since one could pursue all possible courses of action to the maximum extent possible. This, however, is not the case for the U.S. Government. In order to develop sound, realistic strategy, one must recognize the constraints posed by limited resources.

Unfortunately, the Defense Department’s approach to its Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System (PPBS) illustrates the opposite outlook on resource management; the PPBS actually encourages the armed Services to ignore budgetary constraints. How so? Through “cut drills” that are intended to reconcile the gap between the defense program and defense resources. In a cut drill, the Service that has thought through how to apply limited means to achieve its assigned mission—keeping its program in line with anticipated resources—is likely to be penalized, while a Service whose program is substantially short of the resources needed for its execution is rewarded with additional funds. Not surprisingly, this is done because the tendency on the part of the Defense Department’s senior leaders is to assist those who are most in need. The lesson for the Services is clear: put in for as large a program and force structure as you can, and hope to sustain as much as you can in the cut drill. While this may make sense from a narrow, bureaucratic perspective, it hardly makes for a sound national strategy. Instead of encouraging the Services to identify the sources of asymmetric advantage, it compels them to focus on their shortcomings. As Andrew Marshall noted, “The big problem in the Defense Department is that the minute you start categorizing our strengths and advantages then the Services faint, because their sales pitch on the Hill is [focused on] our weaknesses, or the strengths of the other side.”<sup>38</sup>

### ***Barrier Five: Bureaucratic Hostility***

Assuming senior national security decision-makers believe in the value of strategic planning, and understand the role that limited resources must play, they will likely encounter yet another barrier in the form of the bureaucracy. Even the casual student of organizational behavior knows that bureaucracies tend to have their own agendas, which typically offer stiff resistance to leaders’ attempts to enact change.

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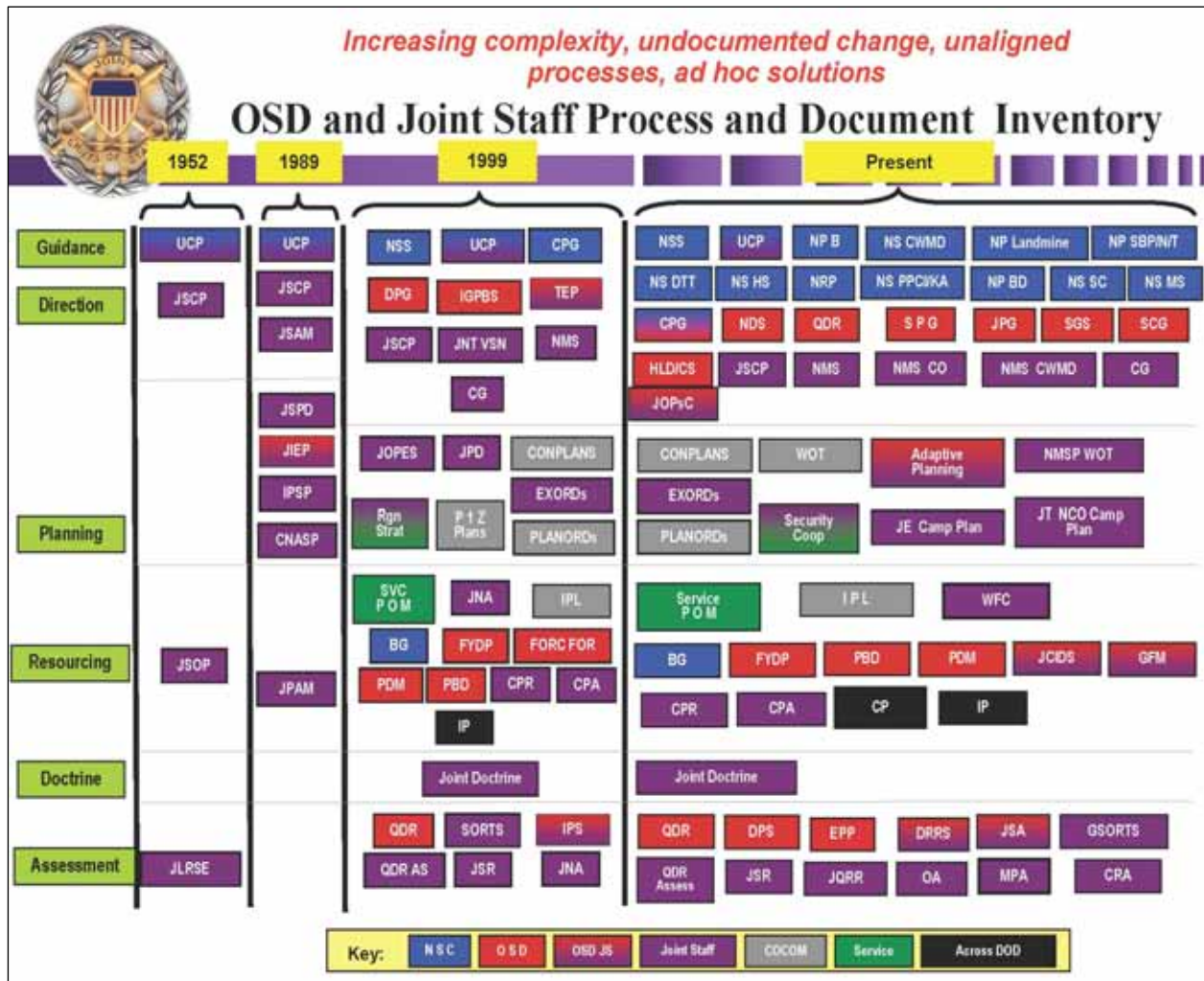
<sup>36</sup> Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?” p. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 46-48.

