

A Proposal for a Unifying Strategic Doctrine for National Security

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It is important at this time in history, especially as a new President takes office, to continue the debate on how the United States thinks about its place in the world and its own security. As the U.S. leadership assesses National Security and the complex and globalized world in which it finds itself, three important potential realities should be contemplated.

First, people who are disadvantaged, disenfranchised, downtrodden, or disassociated are vulnerable to ideological and political manipulation by insurgent, terrorist, criminal, or other organizations (which could include alternatives to sovereign government organizations or nation-states seeking influence over the population of a rival nation-state). Such organizations have always and will continue to seek to exploit people for their own ends. These groups sometimes evolve into violent extremist organizations that use politics, economics, or religion to manipulate or exploit people.

Second, the U.S. is has and will likely be exploited as a target to enhance the legitimacy of an organization or even a nation-state in the eyes of its own constituency. I offer the following examples. The dictators of Cuba, Iran, and north Korea use the fact that they are perceived by the U.S. as a threat. They use this perception to enhance their own legitimacy among their people. Bin Laden and Al Qaeda's single most important measure of effectiveness (from their perspective) is that the AQ network still exists despite having had war "declared" (in the figurative vice Constitutional sense) against them. The U.S. as a world superpower, perceived hegemon, and an enemy is a useful paradigm for opposition elements.

Third, there will always be conditions in the world that will lead to people being disadvantaged and disenfranchised and make them vulnerable to exploitation.

This being the case the U.S. needs to consider viewing the world as it really exists and not as it would wish it to be. People wish that terrorism, extremism, insurgency and the conditions that give rise to all of the above could be eliminated. But it should be asked: is that realistic? The U.S. has to accept that those conditions are always going to exist in varying forms and that it must understand and accept the fact the U.S. cannot and will not change those conditions on a global scale. The U.S. government and its people must accept these realities and formulate a strategic doctrine to unify National Security efforts.

This past fall a conference was held that included discussions by some of the best and brightest strategic thinkers from the “Whole of Government” (to include the Department of Defense and other U.S. government agencies) as they discussed the Global War on terrorism and the way ahead. Also represented were business executives, academics, and key partner nations.

Many frank observations and blunt criticisms of the Global War on Terrorism were presented. However, among all these discussions there was not once a mention of the “elephant in the room.” What is the “elephant”? It is the fact that since 1989 the U.S. and the Free World have had no unifying strategic doctrine to deal with the complexities and effects of today’s globalized world and to guide efforts to provide for national *and international* security.

In 1947 George Kennan (known as “X” in his article in Foreign Affairs magazine) published his theory of a strategic doctrine that was codified in NSC 68 and became popularly known as “Containment.” Despite the fact that there remains debate about the interpretation of the term “Containment” and Kennan lamented that he was misinterpreted in many ways, particularly about Containment in Asia, it was the NSC 68 that guided the US (and to some extent the Free World) and I think most will agree it was a significant contributor to the successful outcome of the Cold War. But since 1989 we have in effect been a rudderless ship adrift in an extremely complex world that only becomes more complex and dangerous every year.

It is true that there have been a number of National Security Strategies through the first Bush Administration and then the Clinton Administration but none provided the unifying strategic doctrine on a scale of the NSC 68. The current strategic doctrine is fundamentally nothing more than the Global War on Terrorism which has also become known as the Long War. Based on discussions among the strategic thinkers observed it is clear that a doctrine based on war is not working, is not acceptable to many U.S. friends and allies, and in many cases is counter-productive both in terms of effectiveness against common enemies as well as with nations around the world whether they may be friendly, hostile, or neutral in terms of relations with the U.S. Most of the strategic thinkers seem to believe the GWOT/Long War lexicon should be retired. However, there has not been a recommendation for a replacement strategic construct.

Both Containment and the GWOT/Long War are threat based constructs. The GWOT as currently being fought requires the application of “hard power” and the use of the direct approach. The popular view is that it uses the direct approach to capture or kill terrorists as well as prevent the use of Weapons of Mass Destruction for terrorist operations. However, there is growing recognition that such a negative construct cannot be successful in the long term despite the highly visible short term positive results of capturing or killing high value targets. What is becoming clear is that to achieve lasting positive effects it requires the application of “soft power” (some use the term “smart power” which emphasizes the correct balance between hard and soft power).

To digress slightly, an additional but related debate is whether terrorism should be treated from a war or law enforcement perspective. While the U.S. treats the terrorist problem as a war that must be fought, most nations around the world view terrorists as criminals. However this debate turns out from a legal perspective, it can be argued that terrorism cannot be viewed as an either/or proposition in terms of the application of military power or police/law enforcement

functions. It is clear there needs to be the correct balance between the police and military to effectively deal with terrorists and there should always be a mutually supporting effort among security forces. Additionally, even the term “illegal combatant” is exploited by terrorist groups to enhance their legitimacy to gain the support of those vulnerable to ideological and religious manipulation whereas terming terrorists as criminals can be used to effectively undermine their legitimacy.

One of the most interesting presentations observed this past fall was termed “strategic appreciation” which discussed the potential security challenges in the coming years. It identified that in the future of this globalized world populations are going to be faced with a strategic choice that is simply the question of to whom will they ally themselves: their nation-state or some other transnational organization (whether it is an insurgent group, criminal organization or even a multi-national corporation)? It all comes down to a “fight” (sometimes literally and sometime figuratively) for legitimacy among the people of a country. Who do they view as the legitimate entity to whom they pledge their allegiance? Of course a political “fight” for legitimacy is one which is to be respected and supported but a legitimacy fight that does not occur in the context of the legal political system is a threat and one that should not be tolerated.

