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How to Last Alone at the Top: US Strategic Planning for the Unipolar Era

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ABSTRACT This article investigates how key actors within the US defence policy community realigned their interests to forge a new consensus on the redirection of US defence strategy following the ‘peace shock’ they faced with the collapse of bipolarity. This consensus centred on the idea that achieving US security in the ‘age of uncertainty’ demanded overwhelming US military power, which was widely interpreted as necessitating military capabilities to fight multiple major theatre wars simultaneously against regional ‘Third World’ adversaries. This helped to preserve many of the principal pillars of US Cold War defence policy through deflecting calls for more radical organisational changes and deeper cuts to defence budgets.

KEY WORDS: US military power, Post-Cold War US defence policy, Major theatre wars

Against the backdrop of complexity and uncertainty that has characterised the international arena since the end of the Cold War, the principle that America’s contemporary and future security rests predominantly upon US military supremacy has attracted virtually universal support among US policymakers.¹ As an illustration of this trend, during the ‘unipolar’ era the United States has participated in numerous peacekeeping operations around the globe and has engaged in two regional counterinsurgency campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, in addition to fighting two short conventional military wars in Iraq. Yet throughout the past two decades the central premise of US strategic planning that has guided the structure, size and equipment of the US armed forces has been the need for the US to preserve and enhance its

¹See Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of US Diplomacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 2002), 125.

military capabilities in order to fight and win at least two conventional major theatre wars simultaneously against regional 'Third World' adversaries, and to guard against the emergence of a future peer competitor in conventional terms. This premise has been repeatedly confirmed under successive US presidential administrations, including those of George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and, most recently, Barack Obama.²

Understanding this sustained focus on the maintenance of overwhelming US hard power requires an examination of the remaking of US defence policy during the transition period as the Cold War came to a close, and how this project evolved over the course of the 1990s. This article aims to go beyond existing accounts of the origins of contemporary US security policy by closely examining the process of how US defence strategy evolved between Spring 1989 and the mid-1990s. In particular, the article traces the intense political struggles that drove US strategic planning during the 'interregnum' between the end of the Cold War and the start of the Global War on Terror after 11 September 2001.

The empirical focus of this article concentrates on a series of formal US defence reviews initiated by both the Executive and Legislative branches of American government during the administrations of George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. In US defence policymaking such reviews are an important instrument for developing and articulating a consensus on the general direction and shape of US defence policy. They are also the crucial mechanisms through which negotiation over a post-Cold War US defence strategy took place. As this article shows, rather than laying the foundations for a significant shift in US defence strategy in response to the far-reaching changes in the international security environment, these defence reviews provided a medium for political bargaining between key actors in the defence policymaking community which enabled the maintenance of core elements of the status quo. This bargaining process led to a rearticulation of actors' interests that in turn enabled a new strategic consensus to emerge that preserved many of the principal pillars of US Cold War defence policy, the linchpin of which was a shared belief in the need to maintain an absolute superiority in US military power.

The development of this new post-Cold War strategic consensus can be analytically separated into three phases between 1989 and the mid-1990s, which are discussed chronologically: (1) the formation of the contours of a new policy consensus; (2) the stabilisation of these ideas with the strengthening of an underlying strategic rationale for

²US Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review*, Briefing Slides and Fact Sheets (2010), <www.defense.gov/QDR/>.

the new approach; and (3) the embedding of the consensus by consolidating a new status quo that could resist the changing policy priorities of different Presidential administrations. As the article shows, this dynamic political process was shaped by the entrepreneurial behaviour of key actors in the wider US defence policy community to reframe how the country's national interests and strategic needs were understood.

Policy Entrepreneurs and Consensus Building

Defence policy actors tend to be most effective in neutralising opposition towards – and generating wider public support for – their policy goals if they can form a broad-based coalition with a large membership base. Yet the greater the number of actors involved in a defence coalition and the more horizontally dispersed coalition membership is within the wider US defence community, the less likely it is that participants are able to compromise their individual interests and orchestrate their actions in order to pursue a mutual goal.³ This means that any defence coalition faces a set of problems regarding the capacity for collective action that is common to other forms of interest groups, organised or not. To overcome this limitation, this article concentrates on the role of *policy entrepreneurs* and entrepreneurial behaviour (through policy initiatives proposed in formal defence policy reviews) for understanding how a range of defence policy actors were able to collectively influence the course of US defence policy in the aftermath of the Cold War.

While the concept of 'political entrepreneurs' has attracted scholarly attention in the study of public policymaking for more than three decades, a clear definition has yet to emerge.⁴ Generally, political entrepreneurs are identified retrospectively by their personal characteristics (including a competitive spirit, tenacity and persistence in facing negative odds, and ability to create, invent and exploit opportunities and to thrive under uncertainty) and through the range of functional roles they occupy in the policymaking process. These roles may include policy innovation, coordination of expectations, brokerage of ideas, rewarding or exchanging benefits and coercing support; as well as agenda setting, signalling electoral support, mobilisation of public

³Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 1965/1971).

⁴Michael Mintrom, *Policy Entrepreneurs and School Choice* (Washington DC: Georgetown UP 2000), ix.

opinion and generating media attention.⁵ For the purposes of this article, *policy* entrepreneurs are broadly defined as actors situated both inside and outside the formal policymaking process who have the ability to formulate a policy problem, interlink it with a desired policy solution, attract others to support the effort, bring it to the attention of policymaking institutions and incorporate the policy objective with the political agenda.⁶

Much of the existing literature on the role of political entrepreneurs within the making of public policy centres on their capacity to generate lasting policy change and institutional innovation.⁷ Yet 'change' *per se* is not a prerequisite for policy action to be characterised as 'entrepreneurial'. Unnecessarily limiting the application of the concept of policy entrepreneurs to their role in facilitating change essentially fails to capture significant facets of entrepreneurial influence on the wider policy agenda. In contrast to much of the existing scholarship on the influence of policy entrepreneurs, this article emphasises the importance of policy entrepreneurship in helping to solve the collective action and coordination problems that are inherent in the establishment and pursuit of mutual interests among potential defence coalition participants over time. As this article shows, these mutual interests may involve the objective of maintaining policy *continuity* as much as they involve introducing policy change – through facilitating a creative recombination of known policy elements and frames.

The specific focus here is on those members of the US defence community who engage in entrepreneurial behaviour through serving

⁵See, for example, Scott Ainsworth and Itai Sened, 'The Role of Lobbyists: Entrepreneurs with Two Audiences', *American Journal of Political Science* 37/3 (1993), 834–66; Dimitrios C. Christopoulos, 'Relational Attributes of Political Entrepreneurs: A Network Perspective', *Journal of European Public Policy* 13/5 (2006), 757–8; John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co 1984); Nathan W. Polsby, *Political Innovation in America: The Politics of Policy Innovation* (New Haven: Yale UP 1984); Nancy C. Roberts and Paula J. King, 'Policy Entrepreneurs: Their Activity Structure and Function in the Policy Process', *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 1/2 (1991), 147–75.

