Defense Decisions for the Trump Administration

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Abstract

The new administration that took office in January 2017 faces cross-currents of continuity and change as it formulates national defense policy. Defense decision making within the Donald J. Trump administration can be organized and streamlined by achieving internal consensus on a grand strategy to secure American interests abroad, by deciding the size and composition of the armed forces needed to meet plausible military contingencies, and by creating a defense budget adequate to underwrite those challenges. This article provides a framework for analysis in each of these three categories of defense decision making and suggests a course of action the Trump administration is likely to follow.

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The word *strategy* requires a modifier, and *grand* sits near the top of a pyramid of choices linking foreign policy objectives and resources. One of the foremost students of grand strategy, Robert Art, posits that grand strategy "tells a nation's leaders what goals they should aim for and how best they can use their country's military power to attain those goals."[1] Importantly, Art differentiates between a nation's foreign policy and grand strategy. Foreign policy delineates a set of objectives that differ in the level of national interest (vital, important, tangential), a time frame to achieve those objectives (long-range, mid-range, or near-term), and the instruments of national power (diplomatic, information, military, economic) that might be used, alone or in combination, to pursue those objectives. Grand strategy focuses on how the military instrument of foreign policy should be used in achieving those goals, across the range

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of interests and time frames stipulated.[2] Thus, grand strategy is very much dependent on the formulation of America's interests in the world and a perception of the threats to those interests. As political science and security studies specialist Barry Posen points out, these are core security interests, traditionally encompassing "the preservation of sovereignty, safety, territorial integrity and power position"—not wider foreign policy goals posed by challenges such as climate change, global pandemics, human rights, or free trade.[3] Posen states that grand strategy's most important purpose is addressing the structure of an international political system in which armed conflict is likely. Therefore, grand strategy subjects military power to the discipline of political analysis. And because states and nonstate actors rise and fall, and measures applied to defeat or deter threats succeed or fail, it is important to periodically revisit and revise the concepts and principles incorporated in US strategy. A change of administrations is an appropriate time for such a reevaluation to take place. Defense decision making within the Trump administration can be organized and streamlined by achieving internal consensus on a grand strategy to secure American interests abroad, by deciding the size and composition of the armed forces needed to meet plausible military contingencies, and by creating a defense budget adequate to underwrite those challenges. This article provides a framework for analysis in each of these three categories of defense decision making and suggests a course of action the Trump administration is likely to follow.

Choosing a Grand Strategy

The Trump administration's national security team can choose from three grand strategies: primacy, selective engagement, and restraint. A good deal of academic study, political analysis, and practical application has described and explained these approaches over the years, and it is well beyond the scope of this article to engage in a rigorous, focused comparison of these contrasting grand strategies. But to get a sense of what might prove attractive to defense planners now taking their seats in the Pentagon and the executive branch, one must take a quick tour of the strategic horizon, noting the characteristics, proponents, and critics of each approach.

The debate over grand strategy is a post–Cold War discussion. The overarching objective of American foreign policy during the Cold War was the containment of the Soviet Union, and successive administra-

tions of both the Republican and Democratic parties adopted that goal. Despite the broad agreement on that objective, however, grand strategies adopted by those governments differed considerably, principally owing to the perception of resources available to dedicate to the military instrument of foreign policy. As John Lewis Gaddis has explained, these administrations adopted either symmetric means (matching the adversary at every level) or asymmetric approaches (applying American strengths against the opponent's weaknesses).[4] Of note to our investigation of a grand strategy choice within the Trump administration, Gaddis—a Cold War scholar and grand strategy expert—concluded that, barring unforeseen events (for example, the terrorist attacks of 9/11), policy perspectives formed before the administration's accession to office tended not to change over the years.

After the Cold War, the consensus on containment vanished in victory, and scholars and politicians deliberated on the meaning of a *unipolar moment*, the end of history, and a new world order. With respect to grand strategy, the debate was introduced in an influential article written by Posen and fellow national security professor Andrew Ross in the Winter 1996 issue of *International Security*.[5] There, the authors suggested four rival grand strategies that might guide American post–Cold War defense policy: a retreat from global leadership, a campaign of liberal internationalism, an effort to maintain American primacy, or a less adventuresome policy of selective engagement. Since that time, given the foreign policy agendas and use of military force supporting those objectives through the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations, the four grand strategy alternatives appear to have morphed into three. Liberal internationalism, coupled with cooperative security, is defined as *primacy*. Neo-isolationism, combined with "offshore balancing" is now best characterized as *restraint*. *Selective engagement* occupies the middle ground of grand strategy, perhaps allowing its practitioners the most flexibility regarding American military action abroad. A brief explanation will help identify which of these might be most attractive to a Trump administration.

Primacy

As Posen and Ross stated, primacy "holds that only a preponderance of US power ensures peace."[6] This strategy is essentially a carryover from Cold War policies, those in which the United States sought a decided

military advantage over the USSR across the spectrum of potential conflict. Under this concept, although allied contributions were welcome, it was up to the United States as a superpower to ensure it could develop and sustain this capability unilaterally. Because this grand strategy proved so successful in winning the Cold War, proponents argue it should not be abandoned. Once the Soviet Union had succumbed, it was the purpose of US defense policy to ensure that any rising competitor would face an unrivaled military power capable of deterring and defeating any challenge to a stable and peaceful international order. Was primacy the adopted grand strategy of the US government during the post–Cold War period? To some degree it was, although not to the extent that its critics claim. Primacy was the guiding strategic concept in the George H. W. Bush administration, as a draft of the 1992 *Defense Planning Guidance* explicitly called for "precluding the emergence of any potential future global competitor."[7] However, primacy was not the grand strategy adopted by the Clinton administration, which chose instead a strategy of *selective engagement*—eschewing the use of military force during some crises and pursuing collective security in place of unilateral military power and action. In rejecting neo-isolationism and deemphasizing primacy, the *National Security Strategy* issued in February 1996 promoted cooperative security measures and acknowledged limits restraining the role of the American military as the world's police force. The George W. Bush administration included in its decision-making circle some of the authors of the 1992 planning guidance. After the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, its *National Security Strategy* called for a military so powerful that it would "dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military buildup in hopes of surpassing or equaling the power of the United States."[8] Since that time, owing to the rise in external threats and diminishing resources resulting from the "great recession" of 2008, American grand strategy has alternated between primacy and selective engagement. Reversing course, Barack Obama, elected on a promise to bring US forces home from Mid-East wars and to seek diplomatic solutions to challenges overseas, characterized his strategy as one of selective engagement, "doubling down where success is plausible, and limiting American exposure to the rest."[9]

