

National Security in the Global Era

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Thanks to all of you for what you do, because it was people like you who introduced a poor kid from a town of fewer than 300 people to the world beyond my little community more than 50 years ago. And it was the programs that have already been discussed that gave me the tools to have a career in both academe and in government that has brought me near the top of the pile in foreign affairs. So, thank you for what you do.

International education, by which I mean the teaching and study of foreign languages and area studies, has never been more important than it is today and is certain to be even more important in the years ahead. I say this not simply because I was the beneficiary of foreign area studies programs decades ago, but also because I used what I learned about other countries and cultures in grad school virtually every day of my career as a senior official in the State Department and the Intelligence Community. I am extremely grateful to the people who kindled and nurtured my interest in international affairs and the programs that gave me the tools to work in and with other countries on issues critical to the security of our nation. I am also grateful for the many government officials, scholars, and private sector specialists who received similar training and used it to solve problems, seize opportunities, and help make today's world more peaceful and more prosperous than it was when the National Defense Education Act was signed nearly 60 years ago.

My assignment is to discuss the importance of foreign language and area studies to the security of our nation. I am delighted to do that but want to set the stage for my remarks—and perhaps giving them a bit of added weight—by noting that my observations are based on 15 years in senior national security positions that included Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Analysis, Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research, Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis, Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, and official responsible for the President's Daily Brief. During these years, my official job description included “supervision of analytic work on all countries and all issues.” That makes me either a consummate comparativist or a shameless dilettante. You can decide which. For fifteen years, I interacted daily with the most senior officials in the US national security enterprise, grappled with an enormous range of country and transnational issues, and depended on information and insights from colleagues with deep understanding of specific countries and regions.

Without the expertise and insights of foreign area specialists, the United States could not have understood and shaped international developments, advanced American interests, or assured the security of our nation and the safety of our people. We did not get everything right, indeed we made some terrible mistakes, but on the whole, the

United States has been remarkably successful and both our country and the world are better because of what we have achieved. Success was not an accident and it was not inevitable. It would have been impossible without the existence and insights of literally thousands of people with knowledge of foreign languages, cultures, political systems, and other factors critical to understanding and interacting with 193 other countries.

The need for foreign area expertise has grown exponentially since I began my national security career as a German linguist and intelligence analyst in 1970 and will continue to grow for the foreseeable future. Much of the growth is attributable to two interrelated developments: the still expanding scope of national security concerns, and the consequences of globalization.

Broader Scope and More Granular Requirements of “National Security”

The primary national security concern of the United States from the end of World War II until the demise of the Soviet Union 45 years later was the existential threat to our nation and way of life posed by the Soviet Union and its allies. That threat was defined primarily in military and ideological/political terms with lesser attention to economics and technology. We sought to know all that we could about Soviet capabilities and intentions, and we became quite good at monitoring its activities and discovering its secrets. We also wanted to know things about other countries, but in most cases our principal concern was whether they would remain aligned with us, could be detached from the Soviet camp, and what might be required to achieve those objectives. That required deep knowledge of specific topics in many countries.

This situation began to change when the Cold War ended. The existential threat to our nation and way of life dissipated, but it was replaced by a growing number and variety of other problems and challenges that came to be defined as “threats” to national security, including proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, threats to the economy, the threat of infectious disease, the effects of climate change, and myriad additional developments with the potential to affect the life and interests of Americans at home and in all parts of the world. In place of one big, slow moving, and predictable “Bear” we began to worry about many “snakes” with very different interests, capabilities, and potential implications for American interests. The global system changed, and it arguably became less dangerous, but we began to worry about—and attempt to avoid, ameliorate, or adjust to—more and increasingly disparate developments in more and more countries. In addition, the focus of concern and assumed responsibility of the national security establishment has shifted from protecting our nation from attack by another country to ensuring the safety of individual Americans. This shift has dramatically increased the need for detailed knowledge about countries and cultures in every part of the world.

