

U.S. National Security Strategy Based on American Values

In The News

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Changing threats mean changing responses, and defense and White House officials have termed the document the most radical reshaping of the strategy since the end of the Cold War.

The threats of terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction have forced a fundamental reshaping of national security strategy, White House officials have said. How the United States defends the homeland has shifted from a strategy of deterrence to one of pre-emption, according to the new strategy.

Deterrence served the United States well during the Cold War when it confronted the Soviet Union in a nuclear stand-off, defense officials have said. Use of nuclear weapons would have meant massive retaliation and "mutually assured destruction."

In a military sense, pre-emption means attacking a threat before the threat materializes. A classic case is the Arab-Israeli War of 1967. The Egyptian military was poised to attack Israel, but the Israelis struck first and eliminated the Egyptian air force as a factor in the Six-Day War.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said the U.S. response during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 was another example of pre-emption. The Soviet Union wanted to station intermediate range nuclear missiles in Cuba. The U.S. government could not allow such a force 90 miles from its border. President John F. Kennedy ordered a blockade to stop Soviet ships from bringing more missiles and launchers to Cuba.

Rumsfeld said with the blockade -- it was called a "quarantine" at the time -- Kennedy pre-empted the Soviets.

The danger to the United States today has shifted since those times. President Bush said the gravest danger to the United States "lies at the crossroads of radicalism and technology." Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Syria and Libya are examples of rogue states actively seeking weapons of mass destruction. In the case of Iraq, Saddam Hussein has chemical and biological weapons and has used them against Iran and his own people. Iraq is also actively pursuing nuclear weapons and already has the missile technology to deliver such weapons, U.S. officials said.

Iraq's and other countries' ties to terrorist organizations increase the threats posed by these weapons. Many of the terror groups would like nothing better than to gain access to weapons of mass destruction, the strategy says.

"The United States will not allow these efforts to succeed," Bush wrote in the National Security Strategy. "We will build defenses against ballistic missiles and other means of delivery. We will cooperate with other nations to deny, contain, and curtail our enemies' efforts to acquire dangerous technologies. And, as a matter of common sense and self-defense, America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed."

The president has said repeatedly in recent months that any action has risks, but so does inaction. If a rogue state were to funnel chemical, biological or nuclear arms to a terrorist group, the results would be devastating, both he and Rumsfeld have said.

Both leaders have said attacks with conventional weapons in the past might have killed

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hundreds or thousands of people, but these new weapons could exact a toll in the tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands. How many casualties are the citizens of the United States willing to absorb in this new era? What sort of proof is necessary for the country to act?

Defending the United States and destroying the terrorist threat are imperatives in the new era that mean going after the terrorists wherever they lurk, according to the strategy.

The document says the government will defend the United States "by identifying and destroying the threat before it reaches our borders. While the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting pre-emptively against such terrorists, to prevent them from doing harm against our people and our country."

But the new strategy is not an American "go-it-alone" tract. Bush said in the document the United States would work with all like-minded states. The strategy specifically calls for strengthened alliances to defeat global terrorism and prevent attacks. It encourages countries to act regionally to isolate terrorists and deny terrorists havens.

U.S. diplomatic and economic policies must work to encourage this national security strategy, the document says. Free markets, free trade zones, diplomatic initiatives and public health efforts can be just as important as military campaigns, it notes.

"A world where some live in comfort and plenty, while half of the human race lives on less than \$2 a day, is neither just nor stable," the National Security Strategy states. "Including all of the world's poor in an expanding circle of development -- and opportunity -- is a moral imperative and one of the top priorities of U.S. international policy."

Again, the strategy calls for the United States to work with other countries to focus aid on needy states in need and to rescue failed or failing states. "Poverty does not make poor people into terrorists and murderers," Bush wrote. "Yet poverty, weak institutions and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorists networks and drug cartels within their borders."

Bush said the goal beyond the war on terror is a just world. "Today, humanity holds in its hands the opportunity to further freedom's triumph over all these foes," he said. "The United States welcomes our responsibility to lead in this great mission."