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# Discriminate Power: A Strategy for a Sustainable National Security Posture

By Michael J. Mazarr  
&  
The NDU Strategy Study Group

May 2013



*"A nation must think before it acts."  
– Robert Strausz-Hupé*



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Members of the National Defense University Strategy Study Group included Rozlyn Engel, Bernard Finel, T.X. Hammes, Frank Hoffman, Thomas Lynch, and Gus Otto. Their work was also informed by a broader consultative group of National Defense University scholars and practitioners who, while not formally associated with the conclusions of the report, contributed greatly to its analysis. The group also benefited from dialogues with several outside individuals and groups during the process.

### *Executive Summary*

A detailed executive summary of this report can be found [here](#).

### *Disclaimer*

The views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and do not represent the opinions or conclusions of any element of the U.S. government, the Foreign Policy Research Institute or any organizations employing the authors.

## INTRODUCTION

In the coming decade, the constraints on U.S. foreign and defense policy—fiscal, social, geopolitical—are likely to intensify. At the same time, the security environment is evolving in ways that pose a more diverse array of risks, threats and opportunities. While foreign threats have dominated national security planning in the past, for example, future wars may more typically involve nontraditional foes and means threatening the homeland. This will change how we perceive and provide for national security, even as we confront new constraints.

This paper summarizes the work of a study group chartered to assess strategy under austerity for the next ten years. A core conclusion was that the United States is buying systems, forces and capabilities increasingly mismatched to the challenges, threats, and opportunities of the emerging environment. Military power, for example, cannot resolve many of the most complex and pressing challenges we confront—and yet our investments in national security remain vastly over-weighted to military instruments. The most likely threats to the U.S. homeland will come from nontraditional challenges such as biological pathogens, terrorism, cyber, and financial instruments, and yet resources for these issues remain minimal compared to traditional military instruments. At the same time, on our current trajectory, we will end up with a national security establishment dominated by salaries, health care, retirement costs, and a handful of staggeringly expensive major weapons systems. We are spending more and more to get less and less, in terms of relevant tools and influence.

One response to an era of austerity would be to take the existing national security infrastructure and shrink it down to a smaller version of its current posture. This is what large organizations tend to do in times of budgetary stress. Such a response is almost pre-ordained, as well, by the densely-woven web of mission requirements and capabilities analyses that have built up within the defense establishment. But it presumes that the current security posture—the sum of our capabilities, forces, doctrines, concepts and mindsets—will be just as relevant in the future, which is not likely to be the case.

Instead, the nation should take this opportunity for a fundamental rethinking. Providing for security has never demanded stubborn adherence to existing arrangements, and it certainly does not today. In fact, wasteful and sub-optimal investments will undercut American public support over the long haul, and stubbornly clinging to primacy as currently understood will erode global backing for a sustainable U.S. leadership position. The essential conclusion of this study is that, in order to deal with the implications of rising constraints on its power and align itself to a volatile era of wide-ranging threats, the United States must move from efforts to sustain primacy to a strategy of discrete and targeted influence that prioritizes capabilities of broad applicability and comparative advantage and relies more on frugal, indirect, and asymmetric strategies.

Elements of the current debate over U.S. national security policy suffer from a false dichotomy. Constrained means and reduced global patience for U.S. dominance make clear the need for restrained ambitions and greater selectivity. Some contend that the resulting constraints imply a dangerous weakness, that becoming less dominant invites challenge and instability. Yet this assumes an unnecessary choice: that the United States can be “either”

strong “or” discriminate and selective. A basic conclusion of this analysis is that it can—and must—be both; that we can continue to play a vibrant global role while addressing the *ways* in which we pursue our objectives.

Austerity need not undermine *what* the United States does, if we are prepared to think creatively about *how* we do it. We must deal with the widening gap between ends and means, not by abandoning American leadership, but by repeatedly asking how we can accomplish existing tasks in new ways.

#### EMERGING CONSTRAINTS ON U.S. POWER

The starting point for this analysis was the looming ends-means gap in U.S. national security strategy. We confront an era of constraint and austerity in a number of specific categories.<sup>1</sup>

The most urgent pressure on current defense plans is fiscal. Whether or not the recent sequestration process persists, the core defense budget will shrink from its recent peak. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) concludes that, under sequestration, future defense budgets (in 2013 dollars) will decline from DoD planned levels of roughly \$530 billion per year between 2015 and 2021 to amounts beginning at \$475 billion in 2015 and climbing only gradually to \$489 billion in 2021. In total over the period from 2013 to 2021, the CBO estimates an \$822 billion gap (in 2013 dollars) between the estimated cost of the DoD’s plan and expected resources.<sup>2</sup>

Defense is not the only national security budget to be facing severe cuts. After years of working to restore its personnel, the State Department is facing significant reductions. Other departments and agencies reflecting instruments of national power, from the Coast Guard to funds for domestic homeland security, also confront shortfalls.

The U.S. fiscal situation could improve over the next decade. Indeed it is already improving: budget cuts and tax increases have reduced the federal deficit and created surpluses in a number of states.<sup>3</sup> But the pressure on the national security account reflects a broader rebalancing between social programs and security spending throughout the advanced democracies, and is not likely to ease. Short-term improvements in the fiscal balance will soon be offset by the explosive growth of health care and retirement programs. While in theory lower security funding reflects a choice that could be reversed, this choice reflects shifting political and social priorities and emerging structural realities such as the pressure of entitlements. If it is a choice, it is a forced one.

A second major constraint is emerging within the defense budget itself, where a variety of support costs, ranging from bases to salaries to health care costs to pensions, are growing rapidly and crowding out instruments of power. Personnel costs have ballooned: Total pay and benefits average \$126,800 per person by 2011, up from \$73,300 in 2001. The CBO projects a 24 percent increase in personnel costs through 2021, from \$169 billion to \$209 billion. (The DoD’s own forecasts imply a slower cost growth, to only \$184 billion.) Given that CBO’s

projection is for a 2021 budget of only \$489 billion (again in 2013 dollars), if their higher figure is correct, personnel costs would rise to almost 43 percent of the defense budget.

A third constraint has to do with changes to the public's willingness to support international presence and military deployments. Recent polls reflect a desire for a more modest international posture and rising skepticism on a range of international engagements, from foreign aid to forward presence.<sup>4</sup> A current example is the crisis in Syria, where the appetite for U.S. intervention is very low despite significant risks of regional instability. Even if new threats arise, policy makers are likely to seek, and the American people may continue to demand, more selective ways of responding to them.

While fiscal and political challenges are today the most evident, changes in the context for power and influence present even more fundamental emerging limits to U.S. power. In a more multipolar world, characterized by state and non-state actors clamoring for greater influence over events and a voice in the setting of norms, the United States will be even less able to dictate outcomes. U.S. diplomatic initiatives will more regularly be challenged, with other states offering alternatives to boost their own global standing. Ranging from the independent stance of erstwhile friends like Pakistan to competing diplomatic proposals from Brazil and India to limits on support from allies in Europe to outright opposition from Moscow and Beijing, this accumulating trend will produce a more challenging environment for U.S. influence.

More generally, the emerging era is likely to erect many roadblocks to the effective employment of traditional forms of state-based power in general. States and non-state actors now have many means— from advanced versions of classic strategies like insurgency to social protest and information campaigns to active resistance in nontraditional forms like cyber war—to thwart efforts to employ military or even economic or informational power to coerce them.

Under the shadow of such constraints, some have proposed addressing the end-means gap by moving to ease exploding costs in personnel accounts and unnecessary expense in places like basing costs and redundant capabilities. Best business practices, such as consolidation of back office functions, can surely help. On the personnel front, without reform, the rising costs of pay and benefits will eat the heart out of U.S. security preparedness. Relatively modest changes that continue to reflect a full commitment to the solemn obligation to serve members could make a major difference in the cost curves of pay, pensions, and health care costs.<sup>5</sup> Indeed current policy intends to use such reforms as a major answer to the looming end-means gap.

But while such steps are necessary components of a larger strategy to resolve looming constraints, they are not, in and of themselves, *sufficient* answers. They will neither result in adequate savings nor realign the national security enterprise to new threats. More will be required—changes to our national security enterprise guided by a coherent strategic concept,

grounded in an understanding of the emerging strategic environment. U.S. national security posture must not merely become leaner; it must become more relevant and sustainable.