We continue to be concerned about military developments, WMD proliferation, political alignments, and other “traditional” subjects, but we now worry about them in more places and are concerned about much “smaller” threats than when we focused on the danger of nuclear war with the Soviet Union. For example, we now worry about the activities of non-state actors like al Qaeda in “ungoverned” spaces like the frontier regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and criminal networks that smuggle arms, drugs, people, and fake pharmaceuticals

In addition to wanting to know about more things in more places, we now need far greater precision in much shorter times than was the case in the not-so-good old days of the Cold War. For decades, our primary objective was to avoid surprise and ensure that we could detect developments in time to take diplomatic, economic, or military countermeasures. Now we often want to intervene in ways that require extremely precise information and very quick assessments of what it means. A few examples will illustrate this evolution.

During the Cold War, we engaged in a kind of voyeuristic monitoring of Soviet activities because we wanted to know what they were doing. For example, we would learn of plans to build a new missile carrying submarine and watch the keel being laid and subsequent stages of construction, monitor its sea trials, installation of missiles, shakedown cruises, and ultimately, deployment. This happened over a period in which my kids went from elementary school to college. Now we want to know if a particular ship or airplane is carrying proscribed weapons and where it might be interdicted, or whether a gathering of people in a remote area of Afghanistan is a tribal wedding or a terrorist meeting that might be targeted in a drone attack.

Terrorism has been a weapon used by the weak against the strong for millennia, but we now consider it a, if not the, principal security threat to our country. Terrorism is a generic strategy, but there are no generic terrorists. Each one operates in and comes from a specific country and culture, speaks a particular language or dialect, responds to specific incentives, is motivated by specific ethnic, tribal, regional, class, or other considerations, and cannot be understood without detailed knowledge of particular foreign areas and languages. To be effective, any strategy or policy to address terrorism-related concerns must be informed by detailed knowledge about non-American cultures.

Another category of national security concerns consists of threats to our economy, the environment, Americans living and working abroad, and the overseas investments of US based companies. Theft of intellectual property was once regarded as the problem of the individuals or firms that owned it; now such theft is seen as a threat to treaties and the rule-based international order, and a threat to American jobs and the American citizens whose pension funds are invested in the company that owns the intellectual property. Discovering, understanding, and addressing this and similar problems require detailed knowledge of the country or countries involved.

Threats to the health of Americans at home and abroad are another new, or certainly higher salience security concern. For example, only a decade ago, polio was on the verge of extinction but there was a sudden upsurge of the disease in Nigeria and a small number of cases in other countries. The cause appeared to be opposition to the administration of polio vaccines from powerful religious leaders who reportedly were convinced that polio immunization was a ruse to sterilize Muslims. They blocked immunizations in the northern part of the country, the disease spread locally, and travelers carried the disease to other countries. Something similar is occurring now in parts of Pakistan. In the Nigerian case, policymakers requested help finding the answers to questions that had to be answered in order to develop a strategy to address the problem. Their questions included, "Who are these Mullahs and who might be able to persuade them to drop their opposition?" "Why do they think this?" And "Can the national government help solve this problem or do the locals consider the national

government to be part of the problem?” Such questions cannot be answered without detailed knowledge about the specific locale and situation.

One more example will, I hope drive home the point that the scope of national security concerns has changed greatly and in ways that require greater knowledge of foreign areas than ever before. In 1994, hundreds of thousands of people fled the mass slaughter—genocide—in Rwanda in search of safety in Eastern Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo). Approximately a quarter million exhausted and dehydrated refugees halted to rest near the foot of a volcano that was beginning to rumble. State Department officials came to me to ask whether the volcano was about to erupt and, if it did, which way the poisonous gas plume and lava would travel. This was a critical question because aid workers had to decide whether to move the refugees and risk killing many from exhaustion, or leave them where they were and risk death from the volcano. To answer the question required detailed knowledge about that particular volcano—the Nyiragongo. We located a French volcanologist who studied that volcano and he told us that it was likely to erupt soon but that the gasses, ash, and lava would travel away from the refugees, who were not forced to move.

