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The National Security Inheritance

President-elect Donald Trump will take office in January 2017 and shoulder the formidable burden of a complex national security inheritance.

On the positive side of the ledger, justice was delivered to Osama bin Laden and many of Al Qaeda’s top leadership. That accomplishment and the manner in which it was achieved should not be overlooked. President Obama’s choice to follow through on his commitment to take out Bin Laden whenever and wherever he was found is something all Americans should be proud of (and also what the operation signaled about the strength of our intelligence and special operations capabilities). Our alliances and partnerships in a rapidly changing Asia-Pacific are generally stronger and more resilient after the early attempts at the so-called “Asia rebalance.” And while there are obvious difficulties in relations with China and Russia, the absence of outright conflict with these major powers is positive. Finally, the nuclear agreement with Iran, the details of which remain controversial and contested, has extended the timeline on which Tehran could achieve a nuclear weapon. These are achievements that the new administration should examine closely before they undertake major modifications.

On the negative side of the strategic ledger, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan remain incredibly complex. Although President Obama deserves credit for undertaking the significant surge of combat forces into Afghanistan in 2009, the difficulty in supporting the Afghan security forces was complicated by the public timelines for a withdrawal. And irrespective of the arguments concerning the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with Iraq negotiated at the end of the Bush administration, the reduction of forces from Iraq between 2009 and 2012 was too steep, making it difficult for the United States to retain adequate leverage over the sectarianism of the Baghdad government, which in turn enabled the rise of the Islamic state and their rapid advances in both Iraq and Syria. Finally, while I largely agree with the parameters of the operational approach in countering ISIL on the ground in Iraq and Syria (e.g. airpower, U.S. special operations forces, combat advisors), it took the administration too long to settle on a strategic approach and begin the campaign. All the while, the ultimate question as to how to deal with the question of Bashar al-Assad has remained unanswered, and Russia’s involvement and support of the barbarism we see everyday in places like Aleppo is horrifying.

I am concerned, but not particularly surprised, by the behavior of Russia and China, both of whom are rational international actors who are pursuing their perceived interests. Vladimir Putin is no friend of the United States, and he clearly sees the long arc of history bending against the maintenance of an

Bold.

Innovative.

Bipartisan.

extensive Russian sphere of influence that acts as a brake on democracy, civil society, and full economic integration with a wider Europe and a global liberal economic order. The unlawful incursion in Ukraine should not be legitimized by the United States and ongoing steps to shore up deterrence in the region ought to be sustained and increased. There is danger of escalation in the region, and the Trump administration would do well to focus on ways to maintain “peace through strength” quite early in 2017, perhaps by signaling a willingness to improve relations while simultaneously working to enhance our military posture in the region.

China’s behavior is perhaps the most consequential in terms of its potential lasting impact on the nature of the regional order over the longer term. China’s aggressive behavior toward its neighbors and, in particular, its rapid land reclamation efforts in the South China Sea, are destabilizing. The eventual placement of obviously anti-access military platforms on these “islands” – anti-ship cruise missiles, advanced air defense systems etc. – would further imperil the balance of military power and risk escalation and miscalculation.¹ The Department of Defense has a significant role to play in enhancing a military posture in the region that can deter and dissuade China from breaking apart decades of a security architecture that has kept the region relatively stable and prosperous.

Finally, from the broader strategic perspective of the Secretary of Defense, tasked to oversee the development, sustainment, and employment of U.S. military forces, it is clear that America’s days of being the sole superpower, free to exercise military power with relative impunity around the world, are numbered. Our military-technical edge that has allowed our men and women in uniform to deploy rapidly around the world and engage our adversaries with unrivaled speed, precision, and staying power has begun to erode to the point where the task of maintain conventional deterrence in key theatres around the world has become much more difficult, expensive, and risky. This has less to do with any particular decision made by the Obama administration over the last eight years, and more to do with the fundamental contours of the international economy and the rapid proliferation of advanced military technology around the world. Clearly, the era of tight defense budgets and the disaster of sequestration has made it very difficult for the Department of Defense (DOD) to keep investing in game-changing defense technologies and to enable a culture of experimentation and exercising that can advance new concepts of operation and displace old and outdated ways and means of keeping our forces on the cutting edge. These external and internal pressures on the Department of Defense are playing out in several important ways.

