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**Fighting the “Good Fight”: An Assessment of Democratic Proposals
For a New National Security Strategy**

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ABSTRACT

Many Democratic Party security policy proposals have been developed in response to the Bush Administration’s actions. Ranging from Peter Beinart’s *The Good Fight* to the Democratic Leadership Council’s Progressive Policy Institution book to left-leaning think tank proposals, this material contains positives, negatives, and “sins of omission” that need to be fully addressed. The first priority is to broaden the definition of security to include protection from threats to human life, with the military as one of many tools available. Strength should not be equated with spending, but with the application of the right tools to the right problems.

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For a New National Security Strategy**

by William D. Hartung

At the end of its second term, the flaws in the Bush administration’s national security policy are painfully apparent. From the debacle of “preemptive war” in Iraq, to the abuses of human rights carried out at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, to the administration’s program of secret domestic wiretapping, there is ample room for criticism of the administration’s post-9/11 policies.¹ Add to this the Bush administration’s disdain for international agreements from the Kyoto protocol to the International Criminal Court, and you have a policy with immense human, economic, and diplomatic costs that will take years to recover from.

One would think that these flaws in the Bush foreign policy would open the way to wide-ranging critiques and proposed alternatives from key leaders and analysts in the Democratic Party. For the most part, this has not been the case. While a number of Democratic proposals have contained potential improvements in U.S. security policy, they have not addressed the fundamental assumptions underlying the Bush policy.

For example, a brief outline of a “Real Security” policy released on March 29th of 2006 with the endorsement of Senate Minority leader Harry Reid (D-NV) and House Minority leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) – now majority leader and speaker of the house, respectively -- makes a number of useful suggestions while dodging the most important issues.² Positive elements of the plan include a call for accelerating efforts to “[s]ecure loose nuclear materials that terrorists could use to build nuclear weapons or ‘dirty bombs.’” Amazingly enough, despite all of its talk about stopping the spread of nuclear

weapons, the Bush team failed to increase funding for this purpose, and even tried to cut it in the immediate aftermath of September 11th.

Another positive element of the official Democratic plan is a pledge to promote energy efficiency and alternative fuels. The menu of new sources cited in the document is broad, ranging from bio-fuels to clean coal to solar and wind energy, but there are no priorities set as to which of these alternatives deserves the most focus and investment. A more concrete approach that talks about where to invest and how long it would take for different sources to make a difference would offer a much stronger contrast with Bush's unfulfilled promise to end America's "addiction to oil" at the same time that he was pursuing policies that have helped create record profits for oil companies.

Aside from these two planks, the official Democratic security platform contains much to criticize. It speaks naively of a commitment to "[e]liminate Osama Bin Laden" and "destroy terrorist networks like Al Qaeda." This tough talk is not backed up with any indication of *how* this will be done, nor does it entail any recognition that Al Qaeda is a "network of networks" that can operate with or without Osama Bin Laden. A more realistic long-term goal than an attempt to "destroy" Al Qaeda militarily would be to make it less relevant by addressing the political, economic, ideological, and security concerns that allow it to recruit new members while spawning unconnected "imitators" of its methods. While the Democratic document mentions these factors, it contradicts itself when it implies that Al Qaeda can be "destroyed" as if it were a conventional military organization.

Perhaps the most objectionable element of the Democratic plan is its implication that it may be necessary to *increase* military spending beyond the levels already reached

during the Bush buildup. With the “regular” military budget weighing in at \$440 billion per year, plus another \$140 to \$150 billion in “emergency” spending on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. military spending weighs in at nearly \$600 billion in proposed spending for FY2008, higher than the peak levels reached during the Reagan buildup or the Vietnam War. Yet the Democratic statement is silent on both the need and the possibilities for cutting this bloated budget, and instead speaks of the need to “Rebuild a state-of-the-art military by making needed investments in equipment and manpower so that we can project power to protect America wherever and whenever necessary.”

The document makes no mention of cuts in *unnneeded* Cold War era weapons systems like the F-22 fighter plane, the Virginia class attack submarine, the Osprey aircraft, and a number of other major systems that were designed to address projected Soviet capabilities that no longer exist. A more logical approach would be to finance new programs from the tens of billions in annual savings to be garnered from cutting unnecessary weapons programs, and to reconsider the U.S. “cover the globe” military strategy, which implies the need to get anywhere in the world quickly and defeat adversaries with or without allies. The Iraq War should offer a cautionary tale about this open-ended, military-dominated approach to security.

