Center for a New American Security

Fifth Anniversary

2012

NATIONAL SECURITY GUIDE TO THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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Introduction

Due to a deeply troubled U.S. economy, national security has not received the attention it deserves in the 2012 presidential election campaign from the candidates, the media and, by extension, the public. Yet the United States faces several daunting security challenges such as instability in the Middle East, an ongoing war in Afghanistan, an increasingly antagonistic China and cyber security threats – all of which will greet the next president on Inauguration Day, if not before. When the campaigning ends, the nation will still be at war, will continue to be the target of terrorist attacks and will continue to face nuclear threats from Iran and North Korea. The next president will need to grapple with these challenges and many more, while navigating a deeply polarized political environment that will require managing deep cuts to the nation's national security budgets.

To focus much-needed attention on today's pressing foreign and defense policy agenda, a group of experts at the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) has assembled a national security guide to the 2012 presidential election. It is intended to help American voters, global partners and other interested observers to better understand the national security issues that will impact their lives and the nation for the next decade and beyond. It is meant to help readers successfully navigate what little discussion of these issues is taking place during the presidential campaign and to encourage the public to press both candidates to address critical issues such as:

- Investing in a strong national defense that meets national security needs while achieving efficiencies that save taxpayer dollars
- Guiding the drawdown of American military forces in Afghanistan and determining the U.S. role after 2014
- Preventing Iran and North Korea from advancing their nuclear weapons programs
- Navigating the civil war in Syria and its repercussions in the region
- Managing the relationship with China and broader U.S. engagement in the Asia-Pacific
- Developing effective means to address challenges to the nation's cyber security
- Establishing policies that increase U.S. energy security while also combating climate change

Drawing on the expertise of CNAS scholars, this guide examines each of these challenges by defining the issue, providing background information and analysis, describing the primary decision points for the next president and raising questions for the candidates to address.

America's next president must lead the nation during a time of tremendous global change. Americans should encourage more vibrant debate about how the candidates would protect and advance America's national security interests at this critical juncture.

We would like to thank Adam Ahmad, Francisco Bencosme, Shawn Brimley, Sara Conneighton and Liz Fontaine for contributing to this guide.

Afghanistan

ISSUE

After more than a decade of war, the United States and its NATO partners plan to withdraw most of their military forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. Although coalition forces succeeded in their mission to oust al Qaeda, the Taliban remains a resilient fighting force. Elements of the Afghan government are severely corrupt, undermining U.S. efforts to develop it into a credible alternative to the Taliban. These challenges raise questions about the feasibility of U.S. and NATO plans to drawdown their forces while preserving the hard-fought gains of the last decade. Over the next two years coalition forces will seek to prevent a Taliban resurgence and strengthen Afghan security forces, while partnering with an imperfect civilian government.

BACKGROUND

The Longest U.S. War

The war in Afghanistan is now the longest war in America's history. Following the attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States and its Afghan partners quickly ousted the Taliban government, which was providing safe harbor to al Qaeda and its allies. Western governments set out to build a more stable, democratic government in Afghanistan after 25 years of war. Throughout the first years after the fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan remained relatively peaceful and a small number of coalition forces and development teams began a slow process to rebuild the Afghan government and military capacity.

After several years, however, the security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated. The Taliban regrouped in safe havens in Pakistan, with some assistance from rogue elements within Pakistan's security establishment, and escalated its guerilla campaign throughout the country. By the 2008 presidential election, U.S., NATO and Afghan casualties had reached record highs. As part of his presidential campaign platform, then-Senator Barack Obama pledged to re-focus U.S. attention on the war in Afghanistan instead of the war in Iraq.

The Surge

Upon entering office in 2009, President Obama immediately approved the deployment of 21,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan. In the fall of 2009, he authorized the deployment of an additional 30,000 U.S. forces for a temporary "surge," which would start withdrawing during the summer of 2011. At the peak of the surge, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) included nearly 100,000 U.S. troops and more than 40,000 troops from NATO and other coalition countries.

Afghanistan continued

Transition

As of October 2012, approximately 68,000 U.S. troops are deployed in Afghanistan. The troop surge from 2009 to 2011 allowed the United States to launch a major offensive against the Taliban in southern Afghanistan, which for a time succeeded in rolling back Taliban gains in provinces like Helmand and Kandahar, the Taliban's ancestral birthplace. In May 2012, NATO leaders agreed that by mid-2013 ISAF's primary focus would shift from combating the enemy to training, advising and assisting the Afghan National Security Forces as they take lead responsibility for providing security throughout the country. They pledged that this transfer of authority would take place concurrently with a transition to a much smaller, enduring U.S. and NATO presence starting in late 2014.

"While military resources have surged, progress toward building a stable civilian government has not kept pace."

