



CHANGE AND ITS REFLECTION IN NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY AND FORCE STRUCTURE

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INTRODUCTION

To understand changes and transitions globally and in the Asia-Pacific Region, the broader context in which change occurs must be appreciated. This chapter begins with a discussion of the challenges faced, particularly by strategic planners, as they look at change through the lenses of both their own overarching perspectives of the world and their own concepts of security. It then examines one systematic approach to structure the analysis of plausible future scenarios and their implications. But to be actionable in the realm of national security, thinking about change must ultimately be reflected in national security strategies and, even more concretely, in military force structures. This paper will examine two such examples from the US experience of how change is reflected in national security strategies and force structure. This overview of the context of change then concludes with a summary of the implications for our thinking about change and transitions in the Asia-Pacific region.

THE CHALLENGES OF CHANGE: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VIEWER'S PERSPECTIVES

Strategic and security planners face the challenge of providing policy leaders a coherent way to understand the world (and its major regions such as the Asia-Pacific) and how it may change over time. This understanding should then logically be reflected in a nation's national security strategy and, eventually, military force structure. We must first, however, face two broader challenges: understanding how we and our leaders conceptualize our own particular view of the world, and how we define security itself.

These broader conceptual perspectives are lenses through which the world and its changes are perceived, and through which policy options are developed. At the highest conceptual level, views of the world may be seen through analytic frameworks such as realism (focused on states as the key actors in a largely zero-sum system dominated by security issues), liberalism or

pluralism (focused on a more complex structure of actors within and between states, international actors and even non-governmental actors, in a non-zero-sum system where social, economic, and security issues all play key roles), and Marxism/structuralism (where the focus is on domination and subordination, the global centers opposed to the peripheries, and a zero-sum system where class/structural economic issues determine politics).¹ Although there are numerous linkages, overlaps and variants of these three classical analytical frameworks, the basic differences are real, and so are the perspectives on the world and on change depending on which of these lenses the strategic planner or the policy leader tends to use to view the world.

Likewise, at the next lower conceptual level are a variety of geo-strategic perspectives (for example, ‘clash of civilizations,’ environmental/resources conflicts, ‘the coming anarchy,’ ‘pivotal states,’ ‘the end of history’ concept of a dominant ideological model of liberal democratic free-market systems, and the like).² Again, whether strategic planner, political leader, or informed citizen, the way one perceives the world and its changes may vary dramatically if seen through different geo-strategic lenses.

Finally, there is the challenge of understanding how one conceptualizes the issue of security itself—which is likely influenced by these overarching world and geopolitical perspectives. Is our perspective on security to be focused in narrowly military terms, or in the broader political/economic/military ‘comprehensive security’ context more common among Asia-Pacific nations, or should security be conceptualized in terms of threats, vulnerabilities, and/or fears? As in all cases, the differing perspectives have much to do with how one will view the world and its changes. The way we conceptualize our views of the world and of security is usually determined over long periods of historical and personal experience—but at a minimum, there is a need for considerably greater awareness of these lenses with which we view the world. If changes in the world (especially as they impact security) are to be better understood we must minimize the extent to which our conceptual world views are biased or based on false assumptions or gross inconsistencies. This may indeed be the hardest challenge in understanding change.

¹ See Andrew L. Ross, *The Theory and Practice of International Relations: Contending Analytical Perspectives*, in *Strategy and Force Planning*, (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2000), pp.52-72.

² See Samuel P. Huntington, ‘The Clash of Civilizations?’ *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993, pp.22-49; Robert D. Kaplan, ‘The Coming Anarchy,’ *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1994, pp.4, 44-76; Robert S. Chase, Emily B. Hill, and Paul Kennedy, ‘Pivotal States and US Strategy,’ *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 1996, pp.33-51.

THINKING ABOUT CHANGE

While there are many different approaches to thinking about change, most share a common failure to identify major surprises and discontinuities in the world—the attack at Pearl Harbor, and the sudden collapse of the former Soviet Union being classic examples. Peter Schwartz offers a more promising approach to structure our thinking about future change (based on the experience of the Royal Dutch/Shell planning group that identified the potential for the 1973 changes in the global oil market).³

The Schwartz approach focuses on the need for planners to ‘re-perceive’ what the future world with its changes may look like. The approach uses the development of alternative future scenarios to challenge assumptions and thereby force the reordering of our perceptions. These scenarios are seen as aids to both anticipating future risks and to discovering future strategic options and opportunities. The scenarios that are developed are not designed as predictions of the future, nor are these scenarios limited to the narrow threat-based planning scenarios common in military planning, since they emphasize consideration of the full range of future possibilities, in order to be prepared for whatever changes may occur.

