



# National Security Watch

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## The (New?) National Security Strategy

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### Introduction

The 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS) lays out the President's vision and intent for the United States on the world stage. The document frames the global strategic environment in terms of current and emerging threats, strengths and weaknesses of American influence and power, and overarching goals designed to safeguard American values and way of life. The immediate question is how this version of the NSS differs from those of past administrations, especially since the United States is involved in two major conflicts that span two presidencies. On the surface, the 2010 NSS' cooperative- and normative-centric methods seem to be a frank rebuttal of those of both the 2002 and 2006 NSS advancement of preemption and unilateralism; however, a closer look reveals many striking similarities along with obvious omissions and clear retorts to past policies. This piece looks at the 2010 NSS and then compares it to those of 2002 and 2006. It then offers commentary on the implications for the military and the nation. To preview the piece's conclusion, while the 2010 and 2002/2006 strategies are the products of two very different presidencies, their ends are very similar; that foretells a continued burden on the military as it struggles to manage diverse conflicts and interests around the globe with serious questions about the coherence and ability to generate the means to win those conflicts.

### Background and Context

The National Security Strategy as a formal document was codified in the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Section 603 requires the President to annually submit a report alongside his budget request that expresses the goals, commitments, uses and capabilities of U.S. political, military and economic power in pursuit of American security. The NSS can be traced informally back to the Truman-era National Security Council document 68 (NSC 68, "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," 14 April 1950) and through other official American policies such as Eisenhower's New Look (NSC document 162/2, "A Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary on Basic National Security Policy," 30 October 1953) and Kennedy's Flexible Response. Each President attempted to convey the threats arrayed against the United States and the tools and strategy to mitigate those threats.

These predecessors tended to focus more on the defense aspect of security rather than on the broader range of tools and international interactions. Today, the NSS is the broad framework of all security issues the nation faces, to include modern concepts in human security, and an equally broad plan to address those threats. Supplementing this way-ahead are the National Defense Strategy (NDS) and the National Military Strategy (NMS). The NDS provides the policy from the Secretary of Defense "on which the armed services plan their research, development and acquisitions of weapons systems."<sup>1</sup> The NDS drives the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) and Joint

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Programming Guidance (JPG) while receiving feedback from all for future adjustments. Those processes then feed the Joint Staff's National Military Strategy, whose function is to balance the ends, ways and means of military power to achieve strategic objectives laid forth in the NSS.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately the NSS is a road map toward national goals and is fundamentally reliant on the lower-level derivative processes to carry it to term.

An obvious challenge with the NSS is one of timing. Legally, the NSS is supposed to be delivered annually when the President submits his budget request to Congress. In practice, NSSs are released every four years or so; the same scheme applies to the NDS. The lag time in preparing the NDS and the QDR, etc., trickles down to the NMS. As a result, the government operates with a mix of report year-groups that are responsible for implementing the NSS plan. For example, the current NDS is from 2008,<sup>3</sup> the QDR from 2010<sup>4</sup> and the NMS from 2005.<sup>5</sup> Whether each report needs to be updated every year or four is open for debate. Broad-spectrum strategy may not change from year to year, but there has to be confidence that the sub-processes are responding to meet current goals and ends and not operating a cycle or more behind. In the case of the NMS, it seems clear that updating it alongside the NDS during a transformative period while engaged in two large conflicts was too taxing; the military has largely been forced to maintain the strategic status quo from 2005 and react to any surprises. Ultimately the key challenge in all this is to align the NSS with its supporting processes and deliver a plan to all strategic participants in a timely manner.

### **The 2010 National Security Strategy**

The 2010 NSS, like its predecessors, presents the President's vision for the United States. From this all other government entities will generate the plans and allocate the resources to make it a reality. The highlights from the 2010 strategy are:

