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Preparing the U.S. National Security Strategy for 2020 and Beyond

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In December 2017, the Trump Administration released its National Security Strategy (NSS). The strategy is well suited to the tasks of protecting the nation's vital interests. Enough time has passed to assess the NSS as well as identify the next steps for realizing the strategy's goal of securing America's competitive global position. Heritage Foundation national security and global political analysts explain the steps that the U.S. should take. The research presented focuses on high-pay-off, feasible, and suitable U.S. actions that will further the objectives of the NSS and improve America's national security and strategic position in a competitive and dangerous world.

The United States is a global power with global interests and global responsibilities. America needs a strategy to match. In particular, the government must safeguard the nation's three top vital interests—defense of the homeland, stability in critical regions, and preservation of the right of states to freely transit the global commons. All three goals are best served by effective U.S. actions in three crucially important parts of the world—the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East.¹

In December 2017, the Trump Administration released its National Security Strategy (NSS).² The strategy is well suited to the task of protecting the nation's vital interests. Further, rather than just a document for public consumption, the Administration has sought to follow the strategy like a blueprint for keeping the U.S. free, safe, and prosperous in a changing and challenging world.

Enough time has passed to assess the NSS as well as identify the next steps for realizing the strategy's goal of securing America's competitive global position. A credible assessment of the strategy and defining a responsible way forward require (1) reviewing the basis for the strategy—U.S. vital interests; (2) evaluating the suitability, feasibility, and acceptability of

current actions; and (3) determining, based on the present geostrategic landscape, the right next steps. To that end, this analysis concludes with the critical next actions organized in two parts—(1) initiatives in the most important strategic regions (Europe, the Greater Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific), and (2) improvements in the instruments of power that must be applied in these regions and globally to safeguard the interests of the American public.

America's Vital Interest

In describing how the U.S. pursues its own safety and prosperity, national security expert and Heritage Foundation Executive Vice President Kim Holmes concludes that

[t]he United States cannot eliminate every bad actor, right every wrong, or correct every perceived injustice in the world. That is impossible. But the United States can contribute to building a world order in which the rule of law, the integrity of national borders, democratic capitalism, freedom of the seas, democratic self-government, human rights, and international trade prevail, not as guaranteed outcomes but as opportunities.³

The best way to determine how to allocate America's power and influence to these ends is to ensure, first, that U.S. vital interests are paramount in every consideration, and that they are the core focus of U.S. strategy. Vital interests are the foundation of a sound national security strategy. "The term 'national interest,'" writes Professor Donald Nuechterlein, "has been used by statesmen and scholars since the founding of nation-states to describe the aspirations and goals of sovereign entities in the international arena."⁴ Heritage Foundation researchers have long advocated for focusing U.S. power on the protection of three core interests—(1) defense of the homeland; (2) stability of regions critical to U.S. interests; and (3) preservation of freedom of movement within the global commons.⁵

Defense of the Homeland. Defense of the homeland is the most self-evident of these interests. It is the protection of United States territory against external threats and aggression.⁶ There are developments far from home that also have direct impact on the homeland. Among them are missile threats to the 50 American states and the American territories of Guam, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa. There are threats from state sponsors of terrorism and terrorist organizations operating in war-torn regions that can strike without warning. Further, there are adversarial, and potentially adversarial, states with the capacity to threaten American national security not through physical invasion, but through the manipulation of, or attack on, key U.S. infrastructure from abroad.⁷

Stability of Key Regions. Addressing threats abroad helps the U.S. to avoid consequences at home. Promoting stability in critical regions prevents conflict there from cascading in ways that affect America. Stability abroad also provides for a free and secure global market place, which redounds to the benefit of Americans. Conversely, open warfare in areas where inter-state tensions are prominent—and the capability of adversaries the greatest—would have a major negative impact on the United States.

The U.S. must be present or have the capacity to project power to protect its interests worldwide. That being said, the U.S. is anything but the world's policeman or a global babysitter. America must be prudent in the application of power. Three key regions link America to the world—Europe, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific. These are also regions with a

preponderance of U.S. friends, allies, and strategic partners with significant political, economic, and military power. Thus, ensuring the stability of these particular regions is exceptionally important to the United States

Freedom of Movement within the Global Commons. Unfettered access to the global commons (air, sea, space, and cyberspace) for all is also a vital competitive advantage for the United States. That access ultimately rests on the U.S., its allies, and its partners. While economic freedom—the ability for people to openly exchange economic activity free of corruption, crime, and undue or untoward influence by government—is not a "commons," per se, free economic practices do represent the natural, most beneficial state of economic exchange. For this reason, it is in the U.S. interest to promote instruments of international economic exchange and investment based on the principles of economic freedom.⁸ Increasingly, it is in the U.S. interest to treat the international flow of goods, capital, and services like a commons, protected from malicious influences and unwarranted intervention. The opposite condition—governments' unfettered martialing of economic resources for the power of the state—leads to economic underperformance, corruption, subjugation, and, ultimately, destructive state-on-state competition and conflict.

Where the U.S. Is Now

What is most crucial for achieving all three core U.S. objectives is successful engagement in three key regions of U.S. interest—Europe, the Greater Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific. Thus, this assessment of the NSS focuses on U.S. policies in these regions, as well as the U.S. response to the principal threats to regional stability from China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and transnational Islamist terrorism.

The focus is on the actual policies implemented by the Administration, their impact on regional security, and their influence on friendly powers and adversaries.⁹ In addition, this assessment acknowledges that the execution of the Administration's policies occasionally has been damaged by inconsistent or flawed messaging. For instance, consistent critic Robert Blackwill, while acknowledging that the President's strategic focus may have merit, detailed a long list of complaints and shortfalls with present U.S. foreign policy.¹⁰ Some of the criticisms, such as the Administration's use of tariffs to advance trade policy, are indeed well justified.¹¹ But debating the

pluses and minuses of individual measures obscures an assessment of the central issue, which is whether the Administration is addressing the core demands of the strategy.

Stability in the Transatlantic Community.

In terms of U.S. vital interests, peace, stability, and expanding prosperity in Europe remain as crucial as ever. The most significant external threats are Russia and destabilizing influences from the Middle East (terrorism, refugees, and conflict) spilling over into Europe. The encroaching influence of China is also a growing concern. The Administration's NSS recognizes these challenges. A candid assessment would conclude that the Administration has largely followed through on addressing all of them. In practical terms, that is reflected in support for a robust U.S. presence in Europe, the continued backing of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as the bedrock of transatlantic security, and a deep-seated U.S.-U.K. Special Relationship.

There are many examples of the U.S. increasing its security engagement with Europe. Funding to increase the U.S. military operations in Europe through the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) has nearly doubled since the final year of the Obama Administration, with the Department of Defense requesting \$6.5 billion for the EDI in fiscal year (FY) 2019. Additionally, the U.S. has greatly expanded its physical presence in Europe, serving as the framework nation for NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) battlegroup in Poland, with 800 American soldiers forming the core of this multinational battalion. The U.S. has continued heel-to-toe rotations to Europe of both an aviation brigade and armored brigade combat team. Further, the United States has beefed up its presence in Norway, doubling the number of Marines to 700 in 2019. The U.S. has also expanded its prepositioned stocks of equipment and munitions, and is currently evaluating the efficacy of a permanent military presence in Eastern Europe.

