

Connecting Strategy and Resources in National Security:
10 Recommendations for the Trump Administration

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Connecting strategy and resources is the central tenet of national security strategy. To ensure an ideal balance between the two, a four-step process should be followed:

1. *Strategic Foresight.* Gain an understanding of the long-term trends in global affairs.
2. *Strategy Development.* Use foresight knowledge to prepare for future challenges and to leverage opportunities for national advantages.
3. *Resource Allocation.* Assign resources to different elements of the strategy to achieve desired objectives.
4. *Strategic Review.* Make necessary adjustments to the strategy as changes in future or current events transpire.

This four-step process should be used by the Trump administration when considering how to connect its strategy to resources. Within this framework, ten recommendations can be made.

Strategic Foresight

As the Trump Administration undertakes its first year in office, it will be faced with many pressing global crises, and also some important opportunities, many of which are predictable and many of which are still unknown. More than likely, President Trump will be tested early in 2017, perhaps by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un conducting an ICBM test, perhaps by Chinese President Xi Jinping accelerating military construction in the South China Sea, or perhaps (against expectations) by Russian President Vladimir Putin testing the limits of any new U.S.-Russia relationship. At the same time, President Trump will have an opportunity to pressure allies and partners to contribute more to their own security, hopefully while also assuring them of a continued strong U.S. commitment.

President Trump will have an early opportunity to make his mark by making changes to the departmental budget proposals he has inherited from the Obama Administration. In addition to seeking increased defense budgets and an end to sequestration, the Trump Administration will want to show that it is serious about other expressed priorities, such as cyber security and improving our defenses against such things as the recent Russian activity. Getting these new initiatives shaped and supported in Congress (along with any early moves to save money through efficiency efforts including reductions in the civilian work force) will also take substantial effort and senior-level attention.

During this first year, the White House and National Security Staff will be fully staffed, though still on a steep learning curve. Meanwhile, many top positions in State, Defense, Homeland Security, and other agencies will remain unfilled well into 2017 as the confirmation process chugs along.

In this context of pressing crises and big dollar decisions amidst potentially under-staffed departments, any new administration could be forgiven for focusing on just getting by – with perhaps a few international initiatives thrown in to show that the new team can play offense as well as defense. This would be a major mistake.

Recommendation 1. Even in the context of a chaotic world – indeed particularly in the context of a chaotic world – senior members of the new Administration including the President himself should carve out time early on to sharpen their insights regarding the future security environment including long-term trends and potential levers for U.S. policy. A well-structured strategic foresight effort will help the team develop better strategy, allocate resources more strategically, and establish explicit indicators of ongoing or pending change in the security environment over time that could merit a major shift in strategy and/or resources.

Strategy Development

In theory, all departmental and agency efforts in national security should flow from the National Security Strategy (NSS). In practice, however, because the NSS is a public document intended for multiple audiences – Congress and the American public, allies and adversaries – rarely if ever has it had the sharp edges needed to truly set priorities. Moreover, no Administration has managed to release a timely NSS to meaningfully shape early initiatives and presidential guidance, or departmental reviews. However, many administrations have defined initial priorities before completing their NSS. For example, the Obama Administration conducted a classified 60-day “National Security Priorities Review” resulting in guidance intended to ensure that departmental strategic reviews were harnessed to the new President’s national security priorities. Administrations of both parties have tried similar approaches with mixed success.

In the case of this particular transition, U.S. allies and adversaries alike – as well as the U.S. government – will be looking especially closely for indications of President Trump’s policy priorities. Some insight may come in the new President’s Inaugural Address. However, there would be significant value in the early release of a document, perhaps accompanied by a Presidential speech, setting forth the Administration’s foreign policy goals and strategy based on the current environment and future projection of global affairs.