There are other “sins of omission” in the Democratic strategy that cannot be ignored in assessing its potential efficacy. There is no discussion of further reductions in the U.S. arsenal of nuclear overkill, which now stands at 10,000 strategic warheads, over 5,700 of which are on active status. There is no position taken on the ill-considered U.S.-India nuclear deal, which threatens to eviscerate the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty by offering nuclear technology to a non-signatory of the treaty on terms far more generous

than those available to nations participating in the NPT. There is no suggestion that the Democrats would renounce the use of force or the threat of “regime change” as part of deals with Iran and North Korea over their nuclear programs. In fact, William Perry, who served as Secretary of Defense in the Clinton administration and later played a key role in keeping negotiations with North Korea on track, called for military strikes against a North Korean *test* of a ballistic missile that occurred in the summer of 2006.³

There is also no indication that a Democratic security policy would substantially cut back the costly, unworkable missile defense program, which is now running at \$9 to \$10 billion per year and has consumed over \$130 billion of taxpayer money since Ronald Reagan’s 1983 “Star Wars” speech.

Action on all of these fronts would put the U.S. in a better position to persuade other nations to put aside their nascent nuclear weapons programs.

Peter Beinart’s ‘Good Fight’

A book length proposal that bears some similarities to the official Democratic position – and with a raft of recent proposals from a network of Democratic-leaning think tanks -- is contained in Peter Beinart’s The Good Fight: Why Liberals – and Only Liberals – Can Win the War on Terror and Make America Great Again. His book has been embraced by Democratic stalwarts such as Madeleine Albright, and may have some impact on the positions ultimately adopted by the Democratic leadership beyond the bare bones proposals set out in the “Real Security” plan. Beinart’s piece has many positive elements, but they are more than offset by his messianic pursuit of the notion of restoring “American greatness,” by force if necessary.

Among Beinart's most constructive themes is his promotion of the need to work closely with allies and international institutions in cases of military intervention and nation building – an approach that is a polar opposite of the Bush administration's approach to its intervention in Iraq. He also makes a critical point in noting that American success abroad requires the pursuit of justice at home.

Where Beinart's thesis goes astray is in his advocacy of open-ended U.S. intervention to stabilize 'failed states.' The breadth of Beinart's proposed mission for the U.S. military is stunning:

“It would be naïve . . . to think that freedom, even broadly defined . . . is enough to defeat jihadism. When governments lose control of their territory, unleashing threats that spill beyond their borders, no amount of investment or aid will help unless someone re-establishes order. Most of the time, that someone will be the government, bolstered by outside help. But some governments cannot reassert control and others are themselves the root of the problem. From the Middle East to South Asia, from the Horn of Africa to the Sahel, the United States may need to enter stateless zones, capture or kill the jihadists taking refuge there, and stay long enough to begin rebuilding the state.”⁴

After four years and over \$400 billion committed or spent in Iraq – a war which Beinart supported – one is hard-pressed to know when the “beginning of the rebuilding of the state” will have been accomplished in any given intervention. Even with the assistance of the United Nations, NATO, and other key allies, these exercises in nation-building are likely to be costly, difficult, and uncertain. What is needed is a new, non-military approach to helping the citizens of failed states and repressive regimes attain the basic human rights they will need to change their own governments. This may be a slow, frustrating approach, but it is far preferable to a policy of attempting to spread democracy and stability at gun point.

The logical concomitant to Beinart's ambitious military agenda is a stable or growing military budget. He argues that "when liberals casually urge cutting the defense budget, although military spending made possible American interventions in the Balkans and Afghanistan, they are succumbing to the old siren song of purity and abdicating their responsibility to do what [Reinhold] Niebuhr urged: make the tragic choices that defending freedom requires."⁵ This approach leaves no room for eliminating wasteful or unnecessary programs *within* the military budget, and seems to embrace the dubious proposition that a certain dollar amount devoted to defense is the only appropriate measure of current and future effectiveness. Nor would new interventions along the lines of those in Kosovo and Afghanistan require military spending above and beyond current levels, given that one-quarter to one-third of current expenditures are tied to the ill-advised occupation of Iraq, a strategic blunder of the highest order that should not be repeated in any even vaguely comparable scenario in the future.

Beinart's support for high Pentagon budgets can be deduced not only from his military agenda, but also from his ideology. He has simplistically divided the Democratic elite into "anti-totalitarian liberals" and "anti-imperialists." In his view, it is only the anti-totalitarian liberals who recognize the threat to America's existence posed by Islamic jihadists, and therefore advocate that we must spend and do whatever it takes to "win." Unfortunately, his view of the problem is tilted towards a monolithic view of the "jihadist threat" which in many ways parallels the monolithic view of the communist threat that led United States foreign policy in so many counterproductive directions during the Cold War era.

Beinart speaks kindly of the good old days of “tough” anti-communist Democrats like Harry Truman and John F. Kennedy, without giving adequate attention to the flaws in the global anti-communist creed. It was Kennedy who campaigned on the issue of a phony “missile gap,” essentially accusing the administration of General Dwight Eisenhower of being “soft on communism.” Likewise, it was Kennedy who embraced the doctrine of counterinsurgency, which opened the door to an accelerating U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and who supported the disastrous “Bay of Pigs” invasion of Cuba.