Consequences of Globalization: Developments Anywhere Can Affect Interests Everywhere. Globalization has produced unprecedented prosperity and interdependence. There are downsides and challenges to be sure, but the point I want to emphasize here is the extent to which the world has become a “global village” in which societies everywhere depend on distant and diverse countries and cultures. The integration, divisions of labor, transnational production and supply chains, high speed travel, instantaneous communications, and other features of globalization have made us more prosperous and given us more options and opportunities. But they have also made us increasingly vulnerable to developments beyond our borders and beyond our control. Meeting challenges, managing threats, and taking advantage of opportunities on a global scale require different and deeper kinds of knowledge than was required during the Cold War. Kinds of knowledge about foreign lands that were once the esoteric preserve of specialists have become essential to communities, companies, and our country as a whole. We live in a global village. To thrive in and continue to lead the global system we helped to build and from which we benefit enormously, we must be as strong in our knowledge of foreign languages and cultures as we are militarily.

Before addressing some of the ways globalization impacts the expanding scope of national security concerns, I will provide a few illustrative examples of the ways in which developments beyond our borders affect our daily lives. The common—and critical—theme running through these brief examples is that although most of us, most of the time, are only dimly aware of the transnational linkages that make modern life what it is, the very substantial benefits of integration and interdependence are accompanied by downsides and vulnerabilities that must be monitored and managed.

My first illustration is so omnipresent that we rarely think about it: the year-round availability of fresh fruits and vegetables made possible because low transportation costs, efficient inventory management, and more importantly, the adoption, inculcation, and enforcement of rules and standards by foreign farmers, firms, and governments allow us to be confident that what we eat is safe. Every link in the chains that bring us strawberries in winter and spinach from Asia is only as safe and efficient as the ability of

American businesses and government regulators to monitor and manage what transpires in the myriad countries and cultures involved in each network of relationships.

Other safety-related examples involve the supply of pharmaceuticals, auto parts, and aircraft components. We import large volumes of such products. Most are monitored and meet exacting US standards. That is not an accident; it is the result of informed interaction between corporate employees with knowledge of foreign cultures and government officials with the skills to work with foreign inspectors, customs officials, and numerous others in the supply chain. Moreover, there are thriving black markets for these and many other goods. It is estimated that 50 percent of the pharmaceuticals for sale around the globe are counterfeit. Not all are dangerous; some are merely ineffective and some are effective rip-offs of intellectual property. Protecting US citizens from the fakes is at least as important as ensuring the quality of legitimate products. Doing both requires detailed knowledge of dozens and dozens of foreign companies, countries, and cultures.

Those examples were general; the next two are both specific and sufficiently recent that many of you will remember what happened. One concerns the impact of the March 2011 “triple disaster” (earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear plant meltdown) in Japan on the production of Toyota automobiles. The disasters in Japan closed the plant that produced the global supply of a few critical components. In the United States and many other countries, plants had to shut down, workers were laid off, and dealers lost sales. This was not just a “far away” problem for a foreign company. Toyota has ten plants and employs 365,000 workers in the United States.

The second example is the impact that massive flooding in central Thailand had on the production and availability of computer hard drives. This also happened in 2011, not the distant past. For efficiency reasons, a very large percentage of all hard drives are manufactured in Thailand. When floods disrupted production there, supplies quickly dwindled, prices went up, computer manufacturers fell behind, and consumers worldwide were affected. It took two years to work through the disruption.

I suspect that the response of many to these examples is that they involve private sector concerns, not the national security of the United States. That is not an unreasonable response, but I remind you of what I said earlier about the expanding definition of national security and the fact that the health and safety of individual citizens, the strength of the economy, and the ability of American firms to compete successfully in the global marketplace have joined security from military attack by foreign adversaries as high profile national security concerns. Our citizens expect our government to monitor and manage these broader concerns and, conversely, what happens in the realm of private sector transactions in the international arena—such as the licit or illicit sale of US products and technologies—can have an adverse (or beneficial) impact on the more traditional dimensions of national security.

The facts in one last example illustrate and underscore the benefits and perils of globalization. That example is the movement of people. Approximately one billion people travel internationally every year. Almost 70 million of them visit the United States, most of them as tourists, and Americans make roughly the same number of trips to other countries. Such travel is enormously beneficial to us and to others, but it raises a host of health, safety, and security issues. We want tourists to come but not terrorists. Americans often want adventure but seldom want to visit places with serious internal

stability or health problems. No one wants persons infected with Ebola to sit next to them in a plane or restaurant in the United States or elsewhere.

