



# Colloquium Brief

Strategic Studies Institute

U.S. Army War College,  
Bush School of Government and Public Service



## PREPARING FOR A MID-TERM ASSESSMENT OF LEADERSHIP AND NATIONAL SECURITY REFORM IN THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION



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### KEY INSIGHTS:

- The initiatives for the extensive national security reform that is required to meet current threats will have to come from outside of the executive branch bureaucracy. This is true even though former senior members of the Project on National Security Reform are holding key executive branch positions.
- The 3-D's (defense, diplomacy, development, as 3 overlapping circles) has been a harmful way to portray the capacities, requirements, and relationships for policy and operational effectiveness, especially in ongoing counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan. The current 3-D's model is incorrect, as these functions are not properly represented by circles, are not the same size in terms of capacity and resources, and in many significant ways they do not overlap in several respects in the key areas necessary for effective integration, alignment, and coordination.
- The Obama Administration still has much work to do in organizing development efforts to focus on the need for stronger political, economic and social development structures, resources, and leadership. Given the ongoing efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is an urgent need for better defining the roles and responsibilities of the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and the Agency for International Development.

### Introduction.

On April 22, 2010, the Reserve Officers Association (ROA), the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI), the Hudson Institute, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), the American Security Project (ASP), Creative Associates International, Inc. (CAII), and the Project on National Security Reform (PNSR) participated with the Bush School of Government and Public Service, and the U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, in cosponsoring a colloquium in Washington, DC, on a mid-term assessment of leadership and national security reform in the Obama administration. Three panels discussed "Assessing National Security Reform," "Legislative Imperatives," and "Assessing National Security Reform-The Way Forward."

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The colloquium theme focused on the need of advancing the research and study of key national security issues, engaging the invited participants in sharing their expertise, and informing the interested community members of ways to develop a deeper awareness and understanding of security reform issues facing the U.S. Government by examining the topics of leadership and national security reform.

### **Panel 1: Assessing National Security Reform.**

The first panel clarified conceptual questions by outlining the current themes inherent in the national security reform debate. In introducing the panel, Joseph Cerami of the Bush School commented that the panel's first objective was to outline and assess changing national security efforts as they have evolved and adapted during the first 2 years of the Obama administration. The second panel objective was to detail specific political and organizational challenges where progress was made during the first 2 years, as well as those obstacles that continue to impede significant and efficient reforms.

The panelists introduced the current terminology and trends, and set the conditions for the colloquium discussions. Integral to this panel was an analysis of how security paradigms and the continuing need for reform might affect the organization, operations, policies, and strategies of the U.S. military in the short term.

Joseph Collins of the National Defense University spoke on Afghanistan. In his examination, Collins made five major points: two presidents have declared that the War in Afghanistan is of vital importance to the nation; the costs of the war have been high in blood and treasure; the Taliban is weakening, thanks to President Obama's surge; the Karzai government is weak, corrupt, and ineffective; and, the Afghan people are tired of war, coalition forces, and their own government. Collins further questioned the future of the war's success, given the current stress on the Defense budget (currently at \$700 billion/year).

Scott Feil of the Institute for Defense Analyses addressed how assessments are generated within the Department of Defense (DoD). Feil examined two categories of assessments, Strategic Assessments and Operational Resource Assessments, subsequently detailing how such assessments contribute to national security solutions. Using as examples the DoD response to the improvised explosive device (IED) and the resurgence of the Army post-Vietnam, Feil concluded that the obstacle encountered in problem solving in government is that it does not focus on the "problem as a whole." Rather, each segment of government proposes solution sets that

optimize its own capabilities and interests. He concluded that the government should confront national security as a whole with a focus on optimizing the overall function, which necessarily suboptimizes the individual subordinate processes and organizations.

Thomas Mahnken of Johns Hopkins University and the Naval War College examined U.S. Defense policy and its implications for national security reform. Focusing on the proper division of labor in the government, Mahnken suggested that entities within government abide by their clearly defined roles, recommending that the DoD be used to fight and win wars, and the State Department (DoS) and USAID be empowered to support a "whole of government" approach to national security issues.

