

Select Upcoming Events

RELOOKING EUROPE: THE ROLE OF LAND FORCES

Monday, March 2, 2015

10:00–11:00 a.m.

CSIS, 1616 Rhode Island Ave., NW

PERSPECTIVES ON EAST ASIA: GENERAL VINCENT K. BROOKS

Wednesday, March 4, 2015

1:30–3:00 p.m.

CSIS, 1616 Rhode Island Ave., NW

MILITARY STRATEGY FORUM: GENERAL JOHN E. HYTEN

Tuesday, March 10, 2015

9:00–10:00 a.m.

CSIS, 1616 Rhode Island Ave., NW

SMART WOMEN, SMART POWER: ANNE-MARIE SLAUGHTER

Tuesday, March 10, 2015

2:30–4:00 p.m.

CSIS, 1616 Rhode Island Ave., NW

MARITIME SECURITY DIALOGUE: A COOPERATIVE STRATEGY FOR 21ST CENTURY SEAPOWERS

Friday, March 13, 2015

11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

CSIS, 1616 Rhode Island Ave., NW

Select Recent Events

GOVERNING URANIUM: FROM PIT TO PORT

Featured the launch of a new, interactive website based on the results of the *Governing Uranium* research project.

SMART WOMEN, SMART POWER: THE FUTURE OF AFGHANISTAN

Featured a conversation with Rula Ghani, the first lady of Afghanistan.

DEBATING USE OF FORCE AGAINST ISIL

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Earlier this month, President Obama proposed an [authorization for the use of military force \(AUMF\)](#) against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). While welcomed as a starting point for discussion on counter-ISIL strategy, the draft text was also met with significant skepticism. Several key elements will define the debate.

First, the proposed AUMF would repeal the 2002 AUMF against the state of Iraq, but it does not mention the 2001 AUMF—the now-controversial authority under which the president has justified military action against ISIL since last summer. [The 2001 language](#), which Congress passed in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and which focuses on entities involved in those attacks, has covered a range of military actions, including operations in Afghanistan, the Caribbean and Central America, the Philippines, and elsewhere. Some politicians view the 2001 AUMF as too open-ended and irrelevant to current counterterrorist campaigns. However, its repeal could leave many ongoing operations without authorization.

Second, the proposed text includes a three-year sunset. Some lawmakers—including Senate Armed Services Committee ranking member Jack Reed (D-RI)—have expressed [concerns](#) with signaling a short-term commitment. That said, without repealing the 2001 AUMF, the limit may have no relevance to continued U.S. military operations against ISIL.

Third, the draft AUMF would prohibit “enduring offensive ground combat operations.” President Obama does not want to commit significant troop numbers, and he presumably means to limit U.S. ground forces to special, rescue, and defensive operations and perhaps to training and advisory efforts in support of partners. However, the phrase itself has no military meaning, and [several lawmakers, including House Speaker John Boehner \(R-OH\) and Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy \(R-CA\), have balked at the idea of limiting military commanders.](#)

Finally, the AUMF debate will certainly shine a spotlight on the nation’s overall counter-ISIL strategy. While several past AUMFs had mentioned broader strategies that included diplomatic, economic, and other efforts, this proposed AUMF is silent on nonmilitary topics. Yet it is clear that bombs and troops are insufficient to combat ISIL, particularly as the group gains traction throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and even parts of the Western world. As the government enters more fully into public debate, Congress and the administration will need to provide carefully considered responses to the full range of difficult questions, from what to do about Iraq as a failed state, Assad’s future in Syria, and the spread of ISIL’s popularity. ■

THE 2015 NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY: LOTS OF WORDS, BUT FAILS TO DELIVER

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Any strategy document, but particularly the National Security Strategy (NSS), should do three things: (1) establish priorities; (2) define the basic strategy for how to accomplish those priorities; and (3) get the national security team on the same script. The 2015 NSS fails on all counts.

