

2017

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### Recommended Citation

Tangredi, Sam J. (2017) "Options for National Security: Policy Practitioners' Advice for the New Administration," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 70 : No. 4 , Article 10.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol70/iss4/10>

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## OPTIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY PRACTITIONERS' ADVICE FOR THE NEW ADMINISTRATION

*Sam J. Tangredi*

*Charting a Course: Strategic Choices for a New Administration*, edited by Richard D. Hooker Jr. Washington, DC: National Defense Univ. Press, 2016. Available at [ndupress.ndu.edu/](http://ndupress.ndu.edu/). 381 pages.

*Charting a Course* is a compendium of analyses and recommendations from the scholar-fellows of the Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS), the primary research center of National Defense University (NDU), along with a few individuals from NDU colleges. It is the result of a yearlong project to address defense and foreign policy issues in a manner useful to an incoming presidential administration. It aims to make new officeholders aware of the facts and nuances the popular media often overlook. As might be expected, most of the INSS fellows are also practitioners with considerable government experience. Thus, the volume is more than a theory-based academic report; it incorporates a healthy dose of the art of the practical. It is also honest, the editor and authors admitting up front that “[w]e see no silver bullets, no elegant solutions to the complex problems we face” (p. xiii). Rather, it focuses on insights and options.

Editor Richard Hooker, director of INSS, leads off with the expected introduction to the book’s seventeen chapters, but it raises some interesting issues that the reader needs to keep in mind while reading the rest of the book. Particularly noteworthy is the question whether we can continue to treat the reemerging great powers of Russia and China as “simultaneously benign partners and aggressive adversaries” (p. ix). Hooker suggests that this divergent approach—seeking political or economic cooperation from nations that refuse to accept global norms—

makes it hard to develop a coherent strategy or respond to their actions in a consistent manner.

On a broader level, Hooker’s individual work, “American Grand Strategy” (chapter 1), seeks to refute the charge that the United States does not have a grand strategy. While admitting that no formal grand strategy document exists, he maintains that the core interests of the United States and its means of securing them have been consistent throughout America’s history as a world power.

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*Naval War College Review, Autumn 2017, Vol. 70, No. 4*

However, his definition of the term is essentially military and practical: “the use of all instruments of national power to secure the state” (p. 1). Others might wonder where messianic efforts to promote global democracy—which historians such as Walter A. MacDougall (in *Promised Land, Crusader State*) charge have been the dominant U.S. foreign policy since the 1880s—fit into Hooker’s construct; but they do not. Hooker proceeds in a highly rational manner, assessing potential actions in terms of ends, ways, and means, as befits someone with experience on the National Security Council (NSC) staff. But if only political decision making—and its end results—were that rational!

The following sixteen chapters break nicely into the two categories of functional (future conflict, defense policy, defense budget, national security reform, weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, and cyber policy) and regional (Asia-Pacific, NATO/Europe, Russia, Middle East, South Asia, Africa, Latin America, central Asia, and the high north / Arctic). The “swim lanes” are therefore well established, eliminating both the overlaps and gaps that are typical in edited volumes of individual contributions. Overall, the book is well organized and superior, in terms of balance, to many other academic compendiums.

It is impossible in limited space to review every chapter; most have important takeaway ideas that could provoke many an enlightened discussion. But necessity focuses the spotlight onto those with the most original and powerful insights.

Chapter 2, “The Future of Conflict” by Thomas X. Hammes, has a fine discussion of nonstate military actors, hybrid warfare, and the proliferation of technologies, about which he has written in the past. But it also suggests that the “return of mass to the battlefield” and the “return of mobilization” will be features of future wars, two elements that strategists have discounted recently. In Hammes’s construction, *mobilization* refers more to industrial production than to manpower. Obviously, the wars he envisions will not be the short ones that many senior military leaders seem to expect.

Frank G. Hoffman’s “U.S. Defense Policy and Strategy” (chapter 3) is similarly well written. He too advises decision makers to “prepare for longer and harder wars” and emphasizes “versatility” in force design, with capabilities that are useful “across the broadest possible spectrum of conflict.” However, he takes the contrarian viewpoint even further by advising the Department of Defense (DoD) to “reestablish a ‘win two modern MTW’ [major theater war] force construct” and shift resources to the U.S. Army so it can apply decisive force on the future battlefield. Such has not been the policy of the past two decades, and many think the construct “unaffordable.”