Recommendation 2. Within the first two months of taking office, President Trump should articulate his national security priorities to his Administration in a classified document. (At least some elements of such guidance, e.g., relating to priority intelligence operations, must be classified to meaningfully convey them.) While a formal 60-day interagency review may not be necessary, the President should give an opportunity for his new national security cabinet members to weigh in. In parallel with issuing classified guidance, the President should articulate publicly his broad priorities. Such a public statement will set the course for engagement with Congress, build support among the U.S. public, signal adversaries and allies, and allow rapid and clear communication throughout the U.S. government.

One of the most valuable resources available to the new Administration – perhaps the most valuable – is the President’s time. Moreover, domestic and international audiences will rightly judge a new President’s national security priorities in part based on where he travels first, and whom he invites first to the White House.

Recommendation 3. The President’s first overseas trip, and first international leader visit to the White House, should be carefully selected to send a message both domestically and overseas regarding the President’s priorities. As a general matter, the President should meet with (whether in Washington or on foreign trips) key friends and allies in a region before meeting with potential adversaries. Our friends and allies are looking for such reassurance, and it will give the new President leverage before approaching potential adversaries. Rough order of sequence: Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.

For all of its limitations, a new Administration’s first National Security Strategy (NSS) is an opportunity to outline its vision for a number of key audiences, including the rest of the government, the Congress and the American people, allies, partners, and adversaries around the world. Delineating this thinking in a clear, concise document like the NSS can reinforce and elaborate guidance for agencies and departments to ensure they are effectively implementing the President’s priorities.

One early and top priority for the new Administration, therefore, should be to release a pithy and clear NSS well before the end of 2017, with mid-2017 being optimal. The dialogue that should occur across the Executive Branch to develop this NSS will help shape the final document and also ensure senior officials understand the President’s vision when building their own strategies.

Recommendation 4. Building from the early guidance on strategic priorities, the new administration should publish a new NSS before the end of 2017, with mid-2017 being optimal. This new strategy should then explicitly drive the conduct of major departmental reviews, and the revision of existing high level planning guidance.

Every new Administration inherits a set of policies and guidance documents from its predecessor. It is through these documents that priorities are conveyed. Some of these documents are Congressionally-required, including the President’s NSS and the Defense Department’s National Defense Strategy (formerly known as the Quadrennial Defense Review). Other similar efforts, such as the Trump Administration’s planned cyber review, occur at the discretion of the President or other senior Administration officials.

There are also a few strategic reviews that the new Administration will want to conduct where the need to act quickly must be balanced with setting a sustainable course toward success. Re-looking U.S. policy toward North Korea should be on that list. Pyongyang’s growing nuclear arsenal coupled with the regime’s irresponsible behavior underscore the need to re-assess the impact of U.S. and allies’ and partners’ policies over the last two

and a half decades. Initiating a broad look at this top national security challenge will enable the new Administration to examine carefully how it wants to approach it. For example, it may choose to elevate capability investments that counter North Korea's nuclear, ballistic, or cruise missiles; it may want to enhance deterrence on the peninsula and in the region; and/or it may decide to deepen engagement with East Asian countries—particularly China—to more effectively pressure Pyongyang and plan for a post-Kim Jong Un regime.

Another topic ripe for a strategic review is U.S. policy toward China. For some, China is a trader or a lender; for others, China is an increasingly capable military power threatening regional allies as well as the U.S. ability to project its influence across Asia. At the same time, there are real global security challenges – like North Korea – where the United States will want Chinese cooperation. This complexity underscores the need for a robust review to set U.S. policy under President Trump.

Given the diverse views regarding Russia in the incoming Administration and on Capitol Hill, and the inherent importance of U.S.-Russian relations, a strategic review on U.S. policy towards Russia is likely essential to get players in the administration rowing in the same direction.

Recommendation 5. The Trump Administration should conduct a handful of major strategic interagency reviews. Many of these reviews can be delegated to Departments and reviewed by the White House (e.g., nuclear posture and ballistic missile defense for DoD, global engagement priorities for State). However, a few including cyber, North Korea, China, and Russia are so fundamental to the foreign policy of the Administration that they should be at least coordinated by the National Security Council (or for cyber, the Homeland Security Council).