⁶See Richard C. Feiock and Jered B. Carr, 'Incentives, Entrepreneurs, and Boundary Change: A Collective Action Framework', *Urban Affairs Review* 36/3 (2001), 382–405; Brian D. Jones, *Reconceiving Decision-Making in Democratic Politics: Attention, Choice, and Public Policy* (Chicago: Chicago UP 1994); Roberts and King, 'Policy Entrepreneurs', 158–9, 168; Mintrom, *Policy Entrepreneurs and School Choice*; Michael Mintrom, 'Policy Entrepreneurs and the Diffusion of Innovation', *American Journal of Political Science* 41/3 (1997), 738–70; Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*.

⁷Caner Bakir, 'Policy Entrepreneurship and Institutional Change: Multilevel Governance of Central Banking Reform', *Governance* 22/4 (2009), 574.

as a communication link, intermediary, and policy diffuser because of their efforts in coalition building, generating consensus and attracting, coercing and coordinating policy support.⁸ As a consequence, this article places the process of generating policy ideas, formulating a vision and strategy, and making them part of the political agenda at the centre of US defence policymaking. The study does not assume *a priori* the existence of a consensus on ‘what is wanted and how to get it’, which is a prerequisite for coordination attempts.⁹ Instead, it focuses, first, on how an initial strategic consensus – a shared belief in the need to maintain a clear superiority in US military power as an overriding national security objective and end in itself – was able to emerge among defence policy actors during the late 1980s and early 1990s through the gradual renegotiation of mutual interests, the exchange of ideas and information, and institutional bargaining fostered by policy entrepreneurs including Colin Powell and Richard Cheney; and, second, on how this consensus became an integral part of the wider political agenda.

The Formation of the US Post-Cold War Strategic Consensus

The *formation phase* of a new post-Cold War strategic consensus within the US defence community lasted from Spring 1989 to Spring 1990 (falling within the first 18 months of the George H.W. Bush administration), when the changes underway in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were so significant that Congress and the US public increasingly demanded the rethinking of US defence policy in general, and the reduction of military budgets and America’s international commitments in particular. As the following discussion shows, this initial phase was marked by interagency struggles and bargaining games within the defence planning community, in particular within the US military establishment and between the military and civilian leadership of the Pentagon, to find a consensus on the questions of what the new rationale for defence policy and the role of the armed forces should be in the changing security climate.

The formation phase of the new strategic consensus began prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Soon after President George H.W. Bush took office in January 1989, faced with a dramatically changing security environment, he initiated a large-scale review of national security in March 1989 through issuing the National Security Review (NSR) 12. This previously classified document also set in motion the process of developing a new US defence strategy and force structure in order to

⁸Adam D. Sheingate, ‘Political Entrepreneurship, Institutional Change, and American Political Development’, *Studies in American Political Development* 17/2 (2003), 198.

⁹Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, 59.

reflect the radical changes in the security climate, and introduced the key terms of the major elements of US post-Cold War security policy – including ‘uncertainty’, ‘complexity’ and ‘unpredictability’ – as well as a focus on Third World regional adversaries to the formal force planning process.¹⁰ At the same time, however, the NSR 12 underscored that even under potentially significant resource constraints, American military strength – which had guided US defence policy since the end of World War II and was interpreted as having brought about the changes in Soviet behaviour – should remain as the central element of a new US security strategy.¹¹

The crucial mechanisms through which negotiation over a post-Cold War US defence strategy took place were a series of defence reviews during the 1990s, which were initiated either by the Executive or Legislative branches of American government. Defence reviews are official US documents primarily produced by high-ranking civilian members within the Department of Defense, which aim to provide the links between defence strategy, policy and budgets and outline the framework for force planning. For its part, the military is responsible for putting into practice the force structure outlined in a defence review. In the case of the Base Force, however, the defence review planning process was effectively reversed, with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) General Colin Powell designing the new force structure.

Powell recognised that the changes underway in the Soviet Union were gradually eroding the rationale for high US defence expenditures and a large military based on the threats posed by the ‘evil empire’; and he feared that the public perception of significantly reduced threats in the international environment – combined with greater pressures on the defence budget due to a weakening US economy, large deficits, and recent procurement scandals – might soon lead to extensive cuts in military spending.¹² The Chairman sought to avoid this by moving away from a force planning approach that was based on existing and

¹⁰US White House, *National Security Strategy Review*, 12 (3 Mar. 1989), <<http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/pdfs/nsr/nsr12.pdf>>.

¹¹Ibid., 1, 2.

¹²See Colin L. Powell, ‘National Security Challenges in the 1990’s: The Future Ain’t What It Used To Be’, Speech at the Army War College (16 May), *Army* (July 1989), 12–4; Colin L. Powell, ‘Address before the National Press Club on June 22, 1990’, *Congressional Record* (10 July 1990), S9463–5; Colin L. Powell, ‘US Foreign Policy in a Time of Transition, Address before the National Press Club on October 27, 1988, Transcript’, *US Department of State Bulletin* (Jan. 1989); cf. Christopher D. O’Sullivan, *Colin Powell: American Power and Intervention from Vietnam to Iraq* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield 2009), 71, 80.

potential threats to US national security objectives. Instead, the foundation of Powell's approach rested on the idea that the US should aim to preserve its superpower status as well as to protect enduring US interests and defence needs in different regions around the world.¹³ Drawing from earlier work by the Joint Staff, Powell thus developed a defence review that established a 'minimum' force level, below which the US in his opinion could not go without endangering its superpower status and the military capabilities necessary to support the execution of its global responsibilities.¹⁴ He incorporated the reality of shrinking defence budgets and calls for a peace dividend by recommending the size of the armed forces be reduced by 25 per cent across the board, and also envisioned significant organisational changes that reflected the new international security climate that would affect the whole US military culture.¹⁵

As a result of these far-reaching reform proposals, the Chairman was confronted with widespread resistance to his planning of the defence review from a range of factions within the US defence planning community.¹⁶ For example, high-ranking officers of the different US military services displayed great reluctance to seriously address the need for force cuts, but instead 'offered plenty of evidence as to why they didn't need to do it'.¹⁷ The services frequently focused their criticism of Powell's plans on his idea to establish minimum force levels within a framework of potential future missions and operations as well

¹³Powell, 'Address'; Eric V. Larson *et al.*, *Defense Planning in a Decade of Change: Lessons from the Base Force, Bottom-Up Review, and Quadrennial Defense Review* (Santa Monica: RAND 2001), 9, 16; Lorna S. Jaffe, 'The Base Force', *Air Force Magazine* 83/12 (2000), 56–7; John F. Troxell, *Force Planning in an Era of Uncertainty: Two MRCs as a Force Sizing Framework* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College 1997), 10.

¹⁴Colin L. Powell, 'US Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Keeping Democracy Alive', Speech to the Town Hall of California, Los Angeles (23 Mar. 1990), in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, LVI/14; Powell, 'Address'.

¹⁵Lorna S. Jaffe, *The Development of the Base Force 1989–1992* (Washington DC: Joint History Office, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff 1993), 11; Leslie Lewis *et al.*, *Assessing the Structure and Mix of Future Active and Reserve Forces: Assessment of Policies and Practices for Implementing the Total Force Policy* (Santa Monica: RAND 1992), 37; Colin L. Powell, 'A View to 1994: The Base Force', CJCS Working Paper, 12 May 1990, Washington DC: Office of the CJCS; Powell, 'Address'.

