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Sustainable Security

Developing a Security Strategy for the Long Haul

By Jim Thomas



**Center for a
New American
Security**

Cover Image

Spc. Christopher Leonard, kneeling, gives land navigation tips to Ugandan army soldiers before they head out on a land navigation exercise at Forward Operating Location Kasenyi, Uganda, on Feb. 13, 2008. Leonard and his fellow soldiers from the 3rd Platoon, Delta Company, 1st Battalion, The Old Guard, are training Ugandan soldiers on land navigation during a 16-week military-to-military training school in Kasenyi.

DoD photo by Tech. Sgt. Jeremy T. Lock, U.S. Air Force. (Released) (Released to Public)

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"...the United States must reorient from its traditional role as the world's 'first responder' in the international sphere to become instead a more effective systemic enabler: the 'Lloyd's of London' underwriter and reinsurer of the international security system."

REDUCING THE GLOBAL SECURITY CAPACITY DEFICIT

The inability of many states in the developing world to govern and police themselves effectively or to work collectively with their neighbors to secure their regions represents a global security capacity deficit that can threaten U.S. interests. Effectively addressing this security deficit will require a new approach, one that is more preventive and indirect in its nature, that seeks to husband American power, and that reconciles America's values, interests, and commitments with its finite resources over the long haul.

America's current strategic predicament lends urgency to the formulation of a new strategy that focuses on how best to reconcile ends and means. More than six years on from the 9/11 attacks, America's position in the world and the course that lies ahead are uncertain. The high costs of current wars in terms of blood and treasure contribute to a growing sense of strategic exhaustion. Given its global goals, responsibilities, and values, America's current course is unlikely to be one that can be sustained for the long term—politically (both domestically and internationally), economically, or militarily.

While the United States faces an array of security challenges, ranging from the rise of China and the resurgence of Russia, to the spread of nuclear and biological weapons, and the extension of conflict into the domains of space and cyberspace, challenges to the nation-state system itself are the most complex and least understood. Many countries in the world expect the United States to lead efforts to counter proliferation or deter interstate conflict. However, the United States is less-suited to lead when it comes to confronting security challenges abroad that are more intrastate in character. It is in these cases that the United States should adopt a more behind-the-scenes, supporting role. This paper focuses on this strategic problem and proposes a conceptual approach for shoring up the nation-state system with the aim of setting conditions for an expansion of global civil society—and the commensurate gains in security and prosperity that would come with it.

THE NEED FOR A NEW STRATEGY

For more than forty years during the Cold War, the United States embraced a strategy of containment. Formulated over several years following World War II—from George Kennan’s “Long Telegram” in 1946 to the development of NSC-68 led by Paul Nitze in 1950—containment became the central organizing principle in U.S. national security policy for the second half of the 20th century. It would be revised and reinterpreted by nine successive presidents, as each administration adopted its own approach toward the implementation of containment. All of them, however, from Harry Truman to George H.W. Bush, accepted the basic strategic premise: that by patiently containing the Soviet Empire’s external ambitions, the internal contradictions of its communist political-economic system would eventually lead to its introspection and mellowing, if not its outright demise.

Since the Cold War’s end, scholars and statesmen have struggled to define a successor to containment to guide America through the early decades of the 21st century. During the early 1990s, the Clinton administration proposed a logical successor: a National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement of the zone of democratic states.¹ Following the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration put forward a “Freedom Agenda,”² which called for promoting democracy as a bulwark against extremist ideologies and shared similar features to the earlier Clinton vision, particularly in its emphasis on expanding the community of democracies. Both of these strategic declarations, however, tended to focus more on the ends of strategy, without explaining sufficiently how those ends should be achieved.

Determining the best strategic course for the United States in the decades ahead is in some respects more difficult than it was at the start

of the Cold War. Both the portfolio of American interests and the array of challenges to them are broader than those of the Cold War, and today are harder to define. Industrial Age articulations of national interests—largely in terms of industrial capacity and oil production—are not well suited to the Information Age, in which interests can transcend geography and threats can emanate from almost anywhere on the planet. In place of the Soviet Union and its satellites there is a wider range of actors who could threaten our interests, and they are less susceptible to a single, overarching strategic approach.

While previous strategic formulations could take for granted the Westphalian nation-state system as the principal framework within which to consider national interests, today that system is itself under siege. There is a growing danger of the nation-state system gradually eroding as the weakest and most fragile nation-states lose their ability to govern and police themselves effectively. Non-state actors—be they radical Islamist transnational terrorist networks, narco-criminal cartels, or reincarnated Communist-era secret police apparatchiks usurping power with Mafia-like efficiency—all threaten the viability of the nation-state system.

