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# Responses to the Ten Questions

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## RESPONSES TO THE TEN QUESTIONS

Paul R. Pillar<sup>†</sup>

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5. WHAT STATUTORY CHANGE IS MOST NECESSARY FOR AMERICAN NATIONAL SECURITY?

Statutory enhancement to U.S. national security policy is not primarily a matter of trying to write into law the substance of wise policy. Past attempts to do so, such as congressional restrictions on aid or trade with certain out-of-favor regimes, have produced rigidity and inflexibility that policymakers in the executive branch have

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overcome only with liberal use of waivers. To be successful, foreign policy needs to be nimble and capable of responding to emergent opportunities and threats. Enshrining any one approach, however wise it may seem at the moment, in a statute precludes the required agility.

Legislation has been a vehicle for another favorite approach toward supposed enhancement of U.S. national security: reorganization. Redrawing of the Government's organization chart clearly requires legislation, but the frequency with which would-be reformers have turned to this device reflects less a need for it than the attraction of reorganization as a specific, visible, response to demands to "do something" after salient failures. Redrawing lines does not eliminate challenges inherent to some security problems, the chance of being counterproductive is significant, and any reorganization entails costs of disruption. One of the biggest reorganizations related to national security in recent years—adoption in 2004 of the 9/11 Commission's redo of the intelligence community—is illustrative. Supposedly a fix for inadequate flow of information across bureaucratic lines, it created still more lines across which information must flow. As underscored by subsequent incidents such as an attempted bombing of a Detroit-bound airliner in December 2009, it did not overcome the inherent difficulty of trying to identify terrorism-related fragments amid a sea of similar but irrelevant information.

The greatest shortcoming related to American national security which a statutory fix might ameliorate concerns not substance or structure but rather process. The process for making national security policy decisions, even ones involving major departures, has too often been restricted and truncated. Too few options have been thoroughly considered, too few sources of insight and expertise have been tapped, and too few relevant factors have been considered. This shortcoming has varied from issue to issue and from administration to administration, but even the best examples have exhibited it to some degree. The work of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, or ExComm, during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 has been cited ever since as a model of thorough deliberation leading to a successful outcome. But the deliberations were not as thorough as they could have been. The option of allowing the missiles to remain in Cuba was never seriously considered.<sup>1</sup>

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1. This gap in the decision-making is discussed in STEPHEN PETER ROSEN, *WAR AND HUMAN NATURE* 58–64 (2005).

When the administration of Lyndon Johnson embarked on the Vietnam War a few years later, a seemingly thorough engagement of the bureaucracy lay behind the decision. But in fact the most important decisions about the war were reached in a very small circle of Johnson and his senior advisers, especially in a weekly gathering known as the Tuesday lunch.<sup>2</sup> The circle exemplified groupthink, in which the very mutual respect that keeps the group cohesive inhibits the questioning of assumptions underlying decisions the group makes.<sup>3</sup> With the Vietnam War the principal unquestioned, and incorrect, assumptions were that the fall of Vietnam to communists would lead to a series of other dominoes falling, and that a withdrawal of the United States from its Vietnam commitment would severely damage U.S. credibility.

The extreme case of a major policy decision being reached through a deficient process was the invasion of Iraq in 2003, which did not result from any policy process at all.<sup>4</sup> There was no meeting, no options paper, and no other forum within the executive branch to provide input to the presidential decision to launch the war. Many meetings addressed the mustering of public support for the war and some addressed the execution of the decision, but none considered whether the war was a good idea in the first place.

Presidents get the kind of policy process they want (if they want one at all). The thorough and orderly consideration of policy options within the executive branch has to result from directions from the Chief Executive much more than from statutes. Significant departures related to national security, however, must involve Congress as well. The most significant departures involve the use of military force. As the Vietnam and Iraq examples indicate, such departures also have involved some of the greatest deficiencies in policy deliberations.

The role of Congress in decisions to use military force has been, since the slide into disuse of the constitutional power to declare war, a

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2. See generally HENRY F. GRAFF, *THE TUESDAY CABINET: DELIBERATION AND DECISION ON PEACE AND WAR UNDER LYNDON B. JOHNSON* (1970) (describing the composition and function of President Johnson's Tuesday Cabinet during major events of the Vietnam War).

3. See IRVING JANIS, *GROUPTHINK: PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES OF POLICY DECISIONS AND FIASCOES* 101 (2d ed. 1983).

