Center for American Progress

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Less Is More

Sensible Defense Cuts to Boost Sustainable Security

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Introduction and summary

"If we are to meet the myriad challenges around the world in the coming decades," argues Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, then our "country must strengthen other important elements of national power both institutionally and financially, and create the capability to integrate and apply all of the elements of national power to problems and challenges abroad." Gates's experience leading our armed forces under two presidents underscores the importance of not relying solely on our unquestioned military might to protect our shores and national security interests around the globe. Instead, Gates maintains, we need to adopt the concept of sustainable security—a strategy that embraces the need to slim defense spending, bringing our own fiscal house in order while investing in nonmilitary economic and social development programs abroad to combat the conditions that breed poverty and political instability.

Our current international posture is increasingly unsustainable. The reasons? First, the United States is simply spending too much continuing to fight wars in Afghanistan and Iraq while total defense spending over the past decade grew in an exponential and undisciplined fashion. Second, the relationship between our key foreign policy institutions (in defense, diplomacy, and economic and social development programs abroad) became wildly skewed in favor of defense at the expense of nonmilitary functions.

This muscle-bound yet clumsy combination of assets leaves America poorly positioned to deal with the threats and opportunities we face as a nation around the globe today and in the future. Restoring a sense of balance and sustainability to our international posture is absolutely essential. The upshot: We need to spend less money overall on defense weaponry while investing a portion of those savings in sustainable security initiatives that simultaneously protect our national security and promote human and collective security.

Shaping this more balanced approach will require sensible cuts in defense spending and concurrent but smaller strategic investments in sustainable security. This

will be challenging amid a rising chorus of concern in Congress and from the general public about deficits and the national debt. This year's deficit is expected to exceed $1.5 trillion, over 10 percent of our nation's gross domestic product—the highest deficit level since World War II. Yet we pay surprisingly little attention to the staggering cost of our current defense posture. U.S. defense spending has more than doubled since 2002, and the nearly three-quarters of a trillion dollars that the United States is now spending annually on defense is the highest in real terms since General Dwight D. Eisenhower left occupied Germany in the wake of World War II.

Military costs continue to constitute more than 50 percent of all federal discretionary spending.[1] Greater and greater sacrifices will have to be made in domestic and international priorities if more isn't done to strategically reduce defense spending. No one questions the need to fight terrorism and protect our country. That's precisely why it is so important for us to develop an international posture that is sensible, sustainable, and effective in achieving its core goals.

Bringing defense spending under control will clearly enhance the overall health of our economy and thus our overarching influence around the globe. But doing so without investing some of those savings in social and economic development and diplomacy abroad would be unwise. Indeed, Secretary Gates consistently notes that we need to strengthen U.S. civilian foreign policy and development institutions if we want to more effectively promote lasting stability and defend our interests around the globe. And he continually points out in public speeches, interviews, and congressional testimony that these institutions currently lack the capabilities and funding to be effective policy partners in promoting our interests internationally.

The mismatch is clear in Iraq and Afghanistan today. There is a massive capabilities gap between the Department of Defense and its civilian counterparts, the State Department and the United States Agency for International Development, or USAID, requiring the military to assume multiple civilian functions. What's more, that civilian expertise will be needed even more as the U.S. military completes its withdrawal from Iraq over the next year and a half and begins its expected drawdown of forces in Afghanistan in July 2011. The U.S. government's civilian-led development and stabilization efforts in both countries will need to be strengthened and empowered.

There are multiple problems in having the U.S. military carry out the roles traditionally and better conducted by the State Department and USAID. First, our men

and women in uniform lack the specific expertise in diplomacy and development needed to carry out these jobs effectively. USAID learned the business of development the hard way—through years of experimentation and periodic failure, and by building the skills of its personnel. In contrast, the U.S. military sees diplomacy and development aid primarily as useful tools for helping to reach their dominant goals of pacification and stabilization. Sometimes that works amid active fighting, but sustainable security over the long term needs to be fundamentally owned by local communities if it is to be successful—something development experts are trained to accomplish.

