



BACKGROUND

Published by the Truman National Security Project

2008 Policy Priorities

John Neffinger and Jessica Tacka, Truman National Security Project

8 January 2008

As 2008 dawns, America is embracing the promise of a new beginning in November. Yet as recent events in Pakistan remind us, the world will not wait for the lame duck to leave town.

2008 brings with it two sets of national security priorities. First are the immediate challenges that the current Administration and 110th Congress must address in their final months. But this campaign year also presents an invaluable opportunity for the candidates to build a popular mandate to make long-overdue changes. The following are our top national security priorities for the coming year, as well as the top five issues we would like this year's candidates to put before the American people as their priorities for our future.

Immediate Priorities in the New Year: Managing Multiple Threats

Despite this Administration's shortcomings, we must demand action this year on the most urgent issues where some political progress is possible.

1. Protecting America from Terrorism. The government's most immediate priority must always be protecting us from attack. This is especially true this election year, as terrorists may be tempted to strike now to scare American voters into electing another president who is more belligerent than strategic in dealing with complex foreign policy challenges. But President Bush does not want to see another attack on his watch, and he should personally push to *close the unconscionable gaps in our homeland security by improving interagency communication on terrorist suspects, adding trained linguists in our intelligence agencies, and ensuring the protection of critical infrastructure.*

2. Political Progress in Iraq. We want success in Iraq and we must make clear to the American people that we will do all in our power to achieve it. Our military has achieved limited but real success this year, halting Iraq's

slide into civil war. But while their extraordinary sacrifices can suppress the violence temporarily, it is up to Iraqi politicians—and the American politicians who support them—to forge a lasting political solution to the conflict. If significant political progress is not made soon, our escalation in Iraq will have only delayed the inevitable. *Success in Iraq is our goal, and that requires an all-out push to foster political settlement among Iraqis, including dialogue with Iran.*

3. Stability in Pakistan. Given its fully functional nuclear arsenal and the presence of Taliban and Al Qaeda within its borders, the stability of Pakistan is a vital security interest of the U.S. Unconditionally supporting the strongman Musharraf has brought neither stability nor democracy. *We must strengthen Pakistan's national institutions, including courts, the press, political parties, and schools, so that we are not one assassination away from putting nuclear weapons in the hands of radicals.* Out of \$1.6 billion provided to Pakistan since September 11, less than \$22 million went to build Pakistan's democracy—and most of that was for an election board controlled by Musharraf. We must radically increase our support to organizations in America working to strengthen democracy and national institutions in Pakistan, while insisting that the February elections are free and fair to prevent immediate violence.

4. Security in Afghanistan. Ousting the Taliban was the first and most universally acclaimed achievement of our War on Terror. Six years later that achievement has almost come undone, neglected by U.S. leaders more concerned with Iraq, and European leaders reluctant to put troops in harm's way even for a cause they support. *We must regroup urgently, both committing additional U.S. resources and calling on our NATO partners to step up, or Afghanistan could remain a safe haven for terrorists and misogynistic tyranny well into the future.*

5. Engagement with Iran. It is important not to overreact to the potential threat of a nuclear Iran. But it is



equally important not to ignore it. Building ties to ordinary citizens is essential to having a sense of what is going on inside this crucial country. Talking with Iran is also essential to ensuring stability in Iraq. *It is time to press President Bush to open a two-track dialogue: with Iranian leaders, and civilian-to-civilian.*

A Mandate for the Next Administration: Restoring American Leadership

The 2008 campaign is an invaluable opportunity to talk to Americans about a new direction for American security, and build a mandate for change so the next Administration can enact the bold, realistic initiatives necessary to put our country back on track.

1. Set the Groundwork to Fight the Long War on Terror. We will be fighting international terrorism for decades to come: it is the defining challenge of this generation. The time for stopgaps has passed: we need to create the long-term means to fight a long-term war. *Chief among these needs is establishing clear, effective and constitutional protocols for surveillance, detainment, and interrogation, as well as border security, visa, and immigration procedures that keep us secure against terrorists, open to the world, and in line with our founding values.* Only after we have met this challenge can America once again serve as a model for other nations.

2. Rebuild American Military Capability. The Iraq war has overtaxed our military and led us to repeatedly break our promises to our servicemembers and their families. It has also revealed the lack of law governing contractors, and the need for new kinds of capabilities - to gain the trust of locals, operate in weak states, provide basic services, and develop functioning democratic institutions. Even without another ill-advised invasion, peacekeeping and post-conflict operations are likely to be critical in preventing fragile states from descending into chaos and becoming terrorist breeding-grounds. *We need to rebuild our conventional military while radically rethinking the new capabilities needed for the next century, including a deployable civilian post-conflict force, improved police training, and reconsidering the role of armed contractors.*

3. Ensure Nuclear Security. The world is teetering on the edge of a new nuclear arms race, sparked by recent proliferation and the perception that a nuclear arsenal provides great leverage in dealing with the American superpower. We must do the hard work of building a new international regime to stop additional weak or hostile states from gaining these terrible weapons. *New approaches like creating centralized fuel banks for enriched nuclear fuel would prevent countries from developing weapons disguised as harmless energy projects, and*

open the door to banning the enrichment of weapons-grade nuclear material entirely. This would both prevent a destabilizing global nuclear arms race and dramatically reduce the chances of a nuclear terror attack.

4. Reclaim International Leadership and Rebuild Alliances. We face a long fight against terrorists who are destabilizing countries and killing innocent civilians worldwide. We also face potential interstate conflict in the Balkans, Asia, and the Middle East, as well as massive humanitarian needs. The international community cannot meet these challenges without a strong U.S. to lead it. *We must win back the respect of the world and rebuild our alliances, particularly with our NATO allies—so that when force is needed, it has international legitimacy, and we have partners to ease the burden on our own overtaxed armed forces.*

5. Secure our Energy Supply. Last year, we failed to rise to the generational challenge of ensuring energy security. Today we face \$100 a barrel oil and global warming that could spark wars and natural disasters on a catastrophic scale. *This is not the time for politics as usual: we must step up and fund the research and development needed to create clean, diversified alternatives to the petrochemical energy we are now forced to buy from dictators and sponsors of terrorism.*

The past seven years have made America and the world less safe. Let us hope that in 2008, we not only take the critical steps to keep immediate threats at bay, but set the stage for a new era of American leadership.

This Paper Can be Found at

www.trumanproject.org

Two Weeks After its Original Release Date.

By signing up as a member you can receive this paper on a regular basis upon its release.

Published by:

Truman National Security Project

1 Massachusetts Ave NW, Suite 333

Washington, DC 20001

Telephone: 202-216-9723

Fax: 202-682-1818

info@trumanproject.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of the Truman National Security Project or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.