Following the strategy, the Administration has also done much to reassure friends and allies. The Administration has, for instance, strongly supported Ukraine, approving the sale of lethal defensive weapons and issuing a non-recognition statement regarding annexed Crimea. U.S. foreign policy under the Trump Administration has placed a premium on national sovereignty, including strong support for Brexit, and a potential future U.S.-U.K. Free Trade Agreement.

While the U.S. has re-engaged with Europe, American policy toward Russia has been to push back against Moscow's aggression, and to increase the costs of actions that threaten our allies. In 2019, the U.S. suspended the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in response to Russia's decades' long and systematic escalation of its violations. The U.S. has also enacted sanctions relating to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, meddling in U.S. elections, and Russia's use of chemical weapons on European soil in Salisbury, England, in 2018. The U.S. has also expelled dozens of Russian officials, and shuttered the Russian consulates in San Francisco and Seattle.

Balance in the Indo-Pacific. The U.S. has long been an Asian power, its peace and prosperity integrally intertwined in the development of the region. The Indo-Pacific is also a vital component of the global commons. While an unchecked North Korea could be a cause for war in northeast Asia, and potentially a danger to the U.S. homeland as well, the destabilizing rise of China stands as the principal concern to the U.S. This concern was recognized in the NSS and reflected in the Administration's quickness to embrace the concept of a "free and open Indo-Pacific."

That being noted, there was significant uncertainty over how the U.S. would follow through on its goals as stated in the NSS. There was confusion over the distinctions between the new strategy and the previous Administration's concept of a "pivot to Asia." Allies have had to adjust to a change to leadership style in the White House. There have been some unnecessary bumps in the road during this transition (contentious negotiations over basing arrangements, for example), but America's principal alliances with Japan, South Korea, and Australia are healthy.

The same is true for other regional allies and security partners. The U.S. continues to work through differences with the most consequential of these, India, on matters like Iran and the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act in ways that allow the relationship to sustain its forward momentum. U.S. resolve on Taiwan, in particular, demonstrated by the Administration and Congress through arms sales, unofficial diplomatic engagement, transits through the Taiwan Strait, and multiple expressions of support, shows that the U.S. keeps its commitments to even the most vulnerable of its partners. U.S. commitment to freedom of the seas throughout the region, but especially in the South China Sea, has likewise been a welcome sign of resolve.

The United States had two core interests in relation to North Korea: Prevent a war in northeast Asia, and protect the U.S. homeland from nuclear blackmail or attack by North Korea. In pursuit of these interests, the Administration put in place a pressure campaign—a mix of nuclear and conventional deterrence, missile defense, and sanctions. In addition, the Administration opened a diplomatic track offering to normalize relations in exchange for North Korean denuclearization.

In Afghanistan, the U.S. remains engaged militarily, even as it seeks a political solution to the ongoing conflict that has required its presence. Its commitment there, despite much media commentary to the contrary, is not slackening. Given the role Afghanistan once played as an incubator for international terrorism, a U.S. presence is critical to the security of the homeland. It is also important to maintaining the confidence of regional partners, like India, and the NATO and non-NATO allies who have contributed to the mission in Afghanistan.

Engagement in the Middle East and North Africa. The Middle East is an important region. It is at the intersection of commercial air and sea travel between the other two key regions. It is a global energy hub, a lynchpin of international financial networks, and a crossroads for human migration. American prosperity and security are always heightened when this part of the world is more stable, peaceful, and prosperous. The two concerns that animate U.S. regional strategy are Iran’s destabilizing activities and the danger posed by transnational Islamist terrorist groups, such as ISIS and al-Qaeda.

After two successive Administrations pursued overly ambitious strategies in the region (nation-building and rapid democratization by the George W. Bush Administration and the flawed Iran nuclear agreement by the Obama Administration, followed by rapid disengagement from regional issues), the present NSS called for a more restrained and balanced approach, recognizing the need for U.S. leadership, action, and engagement, but also looking to regional partners to help implement sustainable security solutions.

In Syria and Iraq, the Administration applied much more robust military pressure to accelerate the defeat of the ISIS “caliphate.” The Administration removed crippling political restrictions on U.S. air strikes, deployed much larger special operations forces inside Syria, and armed and trained Syrian Kurds

to fight ISIS. President Donald Trump also enforced the red line against chemical warfare by bombing Syrian military units and facilities caught using illegal chemical weapons, a red line that was proclaimed and then ignored by his predecessor. These actions were a powerful demonstration of U.S. leadership.

The Administration also dealt squarely and forthrightly with the adversarial regime in Iran. The United States withdrew from the nuclear agreement. With the support of Congress, the Administration ratcheted up sanctions against the Iranian regime, added sanctions on Iranian proxy groups, such as Hezbollah and Iraqi militias, and designated Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organization. The hardline approach to sanctions has reduced Iran’s oil revenues, diminished its ability to finance terrorism and international subversion, and elevated the risk that it will be overthrown by Iranians fed up with its repression, corruption, and costly foreign interventions.

The current Administration also repaired damaged bilateral relations with key Middle Eastern allies Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. It recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and moved the U.S. embassy there from Tel Aviv. The Administration also restored U.S. military aid and arms sales to Egypt and Bahrain, while increasing support for the Saudi-led coalition supporting Yemen’s government against Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

Next Steps for U.S. Strategy

U.S. strategy is rightly focused on the essential issues, yet it is also clear that many of those challenges are far from resolved. There is a clear continued requirement for the application of all instruments of U.S. power. Further, the U.S. will continue to stretch itself in order to be actively and simultaneously engaged in all three core regions. In addition, many regional issues spill over into competition into other areas. For instance, the Arctic is a region of increasing competition with China and Russia. The U.S. is also concerned about destabilizing Chinese and Russian activity and interference in Africa and Latin America.

With these concerns in mind, the next iteration of U.S. strategy must address not only key regional initiatives, but must ensure that critical instruments of American power are prepared to respond appropriately globally with sufficient scope and influence. Thus, rather than focusing on ongoing activities, such as the current negotiations with North Korea or the

Taliban, the authors of this *Special Report* examine what kind of additional actions can be taken to operationalize the current NSS. The recommendations below address further steps for advancing regional policies as well as strengthening the instruments of U.S. power to secure vital objectives.

Recommendations for Europe. The U.S. can exercise more leadership in the transatlantic community in dealing with the great external threats to European stability—Russian meddling, destabilizing concerns from the greater Middle East, and the encroachment of China that could undermine the Western security architecture. The U.S. should:

- **Sustain U.S. policy toward Russia.** There is no evidence that Russian President Vladimir Putin is willing to be more conciliatory toward the West or enter into any serious confidence-building measures in the near term, such as more robust arms control initiatives. Therefore, in the near term the U.S. must continue a campaign to minimize Russian capacity to destabilize Europe. The U.S. should not offer a single conciliatory gesture. Rather, the U.S. should continue to press for NATO enlargement for those countries able to meet the obligations and responsibilities; oppose energy projects that benefit Russia and undermine European energy security, as well as contribute to constructive alternatives; sustain strong sanctions; support nations with territory occupied by Russia (Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova); and step up engagement in the Balkans to combat Russian influence there. Further, the U.S. should emphasize means to expand and reinforce NATO's conventional footprint from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. All this is vital not just to show Putin that America is on watch, but also to show the Europeans that the U.S. will walk the walk when it comes to remaining tough on Russian influence.
- **Double down on the U.S.–U.K. Special Relationship.** The United Kingdom has always been America's anchor for the transatlantic community. That link is more important than ever whether Britain stays in the European Union or not. Indeed, the value of the relationship would be enhanced, not diminished, by Brexit. A U.K. independent of the EU offers the promise of a new economic powerhouse in Europe. According to officials with the Department for International Trade, U.S. foreign

direct investment (FDI) into the United Kingdom has already soared on the promise of Brexit, with an increase of 19.5 percent in 2017 alone. British FDI into the United States rose 8.4 percent during the same period. Total U.S.–U.K. trade in 2017 amounted to \$235.9 billion. Britain will thrive and prosper in the Brexit era. The U.S. is already poised for a trade deal with the U.K.¹² Having an independent security voice in Europe will likely help as well. It is expected, for example, that, post-Brexit, Britain will be tougher on both Russia and Iran.

