CONFRONTING SYSTEMIC SECURITY RISKS

PROPOSALS FOR THE NEXT U.S. ADMINISTRATION

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PROTECTING THE U.S. FROM STRATEGIC RISKS

Many of the most serious security threats facing the United States today arise from rapid developments spiraling across a complex and changing globe. From emerging infectious diseases, to a dangerously changing climate, to the proliferation of nuclear weapons, these trends have the potential to not only threaten the security of the American people, but risk leading to full failure of the systems that for decades have helped hedge against conflict and societal breakdown.

Each of these risks will require an integrated approach across the Federal government, pairing the analytic systems of the Pentagon and intelligence community with the early warning capabilities of our diplomatic and development experts. To prevent the worst impacts, a well-rounded U.S. security community must be prepared and responsive as soon as a new strategic threat emerges.

An integrated approach to addressing these threats will also require higher prioritization within the White House. Therefore, we propose the creation of a dedicated White House Strategy on Confronting Strategic Security Risks, and dedicated positions within the NSC responsible for coordinating interagency planning on these issues, and their integration into regional portfolios.

These systemic and existential risks will shape the global security environment for decades to come. U.S. security leaders have the urgent responsibility to prevent the worst of these threats, and to prepare for those we cannot. As such, the next administration should consider the following steps.

BIological Threats

Even as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to take lives and wreak havoc across the world, other infectious diseases and deliberate biological weapons are just around the corner, promising severe future security risks.

It has never been more urgent that America lead in implementing a systemic approach to halting infectious diseases as they emerge—whether they occur naturally, accidentally, or intentionally.

We propose creating an integrated system of preparedness and rapid response to identify future outbreaks, prevent them from becoming pandemics, and deter anyone who dares to consider biological weapons as part of their strategic arsenals. The nation has also never held more promise in its people, technologies, and tools available to implement such a system, and the timing is ripe for serious investments in this area.

CSR is launching an Alliance to End Biological Threats to coordinate scientific, NGO, and business leaders to work hand in hand with the next administration toward this vision. For additional details refer to Making Bioweapons Obsolete and Pathogen Detection, Mapping and Early Warning.
CLIMATE THREATS

Climate change is reshaping the globe, multiplying threats, destabilizing regions, and undermining the very capacity of our security agencies to execute their missions. The acceleration of climate change poses risks not just to security institutions, operations, and infrastructure, but also to foundations of stability and governance worldwide. Without urgent actions, these threats and impacts will only grow in magnitude, and no region of the world will be untouched.

First, the Administration must establish a whole-of-government Climate Security Strategy (A Climate Security Plan for America), led from the White House, that cuts across defense, diplomatic, and development communities, prioritizes climate change in military and diplomatic strategies and plans, and establishes concrete metrics for implementation.

Second, we must properly anticipate emerging climate security risks, leveraging not only scientific expertise, but also the intelligence and analysis needed to translate climate phenomena into their security implications.

Third, the military and diplomatic communities should work to "climate-proof" their operations, building climate resilience into critical infrastructure and missions and establishing improved planning and expanded early warning and disaster response capabilities.

Finally, in order to avoid the most catastrophic impacts of climate change in the decades to come, we must develop a viable strategy to achieve global net-zero emissions. For more detailed proposals, please refer to our Climate Security Plan for America, Security Threat Assessment of Global Climate Change, the Responsibility to Prepare and Prevent Framework, and the World Climate and Security Report.

NUCLEAR THREATS

The world is grappling with a nuclear arms race fueled by the demise of important arms control agreements, weakening norms against weapons of mass destruction, and the United States and other countries introducing destabilizing new nuclear weapon capabilities into their plans.

America’s leaders should make clear that it will push to strengthen norms against nuclear threats. The next administration should make clear that it will commit to trust-building and good faith efforts to ensure the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons continues to stand as a trusted pillar of international security into the future.

The next president should send instruction to his national security leaders that the United States will help move the world away from the most destabilizing nuclear weapons capabilities -- in particular, misnamed "low yield" nuclear weapons, those that introduce greater ambiguity and chances for miscalculation, and those that blur the lines between conventional and nuclear conflict. These are weapons of warfare, not deterrence.

This should tie to a reimagining of arms control. 21st Century arms control concepts can break the US-Russia bilateral mold, be flexible in the types of agreements created, and get creative in how the world limits and works to eliminate the gravest nuclear weapons threats.

For more detailed proposals, refer to CSR's work on improving nuclear strategic stability, a smarter U.S. nuclear modernization program, and the future of arms control.
SOLUTIONS

FIRST DAY

BIOLOGICAL THREATS: Ensure a systemic response to COVID-19 that leverages U.S. innovation to improve testing and diagnosis. Continues rapid vaccine production via Operation Warp Speed and continue or create an effective distribution plan. Call for a civil defense plan by which all Americans patriotically accelerate an end to the pandemic by wearing masks, getting vaccinated, and other basic steps.

CLIMATE THREATS: Appoint senior leaders on climate security across the federal government - including in the White House, DoD, ODNI, State Department and Department of Energy. Issue a National Security Presidential Directive aimed at developing a comprehensive strategy on climate security issues across government agencies, including through a reinstated Climate Security Working Group.

NUCLEAR THREATS: Issue a National Security Presidential Directive with clear instruction for shaping an updated Nuclear Posture Review to declare a “sole purpose” nuclear doctrine and request plans for halting and/or bargaining away dangerous new U.S. nuclear weapons capabilities that lower the threshold for nuclear war, introduce ambiguity to the strategic environment, and weaken deterrence. If it is not yet done, work with Russia to extend the New START Treaty and signal that work will begin toward restoring the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Iran nuclear deal).

FIRST 100 DAYS

BIOLOGICAL THREATS: Deliver a Prague speech for bioterror threats, setting the vision that the United States will create a system of enhanced preparedness and rapid response that will prevent future pandemics and make biological weapons obsolete as a threat of mass destruction. Task Cabinet officers with mapping how their agencies will contribute and work these plans into the next annual budget request to Congress.

CLIMATE THREATS: Announce a Presidential Climate Security Strategy (A Climate Security Plan for America). Launch a major Climate Security Infrastructure Initiative to improve the climate resilience of our critical civilian and military infrastructure. Request regular reports on climate security threats from the DoD, Joint Chiefs, and intelligence community.

NUCLEAR THREATS: Commit to U.S. allies that the country will smartly reshape nuclear weapons plans in ways that maintain a strong deterrent but signal seriousness toward NPT commitments to reduce and eventually eliminate nuclear weapons. Set the stage with them & in multilateral fora for new arms control talks.

FIRST YEAR

BIOLOGICAL THREATS: Convene government officials, scientists, and business leaders (including from the Alliance to End Biological Threats) to the White House to mark the end of the COVID-19 pandemic and set the agenda for the moonshot vision announced in the Day 100 bio Prague speech. Ensure the Pentagon’s next budget and defense strategy adequately confront bioweapons threats.

CLIMATE THREATS: Include climate considerations as major pillars of National Security and National Defense Strategies. Coordinate an international defense ministerial to pledge mutual climate commitments. Launch Regional Climate Security Plans to bolster climate security resilience and clean energy transitions in key countries. Issue an economy-wide Climate Security Prevention Policy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at a scale necessary for avoiding catastrophic security consequences.

NUCLEAR THREATS: Empower the State Department to advance arms control options for, e.g., a new nuclear-only Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, an end to all nuclear armed cruise missiles, and measures to keep nuclear warheads off of hypersonic missiles. To restrengthen norms against WMD, ensure the Pentagon is on track to finish destroying the last of U.S. chemical weapons stocks by 2023.