¹⁶Lewis *et al.*, *Assessing the Structure and Mix of Future Active and Reserve Forces*, 48–9.

¹⁷Powell quoted in Don M. Snider, *Strategy, Forces and Budgets: Dominant Influences in Executive Decision Making, Post-Cold War, 1989–91* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Inst, US Army War College 1993), 7; cf. *ibid.*, 10.

as resource restrictions, rather than to produce a convincing strategic vision.¹⁸ This notion of the absence of a consensus on the general direction of US force planning was coupled with accusations by the Service Chiefs that Powell would simply proceed with his Base Force plans despite their vociferous objections, and would thereby both undermine and usurp their force planning prerogatives.¹⁹

This stage of the process is where the focus on 'jointness' and achieving consensus ended. The Service Chiefs preferred to argue their positions and views on the future of the US armed forces individually with Powell rather than in debate with each other.²⁰ Moreover, and perhaps unsurprisingly, rather than engaging in a constructive dialogue with the Chairman about the Base Force plans like many of the Commanders-in-Chief (CINC), the Service Chiefs as well as senior members of the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff attempted to lobby the Chairman on behalf of the size of their respective services and to argue for the maintenance of weapons systems in which their own service had special interests.²¹

Many of these advocacy efforts were unsuccessful.²² Yet despite Powell's unwillingness to make major concessions to the services, he had learned through his previous role in the national security apparatus as President Reagan's National Security Advisor that a broad consensus within the force planning community was vital for developing a defence review that would withstand public scrutiny.²³ Indeed, Powell altered his original conceptions several times in the process of bargaining to foster such a consensus within the military leadership on the future role, structure and size of the armed forces in order to develop a more persuasive case.²⁴

In addition to being confronted with the opposition of high-ranking military officers, Powell also had substantial differences about the size of the proposed force structure with the civilian leadership of the Pentagon, in particular with President Bush's Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney and Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Paul D. Wolfowitz, both of whom regarded the Chairman's planning efforts as ignoring the likelihood of adverse developments in the international environment

¹⁸Jaffe, 'The Base Force', 61; see also Jaffe, *The Development of the Base Force*, 22–4.

¹⁹Ibid., 27; cf. Snider, *Strategy, Forces and Budgets*, 7.

²⁰Jaffe, 'The Base Force', 61.

²¹Jaffe, *The Development of the Base Force*, 23, 27.

²²Ibid., 26–7.

²³James S. Chestnut, *Political Foot-Soldier: Colin Powell's Interagency Campaign for the 'Base Force'* (Washington DC: National War College 2002), 3–10; Snider, *Strategy, Forces and Budgets*, 9.

²⁴Jaffe, 'The Base Force', 61.

and thus as too far-reaching within a narrow time-frame, as well as insufficient to provide a compelling justification for maintaining the recommended force levels.²⁵ Yet because the changes in Europe accelerated drastically and were even more difficult to ignore after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the position of the Secretary of Defense and his office was increasingly under bipartisan attack from Congress for presenting a budget that failed to respond to the changes that had taken place in the world.²⁶ Moreover, the planning guidelines and scenarios developed in order to support the new force structure that still rested on the Warsaw Pact threat – such as the US defence of Europe in the event of a Communist attack or a global war against the Soviet Union – were now criticised as outdated and could therefore not be included in the submission of the defence budget to Congress in January 1990.²⁷ While the absence of official planning guidelines and threat scenarios created problems for the whole defence planning community to proceed with the defence planning process, this also provoked bipartisan Congressional opposition to the size of the submitted 1990 defence budget and invited accusations that Cold War planning assumptions had continued to guide both the administration's and the Pentagon's approaches to preparing the armed forces for a drastic change in the security climate.²⁸ In particular, many members of Congress regarded the 1990 defence budget as inadequate in light of America's growing economic and budgetary pressures, as well as the broader US public's demands for a peace dividend.²⁹

Two principal factors made it increasingly difficult for the administration to withstand Congressional opposition. First, public pressure on the administration to fully acknowledge the changes in the international environment through policies rather than rhetoric drastically increased during the spring of 1990. Indeed, the administration increasingly appeared backward in its orientation while Congress seemed to respond to the changes underway throughout the Warsaw Pact, in particular through policy initiatives by Congressman Les Aspin and Senator Sam Nunn.³⁰ Most importantly, the federal deficit continued to rise more

²⁵Larson *et al.*, *Defense Planning in a Decade of Change*, 10; O'Sullivan, Colin Powell, 75, 81.

²⁶Jaffe, *Development of the Base Force*, 35.

²⁷Snider, *Strategy, Forces and Budgets*, 19; Lewis *et al.*, *Assessing the Structure and Mix of Future Active and Reserve Forces*, 23.

²⁸Cf. Lewis *et al.*, *Assessing the Structure and Mix of Future Active and Reserve Forces*, 22–3.

²⁹Snider, *Strategy, Forces and Budgets*, 19.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 22–3; Lewis *et al.*, *Assessing the Structure and Mix of Future Active and Reserve Forces*, 26.

rapidly than was assumed in the administration's budget proposal. Faced with the unpalatable option of raising additional revenues through higher taxes, which the President had promised not to do during his 1988 election campaign, the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Act would have imposed an automatic 25 per cent cut in overall defence spending, and another 38 per cent cut in domestic programmes.³¹

Pocketbook politics continued to drive political debates over the defence budget during the second half of 1990. In order to demonstrate that the Department of Defense was responding to the breathtaking changes in the strategic environment, on 6 June 1990 Cheney publicly indicated for the first time that the Department of Defense might be willing to undertake major force reductions.³² Less than one week later the Secretary of Defense announced to Congress a potential 10 per cent cut in the defence budget.³³ On 19 June 1990, the Secretary of Defense also submitted an 'illustrative plan' to the White House-Congressional summit convened by Bush in order to resolve the budgetary crisis. This incorporated the force planning ideas of both Wolfowitz and Powell: the 25 per cent reduction in force structure and a 10 per cent decrease of the defence budget by fiscal year 1995 as recommended in Powell's Base Force, together with the crisis response/reconstitution strategy proposed by Wolfowitz that would allow for reversing the reduction process in case of dangerous events in the Soviet Union and the international arena – developments that marked the end of the first phase of establishing a post-Cold War strategic consensus.³⁴

While Congress broadly agreed with this redirection of force planning for the post-Cold War era, many controversial questions remained unresolved, including the extent of the defence budget cuts that could be achieved through the proposed 25 per cent reduction in force structure, the pace of the reductions and how potential savings could be invested in order to achieve a peace dividend.³⁵ Although many of these questions were only resolved during the stabilisation phase of the new strategic framework, by the end of the formation phase a 'strategic consensus' had rapidly begun to crystallise within the

³¹Bob Woodward, 'Making Choices: Bush's Economic Record', *Washington Post* (6 Oct. 1992), A14.

