

Blueprint for action



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Critical Book Analysis of *Blueprint for Action: A Future Worth Creating*

Barnett, Thomas P. M. *Blueprint for Action: A Future Worth Creating*. New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2005.

Thomas P. M. Barnett Weblog. "Biography." <http://www.thomaspmbarnett.com/biography.htm>.

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States (US) has struggled to define its role as the remaining superpower. Overnight containment and deterrence, the defining strategy of the second half of the 20th century, became questionable and a new grand strategy never emerged to take its place. Without a clear vision, US security policy since the collapse of the Soviet Union has generally relied on maintaining a balance of power in the international system. Then on 11 September 2001 (9/11), the US was attacked by terrorists and suffered its first domestic strategic military shock since the Japanese assault on Pearl Harbor in 1941. In reaction, the US has undergone a historic reorganization of government and is waging an unprecedented global war on terrorism. Yet despite the thousands who have died and trillions of dollars spent since 9/11, the US has not established a coherent, sustainable, and realistic grand strategy that accounts for current circumstances and the future world context.

In an attempt to fill this grand strategy vacuum and contextualize the current world environment Thomas Barnett has written a series of books that provide a new paradigm for understanding our current and future world circumstance. In the first book, *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in*

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the Twenty-First Century, Barnett frames the global dynamics in terms of rule sets that govern globalization and provides a vision for achieving global security. In the second book, *Blueprint for Action: A Future Worth Creating*, Barnett delivers the specifics of actualizing this vision and is the subject of this essay. Specifically, this paper critically analyzes *Blueprint for Action* because it is inspirational in scope, relevant to the future of US national security strategy, and has implications that warrant serious military consideration.

Thomas Barnett is a strategic planner who has worked in national security affairs since the end of the Cold War. Earning a PhD in Political Science at Harvard, Barnett served as professor at the Naval War College, senior advisor in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and has been involved with several strategic related Department of Defense activities. Over the last decade, Barnett has authored two books, written several articles, and has been widely read by civilian and military audiences.

Building off the vision articulated in *Pentagon's New Map*, the thesis of *Blueprint for Action* is that in order to close the gap between the Core states (healthy and functioning) and the Gap states (unhealthy and disfunctioning) the US must lead a Core state effort to establish the rule sets and institutions that will connect Gap states with the benefits of globalization. This in turn will reduce threats to Core states, promote universal inclusiveness, and foster global peace. Barnett passionately argues, “ we need to make sure our security rule sets match our growing network connectivity, and that our political rule sets keep pace with our economic transactions.” To accomplish this, the book postulates two fundamental actions to make this a reality.

First, a System Administrator Force (SysAdmin) comprised of Core state capability must be created to ensure that combat intervention into Gap states have the required follow on forces to win the hearts and minds by rebuilding infrastructure, enabling government, etc. Barnett points out that the US military's warfighting capacity (Leviathan) and the supporting US economy is not optimized for securing the security environment lying between war and peace. Weapons procurement and service centric force generation designed to support the Cold War high-end strategies of a bipolar world no longer apply to the multipolar globalized environment where low-end fourth generation warfare (4GW) requirements prevail. Given this, the US must "transform" its military to address existing and forecast security needs and enlist other Core state participation. To this end Barnett posits that dividing the military into a Leviathan force that prosecutes high-end war characterized primarily by US airpower (Air Force and Navy) and a SysAdmin force (Army and Marines) characterized by low-end 4GW proficient capability is required to address the war-peace gap. Moreover, the multinational SysAdmin force would be comprised primarily of other Core states and the significant US contribution would be its global logistics capability and 20% of the overall force structure. This approach would then leverage existing Core state military competencies and create a counterbalance to a US dominated Leviathan force.

Even if the White House and all four services bought into this argument, the problem with this construct is that it makes the assumption that Core states will entrust the US with the preponderance of a Leviathan force. Essentially this proposal suggests that non-US Core states command the majority of the

soft power and the US command the hard power. Given this, it is doubtful that rising powers such as China will find this arrangement appealing. Similarly, Russia with their resurgence of nationalism along with most European nations that comprise the majority of the Core states will also be suspicious of what would appear to be the US trying to corner the market on high-end warfare. Additionally, Core nations in general will be reluctant to support US combat dominance given its preemptive track record over the last five years. Barnett's blueprint suggests that the employment of force would not happen without the concurrence of "fellow great powers" because America would be deterred by the realization without the [multinational] SysAdmin little would change in a targeted Gap state. Unfortunately, this logic does not deter the US from pursuing its own vital interests in spite of other Core state objections. What this construct proposes is that the US will monopolize what matters most – hard power and global reach. Therefore, the strategy is idealistic in that it does not provide a compelling case for US or its allies. Knowing that a constrained fiscal environment will challenge the preeminence of US power over the next 50 years, rising powers like China will be just as inclined to wait out an eventual decline of American strength. What Barnett fails to provide is a more convincing rationale to support his idea. To do this he needs to address how the US will give up its unilateral preemption policy and assuage Core state fears of US monopolizing hard power. For example, high-end weapon system development could be intentionally spread over multiple Core states. By making the US dependent on various foreign sources for arms manufacturing it would leverage the benefits of globalization, increase the interconnectivity of the Core, and create distributed weapon system dependency to keep the US in check

militarily. Clearly, many in the US (i. e. military and defense contractors) would object to this, but for a global grand strategy of this nature to succeed checks and balances will need to be structurally imbedded into the institutional framework to foster trust and discourage unilateral tendencies.

From a theater strategic joint warfighting perspective, Barnett is proposing a major transformation of US military force structure and strategy that is dependent on other Core state participants as much as they would be dependent on the US. To actualize this blueprint the Army would be optimized for 4GW and the Marine Corps should remain a mini-Leviathan within the SysAdmin force. Additionally, Civil Affairs units embedded in the Special Operations Command (SOCOM) would be integrated into the Army. The idea is to reconfigure US military forces into distinct Leviathan and SysAdmin force structures. This transformation also implies developing the ability to synchronize with the SysAdmin forces of other Core states and provide the logistical framework for rapid global deployment and sustainment. Given the existing issues involved with US force development the scale and scope of developing synchronized Core wide resourcing, doctrine, training, and equipping is questionable.

The second postulate that Barnett advances is the requirement to establish global rule sets to guide Core state actions for dealing with politically bankrupt states inside the Gap and individual terrorists. The goal of these rule sets is to create transparency, reduce uncertainty, generate non-zero-sum outcomes, and foster a sense that everyone needs to play by the Core's emerging rules. The problem with the Gap rule set is that initiation of Core action is dependent on the United Nations (UN) Security Council to achieve

consensus. Additionally, the rule set does not address how to reconstitute targeted Gap states politically in their transition to peace. Culture, religion, and other factors will clearly make any national rehabilitation unique, and Barnett fails to specify a fundamental political organizing philosophy. Clear political organizing principles need to be articulated to ensure the transparency. Finally, because the blueprint suggests that SysAdmin military force is structurally divided among Core states the rule set would need to address how Core states will collectively react to an attack.

Without a doubt, *Blueprint for Action* is a “ must read” because it offers a plausible context for understanding the global security environment and a framework for addressing the threats we face today. More importantly, Barnett’s paradigm forces readers to leap beyond national constraints and allows for the conceptualization of optimizing civil and military joint capability multinationally. Finally, Barnett offers an optimistic “ future worth creating” and plants the seed for an international discussion on proactively securing the future for our planet.