THE NATIONAL INTEREST

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THE NATIONAL INTEREST

Number 83 • Spring 2006

Strategic Myopia

The Case for Forward Enagement

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OUR NATION'S ability to foresee and respond to increasingly complex and networked threats is handicapped by an archaic and compartmentalized interagency system that dates from the Cold War. While the current system is already hard-put to keep up with ongoing and near-term matters, it is especially deficient in planning for major, long-range contingencies. Some of these contingencies may seem remote, but they arguably have the power to shake the United States to its core. They demand our attention by virtue of their consequences.

The current organizational basis for conducting national security affairs is a legacy from the early Cold War. Because we now face a radically different constellation of problems, it follows that the strategy and management systems we use for dealing with them must be significantly readjusted.

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During the Soviet period, the problem we faced was essentially confined to a point-source: the threat to our national existence presented by the conventional and nuclear forces of the USSR. This is a vast simplification, of course, but there was an underlying truth to it. The implications were profound. Because of our perception of a unitary Soviet threat, we prioritized the national security agenda around it into a hierarchy, and, associated with that hierarchy, we developed a pyramidal approach to the management of national security. Information about the nature of the Soviet threat existed within a relatively narrow and specialized domain, and the management of our response to that threat radiated from the president to the international security cabinet officers and out through the command system.

If we look at America's security agenda in the post-Cold War world, the pattern is much different for the foreseeable future. The problems we face are more likely to be approximately equal in magnitude, meaning that we cannot afford to divert our attention from any one of them for long and that designating one issue as dominant could be a serious mistake. The global environment is a major case in point. If in fact we have entered a final period when discretionary action might avert an epochal disturbance to climate, our attention is required now, not later. Information regarding these new issues is complex and sometimes very interac-

tive. The expertise required to track these problems has broadened. Today, it is necessary to deploy parallel analytic and policymaking resources to deal with concerns such as terrorism, the above-mentioned environmental issues and pandemic disease. In other words, the very concept of national security must be expanded.

With that expansion comes a major challenge to the organizations upon which we rely for management of national policy. The menu of issues, the range of knowledge and the need for attention to the complex interactions among different clusters of problems exceed what can be handled by the vertically structured management system we presently employ. In the 21st century the security of the United States can no longer be preserved as a consequence of military power alone. National security is now a compound function of how well the United States manages all of its assets and with how much foresight we invest them in our future. We need to expand the operational definition of national security from its core interest in physical protection towards a comprehensive definition that embraces the sources and realities of power in the 21st century.

There are many examples of how previously distinct issues must now be viewed and managed as interrelated. Fiscal policy is an important example. We have arrived at levels of debt that can threaten domestic stability, even as they limit our ability to sustain the costs of our international position. Trade is another example. How can the United States remain the world's last remaining superpower if its industrial base is lost? How are our economic stability and our military strength compatible with increasing dependency on energy supplies that can be interrupted by producers, terrorists or natural causes? The destruction wreaked by Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma give us a foretaste of environmental damage at a strategic level—what happens next time around? How will the United States retain its technological edge if its education system fails to produce sufficient numbers of engineers and scientists? Demographic questions, immigration and health care may all be domestic issues, but their impact on our financial, social and economic status is destined to be massive and possibly unsustainable.

At present, our processes of government are still tuned to distinctions between domestic and foreign policy; domestic and international economic issues; external and internal security; and near-term and long-range planning. These distinctions may be comforting to those who grew up with them, but they are major impediments to a full understanding of our circumstances and to comprehensive action for dealing with them. Sacrosanct substantive and bureaucratic boundaries must be effaced. The divide between domestic and external policy has to be bridged. The linkages between economic and traditional forms of security must be addressed.

In particular, the habit of heavily discounting the future in favor of the near-term must be abandoned, for the simple reason that the future—defined here as the rate of incidence of major social change—is accelerating. That acceleration represents, in turn, the dramatically quickened pace of science and technology, translated into ethical, political, economic and social consequences. If we are overtaken and swamped by the accelerating rate of change, then it is likely that our society will fail to grasp major opportunities for advancement and forfeit them to others who are more alert. We will also fail to take action in time to mitigate the societal impact of major, abrupt dislocations.

It is especially important to keep our eye on dislocations so extreme as to represent a permanent, new phase of existence for which previous experience offers little guidance. The detonation of

a nuclear weapon in a U.S. city or the impact on the nation of a man-made or natural pandemic are examples. So, too, would be abrupt climate change or a phenomenon associated with it, such as the collapse of an oceanic circulatory system vital for moderating weather on a continental scale. The shift of economic power to Asia could become one of history's great geopolitical events, with major and permanent changes of fortune for the United States and Europe. Converging advances in genetics, nanotechnology and artificial intelligence can challenge humanity's self-image and even our role in the evolution of life. These contingencies are not fantasies. They are now as much within the range of the possible as was the possibility of general nuclear war with the Soviet Union.

The challenges we face as a society are marked by complex interactions that link, rather than divide, streams of events in the present and the future. Government may by default remain linear, but life can no longer be understood or dealt with in such terms.