What are the arguments for and against a return to a grand strategy of primacy? Writing in the September/October 2016 issue of *Foreign*

Affairs, Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX) and defense policy analyst Andrew Krepinevich call for the new administration to preserve primacy to "allow the United States to preclude the rise of a hegemonic power along the Eurasian periphery and preserve access to the global commons."[10] Thornberry and Krepinevich are concerned specifically with three threats to US security and vital interests abroad: (1) the rising conventional power of China as it seeks regional dominance in the Western Pacific, (2) the use of Russian proxy forces to push back the political freedoms and open markets in former Soviet states in Eastern Europe, and (3) the nuclear potential and ideological expansion of Iranian power in the Middle East. These revisionist states also challenge US and allied access to the global commons of trade and communication. To meet these threats, primacy proponents call for a military strategy focused on reducing these risks to international security. In agreeing with former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger that America has not faced a more complex and dangerous set of crises and adversaries since the end of World War II, the authors call for the United States to develop new military competitive advantages—and to do so more quickly than our adversaries.[11]

Arguments against primacy as a grand strategy characterize it as a military-centric approach leading the United States into costly and unnecessary wars. Posen terms it a "costly, wasteful and self-defeating grand strategy" in which a "huge global military presence and the frequent resort to force produce several unfortunate outcomes."[12] Those outcomes include countervailing behavior by competitors, free riding by allies and friends, and widespread anti-Americanism owing to its insensitivity to identity politics. Primacy's "expansionist dynamic," warn its critics, leads the United States to drift into military action at the expense of more affordable and effective instruments of foreign policy. Rather than a status quo policy to maintain American leadership in the international system, primacy leads us toward political expansion and high defense spending. Continuing primacy, these opponents argue, is unnecessary and likely to be increasingly costly in blood and treasure.

An article in the Winter 2016 issue of *Strategic Studies Quarterly* declared that grand strategy was rarely debated in Washington, where the foreign policy establishment defaulted to a posture advocating American primacy in foreign and defense affairs.[13] The above short historical review suggests that is not the case. Pres. Bill Clinton's grand strategy and what has been termed the Obama doctrine both deemphasized the

military instrument of national power by choosing where, when, and how to intervene militarily and demonstrated explicit themes of selective engagement as US grand strategy.

Selective Engagement

A grand strategy of selective engagement narrows the American worldview to a focus on great power competition and conflict. It calls for American military engagement abroad—but only where that military power can be used to deter great power conflict. Unlike primacy, which sees resources ample enough to support a symmetrical strategy against any adversary, proponents of selective engagement acknowledge that American resources are limited and therefore must be husbanded to be available for the most serious crises in defense of vital interests. Regional conflicts do matter, but only if they might spiral out of control and bring the great powers into military confrontation. The regional focus for selective engagement is maintaining order and avoiding conflict in Europe and East Asia. The Middle East remains an area of concern owing to its petroleum resources but is not vital enough to warrant a forward military presence or continued military intervention. To fight terrorism there, the United States should leverage its regional alliances, lending intelligence and logistic support, rather than leading counterinsurgent and counterterrorism forces.[14]

Proponents of selective engagement believe it is the right grand strategy for the times. It maintains many of the trappings of primacy with a robust military and a forward defense to commit the United States, by demonstrating its credibility and capability, to preserve the liberal international order. But it seeks a middle course between an isolated, retrenching America and one with the power and the motivation to repress any challenger and act as the world's policeman. To pursue either of these extremes risks great power conflict. Selectively engaging preserves the status quo at an affordable political and economic cost.

Critics of selective engagement come at the strategy from both sides. Champions of primacy fear it lacks the commitment to principle and idealism that has characterized American foreign policy and fails to differentiate between good and evil. In focusing on great power relations, selective engagement tends to ignore armed conflicts elsewhere, therefore encouraging mischief-making by lesser actors and tolerating regional wars—but it lacks clear guidance on when and where the United States

should intervene militarily on the periphery. From the *restraint* perspective, neo-isolationists argue that too much reliance on the military instrument overseas is a natural catalyst to involving the United States in future wars. Attempting to deter far-flung conflict often results in fighting them.

Restraint

Since the United States assumed its role of international leadership after the end of World War II, there have been calls for it to retreat to the isolationism that characterized its international posture prior to that global conflict. "No more Koreas" was a chant encouraging retrenchment from American involvement in Asia, and US military intervention in Vietnam led to cries for America to come home. Neo-isolationists in any age see American military presence abroad as both unnecessary and counterproductive. The perception of limited resources and where to spend them occupies a central role in prescriptions of restraint. According to this view, the United States can no longer afford to maintain world order and, instead, should devote its attention and funds to nation building at home, counting on the private sector to pursue globalization and economic well-being. George Washington's farewell advice to "avoid entangling alliances" sits just fine with advocates of restraint as a grand strategy. Bringing that warning up to date, neo-isolationists would agree with the majority in recent public opinion polls ranking "defending our allies' security" near the bottom of foreign policy priorities.[15]