State of the Joint Force: Balancing Preparations for Today Versus Tomorrow

In almost any budget environment, defense leaders need to balance the competing imperatives of maintaining the force’s near-term readiness to ensure it has sufficient capacity for the scale and type of operations it may need to execute, and modernizing it to meet over-the-horizon challenges.² Exacerbating these otherwise routine choices are the constraints imposed by the Budget Control Act of 2011 and the annual budget uncertainty that has persisted since then, including the routine use of continuing resolutions to fund Defense Department activities. These budget dynamics have corroded

¹ See Thomas Shugart, “China’s Artificial Islands are Bigger (and a Bigger Deal) Than You Think,” *War on the Rocks* (September 21, 2016): <http://warontherocks.com/2016/09/chinas-artificial-islands-are-bigger-and-a-bigger-deal-than-you-think/>.

² This section draws from an unpublished paper written with Loren Schulman of the Center for a New American Security (CNAS) and Melissa Dalton of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

responsible stewardship of the massive defense enterprise, and of military capabilities in particular. In general, the Department has managed these budget and operational risks by prioritizing the force's current readiness over maintaining its size and ensuring sufficient resources for modernization, though the precise balance among these variables differs by military service.

The incoming Pentagon team will need to make clear choices about how to balance among the readiness, structure, and modernization needs of today and those of tomorrow. Key near- and long-term challenges to the force are described below.

Readiness

Readiness is a critical concern for the military, given the threats the nation faces and the budget constraints imposed by the Budget Control Act. Currently, forces deployed overseas tend to be highly ready for their assigned missions. But at the end of their deployments, they require time and resources to reset, refit, and retrain, in order to regain their readiness for the next deployment. In addition, in light of an aggressive Russia and a rising China, both of whom are and will continue to test our resolve, forces need time to train for missions beyond counterinsurgency and counterterrorism in order to be prepared for the full spectrum of possible contingencies. The Joint Chiefs have repeatedly sounded alarms about an accumulating level of risk associated with the declining readiness of non-deployed forces. Insufficient readiness carries real risks, in terms of dollars, lives, and the ability to achieve key operational and strategic objectives on preferred timelines. There is a fear today that if a substantial crisis required additional forces to be sent abroad quickly, many of the responding units may not be fully manned, trained or equipped for the mission.

Force Size and Structure

All of the military services would like to grow their size—both the number of personnel (end-strength) and their formations and constituent platforms (e.g., ships, aircraft, tanks and other vehicles). Doing so under current budget constraints would come at the risk of readiness and modernization, however, and as such, the force has instead come down in size over the past five years. Absent a significant infusion of defense dollars, defense leaders will likely need to make the most of the force structure we have over the next five years. This will require significant innovation in Defense Department concepts of operation and creative approaches to maintaining overseas posture.

Modernization

Force modernization has typically suffered most severely in times of tight budgets. In some respects, this is a rational outcome: DoD must attend to the problems of today, so it bides time by accepting risk that may (or may not) materialize in the future. Nevertheless, given the pace of military modernization by China and, in some areas, Russia, the rapid proliferation of advanced technologies to other states and non-state actors, and the lengthy time and investment necessary to develop major capabilities, the Department's underinvestment in modernization is troubling. For instance, many of our most plausible adversaries now have access to satellite imagery, drone technology, and precision guided munitions that threaten U.S. forces. Unlike in decades past, most of this technology is openly available on the commercial market. In recent years, the Pentagon has begun to address these challenges by building bridges to Silicon Valley and other U.S. centers of innovation and by developing new warfighting concepts of operation and making targeted investments in cutting-edge technologies and capabilities. These efforts must continue, but if budget pressures continue it will be difficult to make room for these needed investments in defense innovation.

