
A DISTINCTLY AMERICAN INTERNATIONALISM FOR A GLOBALIZED WORLD

By Richard L. Kugler

*Professor and Director, Center for Technology and National Security Policy,
National Defense University*



“The long-awaited National Security Strategy provides a sophisticated portrayal of the emerging U.S. role in world affairs for the early 21st century. Contrary to the expectations of critics, it is neither hegemonic and unilateralist, nor ultra-militarist and focused on pre-empting enemies,” says Professor Richard L. Kugler of National Defense University. “Instead, its assessment of U.S. interests and values results in a ‘distinctly American internationalism’ aimed at creating a balance of power that favors human freedom and makes the globalized world a safer and better place.”

The long-awaited National Security Strategy provides a sophisticated portrayal of the emerging U.S. role in world affairs for the early 21st century. Contrary to the expectations of critics, it is neither hegemonic and unilateralist, nor ultra-militarist and focused on pre-empting enemies. Instead, its assessment of U.S. interests and values results in a “distinctly American internationalism” aimed at creating a balance of power that favors human freedom and makes the globalized world a safer and better place. Intent on judging how to apply U.S. strengths, this strategy pays weighty attention to handling today’s dangerous security problems and countering the threats posed by terrorists and tyrants. But it also aspires to promote global economic progress, democracy, and human freedom in troubled regions. One of its key goals is to double the economies of poor countries within a decade. The strategy shows that the United States is a superpower willing to pursue new policies that cut against the grain of established practices when necessary. But it also makes clear that the United States will be a responsible leader of the democratic community and a full participant in alliances and multilateral institutions, including the United Nations.

The new U.S. strategy thus is amply endowed with lofty visions and balanced aspirations, as well as a bipartisan blend of continuity and change. It also is attuned to the rising dangers and still-existing opportunities ahead. The central issue is not its

conceptual soundness, but whether it will receive the U.S. resources and support from key democratic partners that are needed to carry it out. An equally important issue is whether this strategy will be grappling with challenges that are amenable to progress or instead are mostly intractable. The manner in which these issues are resolved will determine whether this strategy achieves its ambitious goals fully, partly, or not at all. Only time will tell, but the coming years promise to be eventful because a newly assertive U.S. global involvement has arrived on the scene.

IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION

What makes the National Security Strategy distinctly American is that it is truly global. Whereas most countries address mainly their own regions, the U.S. strategy covers virtually the entire world. This wide-ranging focus is partly the case because the United States has interests and values at stake nearly everywhere. Moreover, it has security commitments to many nations in multiple regions, widespread economic involvements, and membership in a host of global and regional organizations. The accusation that it prefers to act unilaterally is wrong. A leading architect of the 20th century’s most successful alliances and international bodies, the United States remains the most multilateral country in the world today.

Globalization plays a potent role in reinforcing this worldwide outlook because it is compelling the United States to think and act with many regions in mind. As used here, “globalization” does not mean an ideology or a policy, but instead a factual trend: the process of growing international activity in trade, finances, investments, technology, weapons, communications, ideas, values, and other areas. As a result, previously distant regions are being drawn closer together in growing ties, once-separate functional activities are influencing each other, the pace of change is accelerating, and interdependence is increasing. Events in one place are no longer isolated because now they can have big ripple effects elsewhere. In essence, the world is becoming a single stage upon which many actors — nations, multinational institutions, and transnational bodies — now play important roles and interact continuously. Many countries must now be internationalist in their outlook, and the United States more than all others.

As a deep-seated and irreversible trend, globalization in the information era may be the central driving reality of our times, one that creates a framework within which other powerful dynamics unfold. To a degree, globalization has been unleashed because the democracies emerged victorious in their prolonged struggle with totalitarian ideologies during the 20th century. The collapse of the Cold War’s bipolar order has opened the door to an upsurge of international activity, in a setting where representative government, free markets, flourishing trade relations, and multilateral collaboration have become the model for progress in many places. A few years ago, globalization was seen as uniformly positive because it stimulates economic growth and open societies, but recent experience shows that it has downsides. It can help destabilize countries, alienate traditional cultures, and make entire regions vulnerable to volatile swings in the world economy. It can leave less-fortunate countries resentful of their fates and dismayed at the barriers to progress facing them. In addition, it can provide disgruntled actors the technologies and other means to strike violently at long distances, against not only their neighbors but the United States and its allies as well.