The leaders of the U.S. defense establishment have recognized the challenge of growing constraints, fiscal and otherwise, on U.S. national security strategy. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel laid out a bold agenda for reform in a recent speech, pointing to areas such as personnel, acquisition, requirements, and force structure. “It could turn out that making dramatic changes in each of these areas could prove unwise, untenable, or politically impossible,” Secretary Hagel said. “Yet we have no choice but to take a very close look and see how we can do all of this better.”<sup>6</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Martin Dempsey has argued that the emerging security environment “doesn’t call for larger or a smaller military. Instead, it calls for a different military, one capable of deterring, denying and defeating threats across the entire spectrum of conflict. ... The joint force we have is in need of reset,” Dempsey suggested, speaking of a “perishable opportunity to be innovative.”<sup>7</sup>

This effort has tried to take seriously such calls for innovation in security policy. It does so through several stages: Assessing the strategic context; proposing a revised U.S. global role; and offering specific recommendations for reform in three areas—capabilities to rethink, investments to make, and risks to assume.

#### THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT OVER THE NEXT DECADE

In order to shape a future U.S. security posture, we need to understand the world we will confront. The study group undertook an analysis of the global environment for U.S. strategy over the time period covered by the report—the next decade, out to 2023.

A wide range of trends and themes will shape the security environment over the next decade, the sum total of which does not point to a future with one leitmotif or organizing principle. Continuing disputes over resources, for example, and rising environmental pressures will create security dynamics. A major example is water supplies: By 2025 nearly two billion people will live in countries with scarce water.<sup>8</sup> The next decade is likely to be a time of uneven and often stagnant economic growth, the product of demographic factors, chronic fiscal imbalances, pension and health care burdens, “trapped capital” and other factors.<sup>9</sup> Governance crises will continue to emerge from the inability of institutions in many countries to sustain social cohesion and achieve compromise necessary to solve major problems.

But a number of leading themes and trends in the emerging environment stand out as especially important for U.S. strategy. First, *the coming decade will be a time of relatively low direct threat to the United States, but a wider range of potential threats*. The emerging era is characterized less by any single, defining threat than by a comprehensive uncertainty and volatility, caused by the intersection of the empowerment of a wider range of actors, the effect of selected new technologies, and the perturbations of an interdependent global system. Whether in the form of large-scale capital flows producing volatility, dangerous new pathogens crossing borders, or the activities of global nongovernmental groups in pushing



agendas and causing disruptions, dozens of variables are at work in the increasingly closed, inter-linked international system.

Meantime selected regions, notably Asia, North Africa and the Middle East, are likely to remain unstable under the influence of rapid social change and accelerating competition and nationalism. In North Africa and the Middle East alone, hugely disruptive transitions are underway that will take far more than a decade to play out. Pakistan's stability remains a persistent question, and its nuclear stand-off with India a continuing flashpoint. In Asia, rising nationalism is providing a hard edge to territorial and other disputes.

This broad theme has somewhat contradictory implications. On the one hand, persistent sources of volatility and instability call for a continuing American leadership role; U.S. global interests and commitments leave its security bound up with the international system, and an aggressive retrenchment would create unnecessary risk. On the other hand, because the need to deter consciously-directed, aggressive inter-state war is likely to remain low, the coming decade represents an opportunity to rebuild the foundations of U.S. strength and rebalance our assets, rather than to express the highest degree of deployable military power.

A second broad aspect of the emerging environment is that *the existing geopolitical reality reflects the substantial success of U.S. and allied efforts over the last half-century*. Through these efforts, norms, institutions and cooperative habits have been ingrained in the international system. One implication is that the essential goal of U.S. strategy should be to expand and evolve the norms and institutions that have served the causes of peace and development.

Third, *the fundamental systemic reality over the next decade is the emergence of a more dramatically multipolar or "multinodal" system* in which a larger number of states become more assertive in shaping world politics, and more non-state actors gain increasing influence as power diffuses.<sup>10</sup> Some of these fast-growing powers will probably hit social, political and economic speed bumps that make linear projections of "the rise of the rest" suspect.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the growing assertiveness characteristic of an era of multiple, increasingly influential powers will complicate the portrait of world politics. Certain states will act on their own in ways more frequently and on more issues than has been the case—both diplomatically (as in proposals to resolve Iranian nuclear issues) and militarily (as in France's strike in Mali). Non-state actors, from cyber militias to nongovernmental activist groups to terrorist networks, are gaining influence drastically out of proportion to their size or resources.

Most rising powers have many interests that overlap with America's. But they desire a greater say in how world politics is governed and how specific disputes are resolved. They want to be able to reshape rules they did not have a hand in writing—a process captured by the current summit process among the so-called BRICS nations to challenge the hegemony of Western nations and institutions. One result is that the post-war system of norms and institutions

established largely among like-minded democracies must now broaden to accommodate states with differing political systems, values, and perspectives.

China deserves special mention as the rising power with the size, governing values and ambitions to cause the most disruption in the international system. U.S. strategy must not view China as an inevitable adversary. If China follows the example of a number of other major Asian societies, it will transition to a more open, liberal system that will evolve and participate as a largely stabilizing actor in world politics. Such an outcome cannot be guaranteed or assumed, but it is the result most amenable to U.S. interests, and U.S. strategy should do its best to create the conditions for such a possibility. Nonetheless there is clear evidence of Beijing's determination to acquire hegemony in areas it considers core to its security, and worrisome signs of China's willingness to push the boundaries of longstanding norms of conduct in the post-war system. Some of China's actions appear designed to create *fait accompli* situations in key territorial and other claims.

This era of empowerment and competition is not likely to tip over into intentional aggression or a regular pattern of great power warfare. Certain norms—such as the prohibition on unprovoked aggression—have become fairly well established. Leading, modern states crave prosperity above all. The value of conquest has declined, and the ability of smaller powers to impose a steep price for aggression has grown. Nuclear weapons deter thoughts of intentional conquest.

The trend toward a more multipolar world does have a number of other implications. The risk of regional conflict may indeed become more pronounced—but less from revisionist state aggression than from accidental escalation and misperception growing out of generalized competition and internal political or economic turmoil. Current territorial disputes in Southeast Asia, North Korean belligerence, the India-Pakistan conflict, and the contest over Iran's nuclear program are leading examples of this risk. In a world of more widely shared influence, moreover, any sustainable strategy for global security must be devoted to bringing key rising powers into the management of the international system in more profound ways. Only by working to create a more shared sense of action can the burdens of global norms be spread. Yet we face a clear dilemma: The potential for productive partnerships may be more limited than we hope. There is no easy way to resolve this dilemma—only energetic, patient diplomacy combined with a willingness to take risk to empower and call forth effort from others.

A fourth key trend is *the rise of a number of powerful new technologies that empower a diverse array of actors*. Dramatic progress in robotics, for example, will produce completely or partially autonomous platforms from the size of a bee to helicopters and strategic bombers. Advances in nanotechnology are revolutionizing materials science and creating new avenues of innovation, industrial power, and potentially dangerous applications. Localized manufacturing, often called “3-D printing,” is set to advance from limited prototype stages to broader applications. New, exciting, but also potentially harmful methods for manipulating genetics could generate deadly pathogens, even in the hands of relatively small, non-state

groups. Using advancing information and social media technologies, crowd and mob effects can be catalyzed to affect political stability.

One implication of this trend is that, as the basis for such technologies continues to expand, even small groups will be able to experiment with society-affecting weapons. Such technologies also render the advantages of global retrenchment largely mythical: When homelands are regularly threatened, there is no way to disengage from global events to better preserve security. Finally, various technologies are rendering bases and forces stationed close to a potential aggressor's territory more vulnerable, a fact that demands more emphasis on stand-off strike.

A fifth and final leading trend deals with *risks to open, networked societies in the modern era*. The thickening of networks and relationships comes with vulnerabilities, new risks of disruption and volatility stemming not from armies storming across borders but from risks in a complex system that strike at the economic, social and psychological well-being of a people. As Chairman Dempsey has said, "in the future, our homeland will not be the sanctuary it has been."<sup>12</sup>

At one end of this spectrum lie conscious actions by malign actors using nontraditional security tools: cyber and financial hacking, terrorist acts, engineered biological threats, advanced robotics, manipulation of the information environment. At the other lie a collection of emergent, often unintended characteristics of a highly networked global system, including financial sector volatility, energy system interruptions and natural pathogens. More abstract but related threats include volatility stemming from socio-economic-ontological security demands called into question by rapid change and globalization and exacerbated by slow growth, inequity, and lack of effective governance. That trend is very much alive even in Europe, where a perception of ineffective governance and years of stagnant growth are helping to fuel the rise of right-wing, nativist and nationalist parties as well as street violence. Increasingly, the international environment is no longer composed of independent nations, regions or issues, but is becoming a single, interlinked system in which volatility in any area across a range of domains—economic, political, environmental, informational—affects the whole system.

