

**Mapping the Alternatives to the Neocon-Neoliberal Diarchy in US Security Policy**  
*a leadership roundtable sponsored by the Security Policy Working Group*

Thursday, 14 December 2006, 11:00 AM to 5:30 PM  
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Choate Room  
1779 Mass. Ave. NW, Washington DC 20036

## **Why this meeting now?**

An important motivating factor for this meeting is our recognition that the 2008 presidential campaign and the advent of a new administration in 2009 present an opportunity to re-open the debate on US security policy. A change in the leadership of one or both houses of congress in 2007 also may present such an opportunity.

The 11 September 2001 attacks on the United States, the subsequent imbroglio in Iraq, and the consequent surge in terrorism provide reason enough to critically question the precepts that have guided US security policy during the entire post-Cold War period. If 9/11 indicts the practices and policies that preceded it, then the Iraq war and its effluent indict the policies that followed. The mainstream of neither political party seems willing to fully and honestly engage this dilemma.

At issue is more than the so-called "war on terrorism" and how it is being fought. A series of paradoxes have entangled US policy practice in the years since the Berlin Wall fell.

- The period is distinguished by a high-level of diverse US military activity abroad, unimpeded by a peer global competitor. But this activity has not discernibly improved the security situation of the United States. Indeed, many of our efforts and their outcomes seem "pyrrhic" in character, that is: either not worth the cost or actually counterproductive. To say the least, military primacy has not easily translated into decisive positive outcomes at the strategic level.
- Since 1990, the United States has spent more than \$6.5 trillion on defense – and yet its armed forces today do not seem especially well-adapted to the challenges they face. Indeed, structurally, they have changed far less than the world around them. During much of the period, the Pentagon has been obsessed with ideas of "transformation". Yet, more than ten years on, there is no real consensus on the nature, purpose, viability, or value of "transformation."
- In the formulation of defense policy, there continues to be poor alignment among threat assessment, strategy, assets, and budgeting. And worse: serious problems are apparent when we look at each of these variables individually. One especially telling example of misalignment is that we have not yet reached consensus on a strategic posture for which we are willing to actually pay, rather than borrow.
- There has been general assent that the post-Cold War era calls for a re-balancing of US security instruments. The present "war on terror" and counter-insurgency efforts, for instance, are routinely described as battles for "hearts and minds". Yet, this

precept is not reflected in resource allocation. Nor has the role of non-military instruments and the strategy governing them been adequately specified. In many respects, the State Department's role in security affairs is weaker today than ever before.

These paradoxes, and others like them, might and should motivate a broad re-examination of the assessments, assumptions, and goals that have guided successive post-Cold War administrations in their security policy practice. If the treatment of the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review* is any indication, however, no such re-examination is likely to come from inside the Pentagon or inside the neocon-neoliberal box. Nor does the Fifth Estate generally seem able or willing to vigorously pursue a critical tack on these issues.

What is missing and needed is leadership in the effort to re-start the national debate on security policy. The 14 December meeting is conceived as a first step in that effort.

## Topics & process

The sessions will undertake three broad policy queries with the aims of (i) defining and critiquing post-Cold War practice and (ii) posing and substantiating alternatives. In all three queries we will seek to identify and weigh the basic *assessments, assumptions, and goals* associated with current policy and with alternatives – thus clarifying their differences.

The three queries concern:

1. Contrasting views of the present global security environment, its dynamics and evolution;
2. US security goals and US role in the world (especially concerning the use and role of US military power); and
3. The post-Cold War evolution of America's military posture and the modernization or "transformation" of its armed forces – with attention to the correspondence (or lack of it) between threat assessment, strategy, assets, and budgeting.

Of course, any exhaustive exploration of these topics would require far more time than the planned meeting allows. But the meeting's aim is more modest. Participants were chosen on the basis of their having already invested considerable time and thought in exploring these topics and communicating about them. Moreover, basic agreement on many points probably already exists among the invitees.

The December 2006 meeting is an opportunity to summarize our thinking, co-operatively refine, and distill it. During the course of the meeting moderators will identify areas of

agreement and disagreement, moving us toward a systematic rendering of key ideas and conclusions.

Through the session we hope to:

Specify the essential points of criticism with regard to post-Cold War US policy and also outline those principles we consider fundamental to true alternatives.

Adduce the empirical evidence and lessons of recent practice that we consider most important in substantiating critical and alternative views. And, finally,

Develop some broadly accessible “narratives” that convey both the errors of post-Cold War US policy and the essential features of an effective alternative.

## Outcomes

**Report:** Although the meeting itself is “off the record” and statements made during it are “not for attribution”, we will produce a meeting report in accord with the Chatham House Rule, as quoted earlier.

**Media and individual dissemination:** Of course, the ideas developed during the meeting are not proprietary. We hope and expect that participants will broadly communicate what they have learned. And, although remarks made during the meeting are “not for attribution”, we expect that the meeting will inspire subsequent one-on-one media interviews

**Follow-on meetings:** Planning for follow-on meetings of various types is now underway by the Security Policy Working Group. The aim of these would be to more broadly disseminate the perspectives developed during the 14 December sessions and begin a more substantive engagement with journalists and bloggers, academics, foundation representatives, and congressional, political, civic, and advocacy group leaders. Several types of meetings and activities are under consideration for early 2007, including a larger conference (~100 participants) and smaller-group panel sessions and workshops (in both Washington DC and elsewhere). Also under consideration are follow-on “internet/phone conferences” involving some December meeting participants and select journalists and bloggers.

**Internet Forum:** To facilitate further cooperation and information sharing among participants, SPWG will continue to maintain the meeting’s internet forum. Here, participants can carry forward discussions begun at the meeting. Initially, access will be limited to the cohort of invited participants.