Proponents of a grand strategy of restraint complain that America's foreign policy has become too militarized and that the United States can achieve the majority of its goals abroad by emphasizing other instruments of national power. American security, they agree, is of the highest importance, but they see few discernible threats to the continental United States. They rail against profligate defense spending, frequently noting how US defense budgets dwarf those of other nations and arguing that America's prosperity could be enhanced by allocating these resources elsewhere. While positing that a grand strategy of restraint would increase US security and prosperity, advocates of such a strategy admit that "shifting to a restrained military policy will require major changes to America's alliance commitments, regional crisis planning, and force structure."[16]

Those who oppose a grand strategy of restraint see it as a recipe for the loss of US influence abroad and, with it, diminished American se-

curity and prosperity. A world of myriad dangers requires American engagement, not retreat, to shape and maintain the international order. Even post–Cold War administrations electing to lessen a reliance on the military instrument have sought to shore up US activism in the international political system by relying on other instruments to convey American commitment. An isolated America will embolden its competitors, spawn new anti-American alliances, weaken our economic leadership, and encourage destabilizing nuclear weapons proliferation. Any savings in reduced defense budgets will be offset by a loss of American economic, diplomatic, and informational power.

Because President Trump ran a successful political campaign against the establishment, he is well positioned to adopt approaches challenging previous assumptions and practices regarding how the United States should prepare and respond militarily to international actors that threaten American interests. While it is likely the Trump administration will adopt an *ad hoc* approach, adapting its grand strategy to events and crises as they materialize, developing a clear consensus on the role the US military should play in supporting American foreign policy could help shape events, ward off crises, and enhance preparations for the challenges that lie ahead. Only after doing this can the new administration successfully plan future military forces.

Adopting a Force-Planning Construct

Military force planning has been described as an art more practiced than studied, and America's inchoate efforts to downsize its armed forces over the last decade in what has been termed an age of austerity lend credence to that aphorism. Current force planning—how the Department of Defense goes about sizing its ground, maritime, and air and space forces to meet present and future contingencies—has been clouded by competing views on how to confront major state and nonstate adversaries and shackled by arbitrary cost caps and cuts. At the heart of force planning is the *strategic concept*—the number and types of wars the United States anticipates and plans its forces to deter and fight. In the early stages of the Cold War that was *two-and-a-half* wars, two simultaneous conflicts of major proportions in Europe and Asia, plus a lesser conflict—implicitly, Cuba. In the 1970s, in the wake of the American withdrawal from Vietnam and a recognition of the Sino-Soviet split, the Nixon Doctrine reduced those force-planning requirements to encompass a

major war in Europe against the Warsaw pact and a lesser contingency elsewhere, perhaps in Northeast or Southwest Asia—the *one-and-a-half* war strategic concept. Following the success of the 1990 Gulf War, the 1993 "Bottom-Up Review" called for "sufficient military power to be able to win two major regional conflicts [MRC] that occur nearly simultaneously."[17] The *two-war* planning construct (that rather improbably planned the exact same numbers of armored divisions, air wings, and naval battle groups to fight two very different military confrontations) was sustained in a series of defense planning reviews through the 1990s.

With the two-war planning scenario overtaken by the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, defense planners have struggled to come up with the strategic concept to guide future force planning. A series of quadrennial defense reviews (QDR) attempted to adjust the strategic concept to the reality of American forces engaged overseas in less-than-major contingencies while hedging against a larger-than-expected threat. Thus the 2006 QDR's planning construct called for the United States to maintain an irregular warfare capacity at "the current level of effort associated with operations in Iraq and Afghanistan."[18] But it also required the capacity to conduct two simultaneous conventional campaigns (or only one if the irregular campaign turned out to be of a long duration) with the capability to topple a regime and restore order after that military victory. The 2010 QDR, also conducted during ongoing combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, maintained the same strategic guidance while acknowledging the complexity of the force-planning scenarios and the numerous assumptions and calculations used in attempting to match a future force structure to plausible hypothetical contingencies.[19] The 2014 QDR was even less specific regarding a strategic concept and force sizing but followed the 2012 Strategic Guidance declaring that US armed forces would no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations.[20] The 2014 QDR stated that the US military would be capable of "conducting sustained, distributed counterterrorist operations; and in multiple regions, deterring aggression and assuring allies through forward presence and engagement." In addition, US forces "will be capable of defeating a regional adversary in a large-scale multi-phased campaign, and denying the objective of—or imposing unacceptable costs on—a second aggressor in another region."[21]

Strategic concepts, of course, have to be translated into force size and structure. The MRC building block used in the Bottom-Up Review,

based on a force needed to turn back a cross-border armed incursion by a major armed competitor, included four to five Army divisions, 10 Air Force fighter wings, and four to five aircraft carrier groups. Added to that base force were flexible long-range bombers, expeditionary units from the Marine Corps, and special operations forces (SOF). Additional naval surface combatants were required for global presence. That force size, through a series of QDRs, was simply doubled to reach a two-MRC requirement, a rather simplistic formula given the varied adversarial capabilities and terrain that might be encountered. An update of that force-planning process—continuing to rely on a requirement to meet two major contingencies nearly simultaneously and making conservative assumptions—might require 50 Army brigade combat teams (BCT), 346 naval surface combatants with attendant strike aircraft, 1,200 Air Force fighter aircraft, and 36 Marine Corps battalions. This joint force would also be supplemented by long-range bombers, SOF, and support and enabling functions.[22]

On entering office, the Trump administration will find US forces well below these levels. The Army is on track by 2020 to field 30 BCTs (plus 26 more in the National Guard). The Navy plans to build modestly from a current fleet of 287 surface combatants (including 11 large-deck aircraft carriers) to 308 ships by 2021. The Air Force plans to field 55 fighter squadrons and roughly 100 long-range bombers, while the Marine Corps holds steady at three divisions with their associated air wings.[23] These forces have been planned to continue counterterror and counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and wherever Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) might be found, but at a moderate "light footprint" presence and pace. The joint force also has been sized to be able to defeat a regional aggressor and pursue regime change, perhaps within Iran, while deterring and defending against another would-be aggressor in a different region, presumably North Korea. However, the Army and Marine Corps are no longer to be shaped to conduct large-scale stability operations, as reflected in the continued downsizing of ground units in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last eight years. The Navy and Air Force, in addition to supporting roles in both major and lesser contingencies, are tasked with maintaining and securing the global commons of communication and trade.

