CSIS BRIEFS

Getting to Less?

The Progressive Values Strategy

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THE ISSUE

This is the third CSIS Brief in a series called Getting to Less, which explores different philosophies and motivations that could lead to a decreased emphasis on U.S. defense ends, ways, or means. In this brief, the authors explore a defense approach they have labeled the Progressive Values Strategy.[1] The strategy is grounded in a view that the military instrument is not well suited to meeting many of the security challenges facing the United States. Rather than seek military primacy, which only diverts resources and attention from more constructive statecraft solutions, the United States should strive for a level of military sufficiency that deters adventurism by others—as well as itself. The authors explore likely changes that such a strategy might entail. The brief concludes by exploring the risks and opportunities associated with the Progressive Values Strategy.

INTRODUCTION

"Even in a progressive government disinclined to call on the Pentagon to solve problems, the U.S. military will need to be capable of projecting power into key regions, making credible threats, and achieving political objectives with force and minimal casualties if called on to do so. But a force structure sufficient to meet these purposes might be achieved without the endlessly increasing requirements of military superiority." [2]

Discussion of the potential tenets of a progressive national security strategy is well underway in the United States. Detailed exploration of how such a strategy would affect defense activities and direction, however, has only recently begun. The Progressive Values Strategy described here provides an example of how broadly-agreed internationalist progressive principles and values might drive shifts in U.S. defense policy and programs.

PRINCIPLES AND ASSUMPTIONS

The Progressive Values Strategy is rooted in the premise that the structure of the world order is increasingly multipolar. It sees an important role for the United States in helping lead this multipolar international community to create a more peaceful, safe, and prosperous world for all peoples. For the strategy's adherents, the most serious global threats to those interests are climate change, nuclear proliferation, the rise of authoritarianism, and further weaponization of emerging technology. As such, the United States should focus its foreign policy efforts on bilateral and multilateral efforts aimed at reducing these threats. Doing so will require cooperation with many countries, including would-be rivals China and Russia, with the goal of convincing these states of their shared

interest in addressing pressing global challenges. The Progressive Values Strategy demonstrates a willingness to accommodate China's rise and Russia's exercise of influence if they each demonstrate behavior that accords with international rules and norms.

A Progressive Values Strategy views U.S. military power as having relatively limited utility in solving priority national security challenges. Moreover, the quest for military primacy diverts attention and drives unwanted geopolitical dynamics, such as encouraging U.S. adventurism and creating security dilemmas that might spiral into conflict. Strategists view U.S. interest as better served by enhancing other tools of statecraft, especially diplomacy and development.

Rather than seek military superiority, military sufficiency is the applicable frame of the Progressive Values Strategy.[3] Its desired end is allowing the United States to project power into key regions, make credible threats, and achieve political objectives with minimal force and casualties. The strategy places a high premium on ensuring America's approach to military use is, and is perceived to be, just. This emphasis drives a variety of defense choices. Foremost is the strategy's strictures on when to use force or forces in the execution of military missions. The Progressive Values Strategy supports the use of force as an option of last resort and only if authorized by Congress and either the United Nations or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The United States also ends U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria under the Progressive Values Strategy. In addressing the threat of nuclear proliferation, the United States prioritizes working toward "Global Zero"—i.e., the elimination of all nuclear weapons.[4] The United States does this by creating conditions conducive to bilateral and multilateral arms control, and adopts and states its commitment to a nuclear "No First Use" policy.

Sustaining military sufficiency requires the United States to advance research and development on militarily relevant technologies. However, the United States does not pursue any weapons or munitions that are morally suspect or banned by international treaties or other obligations. This includes land mines, cluster munitions, and, when conditions support achieving Global Zero, nuclear weapons. More generally, the Progressive Values Strategy emphasizes that U.S. employment of technology should be carefully calibrated to dissuade the advent of an arms race or dangerous escalation dynamics. These principles suggest caution in the employment of space, cyber, and missile capabilities where such employment is, or could be misperceived as, offensive in nature.

The Progressive Values Strategy seeks a multilateral defense approach to secure common interests. This approach focuses on cooperation among select allies that share democratic values, aimed both at reducing demands on the U.S. defense budget and creating strategic and operational advantages. To advance both of these goals, the United States provides some offensive capabilities to select democratic allies, but it also structures its security cooperation to reduce the risk of unlawful or unintended uses. It does so by making allies reliant on U.S. assistance in areas such as training, maintenance support, and munitions resupply. Moreover, the Progressive Values Strategy stipulates that the United States will, if necessary, track and recover weapons to determine whether end-use agreements and U.S. principles have been violated.