³²Jaffe, *Development of the Base Force*, 35.

³³Lewis *et al.*, *Assessing the Structure and Mix of Future Active and Reserve Forces*, 27.

³⁴Jaffe, *Development of the Base Force*, 36; 'Cheney Offers No Change in Defense Budget to Summiteers', *Defense Daily* (8 June 1990).

³⁵William W. Kaufmann, *Assessing the Base Force: How Much is Too Much?* (Washington DC: Brookings 1992), 3; Larson *et al.*, *Defense Planning in a Decade of Change*, 20; cf. Pat Towell, 'Cheney's Latest Plan Shows Only Part of the Ax Blade', *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* (23 June 1990), 1975.

force planning community on the future size of the armed forces, as well as on the need to maintain absolute military superiority in order to meet US national security objectives in the ‘uncertain’ international security climate and a stronger focus of US defence strategy on regional threats and instability within the less developed world rather than the Soviet Union.³⁶

The Stabilisation of a New Strategic Consensus

The *stabilisation phase* began with Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, and included the collapse of the Soviet Union as well as the operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and ended with the publication of Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney’s ‘Regional Defense Strategy’ in 1993. Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 and the 1991 war in the Persian Gulf proved to be crucial to the emerging representation of ‘rogue’ Third World countries as the principal threat to US national security objectives.³⁷ A similar effect of these events can be observed with respect to defence planning, because these episodes appeared to validate the focus of the US force planning community on mid-level regional contingencies involving advanced Third World adversaries as the primary conceptual underpinnings to determine the size, structure and capabilities of the US post-Cold War military force, which had begun to crystallise at the end of phase one. The crisis in the Persian Gulf served to facilitate widespread acceptance within the force planning community and to attract broad Congressional support for the new force planning framework. By the end of 1992, a consensus on regional Third World threats as the basis for the US post-Cold War defence strategy had emerged within the force planning community that was strong enough to withstand changes in political leadership, and which continues to form the principal basis of US defence planning today.

Three main obstacles initially continued to inhibit the development of solid conceptual foundations for the new defence strategy at the start of the stabilisation phase of the new strategic consensus.³⁸ First,

³⁶See Alexandra Homolar, ‘Rebels without a Conscience: The Evolution of the Rogue States Narrative in US Security Policy’, *European Journal of International Relations*, <<http://ejt.sagepub.com/content/early/2010/11/20/1354066110383996.abstract>>. Cf. Alexandra Homolar-Riechmann, ‘The Moral Purpose of US Power: Neoconservatism in the Age of Obama’, *Contemporary Politics* 15/2 (2009), 179–96.

³⁷Homolar, ‘Rebels without a Conscience’.

³⁸See for example *ibid.*; Jaffe, ‘The Base Force’, 24; Snider, *Strategy, Forces and Budgets*, 18–21; Dale A. Vesser, *Memo to Scooter [Libby]: First Draft of DPG*, Secret, Excised Copy (3 Sept. 1991), <www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb245/index.htm#doc2>, I.

there were diverging views within the Pentagon on which regional threats should form the basis of force planning, including, for example, the questions of whether Soviet military involvement in the Arab Peninsula was still likely or whether the source of regional instability in the 'advanced' Third World might be indigenous. Second, with the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact rapidly moving towards their demise, scenarios that had been developed by the force planning community between late 1989 and mid-1990, which envisaged potential major contingencies with a resurgent Soviet Union, were unlikely to withstand Congressional scrutiny during the drawn-out budget crisis. Finally, a cost-conscious Congress and a peace dividend-demanding public were even less likely to accept the need for a strong US military based on distant potential threats in the less developed world that had been emphasised in previous defence planning documents such as the Defense Planning Guidance issued in January 1990.

By the end of 1990, the administration and the Pentagon had settled many of their internal disputes regarding the details of the new force structure that had continued after an initial consensus on the direction of the new defence strategy and force planning framework had emerged by mid-1990, and were now ready to incorporate the conceptual underpinnings of the Base Force in their force planning approaches for the post-Cold War era. On 29 November 1990, the Secretary of Defense directed the services to implement the recommendations of the Base Force, and included a modified version of Powell's force planning framework in his budget proposal for fiscal years 1992–93 in December 1990.³⁹ When President Bush submitted his budget request to Congress in February 1991, references to the conceptual underpinnings of the Base Force were an integral part of the justification for the proposed size of the defence budget. Moreover, Cheney's 1991 Annual Report to Congress outlined four key tenets of the Base Force as the foundations of the new defence strategy that the Secretary of Defense detailed before the Senate's Armed Services Committee on 21 February 1991:⁴⁰ (1) crisis response – the capabilities to respond to multiple concurrent major regional contingencies; (2) forward presence – the presence of US forces in regions vital to US interests, structured and organised geographically in particular to quickly respond to smaller-scale contingencies; (3) reconstitution – aimed at forestalling a reemerging

³⁹Jaffe, 'The Base Force', 44, 64.

⁴⁰Lewis *et al.*, *Assessing the Structure and Mix of Future Active and Reserve Forces*, 34–5; William W. Kaufmann and John D. Steinbrunner, *Decisions for Defense: Prospects for a New Order* (Washington DC: Brookings 1991), 27; cf. US Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the United States* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office 1992).

global threat/potential peer competitor; and (4) strategic deterrence and defence – the continued relevance of nuclear forces and need for US missile defence.

Driven in large part by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait as a catalytic event,⁴¹ the consensus regarding a post-Cold War force structure based on regional threats had stabilised by the end of 1990. Nevertheless, the central task of complementing the capabilities-based force planning framework with specific regional threat scenarios, and detailed descriptions of the challenges, opportunities and risks the new strategic environment posed to US national security objectives, had not been fulfilled. The force planning community had not yet reached a consensus on which specific regional threats should form the basis of force planning, or what role the Soviet Union should play in aligning the new force structure with the changes in the strategic environment. As a result, the conceptual details underpinning the regional focus of the new force planning framework could still not be included in the President's budget request or Cheney's articulation of the new defence strategy. While the events in the Persian Gulf had justified the administration's general approach to post-Cold War defence policy in the eyes of Congress, this continued to spur Congressional criticism that force planning was removed from credible underpinnings, as well as debates between the executive and legislative branches of the US government regarding the details, costs, and execution of a defence strategy centred on regional contingencies.⁴²

The Office of the Secretary of Defense began to move towards establishing a detailed strategic foundation of the particulars of the new defence strategy and a new National Military Strategy (NMS) in late 1990 through initiating the development of the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance (DPG) for FY 1994–99. In June 1991 the preliminary results of the OSD planning process were sent to the secretaries of the military departments, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Technology, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Program Analysis and Evaluation and the Comptroller of the Department of Defense.⁴³ This recently declassified briefing on the new DPG suggested that the development of the underpinnings of the new defence strategy should focus on the lessons learnt from Desert Storm in the context of the regional focus of the new strategy and that

⁴¹Homolar, 'Rebels without a Conscience'.

⁴²Cf. Eric Schmitt, 'Pentagon Plans Big Budget Cut, Saving Billions', *Special to the New York Times* (30 Aug. 1992), 1-1.