Weak Governance

While military resources have surged, progress toward building a stable civilian government has not kept pace. Many national and provincial officials of President Hamid Karzai's administration are deeply corrupt and unaccountable. Weak governance raises questions about the sustainability of military progress, since it undermines the Karzai administration's credibility and fuels opposition to the foreign coalition partners who support it. It also creates opportunities for the Taliban to sow instability, particularly as NATO draws down or withdraws from many areas of the country. Afghanistan will see a presidential election in 2014, which will coincide with the U.S. and NATO drawdown. Constitutional term limits prevent Karzai from running again, and no clear frontrunner has emerged.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES

- How should the recent increase in insider attacks affect the future conduct of the war and the numbers of troops that should remain through 2014?
- What are U.S. interests in Afghanistan? What level of commitment in troops and funding is appropriate to secure those interests?
- What non-military objectives would you pursue in the region after 2014? How would you seek to stabilize Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan, both economically and politically?
- To what extent should the United States and coalition partners negotiate with the Taliban in order to stabilize Afghanistan and the region?

Afghanistan continued

Escalating Costs

Western publics have grown weary of the war – a trend exacerbated by the recent rise of insider, or "green-on-blue," attacks on ISAF forces by their Afghan counterparts. The war's cost, both in blood and treasure, weighs on coalition nations. More than 2,000 Americans have been killed and more than 17,500 have been wounded in 11 years of war. Approximately 70 percent have died since the surge began in 2009. According to a 2012 study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, the war's costs total nearly $650 billion dollars – $198 billion of which will be spent in 2012 and 2013.

DECISION POINTS

The next president will have to decide how to conduct the war and engage the Afghan government going forward:

- With input from his commanders in the field, the Afghan government and NATO and coalition partners, he must decide the pace of the U.S. troop drawdown from the current level of 68,000 troops to the 2014 level.
- He must decide how many troops will remain in Afghanistan after 2014 to conduct advisory and counterterrorism missions.
- He must determine if and how he wants to encourage Afghan government reform, ensure a free and fair election in 2014 and push forward stalled negotiations with the Taliban.
- He must decide the degree and manner of assistance he wants to offer to help develop a sustainable source of growth for the Afghan economy.
- He must decide what level of regional instability the United States is prepared to accept after the drawdown and how best to work with regional actors to mitigate it.

CNAS EXPERTS

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Defense Budget

ISSUE

With two wars winding down, a slow economic recovery and an escalating national debt, American leaders are weighing significant cuts to the U.S. defense budget. At the same time, policymakers recognize that the nation must continue to invest in its military capabilities, to ensure that the United States can confront rapidly evolving threats and to rebuild a war-weary force after a decade of constant conflict.

BACKGROUND

Matching Strategy and Budgets

The biggest challenge the next president will face is aligning his preferred defense strategy with available resources. President Obama has requested $525.4 billion for the base defense budget and an additional $88.5 billion in war funding for fiscal year (FY) 2013. Those resources must be spent in a way that enables the United States to confront current threats while also preventing and preparing for future challenges. A mismatch between ends, ways and means would create strategic risks.

The Department of Defense (DOD) issued strategic guidance in January 2012 that identifies a new set of priorities for the United States, as it emerges from a decade of war into a complex and unsettled security environment. The guidance highlights the many types of emerging threats, ranging from cyber attacks to extremists and non-state actors to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The new guidance also emphasizes the need to rebalance DOD's geographic focus toward the Asia-Pacific while still deterring conflicts and supporting partners in the broader Middle East.

Several factors influence calculations about how much defense spending is needed to protect U.S. national security. These include not only the changing global security landscape, but the balance of economic and fiscal pressures, including the ballooning national debt and sluggish U.S. economic growth. Moreover, high domestic unemployment has increased political pressure to maintain defense-related jobs in Congressional districts throughout all 50 states.

Sequestration

Current debates about the defense budget focus on the prospect of deep reductions resulting from the "sequester" process mandated by the bipartisan 2011 Budget Control Act (BCA). Unless Congress votes to change the law before January 1, 2013, sequestration will automatically cut the defense budget by $500 billion over the next 10 years (and will automatically cut the same amount from non-defense discretionary accounts). Since the BCA already requires the defense budget to be cut by $487 billion over the next decade, the total defense cuts would reach almost $1 trillion. In FY 2013, sequestration would reduce DOD's budget by about 11 percent, making it about the same as it was in 2007 (adjusted for inflation). By law, the sequester cuts must be applied equally across all programs and

Defense Budget continued

> "By law, the sequester cuts must be applied equally across all programs and accounts, which would prevent DOD from making strategic cuts that prioritize some programs over others and manage risk."

accounts, which would prevent DOD from making strategic cuts that prioritize some programs over others and manage risk.

Bipartisan Opposition

National security leaders and legislators from both parties, as well as both presidential candidates, have opposed sequestration based on concerns about the size and nature of the cuts. Yet, despite widespread opposition to automatic cuts, Congress has not agreed on how to reverse the process, because they are linked to the larger, ongoing debate about how to reduce deficits and the national debt in a way that balances both spending cuts and revenue increases.

DECISION POINTS

The next president must make several decisions regarding U.S. defense strategy and budgeting:

- He must work with Congress to craft defense budgets that provide sufficient resources to carry out America's national security strategy. That process will occur in a political environment that prioritizes deficit reduction but appears intolerant of raising taxes, cutting either defense or non-defense spending, or reforming entitlements.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES

- What are the biggest threats to American security, and what would you do to confront those threats?
- What level of defense spending is sufficient to protect the nation, and on what criteria would you base this decision?
- Which defense programs would you prioritize and which ones would you cut given the spending levels you propose?
- How would you ensure the U.S. military remains on the cutting edge of technology at a reasonable cost?
- How would you balance defense spending with spending on non-defense programs? What tradeoffs are involved?

