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## **Defense and Security Policy: Time for a Strategic Approach**

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A new administration taking office in 2017 faces a diverse set of national security challenges. It would do the nation an incalculable service by articulating an actual strategy—a coherent statement describing the kind of world the United States wants, the role of the United States in that world, and a game plan for achieving it.

The four administrations since the end of the Cold War in 1990 have all grappled with a range of issues and crises with varying degrees of success. None has been able to develop and follow a consistent strategy that identifies enduring American interests in a complicated world; sets priorities for protecting or achieving them; takes timely, forehanded action and balances policies across the diplomatic, economic, and military components of American power and influence.

Some ask whether an overarching strategy is even possible in a post-Cold War world, where so many threats emanate from cyberspace and non-state actors; where we see in real time widespread suffering of people in their own countries or fleeing them; where we face worldwide crises like climate change and pandemics. Is it possible—indeed, can we afford—to deal with all of it?

We cannot afford not to. In the absence of strategy, American national security policy has become increasingly short-term, crisis driven, expensive and not notably successful. The fundamental national security challenge of the new administration is to restore a publicly supported, bipartisan, and enduring approach to America’s responsibilities around the world.

What might a real strategy look like? It would be a statement that avoids laundry lists, and sets forth organized, national security goals to ensure U.S. national survival and prosperity. Having, and living by, a strategy is critical for keeping us on course, and does not hogtie us when it comes to responding to inevitable, unforeseen manmade and natural crises.

### **The International Security Environment: Do Fewer Things Better**

One of the most important, early tasks of a new administration is to assess the complicated international security environment and identify the top priorities.

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Three national security challenges stand out: the rise of China, the breakdown of stability in the Middle East, and the emergence of Muslim violent extremist groups. While there will be many issues and crises in the next four years, these three will have the greatest, long-term importance for American security. Current American policies for dealing with them are neither adequate nor successful.

## China

The only serious rival to the United States is China. As China's economic strength and military power have grown it has more forcibly and aggressively sought to expand its influence. It is pursuing mercantilist policies that unfairly favor its own companies in its domestic market and abroad at the expense of American and other international companies. It is pushing extravagant territorial claims in the East and South China Seas. In cyberspace, it continues to steal American intellectual property. It is rejecting the American model of freedom, democracy and free markets.

Some important aspects of China's rapid development have been beneficial. It has raised hundreds of millions of its citizens out of poverty, it has become an engine of global economic growth, provided inexpensive goods to consumer in other countries, and in important areas it has cooperated with the United States and other countries to deal with regional problems like Iran and North Korea. Moreover, China faces problems that undercut its ambitions. Its economic growth is slowing as it attempts to shift from export and infrastructure investment to consumption and market mechanisms. It faces a massive environmental challenge resulting from its unconstrained recent growth. Its workforce has peaked—its working age population has been falling since 2011—and it has another several hundred million people living in poverty. The authoritarian Chinese political model has little attraction for countries in the region, and its ambitions frighten them.

An improved American strategy to deal with China is not simply “getting tough,” and it is not simply coaching and coaxing China into the US-led economic and security system. China has grown too big for that approach. The United States needs to identify what it wants from China and what it is willing to defend from China, communicate these objectives and limits clearly and both cooperate or compete across the full range of issues.

An improved American strategy for dealing with China needs to be based on strengthened relations with allies and partners in the region—Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam. The United States needs to continue to build its military power in East Asia to offset rapidly increasing Chinese capability. While preserving mutually beneficial business relations with China, and encouraging China's continued and beneficial participation in the world economic system, the United States needs to find ways to check its abuses of the system. Using penalties as well as jawboning and incentives, United States needs to confront the theft of intellectual property and other government-sponsored policies penalizing American and other international companies in favor of Chinese competitors. The U.S.

needs to limit Chinese aggression in the South China Sea, while preserving Chinese cooperation on other regional interests from the Middle East to North Korea.

## Middle East

American Middle East policy since the end of the Cold War has been neither consistent nor effective. Granted, there is nothing simple about developing a consistent strategy, or even a set of strategic principles, for dealing with the Middle East. American interests—protection of the world economy’s swing producers of oil along the southern Persian Gulf coast, safeguarding the security of Israel, limiting the proliferation of nuclear technology, combatting Muslim violent extremist groups, and supporting the development of good governance—often conflict. Short-term interests, such as cooperation against extremist groups, conflict with longer term interests, such as promoting democratic governance and human rights.