A compounding challenge within defense modernization is the so-called “bow wave” of modernization bills coming due in the early 2020s. The bow wave is caused by a number of major programs that have their peak years of funding in the early 2020s, just outside the Department’s five-year planning horizon (but notably inside the next administration’s planning timeline). This bow wave is occurring because DoD has begun a number of development programs today in the hopes that the more substantial funds needed to acquire the resulting military platforms will appear tomorrow. By some estimates, in order to afford the fruits of the current defense program, funding for DoD’s major acquisition programs will need to increase from \$72.0 billion in FY 2015 to a peak of \$88.6 billion in FY 2022, in constant 2016 dollars.³

The largest driver of the bow wave is Air Force aircraft modernization programs, particularly the F-35 fighter, B-21 bomber, and KC-46A aerial refueling tanker. Nuclear modernization is another area that will contribute to the bow wave, with investments planned to recapitalize the sea-, air-, and land-based legs of the Triad. The Obama Administration’s FY 2017 request did not address the difficult tradeoffs required by the modernization bow wave; the next administration will need to set clear priorities that can inform decisions on potential tradeoffs, even if sequester caps are lifted.

The Force Development Balance by Service Component

Below is a description of the particular manifestation of these challenges in each military service as well as in the space and cyber domains.

Army

The Army has borne the brunt of 15 years of continuous American ground operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. By far the largest service (comprising, by FY18, 450,000 active duty and 530,000 reserve and Guard troops), the Army is the most formidable ground combat force in the world. Today, there are approximately 190,000 soldiers deployed in over 140 countries. Although the Budget Control Act spending caps have created pressure to further reduce end strength, the threat environment—especially Russia’s actions in Ukraine and Syria, the challenge posed by ISIS, and the DPRK’s growing threat to stability on the Korean Peninsula—has heightened awareness of the need for increasingly capable and agile ground forces. Army leaders have consistently expressed deep concerns regarding readiness levels for current and future challenges. The Army also has major modernization needs, in particular its fleet of combat vehicles, upgrading its Blackhawk and Apache helicopters, and investing in more effective integrated air and missile defense systems to protect deployed ground units from potential adversaries with rapidly improving cyber, electronic warfare, and precision munitions capabilities.

Navy

The United States is a maritime nation highly dependent on secure sea lanes for trade and travel. Commercial maritime traffic has increased 400 percent since the early 1990s, significantly outpacing the global economy, which has almost doubled over the same period. After years of sustained operations, and with no end to demand likely on the horizon, the Navy’s foremost challenge is to ensure the readiness of its existing fleet while investing in modernization and capacity for the future. Increasingly

³ Assessment drawn from Todd Harrison, *Defense Modernization Plans Through the 2020s*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2016. See also Todd Harrison, *Analysis of the FY17 Defense Budget*, CSIS, April 2016.

sophisticated adversaries are making investments that threaten the Navy's ability to project and sustain not just combat power but daily presence in contested maritime environments. The Navy must be present in and around increasingly contested maritime zones to deter adversaries, reassure allies and partners, and enforce the rules-based order while ensuring its long-term readiness to project and sustain combat power when needed. Deciding how best to balance these near- and long-term demands affects the composition of the fleet: should the Navy have a smaller structure of more expensive but highly capable and survivable platforms or a large structure of lower-end platforms that may not be survivable against a sophisticated adversary? This core question underlies several ongoing debates, including the type of unmanned systems the Navy should acquire, the basing and posture for naval forces, and of course the high-low mix of ships, aircraft, and submarines to pursue. Moreover, the Navy is currently modernizing the sea-based leg of the nuclear triad, with the Ohio-class nuclear submarine replacement program constituting a significant portion of the Navy's acquisition profile.

Marine Corps

The Marine Corps serves as the nation's "force in readiness." In practice this means that Marine Corps units are designed, trained, and equipped to be able to deploy quickly, engage adversaries, and sustain themselves for short to medium periods of time in austere combat environments. This provides the Commander-in-Chief options in crises around the world -- from humanitarian emergencies to major conventional conflicts. During the past years of budget pressure and uncertainty, the Marine Corps has protected the near-term operational readiness of its deploying units in order to meet operational commitments, but this poses risk. In particular, the acquisition of a new Amphibious Combat Vehicle and the modernization of its tactical aviation fleet with the F-35 are critical for future combat power and are at serious risk given current budget levels. Also worrisome is the reduction in operations and maintenance funding for several years in a row, which has forced USMC leaders to prioritize readiness for deploying forces while reducing training and facilities sustainment that are critical to sustaining a deeper bench to draw from in a major contingency.