Defense Budget continued

> "[The president] must decide whether, when and how the nation goes to war. He must ensure that the U.S. military maintains its best people, its high levels of combat readiness and its world-wide deployability during the coming drawdown."

- He must choose civilian national security leaders who can work with military leaders and Congress to effectively implement his vision for national defense.
- He must decide how to shape U.S. defense capabilities to deal with both immediate challenges and a range of emerging threats, while also acquiring the weapons and systems needed to ensure that the U.S. military maintains its technological dominance for decades to come.
- He must decide whether, when and how the nation goes to war. He must ensure that the U.S. military maintains its best people, its high levels of combat readiness and its world-wide deployability during the coming drawdown.

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China

ISSUE

Managing the U.S. relationship with China will rank among the most important foreign policy challenges for America's next president. The United States and China have clear differences, but as highly interdependent countries that share global economic and strategic interests, the two countries have more to gain from cooperation than outright competition. Leaders in both countries are focused on steering a deep and complex economic relationship. After Canada, China is the second largest trading partner of the United States, with trade in goods and services that totaled $539 billion in 2011. Still, a number of unresolved issues persist, including disagreements over China's currency, the yuan, which remains undervalued and China's weak protection of intellectual property rights. The United States is increasingly concerned about the growing number of cyber attacks originating in China, as well. The two countries diverge on such matters as China's support for North Korea and Iran, its muscular approach to regional territorial disputes and its military buildup as well as on issues of human rights, democracy and freedom of information.

BACKGROUND

China Rising

China's market-oriented reforms have produced unprecedented economic growth and have made China the world's second-largest economy. Although China's gross domestic product (GDP) has grown by an average rate of 10 percent per year since 1978, growth has slowed over the last year. Concerns continue about the potential for inflation, a possible housing bubble and growing local government debt. These problems matter intensely for the Chinese government because economic growth underpins domestic stability and regime legitimacy.

In the past 10 years, the Chinese government has funded a robust military modernization program, presumably intended to give China the ability to win a war against Taiwan and defeat or repel the U.S. military from the Western Pacific if it deems necessary. From 2000 to 2011, China's officially disclosed military budget grew at an average of 11.8 percent per year (adjusted for inflation), although that growth started from a very low base. The Pentagon estimates that China spent between $120 and $180 billion on its military in 2011, while the U.S. defense base budget in Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 was just over $530 billion.

Rebalancing

In the fall of 2011, the Obama administration announced a "pivot" or "rebalancing" of U.S. resources and attention to the Asia-Pacific region. The shift reflects the fact that the Asia-Pacific region will be a central driver of global economics and politics in the 21st century, and it

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reaffirms the U.S. commitment to the region after 10 years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The rebalancing to Asia is a multifaceted strategy that combines economic, diplomatic and strategic elements. The Obama administration has sought to deepen relations with traditional allies in the region and build stronger partnerships with emerging powers. It has engaged in economic statecraft and pursued a more diversified military force posture, and it has increased efforts to work with the region's leading multilateral institutions. China, however, sees the rebalancing as a U.S. effort to constrain its rise. Recent standoffs with the Philippines and Japan have reinforced Beijing's view that U.S. security commitments in the region often conflict with China's interests.

Future Challenges

China confronts serious future challenges, both abroad and at home. Internationally, China has established uncompromising positions on territorial disputes, such as the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute with Japan and the Scarborough Shoal dispute with the Philippines. These incidents raise concerns throughout the region about China's willingness to advance its claims through diplomatic, economic and military coercion.

Domestically, China is navigating a once-a-decade leadership transition. Although China's current Vice President Xi Jinping seems sure to become China's top leader, competition for the next rung of government positions – particularly on the Politburo Standing Committee, China's top decision-making body.

China's next leaders will face significant challenges at home. After decades of high-speed growth, the country is beginning to grapple with major demographic, economic, social and environmental issues. One of the greatest challenges involves shifting the country's economy so that growth rises through domestic consumption rather than by increasing exports. Recent

QUESTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES

- Do you consider China a strategic rival or a partner? How would you change current U.S. policies toward China?
- Economic competition between the United States and China continues to grow. How would you ensure China competes fairly without sparking a trade war?
- Do you consider China's military modernization a threat to the United States, and if so, how should the United States respond?
- Where do the interests of the United States and China converge, and how can they work together to achieve mutual benefits in these areas?
- How would you pressure China to improve its human rights record?

China continued

signs of a slowdown will only make that transformation harder, and in turn complicate the process of resolving bilateral economic issues. Slower growth means fewer jobs on both sides of the Pacific, further complicating the willingness of either the United States or China to compromise on issues with domestic economic implications.