⁴³US Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, *Brief to DPRB* (5 June 1991), <www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb245/doc01.pdf>.

the defence planning guidance document, to be finished by December 1991, should contain a thorough characterisation of the new defence strategy and the Base Force.⁴⁴

The absence of references to dissenting views in the briefing document, which were present in earlier planning documents, is indicative of the notion that between November 1990 and June 1991 the force planning community had moved toward a consensus on the direction for complementing the new defence strategy and force planning framework with specific regional threat scenarios and detailed descriptions of the challenges, opportunities and risks the new strategic environment posed to US national security objectives. Indeed, noting previous Congressional debates and hearings, the briefing document itself states that while the administration's and the Pentagon's previous planning efforts had been criticised for having various 'blanks', the force planners had now developed 'strong, compelling, and persuasive answers to fill in these purported blanks in the strategy'.⁴⁵ With the events in Iraq, they could now move forward to refine the new defence strategy.⁴⁶

Following the June 1991 DPG briefing document, Assistant to Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Resources ret. Army Lt. Gen. Dale Vesser sent a first draft of the DPG FY 1994–1999 to the Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Resources Lewis 'Scooter' Libby in September 1991. While Vesser's handwritten title page pointed out that the course of events in the dismantling of the Soviet Union caused problems for the development of scenarios that dealt with potential Soviet threats to US national security objectives,⁴⁷ the 67-page long document included a detailed structure of the DPG and laid out the key elements of the new defence strategy. In particular, the September 1991 document establishes that the general military objective was to address sources of regional conflict and instability, which threatened the United States' own interests, those of allies and friends, and those that had the potential to unsettle international relations.⁴⁸ More specifically, the draft lists that 'access to vital raw materials, primarily Persian Gulf oil, may be threatened; proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles may pose a threat to the US as well as to others; [and] US citizens or interests may be vulnerable to state-sponsored terrorism

⁴⁴Ibid., 2, 6–7.

⁴⁵Ibid., 5.

⁴⁶Ibid., 25.

⁴⁷Vesser, *Memo to Scooter*, I.

⁴⁸Ibid.

or narcotics trafficking'.⁴⁹ Yet – and without providing a rationale – the document emphasised that while regional military threats spanning the spectrum of conflicts, including specific regional contingencies, would present the primary political-military concern to the US on a daily basis, the Soviet Union would continue to be the focus of most US strategic force planning.⁵⁰

Despite some changes in terminology and the addition of more specific sections on force structure, military strategy and regional contingencies, the key tenets of the new defence strategy laid out in this first DPG draft remained largely unchanged until the final draft of the DPG was issued on 29 February 1992.⁵¹ Excerpts of the draft were leaked to the *New York Times* in March 1992 and sparked a major public controversy. Yet rather than highlighting potential weaknesses of the key tenets and planning scenarios underlying the new defence strategy, the criticism focused on the language used with respect to the stated objective of US defence policy to 'prevent the reemergence of a new rival' – a line of criticism that would resurface a decade later in debates concerning a 'neoconservative cabal' in the George W. Bush administration.⁵²

The Office of the Secretary of Defense recast some expressions used in the defence planning guidance, but its main elements showed considerable staying power. In addition to the idea that US national security should be based on maintaining military predominance through actively shaping the future strategic environment and through preventing the rise of a future peer competitor, the most important element that remained unchanged was to base US force structure on the ability to fight two major regional contingencies nearly simultaneously, an idea that President Bush had already included in his 1991 National Security Strategy.⁵³ Based on the regional scenarios developed within the DPG framework, Powell's 1992 National Military Strategy notes that the United States must have adequate forces to counter a number

⁴⁹Ibid., 2.

⁵⁰Ibid., 20.

⁵¹Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Defense Planning Guidance, FY 1994–1999: Revised Draft for Scooter Libby*, Secret, Excised Copy (29 Feb. 1992), <www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb245/index.htm#doc4>.

⁵²Excerpts from Pentagon's Plan: "Prevent the Re-Emergence of a New Rival", *New York Times*, 8 Mar. 1992; Patrick E. Tyler, 'US Strategy Plan Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop: Pentagon's Document Outlines Ways to Thwart Challenges to Primacy of America,' *Special to The New York Times*, 8 Mar. 1992, 1-1-1.

⁵³US White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States* (1991), <www.fas.org/man/docs/918015-nss.htm>, Section V; cf. Dale A. Vesser, *Memorandum to Mr. Libby: Comments Received on Draft DPG – Potential Issues*, Secret, Excised Copy (17 Mar. 1992), <www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb245/index.htm#doc5>, 58a.

of adversaries simultaneously in order to deter potential regional aggressors from exploiting US preoccupation in a first substantial regional crisis, while at the same time maintaining the capacity to develop forces large enough to counter a potential peer competitor.⁵⁴ However, Cheney's 'Regional Defense Strategy' in January 1993 was the first major official and unclassified document after the end of the Cold War that explicitly called for the ability to meet more than one Desert Storm-type regional contingency at the same time.⁵⁵

With the publication of the first post-Cold War US defence strategy, the consensus on 'how to fill in the blanks' in order to establish credible underpinnings for the new defence strategy that had emerged by mid-1991 was now firmly in place. This consensus on the justifications for preserving force and readiness levels almost as high as during the Cold War therefore complemented the strong consensus on the 'necessary' size and structure of the US armed forces in the post-Cold War era which had formed by mid-1990. As a result, the issuing of Cheney's Regional Defense Strategy marked the end of the stabilisation phase of the new strategic consensus. The overall consensus that had formed and stabilised within the force planning community between the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the Clinton administration had gradually proven to be strong enough to withstand Congressional attempts to reduce the defence budget and force structure more significantly.

Embedding the New Status Quo: The Clinton Administration

The *embedding phase* involved consolidating the new status quo and reestablishing the high degree of continuity in defence policy across different Presidential administrations that had been a hallmark of US force planning during the Cold War era. This third phase of establishing a post-Cold War strategic consensus began with the election of President Bill Clinton, who publicly campaigned on a platform of reduced military spending through reorganising and

⁵⁴Jeffrey R. Gerlach, 'Pentagon Myths and Global Realities: The 1993 Military Budget', *Policy Analysis* 171 (24 May 1992), <www.sas.upenn.edu/~dludden/USmilitarybudget02.htm>; Robert S. Litwak, *Rogue States and US Foreign Policy: Containment after the Cold War* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars 2000), 28; cf. US White House, *National Security Strategy of the US*, Section V.

⁵⁵Troxell, *Force Planning in an Era of Uncertainty*, 12; Larson *et al.*, *Defense Planning in a Decade of Change*, 13–6; Richard Cheney, *Defense Strategy for the 1990s: The Regional Defense Strategy* (1993), <www.informationclearinghouse.info/pdf/naarpr_Defense.pdf>.

downsizing the US armed forces and faced a groundswell of public support in America for a post-Cold War ‘peace dividend’.⁵⁶ Yet because of the high level of support that the new consensus regarding the direction of a post-Cold War US defence policy based on the two major regional contingencies force planning framework had gained within the US defence community during the formation and stabilising phases, during the 1990s the Clinton Administration struggled to realise permanent reductions in US defence expenditures, which quickly returned to average Cold War levels during President Clinton’s second term.