Modern societies possess inherent bounce-back capabilities against such threats. Indeed the beauty of a highly-interlinked system may be that it is incredibly resilient to all but the most potent instabilities. But whether in the guise of terrorism, cyber attacks, or turbulence from the system (such as financial or environmental crises), the significance and *perceived* threat of these nontraditional threats are destined to grow for a combination of reasons: The relative damage that can be done; the diffusion of access and democratization of their use; and most of all the media impact, whose sensationalism will turn moderate acts into prominent crises. Increasingly, populations will feel a persistent sense of vulnerability and unease because of risks to homelands.

The sum total of the emerging environment's characteristics has three additional, comprehensive implications. First, because military power cannot resolve most of the era's key challenges, the United States needs a more comprehensive, powerful and integrated set of civilian instruments of power to deal with the likely range of challenges. Second, the inherent uncertainty in the environment points to the need for fungible, flexible capabilities that help ensure responsiveness against many possible futures. Third, the leading requirement is not to express the highest degree of military force to deal with an imminent risk of aggression. It is instead to *reinvest* in the long-term foundations of strength, including domestic social priorities; and to *reconfigure* the U.S. national security posture toward nontraditional threats and a range of civilian instruments of power.

Given several key elements of the environment, a leading strategic challenge over the next decade is to find a way through the medium term to the long-term, where new challenges and threats are emerging and where leadership must necessarily be expressed more multilaterally. This does not mean U.S. strategy can ignore current priorities such as nonproliferation or the risk of state aggression. But we can recognize that deterrence of most such threats is over-determined, and *on balance* our investments can prioritize other areas.

#### A CHANGED U.S. ROLE

The United States has long aimed to promote an open, liberal global society in terms of both trade and freedom, denying access to those who violate its principles, offering engagement as the price of reform, and promoting the rise of liberal societies. This essential commitment to a liberal global order is the consistent lodestar of U.S. security policy and represents an enduring "implicit grand strategy."<sup>13</sup> It is a grand strategy that has generated great success, particularly over the last half-century. This history, and the degree to which U.S. power continues to underwrite peace by offering a stabilizing function in many regions, offer powerful reasons to endorse continued U.S. global leadership. The United States confronts the challenge of sustaining this system while allowing others to have a greater say in its maintenance, and expressing U.S. influence in a more limited way.

In continuing to pursue this grand strategy, the fundamental requirements for advancing U.S. goals and interests over the next decade lie at home. This recognition does not imply a desire for retrenchment; quite the reverse. The vitality of the American society and economy is a precondition for sustainable U.S. engagement in the world, and contributes in essential ways to geopolitical stability. U.S. grand strategy has always used economics to set the stage for the success of discrete tools of statecraft: Global economic opportunity creates a more benign environment in which to resolve specific security disputes and challenges, and it underwrites long-term positive trends in growth and liberalization. And in fact, many other nations are looking to our ability to deal with our domestic challenges as a decisive signal of our ability to sustain reliable global engagement. Limiting national security spending to free resources for bold, innovative programs of domestic renewal represents a sensible tradeoff for long-term security.

## The Goals of U.S. Strategy

Some approaches would close the ends-means gap in U.S. strategy by shaving off ends—abandoning or seriously degrading key U.S. commitments to parts of the world or key issues. Yet a volatile and unpredictable moment in world politics does not call for large-scale retrenchment. The list of key U.S. national interests has remained fairly constant in many national security statements. They range from protection of the homeland as the leading interest to promoting the stability of key lines of communication and trade to building the capacity of friends and allies to protecting Americans abroad. In service of these interests, the United States should continue to sustain elements of the international system that have helped to underwrite peace over the last half-century, embracing a series of specific goals over the next ten years—to end the decade with:

- An international system moving in a positive rather than negative direction relative to states' and non-state actors' respect and support for key norms of conduct and institutions for coordination on common concerns;
- The gradual completion and fulfillment of the system through the integration of more members into more of its forums and norms, including new international accords and a system of enhanced burden sharing in a more multilateral context; and
- A United States underwriting these goals with an increasingly discriminate, targeted and shared approach to leadership and concepts of deploying power.

The *ends* of U.S. strategy, in other words, will remain largely constant. In order to address the growing constraints on U.S. power, the United States must address the *ways* in which it pursues its leading goals. A more selective approach does not ignore the question of what we do—it advises the United States to avoid commitments that seem urgent or have great political salience but are of secondary importance. That is not the same thing, however, as reconsidering broad U.S. global roles or commitments.

We have leeway to focus on ways, in part, because of the essentially defensive and collaborative character of our basic goals and interests. As much as U.S. foreign policy has at times been ambitious and even adventuristic, fundamental U.S. goals are largely conciliatory and shared—stability, liberal trade, the absence of aggression. A dominant position is not necessary to achieve these goals, which do not require absolute control over any aspect of the system. Indeed, over the long run seeking dominance is counterproductive; a more sustainable U.S. posture will be energetic and powerful, but also restrained and collaborative. Given the nature of our goals, therefore, and the reality of shared interests among leading and emerging powers, there should be ample room to pursue existing ends in more discriminate ways.

## A Strategy of Discriminate Power

Given the trends and realities outlined above, the essential U.S. global strategy over the next decade must shift from dominant primacy to a role as strategic catalyst and coordinator. Resort to often unilateral, dominant mindsets and approaches would give way to efforts to

become a trusted and enabling partner—a collaborative orchestration function. The United States would remain an unquestioned global leader, “first among equals,” but use its power and influence to spur the actions of networks, coalitions, emerging powers, and the international community generally. Rather than being prepared to fill any gap, it would seek to bring to relationships, networks, crises, conflicts, and persistent challenges those tools and qualities in which it excels.

In recognition of such a shift in mindset, the United States should embrace a new mindset of *discriminate power*, which can be defined as *the practice of sustainable global leadership through more collaborative, tailored and selective means*. The United States could seek discrimination in three broad categories:

1. *Pursuing targeted, catalytic areas of competitive advantage*, both capabilities and practices, that the United States can uniquely bring to the table to help meet challenges, while retaining a broad base of capabilities at lower levels to act alone when necessary;
2. *Pursuing existing goals and interests in more innovative, selective and asymmetrical ways*, which involves becoming more discriminate in how our concepts envision the application of power; and
3. *Enabling and spurring others to do more* in the combined, multilateral approach to crises, conflicts and persistent challenges.

The concept of discriminate power is based on a view—and analytical judgment—that the United States will seldom be forced to respond alone to the most serious risks. The incentives for stability and critical mass of responsible stakeholders in the system are now quite powerful. Bellicose and aggressive actors, whether state or non-state, energize counter-pressure in the system, if not always dramatic or quickly decisive—a pattern on display in regional and global reactions to Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, Iran and North Korea’s nuclear ambitions, and terrorism. The U.S. role need not be to serve as the sole or dominant counterweight to such risks, but to catalyze and organize a multilateral response. And the United States need not over-prepare to respond alone to *potential* dangers, because it can be confident that if such scenarios become real, they will generate responses well beyond America’s.

Yet pursuing such shared leadership is more difficult in practice than in theory. Many emerging powers remain hesitant to shoulder the burdens of leadership,<sup>14</sup> and the new era will uncover disagreements and divergent interests as often as shared risk. Key rising states (and even some especially powerful non-state actors) in many cases have yet to decide what sort of power they want to become. While many states may share general interests in such cases, moreover, their preferred strategies for resolving the challenges often differ widely.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the effort to multilateralize the responses to leading security challenges must continue and accelerate. It is likely to gain more traction to the degree that

the United States can demonstrate a growing comfort in allowing others to lead and to have the running room they increasingly desire. It is more likely that rising powers and partners with shared interests will do more if their voices are heard and their perspectives allowed more influence more often than the United States has done in the past. Washington will need more patience for allowing security strategies that reflect a range of perspectives. Taking this principle seriously will require hard choices—allowing partners access to cutting-edge technologies, for example, or living with solutions that are highly multilateral but do not reflect the ideal U.S. result.

This strategy also takes seriously the risks and costs of an intrusive U.S. presence, both globally and in particular contexts. While U.S. leadership and reassurance contribute to stability, all too often we have defaulted to a degree of interference and a size of footprint that are both excessive and counterproductive. Our approach is often to assume that American answers are the best ones; we often assume that our role is to instruct others on how to solve problems. A strategy of discriminate power will demand more listening and less talking, even as America continues to lead—a delicate and tricky balance to strike.

