



Strategic Vision Workshop

Land Power in the 21st Century

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The Center for Strategic Leadership (CSL), United States Army War College (USAWC), in conjunction with Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA) Staff and in cooperation with National Security Faculty and Researchers at Texas A&M University, Bush School of Government, Scowcroft Institute, co-hosted a February 2009 workshop entitled *Strategic Vision Workshop: Land Power in the 21st Century*. The workshop's purpose was to assist the Army Staff in analyzing Grand Strategic choices and the impact these choices have on the usage of land-power in the 21st Century. The workshop took an in-depth look at the various strategic choices that the United States must face in its development of a future National Grand Strategy. The event brought together experts from academic and research departments of the U.S. Army War College and Texas A&M University along with representatives from the Department of the Army Staff and other relevant organizations.

On Strategy

This iteration of the Strategic Vision Workshop was a continuation of previous workshops conducted in the greater Boston area that involved the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, and the Security Studies Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The results of these previous workshops were reported in a May 2008 CSL Issue Paper, [Volume 5-08](#). This issue paper provided an overview of the discussions that took place in each of the academic institutions listed previously. The chief architect of the "Strategic Choices" Brief was Major General David Fastabend, now recently retired, who at the time was the G-3/5/7. It was MG Fastabend's premise from his experiences in Iraq as General George Casey's chief strategist that the U.S. military is "brilliant tactically, competent operationally, but incompetent at military/national strategy." His observations opened a dialogue as to how we teach strategy in our institutions using ends, ways, and means but neglecting to include discussions on strategic choices. Fundamentally, strategy is really about choices and the way we currently determine these choices as a nation is done implicitly rather than explicitly.

Strategy and the choices it proposes must be translated through the levels of theater-strategic, operational, and countless other bureaucratic filters to be understood by American Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines. Strategy must be simple. It must be simple not only to communicate to the military the actions necessary to take but also to the American People who must understand why those actions are being taken. Simplicity in strategy also ensures that our enemies understand that until they surrender or cease the offending behavior, all they will experience is death and destruction, political failure, and economic ruin. This simple premise encapsulates that ever-important part of Clausewitz's secondary Trinity. Strategy is a situationally dependent tool that uses violence and other elements of national power to cause an international actor's actions to fall in line with international norms. Strategy counters the attempts made by our enemies to disrupt the logical lines of operation, pick away at our means, invalidate our ways, and change our ends. Strategic choices and the strategy we implement in pursuing those choices affects outcomes and counters enemy attempts to invalidate our actions.

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In the beginning years of the 21st century, the strategic choices we make as a nation will have significant affect on the strategic environment for the foreseeable future in which we seek to develop a National Grand Strategy. In the 21st Century our nation will confront “complex, dynamic and unanticipated challenges to our national security and the collective security of our friends and allies.” These challenges will occur in many forms such as an increasingly globalized world, technological advancements, population growth and loss, natural resource demands, climate change and natural disasters, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the threat of failed or failing states. These challenges, which constitute a future environment of extreme complexity, make it likely that the next decades will be ones of “Persistent Conflict – protracted confrontation among state, non-state, and individual actors that are increasingly willing to use violence to achieve their political and ideological ends.” Therefore, it is essential that Landpower in the 21st Century be postured in meeting these future complexities in an era of limited economic resources.

Strategic Choices

Similar to previous workshops, the construct used to outline the strategic choices facing the nation were organized by elements of national power (Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic). The following several paragraphs summarize the discussions between national security experts at the Scowcroft Institute and members of both the USAWC and HQDA Staff.

Diplomatic

Conventional wisdom advocates that the United States pursue an engagement strategy through multilateralism with the only debate centering around defining the conditions in which the United States should engage and for what purpose(s). Ideally, these engagements will be conducted with nation-states utilizing existing institutions while acknowledging that trends indicate a rise of non-state entities playing an increasing role in world politics. Realizing the influence that non-state entities will play in the decades ahead demands that any engagement involve multiple partners who share similar values and interests. This has the potential of becoming a difficult task and the United States must carefully consider its choices.