DECISION POINTS

The next president will face a demanding agenda:

- He will need to manage strategic competition with China by creating initiatives to combat mistrust (such as broadening military-to-military engagement), while developing capabilities to counter China's growing military capabilities that are designed to prevent the United States from operating in contested areas.
- He must improve the U.S.-China trade relationship by encouraging and pressuring China to compete on a more level playing field. This means increasing protection for intellectual property rights, further appreciating China's currency to meet market rates and ensuring market access for foreign firms.
- He will need to urge China to fulfill its role as a responsible world power, including pressuring Iran and North Korea to end their pursuit of nuclear weapons and helping to create a global agreement to limit carbon emissions.
- He will need to increase U.S. economic competitiveness, which is the backbone of U.S. power in the region.
- He must press China to advance the rule of law and respect for human rights, including improving treatment of minorities and ensuring free and open access to information.

CNAS EXPERTS

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Iran

ISSUE

According to the International Atomic Energy Agency and U.S. intelligence reports, Iran is pursuing capabilities that would enable it to produce nuclear weapons should its political leadership decide to do so. Early in the Obama administration, the United States attempted to engage Tehran diplomatically, with the hopes of achieving a breakthrough or, at a minimum, garnering more support from the international community to pressure Iran. Currently, the United States and its partners are employing a dual-track strategy of pressure and diplomacy to convince Iran to abandon its nuclear ambitions. They have created a robust international sanctions regime that is badly hurting Iran's economy, and have tried to isolate the regime while remaining open to a negotiated solution. It remains unclear whether this approach will alter Tehran's nuclear course.

BACKGROUND

Antagonism between the United States and Iran dates back to 1953, when a U.S.-backed coup ousted Iran's democratically elected prime minister and restored the Pahlavi monarchy to power. Despised for his political repression and viewed as a puppet of the West, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was deposed in a 1979 revolution that led to the current Islamic Republic. The United States broke diplomatic ties with Iran in 1980, six months after Iranian students stormed the U.S. embassy and held 52 Americans hostage for 444 days.

The United States has long considered Iran a sponsor of terrorism and a contributor to unrest in Iraq and the broader region, and has criticized Iran's crackdown on domestic political opposition, including the 2009 Green Movement uprising. Recent tensions have focused on Iran's nuclear program. Iran is a signatory of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which allows states to pursue nuclear capabilities for peaceful civilian purposes (such as energy production and medicine). Yet Iran's track record of building covert uranium enrichment facilities, enriching more uranium than it needs for domestic use and conducting weapons-related research and development casts serious doubts on the peaceful intentions of the program. Iran's leaders deny that they are building a military nuclear program, but credible estimates suggest that the country could develop nuclear weapons within a few years if its leaders decide to do so. Furthermore, Iran has violated the NPT's safeguards by failing to declare all of its nuclear facilities and by denying complete access to international inspectors.

Sanctions

From 2006 to 2008, the Bush administration helped to orchestrate a series of U.N. Security Council resolutions to impose multilateral economic sanctions in order to pressure Tehran to fulfill its obligations under the NPT. President Obama shifted course when he took office by engaging Iran directly. When Iran failed to respond positively, the administration forged an international consensus to implement

Iran continued

unprecedented financial and energy sanctions. In response, the Iranian regime has resumed negotiations with the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council plus Germany) over its nuclear program, but the parties remain far apart and no agreement has been reached.

Military Strike

In the absence of a diplomatic solution, some in both the United States and Israel have called for a military strike against Iranian nuclear facilities before Iran crosses the threshold of weaponization. For example, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has made dire assessments of Iran's nuclear capabilities and warned that he might have no choice but to take military action before the spring or summer of 2013. Advocates of military force argue that the costs and risks associated with a nuclear Iran far outweigh the potential negative consequences of a strike, emphasizing Tehran's threats to "wipe Israel off the map" and the prospect that a nuclear-armed Iran could spark a wave of nuclear proliferation across the Middle East. Others have raised questions about whether a military strike would effectively degrade Iran's nuclear program. Skeptics also warn that military action could destabilize the region, increase oil prices, spark terrorism, rally the Iranian public around the regime, increase secrecy surrounding the Iranian nuclear program and strengthen Iranian resolve to develop a nuclear deterrent.

> "Some in both the United States and Israel have called for a military strike against Iranian nuclear facilities before Iran crosses the threshold of weaponization."

QUESTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES

- What should be the ultimate objective of U.S. policies towards Iran? Would you actively seek regime change or would you be willing to accept a diplomatic settlement that ends Iran's nuclear program but leaves the current regime in place?
- What would you do to stop Iran from building a nuclear bomb? Would you order a military strike and, if so, at what point?
- If Israel launches a unilateral military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, how would you respond? How would your decision affect the U.S. relationship with Israel and with the region? How would it affect international efforts to halt Iran's nuclear program?
- If Iran does develop a nuclear weapon despite these efforts, how would you respond?

Iran continued

DECISION POINTS

The next president will confront an Iran that is deeply isolated and struggling economically but one that remains on the path towards nuclear weapons capability:

- He will have to work with Israel and other regional partners to manage this challenge in a way that protects U.S. security interests as well as the interests of partners and allies.
- He will have to determine whether the United States can accept a civilian Iranian nuclear program that includes some domestic enrichment of uranium and, if it is acceptable, work with the P5+1 to reach a negotiated solution.
- Should pressure and diplomacy fail, Iran's nuclear progress will likely compel him to decide whether to use force against Iran sometime during the next term. That decision will profoundly affect regional security, the world economy and the global posture of U.S. military forces going forward.
- Regardless of his decision about the use of force, he will also need to continue to build and manage an international coalition that can sustain pressure on Iran if he wishes to sustain its economic and diplomatic isolation.

