



The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review: Refocusing Priorities

Introduction

Complexity and uncertainty have characterized the international security environment for the past two decades and will likely continue to do so for the foreseeable future. The rise of new global powers is reshaping the international system. Globalization and rapidly advancing technology continue to empower new, often non-state, actors. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is an ongoing concern, and new security challenges—increasing demand for scarce resources, rapid urbanization, climate change, new disease strains and others—are arising.

The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report describes the security environment and America's role in the world to provide context for its examination of all the elements of the United States' national defense plans, programs and policies. The review is conducted in the year after each presidential election, allowing new administrations to write the document that will provide guidance for defense activities for the next four years. The report is submitted to Congress at the time of the President's February budget request. It outlines the strategy that the Department of Defense is pursuing to meet the challenges and fulfill the role described.

Strategy and Policy in the QDR

The strategy described in the QDR is very similar to that described in the previous two reviews. Many of the elements—countering asymmetric or hybrid threats,

performing counterterrorism operations, defending the homeland, assisting civil authorities, building partner capacity—have not changed in a decade. However, the latest QDR directs a major change in policy direction for DoD.

The report establishes four broad objectives as the most important priorities for the department:

- to prevail in today's wars;
- to prevent and deter conflict;
- to prepare to defeat adversaries and succeed in a wide range of contingencies; and
- to preserve and enhance the All-Volunteer Force.

This is the first time a QDR has listed winning current conflicts as a top priority. This change is intended to focus all efforts across the defense establishment, including training, acquisition and even research and development, on the needs of those fighting in the field today. Defense experts frequently debate the appropriate balance between investing in current needs and developing future capabilities. Secretary of Defense (SecDef) Robert M. Gates believes "that America's ability to deal with threats for years to come will depend importantly on our success in the current conflicts."¹

The inclusion of the fourth objective—to preserve and enhance the All-Volunteer Force—also raises issues of personnel recruitment, retention, readiness, quality of life and deployment tempo to a new level of importance.

¹ Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, "Defense Budget/QDR Announcement," 1 February 2010, <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1416>.



No previous QDR has addressed these issues as one of the pillars of national defense strategy. The new prominence reflects the recognition that defense personnel are the critical strategic assets that all other defense initiatives depend on. It addresses the stress that almost a decade of continuous, large-scale deployments has placed on the men and women who volunteer to serve, and on their families as well. Among other issues, the report describes “transitioning to sustainable rotation rates that protect the force’s long-term health,”² a reference to the Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) process now being implemented.

Sizing and Shaping the Force

Before its release, some speculated that the 2010 QDR would jettison the “two major regional wars” scenario previously used to size U.S. military forces. In fact, the report acknowledges the need for this level of capability but rejects the scenario as too limiting. “[I]t is no longer appropriate to speak of ‘major regional conflicts’ as the sole or even the primary template for sizing, shaping, and evaluating U.S. forces,” the report says.³ Instead, a variety of scenarios, including one involving two major regional aggressors, are examined to determine the right mix of forces and capabilities to meet U.S. defense needs. Greater emphasis is placed on forward stationing, peacetime engagement and building partner capacity than in past years; those activities have been factored into the force planning construct.

Reflecting the renewed emphasis on the current force, the guidance for the evolution of the future force is given less space than in past reviews. The QDR endorses the Army’s concept of preparing for full-spectrum operations but prescribes for U.S. ground forces a “continued focus on capabilities to conduct effective and sustained counterinsurgency, stability, and counterterrorist operations alone and in concert with partners.”⁴ The report also calls for increased capacity of special operations forces, growth of key enablers and more and better enabling systems, such as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets.

The Army will convert one brigade combat team (BCT) from a heavy to a Stryker configuration to provide

“greater flexibility and agility,”⁵ and several more BCTs may be so converted in the future. Saying “[v]ertical lift has been indispensable to successful . . . operations,” the report calls for increased availability of rotary-wing assets.⁶ The Army will add two new combat aviation brigades, one built from existing, separate formations and another from scratch.

