We have witnessed a number of significant challenges to international security in recent years. Some crises have arisen so quickly and with so little warning that national security professionals have had difficulty responding in ways that maintain strategic balance. Other challenges have emerged so slowly and over such a vast scale that near-term options appear limited. How to determine in real time what is a tectonic shift and what is merely a low-magnitude tremor? How to anticipate events and set clear policy goals at a time of such dynamism?

A factor often overlooked in efforts to forecast what is happening “over there” is the effect of what is happening here. CSIS carried out a study for the National Intelligence Council in 2010 looking at foreign assessments of U.S. power. The study demonstrated that while countries see the U.S. position declining relative to rising powers like China, most see the current international order as durable so long as the United States continues to play its traditional leadership role. In fact, foreign expectations of U.S. power remain great and are increasing despite our economic troubles. The

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long-term worry in Europe, Asia, and the Gulf is not over U.S. capacity, but U.S. resolve.

In this context, the most important effect of killing Osama bin Laden may be the signal it sends to allies and enemies alike about the continuing ability of the United States to achieve its stated national security objectives. The lasting misfortune of the past decade of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan has been the impression overseas—rightly or wrongly—that the United States has failed to bend the environment to our stated vision. Washington needs to signal strength, particularly in a time of uncertainty.

This small volume is an effort to capture CSIS’s collective wisdom of the changing international security picture at this moment of great fluctuation. Authors were asked to write short essays on topics of their choosing that could speak to the newly emerging security landscape from a national, economic, regional, and global perspective.

Part I, “National Security in an Era of Contested Primacy,” begins with John Hamre’s vision of how to preserve U.S. power, and transitions to perhaps the biggest challenge facing our national security establishment today: David Berteau’s analysis of how to reduce U.S. defense budgets without jeopardizing security. This challenge is only heightened by deep cuts under way by traditional allies in Europe, a troubling picture illustrated by Heather Conley and Tim Adams. Maren Leed and Nate Freier question the assumption that defense cuts ought to fall disproportionately on U.S. ground forces, despite the conventional wisdom that the United States will not engage in anything like the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan again anytime soon.

Victor Cha reminds us that the possibility of a North Korea collapse may be the most likely large-scale crisis President Obama faces in the years ahead. Avoiding conflict in the event of such a collapse depends first and foremost on cooperation with Beijing. Bonnie Glaser gives us the state of play on U.S.-Chinese military relations. Over the long term, military competition between the United States and China may depend ultimately on technological advancement. As Jim Lewis writes in his concluding essay on advances in U.S. military technology, “power is now determined by the ability to innovate and grow more than it is by the size of a nation’s military force. Technology offers harsh choices—our choice now is advance or decline.”

Part II, “Economic Security Three Years after the Financial Crisis,” picks up on this theme of strategic competition with China, a unique occurrence in world affairs given the deep level of economic integration between our two nations. Ernie Bower begins by explaining that a fierce economic competition is under way in Asia, and the United States loses ground every day we are preoccupied elsewhere. Meredith Broadbent deepens the sense that the United
States has been largely absent in the competition for global trade. Charles Freeman, Karl Inderfurth, Steve Johnson, and Stephen Flanagan turn to our main competitors with a discussion of how China, India, Brazil, and Turkey have used the financial crisis as an opportunity not only to develop internally but to assert themselves geopolitically. Richard Jackson explains how demographics are likely to accelerate these trends.

Frank Verrastro then takes us through the newly emerging energy landscape. As population grows in Asia, energy demand patterns shift dramatically, creating new alignments and rules of the road. Sarah Ladislaw provides a look at one piece of this: how emerging economies are driving private sector growth in clean energy technologies. Dan Runde and Johanna Nesseth conclude this section with essays on the growing private sector role in development given the reality of decreasing foreign assistance budgets, as well as what we can do about global food supplies to prevent political instability.

Part III, “Regional Security after the Arab Spring,” looks at how the Arab uprisings are likely to shape international security in the years ahead. Jon Alterman makes the case that Egypt must remain at the center of Washington’s focus lest a dangerous void materialize in the region. Clark Murdock, Becca Smith, and Mark Quarterman look at the NATO intervention in Libya from two different perspectives—Murdock and Smith on what it means for U.S. grand strategy, and Quarterman on what Libya tells us about the future of multilateralism.

Haim Malka and Jennifer Cooke look separately at the second-order effects of Libya and the surrounding uprisings elsewhere in North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, both in terms of political stability and the risk of terrorism. Richard Nelson and Tom Sanderson conclude the section with an essay on what bin Laden’s death means for al Qaeda in the region and more broadly at a time when al Qaeda’s ideology has been overshadowed by Arab citizens on the streets.

Finally, Part IV, “Global Security after the Japanese Disaster,” looks at the triple catastrophe that took more than 14,000 lives and costs somewhere between $250 billion to $600 billion. Sharon Squassoni lays out the implications of the Fukushima disaster for nuclear safety and governance worldwide, while David Pumphrey and Jane Nakano argue that Fukushima is unlikely to deter the massive buildup of nuclear power given the rising demand. Mike Green and Nick Szechenyi finish the volume with an introduction to CSIS’s latest initiative: a high-level task force aimed at supporting recovery efforts in Japan. Even in an era of newly evolving security challenges, the United States will have to depend on long-standing allies like Japan, particularly in times of great distress.

In sum, readers will find here recurring tensions between short- and long-term challenges, Asian opportunities and Middle Eastern exigencies, and how governments and the private sector can benefit from technological change without leaving citizens at risk. In this time of uncertainty, the United States must be prepared to balance these tensions skillfully if it wants to maintain its leadership on the world stage.