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Strategy and Statecraft
*An Agenda for the United States in an Era
of Compounding Complexity*

By Julianne Smith and Jacob Stokes



Center for a
New American
Security

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STRATEGY AND STATECRAFT: AN AGENDA
FOR THE UNITED STATES IN AN ERA
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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Today's security environment has no precedent. The sheer volume and complexity of current and emerging security threats, and their interrelationship, creates daunting challenges for both U.S. strategy and statecraft. The United States is not in decline. But it does need to radically reshape its approach to meet today's challenges, particularly as traditional foreign policy approaches no longer generate the same results. This paper aims to help policymakers craft an affirmative but affordable foreign policy agenda for today's era of compound complexity. It examines a series of strategic and statecraft challenges that will need to be addressed in any effort to enhance U.S. efforts at global leadership.

The United States faces five *core strategic* challenges:

- 1. The Growing Diversity of Actors and Adversaries.** The United States must deal with rising state competitors whose actions can undermine global stability even as it addresses threats emerging from smaller states, non-state actors and transnational threats.
- 2. Confronting Asymmetric Capabilities and Tactics.** A diverse set of actors either have or are pursuing a variety of asymmetric capabilities and/or are employing asymmetric tactics designed to thwart U.S. conventional military advantages.
- 3. Eroding Foundations of the Post-World War II Era.** The foundations of the international order erected after the Second World War have begun to erode as emerging actors challenge both its institutional and normative components.
- 4. Alliances Under Strain.** The U.S. network of allies and partners faces strain as strategic rationales for historic partnerships fade and emerging powers chart their own geopolitical courses.
- 5. Blurring Lines Between Domestic and**

Foreign Policy. Events of the last decade have underscored how strength at home and strength abroad are deeply intertwined. Recently, the two have been mutually detrimental rather than mutually supportive.

America also faces six core *statecraft* challenges:

1. America's Long-standing Civilian Response

Gap. Despite decades of effort, America has failed to develop and field an effective civilian response to conflict.

2. The Evolving Military Toolkit. The military faces twin challenges of narrowing resources without a narrowing of responsibilities and tectonic shifts in defense policy due to game-changing technologies.

3. New or Revitalized Tools That Present Opportunities and Challenges. Innovation can create both benefits and new problems, as trends in military technology, the intelligence community and the revitalized use of economic statecraft demonstrate.

4. International Organizations Less Prone to U.S. Influence. Due to a wide range of internal and external factors, America's special role inside multilateral institutions has been evolving, often resulting in diminished U.S. influence.

5. Contradictory Public Opinion. The American public appears to be in search of a compromise between doing less in the world and maintaining U.S. supremacy.

6. Managing Strategic Risk. The U.S. government's ability to assess threats, accurately determine levels of risk and then prioritize efforts accordingly remains quite limited.

This report outlines an agenda for future study, posing the questions that must be asked in order for U.S. policymakers to shape an effective response to these challenges. Overall, any

successful approach must find balance in U.S. foreign policy; stress engagement with allies and partners; renew efforts to bolster the liberal international order; and acknowledge challenges resulting from changes in the international system while finding ways to reassert control of the narrative both at home and abroad.

II. INTRODUCTION

Americans are not particularly fond of nuance. They tend to prefer simple notions of good versus evil, friend versus foe. But since the attacks of September 11, 2001, America's foreign policy agenda has been anything but simplistic. The first few months after 9/11 may have rallied the country around the threat of combating al Qaeda. But more than a decade later, as the United States withdraws its troops from Afghanistan and Iraq, the complexities of addressing the persistent insecurity in those two countries have raised questions, particularly among the American public, about the use of military force and how best to shape political outcomes in violent foreign conflicts.

As the nation continues to come to terms with the effects of the past decade's wars, several new global challenges have materialized: The Arab Spring, which policymakers once hoped would generate a wave of democratic transitions across the tumultuous Middle East, has unleashed considerable internal and regional strife. Even regions such as Europe that seemed to be relatively quiet in the last decade have recently erupted in violence and witnessed land grabs by a resurgent Russia. On the other side of the globe, China continues to challenge its neighbors in unprecedented and troubling ways, while North Korea persists in defying international efforts to curb its nuclear ambitions.

