

Does Strategic Planning Matter? The Outcomes of U.S. National Security Reviews

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IN RECENT YEARS, ALL OF THE MAJOR U.S. NATIONAL security agencies have conducted quadrennial strategy reviews.¹ In 1996, the U.S. Congress mandated the conduct by the Defense Department of a Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) that entails a “comprehensive examination” of U.S. defense strategy and policies, “with a view toward determining and expressing the defense strategy of the United States and establishing a defense program for the next 20 years.”² Since then, U.S. policymakers have also launched quadrennial reviews in the U.S. intelligence community and at the Departments of Homeland Security and State. As of this writing, U.S. agencies have completed five QDRs, three Quadrennial Intelligence Community Reviews (QICRs), two Quadrennial Homeland Security Reviews (QHSRs), and two Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Reviews (QDDRs).³ In addition, the Barack Obama

¹I am grateful to Boaz Atzili, David Bosco, Meena Bose, Jon Caverley, Jeff Colgan, Bruce Jentleson, Richard Kernochan, David Lewis, Abby Lindsay, David Ucko, and Sharon Weiner, as well as other participants at American Political Science Association, International Studies Association, and ISSS-ISAC conference panels, for helpful feedback on earlier versions of this article. I also thank Edward Lucas and Kate Tennis for excellent research assistance, and I thank American University and the School of International Service at American University for their support of this research.

²National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997, Pub. L. No. 104-201, 110 Stat. 2422.

³The QICR was discontinued after its third iteration.

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administration has begun the first Quadrennial Energy Review, which is being led by the White House and Department of Energy.

These quadrennial reviews require a major investment of time and energy on the part of many government officials. The reviews therefore raise several questions: What have been the outcomes of quadrennial reviews by government agencies? What factors have shaped their outcomes? More generally, are formal strategic reviews worth doing?

Answering these questions is important not only because of how much time government personnel spend on quadrennial reviews but also because the outcomes of reviews may influence whether the government operates effectively or is prepared for key challenges. Yet there exists relatively little scholarship on quadrennial reviews, and I am unaware of any previous scholarship that draws general conclusions about quadrennial reviews based on a thorough evaluation of multiple reviews.

In this article, I seek to answer these questions and fill this gap in knowledge. Conceptually, I draw on insights from the political science, public administration, and management literatures to explain how formal strategy reviews can influence government activity and how their impact can be constrained by certain features of political and bureaucratic life. Empirically, I draw on government documents, other primary and secondary sources, and interviews of 51 experts and current and former government officials to present original case studies of the first QDDR and QHSR, as well as a more general assessment of the QDR's impact over several review cycles. I also briefly examine the presidentially-issued National Security Strategy (NSS) and several other White House-led strategy reviews in order to consider the importance of presidential involvement in a review. Overall, I aim to enhance our understanding of the links between strategy processes and organizational outcomes in the public sector, which other scholars have identified as an area in need of more empirical research.⁴

In short, I argue that quadrennial reviews by government agencies rarely determine the outcome of the government's most important strategic decisions but they often generate significant policy or organizational changes and can serve as useful management devices for agency leaders. Quadrennial reviews by agencies are generally poor vehicles for shaping major strategic decisions because such decisions are typically made by the president in response to events rather than by individual agencies

⁴Theodore H. Poister, David W. Pitts, and Lauren Hamilton Edwards, "Strategic Management Research in the Public Sector: A Review, Synthesis, and Future Directions," *American Review of Public Administration* 40 (September 2010): 522–545.

according to a quadrennial calendar. A strategic review will therefore not usually generate dramatic change in security strategy unless the review involves the president and is prompted by an external shock or political shift. But even in the absence of those conditions, a structured review can have substantial value in helping the leadership of an agency generate buy-in for important changes that institutionalize the leadership's priorities or goals. In this way, many government reviews serve mainly as tools for leading complex bureaucracies.

THE VALUE AND LIMITATIONS OF FORMAL STRATEGY EXERCISES

Existing scholarship provides a range of views on the value of formal strategy activities. One leading school of thought in the management literature argues that formal strategic planning is rarely conducive to innovation.⁵ In this perspective, organizations operating in rapidly changing environments are better served by more informal and flexible approaches to strategy development. An implication of this school of thought is that the highly structured quadrennial review model would not serve most organizations well.⁶

Yet other management and public administration studies have found that formal planning improves the performance of private firms and public sector organizations and that the most successful organizations conduct both formal and informal planning.⁷ Some scholars argue further that formal planning is valuable because it can help decision makers understand their organizations and prepare for real-time decisions, even though it rarely generates important innovations directly.⁸ This argument is

⁵Henry Mintzberg, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning: Reconceiving Roles for Planning, Plans, and Planners* (New York: Free Press, 1994); and Henry Mintzberg, Bruce Ahlstrand, and Joseph Lampel, *Strategy Safari: A Guided Tour through the Wilds of Strategic Management* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 47–80.

⁶Ionut Popescu, "The Last QDR? What the Pentagon Should Learn from Corporations about Strategic Planning," *Armed Forces Journal* 147 (March 2010): 26–30.

⁷John M. Bryson, *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement*, 4th ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011); Peter J. Brews and Michelle R. Hunt, "Learning to Plan and Planning to Learn: Resolving the Planning School/Learning School Debate," *Strategic Management Journal* 20 (October 1999): 889–913; Peter Brews and Devavrat Purohit, "Strategic Planning in Unstable Environments," *Long Range Planning* 40 (February 2007): 64–83; and Rebecca Hendrick, "Strategic Planning Environment, Process, and Performance in Public Agencies: A Comparative Study of Departments in Milwaukee," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 13 (October 2003): 491–519.

⁸Andrew P.N. Erdmann, "Foreign Policy Planning through a Private Sector Lens," in Daniel W. Drezner, ed., *Avoiding Trivia: The Role of Strategic Planning in American Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2009), 137–158; and Sarah Kaplan and Eric D. Beinhocker, "The Real Value of Strategic Planning," *MIT Sloan Management Review* 44 (Winter 2003): 71–76.

consistent with Dwight D. Eisenhower’s famous comment, “plans are useless. . . planning is indispensable.”⁹ Some scholars add that formal planning is particularly beneficial for government agencies because they operate in relatively stable environments—making rapid innovation less important—and typically need to involve a lot of internal and external stakeholders in their planning, which can be facilitated by a structured process.¹⁰ Even the leading critics of private sector formal planning observe that structured planning tends to be useful for government agencies.¹¹

Scholars of national security affairs have also argued that strategic planning is necessary and, when done well, can be quite valuable. Bruce Jentleson and Andrew Bennett write that without planning, U.S. foreign policy tends “toward drift and incoherence.”¹² Aaron Friedberg argues that an absence of institutionalized national security planning “seems certain to lead to a loss of efficiency” and, at worst, “raises the risk of catastrophic failure.”¹³ Meena Bose writes that structured planning processes can help ensure the systematic consideration of alternatives and center the president’s attention on overall goals.¹⁴

At the same time, there is ample reason to think that it is especially hard to conduct effective strategic planning in the government. Organization theory teaches that government units often resist innovations and seek to protect their turf.¹⁵ These units may see strategic reviews as threats to their budgets and autonomy, and therefore they may try to prevent reviews from establishing priorities or generating changes. Outside the executive branch, lawmakers may be an additional obstacle to changes that challenge their own policy preferences or favored programs.¹⁶

National security scholars have identified a number of additional obstacles to effective strategic planning. Senior policymakers may

⁹Quoted in Richard Nixon, *Six Crises* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1962), 235.

¹⁰Brews and Purohit, “Strategic Planning in Unstable Environments”; and Gerald R. Kissler, Karmen N. Fore, Willow S. Jacobson, William P. Kittredge, and Scott L. Stewart, “State Strategic Planning: Suggestions from the Oregon Experience,” *Public Administration Review* 58 (July/August 1998): 353–358.

¹¹Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel, *Strategy Safari*, 367.

¹²Bruce W. Jentleson and Andrew Bennett, “Policy Planning: Oxymoron or Sine Qua Non for U.S. Foreign Policy,” in Stanley A. Renshon and Deborah Welch Larson, eds., *Good Judgment in Foreign Policy: Theory and Application* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 219–246, at 219.

¹³Aaron L. Friedberg, “Strengthening U.S. Strategic Planning,” in Drezner, ed., *Avoiding Trivia*, 84–97, at 84.

¹⁴Meena Bose, *Shaping and Signaling Presidential Policy* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), 101–111.

¹⁵James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 101.

