Beyond Defense Planning

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Introduction

When the World Trade Center towers were destroyed by terrorists and more than three thousand people died, old notions of defense planning collapsed as well. As Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld noted, the United States' defenses were not designed to protect an American city from a civilian U.S. airliner that departed from a domestic airport. He might have said, with equal veracity, that one cannot "plan" for the unimaginable.

The term "defense planning" evokes two misconceptions. The first of these conceptual problems lies in the notion of "planning," while the second concerns the idea of "defense." To begin to address these misconceptions means putting an end to our inability to envision alternative defense planning systems that could be public, transparent, and plural.

To plan is to outline, conceive, prepare—all of which connote static assumptions about future scenarios. Herein lies one problem with the notion of defense planning, since any effort to anticipate anything beyond the most proximate threat scenarios is fraught with uncertainty. Defense planning *qua* "defendology"—a compulsive devotion to, and de facto ideology of, preparation for war—is often equated with the processes of modernizing and westernizing armed forces[2] Yet, at the core of early 21st century defense planning lies the real dilemma of whether or not "defense" is what defense planning in this age is all about.

In the following pages, such a conceptual dilemma is discussed, after which some of the implications of this intellectual debate are considered. In brief, I argue that NATO —and other alliances, ministries, or other large organizations generally—are preoccupied, almost to the point of compulsiveness, with the "Maginot Line mentality" of planning, and have great difficulty grasping the notion of "de-planning." Such a mentality focuses on what is already in place, and therefore must be supported. Even if a particular element of strategy or an item

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[2] Tomo Radicevic, "Defence Transparency Development: The Case of Croatia" (paper delivered at the workshop on defense transparency, sponsored by the Center for Democratic Control of Armed Forces (Geneva), Sofia, Bulgaria, April 2001), manuscript.

in the inventory does not work, it is maintained. This planning fails to recognize that what is not needed or does not work ought not be implemented or maintained. Fixated on documentary products (often produced for external audiences or their own political constituencies), armed forces, defense ministries, and other parts of national security structures grind out "planning" treatises that repeat the same messages, and that often go unread.

The most important question to be asked is: Are we now in need of "defense" planning? In the discussion below, I suggest that we now require something quite different and substantially divorced from the idea of defense. Defense is primarily military in nature, with armed forces constituting the primary means to deter enemies and defeat them in combat if conflict ensues. In cases where enemies are not precisely defined, live among their victims, and intertwine "them" with "us," against whom is defense planning directed? If a state, a government, or a citizenry perceives the greatest threat to be from terrorist cells, crime, corruption, drugs, infectious diseases, or other amorphous perils, what are the effective weapons?[3] Where is the frontline? Who are the troops?

Planning for What?

Within Western paradigms, and certainly those of NATO and the United States, defense planning follows broad and far-reaching strategic assessments that define national interests and the potential threats to those interests. Typically, these are labeled as the "security strategy of the _____ republic" and "defense doctrine of the _____ republic."[4] Only after such long-term and wide-ranging analyses do the nuts and bolts of defense planning follow, detailing the kinds of forces and equipment needed to ensure that threats are countered and interests protected. Such efforts can be, and often are, prepared within national security structures, for internal use only, meant to inform legislators and executive authorities of Ministry of Defense and General Staff assessments of needs.

In the milieu of transitional systems, where socioeconomic and political environments are being remade at the same time that a country's leaders must find new bases for security,[5] defense planning must be accompanied or preceded by reforms of the armed forces and defense ministry. "Concepts for the reform of the _____ MoD" or "Development of the _____ Army to the Year 20XX" have been characteristic labels for such documents in post-communist Central and Southeastern Europe.[6]

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[3] The European Commission's Eurobarometer has tracked such concerns during the last decade.

[4] For example, these were the terms used in the Slovak case. See Ivo Samson, "Slovakia," in *Central/East European Security Yearbook*, ed. Daniel N. Nelson (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2001).

[5] Regarding the challenges and implicit conflicts of such a triple transition, see Daniel N. Nelson, "Democracy, Market, Security," *Survival* 35:2 (Summer 1993): 156-171.

[6] Again, drawn from the Slovak case. See Samson, *op. cit.*

Defense planning is thus the stage of national security thinking that matches means to ends, and that addresses the goals of effecting policy, not the formation of policy itself. Defense planners, presumably, think far less about strategic wisdom or reasoned policy, and far more about organizational and managerial deficiencies that might impede implementation. Ideally, they aim to "plan smart, manage smart, and buy smart."[7] Defense planning is supposed to be, more than anything else, the organization and management of the military side of national security.[8]

But, insofar as defense planners plan, for what are they planning? Their vision is preordained by interests and threats defined and pronounced by higher levels. Told to plan for certain conflicts or dangers, they do so. In logical syllogisms—if..., then—defense planners consider how to ensure necessary capacities to balance threats, organizing and managing human and material resources given certain strategic aims and policy goals.

