



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S POLICY ADDRESS

Addressing Transnational Threats: Seven Options for Consideration

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY¹

I am Raphael Perl, Executive Director of the Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes. We sponsor in the range of 90 multi-national workshop and training events a year involving some 1,700 participants and I am actively seeking to expand our engagement with Mediterranean Dialogue and ICI Member states. Our eight stakeholder-member Board of Directors includes representatives from NATO nations as well as from neutral and non-aligned states such as Austria, Sweden and Switzerland.

Please note that the viewpoints presented here are personal, so my opinions may not represent official positions. With that in mind I share with you some thoughts on the topic of Regional Security and Military Threats – and present some strategic options we might want to consider when addressing transnational threats both globally and regionally.

My remarks are divided into 3 parts. I will begin with a snapshot of some major characteristics of today's global power dynamics.

I will then provide a strategic context for responding to such dynamics and will conclude with seven options we may want to consider when designing strategies to mitigate transnational threats in the long run.

Snapshot of some Major Characteristics of Today's Global Power Dynamics

When we look at global and regional power dynamics today and ask ourselves: what has changed in the last decade – what is different – 5 things immediately come to mind.

1. The rapid pace of change, the growing degree of uncertainty, and complexity of interconnected actors and events.
2. The decentralization of power and the increased role and influence of non-state actors.
3. The increased role and importance of networks and interdependencies affecting the dynamics of the globe.

4. The growing importance of technology in our lives and in the exercise of power.
5. The increased importance of education as an element of soft power.

Strategic Context

The pace of change is rapid and ever accelerating.

As the world changes we see certain governments and other groups leading the changes while others are simply hurrying to catch up and deal with the consequences of those changes.

The most important strategic perspective in my view is to reach a position of leading – and steering or directing

– the changes rather than merely reacting to them. This involves both short-term and long-term strategies.

If there is indeed a consensus that peace is desirable, then those who favor it need to promote the concept actively. Peace is not the default state of mankind, as history shows. It must be achieved and maintained at a cost.

This has special implications for a nation like Qatar – a small country – with a reputation of wealth and influence – a nation generally not viewed as a significant threat to others. A nation with potential to play a pivotal role in the future diplomacy of the region.

Change is increasingly rapid. And we must accept the fact that sometimes we have waited too long to react, that we have not been leading the changes but instead have been bystanders or observers. And that we may face a situation where the situation on the ground is too well entrenched (the inertia of history is too great) for us to affect in the short term outcomes we oppose.

Hand in hand with change comes uncertainty and this underscores the importance of education in enabling us to better understand and act in an era of complex uncertainties. We can't know the future, but through education, we can be better prepared for it.

Complacency or hesitations are not the only reasons for previous delay in becoming involved. Sometimes the best of intentions, such as maintaining neutrality, contribute to our inaction. Whatever the causes, when faced with a crisis or threat with no definitive solution in the near future, we should accept the reality of a current fait accompli. We should then focus on long-term strategies and not misallocate our limited resources in a futile attempt to control events which cannot be controlled at this time.

That being said, transnational threats come in a wide variety of forms. Not all of them involve violence. Some are more subtle, such as the accumulation of control of financial markets, industries, natural resources or political movements by individuals or groups whose intentions run counter to peace.

Let us face reality in this region and elsewhere. It is likely far too late to abate regional violence and transnational threats in the short term. The U.S. and others have intervened for decades in this region with arguably limited success, and we are not the first to try.

Short-term solutions do not work here, because there is too much inertia of history. We need to identify key strategic areas for long-term progress, and in the short term adopt a policy of “acceptable losses,” with a goal of maintaining relative stability until our long-term goals can be achieved.

A strategic vision is required, based on shared values, consensus and cooperation among a large number of participants whose combined power can steer the course of history. Some will have military power. Others will have cultural or economic influence. Each of these is important in its own way.

Let me propose some specific strategic directions and options that may mitigate transnational threats in the long run. We will defer for now the issue that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter, and that one man's threat is another man's justice. We will not resolve moral issues here.

The fundamental assumption I am making is that we share the goals of relative peace, stability, social and economic opportunity, and spiritual advancement for the people of the world. I hope that we also share the goal of using the limited resources of the planet effectively to prevent, mitigate and respond to disasters resulting from future shortages.

It is amazing to me that after decades of conferences, discussions and conflict, the approach to transnational threats remains fragmented.

What may be new here is an increasing will to mobilize a combined effort to put strategies into practice. Within this context, I offer seven options for consideration.

Seven Options for Consideration

1. Use all possible means to reduce the effectiveness of country or local leaders who promote violent extremism and transnational threats. Impose sanctions and actively disrupt their policies while at the same time supporting their opponents. Obtain regional consensus concerning the use of force, insurrection or subversion against the sources of transnational threats and take action accordingly.