Second, the work of diplomacy and development is ultimately a distraction from the U.S. military's core missions. Our troops must be free to pursue their primary functions. This is exactly why Secretary Gates and others are so eager to invest in greater capacity for civilian institutions carrying out development and diplomacy. Third, using the U.S. military to carry out development and diplomacy is often exorbitantly expensive, in many instances costing twice as much as using USAID and regular development partners. Finally, the heavy involvement of our military forces in development and diplomacy has often blurred the line between military and nonmilitary actors, causing civilians to increasingly be seen as targets for military foes.

Initiating this more balanced approach to our national security needs can and should begin this year. With the support of Secretary Gates, the National Security Council, the State Department, and key voices in Congress, the Obama administration is in a unique position to strengthen its civilian foreign policy institutions to restore a greater sense of balance among the agencies that play such a key role in advancing our interests around the globe.

The effort will come down to money. A look into the budgets of the Department of Defense and the civilian International Affairs agencies is telling. The DoD's fiscal year 2011 budget request totals $708.2 billion. The international affairs budget request for the same period, reflecting the sum of activities of the State Department, USAID, and a number of other smaller entities, was $58.5 billion—8 percent of the total request from the Department of Defense.

This vast gap is emblematic of the imbalances in this arena in the proposed FY 2011 federal budget, yet there are some positive developments in the latest international affairs request to help reverse what Secretary Gates calls the "creeping militarization of some aspects of American foreign policy." The 2010 Supplemental Appropriations Act recommends $650 million be used to transition

Iraqi police training from the Department of Defense to the State Department.[2] Further, DoD's so-called 1207 funds, which support stabilization and reconstruction, will be replaced by the State Department's Complex Crises Fund.[3] This fund will "target countries or regions that demonstrate a high or escalating risk of conflict or instability, or an unanticipated opportunity for progress in a newly-emerging or fragile democracy."[4]

Finally, the Pakistani Counterinsurgency Capabilities Fund, designed to help the Pakistan government build its capacity to conduct counterinsurgency operations, will move from the Department of Defense to the State Department. The FY 2011 request of $1.2 billion for this fund exceeds the FY 2009 funding level by $500 million.[5]

These are positive steps, but in many ways they remain at the margins. Together, funding for the State Department and USAID represents just 1.4 percent of the national budget and less than 7 percent of what the United States spends on issues that can broadly be considered "national security" (see table).[6]

This paper identifies approximately $40 billion that could be cut from the Department of Defense budget without undercutting our national security. We propose that $30 billion be used toward deficit reduction. In December last year, the Center for American Progress proposed 10 cuts to current defense spending totaling $39.3 billion—the basis of our proposed $40 billion reduction in defense spending.[7]

The remaining $10 billion could be best transferred to USAID, an agency that is essential to preventing and managing conflicts in the 21st century. Together, these two steps would help reduce overall military spending while bolstering civilian development work in vital ways. This $10 billion would be transferred over a period of three years, representing an average annual boost of roughly 18 percent to the USAID budget.[8]

In addition, we argue for ongoing budget reforms currently underway within the U.S. government to develop a unified national security budget encompassing defense, diplomacy, and development. In previewing the Obama administration's national security strategy, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, "We cannot look at a defense budget, a State Department budget, and a USAID budget without defense overwhelming the combined efforts of the other two, and without us falling back into the old stovepipes that I think are no longer relevant for the challenges of today."

The Top 20

Top 20 countries benefitting from USAID assistance (obligated program funds) for FY 2009

	Country	FY 2009
1	Afghanistan	1,459,560,810
2	Pakistan	1,084,746,818
3	West Bank/Gaza	798,497,531
4	Egypt	551,255,600
5	Haiti	224,209,944
6	Kenya	515,238,368
7	Jordan	515,749,676
8	Sudan	467,960,516
9	Georgia	331,343,446
10	Iraq	443,519,655
11	Ethiopia	427,743,004
12	South Africa	324,356,642
13	Nigeria	290,736,554
14	Uganda	273,186,427
15	Tanzania	204,370,738
16	Colombia	225,890,663
17	Indonesia	177,123,304
18	Zambia	182,166,338
19	Mozambique	178,096,420
20	Liberia	138,861,346

Note: This does not include funds from military assistance, which would subtantially increase numbers for countries such as Israel, Egypt, Colombia, and Iraq.

Source: U.S. Agency for International Development, available at http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/money/.

