



The Presidential Campaign and US National Security: 2008 and Beyond

Background Essay for the April 2, 2008 Panel Event

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In the area of national security events tend to trump planning. Careful strategic planning is required with the recognition that unforeseen events will compel the new president and his/her national security staff to make rapid decisions, manage crises, and have an architecture in place which will guide US relations with other states. An additional dimension is that, although the US has enjoyed its position of primacy in a unipolar world since the demise of the USSR, the world is again increasingly multipolar, with the rise of China and India, and the asymmetrical leverage of militant Islamist terrorism.

Presidential campaigns are not well designed to provide the public with insights into the national security-related competency of the candidates. Campaign bumper stickers and 30-second sound bites on television do not help voters make informed choices as to how the next administration may develop and manage its national security strategy.

Following are several general national security issues to consider for the year 2009 and beyond:

- **“WAR” ON TERROR:** The “War on Terror” has dominated US foreign policy since September 11, 2001. The “War on Terror” is probably not a “war,” but is closer to a “campaign.” It should not dominate the US national security agenda and obscure other important foreign policy and national security issues.
- **US INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITY:** Intelligence gathering provides the basis for assessing threats. The intelligence community was wrong about Saddam Hussein’s nuclear weapons development program, and the recent National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) assertion that Iran ceased its nuclear weapons development program in 2003 is subject to question. There is an urgent need to restore confidence in the US intelligence product by enhancing the training of the 100,000 people who serve in the US national security/intelligence agencies.
- **NATIONAL SECURITY MANAGEMENT:** National security requires sound, adaptive management. The national security management system should be reviewed and evaluated. Changes may be needed to the National Security Act of 1947 and the function of the national

security advisor. What role, if any, will be assigned to the vice president? How should the missions of the 16 federal national security-related agencies be coordinated?

- **THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS:** How will the president relate to Congress in the area of national security? The assertion of unlimited executive power in national security and foreign affairs will be contested by Congress. This could create an impasse regarding policy and implementation of national security issues.
- **THE US MILITARY AND WARFIGHTING:** Is the US military capable of projecting requisite force if called upon to do so? Will the next president insist on a military transformation that will focus on irregular warfare and an adequate resource allocation which would be supported by Congress?
- **NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION:** An estimated 30 states or other entities may have nuclear weapon capability within the next two decades. What policy will the next president follow regarding the nuclear weapon non-proliferation regime and the likelihood of widespread nuclear proliferation? What is required to enhance the present nuclear non-proliferation regime? What strategy is required to adapt to the likelihood of the proliferation of nuclear weapons?
- **IMMIGRATION AND NATIONAL SECURITY:** What is the intersection of immigration and national security? Can the national security dimension of immigration be recognized and resolved, even though the broad issue of immigration may be unresolved for many years?
- **THE COST OF DEFENSE:** In times of US economic uncertainty, the issue of “guns and butter” needs to be addressed. In 2003, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld estimated that the cost of the Iraq war would be in the range of \$50 billion. The most recent estimated cost is \$2 trillion and mounting. How will the next president balance the allocation of national security and homeland security expenses with education and other social service programs?

Following are several specific national security issues to consider for the year 2009 and beyond:

- **IRAQ TRANSITION AND POST-IRAQ:** Iraq’s problems will not diminish quickly – they will continue to mount and spiral long after America has withdrawn its troops. The following events are likely to shape the future character of Iraq and lead to the destruction of the Iraqi state: A *de jure* partition of Iraq into competing and hostile regions; the intervention of surrounding Mideast states in Iraq (i.e. the declaration of an independent Kurdish state would trigger Turkey’s intervention); and Iraq becoming the staging ground for wars and confrontation between Mideast states, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Syria. Iraq will become a large petri dish for pathologies like terrorism, Islamist radicalism, arms bazaars, crime and drugs. Think Afghanistan after the Soviets were forced out, only on a larger scale.