Air Force

Over the past half-century, the United States has honed an unprecedented dominance in the air domain. But the accelerating proliferation of advanced air capabilities, recent budget pressures, and ongoing global operations have eroded the readiness of the current force and put at risk our prospects for a continued long-term advantage. The major challenge facing the Air Force is sustaining sufficient levels of modernization without compromising readiness for today's pace and scale of operations. The overwhelming majority of planned spending for U.S. air power is devoted to replacing the aging tactical fighter fleet through the acquisition of fifth-generation (stealthy) aircraft, most prominently the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. There are three major areas that compete with the F-35 for Air Force investment. First are needed investments to confront adversaries in space, cyberspace and at long-range, including a new long-range strike bomber that can penetrate increasingly sophisticated air defense systems and the aerial refueling tanker. Second are key enablers, particularly intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, needed to support continued global counterterrorism operations and advanced military campaigns in denied environments. Third is the need to modernize the bomber and ICBM legs of the nuclear triad, in addition to the broader nuclear command and control infrastructure.

Special Operations Forces

Over the past decade, SOF have been deployed at unprecedented rates, placing immense strain on the force. SOF cannot operate in large numbers or for long periods without enabling support from conventional forces, which is the case with ongoing operations today. Most leaders in the SOF

community do not support a large expansion of the force, as they fear doing so would both reduce the “special” element of SOF and, relatedly, would require reducing quality standards. A priority for the next administration must be to craft a more sustainable long-term counterterrorism strategy, and a major component of such a review should be an assessment of the impact on U.S. special operations forces. This includes assessing such issues as personnel recruitment and retention, command and control, global readiness, and deployment posture.

Cyber

DoD, with NSA as a combat support agency, is one of the ablest contributors to U.S. cyber capabilities. It also operates and must defend over 10,000 networks, which makes for one of the most significant network defense challenges in government. DoD has three cyber missions: defend defense networks, systems, and information; provide integrated cyber capabilities to support military operations and contingency plans; and defend the United States and its interests against cyberattacks of significant consequence. Maintaining a full spectrum of capabilities enables DoD to deter attacks and exploit vulnerabilities of adversaries where appropriate. In support of these missions, the Obama Administration made an explicit point of protecting the Cyber Mission Force and its related programs from budget cuts. DoD has also prioritized reaching out to Silicon Valley to build partnerships and attract talent. Key issues for the next administration include streamlining the civilian cyber oversight structure in OSD, deciding whether or not to create a 4-star unified combatant command for cyber and its relationship to NSA (currently US Cyber Command is not considered a combatant command; its 4-star military commander is dual-hatted as the director of NSA), and developing and executing a viable human capital strategy to recruit, develop and retain a cyber workforce that can keep pace with the threat and the demands of this growing mission area.

Space

DoD assets in space are vital to communications, early warning, command and control links, position, navigation, and timing, ISR, and other functions. Space systems are thus key enablers for U.S. power projection and global reach, providing U.S. forces with the ability to operate over long distances and playing a crucial role in deterrence. But these advantages have grown increasingly vulnerable: potential adversaries are pursuing kinetic and non-kinetic counter-space capabilities aimed at disrupting or destroying U.S. space assets and those of our allies, making space an increasingly contested domain. Non-kinetic threats to space systems, such as jamming communications signals, cyberattacks, and lasing of satellites, are particularly worrisome because their effects can be reversible and attribution can be difficult to establish. This could lower the barrier to use and create an unstable environment where escalation control and deterrence efforts are less effective. DoD has accordingly begun to devote substantially more resources to its space architecture and concepts of operation, but significant weaknesses remain. Much more needs to be done to ensure the reliability and resilience of U.S. space capabilities as well as our ability to reconstitute them.