Schwartz’s scenario-based approach to understanding the future environment centers on the identification of three elements: driving forces, predetermined elements, and critical uncertainties. ‘Driving forces’ are those key forces in a given scenario that we must care about because they drive change and directly influence the outcome. Schwartz suggests several categories to examine for driving forces: society, technology, economics, politics, environment, and the military and defense infrastructure.⁴ ‘Predetermined elements’ are the constants (e.g., geography) which ‘we know we know’ and the events or trends already ‘in the pipeline’ (such as demographic trends, or energy dependency), that are ‘independent variables’ in the particular scenario being developed. ‘Critical uncertainties’ are often best identified by questioning our assumptions on elements that we initially perceived as ‘predetermined’ or known to us. In addition to areas of true (‘who knows?’) uncertainties about the future, these ‘critical uncertainties’ should include major events outside of our traditional assumptions that can

³ Peter Schwartz, *The Art of the Long View* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1991).

⁴ *Ibid.*

significantly impact or alter the future scenario.⁵ The important thing is that several alternative ‘futures’ can be identified using different driving forces, predetermined elements, and critical uncertainties, and, having ‘re-perceived’ a fuller range of futures and changes, planners and policy makers can better craft policies and actions to minimize risks and maximize opportunities.⁶

The practical application of the scenario-based approach to ‘re-perceiving’ alternative futures and change in the Asia-Pacific region can illustrate how such scenarios might enhance our understanding of a range of strategic possibilities as well as future uncertainties around the region. ‘Driving forces’ could variously include economic developments, religious/ethnic differences, coalitions, terrorism, mass migrations, and so forth. ‘Predetermined elements’ could include variously geography (‘the tyranny of distance’), continued US engagement, increasing energy dependence, and demographic trends. ‘Critical uncertainties’ could include stability or eruption of regional flashpoints (Korea, Taiwan, South China Sea islands), Chinese or Japanese expansionism, disintegration of states (e.g., Indonesia, China, Russian Far East), terrorism, mass migrations, enhanced regional organization, an increased or decreased US military presence, economic collapses, and so forth. This short and admittedly incomplete listing should nonetheless indicate that a scenario-based approach to future changes in the Asia-Pacific region will help to ‘re-perceive’ wide combinations of alternative futures, each with its own implications for our understanding and action.

HOW CHANGE IS REFLECTED IN NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY AND FORCE STRUCTURE

A better understanding of change and how to structure our thinking about future possibilities systematically is only actionable in the realm of national

⁵ See P.H. Liotta, and Timothy E. Soames, ‘The Art of Reperceiving: Scenarios and the Future,’ in *Selected Readings in Strategy and Force Planning*, Vol. 1 (Newport, RI: Naval War College, CDE, 2002).

⁶ While Schwartz’s categorization of the three elements (driving forces, predetermined elements, and critical uncertainties) is useful as a systematic way of ordering our thinking about future scenarios, the Schwartz approach has often led those who attempt to use it to fall into the error of concentrating too much on identifying whether a future change factor is one or the other element. While questioning initial assumptions of what is a ‘predetermined element’ is a good way to identify ‘critical uncertainties,’ the fact is that the same factor of future change can often fit in either category depending on our assumptions and the scenario we wish to examine. For this reason, many assessments of future change, such as the CIA’s unclassified *Global Trends 2015: A Dialogue About the Future with Nongovernmental Experts*, tend to mix the Schwartz elements together, under such labels as ‘the drivers and trends’.

security when reflected in national security strategy and, even more concretely, in military force structure. Shifting focus now to these specific applications of understanding change, we will examine below two examples from the US experience of how change is actually reflected in national security strategies and force structures. Although this analysis is based on the US strategy and force structure experience, such an examination could also usefully be extrapolated to other Asia-Pacific nations (with due regard for their different strategic contexts and recent history). Properly speaking, national security strategies have diplomatic and economic, as well as military, components—but our assessment here will focus on the military component of national security strategy.

