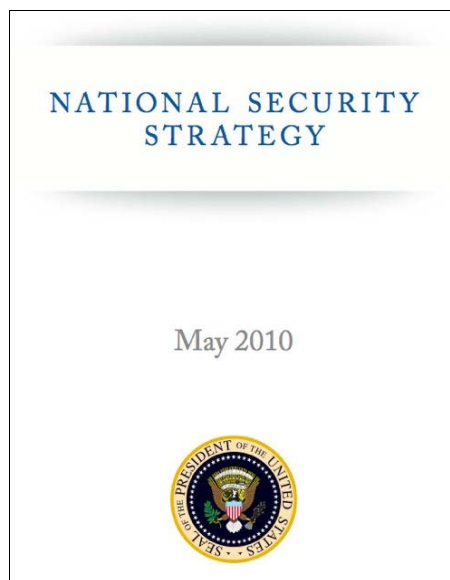


**Armenian Center for National
and International Studies (ACNIS)**

**Summary Overview:
US National Security Strategy
May 2010**



**Richard Giragosian
Director
Armenian Center for National
and International Studies (ACNIS)**

On May 27, 2010, the Obama Administration released its first “National Security Strategy,” a comprehensive articulation of President Obama’s national security strategic approach and priorities. The strategy is “grounded in a pragmatic understanding of our strategic environment - the world as it is; and represents a blueprint for pursuing the world that we seek.” After 16 months in office, President Obama set forth his national security strategy to describe the United States as “hardened by war” and “disciplined by a devastating economic crisis,” and notes that the US focus on counterterrorism efforts “to counter violent extremism” represent “only one element of our strategic environment and cannot define America’s engagement with the world.”

Obama went on to argue that “the gravest danger to the American people and global security continues to come from weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons,” but also recognized the need for greater “cyber-security” and the threats posed by climate change and the American dependence on fossil fuels, which he define as fundamental national security issues.

SUMMARY HIGHLIGHTS

Cooperation & Engagement. The report stresses the need for international cooperation and engagement, stating that the “starting point.....will be our engagement with other countries.....rooted in shared interests and shared values, and which serve our mutual security and the broader security and prosperity of the world.” The report cites the fact that the US is “working to build deeper and more effective partnerships with other key centers of influence—including China, India, and *Russia*, as well as increasingly influential nations such as Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia—so that we can cooperate on issues of bilateral and global concern, with the recognition that power, in an interconnected world, is no longer a zero sum game.”

Recognizing New Global Actors. The report also significantly notes the emergence of new “actors” that “exert power and influence,” citing Europe as “now more united, free, and at peace than ever before” and has “deepened its integration.” It cites the fact that “*Russia* has reemerged in the international arena as a strong voice” and both “China and India—the world’s two most populous nations—are becoming more engaged globally.” The report adds that “international institutions play a critical role in facilitating cooperation, but at times cannot effectively address new threats or seize new opportunities,” and adds that “individuals, corporations, and civil society play an increasingly important role in shaping events around the world.”

Pursuing Constructive Engagement. Boldly stating that “engagement is the active participation of the United States in relationships beyond our borders” and “is, quite simply, the opposite of a self-imposed isolation that denies us the ability to shape outcomes,” the report notes that “America has never succeeded through isolationism.” Specifically, the report argues that the US “must reengage the world on a comprehensive and sustained basis,” adding that the US will “continue to deepen our cooperation with other 21st century centers of influence—including China, India, and *Russia*—on the basis of mutual interests and mutual respect.”