PRIMARY CONTINGENCIES AND MISSIONS

The sizing and shaping of U.S. forces for the Progressive Values Strategy is mostly driven by the need to be ready for the following most stressing combination of contingencies:

- Maintain sufficient assured second-strike capability to deter and respond to nuclear attack against the United States and its treaty allies. The United States will continue to provide an extended nuclear deterrent to its treaty allies.
- In conjunction with key partners and allies, be prepared to deter, defend against, and re-establish deterrence against one significant, all-domain Chinese or Russian military attack on a U.S. treaty ally. Success is measured by the ability to establish peaceful outcomes that uphold principles of international law, balanced against the desire to minimize human suffering. There is no need for combined forces to be capable of reversing such aggression quickly. Non-military tools of coercion, both diplomatic and economic, will play a substantial role in re-establishing deterrence and motivating a political settlement.

At all other times, the United States must ensure its forces are capable of undertaking the following missions, when so authorized by the Congress and in accordance with international law:

- Support efforts to deter coercive use of force, uphold international law and human rights, and conduct noncombatant evacuations, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief.
- Support diplomatic and economic efforts to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

- Support diplomatic and economic efforts to counter terrorism, particularly through selective train, advise, and assist efforts that accord with U.S. human rights vetting laws and U.S. values.
- Support diplomatic and economic efforts to strengthen the capabilities of free and democratic treaty allies and select partners to contribute meaningfully to common defense goals. This includes the ability of these nations to defend themselves

OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS

The Progressive Values Strategy rests on a highly integrated national security enterprise that leverages non-military tools effectively and early to both prevent armed conflict from erupting and reinforce alliance commitments. Its most important operational concepts therefore lie outside the military realm. In preventing escalation, military sufficiency aims to serve as one input for credible deterrence and assurance in a manner that is largely defensive. Deterring and de-escalating in the face of anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) challenges to U.S. treaty obligations and vital interests requires emphasis on denying territory from opposing forces that have initiated armed conflict against these interests. Doing so will also limit damage, such as to civilian populations in accordance with international laws and norms.

Along with resiliency efforts, defense from missile, cyber, and space attacks are critical. Although allies will bear the brunt of direct aggression, the United States will serve in support. The strategy includes some forward forces, largely air and naval, to assist allies' defense, especially through key enablers such as lift, precision-strike, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). Wherever possible, U.S. military forces operate outside of proximity to civilians and emphasize precise application of force on military targets. Under the Progressive Values Strategy, the United States works with allies and other like-minded nations to apply diplomatic and economic tools and, where needed, non-nuclear military capabilities in discrete ways unlikely to escalate conflict. Through these pressures, the United States seeks to convince adversaries to halt hostile activities and negotiate a political settlement consistent with international law.

GLOBAL POSTURE

The Progressive Values Strategy pursues a global military posture that seeks to manifest its orientation toward statecraft, rather than U.S. military power, as the most prominent element of American influence. The bulk of U.S. forces are therefore based in the continental United States, Hawaii, Guam, and Alaska. Because the strategy also prioritizes the seriousness of U.S. security commitments toward allies and helping to lead a just world, the United States maintains some forward-positioned flexible crisis response forces and key enablers in Europe and Asia to help defend against common threats. Additionally, the United States retains prepositioned equipment in Europe, Asia, and the Indian Ocean region for use by crisis response forces as well as potential follow-on forces.

KEY FORCES AND CAPABILITIES

The Progressive Values Strategy's force and capabilities choices fall into three broad categories: nuclear forces and missile defense, conventional and special operations forces, and space and cyber capabilities.