4. With regard to President George W. Bush's Post-9/11 foreign policy, former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage opined, "There was never any policy process to break, by [then national security advisor] Condi [Rice] or anyone else. There was never one from the start. Bush didn't want one for whatever reason. One was never started." RON SUSKIND, *THE ONE PERCENT DOCTRINE: DEEP INSIDE AMERICA'S PURSUIT OF ITS ENEMIES SINCE 9/11*, at 225 (2006).

recurring and unresolved issue. The most significant attempt to resolve it was the passage in 1973 of the War Powers Resolution, which restricts how long the president can commit U.S. forces to armed action without explicit authorization by Congress.<sup>5</sup> The resolution, which was enacted over a veto by President Richard Nixon, has had a troubled history amid questions about its constitutionality. For the purpose of encouraging more orderly and thorough policy deliberations, however, the question of distribution of war-making powers between the executive and legislative branches does not have to be attacked as directly as the authors of the War Powers Resolution attempted to do. Congress should be regarded less as a constraint on presidential powers than as a vehicle for insisting on more careful thinking about exercise of those powers.

A promising way of fostering that congressional role would be a modified version of a draft statute proposed by the War Powers Commission, an unofficial body convened by the Miller Center at the University of Virginia and co-chaired by two former Secretaries of State, James A. Baker III and Warren Christopher.<sup>6</sup> The proposal would not significantly reduce the ability of the President to employ armed force even if a majority in Congress disagreed. But if U.S. forces were to engage in any “significant armed conflict” the President would be required to consult with a Joint Congressional Consultation Committee comprising the party leaders in both houses and the chairmen and ranking members of relevant standing and select committees.<sup>7</sup> Before approving entry into combat, the President would have to submit a classified written report addressing “the circumstances necessitating the significant armed conflict, the objectives, and the scope and duration of the conflict.”<sup>8</sup>

A useful modification to the proposal would be to require even more analysis and justification in the President’s report. The report should identify the specific U.S. interests at stake, describe the different options for dealing with the situation, explain why the option using armed force was chosen, specify all the assumptions underlying the analysis, identify the risks, and estimate the costs. A further modification would be to require an unclassified version of the report as an input to public debate.

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5. 50 U.S.C. §§ 1541–48 (2006).

6. See JAMES A. BAKER ET AL., NATIONAL WAR POWERS COMMISSION REPORT 44–48 (2008).

7. *Id.* at 46.

8. *Id.*

Such requirements would not guarantee a thorough policy process, but they would lessen the chance that the most glaring deficiencies of the past would recur in the future. Merely having to address certain questions would force them to the surface in discussions in the executive branch. And Congress would be a more meaningful participant than it was in the cursory considerations that led to passage of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964 and the resolution thirty-eight years later authorizing the Iraq War.

6. WHAT CHANGE BY EXECUTIVE ORDER IS MOST NECESSARY FOR AMERICAN NATIONAL SECURITY?

The objective addressed in the previous question—more thorough deliberation on major questions of national security policy—can be further pursued by institutionalizing appropriate procedures within the executive branch. Proposing an executive order along this line is admittedly a bit circular because the Presidents most likely to sign such an order would be the ones who least need it, being already attuned to the importance of policymaking rigor. But institutionalization even of habits exhibited by the person at the top can ingrain those habits more deeply and instill them in subordinates.

Perhaps the best model from the past was a National Security Council Planning Board that President Dwight Eisenhower created according to his specifications. Staffed by senior planners from all the relevant departments, the board was charged with debating the costs and benefits of alternative foreign policy strategies.<sup>9</sup> The approach the board embodied reflected the superlative organizational and planning skills Eisenhower himself had displayed during his military career. Unfortunately the subsequent administration of John Kennedy discontinued the board, hoping to make the National Security Council more flexible.

An executive order re-establishing such a planning board could add some embellishments. In particular, the board's analysis could be required to address not only direct costs and benefits but also trade-offs with interests other than those directly involving national security. A recent example of this sort of trade-off arose with the Obama administration's response to the attempted terrorist bombing of an airliner bound for Detroit in December 2009. In a directive that showed the difficulty of coming up with new ideas that could be

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9. Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Long Haul: Fighting and Funding America's Next Wars*, FOREIGN AFF., July–Aug. 2007, at 140, 146.

described as corrective steps, the most significant measure the President announced was a review of criteria for listing people to be subject to special security scrutiny when they fly or to be denied a seat altogether.<sup>10</sup> This is appropriately a matter for the President (and for Congress), and not just for intelligence or security agencies. It is an issue of how much security Americans want to buy at the price of reduced privacy and increased inconvenience while traveling. It is the kind of weighing of different considerations in the public interest that a sound institutionalized policymaking procedure would ensure.

