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Shaping American Military Capabilities after the Cold War

Richard Lacquement

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For more than 40 years, U.S. defense policy and the design of military capabilities were driven by the threat to national security posed by the Soviet Union and its allies. As the Soviet Union collapsed, analysts wondered what effect this dramatic change would have upon defense policy and the military capabilities designed to support it. Strangely enough, this development would ultimately have little effect on our defense policy. Over a decade later, American forces are a smaller, but similar version of their Cold War predecessors. The author argues that, despite many suggestions for significant change, the bureaucratic inertia of comfortable military elites has dominated the defense policy debate and preserved the status quo with only minor exceptions.

This inertia raises the danger that American military capabilities will be inadequate for future warfare in the information age. In addition, such legacy forces are inefficient and inappropriately designed for the demands of frequent and important antiterrorist and peace operations. Lacquement offers extensive analysis concerning the defense policymaking process from 1989 to 2001, including in particular the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review. This important study also provides a set of targeted policy recommendations that can help solve the identified problems in preparing for future wars and in better training for peace operations.

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