



[Briefing Room](#)

[Your Weekly Address](#)

[Speeches & Remarks](#)

[Press Briefings](#)

[Statements & Releases](#)

[White House Schedule](#)

[Presidential Actions](#)

[Executive Orders](#)

[Presidential Memoranda](#)

[Proclamations](#)

[Legislation](#)

[Pending Legislation](#)

[Signed Legislation](#)

[Vetoed Legislation](#)

[Nominations & Appointments](#)

[Disclosures](#)

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

February 06, 2015

Remarks by National Security Advisor Susan Rice on the 2015 National Security Strategy

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you, Strobe, for your kind words and to everyone at Brookings. This was my home for six peaceful years. I miss it. Looking around the room, I see many friends who challenged and encouraged me — and who continue to generate some of the best ideas for America's foreign policy. So, I'm very pleased to be here.

This morning, President Obama released his 2015 National Security Strategy. Fundamentally, it's a strategy to strengthen the foundations of America's power—political, economic, and military—and to sustain American leadership in this new century so that we can surmount the challenges of today and capture the opportunities of tomorrow.

Our strategy is guided by the same four enduring national interests we laid out in the 2010 National Security Strategy – security, prosperity, values, and a rules-based international order. Our interests are enduring, but in many respects, 2015 is a whole new ballgame. Much has changed in the last five years.

As a nation, we are stronger than we've been in a long time. Since President Obama took office, we arrested the worst financial crisis and repaired the biggest collapse in world trade since the Great Depression. In 2010, unemployment in the United States was almost 10 percent. Today, businesses have added more than 11 million new jobs, and unemployment is down to 5.7 percent. In 2010, our deficit topped \$1 trillion; today, we've cut that in half, to less than \$500 billion. Our kids are graduating at higher rates, and millions more Americans have healthcare. We've unlocked a domestic energy boom that has made us the world's number one producer of oil and gas, strengthening our energy security – with huge ripple effects for global oil markets and geopolitics. We've brought home almost 170,000 American troops, responsibly ending two long and costly ground wars and re-purposing our military strength so we can better respond to emerging threats and crises. The diversity and creativity of the American people continue to be a wellspring of American power—driving innovations that are revolutionizing everything from the way we hail a cab to the way we treat disease. By fortifying our foundational strengths, America is in a better position to confront current crises and seize the opportunities of this new century.

Yet, few know better than we the complexity of the challenges that America faces. Every day, I start my morning with a briefing that covers the most sobering threats and the difficult problems we confront around the world. These include the fall-out from the Arab uprisings, Russian aggression, Ebola, cyber attacks, and a more diffuse terrorist threat.

But, too often, what's missing here in Washington is a sense of perspective. Yes, there's a lot going on. Still, while the dangers we face may be more numerous and varied, they are not of the existential nature we confronted during World War II or the Cold War. We can't afford to be buffeted by alarmism and an instantaneous news cycle. We must continue to do the hard work of leading a

complex and rapidly evolving world, of seizing opportunities, and of winning the future for our children.

Strong and sustained American leadership remains essential, as ever. Think for a minute where the world would be today without decisive U.S. leadership. Ebola would be spreading throughout West Africa and likely to far corners of the world. Instead, America galvanized the world to roll back this horrible disease. Without us, Russia would be suffering no cost for its actions in Ukraine. Instead, the ruble is in a free fall, and Russia is paying dearly for flaunting the rules. Without us, there would be no military campaign or sixty countries countering ISIL's advance. There would be no prospect for a global deal on climate change; no pressure for Iran to be at the negotiating table; and, no potential for trade that meets a higher standard for our workers and businesses.

Nonetheless, there is a loud debate in Washington about American leadership in the 21st century. But the issue is not simply when we should have started arming Syrian rebels or whether we should provide lethal weapons to Ukraine. It is about the nature of U.S. leadership for the future. With this national security strategy, we stake out a much larger role for America in shaping our world, while anticipating the challenges to come.