- **Accelerate the strengthening of ties to North, Central, and Southern Europe.** NATO is the cornerstone of the transatlantic political-security alliance, but the best way to sustain a strong base is from the bottom up. The foundation of transatlantic security is the bilateral alliances and partnerships starting with Iceland in the mid-Atlantic and running from the U.K. across the Western frontier from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic.¹³ Part of this effort would inevitably include the Arctic. From a security perspective, it makes little sense not to think of the Arctic in the context of security in the Baltic Sea and Nordic regions. Essential efforts include bilateral military planning, exercises, deployment and forward basing, energy cooperation, and promoting FDI.
- **Keep the Middle East problems out of Europe.** The U.S. regional strategies for Europe and the Middle East must be interlocked. While some in Europe look east at Russia as the primary security concern, others look south across the Mediterranean. The U.S. has been respectful and responsive to both concerns. U.S. contributions toward a more stable, prosperous, and peaceful Middle East have a direct salutary impact on European security. The U.S. is already doing a lot; the U.S. can do more. The Europeans can and must help. Libya is a prime example where the U.S. and Europe should be working together. A stable Libya would be a boon to regional security and expand energy resources available on the world market. Then, there is Turkey, perhaps the thorniest issue with which the U.S. must deal. Ankara's perceived coziness with Moscow, including the purchase of a Russian anti-aircraft system, is problematic for the bilateral relationship. As with other contentious topics,

there is no easy answer. Turkey has lost trust and confidence in the U.S. and Europe, and vice versa. Turkey's best strategic option is to try to rebuild the relationship. The U.S. has to offer that opportunity to its NATO ally.

- **Deliver straight talk to the major European capitals.** This is perhaps the most important step to move U.S. strategy for the region forward. The best contribution the U.S. can make to undercut the insidious European squabbling is to have clear and unambiguous policies on the issues that are vital to transatlantic security. Powerful U.S. opposition and strong leadership against bad ideas will eventually win out in the most powerful places in Europe. Further, an unambiguous U.S. stance on transatlantic issues would likely embolden America's transatlantic partners to take a similar stand. The U.S. should remain resolute in what the allies need to bring to the table, including hitting defense spending targets, improving infrastructure to support the forward defense of NATO, and enhancing deployment and mobility of defense assets. Most of all, the U.S. must show solidarity with its allies against Russian meddling. The U.S. should insist that no NATO member should enable or make excuses for Russia's undermining of NATO nations, nor should any NATO member tolerate Russian corruptive influences. Further, the U.S. must engage in a serious and robust dialogue on Chinese influence in Europe, determining real security concerns that might undermine transatlantic security and forging a joint plan of action.

Recommendations for the Indo-Pacific. Without question, the key focus of U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy is China. The traditional U.S. approach was, where possible, to look for areas to accommodate and cooperate with Beijing and avoid confrontation. The Trump Administration flipped that approach on its head. The United States now consciously seeks points of contention across the military, security, diplomatic, and economic spectrum. It has conducted freedom of navigation exercises in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait; sold arms to Taiwan; confronted Beijing with tariffs; demanded trade negotiations; and criticized China's major international undertaking, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). By challenging China in these ways, the Administration aims to force

Beijing to recognize Washington's interests and thus achieve a more stable relationship between the two powers. In this region, however, ensuring freedom of the commons, including the expansion of the instruments of economic freedom, must be given equal weight with conventional security concerns and the complex web of U.S.–Chinese bilateral issues. Engagement with friends, allies, and strategic partners is as vital as deterring aggressive Chinese behavior. Priorities for the U.S. are to:

- **Right the trajectory of the U.S.–China economic relationship.** The Administration needs to reach agreement with China that addresses some of the major structural impediments for American business trading with and operating in China. These include, most prominently, concerns over intellectual property rights, but also the restraints on market access that both limit international engagement in the Chinese economy and enable the worst of its business environment. At the same time, the Administration needs to fully unwind the tariffs it has imposed and shift attention to World Trade Organization (WTO) compliant ways to enforce the rights of its businesses. The U.S. can also send the right economic message to China by being a leading force pressing for economic freedom in the region. The U.S. has to be out front encouraging economic liberalization in the region across sectors—goods, services, and investment. The U.S. can do that through bilateral arrangements. This puts an especially high priority on moving forward with a U.S.–Japan free trade agreement and an agreement with Taiwan, as well as looking for other partners. The WTO needs reform, and the U.S. has powerful partners with a willingness to change it, including Japan, the EU, and the U.K. When addressing serious issues like those involved with China's push for fifth-generation (5G) wireless networking or its BRI, which pose legitimate risks to U.S. interests and national defense, the U.S. must be careful not to constrain economic freedom beyond what is required for security.
- **Accelerate the building of partnerships for a free and open Indo-Pacific.** Managing China in a way that protects American interests and respects the values that all nations should respect cannot be done without the U.S. But the

U.S. cannot do it alone. The U.S. needs strong alliances and strategic partnerships in the region. The U.S. needs to do more. U.S. partners need to do more. The U.S. is negotiating renewals of cost-sharing agreements with some of its biggest allies in the region—Japan and South Korea. The U.S. needs to take a reasonable approach that accounts for shared interests, as well as the major investments that both sides already make to maintain the U.S. presence. Then there are countries, such as Bangladesh, that will not be partners, but they would like an increased U.S. and allied presence to counterbalance Beijing’s influence.¹⁴ Some of these states are quite small, but strategically important, such as the Pacific Island nations.¹⁵ The U.S. also needs to engage powers from outside the region, such as the EU and its member states, which have a fair amount of presence but little strategy to meet the obvious common objectives.