¹⁶Joel D. Aberbach, *Keeping a Watchful Eye: The Politics of Congressional Oversight* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1990), 7.

marginalize strategic planners because policymakers are focused on day-to-day crises, do not think planning is necessary, or worry that planning could limit their flexibility or result in embarrassing revelations if planning discussions are leaked.¹⁷ In addition, administration officials may resist the setting of priorities because in the absence of priorities, every administration budget request can appear necessary.¹⁸ The effectiveness of strategic planning can be further constrained by cognitive limitations, uncertainty about the future, the exclusion of alternative perspectives, a tendency to inflate threats, insufficient attention to implementation, and inadequate accountability for poor strategic choices.¹⁹ Given these and other common problems in strategic planning, Richard Betts argues that national leaders should avoid adopting security goals or strategies that are very ambitious or complex, and David Edelstein and Ronald Krebs argue with even greater skepticism that the United States would be better off without national security strategizing.²⁰

With regard to specific U.S. strategy activities, scholars have examined the impact of the policy planning offices of government agencies, the NSS, other White House–led reviews, and the QDR and QDDR. The prevailing view in this body of literature is that the U.S. government has done strategic planning poorly.²¹ Regarding policy planning offices, scholars have found that their influence has been highly variable and dependent on the personal relationship between the office director and the agency head.²² With respect to the NSS—whose production is mandated by the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act—scholars have found that the White House generally treats it largely as a public relations tool and that its value has

¹⁷Friedberg, “Strengthening U.S. Strategic Planning”; Bruce W. Jentleson, “An Integrative Executive Branch Strategy for Policy Planning,” in Drezner, ed., *Avoiding Trivia*, 69–83; and Amy Zegart, “Why the Best Is Not Yet to Come in Policy Planning,” in Drezner, ed., *Avoiding Trivia*, 113–124.

¹⁸Paul Y. Hammond, “The Development of National Strategy in the Executive Branch: Overcoming Disincentives,” in James C. Gaston, ed., *Grand Strategy and the Decisionmaking Process* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1991), 3–23.

¹⁹Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?,” *International Security* 25 (Fall 2000): 5–50; David M. Edelstein and Ronald R. Krebs, “Delusions of Grand Strategy: The Problem with Washington’s Planning Obsession,” *Foreign Affairs* 94 (November/December 2015): 109–116; and Barry Watts, “Barriers to Acting Strategically: Why Strategy Is So Difficult,” in Thomas G. Mahnken, ed., *Competitive Strategies for the 21st Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 47–67.

²⁰Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?” 48–49; Edelstein and Krebs, “Delusions of Grand Strategy.”

²¹See, for example, Drezner, ed., *Avoiding Trivia*; Jentleson and Bennett, “Policy Planning”; and Gordon Adams, “Strategic Planning Comes to the State Department,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 30 July 2009.

²²Drezner, ed., *Avoiding Trivia*; Jentleson and Bennett, “Policy Planning”; Lincoln P. Bloomfield, “Planning Foreign Policy: Can It Be Done?” *Political Science Quarterly* 93 (Autumn 1978): 369–391; Linda T. Brady, “Planning for Foreign Policy: A Framework for Analysis,” *International Journal* 32 (Autumn 1977): 829–848; and Jan H. Kalicki, “The State Department Policy Planning Process,” *International Journal* 32 (Autumn 1977): 849–858.

been limited by the unwillingness of presidents to use it to set priorities or provide concrete guidance to agencies or budget officials.²³ Regarding other White House activities, scholars have found that presidents vary considerably in the extent to which they rely on formal strategy processes, and they have pointed to Eisenhower's highly structured use of the National Security Council as a model of sound strategy development.²⁴

Among quadrennial reviews, the QDR, as the longest-standing review, has received the most attention from scholars and policy analysts. The general consensus is that the QDR has been of limited value because it has not generated major changes in defense strategy, military force structure, or allocation of defense resources.²⁵ This view was reflected in a 2010 report by an independent panel of defense experts, which recommended that the QDR be discontinued.²⁶ A number of scholars and analysts have also assessed the QDDR, with these assessments ranging from favorable to critical.²⁷ On the whole, the prevailing sentiment of the policy community toward quadrennial reviews is lukewarm at best.

Despite this prevailing sentiment, my expectation is that quadrennial reviews—and formal reviews more generally—can be useful tools for senior policymakers trying to institutionalize their priorities within an agency. While structured reviews are not very well suited to the generation of revolutionary ideas, they can help senior officials build support within the bureaucracy for important organizational and policy changes. In his

²³Richard Betts, *U.S. National Security Strategy: Lenses and Landmarks* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Project on National Security, 2004); Jeffrey V. Gardner, "Evolving United States Grand Strategy: How Administrations Have Approached the National Security Strategy Report" (thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2004); and Don M. Snider, *The National Security Strategy: Documenting Strategic Vision* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 1995).

²⁴Bose, *Shaping and Signaling Presidential Policy*; Friedberg, "Strengthening U.S. Strategic Planning"; and Paul D. Miller, "Organizing the National Security Council: I Like Ike's," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43 (September 2013): 592–606.

²⁵See, for instance, John Gordon IV, "The Quadrennial Defense Review: Analyzing the Major Defense Review Process" (PhD diss., George Mason University, 2005); Mark Gunzinger, *Shaping America's Future Military: Toward a New Force Planning Construct* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2013), ii; Alexandra Homolar, "How to Last Alone at the Top: U.S. Strategic Planning for the Unipolar Era," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 34 (April 2011): 189–217, at 209–212; and David E. Snodgrass, "The QDR: Improve the Process to Improve the Product," *Parameters* 30 (Spring 2000): 57–68.

²⁶Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel, *The QDR in Perspective: Meeting America's National Security Needs in the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2010), xix.

²⁷Brian M. Burton and Kristin M. Lord, "Did the State Department Get the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review Right?," *Washington Quarterly* 34 (Spring 2011): 111–123; Gerald F. Hyman, *The First Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review: A Noble Effort* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2011); Edward Marks and Christopher Lamb, "Implementing the QDDR," *InterAgency Journal* 3 (Winter 2012): 8–14; John Norris, "The Ambassadors-as-CEOs Model," *Foreign Policy*, 17 December 2010; and Gordon Adams, "Democracy-Pushing Is Not Cutting-Edge Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy*, 11 May 2015.

landmark analysis of defense strategy, Samuel Huntington observed that “meaningful policy requires both content and consensus.”²⁸ Put in those terms, an informal approach to strategy development might generate more innovative content, but a structured process might sometimes be more useful because it builds consensus around content. Indeed, studies of strategic planning and reform efforts in the U.S. Air Force, Defense Department, and State Department have found that processes involving broad participation are necessary to create buy-in among rank-and-file personnel for organizational changes.²⁹ The need to generate buy-in is especially pronounced in government agencies because, unlike corporate leaders, senior political appointees have limited ability to influence the behavior of rank-and-file personnel through crude means such as the threat of dismissal.³⁰ Along similar lines, the legitimacy of a decision-making process often heavily shapes whether decisions are accepted throughout an organization.³¹ In that regard, highly structured processes may defuse concerns that decisions are being made behind closed doors, without broad participation.

I also expect, however, that there are important limitations to quadrennial reviews conducted by government agencies. While agency reviews can shape decisions that fall within an agency’s jurisdiction, they are poorly suited to influence broader decisions that are typically made in the White House or through an interagency process. Unless the president becomes directly involved in a quadrennial review, an agency’s leadership will usually be unable to use a review to catalyze major strategy or policy changes. In addition, even within an agency, the leadership’s ability to use a review to drive change can be significantly limited because career officials may not wish to implement all of a review’s ideas and agency leaders are constantly distracted from internal management by external events, pressures, and demands.

The rigid timelines and public reporting requirements of most quadrennial reviews are additional constraints on the impact of these reviews.

²⁸Samuel P. Huntington, *The Common Defense: Strategic Programs in National Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 167–168.

²⁹Michael Barzelay and Colin Campbell, *Preparing for the Future: Strategic Planning in the U.S. Air Force* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 22–23; Timothy Came and Colin Campbell, “The Dynamics of Top-Down Organizational Change: Donald Rumsfeld’s Campaign to Transform the U.S. Defense Department,” *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions* 23 (July 2010): 411–435; and Donald P. Warwick, *A Theory of Public Bureaucracy: Politics, Personality, and Organization in the State Department* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

³⁰Wilson, *Bureaucracy*, 48–49.

³¹Karen M. Hult and Charles Walcott, *Governing Public Organizations: Politics, Structures, and Institutional Design* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1990), 7–8.

The mandates of quadrennial reviews—particularly those ordered by Congress—typically require them to be completed by a certain date every four years. Such deadlines are generally not well suited to driving substantive policy decisions because policymakers typically need to make such decisions in response to events rather than according to a preset schedule. Major strategy changes, in particular, are often precipitated by an unexpected shock or crisis.³² A quadrennial review is not likely to be very useful to policymakers during a crisis, as the review’s timeline will not necessarily correspond to the timing of the shock. The value of a formal review can be further constrained when it must result in a public report, as is the case with most quadrennial reviews, because it is difficult for policymakers to speak frankly about many issues in a public document.³³ Policymakers may also not want to offer details about their plans in a public report in order to preserve their flexibility.³⁴

I also expect the outcome of a quadrennial review to be influenced by the source of its mandate. Other studies have found that strategic planning efforts and other review processes are more effective when a senior executive branch leader establishes the process and is personally invested in it.³⁵ Drawing on those findings, I expect that a review is likely to be implemented more thoroughly when it is established by the head of an agency than when it is mandated by Congress. On the other hand, I expect a review to be the object of greater congressional oversight if it is mandated by law, as congressional authorization gives lawmakers a greater stake in a review.