Before I go through the elements of this strategy, I want to note how our approach may differ from what others may recommend. We believe in the importance of economic growth, but we insist upon investing in the foundations of American power: education and health care; clean energy and basic research. We will always act to defend our country and its people, but we aim to avoid sending many thousands of ground forces into combat in hostile lands. We have renewed our core alliances, while also building partnerships with emerging powers and neglected regions. We are committed to fighting terrorism and stopping the spread of nuclear weapons, even as we rally the world to meet the threats of tomorrow—malicious cyber actors and deadly pandemics; climate change and competition in space. We focus - every day - on the crises in the Middle East and Ukraine, but we are simultaneously rebalancing to the regions that will do more to determine the course of the 21st century—East Asia and India, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas.

So, with that in mind, let me outline the four ways we are advancing our core interests.

The first element of our strategy is to secure the U.S., our citizens, our allies and partners through a dynamic global security posture in which we employ our unique capabilities, forge diverse coalitions, and support local partners. This approach builds on a more secure homeland and a national defense that is second to none. President Obama is committed to maintaining the best trained, best equipped, and best led military force the world has ever known, while honoring our promises to service members, veterans, and their families. To ensure success, we call on Congress to support responsible investments in our national security, including by ending sequestration.

To counter today's threats, we're implementing a comprehensive counter-terrorism approach that takes account of how the enemy has evolved. As al-Qa'ida core has been decimated, we've seen the diffusion of the threat - to al-Qa'ida affiliates, ISIL, local militias, and home-grown violent extremists. This diffusion may for now reduce the risk of a spectacular attack like 9/11, but it raises the probability of the types of attacks that we've seen in Boston and Ottawa, Sydney and Paris. To meet this morphing challenge, we are combining our decisive military capabilities with local partnerships, with the financial tools to choke off funding, and the international reach of our law-enforcement and intelligence agencies. We're strengthening the capacity of weak states to govern their territory and provide for their citizens, while countering the corrosive ideology of violent extremism. Fighting terrorism is a long-term struggle. There will be setbacks, and there are no one-size-fits-all solutions. We have to work across multiple lines of effort in diverse contexts to be effective.

To degrade and ultimately defeat ISIL, we assembled a broad coalition that is confronting this scourge from all angles—from training Iraqi security forces and supporting the moderate Syrian opposition to encouraging political reforms in Iraq that foster greater inclusion. Together, we've taken out thousands of ISIL's fighters; destroyed nearly 200 oil and gas facilities that fund their terror; and pushed them out of territory, including areas around Baghdad, Sinjar, and the Mosul Dam. Just last week, ISIL conceded defeat in their months-long siege of Kobane. And with the world united in condemnation of its horrific executions, ISIL should know that their barbarism only fortifies the world's collective resolve.

Our counter-terrorism strategy is still at work in Afghanistan, where we ended our combat mission as planned. Now, we are focused on supporting a sovereign and stable Afghanistan that will not be a safe haven for al-Qa'ida terrorists. Even as we help develop Afghan security forces, we will continue to keep pressure on al-Qa'ida through a capable counterterrorism mission.

American leadership remains essential not only to tackling today's threats but also to addressing the global challenges that will define the nature of security for our children and grandchildren. And here, too, we have to lead with our heads, enlisting partners to work alongside us.

American leadership is addressing the danger of nuclear proliferation. No threat poses as grave a risk to our security as the potential use of nuclear weapons. That is why we continue to secure nuclear material and strengthen international norms against the use of all weapons of mass destruction, moving us closer to achieving the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons.

American leadership rallied the world to toughen sanctions against Iran. Through diplomacy and sustained economic pressure, we've halted the progress of Iran's nuclear program and rolled it back in key respects. Now, we must give diplomacy a chance to finish the job. If diplomacy fails, it will not be for lack of good faith by America or the P5+1. And then, if necessary, we would be stronger in

leading our partners to dial up the pressure and in making sure Iran does not obtain a nuclear weapon.

American leadership is addressing the dangers of pandemic disease. Our agenda to improve global health security doesn't end with Ebola. It strengthens the capacity of states and international institutions to prevent, detect, and respond to future outbreaks, before they become deadly epidemics.

American leadership is addressing the very real threat of climate change. The science is clear. The impacts of climate change will only worsen over time—even longer droughts, more severe storms, more forced migration. So we're making smart decisions today that will pay off for generations, like our ground-breaking climate commitment with China that will limit both our nations' greenhouse gases and bend down the global emissions curve.