Force Planning for Primacy

Given that force planning history, what strategic concept and force-planning approach might guide a new administration? There are several from which to choose. In their *Foreign Affairs* article advocating a grand strategy of primacy, Thornberry and Krepinevich call for a strategic concept of one-and-a-half wars. That posture would give the United States an ability to deter or wage a major war with China while being able to send expeditionary forces "to either Europe or the Middle East."[24] In the Western Pacific, the authors are most concerned with Chinese expansionism and advocate a forward defense with additional land, naval, and air forces able to impose a blockade or take back territory. Thornberry and Krepinevich also advocate increased US air and ground forces deployed to frontline Eastern European states to deter further Russian adventurism and proxy wars. In the Middle East, the authors think that the aim of destroying ISIS is unrealistic but advocate greater US support for regional friends and allies countering this virulent strain of Islam.

Force Planning for Selective Engagement

While foreign policy expert Michael O'Hanlon does not term it as such, his *one-plus-two* framework for sizing ground forces including "enough combat capability to wage one substantial and extended regional war while also carrying out two to three smaller operations at a time"—perhaps in continuing counterterror and counterinsurgency operations—might serve as a blueprint for force planning under a grand strategy of selective engagement.[25] O'Hanlon's strategic concept calls for sufficient ground forces to deter and defend against North Korean aggression, plus an air- and naval-centric force to hedge against hostile action in the Persian Gulf or South China Sea. His two "half wars" envision multilateral deterrence or response missions, to include peacekeeping or disaster response, "more on the scale of the typical post–Cold War US missions in Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo or Afghanistan through 2008 (and after 2014)."[26] O'Hanlon's specific force plans call for a modest increase in the size of the Army, stabilizing the naval fleet at 300 ships, and keeping a two-war planning standard for the Air Force and its fighter aircraft.

Force Planning for Restraint

Force planning under a grand strategy of restraint eschews a framework of hypothetical scenarios to plan military forces against and instead emphasizes a maritime strategy, focusing on the "command of the commons." Posen writes, "Command of the commons permits the United States to strengthen itself at leisure for operations abroad, concert and reinforce the actions of allies if they are available, weaken enemies through embargo and blockade, and erode the adversaries' capabilities through direct attack. It also allows the United States to interdict the movements of terrorists and technology smugglers, and to mount offensive raids ashore when needed."[27]

With respect to ground forces, a strategy of restraint permits sizable cuts. Large forward forces dedicated to presence or stability/counterinsurgency operations are seen as counterproductive, and a major land war against a sophisticated armed state is not a likely contingency to plan against. But a sizing principle for land forces is required, and Posen suggests an active ground force able to "alter the local military balance firmly in favor of its friends in a range of contingencies that could matter."[28] Although that force is admittedly difficult to calculate, taking the Bottom-Up Review's approach by modeling the force used for Operations Desert Storm in 1990 and Iraqi Freedom in 2003 suggests an active Army of six divisions, each with three or four brigades, all based in the United States. Such reductions might result in a standing force of 400,000—a reduction of nearly 100,000 from current plans. Acknowledging that the size of the Marine Corps is established by law at three divisions, a strategy of restraint advocates reducing the personnel in each division/wing combination, with enough shipping prepositioned on either American coast to support a division-sized amphibious assault. Such an approach might cut Marine Corps total end strength by about one-third.

Sizing Air Force tactical fighter wings has always been a tricky proposition, as traditionally they were seen as airborne artillery and dedicated to support of Army divisions at a ratio of about two to one. Therefore, despite the importance of combat air to protecting the commons, Air Force tactical fighter squadrons, using the Marine Corps as a model, might be reduced by perhaps three squadrons or roughly 216 aircraft. Posen notes that it is not the challenge of air superiority but rather ground defenses that pose the most serious obstacle to command of the air in nonpermissive environments. Here a premium is placed on

stealth, long-range, and, perhaps, unmanned platforms to accomplish the important mission of suppressing enemy air defenses.

With restraint defined as a maritime strategy for force-planning purposes, the Navy emerges as the key service charged with defending and exploiting the command of the commons. Central to this effort is a robust nuclear attack submarine (SSN) force, which, based on contingency analysis, Posen sizes at 48. In addition to being able to "thwart open-ocean submarine offensives," the SSN fleet must also "maintain an ability to protect the remainder of its surface-based naval power, as well as its trade. This means antisubmarine (and anti-air) warfare capabilities—multipurpose destroyers, long-range antisubmarine warfare aircraft, sensors and command and control."[29] As Army divisions were used to size Air Force fighter wings, the number of aircraft carriers and their attendant battle groups have in the past driven the number of naval surface combatants. Even with maritime forces dominating a grand strategy of restraint, Posen argues that a fleet of nine carriers, rather than the current force of 11, should suffice to underwrite the strategic concept. Based on a naval fleet of 300 ships supporting 11 carriers, a fleet of nine carrier strike groups might reduce the total number of combat ships to 290 or less.

Deciding How Much Is Enough

With grand strategy as a guide and force planning based on plausible military contingencies in support of that vision, formulating a defense budget should be a relatively straightforward process. Of course we know that is not so, as often the topline defense budget is determined, or at least constrained, by outside factors and frequently becomes the entering argument rather than the resulting calculation. Despite these exigencies, defense budget formulation has a history of rational formulation, dating back to the time when analysts Alain Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, in the employment of Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, first asked the question "how much is enough?" and sought to bound the answers systematically.[30] Those methods can and should be renewed. However, there is a great deal of financial carryover from past administrations and, in a budget dominated by well-ensconced and -supported programs of record, flexibility is hard to find. One thing is for sure: the defense budget has fallen dramatically since 2011, and legislated cuts under the Budget Control Act and the process of sequestration call for further declines. Although many agree that the defense budget needed to go

down from the Cold War peaks of 2008–11, an equivalent majority would conclude that the cumulative total of approximately $1 trillion in cuts, executed and planned for the period 2011–20, go too far. That conclusion, of course, is based on grand strategy preferences and force-planning models designed to support those strategies. Defense budgets in the Trump administration, therefore, should reflect on and deliberate alternative foreign and defense policy choices and match their budgets to those priorities.

