

10 Major National Security Challenges the Next Administration Will Face

The next Administration will be entering office at perhaps the most perilous time in our history. The President and his/her team will have to make some momentous decisions, the impact of which could be felt for generations. For brevity, we have limited our list to just ten items ... and we are sure the reader will be able to add or subtract items they believe to be more important than the ones we list. We also should add that this list is not in priority order.

Keeping us safe ... to include border security and immigration policy

This is perhaps job one for any Administration ... and to do so, we must do a better job at securing our borders. Former Secretary of Defense William Perry has said he believes there is a 90% chance of a nuclear weapon going off on US soil in the next decade. Our porous borders would be ideal way to smuggle the materials for such a weapon into the US. Part and parcel of this issue is our immigration policy. It stands to reason that if an illegal alien can make it across our border, so too can a terrorist smuggle the materials for a nuclear or chemical or bio weapon. We have to deal with both of these issues ... but not simultaneously. Border security first.

Re-affirming or changing the strategy for the Global War on Terror

The principal element of our current strategy in the global war on terror is ... that it is better to fight the bad guys abroad than at home. Imbedded in this is the assumption that we should fight all terrorist groups with the means and will to attack us. This means we need a robust military that we can send into some out-of-the-way places. It also means an aggressive foreign aid budget ... where we can help remove some of the grievances of future jihadists and keep them from joining the fight. Critics have said this strategy is an overreach ... and risks alienating the world. The next President must articulate what our strategy should be ... and should contrast it to our present strategy.

Preparing the US public for a long struggle ... and for future attacks

Many academics believe the global war on terror will last for over 100 years. Regardless of how long it lasts, we will be vulnerable to small scale attacks for the foreseeable future. Presently, most of the Defense Department is at war, most of Homeland Security, parts of the State Department, most of the intelligence community, etc. However, to the average citizen, this "Iraq thing" and this "Afghanistan thing" are ... miles away. The citizen, perhaps, knows someone who has a son or daughter who is in the military ... but ... to a large extent the war does not affect him or her. And ... sadly, in our view, most have forgotten the effects of 9/11. Unfortunately, Al Qaeda has not forgotten us. We know they are planning; we know they want to strike us in the homeland; we know they want any future attack to be larger than 9/11, and we know they are seeking the technologies for a weapons with WMD consequences. Any future President must not only prepare the government and our citizens for what may happen, but must emphasize the long-term nature of the war.

Reconstitution of the Military

After almost eight years of war, the US military, down-sized in the aftermath of the Cold War is ... tired. The people dimension of this tiredness is evident in recruiting and retention numbers. But what has gone almost unnoticed is the equipment part. The average age of an aircraft in the Air Force inventory is 25 years old. The replacement tanker is the #1 procurement priority of the AF ... and if acquired on schedule, with full funding and no glitches, the last KC-135 will be replaced in

2043 – almost 80 years after it was acquired. The fleet is the oldest in AF history ... and recent groundings of 650 F-15s with major structural cracks indicate that our nation is accepting risk in relying on this aging capability. The DOD modernization budget must be increased if we are going to be prepared for future conflicts abroad ... as well as for patrolling the skies here at home. The future President must make this a high priority.

What to do about Iraq

No simple subject ... and opinions are strongly held ... but the significant question, arguably peripheral to the question of Iraq should be: What do we do ... long term ... in the Middle East about radical Islam. Most of us skeptics believe we will have, at least, air forces in or near Iraq for a long time. The Iraqis do not have an Air Force ... nor the means to simply acquire one. They have little overhead intelligence and little rapid, near time firepower they can bring to bear in the disparate parts of their country. It is clear ... that they will rely on the US/coalition for the foreseeable future for much of their defense. The central question should not be: do we pack up and leave ... but how do we help position the country for the future. Here the future President must lead the debate ... even if it is not popular.

