



**THE WORKING GROUP ON GRAND STRATEGIC CHOICES
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Executive Summary

The coming decade is likely to present the United States with both an unprecedented opportunity and truly historic dangers. On the one hand, America's preeminent power position gives it a unique chance to promote change in the international system. On the other, a series of important trends in the international system have given rise to novel threats and challenges—including proliferation, the emergence of catastrophic terrorist groups, and the shifting distribution of power in the international system. Moreover, there is a real risk that the very act of tackling these menaces may exacerbate America's security problems.

The overarching message of the Grand Strategic Choices Working Group Report, which draws on views from foreign policy experts across the political spectrum, is that the U.S. must shepherd welcome change in the international system while also acting in a manner consistent with the common interest of the international community. America's long-term security depends both upon U.S. global leadership and widespread international acceptance of that mission. The key to reconciling these twin impulses is to shape, consolidate, and strengthen a 21st century global order that is free, open, stable, and cooperative.

The report's main findings include:

-- East Asia is likely to pose the greatest challenges to the United States over the coming three decades, challenges that have been exacerbated by America's relative lack of interest in tending to the region. The United States should move towards an "Asia-centric grand strategy that consolidates and strengthens the American-led regional order and heads off trouble before it occurs. A central part of this strategy is an effort to compete with a rising China for regional influence while also seeking to integrate it into a trans-Pacific order. The report proposes a "competitive engagement" strategy that seeks to strengthen the institutional architecture of the region in ways that encourage a peaceful and integrative rise of China but also hedges against less desirable outcomes.

-- The key to this strategy is a need to supplement America's existing bilateral ties (particularly the U.S.-Japan alliance) with new multilateral arrangements, to ensure that ASEAN Plus Three (which excludes the United States) is not the only game in town. The basic design decision is whether to include China from the start— e.g. to turn the Six Party Talks on North Korea's nuclear program into a permanent five power organization to provide an OSCE-type forum for discussing regional security issues— or to set up an organization of market democracies focused around good governance and a U.S.-Japan

Free Trade Association that could one day include China but in the meantime serves as a hedge against an aggressive China. The report proposes doing both simultaneously.

-- It may seem fanciful to speak of the centrality of Asia at a time when the United States is fully engaged in a hot counterinsurgency war in Iraq. However, one way to think about this recommendation is to view Iraq as the near-term danger but Asia as the long-term challenge. In other words, the United States must transition to an Asia-centric grand strategy, but first it is imperative to deal with the security challenges in the Middle East.

-- The United States stirred up a hornets nest by invading Iraq and dealing with the aftermath in the way that it did; military power is not an appropriate tool to transform the Middle East. However, it is also clear that the consequences of failure in Iraq, now that America is there, could prove to be catastrophic, leading to further American casualties, a failed state in the Sunni region which could serve as a launching pad for terrorism, a civil war that could come to include neighboring states, a diminution of American prestige and credibility, the potential for an isolationist turn in American public opinion, and the continuing preoccupation of the United States with the Middle East. There are no easy or obvious answers; the United States should be very slow to adopt a strategy that abandons the goal of a stable, functioning government and it must be careful not to allow the preferable to be the enemy of the tolerable.

-- The war on terrorism is a global counterinsurgency campaign, not a clash of civilizations or a conventional conflict. The objective is to kill the hard core, while peeling off their potential supporters through a hearts-and-minds campaign, rather than a larger war against totalitarian enemy comparable to the World Wars or the Cold War. The center of gravity of this struggle is in the Middle East, but Western Europe is also a battleground, where the primary challenge is to integrate disaffected Muslims.

-- The preventive and preemptive use of force against terrorists is a necessary tool in the global counterinsurgency but it should be used discriminately and considerable effort should be dedicated towards developing strong internal controls to ensure that we get our facts right. The costs of being wrong, as the Iraq War demonstrates, are very high. The use of force against rogue states is a very different matter. Preventive action may have unintended consequences that could result in that which we were trying to prevent (e.g. proliferation of weapons of mass destruction). While the United States should not eschew this option entirely, it only ought to be an option in the most extreme cases, where there is no other option and the prospects of achieving our objectives are overwhelming.

-- The past decade demonstrates that what happens inside states matters to the United States because it can give rise to catastrophic terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional aggression, global instability, and massive human rights abuses. However, it also demonstrates that the United States is ill equipped to influence the domestic development of an adversary or rival, both because other states are suspicious of American motives and because of the limits of relying primarily upon military power. Squaring this circle is a necessary and critical step if we are to adequately tackle the security challenges of the 21st century, a feature of which is the dissemination of the means of mass violence to small actors. The United States should lead the international community to develop and use international institutions to engage and reach inside of states without using force and influence their development in a positive direction. These

institutions, including a community of democracies, can bring more resources and skills to bear upon the problem and they can conceal America's role, showing that good governance is not an American project but a widely accepted step towards modernity.

-- Americans have a tendency to view multilateralism as synonymous with the United Nations, projecting its faults and limitations on to all institutions. However, some are more effective than others. It is important to appreciate the great range of multilateral tools available to the United States, which enable us to enlist others in our cause, legitimize our power, inhibit organized resistance from other states, and create a peaceful, prosperous and relatively just international order. These tools will prove increasingly important in dealing with China, stabilizing failing and rogue states, and rebuilding the Western order as long as we have the maturity and self confidence to use them. The United States and its partners should look for ways to renew, adapt, and expand multilateral institutions to new realities—putting America's imprint on 21st century governance institutions.