



CRS Issue Statement on Military Strategies and Force Structure

Stephen Daggett, Coordinator
Specialist in Defense Policy and Budgets

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The 111th Congress will be presented with a wide range of national security issues as the U.S. government undertakes both the intellectual and practical task of updating and revising its military strategy and force planning to meet the demands of a rapidly changing international security environment. Much of the discussion will be shaped by the congressionally mandated Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), on which the Defense Department is required to issue a report no later than February 2010, when the President's budget is due to Congress. The QDR normally follows a statement of National Security Strategy by the White House. The strategy report is required to define U.S. global interests and objectives and to describe the foreign policy as well as military capabilities needed to implement U.S. national security strategy. The new Administration has not completed a report, however, leaving many aspects of national security strategy yet to be fully defined.

In recent years, it has very widely been agreed that the global security environment necessitates an "all of government" approach to national security that combines "soft power" skills, most often applied by civilian agencies, with the military's traditional "hard power." A great deal of interest has been expressed in reexamining how well the U.S. government is organized to apply all instruments of national power to achieve its national security objectives, how to balance major roles and responsibilities among key agencies, and how to integrate agency efforts. The shift of economic strength from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and the rise of China as a major global power, may become a matter of increasing congressional attention in shaping global economic policy, foreign policy, and defense strategy. Meanwhile, managing the drawdown of U.S. forces in Iraq and assessing the effectiveness of the Administration's expanded, though not open-ended, commitment in Afghanistan will remain a major focus of congressional oversight and debate.

Military force structure issues include what types of ground forces and special operations units are required for current and future operations, a matter that has been a particular focus of debate in the Army. The size of the Army and Marine Corps has increased recently, as a means of meeting the demands of current conflicts. Defense strategy reflects the premise that future conflicts are likely to be similar to those facing U.S. military forces today, requiring a continued focus on irregular warfare capabilities. But a very broad range of new challenges are also being discussed, including challenges that may be posed to the U.S. ability to project power in regions far around the globe and threats to exploit U.S. vulnerabilities both overseas and in the homeland. The balance between ground forces, maritime capabilities, and air and space forces may be a matter of as far-reaching and open-ended a debate as at any time since the 1950s. Nuclear non-proliferation policy may be a particular focus of attention, with debates intensifying over matters as varied as global economic sanctions and possible military strikes against Iran, ratification of the nuclear test ban treaty, negotiations with North Korea, arms reduction agreements with Russia, and the role of nuclear weapons in reassuring allies and deterring non-nuclear threats. Defense of the homeland, through military and other means, has been a matter of increasing congressional concern, with renewed attention on the integration of intelligence garnered from disparate sources and by different agencies.

Issue Team Members

Stephen Daggett, Coordinator
Specialist in Defense Policy and Budgets
sdaggett@crs.loc.gov, 7-7642

Nina M. Serafino
Specialist in International Security Affairs
nserafino@crs.loc.gov, 7-7667

Pat Towell
Specialist in U.S. Defense Policy and Budget
ptowell@crs.loc.gov, 7-2122

Ronald O'Rourke
Specialist in Naval Affairs
rorourke@crs.loc.gov, 7-7610

Jeremiah Gertler
Specialist in Military Aviation
jgertler@crs.loc.gov, 7-5107

Amy F. Woolf
Specialist in Nuclear Weapons Policy
awoolf@crs.loc.gov, 7-2379

Amy Belasco
Specialist in U.S. Defense Policy and Budget
abelasco@crs.loc.gov, 7-7627

Richard F. Grimmett
Specialist in International Security
rgrimmett@crs.loc.gov, 7-7675

Rhoda Margesson
Specialist in International Humanitarian Policy
rmargesson@crs.loc.gov, 7-0425

John Rollins
Specialist in Terrorism and National Security
jrollins@crs.loc.gov, 7-5529

Tiaji Salaam-Blyther
Specialist in Global Health
tsalaam@crs.loc.gov, 7-7677

Curt Tarnoff
Specialist in Foreign Affairs
ctarnoff@crs.loc.gov, 7-7656

Liana Sun Wyler
Analyst in International Crime and Narcotics
lwylers@crs.loc.gov, 7-6177

Jennifer K. Elsea
Legislative Attorney
jelsea@crs.loc.gov, 7-5466

R. Chuck Mason
Legislative Attorney
rcmason@crs.loc.gov, 7-9294

Lisa Mages
Information Research Specialist
lmages@crs.loc.gov, 7-7452

Mari-Jana "M-J" Oboroceanu
Information Research Specialist
moroceanu@crs.loc.gov, 7-6329