

A NEW U.S. GRAND STRATEGY

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Grand strategy has always been difficult for the United States. The containment strategy of the Cold War years - bipartisan, sustained over 30 years, and successful - was unusual. Before that era, and certainly since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the United States has not generally acted internationally on a commonly accepted notion of where it wants to go in the world and how it wants to get there.

There are at least two underlying reasons:

First, the competitive politics of the United States make political issues of foreign and defense policy, and therefore grand strategy itself becomes political. As political power ebbs and flows, strategy changes. Strategy must have staying power to be grand, and for the past twenty years American strategy has not. Politics now flows freely beyond the water's edge.

Second, now as was true before the rise of 20th-century totalitarian movements, there is no strategy-forcing threat to the United States. As was the case during most of its life, the United States is generally satisfied with its place in the world, and the citizenry sees no obvious reason to devise and pursue a plan to improve it.

Looking to the future, there is a question of whether the United States can achieve or needs an ordering plan for its policies and actions in the world.

I believe this country has both the capability and the need, and I applaud the hearings by this committee on the subject. However we need to be realistic in our expectations.

It is unlikely that we can achieve a sophisticated long-term strategy with persistent, sophisticated, sometimes covert policies and programs that can be carried out consistently over years by the rapidly rotating political appointees and the longer serving military officers and civilian officials of the national security establishment, that other nations of the world will come to count on. It is not that Americans are incapable of it. I am in awe of the sophisticated strategies that American politicians can devise and pursue over many years. They involve very public activities - speeches, programs, alliances - but also backroom deals, and stratagems, tactical flexibility but strategic constancy, investment in intellectual and organizational capabilities that will not payoff for years. I have yet to see these same brilliant politicians come up with similar strategies to advance the national interest when they come into national office. Our national strategies show little of the depth, brilliance and effectiveness of the domestic political strategies this country produces.

It is not too much to hope that we can achieve agreement on a set of principles that will guide our overall actions in the world, that will form an American approach to the world in the 21st century, if not an American grand strategy. Even a set of principles would be enough to fashion military and civil policies and programs that will both build our own capacity for dealing with challenges and crises, and will build international institutions and habits of action that serve American interests over the long term.

Several earlier speakers to this subcommittee have emphasized the importance of rebuilding the foundations of this country's power as the basis for its grand strategy. It is true that the United States will need to be strong to carry out a successful grand strategy or to follow successfully a set of strategic principles.

In part this is because the United States forms and carries out its international relations in such an open manner, with changes both of people and policies as administrations turn over, with other nations able to participate in our policy process, either through ethnic American populations or lobbying different branches of our government, with it almost impossible to conduct quiet programs, and with our strategy inevitably having to include contradictory elements. Since America will inevitably be inefficient in carrying out its international strategy it will require substantial power to be effective.

For an extreme illustrative example, consider the contrast between

North Korea and the United States. Although North Korea's powerful patrons have abandoned it, its economy has degraded, its population has stagnated, and its military power has diminished, it has managed to stand the United States off for almost twenty years through a sophisticated strategy of ruthlessness, bluff, stratagem, selective military programs and taking advantage of American transparency. America's only advantage in this confrontation has been its immensely superior military and economic power. With little and diminishing power, but a closed political system run by a single leader, North Korea has pursued a sophisticated, complicated and consistent international strategy. The United States, immensely superior by all international power measures, has pursued an intermittent and inconsistent strategy. The result has been at best a tie.

To carry out a successful future strategy in the world, we do not need to maintain a relative level of power to the rest of the world on the order of our superiority to North Korea, but we need to have a vibrant and open economy, strong military forces and a society with important aspects that other countries admire and seek to emulate. This means that we must get our fiscal house in order, we need to improve our K-through-12 educational system, repair our national transportation infrastructure, maintain and improve our global economic business competitiveness, maintain open markets in capital, services and goods, and restore our reputation for acting in a moral and responsible manner. Only an economically dynamic, militarily powerful, attractive United States can improve its position in the world with our open, inefficient national security system not driven by a single powerful threat.

There is one other set of internal policies that the United States must pursue consistently to improve its international position, and these have to do with imported oil. Continued dependence on imported petroleum at current and projected levels will undercut any strategy or set of principles the country tries to pursue in the future. We will continue to be on a military hair trigger in the Persian Gulf Region, and we will become more heavily involved in violent and unstable areas of Central Asia and Western Africa. It is difficult to imagine a successful American grand strategy under these circumstances.

