

## **Balanced Internationalism: 5 Core Principles to Guide U.S. National Security Policy**



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In his prophetic poem, “The Second Coming,” about the coming of fascism in Europe in the 1920s, Anglo-Irish poet W. B. Yeats wrote:

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre*

*The falcon cannot hear the falconer;*

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.*

*The best lack all conviction,*

*While the worst are full of passionate intensity.*

Yeats’ words apply to today’s fierce debate over U.S. foreign policy as much as they did to the debate over Europe’s future after World War I. Today, the long-standing bipartisan consensus about America’s role in the world is being challenged as never before by passionate extremists of the populist left and right. At a time of unprecedented danger in the world, the center must hold, lest the liberal world order we created over seven decades ago falls apart.

*To that end, we offer (1) a summary of the national security challenges that face us as a nation, (2) an analysis of the debate about how we should respond to these challenges, (3) a description of five, distinct, core principles that we believe should guide the next Administration’s thinking about U.S. national security strategy, and (4) an outline of how these principles would be applied to an especially critical question for national security policy—the relationship between diplomacy and military force and the limits of state power in the twenty-first century.*

### **The challenges that face us**

Fifteen years after the September 11 terrorist attacks, the United States finds itself still embroiled in Afghanistan and Iraq, but not for the reasons it initially went to war there. Al Qaeda and its ilk have metastasized across the Middle East and North Africa, and the so-called Islamic State has sought to redraw by force the boundaries of the Levant, while demonstrating its ability to target cities in the Middle East, Europe, and the U.S. Clearly, America’s strategy to pacify these regions and establish at least the foundations of sustainable pluralistic political systems has not fulfilled the aspirations of its proponents. Instead, we are confronted with hostile forces, based in failed states fueled by apocalyptic visions, filling political vacuums previously dominated by more traditional despots.



Meanwhile, more familiar geopolitical threats also claim our attention.

Russia—buoyed by a decade of lucrative oil revenues—attempted to veto Ukraine’s desire to associate more closely with Europe. While one can debate Mr. Putin’s motives and the longer-term effectiveness of his strategy (Putin got Crimea, but Ukraine still signed an association agreement with the European Union), his actions have clearly dashed hopes that Russia would collaborate with the West in assuring peace and security in a post-Cold War Europe.

Similarly, China—following a quarter century of spectacular economic growth that is only now showing its limits—has begun to assert a more aggressive nationalist posture, with motives that need to be understood on many levels. Its actions have called into question, first, the notion that the prosperity of China’s new middle class would move that society in a direction more akin to Western liberalism, and, second, the expectation that greater interdependence and a larger stake in a globalized world order would entice China into taking a “more responsible” role in world affairs.

Terrorism and great power conflicts both dominate our headlines, but they are by no means the only issues on the agenda. The prospect of nuclear weapons proliferation is potentially an existential threat, not just from North Korea (which has them) and Iran (which may eventually choose to get them depending on the fate of the current multilateral agreement), but also from other powers (*e.g.*, Saudi Arabia, Japan, South Korea) if they ultimately determine that they need nuclear weapons for their own security against regional rivals.

We also face another potentially existential threat. Regardless of its causes, the impact of climate change has already exacerbated the potential for conflict in Africa and the Middle East and threatens to undermine some of the most fragile developing countries in the world.

Meanwhile, our Allies are experiencing critical debates about their own identities and their role in the world. In Japan, one hears persistent and highly placed rhetoric about becoming, again, a “normal” country. In South Korea, there is frustration with a frozen and increasingly dangerous peninsula. In Taiwan, renewed interest in claiming their own national identity complicates not just relations with Beijing but a constellation of relationships in the Western Pacific. And in Europe, economic stagnation and floods of immigrants and refugees have reawakened the darker sides of nationalism, nativism, and xenophobia, while “Brexit” is symptomatic of broader forces that may yet unravel the foundations that have given us confidence about peace in Europe for almost three quarters of a century.

The past quarter century has witnessed an explosion in prosperity, health, and technological advances to improve human lives. Moreover, globalization has expanded significantly the distribution of many of these benefits beyond the handful of industrialized societies that dominated the global economy through much of the twentieth century. Yet, this period has also witnessed an alarming growth in the disparity in how those benefits have been distributed—both at home and abroad—contributing to growing levels of disaffection and alienation that, in the extreme, continue to foster and even intensify violence between individuals, groups, and states.

