

Exporting Security: The Balanced Approach

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The debates over the future direction (and budgeting) of the U.S. national security and defense establishments are intensifying. For the last several years, we have had the ongoing arguments as to whether U.S. security is more imperiled by the challenges of weak and failing states--necessitating mobile, light forces skilled in counter-insurgency--or by the return of great powers fielding massive amounts of conventional capabilities--meaning that the U.S. military must rebuild its traditional warfighting platforms. This debate is even [more acute](#) across the Atlantic as Britain contemplates the choices in its forthcoming Strategic Defence and Security Review, which may amount to what David Farley sums up as "funding what's needed today versus funding what will be needed tomorrow."

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has been a proponent of a "balanced" approach--that the U.S. national security establishment, starting with the military, must be prepared to undertake a series of missions over a wide spectrum. The problem, of course, is that future budgets are constrained. The "balanced" approach, as Naval War College professor Sean Sullivan observes, "has limited utility to planners engaged in program and resource decisions. Balance does not provide an expression of priority. In the 2010 QDR, balance is achieved through program and resource decisions between two opposed issues such as investment in convention warfare while retaining the current irregular warfare capability. In this instance, planners are not presented with a priority and the guidance is essentially a hedge which can support investment in a wide variety of capabilities and programs."

Now, entering into the fray--and seeking to capture the hearts and minds of a possible new voting bloc of "Tea Partiers"--are the conservative-leaning think tanks. On one side, there is the [Heritage Foundation/American Enterprise Institute/Weekly Standard position](#): the U.S. cannot cut its current levels of defense spending. "It is unrealistic to imagine a return to long-term prosperity if we face instability around the globe because of a hollowed-out U.S. military lacking the size and strength to defend American interests around the world." This would include dealing with the challenges created by weak states as well as the threats posed by strong states.

In the other corner, led by the Cato Institute, are those who argued that the current U.S. approach encourages free-riding; other wealthy states do not do as much for their own defense while the United States bankrupts itself to provide security for the entire globe.

This is why the approach laid out by Derek Reveron, in a recently published work ([Exporting Security](#)), provides us with a template to move beyond the either/or, zero-sum arguments being marshalled. The U.S. cannot easily or quickly withdraw from global engagement, but, as Doug Bandow also posited, making the case for the Cato-inspired argument, ["It's America safer if its friends possess potent militaries, cooperate with each other and are determined to safeguard their own interests?"](#) So shifting the focus to strengthening the capacities of partners--building up their abilities to exercise effective control over their territories and coastlines and to be in a position to repel outside threats--could work to plug some of the existing security deficits without putting all the responsibilities on American shoulders.

In reading *Exporting Security*, I drew these conclusions, [as I noted in National Interest](#):

"The United States has security-assistance programs with 149 other nations. Some of it is active, kinetic support in combating insurgents, terrorist groups or drug cartels, as in Yemen and Colombia. Some of it is developing partnership and training programs to enhance the ability of nations to deploy peacekeeping forces or coast guards. It can encompass the gamut from humanitarian relief operations to creating defensive alliances. The net result of all of these efforts is to "develop enduring relations" with other states that gives the United States access to a global network of bases and platforms, but also "strengthens key partners and reduces both the need for American presence and the negative attention it sometimes generates"--and in so doing, can also reduce the burden on the United States to have to act as a global sheriff.

"Reveron's approach avoids the "stocking up" approach to military procurement, because the emphasis would be on finding ways to deploy and use assets, rather than warehousing systems "in case of emergency." For instance, in the maritime realm, the carriers, amphibious vessels and destroyers that were designed to contain the Soviet navy and protect sea lines of communication (and which might be used in a similar role vis-à-vis China in the future) are now being used "to conduct activities ashore to improve human security." The 2010 response to the Haiti earthquake saw an aircraft carrier and sixteen other warships deployed to provide humanitarian relief and rescue services; such "nonmilitary" missions, in turn, help to reduce the factors which can produce security threats to the United States and reinforce American ties with other states. Reveron quotes a navy official who notes that using "war" assets for non-military missions such as training and humanitarian relief means "We can show up, provide training, provide resources, and then leave very little footprint behind." An "exporting security" approach guides future procurement decisions towards "multiuse" platforms that can combine conventional and non-conventional missions."

Budget cuts are, in my opinion, inevitable; and certainly there will be no massive new expansion of national security spending in the coming decade. An "exporting security" approach may be the best way to get value for shrinking defense budgets.