This logic, however, confines defense planning to: 1) narrow assumptions about future scenarios, 2) limited resource parameters, and 3) pre-ordained, static thinking. Charged with responsibility for readiness, defense planning takes on the character of preparing for the anticipated, likely, and expected. Inevitably, planning becomes managerial, with little attention given to the least expected or most unlikely scenario. Policymakers typically do not ask for a blueprint for what they do not expect. One of the clearest statements of this desideratum (even demand) of top policymakers was once made to the author by a leading official of the Clinton Administration:

"…don't waste my time or yours by giving me recommendations for what is a 10 percent probability. What is 50 percent or more probable—that's what interests me. Prepare me for what I'm most likely to see, or second-most likely to confront *tomorrow* based on what happened today or yesterday."[9]

Yet, events having the character of crises invariably are tense and dangerous because they combine the high potential for violence with severe time constraints and substantial uncertainty. Further, crises generated by least-likely scenarios are those that are most costly to confront.

It is in the nature of planning, in other words, to pursue strategic interests or meet policy demands with top-down, off-the-shelf plug-ins—standardized but adapted capacities—rather than to seek profoundly innovative answers based on

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[7] These are the three key defense planning tasks as noted by Dr. Gordon Adams, George Washington University, in remarks delivered at the George C. Marshall Center, Garmisch, Germany on April 30, 2001.

[8] An example of such organizational and managerial emphasis in defense planning is Ashton B. Carter and John P. White, *Keeping the Edge: Managing Defense for the Future* (Stanford, CA: The Preventive Defense Project, Stanford University, 2000).

[9] Comment to author by senior Clinton Administration Department of Defense official, 1999.

entrepreneurial and de-centralized initiatives.[10] Innovations and initiatives, which can be encouraged, but can not be produced on demand, are not scripted by planners.

For long-established political systems with more or less democratic credentials and ample wealth, these traits of defense planning may be troublesome and wasteful, but not debilitating. Where a triangular transition has been undertaken simultaneously—to democracy, free markets, and security—defense-planning myopia can hurt badly. In smaller, poorer states new to democracy, one error in every 2000 decisions made in anticipating national security needs can, ten years later, leave a bankrupt treasury, a vulnerable country, and a civil-military chasm.

To make planning less rigid—to assume less, lock in fewer human or material resources over the long run, and to leave more alternative paths open—may be the nucleus of the process of *defense de-planning*. In other words, to plan less, not more, may be required of ministries and armed forces in order to avoid the "tyranny" of the plan. Instead of planning until one drops, a better mantra might be "less is more."

The phenomenon of planning too much can be seen when decisions about force levels, procurement, or training (three principal arenas of traditional defense planning) are derived from over-determined empirical models or from templates, software, or lobbyists imported from elsewhere. Large, long-term resource commitments can become defense-planning nightmares that deter or supplant ideas—indeed, obstacles that constitute the antithesis of thinking.

Sometimes, these over-the-horizon plans are determined by ideology or by raw local economic interests. In the current United States inventory (or soon to be procured), there are, among others, almost one hundred B-1 bombers that do nothing, an enormously expensive V-22 "Osprey" tilt-rotor assault aircraft that has killed many Marines in accidents, and mechanized artillery that are too heavy to be deployed in most zones of potential conflict. The reasons for such blunders lie not with simplistic economic determinism but rather with a planning system locked in cement.

Among the many examples one can cite of this long-term planning excess is Slovakia's decision during the Meciar government to purchase 72 L-159 subsonic jet attack aircraft, a number that is certainly twice Slovakia's reasonable requirement, and a purchase that locks Bratislava into egregious costs that will debilitate all other modernization and training goals.[11] Deferring decisions, and understanding that premature "plans" have the consistency and characteristics of

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[10] A good example of this standardization was the Croatian Ministry of Defense report, drawn from an analysis of defense white papers in the late 1990s, finding eighteen common themes among such studies, even to the point of repeating the same wording. See *Defense Transparency: Defense White Paper* (Rakije: DEFIMI, 2000) as cited in Radicevic, *op. cit.*

[11] Author's discussions with Slovak Defense Ministry officials, Bratislava, March 2001.

quicksand, would have been wiser. Romania's aircraft decision, largely one of up-grading MIG-21s and a few MIG-29s until the country has a decade of additional perspective, and perhaps more money, exhibits the ability to step back from that kind of long-term planning, when to fail to do so might lock very costly errors into place.[12]