Core Element of a New Defense Strategy: Shore Up Conventional Deterrence

Given the strategic inheritance, the range of pressing global challenges, and the state of key U.S. military components described above, a new defense strategy is warranted. Moreover, the hoped for repeal of the Budget Control Act and lifting of sequester caps reinforces the opportunity for the Pentagon to outline a new defense strategy that would use any additional taxpayer dollars very wisely and responsibly, not simply adding more money to old ways of doing business. I believe a useful

framework for thinking about modifications to U.S. defense strategy would be to focus on the following three elements: reestablishing conventional deterrence in key theatres; sustaining a global counterterrorism posture; and undertaking significant reform efforts at the Pentagon. I focus on the first of these elements below (and offer recommended citations for the other two).⁴

The next Pentagon team ought to focus intently on ways to shore up U.S. conventional deterrence, which is a fundamental element of regional stability in Europe, the Middle East, and the Asia-Pacific. Our conventional deterrence relies on convincing potential adversaries that both our military *capabilities* can prevail in conflict – but also that we have the military *capacity* to respond rapidly to provocation or crisis and to sustain warfighting efforts for as long as needed. Sustaining conventional deterrence helps convince potential adversaries that attacking or provoking the United States or its allies and partners is exceedingly unwise and detrimental to their national interests. For a variety of reasons described above, I believe this element of our national defense strategy is at some level of risk, and ought to be a primary focus for the next Pentagon team and Congress.

Sustain the ‘Third Offset’ strategy

I am a strong supporter of the so-called “third offset strategy” and believe the investments highlighted both in the FY17 budget submission and the overarching frameworks offered by Secretary Carter and Deputy Secretary Work represent real progress in evolving the joint force toward one that can operate in a world of ubiquitous precision munitions and prevail against adversaries that can employ them in all warfighting domains.⁵ And while some Pentagon analysts disagree with me, I believe preparing the Joint Force to operate against precision munitions is and ought to be the core issue driving ‘offset strategy’ investments.

For instance, if adversary precision munitions bring a degree of qualitative parity to certain potential warfighting competitions, one would expect the Pentagon to prioritize ways to create quantitative advantages that can help compensate. The FY17 budget reflects this in numerous ways. First, the budget allocates nearly \$500 million to increase the U.S. stockpile of precision munitions. Second, the Pentagon is evolving current precision munitions, such as the SM-6 anti-air missile, to add an anti-ship capability. Combined with new Tomahawk missile upgrades that also add an anti-ship capability, the U.S. Navy’s magazine of long-range guided anti-ship missiles will increase dramatically. Third, the budget prioritizes the Virginia Payload Module, a so-called “extended cab” version of the Virginia class submarine that increases the vertical launch tubes on each sub from 12 to 40. Fourth, we see concepts being considered such as a so-called “arsenal plane” that could deploy a swarm of hundreds of small drones, confusing an adversary’s sensor grids, overwhelming defenses, or even attacking targets. Simply put, a key component of the third offset strategy must be to find ways for U.S. forces to generate more mass or quantity. The focus on the quantitative side of the warfighting equation in these investments

⁴ On what a sustainable counterterrorism posture would look like, see Michael Vickers, “Five Counterterrorism Strategies for the Next President,” *The Washington Post* (September 26, 2016): https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2016/09/26/five-counterterrorism-strategies-for-the-next-president/?utm_term=.1b53bc535ccd. On what defense reform efforts ought to look like, see Arnold Punaro testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, *The Urgent Need to Reform and Reduce DOD’s Overhead and Infrastructure* (November 17, 2015): http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Punaro_11-17-15.pdf. Also see Michèle Flournoy’s SASC testimony, *The Urgent Need for Defense Reform* (December 8, 2015): https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/Flournoy_SASC-Written-Statement-Dec-2015.pdf.

⁵ I outline my views at length in *While We Can: Arresting the Erosion of America’s Military Edge* (Center for a New American Security, December 2015): <https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/While-We-Can-151207.pdf>.

portends a very different approach to the status quo in U.S. warfighting strategy and doctrine, and I think this is strong evidence that the third offset strategy is taking hold inside the Pentagon.