In his preface to the NSS, President Obama notes that as powerful as the United States is (and will remain), “our resources and influence are not limitless” and “we have to make hard choices among competing priorities.” Yet there is no evidence of any choices, hard or otherwise, being made in this NSS. While there are seemingly endless streams of “we will ...” and “we will continue to...,” there is no mention in the strategy of what we will stop doing.

And as for how we are going to do all this, the 2015 NSS takes a blanket approach to all problems: the United States will lead the way. The New York Times’s Peter Baker and David Sanger noted that the words “lead,” “leadership,” or some variation thereof were used almost 100 times. However, the document generally fails to explain what leading actually means.

Even in those cases where “leadership” is detailed, the strategy feeds into another problem I call the “word-deed gap.” For instance, President Obama notes in the preface that “we are leading international coalitions to confront the acute challenges posed by aggression, terrorism, and disease” and specifically mentions “leading over 60 partners in a global campaign to degrade and ultimately defeat” the Islamic State (IS). Yet in the same week that the 2015 NSS was released, the State Department acknowledged that the United States has conducted 97 percent of the airstrikes against IS. And, despite all the words in the 2015 NSS, the Islamic State still occupies a land mass as big as Great Britain in what used to be Syria and Iraq.

Finally, this NSS will do little to get the administration as a whole to function as a team. The 2015 NSS reads better than its predecessors, which likely reflects that it was produced by the White House rather than through an extensive interagency process. Such an approach may result in greater readability, but it does not demonstrate a thoughtful strategic planning process aimed at bringing coherence and direction to the national security establishment.

After 40-plus years as a student and practitioner of national security affairs, I can make a judgment about how well a strategy document will function as a strategy. The 2015 National Security Strategy, in my view, flunks the test. We can and must do better. ■

Multimedia



WATCH ISP scholars participate in a press briefing on the president’s budget and its implications for defense

LISTEN to a discussion with Clark Murdock on the new U.S. National Security Strategy.

Congressional Testimony

READ Andrew Hunter’s testimony before the House Committee on Small Business on “Contracting and the Industrial Base.”

READ Ryan Crotty’s testimony before the House Armed Services Committee on “Alternative Budgets and Strategic Choices.”

TRACKING DEFENSE CONTRACTS BY BUDGET ACCOUNT

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For nearly a decade, CSIS has analyzed trends in Department of Defense (DoD) contracting in order to ensure that discussions about the defense industrial base are informed by data rather than anecdote. One notable long-standing gap in the data was the inability to link contract obligations with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) budget data, but starting in 2012, DoD populated the data fields needed to perform that linkage. [The FY2013 edition of the CSIS series of reports on defense contract trends](#) debuted this capability, and with FY2014 data now available, CSIS has a three-year sample with which to analyze contracting trends within the major budget accounts. This data shows that, although sequestration affected budget accounts uniformly, other dynamics led to very different outcomes for contract spending within those budget accounts.

Overall defense-funded contract obligations declined by 22 percent between 2012 and 2014, but that decline was not evenly distributed among budget accounts. Contract obligations funded out of the Military Construction and Military Sales Program accounts declined at nearly twice the rate (40 percent and 39 percent, respectively) as overall defense contract obligations from 2012 to 2014. By contrast, contract obligations funded out of the Procurement account fell at the same rate as overall DoD contracts over the same period (22 percent).

Over that same period, contract obligations funded out of the Operations and Maintenance (O&M) account declined by only 16 percent. This contradicts the conventional wisdom that O&M would be a primary target for savings over the past two years. Similarly, contract obligations funded out of the Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation (RDT&E) account declined by only 19 percent over the 2012–2014 period.

It is important here to understand the difference between the RDT&E budget account and “R&D contracts.” CSIS has previously found that DoD R&D contract obligations declined notably faster than overall DoD contracts in FY2013. But not all contracts funded out of RDT&E are what would be considered “R&D contracts,” and not all R&D contracts are funded out of RDT&E. Only 70 percent of what CSIS considers to be “R&D contracts” are funded out of RDT&E (with most of the rest evenly split between Procurement and O&M), while only 51 percent of contracts funded out of the RDT&E account are for what CSIS considers R&D.