Since the 1970s, the American approach to the region has become heavily militarized. Military campaigns have failed to produce decisive results, despite great expenditures of blood and treasure, yet in the Middle East, diplomacy without the credible threat of force is generally not effective.

The elements of an effective, long-term strategy for the region, however, are straightforward. They include several strategic principles and objectives:

- First, improving American energy security through domestic measures to lessen the strategic importance of Saudi Arabia and other low-cost-oil producing states.
- Second, without sacrificing American political leadership, involving other countries from Europe and Asia, including India and China, in maintaining a regional balance of power that checks the ambitions of Iran or any other country seeking a dominant position in the region.
- Third, shifting much of the campaign against Muslim violent extremist groups in fragile countries, such as Yemen and Afghanistan, from direct military and intelligence action to support for better governance and effective host-nation security capacity.
- Fourth, sustained support for long-term, peaceful democratic change.
- Fifth, greater and earlier use of military measures, short of committing major combat units, such as providing appropriate equipment and sustained training.

There will be constant, individual crises in the region requiring short-term responses, but the United States needs to be able to make progress on these strategic principles and objectives as it works its way through the crisis of the moment.

## Violent Extremism

Finally, we need a better approach to violent extremist Islamist organizations that threaten fragile states and are capable of isolated attacks within the United States. Since 9/11, the United States has learned a great deal more about these organizations and the

threat they pose, even as their names and locations have changed. We have gained the experience to forge a successful strategy.

An improved counterterrorism strategy should include the following principles and objectives:

- First, maintain the FBI-led campaign to identify and prosecute terror plots originating within the United States, while explaining and building public support for the legal investigative methods necessary to keep the public safe. It has been the FBI and other domestic law enforcement agencies that have thwarted the great majority of intended terrorist attacks on the United States in recent years.
- Second, continue to improve the Department of Homeland Security-led campaign to prevent members of violent extremist Islamic groups from entering the country. There is still a great deal of work to be done to merge all of the information and intelligence available to identify those who pose a threat.
- Third, strike a better balance between conducting direct American military or intelligence action against terrorist organizations and building the capacity of host governments to provide better governance and security for their citizens.
- Fourth, over the long run, support peaceful democratic development in authoritarian countries that support violent extremist Islamist groups in order to build positive alternative political forces.
- Fifth, and probably most important, promote U.S. national resilience. Explain to the American people that they can never be totally protected from terror attacks unless they are willing to give up treasured rights and freedoms, and that the threat of these attacks should not make us a fearful people living in an intrusive state. The citizens of Boston set a fine example of resilience following the horrific attack at the Boston Marathon. They have proudly upheld the continuity of this iconic, public event, while heeding stringent (albeit controversial) new security measures.

There are many second-tier national security challenges that a new administration will also inherit: dealing with Vladimir Putin's Russia, halting the spread of nuclear weapons, dealing with global climate change, engaging India as a partner in addressing common challenges. These issues, too, require consistent and successful strategies, and the investment of resources and attention.

### **The National Security System: Time for a Reboot**

In addition to understanding the international security environment, identifying American interests, and setting priorities, a new administration needs to overhaul the basic structure of how American security is formulated and carried out. As the Project on National Security Reform (PNSR), a distinguished group of national security scholars and practitioners, stated back in 2008:

The legacy structures and processes of a national security system that is now more than 60 years old no longer help American leaders to formulate coherent national strategy. They do not enable them to integrate America's hard and soft power to

achieve policy goals. They prevent them from matching resources to objectives, and from planning rationally and effectively for future contingencies. As presently constituted, too, these structures and processes lack means to detect and remedy their own deficiencies.<sup>2</sup>

The legislative framework and heritage of the current system favor strong departmental capabilities over integrative functions. As the report states:

[t]he basic deficiency of the current national security system is that parochial—departmental and agency interests, reinforced by Congress, paralyze interagency cooperation even as the variety, speed, and complexity of emerging security issues prevent the White House from effectively controlling the system.

PNSR recommended a set of structural improvements through legislation and executive order that would improve budgeting for national security, make the Office of the President a more strategic and forehanded directing body, improve the flow of knowledge and information across the national security system, and improve the execution of integrated policies in the field.

It is difficult at the beginning of a new administration, with all the demands of recruiting personnel, establishing new policies, handling crises, and answering the in-box, to carve out the time and attention for structural reform. However, unless an administration can make these improvements to the current system, the current trends will continue: short-sighted and crisis-driven policy, White House micromanagement of a few issues and neglect of others, and uncoordinated actions in the field.