In the pages that follow, we detail how this sustainable security approach would improve our national security and our federal budget process. We will first examine the current state of USAID and its programs. We will then recommend three ways to improve the agency's capabilities so that a sustainable security strategy will:

- Create greater economic prosperity and trading opportunities in the developing world
- Help prevent conflicts and instability in troubled developing nations
- Improve the health and well-being of people around the globe

Make no mistake—these goals are as important to our national security as our armed forces. As we will demonstrate, reforms to our defense spending and development aid agencies and programs should be undertaken now so that sustainable security becomes the operating strategy in our international relations with the developing world.

The time is ripe for the United States to take a fundamentally different approach to the world, and it is a rare moment when the United States can spend less money on improving our national security and advance the safety and well-being of millions of individuals while promoting shared interests around the globe.

USAID at the crossroads

The U.S. Agency for International Development has experienced numerous ups and downs over the past 50 years, at times becoming an easy lightning rod for criticism from the American public and the press. Indeed, foreign assistance programs remain one of the most controversial and least understood areas of public policy. Public opinion polls consistently demonstrate that Americans believe around 20 percent of the federal budget is spent on foreign aid, when in fact the amount spent is less than one-tenth of that level.[9]

Most credible senior military officials and diplomats feel that we invest too little in development assistance, not too much, given the positive impact these programs have on our own long-term well-being by creating greater economic prosperity and trading opportunities in the developing world, helping to prevent conflicts and instability in troubled developing nations, and fundamentally improving the health and well-being of people around the globe.

Following a joint letter by Secretary Clinton and Secretary Gates protesting a proposed $4 billion cut to diplomacy and development, Adm. Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, echoed their sentiment in a separate letter to the House and Senate leadership. Adm. Mullen writes, "We are living in times that require an integrated national security program with budgets that fund the full spectrum of national security efforts, including vitally important pre-conflict and post-conflict civilian stabilization programs."

This is not to say that USAID is without problems or challenges. Different presidents approached development assistance with very different visions, and the leadership of the agency itself has varied starkly in quality since its creation in 1961. Today, though, by almost any accounting the agency lacks much of the in-house capabilities needed to effectively guide development policy as a strategic priority.

USAID's permanent staff is now roughly 3,000, down sharply from a high-water mark of 15,000 during the Vietnam War. No one would suggest that it is desirable

to replicate the Vietnam-era approach to development, which was characterized by a top-down approach with little consideration for the realities on the ground. But what is equally problematic is that USAID's staff has now shrunk so much that the agency serves as a contracting mechanism whose programs are implemented largely by nongovernmental organizations and for-profit contractors. That's no way to run a government agency, especially one so crucial to our long-term national security.

During a January 2010 lecture at the Center for Global Development, Secretary Clinton said, "It is past time to rebuild USAID into the world's premier development agency." Indeed, the agency's services—from its work promoting good governance in fledgling democracies and countries in political transition to its efforts preventing man-made disasters and lessening the impact of natural disasters—are increasingly in demand. Unfortunately, USAID is in need of far greater resources to undertake the activities demanded of it. Secretary Gates and Secretary Clinton have kind words for the importance of development assistance, but USAID frequently loses in interagency turf battles as more and more of its core responsibilities are carved off to other agencies.

Throughout his presidential campaign, then-Sen. Barack Obama called for a doubling of foreign assistance to help cut global poverty by 2015. This level of funding may no longer be feasible given the federal spending required to lift the United States out of its current economic crisis and the often acrimonious political environment in Washington, but the additional provision of $10 billion in USAID's budget alongside a $40 billion reduction in defense spending would allow for major improvements in three key areas:

- Restoring a professional workforce
- Strengthening its "fundamental" development assistance capacity
- Improving the agency's ability to prevent and respond to disasters

Let's consider each of these areas of improvement in more detail.

Rebuilding USAID's professional workforce capacity

Few U.S. military or civilian development experts question the need for considerable investments in USAID's professional capacity to lead our nation's efforts to prevent global health pandemics, promote global food security, and support broad-based economic development around the globe. The Development

Leadership Initiative, or DLI, which was launched in 2007, is a step in the right direction toward rebuilding USAID's workforce.