In short, not only has national security become both a domestic and a foreign policy question, but governance has become a national security issue. The established democracies that created the post-World War II liberal order have reaped many of the macro-benefits of globalization but have not responded adequately to its socially disruptive features and facilitated the kind of transformations necessary for those benefits to be felt more widely within their societies. That, too, has serious implications for national security.

These are among the most pressing national security challenges that will confront our next President. They are global issues, not just American problems, but others look to the U.S. for leadership in shaping answers. Let’s examine the debate about how the United States should respond.

## **The debate about how we respond**

The United States is experiencing an identity crisis over what role it should play in international affairs. Virtually every tenet that provided the foundation of America’s global role in the second half of the twentieth century—when we, along with Britain and a handful of other close allies, reshaped the international order following World War II—is now being openly challenged:

- Not just the nature of American global leadership, but whether the U.S. should lead at all;
- Not just the structure of our global trading relationships, but whether the U.S. should promote international trade at all;
- Not just the extent to which the U.S. should intervene in defense of what we believe to be universal human rights, but whether it is even America’s place to do this;
- Not just the way we should best balance diplomacy and military force in pursuit of our objectives, but whether either instrument is effective or relevant in this new world;
- Not just how we balance the strictures of domestic and international law in pursuit of our goals, but whether the rule of law is an appropriate check on popular passion and fear.

Historically, presidential election campaigns have offered little reliable insight into how the next occupant of the White House would answer such questions. This year, an alarming number of policy prescriptions from presidential candidates have alternated between isolationism and adventurism—sometimes in the same voice—but with little nuance or evidence of having considered the longer-term consequences of their actions. This year is not unique in this respect, but the intensity of passion around these issues, amplified by contemporary media technologies, has brought these issues into stark relief for the whole world to see.

This oscillation between policy extremes is understandable. The West prevailed in the Cold War with a strategy that enjoyed a resilient domestic bipartisan consensus in the U.S. American political, economic, and military power provided the foundation for a new global order. The end of the Cold War brought predictions of an “end of history” and the eventual globalization of Western liberal values on which that global order had been built, along with a warning that our “unipolar moment” would be short-lived. In retrospect, many of these predictions were grounded in excessively generous assumptions about the human condition.

We have seen questions like this before, especially in the wake of major structural changes in international relations. Following the first cataclysmic war of the twentieth century, E. H. Carr’s classic, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis: 1919-1939*, outlined a devastating realist critique of “utopianism,” yet concluded, “if it is utopian to ignore the element of power, it is an unreal kind of realism which ignores the element of

morality.” Likewise, in *The Irony of American History*, Reinhold Niebuhr explored after World War II the ironies of a moral nation coming to terms with the exercise of global power, stressing the need to balance between the twin evils of “sloth” in refusing to accept the responsibilities of power and of “pride” that overestimates one’s power.

Since the end of the Cold War, successive U.S. national security strategies have consistently embodied this tension by posing, in various ways, two fundamental objectives: first, to promote democracy and free markets; and, second, to promote security and stability. These objectives are, of course, contradictory, but the point is not to choose between them. We want to pursue both, even though they compete with each other, and promoting one is usually at the expense of the other. We need to balance the way we pursue each, because both are vital to us as a nation.

Similarly, we cannot simply choose between “interests” and “values,” between “power” and “morality,” between “isolationism” and “unilateralism.” These are false choices. Values underpin our interests. Morality and power are not opposites, since moral power is arguably the most enduring form of power. Today, neither isolationism nor unilateralism is a serious option for the United States. Our strategic challenge is to balance the pursuit of our objectives with the recognition of the limitations of America’s power, of our increasingly constrained resources, and of our finite capacity to shape favorable outcomes.

To illustrate this balance, we offer five core principles to help guide the next Administration’s thinking about U.S. national security strategy:

- 1. American leadership is essential.**
- 2. Leadership must be collaborative, not unilateral.**
- 3. We don’t have the luxury of ignorance.**
- 4. Empathy is the most important strategic virtue, hubris the most dangerous strategic vice.**
- 5. Especially in a democracy, “process” and the rule of law matter.**

### **1. American leadership is essential.**

American power will remain preeminent for the foreseeable future. We continue to have the most powerful and most resilient economy in the world; our military is without peer on the planet, and the U.S. remains the only country that can project a significant amount of military power anywhere on the globe and sustain it for any length of time; as a society we remain a magnet for peoples from around the world in a way that no other country is; and much of the rest of the world still looks to us to shape the agenda for any concerted action in addressing global issues. In this respect, America remains an “exceptional” nation, even as we acknowledge that it is also a fallible nation, with its own domestic challenges.