Globalization, as noted earlier, is enormously beneficial to our nation and our citizens. But the international system that makes globalization possible is not a self-regulating mechanism; it requires constant attention. The United States plays a unique and critical role in ensuring adherence to rules, a high degree of fairness, and the openness of the system. To a significant extent, a smooth running globalized world depends on US leadership and ability to provide system-maintenance for the global order. Americans are understandably weary of bearing a disproportionate share of the costs and responsibilities this entails, but we do it because it is in our interest to do so. To critics who complain that much of the world behaves as “free riders” unwilling to share responsibility for the public goods that the United States provides, my answer is that we are more prosperous and more secure because we have helped provide a framework in which others also prosper. For example, many have opined on the rise of China and other states and some argue that the rise of others has been at the expense of the United States. Opinions are interesting and perceptions matter in international relations, but facts should matter more. In the 35 years since China began its rise with assistance from the US—a period in which the Cold War ended, the European Union nearly doubled in size, and dozens of other nations have experienced extremely rapid growth—the US share of the world economy has declined: from 26 percent to 24.5 percent. This is not much of a decline and the magnitude is within the range of error for such statistics. Moreover, the world economy today is many times larger than it was 35 years ago so we have roughly the same share of a much larger, more developed, and more inclusive world economy. And we have done this while the US share of world population declined from roughly 6 percent to 4.5 percent. This also was not an accident; it was the result, in part, of our superior understanding of developments, possibilities, and perils in the other 193 countries.

Consequences for National Security and Implications for International Education.

The increasing scope of concerns subsumed under the rubric of national security and the manifestations and consequences of increasing globalization converge in ways that make it essential for our country to have more people with greater understanding of more places and cultures than ever before. Knowledge of foreign languages and societies is not a luxury or esoteric field of study, it is a critical component of national security. We survived and triumphed in the Cold War in part because we made the effort to understand and engage with people in every part of the world. But we are living off the intellectual capital produced in previous decades and must replenish, expand, and improve programs to study and teach about foreign languages and cultures. If we allow our existing capabilities to degrade further, we will quickly become less capable of managing challenges, seizing opportunities, and meeting citizen expectations for American leadership and maintenance of the global order from which we benefit and on which we depend.

The world is becoming more integrated and interdependent, but it is not becoming more homogeneous. Successfully operating in our increasingly globalized world and meeting the requirements of the now much broader scope of national security concerns make foreign language and area studies far more important than they were in the “know your enemy” days of the Cold War when the National Defense Education Act was

signed. All transnational trends and “global” developments occur in specific places with particular cultures, languages, and distinctive social, economic, and political systems. I am a political scientist and appreciate the effort to discover patterns and commonalities across political systems, but I am also an experienced national security official who understands that we do not live in a generic world, and that attempts to devise “one-size-fits-all” solutions are certain to run aground on the shoals of ethnic, cultural, religious, geographic, demographic, linguistic, and other manifestations of diversity. If we do not understand, and cannot communicate with, the still highly diverse world, the downsides and dangers of globalization will erode our prosperity, endanger our safety, and degrade our security. Now, more than ever, we must have a robust and forward-looking national program to nurture and sustain expert knowledge of foreign lands and peoples.

The national security challenges we face in the 21st century are fundamentally different than those that motivated President Eisenhower to launch the first wave of foreign language and area studies programs in the 1950s. I believe that the need for such programs is even greater now than it was in the past, but it is less self-evident than when we were driven by fear of the Soviet Union. We cannot make a persuasive case for funding and programs to meet future needs by simply attesting to the quality and utility of programs adopted to meet the very different requirements of a bygone era. We must—and can—make the case that international education is critical to our ability to ensure the security of our nation and the safety of our people in the global era. But that will not be sufficient. We must also make the case that knowledge of other lands and languages is critical to the success of American communities, states, firms, and non-governmental organizations competing in the global marketplace of goods and ideas. Hoping for the best, and relying on the hyphenated American population will not be sufficient. We must do more to shape our national destiny.