Michael J. Meese approaches his quantitative measures in “The American Defense Budget 2017–2020” (chapter 4) from the same perspective that former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Mike Mullen expressed: “[t]he single

biggest threat to national security is our debt” (p. 62). Given all other expenditures, Meese sees no way that an increase in the defense budget can be financed. However, he would like the administration to recognize that DoD already has made greater efforts to cut personnel costs (witness the changes to the retirement system) and health care than any other government agency, and Congress needs to make similar cuts in entitlement programs. He also notes that there are too many flag and general officers for the size of the current force.

Christopher J. Lamb’s “National Security Reform” (chapter 5) is a summary of his previous writings advocating specific steps to reform national security decision making, particularly the NSC system. The problem, as Lamb describes it, is that “[a]s the security environment grows increasingly complex and dynamic, the current system remains unable to coordinate multiple elements of power” (p. 83). Lamb sees the need for three steps in particular: (1) legislation that allows the president to empower “mission managers” to lead interagency missions, (2) a concerted effort by the president to create collaborative attitudes and behaviors among cabinet officials, and (3) adoption of a new model of an assistant to the president for national security affairs (known as the national security adviser [NSA]). The first two recommendations are necessary to ensure that mission managers (who would be subject to Senate confirmation) get the resources to actually carry out policy, not just draft it.

The new-model NSA would manage and deconflict the mission managers, while also being an honest broker concerning cabinet equities. But the mission managers would be responsible for the results, not the “omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent” NSA that many expect today, but that “does not exist and never has.” (Sorry, Dr. Kissinger.) Lamb uses the example of General James Jones, USMC (Ret.), as NSA. Jones was praised for his collaboration and process management, but was criticized for not working “himself into a state of utter exhaustion” by dominating policy debates, putting cabinet members in their places, and shadowing the president continuously. Lamb maintains that it is the process, not the person, that can deliver success. (Sorry again, Dr. Kissinger.)

Among the regional chapters, James J. Przystup and Phillip C. Saunders lay out a concise statement of U.S. national interests in the Asia-Pacific (chapter 9), with the maintenance of rules-based norms of international behavior (such as in the South China Sea) being the most difficult to achieve. However, they point out a factor often overlooked in all the media and business hype about China’s inexorable economic growth: “The relationship with Beijing will be challenging, but Chinese internal economic and political problems are likely to give U.S. policymakers more leverage” (p. 198). Perhaps it is time to wish for an Asian “color revolution”?

While not as contrarian toward current policies, the chapters on NATO (by Charles L. Barry and Julian Lindley-French) and Russia (by Peter B. Zwack) do suggest that NATO must both deter and reassure Russia, and that expansion beyond the current membership probably would give Putin and his successors an excuse to divert Russian attention from the country's declining economic condition. However, the alleged U.S. promise not to expand NATO made to then-Russian president Boris Yeltsin cannot be found in writing and cannot be verified, despite what current Russian president Vladimir Putin believes.

In his chapter on South Asia, Thomas F. Lynch III points to an "escalating proxy war between India and Pakistan in Afghanistan," something that certainly has not received a lot of press in the United States (beyond that concerning the Kabul parliament building and Salma Dam [the "Afghan-India Friendship Dam"]) (p. 271). Lynch includes intelligence activities the two nations have conducted in Afghanistan as but one piece of his overall discussion of competition throughout Asia and India-Pakistan tensions in particular. One hopes that he or other scholars will research this proxy war in greater detail.

Although not the most detailed discussion, that in chapter 12, Denise Natali's "The Middle East," has one of the most direct recommendations concerning U.S. decision making: "the United States should not attempt to fix failed states. Nor should it seek to resolve protracted conflicts without the necessary requisites in place, namely political conditions and regional actors committed to making necessary compromises" (p. 258). Instead, the United States "should selectively engage and support traditional partners who can serve as strategic anchor points in the region" (p. 249). The first irony of these recommendations is that the George W. Bush administration came into office with the same view (or at least the president did), but did an about-face after 9/11, attempting to use the invasion of Iraq to redirect the Middle East toward (at least somewhat) democratic governance. The second irony is that our pre-President Carter foreign policy was to rely on Saudi Arabia and Iran as the "strategic anchor points in the region." Iran is now hostile and near-nuclear and Saudi Arabia is a kingdom forged by force that seems to promote religious extremism. Israel is, of course, a democratic pillar. But reading Natali's chapter makes one think the United States should just step away from the Israeli-Palestinian peace process until the actors are "committed to making necessary compromises"—another contrarian recommendation (and one with which former president Carter certainly would not concur).