In short, today's security environment has no precedent. No one challenge to U.S. interests is equivalent to those posed by Nazi Germany, imperial Japan or the Soviet Union during the 20th century. But the sheer volume and complexity of current and emerging security threats, and their interrelationship, may be at least as daunting. Actors ranging from states to individuals mix competition with cooperation across and within states, regions and the globe. Interactions overlap economic, security and diplomatic arenas. This paper characterizes the current era as one of

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In the face of this rapidly evolving strategic environment, U.S. statecraft struggles to keep up. Major resource constraints make the task even tougher. In theory, given the size of its economy, the United States could support larger expenditures on both its civilian and military international activities. But political and structural realities – including growth in entitlement spending, policymakers' unwillingness to raise taxes and an aversion to further deficit spending – mean that in practice resources dedicated to international affairs will likely continue to decline or grow more slowly than in the past for some time to come.¹ Game-changing technologies, congressional paralysis and conflicting signals from the American public about U.S. leadership and global engagement are interacting in ways that

have only increased the challenges to the nation's tools of statecraft.

Both strategy and statecraft trends are complicating U.S. efforts at global leadership. Traditional foreign policy approaches no longer generate the same results. Some take this as evidence that the United States is facing its twilight years as global leader. We do not share this pessimistic view. The United States remains the world's most powerful and indispensable nation – it is not in decline. In fact, due in part to newly found sources of domestic energy as well as a host of other long-term advantages, U.S. absolute power may be resurgent. But to realize these advantages, the United States will need to radically reshape its approach to meet today's challenges.

This paper is designed to help American policymakers craft an affirmative but affordable foreign policy agenda for today's era of compounding complexity, although it does not offer a complete strategy in and of itself. Instead, this paper provides an overview of five core *strategic* challenges and examines the implications of each. It then breaks down the six most pressing *statecraft* challenges, drawing out the complexities of executing plans in the real world. The paper concludes by articulating broad attributes of a successful strategic approach along with an agenda for future study.

III. FIVE CORE STRATEGIC CHALLENGES

Challenge One: The Growing Diversity of Actors and Adversaries

During the Cold War, the United States focused mainly on threats emanating from states, primarily the Soviet Union. As the Cold War ended, a series of threats emerged from a wider range of sources, including growing nationalism, ethnic conflict, stalled democratization, the rise of new authoritarian systems and failing states.² Today, in an era of compounding complexity, the United States must continue to address the challenge of rising state competitors whose actions challenge global stability even as it addresses both the emerging threats from smaller states and non-state actors and transnational threats such as health pandemics and climate change. Thus, the United States must address global instability along a number of different dimensions simultaneously – an unprecedented task for the national security strategic planning community.

First, near-peer, resurgent and emerging powers, such as China and Russia, as well as India, Brazil and Indonesia, are growing more powerful, when measured by their relative military and economic capabilities. These nations cannot replace or challenge the United States directly – and may not seek to – but they can try to revise regional orders, and their behavior runs the risk of triggering miscalculations that could spark broader conflicts. Second-tier regional adversaries – “rogue” regimes including Iran, North Korea and previously Syria – comprise a second group. These nations consider the United States a sworn enemy, and they threaten global nonproliferation regimes, support terrorism and engage in gross human rights violations.

The panoply of non-state actors constitutes a third group, one that is growing rapidly. This group includes terrorists, insurgents, corporations, criminal organizations and superempowered individuals. The diffusion of technology as well

as biological weapons has put more power in the hands of non-state actors than ever before.³

Addressing each of the threats and challenges posed by any of these three groups individually is challenging in its own right. But simultaneously tackling all three requires unprecedented levels of strategic focus, policy innovation, cooperation with partners and allies and thoughtful resource allocation. For the United States, the challenge comes in reacting to those threats that directly impact vital national interests while providing much-needed global leadership.

Challenge Two: Confronting Asymmetric Capabilities and Tactics

Many of the growing number of actors discussed above either have or are pursuing a variety of asymmetric capabilities to thwart U.S. conventional military advantages. That quest has in many ways become easier thanks to technological advances and a surge in the number of high-tech yet affordable capabilities now available on the open market. Equally troubling, the United States has also seen a surge in recent years in the use of asymmetric tactics by its adversaries.

Some adversaries look to one-up U.S. conventional capabilities by leveraging weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). They use existing WMDs (China, Russia, North Korea) or are developing WMDs (Iran, previously Syria) in attempts to deter the United States from using conventional military force against them. In addition, non-state actors continue to seek to acquire these capabilities to commit terrorism. Adversaries are also looking to exploit weaknesses in current U.S. conventional capabilities by developing advanced cyber tools, anti-satellite weapons, anti-access area denial (A2/AD) capabilities and other emerging “disruptive” technologies.⁴ Those capabilities, most of which are relatively inexpensive, cannot alone enable adversaries to project power. Rather, they aim to complicate U.S. power projection efforts.

In addition to enhancing their asymmetric capabilities, adversaries try to erode U.S. power by employing irregular tactics such as terrorism, insurgency and subversion. Such tactics, when employed by a highly motivated adversary, have always bedeviled efforts by powerful states to impose their vision on foreign nations. Added up, these trends significantly raise the cost of achieving U.S. goals abroad, despite overwhelming conventional superiority.