One of the main critics in Congress of the Bush administration’s approach to base the proposed force levels on potential US engagement in two major regional contingencies nearly simultaneously was Les Aspin, then Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, who questioned in particular the plausibility that any potential aggressor could in the short term possess capabilities comparable to those of Iraq prior to Desert Storm.⁵⁷ He saw the Bush administration’s force planning framework as a top-down response to bureaucratic imperatives and organisational needs inside the Pentagon, rather than a response to changes in the strategic environment and real threats to US interests, and argued that if the America was to realise the peace dividend it had earned from spending \$10 trillion to bring about the collapse of the Soviet Union, a real bottom-up review was needed instead.⁵⁸ In January 1993, the US Senate confirmed Les Aspin as President Clinton’s Secretary of Defense. His principal challenge was to realise an additional \$60 billion in defence cuts – which had been outlined in President Clinton’s proposals during the election campaign – on the basis of a new force planning framework, the Bottom-Up Review (BUR).⁵⁹

From the start, Les Aspin’s attempt to develop a new force planning framework in order to adjust the US armed forces to the post-Cold War international environment and to achieve additional reductions in US

⁵⁶See for example Bill Clinton, *A New Covenant for American Security: Remarks to Students at Georgetown University* (Washington DC: New Democratic Leadership Council 12 Dec. 1991), <www.dlc.org/ndol_ci.cfm?&subid=128&subid=174&contentid=250537>.

⁵⁷Cf. Mark A. Gunzinger, ‘Beyond the Bottom-Up Review’, *Essay on Strategy XIV* (Washington DC: Inst for National Strategic Studies, National Defense U 1996), 2–3.

⁵⁸Aspin cited in John T. Correll, ‘The Base Force Meets Option C’, *Air Force Magazine* 74/6 (1992), <www.airforce-magazine.com/MagazineArchive/Pages/1992/June%201992/0692watch.aspx>, 1; Litwak, *Rogue States and US Foreign Policy*, 29–30.

⁵⁹Gunzinger, ‘Beyond the Bottom-Up Review’, 1–3; Larson *et al.*, *Defense Planning in a Decade of Change*, 44.

defence spending faced strong opposition to change within the force planning community. For example, Colin Powell, who remained Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Bottom-Up Review planning process, opposed any major changes to the Base Force reforms that he had advocated for more than three years before the review was eventually implemented by the Bush administration in January 1993. Despite his public profile, Aspin was not in a strong position to counter the Chairman for two main reasons. First, at the time he developed the review he did not have a full team of appointees in place, and therefore lacked loyal supporters who could back up his position. Second, Aspin also lacked presidential support because President Clinton, who faced strong Congressional opposition to additional defence budget cuts and the proposal to eliminate the existing outright ban on homosexuality in the US military, sought to avoid further battles with the Chairman over force structure.⁶⁰

Despite these difficulties, Aspin released the report on the Bottom-Up Review in October 1993, which aimed at providing new guidelines for developing a coherent force structure to achieve the proposed additional savings in the context of the changed international security climate and domestic pressures, without endangering US national security objectives in an 'era of new dangers'.⁶¹ Compared to the Base Force, this first defence review under the Clinton administration led to an additional 5 per cent cut in military manpower, and the *projected* levels of defence spending for the period of FY 1994–98 were reduced by 9 per cent.⁶² Overall, however, Aspin's defence review became a bottom-up review by name only, because despite the goal of Clinton's first Secretary of Defense to develop a new force planning framework, the Bottom-Up Review was merely a continuance of the Base Force, and drew heavily upon the concepts developed before President Clinton took office. In Colin Powell's words, the Base Force was a 'lineal ancestor' to the Bottom-Up Review.⁶³ This is particularly visible in the areas of potential future threats and major regional contingencies.

Moreover, like the Base Force, which was supported by contingency scenarios outlined in the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance, Les Aspin's defence review envisioned force levels sufficient to win two major regional contingencies nearly simultaneously. The major regional contingencies component of the Bottom-Up Review focused on the defeat of potentially hostile regional powers, using potential North

⁶⁰Litwak, *Rogue States and US Foreign Policy*, 30.

⁶¹Les Aspin, *Report on the Bottom-Up Review* (Oct. 1993), Excerpts, <www.fas.org/man/docs/bur/index.html>, Section I.

⁶²Larson *et al.*, *Defense Planning in a Decade of Change*, 57, 72.

⁶³Colin L. Powell, *My American Journey* (New York: Random House 1995), 564.

Korean aggression and a resurgent Iraq as regional threat scenarios to underwrite the proposed force levels and phases of US combat operations.⁶⁴ Replicating the assumption previously advocated by Dick Cheney, that planning the future force structure and allocating resources to enable the US to win one major regional contingency would leave an opening for potential aggressors to attack their neighbours and that two simultaneous wars would therefore become more likely, the Bottom-Up Review fielded forces sufficient to (theoretically) win two concurrent major regional contingencies.⁶⁵ The Bottom-Up Review emphasised that an additional rationale for this force-sizing approach was that it would provide a hedge against the possibility that any future adversary or coalition of adversaries might one day confront the US with a 'greater-than-expected threat'.⁶⁶ This justification mirrors one of the Bush administration's key tenets of the Base Force, the National Military Strategy and the Regional Defense Strategy: 'reconstitution'. While such attempts to 'guard against uncertainty' might be viewed as a both 'prudent' or 'flawed' defence planning, it certainly cut against the grain of US public opinion and existing international defence trends in the early 1990s.⁶⁷ In addition, while the force planning framework of the Bottom-Up Review required the maintenance of force and readiness levels that were advocated in the Base Force, many Cold War weapons systems also survived the review although the threat they were designed for had vanished, such as the Seawolf, the F22 and Trident II missiles.⁶⁸

Overall, the Bottom-Up Review drew heavily from strategic concepts developed during the Bush administration, such as crisis response, reconstitution, forward presence, and strategic and tactical nuclear deterrence, and therefore differed less from the force

⁶⁴Aspin, *Report on the Bottom-Up Review*, Section III.

⁶⁵Ibid., Section II.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷See Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 'Military Expenditure Database', <www.sipri.org/contents/milap/milex/mex_database1.html>; Americans Talk Issues Foundation, 'The New World Order: What the Peace Should Be', ATI 15 (Washington DC: Americans Talks Issues 1991); Gallup, 'Public Divided on Defense Spending', 2006, <www.gallup.com/poll/21739/Public-Divided-Defense-Spending.aspx>; Program on International Policy Attitudes, 'Americans on Defense Spending: A Study of US Public Attitudes, Report of Findings', 1996, <www.fas.org/man/docs/pipapoll.htm>.