This is not to suggest that the Kennedy administration was without substantial achievements, from support – albeit equivocal in some respects – for the civil rights movement, to the partial nuclear test ban treaty, to the call to put a man on the moon, to the creation of the Peace Corps, to his broader call to responsibility that energized a whole generation of bright young men and women to consider careers in public service. But the administration’s major flaws, noted above, were all rooted in part in a monolithic view of communism as a coherent global movement rather than as a series of “communisms” from the Soviet bloc, to China, to various Third World nationalist movements, to quasi-independent socialist states like Yugoslavia. A more complex view of the “communist threat” would have saved the United States a great deal of blood and treasure without compromising the larger goal of containing and serving as a catalyst for the decline and fall of the Soviet Union.

Similarly, Beinart’s view of jihadism as a cohesive totalitarian movement misses the critical fact that Al Qaeda and its imitators do *not* form a unified movement, and that therefore his prescription for “capturing and killing jihadists” in failed states and then

engaging in the beginnings of nation-building runs the risk of major miscalculations that could be immensely costly. As George Packer has noted, an effective approach to combating terrorism requires specific knowledge of each of the nations and groups involved, not the blanket approach that Beinart seems to be suggesting.⁶ It's not a question of *whether* to use force, but how to do so judiciously, in cases where it can make a difference.

“With All Our Might”: The Progressive Alternative?

In its book With All Our Might: A Progressive Strategy for Defeating Jihadism and Defending Liberty (Rowman and Littlefield, 2006), the Progressive Policy Institute – the research arm of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) – has produced a comprehensive set of proposals for reforming U.S. military strategy. Given its past and current ties with Democratic leaders such as Bill Clinton, Al Gore, and the now independent, hard-line Sen. Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut, the Institute's views on these issues should be taken seriously.

The Institute's analysis shares Peter Beinart's call for a “muscular liberalism” in the tradition of Harry Truman, John F. Kennedy, and Bill Clinton. It also calls for a “bigger and better military,” without any real clarity about what this larger military should be used for, other than reducing the public opinion gap that has historically favored Republicans over Democrats in matters of national security.⁷

That being said, the DLC analysis contains some excellent ideas for expanding non-military forms of engagement. Even more impressive, and contrary to most approaches, the DLC/PPI plan puts forward a mechanism for funding its ideas, by reversing a substantial portion of the Bush administration's tax cuts.

One set of proposals has to do with ways to counter extremist, jihadist ideology with programs and projects that can build bridges between the West and moderate Muslims. Reza Aslan suggests tapping into a great underutilized resource – the leaders of America’s Muslim community -- to draft a list of initiatives designed to present the United States in a positive but realistic light in countries like Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. Rather than sending Karen Hughes or another U.S. official with an embarrassing lack of knowledge of the Middle East and South Asia to be the U.S. “envoy” for public diplomacy, it makes eminent good sense to draw upon the ideas of émigrés who know the region and, in many cases, still have ties there. Another of Aslan’s suggestions is “engaging moderate Muslim groups, foundations, parties, and individuals to promote shared values like human rights, pluralism, the rule of law and democracy” as a way for the U.S. to “play an active role in facilitating the development of an effective ideological counterweight to jihadism.”⁸

This strategy would include investing in “translation projects” to make it possible for Muslim scholars in Europe and the United States to disseminate their work throughout the Muslim world; support for international think tanks where Muslim scholars can work together on new projects, including moderate interpretations of Islamic law; cultural exchange programs that would allow Muslim scholars, writers, and artists to spend a year working and teaching in each other’s countries; and programs for high school and college students from Muslim countries to study for a year in the U.S. This “people-to-people” approach, involving exchanges between both elites and grassroots individuals and organizations, offers one potentially productive avenue for stemming the tide of anti-U.S. sentiment in Muslim societies.

A useful institutional suggestion set out in the DLC book is the creation of a Department of International Development and Reconstruction, which could handle disaster relief, post-conflict reconstruction, economic assistance, and democracy promotion. Rather than having the State or Defense Departments handle these responsibilities, often on an ad hoc basis, this cabinet level department would specialize in these critical areas and develop the skills and resources to carry their tasks out with competence and professionalism.⁹

The DLC/PPI approach includes a number of other common sense defensive measures, from increasing homeland security funding and focus to addressing high risk targets like chemical plants, to implementing a multi-pronged effort to reduce the risks of nuclear terrorism by securing and destroying loose nuclear weapons and nuclear materials. These are practical preventive measures that have no link to the use or threat of use of military force.

Perhaps the weakest element of the PPI strategy is its approach to military transformation. While making all the “right” statements about restructuring U.S. military forces to meet the changed threat environment, its actual recommendations are more reactive than proactive. The proposed military strategy is organized around a three-part military force, one to “prevent,” one to “defeat,” and one to “rebuild” in the wake of conflict.

