



**REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON
STATE SECURITY AND TRANSNATIONAL THREATS
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Executive Summary

To understand the vulnerabilities the U.S. faces in the 21st century, the U.S. must consider transnational threats along side more traditional threats, as they both have the potential to seriously disrupt our internal life. Of the numerous transnational threats in the world today, global conventional terrorism, terrorism involving weapons of mass destruction (particularly nuclear and biological terrorism), highly infectious pandemic disease, and U.S. dependence on oil will require the most sustained and intensive national security attention from the United States in the 21st century. However, national and multilateral approaches to these concerns are still inadequate. To address these four key issues, policymakers must strive to build broad-based governance and societal resilience within the United States, other countries, and the international system generally.

Because non-traditional, transnational threats will continue to expand in foreign policy and national security significance for the United States over the course of this century, this Working Group's mandate was important to the Princeton Project on National Security's objective of rethinking the foundational premises of U.S. national security. As the George W. Bush administration's *National Security Strategy for the United States* (2002) acknowledged, an effective response to the events of September 11, 2001, requires building a new, lasting security perspective that recognizes threats neither controlled nor necessarily supported by any particular state. To create this lasting perspective, a rethinking of the foundational premises of U.S. national security is crucial; non-traditional, transnational threats will continue to expand in foreign policy and national security significance for the United States over the course of this century, and this cannot be ignored.

To identify the most serious threats, this Working Group challenged traditional definitions and conceptions of U.S. national security, which historically have focused primarily on military threats, and then analyzed a host of transnational threat candidates, including terrorism, environmental degradation, infectious diseases, drug trafficking, resource scarcities, and natural disasters.

Traditional definitions of U.S. national security have focused almost exclusively on the potential of violent attack by other countries on the United States, its citizens, and its vital overseas interests. This state-centric "violence paradigm" offers no room for transnational threats, even violent threats posed by non-state actors, such as terrorists, to

be considered national security issues. Without a framework that transcends the violence paradigm, most transnational threats cannot, by definition, be considered national security issues.

In contrast, much of the “new thinking” on national security sought to broaden the concept of national security away from the state-centric violence paradigm so that serious threats not emanating from the military forces of other states could be analyzed as security concerns. For example, national security strategies compiled by the Executive Branch have identified, with increasing frequency since the late 1980s, many transnational problems as national security issues.¹

Exploring the gap between traditional national security frameworks and the new thinking on national security constitutes both a minefield and a quagmire. The minefield exists because moving beyond traditional notions of U.S. national security to evaluate transnational threats still proves controversial and often provokes skepticism or hostility. The incorporation of the threat of transnational terrorism into the violence paradigm has actually made it more difficult to argue that other transnational threats, such as infectious diseases or resource scarcities, are security issues. The quagmire results from the fragmentation of non-traditional approaches to national security into diverse approaches that are not easily reconcilable. In addition, broader notions of national security often fail to provide parameters to guide a determination of what transnational threats represented national security threats as opposed to foreign policy challenges.

The challenges brought forth by the minefield and quagmire require a critical examination of what exactly national security policy protects. George Kennan's definition of national security as "the continued ability of the country to pursue the development of its internal life without serious interference, or threat of interference, from foreign powers" became a starting point for deliberations on the meaning of national security. However, transnational threats and globalization force us to broaden the categories of sources of "serious interference" in our "internal life" beyond rival states.

U.S. national security policy operates to secure primary public goods that are at the heart of the social contract between the people and its government: economic prosperity, governance continuity, ideological sustainability, military capability, population well-being, and territorial integrity. The environment that influences the production of these primary public goods is critical, and the United States must understand how radically different the context for producing these goods is in the 21st century compared to the Cold War. The structure and dynamics of Cold War international politics have given way to the “networked anarchy” of globalization.

In the 21st century, the United States is unlikely to face an existential threat from another state the way it did from the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The United States does, however, face an existential threat in the form of nuclear terrorism. Furthermore, networked anarchy exposes every aspect of the internal and external

¹ See Appendix D: Chart of Transnational Threats in National Security Strategies: Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush.

functioning of the United States to transnational processes and effects. This exposure creates the potential for serious transnational threats to inflict extraordinary direct and indirect damage to the primary public goods at the heart of national security policy.

In deciding what transnational threats might contain the potential to cause the United States extraordinary damage, policymakers should consider factors such as the overall scale of the direct material and psychological impact of the threat; speed and mobility of the threat; duration of the threat and its impact; and the adequacy and sustainability of response capabilities. Applying these indicators to the wide range of transnational threats present in the world today, global conventional terrorism, terrorism involving weapons of mass destruction (particularly nuclear and biological terrorism), highly infectious pandemic disease, and U.S. dependence on oil emerge as the transnational threat categories requiring the most significant national security attention from the United States in the 21st century.

Even as we identify these major threat categories, the United States must recognize that the nature of networked anarchy and the complexity of transnational threats mean that the “breakout” potential for other transnational issues is significant, requiring very close coordination between foreign policy and national security. Ultimately, the challenges presented by transnational problems illuminate the need for more high-level consideration of the inadequacy of existing national and multilateral approaches to these concerns and for building broad-based governance and societal resilience within the United States, other countries, and the international system generally.