- **Build a sustainable architecture for security in a free and open Indo–Pacific.** There will never be a Pacific NATO. Nor is there a need for one. On the other hand, there is not enough consultation and strategic cooperation among the nations most concerned about China’s rise. The U.S. should respect the system led by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), if for no other reason than that many of the countries the U.S. seeks to work with in the region value ASEAN, and the U.S. does not want to further the narrative of American withdrawal. The Quad countries (Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S.) provide an important overarching informal network. That should be viewed as the capstone of a matrix of trilateral frameworks and bilateral 2+2 (defense and foreign secretary) discussions. That would be enough to achieve critical synergies that are necessary for cooperation in specific concrete areas, such as building common maritime situational awareness.¹⁶
- **Forge strategic partnerships with Taiwan and India.** The U.S. needs special relationships with Taiwan and India in order to send a pointed message to China. Taiwan is the canary in the coal mine. The threat it has faced from China over the past several years has intensified across the security, diplomatic, and economic domains. The U.S. must help Taiwan—in this 40th year of the Taiwan Relations Act—to defend itself and be in

a position to make decisions about its own future. That means selling Taiwan the weapons it needs for its defense and supporting it diplomatically. If Taiwan cannot depend on the U.S., no one can. India is the most important long-term non-ally in the region. Things move slowly with India, but taking stock of common interests and looking ahead makes clear that there is a huge upside in the relationship for both countries and for regional stability. The U.S. may never call India an official ally, but that is beside the point. There will not be a free and open Indo–Pacific if India and the U.S. are not strategic partners.¹⁷

- **Reinforce the U.S. military presence.** Economic posture and strategic partnerships are crucial. It would, however, be naive to ignore the need for security in Asia. Former Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis instituted a concept he called “dynamic force employment,” where the U.S. would develop better means to move limited forces around quickly to where they are required. This dynamic force employment will not be sufficient to provide the presence that is necessary to deter threats to American interests and to reassure the region. U.S. forces are currently not able to address all its global interests. China knows that. The only step that will impress China is if the U.S. builds out its capacity to push more capability into the theater. What is reasonable and achievable? The list would include forward basing more submarines in Guam and investing in a long-range strike stealth drone that can be launched from a carrier. Other initiatives could include buying a land-based anti-ship cruise missile and fielding ground units with the capability.

Recommendations for the Middle East and North Africa. Now that the ISIS “caliphate” has been dismantled, Washington should recalibrate its regional policy to focus more on the balance of power between states, while maintaining a strong counterterrorism posture to prevent Islamist terrorists from carving out sanctuaries in the region. The chief U.S. goals in the region should be to maintain a favorable balance of power to prevent any hostile power from dominating Persian Gulf oil, threatening the free flow of oil exports, or threatening the vital security interests of key U.S. allies, particularly Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf Arab states, and creating space for

the advancement of economic freedom in the region. To maintain a favorable regional balance of power, the U.S. should:

- **Establish a more robust security architecture.**

The Administration first proposed the idea of a multilateral alliance with its Arab partners when it came into office. There was much enthusiasm for the initial U.S. concept, which included security, economic cooperation, and conflict resolution and de-confliction. The project was sidelined by a diplomatic dust-up among Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar. The murder of Saudi dissident Jamal Ahmad Khashoggi in Turkey complicated the situation even more. Further, a second round of U.S. efforts to create a Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA) was met with less enthusiasm. Still, the Administration has not given up; and it should not. There is a need for a regional security architecture that is not as formal as NATO, but more structured and formal than the web of frameworks that the U.S. is putting together in the Indo-Pacific. The Administration could return to something that is more like its original MESA proposal. In particular, there is value to using the original framework to advance a constructive agenda on regional development.

- **Build the firebreak in North Africa.** A stable Middle East is more likely if the region rests on the foundation of a stable Libya, Morocco, Egypt, and Tunisia. In particular, the U.S. needs to up its diplomatic game in Libya. With a stable foundation, the U.S. can work with others in the region to advance trade, regional development, good governance, and the productive use of the country's energy resources.

- **Increase maximum pressure to contain and roll back Iranian influence.** Iran remains the chief threat to U.S. interests, U.S. allies, and regional stability. Economic sanctions have reduced Iran's oil exports to less than 1 million barrels per day, which has severely undermined Iran's state-dominated economy, diminished government revenue, and made it more difficult for Tehran to prop up the Assad regime in Syria and finance its proxy militias in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. Washington must also maintain military forces in the region in order to deter Iranian

aggression and work with U.S. allies to strengthen missile defenses in order to offset the threat of Iran's arsenal of ballistic missiles, the largest in the Middle East.

- **Consolidate and sustain the victory over ISIS and prevent the rise of other Islamist terror groups.**

U.S. intelligence, reconnaissance, and air strike capabilities are still needed to aid Iraqi and local Syrian forces against remnants of ISIS. Washington also should press the Iraqi government to fight corruption, be more respectful of the needs of Iraq's Sunni Arab minority, and convince the Sunnis that they are better off supporting the government rather than ISIS.

- **Demonstrate sustained commitment to defusing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.**

The Trump Administration's overly ambitious plan for a comprehensive peace settlement is a long shot that is likely to fail. The time is not ripe for a comprehensive peace settlement. A genuine peace is impossible as long as Hamas maintains a stranglehold on Gaza, which it has transformed into a terrorist base camp. A genuine peace is not possible until Hamas has been squeezed out of power in Gaza. Washington should press for incremental progress on security arrangements, confidence-building measures, and bolstering the welfare of Palestinians in the West Bank. The best attainable outcome would be establishing a negotiating framework to keep the negotiations alive while building trust and a sense of progress that would enable enhanced Arab-Israeli strategic cooperation against Iran. Two pillars should undergird the U.S. approach—strong support for Israel on the one hand, and credible, effective means to advance good governance in Gaza and the West Bank on the other. It is never too late for peace. The U.S. should continue to lay the groundwork, even if it is years in the making.

- **Recommendations for Improving the Instruments of National Power.**

The key regional challenges that the U.S. faces are concurrent. They are also in some respects global. The U.S. is dealing with challenges presented by regional competitors and their surrogates far afield from the Arctic to the Horn of Africa and the tip of South America. What the U.S. needs in order to respond to these challenges

is not “whole of government” solutions, the equivalent of throwing the kitchen sink at every challenge. Rather, the U.S. should exercise “competitive” power, the means to outmatch its adversaries in key competitions. Further, this exercise of power need not necessarily be symmetrical. The U.S., for example, should not try to match China’s checkbook, bribing and coercing governments for deals. Nor is the best way to stop Russian bots to battle them online. Sometimes the right U.S. response ought to be asymmetrical. What the U.S. needs is better results from the key instruments of global competition, and more effective integration focused on the key tasks that support the strategy.

There are six main areas for improvement: (1) military capability; (2) diplomacy; (3) economic policy; (4) the war against terrorism; (5) technology policy; and (6) public diplomacy and the promotion of good governance.

Recommendations for Strengthening U.S. Military Capability. Current U.S. force capabilities meet or overmatch the capabilities of any major competitor singly, but they fall short of overmatching the combined capabilities of all competitors. This is not to suggest that the U.S. military should plan for all competitors to join forces. Rather, the U.S. military must account for the forces of several competitors spread across multiple regions. While any one competitor need only concern itself with dominating in one region, the U.S. military must plan to operate far from home in different regions simultaneously, and to have sufficient force in each region able to credibly deter, and when necessary defeat, the forces of an adversary in each region. Many competitors operate with a home-field advantage while U.S. forces must play an away game, with small subsets of the U.S. joint force operating against the totality of an enemy force.

