The arrival of postindustrial society has given rise to the suspicion that the traditional bases of national power have been fundamentally transformed and, as such, that the indices used to measure the relative power of nations should be reassessed as well. This suspicion has special resonance given the fact that countries like the Soviet Union and Iraq, classified as relatively significant powers by some aggregate indicators of capability, either collapsed through internal enervation or proved utterly ineffectual when their capabilities were put to the test in war. Both these examples suggest that appreciating the true basis of national power requires not merely a meticulous detailing of visible military assets but also a scrutiny of larger capabilities embodied in such variables as the aptitude for innovation, the nature of social institutions, and the quality of the knowledge base—all of which may bear upon a country’s capacity to produce the one element that is still fundamental to international politics: effective military power. To the degree that contemporary intelligence approaches fail to integrate information of this sort, they may be deficient insofar as visible military indicators will provide important—but still incomplete and perhaps misleading—assessments of “true” national power.

This report represents a “first cut” at reconfiguring the notion of national power to accommodate a wider understanding of capability than is now used in discussions about international affairs. The intention here is to advance a conceptual framework that helps the intelligence community develop better evaluative measures of the national capabilities of countries likely to become potential peer competitors of the United States. This framework, insofar as it cap-
tures a more comprehensive view of national power that helps distinguish “truly” powerful from “apparently” powerful countries, is intended to support the Army’s and the intelligence community’s efforts at long-range planning and global forecasting. These efforts obviously seek to assess the capabilities of potential adversaries as accurately as possible in order to meter appropriate military acquisitions, structures, and development on the part of the United States.

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