Finally, some adversaries have learned to employ coercion strategies designed to stay below the threshold of aggression that would trigger U.S. military action. For example, China employs a “tailored coercion” strategy in the South and East China Seas that slowly advances China’s territorial claims in those regions while remaining, at least for now, below the threshold for war.⁵

Challenge Three: Eroding Foundations of the Post-World War II Era

After the Second World War, the United States led the creation of an international order that has lasted nearly 70 years. But the foundations of that order have begun to erode. Emerging actors are increasingly challenging the order’s institutional and normative components. Traditional international institutions such as the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are struggling to reshape themselves to better reflect today’s distribution of economic and political power, while emerging powers are simultaneously creating parallel regional and global institutions, such as the BRICS grouping (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, that fall outside of this traditional order.

These trends have created a gap in global governance and increasing disagreement among states about international norms on issues such as economic growth and political rights.⁶ There is therefore ambiguity in the international system about how rising

powers work with existing multilateral frameworks, such as the UNSC structure, as well as a disconnect between the privileges these rising powers seek and their willingness to take on the burdens of global leadership, including the financial commitments involved in providing foreign aid.⁷

Struggles over institutional power reflect deeper disagreements about the normative foundations of the order, specifically liberal democracy and free market capitalism. Rising powers with authoritarian systems and semicapitalist economies are looking to contest the principles underlying the current system. Democratic institutions, once seen as a triumphant, almost inevitable outcome of economic development, face headwinds worldwide.⁸ As authoritarian systems develop more sophisticated tactics for political, economic and social repression, international and local efforts to promote democratization become more complicated.⁹

The erosion of the global consensus manifests in the current disagreements about sovereignty. Authoritarian regimes are often rhetorically vocal in their deep noninterventionism. In practice, however, this rhetoric belies a deeper conviction regarding the protection of what they see as their spheres of influence, as recently witnessed with Russia’s actions in Crimea. By contrast, liberal democracies have long tried to advance a rules-based approach to sovereignty, with the recent and notable shift toward introducing one key exception. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine represents a shift in a global conception of sovereignty because it legitimates violations of sovereignty when states are no longer adequately protecting their populations, in cases of mass atrocities. This concept remains an evolving norm, however, and the parameters are being litigated, often on a case-by-case basis. Therefore, the United States and its allies are balancing an effort to inculcate these humanitarian norms while shoring up the international resolve to stand united against flagrant territorial aggression.

Challenge Four: Alliances Under Strain

The United States has long benefited from its alliances with individual partner states as well as participation in collective security organizations. Historically, the United States has relied on this network of alliances to counter adversaries and to address a range of national security threats. But that network faces increasing strain. The strategic rationales for long-standing alliances formed during the Cold War, such as NATO, have become less defined as the threat has changed. The missions of newer alliances, like those with the United Arab Emirates, often focus on tactical issues such as counterterrorism but do not generate the deep strategic commitments that once undergirded security cooperation between the United States and its partners. This dynamic posed less of a problem in an era of U.S. dominance, but today's multipolar environment means that allies and partners have other options.

In addition, some allies are increasingly doubting American resolve in the face of regional belligerence, such as Chinese aggression in Asia, Russia's in Europe and Iran's in the Middle East. Rightly or wrongly, they perceive the United States to be war-weary and preparing to engage in deep military retrenchment as it focuses on challenges closer to home.¹⁰ Meanwhile, some U.S. allies face serious political and fiscal constraints of their own as they attempt to strengthen their national capabilities. In other cases, while U.S. assistance and training programs can help at the margins, local security capabilities remain limited.

At the same time, many emerging powers are charting their own geopolitical course. They are forging partnerships with new states and relying on regional political and security arrangements to a greater extent. Thanks to their rapid economic and military progress in recent years, a number of these countries – including Brazil, India, South Africa and Indonesia – have grown more powerful. While emerging powers share interests with

When U.S. alliances lack a deep strategic foundation with the partner state, minor rifts often risk derailing broader cooperation on a range of issues. Recent diplomatic spats with India and Brazil underscore this point.

the United States, a deeper strategic alignment is often lacking. As a result, emerging powers more frequently challenge U.S. positions on the international stage and, because of their size, regional influence and the large publics that they represent, their opinions carry increasing weight.¹¹ Moreover, when U.S. alliances lack a deep strategic foundation with the partner state, minor rifts often risk derailing broader cooperation on a range of issues. Recent diplomatic spats with India and Brazil underscore this point.¹²