- **Threats:** The strategy states clearly that the primary threat to the United States is from a nuclear weapon delivered by terrorists. Terror networks and non-state actors play an increasingly large role in shaping the world's security environment and the United States must be ready to prosecute a long-term, integrated campaign to destroy these organizations and deny them sanctuary anywhere in the world. Additionally, the United States cannot ignore hostile states that either pursue weapons of mass destruction (WMD) for their own ends, or support the export of terror regimes.
- **Prosperity:** The United States needs to fund the expansive vision of security with a robust economy. An economic revival will be fueled by reinvestment in education, technology, and trade policies that will enable domestic growth and development. Plus, the U.S. government must reduce the deficit, reform the military procurement process and increase transparency to more efficiently use its fiscal resources.
- **Tools:** The report outlines a "whole of government" approach to dealing with the security environment that emphasizes more nonmilitary aspects of U.S. power. Diplomatic efforts, economic assistance, development aid, homeland security and intelligence apparatus must all be leveraged globally. The intent is to protect America while eliminating the conditions worldwide that breed extremism and generate the threats.
- **International Institutions:** The President places a heavy emphasis on normative institutions and international interaction. This "comprehensive engagement" plan seeks to gather international partners and isolate "adversarial governments." The plan also stated the President's intention to court potential rivals such as China and Russia for multilateral diplomacy in troubled areas. To facilitate this, the President stressed his commitment to the United Nations as well as to the expansion of the European G-8 cooperative governmental forum to bring in additional potential partners from the developing world. And of course, the strategy has plans to strengthen existing U.S. ally relationships, especially in NATO and Southeast Asia, with continued policies of extended deterrence and cooperation in threat assessment and engagement.
- **Use of Force:** The document revealed that the United States has retained the right to act unilaterally to protect itself and its interests. Moreover, it did not clearly refute the idea of preemption, instead saying

that “we will exhaust other options before war whenever we can.” There is room for interpretation on whether force will always be considered a last resort. The military has two roles in this NSS: the first is to maintain conventional superiority—its traditional role. The second, more contemporary role is to act in an advisory capacity to developing and transitioning nations and emerging allies. This role is packaged under the comprehensive engagement strategy and no doubt stems directly from eight years of continuous nation building and counterinsurgency.

- **Project Values:** The NSS highlighted several values that the President envisions exporting and strengthening throughout the world. These included women’s rights, prohibition of torture, civil liberties, democracy, anti-corruption norms and food security. This broad list of values will likely be challenging to export given both the target audiences and the limited means of the U.S. diplomatic and foreign service corps. Moreover, there is always the underlying issue of dealing with these same issues domestically while trying to claim moral high ground abroad.

Fundamentally, the NSS of 2010 is strikingly similar to the NSSs of 2002 and 2006. The 2002 National Security Strategy declared that the greatest threat to the United States was the “crossroads of radicalism and technology” in the form of terrorists or rogue states with nuclear weapons. To defeat this threat, it outlined several areas that the United States should focus on in order to combat the proliferation of terrorism and WMD. These areas included hunting down and defeating terrorists, strengthening alliances, working with others to diffuse regional conflicts, igniting global economic growth, building democracy and championing human dignity. These focuses, which are unchanged from 2002 to 2006, are reiterated in 2010 almost without alteration.

All three strategies share a focus on international organizations, alliances and institutional frameworks. The 2002 and 2006 NSSs make several references to working with existing regional and international entities such as the U.N., the African Union, the Organization of American States and the G-8. The strategies focused on soliciting greater involvement from these organizations in resolving regional and global issues in conjunction with U.S. assistance and leadership. Similarly, the 2010 NSS identifies U.S. support for the U.N. and investment in regional organizations as critical to strengthening global security across all metrics, including nontraditional concepts such as human and food security.

Another common thread from 2002 through 2010 is global economic growth and interaction. Previous NSSs stressed free and fair trade and promoted corresponding economic policies such as regional trade initiatives, dropping certain trade barriers and better integration of the International Monetary Fund and international fiscal policy to help developing nations. NSS 2010 echoed these sentiments, but whereas the predecessor documents focused principally on global trade, this tied world commerce specifically to American regeneration and renewal in response to the lingering domestic economic crisis. Both sets of strategies recognized the need for energy independence and clean energy as a contributing factor to long-term security.