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CNAS EXPERTS

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- Dr. Colin Kahl, SENIOR FELLOW
- Dr. Marc Lynch, NON-RESIDENT SENIOR FELLOW

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Syria

ISSUE

After more than 18 months, the civil war in Syria continues unabated. President Bashar al-Asad's regime has escalated the use of force against Syrian rebels, even as the rebel movement resisting his rule has gained military momentum and international support. Syria's future remains uncertain, and policymakers cannot assume that the conflict will end soon. Regardless of Asad's fate, policymakers must seek ways to stop the bloodshed, secure Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles and prevent conflict from spreading across the wider Middle East.

BACKGROUND

The conflict in Syria began in March 2011, sparked by Arab uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. What started as peaceful protests evolved into an armed revolt, as Syrian rebels had little choice but to combat the violence of the Asad regime with force. The International Committee of the Red Cross has labeled the conflict a civil war, and over 20,000 people have been killed to date. Refugee flows to neighboring countries may reach 700,000 by the end of 2012, according to U.N. estimates.

Rebel Backing

The United States has provided non-lethal assistance to Syria's armed rebels, including communications equipment and command and control support. The United States is also working with elements of Syria's political opposition to encourage them to unify and develop plans for a political transition. Saudi Arabia and Qatar have provided funding, arms and ammunition to the rebels, and the United States is reportedly helping to coordinate the distribution of this equipment to rebel elements. Leaders of both countries believe that this assistance may enable the Syrian opposition to wear down the Asad regime. However, significant divisions within Syria's political and military opposition are frustrating this effort.

Asad's Allies

Iran backs the Asad regime, which allows it to use Syria as a supply route to Hezbollah in Lebanon. China and Russia have blocked international action on Syria at the U.N. Security Council, citing the need to respect national sovereignty. Russia has additional interests: The Asad regime reportedly bought $1 billion in military equipment from Russia in 2011, and the Syrian city of Tartus hosts the only naval base that Russia maintains outside the former Soviet Union.

Disparate Forces

While the Syrian rebels now increasingly control territory in pockets throughout Syria, particularly in the north, they continue to lack political cohesion or an overall military strategy. Some factions of Syria's armed rebel groups are loosely aligned under the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Some members of Syria's nascent political opposition movement have attempted to organize under the umbrella of the Syrian National Council (SNC) in order to formulate a post-Asad political strategy and engage foreign supporters. However, neither the FSA nor the SNC has developed a coherent vision or strategy for Syria's future that unites the many different elements of the political and military opposition. Reports of reprisal killings and growing numbers of al Qaeda-inspired groups inside the rebel movement's ranks have given U.S. policymakers pause as they consider increased support to the rebels.

Syria continued

Policy Options

Some western countries have been exploring the possibility of a limited intervention along the lines of the 2011 NATO mission in Libya. But circumstances in Syria are far less favorable and include deeper sectarian tensions, a geographically dispersed opposition, a far stronger Syrian military, the lack of political unity among the rebels and the lack of regional and international consensus on military action. Additionally, a growing number of al Qaeda-inspired groups are reportedly operating in Syria, which would likely attack any Western intervention forces. U.S. policymakers fear that overt military involvement in Syria could spiral downward quickly, which would embroil the United States in another war in the Middle East, fuel militant or national backlash against U.S. intervention and divert attention away from Asad's atrocities. And if substantial U.S. military assets were required in Syria, fewer forces and capabilities would be available for a military conflict with Iran, whether triggered by an Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear facilities or some other event.

At the same time, others fear that if no outside actors intervene militarily, atrocities against civilians will escalate and sectarian tensions will intensify. This could draw in more regional players, who may pursue militants across Syria's borders or support proxies operating in Syria. It could also create a safe haven for al Qaeda-inspired groups in Syria, and put Syria's substantial stockpile of chemical weapons at risk. As Syria's conflict persists, arms, militants and sectarian tensions could spill over to neighboring Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey and Jordan. Hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees have already fled to these neighboring countries, particularly Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, which are straining to absorb them. Most observers expect the war to rage on at least until Asad's departure and likely for a significant period of time afterwards, as groups that backed Asad continue to fight in a life-or-death struggle for power.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES

- What are America's interests in the Syrian civil war?
- What are the dangers of military intervention? What are the risks of not intervening?
- How would you work with allies and regional partners to achieve U.S. goals in Syria?
- How would you ensure that chemical weapons stockpiles are secure?
- How would your policy toward Syria affect your policies toward Iran?
- What should the United States do to alleviate humanitarian suffering resulting from Syria's conflict?