The first problem with this approach is that “prevention” is described in purely military terms, as in “striking terrorist camps or training cells” on foreign soil; “destroying weapons of mass destruction . . . and the means to produce them in rogue states”; and “preempting aggression against an ally or area of great economic importance

to the United States.”¹⁰ Of the three examples chosen, only one clearly qualifies as a possible preemptive strike – the attack on terrorist camps, assuming the group in question is about to strike the U.S. In the cases of pursuing economic interests or dealing with weapons of mass destruction, the attacks would be *preventive* (carried out before the threat is imminent), and should be dealt with by non-military means until such time as a more immediate threat develops *and* a persuasive case can be made that military force can get the job done. To do otherwise can lead to severe miscalculations – as with U.S. intervention in Iraq. It can also set a norm that, if used uniformly by other nations, would create a world of chaos and conflict which would make current global realities seem serene by comparison. Last but not least, it ignores the possible synergies between other, non-military tools of conflict prevention and military action.

There are cases where diplomacy is so clearly the preferred route that military force should virtually be ruled out, or at most used as a threat to back up diplomacy. A perfect example of this is the doctrine of counterproliferation, which implies using military or other coercive means to prevent the spread of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons, or to destroy these weapons when adversaries have capabilities or stockpiles of these deadly items. There are few if any examples of successful counter-proliferation; even the 1981 Israeli attack on Iraq’s Osirak reactor is the subject of a lively debate as to whether it set back or accelerated Iraq’s quest for nuclear weapons. The reason for this generally involves inadequate intelligence on what facilities to target. On the other hand, diplomacy has a track record of success in eliminating nuclear weapons or nuclear weapons programs in South Africa, Argentina, Brazil, Libya, the Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. Given the proper mix of incentives (including security guarantees that the

United States will not attack the nation in question), the nuclear programs in North Korea and Iran can be dealt with through diplomatic measures as well. In the case of Iraq, the credible threat of force helped get international inspectors back on the ground there; the strategic error was in not letting them finish their job before intervening militarily.

Democratic-Leaning Think Tanks: Common Themes

Beinart's book and the DLC agenda were early entrants in the security policy sweepstakes leading up to the 2008 presidential elections, but they are now part of a plethora of proposals put forward by an overlapping network of Democratic-leaning think tanks. The organizations listed below share not only a set of over-riding themes, but they also share remarkable numbers of policy experts and advisory board members in common. Materials from the following groups were reviewed in the preparation of this essay: 1) The Truman National Security Project; 2) Center for a New American Security; 3) the Third Way National Security Project; 4) the Security and Peace Initiative, a joint effort of the Center for American Progress and the Century Foundation; 5) the Commission on Smart Power of the Center for Strategic and International Studies; 6) the American Security Project; 7) the 21st Century Defense Initiative of the Brookings Institution; and, 8) the National Security Network. This listing is not meant to be comprehensive, and it omits a number of important think tanks with proposals of a more bi-partisan flavor. Decisions on which think tanks are "Democratic-leaning" are based on their own self-descriptions and/or the prevalence of individuals who have served as national security officials and analysts in past Democratic administrations in their roster of analysts and advisory board members.

One positive thrust that characterizes most of the proposals emanating from the above-mentioned institutions is the call for a more comprehensive view of what constitutes national security. This includes discussions of ends as well as means.

Starting on the narrower question of how to mesh the full range of security tools – from military force to intelligence and law enforcement to development assistance – into a coherent strategy, there is relatively broad agreement among Democratic-leaning analysts. As the Truman Project on National Security puts it, “power is multi-faceted. Our troops cannot root out terrorist networks in Europe; American air raids cannot change hearts and minds of children growing up in an environment of hate. Military power is crucial – but without allies, moral legitimacy, a strong economy, and the ability to influence hearts and minds abroad, it gives us very little power indeed.”¹¹

The Center for American Progress strikes a similar note in its call for a strategy of “integrated power” that melds military action, steps to increase global economic opportunity, “undermining the appeal of extremist ideologies,” and modernizing international security institutions.¹²

Michelle Fluornoy, a co-founder of the Center for a New American Security, notes the importance of not only utilizing a wider range of tools but of *investing* in non-military instruments of security: “The administration has consistently overemphasized the role of the military, without adequately using or resourcing other instruments like intelligence, law enforcement, diplomacy, information operations, trade, and foreign assistance, which are equally critical to victory.”¹³ And, the Third Way National Security Project speaks of the importance of using “all elements of national power, including police work, diplomacy, and intelligence.”¹⁴

In a similar fashion to the Progressive Policy Institute (above), several of the Democratic-leaning think tanks propose new institutional arrangements to help implement a more balanced approach to security policy. The Center for American Progress calls for a “Department of International Development mandated to oversee all foreign aid budgets, instruments and initiatives, capable of providing diverse expertise, and charged with ensuring the effective coordination of aid and crisis prevention policies with the Departments of State, Defense, Treasury, and other relevant U.S. government agencies.”¹⁵ The Third Way National Security Project suggests creating a “unified foreign aid organization,” either as a part of the Department of State or as a separate cabinet-level agency. As envisioned, the organization would house separate agencies to deal with “long-term humanitarian programs, short-term good governance programs, and emergency response programs.”¹⁶