IN A GENERAL sense, foresight in governance is the responsibility of all citizens, because its exercise entails trade-offs that can only be sustained by public support. But the specific role of conceptual and political leadership falls directly and pointedly on governance and on political leaders. Efforts have been made to create a more integrated approach to governance. The Clinton-Gore team designed the National Economic Council (NEC) for the purpose of coordinating economic policy among cabinet departments and executive agencies, and to help work out difficult trade-offs between domestic and international issues, including many that crossed over into matters of national security.

The NEC did not have time to develop into a full institutional co-equal of the NSC, while under the current administration the NSC itself has been substantially weakened by a massive reversion of authority back to the cabinet agencies and to the Office of the Vice President. The cabinet appears to be an important locus for policy management, but it is more a photo-op than a governing institution. Its members do not meet for the purpose of creating policy, but only to affirm it. They do not orchestrate the execution of policy as a whole, but only those portions of policy that are legally applicable to their departments. The Executive Branch in its current incarnation is not able to deal effectively with complex, interlocking issues that are major challenges to the future power position of the United States and the well-being of its people.

Congress is worse. If the Executive Branch now faces the 21st century with systems developed in the 19th and 20th, Congress makes do with structures originating in the 18th. It is not only internally dysfunctional, but is also locked into a dysfunctional relationship with the Executive Branch. Congress lacks the means to internalize the demands of complex policy formation and management. It lacks the means to exercise foresight, and in some cases it has dismantled offices with the ability to foresee on its behalf—such as the Office of Technology and Assessment. Congressional oversight should be vigorous, but under today's circumstances of one-party dominance, that has not been the case. Multiple and overlapping congressional jurisdictions effectively sap energy out of the executive agencies, with no commensurate value added. If Congress cannot reform its own operations, it will continue its decline as an independent branch of the government, and it will frustrate initiatives to modernize that might arise in the Executive Branch.

On occasion, Congress has intervened to force the Executive Branch to accept major organizational change. In the case of the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols

Act, which imposed the goal of "jointness" on what had been a tribalized military system, Congress got it right. Unfortunately, in other instances Congress's impulse has been to centralize control of disparate functions, rather than to promote flexible, networked approaches to management. The resulting systems are deeply flawed, because they are too highly centralized to be flexible, as we have seen in the case of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Congress has also interpreted intelligence reform to mean centralizing power in the hands of the director of national intelligence.

REDESIGNING THE national security infrastructure to cope with the new challenges of the 21st century has to start with recognizing how the world has changed. We have left a period when our most serious security problems were by nature "stove-piped", when information about these problems was linear and management was hierarchical. We have entered a period when the problems we face are themselves networked: Information about them is marked by complex interaction, and organization for dealing with them must become flattened and integrated. The solution we require demands organization that is geared towards flexibility and speed. Bureaucracies are Procrustean: They tend to deal with new problems by chopping them to fit old concepts. We need a form of management that could be called Protean: able to change its shape rapidly to match evolving challenges.

U.S. military forces have been struggling for decades to realize the benefits of a networked organizational system in which intelligence and action would be intimately related. The so-called "AirLand Battle Doctrine" of the 1980s was a pioneering effort to integrate forces and real-time intelligence for the purpose of disrupting an unfolding Warsaw Pact invasion of NATO. In the 1990s, AirLand evolved into the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), which aimed much more explicitly to use accelerating American advances in information technology to fully integrate combat operations in a given battle space. In the present decade, as the result of brilliant work by the late Admiral Arthur Cebrowsky, RMA "morphed" into the concept of "Network-Centric Warfare", which placed American information dominance at the heart of warfare by "networking sensors, decision makers, and shooters to achieve shared awareness, increased speed of command, higher tempo of operations, greater lethality, increased survivability, and a degree of self-synchronization."[1]

Civilian governance lags far behind the military in developing advanced management concepts to deal with increasingly complex problems. As a result, the civil-military relationship is becoming dysfunctional. There is an increasing tendency on the part of the Department of Defense to supplant civilian influence in the management of regional diplomacy, post-conflict operations and even in domestic emergencies—a trend that Brent Scowcroft and Sandy Berger noted on these pages in the Fall 2005 issue. Diminution of respect for the competence of civilian authority is an unhealthy trend for a republic. It is not based on an inherent or irredeemable weakness of civilian management, but on the lack of attention paid to the challenge of making civilian management more sophisticated. More broadly, the objective for civilian governance as a whole should be to master and apply the implications of information technology and especially of networking theory, in order to create "shared awareness" in the formation of policy and in its execution. As in the national security sector, shared awareness means the capacity

[1]David S. Alberts, John J. Garstka and Frederick P. Stein, *Network Centric Warfare*, (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1999).

to anticipate complexity, accommodate it in planning and deal with it in execution.