As the U.S. weighs its efforts to meet current and near-term (expected) challenges, it runs the risk of creating critical shortfalls in geographic areas and against specific competitors. This creates opportunities for competitors to challenge U.S. interests in key areas and incentivizes bad behavior by all U.S. competitors, each seeking to take advantage of the U.S. being focused elsewhere. In their individual efforts, and certainly if they coordinate their activities, they can overwhelm America’s ability to address challenges in more than one place. Many actions are required to address these concerns.¹⁸ As priorities for the next decade or so, the U.S. must:

- **Achieve sustained investment in defense.** The Administration must work with Congress to ensure budget stability and methodical increases for the next several years to repair problems that have accrued, and to enable the military to prepare for future challenges. The Administration should stabilize defense spending at 2019 levels, at a minimum, and begin to build defense spending at 3 percent to 5 percent above inflation for the next five years. Since the Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011 was enacted, capping defense spending at dangerously low levels, the past and current Administrations have worked with Congress to find creative ways to provide essential funding above BCA limits, clearly illustrating that these legal limits create great risk for America’s security.
- **Make substantial investments in experimentation.** Experimentation is what enables a military to figure out how a new technology or capability might work in an operational setting against an enemy force. The breakneck pace of technological developments in artificial intelligence, cyberspace, unmanned systems, stealth technologies, and long-range, precision-guided munitions has not been matched by an equally robust experimentation program in the U.S. military to know where programmatic investments need to be made or how the force might be reorganized for maximum effectiveness in various settings.¹⁹
- **Modernize its nuclear warheads, delivery systems, and nuclear weapons infrastructure supporting the U.S. deterrent mission.** Nuclear weapons will continue to be important to U.S. and allied security for decades to come because they deter large-scale attacks against the United States and its allies. As U.S. systems age and phase out of their service life, it is critical for U.S. and allied security that the U.S. not have a gap in its nuclear-deterrent capabilities. In the next 15 years, the United States has to modernize each of the legs of its nuclear triad: bombers, intercontinental-range ballistic missiles, and submarines and submarine-launched ballistic missiles. Without leadership focus and proper resourcing, the nuclear weapons modernization program will not be successful. As the missile threat advances, so must U.S. missile defense programs. In the near-term, the United States ought to improve capabilities of existing

missile defense interceptors by providing them with the best possible data from a space-based sensor layer. In the medium term to long term, the United States must develop and deploy a comprehensive, layered missile defense system, including interceptors in space.

- **Create an Independent Space Force that includes all service and national security space assets and capabilities.** As a combatant command, U.S. Space Command, however, will still not have the authorities necessary to organize, train, and equip forces—the responsibility of a service. In order for the Department of Defense to have that authority, Congress will have to reconsider the department’s organization and the associated Title 10 authorities. If an effective Space Force is to emerge, it must be oriented toward providing the U.S. with the ability to secure space dominance. This will mean bureaucratic streamlining—simply aggregating the current range of bureaucracies will not be enough. It will also require a real focus on warfighting as a central mission, with careful attention to properly managing acquisition of forces and promotion of personnel, if it is to succeed.²⁰

- **Increase funding to enable maximum production of critical platforms and resources.** The U.S. military is currently near historically low levels of capacity even though its specific platforms, tools, systems, and munitions are world class. U.S. submarines, for example, outmatch any similar platform currently fielded by any other country. The same can be said for U.S. aircraft like the F-22 and F-35. But a plane, ship, submarine, or armored brigade combat team can be in only one place at a time. As a global power with global interests, the U.S. must be in many places simultaneously to deter opportunistic behavior from competitors like China and Russia. Investments in the production of such components also ensure that the supporting industrial base remains viable over time. Only the U.S. government buys fighter aircraft and tanks; there is no corresponding market in the private sector. Capacity in platforms, munitions, and supporting systems quickly becomes the primary factor limiting what the U.S. can do to protect its interests. Accounting for the respective characteristics of regions associated with primary competitors,

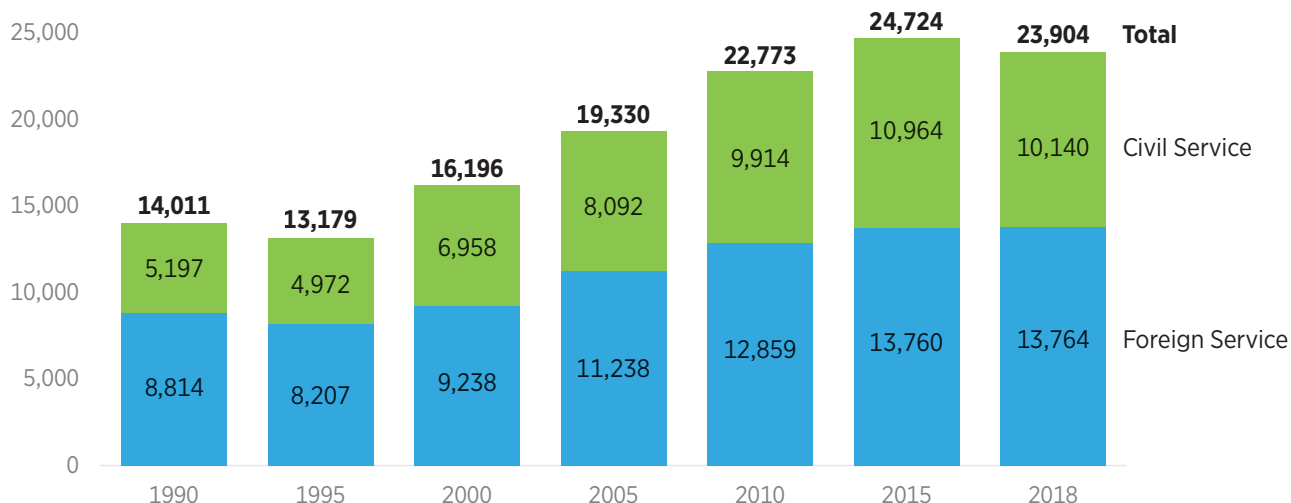
the U.S. needs more submarines and ships in the Indo–Pacific to counter China’s activities and to reassure partners. In Europe, the U.S. needs more ground forces and supporting tactical aircraft. To better support allies and partners in all theaters, the U.S. needs long-range missiles capable of countering enemy ships, aircraft, and ballistic missiles.

Recommendations for Advancing U.S. Diplomacy. Successfully defending and advancing U.S. foreign policy, as well as economic and strategic interests, requires an effective and capable Department of State, realistic assessment of the relative importance of international organizations, and a reformed U.S. assistance program focused on supporting U.S. priorities. The U.S. should:

- **Restructure the Department of State.** While America remains a superpower, there is a clear sense that U.S. influence falls short of that which it should wield, and that the Department of State—the key instrument for employing and expanding that influence—has borne and continues to bear significant responsibility for this failure. There is a tendency in the foreign policy establishment to blame this shortfall on insufficient resources or personnel, but the facts do not support this conclusion. Budget authority for the International Affairs budget in FY 2017 was \$66.7 billion, 160 percent higher than in FY 1995 (73 percent higher in constant 2012 dollars), and 103 percent higher than in FY 2005 (64 percent higher in constant 2012 dollars). The number of State Department Foreign Service and Civil Service employees is similarly larger. Specifically, as illustrated in Chart 1, the number of Foreign Service employees and Civil Service employees in 2018 was 81 percent higher than it was in 1995, and 24 percent higher than in 2005. The data show that the State Department’s budget and employment under the Trump Administration is roughly the same as it was at the end of the Obama Administration, and far higher than during the Bush and Clinton Administrations. In other words, the deficiencies of the State Department are not due to shrinking resources. The reason for failings and ineffectiveness lie elsewhere. The Trump Administration initiated a reform effort in observance of the President’s Comprehensive Plan for Reorganizing the Executive Branch, but budget disagreements with Congress,

CHART 1

State Department Foreign and Civil Service Employees



SOURCES: Data from 1990 through 2010: U.S. Department of State, “Department of State FS & CS Full-Time Permanent Employees, 1970–Present,” April 4, 2013, <http://www.afsa.org/sites/default/files/Portals/0/Dept%20of%20State%20Stats%20042313.pdf> (accessed May 14, 2019). Data from 2015: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Human Resources, “HR Fact Sheet: Facts About Our Most Valuable Asset — Our People,” December 31, 2015, http://www.afsa.org/sites/default/files/1215_state_dept_hr_factsheet.pdf (accessed May 14, 2019). Data from 2018: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Human Resources, “HR Fact Sheet: Facts About Our Most Valuable Asset — Our People,” December 31, 2018, http://www.afsa.org/sites/default/files/1218_state_dept_hr_factsheet.pdf (accessed May 14, 2019).