It will not always be in the interest of the United States to defend the status quo international system, with its artificial borders and in the face of legitimate calls for self-determination. However, the United States does have an interest in maintaining an orderly system in which change ideally occurs without resort to bloodshed. It also has an interest in opposing illiberal forces that can metastasize beyond a single state and threaten U.S. security more directly over time.

SUSTAINABLE SECURITY

Reducing the security capacity deficit begins with the premise that U.S. security is indivisible from security of the broader nation-state system. To meet intrastate challenges to the nation-state system the United States must fashion a new strategy, one that is more sustainable in every sense of the word. The United States must set conditions to strengthen the weakest and most fragile of nation-states. Most dramatically, the United States must reorient from its traditional role as the world's "first responder" in the international security sphere to become instead a more effective systemic enabler: the "Lloyd's of London" underwriter and reinsurer of the international security system. In doing so, it can establish a new pattern of international security, one that is at once more preventive and resilient. This is neither a recipe for the United States to do less in the world, nor an attempt to maintain super-power status on the cheap. Rather, it is a design for the United States to more effectively apply its resources and be able to dispatch its military and non-military forces to more places in the world, but in smaller, distributed packages.

This reorientation would be made manifest principally by building up local, national, regional, and international layers of security capacity to meet the security challenges of the 21st century in a more anticipatory fashion with less dependence on the United States for direct military intervention. By increasing the capacity of like-minded states to withstand internal threats as well as external aggression, the United States can more effectively concentrate on the provision of security capabilities it is uniquely able to bring to bear: projecting power at great distances, organizing and leading alliances and coalitions to counter hegemonic threats, confronting nuclear and proliferation challenges, and maintaining freedom of navigation

and peaceful use of the global commons—the high seas, air, space, and cyberspace.

Such a strategy of sustainable security requires extending security beyond geographic areas normally associated with Industrial Age "vital interests" by supporting others to defeat those who would visit violence on us wherever they may operate. Extending security globally, however, cannot be accomplished through outdated Cold War-era deployments of American military personnel to distant garrisons, guarding borders and keeping the peace, with scarce contributions from the threatened states themselves. The vast areas of the world that need to be policed grossly outstrip the capacity of the United States to police them directly or unilaterally. Direct interventions, moreover, tend to tie down U.S. forces and decrease their ability to prevent or deter conflicts in other areas. Similarly, unilateral policing efforts tend to stir animosity and weaken U.S. legitimacy.

Departing from such approaches, it should be the policy of the United States to enable others—who have greater local knowledge and legitimacy than a foreign intervening power—to help shrink the ungoverned areas of the world and through them deny sanctuary to terrorists and other hostile parties, thereby collectively addressing broader threats to the nation-state system. This will require U.S. forces to operate in far more places than it does today, but with relatively smaller advisory and training units and, in some cases, even single individuals serving as advisors and mentors in the mode of Edward Lansdale, who quietly worked behind the scenes as an advisor to the Philippine government in the early 1950s to help defeat the Huk rebellion. Adopting a strategy to enable others to police themselves and their regions more effectively is the best way to reduce the security capacity deficit without bankrupting

the United States or forcing it to defend the system by itself at every weak point on the globe.

Like containment, a new strategy will require the support of a concert of international allies and partners to be sustainable and effective. America's friends look to the United States for constancy and reliability as a security partner. Adopting a strategy of sustainable security for the long haul would help the United States achieve those attributes, by embracing a strategy that can maintain domestic bipartisan support, not exhaust U.S. financial resources, and be supported by the rotational base of all-volunteer U.S. military forces. Such a strategy should bring greater alignment between the interests of the United States and those of its allies and partners by strengthening the natural forces of resistance to extremism and non-state threats within the international system, namely the nation-states themselves. Where interests overlap, the United States should partner with like-minded states from the developed world to reduce the security deficit of the developing world.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

A strategy of sustainable security should be guided by five key principles: prevention, indirection, disaggregation, strategic perseverance and unity, and a global economy of force.

Prevention

At times the United States may have to use its military to prevent wars and advance its interests, not simply to “fight and win wars” when they occur. Accordingly, the application of the military should in some cases be not of last resort, but should sometimes occur at an early date when it is still possible to prevent security problems from metastasizing and affecting the broader international security system, and U.S. interests more directly.

Such a preventive approach would represent a departure from the so-called Weinberger doctrine on the use of the military—as a last resort and only when vital interests are threatened—and a reorientation toward earlier involvement in problem areas by working with and through others to address security challenges so that large-scale intervention by the United States is less likely at a later time.³

Indirection

A preference for indirect approaches to security problems—that is, working by, with, and through others in the world to achieve U.S. goals—would be the hallmark of a sustainable security strategy. Working where possible with like-minded governmental, nongovernmental and other groups to confront common security challenges offers the best chance for the United States to avoid strategic exhaustion.