That power brings responsibilities, including global leadership. The U.S. assumed the mantle of global leadership following two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century that left in their wake both a far-reaching political vacuum and hostile forces willing to fill that vacuum if we did not. With allied, especially British, help, we built a new rules-based world order that defined a resilient international security structure that prevented a new and devastating global conflict, built the foundations of a new global economy that fostered the resurgence of war-torn economies, and created the political infrastructure into which new states could find their place in that order.

American global leadership is not an act of philanthropy, but one of self-interest. Our interests are global. Even while, in the nineteenth century, we avoided “entangling alliances,” we understood that our prosperity depended on being part of an international trading system, and we more than once in that century used military force to protect freedom of the seas. After liberating Europe twice in the twentieth century, lest our own security be threatened, our unprecedented peacetime commitment to Europe through NATO was an essential preventative measure that has secured a longer period of peace in Europe than Europe has enjoyed for much of its history. Similarly, American engagement in the Pacific has been an essential foundation for what even the Chinese leadership has called a “constructive force for peace and stability in the region.” Those institutions and alliances remain vital today.

In recent decades, we have only become more intertwined with an increasingly globalized world. We enjoy an unparalleled ability to project influence and to grow our economy, but we have also become increasingly vulnerable—to the loss of critical resources, to economic shocks across the globe, to epidemics, to cyber attacks from states and pranksters alike, and to terrorism. Hence, our own lives and livelihoods depend on our ability to anticipate, shape, promote, and defend against forces that can affect us over time and in material or virtual space.

American leadership is also critical to maintaining a degree of stability in the international system. That system is not static; it is not the same system we created in the wake of World War II. Yet, the international system depends on preserving a dynamic stability—the ability to adapt to change without the kind of revolutionary disruptions that promote uncertainty, fear, and chaos, which can cause the entire system to unravel.

In this respect, when we invest in the sources of American power abroad, we do so not only for ourselves, but also for the system as a whole. For example, the health of the American economy and the dollar is not only important to the U.S., but it is also an essential foundation to stability within global financial markets, and *vice versa*. U.S. military power—including the efficacy of its extended nuclear deterrent on behalf of allies—is not only important to projecting American power, but is also essential to preserving regional stability among allies and potential adversaries alike.

To demonstrate this point, one must only observe the open anxiety of both allies and potential adversaries when America’s capacity to provide these “collective goods” to the system is put into question, either because the sources of American power are weakened or because politicians openly question whether such investment is even necessary or desirable.

This is not to suggest that American leadership has always been benign, well articulated, or well executed. Even at the height of American postwar influence, our ability to coerce outcomes was limited. American leadership is all the more essential in a volatile world, but it also must adapt. In recent decades, the nature of power has changed; so must our leadership.

## **2. Leadership must be collaborative, not unilateral.**

Power is not a zero-sum game. In his provocative book, *The End of Power: From Boardrooms to Battlefields and Churches to States, Why Being in Charge Isn't What it Used to Be*, Moisés Naím advises that we “get off the elevator” and stop thinking about power as a vertical concept, obsessed with whether countries, politicians, or business leaders are “number one” or “winning.” As he and others have argued, the nature of political power is changing. Successive National Intelligence Council Global Trends reports have consistently highlighted the “diffusion of power” within the international system.

Power is not a quantifiable commodity, but a “capacity to influence,” which depends not only on the instruments of power that we possess but also on whether those instruments will have any effect on another. In that respect, the classic concept of “balance of power” that has dominated international relations for over three centuries is not obsolete, but it is inadequate. In some cases, it is more telling to understand the “balance of vulnerabilities” between states than it is to understand a “balance of power.” Economic sanctions against a state that has no other options for commerce can be powerful, but sanctions against a state that exists within an economically porous global marketplace are futile, regardless of the presumed power of the sanctioning state.