<sup>38</sup> Watts, “Memorandum for the Record,” p. 7.

In the Defense Department alone, the effort to develop strategy has become so cumbersome and convoluted that it is accepted by the Pentagon itself to be one of “increasing complexity, undocumented change, unaligned processes, [and] ad hoc solutions.” (See Figure 1.) The Defense Department’s approach to developing and executing strategy has been reduced to a process involving a cast of hundreds if not thousands of individuals, often working diligently in the absence of active participation by the Pentagon’s senior leadership.

**Figure 1: OSD and Joint Staff Process and Document Inventory**



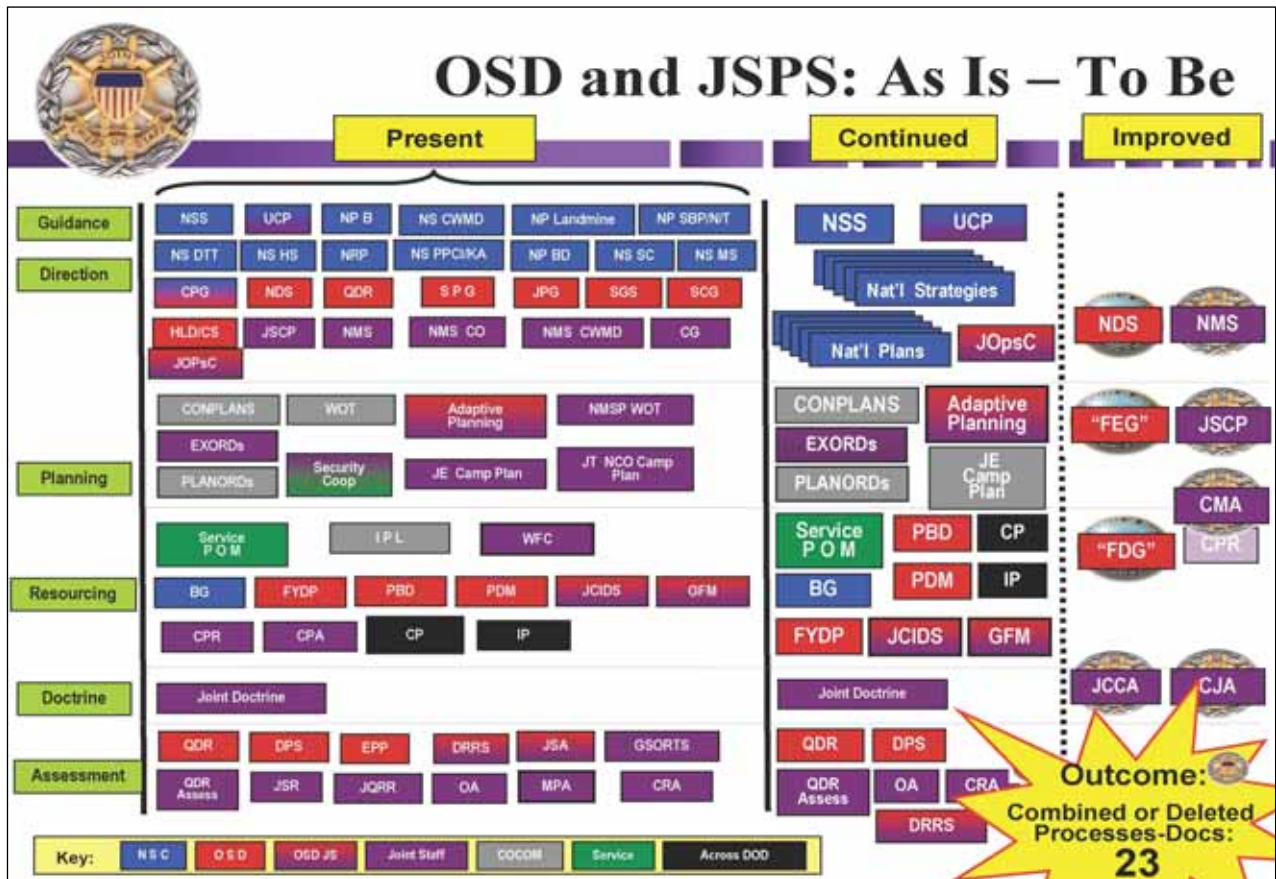
In examining Figure 1, which lays out the staff process and associated document inventory of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and Joint Staff, we find that even if the process is limited to just those aspects that relate to strategic planning—that is, those associated with “direction” and “planning”—one cannot help but notice how many new bureaucratic organizations, documents, and processes there are now compared with only twenty years ago. When the present situation is compared to 1952 and the planning structure that existed when a successful Cold War strategy was developed and many of its basic elements put in place, the implications are nothing short of devastating, especially when one considers the harsh

critiques leveled by many members of the strategic studies community at the United States' current strategic competence. Here it really is the case that more is less.