British military historian Sir B.H. Liddell Hart observed, “In strategy the longest way round is often the shortest way there; a direct approach to

the object exhausts the attacker and hardens the resistance by compression, whereas an indirect approach loosens the defender’s hold by upsetting his balance.”⁴ By adopting an indirect approach, the strategy would favor supporting, training, equipping, advising, and mentoring indigenous security forces to counter insurgencies, terrorism, and other threats that are intrastate in nature over the direct or unilateral application of U.S. instruments of power.⁵

Disaggregation

Many of the threats the United States and its allies and partners face, terrorism and proliferation most notably, are global in nature. In many cases, however, the best way to defeat them will be to disaggregate them by adopting approaches tailored to local conditions and differentiated from region to region. Local conditions should dictate different methods to achieve global U.S. objectives. For example, in the Philippines today, U.S. Special Forces work with the Philippine army to “win hearts and minds” and strengthen the legitimacy of the central government and military through civic action projects in the southern islands, while in Iraq and Afghanistan the main efforts are training and advising indigenous security forces for counterinsurgency operations and shoring up local security conditions.

Disaggregation calls for “thinking globally, but acting locally” to address the greatest security concerns facing the United States and its partners.⁶

Strategic Perseverance and Unity

Like the strategy of containment, U.S. policy-makers should craft their strategy in a way that it is most likely to be sustained by successive presidential administrations. If adopted, such a strategy will likely require decades of patient application to be successful. And success will not take the form of a wall crumbling or a statue falling, but

rather will be made manifest through the steady improvement in the international community's aggregate security capacity, as measured by the capacity of states and regional security institutions to do more for themselves to keep the peace with less dependence on outside powers. A premium should be placed on maintaining bipartisan political consensus, because it is critical for maintaining the strategy in its broad form.

While there will be adaptations from one presidential administration to the next, the strategy's success will hinge on whether it can maintain political support for the long haul. It will also place great demands on future presidents to continually explain the strategy and why it is our preferred approach, the need for sacrifice, and the necessity of taking the long view. Similarly, the United States cannot confront all of these perils and defend all of its interests unilaterally: it will need the support and cooperation of others. Without the support of allies, the strategy is unlikely to succeed.

Global Economy of Force

In many cases, a large U.S. military presence is counterproductive when it comes to building up indigenous security capacity. It may breed resentment in the local population, delegitimize the central government (or at least diminish perceptions of its effectiveness), and increase dependence by indigenous security forces on the U.S. military. Accordingly, a strategy of sustainable security should seek to minimize the U.S. military footprint wherever possible and to adopt low-visibility and frequently clandestine approaches to help local security forces set security conditions for broader societal development and institution building.

The United States should aim to achieve a global economy of force, principally by enabling and

leveraging the security capacity of others. In this sense, U.S. military forces and non-military personnel serve as force multipliers to build capacity and institutions abroad that can play the primary role in setting security conditions rather than U.S. forces themselves. Thus, American personnel—both military and non-military—can have influence and achieve effects far beyond their numbers.

In adopting these principles and strategic approach, the United States must account for the limits of its power, reconciling ends and means. The United States cannot solve all of the world's ills, but it also cannot ignore problems that are likely to worsen and provide fertile ground for terrorism, instability, and other security threats. It cannot bear any burden indefinitely, but instead must judiciously marshal its resources to cope with today's dangers even as it husband resources for the security of posterity. It cannot afford to be, nor should it desire to serve as, the world's policeman, but it needs states that can police and govern themselves justly and effectively.

ADOPTING A MULTI-LEVEL APPROACH

A strategy of sustainable security should aim to reduce the global security capacity deficit holistically, from the lack of security at the local level, to the weakness of nation-states to police and govern themselves justly, to regional and international security institutions that can extend the viability of the international security system.

Local Security

Tip O'Neill, the late Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, famously learned from his father that “all politics is local.” The same could be said for security. At peace within its own borders, most Americans enjoy the luxury of being able to look far over the horizon at threats to their interests and to formulate security from the perspective of the nation-state, rather than more local constructs. But for many people in the world, it is the more proximate dangers on which they focus. If your children cannot safely travel to and from their school, it is hard to think in broader terms of international security.