Discrimination also embodies a time factor. Questioning how we go about achieving our goals relates in part to how long we are willing to give ourselves to achieve a given goal, even one that seems urgent. Greater selectivity can mean simply being more patient in accomplishing things, an approach that makes particular sense when a state believes that long-term trends are running broadly in its favor. One reading of recent world history would suggest, for example, that twenty years from now, the provocative regimes in North Korea and Iran may have undergone significant change, and a rising, increasingly influential China may have become notably more liberalized and globally engaged. These outcomes are far from inevitable, of course, but neither was the dissolution of the Soviet Union. All of them, however, do reflect trends that have dominated world politics in recent decades. If the United States expects trends to generally work in its favor in the long-run, it can display more patience in managing short-term challenges rather than taking more costly, risky and urgent action.

### **Elements of Discrimination**

Under a strategy of discriminate power, the cardinal principle will be to invest in the capabilities, issues, and moments that possess the highest leverage potential—challenges that put global stability at most risk, the issues that represent the greatest potential to bring new actors into dynamic problem solving. Cardinal mistakes will include investing in capabilities that can be neutralized with relatively modest investments or buying systems that achieve for vast expense and high sophistication what could equally well be done for far less of both.

Discrimination applies to the missions and contingencies a nation undertakes as well as the capabilities it buys. To husband its resources and influence for truly critical moments, the United States must do a better job of being selective in its major commitments. The challenge, of course, is to determine what is critical and what is secondary, a judgment that will always

be subjective. In applying a greater selectivity in the choice of foreign adventures, we can make use of a number of criteria, including:

1. The hierarchy of U.S. interests;
2. The ability of U.S. power to make a decisive difference at reasonable cost;
3. The effect of the issue on the larger system; and
4. The willingness of others, especially local partners, to make a major commitment.

A strategy of discrimination demands substantial investments in the institutions of global leadership—international organizations, networks, treaties and agreements that commit the power and prestige of the United States to multilateral and collaborative processes. Examples could include training, capacity building and transferring technology to enhance the influence of regional organizations; expanding the membership of major global institutions; using trade agreements and other types of norm-building accords to help set the conditions for stability; and agreements to regulate areas of growing danger (such as cyber). This will require a growing U.S. willingness to subject itself to the rules it attempts to impose upon others, including global treaty commitments it has been reluctant to accept.

A mindset of discrimination prefers anticipatory and preventive to reactive approaches. And even while seeking discrimination, it will be crucial to avoid pushing efficiency to the point of undermining effectiveness. We have often forgotten that the two qualities stand in tension and should pursue capabilities and reforms designed to produce a reasonable balance. Some degree of redundancy in systems and capabilities provides for an effective, agile national security architecture that avoids the brittleness that comes with high degrees of efficiency.

The shift away from dominance will provoke debate. Some critics view any proposed reduction in defense spending, force structure, or the levels of forward presence as signals of American retrenchment, and invitations to conflict. But the United States has dramatically adjusted its presence in key areas—Europe and Korea, for example—over the last two decades, and its credibility did not vanish. U.S. defense spending has waxed and waned over the last half-century without fatally undermining the U.S. position. And such objections tend to mirror-image American concepts of credibility and deterrence, when others might not measure specific capabilities against precisely defined scenarios as much as gauging broad U.S. intent.

### **A Discriminate Approach to Critical Challenges**

Becoming more discriminate does not demand abandoning the essential ends or even established strategic concepts when approaching key strategic challenges, from China to Iran and North Korea, but rather pursuing them in different ways. Again it is not *what* the United States is after that must change, but rather *how* it goes about pursuing those objectives.



One example is the pressing challenge of managing China's rise. U.S. interests have produced a strategy of pursuing cooperation and working to integrate China into global institutions and norms, while making clear that aggression will not be rewarded. Yet current policy confronts an emerging China in blunt and direct ways that commit the United States to resource-intensive concepts of operations and risk sparking an adversarial relationship. The current approach builds U.S. regional presence on the foundation of military power, even as technological developments are challenging traditional means of deterrence: Air wings at large, fixed bases are subject to strikes by long-range conventional weapons; carriers are increasingly vulnerable to missiles and swarming attacks. This approach may also be unsustainable; we cannot afford an arms race, and regional partners do not want to be recruited into a regional stand-off between the two largest powers. In the long-run, U.S. military capabilities cannot on their own provide the sustainable basis for a balance of power in Asia.

A more discriminate approach would pursue the same ends through modified ways that maximize civilian tools of statecraft and the power of multilateral action, and rely on U.S. comparative advantages. Such an approach would point to a number of specific initiatives.

- *Emphasize and build the U.S. civilian presence in Asia*, from diplomacy toward regional disputes to expanded Coast Guard work with local partners to deepened trade accords to expanded civilian exchanges and fellowships to multilateral efforts in humanitarian actions. Such tools would be more able to gather multilateral involvement and less likely to spark a security dilemma dynamic with China.
- *Expand deterrence capabilities in nontraditional areas*, including cyber, informational tools with effects on society, long-range timely strike assets, and subsurface platforms. We can downplay some assets whose survivability is in question, such as air wings and carriers.
- Given the risk of unintended war and escalation, *build regional confidence building, de-escalation, and transparency measures*. These could include a regional ISR network.
- *Enhance the capacities of partners, but not solely or even dominantly in the military sphere*. We can increasingly rely on the multilateral dimensions of power to buttress U.S. efforts—not only through military collaboration and capacity but through initiatives across a wide range of issues and categories, from foreign aid to institutional capacity building to joint diplomatic initiatives.

In the case of a second major current issue, deterrence and nonproliferation in Iran and North Korea, U.S. strategy seeks to deter the local or regional adventurism of these states, to halt or roll back their nuclear programs, and ultimately to promote systemic change, whether peaceful unification or political liberalization. These goals remain relevant, but the ways we pursue them can change.

- *Powerful deterrence can be built on a wide range of coercive and strike elements as well as expanded partner capacity*, not merely forward deployed forces. We can enhance the multilateral contribution to deterrence by having other states and non-state actors clarify the consequences for specific aggressive actions.
- Provocations from these states serve only to further isolate them, and *we need not overreact to individual actions* with resource-intensive displays of power.
- In both cases *we can develop new strategies for medium-term systemic influence* through information and diplomatic channels.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS: A U.S. SECURITY STRATEGY OF DISCRIMINATE POWER

The concept of a United States playing the role of orchestrator, catalyst, and trusted partner can shed light on specific choices in national security policy. The United States needs a national security establishment that is:

1. Better aligned to the spectrum of risk and threat;
2. Better balanced among instruments of statecraft;
3. Built around the foundational capabilities, skills and mindsets that can underwrite responses to a wide range of scenarios;
4. Focused on comparative advantages rather than dominant power; and
5. Capable of operating with and developing the capacities of friends, allies and partners.

By taking these criteria as the basis for a revised national security posture, the United States can end the decade stronger, more secure, and with a reputation as a more trusted partner—all under a lower top-line national security budget.<sup>15</sup> A primary theme of this analysis is the changing value of security investments: Over the next decade, the amount of money we spend on defense, or the numbers of brigades or ships or aircraft we buy, will count for less than a range of less obvious but ultimately more important capabilities and qualities. This is not to suggest that deterrence of traditional military threats has become irrelevant. Far from it, and the posture outlined here is designed to preserve dominant military power—but to the reasonable, increasingly multilateral degree that the emerging environment demands, not measured against some arbitrary, boundless standard of dominance.

In determining priorities, this study looked at the demands of the emerging environment, current U.S. strengths, and the implications of a posture of discriminate power. It makes three broad recommendations, each with a number of associated actions.

## Rethinking Ways of Doing Business

The first broad recommendation is to rethink and revise a number of leading practices in national security policy with an eye to discrimination, focus, and alignment to the emerging security environment. This points to at least five areas of policy reform.

*Streamlined Forward Presence.* Under a strategy of discriminate power, the U.S. approach to forward presence, while still underwriting a commitment to key regions, would come to emphasize the development of partner capacities. Forward presence conveys U.S. commitment to regional security, promotes training and cooperation with allies and partners, and enhances deterrence by positioning U.S. forces close to potential conflicts. Abandoning U.S. presence in the name of efficiency would sacrifice important advantages. But the requirement to keep large numbers of U.S. ground and air forces in Europe, the Middle East and Asia has placed significant demands on the force. Heavy footprints can generate serious political reactions. In a number of large forward bases, practical and political constraints on training mean that some forward deployed U.S. forces cannot sustain high readiness. Growing area denial threats to large, fixed U.S. bases in key regions mean that wartime basis for forward presence is less obvious over time. In any case, the strategic rationale for forward deployment is not the same as it was during the Cold War, when maintaining deterrent tripwires at every rampart of communist enlargement was arguably critical to global security.