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF QUADRENNIAL REVIEWS

My analysis of the first QHSR and QDDR—as well as my more general assessment of the QDR’s impact over the past two decades—supports these expectations. I chose to focus in this article on the first QHSR and QDDR because they have received less attention from scholars than the QDR and because they were conducted at approximately the same time, although only the QHSR was mandated by Congress, thus providing a particularly

³²Jordan Tama, *Terrorism and National Security Reform: How Commissions Can Drive Change During Crises* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Jeffrey W. Legro, “Renewal of America’s Internationalism,” in Drezner, ed., *Avoiding Trivia*, 52–66; and Brady, “Planning for Foreign Policy.”

³³Remarks by Shawn Brimley and Jim Thomas at the Conference on “Preparing for the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, 25 January 2013, accessed at <http://csis.org/event/preparing-2014-quadrennial-defense-review>, 28 July 2014.

³⁴Thomas C. Schelling, “PPBS and Foreign Affairs,” *The Public Interest* (Spring 1968): 26–36.

³⁵Barzelay and Campbell, *Preparing for the Future*; Isaiah O. Ugboro, Kofi Obeng, and Ora Spann, “Strategic Planning as an Effective Tool of Strategic Management in Public Sector Organizations: Evidence from Public Transit Organizations,” *Administration & Society* 43 (January 2011): 87–123; and Tama, *Terrorism and National Security Reform*.

useful opportunity for assessing how a review is influenced by the way it was initiated. I further chose to include a general assessment of the QDR to determine whether my findings regarding the QHSR and QDDR also apply to the largest national security agency. (I do not assess the QICR because it is classified, and I do not assess in detail the presidential NSS because my focus is on agency reviews. However, in the article's next section, I briefly discuss the NSS and a few ad hoc presidential reviews by way of considering the importance of presidential involvement in strategy activities.)

I evaluated the impact of the QHSR, QDDR, and QDR by examining the extent to which they contributed to strategy, policy, organizational, or management changes. To make these assessments, I reviewed a variety of primary sources, including agency reports, statements by agency officials, congressional hearing transcripts, and reports by government auditors; consulted relevant secondary sources, such as contemporaneous periodical articles and think tank reports; and interviewed policymakers and experts who are very knowledgeable about the reviews. With all of these sources, I sought, in particular, to identify any information that shed light on whether the reviews led to changes in strategy, policy, management, or organization that might not have otherwise occurred and why the reviews did or did not have such effects.

The policymaker interviews were particularly important in this regard because some government insiders are well equipped to assess whether a review led the government to do something differently. At the same time, such insiders often have biases or agendas that shape their responses to interview questions about issues in which they were involved. To compensate for such biases or agendas, I interviewed at least a dozen people regarding each of the three reviews, including both officials who were directly involved in one of the reviews and officials and experts who were not directly involved in a review but are very knowledgeable about it. In all, I interviewed 32 people who worked on or observed a review while serving in the executive branch, 11 people who oversaw a review as a congressional official, and 8 nongovernmental experts on one of the reviews or agencies in question. Many of the interviews were conducted on a not-for-attribution basis to enable interviewees to speak more frankly.

To summarize my findings, I found that the first QHSR had little direct impact on homeland security policies and programs, but it gave leaders of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) a useful framework for managing the department and modestly advanced departmental integration. In addition, I found that the first QDDR did not significantly reorient the substance of U.S. diplomacy or foreign aid programs, but it triggered

some important State Department reorganizations and personnel policy changes that strengthened departmental capacity and skills in areas prioritized by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. I further found that Clinton's personal investment in the QDDR led to a stronger implementation process than existed at the DHS with the QHSR, whereas lawmakers conducted more oversight of the congressionally mandated QHSR. My investigation of the QDR furnished additional evidence that quadrennial reviews by agencies tend not to generate major changes in strategy, but they can be useful tools for leading and managing large bureaucracies.

The Quadrennial Homeland Security Review

The QHSR was mandated by legislation enacted in 2007 that required the secretary of homeland security to conduct, starting in 2009 and every four years thereafter, "a comprehensive examination of the homeland security strategy of the Nation, including recommendations regarding the long-term strategy and priorities of the Nation for homeland security and guidance on the programs, assets, capabilities, budget, policies, and authorities of the Department [of Homeland Security]." ³⁶ The review must result in a publicly available report.

The first QHSR was directed by the DHS Office of Strategic Plans, led by Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy Alan Cohn. The core of the process consisted of seven study groups comprising some 200 DHS officials from 42 DHS organizational units, which fed ideas to a steering committee led by Cohn. The 78-page QHSR report, issued in February 2010, was drafted by Cohn's team in the Office of Strategic Plans. ³⁷

One of the principal congressional motivations in mandating the QHSR was to promote greater unity of effort and integration in the DHS, which had been created in 2002 through a merger of 22 preexisting agencies and was struggling to establish organizational coherence. ³⁸ Senior DHS officials shared this goal and sought to advance it by using the first QHSR to develop an organizing framework for the department. ³⁹ The QHSR report, "A Strategic Framework for a Secure Homeland," outlined five core DHS missions: preventing terrorism and enhancing security, securing and managing our borders, enforcing and administering our immigration laws,

³⁶Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007, Pub. L. No. 110-53, 121 Stat. 266.

³⁷Interviews of current and former DHS officials, February 2013.

³⁸Remarks by Senator Joseph Lieberman, hearing of the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Homeland Security Department's Budget Submission for Fiscal Year 2008*, 110th Congress, 1st sess., 13 February 2007; interview of Christian Beckner, 20 February 2013; and interview of congressional homeland security aide, February 2013.

³⁹Interviews of current and former DHS officials, February 2013.

safeguarding and securing cyberspace, and ensuring resilience to disasters.⁴⁰ The report also articulated more specific goals and objectives within each of these five mission areas but did not describe concrete proposals or initiatives.

Near the end of the QHSR process, the DHS began a follow-on activity, called the Bottom-Up Review (BUR), because the QHSR's broad language was not going to be sufficient to satisfy Congress.⁴¹ The BUR report, issued in July 2010, described DHS activities in each of the QHSR's five mission areas and outlined 43 initiatives across those missions. However, many of the initiatives were vague. For instance, on aviation security, the BUR said that the DHS would "collaborate with the aviation industry to use a risk-based approach to inform decisions" and "use current intelligence-derived threat information to drive day-to-day operations."⁴²

When the BUR report was issued, key lawmakers criticized it and the entire QHSR effort. Senator Susan Collins (R-ME), ranking member on the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, said that the QHSR and BUR "simply do not compare to the level of analysis and planning that goes into the Quadrennial Defense Review."⁴³ Senator Joseph Lieberman (I-CT), the committee chair, also chided the DHS for not providing more detail in the reviews and submitted to the DHS 21 questions about the conduct of the reviews and plans to implement them.⁴⁴

On the whole, the impact of the first QHSR was modest. Its most important outcome was to outline the department's missions, goals, and objectives—although the identification of missions cannot be attributed entirely to the QHSR. At her January 2009 Senate confirmation hearing to become secretary of homeland security—at which time the QHSR process was barely under way—Janet Napolitano described the DHS mission as "to protect the nation's borders by fighting and killing the roots of terrorism and to stop those who intend to hurt us; to wisely enforce the rule of law at our borders; to protect our national cyber infrastructure; and to prepare for

⁴⁰U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Quadrennial Homeland Security Review Report: A Strategic Framework for a Secure Homeland," February 2010, accessed at http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/qhsr_report.pdf, 28 July 2014.

⁴¹Interview of former DHS official, March 2013; interview of DHS official, October 2013; and interview of congressional homeland security aide, February 2013.

⁴²U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Bottom-Up Review Report," July 2010, 9, accessed at http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/bur_bottom_up_review.pdf, 28 July 2014.

⁴³U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Charting a Path Forward: The Homeland Security Department's Quadrennial Homeland Security Review and Bottom-Up Review*, 111th Cong., 2nd sess., 21 July 2010.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

and respond to natural and man-caused disasters with skill, compassion, and effectiveness.”⁴⁵ Four of the missions outlined a year later in the QHSR report were similar to elements of this statement, with the only major change being the addition of the mission of enforcing and administering immigration laws. The QHSR mission framework therefore only adjusted incrementally Napolitano’s preexisting conception of the department’s mission.

