The arrival of postindustrial society has given rise to the suspicion that the traditional bases of national power have changed; if this is so, 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 conceivably 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 lack information of this sort, they may be deficient insofar as the emphasis on gross indicators provides 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 currently utilized in discussions about international affairs. The intention here is to develop a conceptual framework that provides better evaluative measures of the national capabilities of countries likely to become potential peer competitors of the United States. Toward that end, the framework offered in this report integrates some existing measures of national power like size of popula-
tion, GNP, and the capabilities of the armed forces with other, newer measures of capability flowing from a detailed reassessment of the nature of the “state” itself. Unlike most traditional approaches to power measurement—which treat countries as “bordered resource containers” with measurable attributes of the sort identified above—the framework offered in this report unpacks the concept of “country” in order to look within what was previously treated as a black box.

Unpacking the concept of country enables national entities to be viewed as active social structures rather than as mere geographical containers, and it allows national power to be seen as produced by three distinct realms, every one of which is as important as the other for the generation of usable power in international politics. The first realm encompasses the level of resources either available to or produced by a country; the second realm encompasses national performance deriving both from the external pressures facing a country and the efficiency of its governing institutions, nominally labeled the “state,” and its society at large; and, finally, the third realm encompasses military capability, which is understood in terms of operational proficiency or effectiveness produced as a result of both the strategic resources available to a military organization and its ability to convert those resources into effective coercive power. These three realms taken together describe national power. The analysis offered in this report elaborates the rationale for assessing each of these components as well as proffers ideas on how they might be measured in tangible ways.

Because of the great detail inherent in the analysis, this framework is not intended for cross-national comparisons on a large scale. Rather, it is more appropriate for the close scrutiny of a few significant powers in the international system, one at a time. In any event, the analytical framework offered here is not intended to be a complete statement of intelligence-collection requirements. The data sought may not be collected by the intelligence community, and in some cases may simply be too complicated or too difficult to collect. Even if all these data were available, however, this framework will not allow any “automatic computation” of a given country’s national power. Any framework that enables such computation would of necessity be sparse and parsimonious. By virtue of this fact, it would also not provide the detailed “national power profile” that the intelli-
gence community needs to make critical judgments about whether certain candidate great powers are on the cusp of becoming true peer competitors of the United States.

Since this framework is fundamentally oriented toward assisting the intelligence community in its efforts to create a standardized power profile of such candidate great powers, it must—almost by definition—be sufficiently detailed while still reserving room for the specialized knowledge that country specialists and regional analysts will invariably bring to bear in the production of any strategic assessments. The purpose of this framework, in the first instance, is therefore heuristic: it is meant to identify what a comprehensive understanding of national power requires in the postindustrial age and, to that degree, is intended to contribute to the discussions now taking place within the intelligence community about what the appropriate measures of national power ought to be. In the final instance, however, it is intended to supply an intellectual “template” which, if found suitable and after further modification, the intelligence community could use to define future collection requirements for purposes of constructing power profiles of certain key countries of interest to the United States.

Three distinct premises undergird the analytic framework offered in this report. The first premise is that something resembling a science-based “knowledge revolution,” most clearly manifested by the current breakthroughs in information processing, technology, and management, is currently under way in society at large and that this phenomenon has consequential effects in both the civilian and the military realm. The second premise is that the performance of the “state,” understood precisely as the governing institutions that steer a nation’s political direction, will be critical to a country’s success in the postindustrial age because no matter how successful a given society may be in developing or exploiting the science-based knowledge revolution currently taking place, a minimally efficient state is required if these societal advances are to be transformed into national power. The third premise is that national power will continue to be expressed—ultimately—in terms of warfighting capabilities and that the most important kind of warfighting capabilities are those that exploit critical emerging technologies, especially those relating to information and communications technologies, to produce militarily effective conventional forces.
Taken together, these premises imply that the framework for analyzing national power advanced in this report—and depicted below in graphic form—focuses on assessing what a given country must possess if it is to effectively create and utilize the emerging technological changes to produce those capabilities that will ultimately advantage it in the arena of international politics.

As mentioned above, the framework offered here for assessing national power divides the polity into three distinct realms. The first realm seeks to depict the national resources a country must possess if it is to develop capabilities that enable it to produce an effective military force. Since the beginning of the modern international system, these capabilities have usually been measured by variables such as population, size of territory, economic strength (usually measured in terms of GNP/GDP), and natural resources. Since these measures cannot simply be jettisoned, we incorporated them in our framework in the context of other, newer qualitative variables that speak to a country’s wider ability to incorporate the science-based knowledge revolution in their political, economic, and social spheres. This ability to incorporate the knowledge revolution in every realm of material life is critical because the changes in the political, economic, and social spheres are themselves seen as creating the foundations for new forms of military power. The inputs of national power identified

![Figure S.1—A Revised View of National Power](#)
in this framework are discussed here under the rubric of (1) technology, (2) enterprise, (3) human resources, (4) financial/capital resources, and (5) physical resources.

The second realm seeks to capture the mechanisms that enable countries to create or convert national resources, which represent latent power, into tangible forms of usable power. The objective of introducing this “transformative” dimension of national power is to move beyond the traditional view of countries as “bordered power-containers” to something that models countries as active social structures consisting of state and societal actors and institutions, all of which exist in an environment populated by many similar entities abroad. Introducing this dimension allows the framework to capture an element that most traditional measures of power cannot accommodate: a state’s relationship to both its external environment and its own society and the consequences thereof for national power capability. In particular, this level of analysis allows the observer to assess the levels of external pressures confronting a given country as well as how aware and responsive a particular state-society complex is to the new resources that must be produced if the country is to develop the effective military capabilities referred to earlier. In this realm, the three variables examined are (1) the external constraints emerging from the international system, (2) the infrastructural capacity of a given state, and (3) its ideational resources.

The third realm seeks to capture the tangible military capability produced by a country. Military capabilities are considered to be the effective manifestation of national power because they represent the projectible power that a country can bring to bear against other competitors which, in the anarchic system of international politics, constitutes its first line of defense. Military capabilities in this framework are understood to be a resultant product of the continual, cyclic interaction of both national resources and national performance: resources may be “building blocks,” but these building blocks, far from existing in nature, must be consciously produced as a result of human artifice, which is captured, however imperfectly, by the domain of national performance. The institutions inhabiting this latter realm, in turn, rely on the resources they have produced both to maintain themselves internally and to expand their own (or their country’s) power externally, and the most important manifestation of this external power is military capability. Many traditional indexes
of national power have incorporated military capabilities in some form or another, though this was usually done through the use of summary variables such as level of military expenditure or gross size of the armed forces. In its focus on military capabilities, our framework seeks a greater level of detail. The examination of military capability is patterned like the larger framework for assessing national power. It identifies (1) the strategic resources a military receives from the government it serves, which include defense budgets, manpower, military infrastructure, combat RDT&E institutions, the defense industrial base, and the warfighting inventory and support; (2) the variables bearing upon how these resources are converted into effective capabilities, such as the threats facing a country and the strategy developed to cope with them; the structure of civil-military relations; the density of foreign military-to-military relations; the nature of doctrine, training, and organization; and the potential and capacity for innovation; and (3) the capabilities of the combat force itself, understood via a spectrum of warfighting competencies which may be attained to a greater or lesser degree and which may be compared across countries.