After lauding the stronger chapters, it is appropriate to identify the problematic. Chapter 8, "Cyber Policy," is one of the longest chapters, but also the most contradictory and—to anyone concerned about the potential dominance of government bureaucracy over the private sector—the scariest. The authors begin by

creating an excellent model of the relationships among technology (“the range of the possible”), law (“the limits of what is permissible”), and government policy (“the realm of the preferable”) (p. 151). But, as in the rest of the chapter, the authors’ enthusiasm becomes a runaway engine, and they proclaim their model to be a “common operating picture” when it is only a conceptual model.

The authors excoriate the federal government for its “industrial age” organization of departments and agencies that results in a “pile-up of ‘cross-cutting’ issues—particularly those generated by the disruptive information/digital age,” and they recommend a bewildering array of “issue-specific fusion centers” run by “supervisory czars.” While similar in concept to Lamb’s proposal, it diverges in scope, with potentially sixty-five centers for cyber issues alone (if I read their diagram correctly) (p. 152). Where we would get the people and funding is unexamined. Worse, they appear to contradict themselves, suggesting the creation of a Department of Cyber, with U.S. Cyber Command located under it instead of DoD. They justify this as “[f]ollowing the U.S. Coast Guard precedent of having one of the Armed Forces report to an agency other than DOD” (p. 155). Obviously, U.S. Cyber Command is not its own armed force, and it exists primarily to support the other combatant commanders—hard to do if you are funded and directed by a nondefense agency.

The authors conflate information (data, television, film, music, etc.) with information technology / cyber, and there seems no aspect of cyber in which they do not want the government involved: reviewing, requiring, investing in, establishing connections with nonstate actors, tapping private-sector research, etc. It is as if government, not the private sector, is the driver of information technology, rather than but one of its consumers. Some of the recommended actions border on the patronizing: “[c]onduct outreach to address public fears that AI [artificial intelligence] may cause loss of jobs or that autonomous machines may threaten public safety” (p. 164). At this point in AI’s development, who can say that it will *not* cause the loss of jobs or threaten public safety? Part of the chapter’s seeming breathlessness is caused by the authors’ desire to reinforce their insistence that cyber is a war-fighting domain “fully as significant as the land, sea, air, and space domains.” But is not cyber a tool, an enabler that facilitates action *within* the physical domains? Have we not become dependent on cyber *voluntarily*? The authors conclude with a campaign promise–like statement: “The potential opportunities found within the domain of information and cyberspace are seemingly limitless” (p. 168). That overweening attitude is what makes their chapter (and recommendations) so scary.

While not as problematic, chapter 7, “Combating Terrorism,” is the shortest chapter and comes across as weak. Perhaps that is because terrorism is discussed

in the regional chapters as well. However, the chapter does have a good treatment of the rivalry between the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and al Qaeda that points to the fact that local terrorist groups ally with the most successful umbrella organization. The definition of *successful* seems determined by which organization currently gets the most media coverage. There is a notably brief suggestion that the attack in San Bernardino, California, was connected to ISIL; however, that incident is not mentioned again, whereas other attacks are given more detail. One wonders whether that simply reflects the Obama administration's reluctance to tie the San Bernardino attack to Islamic terrorism, lest it give a hoodlum an excuse to attack a mosque.

The author provides a good discussion on the threat of veteran Islamist foreign fighters from the various Middle Eastern wars returning to commit terrorist acts in their home countries, but then makes the following curious statement: "Some countries, such as Russia, have decided to revoke the citizenship of their foreign fighters. But it is not in the interest of the United States to allow these fighters to remain in Syria or relocate to another conflict" (p. 143). But where do we want them to go? Not San Bernardino. The solution—which is not one—is that "[t]he issue of returnees should receive more diplomatic emphasis, forethought, and planning," and United Nations help is suggested (p. 143). Guantánamo or its equivalent is not discussed.

In summary, *Charting a Course*—including those chapters not reviewed—is an excellent and up-to-date summary of the national security issues that President Trump's administration will face, written by the most practical group of experts one might assemble. Whether one does or does not agree with the recommendations, most are argued logically and boldly. As the new DoD officials wait to be confirmed, they should read this book before they are inundated by policy papers. So should all other students and practitioners of national security affairs.