Afghanistan for the long term

The movie, Charlie Wilson's War, ended with one of the most insightful of observations. For us to be effective in keeping Afghanistan out of the hands of radical Islam and terrorism, we have to focus on rebuilding the country. Basic infrastructure – such as dams, irrigation, alternative (to poppies) agriculture, schools, fresh water, hospitals, roads, and bridges – has to be built/rebuilt. US (and Allied) involvement in Afghanistan has to deepen beyond troops and military power. It will take a strong President to understand, support, and fund this.

Battle of Ideas

With almost \$1B per year spent in this area ... why would we consider it a major challenge? Recall the title is one which connotes that we must have an information campaign which prevents [mostly] Muslim youth from choosing the path of terror. One would think that this would be easy to pull together ... after all America is the home of Madison Avenue. We are the best in the world at this. Sadly, the opposite is true. We are only good ... at battling ourselves.¹ Consider that the sum of all monies spent in the 2006 elections amounted to \$8B – eight times as much as securing our survival in the future. Secondly, there's the matter of scope ... If we think \$1B is a lot of money, consider this: Last year Coca Cola spent \$2B ... advertising “brown fizzy water” that didn't need to be advertised. When we consult the experts, they tell us we need to spend X dollars per person reached. Translate that to ... perhaps ... \$5 per Muslim per year. That's \$8.6B per year ... and arguably we need to reach many more people than just the Muslim population. All of this above doesn't even mention the national organization needed for such an effort. We all know the Commander of our effort in Iraq – Gen Dave Petraeus. Does anyone know who's in charge of the battle of ideas? The next President has to get us organized ... and ... funded ... for the future.

Cyber Threat

¹ Exhibit one is the host of campaign ads for the Presidential candidates

The simple fact is that we are vulnerable to cyber attacks ... Our infrastructure relies on the web for controlling flows of money, electricity, natural gas, and information. The military supply system is dependent on the web. Our telecommunications system is also. With industries outsourcing to overseas countries, service industries in the US also rely on the internet. Yet ... we still have no international definition of what constitutes an attack or a denial of service; our forensic tools need to be improved and made available to law enforcement officials across the country; the responsible department to protect the US (Department of Homeland Security) does not have a viable strategy for identifying the threats, warning the public of an attack, or defending our networks; and we have little public guidance of what to do if under attack. In fact, many believe that the US military has the responsibility to defend the US against a cyber attack. The next President will have the task of defining and creating a national and international policy.

Bringing China along ... and watching Russia

China's economy is growing like gangbusters. Its military has experienced double digit percentage increases in its budget for each of the last 18 years. And while we all might be hopeful of a positive outcome, experts are divided on whether China will be friend or foe in the future. [Certainly its military ... which continues to threaten nuclear attacks on US cities, seems to think it possible that it would fight the US in the future.] No expert we know can show convincingly how China gets from where it is now ... to where we would like it to be long term. Our relations with China need to be managed carefully by the next President.

Likewise, Russia has shown a resurgence of the old Soviet days. With the high world price of oil and natural gas, Russia has a new-found wealth ... and is flexing its muscle in dealing with a host of international issues – missile defense, testing US air defenses, human rights, drug dealing, crime, and others. While we don't believe this is at a crisis level ... it does bear watching.

National Energy Policy

This nation has to face the future with a powerful set of binoculars. The world's oil supply is not keeping pace with demand and comes from some unsavory places. What this causes ... is that every time there is a crisis in an oil-producing area, it becomes a US national security interest. And ... we don't have an energy policy. Yet ... most of us know the elements of such a policy. Simply stated it is: Increase supplies of oil ... domestically and from countries which will be reliable in the future; decrease demand – by conserving and by turning to renewable sources plus nuclear energy, build our public transportation system; and invest heavily in R&D for the future. Public policies should be designed to remove impediments and providing incentives for doing the above, encouraging the nation to shift to a more sustainable long-term situation. The future President will have to lead us to this and do so ... without doing significant damage to our economy.

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The views expressed in this paper are the author's alone.