Harvey Sicherman of the Foreign Policy Research Institute reviewed the best/worst cases of past presidents' actions in making national security policy, distinguishing between the Truman (White House-State Department partnership) and Nixon (White House dominant) models. He praised the Bush-Baker-Scowcroft (Presidential-led, integrated, interagency process) variant. Sicherman concluded that the current administration has tried a version of the Bush-Baker-Scowcroft model, but too much is being done in the White House. Instead, Sicherman recommended giving greater responsibility to the State Department, allowing the NSC to focus on its primary mission of coordinating policy for the president while considering policy alternatives.

### **Panel 2: The Legislative Imperative.**

The second panel, discussing the Legislative Imperative, examined the congressional role in the national security process from 2008 to 2010. Panel Chair James Locher III of the Project on National Security Reform opened the panel by stating that 95 percent of people say that national security reform will never be done. Locher went on to refute this point, claiming that the objects impeding reform were: lack of routine oversight; a lack of confidence; a slow confirmation process for presidential appointees; a failure to pass legislation that has become endemic; and, frequent confrontation between the branches of the government. Locher exclaimed that many believe Congress lacks the political will to take on national security reform, but was quick to point out that quite to the contrary, Goldwater-Nichols achieved just this feat. To elucidate the issue's complexity, Locher identified clear differences between the past and today, with today's challenges being: a security environment that is much more complex; the unprecedented size of the defense budget; and, concerns over domestic security. According to Locher, the major

challenges confronting national security reform are those of politics, scope, ownership, and bandwidth. Politically, individuals favor the status quo. With regard to scope, Locher emphasized that the size of national security reform is daunting and it inhibits congressional commitment. In reference to ownership, Locher stated that the simple fact is that there is no mandate for national security reform. Finally, he stated that bandwidth, or time, is a major challenge, as it took Goldwater-Nichols over 4 years to complete. The focus needed for national security reform would certainly require politicians to surrender other legislative initiatives.

The post-9/11 system and campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan have placed additional pressure on the U.S. Government's civilian and military departments and their levels of interagency cooperation. At the heart of this discussion was an assessment of the contributions of the Project on National Security Reform, an initiative on Capitol Hill to build political support for congressional reform of interagency dynamics much in the same way the Goldwater/Nichols Act transformed the armed services.

Nina Serafino of the Congressional Research Service focused on the possibility of legislative action on reform, including reorganizing Congress for proper oversight. Recognizing prospects for comprehensive reform is a daunting task; however, Serafino stated that some members are discussing selected reforms. One example is a national security professional development program to foster interagency cooperation through a civilian interagency education and training program, including rotations between agencies. She noted expert opinion that recommends that Congress reorganize itself cyclically, with small changes made in response to events and, large, substantive changes following periods of rising frustration, or party turnover. She reflected that the Obama administration might trigger changes in Congress by submitting a "unified security budget," combining all security assistance accounts.

Larry Sampler of Creative Associates International spoke on the topic of legislative imperatives for national security reform. Sampler said that one of the major impediments to national security reform is the prerogative of an official to seek reelection, thus making things inefficient. The U.S. Government's system of checks and balances creates an environment of stasis, leading to operational paralysis in the government. Sampler also addressed the issue of the terminology being used between military and civilian entities, and the need to understand this terminology to produce effectiveness. Sampler cited the need for good leadership behind national security reform. Finally, Sampler expressed his belief that the 3-D's (defense, diplomacy, and development) is not a model based in reality, and should be done away with.

Richard Weitz of the Hudson Institute and Project on National Security Reform discussed the importance

of resource allocation and national security reform. He recommended that the National Security Council (NSC) play a greater role in designing an integrated national security process, including new approaches for matching resources to strategies. Weitz also suggested the need for a national operational framework, whereby national security reform would be viewed as more of a "national responsibility."

James Lindsay of the Council on Foreign Relations examined the practicality of national security reform. Specifically, Lindsay tried to answer the questions of why Americans wish to produce reform, and why the government has failed to achieve it. Lindsay suggested that reform is undertaken to elicit greater policy effectiveness. The U.S. Government has failed to achieve reform due to bad policy choices and a streamlined executive. Lindsay also focused on the role of development and its organization within the government, emphasizing the political battles that impede reform. He concluded that reform would only be achieved if government focused on pivotal reform measures, admitting that the overall political climate would be the eventual catalyst for change.