⁶⁸Lawrence J. Korb, 'US National Defense Policy in the Post-Cold War World', in Ann R. Markusen (ed.), *America's Peace Dividend*, Ch. 2 (New York: Columbia International Affairs Online 2000).

planning framework inherited from the previous administration than Aspin's initial aspirations might have implied. In particular, rather than incorporating Aspin's originally proposed 'win-hold-win'⁶⁹ approach (fighting and winning one major regional contingency, while having sufficient capabilities to prepare for US engagement in a second major conflict) in order to achieve additional savings in the defence budget or assigning a more prominent role to force requirements for US involvement in asymmetric conflicts and peacekeeping operations, both the underlying rationale and the threat scenarios emphasised in the Bottom-Up Review reflected the strategic consensus that had been carried over from the Bush administration – with major regional contingencies remaining at the centre of Aspin's force planning framework.⁷⁰ The fact that the Bottom-Up Review restated the need to determine the size and structure of the armed forces through the two major regional contingencies approach, which the Secretary of Defense had strongly opposed during his leadership of the House's Armed Services Committee, indicates that the consensus reached within the force-planning community had grown strong enough to withstand the early efforts of the Clinton administration to find a new rationale to adjust the armed forces to the new security climate. This had increasingly enabled the defence sector to protect its vital interests in high defence spending from domestic pressures.

In order to resolve the differences within Congress and between the executive and legislative branches of US government on the shape of post-Cold War defence policy, Congress requested a comprehensive analysis of US defence strategy by the Commission on Roles and Missions in 1994.⁷¹ The Commission could not provide Congress with a new defence strategy and force planning approach, but because differences regarding the future role, size, structure and funding of the US armed forces had intensified after the 'Conservative Revolution' in Congress in 1994, Congress followed the Commission on Roles and Missions' recommendation to require each incoming administration to conduct a Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) at the beginning of each

⁶⁹See Les Aspin, 'An Approach to Sizing American Conventional Forces for the Post-Soviet Era: Four Illustrative Options', White Paper (Washington DC: House Armed Services Committee 25 Feb. 1992), 2–3.

⁷⁰Aspin, *Report on the Bottom-Up Review*, Section II, Section IV; cf. Larson *et al.*, *Defense Planning in a Decade of Change*, 49; Gunzinger, 'Beyond the Bottom-Up Review', 2–4.

⁷¹Jeffrey D. Brake, *Quadrennial Defense Review: Background, Process, and Issues* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service 2001), 2.

presidential term.⁷² The first of these Quadrennial Defense Reviews was developed by Clinton's third Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen and was issued in May 1997. The QDR 1997 thus represents the third attempt by the Pentagon to produce a coherent post-Cold War defence and military strategy.

Congress had issued the requirement for conducting a QDR in part because members perceived the Pentagon as failing to look beyond its narrow and established horizon.⁷³ On the first page of his report, the Secretary of Defense criticises the assumption that 'America's military establishment and forces are trapped hopelessly in the past, still structured and struggling to fight yesterday's wars', and attempted to demonstrate that the new defence review would adequately meet future dangers and challenges.⁷⁴ Indeed, at first sight, the QDR 1997 appears to depart significantly from previous post-Cold War attempts to restructure the US armed forces. For example, compared to the Bottom-Up Review, the QDR 1997 was a much more detailed report, offering an extensive introduction to the global security environment and comprehensive sections on force structure and weapon systems and including discussions of methodology, alternative defence postures and means for achieving a 21st-century defence infrastructure.⁷⁵

In addition, the QDR 1997 explicitly claimed three important differences to the Bottom-Up Review.⁷⁶ First, a stronger emphasis on the need to maintain a continuous overseas presence in order to shape the international environment and to be better able to respond to a variety of smaller-scale contingencies and asymmetric threats.⁷⁷ Second, that the proposed force structure would be different in character to the Bottom-Up Review because of the recognition of the need to begin to 'prepare now' for the future through increased investment in force modernisation and transformation in order to ensure future 'full spectrum' military dominance in any operation or environment.⁷⁸ Finally, that in contrast to its predecessors the new

⁷²US Congress, *HR 3230: The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997*, Public Law 104-201 (Washington DC: Library of Congress 1996), <www.nps.gov/legal/laws/104th/104-201.pdf>, 2623-4.

⁷³George C. Wilson, *This War Really Matters. Inside the Fight for Defense Dollars* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly Press 2000), 15.

⁷⁴William S. Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review* (May 1997), <www.defenselink.mil/pubs/qdr/index.html>, 1.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid., The Secretary's Message.

⁷⁷Ibid., Section IV.

⁷⁸Ibid., Section II, Section VII.

defence structure would be fiscally executable within the agreed \$250 billion defence budget ceiling through its focus on rebalancing the overall defence programme, improving stability within that program, and fixing inefficiencies within service and defence-wide budgets to meet modernisation targets.⁷⁹

Despite these stated differences, however, and notwithstanding Cohen's aim of proving wrong the assumption that force planning had an inherent tendency to ignore changes in the international security climate, the 1997 defence review is an exemplar of a defence planning community that remained 'trapped hopelessly in the past'.⁸⁰ For example, the QDR 1997 outlined a defence strategy of 'shape, respond, prepare now' as the primary new rationale for US post-Cold War force planning.⁸¹ Rather than significantly departing from its predecessors, however, this strategy essentially built upon and expanded the strategic foundations of past defence reviews in five respects.

First, the concept of environment shaping, which can be defined as 'the use of military power in peacetime to help channel world events down paths favorable to US interests'⁸² and which was aimed at deterring and averting the emergence of new threats and regional powers, had been part of the strategic consensus reached within the US force planning community during the George H.W. Bush administration, and was also included in the Bottom-Up Review. Second, the 'response' element of the new strategy was a continuation of the idea that the US must field forces capable of engaging in a spectrum of conflicts ranging from small-scale contingencies (Powell's crisis response) to major regional conflicts (now referred to as major theatre wars). Third, the notion that the US should begin preparing for an uncertain future kept in place the ideas of force reconstitution and transformation that had been central elements of the strategic consensus reached within the US force planning community well before the Clinton administration. Fourth, the QDR 1997 placed continued emphasis on the idea that the US should aim to preserve military superiority over any current or future adversary. As discussed above, this particular element of US force planning had evolved shortly after the end of the Cold War, and had invoked criticism during the George H.W. Bush administration when excerpts of the 1992 Defense

⁷⁹Ibid., Section IX.

⁸⁰Ibid., 1.

⁸¹Ibid.; cf. US White House, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (1997), <www.fas.org/man/docs/strategy97.htm>.

⁸²Project on Defense Alternatives (PDA) 'A New US Military Strategy? Issues and Options', Global Beat Issue Brief 65 (May 2001, Cambridge, MA: Project on Defense Alternatives, Commonwealth Inst.), 2.

