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New Challenges for Defense Planning: Rethinking How Much Is Enough

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BOOK REVIEWS

A book reviewer occupies a position of special responsibility and trust. He is to summarize, set in context, describe strengths, and point out weaknesses. As a surrogate for us all, he assumes a heavy obligation which it is his duty to discharge with reason and consistency.

Admiral H.G. Rickover

“A Smorgasbord of Defense Thinking”

Davis, Paul K., ed. *New Challenges for Defense Planning: Rethinking How Much Is Enough*. Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 1994. 769pp. \$25

FOR THOSE WHO STILL ASSOCIATE THE RAND Corporation with its large role in developing U.S. nuclear strategy, *New Challenges for Defense Planning* provides the answers to some interesting questions posed at the end of the Cold War: What do the “wizards of armageddon” do, now that armageddon has been (we hope) averted? Do they continue “thinking about the unthinkable,” or do they turn their efforts to new subjects? From this broad collection of essays, it appears that a little of both is true; some are a continuation of RAND’s earlier work and some show movement toward new ideas. The analysts approach the post–Cold War era with a sense of excitement: “These emerging questions are a boon for those involved in defense planning,” states the editor, “because starting afresh is interesting and challenging.” These essays are the result of research sponsored by the Air Force, Army, Department of Defense, and the Joint Chiefs, which represent their concerns. There is little here for those interested in naval affairs but much to benefit naval readers interested in improving their knowledge of joint operations.

The first major section of the book deals with the principles of defense planning, looking at different models for the logical analysis of defense issues and at structures for rational planning. The most interesting of these essays, however, is “The Discipline Gap and Other Reasons for Humility and Realism in Defense Planning,” by Kevin Lewis. He analyzes defense spending rates, approaching the effects of defense planning rather than its causes. He discovers a process stubbornly resistant to intervention, where intention and execution are often markedly different. He also raises concerns about rapid drawdowns, which can

cause great damage to military readiness—a sobering thought as politicians try to strip-mine quick deficit reductions from defense budgets.

The next group of essays is about strategic planning, examining the impact of the end of the Cold War on grand strategy, and also the start of an era where competition may shape the future more than does conflict. These essays look at protecting the “great transition” that ended the Cold War, the probability of facing nonstandard contingencies, and the need to consider military roles in operations other than war. Two essays discuss ballistic missile defenses—a technology that has matured into feasibility and an attractive capability in an uncertain world—warning that while attractive, these systems could bear a high cost and rekindle nuclear competition between Russia and the United States.

The following section examines operational or campaign-level planning, looking at current U.S. plans that deal with two major regional contingencies and the high probability of the U.S. facing contingencies that do not fit these plans. One essay looks at Poland's new position in a largely post-communist world and its options for new, independent defense strategies and forces. Another looks at the U.S. Air Force's options for adapting bomber forces from strategic nuclear roles to new conventional roles in regional contingencies. This group of essays makes it clear how fortunate the U.S. was during the Gulf war, facing an enemy content to dig in and give its opponents time to constitute offensive forces in the region.

The final section focuses on the economic concerns of the U.S. defense program, as well as the issue of supplies and logistics. The first two essays deal with aviation and force modernization from the viewpoint of the Navy's “competitors,” and they draw some interesting conclusions. Another interesting essay searches for the best mix of Army, Army Reserve, and National Guard forces, in an attempt to bring rational analysis to an issue that is often dealt with on the political level. Other essays look at strategic mobility options and the opportunity to use emerging “leaner” commercial supply philosophies to improve defense logistic systems.

This book is a smorgasbord of defense thinking without any attempt to reconcile the differences between its disparate authors. It is often difficult reading and assumes a high level of prior knowledge from the reader, and the text is often punctuated with graphs, charts, and formulae. However, those who are searching for substance rather than style and are willing to persevere will find much here to reward them.

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