The U.S. and like-minded nations also have a strategic choice to make in this security environment: A nation can turn inward and seek to protect itself against all enemies, foreign and domestic. It can seek alliances with either other nation-states or transnational organizations or a combination of both in order to gain assistance in protecting itself. The third choice is that a nation can choose to support the nation-state system and seek to protect and strengthen that system against all enemies. While there can be and are legitimate transnational organizations with whom nation-states can work and *co-exist*, those that are a threat to the nation-state system cannot and should not be tolerated. If a transnational organization violates a nation’s laws or international law it should be dealt with effectively by the community of nations. On the other hand, a legitimate transnational organization that works within and supports the nation-state system can be an effective partner and should never be discounted solely because it is a transnational organization. Such organizations are growing in power, particularly in terms of economic power. Again, this is a reality that must be accepted. But in the end if such an organization cannot abide by national and international laws then it is a threat with which the international community must deal.

It is this third choice, based on the recognition of and respect for the sovereignty of nations that is the only choice that can provide a construct that can work toward global security and stability (recognizing that there will always be emerging threats and challenges to the system and nation-states). In essence this third choice requires a strategic doctrine of “*Co-existence*”. The U.S. and like-minded nations (and legitimate transnational organizations) have to choose to co-exist in the nation-state system and recognize that it is in their strategic national interests to protect and preserve this system by respecting and helping to protect the sovereignty of nations.

Co-existence is a positive strategic doctrine that is focused on the environment or the system of nations and not on directly defeating threats. However, that does not mean that threats cannot or will not be defeated. The strategic doctrine of Co-existence calls for the threat to be engaged using an indirect approach by the international community in which nations, *when asked*, come

to the aid of those whose sovereignty is threatened internally by lawlessness, subversion, or insurgency or externally from a hostile nation-state. Alliances can be formed and international security arrangements can be established to deal with threats. Threats are engaged indirectly by helping sovereign nations to reduce and eliminate ungoverned or under-governed spaces that can provide sanctuary and resources to insurgents or terrorists. Some threats will always need to be engaged directly by external security forces but the force of choice needs to be the nation's security forces in which these threats reside. If a nation's own security forces do not have the capacity to deal with these threats and that capacity cannot be developed to meet the threat in a timely manner, then that nation may request and accept outside assistance. But in the end, the sovereignty of that nation must be respected and protected and any outside assistance must take that into account.

How can the strategic doctrine of Co-existence be operationalized by the National Security apparatus of nations? It does this by identifying nation-states who have threats or where there is the potential for a threat to develop and that may cause a nation to fail or to become destabilized and have its sovereignty challenged. A nation-state that possesses the will and ability to come to the aid of such nations can, *when requested*, provide security assistance to a friend, partner or ally to build the capacity to defend itself against and defeat threats. Again, *when requested*, It can apply interagency expertise and civil support to a government's internal defense and development programs to reduce and eventually eliminate ungoverned and under-governed spaces so that it can separate its population from insurgents and terrorists thereby protecting its sovereignty and enhancing its legitimacy.

A doctrine of Co-existence recognizes that each nation-state must be in charge of its own security and while friends, partners, or allies can provide external support, in the end a nation must assert its sovereignty and protect itself. The U.S. or another country cannot win a counter-insurgency fight in another nation's territory. It can only provide external support to that nation fighting against lawlessness, subversion, or insurgency.

Co-existence is a population based approach because it recognizes that it is the people who have strategic choices to make. The nation-state must provide the secure environment as well as the opportunity for development. They have to do this better than the competition whether that competition is a transnational organization, an insurgent group, a terrorist organization, or a competing nation-state. In addition, Co-existence also provides the foundation for the proper strategic communications effort that focuses on support to the nation-state system and respect for the sovereignty of nations and counters the perception that the U.S. desires to be a hegemon and is only interested in "shaping conditions" for its benefit. A doctrine of Co-existence recognizes that a nation's security can be protected by like-minded nations working together to protect the nation-state system and nations' sovereignty.

To further look at operationalizing this strategy we can observe the examples of Special Operations Forces (SOF) in places such as Colombia, the Philippines, and Africa where SOF elements with support from other military organizations in a strong partnership with U.S. government interagency organizations (to include law enforcement activities) are using the indirect approach to advise and assist friends, partners, and allies to defeat insurgencies and

terrorist organizations. This U.S. assistance is being applied in a supporting role in which the Host Nation is in charge.

While terrorists, insurgents, and criminal organizations are suffering defeat at the hands of the Host Nation security forces; the Host Nation, with U.S. support, is also focusing on bringing stability to ungoverned and under-governed spaces, extending the rule of law, and changing the local conditions which give rise to the ability of threat groups to exploit the local population. While destruction of threats is critically important in many cases and should never be discounted, it is the changing of conditions that will ultimately have a lasting impact that enhances the nation-state's legitimacy and ultimately protects its sovereignty. This calls for the correct balance between the direct and indirect approaches.

What is common among the operations described above is the respect for the sovereignty of the nation. This is a fundamental concept pioneered by SOF, and in particular, U.S. Special Forces, that is popularly termed as "through, by, and with" friends, partners, and allies. Fortunately, this concept is not exclusive to SOF and it is now being embraced by other military forces and government agencies and it is an example of an operational application of a doctrine that might be termed Co-existence.

If the U.S. is to retire the negative lexicon of GWOT/Long War there is an opportunity to develop a strategic doctrine that can unify the national security process and apparatus to secure the future. Co-existence might be a strategic doctrine that can be a unifying positive construct that may be acceptable to friends, partners and allies, provide the basis for the application of soft, hard, and smart power, and can be used to operationalize the indirect approach to defend against international security threats.

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