### **Panel 3: Assessing National Security Reform-The Way Forward.**

This panel focused on examining steps to implement significant national security reform over the next 2 years (2010-12). Panel Chair Robin Dorff of the Strategic Studies Institute asked the panelists to assess the Obama administration's first years with an eye towards offering ideas for continuing or accelerating the pace of national security reform. The researchers were also asked to assess the successes and weaknesses of the first years and address the institutional and organizational challenges that continue to face the administration. Finally, the panelists were asked to suggest promising areas for national security reform initiatives in the near term.

Patrick Cronin of the Center for a New American Security stated that one issue confronting the Obama administration is that it has recognized its limits of engagement, especially given the complexity of issues like Iran and North Korea. Cronin criticized the nearsightedness of America by calling for a national security strategy that focused on the future, "thinking about the America of 2030, and not just 2010." Cronin recommended that the U.S. should focus on civilian capacities and a stronger State Department by developing a better system of educating diplomats, and by recruiting the best and brightest. Cronin also recommended that the U.S. should become serious about investing in development, focusing on those countries in the bottom realm of the development process—the poorest performers.

Bernard Finel of the American Security Project suggested strengthening the role of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and removing any politics associated with the position. He suggested that this could be achieved by assigning a timeline to the position, such as 5 years without the possibility of removal. In that same vein, he recommended taking the media out of the military, allowing the DoD voice to be expressed through a single office—the Secretary of Defense. Fiscal responsibility was another topic of interest, as Finel stated that declaring wars (those planned for 10, 15, or more years) should be something that is placed on a normal budgeting process. Finel also discussed the Legality of behavior in combat by suggesting that there should be an increase in personal liability for criminal conduct.

James Stephenson of Creative Associates International examined the areas of counterinsurgency, reconstruction, and stabilization. A focus of the talk was the shrinking role of USAID. Stephenson said it was a great concern that USAID was being taken over by the DoS, further hindering USAID’s ability to control its own policy, planning, and budget. The majority of Stephenson’s time was spent discussing the role of stabilization and reconstruction. Stephenson said that the individuals that work effectively in stabilization know their territory and can enable the local populace. Mr. Stephenson questioned the fiscal sustainability of the current DoS-led civilian efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which use large numbers of U.S. temporary hires who are expensive and lack the training, the experience, or the mobility to be effective.

Beth Tritter of The Glover Park Group explored the debate over development, questioning where it fits in the approach to national security. Tritter agreed that the 3-D’s approach is an incorrect model, and further addressed the question of whether or not development was truly essential to U.S. foreign policy. Tritter suggested that Secretary of Defense Robert Gates was making development an issue because it takes work off of the hands of DoD. Tritter also commented on deficits and current spending levels, saying that this will be the catalyst for reform.

**Keynote Speaker: James Carafano, Heritage Foundation.**

The Keynote Speaker, James Carafano, tackled national security reform with regard to defense spending and congressional oversight effectiveness. First, Carafano addressed the overarching sentiment of pessimism in America today—the belief in the idea that we cannot afford defense measures. Carafano defended the position that defense is the fundamental responsibility of the government. He further stated that the proposition for cutting defense

spending often becomes an excuse for inaction. Carafano also spoke on the topic of Congress, suggesting that it is incapable of doing functional assessments of national security. He said this is due to the fact that the majority of power is being held by the Senate and House leadership, and is not in the committees. This produces committee hearings that are almost irrelevant, allowing little time to be given to pertinent, substantial issues. He also directly addressed “whole of government reform,” coupling it with the recommendation that there is a need to more clearly define this concept. Carafano concluded by stating that the government should build an effective construct for the whole of government, and the nation’s leadership needs to build a conceptual doctrine in strategic, operational, and tactical terms. According to Carafano, this will allow the government to focus more directly on national security issues that are non-linear and highly complex.

**Concluding Remarks.**

The panelists’ papers will be compiled into a book published by the Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute. Previous collaborative efforts between the Bush School and SSI on the topic of leadership and national security reform have produced conference reports and books that have reached a variety of national and international government agencies, university research programs, and think tanks. These publications include *Leadership and National Security Reform: the Next President’s Agenda* (2008) and *Rethinking Leadership and “Whole of Government” National Security Reform: Problems, Progress, and Prospects* (2010). They are available on the SSI website at [www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/](http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/).

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