It follows that power is a relational and contextual concept. We have power not in the abstract, but in relation to others, circumscribed by our ability to affect what others value. In a globalized world, we have enormous influence, but our ability to coerce has been substantially diminished. Our greater success comes from our ability to persuade, to identify shared interests even in—and sometimes especially in—an antagonistic relationship. Ultimately, leadership is most effective when the leader enjoys the respect of those who are being led, and when those being led believe they have a stake in the system.

These ideas point to a simple fact—that “rising powers” within the international system do not necessarily mean the “decline” of American power. American power is preeminent, in virtually every measure, but it must make room for the emergence of new powers—with different voices and perspectives—within the international system.

The post-1945 international order was the product of a small group of largely like-minded powers that commanded the preponderance of global political, economic, and military might. The U.S. operated as the chairman of a small and largely homogenous board of directors. Yet, even then, American leadership did not extend to remaking the world in our own image: we did not have that ability even at the height of American power in the wake of World War II; we do not have that power now.

To bring together that same preponderance of power around one table today, one needs to gather at least the G-20, with countries from every region of the world and encompassing a wide array of cultures, religions, ethnicities, forms of government, and economic structures. Even with American leadership, global solutions to global problems will require that this diverse constellation of states have a stake in the outcome. Leadership cannot—and need not—be unilateral. We must rely on allies, partners, and friends, as well as the international institutions that we helped build over the past seven decades.

Similarly, in dealing with competitors and potential adversaries, preserving security within the international system requires that we identify those shared interests that do exist. Even in the most frigid moments of the Cold War, the U.S. and the Soviet Union shared a basic interest in survival. We developed through regular interaction a shared vocabulary for managing our fragile strategic relationship, which ultimately bore fruit in a litany of arms control agreements and confidence building measures—nurtured through continual diplomatic interaction—that helped keep conflicts from escalating out of control.

That logic should extend to today’s competitive relationships, especially in dealing with emerging and (re)emerging powers like China and Russia, as well as those (*e.g.*, Iran) that have the potential for destabilizing an entire region. This does not in any way suggest that we become indifferent to behaviors that violate the foundational values of the international system—whether in Ukraine, the South China Sea, or in the Levant—but neither should we let those conflicts blind us to the existence of shared interests, which do exist. If we presume that others have no shared interests—even with those with whom we disagree—we are destined for conflict no less so than when the world stumbled into a cataclysmic war in 1914.

Finally, we need to find a new form of collaborative leadership in working with our allies, who—precisely because of the emergence of new and not-so-like-minded powers—are more important to us than ever. The alliance systems we created in the twentieth century were founded on common values as well as interests. As we seek to strike a balance of both values and interests in dealing with states that would contest the existing international order, we will be more effective if our allies participate in striking that balance. Our allies must see a continuing stake in the system, and then invest their fair share into preserving that system. For our part, we need to treat allies with the respect they are due and keep faith with our commitments. The alternative will be that we and our erstwhile allies decide to find security on our separate paths, an outcome that historically has proven more catastrophic than beneficial.

## **3. We don't have the luxury of ignorance.**

In an address at West Point in 2011, then-Secretary of Defense Bob Gates noted, “when it comes to predicting the nature and location of our next military engagements, since Vietnam our record has been perfect. We have never once gotten it right ... and we had no idea a year before ... that we would be so engaged.”

Because our own lives and livelihoods depend in large measure on what happens around the world, we cannot afford blind spots. We must therefore invest carefully and strategically in our nation’s intelligence capability, so we can anticipate, understand, and carefully weigh all the prospective issues, wherever they may arise. It may not be up to us to provide “solutions”—that is a policy choice—but we need to have a clear and holistic picture of a rapidly changing strategic environment for us even to have a meaningful choice.

To avoid blind spots, two key elements of communication need to exist within the policy process. First, the intelligence community must be able to produce good intelligence; second, those in key policy positions need to be intellectually prepared to listen and assess what the intelligence community says. To accomplish this, we need to remember five essential characteristics about the relationship between intelligence and policy making.

First, intelligence is inherently replete with uncertainties and ambiguities. Sources must be critically analyzed and corroborated. One can often ascertain trends and make strategic predictions, but precision in predicting specific events is generally elusive.

Second, intelligence cannot be politicized, by which we mean the intelligence community must be free to offer its candid assessments—with all their inherent uncertainties and ambiguities—without political pressure or being filtered through the prism of partisan politics.