Promoting a “Responsible Iran.” The report also focuses on *Iran*, stating that:

“For decades, the Islamic Republic of Iran has endangered the security of the region and the United States and failed to live up to its international responsibilities. In addition to its illicit nuclear program, it continues to support terrorism, undermine peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and deny its people their universal rights. Many years of refusing to engage Iran failed to reverse these trends; on the contrary, Iran’s behavior became more threatening. Engagement is something we pursue without illusion. It can offer Iran a pathway to a better future, provided Iran’s leaders are prepared to take it. But that better pathway can only be achieved if Iran’s leaders change course, act to restore the confidence of the international community, and fulfill their obligations. The United States seeks a future in which Iran meets its international responsibilities, takes its rightful place in the community of nations, and enjoys the political and economic opportunities that its people deserve. Yet if the Iranian Government continues to refuse to live up to its international obligations, it will face greater isolation.”

Promote Democracy and Human Rights Abroad. The report argues that the US “supports the expansion of democracy and human rights abroad because governments that respect these values are more just, peaceful, and legitimate,” explaining that in terms of fostering “an environment that supports America’s national interests,” it is most effective to foster “political systems that protect universal rights,” which are “ultimately more stable, successful, and secure.” It then argues that “as our history shows, the United States can more effectively forge consensus to

tackle shared challenges when working with governments that reflect the will and respect the rights of their people, rather than just the narrow interests of those in power. To meet these goals, the US is “advancing universal values” by an emphasis on:

Ensuring that New and Fragile Democracies Deliver Tangible Improvements for Their Citizens: The US must support democracy, human rights, and development together, as they are mutually reinforcing. We are working closely with citizens, communities, and political and civil society leaders to strengthen key institutions of democratic accountability—free and fair electoral processes, strong legislatures, civilian control of militaries, honest police forces, independent and fair judiciaries, a free and independent press, a vibrant private sector, and a robust civil society. To do so, we are harnessing our bilateral and multilateral capabilities to help nascent democracies deliver services that respond to the needs and preferences of their citizens, since democracies without development rarely survive.

Practicing Principled Engagement with Non-Democratic Regimes: Even when we are focused on interests such as counterterrorism, nonproliferation, or enhancing economic ties, we will always seek in parallel to expand individual rights and opportunities through our bilateral engagement. The United States is pursuing a dual-track approach in which we seek to improve government-to-government relations and use this dialogue to advance human rights, while engaging civil society and peaceful political opposition, and encouraging U.S. nongovernmental actors to do the same. More substantive government-to-government relations can create permissive conditions for civil society to operate and for more extensive people-to-people exchanges. But when our overtures are rebuffed, we must lead the international community in using public and private diplomacy, and drawing on incentives and disincentives, in an effort to change repressive behavior.

Recognizing the Legitimacy of All Peaceful Democratic Movements: America respects the right of all peaceful, law-abiding, and nonviolent voices to be heard around the world, even if we disagree with them. Support for democracy must not be about support for specific candidates or movements. America will welcome all legitimately elected, peaceful governments, provided they govern with respect for the rights and dignity of all their people and consistent with their international obligations. Those who seek democracy to obtain power, but are ruthless once they do, will forfeit the support of the United States. Governments must maintain power through consent, not coercion, and place legitimate political processes above party or narrow interest.

Strengthening International Norms Against Corruption: We are working within the broader international system, including the U.N., G-20, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the international financial institutions, to promote the recognition that pervasive corruption is a violation of basic human rights and a severe impediment to development and global security. We will work with governments and civil society organizations to bring greater transparency and accountability to government budgets, expenditures, and the assets of public officials. And we will institutionalize transparent practices in international aid flows, international banking and tax policy, and private sector engagement around natural resources to make it harder for officials to steal and to strengthen the efforts of citizens to hold their governments accountable.

Building a Broader Coalition of Actors to Advance Universal Values: We are working to build support for democracy, rule of law, and human rights by working with other governments, nongovernmental organizations, and multilateral fora. The United States is committed to working to shape and strengthen existing institutions that are not delivering on their potential, such as the United Nations Human Rights Council. We are working within the broader U.N. system and through regional mechanisms to strengthen human rights monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, so that individuals and countries are held accountable for their violation of international human rights norms. And we will actively support the leadership of emerging democracies as they assume a more active role in advancing basic human rights and democratic values.