Although energy independence is unrealistic, a dramatic decrease in the oil intensity of the American economy is very achievable. During the 1970s and 1980s the United States cut in half the amount of imported petroleum it used to generate a dollar of gross domestic product. We can do so again with a combination of known

conservation measures, safe drilling of domestic reserves, and investment in alternative technologies financed in large measure by revision of ethanol tariffs. With national oil intensity cut in half our economy would be much less subject to interruptions in supply abroad and variations in price, and our policies towards the Middle East, Africa and Central Asia could be more balanced, less militarized, and more in keeping with our values.

So the first orders of business are to rebuild the foundation of American international power, restoring a United States that is economically dynamic, globally competitive, attractive in its values and with reduced imported oil intensity. Beyond these actions at home we need a set of strategic principles to guide our international policies and actions.

The start point for a set of strategic principles is a goal or objective. What kind of a world does the United States want in another 20 or 30 years? What is our vision of the world we want to build?

We seek a world of nation states with secure and respected borders that are able to enforce the rule of law within their territory; we seek a world of nation states that have representative governments that protect the rights of their minorities, that base their economies on free markets, and that openly trade with one another in capital, services and goods.

I believe that the great majority of Americans share this vision. As important, I believe that the great majority of citizens of the rest of the world and their governments also share it. In fact, most of these goals are expressed in the United Nations Charter, to which 192 nations now belong, representing virtually the entire population of the planet. Beyond the hypocrisy of authoritarian governments that repress their people and pay lip service to these ideals, the only reservations around the world about this goal have to do with enforcing one of its tenets at the expense of others and timelines and methods for achieving it. So American grand strategic principles have the great advantage of being based on a vision shared by most of the world.

This seems like a blinding flash of the obvious, but remember that it was not always so. During the Cold War large parts of the world had very different visions of the future world they were working towards. Now a common vision is much more widely shared.

It is also important to understand that most other people and governments do not want a unique American version of this shared vision: representative government is not necessarily American-style democracy and market-based economies come with different degrees of government involvement. However if we choose our words carefully, and talk in terms of fundamental values not their forms, we can find common objectives with most of the rest of the world that provide a solid basis for policies that will benefit all of us.

Although the goal - the vision - of our grand strategy is easy to state and widely shared, it provides only minimal guidance for our actions in the short and medium term, and there are many contradictions among the tenets of the goals.

This brings us to the most difficult part of strategy and strategic principles. They must include not just ends - the world we seek in the future - but also means - how we will work towards that world.

In considering means we must begin with the current American position in the world, and the nature of the world itself.

At the end of the Cold War there was a great deal of careless thinking about the American position in the world. With the breakup of the Soviet Union, it appeared that the United States would enjoy absolute military, economic and moral dominance in the world for as far as the eye could see.

It seemed that we did not need an overall plan or set of principles to guide our actions. The world would naturally seek either to emulate American success, to cooperate with the triumphant United States, or at a minimum would not dare to challenge its interests. The twenty years since have dispelled those illusions.

The American armed forces are certainly the most powerful in the world, but they cannot solve every international problem the country faces. They cannot provide 100% protection against nuclear attacks; they cannot find and destroy all the cells of all terrorist organizations that seek to do damage to this country; they are not large enough to occupy medium-sized countries and provide the security over the many years required to rebuild them. Moreover, the deployment of military forces to some areas of the world generates negative effects, creating resistance to American objectives rather than acceptance; finally, military forces are expensive, consuming large amounts of the

discretionary national budget.

The dominance of the American economic model also was not as absolute as it seemed in 1990. During the 1990s Japan developed more efficient manufacturing processes that provided more attractive projects that even patriotic Americans bought in preference to homemade products. In the 2000s, American indebtedness to foreign countries skyrocketed and the dollar slipped in value, and in importance as the world reserve currency. American dependence on imported petroleum not only caused further indebtedness, but also constrained its security policy in important ways.

Finally, America's moral authority frayed during these years. While American science and technology prowess remained highly rated in global opinion, its higher education system maintained world leadership, and millions sought to immigrate to this country, it stood aside from many world efforts or went its own way in furthering common goods such as dealing with climate change, enforcing global legal standards against war crimes or global bans on land mines, or asserting exceptions to the Geneva Convention.