Accepting imprecision, expecting the unexpected, and demanding that solutions to tomorrow's crises be derived less from a script or blueprint than from a sense of innovative capability and decentralized responsibility, are all essential to de-planning. To plan less does not mean to minimize preparation; pre-positioning equipment, simulation exercises, field training, and similar measures can continue. Pre-positioning tanks does not preordain their use. Simulations and games do not require that we memorize moves. Rather than a rote if-then logic of defense planning, the tools of national security should be maintained with maximum decentralization and flexibility; resources need, first and foremost, to be assembled in light of a crisis and its unique character.

Such de-planning has implications for personnel, equipment, and training. Implicit trade-offs become immediately evident, as leading security policy decision-makers grapple with choices between obtaining necessary numbers and quality of people, buying hardware, and sustaining operations. Usually, all of these cannot be done equally well. Particularly in smaller, poorer countries, it may be that *none* of these tasks can be done well. Choices may be limited to creating national security policies that avoid the worst damage, or minimize harm.

Still, armed forces that eschew planning for conflict against specific opponents in rigid scenarios must broaden their training of personnel, and create units that are smaller (battalions, companies, or smaller detachments) to be assembled into larger organizations as needs require. Multi-purpose weapons and equipment, cross-training, "jointness," and other concepts are essential to such flexibility. These innovations have been discussed for years in many defense ministries (including the United States), and still require budgeting and procurement expertise. Rather than being more expensive, these concepts are likely to produce economies of scale and long-term savings.[13] If applied by countries with limited resources, such principles will quickly highlight the dangers of over-planning by large, entrenched defense bureaucracies, for whom planning is another name for the sinecures many career officers and bureaucrats enjoy.

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[12] Thomas Szayna comments favorably on this Romanian decision in his report, *NATO Enlargement 2000-2015* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001). Further, in conversations with the author, senior NATO officials engaged with MAP countries have noted that the Romanian action, made by the previous government (1996-2000), reflected financial realities and the need to defer decisions until all options are clear.

[13] Personal communication to author by Dr. Gordon Adams, former deputy director (1993-1998), Office of Management and Budget, Office of the President. Adams is now director of the National Security Program in the Elliot School at George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

Defense Against Whom?

Decoupling our thinking about defense planning from excess and inflexibility is only half the battle. The very notion of defense carries with it the implication of threat from someone or something else. Even when any potential threat seems remote, the use military force is explained and rationalized to democratic citizens as an act of defense, defending principles if not territory.[14]

The "other" from whom we seek protection via our own capacities or those of allies is, however, becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish from "us."

Moreover, as peril becomes more diffuse, and organized armed force seems less potent against such threats, the use of multilateral, unconventional, non-military responses are beginning to unravel national defense planning. Planning within states or among states (in alliances) is being complicated and confounded by the emergence of supra-national and sub-national authorities that use resources and assets. For example, the European Union resolved, in 2000, to create a rapid reaction force of 60,000 personnel. Whatever the ultimate success of such an endeavor, the personnel and equipment of this force are to be "shared" with NATO.

Furthermore, increases in the size and frequency of humanitarian interventions or peacekeeping deployments require adjustments in the standard norms of defense planning, whether in terms of manpower, equipment, funding, or training. Such events are, by their very nature, unpredictable in the long term. To the extent that such commitments can be planned, planners must join with humanitarian NGOs and international bureaucracies (at the UN Secretariat, at OSCE, etc.) to consider all aspects of deploying erstwhile "national" equities in such crises. Defense planning, in other words, is becoming denationalized and far more plural.

In the literature of critical security studies, vigorous discussion has been devoted to the "discourse" of security, and the incessant "securitization" of topics that might otherwise be seen from a different perspective.[15] Most discussions of defense planning begin with a survey of the security environment, go on to talk about the recent transformation of multilateral organizations or bilateral relations, and then look at individual countries' capacities to find or obtain security via those organizations.[16] The broad strategic assessment flows, almost automatically, towards the assumption that we require "defense," and that certain institutions provide capacities for that defense. Defense equals security. More insecurity requires more defense.

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[14] An analytical treatment of such themes within leaders' speeches (Bill Clinton and Tony Blair) as they sought to convince their citizens that military action against Serbia was justified and warranted because of Kosovo is Paul Chilton, "Justifying the War," in *At War With Words*, eds. Mirjana Dedaic and Daniel N. Nelson (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, forthcoming 2002).