Third, debate within the intelligence community should be encouraged, rather than discouraged. The intelligence community is necessarily fragmented, ensuring that multiple institutional perspectives on an intelligence problem can be brought to bear. The Director of National Intelligence and the President's National Security Advisor have a responsibility to ensure that multiple perspectives are aired and understood, not filtered out to render a more simplistic or biased picture to the President.

Fourth, technical intelligence is critical, but there is no substitute for good human source intelligence. Only human intelligence can take us inside the minds of adversaries and give us a better sense of intentions. Such sources take years to cultivate. In this regard, as Mike Morrell has suggested in his recent book, *The Great War of our Time*, an increasing operational—indeed paramilitary—role for the CIA at the expense of intelligence gathering and analysis may prove counterproductive.

Fifth, the recipients of intelligence must be willing to listen, while suspending—at least temporarily—their own preconceived notions of reality. All policy makers have filters through which they receive intelligence, but they must be prepared to set those filters aside and consider fully the information brought to them. Those, for example, who insisted that 9.11 could only happen as a result of state-sponsored terrorism were effectively blind to the capabilities of an organization such as Al Qaeda operating out of remote areas of Afghanistan.

Throughout the Cold War, the U.S. operated in a relatively predictable bipolar competition, in which we tended to see most world events as a manifestation of that Cold War competition and ignored most anything that did not fit that paradigm. Today, there may be similar tendencies, whether viewing actions by Moscow and Beijing as reminiscent of a new Cold War, or to see all terrorist threats as emanating from a monolithic Islamic tradition. In doing so, we ignore—at our peril—the complexities of each issue.

#### **4. Empathy is the most important strategic virtue, hubris the most dangerous strategic vice.**

In a recent lecture to students at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Sir Lawrence Freedman, author of the landmark *Strategy: A History*, reinforced the importance of empathy as a strategic virtue. Security—whether of a state or of any other community—is always in the eye of the beholder. If we are to understand our own security environment, we need to be able to see that same environment through the cultural and political lens of those with whom we are dealing.

Conversely, it is easy to project on to others our own values, interests, priorities, and perspectives and assume that others view the world through the same set of lenses. Hubris forms the root of strategic miscalculation—assuming that others will do what we would do, respond the way we would respond, and for the reasons that we would do so. Hubris breeds arrogance and contempt for the capabilities of potential adversaries. Hubris can also blind statesmen and military leaders alike to the risks of war. As Sir Alistair Horne concludes in his recent book, *Hubris: The Tragedy of War in the Twentieth Century*, “We students of history should not succumb to our own arrogance in supposing that hubris is easy to avoid. It arises out of success. In the aftermath of triumph, anything seems possible. And this ... is when so many calamitous decisions are made.”

History is full of examples in which actions taken by one party to enhance one's security only serve to fuel the insecurity of others, engendering a destabilizing spiral that simply contributes to everyone's insecurity. No doubt there are times when such actions are justified, but, more often than not, the resulting spiral is an unintended and unanticipated consequence that is enormously difficult to control or manage, much less reverse.

Consider, for example, how one manages relations with Russia and China—both nuclear weapons states claiming that the U.S. and its allies are threatening “their space,” which they view as important to their security. Whether in Eastern Europe or in the East and South China Seas, it is critical that principles such as the inviolability of borders, the right of states to choose their own security relationships, and freedom of the seas be upheld, and that challenges to those principles be effectively met. Yet, the desire for a muscular response to those challenges should be tempered with the realization that, for others, a different set of vital interests is at stake. In these environments, coercive solutions may not have a high probability of success. While we must deter adventurism as well as aggression, and reassure our allies who, unlike us, live in their respective neighborhoods, we also should avoid actions that exacerbate a crisis, harden confrontation, or make the eventual diplomatic and political solution more elusive.

Consider, as well, how we attempt to manage the actions of autocratic leaders who conflate their own survival and state survival. To us, strong actions—for example, military strikes or drawing “red lines”—are typically justified on the grounds that they “deter” an adversary from taking further actions that we oppose. Deterrence presumes that an adversary will be dissuaded from taking actions out of fear of the consequences that we threaten. Yet what if the adversary actively seeks to provoke that very response on our part? In retrospect, Slobodan Milosevic was not deterred by the threat of NATO bombing in Kosovo in 1999; instead, he saw NATO's bombing raids as a way to solidify political support for him. Milosevic may have miscalculated, at least in the long term, but deterrence failed because we also miscalculated his motivations.