The US will continue to pay a price in other regions for its preoccupation with Iraq. In Asia, actors have begun to hedge their bets, forming strategic alliances with China. The Iraq experience will spur the reassessment of strategic relationships. Grand coalitions will become a thing of the past, as security relationships become focused narrowly on specific issues and produce temporary coalitions of strange bedfellows.

- **PERCEPTIONS AND ALLIANCES:** Political and strategic miscalculations have led to the perception in the US and throughout the world that the US global strategic posture has been weakened and its resources exhausted. As a result, US allies and adversaries alike will view the US as reluctant and less able to assume a dominant role in global affairs. US allies, who will perceive that the US is less willing and able to assist them, will:
 - Arm themselves, possibly with nuclear weapons. For example, Japan is already advancing towards rearmament.
 - Seek new alliances and strategic relationships with rising regional powers, such as China.
 - Implement hedging strategies. For example, despite an emerging US-India strategic relationship, India may seek a regional alliance with Indonesia.

US adversaries will perceive that they are less constrained. The US should expect:

- More risk taking by highly unstable actors.
- More aggressive challenges from state actors, such as Iran, Syria, North Korea, some African states, and others.
- Larger competitors, such as China and Russia, will be emboldened to expand their spheres of influence. The opportunistic diplomacy of both China and Russia has received a strong stimulus from America being bogged down in Iraq.

After the Cold War, the nature of competition with and resistance to the US changed. “Strategic competition,” a core component of the America ethos to secure US interests and assets, morphed into ‘friend v. foe’ / ‘with us or against us’ politicking. Recasting balanced and shifting US alliances, as well as more tentative and contentious relationships, as “strategic competitors” in language and action may be useful.

- How is ‘strategic competition’ defined? What are the principles of strategic competition?
- What are US assets of strategic competition?
- Who are the primary US strategic competitors? (the European Union, China, Russia, etc.)?

Many of these forces could have transnational and transformative effects, and the US should expect actors to behave unpredictably.

- **CHINA:** Why should the US be worried about China economically? What is the worst thing China can do to the US? Can and would China use America’s debt against us? What are China’s economic levers of power and how might they be used? What are the possible outcomes and impact? What might provoke China to wield its financial muscle? Considering US-China tensions, could the US respond and recover if China stopped feeding the US dollar?
- **TRIUMPH OF ISLAM:** Iraq is now al Qaeda’s primary base of operations. Al Qaeda may broaden its foothold in Iraq as American forces leave the country. Iraqi jihadists will likely return to their countries of origin – Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Yemen, and other states – where they could succeed in overthrowing pro-US regimes and garnering popular support.

Regimes in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt could collapse, and Israel's security would be threatened. The largest Islamic states – Indonesia, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh – could fall under Islamist control; new regimes would implement the “Talibanization” of these countries.

The spread of sectarian violence into surrounding Mideast states would have considerable implications. Consequences could include a Shi'ite revolution in Bahrain against the pro-US minority Sunnis and a Shi'a attempt to take over oil facilities in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, which could destabilize and/or break up the country.

- **ENERGY:** Any of the negative scenarios could trigger the collapse of Gulf energy production. For example, violence in Saudi Arabia or the Gulf states could cause the evacuation of nearly three million Indian and Pakistani nationals who work in critical energy infrastructure jobs. This event could initiate cascading economic crises with consequences for the world's largest economies – the US receives 30 percent of its imported energy from the Gulf; China, 60 percent; Japan, about 90 percent; and India, 70 percent. As a result, Russia and Iran would gain significant leverage.

How can the US achieve energy security and reduce dependence on foreign oil?

- What are the current competition policies?
- What are the roles of the private and public sectors? Are there existing sector-specific impediments to advancements in energy security?
- How can the US encourage greater innovation?
- Abroad, what are the possible flash points? For example, increased competition among developed and developing states for diminishing energy resources.
- How does the US reduce instability in oil-rich nations?