NUCLEAR FORCES AND MISSILE DEFENSE

As part of this strategy's goal of achieving Global Zero, the Progressive Values Strategy extends the New Start Treaty and initiates a new round of U.S.-Russian strategic arms reductions. Of note, the United States signals its willingness to reduce national missile defense systems in exchange for Russian strategic concessions. Assuming a verifiable agreement is reached, a Progressive Values Strategy moves quickly to implement a dyad nuclear force of bombers and ballistic-missile submarines, eliminating the ground-based leg of 400 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and substantially reducing remaining strategic nuclear platforms and warheads compared to the currently planned force. No new non-strategic nuclear weapons are added to the current U.S. inventory, including those contemplated in the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review. Although the extended nuclear deterrent remains, all existing non-strategic nuclear weapons are removed from forward deployment in Europe. The Progressive Values Strategy invests in the minimal nuclear modernization and infrastructure improvements needed to maintain the credibility of its deterrent and to reassure allies in order to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The strategy continues a modestly capable national missile defense system, scaled to the challenge of potential new nuclear adversaries. It reduces planned ground-based midcourse defense interceptors in line with its willingness to remove national missile defense in exchange for Russian concessions in a future U.S.-Russian strategic arms reduction agreement. The strategy also continues some investment in regional integrated air and missile defense systems. Aegis Ashore sites are eliminated to avoid disrupting the military balance, while mobile short-range air defense (M-SHORAD)

is maintained to provide short-range air and missile defense for U.S. forces and installations.

CONVENTIONAL AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

The Progressive Values Strategy's conventional capability is focused on maintaining military sufficiency while pursuing bilateral and multilateral treaties and agreements with both adversaries and allies alike. It aims foremost to ensure a military that enables the United States to assist in defense of allies, back diplomatic efforts with credible military threats, and achieve political objectives with minimal force and casualties. It is a smaller force, with readiness prioritized only for a subset of crisis responders. Modernization is desired to create cost-imposing opportunities to deny potential aggressors' objectives and to reassure allies and partners, balanced against the need to be consistent with U.S. and international laws and limit chances of civilian suffering. Effort is expended mostly in the research and development phase and advanced to production only where vital to the strategy's objectives. All conventional capability investments in the Progressive Values Strategy are assessed with regard to their support to strategic nuclear stability and management of non-nuclear escalation dynamics.

The strategy reduces ground forces with the expectation that only forward-positioned flexible crisis response forces will be routinely present in Europe or Asia. Local allies are assumed to provide the bulk of ground forces and close air support forces for their defense, which includes leadership of theater-level ground command and control. U.S. forces must be able to support local allies with territorial defense and aid with follow-on deterrence phases. Enablers are particularly critical, such as all-domain ISR, lift, and mobility assets, including air-and maritime-delivered precision conventional strike that can be projected in and operate through a denied environment. The United States and its allies must also provide force protection for all U.S. personnel that may engage in operations, as well as for their bases of operation. This requires theater missile defense capabilities that sufficiently pace the challenge posed by expanded missile and unmanned aerial vehicle innovations and technologies without upending strategic nuclear stability.

The United States invests in field artillery, defense-minded electronic warfare, and shore defenses, as well as the ability to build the ground capability of key allies. Both active component and Guard/reserve component Army Infantry Brigade Combat Teams are reduced. The number of Stryker Brigade Combats Teams is only reduced slightly to ensure mobile crisis response forces, while some active Armored Brigade Combat Teams are retained to help allies deter and defend against Russian conventional or nuclear aggression against NATO territory. Several Field Artillery Brigades are shifted from the Guard to the active component to deter and defend against threats and reinforce U.S. commitments. Where possible, support missions are transitioned to automation and unmanned systems in lieu of U.S. personnel, reducing risks to human life. Such substitutions are largely not made, however, for strike missions. The fully planned complement of Security Forces Assistance Brigades is maintained to build partner capacity. As with the Army, the Marine Corps' structure and end strength are reduced, given the strategy's reliance on allied ground forces for crisis response. Special operations forces are reduced but are still expected to participate in selective train, advise, and assist efforts where consistent with U.S. human rights vetting laws and U.S. values.

The Progressive Values Strategy envisions a significantly smaller fleet than what is outlined in the Department of Defense's (DoD) current shipbuilding plan.[5] The cuts largely come in the surface fleet, with reductions in the number of aircraft carriers to provide roughly two carriers at sea: one each from the east and west coasts of the United States. Large and small surface combatants as well as amphibious ships see significant reductions. Notably, while the nuclear-powered attack submarine fleet is maintained, the nuclear-powered, ballistic missile fleet is reduced in alignment with the stated goal of advancing to Global Zero. Investments are also made in medium unmanned surface vehicles to enhance ISR capabilities.

Under the Progressive Values Strategy, the B-1B bomber and reserve component B-52 bombers are eventually retired. Roughly half of the complement of planned B-21 bombers are accepted into the Air Force's inventory to augment the aging B-2 fleet in securing the nuclear deterrent and providing precision-strike in a denied environment. The active component of the aerial refueling fleet is also maintained to ensure that there are sufficient force enablers for both U.S. forces and allies. Both non-stealthy fighters and stealthy fighters are reduced as a reflection of the U.S. pursuit of sufficiency and a defensive orientation.