Similarly, the Obama Administration drew a “red line” with respect to Syria's use of chemical weapons, intended in part, perhaps, as an alibi for not using military force up to that point, but also as a deterrent to Assad in breaching an important international norm. Given Assad's response, it is just as likely that, for him, the red line was not a deterrent, but an invitation to take the step that would embroil the United States militarily in Syria in a way that, ironically, Assad may have thought would only bolster his position. In the end, as Jeffrey Goldberg's profile of “The Obama Doctrine” in *The Atlantic* suggests, Obama declined to carry through with the threat of military force against Assad and grasped, instead, the opportunity for a collaborative effort with Russia to remove Syria's chemical weapons.

These cases suggest that deterrence, like security, is in the eye of the beholder. Those whom we hope to deter are, in their own way “rational,” but we need to understand *their* frame of rationality, not impute on to them our own or assume that they would or should respond as we would in the same context. And we need to have this understanding *before* drawing “red lines,” which either compel action on our part or leave in their wake questions of American resolve. As a rule, the President should never threaten anything that he or she does not intend to carry out; hence, it is all the more important that one have a clear understanding of both the intended and unintended consequences of drawing that red line.



However we may define our strategic objectives, they will be fundamentally political in nature. Military and economic instruments may be useful to shape others' calculus about risk, but—short of all out war—persuasion, not coercion, is the more likely path to success. Effective persuasion, in turn, requires an understanding of others' interests, values, priorities, and limits, and such an understanding requires continuous engagement with those with whom we must deal.

It has become the habit to suggest that diplomatic engagement with those who do not share our values or interests and of whom we disapprove should be the “carrot” held out as a reward for making concessions. The U.S. does not have diplomatic relations with Iran or North Korea, and, until recently, did not have relations with Cuba. It is difficult to see what benefits the U.S. has derived from not having a diplomatic presence in these countries; it is, on the other hand, evident that the U.S. has had a more difficult time understanding the internal political dynamics of those countries precisely because there has not been the opportunity for continuous engagement on various working levels. During the Cold War, U.S.-Soviet relations persisted at the political and diplomatic levels, as well as through scientific and other contacts, which arguably enabled both countries to manage crises that could otherwise spell catastrophe.

Preserving a continuous line of communication and diplomatic interaction with governments is an important means for understanding how that government and its society view the world. Without such insight, devising a strategy for dealing with that state is severely handicapped, and the potential for strategic miscalculation—on all sides—is substantially increased.

## **5. Especially in a democracy, “process” and the rule of law matter.**

Professor Edward Corwin, an eminent legal and political scholar, wrote that the U.S. Constitution is an “invitation to struggle”—an invitation to struggle among competing ideas, among competing centers of power, and among competing responsibilities in the exercise of governmental authority. If there is anything “exceptional” about the United States, it derives from its historical foundations as a constitutional republic that balances, on the one hand, the need for strong government, and, on the other hand, the necessity of checking that government through various institutional means.

In foreign and national security policy, the Constitution obliges both the President and the Congress to share power, even if the respective boundaries of power are blurred. Treaties that bind the United States need to be subject to appropriate advice and consent of the Senate, but members of the Congress should not arrogate to themselves the role of unilateral or collective representatives of the state and undermine the role of the Executive Branch to negotiate with other states. It is difficult enough for the United States to engage with foreign powers when there is a constitutional sharing of power between the executive and the legislature. It is chaos when the political system is so polarized that the only way government can act is by one branch taking unilateral action that challenges its constitutional limits, while the other branch refuses to take action and thereby abdicates its constitutional responsibilities.

In war powers, the Constitution likewise offers no clear boundaries between the President's authority as commander-in-chief and the Congress' right to declare war. Notwithstanding the ambiguity of these boundaries, the logic of our founders was that the responsibility for wielding the powers of deciding war and peace should be shared.

Historically, Congress has declared war on eleven occasions, and, in another eleven occasions, authorized the use of military force without a declaration of war. Yet, the pendulum has swung from attempts—following Vietnam, through the War Powers Resolution—to limit the President's ability to wage war unilaterally, to the post-9.11 reality in which the President enjoys an unconstrained authority “to use all necessary and appropriate force to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States....” In 2015, it was—ironically—the President who asked Congress to repeal this September 2001 authorization to use military force, but Congress has declined to act.