America's current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan underscore this point. For the first several years in both countries, coalition forces placed emphasis on national-level efforts—building up national security forces and institutions to strengthen the state's center—while relatively fewer resources went to shoring up security at the tribal, neighborhood, and village levels by empowering local people to be able to police and defend themselves. Without security at the local level, it will be difficult in many countries to achieve national unity. In many areas of the world there will be a need for the United States to balance efforts to build up national constabularies with efforts to build up grassroots security, neighborhood by neighborhood, village by village, tribal area by tribal area.

Accordingly, the United States will need to develop ways to more effectively foster security at the lowest levels of society that can be aggregated up to improve the security of a country as a whole. Consistent with this more balanced approach to helping others achieve local security, the United States will need to build on the use of Commander's Emergency Response Program funds so heavily used in Iraq and Afghanistan to improve the security and wellbeing of local populations. Similar to microloans for economic development, the United States should also develop new schemes for “microsecurity” projects aimed at empowering people in local villages and neighborhoods to do more for themselves.

At the same time, it is unlikely that activities aimed at bolstering security in one area will always work in others. The U.S. government must encourage in its civilian officials and military officers abroad a willingness to experiment and determine tailored, differentiated approaches suitable for any given local environment.⁷ A “one size fits all” approach to building local security capacity is likely to fail.

Vulnerable Nation-States: Helping Others Help Themselves

The political philosopher Max Weber defined the state in terms of its security capacity. A state exists, he argued, “insofar as its administrative staff successfully upholds a claim on the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order.”⁸ At the start of the 21st century, however, many nation-states in the world fail to meet this basic requirement to uphold their security claims in the face of internal and transnational non-state threats. Their effective level of governance and policing falls far short of their internationally recognized sovereignty. Perhaps this did not matter in earlier times when the disorder within states might be largely confined

within their borders, but in the jet age when terrorism and deadly weapons of mass destruction can easily jump borders, the weakness of individual nation-states is a source of weakness for the international security system as a whole.

Expanding global civil society in developing nation-states requires holistic development in terms of economics, civic institutions, and politics, while recognizing that basic security is a foundation for everything else. Without basic security and just legal institutions, it is difficult to conduct basic commercial transactions or mature effective political institutions. Expanding global civil society—including the development of representative and legitimate governance—depends on setting security conditions so that such development can take root and be viable. Thus, a strategy of sustainable security should strive to raise self-governance of developing states to a level commensurate with the legal principle of sovereignty so that others are not compelled to intervene in their internal affairs to address non-state threats emanating from within their borders. Such efforts cannot be imposed, but where states are willing to improve their capacities for security and governance, the United States and its allies should be willing to help them, while encouraging broader societal reforms.

For many states in the developing world where the most pressing security threats are internal in nature, there is a far greater interest in developing constabulary capabilities to deal with insurgencies and terrorism than mechanized territorial defense forces to guard and protect their borders from conventional military invasions. Legacy types of security relationships the United States developed during the Cold War—in which the American military provided the lion's share of capabilities to defend principally against cross-border aggression—are ill suited for the reality of today's

common threats, which demand much greater efforts to enable other states to help themselves in the security sphere.

It is insufficient, however, simply to assist in training and advising indigenous security forces. Broader security sector reform aimed at ensuring that security forces are accountable under the law and under civilian control are also needed, as are reforms to foster improvements in governance so that states have greater legitimacy. Efforts to improve governance must go hand in hand with efforts to improve a state's ability to police itself.

Wherever possible, these efforts to promote good governance through advisors, instructors, and mentors should be undertaken by non-military agencies and international institutions. These efforts will decrease the probability of security forces being misused or becoming instruments of repression. They will also increase the ability of the state to sustain improved security with less dependence on outside assistance over time.

Dealing with Incurable Regimes

Not all states are worthy of U.S. support. In some cases, the United States must be prepared to act in concert with others against a state when a regime commits atrocities against its own people, threatens its neighbors abroad, provides safe haven to terrorists, or pursues destabilizing weapons of terror or mass destruction. In such cases, states may lose their claims on legitimacy and the interests and values of the United States may compel action.

Wherever possible, the United States should favor indirect approaches to change governments from within, through the political process if possible or the use of unconventional warfare, working by, with, or through local proxies and surrogates if necessary. Iraq has demonstrated the pitfalls of

the direct approach: removing a tyrannical regime through external intervention and occupying a country with foreign forces. While the United States bears a moral responsibility to “stand with others who stand for freedom,”⁹ others must be prepared to fight and die for their own freedom. U.S. willingness to act should depend in part upon local actors. The willingness and motivation of indigenous forces to take action should be a precondition of U.S. security assistance and intervention.