SPACE AND CYBER CAPABILITIES

Under the Progressive Values Strategy, U.S. capability in space is solely defensive in nature, aimed at protecting critical U.S. space assets and timely and accurate ISR. The risk of escalation through offensive space capabilities necessitates the strategy's careful focus solely on defensive systems. The strategy maintains current space assets while relying on the commercial

sector for the development of wideband and narrowband communications satellites.

In the cyber domain, defensive capabilities are developed and deployed to protect military and critical domestic infrastructure, as assigned by the president. The Progressive Values Strategy allows for limited offensive capabilities aimed at deterrence through active denial but requires an emphasis on controlling escalation dynamics.

INDUSTRIAL BASE AND INSTALLATION IMPLICATIONS

The Progressive Values Strategy's top industrial base priorities are protecting the competitiveness of its defense industrial base, the security of its supply base, and promoting ethics and reducing corruption in the military-industrial complex. For the Progressive Values Strategy, these two priorities are mutually reinforcing. Eliminating the revolving door between government and industry promotes more competition within the defense industry, which in turn reduces corruption within the military-industrial complex and creates greater efficiency.

The Progressive Values Strategy advances these priorities through three related efforts. First, it invests substantial resources to achieve a clean Pentagon audit, in anticipation of identifying potential sources of waste, fraud, or abuse in the Pentagon's budget. Second, the strategy generally prevents further consolidation among major defense manufacturers to limit the industry's market power and promote price competition. Third, the United States prioritizes a U.S.-centric supply chain to protect against foreign competitors and to prevent U.S. military technology from unintended proliferation and use.

On the issue of international defense trade, the Progressive Values Strategy is open to defense trade among democratic allies that occurs on a fair basis and supports alliance interoperability, responsibility sharing, and international norms. Technology controls are relatively strict. For this strategy, supporting and reinforcing international norms are more important than exporting U.S. defense products. For example, the United States might expand the National Technology and Industrial Base to other democratic partners beyond Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom but halt foreign military sales to non-democratic countries to which it currently exports.[6]

Additionally, the DoD seeks to change federal acquisition policies and statutes in pursuit of broader socio-economic goals. Potential examples include, but are not limited to, promoting diverse and underrepresented groups in the awarding of federal contracts, green initiatives, and employment non-discrimination for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer persons. Implementation is sought through new binding rules for all federal contractors, set asides, and shifts in federal contracting spending toward certain areas, such as renewable energy research and development.

The Progressive Values Strategy accepts industrial base risk from reduced exports of weapons systems overseas and reductions in production rates across a range of industry sectors.

Finally, the strategy consolidates basing inside the United States, retaining current state national guard basing structure as a hedge for emergencies.

ASSESSING RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Progressive Values Strategy's geopolitical assumptions bear two primary risks. First, the strategy could overestimate the likelihood that China and Russia will reduce their contestation of U.S. interests and global norms in the presence of a less assertive U.S. military policy and posture. At present, there is significant evidence that Russia and China are pursuing military capability improvements that can threaten the global order. It remains to be seen if a more limited and defensive orientation of the U.S. military would lessen the realization of such threats. Second, the strategy could underestimate the likelihood of armed military threats that jeopardize the interests it espouses, including sovereignty and human rights. History has at times been unkind to liberal democracies that count on the restraint of autocracies. Contemporary examples include Ukraine, which gave up nuclear capability and later suffered an invasion and territorial annexation from Russia, and Hong Kong, which faces existential challenges to the "one country, two systems" promise made by the Chinese Communist Party in 1997.

Another risk could be that allies and partners are less assured by the Progressive Values Strategy than today's strategy. As a result, existing U.S. alliances and international institutions may grow weaker, not stronger. Force sufficiency, after all, is a matter of perception to allies and rivals alike. Conventional cuts imagined in this strategy may make protection of the seas and airspace and the ability to contribute to combined efforts more rhetoric than reality. The reduction in nuclear capability, which no longer supports a continuous at-sea deterrent, may also fail to assure.

