

# Newt Gingrich's Last Boondoggle

*The Hart-Rudman national security commission shows every sign of being an expensive flop.*

BY TOM DONNELLY

**D**uring the decade since the Cold War ended, the United States has searched in vain for a new national strategy. The Pentagon has undergone a Base Force review, a Bottom-Up review, a review of service roles and missions, and an independent National Defense Panel review. At the moment it is readying itself for a second Quadrennial Defense Review, whose main virtue appears to be that it comes around every four years; it's the strategic equivalent of Bill Murray's *Groundhog Day*.

But the most expensive failures of the past decade have been the reports of the U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century, known as the Hart-Rudman Commission after its principals, former senators Gary Hart and Warren Rudman. The \$10 million commission, which modestly styles itself "the most comprehensive review of the national security environment, processes, and organizations since the National Security Act of 1947," has just issued the second of three planned reports, a 16-page effort titled *Seeking a National Strategy: A Concert for Preserving Security and Promoting Freedom*.

In fact, the Hart-Rudman commission has been something of a joke on the taxpayer almost since its inception. The project was the pet rock of former House speaker Newt Gingrich—now himself a commissioner—and remains in part an effort to inject some "third wave" thinking into the national security debate. It is also a collaboration between Gingrich and retired Air Force general Charles Boyd. Boyd, a Vietnam-era pilot, prisoner of war, and genuine hero, has worked with Gingrich on national security matters for several years. Gingrich's influence assured Boyd's appointment as the commission's executive director and a favorable hearing for Gin-

grich's Toffleresque views of the future.

Gingrich's imprimatur, along with the huge budget and the hope that distinguished commissioners could rise above personal ambition and produce serious work, gave the panel an initial cachet. Much of the foreign policy and defense elite participated; the 14 members range from former United Nations ambassador Andrew Young on the left to former energy and defense secretary James Schlesinger on the right. Yet there were signs of trouble from the start; and in the end, the commission produced mush.

The first bad sign was the resignation of commissioner Lynne Cheney, former head of the National Endowment for the Humanities and wife of former defense secretary Dick Cheney, in a dispute over the panel's first report. Cheney was unhappy with the suggestion that American power was bound to decline: "Emerging powers will increasingly constrain U.S. options regionally and limit its strategic influence. As a result, we will remain limited in our ability to impose our will. . . ." In recent months, most of the group's hired hands have been scrambling to avoid going down with a sinking ship. "A bad idea, badly executed," concludes one national security scholar who signed up to work on the project. "There is no organizing mind," says another who contributed several papers. Gingrich, characteristically, has been wildly undisciplined: "He would begin the discussion of some serious issue by saying, 'I was just reading last night . . .'" said a senior participant. "It was an indication that he had not given it any thought at all. He just threw out the latest buzzwords."

Staff turnover has been high and morale low. "The staff and consultants produced some very fine work," says one experienced analyst who worked for the commission, but many sources agree that the efforts of the permanent staff and the parade of outside advisers have been for naught. To insiders, the commission's final strategy recommendations represent Gen. Boyd's attempt to harness

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the various hobby horses of individual commissioners.

"It is totally out of control," says one staffer. "Gingrich wants to give a cell phone to every flood victim in Mozambique." Neither Hart nor Rudman attempted to direct the commission; Rudman reportedly bullied the staff whenever he was wrestling with ideas he did not comprehend. The caustic Schlesinger, perhaps the most experienced and thoughtful of the commissioners on national security matters, occasionally attempted to discipline the others. But so far, Schlesinger has been content to do damage control rather than lead.

All this expensive wheel-spinning would be merely irritating if it hadn't actually produced a pernicious result. For if there was one point of agreement between the commission's Kissingerian and McGovernite wings, it was that unchecked American power is a very bad thing. The strategy report, lamenting that America is now a power without wisdom, quotes Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*: "O, it is excellent / To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous / To use it like a giant." Apparently, to the Hart-Rudman commissioners, America today is analogous to the lustful Angelo, or at best Vincentio, duke of dissipated Vienna.

But in truth, Hart and Rudman more often recall *Hamlet*. No, not the melancholy prince, but the elderly windbag Polonius: Hart and Rudman feel very strongly both ways. For example, their report begins with the assertion that "strategy and policy must be grounded in the national interest" but also claims, in the same paragraph, that the national interest "has many strands" including humanitarian interests. It affirms that "gaining and sustaining public support for U.S. policy is best achieved when American principles are coupled with clearly visible national interests," but also that "national interest, properly conceived, engenders respect for the interests of others."