Challenge Five: Blurring Lines Between Domestic and Foreign Policy

Events of the last decade – costly wars, a crippling financial crisis, soaring debt and heated budget battles – have underscored how strength at home and strength abroad are deeply intertwined. Foreign policy directly affects domestic prosperity in two ways. First, maintaining the U.S. military's command of the commons – sea, air, space and cyberspace – is essential to sustaining the international order and the economic benefits that come with it.¹³ However, considerable debate surrounds the question of how much global engagement, backed by military power, is required to keep up the uninterrupted flow of goods and services across the globe.¹⁴ Second, U.S. trade facilitates global

economic growth and offers America strategic benefits by deepening economic ties with key nations. At the same time, ensuring that the benefits of trade do not come at the expense of the U.S. economy, especially the labor force, has become more challenging over time.¹⁵

The dynamic works in reverse, too. What happens at home profoundly affects the execution of American foreign policy, both in material and psychological ways. Materially, the global financial crisis and resulting austerity measures – notably sequestration – have caused major disruptions for both the military and civilian arms of the national security apparatus. The structural challenges facing the United States today might be even more consequential for U.S. power over time: Widening inequality, long-term unemployment, growing debt, crumbling infrastructure and a faltering education system endanger America's long-term global leadership position, including its economic and military competitiveness over the course of the 21st century.¹⁶

As for perceptions, the partisan political brinkmanship in recent years that risked U.S. default fed false notions abroad that the United States is in decline and unable to lead. Disputes between Congress and the executive branch, as well as partisan feuds, call into question America's commitment to international agreements and treaties; hurt U.S. soft power; and lend credibility to arguments by U.S. competitors regarding the dangers of democratic systems.¹⁷ To be sure, the United States possesses many fundamental strengths, including a boom in domestic energy, a relatively youthful population, innovative businesses, leading universities and the world's reserve currency.¹⁸ But capitalizing on those advantages and addressing the problems outlined above will require a level of political cohesion and pragmatic consensus that has largely broken down in recent years.

IV. SIX CORE STATECRAFT CHALLENGES

In addition to the core strategic challenges outlined above, the United States faces a dizzying array of statecraft challenges. In other words, policymakers and the public are not only divided on *what* the nation should be doing (retreating from the world versus leading the world). They are also divided on *how* the United States should engage in the world – what mix of existing tools is best suited to cope with today’s complex security environment and what additional tools might be required, and at what cost. While American statecraft has had to evolve continually to adapt to a changing threat environment, the United States now faces six core challenges regarding its tools of national power, challenges that present fundamental choices – but also opportunities – for the next president.

Challenge One: America’s Long-standing Civilian Response Gap

For the last 20 years, every conflict the United States has tried to address – from the Balkans to Afghanistan to the Arab Spring – has exposed a gaping hole in not just American but global statecraft: the inability to develop and field an effective civilian response either before a conflict escalates or after it dies down. Three U.S. administrations, from President Bill Clinton through President George W. Bush to President Barack Obama, have pledged to fill that gap in an effort to better equip the United States to cope with complex challenges often associated with failed or failing states and avoid a long-standing overreliance on the U.S. military (which has repeatedly expressed its disinterest in taking on largely civilian tasks). Perhaps most encouraging, at least initially, was the joint effort pursued by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and then-Defense Secretary Robert Gates to raise awareness among the American public and Congress about the importance of funding and developing America’s nonmilitary instruments. Unfortunately, that high-visibility public relations campaign failed to shift resources from

the Department of Defense (DOD) to the State Department to allow such a capability to be created.

It would be unfair, however, to conclude that absolutely no progress has been made in this regard. The efforts of the last three administrations have yielded some success in creating new models of civilian-military cooperation (see the provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan) and new structures across the U.S. government (such as the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations at the State Department). But the reality is that the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) continue to struggle to find ways to respond to today’s long list of intractable conflicts for which traditional diplomacy feels like too little and hard power feels like too much. That struggle stems in part from the fact that both agencies have fought and lost battles in the last four years to maintain even status quo budget lines (despite a 2010 *National Security Strategy* that rightly put a heavy emphasis on modernizing diplomacy and development capabilities).¹⁹

When Obama stressed the need to move away from “America’s war footing,” many policymakers were hopeful that that goal might trigger greater and more innovative investments in indispensable nonmilitary tools. Despite the best of intentions, though, considerable uncertainty remains as to how that goal translates into actual practice and what types of new tools such a strategy may require. The next president should ask himself or herself what the United States has learned from its 20-year quest to build a civilian response capacity and how the country can best link “ends” with “way and means.” At the heart of that dilemma is the strategic challenge of addressing a wide array of global security threats. To what degree does the United States want to stress the importance of tackling failed states and transnational threats? And how much is the United States willing and able to invest in new tools to do so? Will the next U.S. president put as much

Game-changing technologies such as cyber, synthetic biology, distributive manufacturing and autonomous systems have triggered tectonic shifts in U.S. defense policy.

emphasis as Obama on partnerships? If so, what kinds of opportunities does that present for the United States to outsource its civilian capacity needs largely to countries or organizations that possess greater capacity in this realm?