As an indicator of what might be done in a Trump administration, a group of think tanks in Washington recently asked again, "how much is enough?," and offered a range of budget amounts and priorities.[31] The study was based on the current 10-year forecast of US defense spending—some $6.3 trillion—and asked the five teams to supplement or decrement that amount based on their preferred strategy and supporting forces. Although these organizations, for the most part, did not explicitly tie their force planning and budgets to specific grand strategies—or prescribe a defense budget for the Trump administration—by inference we can suggest what a defense budget might look like across a range of the three grand strategies and in support of the forces required to underwrite that strategy.

Budgeting for Primacy

The positions taken by individuals from the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) come closest to estimating a defense budget that might underwrite a grand strategy of primacy. The AEI section of the collective study explicitly renounces a strategy of selective engagement in positing three major theaters of potential conflict—Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East—and advocates forces and budgets capable of restoring American military primacy in each. Force planning in support of the hypothetical contingencies that might be encountered in those theaters focuses on three initiatives. First, AEI suggests fielding stealthy aircraft en masse to counter the anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) networks now being developed by China and Iran with the purpose of denying US air and naval forces presence and freedom of action as they respond to territorial aggression in East Asia and the Persian Gulf. Second, AEI champions reclaiming sea control through renewed and increased investment in surface combatants, nuclear attack submarines, and the jump jet F-35B. Third, AEI prioritizes modernizing the Army with more organic firepower

to conduct both irregular and conventional ground combat missions successfully. To reach these desired capabilities, AEI estimated that the planned defense budget would have to be increased a total of approximately $1.3 trillion over the next 10 years.

In making "strategic choices for future competitions" CSBA nevertheless argues for a US military that is second to none. This think tank also adopts a three-theater planning framework but recommends a defense budget increase of only about half the AEI proposal—$572 billion over the next decade. As a longtime advocate of a "revolution in military affairs" composed of not only technology improvements but also organizational change and new concepts of operation, CSBA notes that greater funding alone will not be enough to reestablish American military primacy. Nevertheless, it advocates increased US ground presence in Europe and Asia, resulting in a 55,000-Soldier add above currently planned personnel levels. A high-low mix for the Air Force includes accelerated production of the new stealth bomber (the B-21) a restart of the stealthy F-22 air superiority fighter, sustained funding for the F-35, and a new low-cost fighter to replace the A-10, although the size of the force—owing to retirements of aging aircraft—should remain about the same. For the Navy, CSBA calls for an increase in the size of the battle fleet from 272 ships to 384 over the planning period. Sea control and power projection drive these increases, with emphasis on long-range unmanned penetrating intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance and carrier-based strike aircraft.

Budgeting for Selective Engagement

In addressing the question "how much is enough" in this study, two think tanks offered forces and budgets that might be presumed to underwrite a grand strategy of selective engagement. Analysts from the Center for New American Security (CNAS, which did not take an institutional position) focused on maintaining force readiness and hedging against future threats through select modernization. The result of their prescription was a relatively modest 2 percent increase above the FY17 projected defense budget, resulting in an annual defense budget of approximately $550 billion over the decade. Nevertheless, the CNAS scholars' recommendations mirrored some of those advanced by their primacy-seeking colleagues: increase the Navy's battle fleet from 272 ships to 345 and grow the attack submarine force from 58 to 74. The Air Force also profited

from force increases, including adding 180 fighter aircraft and 44 stealth bombers. The Army was preserved at an end strength of approximately 450,000, with armored BCTs increased from nine to 12. In supporting a selective engagement policy of overseas presence, the CNAS team heavily invested in forces abroad by positioning additional carriers and attack submarines in the Pacific and shifting brigade combat teams to Europe. Budgetary savings for these improvements were achieved by decommissioning legacy forces determined to have declining utility in new, contested environments.

The second budgetary and force proposal that can be considered as supporting a strategy of selective engagement was advanced by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). The rebalancing approach offered by CSIS stressed that military needs must be assessed "against the resources available and the tradeoffs that must be made elsewhere in the federal budget." Their roles and missions statement for the US military in the future has a definite selective-engagement ring: providing a stabilizing military balance in key regions when needed and conducting humanitarian and disaster relief operations. Specifically, the CSIS work differentiated between planning for major military competitions with great powers and a selective-engagement policy to counter lesser regional threats. However, in seeking investment commonalities across these two planning contingencies, CSIS was able to restrict its requested budget increase to a relatively modest $461 billion over the next 10 years. Central to that increase was moving back into the baseline budget enduring operational costs that had previously been absorbed into the war-fighting supplemental—overseas contingency operations. Additional new investments went to air, space, cyber, and sea—the anticipated domains for future combat in highly contested environments.

Budgeting for Restraint

The only organization to advocate cuts to the US defense budget over the next 10 years was the Cato Institute, and its team did so under the specific declaration that it was following a grand strategy of restraint. The Cato proposal to cut about $1.1 trillion from the defense budget over a decade results primarily from that strategy's assumption regarding the decreased role the US military should play in underwriting American foreign policy and the force reductions that naturally result. In keeping with the "come home, America" theme of restraint, the Cato analysts

eliminated almost all US overseas bases over the decade and cut US ground forces—Army, Marine Corps, and SOF—by about one-third. Such a move gets the United States out of the nation-building and even train-and-equip missions, reducing commitments to allies and friends in the process. The Air Force also came in for its share of budgetary reductions, cancelling the short-range F-35 and instead investing in so-called fourth-generation legacy fighters, but preserving the new long-range bomber. The Navy fares better under a grand strategy of restraint, still cut by 25 percent but left with the lion's share of the defense budget. Carrier reductions amounting to the four oldest flattops in the inventory allowed further cuts in supporting surface and undersea combatants, along with the cancellations of the littoral combat ship. Rather than forward presence—on which the Navy has rested its planning foundation for decades—Cato proposes a surge force that responds to challenges to the sea lanes as necessary. The strategy of restraint, both in force planning and budgeting, promises a defensive strategy to achieve greater security at lower cost.