Marshalling New Technologies and Promoting the Right to Access Information: The emergence of technologies such as the Internet, wireless networks, mobile smart-phones, investigative forensics, satellite and aerial imagery, and distributed remote sensing infrastructure has created powerful new opportunities to advance democracy and human rights. These technologies have fueled people-powered political movements, made it possible to shine a spotlight on human rights abuses nearly instantaneously, and increased avenues for free speech and unrestricted communication around the world. We support the dissemination and use of these technologies to facilitate freedom of expression, expand access to information, increase governmental transparency and accountability, and counter restrictions on their use.

Ensuring Strong Alliances. The report notes the necessity of ensuring strong alliances, adding that “alliances are force multipliers: through multinational cooperation and coordination, the sum of our actions is always greater than if we act alone.” The report goes on to say that the US “relationship with our **European allies** remains the cornerstone for U.S. engagement with the world, and a catalyst for international action,” adding that the “North Atlantic Treaty Organization (**NATO**) is the pre-eminent security alliance in the world today,” which “will strengthen our collective ability to promote security, deter vital threats, and defend our people.” The report then hailed “NATO’s new Strategic Concept” as providing “an opportunity to revitalize and reform” the NATO alliance, and states that the US is “committed to partnering with a stronger European Union to advance our shared goals, especially in promoting democracy and prosperity in **Eastern European countries** that are still completing their democratic transition and in responding to pressing issues of mutual concern.” The report further pledges that the US “will remain dedicated to advancing stability and democracy in the **Balkans** and to resolving conflicts in the **Caucasus** and in **Cyprus**” and “will continue to engage with **Turkey** on a broad range of mutual goals, especially with regard to pursuit of stability in its region.”

Build Cooperation with Other “21st Century Centers of Influence.” The report significantly heralds the reality that “the United States is part of a dynamic international environment, in which different nations are exerting greater influence, and advancing our interests will require expanding spheres of cooperation around the world,” pointing out that “certain bilateral relationships—such as U.S. relations with **China**, **India**, and **Russia**—will be critical to building broader cooperation on areas of mutual interest.” Concerning Russia, the report is quite specific:

We seek to build a stable, substantive, multidimensional relationship with **Russia**, based on mutual interests. The United States has an interest in a strong, peaceful, and prosperous Russia that respects international norms. As the two nations possessing the majority of the world’s nuclear weapons, we are working together

to advance nonproliferation, both by reducing our nuclear arsenals and by cooperating to ensure that other countries meet their international commitments to reducing the spread of nuclear weapons around the world. We will seek greater partnership with Russia in confronting violent extremism, especially in Afghanistan. We also will seek new trade and investment arrangements for increasing the prosperity of our peoples. We support efforts within Russia to promote the rule of law, accountable government, and universal values. While actively seeking Russia's cooperation to act as a responsible partner in Europe and Asia, we will support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia's neighbors.

Transnational Criminal Threats and Threats to Governance. In terms of providing a new threat assessment, the report also recognizes that “transnational criminal threats and illicit trafficking networks continue to expand dramatically in size, scope, and influence—posing significant national security challenges for the United States and our partner countries,” explaining that “these threats cross borders and continents and undermine the stability of nations, subverting government institutions through corruption and harming citizens worldwide.” The report further warned that “transnational criminal organizations have accumulated unprecedented wealth and power through trafficking and other illicit activities, penetrating legitimate financial systems and destabilizing commercial markets” and extended their reach by “forming alliances with government officials and some state security services” in a “crime-terror nexus.”

Conclusion. The report concludes by noting the new US national security strategy “calls for a comprehensive range of national actions, and a broad conception of what constitutes our national security,” and promising to “demonstrate the capability and courage to pursue a more perfect union and—in doing so—renew American leadership in the world.”