Challenge Two: The Evolving Military Toolkit

The DOD faces two sets of challenges in determining its proper place in the future of American statecraft. First, for the first time in decades, the U.S. military is experiencing a genuine narrowing of its capabilities but not necessarily a narrowing of its responsibilities. Thanks in no small part to budget pressures associated with sequestration, the military faces a future in which it will have both a smaller set of forces and a lighter global footprint. The United States will also possess fewer military assets and systems as it retires combat fleets and puts future purchases on hold. And yet the number of missions the military is being asked to undertake shows no signs of slowing, raising questions about both how the United States should prioritize global security threats and how best to manage risk in an era of austerity. For example, is the United States prepared to assume more strategic risk to avoid a situation in which its military must try to do more with less? If the 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) is any indication, that answer is a resounding yes, but the real test will come in the QDR's actual implementation.

Second, game-changing technologies such as cyber, synthetic biology, distributive manufacturing and autonomous systems have triggered tectonic shifts in U.S. defense policy. Most troubling, these new technologies have put disruptive and catastrophic capabilities in the hands of ungoverned individuals and small groups, dramatically expanding the list of contingencies for which the United States must prepare.²⁰ The array of new technologies has also radically altered a long-standing assumption about U.S. statecraft: that innovation resides in the defense sector. Today DOD regularly goes to the resource-rich open market to seek help, rather than having its own innovations trickle down to the outside world as occurred throughout the Cold War. But this new paradigm carries risks, given DOD's special security requirements and the loss of governmental control. Finally, new technologies have put added budget pressure on a declining DOD budget, leading some military commanders to express concern about America's ability to sustain its technological edge.²¹

Challenge Three: New or Revitalized Tools That Present Opportunities and Challenges

America's ability to innovate has long been heralded as one of the country's core strengths, and there has been no shortage of innovation when it comes to American statecraft, particularly in regards to the military. What government agencies have come to realize in recent years, however, is that innovation can often cut both ways – it can give the United States a tremendous advantage, but new or revitalized tools can also create dilemmas and challenges. For example, the U.S. military has been able to develop and procure countless technical innovations in recent years that make it the envy of the world. Many of those same technologies, especially unmanned aerial vehicles and offensive cyber capabilities, now pose significant legal challenges. In most cases, the laws – both domestically and internationally – simply have not been able to keep up, raising all sorts of thorny

questions about the legality of use, the risks of proliferation and global norms. Those questions are only growing as more countries find ways to acquire and sell new technologies that are increasingly becoming available on the open market. The U.S. government has been conflicted on how to respond to such challenges. On the one hand, there is some appeal in maintaining at least a short-term monopoly on new technologies that have yet to be exposed to international scrutiny. On the other hand, the U.S. government understands the risks associated with a proliferation of new technologies without any sort of international framework – preferably constructed with American negotiators at the table.

The U.S. intelligence community has faced similar challenges. Thanks to an unprecedented surge of resources, personnel and materiel support in the years after 9/11, the U.S. intelligence community has grown into one of the prized tools of national security, exhibiting a global reach that remains unmatched and an admirable ability to develop new capabilities rapidly. The immense growth, however, has also created an intelligence system that has been described as unwieldy, redundant and “lacking in thorough oversight.”²² The Edward Snowden revelations confirmed such suspicions by exposing practices and policies that shocked policymakers, the public and allies and triggered calls for an overhaul of how the United States collects, stores and utilizes intelligence. The U.S. government is now working to find the right balance that addresses private and public sector concerns without chipping away at the country’s technological edge or revealing too much more about its methods to adversaries.

Dilemmas and challenges have also surfaced in cases where the government has attempted to revitalize existing tools of statecraft. One such example would be former-Secretary Clinton’s “economic statecraft” agenda, which the State Department defined as leveraging U.S. economic

policy to strengthen the country’s diplomatic positions abroad and ensuring that U.S. foreign policy serves as a force for economic renewal at home. The overarching aim of merging domestic and foreign policy and enhancing engagement with local stakeholders and business executives – all without any accompanying increase in funding – was initially applauded by folks on both ends of the political spectrum as an important policy innovation. But even the Obama administration’s biggest policy victory in this regard – the sanctions that forced Iran to the negotiating table – had its share of challenges. As easy as it may appear to impose sanctions, Iran has come to demonstrate the difficulty in lifting them. With Congress in no mood to offer sanctions relief, the Obama administration has been left with a weaker negotiating hand should the Iranians agree to roll back their nuclear ambitions. The Iran case has also raised questions about the degree to which industry partners will be consulted and included in the policy process in the future.