Defense Decision Making in the Trump Administration

Political scientists describe, explain, and predict. They are generally good at the first two but lamentably poor at the third. As a current reminder of this, recall the projections on the result of the 2016 presidential election by experts who make their living polling potential voters and outcomes. The bane of social scientists is attempting to quantify rational choices from irrational actors.[32] As Yogi Berra and others have warned us, "Prediction is difficult . . . especially about the future." On the other hand, prescription is a much easier task. History's arc gives a great deal to build on, and one's preferences immediately come to the fore. Moreover, prescriptions cannot be proven wrong, only misapplied. But to wade through the above analysis only to arrive at a previously determined recommended course of action would seem to be a waste of time. Therefore the prescriptions here are based what was known in December 2016, prior to inaugural speeches and confirmation testimony, to offer an informed opinion on what the Trump administration might decide to do about America's defense.

Students of decision making know that individuals matter, whether it is the power of a single leader's charisma or the collective conclusions of groupthink. The new set of leaders brought into the Trump administration

to deliberate and act upon challenges to American defense and security will therefore have much to say in deciding on grand strategy, force planning, and budgets. As stated in the beginning, reaching consensus on key issues of strategy, forces, and budgets could ease and streamline future decisions. Given what we know about those occupying key defense and security positions in the Trump administration, such a consensus appears unlikely. With apologies to historian Doris Kearns Goodwin and, perhaps, to Abraham Lincoln, Donald Trump may have, wittingly or not, created a "team of rivals." Foreign policy expert Thomas Wright has suggested that a new cabinet of defense decision-makers may be divided into three opposing camps: "the America Firsters, the religious warriors, and the traditionalists."[33]

An *America First* policy preference harks back to the days of US isolationism and protectionism. In asking "what's in it for America economically," President Trump's frustration is that "the United States gets little for protecting other countries or securing the global order, which he sees as a tradable asset."[34] Trump seems willing not only to withdraw from international trade agreements he sees as unfavorable to US economic interests but also to conduct an "agonizing reappraisal" of American security commitments. Wright's *religious warriors* make up the second group, one that waves a flag of "radical Islamic terror" to rally against and believes the war against radical Islam is every bit as important as the Cold War struggles against Communism. President Trump's pre-election pledge to defeat ISIS by bombing (more recently, to "eradicate them from the face of the earth") is a course of action this part of the team would advocate. They believe radical Islam is an existential threat, that Iran's role in supporting such radical groups must be countered, and that this danger ranks in priority well above meeting the security challenges presented by Russia and China. Finally, some players on this team of rivals can be characterized as *traditionalists*, acting as a bulwark against those advocating major changes in American defense policy. The traditionalists seek "to maintain America's alliance system and military presence around the world."[35] They are likely to have a strong voice, but not an unrivaled or uncontested one, in the making of defense policy in the Trump administration.

Trump's Grand Strategy: Restrained Engagement

This strategy might also have been termed *selective restraint*, but a grand strategy in the Trump administration is likely to be more engaged than restrained. As the term implies, this strategic choice is influenced by an America First perspective, abandoning an objective of primacy in favor of a more restrained US role in the world. Indeed, advocates of restraint may find much to like in Donald Trump's grand strategy. Posen has suggested three objectives within a strategy of restraint: preventing a powerful rival from upsetting the balance of power, combatting terrorism, and limiting nuclear proliferation.[36] The Trump administration will also like some of the recommendations supporting those goals, including recasting US alliances so other countries increase contributions to their own defense. Combatting terrorism is also high on the defense agenda of the new administration. However, limiting nuclear weapons proliferation was not a goal enunciated by Mr. Trump; in fact, the contrary has been suggested—that other nations may need to develop their own nuclear capability if the United States rejects extended deterrence. But advocates of selective engagement will note—and traditionalists within the administration will agree—that "military force will remain an important component of U.S. power . . . that [m]arkets depend on a framework of security . . . and that maintaining alliances is an important source of influence for the United States."[37] A grand strategy of restrained engagement would adopt an *offshore balancing* view, calling on the United States to preserve a favorable balance of power in the event a potential hegemon emerges in vital regions, but it would maintain American presence and overseas engagement to assure the free flow of international commerce and global economic growth assured by an activist and engaged policy.[38]

The Nixon (Trump) Doctrine for Force Planning

Donald Trump is an admirer of Richard Nixon. According to news reports, he "borrowed phrases from him, used his speech at the 1968 Republican convention as a template for his own convention address, and spoke glowingly of Nixon in interviews."[39] In that case, Trump might like his doctrine, too. With the 1969 declaration of the Nixon Doctrine, the United States abandoned the two-and-a half war standard that had been used since the Kennedy administration to size conventional forces

in favor of that of one-and-a-half wars. The assumption that America no longer faced the threat of dual, simultaneous major conflicts allowed the phasing down of US global military commitments. While pledging to keep those treaty agreements, the formal declaration of the doctrine noted that "we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense."[40] The premise of the doctrine was that the United States would give first priority to its own interests.