The first and perhaps most difficult choice facing the United States is determining the role it takes in this new strategic environment. The United States supports the belief that free people, democratically governed, are more likely to live in peace as their institutions mature. There are three possible roles that continue to be debated as options for the United States to pursue. The first role is that of “facilitator of good governance.” In this role the United States pursues strengthening global institutions, such as the United Nations which is seen as a key player in facilitating world order through good governance. A second option for the United States to pursue is as a “leader of global order.” In this role the United States can be viewed as the “world’s policeman,” not unilaterally, but through robust engagement and multilateralism first and through unilateralism only as a last option. The third and final option was for the United States to be a “Balancer through Selective Engagement.” This strategy recognizes that U.S. interests cannot be everywhere and acknowledges that a balance must exist in what pursuits warrant U.S. engagement.

According to Dr. Chris Layne (Professor, Bush School), there is very little new thinking on the various options for a National Grand Strategy, mainly because no one has challenged basic assumptions in our strategic assessment. The first basic assumption that needs to be challenged is whether promoting democracy leads to regional stability. Evidence shows that newly formed democratic states tend to be volatile given their institutions are still in the embryonic stage of development. This volatility increases exponentially if the culture in question has no history of representative government structures. Moreover, the United States has a tendency of operating on a different “clock” than is required for the development of democratic institutions in developing nations. Strategic impatience leads to poorly thought-out policies that can further exacerbate the tensions in developing nations. Therefore, another way of approaching peace and stability is by promoting “good governance” that may take different forms than traditional democracies. These forms of government can still share the same values inherent in democracies but are tailored to the particular cultures in which they are being developed. Over time these developing nations can evolve their institutions to resemble those in democratic states; however, this evolution must be in that particular states’ own timeline and not of one that revolves around U.S. election cycles.

The next assumption that must be challenged is the viability of existing alliances. The premise here is that alliances are eroding because common threats are no longer as common as they were during the Cold War. Little argument can be made that alliances are inefficient creatures due to national politics governing each partner nation. Common threats tend to be the glue that holds alliances together to confront a common enemy. However, 21st century challenges will mean different things to different nations which increasingly challenge basic assumptions that partner nations share the same values and or interests. Once values and interests come into question between partner nations within an alliance, the alliance begins to crumble. Dr. Layne emphasized that, “ideology shaping strategy does cause bad things to happen.”

The pursuit of a balanced role within the strategic environment and the importance of maintaining alliances creates a necessity to think differently on how the United States pursues its engagement abroad while harnessing the energy of multilateralism. As stated previously, there is little argument that the United States will continue to be engaged throughout the world and the form of this engagement will in most cases be with partner nations forming a coalition. However, instead of trying to re-define existing alliances to meet 21st century challenges, another way to approach multilateralism is through temporary regional partnerships and alliances. It is already understood that common threats must be evident for an alliance to increase its effectiveness, but for this to be successful, partner nations must share in common threats. That these threats mean different things to different regions requires the United States approach coalition building by region vice using an existing alliance – such as NATO – to counter challenges that are not necessarily threatening to all the nations in the alliance. Does this mean an end to existing alliances? No. It does mean, however, that facing 21st century challenges will require a more robust diplomatic effort in coalition building.

Information

In mature democracies, freedom of information is viewed as a basic right. This makes the informational element of national power the most difficult challenge in free societies. Any effort to restrict or deny freedom of information will be seen as a threat to the credibility of a nation and its government. This challenge is made worse when facing an enemy that has no constraints in his use of misinformation. Regardless of our opponent’s perceived advantage in this realm, the United States must continue to adhere to this fundamental democratic right. Not doing so would be counter to one of our core national values.

This challenge forces the United States to determine how we construct the narrative in communicating to the world the character of the current conflict. Some view the current conflict as a “war of identity,” which creates a perception amongst Muslim countries that the United States is waging a war against Islam. For many Muslim societies, the current conflict is viewed as a war against occupation and outside oppression. This perception makes it increasingly difficult for the United States to achieve any long-lasting effect against extremism in this particular region of the world. An alternative way in characterizing the current conflict is by describing it as a “reestablishment of global order.”

Describing the current conflict as a “reestablishment of global order” is a direct counter to the stated goals of Al Qaeda and its strategic objective of resurrecting the Caliphate. Reestablishing the Caliphate is a direct challenge to the current global order, not only in the Middle-East but also in the Maghreb and parts of Europe. Countering this threat to the global order will have to be accomplished through communicating to the Muslim world that the current global order is not meant to suppress Islam.