In assessing the recent history of US national security strategy, two landmarks stand out—the Cold War, and the post-Cold War decade culminating in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks—and the new National Security Strategy issued in September 2002 by President George W. Bush. Although it was only in the late 1980s that the US Congress established the requirement for the president to publish annually a National Security Strategy, we can identify the essential elements of a strategy against the Soviet Union and its allies and supporters—including containment, deterrence, and US alliances and forward basing of forces—as it evolved after World War II. A critical juncture was reached in 1947, with the Marshall Plan and US aid to Greece formalizing the split with the former Soviet wartime ally. Most importantly, at the behest of the Truman Administration, Congress passed the National Security Act of 1947, creating a unified defense establishment, a separate service in the Air Force, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Council (NSC). This was indeed a significant reorganization of the US national security structure to address the changes in the world, but was not the simple success later mythologized by those ‘present at the creation’. In fact, the achievement of the goals of real change in national security strategy and even organization was a slow process, punctuated by false starts, errors, and bitter bureaucratic battles.⁷ The 1947 Act was amended just two years later in 1949 to formally establish the Department of Defense and to increase the role of its Secretary (the frustrated first Secretary committed suicide in 1949 by jumping from an upper window of the Bethesda Naval Hospital). It would not be until the 1960s that the NSC, and the significant role of the President’s National Security Advisor, would fully develop. The stronger role of the defense secretary came only after further revisions to the

⁷ Fred Hiatt, ‘Truman’s Rose-Colored Reforms,’ *Washington Post*, July 15, 2002, p.17.

1947 Act in the late 1950s, and with Secretary of Defense McNamara and his Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System and systems analysis changes in the early 1960s. The stronger role of the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff took almost forty years after 1947 to evolve, with the real boost to the authority of the chairman and to the Joint Staff and ‘jointness’ in general, coming from the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986.⁸ The defense acquisition process has evolved over the years without similar landmark reforms and remains a subject of criticism for its lengthy processes, bureaucracy, and costs. The Cold War national security strategy itself, which this reorganized national security structure was to execute, took almost a half decade from the end of World War II to be articulated (initially only within the government) by George Kennan’s ‘containment’ writing and Paul Nitze’s NSC-68 document in early 1950. Only the start of the Korean War in the summer of 1950 finally pushed President Truman to fund the new strategy and the force structure it would require.

If US national security strategy lagged behind the changes in the post-World War II security environment, US military force structure changes were even slower. The US Army emerged from World War II with a primarily light/heavy ‘barbell’ division structure.⁹ During the 1950s era of ‘massive retaliation,’ the Army’s abortive ‘Pentomic Army’ reorganization was strongly resisted within the service and never completed. In the 1960s era of ‘flexible response,’ the Army added Green Berets and counterinsurgency emphasis without altering the essential ‘barbell’ force structure, which continued (with new equipment) through the 1980s Air-Land Battle era and the 1991 Gulf War essentially to this day. However, recent years and army experience in Kosovo and Afghanistan have again emphasized the need for lighter and more mobile medium-strength Army force structures as now envisioned in the Interim Combat Brigades and Future Combat System the Army is developing. Similar examples could be given for the other services—but the Navy and Air Force force structures tend to focus more on platforms (aircraft, naval vessels) that can be upgraded over time with new weapons systems, so the ways in which force structure lags changes in strategy are perhaps less visible.

⁸ For a critical analysis of the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, see the review by Professor MacKubin Thomas Owens of *Victory on the Potomac: The Goldwater-Nichols Act Unifies the Pentagon*, by James Locher III, in the *Washington Times*, September 15, 2002.

⁹ John Gordon, and Peter A. Wilson, *The Case for Army XXI ‘Medium Weight’ Aero-Motorized Divisions: A Pathway to the Army of 2020*, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, May 1998.

The second example from US experience of how change is reflected in national security strategy is the post-Cold War reorientation to focus more on homeland security and asymmetric threats, particularly terrorism. The US awareness of and concern with asymmetric threats did not begin on September 11, 2001. For much of the past decade there were studies and warnings suggesting the need for a reorientation of post-Cold War national security strategy and force structure to focus more on such threats. The Defense Department's longtime director of Net Assessment, Andrew Marshall, had since the early 1990s pushed the need to think more broadly about how changes in the security environment increased new asymmetric threats and highlighted the need to change US force structure. Marshall's work tended to focus more on the longer-term rise of a peer-competitor state, but clear warnings of the potential of mass-casualty terrorism by non-state actors were provided by the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the spring 1995 Aum Shinrikyo attacks in Tokyo (as well as the Oklahoma City attacks in the United States).