In addition to adding the immigration mission, the report went farther than preexisting statements by Napolitano or other DHS officials by outlining goals and objectives for each mission, and the inclusive QHSR process helped build greater acknowledgment and acceptance of these missions across the department. A DHS official commented that the QHSR process was important in pushing the heads of DHS components—who had widely varying ideas about the department’s purpose—to “come to the table” to discuss the department’s missions.⁴⁶ The QHSR process did not eliminate differences in opinion among component heads, but it did create more shared recognition of core DHS functions. Homeland security expert Stephen Flynn noted that this achievement was particularly important for DHS because, since its establishment, DHS units had defined their missions autonomously.⁴⁷ A former DHS official added, “People in DHS now refer all the time to the five missions. They’re just assumed.”⁴⁸

The 2010 QHSR also helped DHS leaders take a few concrete steps toward integrating the department. Government Accountability Office (GAO) homeland security auditor David Maurer noted that the QHSR’s missions, goals, and objectives created “a common organizing framework for the whole department” and have been used by DHS leaders to try to advance integration.⁴⁹ For instance, after the QHSR, the DHS overhauled its accounting system so that all spending data would be grouped within each QHSR mission, goal, and objective.⁵⁰ This reform enabled senior DHS leaders to understand how much money was being spent across the DHS on different priorities. As an example, one DHS official noted that senior leaders did not know how much money was being spent department-wide on cybersecurity until the accounting reform was instituted. The official added

⁴⁵Remarks by Secretary-Designate Janet Napolitano, hearing of the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Nomination of Hon. Janet A. Napolitano*, 111th Cong., 1st sess., 15 January 2009.

⁴⁶Interview of DHS official, October 2013.

⁴⁷Interview of Stephen Flynn, 11 March 2013.

⁴⁸Interview of former DHS official, February 2013.

⁴⁹Interview of David Maurer, 8 March 2013.

⁵⁰Interview of John Whitley, 13 March 2013.

that the reform empowered DHS leaders by giving them “a factual basis to question component leadership,” which had drawn power from fragmented accounting.⁵¹ John Whitley, who served as director of the DHS Program Analysis and Evaluation Office, said similarly that “the department’s leadership has a better handle on resources” as a result of the reform.⁵²

However, the QHSR was not a significant driver of subsequent DHS decisions about the allocation of homeland security resources. The GAO found that in the DHS budget submission to Congress for fiscal year 2012, the department included proposals to implement only one-third of the BUR initiatives.⁵³ This very partial attempt at implementation may have reflected in part the environment of fiscal austerity that set in after the 2010 congressional election, but current and former DHS officials mainly attributed it to a lack of strong high-level commitment to implement many of the initiatives in the face of resistance from DHS units. In the words of one former DHS official, if a DHS component did not want to implement a BUR initiative, it “tried to kill it,” and the overall implementation effort “didn’t go very far.”⁵⁴ According to GAO auditor Maurer, even some of the initiatives prioritized by DHS leaders did not receive much attention within operational units.⁵⁵ In addition, only some of the strategic plans subsequently issued by major DHS components conformed to the QHSR’s goals and objectives.⁵⁶ More generally, most current and former DHS officials agreed that the QHSR had little direct impact on the substantive content of homeland security policies and programs.⁵⁷

The QHSR might have had more impact on policies and programs if it had set priorities or rank ordered the missions, goals, and objectives. But such an effort would have angered DHS units whose activities did not rank highly, as well as lawmakers who care about those activities. Indeed, the DHS Strategic Plans Office tried during the process to set priorities within each mission, but it could not get DHS units to agree on them.⁵⁸ Regarding Congress, a homeland security analyst commented, “DHS would get killed on the Hill if they rank-ordered priorities.”⁵⁹

⁵¹Interview of DHS official, June 2013.

⁵²Interview of John Whitley, 13 March 2013.

⁵³Testimony by David C. Maurer, hearing of the U.S. House Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Management, *Is DHS Effectively Implementing a Strategy to Counter Emerging Threats?*, 112th Cong., 2nd sess., 3 February 2012.

⁵⁴Interview of former DHS official, March 2013.

⁵⁵Interview of David Maurer, 8 March 2013.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷Interviews of current and former DHS officials, February–October 2013.

⁵⁸Interview of former DHS official, 25 February 2013.

⁵⁹Interview of homeland security analyst, March 2013.

In the end, the QHSR's impact was significantly constrained by its legislative origins and by the secretary of homeland security's limited control over much of the DHS. The legislative origins of the QHSR did give the congressional homeland security committees a stake in the review, and these committees held serious oversight hearings on the review when it was completed.⁶⁰ But this congressional scrutiny was not sustained, as Congress did not hold another hearing on the QHSR for the next 18 months. Implementation therefore depended primarily on the DHS leadership, but Napolitano was not personally invested in the review and did not send a strong signal to DHS personnel that implementation was a high priority. In the words of one DHS official, Napolitano "took an arm's length approach" to the QHSR.⁶¹ DHS deputy secretary Jane Holl Lute did see the review as a key opportunity to make DHS more mature, but her ability to drive change was limited in the absence of deeper commitment from Napolitano.⁶²

The fragmentation of the DHS was also a major obstacle to the QHSR's impact. Since its creation, the DHS has been a highly fragmented and heterogeneous institution with weak central authority.⁶³ These institutional characteristics prevented the QHSR from going much beyond lowest-common-denominator ideas. One congressional homeland security aide noted that the QHSR did not accomplish more "because that would involve tearing down [DHS] silos."⁶⁴ While some lawmakers and DHS officials saw the QHSR as a vehicle to integrate the DHS, the centrifugal forces in the department made it very hard to take more than incremental steps toward this goal.

The Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review

Secretary of State Clinton launched the QDDR in July 2009. Clinton established the review in an effort to strengthen the State Department's capacity and performance in certain areas, give State more influence in interagency decision making, and help State gain more resources from

⁶⁰U.S. House Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Management, *Laying the Framework for the Task Ahead: An Examination of the Department of Homeland Security's Quadrennial Homeland Security Review*, 111th Cong., 2nd sess., 29 April 2010; and U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Charting a Path Forward*.

⁶¹Interview of DHS official, February 2013.

⁶²Interviews of current and former DHS officials, February–March 2013.

⁶³Timothy Balunis and William Hemphill, "Congress and Homeland Security," in David P. Auerswald and Colton C. Campbell, eds., *Congress and the Politics of National Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 100–120; and Peter J. May, Ashley E. Jochim, and Joshua Sapotichne, "Constructing Homeland Security: An Anemic Policy Regime," *Policy Studies Journal* 39 (May 2011): 285–307.

⁶⁴Interview of congressional aide, February 2013.

Congress. Clinton saw a formal review as a useful means to advance these goals because she thought it might help overcome likely internal resistance to organizational reforms and signal to Congress and the White House that the State Department was well run and capable of spending money effectively.⁶⁵ In announcing the review, Clinton said it would provide a blueprint for advancing U.S. foreign policy objectives, a comprehensive assessment for organizational reform, and recommendations for improvements to the department's policymaking processes.⁶⁶

The 2009–10 QDDR was formally led by Deputy Secretary of State Jacob Lew and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) administrator Rajiv Shah, with State Department policy planning director Anne-Marie Slaughter serving as the executive director. Slaughter directed a QDDR leadership team of some two dozen officials who coordinated 17 working groups and task forces involving more than 500 State Department and USAID personnel. The final report, issued in December 2010, was drafted principally by William Burke-White, a senior adviser to Slaughter in the Policy Planning Office.

The central goal articulated in the 219-page report, “Leading through Civilian Power,” is to strengthen the capacity of diplomats, aid officials, and other civilian experts to serve as the leading edge of American power overseas.⁶⁷ The report called for boosting State's capacity in part through organizational changes in functional areas that Clinton prioritized. In the security area—where Clinton thought the department was lagging too far behind the Defense Department (DOD)—the QDDR called for converting the preexisting Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) into a new Conflict and Stabilization Operations Bureau (CSO); converting a counterterrorism office into a bureau (bureaus generally have more power than offices at State); creating a coordinator for cyber issues; and placing a number of units under the authority of a new under secretary for civilian security, democracy, and human rights. On economics and energy—where Clinton also thought State was not exercising sufficient influence—the QDDR proposed creating a Bureau for Energy Resources and an Office of the Chief

⁶⁵Jordan Tama, “The Politics of Strategy: Why Government Agencies Conduct Major Strategic Reviews,” *Journal of Public Policy* (Online May 2015; Forthcoming in Print).

⁶⁶Remarks by Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton, Town Hall at the State Department on the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, 10 July 2009, accessed at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2009a/july/125949.htm>, 28 July 2014.

⁶⁷U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development, “Leading through Civilian Power: The First Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review,” December 2010, accessed at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/153108.pdf>, 28 July 2014.

Economist, both of which would be overseen by a new under secretary for economic growth, energy, and the environment. The department instituted all of these reorganizations within 15 months of the QDDR report.

