



Chapter 1

Introduction

Is the 21st-century security environment very different from that of the 20th century?

Are the changes we are seeing now temporary or are they likely to persist into the coming decades?

Are the capabilities the U.S. developed to manage the challenges of the 20th century adequate for those of the 21st century?

The authors and contributors in this volume believe that the 21st-century environment is substantially different; that the trends discernable now will persist for decades; and that there are gaps in U.S. security capabilities that need to be filled.

There is no universal agreement on these issues. Inside and outside the U.S. government and in military and civilian think tanks and universities a debate about them is underway. The focus is on the specifics and likely persistence of the global environment, and the tools or capabilities that are needed to manage it.

The dominant view in the U.S. executive branch is that the world now is “unpredictable” and that the U.S. should be prepared to address many different types of conflicts from conventional to irregular to diplomatic engagement.¹ Those who subscribe to this view believe it is impossible to predict or anticipate what trends and threats will predominate, and therefore that the needed capabilities over the next twenty or more years cannot be prioritized in organizational or budgetary planning.

1. Quadrennial Defense Review Report, February 2010, U.S. Department of Defense, Washington, DC.

However, some of the nation's most senior leaders have expressed concern about the need for adaptation to today's realities. They have made declaratory statements about the need to supplement U.S. capabilities, particularly to address irregular challenges. This has resulted in some enhancements in capabilities and professionalism; but important gaps and deficiencies still exist.²

There are signs that this may be changing. Many in and out of the executive branch and Congress share the view that the environment is sufficiently predictable to focus on new and enhanced capabilities for irregular conflict. There are also imaginative military combatant commanders and civilian officers who—within the policy guidelines and resources that have been made available to them—recognize that the U.S. needs new capabilities, or at least has to adapt traditional missions and rules to fit into the contemporary environment. Some of them seek to develop or adapt U.S. doctrine for general U.S. applicability. Others are working hard to support Host Nation's attempts to prevail in specific geopolitical conflict zones—such as Afghanistan and Mexico.³

Others in think tanks, foundations, academe, the media, as well as former security practitioners are also seeking to define with more precision the parameters of the contemporary security environment in order to identify priorities and capabilities to match the environment. Similar efforts are underway in and out of the governments of foreign democracies such as the UK, France, and Mexico.



Since 2008, the National Strategy Information Center research team (who authored this volume) has been working with current and former leading practitioners from democracies around the world. The focus of the inquiry has been on whether the 20th-century security paradigm—with its emphasis on wars fought between states—was appropriate for the 21st-century environment. The members of this International Practitioner Working Group are listed in Appendix 2. These creative, highly qualified individuals have

2. See Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, Speech to the Association of the U.S. Army, Washington, DC, October 5, 2009; Speech to the Economic Club of Chicago, July 16, 2009; Defense Budget Recommendation Statement, Washington, DC, April 6, 2009; "A Balanced Strategy: Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February, 2009. For a journalistic account of the evolution of thinking on this issue among top commanders, see Greg Jaffe and David Cloud, *The Fourth Star: Four Generals and the Epic Struggle for the Future of the United States Army*, New York, NY: Crown, 2009.

3. See, for example, an article written by the commander of U.S. Special Forces Command, which has responsibility both for kinetic strike forces and for U.S. combined foreign security assistance programs in more than 60 countries. Eric T. Olson, "A Balanced Approach to Irregular War," *International Security Affairs*, No. 16, Spring 2009.

shared their firsthand experience in the contemporary security environment—all having held senior-level positions in their nation’s military, diplomatic, or intelligence services. They were invited to participate in the group based on their recent contributions to the development of effective capabilities in their own countries and regions. All have distinguished records of command responsibility, and have enhanced their country’s security policies in a manner consistent with democratic principles and the rule of law.

Together they identified 21st-century actors, their visions, strategic cultures, and techniques. The team also examined effective practices from U.S. and foreign experiences. The named authors are responsible for the conclusions expressed in this publication.

