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## A War Without End

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**Résumé :** Many wars are surely winnable only if and when you are fully committed. The public is likely going to start to question whether Washington is actually committed to ending the war at all, or if the Middle East could become the next Korean peninsula.

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Some wars are without doubt long, and many wars are surely winnable only if and when you are fully committed. Nevertheless, although a specific time table for troop withdrawal from the Middle East may yet be unwise, the public is likely going to start to question whether Washington is actually committed to ending the war at all, or if the Middle East could become the next Korean peninsula. Particularly given the constitutional liberties that the president has taken under the auspices of a wartime commander-in-chief, the idea of perpetual war should cause some concern.

The Defense Department released its much anticipated Quadrennial Defense Review Report on February 6, 2006. The 100 plus page report outlines both a number of overarching strategic goals and specific policy recommendations for the coming years. The theme woven throughout the strategic guideline is simple and singular : "the United States is a nation engaged in what will be a long war." Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld concludes his introductory remarks by heralding the QDR as a "roadmap for change, leading to victory." His confidence is palpable.

The QDR tackles the difficult question of how to transform US defense capabilities in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, as both emerging threats and possible responses seem increasingly distinct from their Cold War predecessors. Although many of the recommendations to create a more agile and responsive military with enhanced technological, special operations forces, and power projection capabilities seem fitting, the reader is left with a simple yet troubling question : what exactly is a long war, and as a corollary, when does it end and how do we know ?

Although it's beyond cliché, beyond the point, and not entirely accurate to lament the end of the "good old" Cold War days when the US "knew" who its friends and enemies were, it is clear that new security challenges will require new approaches and new solutions. That said, there is something troublesome by a War on Terror (not a specific terrorist organization, or even terrorism, but the common noun "terror," which, when you think about it, is ultimately destined to be a war on itself) being officially upgraded to a Long War.

Some wars are without doubt long, and many wars are surely winnable only if and when you are fully committed. Conservatives have surely played this card to no end in the spin wars between Long War advocates and those advocating withdrawal from Iraq. Nevertheless, although a specific time table for troop withdrawal from the Middle East may yet be unwise, the public is likely going to start to question whether Washington is actually committed to ending the war at all,

or if the Middle East could become the next Korean peninsula. Particularly given the constitutional liberties that the president has taken under the auspices of a wartime commander-in-chief, the idea of perpetual war should cause some concern. Even though it's possible to be both peace loving and militarily strong, isn't it perhaps better to devote resources to avoiding a long war instead of embracing one ?

Of course the QDR is a Department of Defense report, and therefore its – focus on military responses – “the continuation of politics by other means” – is expected. The long war mentality seems to have permeated the Pentagon's well guarded perimeter, however, as it seems that many within the Beltway have likewise accepted the notion that the War on Terror is inevitably going to be a long one. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves, though, if victory is really possible in a war without end, with an enemy that is also a common noun, and an emotion, and if our resolve to be victorious in this Long War is a sign of strength or maybe just possibly a sign of weakness. These are surely difficult questions, but if we are serious about clearly defining and defending our national interests, important ones nonetheless.