Both the National Defense Panel report and the Commission on US National Security Strategy in the late 1990s warned of the need to focus more on these types of asymmetric terrorist threats. Yet for over a decade after the Cold War, successive US national security strategies still emphasized more conventional adaptations to focus military forces (essentially the same forces of the Cold War, scaled back by one-third) on regional conflicts and interventions. In fairness, the 1997 *Quadrennial Defense Review* and resulting National Security Strategy did include some greater emphasis on asymmetric warfare in its third element 'Prepare now for an uncertain future,' but largely absent was real funding for force transformation and the willingness to see the possible military roles in countering terrorism (still being viewed largely as a 'law enforcement' problem).

After the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks, US national security strategy and force structure began to anticipate and reflect a new emphasis on dealing with the changes in the security environment—an emphasis which had actually begun earlier in 2001 as Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld conducted the *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR). While the military quickly acted to eliminate the terrorist-harboring Taliban government in Afghanistan, the President appointed a coordinator for homeland security and, some months later, proposed the creation of the cabinet-level Department of Homeland Security. The lengthy debate in Congress over authorizing this new department reflected the complex bureaucratic realignments and new power centers likely to result from this reorganization. If the history of the 1947 National Security

Act is any guide, the Department of Homeland Security is likely to experience much change in coming years. As Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz testified to Congress: ‘I don’t think we’ve got the final answer here, and it’s going to take a long time.... But I think this is a very important step...’.¹⁰ Military force structure implications continue to be debated and once again, as in the post-World War II period, national security strategy and, even more, military force structure lags years behind the first indications of change in the broader international environment.

IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR THINKING ABOUT CHANGE IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

These observations have several implications for our thinking about change and transitions in the Asia-Pacific region. First, conceptual worldviews and geostrategic perspectives are lenses that color how we see the world and its changes. There is a need for greater awareness of this fact, so that we can minimize the biases, false assumptions and gross inconsistencies that can hamper our understanding of change.

Second, there is also the need for better awareness of how we conceptualize the issue of security itself. The impact of change on ‘security’ may be very different depending on whether our meaning of security is military, comprehensive, or simply vulnerabilities and fear.

Third, whatever the broader issue of change, the US historical experience suggests that national security strategies and force structures tend to lag in reflecting this change. Major changes to national security strategy tend to emerge as delayed responses to historic landmarks such as the end of World War II or the end of the Cold War. The creation of new national security institutions and structures to implement the new strategies is particularly difficult. As Machiavelli wrote in *The Prince*:

It must be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than the creation of a new system. For the initiator has the enmity of all who would profit by the preservation of the old institutions and merely lukewarm defenders in those who would gain by the new ones.¹¹

Military force structure lags even further behind in reflecting change. With the lifetimes of ships and even aircraft platforms now measured in decades,

¹⁰ Hiatt, *op.cit.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

fundamental force structure changes are today more likely to occur through transformations in how these forces are linked together and integrated as joint forces (through networks and command, control, communications, and computers).

Finally, as we seek better ways to understand change, we would be well advised to approach change through a systematic process which challenges our assumptions and forces us to identify the full range of possible scenarios and challenges, including the less likely changes that can truly surprise us. Thomas Schelling's foreword to the classic Roberta Wohlstetter analysis *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* contains a wealth of insight on how change can surprise:

Surprise, when it happens to a government, is likely to be a complicated, diffuse, bureaucratic thing. It includes neglect of responsibility but also responsibility so poorly defined or so ambiguously delegated that action gets lost. It includes gaps in intelligence, but also intelligence that, like a string of pearls too precious to wear, is too sensitive to give to those who need it. It includes the alarm that fails to work, but also the alarm that has gone off so often it has been disconnected... It includes the contingencies that occur to no one, but also those that everyone assumes somebody else is taking care of. It includes straightforward procrastination, but also decisions protracted by internal disagreement. It includes, in addition, the inability of individual human beings to rise to the occasion until they are sure it is the occasion—which is usually too late.¹²

¹² Thomas Schelling, 'Forward', Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962). I am indebted to Dr. James Giblin for this insight.