The first part of this volume puts forward the main propositions, elements, and characteristics of the anticipated global security environment, and explains why they are likely to persist for decades to come. The second part focuses on capabilities that will be needed to manage this environment, and identifies gaps or deficiencies in the U.S. “arsenal.”

The main thesis is that we need to adapt the propositions that guided the U.S. in the 20th century. The principal lens through which we then understood that environment was the behavior of states and the traditional instruments of statecraft—war conducted by states, diplomacy, and intelligence by states. At a minimum, the state-centric security paradigm is in need of major amendment.

The full implications of the contemporary security environment are yet to emerge. Surprises and unanticipated events are to be expected along the way. However, some trends are clear; patterns are discernable in the security environment now that will persist for years to come. The authors posit that many of the key assumptions, perspectives, and hypotheses that guided our understanding of the 20th-century global security environment are outdated, and, by implication, we need to build the capabilities and tools to manage the anticipated environment.

We reached these conclusions by identifying the key propositions that guided U.S. understanding of the 20th century. (See Appendix 1). Then we identified the propositions that we believe explain much of the contemporary environment and provide us with a much better picture of contemporary reality. *First*, we (a) identify who or what were the major actors in the 20th century, and then (b) compare and contrast them with those actors at play now, and finally (c) project which actors are likely to be the key players for the next few decades.

We also identify the key characteristics of the major sets of contemporary actors—state and nonstate—and believe them to be both qualitatively and quantitatively different from most of their 20th century counterparts. We

now face many more and heterogeneous actors, particularly scores of fragile and failing states and the proliferation of armed nonstate and super-empowered actors. Added complexity arises from the difficulties of identifying the shading between state and nonstate actors. Even without the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction—which we believe is likely—the environment has become much more complex and we need to keep track of many more players and their interactions.

Second, we examine the visions and strategic cultures of the major state and nonstate players. By strategic culture we mean the framework or shared beliefs, preferences, and modes of action of the leadership of the major actors on the world scene. (For the definition of this term and others used in this volume, see *Glossary*.) We found that although there are significant individual differences, there are also significant similarities in the cultures of the major sets of diverse actors. There are elements of a shared vision among the world's stable democracies—although they differ considerably on how to pursue their goals.

Similarly, the world's major competent authoritarian states share a world view to an extent. Most are revisionists who want to “revise” the balance of power in their region so that they are predominant. Foremost among them are Iran, China, and Russia. They seek regional hegemony, if not global influence. They reject U.S. influence in their region, and what they perceive as the U.S.-led global, liberal world order.

As far as can be discerned, these regimes do not seek conventional military confrontation with the U.S. or other major developed democracies, at least at present. Rather, they are interested both in strengthening their military and economic capabilities as well as using the territory and resources of other, weaker states and proxies, through a variety of irregular techniques, to achieve regional hegemony and reduce U.S. influence in their regions and perhaps beyond. That is not to imply that these regimes do not also constitute serious conventional threats. They do, and the United States must continue to maintain, to varying degrees, a robust response capability with the full panoply of means.

Then there are more than a hundred fragile and failing state actors, where conditions are unlikely to improve in the short term. About half are democratic and half are led by authoritarian elites. Most are struggling to survive, but diverge on how to attain any kind of stability. Some of the democratically oriented leaders courageously stake out their vision and strategy. There are hundreds, if not thousands of leaders and activists in these countries battling for the future of their countries—as presidential security advisors and in the police, military, and security services, as well as in the schools, media, and religious institutions and other centers of moral authority. They reject overt

or covert alliances of convenience with authoritarian regimes as well as corrupt and violent elements in their region. Others, however, believe that their fledgling democratic institutions are too weak to resist crime and corruption and the forces of authoritarian elites.

Another set of actors are the diverse armed groups, some with regional and even global capabilities and influence. Some have grandiose visions that they attempt to impose on others—nationally, regionally, and even globally. Others have more limited visions and value systems. They remain primarily interested in achieving sufficient control over particular territory so that they can govern themselves and exclude or eliminate their adversaries, governments, and other armed groups. Almost without exception they are opposed to pluralist democracy, rule of law principles, and international law.