The common sense notion of integrating all the tools of statecraft and attempting to use military force as appropriate for objectives in which it is best suited to the task at hand needs reinforcing primarily because of the “military-first” emphasis of the Bush administration. Although this approach has been moderated to some degree in the wake of the fiasco in Iraq -- as evidenced, for example, by the administration’s better-late-than-never embrace of serious negotiations with North Korea over rolling back its nuclear weapons program – saber-rattling and calls for keeping “all options on the table” in discussions with Iran over its nascent nuclear program, indicate that the military emphasis remains a strong current of administration policy.

If there can be a consensus on utilizing a broader range of instruments to achieve security objectives, the question remains: toward what ends should security tools –

military and non-military – be applied? Here is where the advocacy of a broader range of security objectives comes into play. Issues cited in this regard include such non-traditional or controversial security matters as promoting prosperity through increased economic development assistance; addressing outbreaks of disease like Avian flu and global pandemics like HIV-AIDS; promoting energy security; and addressing the challenge of climate change.¹⁷ The Third Way National Security Project addresses the issue of ends as follows: “Indeed, terrorism is only one of several national security crises that cross borders: organized crime, trafficking in strategic materials, genocidal outbursts that demand intervention and environmental threats such as famine, disease and water scarcity will all have serious national security repercussions.”¹⁸

The embrace of a more carefully considered use of the tools in the security arsenal, aimed at a range of traditional and non-traditional security objectives, may serve as the beginning of a viable alternative to the Bush doctrine of preventive war. But it begs a number of key questions: 1) When *is* it appropriate to use force; 2) How should decisions on the use of force be made; 3) What criteria should be used to determine how much to invest in the different security tools, and via what process should those decisions be made; 4) What kinds of reforms are needed within and among the various tools of statecraft, from the much touted “revolution in military affairs,” to genuine intelligence reform, to the ever elusive goal of better communications among the various agencies involved in national security affairs?

It is on these fundamental questions that the bulk of the Democratic-leaning alternatives fail to chart a sufficiently different course from that entailed in the Bush Doctrine.

On the issue of failed states and humanitarian intervention – much along the lines of Peter Beinart’s perspective, cited above – there is little effort to circumscribe those situations in which military force is likely to be an effective response, or to determine what should trigger such intervention. On the humanitarian front, intervening to interrupt a campaign of genocide could be one bright light for those who favor some sort of military response to this class of problems. But absent clearer guidance on when or whether to intervene in situations short of genocide, there is a risk of creating an institutional and policy bias that could create a slippery slope towards a debilitating chain of “humanitarian wars.”

Occupation of failed states to prevent them from becoming havens for terrorist activity or recruitment is another potentially huge military commitment of uncertain outcome. From Somalia to Iraq, the notion of nation building in the service of security ends has a mixed record, to put it mildly. Other than attacking actual terrorist havens, as occurred in Afghanistan – with a concomitant effort to oust a terrorist-supporting government – it is hard to imagine a workable or affordable strategy that contemplates regular resort to military means to “jump start” a process of nation building. In the few areas where such interventions have had some record of success, such as the Balkans and East Timor, they have involved multi-lateral efforts and long-term commitments of troops and treasure. These interventions have not even remotely approached the resources devoted to a large scale intervention as occurred in Iraq, but depending upon how many such operations are contemplated and carried out, they could add up to a very substantial commitment nonetheless.

A second question of some moment, referenced above, is the possible commitment of forces to stop the development or spread of nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. The most appropriate and practical use of force in these instances is as a threat designed to open up the state or states in question to rigorous and – if a cooperative approach is stymied by a recalcitrant regime – mandatory inspections of suspect facilities and materials. Yet, most of the Democratic-leaning proposals include the option of military intervention in their menu of counter-proliferation tools, even though prior action to head off such programs or “bargain them away” is likely to be far more effective. This assumption that resort to force is a viable option in these cases also ignores the reality that other than in extreme circumstances – such as the collapse of a nuclear armed regime – the concept of deterrence will hold if even the most tyrannical regime were to acquire a small quantity of nuclear weapons. As noted by former State Department intelligence analyst Greg Thielmann, tyrants want to survive to wield power another day, and therefore will almost certainly not take the suicidal step of attacking the U.S. or a U.S. ally with nuclear weapons:

“For emerging missile powers to anticipate effectively intimidating the United States with threats of a direct missile attack on the American homeland is a dubious proposition. There is no empirical evidence that even the most erratic foreign leader would believe himself immune from . . . [a US] counterattack . . . There are no plausible scenarios for disguising the source of an ICBM [intercontinental ballistic missile] attack on the United States . . . Devastating retaliation and the end of the attacker’s regime would have to be assumed.”¹⁹