A core principle of a strategy of discriminate power is that the United States should contribute to allied and partner relations in areas of its competitive advantage, in ways designed to enhance the capacities of those friends and allies—and in most cases to the degree that friends and allies are willing to match that effort. A revised approach would promote a sustainable, long-term U.S. role in key regions by restructuring forward presence and focusing it on narrower goals: To underwrite cooperative relationships and enhance the capabilities of friends, allies and partners, and to sustain a visible U.S. commitment to regional security. In most places these two purposes can be served with smaller U.S. forces in place oriented more to building the capability and capacity of the host nation, preserving interoperability with U.S. forces, and maintaining the infrastructure for surge during crisis response.

One element of the resulting approach would be to broaden our understanding of what it means to be “present” in a region. Today presence is defined too dominantly in military terms—and even more simplistically, often in crude numbers rather than capabilities. Through statements and actions, we can build credible approaches to presence that embrace diplomatic activism, economic investment and trade, alliance commitments and partner relationships, civilian humanitarian response and maritime capacities, development efforts, and public-private partnerships.

This approach would have specific implications for U.S. forces in key regions. In Europe, where U.S. forces have already declined dramatically from their Cold War peak,<sup>16</sup> our NATO allies tend to be our most reliable and capable partners in global contingencies, and it makes sense to have a residual force to do regular training and exercising. Moreover, America’s European allies most commonly share its interests and values, and a presence that helps

energize a more vibrant and effective global role for the European Union is a valuable investment in U.S. interests. The mix of forces and total numbers, however, could change; one Brigade Combat Team (BCT) could be replaced by Special Forces optimized for training and force development. And efforts that reflect a broader notion of presence, such as combined programs in cyber and bio or expanded collaborative programs in threat finance or capacity building in key fragile states, should have growing emphasis.

In Korea, given the threat from the North, a true economy of force effort would not be wise and day-to-day deterrence remains a priority. The U.S. commitment must remain secure and alliance coordination and combined operational skill maintained. But these goals can be achieved with a slightly redesigned presence built around an artillery brigade, selected air units, rotational forces for training, and logistical units maintaining prepositioned equipment. At the same time we can extend the alliance beyond military deterrence to a comprehensive and global partnership with cooperation in a range of areas, from counter-piracy to aid and development to efforts to build new cyber norms.

The U.S. presence in Japan reassures allies and serves as a linchpin of Asian power projection. But that U.S. presence, especially in Okinawa, is politically controversial; large bases are increasingly vulnerable to area denial strategies such as missile attack; and restrictions on training limit the operational readiness of the Marines on Okinawa. An agreement to redeploy up to 9,000 of the 17,000 Marines on Okinawa has been delayed in part by cost concerns. A more discriminate approach would accelerate this process and build a sustainable presence around areas of comparative advantage—naval and air forces—while boosting collaboration in new areas of security, from cyber to organized crime to biohazards to humanitarian response.

Only one major threat in the Middle East—Iran—demands a credible deterrent posture. Forces close to the scene of potential aggression, such as carriers in the Gulf, can represent vulnerabilities as well as strength. A discriminate U.S. posture for the region would streamline forces in place, work toward strengthening local partners, and use rotational deployments as signals of commitment. The proposal would not abandon local presence, but focus it on partner development and a small handful of U.S. comparative advantages, such as missile defense and Special Warfare forces.

This revised approach to forward presence carries risk, and there are steps we can take to hedge against it. The development of a credible, broad-based capacity for timely long-range strike across multiple domains can bolster deterrent capabilities even as forward deployed forces are declining. Given the risk to forces and bases close to aggressors' territories, in any case, over time long-range strike will be more necessary. Because of shared interests in the face of potential aggression, we can also use multilateral agreements of various kinds to bolster regional deterrence even as on-station U.S. forces are declining. For example, China's own interests favor stability on the Korean Peninsula, and expanded contingency planning with Beijing, and efforts to add a strong Chinese voice to demands for peace and an end to provocations, would bolster deterrence.

*A New Mindset for Technology Development and Acquisition.* A second area that requires a rethinking is the role of high technology in the U.S. security posture and the associated question of acquisition policy. Surrendering U.S. technology overmatch would abandon the leading capability that has underpinned the relatively easy U.S. victories in the conventional phases of recent wars. Yet in some areas we are so far ahead of possible competitors that we have been largely competing against ourselves, and have made interoperability with allies difficult. We may also be paying top dollar for large production sets of fifth-generation versions of systems that will not be fielded for fifteen years and will no longer be decisive when they arrive in service in large numbers. Meantime, the ultra-high-end acquisition strategy violates the principle of flexibility and broad applicability for an era of fundamental uncertainty: By placing so many of our eggs in these few baskets, when we confront surprising contingencies, we invite a mismatch of capabilities and demands.

The existing approach is unsustainable. Even apart from current systems, such as the F-35 and large-deck aircraft carriers, the Defense Department now confronts a new generation of acquisition programs—led by a new nuclear missile submarine, a stealthy strategic bomber, and an Army combat vehicle—whose burgeoning costs could engulf the defense budget ten to twenty years from now.<sup>17</sup> One result is that, even with much larger base defense budgets, we are buying a much smaller military. Between 1980 and 2009, annual total budget authority in 2009 dollars rose from \$385 billion to \$687 billion (of which roughly \$150 billion accounted for war funding). And yet the number of Navy ships had plummeted from 530 in 1980 to 285 in 2009; the number of Air Force tactical aircraft from 2,769 to 1,493; and the number of Army divisions from 19 to 10.

An alternative approach, built on principles of discrimination and comparative advantage, would pursue a high-low mix that continues to invest in a relatively small number of high-end, cutting-edge systems as the “wedge” capabilities for the overall force while employing the lowest possible level of technology in systems where technology has no decisive value—and expanding basic research for medium-term breakthroughs. We cannot continue the habit of pursuing high technology at high expense for its own sake, loading down every new proposed system, whether an advanced fighter or an army truck, with hundreds of requirements that arbitrarily drive up technological sophistication and cost. The protection of space assets, small numbers of high-end tactical aircraft, missile defense, undersea warfare, and timely stand-off strike stand out as candidates for wedge capabilities. Meantime we can safely procure additional numbers of current-generation systems—strike aircraft (F-16, F-18), nuclear missile submarines, ground combat vehicles—for the majority of the force.<sup>18</sup>

*Overambitious Warfighting Concepts.* The challenge of rethinking current ways of doing business is especially powerful in the realm of operational concepts. Rather than the victim of asymmetric and creative approaches, we should be their author.

One example is to avoid concepts that demand power projection into the airspace of leading contender states to achieve defensive and deterrent missions that could be fully accomplished

with less aggressive concepts. Any approaches that threaten operations deep into rivals' homelands during regional conflict would be unnecessary, provocative and counterproductive. We can achieve our goals and serve our interests with approaches that involve denying would-be aggressors their aims through deterrent and area denial approaches of our own.<sup>19</sup> One recent survey of U.S. deterrent approaches in Asia argued that one alternative to forward-leaning postures—"conditional offense/defense," which would preserve U.S. regional leadership but with aim for a better balance between strategies of deterrence and reassurance—could serve many U.S. interests at less expense and with less provocation.<sup>20</sup> Similar conceptual shifts might be appropriate for the Persian Gulf, aimed at denying Iranian ambitions in a deterrent guise.

Operationally, a deterrent versus escalatory approach would address austerity by shifting the long-term cost burden to a would-be aggressor. A concept like Air-Sea Battle appears to impose vast requirements—and costs—on us, while allowing potential competitors to find cheaper, asymmetric ways to defeat our intentions. Shifting to approaches based on denying would-be aggressors their goals would turn that dynamic on its head.

Such an approach would be cheaper, requiring fewer and less sophisticated systems. (In the South China Sea and related areas, for example, it would suggest that we need fewer F-22 or F-35 aircraft for airspace penetration. It should allow a greater role for missile-firing submarines, long-range unmanned platforms, and other forms of timely strike rather than aircraft carriers.) It would be more feasible, because improving capabilities in the hands of adversaries will make more aggressive, offensive forms of regional deterrence less possible over time. And it will be easier to integrate allies into defensively-oriented deterrent postures. A major focus of such an emphasis would be to enhance the area denial capabilities of allies, friends and partners, so that the United States would not be dominantly responsible for regional defense.

A similar rethinking is required for counterinsurgency doctrine. This is already underway, but a strategy of discriminate power would formalize a "light footprint" approach combining advisory and SOF tools with the efforts of local partners. It would formally reject, in strategy and contingency planning preparations, the idea of long-term, large-scale U.S. foreign counterinsurgency: If a local partner is incapable of providing the bulk of the fighting forces necessary for the effort then the campaign is not likely to be won with massive external intervention.