7. HOW DO THE ABUSES OF CIVIL LIBERTIES UNDER THE GEORGE W. BUSH ADMINISTRATION COMPARE TO THE INTERNMENTS OF JAPANESE ALIENS AND JAPANESE-AMERICANS DURING WORLD WAR II?

The public sense of what constitutes an abuse varies with the prevailing political and social climate. Standards change, sometimes dramatically and within a remarkably short span of time. The standards that underlay public acceptance of the forced relocation of American citizens during World War II merely because of their ethnic background now seem remote, unfamiliar, and unjustifiable. The remoteness seems all the greater because several decades and a couple of generations have passed since the World War II internments.

Controversial actions the George W. Bush administration took in the name of counterterrorism instead occurred only a few years ago. Views of those actions today, however, also reflect changing standards. Some of the most controversial of the Bush administration's measures, including torture of detainees and warrantless interception of communications of U.S. persons, were branded as abuses and stopped not just because what had been done in secret later became public knowledge. Such actions were first taken and then ceased because the militant public mood in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attack—which tolerated or even demanded a very broad interpretation of what the government ought to do in the name of national security—evolved into something less militant as time went by without another major terrorist attack on U.S. soil.

We need to bear in mind such changing of standards as we pronounce judgment on abuses, or what we choose to characterize as

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10. See *Presidential Memorandum Regarding 12/25/2009 Attempted Terrorist Attack*, Jan. 7, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/presidential-memorandum-regarding-12252009-attempted-terrorist-attack>.

abuses. Evaluation of any action, and assessment of the seriousness of any abuse, can be performed according to the standards that prevailed at the time the action was taken, or according to current standards. The natural tendency is to use current standards, and such use might be justified on grounds that current standards represent moral growth and maturity beyond what came before. This is how the great majority of America would today look back on the World War II internments. Almost no one now tries to justify them, and they are widely regarded as among the blackest marks in American history. If we are to use current standards, however, we must realize that those standards also will probably be replaced by something else in the future. Moreover, the evolution of standards is not always one-way moral growth. Sometimes it is more the swinging of a pendulum, with future changes entailing a reversion to earlier perspectives.

A related question is whether standards *should* change. An argument in favor of the proposition that they should is that security challenges and dangers change, and thus the criteria for selecting measures to meet those challenges and dangers need to change with them. An opposing view is that fixed principles are required to avoid boundless moral relativism.<sup>11</sup>

Moral philosophers have argued about such questions for centuries and will continue to do so, but some more specific observations can be made about domestic security that relate more directly to the cases at hand, especially the Bush administration's counterterrorist measures. Despite the common tendency for public discourse about counterterrorism to be phrased in absolute terms, with talk about doing whatever it takes to keep the American people safe, the real policy issues do not involve absolutes. Doing as much as possible to keep Americans safe from terrorism would involve turning the United States into a tightly controlled police state, which no American wants. The issues instead are questions of how much security Americans collectively want to buy at the price of how much reduction in privacy or civil liberty or increase in inconvenience. Curtailing civil liberties is not necessarily an abuse if—perhaps a big “if” in the case of some of the Bush administration's actions—the curtailment is in line with the public preference of where to strike the security-vs.-liberty balance.

Another consideration relevant to both cases is whether the climate of opinion, which sets the standards of what does or does not

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11. A leading example of the latter viewpoint as applied to actions during war is found in MICHAEL WALZER, *JUST AND UNJUST WARS: A MORAL ARGUMENT WITH HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATIONS* (1977).



constitute an abuse, reflects the need to meet actual security challenges, or instead reflects something less defensible. The internment of the Japanese-Americans is worthy of condemnation partly because the action was motivated not solely by a desire to reduce the danger of Japanese sabotage but also by ethnic prejudice.