Syria continued

DECISION POINTS

The next president could face several different scenarios, ranging from an embattled Asad regime still holding onto power to a post-Asad Syria in which central control has disintegrated. If Syria's disparate opposition elements come together and create a strategy for the future of Syria, a managed political transition, where opposition and pro-Asad groups negotiate a power-sharing agreement, may still be possible. Any action by the next administration will require a complex blend of diplomacy, intelligence activities and economic initiatives, as well as possible military action. Several critical decisions will confront the next president:

- He will have to decide what role, if any, the United States should play in the conflict and what tools the United States should employ to try to achieve its objectives.
- Even if he does not want to intervene militarily, he may be forced to reconsider if Asad uses his chemical weapons or if there is a significant risk that those weapons might fall into the wrong hands.
- He will have to balance the challenges posed by the situation in Syria with other national and international priorities, including the ongoing issue of Iran's nuclear program and U.S. objectives in an uncertain Middle East.
- He will have to determine whether and how a military intervention in Syria could compromise U.S. planning and force posture arrangements for a possible conflict with Iran.
- He will have to decide whether, at some point, the humanitarian toll in Syria requires intervention to stop the violence and protect civilians.

EXPERTS

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North Korea

ISSUE

The authoritarian regime in North Korea (formally, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea or DPRK) presents a persistent and difficult challenge to U.S. policymakers. Despite past policies ranging from pressure and sanctions to engagement and assistance, North Korea continues to threaten U.S. security by developing nuclear weapons and long-range missiles. It also threatens the security of a U.S. ally, South Korea, through continued hostility on the Korean peninsula. North Korea resorted to lethal force as recently as 2010 when it shelled South Korea's Yeonpyeong Island and sank a South Korean warship – two of the most serious confrontations between the two nations since the end of the Korean War.

North Korean officials have suggested that they might be willing to return to the Six-Party Talks on de-nuclearizing the peninsula. But many experts express concern about North Korea's true intentions – especially since the country's Supreme People's Assembly amended the constitution to declare North Korea a nuclear-armed state. North Korea is seeking to expand its nuclear arsenal, which is presently estimated to include fewer than a dozen weapons. It is also developing long-range missiles that could reach U.S. territory, though tests so far have been unsuccessful.

BACKGROUND

Diplomatic Disappointments

The end of the Cold War ushered in hopes for improved relations between North and South Korea, which had been tense since the 1953 armistice that ended the Korean War. That optimism was dashed in January 2003, when North Korea announced it was withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Nearly a decade earlier, the United States and North Korea negotiated the 1994 Agreed Framework intended to freeze and eventually terminate North Korea's plutonium nuclear weapons program in exchange for oil shipments and the construction of two light-water nuclear reactors that would be difficult to divert to military use. That diplomatic bargain foundered in 2002 over the revelation that North Korea was secretly building a uranium-enrichment facility, and it withdrew from the NPT a few months later. In 2003, China, the United States, North and South Korea, Japan and Russia began new multilateral negotiations called the Six-Party Talks. But differences persisted and North Korea withdrew from the talks in 2009.

North-South Relations

From 1998 to 2007, South Korea launched a policy of engagement with the North popularly known as the "Sunshine Policy," despite actions such as Pyongyang's 2006 test of a small nuclear device. After 2007, however, North-South relations deteriorated. President Lee

North Korea continued

Myung-bak pursued a harder line with North Korea than his predecessors, while North Korea continued developing its capabilities. North Korea conducted a second nuclear test in 2009, and in 2010 it conducted several missile tests as well as two lethal military operations. South Korea responded by cutting off virtually all humanitarian and economic interaction. As CNAS scholar Patrick Cronin notes in a 2012 study, business activity at the Kaesong Industrial Complex, which includes some 123 South Korean businesses employing more than 50,000 North Koreans, remains the sole example of economic cooperation between the two countries. South Korea will elect a new president in December 2012, and both candidates have indicated that they will return to at least some form of engagement.

Succession in the North

Kim Jong-un, who assumed power in December 2011 following the death of his father, Kim Jong-il, has expressed notional interest in pursuing economic reforms. Thus far, there are no signs that serious economic liberalization is underway. About 60 percent of North Korea's 25 million people rely on government food rations, and more than one in five children is malnourished, according to the World Health Organization. Negotiations between the United States and North Korea over the country's nuclear program appeared to make progress in late February 2012, when North Korea reportedly agreed to forego nuclear and missile tests and suspend work at its Yongbyon uranium-enrichment plant in exchange for food aid. In April, however, North Korea tested a three-stage missile, which the United States considered an abrogation of the deal.

Uncertain Future

For decades, North Korea's behavior has been erratic and unpredictable. The months and years ahead could bring more provocations from North Korea, possibly including a third nuclear test, new missile launches,

QUESTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES

- How would you prevent North Korea from gaining additional nuclear weapons and long-range missiles?
- How would you engage with the newly elected president of South Korea, particularly one who chooses greater engagement with North Korea?
- How would you work with U.S. allies and partners worldwide if North Korea collapses?

North Korea continued

large-scale cyber attacks or further uses of lethal force. Such provocations could reignite tensions similar to those provoked by North Korea's shelling of South Korea's Yeonpyeong Island and sinking of the South Korean warship.

DECISION POINTS

North Korea will pose several tests for the next president:

- The next president will need to determine whether any diplomatic options exist for making progress on bilateral disagreements.
- He will need to respond to any use of force by North Korea in a rapid and effective but measured way, in coordination with U.S. allies.
- He must prepare for the likelihood that the newly elected South Korean government will seek a policy of greater engagement with North Korea, and decide whether he would support this policy.
- He must try to prevent North Korea's nuclear arsenal from growing, since a successful three-stage missile could pose a nuclear threat to American territory.
- He will need to prepare for the possibility of a sudden upheaval in North Korea, which could lead to a massive humanitarian disaster and refugee flows, insecure nuclear weapons and potential combat operations between the two Koreas, which could draw in both the U.S. and Chinese militaries.