*Active-Duty Maritime Assets.* In general terms, the United States should preserve a balanced joint force in service of the principle of flexible, broad-scope capabilities. And yet there is a compelling argument to weight that balance in favor of maritime forces as the core of agile, flexible U.S. global military power. We should, however, rethink the character of the maritime force we plan to deploy.

Maritime forces can provide presence capacity even as foreign basing assets decline, project power in a wide range of contingencies, and demonstrate American resolve at key moments.<sup>21</sup>

They also offer opportunities to train, exercise and partner with other nations and to deter and respond to a wide range of risks and threats.

At the same time, major naval vessels are increasingly vulnerable in an era of emerging strategic strike and swarming assets.<sup>22</sup> In the future a president may be unwilling to deploy a carrier anywhere near theaters such as the Straits of Hormuz or Taiwan, given the risks to a \$14-billion platform. Carriers are also expensive relative to other forms of naval power projection: A recent CBO estimate suggests that maintaining a single carrier and its air wing costs nearly \$2.4 billion *per year* in direct, indirect and overhead costs—whereas each attack submarine costs about \$130 million.<sup>23</sup>

Under a strategy of discrimination, we can view carriers as temporary power-projection assets. The more we develop a wider array of timely stand-off strike capabilities, the less the carrier will stand out as the default instrument for placing kinetic power onto targets. A future navy is therefore likely to end up with fewer large-deck carriers and a larger proportion of smaller, more stealthy, and subsurface combatants operating under a new concept of integrated and diverse power projection and cooperative maritime security. As it moves in this direction, the Navy should rethink the Littoral Combat Ship, whose value is relatively low. The Navy should use funds from most future planned LCS procurement for a combination of some degree of cost savings, but also new investments in additional *Burke*-class ships, new smaller combatants (a new-generation true frigate or destroyer optimized for a presence mission), missile-firing submarines, and unmanned stealthy aircraft.

*Nuclear Deterrent Forces.* The U.S. nuclear deterrent plays an important role in sustaining a credible U.S. posture in key regions. Allies who depend on the U.S. arsenal look to it as a key pillar of U.S. reassurance. In a world of proliferating nuclear capabilities, a secure and reliable deterrent will be critical. But this does not imply that the deterrent must retain its current size, posture, guise—or fulfill all the entire infrastructure and nuclear force modernization now envisioned. Spending on nuclear infrastructure and force modernization continues to balloon. If associated programs such as the new nuclear missile submarine are included, these investments threaten to crowd out other capabilities.

Relatively small numbers of nuclear weapons can have an outsized deterrent effect. Continued progress on nuclear reductions would be an important sign of workable relations with Russia, and build legitimacy for U.S. Nonproliferation Treaty demands. Some elements of the modernization plan, such as revised versions of tactical nuclear weapons designed for Europe, seem badly out of touch with current realities. In a series of nuclear posture reviews, the United States has already moved away from many aspects of its Cold War nuclear posture. This progress could continue with a new, even more fundamental review that could produce a plan for lower numbers, reductions in non-deployed warheads, and a constrained but still meaningful program of infrastructure and force modernization to ensure the reliability and credibility of a smaller force.

## Prioritize Investments

A second broad recommendation is that, even as the United States maintains broad, flexible capabilities for an era of volatility and uncertainty, it can be selective in its priority investments. Key capabilities are those most attuned to the rising threats in the new environment, those that represent areas of disproportionate U.S. comparative advantage, and those which sustain foundational components of power and security to be prepared for a wide range of challenges. The text box below lays out areas deserving priority.

### SUMMARY: AREAS OF EMPHASIS IN SECURITY PLANNING

#### *Capabilities Demanding Enhancement to Meet Security Challenges of Emerging Environment*

- Capacities for resilience against new array of threats to societies—cyber, bio, economic
- Expanded and integrated civilian instruments of power—but reformed and rethought

#### *Capabilities of Comparative Advantage*

- Diplomatic skill to build new norms and rules of the road on key issues
- Human capital and quality of personnel
- Research, development and innovation
- Intellectual capital of the national security enterprise (education, training, research, awareness)
- Global awareness—ISR, intelligence; increasingly open-source
- Wedge capabilities in selected areas: Advanced tactical air, C4/ISR
- Timely stand-off strike
- Space systems
- Classic Special Warfare forces for training, partner relations, long-term advising

*Nontraditional Security Requirements: Resilience and New Technologies.* The first is the requirement to enhance our readiness for nontraditional security risks and threats. Current investment policy is vastly over-weighted toward traditional military contingencies. Alternative areas include cyber defense, not merely in military categories but throughout society; cyber offensive capabilities for defense and daily operations; critical infrastructure protection generally, to include energy; space systems defense; and defenses against pathogens, either natural or engineered. Specific actions to enhance our resilience would include protecting critical infrastructure from a range of threats including cyber disruption, nuclear EMP, and severe space weather; investments in and collaboration and sharing of best practices among local and regional institutions of emergency response; preparing for biological outbreaks, natural or man-made; and continuing to work on renewable, localized energy options.

*Nonmilitary Tools of Influence.* Most of the challenges we confront in the next decade are not amenable to military solutions. The most effective approaches will come in economic, diplomatic, and informational tools, employed patiently and to achieve catalytic effects on local circumstances. Nonmilitary tools are essential to any sustainable campaign against



extremism, for example: A key lesson of the last ten years is that kinetic counterterrorism, while perhaps appropriate in constrained ways and for a limited duration against the most high-value targets, risks exacerbating the problem if used too much or for too long. Diplomacy represents the foundation for dialogue, negotiations, and the development of new norms and rules of the road on key security issues where global accords would be an economical answer. A range of other capabilities—from the monetary and financial know-how of Treasury to the nonmilitary partnership and humanitarian capacities of the Coast Guard to legal and police advisory offices of the Justice Department—play a critical role in responding to the range of challenges in the strategic environment.

It is not always the right answer to throw more resources at a capability just because of its growing importance. Many of these nonmilitary tools simply don't require personnel or funding on the scale of military capabilities. In some cases, the right answer might merely be avoiding draconian cuts to a program that works well—such as the Peace Corps. In other cases adding more staff or budget might not be as useful as revised operating procedures that make better use of the funds already being spent. In foreign aid, for example, we must accelerate movement toward models that replace a planning methodology with often smaller-scale projects involving high degrees of local ownership and multilateral coordination.

Yet there is persuasive evidence, from experience and the character of the environment, that enhanced resources in a number of these capabilities would have strong return on investment. Admittedly there is only room here for a suggestive discussion of the specific tools to be developed. More detail will have to flow from a more comprehensive analysis of the most cost-effective, agile and flexible nonmilitary tools. Examples of such capabilities include:

- Discretionary resources available to embassies for small-scale local public diplomacy and development projects, which often have large multiplier effects.
- Funding for scholarship and exchange programs, which have built so many tens of thousands of crucial relationships.
- The overall size of the State Department's Foreign Service personnel pool (including USAID) to provide support for an expanded array of global engagements.<sup>24</sup>
- The size and resourcing of interagency teams devoted to capacity building and training in developing or fragile state contexts.
- A bolstered Coast Guard, which plays a major role in partner development and nonmilitary presence.
- A rapid reaction crisis response fund to provide for sustained, preventive investments early in crises, perhaps built on the State-Defense Global Security Contingency Fund.

- Pursuing more partnerships to bring ideas and energy of nongovernmental institutions to the promotion of U.S. goals. An example is USAID’s Higher Education Solutions Network, which has funded “development labs” at a number of leading universities to generate critical analysis of existing aid practices and innovative models for the future.

*Mechanisms of Global Awareness: Intelligence, C4/ISR.* A third area of emphasis is the U.S. comparative advantage as a provider of intelligence, transparency, awareness, and foresight. This requires investments in the practice of intelligence as well as technologies of global surveillance. An implication of the trends above, however, is also that the environment of the future will be increasingly open source; the forms of information necessary for decision makers in government will be more from the open world than stolen information. Another required reform is rethinking the types and degrees of knowledge we gather to inform judgment, and the institutions that do the gathering through open source information and public-private assessment networks. A specific concept reflecting this priority would be an open-access ISR network in Asia, a combination of open-source intelligence and a basic level of surveillance. Countries could be invited to join who were willing to contribute capabilities and knowledge to the network. It would help preserve stability by providing regular awareness of events, as well as building the foundation of collective action.