Partly owing to globalization’s diverse effects, the world has become bifurcated. The democratic community, which totals about 30 percent of the world’s population but has 70 percent of its wealth, finds itself stable, united, and prosperous. But elsewhere, conditions are not nearly so good, and progress is less rapid. This especially is the case along the so-called “southern arc of instability” that stretches from the Middle East to the Asia littoral. This huge zone is rendered chaotic by a host of problems: security vacuums, power imbalances, poverty, ineffective governments, high unemployment, and extremist Islamic fundamentalism. The result is a breeding ground for today’s principal dangers, including terrorists, tyrants, rogue governments, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), ethnic tensions, failed states, resource shortages, geopolitical rivalries, drug trafficking, and organized crime. As the National Security Strategy says, these problems and dangers must be brought under control if the future is to be peaceful and the opportunities of a globalized world are to be realized.

THE STRATEGY’S KEY FEATURES

The National Security Strategy is composed of features that are also distinctly American. Throughout the Cold War, U.S. foreign policy pursued a combination of stable security conditions, democratization, and economic progress. The new strategy applies these hardy perennials of American doctrine to the fluid conditions existing today. In order to defend the American homeland against new threats and bring peaceful progress to zones of turmoil, the strategy’s eight key features call for efforts to:

1. Champion aspirations for human dignity.
2. Strengthen alliances to prevent and defeat global terrorism.
3. Work with others to defuse regional conflicts.
4. Prevent enemies from threatening peace with weapons of mass destruction.
5. Ignite a new era of global economic growth through free markets and trade.
6. Expand the circle of development by promoting open societies and democracy.

7. Develop agendas for cooperative action with main centers of global power.
8. Transform America's military and other national security institutions.

In response to the events of September 11, 2001 and their aftermath, robust security measures figure prominently in this agenda. The National Security Strategy makes clear that the United States will act vigorously to defeat global terrorists and their sponsors, and to prevent them from attacking the U.S. homeland and America's friends. The strategy says that the United States will not hesitate to act alone in conducting military strikes against terrorists. But it also proclaims that the United States will build coalitions with friends and allies, and that it will wage a war of ideas against terrorism, support moderate governments in the Muslim world, and seek to improve the harsh economic conditions that give rise to terrorism.

The National Security Strategy puts forth a similarly firm stance for dealing with WMD proliferation by rogue countries. It calls for robust homeland security measures, missile defenses, and upgraded military forces capable of proactive counter-proliferation measures. It makes clear that the United States will be prepared — on a selective and limited basis — to launch pre-emptive attacks against WMD-equipped rogue countries and terrorists that pose an imminent danger of attack. But the strategy also states that the United States will work multilaterally with partners in using diplomacy, arms control, export controls, and threat reduction assistance to discourage WMD proliferation. Likewise, the strategy calls for strong diplomatic efforts to help defuse regional tensions, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Indo-Pakistan conflict, that stimulate terrorism, WMD proliferation, and other dangers.

Accusations that the United States will act like a unilateralist hegemon in handling security affairs are rebutted by the National Security Strategy's call for close multilateral cooperation with old allies and new collaborators. It emphasizes NATO's need to prepare for new missions and to develop improved European military forces that can operate alongside transformed U.S. forces. In Asia, it calls for existing

U.S. alliances with Japan, South Korea, and Australia to acquire a regional focus, and for use of ASEAN and APEC to help promote progress. Importantly, the strategy also calls for collaboration with such major powers as Russia, China, and India in handling security problems. Indeed, it asserts that the end of bipolarity has opened the door to peaceful relations among the major powers in ways that can help stabilize global geopolitics for many years, provided they resist the temptation to fall into rivalry.

Likewise, accusations that the United States is narrowly preoccupied with security politics and military affairs are rebutted by the National Security Strategy's call for sustained efforts to promote democratization and economic development. About one-half of the world's countries are democracies, covering North America, Europe, and major parts of Asia and Latin America. The new strategy hopes to spread democracy to new regions in order to advance human rights, provide better governance, and encourage free enterprise. It suggests that authoritarian governments can follow a gradual path to democracy by pursuing political reforms and open societies a few steps at a time. The strategy's economic component envisions bilateral and regional agreements aimed at spreading prosperity from the wealthy democracies to such poor regions as Latin America, the Middle East, South Asia, Africa, and parts of East Asia. It does not envision an economic miracle for these regions, but instead faster annual growth in order to double their wealth in ten years. It says that if the wealthy democracies have healthy economies, this will help encourage growth among poor countries by promoting exports and imports. It judges that free trade, investments, capital flows, finances, and enhanced productivity are the best mechanisms for encouraging their growth. It also calls for greater U.S. economic aid through a new Millennium Challenge Account and grants rather than loans, coupled with help from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), but mainly to countries that are pursuing the effective governments and economic reforms essential for aid to be decisive. Along with this aid are to come efforts aimed at promoting public health, workers' rights, education, new energy sources, and control of greenhouse gas emissions.

PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS

Although the National Security Strategy is controversial in some quarters and misunderstood in others, its prospects for success are reasonably good if it is carried out strongly and wisely. Commentators have noted that the new strategy shifts some policies in conservative directions: scuttling of the Kyoto global warming accord is an example. But the larger reality is that it remains firmly anchored in the bipartisan tradition that has guided American foreign policy for many years. Also important, it alters the status quo in favor of innovative departures that respond to new dangers and rapid changes abroad. Fresh policies that initially come across as unilateralist are often candidates for a new multilateralism: an example is U.S. withdrawal from the ABM treaty, which led to a new agreement with Russia on reducing offensive weapons even as thin missile defenses are fielded. As a result, the new strategy seems capable of commanding widespread consensus in the United States even though its specific features will be debated and doubtless will evolve as it matures.

A main strength of this strategy is its far-sighted vision and its effort to weave security endeavors and economic policies into a coherent whole. Basically the strategy hopes that by applying U.S. strengths, in concert with help from close allies and great powers, it can quell emerging threats and establish a foundation of stable security affairs in turbulent regions, upon which economic prosperity and democracy can be built. Progress in these areas, in turn, hopefully will further ameliorate security tensions in ways that encourage a new era of international collaboration. Beyond question, this ambitious and demanding agenda will require the entire U.S. government to take national security quite seriously in the coming years, and to apply the full set of instruments at its disposal. Adequate resources in all areas will also be essential.

The National Security Strategy calls for a defense transformation effort, backed by rising defense budgets, that will prepare U.S. forces for new

strategic missions, including surprising contingencies in unfamiliar geographic locations. As transformation accelerates, U.S. forces will acquire information networks, new technologies, and new operational concepts that prepare them for joint expeditionary warfare. The effect will be to ensure that U.S. forces remain the world's best, capable of swiftly defeating future adversaries. This endeavor, however, must be accompanied by efforts to reorganize other national security bureaucracies for new purposes, and to strengthen intelligence and global law enforcement. Commitment of sufficient resources to support U.S. diplomacy, economic assistance, trade policies, and other activities also will be necessary. Equally important, successful performance in the information age will be knowledge-based. The ability of the U.S. government to marshal the necessary brainpower — so that it can understand the global setting and accurately gauge the consequences of its actions — will be a critical factor in determining the success of the new strategy.

A continuing challenge facing the U.S. government will be that of staying focused on its long-term agenda while handling daily crises. Because the United States cannot carry out this agenda alone, success at mobilizing help from allies, and at reforming old Cold War alliances to perform new missions, will be critical. NATO's successful Prague Summit of November, 2002 took a big step in the right direction by calling for a new Response Force and other military capabilities for power projection. The need for help also applies to big powers that stand outside the U.S.-led alliance system, including Russia, China, and India. Building better coalition partnerships with other countries in chaotic regions is another key endeavor. Although recent trends are encouraging, these tasks do not promise to be easily accomplished.

Even if allies and partners provide help, many of the world's problems will be hard to fully solve anytime soon. Quelling specific threats may be feasible but difficult. Creating peaceful security affairs in multiple regions could be nebulous and complex. While European-Russian relations are hopeful, the

triple agenda of preserving tranquil relations with China in fluid Asia, dampening the Indo-Pakistan rivalry, and stabilizing the Middle East/Persian Gulf will be a tall order. Likewise, promoting economic prosperity and democracy everywhere promises to be frustrating and time-consuming. The new U.S. strategy thus has its work cut out, it likely will have to set priorities and acknowledge limits, and it may experience setbacks. But even if it is only partly

successful in ways that bring safety to the United States and its allies coupled with measured progress in turbulent regions, it will have served its purposes and made a worthy contribution. ●

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Government.