Accordingly, the United States must sometimes reach out to internal opposition groups in countries with tyrannical regimes or where those regimes threaten broader international peace and security. The United States should use all instruments of national power to bolster such forces and set conditions so that indigenous people who seek freedom and want to create more liberal, civil societies may do so. But it is not the responsibility of the United States to “build nations” or topple despotic regimes on behalf of others. As an enabler, it should be the policy of the United States to help set conditions so that indigenous peoples can determine their own fates, act against tyrannical rulers, and build their own nation-states, in their own ways.

Regional and International Security Institutions

Beyond state-level security capacity, a strategy of sustainable security requires shoring up and reorienting regional and international institutions so that they can more effectively play their intended roles in the international security system. To date, regional and international security institutions have rarely lived up to their mission statements. They tend to lack political unity among their member states and the capacity to dispatch and sustain their forces for extended deployments. Still, such organizations could be enabled by

the United States and other states in the developed world to more effectively serve as primary responders to security threats. The United States should do more to strengthen them by providing critical “force multipliers” for their multinational operations—training for their forces and assistance with transport and logistics, communications, and intelligence.

With its traditional allies in Europe and Asia, the United States should pursue a dual-track approach that 1) encourages these allies to take greater responsibility for their own security in the face of a wide spectrum of threats, from external attack to terrorism within their borders; and 2) facilitates the timely formation of coalitions to act in concert “out of area” either to prevent state collapse elsewhere or to respond to common threats to international peace and security. The aim should be to ensure that America’s allies are secure in their own areas while increasing their capacities to share the responsibilities for maintaining international peace and security—the foundation of globalization and their continued prosperity—further afield. If America’s allies are to improve their military capabilities, the impetus must come from within those states. They must come to see that excessive dependence on the United States to shoulder global security burdens is not in their own national interests, as it more likely leads to undesirable American unilateralism and weakens their own say in the future course of events.

Long-standing U.S. allies can play greater roles in enabling other states and regional security institutions. Building on NATO’s operational experience in Afghanistan, the United States should continue to encourage its allies to develop greater capacity for transporting and sustaining their forces in distant theaters and to hone their skills for irregular warfare—operations in which one or more parties do not consist of regular military

forces. NATO is already taking important steps in this regard. It has committed itself to fielding a wing of large transport aircraft to improve its ability to dispatch forces “out of area” and recently established a Special Operations Coordination Center.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the lack of allied capacity to deploy and sustain significant numbers of forces in distant wars will remain a major deficiency for the foreseeable future.

The United States must also do more to support regional security institutions, like the African Union, and regional leaders, like Australia and India. It should be the aim of the United States to enable such institutions and states to take the lead in organizing coalitions and serving as the first line of response to security problems in their regions. The United States should offer them training and equipment, as well as intelligence, transport, communications and logistics support. At times, the United States may also need to provide air cover, or over-the-horizon reinforcements to insure the security and effectiveness of a regional multi-national force.

Finally, no organization in the world has greater institutional interests both in the viability of the Westphalian nation-state system and in the maintenance of international peace and security than the United Nations (UN). The fragility of the nation-state system in the face of new threats that are more internal in nature, especially from non-state actors, and the threat this poses to international peace and security should be the overriding concerns of the UN. Addressing them effectively would require a radical departure for that organization. The United States should consult with other Permanent Members of the UN Security Council to pursue broad reform, aimed at the need to safeguard the nation-state system in the face of threats from non-state actors, and to raise effective governance in states to levels

consistent with the rights and privileges of sovereignty. In this regard, there is a need to move beyond “blue helmet” operations in which UN peacekeeping forces undertake inter-positional missions between warring parties. The UN should develop a corps of advisors to promote good governance and proper policing under the rule of law to build up the capacity of the weakest and most fragile of states.

IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

Effective implementation of this strategy would benefit from a new bipartisan political consensus that adopting a more indirect approach focused on enabling others in the world to counter new threats is more sustainable politically, economically, and militarily than confronting threats more directly, militarily, and unilaterally. Its effective implementation will require more than piecemeal adoption by various agencies and departments: it will necessitate presidential direction and articulation, with the active consultation of the Congress—both to garner popular support and to reconcile competing bureaucratic interests and ensure unity of effort across the whole of the U.S. government, including far greater coordination and integrated approaches across government agencies and departments.