American leadership is also addressing the pressing need for enhanced cyber-security. As more of the world comes online, we're leading an international effort to define the rules for how states engage with one another in cyberspace, while ensuring the Internet remains a powerful tool to drive future advances. At the same time, we are committing new resources to bolster the security of U.S. critical infrastructure, government networks, and other systems against cyber threats.

Second, we will expand prosperity by using our renewed economic strength—our resurgent economy and improved energy security—to bolster the global financial system, advance an open international economic order, and reduce inequality and poverty.

With the world's top universities, premier research facilities, and a culture of entrepreneurship, America already has the keys that will drive our knowledge economy through the coming century. And, with critical investments in technology and innovation, we'll keep sharpening our technological edge to keep the American economy at the forefront of innovation.

We're opening more markets to American businesses, workers, and farmers while forging trade agreements that set high standards for fair wages, safe workplaces, and environmental protections. And, to make sure new trade and growth benefit people around the world, we'll continue to pursue a sustainable development agenda, grounded in our commitment to end extreme poverty.

We'll work with Congress to pass Trade Promotion Authority so we can finalize the Trans-Pacific Partnership, thus securing a free trade agreement with many of the world's fastest-growing economies. We're working to make rapid progress with the European Union on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, expanding what is already the largest trading relationship in the world. And, we are committed to renewing and enhancing the African Growth and Opportunity Act to further deepen our investment in that promising region.

Africa is primed to become a major center of global growth. We've ramped up our commitments across the continent, including through the President's Power Africa initiative to connect millions more people to reliable electricity. Through Feed the Future, we're helping farmers plant better crops and raise their incomes, while also improving the food security of the region. And last August, for the first time ever, President Obama hosted some 50 African leaders to chart ways our nations will do more together and seize opportunities for U.S. businesses to invest in Africa's future.

Third, at a time when citizens in every region are demanding greater freedom and more accountability from their governments, our strategy is to defend democracy and human rights, combat corruption, promote open government, and stand with civil society. We do so by living our values at home, growing the ranks of capable democratic states, and defending universal rights. We'll help countries in transition—like Burma, Tunisia, and Sri Lanka—become more open, more democratic, and more inclusive societies. We'll support established democracies that are in danger of backsliding. We'll empower citizens and NGOs in places where they are under attack.

At the same time, President Obama has deepened our commitment to promoting that basic American value: equality. We believe everyone should be able to speak their minds and practice their faith freely. We believe all girls deserve the very same opportunities as boys. We believe that all humans are created equal and are worthy of the same love and respect—including our lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender brothers and sisters. These beliefs are fundamental to who we are.

Advancing equality is both morally right and smart strategy. If we reduce disparities, which can lead to instability and violence, we increase our shared security. Reams of empirical evidence demonstrate how countries do better—across every metric—when they tap the talents of all their people. So, we champion the rights of vulnerable communities—those targeted by abuse or excluded from society—and counter escalating cycles of hatred that can spark violence. Mass killings threaten our common security and diminish our shared humanity, so we affirm that governments have a responsibility to protect civilians. We'll continue to lead global efforts to prevent atrocities and hold accountable those who commit the worst abuses.

We're also reaching out to populations that America can ill-afford to neglect. With more than half the world under the age of 30, our strategy invests in and empowers young people through educational exchanges and entrepreneurship. Our Young Leaders initiatives in Africa and Southeast Asia identify and mentor the next generation of talent to grasp opportunity.

And, because we seek to lead by example, we'll keep working to make our own laws more inclusive, to sustain our prohibitions against torture, to protect civil liberties and privacy, and to improve transparency on issues like electronic surveillance. We've reduced the population of Guantanamo by nearly half, and while there are tough challenges ahead, we mean to keep going until we finish the

job.

Finally, our strategy leverages American leadership to uphold the liberal international order, which has served the world well for 70 years, by reinforcing rules-of-the-road and strengthening and diversifying our alliances and partnerships in every region of the world.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine is a heinous and deadly affront to long-standing international law and norms. In lock-step with our European allies, we have built a coalition of partners around the world to impose steep political and economic costs on Russia, in contrast to its cost-free invasion of Georgia. And, we will continue to turn up the pressure, unless Russia decisively reverses course. At the same time, we're providing vital economic support to help the Ukrainian people write a better future for their country, and we are strengthening our enduring alliance with Europe—by reassuring our allies in Eastern Europe and investing in modernizing NATO to meet emerging threats.