The least justifiable proposal that is present in the security blueprints of virtually all of the proposals of Democratic-leaning think tanks is the notion that the United States needs to expand the Army and Marine Corps by a combined total of 100,000 troops or more. The rationales for these proposals are grounded in the notion that we might have to

face a scenario as or more demanding than the current simultaneous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Unless evolving strategy is tied to the failed strategy of military occupation, it is hard to see where the need for these additional combat troops comes from. In a joint essay, Frederick Kagan and Michael O’Hanlon put forward a series of scenarios in which major U.S. troop commitments may be required. Their examples -- such as intervening in Nigeria, Indonesia, or Saudi Arabia to prevent or reverse state failure or the rise of a virulently anti-U.S., pro-terrorist regime, or sending massive forces restore order or guard borders to prevent nuclear weapons from being smuggled out of an imploding nuclear armed regime in Pakistan -- are not persuasive.²⁰

State collapse in Nigeria or Saudi Arabia, while no doubt destabilizing to the region and potentially disrupting the flow of oil to global markets, is not on the face of it a rationale for a major U.S. intervention and occupation. If military action is considered necessary – a big if – it can be done with smaller forces for a time-constrained period, ideally with allied participation. More likely, a policy of containment combined with attacks on terrorist strongholds – if such exist – would be the prudent approach.

It is not possible to deploy enough troops to seal off Pakistan’s borders, a point that Kagan and O’Hanlon seem to accept by calling the mission “nearly impossible” – but they include it as a scenario to be planned for nonetheless. Amazingly, they suggest the possibility of needing a force of “up to one million” to stabilize Pakistan in a crisis that threatens the regime. This extreme worst case scenario must be contrasted with the fact that the most effective strategy in this instance would be to ensure prior to a crisis that Pakistan takes all possible measures to prevent the leakage of usable nuclear weapons to regime opponents. One such approach is to store the components of the weapons

separately so that a workable weapon cannot be easily captured. The use of security codes that make a finished weapon unusable is another strategy, as is a failsafe mechanism to destroy all weapons in event of a fatal threat to the regime. U.S. assistance can play an important role in implementing these protective measures, some of which are believed to be in place already.

Rather than push for more troops, funds should be invested in other security tools that are more appropriate to many of the security threats that are likely to emerge in the coming period. (see next section).

The final major flaw running throughout most of the proposals of pro-Democratic Party think tanks is the failure to seek lessons from Republican administrations. Most of the major arms control agreements of the past half century, from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to the (now-abandoned) Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and the Intermediate Nuclear Forces in Europe (INF) agreement, have been ratified or implemented under Republican administrations. Ronald Reagan, who came to power calling the Soviet Union an “evil empire” and embarking on a major buildup of nuclear forces, emerged as an advocate of the reduction and ultimate abolition of nuclear weapons. George Herbert Walker Bush presided over the removal of most tactical nuclear weapons from Europe, and all such systems from U.S. combatant ships. This tradition of support for nuclear arms reductions has been cast aside by the neoconservative strategists of the George W. Bush administration, but that does not mean that the prior approach of the party cannot be revived.

By and large, Republican administrations prior to the current one have also been reluctant to engage in “boots on the ground” military interventions, as evidenced by the role of Dwight Eisenhower in ending the Korean War and Ronald Reagan’s withdrawal of U.S. troops from Lebanon after a bombing that killed 241 U.S. Marines there. This more measured approach to assessing when it is worth using troops has been accompanied by a penchant for covert action (in Iran and Chile, for example) and the provision of arms and training to alleged “freedom fighters” (a la the Reagan Doctrine of arming rebels in Nicaragua and Afghanistan). These policies have caused their own problems, to put it mildly, but they should not obscure the tradition of moderation in matters of direct military intervention that is one strand of historic Republican security approaches.

Prevention, Not Intervention: a Practical Alternative

The first priority for any new approach to defense is to broaden the definition of security to include all threats to human life, whether they stem from terrorism, disease, environmental degradation, natural disasters, or entrenched poverty. This concept of security as “protection” makes it clearer that the military is only one of many tools that can be used to address today’s most urgent threats, and in many cases the least appropriate of the instruments available. This is not to suggest that U.S. military capabilities should be allowed to atrophy, but rather that they should be focused on problems with military solutions, while being reinforced by other non-military programs and policies that will result in a stronger, more efficient military. In this scenario, strength should not necessarily be equated with more defense dollars, but with the application of the right tools to the right problems.