Resource Allocation

Armed with a clear sense of the President's national security priorities, Department and Agency heads should be directed to develop budgetary (and other) initiatives consistent with a post-sequestration environment. Encouraging such initiatives early on will send a signal also that the President intends to delegate more decision-making authority away from the White House. For the Department of Defense, such initiatives might include reasonable paths to growing each of the Military Services as the President-elect has already announced, and new efficiency moves to reduce institutional support costs.

Recommendation 6. Solicit budget proposals and other initiatives from departments and agencies that support the President's national security priorities.

The new White House will face early important choices regarding how to structure the intelligence community to best support the new administration. The community has already been through considerable reorganization and change over the last decade, and this needs to be kept in mind.

Recommendation 7. Give particular consideration to how to sustain and empower the Intelligence Community (IC). Given recent reorganizations undertaken in the IC, our recommendation would be to go slowly and prepare the ground before undertaking the major changes that the administration may conclude are required.

Last, but certainly not least, in order for new spending and cost-cutting initiatives to succeed, the new Administration will of course need to work closely with the Republican Congress. Early outreach, and the establishment of good working relationships, will be crucial for near-term initiatives as well as the coming years.

Recommendation 8. Establish good working relations with Congress early, and work to maintain them.

Strategic Review

Setting the guiding vision for an Administration is the first big hurdle. Implementing it is just as significant, if not more so. Guidance documents like the NSS, among others, are often critiqued for being “glossy” and sitting on a shelf soon after their completion. Although it may seem counterintuitive that an administration intending to shift power from the White House to Departments should conduct a centralized review of how (and how well, and how rapidly) Presidential priorities are being pursued, in fact such follow-up is essential. Advancing the President’s national security priorities are the “bottom line” requirements for Department leaders, and while progress and success cannot be measured in dollars, they can and should be otherwise assessed.

Reviews of strategies in execution tend to occur either when there are obviously changed circumstances or overwhelming (and often public) signs of failure. For the President’s top priority areas, the new Administration would be wise to facilitate mid-course corrections by conducting periodic and clear-eyed assessments of whether the implementation and execution of the strategy is producing the intended effects on the ground and progress toward achieving the objective of the strategy.

Two key steps by the new Administration can help ensure its vision is effectively implemented across the Executive Branch.

First, the President’s priorities must be tied directly to resources. Failing to do so will severely limit the realization of his vision across the government. One approach would be for OMB to have a checklist of the President’s top 5-10 priorities as outlined in the NSS and then scrub draft budget submissions to ensure they align with the intent of these ideas. In addition, a small group on the National Security Council staff could review the allocation not only of financial resources but also the engagement of top diplomats, diplomatic initiatives, development priorities, and major changes in military force posture.

Recommendation 9. The President should establish a White House-led review process involving a small number of OMB and NSC staff to assess the allocation

of resources and substantive progress toward meeting his national security priorities, and to recommend when course corrections may be needed.

Second, the Administration must find a way to deliberately and periodically assess its strategy and how resources are aligned against it – as well as to make adjustments to account for unexpected international developments. There are a number of ways to structure this assessment. One approach would be to bi-annually hold a Deputies-level and Principals-level dialogue on strategy efficacy to date, and task the intelligence community to identify how key adversaries and allies have responded to U.S. policy since the initial strategy was set. Another way would be to gather senior officials from each Department to hold their own discussion on the strategy’s impact so far, and then to bring those findings together at the national level. No matter what, a forcing function that will enable the senior Administration officials to step back and evaluate the impact of their policies to date is critical to ensuring smart strategy implementation.

Recommendation 10. In addition to ongoing staff reviews, the Trump Administration should conduct periodic senior-level (Deputy or Principal) reviews of resource allocation relating to, and progress toward, key Presidential priorities. Adjustments will likely be needed over time due to changed circumstances; such adjustments are not a sign of failed strategies but a sign of strategies being given improved prospects to succeed.

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