[15] There are countless volumes and articles in this literature. Their general flavor is suggested by Ronnie Lipshutz, ed. *Critical Security Studies* (Boulder: Roman & Littlefield, 1996).

[16] Quite understandably, given RAND's U.S. Air Force clients, Thomas Szayna follows this formula in his thorough report, *op.cit.*

The neologism "defendology" embodies such a formula. Ever on the watch for more threats, defendologists (?) study insecurity, beginning with the assumption that defense is the paramount role of the state. Finding (or creating) and defining threats, the response to which is the creation of heightened state-organized capacities *qua* military and intelligence assets, are the leitmotif of defendology.

This equation, however, ignores at great peril an alternative view: that security is not merely capacity-driven (by having better armies, bigger alliances, growth economies), but is rather and increasingly a function of *a dynamic balance between threats and capacities.*[17] Under this view, threat-abatement thus becomes a critical partner of capacity-enhancement; both must be manipulated and utilized to ensure such a balance.

Defense planning may preordain a capacity-driven understanding of security, denying to a country and its population many productive (and cheaper) paths to stability, peace, prosperity, and other desiderata.

Security-planning, a broader concept, embodies fewer of the implications of 'other'-directed defense derived from the push to enhance capacities. To plan for security is to consider, more broadly, how the dynamic balance between threats and capacities can be maintained, and to create a robust policy designed to abate threats. De-nationalized security planning, indeed, stresses international collective cooperation.

Open, Limited, or Closed? A National Security Planning Continuum

Three characteristics or traits differentiate between internal security planning systems. First, the *locus of decision-making* regarding national security planning may vary from highly public to decisively non-public and dominated by a party or clique. In the former, questions regarding armed forces personnel, their armaments, and training are all posed, aired, and debated in public forums. Positions of decision-makers are evident and defined, and both domestic and international publics can know about decisions taken and policies made by a country's institutions regarding defense.

The *degree of accountability,* or the level of scrutiny of the process by which such decisions are arrived at, is a second way in which security planning can vary. Legislative oversight, media investigation, non-governmental organization examination, and scholarly study are all essential aspects of transparency, which is an essential trait of open security planning.

Third, and perhaps most deeply, who decides and *who has policy input* varies greatly. A broad representation of various socioeconomic and political groups and interests indicates a plural security-planning environment, while a closed system

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[17] For developments and iterations of these ideas, consult Daniel N. Nelson, "Security In A Post-Hegemonic World," *Journal of Peace Research* 22:3 (September 1991): 333-345. Also see Daniel N. Nelson, "Great Powers, Global Insecurity," in *Global Security: Challenges for the 21st Century*, eds. Michael Klare and Jogesh Chandrani (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

would accept only inputs via one channel without broad representation. (See Table below)

Type of Security Planning Systems

Characteristics	Open Security Planning	Semi-Open Security Planning	Closed Security Planning
Decision locus	Public	State	Party
Accountability Scrutiny	Transparent	Translucent	Opaque
Representation Inputs	Plural	Selected	Unitary

Transparency

In developing a security-planning apparatus, transparency is a "must have."[18] To see into and through deliberations that eventuate in resource allocation for armed forces and all security structures is essential, for nascent democracies and for long-in-the-tooth democracies alike. One does not need to see everything in order for transparency to exist. Yet, to the degree that specific programs or activities on which human and financial resources are being spent are concealed, the normative bases of democracy are violated, and the pragmatic needs of security planners (to know and have their constituencies know what they are doing and why) are ignored.

Transparency does not imply simply announcing and broadcasting everything. Rather, to be transparent suggests procedural visibility and clarity, both facilitated by media investigations, parliamentary oversight, and academic scrutiny. Absent this public portrait of security planning, the process quickly reverts to byzantine rites and holy writ. The frequent involvement of national secrets militates against transparency, and it is often thought that the de-planning emphasis noted above will endanger sources and processes essential to "national technical means."

Translucent systems offer glimpses and outlines, but never details. *Opaque systems* hide most of the national security planning process. There are many points on this spectrum, and these three points only illustrate a much larger phenomenon whereby open, limited, and closed security-planning systems are differentiated from each other in part by their degree of accountability and "penetration." Every system that seeks to conceal activities, maintain "black" programs, and hide true intentions winds up with its Iran-Contra scandal, ministerial resignations for shady transactions, or massive investigations.

To ensure transparency requires proactive measures to provide and reveal information to the press, to discover errors, mistakes, and malfeasance from within,

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[18] Dr. Gordon Adams, Lecture presented to the George C. Marshall Center, April 30, 2001.

and to maintain regular and cooperative liaisons with national legislative bodies. Transparency does not simply happen; it must be assiduously pursued.