The basic international position of the United States is that it is the single most powerful nation in the world, but there are limits both to the type and number of issues that it can dominate by unilateral exercise of that power. Moreover, the position of dominance that it enjoyed at the end of the Cold War was due to a unique set of circumstances, and even as American power will increase in absolute terms in future, the power of other nations, starting from a lower base, will increase more rapidly, and American relative dominance will decline.

The nature of the world itself is also changing rapidly. State borders matter in important ways in much of the world in organizing military forces, in enforcing civil and criminal laws, and nationalism remains a potent popular force. However national borders matter much less in the flow of information, in the operations of business and in the threat posed by small illegal groups, and the threats of epidemics and environmental degradation. In these areas the individual policies and actions of single nation states will not have a dominant effect - they will have effect only when undertaken by many governments acting together and in combination with decisions and actions of non-governmental organizations.

Based on these realities, the first strategic principle the United States should follow is to use its power to build the norms of international behavior, institutions, and precedents that favor that future world we seek.

There are at least two important guidelines within this strategic principle:

First, the United States should invest steady efforts in building the capacity of other countries and international institutions to participate in collective action for common goods. These efforts are best taken ahead of time, before issues reach the boiling point. They involve attendance at often tedious international meetings, drawing up international agreements and protocols, running exchange programs that identify international leaders and bring them to the United States for education, or the education of rising military officers from other countries, the development of language skills in this country, the development of regional studies centers in our colleges and universities, or the funding of private organizations that strengthen judicial systems in other countries. They involve talking with other countries before the United States forms its policies and taking the concerns of other countries into account, rather than the formation of American policy first, followed by intense efforts to sell it to other countries.

Second, in dealing with issues and crises, the United States should stimulate collective action in support of common international interests in preference to the unilateral exercise of American power.

The United States may have to take unilateral action on particular issues, but the strong preference should be for collective action for common goods, preferably collective action led by a nation other than the United States. Collective action for a common good, especially when led by another country than the United States, generates a momentum in the direction of common goals. Unilateral action by the United States creates only the expectation of further unilateral action.

As other countries become relatively more powerful in the world, and as they therefore play more important international roles, their roles can be positive and powerful if the countries learn to act collectively in the common good. This development will benefit the United States, not weaken it.

If we review the actions of the United States in recent years, we see

cases when these strategic guidelines were followed, and cases where they were violated.

Capacity building:

Nowhere has this been more prominent than in Colombia, where a comprehensive program of military and civil assistance has helped Colombia deal with a narco-insurgency that was also threatening the United States.

In contrast, the United States has neglected building the capacity of department of peacekeeping operations of the United Nations, leaving that organization to flounder and often fail in supervising many peacekeeping operations around the world, peacekeeping efforts that would have benefited the United States had they been better supervised and more effective.

Dealing with Issues or Crises:

Collective action: The United States participated in, but did not lead, a multi-national peacekeeping operation spearheaded by Australia that safeguarded the independence of East Timor; a few years later the United States participated in but did not lead a humanitarian response to the tsunami in Indonesia that restored American standing in that important country; both these uses of military force achieved American objectives. It is unlikely they would have been as successful had the United States been large and in charge in the two cases, as there would have been suspicions of American intent and resistance.

Unilateral action: In addition to the invasion of Iraq, which may still prove successful, but at huge cost, American unilateral action to isolate Myanmar has achieved none of our stated goals for that country. While ASEAN's engagement policy, and China's business-oriented policies have had little positive effect either, consultation among all three would have a better chance of causing change in that sad country.

The second strategic principle the United States should follow in the future is the integration of all its forms of national power and means of influence.

The traditional programs of the traditional departments concerned with national security will in future not be sufficient to attain American international goals, especially if they operate in the independent,

sequential fashion we have used them in the past. Since the end of the Cold War our default approach to most international problems has been first to attempt diplomatic negotiations, unilateral or multilateral, then to attempt economic sanctions, then to use military force, followed by stabilization and reconstruction operations. We can do better.

In the more complicated world of the future, we must learn to use our governmental powers in a more integrated fashion, and to make use of non-governmental organizations to achieve our goals.

One positive example has been the approach to countering the criminal-terrorist Abu Sayyaf organization in the southern Philippines. There the United States, in cooperation with the Philippine Government, has used training assistance to the Armed Forces of the Philippines, economic assistance, and international cooperation with Malaysia, to bring moe law and order to a previously lawless region, and to undercut sympathy and support for an organization hostile to the United States.