Current and former State Department officials said that most of the reorganizations would not have occurred without the QDDR because, absent the review, there would not have been an institutional vehicle to advance the ideas or to overcome resistance to them from powerful parts of the department.⁶⁸ One official noted that State's regional bureaus, which exercise great influence, generally resisted the reorganizations because they threatened to take away some of the bureaus' power: "The regional bureaus don't want a lot of other fiefdoms created."⁶⁹ On the economics and energy reorganizations, Julia Nesheiwat, a deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau of Energy Resources, said, "The ideas were floating around before the QDDR process, but if it wasn't for the QDDR, they probably would've lingered for a long time."⁷⁰

The QDDR reorganizations did not transform State, but they did strengthen it in some important areas. The earlier Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization lacked the capacity or influence to carry out its stated mission of coordinating reconstruction and stabilization operations at the interagency level.⁷¹ In interviews, government officials generally agreed that the establishment of the new Conflict and Stabilization Operations Bureau has boosted State's capacity and influence in this area. A congressional foreign policy aide said, "S/CRS was a bastard child in the department. Making it a bureau gave them more clout."⁷² Other government officials added that the CSO has demonstrated its increased influence by directing a large part of U.S. nonlethal aid to rebels in Syria—an interagency leadership role that the S/CRS would have been unable to play.⁷³ The new Energy Bureau, for its part, strengthened State's work on energy issues. A department official who does not work in the bureau said it has given State's energy experts "more oxygen in the building."⁷⁴

⁶⁸Interviews of current and former State Department officials, March–June 2013.

⁶⁹Interview of State Department official, June 2013.

⁷⁰Interview of Julia Nesheiwat, 26 March 2013.

⁷¹Renanah Miles, "After War: Inside the U.S. Civilian Struggle to Build Peace," *Political Science Quarterly* 128 (Fall 2013): 489–516.

⁷²Interview of congressional aide, March 2013.

⁷³Interview of State Department official, March 2013; and interview of U.S. government official, May 2013.

⁷⁴Interview of State Department official, March 2013.

There have been some significant changes in personnel policy as a result of the QDDR, too. The QDDR recommended an array of reforms to place greater importance on innovation, risk taking, interagency experience, and skills other than traditional diplomacy in the hiring, training, and evaluation of State Department officials. A number of these reforms, which aimed in part to change State's culture, have been adopted. For instance, candidates for the positions of chief or deputy chief of a U.S. mission are now evaluated in part based on their interagency experience and demonstrated willingness to take constructive risks to achieve results.⁷⁵ (The loss of four American lives in the September 2012 attack on U.S. facilities in Benghazi, Libya, made it more difficult for State Department officials to take security risks, but the QDDR reforms are intended to facilitate risk taking more generally.) In addition, the department has made changes to allow more officials to take temporary assignments in other agencies, established a pilot program to enable some Civil Service officers with specialized skills to take positions overseas that were previously reserved for Foreign Service officers, added to the Foreign Service exam a few questions designed to assess innovation and willingness to take risks, and created new Foreign Service training courses on interagency operations and public-private partnerships.⁷⁶

Many of these and other QDDR proposals were resisted by the leadership of the Foreign Service, which led to some of the proposals being scaled back and prevented others from being fully implemented. For instance, the American Foreign Service Association opposed making more substantial changes to the Foreign Service exam and opposed allowing Civil Service officers to be deployed overseas.⁷⁷ This opposition is consistent with long-standing resistance in the Foreign Service to organizational changes perceived as challenging the Foreign Service's unique role in the department or emphasizing skills and activities other than diplomacy and reporting.⁷⁸ On the other hand, the QDDR changes are strongly supported by some Foreign Service officers. One officer commented that the QDDR is "a vehicle to change the culture of the Foreign Service, which hasn't in the past provided a lot of time for training and external interagency

⁷⁵Remarks of Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Town Hall Meeting at the State Department on the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review, 26 January 2012, accessed at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2012/01/182613.htm>, 28 July 2014; and interview of State Department official, July 2013.

⁷⁶Daniel Hirsch, "Defining, Not Defending, Our Future," *Foreign Service Journal* 89 (April 2012): 51; interview of Ruth Whiteside, 31 May 2013; and interviews of State Department officials, March–July 2013.

⁷⁷Interview of State Department official, June 2013.

⁷⁸Miles, "After War," 500; Warwick, *A Theory of Public Bureaucracy*.

assignments.”⁷⁹ The long-term effect of the various personnel policy changes will hinge in part on whether that culture does in fact change.⁸⁰

In some other important areas, it is already clear that the QDDR’s impact was quite limited. On foreign aid, many key decisions were made at the White House rather than through the QDDR. During the QDDR, the White House led an effort to draft a presidential directive on development, which was issued in September 2010.⁸¹ That directive, rather than the QDDR, established the principal framework for President Obama’s foreign aid policy.

The QDDR also did not transform the relationship among State, USAID, and other agencies. During the review, there were sharp clashes among officials from different agencies and the White House regarding interagency roles. As one official commented, “We spent a lot of time fighting over theology instead of looking for solutions.”⁸² Ultimately, the QDDR report only partially resolved or papered over many of these disagreements. For instance, the report said that USAID would lead a new Global Health Initiative if certain benchmarks are met. But after the report was issued, other agencies resisted transferring control over global health programs to USAID, and the administration abandoned the effort.⁸³ Another important QDDR proposal was to bolster unity of effort at U.S. missions by enabling ambassadors to contribute to the evaluation of personnel from other agencies who serve at their missions. This proposal also had limited impact because State could not compel other agencies to take ambassadorial evaluations into account in their own personnel processes.⁸⁴ In addition, the report did not address the respective roles of State and the DOD in the management of U.S. security aid—despite strong concern at State that the DOD had asserted too much control in that area. On the whole, State’s influence at the interagency level did not clearly increase as a result of the QDDR.

Overall, then, the 2009–10 QDDR’s impact was significant but not transformative. To the extent that it did shape changes, this was largely attributable to Clinton’s personal stake in a review that she had ordered. As one department official commented, Clinton “sees her legacy bound up in

⁷⁹Interview of State Department official, December 2012.

⁸⁰Miles, “After War,” 514.

⁸¹Presidential Policy Directive on Global Development, 22 September 2010.

⁸²Interview of State Department official, July 2013.

⁸³Josh Rogin, “Development Community Upset over Future of Global Health Initiative,” *Foreign Policy*, 10 July 2012.

⁸⁴Interviews of current and former State Department officials, March–July 2013.

part with getting implementation done.”⁸⁵ Indeed, the QDDR has sometimes been cited in the media as an important part of Clinton’s legacy. An article about her tenure in *The Economist* described QDDR reforms as important accomplishments, stating, “She may not have brought peace to the Middle East, dealt with Iran’s nukes, or permanently reset relations with Russia, but Mrs. Clinton can be said to have changed the State Department itself for the better.”⁸⁶

While the QDDR implementation effort was inconsistent, it was stronger than the QHSR effort. When the QDDR report was issued, Clinton charged Thomas Nides, deputy secretary of state for management and resources, with advancing implementation. Nides then tasked 19 State and USAID officials with advancing implementation in their areas of responsibility, and held periodic meetings with those officials to track progress.⁸⁷ Clinton also convened a major department conference on the QDDR, at which she charged all U.S. chiefs of mission with implementing the report, stating, “This has to live and breathe in you and through you.”⁸⁸ A year later, she convened additional town hall meetings on the QDDR at State and USAID, at which she reiterated implementation’s importance.⁸⁹ Clinton also discussed implementation at smaller staff meetings. Ruth Whiteside, who directed the Foreign Service Institute under Clinton, noted that Clinton would ask her about progress in rolling out QDDR-related courses when they met.⁹⁰

Nevertheless, high-level attention to QDDR implementation was uneven, and implementation lagged for extended periods of time in the face of competing priorities and resistance from some department officials. On some issues, implementation did not move forward until Clinton’s chief of staff, Cheryl Mills, became directly engaged.⁹¹ A push from senior department leaders was particularly needed to spur action, as Congress, which had not mandated the QDDR, did not hold a single hearing on the QDDR, revealing a lack of any pressure from Capitol Hill to implement the report.

In April 2012, Clinton gave a new indication of the importance she placed on the QDDR by hiring David McKean, a former chief of staff to

⁸⁵Interview of State Department official, February 2011.

⁸⁶Anonymous, “A Legacy at Foggy Bottom; Hillary Clinton Bows Out,” *The Economist*, 9 February 2013, 33.

⁸⁷Interview of former State Department official, September 2011.

⁸⁸Global Chiefs of Mission Conference, U.S. Department of State, 2 February 2011, accessed at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2011/02/155870.htm>, 28 July 2014.

⁸⁹Town Hall Meeting at the State Department; USAID Town Hall Meeting, 15 February 2012, accessed at <http://www.usaid.gov/news-information/speeches/remarks-secretary-state-hillary-rodham-clinton-and-usaid-administrator-d-0>, 28 July 2014.

⁹⁰Interview of Ruth Whiteside, 31 May 2013.

⁹¹Interviews of current and former State Department officials, March 2013.

then-Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman John Kerry, as the head of a new QDDR Office. Clinton also asked Congress to enact legislation that would mandate the QDDR and thereby ensure that her successors would conduct the exercise. McKean worked with Kerry's staff to draft this legislation, which was introduced by Kerry and approved by the Senate in September 2012.⁹² However, the bill did not advance in the House of Representatives, where Foreign Affairs Committee chairwoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Republican critic of the Obama administration's foreign policy, was not inclined to approve something that might burnish Clinton's legacy.⁹³ (After becoming secretary of state, Kerry named McKean his policy planning director and tapped former Democratic congressman Tom Perriello to lead the QDDR Office and run the second QDDR.)