It is crucial that this shared awareness extend as far forward into the future as possible, which is to say, much further than is our practice. Leaders are not unmindful of the need to think of the longer-term implications of their actions, but they also know that representing the interests of the future often involves significant political risk to themselves in the present. Faced with such a choice, they frequently take comfort from the bromide that it is impossible to predict the future. That is certainly true in a literal sense, but it obscures a much more important fact: that it is entirely feasible to think about the future in disciplined fashion and to reach conclusions about it that ought to be important factors in the making of contemporary policy.

Forecasting will never reach the point at which it eliminates doubt. However, it can be used as part of an orderly policymaking process to diminish risk and to maximize opportunity. Our era is destined to be marked by accelerating, deep change. In such a period it is increasingly dangerous to make policy only in the short term or to look at the universe of possibilities through the filter of ideology. An important hallmark of successful governance is the timely ability to recognize what may happen, in order to have the best possible chance of influencing what does happen. Democratic governance is at risk of losing this capacity by failing to analyze the alternative paths that lead towards futures that are desirable, or away from those that are not, and especially by failing to begin that process early enough to permit adequate time for the debate and deliberation our system requires.

During the Cold War, the United States practiced "Forward Deployment": placing its intelligence sensors and its military forces at strategic locations chosen to improve our ability to engage the enemy as early as possible, on terms advantageous to ourselves. We should now be practicing what ought to be thought of as "Forward Engagement": recognizing and responding to major societal challenges sooner rather than later, when our leverage over the course of events is greatest and the costs for influencing them are lowest.

THE MOST promising response to increasing complexity in the problems facing governance is to develop a networked, small, flexible, task-oriented, managerial "supra-structure" designed to be retrofitted to the existing system. This supra-structure should supplement rather than displace existing methods. It should be allowed to grow not only as a management system but also as a culture. Its added value would be to synthesize information and action: to compensate for the innate tendency of all bureaucratic organizations to subdivide issues rather than to integrate them. Where the bureaucracy creates and defends "stove-pipes" along jurisdictional and substantive boundaries, the new system must allow officials to think and act across them.

The key to reforming processes in both the Executive and Legislative Branches is to organize according to mission rather than according to bureaucratic jurisdiction. An unplanned experiment of the Clinton Administration provides guidance: the establishment of a series of binational commissions co-chaired by the vice president and an official of equal or greater political seniority from the partner country (for example, a prime minister or a president). Five of these commissions were established: for Russia, Ukraine, South Africa, Egypt and Kazakhstan. Of these, the Russian commission was the first and the best known, ultimately serving as a start-up model for the others. In all of the commissions, the day-to-day work of managing bilateral relations was left to established bureau-

cratic systems, but the capacity to innovate was augmented by adding an *ad hoc*, highly flexible and informal system both within and between the cooperating governments. Sometimes these arrangements were negotiated in a formal way. After a time, however, they began to develop spontaneously. Transactions became much more rapid, and institutional barriers to the flow of information were substantially lowered. In effect, the management systems that evolved for the commissions were networked.

What was done on an unplanned basis in setting up these international commissions can be done for the purpose of managing our own affairs. We do not have to destroy the existing system in order to begin the process. Much of the needed new capacity exists in latent form in the White House. Presidents already have at their disposal the means to create a core mechanism by using existing elements of the executive office to operate as an overall steering body. The chief of staff, the national security advisor, the national economic advisor, the director of the Office of Budget and Management, and so on, can be used collectively as a means to assure overall coherence. To some extent they are already used for this purpose—but mostly on an *ad hoc* basis, rather than systematically.

The cabinet should be reinvented to serve as the primary method for managing-to-task, with different groupings of cabinet officers operating in mission-oriented partnerships for the purpose of attaining deeper coordination. Such arrangements exist in fragmentary form for national security purposes and, to a much lesser degree, for economic issues. Echoing arrangements need to be encouraged within Congress. Greater use needs to be made of intercommittee arrangements, both within and between the two bodies. Unless such innovations are made, the existing system will remain so severely stovepiped that it threatens not only the ability of Congress to deal with complex issues, but it will also severely hamper any effort by the Executive Branch to evolve.

To accomplish this kind of governance, not only new systems, but also a new bureaucratic culture are required. As we have learned from experience with military reform, networked command and control are essential, but so too is the culture of jointness—the capacity, based on constant practice, of being able to plan and operate seamlessly across jurisdictional lines. The absence of a jointness culture was one of the main causes for the failure of the U.S. intelligence community to head off September 11. It is now exposed as a fundamental cause of the Department or Homeland Security's debacle over Hurricane Katrina. To make networked governance possible, the first step is to upgrade our systems of governance. But to make it permanent, we have to change civilian career patterns, by arranging for exposure to joint planning and joint operations as an expected element of professional development. This should be accompanied by a revised approach to training at the academic level, stressing interdisciplinary study and also exploring more thoroughly the relationship between theory and practice.

Networking is society's best organizational response to complexity. Networking is fortunately also a form of social action that is profoundly well suited for democratic governance. It depends both on the intelligence and initiative distributed throughout the system, and on the existence of a collaborative ethos, whereby an instinct for teamwork offsets the natural search for individual advantage. The challenges of complexity now require that we systematically upgrade self-governance in order to preserve it. Democracy *is* networking. □