Nowhere does the tension between “security” and “liberty” come into sharper focus than in questions of war and peace. This is the classic clash between security of the whole—the general welfare—versus freedom of individuals. Today, “war” is a much more pervasive and ill-defined concept. Our Constitution is designed around a system of checks and balances, even if the language is deliberately vague and ambiguous. Once an institutional check is lifted, it is extremely difficult to restore it. As much as we are both inclined to give the President latitude on the use of military force, we fear Congress has abdicated its responsibilities in this regard by preserving an open-ended authority that has few, of any, boundaries.

The rule of law is important not only for our domestic governance, but for preserving the rules-based international system for which the U.S. was the principal architect. As much as international law relies on a “self-help” enforcement principle, it has evolved over the centuries because states exercise their sovereign right to conform to norms out of self-interest and reciprocity. The U.S. respects its treaty obligations so we can hold others to the same standards. The U.S. abides by the Geneva Convention with respect to the treatment of combatant prisoners because it expects others to treat our own fighting men and women according to the same rules. The U.S. subscribes to the laws of armed conflict because it expects others to do so as well.

For the United States, the rule of law—at home and abroad—is not optional. If the U.S. is to exercise moral authority within the international community, we need to demonstrate our own commitment to the rule of law. To be sure, there will be mistakes—by men and women both in and out of uniform and by those in the lowest to the highest rank. In every case, there must be accountability, or there will be no legitimacy if we seek to hold others accountable as well.

Shaping policy within the framework of U.S. interests, values, and the rule of law requires a process that serves the broad interests of the Republic and embodies its own integrity, predictability, and transparency. National security policy transcends the traditional boundary between “foreign” and “domestic” policy and engages the bureaucratic domains of a growing number of executive departments and agencies. Marshaling the resources of government to frame a consistent and effective national security strategy requires that the National Security Council staff be a credible “honest broker” in ensuring that the most senior decision makers in government have the fullest possible understanding both of the issues being addressed and the benefits and risks associated with policy options.

Following the Iran-Contra crisis, the Tower Commission recommended that the National Security Advisor and the NSC staff “focus on advice and management, not implementation and execution ... [which are] the responsibility and strength of the departments and agencies.” The NSC staff should be empowered to do that job, but not so large or compartmented that it no longer can take a holistic view of U.S. policy. Most of all, it must be above politics. National security policy must reflect the best that government can muster, beyond the competition of partisan

politics or institutional prerogatives.

America's pursuit of enlightened national security interests, consistent with the best of American values, has been possible when it rested on a broad political foundation, in which competing government bureaucracies and institutions worked to shape a solid consensus, offered to the rest of the world both a united front and a vision of a better future, and committed the resources and shaped the policy instruments that made it possible.

None of this is possible within a system that is institutionally paralyzed and in a society that is politically polarized. This may be the greatest national security threat that we face as a country.

### **Applying the principles: diplomacy, military force, and the limits of power.**

Defense Secretary Bob Gates was famous for being an advocate of soft power, complaining that there was a serious misalignment of priorities when the Department of Defense had more men and women in military bands than the Department of State had diplomats. In a commencement address at Notre Dame in May 2011, he highlighted "the critical importance of diplomacy and development as fundamental components of our foreign policy and national security." But Gates went on to stress that "the ultimate guarantee against the success of aggressors, dictators and terrorists in the twenty first century, as in the twentieth century, is hard power—the size, strength and global reach of the United States military."

Clearly, the nature of our military challenges is different in the twenty-first century, and our force structures have to adapt to those needs. In today's security environment, we must be prepared to deal with a full range of contingencies, with forces that are qualitatively different from those of the twentieth century. But America's ability to deliver military force across the globe to meet these contingencies cannot be allowed to deteriorate in the face of serious threats to U.S. vital interests. That America's ability to do so would be compromised by arbitrary budget sequestration decisions void of strategic content is unconscionable.

Military activity and diplomacy are not mutually exclusive. In modern conflicts they are increasingly intertwined, and military activity can be an enabler of diplomacy. As former British Army officer Emile Simpson wrote in *War from the Ground Up: Twenty First Century Combat as Politics*, "military activity is not clearly distinguishable from political activity."