Indeed, strategy is best done not by bureaucracies but by small teams of individuals—*highly capable individuals*. A strategy is measured neither by the pound, nor by the number of individuals who participate in its development. It is measured by the number of good insights—the number of asymmetric advantages identified, along with a sense of how they can best be applied to the problem at hand. When asked how strategy ought to be formulated, Richard Rumelt responded that what is needed is

A small group of smart people . . . Doing this kind of work is hard. A strategic insight is essentially the solution to a puzzle. Puzzles are solved by individuals or very tight-knit teams.<sup>39</sup>

**Figure 2: OSD and JSPS**



<sup>39</sup> Dan P. Lovallo and Lenny T. Mendonca, “Strategy’s Strategist: An Interview with Richard Rumelt,” *The McKinsey Quarterly*, August 2007.

Henry Mintzberg reinforces the benefits of Eisenhower's approach in observing that formal planning (i.e., planning by large bureaucracies), by its very nature, "has been and always will be dependent on the preservation and rearrangement of established categories . . . . But real strategic change requires not merely rearranging the established categories, but inventing new ones."<sup>40</sup> By "new ones" Mintzberg is referring to a group working toward identifying (or "inventing") the insights that lead to the identification, creation and application of asymmetric advantages.

There is some evidence that senior Defense Department leaders recognize the problem and have streamlined their strategic planning process. The new process provides for a significant reduction in the number of planning documents and processes. Yet even the "continued and improved" version (see Figure 2) is far more bureaucratically process-oriented than that which existed during Truman and Eisenhower's time, even when one (again) limits the focus solely to those aspects dealing with "guidance" and "direction."