Planning Guidance had been leaked to the *New York Times*. Fifth, and most importantly, the Clinton administration's 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review reaffirmed the two major regional contingencies scenario by implementing forces able to fight and win two major theatre wars, thus leaving in place the force structure, modernisation strategy and emphasis on readiness of the two previous reviews.⁸³

Overall, the QDR 1997 strongly reinforced the status quo and was widely denounced for the continued emphasis on the two major theatre wars force planning approach – rather than focusing on the numerous smaller contingencies the US was actually involved in – combined with 'dated' force planning scenarios.⁸⁴ For example, the National Defense Panel (NDP), established by Congress in 1996,⁸⁵ criticised some of the findings of the first Quadrennial Defense Review for the reluctance to promote significant changes in force planning. The panel's final report on the QDR 1997, *Transforming Defense: National Security in the 21st Century*, stated that under the QDR 1997, the Pentagon would still spend too much money on obsolete weapons systems, that the modernisation plan in the review had more budget risks than it acknowledged, that the analytical models used (originally developed for the analysis of the NATO/Warsaw Pact Central Front scenario) were out-of-date, and that the proposed organisational changes in the Department of Defense did not go far enough. Indeed, the NDP speculated that the two major theatre wars approach had become 'a force-protection mechanism – a means of justifying the current force structure – especially for those searching for the certainties of the Cold War era'.⁸⁶ As Michael Vickers and Steven Kosiak pointed out, 'The QDR provides ample evidence that Department of Defense has yet to transcend its Cold War planning framework.'⁸⁷

As the foregoing discussion has illustrated, all major defence reviews in the post-Cold War era have underlined the US status as the sole military superpower and the will to persist as the world's preminent military power as well as the willingness to resort to the use of military force, despite a strategic environment where manifest military threats to US interests appeared to have declined substantially. In short, the

⁸³Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review*, Section III.

⁸⁴Cf. Wilson, *This War Really Matters*, 29; McGinn *et al.*, *A Framework for Strategy Development* (Santa Monica: RAND 2002), 2.

⁸⁵US Congress, HR 3230, 2626–28.

⁸⁶National Defense Panel, *Transforming Defense: National Security in the 21st Century* (Arlington, VA: National Defense Panel 1997), <www.fas.org/man/docs/ndp/toc.htm>, Section III/1.

⁸⁷Michael G. Vickers and Steven M. Kosiak, *The Quadrennial Defense Review: An Assessment* (Washington: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments 1997).

maintenance of 'unipolarity' quickly became defined as a central objective of US defence policy in the post-Cold War era. As Bacevich suggests, before the end of the 1990s, '[t]o dissent from that position was to place oneself beyond the bonds of respectable opinion'.⁸⁸ The development and enhancement of the two major regional contingencies/major theatre wars approach to force planning in order to respond to the threat posed to US national security objectives by 'Third World' adversaries and regional instabilities provided an alternative to scenarios that focused on a global war against a peer competitor, which had guided US defence strategy for four decades. At the same time, this reconfiguration of US strategic objectives served to avert radical changes within the US defence establishment.

As a result, a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the structure and equipment of the US armed forces were little different than at the end of the Cold War, which – despite their initial usefulness during the conventional military campaigns in Iraq in 1991 and 2003 – have proven to be spectacularly inappropriate for contemporary US military operations such as fighting small-scale contingencies, pursuing peace-keeping operations, or dealing with asymmetric warfare. The US force that entered the 21st century was essentially just a shrunken version of the Reagan era Cold War Force, while the changes to the US defence budget were judged by many members of the military, political elites and the public to be woefully inadequate in either direction.⁸⁹ The reductions in US defence expenditures from the end of the Reagan military build-up in 1989 to the nadir of US military spending in 1998 add up to a total of \$142.7 billion. This means that the entire 'peace dividend' that was achieved in the decade after the end of the Cold War only amounted to a mere *five months* of average annual Cold War defence expenditures. What had changed was the underlying rationale: shortly after the justification for the immense Cold War build-up had vanished with the fall of the Berlin Wall, a strategic consensus within the US defence planning community emerged and stabilised to base post-Cold War defence planning on fighting and winning two major regional contingencies, which – once embedded – helped to protect the defence sector from much more radical spending reductions and restructuring.

⁸⁸Bacevich, *American Empire*, 125.

⁸⁹Korb, 'US National Defense Policy in the Post-Cold War World'; Cindy Williams, 'Holding the Line: US Defense Strategy', *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 6/19 (2001), <www.fpif.org/briefs/vol6/v6n19defense.html>, 2.

Conclusion

Many international security scholars continue to assume that national security policy is unlike other areas of public policymaking, and that national security is insulated from societal pressures and parochial interests. Such perspectives tend to focus on exogenous rather than endogenous sources of change or continuity, thereby disregarding the centrality of the security policymaking process itself.⁹⁰ Yet much is to be won or lost during the process of negotiating a new national defence strategy, in particular because it has a major impact upon the articulation of new threat scenarios, the identification of national security objectives as well as the size of the defence budget and force planning requirements, and defence budgets are especially vulnerable when pocketbook politics comes to the fore. This suggests that it is 'wishful thinking' to imagine that parochial politics is somehow sidelined where national security is at stake.

As this article has shown, the process of developing a post-Cold War US defence strategy was indeed riddled with politics that pulled the future orientation of US defence policy in different directions by groups of actors that each pursued competing sets of interests. The medium through which these competing agendas were gradually reconciled was a series of formal defence policy reviews during the 1990s under both the Bush administration and the Clinton administration. Rather than heralding a radical departure from the main pillars of Cold War US defence policy, these defence reviews initiated a process of redefining US national security objectives and repackaging existing defence priorities that left many of the core elements of US defence strategy at the end of the Cold War intact. In particular, the strategic consensus that emerged among the force planning community with the acknowledgment of a diminished Soviet threat continued to be centred on both a regional focus, and especially the rogue states threat scenario, as well as the need to prepare for the emergence of a new future peer competitor through maintaining US military preponderance even as a new 'unipolar' era dawned.

After the end of the Cold War, US defence policy could potentially have taken a number of new directions. Instead, US defence policy was driven by an imperative to align new threat scenarios with existing strategic models to preserve as much as possible of the status quo and, in particular, to guard against more radical restructuring proposals and deeper cuts in the defence budget. Against a backdrop in the early 1990s of Congressional opposition to the maintenance of current levels

⁹⁰See Alexandra Homolar, 'The Political Economy of National Security', *Review of International Political Economy* 17/2 (2010), 410–23.

of defence spending, and amid political accusations of bureaucratic inertia and a refusal to adjust to the strategic realities of the post-Cold War security environment, the outline of a new strategic consensus rapidly emerged among the US defence policymaking community that provided a credible rationale for limiting spending cuts and military restructuring.

As this article has illustrated, by centring the development of a new US defence strategy on the need for the US to have the military capabilities to fight and win two major theatre wars simultaneously, combined with the need to preserve overwhelming US military power to guard against the emergence of a future peer competitor, the US force planning community was surprisingly effective at achieving the realignment of existing strategic models with new threat scenarios. In particular, given that the majority of US military operations during the 1990s involved small-scale contingencies and peacekeeping interventions that were not at the forefront of the revamped US defence strategy, this indicates the success of the US defence establishment in resisting public pressure for more radical cutbacks and a more comprehensive reorientation of US strategic priorities. Rather than taking advantage of the window of opportunity for achieving more substantive reforms of US defence policy, the political struggles over changes to US defence priorities and the definition of national security objectives during the 1990s culminated in new window dressing for traditional strategic models that, for the most part, allowed the continuation of business as usual.

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