Sustainable security will require better orchestrating all elements of national power to achieve unity of command. Today, the National Defense Strategy and Unified Command Plan, which delineates the responsibilities of the Combatant Commanders in peace and war, govern U.S. military forces. The Department of Defense also has a long-standing process for determining the allocation of resources across its forces. And yet, there are no similar mechanisms for coordinating and integrating both the military and non-military instruments of national power. Planning and budgetary activities for the U.S. government as a whole tend to occur in stovepipes, in which changes are measured incrementally in terms of one agency's budget from year to year, rather than the reallocation of aggregate resources across agencies. Solving this problem will also require cooperation between the executive and legislative branches. Within the executive branch, there is a need to conduct a comprehensive national security review at the start of a new administration (analogous to the Pentagon's Quadrennial

Defense Review) for the whole of the government's national security functions. One output from such a review should be a unified command plan for the whole U.S. government that lays out peacetime and crisis responsibilities, as well as "supported/supporting" relationships, in other words which departments will serve as lead and which will support for various missions and operations. Another key output would be a unified resource allocation plan for national security-related executive departments and agencies.

Foreign assistance, including new forms of security assistance, will be a vital factor of the strategy. Achieving a sustainable security strategy will require more than simply re-tooling foreign assistance; it will necessitate an overhaul of the Foreign Assistance Act and a reorientation toward internal security missions over general economic development and external territorial defense.

There is a need to return the U.S. Agency for International Development to its historical roots, focusing more on the role of small-scale but more numerous micro-development and civic action projects to "win hearts and minds" at the grassroots level in the developing world, rather than continuing to pursue large-scale, contractor-executed development projects as it does today. Taking a page from the successful Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) organization that operated in Vietnam, USAID should develop greater field service capacity to serve as a "Global CORDS," promoting good governance and economic development efforts aligned with U.S. strategic priorities and as part of broader interagency operations. Doctrinally, such a retooled field organization should place its emphasis on improving the self-reliance and resiliency of indigenous societies, while simultaneously reducing their dependence on the United States and other foreign powers for basic services.

A large component of foreign assistance will entail dispatching small teams of U.S. civilian and military personnel to far-flung capitals to serve as behind-the-scenes advisors and mentors, while bringing up-and-coming foreign officials to the United States for educational and training programs that improve their effectiveness and form lasting relationships with their American counterparts. Military and non-military advisors and trainers will need greater flexibility under the law to promote security sector reform in other countries, but also to undertake much deeper and sustained efforts to promote just and effective governance.

Security cooperation activities should also be reevaluated. The Cold War approach to security assistance that stressed territorial defense assistance and helped to underwrite the U.S. defense industrial production of large conventional platforms (fighters, tanks, ships, etc.) is less relevant to the security capacity deficit we face today. New forms of security assistance must be developed that are more inwardly focused on constabulary missions. These could take the form of clandestine, low-visibility assistance to conduct unconventional warfare against a hostile state or to counter an insurgency in one that is committed to legitimate governance. They may take the form of police training or building up the maritime patrolling capabilities of partners to interdict shipments of weapons, drugs, or human slaves. Security assistance must also support broader security sector reforms aimed at ensuring effective security institutions, civilian control over military forces, transparency in defense planning, and respect for the law and human rights. Ensuring flexibility to work with the various security forces within a country, under both interior and defense ministries, is crucial.

Covert action and paramilitary operations are also increasing in importance, both to shore up allies and partners facing extremist threats and to work indirectly by, with, and through indigenous forces that oppose regimes committing crimes against their own people, harboring terrorists, or threatening broader international peace and security. Such measures short of war can impose costs on adversaries, complicate hostile military planning, and challenge despotic regimes from within their own states. Specialized U.S. forces may also be needed to conduct low-visibility operations against terrorists and other non-state adversaries in countries with which the United States is not at war. Because of the critical importance of U.S. credibility to the long-term success of a sustainable security strategy, covert operations must be employed judiciously, and must be defensible to the American people in the event they are exposed.

Improving U.S. human intelligence, especially for understanding the dynamics of intrastate conflict in the developing world, should also be a priority. One of America's greatest advantages is the diversity of our society. Yet the national security organizations of the U.S. government have not fully tapped into this source of strength. Intelligence and other national security organizations, including the U.S. military, should increase recruiting efforts focused on men and women with not only language skills, but also cultural and societal understanding of developing states that only firsthand experience can yield.

There is also a need for tighter cooperation between the Defense and State Departments when it comes to enabling others to police themselves more effectively. During the Cold War, the United States maintained military advisory and assistance groups (MAAG) in many countries to coordinate State and Defense assistance activities and

to enable the security forces of the host nations.¹¹ Today, there is a pressing need to dust off the concept of the MAAG, to dedicate forces for such missions, and to deploy such groups throughout the developing world.