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What might be done to overcome these barriers? To begin, the president must be convinced of the value of strategy and strategic planning. The active involvement of the nation's commander in chief and chief diplomat is essential to overcoming the barriers discussed. Failure of the president to take an active role could cause the strategic planning process to fall prey to narrow bureaucratic or organizational interests, leading to a suboptimal strategy, or no strategy at all.

Contemporary national security decision-makers could also benefit from the success of Eisenhower's NSC structure, which provided strong incentives to engage in serious discussions of strategy. Under this structure, the president chaired the NSC meetings and led the discussion, "asking for views around the table so as to bring out conflicts" and differences among the members. Attendance was mandatory, as reflected in the fact that during the four-year period when Robert Cutler was Eisenhower's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, the president missed only six of 179 NSC meetings.<sup>41</sup> To ensure a rich discussion, Eisenhower strictly limited the number of individuals who could participate, typically to eight.

To support the president and his senior national security lieutenants, Eisenhower also created a Planning Board, which developed policy papers to be considered by the NSC. The reason for the board, he explained to the NSC members, was that

You [National Security] Council members...simply do not have the time to do all that needs to be done in thinking out the best decisions regarding the national security. Someone must therefore do much of this thinking for you.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Henry Mintzberg, "The Fall and Rise of Strategic Planning," *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 1994, p. 109.

<sup>41</sup> Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, p. 91.

<sup>42</sup> *Idem*.

A revived Planning Board's purpose should be similar to that originally intended for the State Department's Policy Planning Staff—to look ahead, beyond the vision of the operating officers caught in the smoke and crises of current battles, to anticipate future challenges and outline ways to meet them. In doing this, the staff should also do something else: “constantly reappraise what was being done . . . [given that] policies acquired their own momentum and went on after the reasons that inspired them had ceased.”<sup>43</sup>

Eisenhower adopted a similar perspective, noting that “[S]ituations of actual or probable conflict change so rapidly and the weaponry of modern military establishments increase their destructiveness at such a bewildering speed [that the president] will always need the vital studies, advice, and counsel that only a capable and well-developed staff organization can give him.”<sup>44</sup> Dean Acheson, who succeeded George Marshall as Secretary of State, observed that, designed in this manner and populated with chiefs like George Kennan and Paul Nitze, the Policy Planning Staff “was of inestimable value as the stimulator, and often deviser, of the most basic policies.”<sup>45</sup> The Planning Board's members were nominated by the NSC principals and appointed by the president. The individuals comprising a new Planning Board should be senior officials who are exceptional strategists, since they are, in effect, the small group of people tasked with identifying the insights upon which asymmetric advantages are derived and strategies formed. For example, the Defense Department might assign the director of its Office of Net Assessment to serve on a revived Planning Board, while the State Department might designate the head of its Policy Planning Staff.<sup>46</sup> The quality of the information and analysis these key individuals present to the NSC would greatly influence that body's ability to make good strategic decisions.<sup>47</sup>

To ensure that the Planning Board members were not beholden to their departments or agencies, Eisenhower made it clear that their mission was not “to reach solutions which represent merely a compromise of departmental positions.”<sup>48</sup> Reestablishing a Planning Board could, along with persistent presidential involvement in the formulation of strategy, go a long way toward improving the quality of U.S. strategy.

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<sup>43</sup> Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1969), p. 214.

<sup>44</sup> Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, p. 83.

<sup>45</sup> Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, pp. 214-15.

<sup>46</sup> The Policy Planning Staff was established by George Kennan at the direction of Secretary of State George C. Marshall to provide “a source of independent policy analysis and advice for the Secretary of State.” Its first assignment was to design the Marshall Plan. It also played a major role in developing one of the Cold War's seminal strategy documents, known as NSC-68. The Office of Net Assessment was established in 1973 by Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger. It serves as the Defense Secretary's internal think tank and has played an important role in a number of important strategy issues, including the Maritime Strategy, the Strategic Defense Initiative, the Competitive Strategies Initiative, and the Revolution in Military Affairs. Andrew W. Marshall has led the office since its inception.