What might a one-and-a-half-war doctrine yield for force planning under a Trump doctrine? Presumably the one major conflict would be either against China in the South China Sea or Iran in the Persian Gulf. Although major military force-on-force confrontations cannot be ruled out—particularly if such a conflict over Taiwan independence or Iranian nuclear weapons were to spin out of control—the most plausible hypothetical contingency to plan against in both cases is likely to be maintaining freedom of navigation in territorial waters, penetrating or establishing a naval blockade, and overcoming A2/AD defenses. In 2010 the CSBA developed the operational concept of "Air-Sea Battle."[41] Although the title has since been rejected by the Pentagon owing to its focus on only two of the armed services, the principle on which the concept was based has only become more relevant. Politically incorrect, the initial study and further elaborations of it pointed to the A2/AD capabilities being developed by China that, if not responded to, could negate the ability of American armed forces to approach and operate within the Western Pacific. A follow-on CSBA study found a similar challenge and advocated a common approach to deal with Iran's emerging anti-access capabilities.[42] In each hypothetical conflict, the need was for new long-range air and naval systems such as penetrating bombers and carrier-based unmanned aircraft, increased numbers of nuclear attack submarines with larger magazines of standoff munitions, improved air and missile defenses, and forward posture initiatives to shore up deterrence and "complicate the operational planning of an enemy force."[43] Underwriting this concept of operation requires a buildup of air and naval forces similar to that advocated by CNAS and CSIS in their force and budget proposals.

Despite Trump's calls for increasing the size of American land forces during the presidential campaign, such an approach seems at odds with this doctrine. Candidate Trump promised a policy that would "stop

looking to topple regimes and overthrow governments" in the Middle East and elsewhere, so large land armies required to do that appear superfluous. Thus, although the military may be given more leeway in going after Mid-East militants, the numbers of US forces increased slightly, and the bombing sortie rate increased, the end strength of the Army and Marine Corps seems unlikely to grow significantly.[44] Sizing for the Army, then, might best follow O'Hanlon's one-war capacity that "might or might not lead to regime change and occupation of enemy territory."[45] O'Hanlon suggests a modest increase in the size of the 450,000 active Army and 525,000 Reserve and National Guard forces to total about one million men and women.

Force planning focuses on the strategic concept, the numbers of wars the nation might fight, and the plausible contingencies that drive the quantity of general purpose forces needed. But there are three other initiatives in force planning carried over from the previous administration that the Trump administration will find worthwhile. The first of these is the so-called third offset. A name change might be useful here—something like *game changers* perhaps, or *creative disruption* to add a business school ring to it—but the investment in next-generation weapons systems and technologies, such as directed energy, unmanned platforms, cyber and hypersonic weapons, and space-based assets and their concepts of operation, is meant to assure future US military superiority and strengthen conventional deterrence.[46] A second program to continue is strategic nuclear modernization, recalling that the Nixon Doctrine promised that the United States would "provide a shield if a nuclear power threatens the freedom of a nation allied with us or a nation whose survival we consider vital to our security."[47] Like those underwriting Eisenhower's "New Look," nuclear weapons systems are relatively affordable and bring a good deal of "bang for the buck."[48] Finally, the so-called Asian pivot should be continued, with perhaps another name change.[49] Europe no longer is the central focus for defense. And although ISIS and Iran will remain important in force planning and operations, Asia, particularly China, deserves a new prominence in American defense policy.

Conclusion: Deciding How Much Is Enough

Four of the five think tanks participating in the study referenced above recommended significant increases in the defense budget. There-

fore, the first declaration a Trump administration may choose to make regarding defense spending is that the era of austerity is over. The 2011 Budget Control Act, the central legislative player in equating defense budgets with other discretionary spending in the process of sequestration, should no longer be allowed to dictate defense budgets. With that obstacle set aside, the question of how much is enough remains. To support a grand strategy of restrained engagement and a one-and-a-half war force-planning construct, the relatively modest defense budget increases proposed by CNAS and CSIS appear to be adequate to support overseas operations, keep modernization and readiness initiatives on track, increase Army end strength marginally, and make major improvements in the quantity and quality of air and naval capabilities. In O'Hanlon's words, a 2020 defense budget of $650 billion in constant 2016 dollars will be the "best bargain going."[50] President Trump's defense decision-making team, in the spirit of "the art of the deal," should start negotiating that bargain right now. SSQ

Notes

1. Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 1.
2. Another dedicated student of grand strategy, Hal Brands, uses a more expansive definition: "an integrated set of concepts that offers broad direction to statecraft." Because this article focuses on defense decision making, we will adopt Art's more narrow definition. *See* Hal Brands, "Barack Obama and the Dilemmas of American Grand Strategy," *The Washington Quarterly* (Winter 2017): 101–25, http://doi.org/bwrm.
3. Barry Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 1.
4. John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
5. Barry Posen and Andrew Ross, "Competing Visions for U.S. Grand Strategy," *International Security* 21, no. 3 (Winter 1996/97): 5–53, http://muse.jhu.edu/article/447445.
6. Ibid., 32.
7. "Excerpts from Pentagon's Plan: 'Prevent the Emergence of a New Rival,'" *New York Times*, 8 March 1992, http://www.nytimes.com/1992/03/08/world/excerpts-from-pentagon-s-plan-prevent-the-reemergence-of-a-new-rival.html.
8. George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House, September 2002, 5.
9. Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine," *The Atlantic*, April 2016, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/.
10. Mac Thornberry and Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., "Preserving Primacy," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 5 (September/October 2016): 27, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-america/2016-08-03/preserving-primacy.
11. Robert Art distinguishes between *dominion* and *primacy*, which he does not believe deserves the title of a grand strategy. But he admits that dominion is a dictatorial position and probably unachievable, while primacy is both feasible and—for some—desirable.
12. Posen, *Restraint*, 65.
13. Benjamin H. Friedman and Justin Logan, "Why Washington Doesn't Debate Grand Strategy," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 14–43, http://www.au.af.mil/au/ssq/comments.asp?id=143.
14. Art, *Grand Strategy*, 198–203.

15. *See* Richard N. Haas, "The Isolationist Temptation," *Wall Street Journal*, 6 August 2016, C1, http://www.wsj.com/articles/the-isolationist-temptation-1470411481.