In subsequent decades, American attitudes toward terrorism, and by implication of measures taken to counter terrorism, have fluctuated markedly for reasons other than the actual severity of the terrorist threat. In the mid-1970s, for example, terrorism within the United States was far more frequent and extensive than it has been in the years since 9/11. Attacks ranged from car bombs on the streets of Washington to the bombing of railroad stations in New York, committed by perpetrators ranging from leftist radicals to Puerto Rican nationalists. And yet there was no “War on Terror” and no public acceptance of—much less a demand for—intrusive new security measures to curb the terrorism. This was because the prevailing political mood among Americans at the time, having just come off the Vietnam War and the Watergate affair, favored the curbing rather than the expansion of governmental powers.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the sudden and drastic increase in American public acceptance of a host of new security measures in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attack in September 2001 did not reflect any actual change in the threat—only a change in public fears. Such measures were no more useful in countering terrorism on September 12 than they would have been on September 10.

To the extent that the Bush administration was responding to this sea change in the public mood, one could say that some of what later came to be regarded as abuses was an excusable implementation of the alteration the American public was demanding in the security-vs.-civil liberties balance. The excuse wore thin as the shock of 9/11 wore off and the public mood became more one of the administration’s own making. The administration had other reasons to foster a climate of fear, including an ideologically-based desire to assert executive power and especially the selling of an offensive war in Iraq conducted under the label of “War on Terror.”

Several other criteria are relevant to assessing the seriousness of abuses. One is transparency: the extent to which the public (or congressional overseers) know what’s going on. This was not an issue

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12. See PHILIP JENKINS, *IMAGES OF TERROR: WHAT WE CAN AND CAN’T KNOW ABOUT TERRORISM* 31–66 (2003).

with the World War II internments, which were public knowledge. It was, however, an issue with some of the Bush administration's initiatives, some of which may have been briefed to the overseers in cursory or incomplete fashion.

Another criterion is whether controversial measures are necessary to achieve their stated goal or whether other, less intrusive or otherwise less extreme, means are available to accomplish the same purpose. The internments are all the more inexcusable to the extent that other means of preventing potential Japanese sabotage or espionage within the United States had not been fully utilized. The one action by the Bush administration for which this criterion is most relevant was the interception of communications involving U.S. persons without obtaining a warrant under the procedures of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). The key issue was not the usefulness of the intercepted communications but instead whether the effectiveness of the intelligence collection operations would have been impaired in any way by following the FISA procedures. Given the FISA court's record of approving nearly every past request, it is difficult to see how it would have been.

Yet another criterion is effectiveness: how well the measure in question advances its stated goal. Possibly the internments impaired Japanese subversion, but this would be a difficult case to make. The Bush administration's action that most acutely raised the question of effectiveness was the torture of terrorist suspects. The proven instances of detainees providing bad information and saying what they believed their tormentors wanted to hear makes torture an ineffective measure even if it did not have to be balanced against the inhumanity of the practice.<sup>13</sup>

A single weighing of the World War II internments and some of the counterterrorist practices of the Bush administration is not feasible. The internment camps represented a gross deprivation of civil liberty for many innocent people, although not inhumane treatment. Some of the Bush-era practices involved very mild infringements on the privacy of undetermined numbers of people, most of whom were innocent, and in the case of torture, inhumane treatment of small numbers of people, most of whom probably were guilty. The term abuse is appropriately applied to each, but it is a comparison of apples and oranges.

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13. Paul R. Pillar, *No Torture. No Exceptions*, WASH. MONTHLY, Jan.–Mar. 2008, at 41.

## 8. DOES AL QAEDA POSE AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES?

Of course al Qaeda does not pose an existential threat to the United States, or anything close to such a threat. It is preposterous to think that a small terrorist group could threaten the existence of the most powerful nation on the planet, which is far above any other nation in economic or military strength, steeled through more than two centuries of challenge and growth, and one of the most firmly established representative democracies ever. Al Qaeda was nowhere close to being an existential threat even at the apogee of its own strength, about the time of the 9/11 attack. Even 9/11, the most spectacular, off-the-charts terrorist attack in modern history in terms of both the death toll and its political and psychological impact, did not come close to endangering the foundations and vitality of the United States.

Al Qaeda is farther still from being such a threat now, after nine years in which it has suffered more pressure and setbacks than growth. Al Qaeda—meaning the group led by Osama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri and mostly holed up in the hinterland of South Asia—now comprises only a segment of the larger radical, Sunni, violence-prone Islamist movement, to which the label “al Qaeda” sometimes is loosely and misleadingly applied. Even the movement as a whole does not come anywhere close to constituting an existential threat to the United States. The extent of its capabilities to harm the United States is illustrated more by the highly publicized incident in December 2009 in which a Nigerian backed by the group calling itself al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula unsuccessfully attempted to detonate explosive underwear on a flight to Detroit.