2. Identify causes of conflict that could be mitigated through cooperative allocation of resources. One example in this region would be transnational threats stemming from conflicts over allocation of water or

other natural resources. Where solutions can be found to reduce or eliminate the sources of conflicts, threats can be reduced. Funding for desalination, nuclear power plants, or subsidized prices for vital commodities are among the options here.

3. Pre-emptively work to change the mind-set of people toward nonviolent conflict resolution. This involves education, and particularly the education of the young. We should identify community leaders who embrace nonviolent conflict resolution and put them in charge of early childhood education. We should remove radical educators wherever possible and mitigate their influence. We should use textbooks with nonviolent themes. It will take at least two or three generations to bring about significant changes. That timeline can be inferred from the length of time it took for the United States to change its culture from discrimination and segregation to acceptance of minorities. There are other examples.

Also in the field of non-violent conflict resolution:

One of the most important aspects of strategy formulation is to identify experts in the area of nonviolent conflict resolution and bring to bear the entire gamut of techniques from this arena. Amelioration of potential or actual conflict can reduce threat levels rapidly. Prevention of violence or threats through ongoing discussions and negotiations or other nonviolent interchanges may save many lives, but leaders are often reluctant to rely on the expertise of those outside their inner circles even though such specialists might be more effective in producing positive outcomes. Policy formulation and implementation should include input from these specialists. Organizations like the Strategic Studies Center, the GCSP, and my organization the PfpC can play a meaningful role here.

4. Reinvigorate diplomacy. Diplomatic missions today are very different from what they were in the distant past. Workload burdens have greatly increased, while funding is very often cut. When funding is cut, it is generally in the worst possible areas, removing the ability of political diplomats to travel, to interact with their counterparts, or to host events which would build face-to-face trust at all levels. There seems to be a growing view that diplomacy is losing relevance, because with modern technology policy making can be more centralized, and communication can take place more directly among world leaders. This is an incorrect view. Leaders change, but diplomats remain in their

careers. Trust must be developed over time. In the Middle East interpersonal trust relationships are valued greatly, yet diplomats are sent here for periods of time too short for them to understand the cultural context and to form durable friendships. Diplomacy costs far less than war, yet it is consistently underfunded. Diplomacy – as currently funded – simply cannot match the operational pace of crisis events as they suddenly arise.

5. Disrupt financial resources of violent extremists. We should accept that violent extremist groups with widespread popular or governmental support will likely have more financial resources available than we have to combat them. We cannot hope to outspend them, so we should engage in a long-term strategy of disruption of their finances and media channels through cyber activity, sanctions, harassment, disinformation, confiscation and other methods. This must be an ongoing program whose purpose is not victory, but simply mitigation.

6. Accept the risk of WMD consequences and make better contingency plans. Horrible as the thought may be, we should begin to actively plan for the limited use against us of weapons of mass destruction: whether chemical, biological or nuclear. We should formulate policies for preventive action as well as making contingency plans for reaction. The recent Ebola crisis in Africa and limited outbreaks elsewhere suggests that such planning has not been meaningfully done. There is little political reward from contingency planning for unlikely events, but without it, when disaster strikes there can be significant economic and political disruption in addition to the tragedy of unnecessary casualties.

7. Gather data to assist in policy formulation. We need to identify those countries and specific individuals who are well regarded by large numbers of people, whether for perceived honesty or simply for their influence on the world stage, and make use of this influence to help resolve conflicts peacefully. Envoys and negotiators may be chosen because of their political connections rather than the support they have from a populace as honest brokers.

So far I have been speaking about rather general long-term strategic options. There are strategic military options as well. History shows that limited military action against an established and decentralized force with popular support is not effective for purposes of large-scale control. However, it can be effective as

harassment, disrupting logistics and preventing full control by others, and is therefore a strategic as well as a tactical approach. There is a cost in human lives to any such approach.

Different countries and cultures have different leadership requirements, based on their ideologies and cultures. The goal we share is not to tailor the political futures of other countries, but rather to preserve a relative degree of peace, while accepting the inevitability of occasional threats and violent conflicts and putting forth our best efforts to limit these.

Let me restate that I am a proponent of a policy of “acceptable losses,” where we do not expend vast resources in a futile effort to protect everything, everywhere, all the time, but instead apply more resources toward longer-term solutions and accept a certain amount of short-term consequences. To do otherwise, to refrain from putting resources into long-term solutions, is a guarantee of eventual failure.

The Internet and globalization facilitate the exchange of information and points of view. If we can maintain stability while this exchange continues for a few more decades, I am optimistic that a high degree of peace can and will prevail.

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FOOTNOTES:

¹ *Remarks by Dr. Raphael Perl, Executive Director, Partnership for Peace Consortium, before the Third International Conference on Strategic Studies, Doha, Qatar November 26, 2014.*