DLI is a four-year initiative that seeks to double the size of USAID's Foreign Service officer corps. Testifying before Congress in February 2009, former USAID Deputy Administrator James Kunder called DLI "the single highest priority" at the agency. He went on to explain how having just over 1,000 Foreign Service officers spread throughout 85 countries fundamentally "undercuts our nation's ability to address the underlying causes of poverty and instability."

USAID's Human Capital Strategic Plan for FY 2009 to FY 2013 outlines the agency's strategic objectives. It calls for:

- A larger workforce with appropriate skill sets to meet the increasing demands of the international community
- Efforts to better develop current talent and invest in the current and future workforce
- Practical steps to retain the current workforce

Key to any meaningful modernization effort is revamping USAID's personnel system. It is increasingly rare for individuals to join the Foreign Service as a junior officer and stay until retirement, yet the Foreign Service system has been slow to recognize this reality of the modern workplace and adapt accordingly. As is the case with other occupations, Americans interested in joining the Foreign Service today are more prone to explore various, often related career paths. And a wide range of options exists for development-oriented individuals, including non-governmental organizations, philanthropies, development banks, international development institutions, and microfinance organizations. If USAID is focused on strengthening the quality and quantity of its workforce, it must hire, recruit, and retain based on the realities of the modern American workforce.

Two specific tracks should be considered in order to make USAID's workforce more flexible. The first is for Foreign Service officers to have the option to move between U.S. civil service agencies and the Foreign Service abroad and vice versa. Some officers with young families often prefer to be based in the United States. Others often prefer to return home when their children enter their high school years. The option to move between the civil service and the Foreign Service would incentivize these dedicated public service employees to remain available to USAID throughout their careers.

Secondly, the USAID personnel system needs to be more flexible in allowing mid-level development professionals to join the Foreign Service. The agency needs seasoned development professionals with specific skills linked to current priorities such as health and food security as well as program implementation in conflict areas such as Afghanistan and Pakistan. These types of development professionals have honed their skills through decades of work around the world. They should find the necessary incentives to join the Foreign Service and turn USAID into what it should be—the world's premier development agency. More Americans should have the opportunity to contribute to government service without making a lifelong commitment to the Foreign Service.

In short, diversity of experience should be treated by government personnel systems as a strength, not a weakness.

In addition to its essential work in the frontline states of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, USAID will play a leading role in promoting the "targeted investments" highlighted in the recently submitted FY 2011 International Affairs Budget request. The first two of these investments—food security and global health—will require much greater capacity at USAID. The budget requests $3.5 billion over three years to improve global food security. Yet USAID has just 130 agricultural specialists to implement these programs. The agency would also need greatly expanded capacity in terms of experts on nutrition and livelihoods to effectively advance food security around the globe.

These moves by the Obama administration are designed to reverse a poor decision made by the previous administration in January 2006, when the State Department launched a series of foreign assistance reforms known as the "F process." This process created a new position at the State Department in which the USAID administrator was "dual-hatted" as the director of foreign assistance. A new Office of Foreign Assistance was also created known as the F bureau. The F process not only stripped USAID's direct relationship to the Office of Management and Budget, but also meant that USAID's budget was prepared by the State Department. The F process also took away USAID's Policy and Program Coordination bureau (which ran strategic planning and coordination with bilateral and multilateral donors) and placed it in the State Department. These moves represented a major loss of capacity and autonomy for USAID because its field missions relied heavily on headquarters for policy guidance and best practices in carrying out their duties.

USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah announced in May 2010 the establishment of his agency's Policy Planning and Learning, or PPL bureau, a logical successor to the Policy Planning and Coordination bureau. This is a useful step forward in re-establishing more professional workforce capacity at USAID because the restoration of a policy planning capability will allow the agency to be more proactive in getting out ahead of crises and more firmly establishing development priorities.

A strong policy planning office will be able to help better coordinate the multitude of global development programs spread out across more than 20 government agencies and departments and could hopefully make important contributions to the preparation of a national strategy for global development by the Obama administration. In its current form, PPL is headed by an assistant to the administrator of USAID. We recommend that Congress work with USAID to make this position a Senate-confirmable assistant administrator position.