A final, if commonly overlooked, similarity is that both the 2010 NSS and that of 2006 described the need for a whole-of-government approach to security. To be fair, only the recent iteration labeled it as such, but both reports’ views on interagency development and expansion are almost identical. In 2006, the plan cited intelligence coordination and reform, diplomatic presence and expansion, homeland security response and the expansion of democracy through allies and partner-driven development as the keys to success in the future. The newest plan repeated all of these almost verbatim; however, the 2010 NSS was compelled to address two new categories: strategic communications and the private sector. Clearly, these are meant to address exigent deficiencies: losing the information war against al Qaeda and the second and third order effects from the war on terror around the world, as well as the severe domestic economic crisis that is robbing the United States of the ability to meet its fiscal obligations. Although the visions are almost identical, the environment and national ability to achieve them are much different.

The key difference in the 2010 NSS versus that of prior versions is tone. The 2002 NSS was heavily laden with explicit mandates to use military force as a compulsion tool against terrorist organizations and rogue states; the 2006 NSS had ratcheted back on this theme but replaced it with a no less aggressive goal of

“ending tyranny.” The 2010 NSS places much less overt emphasis on the use of force and more emphasis on gathering wide support and isolating problematic regimes from the international scene. The 2010 report also makes no mention of regime change, or similar “ending tyranny” -style remarks, leaving unspoken what, if any, consequences there are for nations that refuse to conform to international norms and standards. The fact that the United States will underwrite global security through allies, partners and institutions leaves room for speculation about what U.S. leadership will look like in the future. How the United States approaches collective action and security programs vis-à-vis the international community will be the true indicator of how close, or far, the current strategy is to prior ones on national security. The option to act with unilateral military force is still present, but exercising that option is something completely different.

## **Implications**

The 2010 NSS and its associated wish-list of international and domestic outcomes has some serious implications, many of which are fundamentally at odds with the goals laid out in the documents. First and foremost are implications for the defense budget. The sweeping goals of the NSS will undoubtedly require significant funding across the major departments. Even though the plan states that “implementing our national security strategy will require a disciplined approach to setting priorities and making trade-offs among competing programs and activities,” there is no such “hard choice” or “trade-off” anywhere in the document. The military will need a significant budget to maintain its conventional superiority, which means funding the advanced weapon projects and conventional force structure, especially of the Air Force and Navy. But the military will also have to be able to defeat terror cells and organizations that are hidden in remote or inaccessible locations far into the future. This means an investment in technology, deployment and sustainment capabilities, and a potentially expanded forward U.S. military footprint around the world.

On top of military expenditures, the re-focus on increasing diplomatic and other soft-power tools will need to be supported by a massive expansion of relevant organizations, such as the Department of State and United States Agency for International Development as they are expected to shoulder more of the security burden in the developing world. Of course, any ideas about the military ceding back jurisdiction in nation-building will need to be accompanied by a tangible increase in diplomatic and developmental capability—which will require a significant increase in fiscal resources. Nowhere does the NSS suggest that the military will have to give up funding so that other governmental entities will be better resourced—no hard choices. And of course, there is no mention of how any of this expansive overseas governmental expansion and interaction will be funded given the current state of the U.S. economy and the absolute avoidance of any meaningful discourse on the ballooning costs of domestic entitlements and non-discretionary spending.

Along with monetary implications are implications on the future use of force. The latest statements on commitment to allies and partners seem to indicate that military deployment frequency will stay relatively high, although perhaps the scale of future deployments will be smaller than for major regional contingencies. The military will likely see frequent deployments to developing nations in an advisory role as the United States seeks to build rapport with traditional allies and organic, local security capacity in new ones. The flip side is how the more conventionally-oriented services of the Air Force and Navy will fare in the future, in terms of both resources and mission, as the U.S. tries to project future adversaries into the next two decades. Force structure issues within all the services will need to be balanced to meet the conventional and unconventional threats. The challenge will be for each service to remain dominant in its own spectrum while simultaneously being more relevant to the other services in a joint capacity despite diverging mission sets and roles. This will need to be accomplished within existing endstrengths, as no hint of expansion exists in the NSS.