Within the Department of Defense, efforts to improve advisory capacity, particularly of the Army and Marine Corps, are underway. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has made clear that the Army must embrace the demands of irregular warfare: “Arguably the most important military component in the War on Terror is not the fighting we do ourselves, but how well we enable and empower our partners to defend and govern their own countries. The standing up and mentoring of indigenous armies and police—once the province of Special Forces—is now a key mission for the military as a whole.”¹² Building on these efforts, the next administration should consider further efforts to strengthen the military’s capacity to conduct foreign internal defense, unconventional warfare, counterinsurgency, and civic action, as well as general foreign security force advisory missions.

In this regard, there are several organizational adaptations that should be considered. One is to create a dedicated Advisory Corps within the Army to support advisory missions.¹³ Another is to create with the U.S. Special Operations Command a “white SOF” equivalent of the Joint Special Operations Command that focuses on unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense and counterinsurgency operations.¹⁴ A premium must be placed on enabling foreign forces to fight and win wars, including internal conflicts, with minimal reliance on external support or assistance over time. Accordingly, the Pentagon’s construct for shaping and sizing forces should be further adapted to give greater emphasis to steady-state requirements to train, equip, and advise other security forces.

Finally, it will be difficult to undertake any of these changes without reforming some of the basic structures of the Congress. Existing oversight committee stovepipes and authorities between Foreign Relations, Armed Services, and Intelligence, should be re-evaluated to help facilitate the adoption of more integrated, whole-of-government approaches within the Executive Branch.

WEIGHING THE RISKS

Every strategy entails acceptance of certain risks. Identifying them explicitly is essential to effectively mitigating and managing them, as well as for providing a basis for honest and open discussion.

First, in building up the capacity of developing states — many of which are poorly governed today — there is a risk that the United States would simply be solidifying their grip on power and giving them more effective instruments of repression. This danger is undeniable. It makes manifest the imperative of coupling security capacity development efforts with broader security sector reform and governance reform, while encouraging reforms that can enable the expansion of liberal civil society. To be truly sustainable, the United States needs partner governments that not only uphold a monopoly over the legitimate use of force, but also are seen as legitimate in terms of their increasing ability to meet the needs of their citizens. Just as in the Cold War, the United States must “be careful not to lend moral prestige to unworthy elements by extending American aid.”¹⁵ Thus, U.S. decisions about whether or not to support states facing extremist threats must be determined on a case-by-case basis, always weighing the probability of reforming an illiberal regime while enhancing its security, against the probability of such a regime collapsing into chaos in which even greater threats emerge.

Second, some may see the adoption of a strategy emphasizing the indirect approach as the beginning of the decline of the United States as a superpower, as America becomes more dependent on others in the world to address security challenges. It is true that this strategy accepts both the risks and rewards of greater interdependence between the United States and its partners abroad.

Sustainable security recognizes that few problems in the world can be addressed effectively alone, as well as the paradox that in attempting to be completely independent of others in the world, the immense burden of unilateralism and direct interventions may hasten the decline of the United States and drive the nation to a point where it is far more dependent on others for its security sooner rather than later. To address this paradox, the strategy must balance direct and indirect, supported and supporting efforts with the aim of preserving U.S. power and maintaining its leadership position.

Third, in some cases overt U.S. support for certain governments or indigenous groups can undercut the legitimacy of those we seek to assist. For example, the United States has an interest in the emergence of voices within the Muslim world that oppose Salafist-inspired acts of terrorism. However, even the suggestion of association of such leaders with the United States could undermine their standing within the Muslim world. In cases such as this, the United States will have to choose between more clandestine forms of assistance on the one hand, and more laissez-faire policies on the other.

Fourth, there is the possibility of “mission creep,” whereby the lack of success in small-scale advisory efforts to shore up the constabulary forces of a given country lead to calls for greater involvement to preserve our credibility and signal the resolve of our commitment. This risk is reminiscent of the U.S. experience in South Vietnam in the mid-1960s when the principal mission of U.S. forces shifted from indirect foreign internal defense to direct combat. This risk can be mitigated by placing emphasis on building up the self-reliance of indigenous forces and practicing an economy of force. It also requires accepting the limits of American power and recognizing that

not all security problems can be solved. A failure anywhere should not equate to failure everywhere.