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inept communications, and leadership disruption impeded significant changes. This effort should be revisited, with emphasis on restructuring the department to focus on current and emerging priorities, strengthening and clarifying lines of accountability, and reevaluating standards, training, and qualifications for Foreign Service and Civil Service employees to equip them to meet future challenges.²¹

- Assess the importance of international organizations to U.S. interests.** International organizations frequently address or consider issues and policies that directly affect U.S. interests and it is vital for the U.S. to engage these organizations to defend or promote those interests. However, not all international organizations are equally important, nor are U.S. funds necessarily allocated to best support U.S. interests. The U.S. should periodically conduct a comprehensive analysis of the nearly 200 international organizations receiving billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars each year (more than \$12 billion in 2017) to identify the

organizations that are most, and least, vital to U.S. interests, and which provide the most, and least, value for money. The Trump Administration has partially addressed this issue through its decisions to withdraw from UNESCO²² and the U.N. Human Rights Council and suspend funding for UNRWA.²³ However, a comprehensive analysis would provide a basis for reorienting U.S. funding to maximum benefit.

- Consolidate foreign assistance programs and prioritize support for U.S. policy.** Programs created by dozens of large and small federal departments and agencies have proliferated over the decades and have remained in place due to patrons in Congress and the Washington foreign aid community. Today, a multitude of foreign assistance efforts are implemented by 21 major and 11 lesser authorities spanning a dozen departments and multiple independent agencies. The combined effect is that foreign aid has become diffused—scattered unevenly and thinly in an attempt to achieve an increasing number of disparate goals

in an unwieldy number of countries. As a result, foreign aid is micromanaged and diffused, lacking the coherence, flexibility, and vision necessary to be most effective.

- **Focus development assistance on promoting and rewarding policy changes that advance economic freedom.** U.S. development policy has lurched historically from funding basic infrastructure to financing basic human needs to encouraging diversity and social policy reform. Experience shows that the most reliable path to economic growth and development is to embrace economic freedom, the rule of law, and good governance. The U.S. should make the promotion of such policies the core of its development agenda and focus development resources into programs like the Millennium Challenge Corporation that work with countries that demonstrate real capability and commitment to ruling justly, investing in people, and advancing economic freedom.
- **Eliminate or consolidate agencies and programs that subsidize exporters, and ensure that they are truly filling unserved strategic needs.** Such programs, including the U.S. Development Finance Corporation established by the recently passed BUILD Act, duplicate financing mechanisms and resources readily available in the private sector. The economic circumstances under which these activities may have merit are limited to the few dozen countries where access to international financial markets is restricted or political risk is excessive. There may also be circumstances where security interests might justify U.S. government intervention to counter the influence of an adversary. Historically speaking, however, institutions like the Overseas Private Development Corporation and the Export-Import bank have not limited their activities to these niches, and have acted where they are unnecessary or counterproductive.

Recommendations for Enhancing U.S. Economic Power. Promoting economic freedom in the United States encompasses every aspect of economic policy, including national security. The U.S. must not only protect itself from malicious actions, it must protect and facilitate the freedom of Americans to act economically on the global stage. Maintaining

and advancing U.S. economic prosperity is a key element of national security. That prosperity is built on a foundation of economic freedom. In addition to maintaining the most prosperous U.S. economy possible to underpin the capabilities needed to ensure U.S. security, it is in the U.S. interest to encourage peaceful economic growth and development in other countries as well.

The U.S., through its government and particularly through the activities of the business sector, has led in the globalization of economic activity, linking businesses and consumers, and ultimately nations and governments, in elaborate webs of peaceful and profitable economic interactions, contributing to increased understanding and interdependence. As a model for international cooperation, the trade that occurs in a free-market setting has an unparalleled advantage in that it is inherently a win-win interaction in which both parties gain. Therefore, in order to advance this component of the National Security Strategy the U.S. should:

- **Deepen U.S. relationships with like-minded countries through free trade agreements (FTAs) or other cooperative arrangements.** The U.S. has existing basic trade liberalization policies in place with 161 countries through the WTO, and provides a much higher level of access to U.S. markets to 120 countries through the Generalized System of Preferences program, around 40 beneficiaries of the African Growth and Opportunity Act, and 24 countries through the Caribbean Basin Initiative. Such programs are important tools for enhancing U.S. relationships and should be maintained or strengthened. The U.S. has FTAs with 20 countries. These provide the highest level of freedom and economic integration. The Administration has indicated an interest in expanding the list by negotiating FTAs with Japan, the European Union, and the United Kingdom, and has additionally expressed interest in possible agreements with Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, and Kenya. To that list should be added Switzerland, Taiwan, Georgia, and Tunisia. A U.S.-inspired network of free-trading states is likely to be a network of friendly competitors, not adversaries.
- **Use resources and diplomacy with international economic institutions to ensure that they remain focused on increasing world**

growth, improving the efficiency of international commerce, and promoting economic freedom. The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the WTO have over the years become increasingly supportive of the principles of economic freedom and the free market. The U.S. should encourage this trend, and strongly resist all proposals to use these organizations to support secondary issues, such as climate change, or economically harmful policies, such as increased taxation.

- **Resist protectionism.** The Administration's aggressive approach to opening foreign markets is welcome, but the tools it has employed, in particular tariffs, quotas, and threats to abrogate existing agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, are costly for Americans and create harmful uncertainty for American businesses, potential investors, and allies. The global network of like-minded states broadly committed to the principles of economic freedom is an enormous asset, and a better approach to advancing economic interests is to strengthen the partnership with those states to include joint actions (including restrictions on trade in extreme cases) in order to encourage greater openness and respect for the rule of law in countries still lagging in those areas.
- **Eliminate tariffs or other import restrictions on intermediate goods used by American firms in their manufacturing processes.** Industrial tariffs are incompatible with the complex supply chains employed by major manufacturers to increase their productivity, and they raise the costs of U.S. manufactured products, including essential military weapons and equipment that must be produced domestically. As a result, the U.S. government gets less bang for the buck for its defense spending. Eliminating such tariffs would boost the American economy overall and ease the burden of military procurement on the federal budget.
- **Restore congressional authority for trade policy.** The power to regulate commerce with foreign nations is explicitly granted to Congress in Article 1 of the Constitution. Over time, in an

attempt to improve the efficiency of trade negotiations and the implementation of trade remedies, Congress has delegated substantial power to the executive branch for the implementation of trade policy. When trade accounted for a very small percentage of American economic activity, the risks of granting to the President what amounts to the unilateral power to raise taxes (tariffs) on commerce was minimal. Now, with imports equal to about 15 percent of gross domestic product, the delegation of such taxing power is no longer appropriate. The ability of tariffs to disrupt trade flows and supply chains is substantial, and as a potential destabilizing force in the economy and U.S. relations with other countries, their imposition deserves more careful consideration by Congress.