Furthermore, much of the economic statecraft agenda to date has relied on sanctions. It is unclear, however, how the State Department and other federal agencies plan to develop an economic diplomacy agenda beyond sanctions. The administration continues to pursue an ambitious trade agenda that includes bilateral free trade agreements and large regional trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. With Congress stating that it has no intention of considering fast track authority, without which the larger regional trade deals are unlikely to pass, one has to ask whether such ambitious trade policies are viable.

Statecraft innovation should continue, especially in the spectrum between diplomacy and force. Much of America’s strength will rest on this ability to innovate. However, those innovations must build on a holistic conception of U.S. power and leaders

must take pains to involve stakeholders outside of government where appropriate – for example, by listening to U.S. businesses and labor groups on trade negotiations and to technology industry leaders on technology policy. Moreover, effective oversight of these innovations must ensure that the short-term advantages they provide do not come at a longer-term cost for American power broadly or for the strength of U.S. democracy at home. Such a mistake could result in strategic failure, even amid a string of tactical victories.

Challenge Four: International Organizations Less Prone to U.S. Influence

As a country that assumed a major leadership role in the creation of many multilateral institutions, such as the UN and NATO, the United States has been able to rely consistently on its ability to steer and shape the policies stemming from such institutions. Due to a wide range of internal and external factors, though, America's special role inside multilateral institutions has been evolving, leaving it with far less influence than it has been accustomed to. One of the biggest factors contributing to this change has been the role of rising powers, which, in an effort to challenge legitimacy of these organizations, sometimes act as spoilers and deliberately oppose what they perceive to be a heavy U.S. hand in day-to-day operations. The United States has also faced challenges from long-standing partners and allies who feel increasingly confident testing and/or opposing U.S. positions.

Domestic politics have played a role as well. Congress, having reached a point where the ratification of international treaties and agreements has come to a virtual standstill, has diluted America's credibility concerning its ability both to lead and to deliver on agreed priorities. Finally, the sheer age of the institutions is partly to blame for America's changing role inside such organizations. Many international organizations were created in a vastly different era, one shaped by different types of global and regional conflicts as well as different

sets of international relationships. As a result, the toolboxes and memberships of those organizations are often outdated and mismatched for today's global security environment, generally reducing the impact they can have on cross-cutting challenges such as cybersecurity or energy security.

Determining America's future approach toward international organizations must be linked to how the next U.S. president wants to address today's core strategic challenges. If the next president concludes that bolstering the liberal order and enhancing relationships with "swing states" that waver between constructive and obstructive behavior are top priorities, he or she will need to think about the ways in which restoring U.S. leadership within international organizations can contribute to those two goals. But the president will need to be clear-eyed about the size of that challenge. Restoring or redefining the U.S. role in institutions such as the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe or NATO would be a significant undertaking, one that would require the president to expend considerable political capital in persuading a skeptical Congress and American public of the value of both multilateral institutions and U.S. leadership inside those institutions. It would also require sustained, high-level engagement with like-minded allies as well as those that oppose a more assertive U.S. role. Alternatively, the next president may want to reassert U.S. leadership on just one or two core issues within a single international organization. Whatever shape it takes, America's future strategy for addressing this statecraft challenge will need to be clearly articulated to domestic and international audiences.

Challenge Five: Contradictory Public Opinion

After more than a decade of war, the American public is expressing a declining interest in global engagement generally and long-term military engagements more specifically. Polls show that the public thinks the United States does too much

to solve world problems, and increasing percentages want the country to “mind its own business internationally” and pay more attention to domestic challenges.²³ Obama’s attempt to build broad public support for strikes in Syria after the chemical weapons attacks in August 2013 serves as just one illustration of this trend. Only 36 percent of Americans favored military strikes in Syria in September of last year, the lowest level of support for *any* intervention in more than two decades.²⁴ But the fact that simultaneously, only 28 percent of Americans believe the president is handling Syria well paints a more complicated picture about public attitudes.²⁵ Given that 84 percent of Americans want the United States to remain a global leader and 56 percent want the country to remain a superpower,²⁶ the American public appears to be in search of a compromise between doing less in the world and maintaining U.S. supremacy.

The country needs to move away from the notion that international engagement comes in only one form – military missions abroad.