Such operational ineffectiveness on the part of terrorists, and the absence of any significant terrorist attack on the U.S. homeland in nearly a decade, does not reassure those who point to al Qaeda’s proven interest in acquiring what are usually labeled weapons of mass destruction, and to the specter that someday it might acquire such weapons. The possibility of terrorists acquiring or fabricating a nuclear fission device is the specific specter most frequently invoked.<sup>14</sup> Nuclear terrorism has become the *de rigueur* response, by politicians and others, to the question of what is the greatest security threat facing the United States. Moving beyond required mantras to more

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14. See, e.g., GRAHAM T. ALLISON, NUCLEAR TERRORISM: THE ULTIMATE PREVENTABLE CATASTROPHE (2005).

careful analysis, however, shows the likelihood of this threat materializing, at the hands of al Qaeda or any other terrorist group, to be extremely small.<sup>15</sup> And to speak directly to the question of existential threats, even if this particular threat were to materialize it would not endanger the existence—or destroy the economy or social fabric—of the United States, any more than the detonation of nuclear bombs over two Japanese cities in 1945 had that effect on Japan.<sup>16</sup>

The posing of the question about al Qaeda as an existential threat points to two other patterns that do not help U.S. security. One is excessive and exaggerated use of the term “existential.” It has become an all-purpose amplifying adjective whose use is divorced from the literal meaning. Truly existential threats are extremely rare. Rome was an existential threat to Carthage in the Third Punic War, for example, in which the Romans followed up their victory by reducing Carthage to rubble and killing or enslaving its citizens. The unhelpful modern use of the term involves countries other than the United States justifying all manner of responses to supposedly “existential” threats. The term ought to be consigned to John-Paul Sartre and those other existentialists who could be found smoking cigarettes in Left Bank cafes.

The other pattern is American overreaction to terrorist threats. Substantially more costs have been incurred and harm has been done by responses to terrorism, or to the fear of it, than by the terrorism itself.<sup>17</sup> Al Qaeda will harm the United States more by provoking such responses than through any physical harm it is able to inflict.

#### 9. WHAT SHOULD THE UNITED STATES DO IF IT CONFIRMS THAT IRAN HAS NUCLEAR WEAPONS?

This question differs somewhat from the most commonly posed question about Iran and nuclear weapons, which is what should be done to prevent Iran from obtaining such weapons. Many of the same considerations apply in answering each question. The principal difference is that if Iran had already established a nuclear weapons

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15. The most thorough and dispassionate recent analysis of the topic is BRIAN MICHAEL JENKINS, *WILL TERRORISTS GO NUCLEAR?* (2008).

16. John Mueller, *Nuclear weapons: president Obama's pledge to rid the world of atomic bombs is a waste of breath. But not for the reasons you might imagine*, FOREIGN POL'Y, Jan.–Feb. 2010, at 38, 40.

17. See JOHN MUELLER, *OVERBLOWN: HOW POLITICIANS AND THE TERRORISM INDUSTRY INFLATE NATIONAL SECURITY THREATS, AND WHY WE BELIEVE THEM* 29–39 (2006).

capability, the danger and thus the folly of striking Iran with military force would be even greater than if Iran had not crossed that threshold.

The costs and risks of trying to use military force to set back an Iranian nuclear weapons capability would be prohibitive in any case, whether or not the threshold had yet been crossed. Such an attack would not eliminate Iran's nuclear weapons capability or the ability to achieve one, given the hiding and dispersal of Iranian nuclear facilities (and any extant weapons) and the fact that much of that capability would reside in human knowledge and expertise. Such an act of war would redouble Iranian determination to achieve (or restore) a nuclear weapons capability. The rest of the Iranian response would be more obviously damaging, including likely military action in the Persian Gulf that would interrupt oil exports and cause oil prices to skyrocket, as well as terrorist attacks against U.S. interests at times and places of Iranian choosing. The political consequences would include boosting the power and standing of hardliners in Tehran and setting back the prospects for favorable political change in Iran.