At the same time, the military instrument is a means to political ends—military victory has never been an end in itself. As the Tet Offensive began in Vietnam in 1968, General William Westmoreland lamented that the North Vietnamese were "trying to win politically what they could not militarily," which proved to be a telling statement as to why the United States could never win in Vietnam. Many decades later, military success in deposing the Taliban in Afghanistan, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and Muammar Gaddafi in Libya did not achieve the political outcomes they were designed to enable; military victory was a necessary but hardly sufficient ingredient to strategic success.

To be sure, the military is not always the right instrument. As President Obama noted in a commencement address at West Point in 2014, "The military ... is, and always will be, the backbone of [our] leadership. But U.S. military action cannot be the only—or even primary—component of our leadership in every instance. Just because we have the best hammer does not mean that every problem is a nail."

After Vietnam, the U.S. was reluctant to employ military force to achieve political ends. Our uniquely stunning success in Iraq in 1990-91 produced a renewed enthusiasm—and perhaps exaggerated expectations—about the use of military force. Over the past decade, public opinion has again reflected a deep reticence to commit American lives and treasure unless there is a clear danger to American vital interests and the prospect of near-term success.

In reality, the answer cannot reflect either extreme, based on the public's enthusiasm for committing military force. Government must lead, engaging public opinion with an honest appraisal of the stakes as well as the risks involved. We must debate so we can commit ourselves with one voice. We must be consistent with our principles and conform to our standards within the rule of law. And we must have a realistic understanding of the limits of military force and how force and diplomacy can be employed synergistically to achieve our political objectives.

Our world has no small number of brutal dictators leading failed or failing states, or deadly megalomaniacs leading terrorist organizations, openly violating international norms and basic human rights and threatening U.S. interests.

But does that mean that the U.S. has the responsibility—even if it has the capacity—to intervene with military force? Conflicts are often also local, between competing ethnic or religious claims, or tribal rivals fighting over resources. If we interpose ourselves in local rivalries—ancient or modern—we run the risk of transforming second or third order conflicts fought with antiquated weapons into full blown deadly wars fought with modern high technology weapons that could destroy whole populations. We must also avoid the belief that we can simply impose our concepts of governance on societies that long predate our own, and then depart.

We offer, therefore, the following essential principles for employing military force:

- We must honor our treaty commitments.
- We should engage when our vital interests are directly threatened. When we do, we must define clearly what military victory looks like and how it contributes to the achievement of political objectives. And then we must fight to win.
- We should intervene in the aftermath of natural disasters to help those affected and to facilitate the reestablishment of effective and responsible governance.
- We should intervene in the face of humanitarian crises, but not if our actions will simply create a political vacuum that exacerbates the crisis.
- If we intervene, we should be prepared to commit—with international partners—to enable a transition to responsible governance. If we are not prepared to do this, then we should not intervene.

Not all national security problems can be solved. Sometimes they can only be managed, and their deleterious effects perhaps minimized. When one cannot coerce, one must be patient, just as George Kennan famously advocated in his outline of America's Cold War "containment"

doctrine in 1947. America's reluctance to use military force does not mean disengagement. It means that we must deal with others on their own terms and be prepared to engage through diplomacy. That takes time, and it necessarily involves compromise, but it has shown itself to be a much more reliable and sustainable instrument than coercion.

Ultimately, military force—whether as a credible threat or through actual use—remains an important complement to political action. Whatever national security strategy the next Administration chooses to pursue must reflect a sophisticated understanding of how today's various and diverse instruments of military force are integrated with non-military means to achieve political ends.

### **The bottom line...**

American global leadership is important—not only because others look to us, but also because it is in our interests and within our responsibility if we are to live up to the values we profess. How we lead, however, matters, because this world does not enable us to dictate outcomes. Not only are our resources limited, but others also have—and we need them to have—a stake in the system.

We must stand firm against those who would wreak havoc within the system, but we will have our greatest success if we can engage others in ways that encourage them to invest in the system. This, however, requires that they also have a voice in shaping that system. This will also offer us the broadest base of support if we have to use military force as an essential enabler to effective diplomacy.

Ultimately, America's legitimacy as a global leader will rest not only on our military and economic power, but also on the moral authority that we garner by being a nation committed to the principles of our founding and the rule of law. If we cannot harness those institutions to the service of our national enterprise, we will surely find ourselves in decline, isolated, and our national security severely challenged on many fronts.

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*Image: The crew of USCGC Kiska fly a battle ensign upon completion of a patrol. Flickr/U.S. Coast Guard.*

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