Such contradictory attitudes present a fundamental choice for policymakers. One option would be for American foreign-policy elites, including the U.S. president, to reduce their overarching ambition and develop a strategy and accompanying toolkit that match the public’s low level of support for U.S. engagement, particularly in regards to costly military missions. Alternatively – as we argue in this report – policymakers can maintain an ambitious policy agenda but then craft a narrative and agenda that will succeed in pulling along a

reluctant public. As Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., has argued, the United States needs to pursue a new form of internationalism that acknowledges its stake in the world, even as it avoids costly military interventions.²⁷ In other words, the country needs to move away from the notion that international engagement comes in only one form – military missions abroad. Instead, the connection between internationalism and the daily lives of average Americans must be made more explicit. Americans are likely to ask whether an affirmative foreign policy agenda can also be affordable. The next U.S. president must establish that it can. That includes clearly articulating priorities, identifying and maintaining strategic attention, outlining the risks of disengagement and investing in alternative non-military tools that are effective in both preparing for and tackling today’s complex challenges.

Challenge Six: Managing Strategic Risk

Currently, the U.S. government’s ability to assess threats, accurately determine levels of risk and then prioritize efforts accordingly remains quite limited. Finding enough hours in the day to meet on merely the most pressing challenges is hard enough. Setting aside time for senior policymakers to think beyond the next 48 hours and develop a more sophisticated approach to risk management has proved virtually impossible. At its core, though, all strategy comes down to managing risk. Perfect security is impossible, so it is important for policymakers to be systematic about where they accept risk and why.

Of course, effective risk management should not be confused with a formula for predicting the future – something even the top intelligence analysts cannot do. Instead, the process should test assumptions about risks in the world in order to derive more rigorous conclusions and help tailor policy responses that pair actual resources with the greatest risks.

Fortunately, the practice of risk management is not foreign to the national security arena, but it

has declined since the early 1990s. Paul Bracken, Ian Bremmer and David Gordon write that after the Cold War, “Whether in dollars or military action, power was mistakenly thought to be a substitute for good thinking about risk.”²⁸ The one U.S. national security agency that still attempts to practice risk management is the DOD. The process surrounding its 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance was heralded as creating a “Strategy-Based Framework for Accommodating Reductions in the Defense Budget”²⁹ instead of the other way around. But growing resource constraints and public reservations about U.S. global engagement necessitate better practices surrounding strategic risk across the entire national security bureaucracy.

To facilitate better risk management, U.S. policymakers might hold monthly Deputies Committee meetings that regularly dedicate senior policymakers’ time to a review and assessment of risks and objectives to determine what midcourse corrections or fundamentally new policy directions might be needed. As seen in the Middle East in recent years, events on the ground can evolve quite rapidly and a failure to assess objectives regularly in light of those changes runs the risk of propelling the United States down a course that is no longer relevant or effective. These special Deputies Committee meetings could also be used to set medium-term priorities to ensure that the immediate does not drown out the important. Finding a balance among issues – between number and depth, long-term and short-term, high-profile and under-the-radar, quick fixes and long slogs – constitutes one of the biggest challenges for the national security bureaucracy.

V. LOOKING AHEAD: AN AGENDA FOR FUTURE STUDY

There is no question that America finds itself in a new era that is shifting the balance of power and leaving many – both among the elite and the general public – with feelings of uncertainty about what lies ahead. Developing the specifics of new approaches will require future study, some examples of which are laid out below. Generally, the results of those projects must do several things: First, they must help the United States establish balance in its foreign policy. While the nation cannot and should not engage in deep retrenchment or isolationism, certain forms of restraint are merited. Today's leaner national security budgets simply do not allow for the same levels of engagement as Americans have come to expect.

Second, future studies must stress engagement with allies and partners, providing them as well as the United States with a strategic frame for future relationships that meet expectations on both sides. Because the United States is operating in a resource-constrained environment and is increasingly competing with other countries that do not necessarily share its interests, it must redouble its efforts to enhance and expand relationships with partners and allies. And those relationships have to expand beyond building partner capacity in military-to-military channels.

Third, renewed efforts to bolster the liberal international order must undergird any strategy. That includes both widening participation and deepening the foundations of the order. The United States can lead in particular by outlining the risks of a continued deterioration of the liberal order and set the table for policy innovation, strategic communications efforts and countering the efforts of spoilers. Finally, the United States must acknowledge challenges resulting from changes in the international system and reassert control of the narrative both at home and abroad. It is

time to confront the changing global order by accepting the consequences of power shifts and developing new sets of approaches both in terms of strategy and statecraft. We believe effective statecraft in an era of compounding complexity requires: implementing nimble, innovative and efficient U.S. policies; building and sustaining international support for U.S. leadership; maintaining America's commitment to internationalism; and managing risk and establishing priorities.