Overall, contracts funded out of the Military Construction and Military Sales program accounts have taken disproportionate cuts over the last two years, while Procurement has declined in parallel with overall defense contracts, and O&M and RDT&E were relatively spared. CSIS hopes to explore these issues more thoroughly in the months ahead. ■

Media Highlights

“He will always provide his honest and unflinching counsel to the president and will advocate for the chiefs and the chairman to do the same.”

—Kathleen Hicks to *Politico* on what to expect from Ashton Carter as secretary of defense.

“Acting on what I think seems to be a broad consensus in both chambers and the executive that defense spending as it has been in the last couple of years is too low.”

—Ryan Crotty to *Voice of America* on the 2016 defense budget proposal correcting for a few years of insufficient funding.

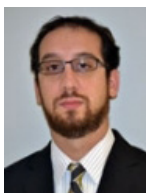
“I think at the end of the day, we will end up with an authorization for the use of military force, but it’s going to look very different from what the President proposed.”

—Stephanie Sanok Kostro to *USA Today* on proposed legislation to combat ISIS.

OVERAMBITIOUS IN AFGHANISTAN: THE TALE OF THE DOORKNOB

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All seen the examples—\$468 million spent on C-27 transport aircraft that were [rarely used and eventually cut up into scrap metal](#), \$60 million spent on [half-completed hospitals](#), \$500 million spent on [a perpetually almost-finished hydroelectric dam](#). The list goes on and on. We've also seen the usual explanations: corruption, bureaucracy, bad metrics, little oversight, poor communication, or good old-fashioned fraud. To this list of (not-inaccurate) explanations for failure, I'd like to add the Tale of the Doorknob:

In 2011, I met a USAID engineer in Kabul who told me a frightening tale that cuts to the heart of our failures in Afghanistan. He had been charged with building a police station in northeast Afghanistan—one of the least-developed regions in one of the least-developed nations on earth. The police station was (foolishly) built to American standards, complete with a modern fire-suppression system and a two-story atrium. Shortly after the building was completed, the local police chief pulled him aside to explain why the building would likely be abandoned in a few years. "These men are from the Hills," the chief explained, pointing to his employees. "One of them couldn't get into my office for a meeting this morning because he had never seen a doorknob before. How do you expect them to maintain this station?"

The Americans who approved the design of the police station likely could not conceive of an Afghan not knowing how to use a doorknob, let alone how to maintain a modern fire suppression system. The lesson of the doorknob lends itself to other, more expensive and troubling decisions the United States and its NATO allies have made in Afghanistan. For instance, why are we currently wasting huge sums of money and limited Afghan resources training them to fly four (extremely expensive and difficult to fly and maintain, but large and efficient) C-130 transport aircraft, instead of, say, 50 (smaller but cheap, easy, and rugged) Cessnas?

Luckily, as U.S. forces and resources are drawn down in Afghanistan, many of these overambitious plans and projects will likely be scaled back. Resource scarcity may force U.S. planners to shift to the more Afghan-appropriate models that they should have been using all along. But the damage has been done, over and over again. We must only hope that the next time wild-eyed U.S. planners seek to create a "little America" in some other devastated developing nation, the Tale of the Doorknob is remembered and heeded. ■

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Recent Publications

READ "The FY 2016 Budget: The Defense Impact," for analysis by ISP scholars on a wide range of critical budget issues in the president's request.

READ "Balancing Strategy, Resources, and Politics," a commentary by Ryan Crotty and Clark Murdock on the political realities of the tradeoffs required to increase defense spending.

READ "Intelligence Integration and the Syrian CW Threat," by Brian Lessenberry, for an insider's account of the intelligence community's response to Syrian chemical weapons.

READ *The Uncertain Transition from Stability to Peace*, by Robert Lamb, Kathryn Mixon, and Sarah Minot, for a set of case studies on four countries and their attempts to transition from a cycle of violence to stability.

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