There is also a real issue with the NSS in terms of how it relates to the derivative planning processes. The United States now has an NSS, but it also has a QDR that was written before it. Which is the guiding document? Does it even matter? As it is, both documents are sufficiently generic to preclude conflict, but that creates another problem. The NSS gives so little specific guidance to the military that it allows for an anything-goes mentality in planning, programming and budgeting. All plans are valid, since the United States has to be ready for anything, anywhere, anytime. The danger is that services will program what they want

and not what is needed, or that real priorities will be ignored or relegated to the second tier since the guidance is so vague. An example of this is with WMD and nuclear proliferation, labeled the number-one threat since 2002; non-proliferation funding amounts to two-tenths of one percent of defense spending.<sup>6</sup> Is that the really the priority? Or is it fighting al Qaeda, the strategy for which occupies more space in the NSS than non-proliferation issues? Alternatively, the F-22/F-35 procurement and employment discussion highlights the duality-of-mission problem; neither airframe adds much to low-intensity, counter-insurgency warfare, but both add significant conventional capability. Again, what is the priority for the future force? The result of a weak NSS is a weak QDR, which in turn leaves a path-dependent programming and budget cycle to its own devices. When everything is a priority, everything is an option to every service. The United States needs a clear strategy with clear priorities to drive the strategic planning and programming cycle to facilitate joint-environment dominance over the long term.

Finally, the latest NSS has reconfirmed the notion that the United States is in for the long haul against terror and extremism that will always seek us out at home. The stated fact is that the United States will require overhaul of its law enforcement and intelligence capabilities, both at home and abroad. Better integrating foreign and domestic surveillance functions will require more interagency cooperation and less political infighting; that will require strong leadership and potentially new organizations or cabinet positions with the authority to act across agency borders. Given the recent row over the dismissal of the National Intelligence Director, this interagency cooperation is unlikely.<sup>7</sup> Also, existing security challenges must be met head-on. Problems with illegal immigration and border security will need to be addressed to capitalize on gains made overseas. Such emotional issues will require strong leadership, adequate staffing and funding, and hard choices about the personalities involved. Without those, the long-term ability of the United States to track, target and prosecute terrorists will remain stagnant and prone to political turnover.

## **Conclusion**

Despite being produced under vastly different leaders, the 2010 and 2002/2006 National Security Strategies share almost identical views on prosecuting the war on terror and winning globally. Both documents recognize the enduring nature of combating extremism, whether in state or non-state actor form; both stake successes in the long term on economic vitality and innovation; and both identify the need for a robust foreign and domestic law enforcement/intelligence apparatus. The main difference is about the attitude of the United States in response to overseas security threats. The 2002 U.S. strategy unapologetically embraced unilateralism and emphasized military action when necessary, while the 2010 U.S. strategy ostensibly seeks to build coalitions with strong international support and participation. That said, the 2010 NSS has explicitly retained unilateral action as an option and so it remains unknown how the United States would react if such an option presented itself, particularly if that option is not a last resort. The United States has also put far more emphasis on supporting institutions, stating the “military cannot shoulder all of this burden [of nation building]” and calling for more nonmilitary governmental commitment to alleviate the conditions that grow terrorists. How, exactly, these goals will be met given the erratic and constrained domestic eco-political environment is unknown. The goals of the administration require a level of resources, organization and cooperation previously unknown. Reform, restructure and reevaluation of existing practices and entities are a must. Both strategic visions share this far-reaching agenda and although they disagree about the principal paths and means, they share the same endstate: a United States free from the threat of radical extremism and mass destruction, and a preservation of universal values and freedoms throughout the world.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Walter Pincus, "Pentagon Has Far-Reaching Defense Spacecraft in Works," *The Washington Post*, 16 March 2005, p. A03.
- <sup>2</sup> Defense Acquisition University, "National Military Strategy (NMS)," DAU ACQuipedia, [https://acc.dau.mil/ILC\\_NMS](https://acc.dau.mil/ILC_NMS).
- <sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, <http://www.defense.gov/news/2008%20national%20defense%20strategy.pdf>.
- <sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, <http://www.defense.gov/qdr/>.
- <sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, <http://www.defense.gov/news/Mar2005/d20050318nms.pdf>.
- <sup>6</sup> Gordon Adams and Cindy Williams, *Buying National Security: How America Plans and Pays for Its Global Role and Safety at Home* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), quoted by Andrew Exum at Abu Muqawama, 26 May 2010, <http://cnas.org/blogs/abumuqawama/2010/05/national-security-strategy-show-me-money.html>.
- <sup>7</sup> Brian Montopli, "James Clapper to be Tapped as New National Intelligence Director," CBS News Online, 4 June 2010, [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544\\_162-20006867-503544.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-20006867-503544.html).

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