Academic study can be enhanced through scholar-in-residence programs in ministries and agencies. Legislative oversight can be expanded by developing reciprocal civilian and military competencies regarding security issues, through joint educational opportunities, on-the-job exchanges (secondments), liaison offices, and frequent, regular, and detailed briefings. Capacities for substantive media reporting can be improved through the provision of ample and accurate information about security issues, planning, and policies and the joint education of journalists with legislators, bureaucrats, and officers. Ideas such as these are easily listed but far more difficult to implement, yet the route to transparency is through these endeavors.

Pluralism

It is not true that thinking about national security, and the defense package within larger matters of security, will always benefit from adding people or institutions to the process. It is equally untrue that denying access, minimizing input, and limiting debate will enhance the quality of national security products.

The notion of pluralism—which means not just abundant inputs, but the contribution of ideas and opinions across a wide spectrum—is surely part of modern democratic thought. But it is also a concept implicit to effective leadership and decision-making. Without knowing the alternatives, leaders have no options, and without hearing debate and criticism, they cannot rationally choose among alternatives when they are presented to them.

Pluralism is the presence, in decision-making, of representative diversity, but it ought not be confused with cacophony. Institutionally, democracies typically include parliamentary elites (defense committees, for example) in security planning. Academic and think-tank experts are called upon to provide data and opinion. Business, ethnic, and other interest groups are solicited for their opinions concerning parts of the world or specific threats. Most importantly, the General Staff, the Defense Ministry, and the intelligence agencies are not the only entities that contribute views, positions, and assessments. Indeed, the writing and editing of national security documents requires, for true pluralism to be implemented and maintained, a much wider vetting, by skilled, experienced, and trusted individuals in business, academe, think tanks, and other socioeconomic and political institutions. Critical views, alternative assessments, or sharply divergent interpretations of data on which a defense ministry may have drafted original documents or budgets must be sought.

Yet merely including multiple voices in the process would offer little pluralism if all voices, for example, were dominated by one party, one class, or one cultural identity. Hence, the full breadth and scope of socioeconomic, cultural, and political diversity deserve solicitation and careful attention, as all these may affect

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security. These inputs cannot be ad hoc and random, but rather must be seen as appropriate and necessary to the nation's effort to balance threats and capacities, and thereby to achieve security.

Pluralism in security planning can be promoted, although not guaranteed, by a number of measures, none of which are confined to one political system or culture. In any country, ministries, agencies, and branches of government must contact each other and interact to some degree on matters of national security. Formal and regular contact, referred to in the United States and most NATO countries as the "interagency process," can be inaugurated with personnel exchanges across institutions: secondments from the foreign ministry to the defense ministry, from the intelligence services to a parliamentary committee staff, or from the general staff to the presidency.

Additional pluralism can be encouraged if top decision-makers (ministers, a prime minister or president) purposefully establish among key advisors a "B team" that is charged with creating alternatives to prevailing thinking, thereby forcing into the security planning process some interpretations and findings that run counter to orthodoxy. Panels of "outsiders"—from academe, business, NGOs, religious communities, and others —can be named by top decision-makers and challenged to address the same national security issues as those being addressed inside the government, and could produce policy recommendations that might depart substantially from governmental orthodoxies.

Security as a Public Good

Via both transparency and pluralism, an open discussion of security planning can be generated and maintained. These concepts *open* such an essential issue, removing it from the realm of party and clique or from within the bureaucratic corridors of presidencies, ministries, and parliaments.

By embracing these values, an opportunity is created to transform "defense planning" into a less rigidly-planned and stasis-oriented process that considers a country's larger security environment. By relying less on planning and more on a better understanding of routes to security that do not depend on capacities alone, the grip of defense planning on security thinking might be broken.

At the core of such a conceptual shift is seeing security not as the product of capacities alone, but as a dynamic balance between threats and capacities. In this formula, threat abatement is just as essential a component of security policy as defense planning. From the model of *planning a defense against others* from within the confines of a comfortable clubhouse into which few others will be admitted, we need to move towards the notion of *security with others*. Not a "clubhouse

good" but a public good, security for each member is at best partial unless it is holistic.[19]

Today's defense planners may not yet be ready for such transitions. But it is already clear that every state's security is no longer the domain of an intra-party elite or junta, who once upon a time could guard their control of the opaque resource allocation process for defense.

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[19] For an expansion of this notion of security as a public good, see Daniel N. Nelson, "Post Communist Insecurity," *Problems of Post-Communism* (September, 2000). Also see "Civil Armies, Civil Society," *Armed Forces & Society* 25:1 (September 1998).

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