The research agenda laid out below – divided into strategy and statecraft projects – can pioneer a new strategy for the era that fits within this overarching framework and supports U.S. global leadership for decades to come.

Strategy

AMERICAN INTERNATIONALISM

America's place in the world is changing. The United States now shares a global stage with both partners that are far less predictable in their loyalties to U.S. interests than in decades past and genuine spoilers. America's relative share of world power is therefore shrinking, even if its absolute power remains formidable or is perhaps even growing. Simultaneously, several new national security challenges have surfaced, adding even more complexity to today's overflowing U.S. foreign policy agenda. Meanwhile, Americans are raising questions about the utility of military force and the value of global engagement. How can policymakers craft a foreign policy strategy that is both affirmative and affordable in light of these changes?

HOW MUCH CAN AND SHOULD THE UNITED STATES SHAPE INTERNATIONAL ORDER?

Authoritarian capitalist regimes are increasingly competing with the West for global influence. How might the West reassert control and bolster the liberal order particularly among the so-called "swing states?" What role can and should the United States play in this regard?

FROM WAR FOOTING TO WHAT?

The United States needs not just a brand but an overarching strategic frame. Is the new strategy solely focused on building partner capacity? What challenges exist in doing so? Where should the United States place its emphasis – strengthening partnerships with traditional allies, new powers or the developing world?

A NEW CONCEPT FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES?

Many developing countries are neither anti- nor pro-United States. How should the United States alter its relationships with developing countries to help transform them into capable and responsible partners that can help strengthen the global economy and bolster the liberal order?

FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

Is democracy promotion the foundation of liberal internationalism or a tool the United States can no longer afford? Is it a tool that continues to benefit from bipartisan support? How do U.S. policymakers now assess the risk and effectiveness of democracy promotion in light of events across the Middle East and South Asia in particular?

WHAT DOES THE WORLD EXPECT FROM U.S. LEADERSHIP?

How do U.S. partners and allies view the future of U.S. leadership? What are their expectations both for their region and the wider global landscape? How are they making adjustments to prepare for an evolving U.S. role in the world?

GREAT POWER SHIFTS AND REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

As the United States restructures its security presence in the Middle East, what role can other powers play in helping stabilize the region? Similarly, as the United States continues to rebalance toward the Asia Pacific, how will relationships between and among countries in Asia, the Middle East and Europe evolve?

MANAGING RISK

In an era of budget cuts and public reluctance to engage, how should the United States manage strategic risk? How does the government measure or even consider risk when making policy? Is there anything resembling a process today? What would a good risk assessment process look like, and what might it conclude?

STRATEGIC FOCUS

The United States learned from the first decade of the century that focusing too heavily on one issue can leave important issues unaddressed, much to the detriment of the nation and its allies. During the Obama presidency, arguably the country has focused on too many issues, failing to establish priorities and devote sufficient attention to follow-through. How should policymakers think about the role of strategic focus? What can they learn from past successful policymakers, as well as other sectors such as business, that applies to today's strategic choices?

Statecraft**BUILDING CIVILIAN RESPONSE CAPACITY**

The United States has tried unsuccessfully to improve its civilian response capacity for 20 years. Is this goal truly attainable? If not, what alternatives exist? Should the United States consider restructuring combatant commands to include a greater civilian role at the top?

EXPEDITIONARY DIPLOMACY

Is there a future need for expeditionary diplomacy as distinct from traditional diplomatic activity? How can the State Department, USAID and other agencies best organize for expeditionary diplomacy? How might the United States coordinate with allies and partners to increase and efficiently utilize existing capacity for expeditionary diplomacy?

U.S. LEADERSHIP IN INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

America's ability to shape policies crafted inside international institutions is changing, thanks to

rising powers that question both the legitimacy of such organizations as well as U.S. leadership thereof; partners and allies who feel increasingly confident testing or opposing U.S. positions; and congressional paralysis that has inhibited America's ability to ratify international treaties and agreements. What shape should U.S. strategy take in the future regarding America's role in international organizations? Should the United States reassert its long-standing leadership role? How?

VALUE OF TRADE DEALS

In the face of two possible trade deals in Asia and Europe, it is worth assessing trade deals' durability and overarching value, especially from a strategic perspective. Also, if they prove unattainable, are there alternatives that can achieve similar objectives?

THE FUTURE OF ECONOMIC STATECRAFT

Assuming the United States will continue to rely on economic tools to address national security challenges around the world, how should this element of statecraft continue to evolve? What role does the government foresee for partners from the business community and how can the private sector-public sector relationship be strengthened to improve the effectiveness of economic policies?

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