As we update the existing international system, our strategy is to enhance our focus on regions that will shape the century ahead, starting with the Asia-Pacific. Our rebalance is deepening longstanding alliances and forging new partnerships to expand cooperation. We're investing in ASEAN, the East Asia Summit, and the Pacific Islands Forum to strengthen their capacity to enforce regional norms, respond to crises like natural disasters, and resolve disputes peacefully, so that the Asia Pacific remains a region of dynamic growth and opportunity.

With China, we're building a constructive relationship that expands practical cooperation across a wide spectrum of issues from global health to non-proliferation, even as we confront real differences over human rights, cyber-enabled economic espionage, and the use of coercion to advance territorial claims. President Obama's recent trip to India strengthened another critical partnership that will deliver economic and security benefits for both our nations and the broader region, and help lift up the lives of more than a billion people. In furtherance of our relationships throughout the region, I'm pleased to announce today that we have invited Prime Minister Abe of Japan and President Xi of China for state visits, and we look forward to welcoming other Asian leaders to the White House this year—including President Park of South Korea and President Widodo of Indonesia.

At the same time, we seek a Middle East that's more secure, prosperous, and where democracy can take root. That's the ultimate vision we're working toward with partners throughout the region. We'll continuously strengthen the unique bonds that unite the peoples of Israel and America. Our commitment to Israel's security remains enduring and unshakeable. We refuse to give up on a peaceful resolution to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. We'll keep investing in the ability of our Gulf partners, like Saudi Arabia and the UAE, to deter aggression, even as we deepen our cooperation on regional challenges. Since Libya, Syria, and Yemen confront persistent violence and instability, we'll protect our people, work with partners to shrink terrorist safe havens, and

support those working to achieve political and social reform.

To be sure, the region's challenges are many, including: a generational transformation; citizens' legitimate demands for political and economic reform; sectarian, ethnic, and tribal tensions; and Iran's destabilizing influence. But, we'll keep leading international efforts to reduce insecurity and, drawing on all sources of our influence—not just our military—we will work to foster progress that endures.

Closer to home, Latin America and the Caribbean is a region that's experienced rapid growth, with a large and growing middle class, vibrant democracies, and still untapped potential. It's grappling with challenges like transnational crime and trafficking that have serious implications for our own security. Thanks in part to our opening with Cuba, which turns the page on 50 years of fruitless policy, we have new opportunities to strengthen our partnership with our neighbors. We're investing particularly in Central America to improve governance and citizen safety to address some of the root causes of mass migrations, like we saw last summer.

Across a range of issues, with an array of partners, the United States is proudly shouldering the responsibilities of global leadership. As President Obama made clear during his State of the Union address: "The question is not whether America leads in the world, but how." The answer is: we are pursuing an ambitious, yet achievable agenda, worthy of a great power. The President's Budget directly supports his strategy. Our national security leadership is united around this shared vision and agenda. And, we are eager to work with Congress to restore the vital bi-partisan center to U.S. foreign policy.

Our unparalleled leadership is grounded in America's enduring strengths and guided by a clear sense of purpose. We approach challenges using all levers of our power—vigorous diplomacy, broad-based development, economic leverage, our technological advantages, the talent and diversity of our people, and, when needed, our military might. We rally partners to enact sustainable solutions when challenges arise. We strive to set the highest standards by our own example. And, we lead with our eyes fixed firmly on the future, alert to opportunities to make the world safer and increasingly just.

President Obama has two years left in his term—and two years is plenty of time. This national security strategy is a blueprint for what we intend to get done over the next two years - from degrading ISIL and opposing Russian aggression, to leaving behind a world that can more effectively meet the dangers of climate change and disease, cyber threats, and extreme poverty.

If we run through the tape, America will be better and more sustainably positioned to continue leading - on the issues, and in the regions, that will shape our future.

One thing I can guarantee you: President Obama is going to leave everything on the field, and so will

the rest of us. The challenges ahead will surely continue to be many and great. Progress won't be quick or linear. But, we are committed to seizing the future that lies beyond the crisis of the day and to pursuing a vision of the world as it can and should be.

That's our strategy for sustaining the leadership that future generations deserve. Anything less would not be worthy of the American people or of our great nation.

Thank you.

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