However, by reducing the relative emphasis on defense tools, a Progressive Values Strategy may create opportunities for new solutions to these and other challenges. Neither the

Ukraine nor Hong Kong examples have been or likely will be addressed by U.S. military intervention, whereas diplomatic, informational, and economic pressures have been used, and their further use may bear fruit. Insofar as the Progressive Values Strategy creates or expands non-military capabilities that can limit human suffering and still coerce rivals as needed, it incents great powers joining together to solve the global challenges the strategy cares most about.

The Progressive Values Strategy may also create opportunities relative to today in attracting allies and partners to its agenda, sharing security burdens, and underscoring liberal democratic principles. Nevertheless, its intention to rely more on allies to secure their own territory and support common defense objectives bring risk. Although more realpolitik strategies may likewise bear this risk, its effect on the aims of this Progressive Values Strategy is particularly large, insofar as it deems the advancement of international norms and upholding of security commitments to be vital U.S. interests. If such norms are violated and allies are weak, the United States may face increased pressure to intervene militarily than it would today or, as discussed above, risk the loss of allies and partners and the failure to enforce key norms if it does not. An additional risk factor that could unintentionally weaken important alliances, and allies' self-defense capabilities, is the Progressive Values Strategy's significant tightening of technology transfer and arms sales. Although it may reinforce norms around the use of force and protecting civilians, it may drive key market segments away from the United States, limiting the nation's influence in setting global norms for military technology use.

The CSIS study team assesses that its instantiation of a Progressive Values Strategy could generate approximately $760 billion in savings from the DoD's current program of record over a 10-year period (FY 2021-FY 2030), increasing from approximately $20 billion in defense savings in FY 2021 to almost $130 billion per year by FY 2030.[7] The pattern of increasing savings over time results from the compounding savings in Operations and Support (O&S) costs associated with each unit of force structure that is cut. For example, if one unit is cut in FY 2021, the O&S costs associated with that unit continue for each year thereafter. If a second unit is cut the following year, then those O&S savings are additive. This analysis suggests that major savings are unlikely to be realized immediately but rather will come over time. It is also worth considering that while the strategy ostensibly generates savings as compared to the DoD's current program of record, its industrial policy may simultaneously create unintended societal costs to be absorbed, such as if it results in an unmanaged industry shakeout and job losses.

CONCLUSION

The Progressive Values Strategy makes substantial promises about the goals it will advance as well as the defense savings it will achieve. Yet there is significant tension between these promises: advancing capabilities consistent with the strategy's internationalist objectives will require higher defense spending than many of its proponents expect. Regardless, success for the Progressive Values Strategy should not be judged primarily on the basis of projected cost savings but on the viability of its core strategic logic. The Progressive Values Strategy could advantage the United States if it is correct about the nature of the most pressing security challenges and if a more limited and defensive military strategy can both deter adventurism by potential adversaries and help foster global solutions to issues such as climate change.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The Progressive Values Strategy is a creation of the authors for heuristic purposes and does not seek to represent the views of any other single author or work.

[2] Van Jackson, "Toward a Progressive Theory of Security," War on the Rocks, December 6, 2018, https://warontherocks.com/2018/12/toward-a-progressive-theory-of-security/.

[3]Adam Mount, "Principles for a Progressive Defense Policy," *Texas National Security Review*, December 4, 2018, https://tnsr.org/roundtable/policy-roundtable-the-future-of-progressive-foreign-policy/.

[4] For a more comprehensive definition of "Global Zero," see, e.g., "Our Strategy," Global Zero, https://www.globalzero.org/reaching-zero/.

[5] "FY 2020 U.S. Navy 30-Year Shipbuilding Plan," USNI News, March 21, 2019, https://news.usni.org/2019/03/21/fy-2020-u-s-navy-30-year-shipbuilding-plan.

[6] Rhys McCormick et al., *National Technology and Industrial Base Integration: How to Overcome Barriers and Capitalize on Cooperation* (Washington, DC: CSIS, March 2018), p. 51-54, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180307_McCormick_NationalTechnologyAndIndustrialBaseIntegration_Web.pdf.

[7] The cost evaluation that led to these estimates was based on a hypothetical military force structure developed in accordance with the assumptions, missions, and capabilities outlined in the Progressive Values Strategy. The evaluation represents the net change from the current program of record for the DoD from FY 2021-FY 2030. Cuts in force structure were implemented gradually to reflect an orderly stand-down of operational forces. Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) costs were not factored in given the lack of projections in budget justification documents but are expected to decline to $10 billion in total by FY 2024, according to the FY 2020 budget request.