*Timely Stand-Off Strike.* Major systems placed close to enemy homelands are becoming more vulnerable. Moreover having deterrent and warfighting capabilities to deal with the new category of security threats will demand an ability to offer options of long-range, survivable forms of retaliation. Growing capabilities in this area would thus help offset reductions in fixed forward presence assets. The United States should build a suite of balanced and overlapping stand-off strike systems with the capacity to react, or be threatened for deterrent purpose, in timely ways. These could range from attack submarines firing cruise missiles to non-stealthy bombers firing long-range precision strike to long-range, carrier-based unmanned systems to the use of offensive cyber. Part of the concept here is to think of stand-off strike as a flexible concept that applies across various domains and is not limited to the kinetic, or even military, realm. Indeed there may be room to develop new concepts or doctrines for the employment of stand-off strike in a number of complementary areas for enhance deterrent effect.

*Personnel Policies and Career Tracks.* Maintenance and improvement of our human capital is arguably the most important determinant of a national security enterprise capable of creative, agile responses to future challenges. But our policies and investment choices do not match our rhetoric.

In era when most responsibilities of U.S. military personnel will involve a range of issues short of fighting, for example, it becomes essential to shape effective career tracks that allow officers to develop military operational skills *and also* to become more well-rounded, agile and creative thinkers. Yet the assignment and promotion systems of all the services remain antiquated, byzantine and often punitive.<sup>25</sup> Services favor combat arms specialties over

advisory, strategic, public affairs, or political posts. The focus on developing creative thinkers with a wide range of experiences remains secondary.

Throughout the national security enterprise—in intelligence, diplomacy, foreign assistance and others areas no less than the military—thousands of highly talented young people leave service every year because of career assignment frustrations, bureaucratic barriers to independent and creative action, and a robotic training system.<sup>26</sup> This problem will only worsen as generations of empowered young people continue to enter government service and collide with the realities of stifling bureaucratic culture.

Addressing this challenge will require taking on hallowed views of what it means to be a military professional, and the default expectations of a military career. But developing the right kind of personnel for the complex challenges of the future, and creating a more flexible and agile defense establishment, demand nothing less.

*Intellectual Foundations of Excellence: Education, Training, Research.* Between the world wars, the United States preserved significant investments in education, training, exercises, and research in ways that would prepare a thoughtful, innovative and creative class of officers and leaders for the challenges ahead. The capabilities most suited to dealing with an environment of uncertainty are not material, because any given weapons system might be ill-suited to future demands. They are human, cognitive, and relational: The thought processes of military officers and other national security officials, and the networks of relationships both among them and between them and foreign counterparts.

Today, however, austerity is being allowed to hit all categories equally, without thought to the relative importance of the intellectual foundations of excellence and agility. Budgets and priority given to education—from joint professional military education (JPME) to government-funded civilian graduate education for officers and professionals to the State Department and Directorate of National Intelligence’s schools—must remain steady and, in fact, grow. They reflect a tiny proportion of overall security investments and have disproportionate payoff.

*RDT&E Funding.* Investments in basic research and development will lay the foundations to deal with unforeseen contingencies beyond the next decade and hedge against threatening new developments in the various categories of technology outlined above. Because the next decade is not likely to be a period of high imminent threat, continuing to push technological boundaries and respond to new breakthroughs in the hands of others is more important than fielding large numbers of the most advanced technology systems. We should constantly be on the lookout for the “next big thing.” Such an approach is not reflected in current investments, however: In FY2013, for example, just \$2 billion of the Defense Department’s overall RDT&E budget went for basic research, and another roughly \$4.5 billion was for applied research. The vast majority focused on systems development.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, in an open source world, preserving existing technologies is becoming less and less reliable as a security strategy.

Innovation is becoming more important than ever, to stay ahead of competitors with new technologies, systems and techniques.

### **Taking Calculated Risk**

Apart from places to continue a strong emphasis, a strategy of discriminate power must point to areas in which we can take some risk. One example is in large-scale, short notice ground combat operations. A reasonably balanced joint force oriented somewhat more toward maritime capabilities—a force with a smaller, but not drastically reduced, ground component—would remain capable of fighting and winning traditional land wars against any likely adversary. Relatively small numbers of U.S. ground forces supplemented with key wedge capabilities—C4/ISR, precision strike, air dominance, special operating forces, space assets—can defeat far larger enemy ground components.

Extended stability operations such as those that have taxed U.S. forces so heavily over the last decade, however, demand tens or hundreds of thousands of troops, devoted for months or years at a time. And some postulated scenarios for war in Korea relate to outsized requirements for U.S. ground forces. The ability to undertake large-scale, short-notice ground combat operations from the active force alone is an area where we can assume some strategic risk. We could, for example, transfer a substantial proportion of any reinforcement component designated for a Korean contingency to the reserve force. In a discriminate approach, the United States is focusing on its areas of comparative advantage; and if the alliance leaders determine that additional increments of active duty ground forces are required, South Korea is in a better position to add them. An implication of this approach would be a moderated requirement for active-duty ground combat forces and use creative active/reserve combinations to meet requirements at lower active force levels.

We can hedge against the additional risk in this area with reserve component forces optimized for such duties and capable of being activated within a relatively short time; larger special forces capabilities which could be surged into such a requirement; collaboration with partners and allies to undertake any such mission as a fully multilateral enterprise; and finally, the use of more modest concepts for dealing with such contingencies that do not require years of stability operations and counterinsurgency operations conducted by U.S. forces.

### **A Posture for a New Strategic Environment**

The sum total of these recommendations would support a revised U.S. approach to meeting its commitments in the world. The strategy outlined here deals with a looming ends-means mismatch, not by abandoning specific ends, but by changing the ways in which we meet them, and the balance of means in which we invest.

Based on the considerations outlined in this report, we believe that the leaders of the U.S. defense and security establishment could take a package of initial actions designed to send a clear signal of the need for substantial change in ways of doing business.

- Develop new concepts of integrated civilian power across domains to achieve U.S. objectives and reflect U.S. presence in key regions.
- Work with other agencies to help sustain and expand investment and a more coordinated interagency process on a key nontraditional security risk, such as biological pathogens.
- Form an independent task group within the Joint Staff to develop a plan to transform the military personnel system to promote creative and innovative career paths, sensible assignment patterns, and related goals.
- Propose an initiative designed to symbolize a commitment to multilateral efforts, promotion of stability and crisis management; one example would be an open-access ISR and awareness network in the Pacific.
- Develop an elaborated concept for timely, long-range strike across domains to bolster global deterrent and warfighting capacity when local deployments may shrink.
- Reverse recent cuts in military education, research and exchange programs to promote critical thinking leaders across the national security enterprise.
- Request a plan for the long-term collaborative enhancement of defensive area denial capabilities in the hands of allies and partners.
- Request a plan for increasing the emphasis on basic and applied research within Defense RDT&E as opposed to systems development.
- Order the Army to go back to the drawing board on its plans for future combat vehicles.
- Order the Navy to plan for a future fleet of similar overall size, but based on a more comprehensive power projection concept that relies less on large-deck carriers and restricts or eliminates further purchase of the Littoral Combat Ship.
- Order the Air Force to develop a revised modernization plan using a modest purchase of F-35 Joint Strike Fighters as a “wedge” capability while continuing to modernize with additional purchases of current generation strike aircraft.

Recommendations like these, of course, are only a part of the answer. Far more difficult is summoning the political will necessary to make the hard choices that are now fairly apparent if we want a strategic posture that is sustainable and aligned to the character of the emerging environment. We *know* that the military instrument of power is over-emphasized. We *know* that the quality of our human capital will be a critical determinant of our ability to respond to

future contingencies. We *know* that the existing acquisition program is unaffordable and misaligned to the range of challenges we face.

We are not yet acting as if we took these truths seriously. We must do so—gradually but with accelerating seriousness—if we are to be ready for the demands of the coming decade.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> One argument on this score is Michael J. Mazarr, “The Risks of Ignoring Strategic Insolvency,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (Fall 2012). Similar analysis can be found in Andrew Krepinevich, Simon Chin, and Todd Harrison, *Strategy in Austerity* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2012), 18-35.

<sup>2</sup> See U.S. Congressional Budget Office, “Approaches for Scaling Back the Defense Department’s Budget Plans,” March 18, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Congressional Budget Office, “Updated Budget Projections: Fiscal Years 2013 to 2023,” May 14, 2013, at <http://www.cbo.gov/publication/44172>.