An example of this approach is the Unified Security Budget (USB), the product of a task force of non-governmental policy analysts that includes former government officials who have served in the Pentagon, the Congress, and the uniformed military. The most recent task force report proposes a “security shift” that involves \$56 billion in cuts from current military programs and \$50 billion in investments in non-military tools of security. Proposed military cuts include Cold War era systems with no clear missions in the new security environment, including the F-22 Raptor fighter plane, at a savings of \$3.8 billion per year and the Virginia class submarine, at a savings of \$2.5 billion per year. Cutting nuclear weapons programs back to a deterrent force, not a “usable” arsenal, could yield savings up to \$15 billion per year as a consequence of cutting the U.S. arsenal to 1,000 warheads (deployed and in reserve) versus current levels of 10,000 (deployed and on “active status”). The USB also proposes a reduction of the costly and unworkable missile defense program from an \$11 billion-plus rush to deploy unreliable systems to a \$4 billion research and development program. Finally, the task force report proposes cutting systems like the V-22 Osprey (\$2.4 billion per year saved) that have had poor performance records and are not needed to replace current systems that can perform the same missions at less cost.²¹ These proposals are not unique to the USB. For example, the Third Way National Security Project asserts that “there is no reason why the United States should continue Cold War legacy systems – of weapons and personnel – more suited to mass armies facing off on open fields.”²² But, it is the only major proposal that seeks a direct shift of funds currently devoted to military tools of security to non-military tools.

In keeping with this approach, the USB task force proposes transferring \$50 billion of its proposed military cuts to investing in neglected security tools such as U.S. contributions to international organizations; beefed up diplomacy (\$1.9 billion); non-proliferation efforts, with a focus on dismantling and securing “loose” nuclear weapons and bomb-making materials (\$5 billion); alternative energy sources (\$8.8 billion); economic development (\$15.0 billion); nuclear plant hardening, chemical plant protection and port security – including monitoring of shipping containers (\$1.7 billion); and increased investments in public health infrastructure and first responders (\$7.7 billion).²³

One could argue with the specific figures set out in the USB, but the concept of re-balancing security spending to address the full range of threats facing the United States by investing in both military and non-military tools of security is an essential step forward. Also, since the USB is the only alternative proposal under major discussion that includes detailed estimates of its spending priorities, it serves as an excellent basis for discussion of a new security policy.

Some of the larger of the USB’s proposed investments in non-military tools of security deserve further discussion. Spending on alternative energy sources has multiple benefits, from fending off future conflicts over energy resources to reducing dependence on fossil fuels that contribute to global warming. While competition for energy sources is not the only cause of conflict in the Middle East, the Caucasus, and other energy-rich areas, it is an important underlying factor. As for global warming, the initial impacts appear to be upon us in the form of record numbers of hurricanes, extreme summer heat, and other forms of severe weather. The damage caused by further human-driven changes in the earth’s climate could be catastrophic, second perhaps only to a global nuclear war

in its economic costs and human consequences. Hence, if the goal is to protect lives and preserve freedom and stability, energy policy *is* security policy.

Development assistance – whether in the form of funding anti-HIV initiatives, child health and literacy programs, or investment in targeted projects designed to improve infrastructure, agriculture, and other pillars of economic independence – is worthwhile in its own right, as a down payment on eliminating poverty, disease, and unequal opportunity in a world where billions are barely able to put together the means of existence. It also holds out hope of focusing the interests of the world’s growing population of young people on positive opportunities rather than negative ideologies such as Islamic fundamentalism. While there is no one-to-one link between deprivation and terrorism, promoting sounder, more prosperous economies in the global south will help to counter ideological support for terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda.

Public health professionals and institutions are first-line responders in preventing or curbing epidemics of disease, whether they stem from natural sources or terrorist attacks. From improving the capacity of hospitals to handle a surge of patients in a public health emergency, to supporting more research into diseases and vaccines, to increasing communications infrastructure among local, state, and federal public health officials, there is much that can be done to make our public health system a more effective asset in fending off terror attacks. And, as with many other non-military tools of security, investments in public health institutions have benefits that go far beyond their potential role in fighting terrorism, by protecting the nation against outbreaks of disease, whatever the source.

In addition to broadening our definition of what constitutes security, it is critical that we begin a national discussion on what the mission of our armed forces should be. The other proposals discussed in this essay assume an activist global role for the U.S. military, varying only with respect to tactics, the extent to reach out to allies and international institutions, and so forth. Their commitment to “modernizing” (and spending more) on a military that is already the strongest in the world stems from this assumption.

When should the U.S. use military force? To attack specific terrorist strongholds, to act against nations on the verge of attacking the United States or one of its closest allies, to prevent genocide, or to *assist* in policing peace agreements in unstable regions. The Bush administration’s “doctrine of preemption” – which really means a first-strike war against a country that poses a distant threat to U.S. security – should be abandoned, given its disastrous consequences in Iraq. Except in extreme circumstances, the United States should seek United Nations and Congressional approval for acts of war, and reach out to allies in a genuine fashion, not in the “take it or leave it” approach that governed alliance-building in the Iraq conflict. Only on rare occasions should the United States feel compelled to act alone, when there is a genuine national security threat that has not received broader international approval. A true commitment to alliance building and international institutions would permit a reduction in U.S. force projection capabilities and “cover the globe” military strategies, leaving further room for shifts of funding from military to non-military tools of security. This short list is hardly sufficient to under gird a new U.S. military strategy, but it references some of the points that must be debated to

avoid “drift” from one conflict to the next, with no set of criteria or priorities to govern the use of U.S. military forces.