Recommendations for Combating Transnational Terrorism. The U.S. must keep military pressure on terrorist groups plotting attacks on the U.S. or its allies. The degradation of ISIS, al-Qaeda, and both groups' various affiliates in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia will enhance U.S. security at home. Countries of particular priority are Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen; with Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, and the Sinai Peninsula among the other areas of concern. The U.S. military must also remain capable of responding quickly to help crush ISIS and al-Qaeda offshoots that could emerge around the world in the near future and which may aim to recreate a caliphate or launch attacks on Americans and U.S. interests overseas. To fight the spread of terrorism, the U.S. should:

- **Reduce the numbers in the detainee camps by dispersing ISIS fighters.** Tens of thousands of ISIS suspects are held in Kurdish-run detainee camps in Syria. These include individuals with close ties to the U.S. The Syrian Kurds cannot be expected to hold these ISIS detainees indefinitely, yet reluctance from many governments to allow their citizens to return has ensured that they necessarily remain open. This is neither a sustainable nor a safe state of affairs. In order to mitigate this threat, countries would ideally take back their foreign fighters and jail them. This often does not happen because these countries do not have sufficient laws in place to bring foreign fighters to trial, ensuring that they would have to immediately be set free. The U.S. must press these countries

to amend their legislation so that they are able to prosecute their own foreign fighters in future conflicts. The U.S. should also encourage those governments who cannot prosecute their foreign fighters to monitor them and develop programs to prevent re-engagement in terrorist activity. In the meantime, the Administration should confirm which individuals being held in these camps are American citizens. Those who are not have no legal right to enter the United States. If they are, the United States must then assess whether they committed federal crimes. If they did, the U.S. should consider the option of indicting them and bringing them to trial in a federal court in the United States.

- **Get ahead of the threat from the next wave of foreign fighters.** Syria may have been the largest magnet for Islamist foreign fighters, but it was by no means the first. Another foreign fighter conflict zone will inevitably develop, with al-Qaeda continuing to hold territory in the Middle East and Africa, and ISIS’ surviving foreign fighters already fleeing from their caliphate to nearby countries. The Administration’s approach must be dynamic if the U.S. is to stay ahead of the next foreign fighter threat. The U.S. must monitor how terrorists attempt to travel, push other governments to implement security measures to ensure terrorist travel from their country is less likely, and exchange information with partners about emerging terrorist threats. The U.S. must constantly assess its security procedures and vulnerabilities to ensure that visas or the asylum system cannot be exploited to infiltrate to the American homeland.
- **Implement a strategy for weakening the Muslim Brotherhood.** A coherent response is required to weaken the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood.²⁴ If there is credible evidence that Brotherhood groups are carrying out terrorist acts, the U.S. can legally designate the group as a foreign terrorist organization. If that evidence does not exist, the U.S. should consider strategies to roll back the Brotherhood’s ideology and influence in specific countries, even when Muslim Brotherhood groups constitute parts of various governments. This strategy should revolve around the principle that the Brotherhood—and like-minded political Islamists—should be treated as adversaries, not as

allies, and that the Brotherhood cannot be tactically co-opted by governments to act as a firewall against more violent Islamist organizations (as was previously attempted in the U.K.). The strategy should acknowledge that the Brotherhood’s ideology does not represent the majority opinion among American Muslims. A halt to engaging with Muslim Brotherhood legacy groups in the U.S. is also needed, as well as a push to identify all domestic Muslim Brotherhood front groups.

- **Combat Islamist extremism and terrorism, not “violent extremism.”** The Obama Administration held a preference for funding local, community-led initiatives as part of a domestic Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) strategy. This funding was often pushed toward vague, feel-good community projects that offered no accountability, little proof that they were good value for taxpayer money, and no evidence that they kept America safer. Under the Trump Administration, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has reallocated sections of CVE money from community groups to law enforcement. This is a welcome first step, and the Administration must build on it. However, the U.S. must also have strict lines of engagement to ensure that any community groups it does partner with in combatting terrorism are not only held strictly accountable for how they use their funds, but are also groups who are supportive of democracy, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, the rule of law, and individual liberty. The newly formed Office of Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention within DHS is best placed to ensure that this quality control takes place.
- **Allocate resources to contain the threat from terrorist offenders who are released from prison.** The number of individuals convicted of terrorism offenses and released from U.S. prisons has previously been a manageable trickle. However, over the next five years, approximately 80 terrorists could be released in the U.S.²⁵ These individuals have been aligned—either operationally or ideologically—with both al-Qaeda and ISIS. They include John Walker Lindh, the U.S. citizen captured in Afghanistan in November 2001 who fought alongside the Taliban. Many of those emerging from U.S. jails will likely not have recanted their previous Islamist views. The experience

in other countries has been that many who were jailed for terror offenses have been radicalized even further in jail, and may plan or attempt to carry out attacks upon release. Ideally, repentant individuals would be reintegrated back into society. However, the U.S. must ensure that it has allocated the resources necessary to track offenders still committed to a terrorist cause, monitoring their online activity where appropriate, and has trained probation officers who can spot signs of recidivism. It must especially prioritize those who seek to engage with other terror suspects known to already be operating in the U.S.

Recommendations for Strengthening Technology Policy. American industry is best suited to deliver and deploy the technology that will keep America competitive and safe in a competitive world. That does not absolve the federal government of its constitutional responsibility to provide for the common defense, protecting the people and the interests of the United States. The nation must forge a path so that these goals can be accomplished in a complementary fashion. There are actions that the government can undertake now to continue moving in the right direction. In furtherance of the NSS, the Administration should:

- **Develop a more robust and enduring national strategy for cyberspace.** This strategy should state explicitly America’s desired end state for the Internet with a rationale for how this end state will be achieved and what is at risk if it is not. This strategy must also describe America’s core cyber interests and articulate an overarching American doctrine for how these interests will be advanced and defended. Finally, there must be a detailed plan for integrating private and industry stakeholders at the root-level of strategy and policy in light of their vital role in developing and deploying technological innovation.
- **Prioritize the development of more secure supply chains for hardware and software, particularly for the Department of Defense.** This will be a herculean task in scale and complexity; nevertheless, it is essential. No effort to secure the U.S.’s digital future can succeed if the underlying infrastructure of that future is decisively compromised.

- **Prepare to operate in a global environment characterized by networks that are developed and run by hostile foreign actors—especially China.** These “zero trust networks” are proliferating globally as nations prioritize short-term expediency over long-term security when it comes to next-generation wireless networking and other telecommunications infrastructure. Operating in the new global environment will require new networking strategies as well as new developments in data management and security. This challenge is especially pressing in the context of 5G wireless networking, where a single Chinese company—Huawei—could have as much as 50 percent of the global 5G market and is suspected of acting on behalf of Beijing’s military and intelligence agencies. While the development and deployment of these networks should not be ceded to hostile powers, it is prudent for U.S. national security leaders to prepare for a digital domain that is crowded with, and sometimes controlled by, America’s chief global challengers.