There is also a third set of propositions that explain contemporary patterns—the instruments and techniques employed by the diverse groups of actors to achieve their objectives and manage conflict.

What is clearly a characteristic of this era is that authoritarian regimes and armed groups are likely to continue to use irregular techniques as their instruments of choice. They can be cunning, nimble, adaptable, and creative. They realize that they cannot prevail or even survive for long if they directly confront the overwhelming firepower of their major adversaries. So, as have others who have confronted this dilemma in the past, they seek out asymmetric, nontraditional, indirect, or irregular violent and nonviolent techniques and coalitions to neutralize the strengths of their adversaries. And sometimes they prevail.⁴

One of the major techniques used by these authoritarian regimes is exploitation of state and nonstate proxies, surrogates, and diasporas near and far from their shores to build centralized and decentralized alliances and coalitions of convenience. Other irregular means are also being developed and tested. For example, states with resources and skills are working on offensive cyber warfare capabilities to neutralize the now vital infrastructure and will of adversaries. Others are developing relatively inexpensive techniques to paralyze key global and regional transportation and communication hubs, disrupting the supply and prices of key commodities and causing havoc in the democracies. In this globalized, networked, yet decentralized world, micro groups and relatively small actors can cause macro damage.

Most of the world's weak states have few capabilities to counter the complex array of centralized and decentralized security challenges that other

4. For example, it was hard to imagine in the early 1980s that Iran, in combination with Lebanese Shia elements would be able to establish a political/military armed group that would emerge as a principal actor in Lebanese affairs; that this group would become a player in other parts of the world, including in the conflict with Israel, or that it would pose a challenge well beyond the region.

states, armed groups, and political movements pose. In particular, armed groups from within and without now compete both with government and armed group rivals by developing both underground organization, and also sometimes by creating parallel or shadow governmental structures, combined with terror and violence. They continue to raise sizeable funds from the local and global criminal economy—using extortion, kidnapping, and trafficking in drugs, arms, people, and counterfeit goods—amounting to several hundred billion dollars per year. For example, criminal organizations in Mexico alone are estimated to garner US\$90 billion, more than the resources of the Afghan Taliban and Al Qaeda combined. They also have proven adept at securing financial and other types of support—technology, arms, diplomatic support, protection, covert intelligence, publicity, and legitimacy, from authoritarian and corrupt elites and from nonstate, super-empowered individuals and groups with money and/or technology.

There is little agreement within liberal democracies over which instruments and techniques should be used to manage these challenges. Some in the U.S. continue to view conflict and war as “owned” by the defense establishment, with an admixture of civilian support, diplomacy, and intelligence. They still rely basically on deterrence and an enhanced U.S. military with a capability to fight conventional wars on at least two continents at the same time. While they view special forces and irregular conflict capabilities as necessary, they are reluctant to endorse the need for permanent dedicated units and special skill sets for irregular conflict. A few stable democracies have robust regional military capabilities—France, for example—but on their own few can prevail in conventional or even irregular war outside their own borders. Most other democracies have decided to make do with limited conventional, deterrent, and irregular forces.

However, in the U.S. and in other democracies there are those practitioners, specialists, and scholars who have come to believe that in addition to conventional and deterrent forces there needs to be a broader and much more effective array of methods and practices both to prevent and to prevail in irregular conflicts. Thus far, some elements of such capabilities have been developed by the U.S., the UK, Australia, and others, and some have actually been deployed abroad. It is too early to ascertain whether these kinds of techniques will become a major characteristic of security policy in democracies in the 21st century.

The major propositions of an adapted paradigm that explain the contemporary security environment of the 21st century are listed in Appendix 1. Evidence and sources to substantiate each of these propositions can be found in the Research Working Papers section on National Strategy Information Center's website at www.strategycenter.org. The propositions were also sub-

ject to the review, critique, and refinement of the International Practitioner Working group, comprising diverse experiences in both the late 20th-century and early 21st-century environment as managers of their military, diplomatic, and intelligence services of democracies in Europe, Australia, Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas.