<sup>4</sup> Lydia Saad, “Growing Minority Wants Minimal U.S. Role in World Affairs,” Gallup Politics Report, February 21, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> CBO estimates that limiting growth in military pay to the inflation rate might save between \$25 billion and \$45 billion (in 2013 dollars) through 2021. Cost-sharing in the form of a premium for Medicare-eligible retirees and family members, slightly higher Tricare premiums, and slightly higher deductibles and copayments could save anywhere from \$1 billion to \$10 billion annually depending on the specific character of the changes. It must be remembered that benefits now defended as sacrosanct are relatively modern inventions, or have been recently increased: Military basic pay, for example, rose 62 percent faster than inflation between 1998 and 2012 and substantially faster than comparable private sector pay growth. Other reforms could also help: Changing the housing allowance from 100 percent of civilian costs to 90 percent would save \$1.4 billion. Ending redundancies in military commissaries and ending the subsidy to the system would save almost a billion a year; Cindy Williams, “Making Defense Affordable,” The Brookings Institution, February 2013; CBO, “Approaches,” 22-23.

<sup>6</sup> Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, Remarks at the National Defense University, April 3, 2013, available at <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=5213>

<sup>7</sup> General Martin Dempsey, Speech at the 2012 Joint Warfighting Conference and Exposition, May 16, 2012, available at <http://www.jcs.mil/speech.aspx?id=1698>

<sup>8</sup> McKinsey and Co. sees demand rising by 40 percent within two decades, and by 50 percent in rapidly growing emerging markets. McKinsey and Company, *Charting Our Water Future* (McKinsey and Co., 2009), available at [http://www.mckinsey.com/App\\_Media/Reports/Water/Charting\\_Our\\_Water\\_Future\\_Full\\_Report\\_001.pdf](http://www.mckinsey.com/App_Media/Reports/Water/Charting_Our_Water_Future_Full_Report_001.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> The World Economic Forum surveyed constraints on economic performance and concluded that a return to pre-2008 growth levels “looks increasingly unlikely”: In the G-7 countries, the WEF notes, nonfinancial debt had reached 300 percent of GDP; the world was still clawing out of the financial crisis; demographic factors will put crushing pressure on economies as

working-age sectors continue to shrink and the burdens of the aging grow; The World Economic Forum, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds* (Geneva: WEF, 2013), vi.

<sup>10</sup> The U.S. National Intelligence Council, for example, did an analysis based on a “four power index”—GDP, military spending, population size and technology—and suggests that the U.S. share of global power will decline between 2010 and 2030 from an index value of 24 to about 17, and the EU’s from about 17 to just under 10—whereas China’s will rise from about 13 to nearly 20 and India’s from 7 to about 15; U.S. National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds* (Washington, D.C.: DNI, December 2012), 17.

<sup>11</sup> See Ruchir Sharma, “Broken BRICs: Why the Rest Stopped Rising,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 6 (November-December 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Dempsey, Speech to 2012 Warfighting Conference.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Russell Mead has emphasized this point. See Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> One recent analysis of India’s reluctance to step into the role its own strategic culture claims for it is Manjari Chatterjee Miller, “India’s Feeble Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92, No. 3 (May-June 2013).

<sup>15</sup> In fact even smaller budgets are likely to remain very high by historical standards. Even after sequestration, the base DoD budget for 2013 would still match its counterpart from as recently as 2007, and run 7 percent *above* average base budget funding since 1980.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. forces have dropped from over 250,000 during the Cold War to 55,000 in 2001 down to current plans for post-2014 presence of 2 BCTs plus support, about 29,000 troops.

<sup>17</sup> The cost of a Navy destroyer doubled (in constant dollars) from \$2.2 billion to \$4.3 billion from the *Arleigh Burke* to the *Zumwalt* class. The F-35 is now a \$400 billion program. The tooth-to-tail ratio, a product of supporting high-technology weapons systems, had shifted over time to a much smaller tooth. Some 16 percent of U.S. military personnel are in combat specialties. These figures, and the broader argument, are derived from Daniel R. Lake, “Technology, Qualitative Superiority, and the Overstretched American Military,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Winter 2012.

<sup>18</sup> One of the most urgent areas to resolve acquisition challenges is in the area of tactical aviation, in part because of the status, and anticipated cost, of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program. This capability is important, but can be viewed as a “wedge” rather than something that the whole force requires. We recommend reducing the purchase to the absolute minimum necessary number to sustain a reasonable deployment posture going forward—on the order of several hundred total airframes, all in the U.S. Air Force variant. Alternative approaches are available that would invest smaller amounts in additional F-15s, F-16s and F-18s, use the existing F-22 and growing F-35 fleets as wedge capabilities for high-threat air defense



environments, and develop a coherent approach to unmanned aircraft as a more integral part of the force going forward.

<sup>19</sup> One argument to this effect is made in Andrew F. Krepinevich, “Strategy in a Time of Austerity,” *Foreign Affairs*, November-December 2012.

<sup>20</sup> See Michael D. Swaine et al., *China’s Military and the U.S.-Japan Alliance in 2030: A Net Assessment* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> As one recent Stimson Center report pointed out, naval power can “project forces far from U.S. shores in a rotational, expeditionary manner without requiring permanent bases on other nations’ territory” and therefore provides “flexible surface, air, and sub-surface forces without becoming entangled in conflicts and political circumstances on the ground”; Henry L. Stimson Center, “A New U.S. Defense Strategy for a New Era” (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2012), 33.

<sup>22</sup> An outstanding recent analysis of the challenges confronting U.S. naval strategy is David C. Gompert, *Sea Power and American Interests in the Western Pacific* (Santa Monica, CA: 2013).

<sup>23</sup> CBO, “Approaches,” 19.

<sup>24</sup> The Department of State’s Diplomacy 3.0 project, which began taking on more staff in 2009, has begun to make up the shortfall, but not nearly enough and in the wrong areas: Of the 3,500 new hires, only 1,200 are FSOs in field. Specific examples of shortfalls are legion. When the Arab Spring hit Tunisia, for example, and the U.S. mission there was deluged with new requirements—for reporting to Washington, for outreach to the country’s newly active democracy and civic sector—it requested but could not acquire additional staff to address the new needs. And now budget cuts threaten all this progress.

<sup>25</sup> See Tim Kane, *Bleeding Talent* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). For a related discussion of personnel issues in current policy, see also Fernando M. Luján, “Light Footprints: The Future of American Military Intervention,” Center for a New American Security, March 2013.

<sup>26</sup> A 2011 study surveyed promising junior military officers who had left service before a 20-year career. Military pay levels and operational tempo—commonly viewed as major sources of career frustration—in fact ranked low as reasons for their early departure. Instead, “The number one reported reason for separation among our respondents was limited ability to control their own careers. Frustration with a one-size-fits-all system was by far the most common complaint, with emphasis on bureaucratic personnel processes that respondents called ‘broken,’ ‘archaic,’ and ‘dysfunctional.’” The second commonest reason for leaving was “frustration with military bureaucracy. ... Nearly half felt the military did a poor job at identifying and rewarding traits such as creativity, as opposed to qualities such as endurance or ability to follow orders. See Sayce Falk and Sasha Rogers, “Junior Military Officer

Retention: Challenges and Opportunities,” Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, March 2011.

<sup>27</sup> John F. Sargent, “Federal Research and Development Funding: FY2013,” U.S. Congressional Research Service, October 1, 2012, 16.



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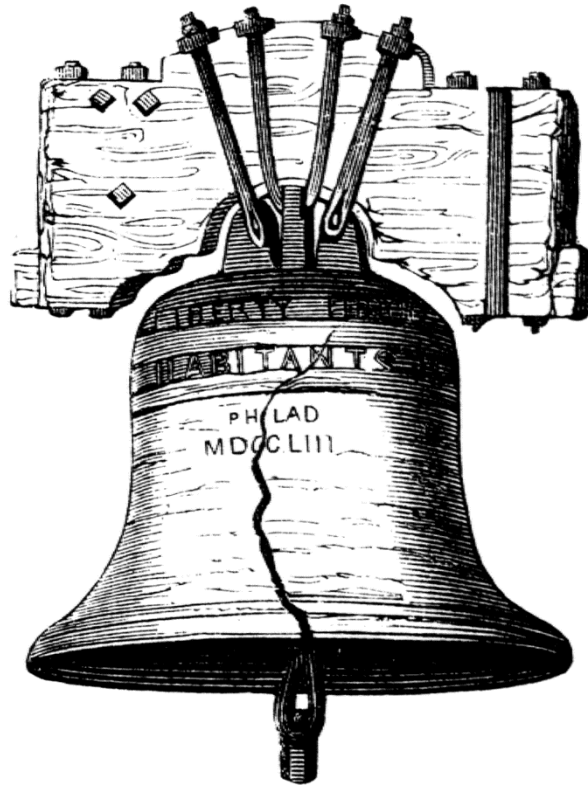
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