- **Block vulnerabilities.** The U.S. should block any foreign technology from U.S. markets that creates vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure or that provides hostile foreign actors with “backdoors” to U.S. data. Doing so will impose significant pressure on China and it will spur domestic security research in the U.S. that will incrementally improve the safety of the hardware and software supply chains into the United States. The U.S. should encourage the other four Five Eyes countries—Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom—to implement similar exclusionary measures.

- **Block untrusted companies.** The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) has the authority to block foreign companies, even from non-controlling U.S. investments, if they have a history of producing hardware or software with known vulnerabilities. CFIUS should narrowly exercise this current authority to mitigate the challenge of Chinese investment in American start-ups that might embrace poor security practices in return for rapid access to capital.

Recommendations for Robust Public Diplomacy and Good Governance. The Administration

needs to drive convergence among the NSS; strong congressional support for U.S. institutions undertaking democracy promotion-related activities; and the capabilities, expertise, and capacity of government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—providing insights for an enduring national strategy that effectively harnesses these institutions in support of U.S. interests. The U.S. lacks an effective inter-agency capacity for granular coordination of specific programs. Instead of broad government reforms, the U.S. needs solutions that work now. The goal is not a whole-of-government approach, but to amass enough instruments of power to secure a competitive advantage against a specific adversary for a specific mission or task.²⁶ Public diplomacy and efforts to promote good governance must be focused to support U.S. efforts to establish a competitive advantage in great power competition. The overall objective is to stabilize global competition to protect America’s interest, not to remake the world order, drive regime change, or undertake nation-building. Further, the question is not “What is in the best interest of another country?” but “What is in the best interest of the U.S.?” Still, promoting good governance, robust civil society, and liberal values make the most sense where there is a convergence of goals between the U.S. and partner countries and peoples—it is this convergence that makes programs credible and legitimate. To foster this convergence the U.S. should:

- **Establish objectives to protect critical institutions of civil society and the foundations of good governance in countries where there are significant risks** to friends, allies, and strategic partners. China and Russia’s “sharp power” is a strategic threat, and there have to be specific objectives to counter their sharp power.²⁷
- **Establish clear priorities.** While U.S. strategy clearly states that U.S. power should be focused on fostering peace and stability in Europe, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific, that does not necessarily mean that democracy promotion and good governance efforts must match those priorities. Arguably, the number one contribution of an agenda might start with ensuring that democracy has a firm foundation in America’s “backyard,” making the transatlantic community and Latin America the highest priority. Good governance promotion can be a tool for an “economy of force,”

a primary means of affecting U.S. interests where great power competition is less intense. Countering Chinese influence in Latin America and Africa, as well as countering Russian influence in Central Europe, should be higher priorities. Another area for increased efforts could be in the Pacific Islands region and South Asia.

- **Take a disciplined, yet free-market, approach to Internet governance and combating technological illiberalism.** The multi-stakeholder process of oversight for Internet and cyberspace will not work. China and Russia, whether through international forums or brute force, will balkanize the Internet to advance repression. The U.S. lacks an effective capacity to deal with this. Further, the U.S. must have the means to analyze and counter the range of tools, including artificial intelligence, being developed by Russia, China, and other authoritarian states to undermine other states (such as through election interference) and to expand their societal controls (through ever-increasing monitoring). The U.S. government must also have a more effective partnership and dialogue with the private sector on the consequences of cooperation and exploitation by adversarial states (in lieu of legislation). The recent example of the restricted Google search developed for China highlights the challenge. Further, there needs to be U.S. engagement with more than just the so-called tech community. Engagement with mass media and with institutions of higher education, for example, is also important.²⁸
- **Overhaul the process for collecting data for the State Department’s reports on human rights.** The reports on human rights should be overhauled to make their standards clearer and their processes more objective. As is, target audiences may see certain reports—the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, for instance—as tainted by political, economic, or geostrategic purposes. This was the case during Congress’s consideration of trade promotion authority. Some thought that the TIP report shaded abuses in Malaysia because of its membership in the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Such allegations reduce the reports’ credibility. The reports should be tailored for target audiences to have strategic affect.

- **Gain and share more data on China's BRI.** Chinese “corrosive” capitalism is a major threat to global economic freedom.²⁹ There is lack of a central repository of information on specific BRI activity that could provide authoritative quantitative and qualitative data to design programs in response to the initiative. The U.S. government should promote a public–private consortium of research entities that obtain, analyze, and publicly share data in open source. The U.S. government, friendly powers, and NGOs should share this information with civil society groups affected by Chinese investments, bringing more global transparency and accountability to Chinese activity.

Conclusion

The assessment of the current U.S. National Security Strategy in this *Special Report* has identified instrumental initiatives that build on the strategy's success. The research presented here focuses on high-pay-off, feasible, and suitable U.S. actions that will further the success of the NSS and improve America's national security and strategic position in a competitive and dangerous world.

Endnotes

1. Sections of this paper were adopted from a series of articles developed with the assistance of the Heritage Foundation foreign policy research team. See James Jay Carafano, "America's Next 5 Moves in the Indo-Pacific Region," *The National Interest*, April 7, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/america%E2%80%99s-next-5-moves-indo-pacific-region-50767> (accessed May 6, 2019); James Jay Carafano, "America Needs to Give Europe Some Tough Love," *The National Interest*, March 30, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/america-needs-give-europe-some-tough-love-49737> (accessed May 6, 2019); and James Jay Carafano, "5 Sustainable Solutions for Middle East Security," *The National Interest*, April 25, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/5-sustainable-solutions-middle-east-security-54282> (accessed May 6, 2019).
2. National Security Strategy of the United States of America, December 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf> (accessed May 6, 2019).
3. Kim. R. Holmes, "What Is National Security?" in Dakota Woods, ed., *2016 Index of U.S. Military Strength* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2015), p. 17.
4. Donald E. Nuechterlein, "National Interests and Foreign Policy: A Conceptual Framework for Analysis and Decision-Making," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (October 1976), pp. 246-266.
5. Dakota Woods, ed., *2019 Index of U.S. Military Strength* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2018), p. 2.
6. For recommendations on immigration and border security, see James Jay Carafano, John G. Malcom, and Jack Spencer, eds., "An Agenda for American Immigration Reform," Heritage Foundation *Special Report* No. 210, February 20, 2019, <https://www.heritage.org/immigration/report/agenda-american-immigration-reform>.
7. Klon Kitchen, "The U.S. Must Treat China as a National Security Threat to 5G Networks," Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 4952, April 16, 2019, <https://www.heritage.org/technology/report/the-us-must-treat-china-national-security-threat-5g-networks>.
8. Economic freedom is the fundamental right of every human to control his or her own labor and property. In an economically free society, individuals are free to work, produce, consume, and invest in any way they please. In economically free societies, governments allow labor, capital, and goods to move freely, and refrain from coercion or constraint of liberty beyond the extent necessary to protect and maintain liberty itself. See Terry Miller, Anthony B. Kim, and James M. Roberts, eds, *2019 Index of Economic Freedom* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2019), p. 1, <https://www.heritage.org/index/about>.
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