These propositions, empirical evidence, and the experience of these practitioners add up to another way of “seeing,” understanding, and making sense of many apparently disparate activities in different parts of the world. Hence we call this an “adapted paradigm” (See *Glossary*).

However, this is not a complete replacement; there are still important elements of the state-centric 20th-century paradigm present, which must be taken into account. States, particularly the developed and competent ones, are still major actors. Deterrence, conventional forces, and the traditional instruments of statecraft are still significant. But the world has changed. The 21st century is different. Hence the need for self-conscious adaptation in our cognitive “lenses.” A summary and synthesis of the Adapted Paradigm is presented in chapter 2.

To highlight further the main contours of this adapted security environment, chapter 3 includes a comparison of the Adapted Paradigm with the 2010 U.S. Department of Defense Quadrennial Review (QDR). This comprehensive review mandated by the Congress every four years is intended to present the department’s overall consensus review of the global security environment and draw implications for U.S. defense policy, priorities, and capabilities in the near term and more distant future. The QDR takes months to prepare, and draws on senior staff from all the military services and their civilian leaders, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Secretary of Defense. It is not an interagency document, nor does it carry the president’s official seal of approval. Yet the Defense Department’s QDR usually reflects the main strands in the thinking, or center of gravity, of the most important and certainly the largest and most resourced U.S. security institution (and probably in the world). It is usually in sync with presidential thinking.

Comparing the previous QDR with the current one is revealing. In 2006, the administration had begun to shift from the 20th-century state-centric approach to U.S. security. For the first time, the QDR identified irregular conflict and war (not only global terrorism) as a major factor in world affairs, and a driving priority in U.S. security. In subsequent statements, lectures, and testimony, Secretary of Defense Gates returned to and reiterated these themes, and he continued to do so after his appointment and confirmation in the Obama administration in late 2009. The Joint Chiefs of Staff also took steps to develop doctrine to address irregular conflict. Some important U.S. initiatives and the development of capabilities matching this irregular em-

phasis continued even into the spring of 2010.⁵ However, in the 2010 QDR there is no specific recognition that irregular war is the predominant form of conflict facing the United States. Further, as some keen observers have noted, there is no prioritization of defense challenges to prevent and prevail in the uncertain current and future environment.⁶ Rather, the 2010 QDR postulates an uncertain, fluid conflict environment, posing a multitude of threats—all of which must be prepared for simultaneously.

Although Secretary Gates has subsequently stated that dealing with “fractured or failing states is, in many ways the **main security challenge of our time**,”⁷ and he has repeatedly called for more civilian resources to help address this problem, there is little clarity, and prioritization, or the identification of specific new or adapted capabilities that might be developed. To some extent, the picture has become even more blurred.

This is making it difficult for its principal intended audience, the Congress and the American people—to “see” the main (but not exclusive) security challenge of our time, and to identify specific capabilities that the U.S. will need to meet its needs in this environment. The 2010 QDR provides support to both those who see the world primarily in 20th-century terms and capabilities, as well as those who see major changes in the 21st-century environment, and makes specific contemporary capabilities innovation more difficult.

At the same time, since 2009, Secretary of State Clinton has been calling for new civilian and foreign diplomatic capabilities to meet the demands of the contemporary global environment. The first major statement on the subject was issued in mid-December 2010, when the Department of State published its first-ever Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR). While this review makes little reference to the specific concept of irregular conflict, it does begin to address the lack of U.S. capabilities—particularly civilian skill sets and professionalism that are making it difficult for the U.S. to prevent and manage these security challenges.⁸ Thus, although there has been bipartisan consensus that the U.S. will need additional funding for foreign security assistance, it is far from clear what spe-

5. Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept, Version 2.0, U.S. Department of Defense, April 2010.

6. See for example, Statement of Ike Skelton (D-MO), Chair, House Armed Services Committee, hearing to review the 2010 QDR on February 4, 2010. The QDR, he observed, required a force “capable of being all things in all contingencies,” making it difficult to set priorities.

7. See Robert M. Gates, “Helping Others Defend Themselves: The Future of U.S. Security Assistance,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2010. (Emphasis added.)