Hart and Rudman do not lay out an overriding American purpose in the world. Indeed, they argue that American strategy must "compose a balance" between the goals of freedom and stability. But in a world where so many nations remain ruled by dictators, liberty and stability are often at odds. How, for example, is the United States to "compose a balance" between liberty and stability in

China? If stability reigns, so will the Chinese Communists. If America works to advance freedom in China, there will almost certainly be turmoil.

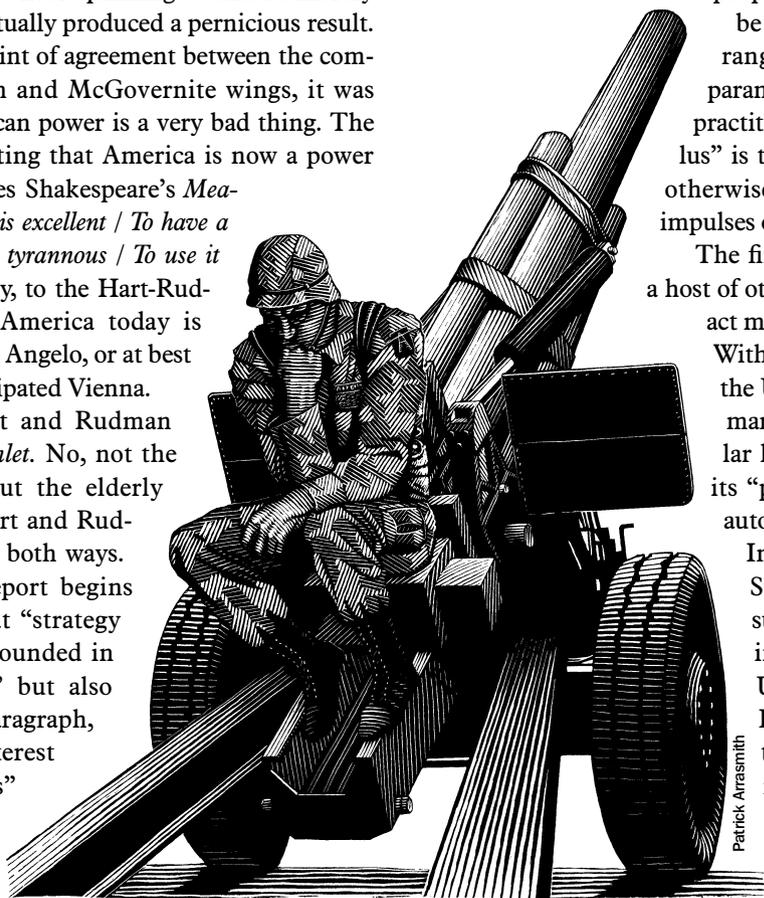
But in fact, a close reading of the Hart-Rudman strategy report shows that the commissioners' bias is for stability over liberty. The report whines that "America must not exhaust itself by limitless commitments," especially military ones, in regard to which "a finer calculus of benefits and burdens must govern." This, of course, represents the unhappiness of aging American politicians and statesmen with places like the Balkans, which is full of quarrelsome

people whose problems cannot be neatly solved by long-range bombing. One of the paramount requirements for the practitioners of this "finer calculus" is to resist the "CNN effect," otherwise known as the moral impulses of the American people.

The finer calculus also produces a host of other reasons for America to act modestly in the 21st century. With any luck, says the report, the United States can lay down many of the burdens of unipolar leadership by encouraging its "partners" to "seek greater autonomy and responsibility." In particular, "the United States should be prepared to support the evolution of an independent European Union defense policy." Here the commission tries to square the circle by insisting that an independent Europe must act "in a manner consistent with the unity of the Atlantic Alliance." But

Europe cannot both act independently and subordinate itself to an American-led alliance; it's an either-or proposition.

The Hart-Rudman report concludes that "the strategy outlined here for U.S. national security differs from the strategic habits of the past half-century." That claim is probably true: The report disavows the habits of leadership, power, and principle that unexpectedly won the Cold War. Alas for Hart and Rudman, these strategic habits may be hard to break—and since they made America into history's "sole superpower," some will wonder why they need breaking. ♦



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