In case this sounds like an impossibly daunting or idealistic task, we already have models of integration on which to build. The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 brought an end to crippling rivalries and confusion within the Department of Defense. The Office of the Director of National Intelligence has been integrating the vast, diffuse U.S. Intelligence Community—from technology to personnel policies to operational procedures—since its post-9/11 birth in 2005.

### **The Armed Forces: Air, Sea, Land, Space, Ether**

With the international security situation as complicated as it is, the armed forces of the United States needs to be flexible and multipurpose. As outlined earlier, the United States, at a minimum, needs the military capability to deal with China, an unstable Middle East, and violent extremist Islamic groups, while maintaining a reserve of capability for unexpected crises and challenges.

The fundamental, standing military task is to deter cross-border aggression against allies or other friendly countries, from members of NATO to South Korea and Japan. This mission involves maintaining ready, conventional force units strong enough, in

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<sup>2</sup> *Project on National Security Reform* February 2008, available at <http://www.pnsr.org/>

combination with the armed forces of allies and treaty partners, to convince potential aggressors that cross-border military attacks would not succeed.

The other major American military mission is to deal with violence within states, from insurgencies to civil wars, when that violence is causing wide-scale suffering, or when adversary countries are exploiting local conditions to increase their power and influence. It will always be a fine judgment choosing the time and place of American intervention. It will depend on the degree of threat to US or allied interests, the scale of human suffering, and what is going on elsewhere in the world. However the armed forces need to have the ready capability to take action when the decision is made. Current examples run from the Ukraine to Yemen. American military support in these cases can be for a government defending its authority (Iraq, Ukraine, and Yemen), or it can be for insurgents challenging the government (Syria). This military support will generally take the form of equipment, advisors, air strikes, and logistic support, although there may be times when American combat units are committed.

Finally, specialized military forces are required for operations in a small number of fragile states that are home to violent extremist Islamic organizations that threaten the United States and our friends and allies—Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Nigeria, Libya, and Syria, to cite current examples. The mission is to cooperate with local specialized forces to capture or kill leaders of these violent groups, and to otherwise disrupt their operations.

There are three additional sets of functional force requirements—nuclear modernization, cyber defense, and space defense.

In the next twenty years, virtually the entire current nuclear triad—land based missiles, submarine-launched missiles, and long-range bombers—will need to be replaced. An important question is whether the United States needs to replace all three legs of the triad, or if it can be secure with a two-legged dyad.

In the cyber aspects of conflict, even an opponent like North Korea or Iran can pose a formidable threat to American military networks. Both China and Russia devote large resources and skilled personnel to offensive cyber units. To secure its networks, the Department of Defense needs a continuing, major investment in technology, highly qualified personnel, and continuous training and exercises.

The technology for attacking satellites in orbit, their ground stations, and the networked systems that control them is becoming less expensive and more widespread. With all of its likely military theaters far from its shores, the United States depends heavily on space-based intelligence and communications to support military operations. Survivability of satellite systems can be improved by design features, operational maneuvers, and other techniques. It will become necessary in the near future for the United States to spend more resources on its space systems to ensure that they can be effective against attacks from even medium-level threats.

## **Defense Budget Choices: Get Real**

The currently planned armed forces do not jibe with the military challenges of the future. The projected funding for nuclear modernization, cyber security, and space defense are inadequate. If more funds are budgeted to them, and budgets remain constrained, there will be fewer resources for the regular forces.

The Navy and Air Force require steady increases of funding to pace growing Chinese military capabilities. Special Forces Command needs continued budget increases both to deal with violent extremist Islamic organizations and to train allies and partners. The Army, and, to a lesser extent, the Marine Corps, need to maintain conventional units for alliance commitments in NATO and in South Korea, while increasing their capability to provide military training and other forms of assistance to countries the United States decides to assist or oppose in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Even without a detailed analysis, it is clear that these essential capabilities of the armed forces cannot be maintained with sequestration ceilings or even the relative straight-line projections of the current administration budget. It is also clear that, under realistic budgets, there have to be changes in the traditional, proportional budget shares of the services and their fundamental structures. While maintaining the ability to expand quickly in the case of major threats arising, the Army and the Marine Corps should be reduced in end strength. Navy and Air Force inventories of manned aircraft can be reduced, in favor of unmanned aircraft for several missions, and sea- or ground-based missile systems for air defense.

A new administration will have to make hard choices on the size and shape of its armed forces to support its strategy, and will require skill and persistence to gain approval and funding from the Congress.