These steps do not obviate the need for reform of the Foreign Assistance Act to add coherency to U.S. development programs—which is currently underway in Congress—because effective policy planning continues to be hampered by the proliferation of development assistance goals, regulations, guidelines, and earmarks.[10] For the Obama administration to effectively institute USAID programs the agency needs to do fewer things and do them better.

We recommend that $4 billion over three years be dedicated to expanding USAID's staff with a particular emphasis on attracting mid-level officers with skills in food security, economic development, basic education, global health, and disaster prevention. Efforts should also be expanded to attract and retain returning Peace Corps volunteers given their proven expertise and commitment to many of these areas. In the 1960s, the Peace Corps was seen as a mission with genuine purpose, reflecting a fundamental willingness by the American people to improve the world around them. It seemed natural for former Peace Corps volunteers to continue with public service upon their return. That coherence of vision has been lost in the minds and imaginations of many young Americans today. Our current international aid program would greatly benefit from a new infusion of imagination, boldness, and common purpose.

Efforts should also be made to shorten and otherwise streamline the hiring process for USAID's Foreign Service officers given that many attractive candidates are deterred by the length and hassle of the official recruitment process, which remains cumbersome.

Strengthening fundamental development assistance

In the wake of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, USAID is increasingly engaged in stabilization activities. The FY 2011 budget request for Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan alone is $5.2 billion, almost $1.6 billion more than the last year's baseline appropriation for these three countries.[11]

This had led some development professionals to make a distinction between "fundamental" and "instrumental" assistance. Fundamental assistance seeks to improve the lives of beneficiaries as an end in and of itself and is best conducted in countries where leadership and local communities are committed to reform and development (see box). Instrumental assistance, in contrast, sees aid to benefi-

Fundamental assistance to Sudan

South Sudan will vote in an independence referendum in January 2011. All signs point to South Sudan separating from Sudan and the abusive government in Khartoum. The likely secession vote will split Africa's largest country in two—sparking major political, security, and economic ramifications throughout the region. There is also considerable danger that the division of Sudan into two successor states could be accompanied by wholesale violence.

But even if South Sudan is allowed to depart peacefully, it is poorly positioned to succeed as a modern state without major assistance. South Sudan is the size of France, yet it has only about 20 miles of paved roads. Its institutional capacity to govern itself and care for its citizens is badly limited. Its population currently faces some of the highest malnutrition rates in the world. And there is little in the way of modern livelihoods other than in the oil sector.

Some Americans will undoubtedly question the need to provide considerable assistance to a newly independent South Sudan, but the alternative is grim. If South Sudan were to falter and become a failed state or become otherwise mired in prolonged conflict, the United States and its allies would end up spending billions of dollars in humanitarian assistance simply to respond with lifesaving assistance. Indeed, the international community spent tens of billions of dollars on humanitarian aid in South Sudan during the earlier two-decade-long conflict between Northern and Southern Sudan.

In addition, as we have seen in both Afghanistan and Somalia, terrorists and organized crime networks find failed states an easy base from which to operate, directly threatening U.S. interests and lives. Those threats ultimately lead the United States to spend tens of billions of dollars more on defense spending and budgets. Thus we see that relatively modest investments in development assistance and crisis prevention assist the United States in embracing a much more sustainable approach to security over time.

Assistance to a newly independent South Sudan will need to be conditioned on the adoption of basic norms with regards to human rights and democracy in South Sudan. Giving the new government of South Sudan a blank check is no way to ensure development that will actually benefit the population and promote stability and security.

These programs should be disbursed rapidly, creating employment at the local level and encouraging reconciliation in communities that have often been torn asunder by decades of conflict and chronic underdevelopment. It will be vital for the United States to have its own development and transition experts on the ground. While multilateral financial institutions such as the World Bank will surely pledge large sums to assist South Sudan, the World Bank has a horrible record in actually getting programs implemented quickly and effectively in such high-profile transitions. This is exactly where dedicated, U.S. civilian-led development assistance can have an immediate and measureable impact.

ciaries as a means to an end, where the actual goal is a security objective that is abetted through development or humanitarian assistance. Instrumental assistance is often carried out in conjunction with host governments that are engaged in, or emerging from, intensive conflicts and upheaval and whose capacity and commitment to development may be in question.

