

## Foreword

The new administration takes office in a time of great complexity. Our new President faces a national security environment shaped by strong currents: globalization; the proliferation of new, poor, and weak states, as well as nonstate actors; an enduring landscape of violent extremist organizations; slow economic growth; the rise of China and a revanchist Russia; a collapsing Middle East; and a domestic politics wracked by division and mistrust. While in absolute terms the Nation and the world are safer than in the last century, today the United States finds itself almost on a permanent war footing, engaged in military operations around the world.

We tend to think first of the military when pondering national security, but our political system and economic strength are its true wellsprings. Whatever our internal political disputes may have been, in former times a consensus on how best to address the most formidable security threats obtained. Against great threats we were able to come together. That consensus was shattered by the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, a 24-hour news cycle, and the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Our polarized domestic politics represents a clear challenge to our national security. Political fissures will always exist in our constitutional system. But without broad coherence and accommodation, sensible and sustained national security and defense policy is gravely impaired.

A parallel threat is our inability to rise above local and partisan political considerations to more effectively manage the defense budget, programming, and acquisition processes. The U.S. defense budget approaches \$600 billion per year, dwarfing China's \$150 billion defense budget and Russia's \$70 billion. Yet we get far less capability than the numbers suggest. Political opposition to base closures, rising personnel and program costs, and excessive influence by defense industries on defense acquisition limits decision space. Our inability to pass defense budgets on time further complicates programming and budget execution. More broadly, continued growth in nondiscretionary spending on entitlements and debt service will, in the next generation or so, begin

## Foreword

to seriously crowd out defense spending if not brought under control. Meanwhile, expanding staffs and organizations sap resources from the fighting forces. Defense spending matches the height of the buildup by Ronald Reagan but can only support a force two-thirds the size. New systems feature exquisite technology but are so costly that we can afford far fewer of them, while cost overruns, delayed fielding, and system flaws are endemic. These are serious issues that cannot be solved without congressional action and determined Presidential leadership.

In a similar vein, the interagency process employed in national security decisionmaking increasingly faces criticism. Some see an inability to overcome parochialism on the part of departments and agencies in the interests of optimum policy development. Others see dramatic growth in the National Security Council staff leading to operationalizing the White House and curtailing the prerogatives of Cabinet officers and combatant commanders. In this view the excessive centralization of power in nonconfirmed White House staff marginalizes the expertise and statutory authority of the departments and degrades congressional oversight. The net effect is held to be suboptimal interagency performance that demands reform.

Turning to national security strategy, perhaps the key question for the new administration is whether to remain engaged as the guarantor of the international economic and political order. For the previous 8 years, caution was seen as the order of the day; military interventions have been few and limited essentially to airpower and trainers or infrequent special operations and drone strikes. In the heated 2016 political season, calls for “offshore balancing” and even withdrawal from overseas commitments were heard more loudly than in many decades. In the best of times, breaking crises and unforecasted events will tend to crowd senior leader agendas and decision space. Yet a broad strategic framework, emphasizing alliances, forward basing, active diplomacy, and military and economic preponderance, has characterized U.S. national security for almost a century. It is difficult to see how continued disengagement from world affairs will redound to improved national security. As we have seen, a proliferation of failed and failing states and the rise of nonstate actors have created political vacuums around the periphery of the former Soviet Union, eastern Congo, South Sudan, large parts of northern Africa, and the Middle East (among others), leading to massive population displacement, loss of life, security threats, terrorism, and instability.

A holistic approach to dealing with this security environment will not be easy to contrive but will be needed if America’s security posture is to improve. For some years, defense leaders have used a “4+1” construct as shorthand for the most serious threats: China, Iran, North Korea, and

## Foreword

Russia, and violent extremist organizations like Daesh and al Qaeda. Though the rebalance to Asia specifically highlighted that region as a priority, in all likelihood the national security establishment will continue to orient on all these in the near and midterm. In this regard, containing and deterring adversary states will be called for. Armed conflict with any would represent a failure of both policy and strategy of the first order. Thus, U.S. approaches should seek to create the perception in the minds of adversary decisionmakers that the costs of any challenge to core U.S. interests will outweigh any benefits.