A factor outside Clinton's control also greatly influenced the first QDDR's impact. While Clinton could give a boost to State's capacity through organizational changes that she could execute unilaterally, major changes would require new resources or authorities from Congress. The prospect of gaining such resources or authorities became remote when the Republican Party gained control of the House of Representatives in November 2010, with a goal of cutting federal spending sharply. The result was that State could not make significant new investments and therefore could not make larger strides toward Clinton's goal of strengthening civilian power.

The Quadrennial Defense Review

Although space constraints prevent me from discussing any single QDR in as much depth as the preceding discussions of the first QHSR and QDDR, I briefly evaluate the QDR's overall impact here. Existing literature and interviews of experts and government officials reveal that the QDR has not been a major driver of overall defense strategy, but it has shaped some important narrower defense policy and organizational decisions.

Defense scholars and experts generally have found the outcome of QDRs to be disappointing because the reviews have not led to major changes in defense strategy, in the size and shape of military forces, or in the allocation of resources among the military services.⁹⁴ The 2010 QDR Independent Review Panel concluded that instead of challenging

⁹²S. 3341, Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review Act of 2012.

⁹³Interview of government official, March 2013.

⁹⁴Gordon, "The Quadrennial Defense Review"; Gunzinger, *Shaping America's Future Military*; Snodgrass, "The QDR"; testimony by Andrew Krepinevich, hearing of the U.S. House Committee on Armed Services, *Department of Defense Quadrennial Defense Review*, 14 March 2006; and testimony by Jim Thomas, hearing of the U.S. House Committee on Armed Services Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee, *The Quadrennial Defense Review: Process, Policy, and Perspectives*, 113th Cong., 1st sess., 26 February 2013.

preexisting thinking, the QDR reports have consisted only of “explanations and justifications, often with marginal changes, of established decisions and plans.”⁹⁵

The limited impact of the QDR is in significant part a result of the determined efforts of the military services to prevent the adoption in the QDR process of changes that they do not favor. The U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps have each created separate QDR offices in order to advance their priorities and goals, which include the prevention of cuts to their budgets and the promotion of their programmatic preferences.⁹⁶ As a result, service priorities have shaped the QDR at least as much as the QDR has shaped the services.⁹⁷ The intensive effort by the services to protect and advance their priorities in the QDR process illustrates how hard it can be for the head of a government department to drive major organizational change.

Officials and experts have cited the public nature of the QDR report and the many congressional requirements for it as additional constraints on the QDR’s strategic impact. Jim Thomas, the principal author of the 2006 QDR, has said that “writing an unclassified document. . . that you’re going to put out there and you’re going to pass off to your allies, as well as your enemies, as well as folks in your military and then industry, you’ve got too many audiences in play.”⁹⁸ Kathleen Hicks, who directed the 2010 QDR, pointed to the detailed congressional mandate for the legislation—which requires the QDR to cover at least 17 specific topics—as a significant limitation on the review’s strategic value: “You can’t satisfy all the congressional requirements and also have a rational strategy statement that would speak to other audiences.”⁹⁹

The QDR’s congressional origins have also constrained its impact in the sense that most secretaries of defense have not been very invested in the review. Some secretaries and other senior officials have even expressed significant frustration with the QDR process. For instance, in 2001, William Cohen, who was secretary of defense during the 1997 QDR, told incoming secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld that the 1997 QDR was a juggernaut that he could not control.¹⁰⁰ Rumsfeld proceeded to initiate a set of ad hoc reviews that he could control more effectively. Similarly, in March 2013, five former deputy secretaries of defense wrote

⁹⁵Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel, *The QDR in Perspective*, iii.

⁹⁶Gordon, “The Quadrennial Defense Review,” 78–80.

⁹⁷Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel, *The QDR in Perspective*, 96.

⁹⁸Thomas, Conference on “Preparing for the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review.”

⁹⁹Interview of Kathleen Hicks, 15 October 2013.

¹⁰⁰Interview of Jim Thomas, 17 May 2013.

a letter to incoming secretary of defense Chuck Hagel urging Hagel to launch a brief review of U.S. defense posture separate from the QDR process. The signatories wrote that the QDR “is not an attractive mechanism for a fresh examination of the challenges that the nation faces” because it “has become cumbersome and captured by the interests of the [military] services, defense agencies, and the many joint program offices of the Pentagon.”¹⁰¹ Hagel followed this advice, creating an ad hoc Strategic Choices and Management Review with a mandate to generate options for how the DOD might adapt to the budget cuts it faced under sequestration.¹⁰²

Yet ad hoc defense reviews tend themselves to involve a large number of personnel—suggesting that it simply is not possible to move a department as big and complex as the DOD in a new direction without a structured process. For instance, the Strategic Choices and Management Review involved more than a dozen working groups of defense officials.¹⁰³ Moreover, if a secretary of defense does not involve many personnel in an important review, he or she may face a significant backlash that makes the review ineffective. Indeed, Rumsfeld’s creation of small ad hoc strategy teams in 2001 generated deep resentment among the military services and key members of Congress that severely undermined his ability to use the ad hoc groups to advance his agenda.¹⁰⁴ These examples show how an inclusive process can be necessary to generate buy-in for change in large agencies.

My research further indicates that while secretaries of defense often find the QDR process to be cumbersome, the review can be a useful—if highly imperfect—vehicle for institutionalizing their priorities. Barry Pavel, a longtime DOD official who was involved in all four QDRs, noted, “QDRs are ugly exercises. Everyone is defending turf. But they are the best and perhaps only opportunity for the Secretary to put a lasting imprint on the defense program.”¹⁰⁵ Clark Murdock, a former DOD official and congressional defense aide, said, “When a public document says the department is going to do something, it makes it more likely that the

¹⁰¹Letter from John M. Deutch, John P. White, John J. Hamre, Rudy deLeon, and William J. Lynn III to Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, 5 March 2013, accessed at <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/ext/2013/03/05/57499/letter-to-the-honorable-chuck-hagel-secretary-of-defense/>, 28 July 2014.

¹⁰²Robert Burns, “Hagel Orders Review of U.S. Defense Strategy,” *Military Times*, 18 March 2013.

¹⁰³Gordon Lubold, “Has the Pentagon’s Strategy Shop Gone MIA?,” *Foreign Policy*, 1 July 2013.

¹⁰⁴Came and Campbell, “The Dynamics of Top-Down Organizational Change”; and Charles A. Stevenson, *SECDEF: The Nearly Impossible Job of Secretary of Defense* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006), 159–178.

¹⁰⁵Interview of Barry Pavel, 21 June 2013.

department will do it because it gives debating points that advocates of the idea can use in budgetary wars.”¹⁰⁶

Current and former defense officials observed that the QDR has had a significant impact on some important discrete issues. For instance, the 2010 QDR catalyzed the creation of 10 homeland response units with the mission of responding to a chemical, biological, or nuclear attack in the United States.¹⁰⁷ The creation of these homeland response units, which report to governors, was favored by civilian homeland defense officials in the Office of the Secretary of Defense but was opposed by the U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM), which is responsible for defending U.S. territory. An official involved in the debate said that the QDR was a necessary vehicle for gaining approval of the new units: “We had a knock-down, drag-out fight with NORTHCOM about this. It wouldn’t have happened without the QDR.”¹⁰⁸ Kathleen Hicks added, “The homeland defense community never sees the light of day [in the Pentagon], and the QDR venue provided them a lot of top cover to make this change.”¹⁰⁹

The 2010 QDR also resulted in other new initiatives to counter weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). During the QDR process, a pair of mid-level officials—Rebecca Hersman, deputy assistant secretary of defense for countering weapons of mass destruction, and Hersman’s special adviser, Robert Peters—used a working group on countering WMDs, which Peters directed, to gain departmental approval of a set of initiatives in this area. These initiatives included the establishment of the Standing Joint Force Headquarters for Elimination, which brings together personnel from across the military services to plan and train for missions to secure, disable, and destroy WMDs in hostile or semipermissive environments.¹¹⁰ Some of the services opposed this initiative because they did not want to provide personnel to a joint headquarters, but Hersman and Peters gained the backing of Under Secretary for Policy Michèle Flournoy for the idea during the QDR process, which allowed them to overcome service resistance.¹¹¹ In addition, the countering WMDs working group influenced DOD decisions to allocate more resources to the development of countermeasures for

¹⁰⁶Interview of Clark Murdock, 4 July 2013.

¹⁰⁷U.S. Department of Defense, “Quadrennial Defense Review Report,” February 2010, 19, accessed at <http://www.defense.gov/qdr/qdr%20as%20of%2029jan10%201600.pdf>, 28 July 2014.

¹⁰⁸Interview of defense official, February 2011.

¹⁰⁹Interview of Kathleen Hicks, 15 October 2013.