The United States has had experience in accustoming itself to acquisition of nuclear weapons by feared or hostile states. The first of those was the Soviet Union of Joseph Stalin as the Cold War was getting into high gear. Then there was China, which when it conducted its first nuclear test in 1964 was seen as a radical and unpredictable state and was about to embark on the disorder and revolutionary mania of the Cultural Revolution. After that was Pakistan, with the anxiety surrounding the development of the first "Islamic bomb." All of these we now accept as established nuclear powers despite the earlier fears. In the case of Russia and the Soviet Union, a relationship of nuclear deterrence has remained stable for over sixty years despite conflicts and upheavals that included dissolution of the Soviet Union itself.

There is no reason the same pattern cannot prevail with Iran. If Iran acquires nuclear weapons then the United States should do what it can to foster stable relationships of nuclear deterrence, both between Iran and itself and between Iran and its neighbors in the Middle East. Drawing lessons from the earlier development of stable deterrence with the USSR, this means attention to such things as transparency, confidence-building measures, and encouragement of force structures that do not favor a first strike.

There is little else the United States would need to change in its

policies toward the Persian Gulf region, because a nuclear weapons capability would change little in Iran's regional policies. Iran already has conventional military superiority over its Arab neighbors on the other side of the Gulf, and it is difficult to envision how a threat to employ nuclear weapons would figure into those relationships. Not being suicidal, Iranian leaders would have no incentive to do anything else with those weapons that would bring ruin down on themselves. The principles of deterrence are not repealed even when one of the parties to a deterrent relationship wears a beard and turban.

10. WHEN WILL THE UNITED STATES CEASE TO BE THE WORLD'S  
NUMBER-ONE POWER?

It is impossible to apply a timetable to the rise or decline of any power. This is partly because of the uncertainties facing any such prognostication that looks out more than a few years, and partly because of the different scales of economic, military, and other forms of power one could apply to such rankings. Two general observations can be made, however, about the standing of the United States over the next several years. The first is that the United States is so far ahead of the pack on most conventional measures of national power that it will not be eclipsed any time soon.<sup>18</sup> The second is that the conventional wisdom about other rising powers such as China and India has become so conventional that it tends to overlook some factors that, upon closer examination, will tend to work in favor of the United States. One such factor is the aging of populations, which will affect the United States less severely than most other major powers.<sup>19</sup>

But what does—or should—"number one" mean? Traditional measures of hard power such as military might or economic strength are not the only ways to assess the stature or standing of nation states. In addition there is "soft power"—the cultural and other bases for influence and attraction that also have served the United States well.<sup>20</sup> Soft power is in many ways more perishable than the hard variety,

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18. See William C. Wohlforth, *The Stability of a Unipolar World*, INT'L SECURITY, Summer 1999, at 5, 7. ("The United States is the first leading state in modern international history with decisive preponderance in *all* the underlying components of power: economic, military, technological, and geopolitical. To describe this unprecedented quantitative and qualitative concentration of power as an evanescent 'moment' is profoundly mistaken.") (emphasis in original).

19. See Mark L. Haas, *A Geriatric Peace? The Future of U.S. Power in a World of Aging Populations*, INT'L SECURITY, Summer 2007, at 112, 112–13.

20. See JOSEPH S. NYE, JR., *SOFT POWER: THE MEANS TO SUCCESS IN WORLD POLITICS*, at x (2004).

being subject to diminution merely through the changed attitudes or preferences of others. The importance of what non-Americans think and feel about the United States is further underscored by the ability of other countries, even otherwise weak ones, to resist the United States and limit what it can accomplish overseas. It may be impossible to assemble a coalition strong enough to outweigh the United States according to most of the conventional measures of power, but other states curb the exercise of U.S. power in many less visible ways.<sup>21</sup>

If, and when, the United States loses its preeminent rank will depend in large measure on how the United States uses its power, which is to say on U.S. policies. There are many aspects of this, but two in particular are worthy of note. First, the United States risks losing soft power to the extent it strays from the core values, including those involving human rights and civil liberties, that have set it apart from most other states. Second, although the active exercise of influence overseas is a necessary and appropriate aspect of being a superpower, overplaying one's hand overseas can endanger the very power that makes such playing possible. This is a matter not only of the resource strains from imperial overstretch but also of the resentment and reaction of others.

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21. See STEPHEN M. WALT, *TAMING AMERICAN POWER: THE GLOBAL RESPONSE TO U.S. PRIMACY* 109–79 (2006) (describing a variety of methods states might utilize to oppose U.S. foreign policy that the United States cannot or will not respond to for various reasons).