Peaceful economic and diplomatic engagement will remain important, but we should not be under any illusions. The temptation to treat these nations as simultaneously benign partners and aggressive adversaries may hamper effective strategy. Russia in particular has repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to use force to overturn or set aside international norms, while China's muscular assertion of sovereignty in the South China Sea has roiled our traditional partners and allies in the region and called into question U.S. leadership in the Asia-Pacific region. Iran pursues a hegemonic agenda deeply rooted in a strategic culture that is many centuries old, exacerbated by a militant Shia impulse directly at odds with the Sunni world. On the Korean Peninsula, an unstable and erratic nuclear regime threatens an increasingly fragile peace. Throughout the Middle East—and indeed the world—terrorist organizations like Daesh and al Qaeda remain potent threats that demand serious attention.

Other regions such as Latin America and Africa have traditionally enjoyed lower priority but cannot be ignored. In both the rise of more globalized transnational criminal organizations has eroded state control, increased corruption, and provoked mass immigration. Pandemics originating in these regions must also concern strategists and policymakers. Terrorist groups have gained a growing foothold, while stable and functioning democracy remains elusive in some quarters. Neither region will assume top priority in U.S. national security policy anytime soon, but both will require sustained engagement going forward.

When today's most senior military leaders entered the force, space and cyber began to emerge as distinct domains. Today they are crucial to our military success and to national security writ large. Our military is dependent on space for navigation, targeting, communications, and strategic intelligence gathering and early warning. Protection of our information networks (private and public, civilian and military) is a first order priority as is an offensive capability to target adversary networks in time of war or confrontation. Loss or degradation of these key capabilities offers war-winning advantages to China and Russia in particular. Amid many competing priorities these must be championed.

## Foreword

On many of these fronts, diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments will matter greatly, but hard military power will count most. How much is enough? On the nuclear front, the deterrent force is aging, and large investments will be needed if the intent is to preserve the nuclear triad going forward. A survivable capability to deliver unacceptable levels of destruction is the sine qua non of deterrence. Yet the projected costs of replacement systems such as the Long Range Strategic Bomber, *Ohio*-class ballistic missile submarine, modernized intercontinental ballistic missiles, and nuclear-armed cruise missiles may approach \$1 trillion, forcing hard choices on the Department of Defense.

Conventionally, the U.S. military finds itself repeating a familiar pattern, with land forces declining following more than a decade of exhausting deployments. As noted in the most recent Quadrennial Defense Review, this factor poses a high risk. At sea and in the air, U.S. forces remain clearly preponderant—particularly when the forces of close allies are factored in. As a force-sizing construct, this volume argues that the force should be balanced among land, sea, and air forces and sized to conduct two major conventional campaigns simultaneously. (Since the end of the Cold War this construct has been progressively relaxed as the size of the force has declined.) The compelling argument is that a “one major war at a time” force reduces the United States from a global to a regional power, impairing deterrence and reassurance of key allies. Post-Cold War trends have also seen the force come home from many of its forward bases. Projecting force from the homeland to distant locations is now the norm, and airlift and sealift as well as prepositioned stocks will remain essential building blocks of American grand strategy.

If all these capabilities are important, what are our true strategic priorities? Effective nuclear deterrence must top the list, along with modernized space, cyber, and command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems and communities. With the majority of our combat forces no longer forward deployed, power projection in the form of sealift and airlift as well as prepositioned stocks must be resourced. Given our strong preponderance in seapower and airpower, the next administration has an opportunity to revisit program acquisition decisions in these domains, though ground forces are far less dominant or modernized and will need help.

No formal document describes a grand strategy for the United States, and indeed, many academics deny that one exists. Yet a close look at our history as a world power suggests that core interests and how we secure them have remained generally consistent over time. If grand strategy “rises above particular strategies intended to secure particular objectives,” many decades of focusing on nuclear deterrence, power pro-

## Foreword

jection, alliances and partnerships, and military and economic strength probably constitute the underpinnings of a coherent grand strategy. How we employ and leverage these instruments of national power to protect, defend, and advance the national interest is, after all, the essence of grand strategy. In a dangerous world, these pillars have provided a strong foundation for national security. If our domestic politics can achieve consensus on future threats and solutions, America is well positioned to lead and prosper in a world that will remain both dangerous and uncertain.

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