

## Editor's Corner

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by Mackubin T. Owens

### *In These Pages*

This issue of *Orbis* focuses on the national security challenges facing the Obama administration, raising critical issues that, if not fixed, could lead to a serious deterioration of American military capabilities. The first four articles are from FPRI's February conference on "Defense Showstoppers: National Security Challenges for the Obama Administration," which was cosponsored and hosted by the Reserve Officers Association in Washington, D.C. General James Mattis, USMC, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Transformation and Commander, U.S. Joint Forces Command, delivered the keynote address.

T.X. Hammes addresses the question of the kind of wars the U.S. military can be expected to fight in the future. Frank Hoffman discusses the defense budget. He observes that "in the last eight years, cost overruns, decisionmaking, cost estimates, and perhaps mismanagement—have cost us three years of capital investment in the Pentagon." He calls for strategic solvency and says that the most important thing the Obama administration can do is "get us out of the red—metaphori-

cally, strategically, economically, and militarily."

Michael O'Hanlon argues that while claims that the U.S. military is on the verge of being "broken" by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are overstated, U.S. personnel policies must be reformed to avoid adverse consequences in the future. Janine Davidson discusses ways to improve the inter-agency process for national security.

Kori Schake, who joins the editorial board of *Orbis* with this issue, argues that the congressionally-mandated Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) provides the Obama administration an excellent opportunity to provide direction for force planning, but because of the 2008 National Defense Strategy, Secretary Gates' plan for shaping the midterm Department of Defense spending program is already focused on the wrong set of questions for defining U.S. defense policy.

The articles by Gian Gentile and Bruce Floersheim reflect a debate within the Army about the focus of future doctrine and force structure: should the Army's focus be on fighting and winning conventional wars or on conducting

counterinsurgency and stability operations? Of course, this debate goes far beyond the Army and has implications for U.S. foreign policy in general. For instance, Derek Reveron maintains that because there are so few institutional alternatives for insuring stability and security in developing states, the U.S. military increasingly will find itself in non-warfighting roles.

Finally, Christopher Fettweis offers a “realist” critique of the “preposterous historiography” that he claims underpins “neoconservative” defenses of the “Bush Doctrine.” His targets include Robert Kagan, William Kaufman, John Lewis Gaddis, and my own article for the winter issue of *Orbis*, “The Bush Doctrine: The Foreign Policy of Republican Empire.”

### *Impromptus and Aside: Getting Grand Strategy Right*

One of the first steps the Obama administration must take in formulating its defense policy is to issue its national security strategy. Of course, as a number of authors for this issue have noted, recent iterations of the *National Security Strategy of the United States* have been long on goals but short on any discussion about the ways and means necessary to achieve those goals.

Despite the ancient origins of the word “strategy” etymologically, modern strategic studies can be said to begin with the division of the art of war into the theory of “the use of engagements for the object of the war” (strategy) and “the use of armed forces in the engagement” (tactics) by

the great interpreters of Napoleonic warfare, the Baron Antoine Henri Jomini and Carl von Clausewitz. As the latter wrote:

Strategy is the use of the engagement for the purpose of the war. The strategist must therefore define an aim for the entire operational side of the war that will be in accordance with its purpose. In other words, he will draft the plan of the war, and the aim will determine the series of actions intended to achieve it: in fact, shape the individual campaign and, within these, decide on the individual engagements.

These nineteenth-century writers originated the modern conception of *strategy* as the art of assembling and employing military forces in time and space to achieve the goals of a war.

While such writers and their successors limited their use of “strategy” to mean the application of military forces to fulfill the ends of policy, it is increasingly the practice today to employ the term more broadly, so that one can speak of levels of strategy in both peace and war. Accordingly, more often than not, strategy now refers not only to the direct application of military force in wartime to achieve the goals of national policy, but also to the use of all aspects of national power during peacetime to deter war and win, should deterrence fail. This broader formulation is *grand strategy*.

In the words of Edward Mead Earle:

strategy is the art of controlling and utilizing the resources of a nation—or a coalition of nations—including

its armed forces, to the end that its vital interests shall be effectively promoted and secured against enemies, actual, potential, or merely presumed. The highest type of strategy—sometimes called grand strategy—is that which so integrates the policies and armaments of the nation that resort to war is either rendered unnecessary or is undertaken with the maximum chance of victory.

Grand strategy is, thus, intimately linked to national policy in that it is designed to bring to bear all the elements of national power—military, economic and diplomatic—in order to secure the nation's interests and objectives.

In general, strategy, especially grand strategy, provides a conceptual link between national ends and scarce resources, both the transformation of those resources into means during peacetime, and the application of those means during war. As such, it serves three purposes. First, strategy relates ends, the goals of policy (interests and objectives), to the limited means available to achieve them. Both strategy and economics are concerned with the application of scarce means to achieve certain goals. But strategy implies an adversary who actively opposes the achievement of the ends.

Second, strategy contributes to the clarification of the ends of policy by helping to establish priorities in the light of constrained resources. Without establishing priorities among competing ends, all interests and all threats will appear equal. In the absence of

strategy, planners will find themselves in the situation described by Frederick the Great: "He who attempts to defend too much defends nothing."

Finally, strategy conceptualizes resources as *means* in support of policy. Resources are not means until strategy provides some understanding of how they will be organized and employed. Defense budgets and manpower are resources. Strategy organizes these resources into divisions, wings, and fleets and then employs them to deter war or to prevail should deterrence fail.

Although strategy can be described as the conceptual link between ends and means, it cannot be reduced to a mere mechanical exercise. Instead, it is "a process, a constant adaptation to shifting conditions and circumstances in a world where chance, uncertainty, and ambiguity dominate." It is a mistake to attempt to reduce strategy to a single aspect, although it is not unusual for writers on strategy to try. Clausewitz dismissed as simplistic the reduction of strategy to "principles, rules, or even systems" because strategy, on the contrary, "involves human passions, values, and beliefs, few of which are quantifiable."

Thus strategy, properly understood, is a complex phenomenon, comprising a number of elements. Among the most important of these are geography; history; the nature of the political regime, including such elements as religion, ideology, culture, political and military

institutions; and economic and technological factors. Accordingly, strategy can be said to constitute a continual dialogue between policy on the one hand and these other factors on the other.

In practice, strategic decisions must always compete with the demands of domestic politics, or what Samuel Huntington has called “structural decisions.” These are choices “made in the currency of domestic politics.” The most important structural decision concerns the “size and distribution of funds made available to the armed forces. . . .” The strategy maker or force planner can never ignore fiscal constraints. Indeed, political reality sometimes dictates that budgetary limits will constitute the primary influence on the development of strategy and force structure. Additionally, bureaucratic and organizational imperatives play a

major role in force structure choices.

Strategy is designed to secure national interests and to attain the objectives of national policy by the application of force or threat of force. Strategy is dynamic, changing as the factors that influence it change. Strategic requirements have evolved considerably since the end of World War II and with them, the descriptors of military strategy.

Strategy-making is a central component of defense policy. Without a coherent, rational strategy to guide the development and employment of forces, structural factors such as bureaucratic and organizational imperatives dominate the allocation of resources for defense, leading to a suboptimal result. This is why it is important for the Obama administration to get it right, or more likely, not too wrong.