NOTES

¹ Although the Bush administration refers to “preemptive” war in its major documents, it has actually engaged in preventive war. Preemption implies an immediate security threat, which decidedly did not exist in the case of war with Iraq. Rather, it was a preventive war designed to head off an alleged threat that might occur at some point in the future.

² “Real Security: The Democratic Plan to Protect America and Restore Our Leadership in the World,” www.democrats.gov, March 29, 2006.

³ Ashton B. Carter and William J. Perry, “If Necessary, Strike and Destroy; North Korea Cannot Be Allowed to Test This Missile,” *Washington Post*, June 22, 2006; for a response, see Charles L. “Jack” Pritchard, “No, Don’t Blow It Up; A Saner Approach to a North Korean Missile Test,” *Washington Post*, June 23, 2006.

⁴ Peter Beinart, *The Good Fight: Why Liberals – and Only Liberals – Can Win the War on Terror and Make America Great Again* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), p. 196.

⁵ Beinart, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

⁶ George Packer, “Fighting Faiths: Can Liberal Internationalism Be Saved?” *The New Yorker*, issue of July 10/17th, 2006. To give the flavor of Packer’s critique, the following excerpt may be useful: “Ultimately, the Cold War analogy is unhelpful, because it allows Americans to make a virtue of our ignorance. Beinart is one of those bright young journalists who have spent their lives in topnotch universities and Washington political circles rather than in places where jihad is more than just a word. Islamism is far stranger to us than Communism. It requires a deeper, subtler knowledge of local realities around the Muslim world, in all their variety, than most American writers and politicians have shown. The policymakers of the Kennedy era overlooked the essentially nationalist nature of Vietnamese Communism because they were swept up in the binary thinking of Kennedy’s call to “pay any price, bear any burden.” How much less do today’s policymakers know about the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the factions vying within the Arab Gulf states, the Muslim minorities in Europe, the configuration of power in Iran, the causes of the Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan, the Islamist takeover in Mogadishu, or the rising terrorist threat in Bangladesh? The grand, overarching “narrative” of antitotalitarianism that Beinart offers can’t explain the different kinds of trouble that America faces in a chaotic world. It substitutes will for understanding, which is just as dangerous as the reverse—if the Iraq war has taught us anything, it should be that.”

⁷ Will Marshall, editor, *With All Our Might: A Progressive Policy for Defeating Jihadism and Defending Liberty* (London, Routledge, 2006), pp. 6, 9, 13, 54.

⁸ *With All Our Might*, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁹ Larry Diamond and Michael McFaul, “Seeding Democracy,” in *With All Our Might*, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

¹⁰ James R. Blaker and Steven J. Nider, “Fighting Unconventional Wars,” *op. cit.*, note 6, pp. 134-135.

¹¹ Rachel Kleinfeld and Matthew Spence, “Creating Truman Democrats: A Three-Step Program for Rebuilding Democratic National Security Policy,” Washington, DC, Truman National Security Project, January 2005.

¹² Lawrence J. Korb and Robert O. Boorstin, “Integrated Power: A National Security Strategy for the 21st Century,” Washington, DC, Center for American Progress, June 2005.

¹³ Michele Fluornoy and Shawn Brimley, “U.S. Strategy and Capabilities for Winning the Long War,” in Julianne Smith and Thomas Sanderson, editors, “Five Years After 9/11: An Assessment of America’s War on Terror,” Washington, DC, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2006, p. 45.

¹⁴ William Galston and Elaine Kamarck (with Sharon Burke), “Security First: A Strategy for Defending America,” Washington, DC, May 2007, p. 8.

¹⁵ Korb and Boorstin, *op. cit.* p. 49.

¹⁶ Galston and Kamarck, op. cit. pp. 41-42.

¹⁷ For example, the Third Way National Security project makes promoting energy security and addressing the threat of climate change two of its ten key national security objectives; see Galston and Kamarck, op. cit.

¹⁸ Galston and Kamarck, op. cit., p. 34.

¹⁹ Greg Thielmann, "Rumsfeld Reprise? The Missile Report That Foretold The Iraq Intelligence Controversy," Arms Control Today, July/August 2003, p. 6.

²⁰ Frederick Kagan and Michael O'Hanlon, "The Case for Larger Ground Forces," the Stanley Foundation, April 2007, pp. 4-7.

²¹ Lawrence Korb and Miriam Pemberton, principal authors, Report of the Task Force on a Unified Security Budget for the United States, 2008, Washington, DC, Foreign Policy in Focus and the Center for Defense Information, April 2007, pp. 21-25.

²² Galston and Kamarck, op. cit., p. 33.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-54.