Non-governmental organizations, both American and international, are especially valuable for advancing the values of the rule of law and representative government in countries in which official American programs would be mistrusted or rejected. Trade unions have often been the vehicles for spreading democratic ideals internationally, and international businesses are agents for advancing the rule of civil law in developing countries. Non-governmental organizations can work against American interests also. Radical madrasses in the Muslim world have been one of the most important institutions in promoting anti-Western sentiment.

An American grand strategy that includes a shared vision of the future world, and a small number of strategic principles, is realistic and achievable.

As a final validation, such a strategic construct should be checked against the areas of the world that will be of greatest concern to the United States in the future, Asia and the Middle East.

Asia is gaining more and more of the world's economic, and military power, and American strategy must be successful there.

The strategy I recommend is exactly what we need in Asia - building

international institutions and national capacity and favoring multilateral action to move the region towards a future of secure states with representative governments able to enforce their laws and protect minority rights, with free markets and trading freely with each other. Under this strategy China and India will assume more prominent roles in regional affairs, but they will see their national advantage not in forcing the United States from the region but in supporting common goods. Legacy flash points such as Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula will be managed through multilateral actions based on commonly accepted principles, and principles of human rights and representative government will be more commonly observed. Should China become unilaterally aggressive, then an Asia that shares a common vision and prefers secure borders, representative governments and free markets will collectively resist an assertive China.

The Middle East will continue to be the source of the most immediate dangers and challenges to the United States. The vision of representative governments respecting minority rights, developing economically through free markets and trading freely is right, but the immediate challenges of religious hostility to the United States, American oil dependency on the region and authoritarian governments oppressing their people is far from that vision.

In rebuilding Afghanistan, dealing with Iran, determining a long-term relationship with Iraq, combating al Qaeda, ensuring the flow of oil from the region and managing the Israel-Palestinian issue, the United States will need to take actions across a broad front. However the strategic principles of capacity building, preference for collective action and integration of all forms of national power still offer the surest path to long-term progress in advancing American interests in that part of the world. Different policies and programs will have to be developed and pursued, but they need to be consistent with the strategic principles outlined here, and to be consistent with the vision of the kind of world the United States is pursuing. The vision for the Middle East will be a long time in coming, but one of the major advantages of strategic principles is that they can justify patience.

In summary:

Constructing and carrying out a grand strategy is difficult for the United States and has been rare in our history. This is because of the open, competitive political nature of our system of government and the absence of a unifying dominant threat to the nation.

The open nature of our system also makes it impossible to construct and conduct an efficient, focused grand national strategy, but we can adopt a set of strategic principles that will guide our policies and programs. To support these principles we need substantial national power - military, economic and inspirational - to advance our objectives in the world.

We therefore need to renew the recently eroded basis of our national power through improvements at home in our education system, in national fiscal policy, in improving our transportation infrastructure and our global economic competitiveness, in reducing the energy intensity of our economy, and in our leadership in and observation of international norms of behavior.

Our strategy should be based on a vision of the future world we seek. That vision is of a world of nations with secure and respected borders and the rule of law observed within those borders; a world of nations with representative governments that respect the rights of minorities; a world of nations with market-based economies trading freely. Expressed correctly, in terms they can understand, that vision will be shared by most of the rest of the world.

Our strategy must be based on the reality of the world as it now is, and America's place in it. We are powerful, but not omnipotent; our absolute power will continue to grow, but the power of other countries starting from a lower level, will grow more rapidly; although nation states and the traditional military, diplomatic and intelligence forms of security policy and action will remain important, increasingly important forms of international relations are not bound by national borders, and organizations outside of national governments will continue to grow in importance both as positive factors and as threats.

The first strategic principle to achieve that vision is to use our power to build habits of international behavior, institutions, and precedents that favor that future world we seek. This means building the capacity of other countries and international institutions to participate in collective action for common goods, and it means dealing with issues and crises by stimulating collective action in support of common international interests in preference to the unilateral exercise of American power.

Second we must use and integrate all forms of our national power and means of influence, both within and outside the

government.

If we renew the foundation of our power as a nation, keep our eyes on the vision, and develop specific policies and programs according to the principles, then the United States can play a major role in building a world in which our children and grandchildren, along with their contemporaries in most of the rest of the world, can live lives that are free, safe, and fulfilling.