



A Call to Action: Driving Change to Maximize the Strength of our National Power

The United States has faced multiple complex challenges at home and abroad over the last decade: attacks from al-Qaeda and its affiliates, conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, Syria's brutal civil war, and the expansionist foreign policies of Russia and China. Domestically, Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans revealing key vulnerabilities, and in our cities like Ferguson, MO, and Baltimore, MD, complex tensions with local community officials exposed deep-rooted questions about perceptions of the legitimate use of power.

All too often, government responses to these and related challenges lack the requisite agility, sensitivity, and planning. Our leaders consistently fail to create effective strategies for leveraging the whole of government and society to achieve positive outcomes. As a nation, we struggle to understand these problems in relation to our enduring values and vital national security interests. While the United States has a \$4 trillion government budget and powerful and unique capabilities at its disposal, we still struggle to bring our federal, state and local governments; non-profits; universities; and private sector together to accomplish our near- and long-term national goals. Repeatedly, we assemble the after-action reports only to find that a more unified and comprehensive approach would have supported a different unfolding of events. We must innovate and redesign our problem-solving approaches to safeguard our critical international and domestic interests.

Our nation requires solutions that refocus our leadership on three key concepts: First, we need strategic vision. We must return to the critical thinking and planning that developed the long-term strategy that won World War II, countered Soviet expansion, and prevented nuclear war. Next, we must return to whole-of-government solutions to solve our most complex issues. Our nation's political, diplomatic, information, economic, societal, and military power must be brought to bear in an effective manner so we achieve our strategic objectives. This requires breaking through the bureaucracy and operations silos in our government to reestablish cooperation among agencies, and thus, allow the United States to be responsive, agile, and ultimately more competitive. Lastly, we need to harness the power of the whole of society to solve our international and domestic challenges. Our nation's leaders must find ways to effortlessly link public and private organizations to address crises of the day by tapping into the expertise and resources within non-profits, the private sector, universities, and multiple local, state, and federal government agencies.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

The Arizona State University Flag Officer Advisory Council is made up of more than a dozen active duty and retired flag and general officers from the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force who advise Arizona State University President Michael Crow on complex matters of national significance. We are experts in information technology, military campaigns, terrorism, complex disasters, public health, strategic planning, and a range of other areas that give us a unique vantage point on our nation's most vexing challenges.

Paramount in this new thinking must be an insistence on a strategic vision for the United States. The members of the Arizona State University Flag Officer Advisory Council have significant experience in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and issues at home. They have seen firsthand the lack of long-range strategic vision, the uncoordinated governmental efforts, and the urgent need to cut through turf wars and agency cultures to improve the United States' strategic position. On Syrian issues, for example, our government leaders must create a strategy that brings the world together to end conflict while enhancing the United States' strategic position in the Middle East. This strategy should include a modern day Marshall Plan to rebuild the region and help the Syrians recover from a decade of conflict. In reality, our money and our military have been used far too often to attempt resolution of crises—in Syria, Russia, China, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere—rather than more readily employing informational, economic, and political power; diplomacy; and other significant elements of U.S. influence.

The answer lies, in part, in the hands of our policy-makers who must find a new way to steer the whole of government and reach out to our whole of society. We believe Congress and the White House must come together to revise the 1947 National Security Act in order to create a National Security Council (NSC) that is able to meet the tests of the modern era and establish itself as the U.S. government's prime strategist for domestic and international

challenges. In doing so, lawmakers must redefine the council's role and select its participants accordingly. To be clear, we are not calling for a larger NSC; instead, we seek a more effective organization that inspires whole-of-government and societal solutions. We see a Council with a fluid membership that cuts through bureaucracy and makes the interagency and societal outreach processes work because its leaders have the statutory authority to require cooperation and the leadership abilities to execute their plans. While the Homeland Security Council and Council of Economic Advisors each have their own missions and certainly have played pivotal roles in providing policy options to the White House, we believe a more robust NSC must do more to integrate all elements of our government. As the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act compelled the military to reform its command structure and work together, we must reimagine the National Security Council as a more effective interagency leader to make the whole of government responsive and better equipped for the increasingly complex threats the nation faces today.

With this new vision for the council must come a new approach for how the United States efficiently maximizes resources available within the whole of society. Currently, U.S. dollars are dedicated to a problem without sufficient planning for engaging the enormous capabilities of our society to protect our national interest and the interests of the people we mean to assist. Consider the \$5.1 billion promised to aid refugees from Syria and the region since 2011 or the state of emergency declared in Flint, MI, that provides \$80 million in aid for people who have been poisoned by their drinking water. In both cases, the U.S. government and its many diverse partners have failed to articulate a clear, long-term strategy for application across society to solve the crisis. We should be employing every element of our national apparatus—including the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and institutions of higher learning—to solve these complex challenges as a matter of routine. In addition, we must keep in mind that the individual states have a large and complex role to play in preventing and responding to crises. Recall in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, 50,000 National Guard members from every state in the country were part of what might have been the Guard's largest rescue and relief operation after a natural disaster. Clearly, a more effective strategy and application of resources could have been achieved. We can—and must—do better to pull all elements of society together.

A significant piece of the federal and state government's role should be to work toward rich public-private partnerships for advancing whole-of-society solutions. One fruitful, underdeveloped resource is partnerships with academic institutions. Arizona State University and other like-minded universities are the catalyst for long-term change and innovation to create strategic vision and whole-of-government and society approaches to the complex problems that we must solve. For instance, Arizona State University's newly established Public Service Academy is uniquely positioned to educate a pipeline of character-driven leaders dedicated to solving tomorrow's complex problems. The Global Security Initiative is applying multi-disciplinary research teams to transform the security and intelligence landscape and tackle the wicked problems of the world, such as the security implications of climate change, international and domestic threats to our digital infrastructure, and a broad spectrum of complex issues that lack obvious solutions. The Center on the Future of War—led by ASU and the New America public-policy institute in Washington, D.C.—brings together national security experts to leverage their expertise with a focus on conflict resolution. These three programs listed above, along with countless others at colleges and universities across the country, will provide invaluable insights and expertise to government leaders.

Now is the time to seize upon these three concepts—strategic vision, whole of government, and whole of society—to ensure that America can protect our long-term, pressing interests at home and abroad. We do not see the existing shortfalls in the federal government as creation of either the Republican or Democratic parties. However, we do think the solution lies in the hands of our next administration—whatever affiliation the party—and we strongly believe the presidential candidates must take a serious look at whole-of-society decision-making to meet our national challenges and secure our vital long-term interests. We also believe that our future leaders must turn to the whole of society—especially the abundant expertise at ASU and other colleges and universities—to solve the challenges they face. During the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, President John F. Kennedy was surrounded by a dozen members of the National Security Council's Executive Committee (ExComm) to advise him on the Soviet threat. Kennedy looked to the best and brightest; we should too. They effectively engaged numerous elements of the U.S. government and diffused the nuclear standoff with the Soviets. The U.S. government must operate in similarly strategic ways once again with equal focus, decisiveness, and creativity. The United States should not be involved on every problematic front in the world. As deemed appropriate, we must apply the strength of an integrated whole of government and broader community to achieve our objectives. In Kennedy's words, "Efforts and courage are not enough without purpose and direction." Our leaders need to apply the full capabilities of our power—political, diplomatic, informational, economic, and military—to safeguard vital U.S. interests and solve domestic challenges for decades to come.