<sup>47</sup> The NSC Planning Board met on Tuesday and Friday afternoons and comprised officials from the agencies with permanent or standing representation on the Council, as well as advisors from the JCS and CIA. The NSC, chaired by the president, met regularly on Thursday mornings. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/history.html#eisenhower> (accessed 23 December 2008).

<sup>48</sup> Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, p. 91.

To ensure the Planning Board has access to the best information and the best minds, both in and out of government, it should be able to task any department or agency for information and have the capacity to reach outside of government for expert advice and support.<sup>49</sup> What it should not be able to do is outsource its critical thinking and analysis. It may be prudent to establish temporary advisory boards to address specific issues of great importance to support the Planning Board's work. If so, these supporting groups should be comprised of individuals who are among the most eminent in their field.

There are at least two threats to the effective operation of the Policy Planning Board: one is that its talented staff will be drawn into day-to-day operations; the other is that it will become a compiler of information as opposed to a thinking body.<sup>50</sup> Eisenhower sought to solve the first problem by such means as prohibiting its members from accompanying their principals on overseas trips except when absolutely necessary so they could "stay on the job and supply a continuity of planning and thought."<sup>51</sup> The second problem might best be addressed by eliminating staff who do not spend their time focusing on matters of strategy.

There is also the matter of executing the NSC's decisions. If the bureaucracy is unable to advance its own agenda during strategy formulation, it will work to enforce its will in strategy execution. We turn again to the success of the Eisenhower administration: To ensure that decisions based on the Planning Board's efforts were implemented, Eisenhower established the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) which would, at regular intervals (of three to six months), prepare progress reports for review by the NSC.<sup>52</sup>

The OCB met regularly on Wednesday afternoons at the State Department. Its members included the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Directors of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), and the Special Assistants to the President for National Security Affairs and Security Operations Coordination. The NSC's action papers were assigned to an OCB team for follow-up.<sup>53</sup> A similar organization could support the new president's efforts to ensure his key policy decisions were being implemented as intended.

Aaron Friedberg's suggestion that these revived boards be placed under the direction of a National Security Advisor for Planning and Coordinating makes great sense, given that the

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<sup>49</sup> At Eisenhower's direction, Robert Cutler, the National Security Advisor, organized "study groups" of senior strategists, to include those who had served in the Truman administration, such as Paul Nitze. These groups provided individual and collective advice, while also reviewing past NSC papers, hearing the testimony of experts, and soliciting memoranda from experienced leaders with knowledge of strategy, such as George Marshall, Charles "Chip" Bohlen and Robert Lovett. Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, p. 87.

<sup>50</sup> Acheson saw these as the two major "distractions" confronting the State Department's Policy Planning Staff. Acheson, 214.

<sup>51</sup> Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, p. 91.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>53</sup> "History of the National Security Council, 1947-1997," The White House. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/history.html#eisenhower> (accessed 23 December 2008).



modern-day National Security Advisor has become enmeshed in the day-to-day activities of government. As I understand the PNSR report, this position might be similar to the report's "Director of National Security" position.

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As the PNSR report notes, the barriers to developing and executing sound national security strategy are many, and they are formidable. An argument can be made that the United States Government not only has lost the ability to do strategy well, but that many senior officials do not understand what strategy is. Despite these barriers, the benefits of crafting good strategies are so great—and the potential risks posed by ignoring strategy so deleterious—that they merit a strong push by senior U.S. national security decision-makers, the president above all, to overcome them. Although this recommendation is modest when compared to the PNSR's comprehensive approach, it has the advantage of being relatively easy to accomplish, *if* the president wants to move in this direction. Revitalizing strategic planning at the highest levels of the government with a contemporary version of President Eisenhower's NSC, to include the Planning and Operations Coordination Boards, could be an important first step toward achieving the laudable goals set forth by the PNSR.