¹¹⁰Daniel Martinez, “Stand Up of SJFHQ-E Enhances CWMD mission,” U.S. Strategic Command, news release, 6 February 2012, accessed at http://www.stratcom.mil/news/2012/289/Stand_up_of_SJFHQ-E_enhances_CWMD_mission/, 28 July 2014.

¹¹¹Interview of former defense official, November 2013.

chemical agents and the detection of biological weapons.¹¹² A DOD official explained that the QDR process provided a needed venue for elevating this set of “second-tier” issues to a senior level for decision making, thereby giving “smaller stakeholders in the department [such as Hersman and Peters] a chance to play in the big leagues.”¹¹³

The 2010 QDR report also addressed broad strategic issues, but its direct impact on overall defense strategy was quite limited. Issued as the DOD was carrying out President Obama’s troop surge in Afghanistan, the report highlighted the importance of prevailing in current wars rather than focusing primarily on preparing for long-term challenges. In accord with that idea, the report proposed a significant expansion in capabilities designed for counterinsurgency, stability, and counterterrorism operations, such as unmanned aircraft systems. But Secretary of Defense Robert Gates had written publicly about the importance of placing greater priority on victory in current wars as early as January 2009—indicating that the QDR did not drive this strategic shift—and current and former DOD officials noted that Gates made the key decisions on unmanned aircraft systems and other added capabilities for current conflicts prior to the QDR process.¹¹⁴

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRESIDENT AND EXTERNAL EVENTS

This article’s analyses of the QHSR, QDDR, and QDR suggest that strategic reviews by government agencies often facilitate incremental policy and organizational changes, but they are not conducive to major strategic or policy innovation. This is in part because decisions of broad importance are typically the purview of the White House and in part because sharp breaks in strategy are usually driven by events rather than by a quadrennial calendar. Put another way, a review only tends to generate major change when it coincides with an important political shift and when the president is personally involved in it. To illustrate this reality, in this section, I briefly consider a few reviews that featured active presidential engagement.

After a decade in which U.S. defense spending had increased every year, in August 2011, Congress enacted the Budget Control Act, which mandated a cut in defense spending of nearly \$500 billion over 10 years. This

¹¹²U.S. Department of Defense, “Quadrennial Defense Review Report,” 34–37; interview of defense official, June 2013; and interview of former defense official, November 2013.

¹¹³Interview of defense official, June 2013.

¹¹⁴Robert M. Gates, “A Balanced Strategy: Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age,” *Foreign Affairs* 88 (January/February 2009): 28–40; interview of Shawn Brimley, 15 May 2013; interview of Kathleen Hicks, 15 October 2013; and interview of defense officials, May–June 2013.

large cut created an impetus to rethink defense strategy, but the next QDR was not due until February 2014. Instead of waiting for that QDR, President Obama ordered an ad hoc defense strategy review, which resulted in new strategic guidance for the DOD. This Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG), issued in January 2012, departed sharply from preexisting strategy by stating that “U.S. forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations,” such as the decade-long operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹¹⁵ In conjunction with the DSG’s release, the DOD announced plans to reduce the size of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps by 72,000 and 10,000 personnel, respectively.¹¹⁶ In interviews, current and former defense officials generally agreed that these major strategy and policy changes—which were resisted by the army—were a direct result of the DSG.¹¹⁷ These officials also generally agreed that the DSG had more impact on defense strategy than any QDR, mainly because it was dictated by severe budget pressure rather than by a quadrennial calendar, which led the president to take charge of the review and chair several meetings on it. This presidential involvement was far greater than the involvement of any president in a quadrennial agency review, and it was particularly important because only the president had the political clout to overrule the army on such major issues.

The importance of presidential involvement is also illustrated by the 2009–10 Nuclear Posture Review, which a 2008 law required the secretary of defense to conduct.¹¹⁸ Because nuclear nonproliferation and arms control were among Obama’s top priorities during his first two years in office, he chose to make the review a White House–led exercise instead. As with the DSG process, Obama chaired some of the review’s meetings, and he pressed his advisers to draft a report that narrowed the circumstances in which the United States would be willing to use nuclear weapons.¹¹⁹ The result was a report that stated that the United States would not use nuclear weapons in response to a non-nuclear attack by a country that is in compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty—a departure from preexisting U.S. doctrine, which allowed for the use of nuclear weapons in response to attacks

¹¹⁵U.S. Department of Defense, “Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense,” January 2012, 6, accessed at http://www.defense.gov/news/defense_strategic_guidance.pdf, 28 July 2014.

¹¹⁶U.S. Department of Defense, “Defense Budget Priorities and Choices,” January 2012, accessed at http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Budget_Priorities.pdf, 28 July 2014.

¹¹⁷Interview of Shawn Brimley, 15 May 2013; interview of Michèle Flournoy, 24 July 2013; interview of Kathleen Hicks, 15 October 2013; and interviews of current and former defense officials, February–May 2013.

¹¹⁸National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-181, 122 Stat. 3.

¹¹⁹Interview of Michèle Flournoy, 24 July 2013; and interview of Barry Pavel, 21 June 2013.

involving nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons.¹²⁰ This significant change would not have occurred without Obama's involvement in the review, as the DOD under Gates opposed narrowing the circumstances in which nuclear weapons might be used.¹²¹ The review's outcome also suggests that a congressionally mandated review can generate substantial strategic change, but only if the review centers on a presidential priority and takes place when the president is seeking to make a change.

Other reviews that resulted in major strategy or policy shifts have also tended to be conducted in the White House with significant presidential involvement. For instance, Presidents George W. Bush and Obama were heavily involved in reviews of Iraq and Afghanistan strategy in 2006 and 2009, respectively, which resulted in the decisions of those presidents to "surge" tens of thousands of additional troops to those war zones.¹²² Similarly, during the Cold War, President Eisenhower was the driver of the Project Solarium exercise that generated his administration's "New Look" national security strategy, which emphasized nuclear deterrence of the Soviet Union in conjunction with restrained spending on conventional military forces.¹²³ NSC-68—the 1950 Harry S. Truman administration document that called for a large-scale U.S. defense buildup to counter the Soviet Union—was an exception to this pattern, as it was developed by a group of State and DOD officials. But its sharp shift in strategy was triggered by a major shock—the Soviet Union's 1949 testing of an atomic bomb—which led President Truman to request the strategy review, and it was only adopted by Truman after another major shock—North Korea's 1950 invasion of South Korea—that appeared to validate its arguments.¹²⁴

¹²⁰U.S. Department of Defense, "Nuclear Posture Review Report," April 2010, accessed at <http://www.defense.gov/npr/docs/2010%20nuclear%20posture%20review%20report.pdf>, 28 July 2014.

¹²¹Joanna Spear, "More Business As Usual? The Obama Administration and the Nuclear Posture Review," *Contemporary Security Policy* 32 (April 2011): 241–263; interview of Barry Pavel, 21 June 2013; interview of executive branch official, June 2013; interview of defense official, June 2013; and interview of former defense official, November 2013.

¹²²Stephen Benedict Dyson, "George W. Bush, the Surge, and Presidential Leadership," *Political Science Quarterly* 125 (Winter 2010–11): 557–585; Peter Feaver, "The Right to be Right: Civil-Military Relations and the Iraq Surge Decision," *International Security* 35 (Spring 2011): 87–125; Andrew J. Polsky, *Elusive Victories: The American Presidency at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 273–339; and Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

¹²³Bose, *Shaping and Signaling Presidential Policy*, 19–41; Robert R. Bowie and Richard H. Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Reappraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 125–161; and Warner R. Schilling, Paul Y. Hammond, and Glenn H. Snyder, *Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 379–524.

¹²⁴Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 87–124; Ernest R. May, ed., *American Cold War Strategy: Interpreting NSC 68* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1993), 1–19; and Schilling, Hammond, and Snyder, *Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets*, 267–378.

The track record of the NSS further illustrates that even a White House-led process only tends to generate major change when an important political shift creates an impetus for both presidential involvement and a significant departure from the status quo. Presidents have not generally treated the NSS as a high priority. As a result, NSS reports—which are typically drafted by the White House national security staff and approved through an interagency process—have often largely restated preexisting administration stances or articulated the interagency’s lowest-common-denominator positions.¹²⁵ An exception to this trend was George W. Bush’s 2002 NSS, which Bush prioritized in the aftermath of 9/11 and during the run-up to the Iraq War as a valuable opportunity to formulate a doctrine that could make the case for overthrowing Saddam Hussein. In order to ensure that the 2002 NSS broke new ground, Bush and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice had the NSS drafted by Rice’s former colleague and coauthor Philip Zelikow—with minimal involvement by other administration officials.¹²⁶ The result was an NSS that articulated a controversial new doctrine of preventive war.

CONCLUSIONS

My goals in this article have been to assess the impact of quadrennial reviews by U.S. national security agencies, the factors that shape and constrain their influence, and the value of formal reviews more generally. In this concluding section, I recap my main findings, highlight a couple of potential effects of quadrennial reviews that I did not assess in this article, and consider whether large periodic reviews are worth doing.