16. Eugene Gholz, Daryl G. Press, and Harvey M. Sapolsky, "Come Home, America," *International Security* 21, no. 4 (Spring 1997): 17, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/447452.

17. Department of Defense (DOD), *Report on the Bottom-Up Review* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, October 1993), 7, http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf&AD=ADA359953.

18. DOD, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2006), 27.

19. Kathleen H. Hicks and Samuel Brannen, "Force Planning in the 2010 QDR," *Joint Force Quarterly* 59 (4th Quarter 2010): 142, http://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-59.pdf.

20. DOD, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, January 2012), 6, http://oai.dtic.mil/oai/oai?&verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA554328.

21. DOD, *2014 Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2014), https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/QDR/2014_Quadrennial_Defense_Review.pdf.

22. Dakota Wood, ed., *2016 Index of U.S. Military Strength* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2015), 8, http://index.heritage.org/military/2016/.

23. DOD, *Defense Budget Materials—FY2017, Budget Briefing* (Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense [Comptroller/Chief Financial Officer], 9 February 2016), http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2017/FY2017_Budget_Request.pdf.

24. Thornberry and Krepinevich, "Preserving Primacy," 29.

25. Michael O'Hanlon, *The Wounded Giant* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 47.

26. Michael O'Hanlon, *The $650 Billion Bargain* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2016), 48.

27. Posen, *Restraint*, 144.

28. Ibid., 146.

29. Ibid., 151.

30. Alain C. Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, *How Much Is Enough*? (1971; repr., Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005), http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/commercial_books/2010/RAND_CB403.pdf.

31. Jacob Cohn and Ryan Boone, eds., *How Much Is Enough: Alternative Defense Strategies* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments [CSBA], 2016), http://csbaonline.org/research/publications/how-much-is-enough-alternative-defense-strategies/publication. The summaries of the proposals put forward by the think tanks participating in this project are taken directly from this study.

32. Those wishing to delve more deeply into the difficulty of linking human action with rational outcomes in the social sciences might start with Robert K. Merton, "The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposeful Social Action," *American Sociological Review* 1, no. 6 (December 1936): 894–904, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2084615.

33. Thomas Wright, "Trump's Team of Rivals, Riven by Distrust" *Foreign Policy* (website), 14 December 2016, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/12/14/trumps-team-of-rivals-riven-by-distrust/. *See* also James Mann, "A Foreign Policy Team of Rivals That's Set to Fail," *New York Times* news service, 18 December 2016, https://t.co/syPa3fn3Ou.

34. Wright, "Trump's Team of Rivals."

35. Ibid.

36. Barry Posen, "Pull Back: The Case for a Less Activist Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 1 (January/February 2013): 123, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2013-01-01/pull-back.

37. Joseph H. Nye Jr., "Will the Liberal Order Survive?," *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 1 (January/February 2017): 16, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2016-12-12/will-liberal-order-survive.

38. *See* Hal Brands and Peter D. Feaver, "Should America Retrench?," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 6 (November/December 2016): 168, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/should-america-retrench. Kori Schake suggests the Trump administration might move toward a grand strategy of offshore balancing. *See* "Will Washington Abandon the Order?" *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 1 (January/February 2017): 41–46, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/review-essay/will-washington-abandon-order.

39. Manny Fernandez, "When Donald Trump Partied with Richard Nixon," *New York Times*, 19 December 2016, http://nyti.ms/2i4ox4j. *See* also Barry M. Blechman, "What Trump Could Learn from Nixon," *USA Today* (website), 21 December 2016, http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2016/12/21; and Matteo Fairi, "America's National Security Agencies under Trump: Lessons from the Nixon Administration," *War on the Rocks* (blog), http://www.warontherocks.com/2016/12.

40. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 296.

41. Jan van Tol, Mark Gunzinger, Andrew Krepinevich, and Jim Thomas, *Air-Sea Battle: A Point of Departure Operational Concept* (Washington, DC: CSBA, May 2010), http://csbaonline.org/research/publications/airsea-battle-concept/.

42. Mark Gunzinger and Christopher Dougherty, *Outside-In: Operating from Range to Defeat Iran's Anti-Access and Area-Denial Threats* (Washington, DC: CSBA, January 2012), http://csbaonline.org/research/publications/outside-in-operating-from-range-to-defeat-irans-anti-access-and-area-denial/publication.

43. Ibid., xii.

44. *See* Gerald F. Seib, "Trump Proposing Big Mideast Strategy Shift," *Wall Street Journal*, 13 December 2016, http://www.wsj.com/articles/listen-closely-donald-trump-proposes-big-mideast-strategy-shift-1481561492; and Seib, "Pentagon to Show Trump Tougher Options," *Wall Street Journal*, 9 December 2016, http://www.wsj.com/articles/pentagon-prepares-tougher-options-on-fighting-militants-to-show-trump-team-1481330246. For arguments on increasing the tempo of the air campaign against ISIS, see Lara Seligman, "Fighting ISIS: Is Pentagon Using Air Power's Full Potential?," Defense News, 11 October 2015, http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/air-space/strike/2015/10/11/fighting-isis-pentagon-using-air-powers-full-potential/73667346/.

45. O'Hanlon, *The $650 Billion Bargain*, 48.

46. DOD, "Deputy Secretary: Third Offset Strategy Bolsters America's Military Deterrence," Defense.gov (website), 31 October 2016, https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/991434/deputy-secretary-third-offset-strategy-bolsters-americas-military-deterrence.

47. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 296.

48. *See* Michael D. Shear and James Glanz, "Trump Says the U.S. Should Expand its Nuclear Capacity," *New York Times,* 22 December 2016, http://nyti.ms/2he71NC.

49. Ross Babbage calls it a "Regional Security Partnership Program." *See* "How Donald Trump Can Stave Off Defeat in the South China Sea," *The National Interest* (website), 20 December 2016, http://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-donald-trump-can-stave-defeat-the-south-china-sea-18802.

50. O'Hanlon, *The $650 Billion Bargain*, 113.

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