

The NATIONAL STRATEGY FORUM REVIEW

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Publisher's Note

What is the status of U.S. national security? It is difficult to make an objective judgment. The best indicator is that there has been no major, successful attack against U.S. interests since September 11, 2001. Subsequent to 9/11 the U.S. has successfully adapted its national security system from meager to near-robust in the past decade of the Global War on Terror ("GWOT").

Adaptation will continue, but it will be substantially enlarged beyond the focus on counterterrorism. It will include the driving force of economics: the intersection of the economy and national security.

The U.S. has become a debtor state within the past two decades. Debtors lose their international leverage. For example, U.S. policy regarding PRC is constrained by the debtor/creditor relationship; and the U.S. is constrained by its Middle East oil dependency. U.S. policymakers must confront the issues of the U.S. living beyond its means, including the affordability of Department of Defense undertakings, and the expense of TSA airport security. The orientation of the open purse GWOT largesse era must be examined.

The ongoing presence of U.S. military forces in Afghanistan and Iraq must be reassessed through the lens of affordability. Critical analysis questions the annual expense of counterinsurgency. What are the existential and future Al Qaeda and Afghan Taliban threats to the U.S.? The partial answer to this question is that a stable, functioning Afghan government will deny safe haven to terrorists who may threaten U.S. security interests. This conclusion is accurate, but it is only partially correct.

Terrorists have or could have safe havens just about anywhere. There are and estimated 400-600 "black spots," which are ungoverned or poorly governed places within states where terrorists can operate without interdiction. Safe havens can exist in any American city or suburb. The difference between Evanston, Illinois and Somalia, Yemen, or Mauritania is that Evanston is not a safe haven and the likelihood of interdiction is great, but not perfect.

It is estimated that there are more than 200 unguarded crossing points on the U.S./Canada border. The U.S.-Mexico border is also porous. The reality is that in a global society, no state's borders can be sealed completely.

U.S. national security and international relations policy are based on secrecy. However, this assumption has proven to be grossly unfounded. The WikiLeaks secrets information dumps shocked the national security, private sector, public, and defense and intelligence communities. Successful hackers should have alerted policymakers to the reality that there are no more enduring secrets. Leverage gained by information advantage is short-lived. U.S. policymakers and the commercial private sector are beginning to awaken to the reality of a future with no more secrets. How quickly and rationally the U.S. adapts to this new reality will be a marker for future national security.

Since its founding in 1983, the National Strategy Forum has focused on national security strategy. Beginning in 1990, the NSF has made quadrennial predictions regarding U.S. national security — a look ahead to the following four years. At the end of each time period, we evaluate our predictions. We have awarded ourselves a consistent grade above 90% accuracy. The reason for this prescience is that we apply common sense and critical analysis to the mosaic of discrete national security problems. This enables the NSF to develop a strategic umbrella composed of complementary and competitive strategy components.

The key issues have been economic, international terrorism, and the consequence of globalization.

Subsequent to the demise of the Former Soviet Union, U.S. policymakers focused on two issues: how to spend the "peace dividend," and America's world role as the "the global sheriff." In retrospect, this constituted a delusion of U.S. grandeur. The rapid U.S. change of status from creditor to debtor nation began in the 1990s. We did not understand that China, India, and most other major states focus on their self-interest and that the world has become economically highly competitive with the United States. Arrogance and misplaced belief in America's continuing primacy has skewed reality.

What should be the U.S. national security strategy for the next decade? The first steps already taken are encouraging. America has awakened to the severity of our present condition, and there is apparent motivation to use our abundant resources to adapt to changed circumstances. The major unanswered question is whether U.S. policymakers will think and act strategically, and abandon the traditional ad hoc way of resolving problems.

The NSF Editorial Board has identified an array of emerging security issues and suggested policy issues for the matters that follow.