



**Healing the Wounded Giant: Maintaining Military Preeminence While Cutting the Defense Budget**

By Michael E. O'Hanlon

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Reviewed by

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Sequestration has spurred a number of reports and books such as this one by defense expert Michael O'Hanlon, who urges the United States to "avoid Afghanistan-like wars" and the force structures associated with large-scale, land-centric combat. Here, he focuses on ways to reduce the costs of defense in order to achieve established strategy rather than presenting any revolutionary changes to U.S. strategy itself. He presents the deficit as one of the greatest challenges to national security, arguing that there are ways to cut another \$200 billion in the next decade beyond the Obama administration's current baseline reduction of \$350 billion. Readers grappling with the difficulty of sustaining a "preeminent" military with reduced funding will be rewarded with challenges to the status quo and insightful ideas as the United States moves beyond the previous decade's military growth. Yet the planned military

posture is dependent on estimates of the future security environment, which is where the book begins.

Chapter one starts with thoughts on U.S. grand strategy, which serves as a framework for future force structure. While O'Hanlon acknowledges short-term security challenges in the Middle East, South Asia, and Northeast Asia, he argues that the United States must uphold the long view in strengthening its nonmilitary foundations to maintain enduring power. He also provides broad ideas that hold considerable merit, such as the need for allies to contribute more to not only their own security, but to regional and global security as well. Nonetheless, the reader must judge if his views of the security environment are satisfactory and the accompanying force structure recommendations are adequate.

Chapter two proposes a future ground force structure for the Army and Marine Corps that is much smaller than today since the assumption is that the United States will not engage in protracted land wars of the kind recently experienced in Iraq and Afghanistan. Of the \$200 billion in total savings that O'Hanlon argues is plausible, land forces account for the largest single savings component at \$80 billion. He states that the United States can maintain the same combat capability through reductions in Active-duty Army Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) and Marine Infantry Regiments by shifting some BCTs to the National Guard. This would sufficiently support his "1 + 2" construct while providing for a base force that could expand if necessary. It is worth noting here that the "1 + 2" construct is somewhat a hybrid of previous studies from the last 25 years, such as the Bottom Up Review strategy of winning two major regional conflicts. However, O'Hanlon's idea is less ambitious, calling for the United States to be able to fight "one war plus two missions," the latter effort characterized by stabilization and peace-keeping like the drawdown efforts in Afghanistan.

Chapter three highlights operations in the Asia-Pacific where the Navy and Air Force are expected to be the leading Services, as evident by the emergence of Air Sea Battle. In this chapter, O'Hanlon builds on his push for increased burden-sharing by allies, especially in terms of airbase access, which would facilitate a reduction in aircraft carriers. He carefully argues that



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**Strategic Forum 281**

*The Rebalance to Asia: U.S.-China Relations and Regional Security*

By Phillip C. Saunders

The rebalance responds to the Asia-Pacific region's increased economic and strategic weight and seeks to bring U.S. global diplomatic, economic, and military resource commitments into balance with expanding U.S. regional interests. According to author Phillip C. Saunders, a key challenge is making the rebalance robust enough to reassure U.S. allies and partners while not alarming Chinese leaders to the point where they forgo cooperation with Washington. Chinese officials and scholars are skeptical about the U.S. rationale for the rebalance and criticize its supposed negative effect on regional security. However, China has also redoubled efforts to stabilize Sino-U.S. relations and build a "new type of great power relations."

To prevent unwanted strategic rivalry, U.S. and Chinese leaders should increase cooperation on common interests and seek to manage competitive aspects of U.S.-China relations.



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## **Strategic Forum 282**

### *Transitional Justice for Syria*

by Nicholas Rostow

Syrian political and community leaders are already planning for postconflict “transitional justice.” Transitional justice refers to the wish to hold perpetrators of atrocities accountable by means of some formal process that helps instill or rebuild the rule of law that replaces a former government perceived as unjust. No single model for transitional justice exists; in the course of confronting, overcoming, and recovering from serious domestic upheaval and conflict, a substantial number of countries have employed various means to achieve transitional justice.

Syria can help itself by quickly choosing a model for transitional justice that is consistent with its national culture and that meets the standards expected of such efforts with respect to due process and transparency. Such an effort may facilitate national healing and reconstruction and allow warring parties to find common ground. If delayed, transitional justice may be irreparably supplanted by the wholly destructive desire for private or communal vengeance.



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## **BOOK REVIEWS**

the United States should continue relying on airbases in the Middle East, which provide greater airpower capability at significantly lower costs than carriers, saving \$10 billion a year. While he acknowledges that friendly countries have a vote in how U.S. forces operate from their soil, he assures readers that a smaller carrier force would compensate for such constraints. He takes aim at the F-35 program, too, stating that advances in precision weaponry enable a smaller number of F-35s to be purchased than currently programmed. In terms of the surface and subsurface fleet, he advocates “sea swapping,” where ships and attack submarines would utilize dual crews to maintain a longer forward presence. This concept is in use today with the Navy’s ballistic missile submarines.

Chapters four and five discuss modernization, nuclear weapons, missile defense, and intelligence. O’Hanlon prudently cautions against taking another “procurement holiday” that characterized military budgets in the 1990s, reminding readers that the Reagan buildup of the 1980s enabled American success since 2001. Further victory resides with fully funding acquisition but revising it with new notions such as counting Air Force and future Navy unmanned aerial vehicles as fighter jets. These actions could permit substantial decreases in the planned purchase of nearly 2,500 F-35s with a program cost of \$300 billion. He also urges further reductions in nuclear weapons below the current Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty agreement of 1,550 strategic nuclear warheads by retiring intercontinental ballistic missiles and refurbishing existing ballistic missile submarines. The rationale for these cuts is the belief that the United States will not fight a war with Russia and thus only needs to maintain a sufficient nuclear force to deter Moscow and Beijing.

The final chapter covers military compensation and Pentagon reforms. O’Hanlon advances several ideas such as reforming retirement to include IRA-like contributions for members serving less than 20 years, halting future increases in military pay, and increasing members’ sharing of health-care costs. Throughout this chapter, he makes the overused comparison of the military and civilian sector, forgetting that the military members’ sworn oath to make the ultimate sacrifice is a fundamental and often overlooked distinction between the groups.

*Healing the Wounded Giant* does a reasonable job of generating the discussion for further reductions and provides sensible ideas for maintaining preeminence with a smaller defense budget. While O’Hanlon contends that his force posture recommendation is flexible enough to respond to a changing future, military minds will likely struggle with that point. After all, the need to plan for the worst-case scenario creates dissonance in the ability to think realistically about the plausibility of the worst-case threat. While some readers may dispense with some of the recommendations, it would be irrational to discard them all. In the end, it is imperative that America preserves its military preeminence while at the same time being mindful of the new reality of shrinking defense budgets. This is where O’Hanlon gives readers a lot to contemplate. **JFQ**

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