A great debate exists within Islam as to the true meaning of the Islamic faith as interpreted by the Koran. It is a faith that is increasingly being challenged by modernity and ultimately this conflict must be solved by Muslims. The United States cannot make the choices for Islam, but it can assist in the outcome by helping define the problem and avoid giving extremists within Muslim states an opportunity to exploit the tensions that exist within Islam due to modernity and the challenges that the 21st century will bring in the decades ahead. According to Dr. Rola el-Husseini, a Middle-East expert at the Bush School, Islamic extremists constitute only 1% of Muslim societies. These are the truly hard-core extremists that are implacable. However, the other 99% of Muslims can be convinced that the current global order is not what is ailing this great religion, but instead, Islam is in a great battle of reestablishing its identity

in an ever changing world that is challenging Islamic beliefs and how these beliefs are interpreted by the Koran. In essence, the message must transition from one of “war on terrorism” to a “war within Islam” itself.

Dr. Husseini believes that one way that the United States can make progress in this endeavor is by reinvigorating the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Muslims recognize that the United States will continue to pursue its interests within the region. However, it is his opinion that all too often the United States is not seen as an honest broker in the peace process. According to Dr. Husseini, consistency of effort and an effective message to both sides of the issue would have a positive reception from Muslim societies throughout the region and counter the perception that the United States is arrogant and an occupier.

Military

A key strategic choice is determining what size U.S. military forces should be to meet 21st century challenges. The Army’s position is that a balanced joint force that poses no key domain vulnerabilities, with a strategy that matches the size of the force, is preferable. The nation has been addressing this choice and has taken some action with increases in the Special Operations Command and the “Grow the Army” decision.

Just like the choice of size, the next key choice is Force Structure. Historically, the United States has tried to tie sizing of military forces based on assumptions about future strategic demand. Not surprisingly, the United States often gets its calculations wrong. However, a basic choice exists when considering Force Structure and that is to build the force to an estimated “strategic demand” or build the force to an estimated “strategic supply.” Building a force to strategic demand will often entail focusing on the metric for that demand, i.e. number of divisions or brigade combat teams. This methodology takes a lot of risk on the associated enablers that are required to make those force structures effective. If the United States makes the choice of building to an estimate of a “balanced strategic supply,” the focus can then shift in building a balanced force. Building a balanced force allows the military to provide political leaders with better estimations on what can be strategically accomplished given “X” dollars and “Y” end strength. This generates “Z” combat power which demands that strategic ambitions be calibrated to a “Z” amount of combat power.

Directly tied to Force Structure is the choice of a volunteer force versus a conscripted force. A clear decision has been made by the nation and the defense community for the All Volunteer Force (AVF). The assumption is that this is the right choice although there are still some significant issues on the table when considering size limitations of the force given the strategy that drives the employment of the force. One of these key issues revolves around size limitations of the AVF that causes the military to outsource some significant activities on the battlefield. The extent in which the United States continues to allow the numbers of contractors on the battlefield may have an impact on our ability to man the AVF. Furthermore, the end of stop-loss could also possibly pose significant challenges within some specialties and grades.

Sizing and Force Structure decisions coupled with the choice that an AVF is the correct approach in building the force demands that we approach warfare by being increasingly reliant on our joint brethren. This becomes a discussion of “domain dominance” versus “domain supremacy.” It is seldom discussed this way but there is a distinction between domain dominance and domain supremacy. What the other services have can be characterized as domain supremacy. Land forces expect and absolutely need the joint force to eradicate any threats that can have a detrimental effect on land forces from the air and sea. An expeditionary Army has to settle for domain dominance, which is the ability to win at the decisive time and place. Land forces are able to do this by leveraging the domain supremacy of the joint force so that we get “cross-domain” effects on the land. Land domain supremacy – the ability to dominate everywhere, all the time – is simply not feasible for U.S. military forces at the end of strategic lines of communications amidst an enemy who will outnumber us on the battlefield. This requires that the air and maritime forces develop their force structures and sizing to mitigate vulnerabilities inherent in expeditionary land forces. This is a very joint concept and inherently requires that air and maritime forces understand landpower roles and needs.

