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### **America's New Global Challenge**

AS Barack Obama travels abroad this week, he is finding a world that still wants America to be engaged, but no longer necessarily waits for America to take the lead. The challenge for the next president is to understand how much has changed and how America can best pursue its national interests in such a different international environment.

It isn't just the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that have changed the world, nor other aspects of the Bush legacy that have weakened America's power and position. The world itself has changed. Ours is the era of global interconnectedness. The fate of the average American is increasingly connected to the fate of people around the world creating unparalleled opportunities but also great dangers from which no nation can be immune. Ours is also an era of increasingly diffuse power, as more powers rise to demand influence and a say over global affairs and more actors of many different kinds affect the course of global politics.

Such a world requires a new kind of leadership - one that is clear on how, when, and with whom America leads. Call it strategic leadership. A leadership that understands that while much of the world still believes that international peace and prosperity are most likely to be achieved if Washington plays a significant and constructive role, key actors no longer simply defer to or automatically prefer what America wants. A leadership that focuses on effective action rather than who is in the lead. A leadership that relies on clear judgment as much as demonstrating resolve. A leadership that grasps that however great our power, America cannot meet today's challenges all on its own.

Strategic leadership requires a commitment to statecraft as both an alternative and a complement to military force. Although diplomacy has its limitations, US strategic interests are often best served by leveraging its potential for enhancing security, reducing tensions, resolving conflicts, achieving peace, and transforming adversarial relationships.

With regard to nuclear proliferation, for instance, the best hope lies not in striking possible proliferators, but in working with countries around the world to renew the essential bargain at the core of the nuclear nonproliferation regime. On this issue, America will have to lead, by reducing reliance on nuclear weapons and committing to seeking a world free of nuclear weapons. Only then can it convince others to do likewise and gain the benefits of nuclear power without risking wider proliferation of nuclear weapons and capabilities.

Strategic leadership demands a strong military, but also the wisdom to know when and how to employ it. For example, US withdrawal of combat troops from Iraq cannot be a military withdrawal from the region. A regional military posture that deters adversaries and reassures

allies must remain in place. The conflict in Afghanistan must get greater priority. But so too must diplomatic initiatives. Militarily and diplomatically, the United States needs regional and European partners to do their part. America should take the lead where it can play the most constructive role and support others when their roles are most promising.

Strategic leadership also requires that the United States work to ensure that all the relevant actors have a seat at the table. Take climate change. America must go from laggard to leader both in domestic energy and environmental policies and as a global leader in development of emissions standards that are fair and viable.

The United States is late to this party, so it will not be easy to convince all the important actors - not least China and India - that they, too, will have to be part of any solution. But in both doing its own part and being open to others also playing leading roles in forging common solutions, America has much more credibility in pressing others to do their part.

Strategic leadership applies to other policy priorities, including enhancing prosperity and development, encouraging democracy and human rights, and reshaping relations in East Asia.

These are detailed in our new report, which we and our fellow members of the Phoenix Initiative released today ([cnas.org/phoenixinitiative](https://cnas.org/phoenixinitiative)).

The essential objective of strategic leadership is to achieve the same goals envisioned by the Founders: a nation that would secure life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness for all Americans. In this interconnected world, doing so depends increasingly on helping others to secure the same goals.

The doctrine of strategic leadership shows us how, together with our partners and friends around the world, we can create a better, more secure, and prosperous world for all.

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