

REBUILDING THE
AMERICAN DEFENSE CONSENSUS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After World War II, the leaders of the United States, on a bipartisan basis, made a deliberate decision to change America's approach to global affairs. The disasters of the 20th Century to that point, and especially the two World Wars, had made clear that the United States could no longer play a secondary role in the world. To protect America's homeland and her vital national interests, and to prevent a third World War, it was necessary for the United States to assume a global leadership role, and to build a national security architecture that allowed her to execute that role effectively. To that end, the United States built alliances and partnerships with like-minded nations, and developed and maintained robust standing tools of power, hard and soft, with a view towards anticipating and deterring the risk of aggression before it directly threatened America's vital interests.

That policy eventually bore fruit in the late 1980's, when the United States won the Cold War without firing a shot.

Since that time, however, American policy has drifted. An increasingly multipolar world has brought with it myriad new threats — global terrorist organizations, rogue states like Iran and North Korea seeking access to nuclear weapons, a resurgent Russia looking to re-establish a sphere of influence on its eastern and southern borders, and a Chinese regime expanding and modernizing its military at a rapid pace. Yet even as threats continue to multiply, the Obama Administration has repudiated the operating principles of the post-war strategy that kept America safe by allowing our alliances and power to atrophy and disengaging from a global leadership role.

But disengagement is not a prescription for American security, nor is it the basis for a successful American foreign policy. We cannot continue to pretend that the world will get safer, or that risk will go away, if we respond to threats with

rhetoric or attempt to ignore them entirely. The tumult of the last six years — and the last several months in particular — have demonstrated the failure of President Obama's attempts to "lead from behind." Instead, to preserve America's security, our leaders must explain that America must remain active in the world, that her strategic interests must be protected, and that the way to protect them isn't to deploy at every sign of trouble, but to maintain the robust tools of a great power, both hard and soft, both military and diplomatic, and use those tools thoughtfully to protect America and deter or contain conflict.

We cannot continue to pretend that the world will get safer, or that risk will go away, if we respond to threats with rhetoric or attempt to ignore them entirely.

Unfortunately, the past several years have witnessed a significant erosion in America's military capabilities. Three years ago, then-Defense Secretary Robert Gates, recognizing both the growing threats to our national security and the fragile state of our military force structure and readiness, proposed modest increases in the overall defense budget. In response, President Obama took the unprecedented step of disregarding the recommendations of his own Defense Secretary, implementing nearly \$1 trillion in cuts to the defense budget over the next decade. At a time when our armed forces were already stressed from frequent combat deployments, these additional cuts have further undermined a military in desperate need of repair.

Rebuilding our military begins with establishing a confident and workable foreign policy that Americans understand and support — a vision — and a sober understanding, that few good things

happen in the world today unless America helps shape them. The paradox of American military power is that there's less of a need to use it when it is feared and respected. Therein lies the great economy: peace through strength costs infinitely less in American blood and treasure than does war precipitated by weakness.

Therefore, rebuilding our defense consensus centers on rebuilding an increasingly hollowed-out military, based on the following premises:

- Congress, the President, and the Defense Department should immediately take steps to restore American military readiness. America's servicemen and women deserve nothing less than to have all the training and equipment they need to succeed in their missions.
- In the longer term, Congress and the President should establish a defense budget based on actual needs assessments in light of America's strategic interests — not arbitrary numbers with no connection to the threats the United States faces. The Defense Department should conduct a real review of its needs given America's strategic interests and vulnerabilities, and Congress and the President should fund the military accordingly. Pending the outcome of that review, Congress and the President should plan on returning to the budget baseline Secretary Gates proposed in 2011.
- Even as it re-evaluates the needs of the military services, the Defense Department should also ensure that taxpayers receive good value for money, by reforming the procurement process to prevent cost overruns. A streamlined acquisition process, shorter design and procurement windows, and multi-year procurement contracts subject to competitive bidding will all work to bring down costs, reduce delays, and

ensure predictability both for the Pentagon and the American taxpayer.

Our nation's defense should be the top priority of the federal government. Without a secure nation and economy, America cannot hope to overcome the other challenges which face us.

The postwar generation of leaders understood this principle — and the need for a robust military as a primary tool to deter threats before they grow. Having witnessed firsthand the effects of passivity in failing to protect the American people from attack, and the cost in men and material that our lack of preparation bred, politicians from both parties supported a strong national defense as a key way of deterring Soviet aggression, and protecting American interests.

While the specific threats have evolved, and in many cases multiplied, since the end of the Cold War, the principle that a strong defense will best protect the country remains valid. It is time for America's leaders to return to that principle, and commit to rebuilding a weakened military infrastructure. The American people will support that effort, and the United States is more than strong enough to make it a success. What is needed is leadership, on a bipartisan basis, committed to the idea that clarity, purpose, and power remain the keys to peace and security.



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