Fundamental development assistance is and should remain USAID's core function. It is important, at the same time, that the agency remain involved in instrumental assistance and further explore its comparative institutional strength in operating in conflict environments. Both types of assistance are designed to ultimately replace USAID's programs with ones driven—and funded—by host country governments and local institutions, although this goal is more easily accomplished with fundamental rather than instrumental assistance.

Fundamental assistance, in its own right, has a preventative nature that looks to strengthen institutions and civil society around the world. Programs from Peru to Ghana and Botswana to Indonesia have helped improve standards of living while leaving structures behind that are necessary for those countries' sustained growth. These development programs have helped make countries more prosperous and stable, creating better economic partners and allies for the United States. It is essential that USAID continue to promote and further hone its expertise in fundamental assistance. We recommend that $3 billion over three years be devoted to strengthening this capacity at USAID.

Disaster preparedness

The United States continues to play a key role as the most important first responder in dealing with major humanitarian crises around the globe, such as the recent earthquake in Haiti and the major tsunami that hit Asia in 2004. USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, or OFDA, was created in 1964 and has long been recognized as a world leader in both responding to major emergencies and providing training and assistance to developing nations to help monitor and prevent natural disasters. OFDA responded to 80 disasters affecting more than 202 million people in 62 countries in fiscal year 2008.

A large part of why OFDA is so successful and highly regarded is because it works well with a wide range of nonprofit organizations, international economic and humanitarian aid institutions, local groups, and other branches of the U.S.

government. While many associate OFDA exclusively with dealing with natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods, responding to complex emergencies created by ongoing conflicts, displacement, and social collapse has been a major part of its portfolio.

The first challenge is improving disaster mitigation and prevention while making postcrisis transition efforts more effective and durable. Both conflict prevention and postcrisis transition programs tend to be underfunded in all but the most high-profile and attention-grabbing of instances, such as Haiti, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Hopefully, ongoing discussions between Congress and the Obama administration will also consider creating dedicated, fire-walled accounts for these activities. This would fundamentally change the way that funding currently works. USAID essentially steals funding from its other important programs to provide humanitarian relief and then hopes the funding is later backfilled by Congress through supplemental appropriations.

This makes logical programming extremely challenging. USAID often ends up borrowing from one set of lifesaving activities to fund another set of lifesaving activities. This leads to a system where funds allocated for relief in disaster-prone countries are stripped away to pay for the crisis of the day. What's more, this makes it exceedingly difficult for USAID to avoid simply being almost exclusively focused on the latest unexpected crisis at the expense of other major but less high-profile crises or valuable work in helping countries prevent crises through efforts to develop improved early warning systems and strengthened local capacities.

The value of prevention work can be seen powerfully in the impact of the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile. In Chile, early warning systems were in place, building construction standards were far higher, and the subsequent loss of life and property was a fraction of that in Haiti. Similarly, systems such as the USAID-funded Famine Early Warning Systems Network provide crucial early warning and vulnerability information on emerging and evolving food security issues. This data is used to aid decision makers in their efforts to mitigate food insecurity and is far cheaper than responding to a disaster after it occurs. The Famine Early Warning Systems Network has centers all around the globe, including ones in Guatemala, Niger, Haiti, Yemen, and Afghanistan, and represents a major step forward in preventing or lessening the impacts of natural disasters.

USAID's disaster-response capacity is also chronically underfunded, even though we know we will see major natural and man-made disasters every single year. In

practice, this leads to many disruptions in USAID's activities and to considerable gamesmanship at the moment a crisis hits as agencies, offices, and departments try to protect their respective budget bottom lines rather than purely focusing on the work of disaster response. We recommend that a contingency fund of $1 billion annually be established to allow for the most effective immediate response to major humanitarian disasters as they occur and to better fund much-needed activities aimed at prevention around the globe.

Conclusion

The Obama administration has a historic opportunity to recalibrate and rebalance America's approach to the world and advance the cause of sustainable security. By investing greater amounts in development assistance and crisis prevention while beginning to curb overall defense spending, the administration can better protect the American people, enhance the safety and well-being of millions in the developing world, and promote our shared interests in a more stable, peaceful, and prosperous international community.

Endnotes

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