CNAS EXPERTS

- Dr. David Asher, NON-RESIDENT SENIOR FELLOW
- Dr. Patrick Cronin, SENIOR ADVISOR AND SENIOR DIRECTOR OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC SECURITY PROGRAM
- Oriana Skylar Mastro, FELLOW
- Dr. Ely Ratner, FELLOW
- Zachary Hosford, RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

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Cyber Security

ISSUE

America's next president must maintain an open, resilient and secure Internet in partnership with private companies and governments around the world. With more than 242 million regular American users, the Internet has become a cornerstone of economic growth and innovation, a vital contributor to global communication and an integral part of American life. Yet, a range of cyber threats now endanger reliable access to information technology, as well as U.S. economic and national security interests. These threats include cyber warfare waged by both state and non-state actors, cyber espionage that steals valuable national secrets and the intellectual property of private companies, cyber crime that costs billions of dollars each year, and cyber agitation by those with political or ideological objectives. Policymakers across the political spectrum recognize the threat, but have not yet reached consensus about how to balance privacy and security, government regulation and private sector initiatives, and constraints on the Internet with the incredible freedom that has produced unprecedented economic and social gains. Debate on how and when to use offensive cyber weapons is in its infancy and the ways in which cyber conflicts may escalate are poorly understood.

BACKGROUND

Vulnerabilities

Cyber attackers with a range of motives are targeting critical infrastructure such as electricity grids, nuclear power plants, financial institutions and water treatment facilities. According to General Keith Alexander, who leads both the National Security Agency and U.S. Cyber Command, the number of attacks on critical infrastructure increased seventeenfold between 2009 and 2011. These attacks were initiated by criminal gangs, hackers and other nations. For instance, news reports in September 2012 revealed that Iranian hackers had successfully conducted massive distributed denial of service attacks against the websites of Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase & Co.

In addition, the pace of cyber espionage is accelerating. According to a 2011 report by the U.S. government, foreign hackers – including individuals and governments – are increasingly stealing military secrets, sensitive data, intellectual property and proprietary technologies that cost millions of dollars to develop and up to hundreds of millions of dollars in potential profits.

Cyber crime is also growing. Though it is hard to establish concrete estimates of the cost of cyber crime, the security firm Symantec estimates that cyber crime costs companies $114 billion each year and as much as $274 billion if the costs of recovery time are included.

Cyber Security continued

"Hacktivists" steal confidential information and use it to advance their own political or ideological agendas. In 2010 the group Wikileaks released thousands of sensitive U.S. diplomatic cables, creating tensions with allies and putting dissidents around the world at risk.

Public Needs in Private Hands

The U.S. government cannot address these cyber threats without actively engaging the private sector, because private industry owns and operates the vast majority of U.S. cyber networks and critical infrastructure. Private companies in the defense industrial base must also play a critical role, since they control networks containing sensitive information about U.S. military capabilities. The private sector is also the paramount source of technological innovations to prevent and respond to cyber threats.

"In August 2012, a bipartisan bill to address cyber security threats failed in the Senate."

Cyber Weapons

The United States continues to develop offensive cyber weapons and, according to media reports, has used these weapons to disrupt the Iranian nuclear program. In responding to cyber attacks, the U.S. government has clarified that it reserves the right to respond to a cyber attack through diplomatic, economic, military or cyber means. Debates about when and how to use cyber weapons – and how to prevent cyber conflicts from escalating into full-scale shooting wars – remains secretive and reportedly at early stages.

Failed Legislation

In August 2012, a bipartisan bill to address cyber security threats failed in the Senate. The bill foundered largely because business groups opposed its provisions

QUESTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES

- What strategies would you pursue to protect the nation against cyber attacks?
- How would you work with critical infrastructure providers to set cyber security standards and share information about cyber threats?
- How would you engage the private sector to prevent and respond to cyber threats?
- How would you work with Congress to enact cyber security legislation?
- How would you work with like-minded nations to ensure an open and secure Internet?
- Under what conditions do you think the United States should consider using a cyber weapon against an enemy? What are the costs and benefits associated with using cyber weapons?

Cyber Security continued

for voluntary cyber security standards. The Obama administration is now developing an executive order to achieve some of the objectives of that legislation. Not all provisions in the failed bill can be instituted through executive order. For example, an executive order cannot provide liability protection to companies that share sensitive information with the government, and it cannot exempt cyber hiring from standard civil service requirements.

DECISION POINTS

The next president must address a diverse range of cyber threats:

- He will need to work with like-minded nations and the private sector to increase cyber security while simultaneously promoting Internet freedom.
- He will need to work with Congress to pass legislation that protects critical infrastructure and facilitates the sharing of threat information while assuaging the concerns of privacy advocates and the business community.
- He must choose when and how to use cyber weapons, while considering the precedents these decisions will set for other countries.
- The president must develop a cyber security workforce and encourage the development of hardware, software and networks that will be less vulnerable to cyber attacks.