Further, as adversaries invest in longer-range ballistic and cruise missiles that require U.S. forces to project power from farther away in some scenarios, maximizing the range of our aircraft is a logical response. And we see that in the decision to require the Navy to develop an unmanned carrier-based aerial tanker aircraft. At present, the parameters of the new Stingray carrier tanker drone remain somewhat unclear, such as whether or not the aircraft will be designed to eventually evolve into a stealthy-strike platform. But extending the organic range of the carrier air wing is a vital means by which to keep the crown jewel of U.S. power projection — the aircraft carrier — the platform of choice. Equally important is making sure that the new B-21 Raider bomber is procured in quantities sufficient to underwrite the long-range strike mission in key theatres – 100 ought to be a baseline not a ceiling.

Similarly, if precision munitions are making land bases and large surface vessels more vulnerable, we should expect the Pentagon to make substantial investments in undersea platforms of all types. This is evident in DoD's FY17 budget submission, both for the Ohio-class Replacement Program, the Virginia Payload Module mentioned above, and a move toward building numerous types of unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs). UUVs are potential game-changers as they offer the possibility of U.S. forces being able to infiltrate large numbers of submersible drones for a variety of warfighting missions. Imagine a scenario whereby U.S. manned surface vessels or submarines launch hundreds of unmanned submersibles that could infiltrate well inside an adversary's A2/AD zone and rest on the ocean floor near adversary ports or key sea lanes. The deterrence and warfighting possibilities are numerous, to say the least.

Enhance U.S. Global Basing and Posture⁶

The secretary of defense has outsized influence over America's global network of bases, the number of military personnel stationed overseas, and the frequency of international visits, exercises, and rotational deployments of forces stationed in the United States—in short, the worldwide posture of the U.S. military. This network of bases has for many decades generated significant advantages for the United States. But these advantages are not static, and the systems and assumptions that enable them are complex. Serious changes can take decades of investment in both relationships and facilities, and minor details can have major implications on size and readiness of the U.S. military. The next secretary of defense would do well to see defense posture as more than an extensive map of real estate agreements and instead devote time to understanding and refining this global system.

There are three interrelated characteristics of the American way of war that help to illustrate why global posture is so important as an element of deterrence.

First, the United States fights far away from home. Two oceans and no major hemispheric threats have enabled the United States to focus on building an international system that is beneficial to our global interests. But this means that projecting transoceanic power, certainly if long-duration in nature, requires a vast network of ports, airfields, and bases from which to operate and sustain operations, as

⁶ Elements of this section are drawn from Shawn Brimley and Loren Schulman, "Observations on Global Military Posture," *War on the Rocks* (May 10, 2016): <http://warontherocks.com/2016/05/observations-on-global-military-posture/>

well as the political agreements to ensure access. Some of these are located in U.S. sovereign territory (e.g., Guam), but the vast majority overseas are provided by our allies and partners via treaty obligation or access agreements.

Second, the United States almost always fights alongside allies and partners. American strategy since the end of World War II has depended on sustaining a network of alliances and key partnerships that, among many other benefits, typically ensure when U.S. forces are sent into battle, that they fight alongside militaries from other nations. Having U.S. forces deployed forward in peacetime typically means that multinational exercises, training courses, and unit-level exchanges are commonplace and help facilitate interoperability and coalition warfighting effectiveness.

Third, U.S. strategy depends on deterring adversaries. The United States is largely a status quo power — meaning that our national security strategy focuses mainly on sustaining a healthy international system. Maintaining that status quo requires that U.S. military forces maintain a degree of presence in areas where doing so is an important part of the strategic balance. The deterrence equation is a complex one, but rarely can the United States take the overseas military presence variable to zero and credibly maintain strategic balance. Doing so would require the United States to convince adversaries that it would quickly deploy military forces from their U.S. bases to address even the most minor regional security tensions.

For these three reasons, among others, I am very supportive of efforts to legislate another formal global posture review to be undertaken by the next Pentagon team. I believe such an effort is overdue, and ought to be included as a core constituent element of the Defense Strategy Review (DSR) which Congress will also require of the next administration. While political controversial, I believe that domestic basing and infrastructure also ought to be included as part of this global posture review, as right-sizing how the Department stations its forces at home and around the world should be an integrated effort.