Defense planning for future national security has to be a matter of guesswork. The practical choices on how to proceed are only two: an educated futurology, or an approach based upon the humanities, identified here inclusively as history, politics, and strategy. Many people have genuine difficulty grasping fully the implications of the fact that the future can be a direct source of no data at all. Everyone knows that the future has not happened, that it never can and therefore never will. Nonetheless, we need to try to work around this forbidding natural law and do our best to provide prudently for national security in the unknown future. There are better and worse ways in which this can be attempted. Fundamentally, however, it is essential to retain an open mind about the future. The pragmatic challenge is to identify ways in which one can make all prudently permissible allowance for future uncertainty, while making suitable definite preparation with military capabilities that could meet a wide range of possibilities.

The approach labeled here as “educated futurology” is considered with reference to three methodological aids to future defense planning: scenario design, development and testing; trend spotting; and scientific defense analysis. These activities are now mature in the United States (and elsewhere) and do have merit. However, they also have limitations and can inspire a measure of confidence about understanding of the future that is almost entirely unwarranted. A generic fact that needs to be understood about these methodologies is that although they encourage us to lean forward mentally into the future, in fact, indeed necessarily, they project what is understood from today into the future. *Ipso facto,* this is not a criticism, given that we can only consider the future in the light of our comprehension now: the future itself cannot now be accessed for our defense planning convenience.

The most serious weakness shared by scenarios, trend-spotting, and defense analysis are that: (1) they overprivilege the projection of understanding from the present into the future, and (2) underprivilege recognition of the real problem (ignorance) and, as a consequence, discourage any effort to address it intelligently. The most sensible way to think about the challenge of defense planning for the future is to identify honestly what is now known, as well as what is not knowable by any methodology. The latter should worry us, because unpleasant complete surprises could spoil a decade or longer of America’s future. But, the former, less exclusive category of current uncertainties is accessible to us, though not in detail. Scenarios, trend-spotting, and defense analysis, are all typically characteristically “presentist” efforts to conduct futurology in a disciplined way. Not infrequently, these activities are described as social-scientific, if not scientific: This is regrettable and should be avoided. Science is about the search for certainty in knowledge; a certainty that can only be achieved by means of empirical testing for verification. Nothing about the future, from the future, of high interest to American defense planning for future national security is empirically testable. Highly imaginative scenario design and innovative and elegant mathematics are all probably useful as planning tools, but they can breed a false confidence, in important respects, that the fog that shrouds the future has been penetrated.

Fortunately, there is an approach to future defense planning accessible to us which can yield critically helpful assistance. This is categorized here
understand the concept and label it, is quite modern functional grasp of the subject. Strategy, as we of the general theory of strategy as a key to proper use useful order in historical enquiry, make careful use 2. Strategy: In order to provide the discipline for history for understanding of experience long and ever moving present, compel us to look to strategic quality. A nonexistent future and an untrustworthy must be different, but the challenges to national understanding of America's defense planning needs be employed as the principal basis upon which planning for the future, no matter how impressive and emotions, of American voters. Studies of defense the hands, or more accurately, in and from the brains national political decision for or against action is in authority upon professional military advice, but expertise founded upon experience confers needed preparation for the future. That preparation will be done as the result of on-going politics. Military expertise founded upon experience confers needed authority upon professional military advice, but national political decision for or against action is in the hands, or more accurately, in and from the brains and emotions, of American voters. Studies of defense planning for the future, no matter how impressive methologically, should always be treated with caution for two basic reasons. First, and as noted already, there can be no certain knowledge about the future. Second,
because defense preparation always is and must be determined politically, there can be no certainty concerning the prudence in the relevant decisions. Politics is all, but strictly only, about influence; it is empty of any necessary strategic wisdom. It has to follow that when regarded as it must be, which is to say in political terms, the capabilities of America’s land power can never be assumed to be on all-but an autopilot guided by a certainty of strategic prudence. Instead, politics both reigns and rules—and requires constant attention in the interest of the public safety and security.

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