8. See <http://www.state.gov/s/dmr/qddr/>. (See also, Hilary Rodham Clinton, “Leading Through Civilian Power,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December, 2010, which previewed the content.) The first chapter of the 291-page document addresses “Trends Reshaping the Global Contexts of U.S. Foreign Policy.” This and succeeding chapters call for substantial quantitative and qualitative changes in personnel, resources, and management of U.S. diplomacy.

cific new capabilities or skill sets are being called for or are to be developed and funded.

The second focus of the volume is on the specific capabilities that the U.S. requires to manage and mitigate the threats and challenges described earlier. This adds up to a security agenda that needs to be addressed. Although much attention and resources have been committed to irregular conflict in the past ten years, significant gaps remain.

There are five important civilian and military capabilities that are “force multipliers” in the persistent conflicts we face over the next decades. These are intelligence dominance; security and stability, rule of law teams; strategic communication; political entrepreneurship; and military units with a combination of kinetic and stability functions.

Fortunately, some elements of each already exist. But the expertise is disparate, ad hoc, and not integrated. We need to develop the competency, organization, and skills to utilize and deploy units of Americans who are expert practitioners. These professionals would be specially recruited, receive specific training, have defined career paths with various specialties, be allocated financial and other resources, and in some cases employ sophisticated equipment.

Ideally, they would be authorized by the president and Congress with a chain of command and accountability. They would operate from home bases in the U.S. and be dispatched to conflict zones. Depending on the particular type of contingency, these units may be commanded by the Department of State or Defense and the regional military combatant commands, or by individual country ambassadors and embassy country teams.

There are currently few professionals specifically trained to undertake these tasks in either the Departments of State or Defense. Those who usually do so are employed on an ad hoc basis, often on temporary two-year assignments. Many are contractors. There are too few trained professionals with cultural, foreign, or linguistic expertise, who specialize in these subjects and too few units to perform these tasks on a regular basis.

The ad hoc approach, although it has at times resulted in some excellent improvisation—such as the Awakening Movement in Iraq—is insufficient. Policy statements from elected leaders and senior government officials have called for a version of these capabilities. Some are even partially funded but they are not functioning regularly as units and have not been institutionalized professionally.

Shaping the global security environment for the next several decades will require military, civilian, and intelligence operators with particular skills. We are at one of those crossroads in history. Just as horses were sent back to

the stables in 1914, and tanks became the new cavalry, a new set of tools, skill sets, and tactics need to be developed and employed.

The political, developmental, and local intelligence components of security cannot be relegated to the periphery as adjuncts to kinetic military force and diplomacy. They must be principal ingredients, not just adding the equivalent of vanilla to a recipe, but rather baking a whole new cake.

Aligning U.S. Capabilities to Security Challenges: The Security Agenda and Proposed Methods

The specific configuration and deployment of these capabilities will need to be adapted based on the specific political and security context or conflict zone in which the United States is engaged. Most conflicts will need advisory U.S. missions, involving limited U.S. presence on the ground—as has been the case in Pakistan, Mexico, and Colombia. Some may be war zones where the U.S. military is or was the main security force, as in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The advisory missions should be mainly preventative in scope, and not activated only in the wake of a crisis or major conflict. These missions would have as their objective assisting or building local capacity, particularly in fragile democracies, preferably before armed groups and/or authoritarians take advantage of them. These foreign “internal defense” missions should also aim to address the underlying weaknesses before they generate violent instability that spreads from local to regional and even global levels. Some elements of the required capabilities are lost U.S. skill sets, such as strategic communication, which was very effective at times during the Cold War. Others exist today but in ad hoc configurations.

However, the capabilities identified below will also be needed for larger missions to include those where U.S. military forces—combat brigades—are engaged in major population-centric security operations against one or more robust armed groups or the proxy movements of adversarial states such as Iran and its proxy, Lebanese Hezbollah.

Fortunately, establishing and building up these capabilities will not entail major additional budget commitments. In national security terms they are not big-ticket items like advanced technology, aircraft carriers, or more troop divisions. Their establishment will require more central coordination and some reorganization.