I found that quadrennial reviews have not generated sharp shifts in homeland security, foreign policy, or defense strategy, but they have influenced significant policy and organizational changes within agencies. The first QHSR gave DHS leaders a conceptual framework for directing the DHS by outlining missions, goals, and objectives and shaped a reform of the DHS accounting system that made the department more integrated. The first QDDR catalyzed a set of State Department reorganizations and personnel policy changes, which boosted State’s capacity in prioritized areas and established new incentives for State officials to cultivate important skills and practices. The QDR, for its part, has influenced some

¹²⁵Betts, *U.S. National Security Strategy*; Richard B. Doyle, “The U.S. National Security Strategy: Policy, Process, Problems,” *Public Administration Review* 67 (July/August 2007): 624–629; Drezner, ed., *Avoiding Trivia*; Snider, *The National Security Strategy*; and Gardner, “Evolving United States Grand Strategy.”

¹²⁶James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush’s War Cabinet* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 316–317.

significant decisions on defense issues, such as preparing for and countering WMD threats.

I further found that quadrennial reviews are shaped by the source and character of their mandate. Because Hillary Clinton initiated the QDDR, she was invested in it and pushed State Department officials to implement the report. By contrast, Janet Napolitano and secretaries of defense have been less committed to the congressionally mandated QHSR and QDR. In addition, congressional requirements that quadrennial reviews be completed by a certain date, address various specific issues, and result in a public report can separate the timing of legislatively mandated reviews from the executive branch's need for new thinking and limit the strategic value of these reviews.

I determined as well that the influence of these reviews is heavily constrained by the limited ability of department leaders to effect major change—both within their own department and at the interagency level. Internally, department leaders have to contend with units—such as the military services, the Foreign Service, and the many components of the DHS—that possess large degrees of autonomy and competing ideas about policies and management. A strategic review can help a department leader build internal support for changes, but even with a transparent and participatory process, it tends to be very difficult to generate agreement in large government departments for dramatic changes to the status quo.

The constraints can also be great at the interagency level, where major strategy and policy decisions typically are made. Consider the case of the QDDR. One of Clinton's principal goals in launching the QDDR was to boost State's influence in interagency decision making, but officials at the White House and other agencies limited Clinton's ability to set new policies in some areas through the QDDR, and on issues on which the QDDR did make proposals that concerned other agencies, those proposals generally were not fully implemented.

The result of these constraints is that it is far harder for an agency-led review to shape broad strategic shifts than to influence incremental organizational and policy adjustments. Such incremental changes are not very impressive to most observers—hence the common disappointment in quadrennial reviews—but it is unrealistic to expect reviews to generate sharp breaks considering that incremental change is the norm in democratic governments.¹²⁷

¹²⁷Charles E. Lindblom, "The Science of 'Muddling Through,'" *Public Administration Review* 19 (Spring 1959): 79–88, at 84.

My brief consideration of a few White House–led strategy reviews further illustrated that when dramatic strategic change does occur, it tends to be driven by the president. This tendency suggests that the Quadrennial Energy Review, which President Obama initiated in 2013 and which is being led by the White House, has the potential for broader impact than the quadrennial reviews evaluated in this article. But the track record of the NSS reports suggests that even a White House–led review is unlikely to generate major strategic change unless the president makes it a priority and drives it away from lowest-common-denominator outcomes.

At the same time, my research on the QHSR, QDDR, and QDR suggests that it would be wrong to dismiss formal reviews by agencies as useless exercises. Given the limited control of senior officials over large, complex, and fragmented departments, an inclusive and transparent review can help those officials manage their departments and build internal support for policy and organizational changes. As former under secretary of defense for policy Michèle Flournoy noted, “If you have a very large diverse group of stakeholders in a department, it’s important to have some process that gets them all on the same sheet of music.”¹²⁸

Yet paradoxically, my research shows, the same factors that can make formal reviews useful for the leaders of agencies also make it very difficult for such reviews to generate major change. Even if a review involves all important stakeholders, powerful stakeholders may still resist changes, and agency leaders may be unable to overcome that resistance—particularly because other pressing issues will tend to divert their attention from management.

While I focused in this article on the impact of quadrennial reviews within the executive branch, I also wish to highlight briefly the potential of these reviews to have effects outside the executive, such as influencing congressional oversight or external perceptions of an agency. Indeed, one of the reasons lawmakers mandated the QHSR was to facilitate oversight of the DHS, and Hillary Clinton’s decision to initiate the QDDR was influenced by her impression that the QDR had been a useful communications device for DOD in its interaction with Congress.¹²⁹ Lawmakers have in fact conducted substantial oversight of congressionally mandated reviews. For instance, congressional committees held three hearings on the 2010 QHSR and six hearings on the 2010 QDR. Congressional aides also observed that the specific legislative requirements for the QDR and QHSR

¹²⁸Interview of Michèle Flournoy, 24 July 2013.

¹²⁹Tama, “The Politics of Strategy.”

can make the reviews a useful tool for extracting information from the executive branch and said that the resulting reports provide a reference point that lawmakers can use to evaluate whether the executive is meeting its stated goals.¹³⁰ On the other hand, some lawmakers have expressed great disappointment with the output of quadrennial reviews. As noted above, key lawmakers sharply criticized the first QHSR. Along similar lines, Representative Mac Thornberry, an influential Republican member of the House Armed Services Committee, commented that QDRs “are glossy publications that don’t say anything.”¹³¹

While my analysis suggests that quadrennial reviews do have policy making value, it is certainly true that agencies also treat quadrennial review reports as public relations devices. Although these reports usually receive little attention from major media outlets, agency leaders recognize that the reports can influence how an agency is perceived by Congress and the policy community. Indeed, a former DHS official noted that the first QHSR report was “as much a communications document as a strategy document.”¹³² This treatment of quadrennial reviews as mechanisms to enhance the external standing or legitimacy of agencies is similar to the common use by national leaders of other statements to mobilize public support for grand strategies.¹³³ Further research is needed to examine more systematically the impact of quadrennial reviews on congressional-executive relations and on public and congressional perceptions of agencies.

Setting aside these additional potential effects of quadrennial reviews, are large, periodic strategy reviews ultimately worth doing? The costs of these reviews can certainly be great: Pentagon officials calculated that senior civilian and military personnel alone spent 6,500 person-hours on the 2006 QDR.¹³⁴ Given such costs and the common perception that quadrennial reviews have an underwhelming record, many government officials would be delighted to discontinue these reviews, as the 2010 QDR Independent Panel recommended doing with regard to the QDR.

Yet national security policymakers can clearly benefit from planning in a structured way, as even critics of quadrennial reviews recognize in

¹³⁰Interview of Christian Beckner, 20 February 2013; interview of congressional defense aide, 29 May 2013; and interview of former congressional homeland security aide, November 2013.

¹³¹Interview of Mac Thornberry, 1 August 2013.

¹³²Interview of former DHS official, November 2013.

¹³³Stacie E. Goddard and Ronald R. Krebs, “Rhetoric, Legitimation, and Grand Strategy,” *Security Studies* 24 (January-March 2015): 5–36.

¹³⁴Remarks by Edmund P. Giambastiani, Jr., hearing of the U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Department of Defense Quadrennial Defense Review*, 100th Cong., 2nd sess., 8 March 2006.

recommending alternatives to the quadrennial review model. For instance, the 2010 QDR Independent Panel proposed replacing the QDR with a broader national security review.¹³⁵ The principal problem with the existing quadrennial review model—particularly for congressionally mandated reviews—is that a review’s value is significantly constrained when it concerns only one agency, must be conducted according to a preset calendar, and must satisfy various legislative requirements. The American people would probably be better served by a system wherein the White House directs a comprehensive interagency national security planning process at the outset of an administration that generates both the public NSS and classified guidance regarding priorities and key policies, to be followed by more narrow reviews by individual agencies aimed at implementing the output of the interagency process—with the precise timeline for those follow-on reviews set by the White House. Limiting the scope of the agency reviews to implementation of the interagency review would also reduce the number of person-hours spent on the agency reviews. In addition, the impact of strategic reviews could be boosted by integrating them deeply into executive branch processes for developing budget proposals, having the president and department heads convey strongly to the bureaucracy that review implementation is a high priority, and giving a senior official the mandate and backing needed to drive implementation forward.

In the end, periodic formal reviews are best seen as tools of limited but not insignificant value. In the absence of substantial presidential involvement, they are not generally conducive to the formulation of new grand strategies or other major strategic innovations. When political or international events force a rethinking of strategy, the president is likely to turn to a more flexible ad hoc process. But even when conducted outside the White House, formal reviews are not usually a waste of time. While their process tends to be unwieldy and their results often disappoint those seeking sharp change, they can provide senior policymakers with a useful tool of organizational leadership. To adapt Richard Betts’s conclusion about military strategy, many of the criticisms of quadrennial reviews are on the mark, but such reviews can still be worthwhile.¹³⁶

¹³⁵Quadrennial Defense Review Independent Panel, *The QDR in Perspective*, 101–103.

¹³⁶Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?” 46.