Fifth, in giving greater weight to preventive efforts aimed at shoring up others, there is a danger that the U.S. military may be less prepared to fight and win high-end, high-technology conflicts, that the U.S. military could lose its warfighting prowess over time. However, in a force where its people are its greatest source of strength, the routine interaction of military forces with foreign indigenous forces in operational environments may hone leadership skills and innovation, which would be crucial in large-scale wars as well. During the years between the two world wars, the U.S. Marine Corps intervened repeatedly in “small wars” in the Caribbean and Latin America. Later historians would credit the early performance of Marines in World War II, particularly on the part of its noncommissioned officers who were often brevetted as lieutenants in the indigenous forces of Central American armies and constabularies, on the small unit leadership lessons learned through those experiences.¹⁶

Sixth, the record of the United States, particularly its military, performing the types of training and advisory missions that would be such a critical element of this enabling strategy is mixed at best. Historically, the United States has preferred to provide security to its partners directly. It has successfully conducted several operations in which it enabled and leveraged proxies and surrogates, notably in Afghanistan and El Salvador in the 1980s. However, it ultimately failed to sustain a program of support for the South Vietnamese Army in the 1970s, and the Army and Marine Corps moved away from counterinsurgency as a main mission for general purpose forces in the aftermath of Vietnam. Despite this mixed record, there are grounds for optimism. The Army and Marine Corps recently adopted a

new Counterinsurgency Manual that has been embraced by ground force commanders and can serve as an effective doctrinal foundation, while the department as a whole has embraced a strategy articulated in the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review that emphasizes the indirect approach.¹⁷ At the same time, many Army and Marine officers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan see irregular operations not as anomalies, but as a likely future aspect of war for which their services must hone their skills.

Finally, any honest assessment of this strategy must consider whether it can garner American public support over the long haul. Historically, Americans have been reluctant to support foreign assistance programs and preventive security efforts. While it is true that the United States has spared little cost when it has been attacked to fight and win wars, it is not clear that the American people and their leaders would be willing to play a much greater preventive security role in the world. More than fifty years has elapsed since the United States undertook the Marshall Plan of economic assistance to set conditions for European economic recovery following World War II. Will Americans be willing to pay a comparable price in the 21st century to help make international peace and security more durable? It is doubtful without constant efforts by American leaders to communicate the benefits of such actions.

CONCLUSION

As the United States considers lessons learned from Iraq, Afghanistan, and the myriad other operations conducted around the world since the 9/11 attacks, their pattern reveals greatest success where the United States has worked hardest to enable others, setting security conditions for their success while preventing today's problems from becoming tomorrow's wars. Stitching these disparate efforts into a national security strategy offers the best hope of maintaining international peace and security, while avoiding strategic exhaustion. Making the changes to become the international security system's "enabler" will entail many risks, but it is the best hope for reducing the most serious risks to American and global security while expanding liberal civil society in the first part of this new century.

ENDNOTES

¹White House, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (July 1994). The strategy was first articulated by former National Security Advisor Anthony Lake in a speech at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies on September 21, 1993. A precursor to the next administration's "freedom agenda," Lake warned of the false assumption that democracy and market economics would "be embraced only by the West and rejected by the rest." He asserted that "the idea of freedom has universal appeal." He was also one of the first to recognize that in the post-Cold War era, "most conflicts are taking place within rather than among nations" (emphasis in original). See Anthony Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement," (21 September 1993), at <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/lakedoc.html>.

²See George W. Bush, Speech to the 88th Annual American Legion National Convention (1 September 2006); see also White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (March 2006): 6. "It is the policy of the United States to seek and support democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world."

³Caspar Weinberger, "The Uses of Military Power," (28 November 1984), at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/military/force/weinberger.html>.

⁴B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Meridian, 1991): 5.

⁵Already, the U.S. military is adopting the indirect approach. See Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (6 February 2006).

⁶David Kilcullen, "Countering Global Insurgency," *Small Wars Journal* (30 November 2004).

⁷See Greg Jaffe, "Great Divide: In Iraq, an Officer's Answer to Violence: Build a Wall," *Wall Street Journal* (5 April 2007): A1; and Jim Michaels, "An Army Colonel's Gamble Pays Off in Iraq," *USA Today* (1 May 2007): A1.

⁸Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Talcott Parsons, ed. and A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons, trans. (New York: The Free Press, 1964): 154.

⁹George W. Bush, Second Inaugural Address (20 January 2005).

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¹¹Bob Killebrew, *The Left-Hand Side of the Spectrum: Ambassadors and Advisors in Future U.S. Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2007).

¹²Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Remarks to the Association of the United States Army, Washington, D.C. (10 October 2007), at <http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1181>.

¹³John Nagl, *Institutionalizing Adaptation: It's Time for a Permanent Army Advisory Corps* (Washington, D.C.: Center for a New American Security, 2007).

¹⁴Linda Robinson, "Men on a Mission," *US News & World Report* (11 September 2006).

¹⁵George F. Kennan quoted in John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982): 40.

¹⁶Max Boot, *Savage Wars of Peace* (New York: Basic Books, 2002): 252.

¹⁷Department of the Army, Field Manual 3–24, *Counterinsurgency* (June 2006); and Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (6 February 2006).

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