Tradeoffs are necessary to afford these enhancements, and the QDR describes decisions made in the past two budget deliberations, such as the restructuring of the Future Combat Systems (FCS) program, as the difficult choices needed to refocus scarce resources on top priorities. “More such tradeoffs could be necessary in the future,” notes the report.⁷

New and Ongoing Initiatives

The QDR report describes a series of initiatives to rebalance the force and implement the defense strategy. The initiatives are organized into six categories that together outline the direction that the DoD is moving:

- Defend the United States and support civil authorities at home.
- Succeed in counterinsurgency, stability and counterterrorism operations.
- Build the security capacity of partner states.
- Deter and defeat aggression in anti-access environments.
- Prevent proliferation and counter weapons of mass destruction.
- Operate effectively in cyberspace.

Many of these are enduring concerns that appear in every QDR, their importance never waning. However, the last entry in the list represents a new emphasis on an emerging issue. Although past QDR reports have mentioned cyberspace as an area of interest, none have given it such prominence or dealt with it in such depth. The initiatives described in this area are still rather vague, a reflection of the youth and highly technical nature of cyberspace defense. But DoD has recognized cyberspace as a new global domain, alongside the land, sea, air and space domains, and it is improving capabilities and capacity to

² Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, February 2010, p. 45, http://www.defense.gov/qdr/images/QDR_as_of_12Feb10_1000.pdf.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

defend it.⁸ In June 2009, the SecDef directed the creation of U.S. Cyber Command, a sub-unified command under U.S. Strategic Command that may be made an independent unified command in the future. The Army is planning for Army Forces Cyber Command, which will be the service component command for cyberspace.

Three other areas of ongoing concern are addressed. A section on “Taking Care of People” expands on plans to achieve the objective of preserving and enhancing the All-Volunteer Force and gives those personnel issues more space than in previous QDRs. In addition to standard issues of recruiting, training and retention, issues such as medical care, dependent care and quality of life are stressed as important to being able to recruit and retain an effective volunteer force.

Sections on “Strengthening Relationships” and “Reforming How We Do Business” treat those issues similarly to past QDRs. Improving interagency cooperation is emphasized, as is working with partners from other nations to prevent conflict. Among other reforms, the report calls for institutionalizing the rapid acquisition processes that were used to acquire critical battlefield needs such as the Mine-Resistant Ambush-Protected (MRAP) vehicle and the MRAP All-Terrain Vehicle (M-ATV). Issues of energy use and climate change make their first QDR appearance with four pages of discussion.

Implications for the Army

Many Army initiatives are endorsed as important contributors to overall defense strategy. The shift to preparing for full-spectrum operations and managing deployment with the ARFORGEN rotational cycle are both highlighted. The Army’s efforts to restore balance are recognized as strategically imperative to maintaining the All-Volunteer Force. Counterinsurgency and its inherent demands for manpower should precipitate a commensurate increase in endstrength; however, the QDR calls for increases only in certain areas and no increase in overall endstrength. It also deemphasizes modernization, citing the restructuring of FCS as an example of “direct[ing] resources away from lower-priority programs and activities so that more pressing needs [can] be addressed.”⁹

The 2010 QDR Report describes a world that remains volatile and dangerous and indicates that the United States will continue to pursue the same general strategy that it has used for the past decade. However, the report describes significant changes to the policies used to implement that strategy, with a new focus on prevailing in today’s wars, even at the expense of future capabilities. The QDR affirms and explains many of the changes that have been made to defense programs through the annual budget processes for Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011. And it establishes the Department of Defense’s top priorities and sets the direction that defense planning will take for the next four years.

Key Points

- Complexity and uncertainty characterize the international security environment.
- Prevailing in today’s wars is DoD’s top priority—even at the expense of investing in future capabilities; preserving and enhancing the All-Volunteer Force is also a high priority.
- Defense strategy includes full-spectrum operations and rotational deployment cycles.
- Force structure guidance does not include any increase in overall endstrength.
- Modernization programs are deemphasized.

⁸ For further discussion see Michèle Flournoy and Shawn Brimley, “The Contested Commons,” *U.S. Naval Institute. Proceedings*, July 2009, http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/story.asp?STORY_ID=1950.

⁹ *QDR Report*, February 2010, p. 40.



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