Additional choices that need to be considered are forward basing versus CONUS-based Expeditionary. The strategic issue here is between the advantages gained by having forces forwardly present and engaged versus the global agility

achieved of being CONUS-based. If we choose to maintain a rotational presence of the force, we can retain global agility. However, three additional units are needed at objective Army Force Generation (ARFORGEN) posture for every one forward rotational presence unit. Forward basing does not offer the same agility particularly if requirements for forces are needed in a region where there is no significant forward presence. Analysis on force posturing has determined that the best option for the force is that it remain CONUS-based expeditionary but there is a growing list of reclaims and requests by the combatant commands for additional force presence in their areas of responsibility.

In a complex environment that will demand full-spectrum capabilities, the United States will have to make a choice between those general purpose forces (GPF) that are developed to operate for full spectrum operations vice a wide set of niche capabilities: cyberspace, lift, missile defense, special operations, etc. The current choice is to develop a full spectrum capability in our GPF but there are still some niche areas that we do not expect GPF to deal with. The United States faces adversaries that adjust their methodologies asymmetrically to counter our strengths. This is not a new development. During the post-Vietnam years, senior leaders could have adjusted the force to be effective in unconventional warfare; however, with the looming Soviet threat over the horizon, decisions were made to develop a force capable of meeting a conventional threat. The difference today is that it is not clear what future adversaries will challenge the United States nor does any “crystal ball” exist that can accurately predict our future adversaries, but one thing is certain, it is foolhardy to build a force structure to fight the last battle. Given this uncertainty and the speed in which future threats can develop, returning to a progressive mobilization force is no longer appropriate. Rotational readiness through the ARFORGEN model allows the force to meet operational readiness over a span of time congruent to its deployment timeline. However, in order for rotational readiness to work in maintaining capable full spectrum forces, the United States will probably have to reduce its strategic aspirations.

Economic

American economic prosperity is one of the most vital interests in any U.S. Grand Strategy. Maintaining economic prosperity will require strategic choices that place the United States in a position of economic dominance within an increasingly globalized world. Globalization is good for nations that are able to take advantage of today’s technology but seen negatively by nations that are still developing and have not been able to enter into the information age. This economic and technological gap creates a culture of “have-and-have-not” nations, breeding regional instability.

Current and future rising powers will continue to increase the demands on natural resources particularly those involving energy. This challenge has two components that will require the United States to make some hard decisions. The first strategic choice is whether to continue pursuing a hydrocarbon economy or seek alternative energy and lead the world into a new energy era. Directly tied to this choice is how the United States approaches climate change that theoretically is being affected by the burning of fossil fuels. Addressing these two issues will be expensive and everyone agrees that the international community must take positive steps towards reversing the effects of excessive hydrocarbon usage.

There is little disagreement that the hydrocarbon economy will remain dominant until technological breakthroughs makes alternative energy sources more economical for the nation and the world to pursue. However, developing the technological breakthroughs as well as the infrastructure supporting a new energy era becomes a strategic decision that will demand huge capital investments. The United States cannot do this alone and will require the international community to jointly invest in this endeavor. Technological breakthroughs in alternative energy will have a trickle effect on rising powers that will not necessarily invest in these developments, essentially making them free-riders on the economies of developed nations.

Entering into a new energy era will directly compete with how the United States chooses to control its foreign debt. The United States will have to make strategic choices regarding its spending priorities. Choices will be made between security and non-security related programs. Controlling national spending in an era where healthcare reform, education reform, and energy reform are all key issues facing a new administration will demand tough decisions be made on how the United States traditionally conducts its business, both domestically and abroad. In order for the United States to remain dominant, choices must be made in increasing the priority in non-security sectors. These non-

security sectors – education, healthcare, energy – are essential components of the nation’s foundation for continuing to be a dominant world power. If the United States does not invest in itself, it risks losing its strategic position.

Conclusion

This latest iteration of the Strategic Vision Workshop proved once again to be an extremely successful event in communicating to academic institutions the strategic issues that the Army views as being important to not only the Army as an institution but the nation as a whole. The professional exchange of ideas and opinions not only increased each groups understanding of the challenges facing the nation and the Army but also helped strengthen the relationship between the Army and academia, particularly with Texas A&M University.

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