CNAS EXPERTS

- Shawn Brimley, SENIOR FELLOW
- Bob Butler, NON-RESIDENT SENIOR FELLOW
- Dr. Kristin Lord, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR OF STUDIES
- Dr. Irving Lachow, SENIOR FELLOW AND DIRECTOR OF THE PROGRAM ON U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY IN THE INFORMATION AGE

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Energy and Climate

ISSUE

Despite increased domestic oil and natural gas production, the United States remains vulnerable to disruptions in global energy markets. While U.S. production of low-cost natural gas can promote economic growth by reducing energy costs for U.S. businesses, domestic oil prices still remain tied to global supply and demand. As a result, the U.S. government will need to continue to help protect critical petroleum infrastructure globally, such as pipelines and oil export terminals, and the sea lanes that are essential to global oil trade. It must also invest in new technologies, such as next generation biofuels and advanced battery technology for electric vehicles, which will help dampen the impact of disruptions to the global oil market.

The United States also needs to develop policies that balance demand for affordable energy with the need to mitigate global climate change. Global increases in petroleum production may deter governments and businesses around the world, including the United States, from investing in new, cleaner energy technologies that could help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Yet, scientists project that climate change will harm American interests, particularly through rising sea levels that threaten vulnerable coastal communities and U.S. naval installations.

BACKGROUND

From Net Importer to Net Producer

After decades of increasing energy imports from abroad, U.S. domestic petroleum production has boomed over the last several years, since new production techniques (e.g., the combination of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking") have become economically viable. After peaking in 2005, U.S. petroleum imports declined from 60 percent of total liquid fuel consumption to 49 percent in 2010. At the same time, U.S. liquid fuel demand is shrinking, partly due to increased fuel efficiency standards for U.S. automobiles. As a result, U.S. oil demand has decreased about 10 percent since 2005. Together, these trends have bolstered U.S. energy security by ensuring more assured access to affordable energy.

Elusive Independence

While growth in U.S. oil and natural gas production has renewed talk of "energy independence" and hopes that the United States can insulate itself from disruptions to the global oil market, that goal remains distant. Despite America's shrinking reliance on imported crude, oil is a globally traded commodity, with prices set by world supply and demand. As long as U.S. consumers buy energy on the world market, prices will continue to be determined by market factors. For example, supply disruptions caused by unrest in the Middle East and increased demand from emerging economies still affect prices throughout the world, including in the United States, which directly

Energy and Climate Security continued

affect the global economy. As a result, the United States will have a continued stake in the Middle East, and will need to continue to work with petroleum-producing countries to protect critical infrastructure such as oil export terminals and protect sea lanes that are essential to oil trade.

Climate Change

Since Congress failed to enact comprehensive climate change legislation in 2009, this issue has received little attention from U.S. policymakers. Global efforts have also been slow, despite active efforts by those supporting the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to forge an international consensus to limit greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, global emissions continue to rise, and have increased by more than 3 percent since 2011. The consequences of global warming can be clearly seen in the Arctic. In 2012, for example, the summer melting of sea ice in the Arctic reached a record high, which may further accelerate future global warming, since shrinking ice sheets reflect less solar heat.

Climate change harms the United States in several ways, including large-scale flooding affecting U.S. coastal communities and naval installations, and more severe and sustained droughts affecting the American heartland. More severe and frequent typhoons, hurricanes and other storms are also likely. These changes harm vulnerable U.S. partners such as Vietnam and Indonesia, and exacerbate already dangerous conflicts in countries such as Yemen and Sudan. Experts agree that in order to prevent many of the worst outcomes – what scientists refer to as a "climate tipping point" – countries around the world must take steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CANDIDATES

- **Global action on reducing greenhouse emissions has stalled. Would you try to reinvigorate the effort and, if so, how?**
- **American energy production has soared in the last five years. How do you think this trend affects U.S. national security?**
- **How would you ensure that petroleum production and consumption in America helps promote the U.S. goal to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions?**
- **Do you believe that demand for renewable energy technologies will grow and make them more commercially viable? If so, what would you do to ensure that American companies are powerful players in the global marketplace?**
- **Given that energy independence is unrealistic, what would the goal of your energy policy be?**

Energy and Climate Security continued

DECISION POINTS

The next president must craft policies that increase U.S. energy security while also combating climate change:

- The president will need to develop a national energy strategy that emphasizes both access to affordable energy and minimizing climate change.
- He must accelerate the economic and commercial viability of renewable energy sources by investing in basic scientific research and joint private- and public-sector investments.
- He will need to use U.S. diplomatic and economic clout to promote global efforts to limit carbon emissions while minimizing the negative effects on world economic growth.
- He must share technologies and techniques that can help vulnerable countries blunt the impact of climate change (such as drought-resistant seeds and reinforced storm surge walls).
- He will have to decide whether to support ratification of the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, which would help the United States make sovereign claims on energy resources in the Arctic.

"The president will need to develop a national energy strategy that emphasizes both access to affordable energy and minimizing climate change."

CNAS EXPERTS

- Dr. Nancy Brune, NON-RESIDENT SENIOR FELLOW
- Will Rogers, BACEVICH FELLOW

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