The international system is shifting in ways not yet fully understood. The well-worn frameworks of “post–Cold War era,” “strategic pause,” or even “the Global War on Terror” are no longer helpful in understanding the role of new powers such as China and India, the expanding reach of militant Islamist ideology, or the growth of major power provocations short of traditional war. Indeed, no single, compelling frame may exist that could capture the complexity and breadth of challenges we face. Critics have been right to point out the failures of the Obama administration to articulate its vision for how the world is evolving along all these dimensions. Yet the administration is not alone: no significant historian, analyst, or politician has done so either, including the administration’s harshest critics.

The time is more than ripe for serious discussion of the dynamics shaping the global order and the role for U.S. leadership and action within that order. Discerning the shifting nature of the international system, and designing an effective set of U.S. security tools within it, are monumental tasks, but they are not unprecedented. It is the same task that faced “the wise men” who helped shape the U.S. approach to world affairs at the end of World War II. Our circumstances today are likewise daunting, requiring a similarly disruptive reexamination of our strategies and capabilities for securing U.S. interests. Even more so than in 1945, this effort will be difficult to accomplish within the confines of government—due in part to the pernicious effect on strategic thinking of a culture of crisis management but also due to the very nature of the challenges and opportunities at hand, the range of which extend beyond the expertise of government to address.

The work of helping policymakers and the public frame an understanding of the international system and of U.S. security interests, objectives, capabilities and tools within it, is at the heart of the International Security Program’s mandate. We are uniquely positioned to bring together a broad, bipartisan cross-section of public- and private-sector stakeholders, from Capitol Hill and the administration to the think tank and academic sectors to the best thinkers in the private sector. We are also advantaged by being part of a larger CSIS family that has world-class expertise in every region of the globe and on trade, economic statecraft, development, energy, and global health. As the United States transitions into presidential campaign season this year, our ISP team will be seeking to help frame the key debates over how American government and society can lead in the highly complex, fast-moving environment of the twenty-first century.
The Navy’s bold new “distributed lethality” (DL) concept could dramatically change naval operations both in terms of geographic dispersion and armaments of individual ships. By decreasing emphasis on manned aircraft, DL would have significant implications for shipboard weaponry, especially in terms of defensive and offensive missiles as well as payload structure. The concept has already garnered serious attention, but questions remain about its practical implications and near-term implementation.

A shift away from carrier groups to smaller, heavily armed “surface action groups” has several drivers, especially the challenges posed by anti-access/area-denial threats. The primacy of carrier aviation encourages adversaries to target carriers; reducing reliance on them presents an adversary with more targets, but it incurs new risks.

With increased dispersion comes increased demand for individual ship defenses, including air defenses and antiship missiles. Regional missile defense missions, and thus SM-3 missiles, may also become less concentrated and more distributed across the fleet. One way to boost interceptors without ships is to put more defensive missiles on land, but in principle a Navy-operated land-based Vertical Launching System (VLS) could hold offensive strike capabilities.

DL would also mean more offensive missiles. Writing in *Proceedings*, three senior surface warfare officers recommend two new types of medium-range missiles that could be dropped into the VLS or “bolted” onto virtually any ship in the fleet. A good portion of the fleet could become missile carriers.

It remains to be seen if the Navy will buy the quantity of armaments the concept suggests, but the sheer number of missile tubes required will itself be a challenge. Replacing Ohio-class guided-missile submarines (SSGNs) by 2028 would be quite costly, but their retirement will mean a net reduction of some 600 missile cells. There are several ways to meet this shortfall: Virginia Payload Modules, with 28 additional cells; Towed Payload Modules, trailers with lots of tubes; and enhanced at-sea reloading. Other solutions include packs of missiles in semiautonomous unmanned undersea vehicles or prepositioning on the seafloor.

Creating multi-mission flexibility in the missiles themselves may be one way to take greater advantage of scarce tubes. Tomahawk is one example of such flexibility. Another is SM-6, currently used for cruise missile defense, which will soon be tested for terminal ballistic missile defense. With different payloads, the SM-6 might evolve to land-attack or antiship missions.

Although the implications of distributed lethality are not yet fully understood, one thing seems clear: there are going to be a lot of missiles involved.
The Smart Women, Smart Power (SWSP) Initiative launched at CSIS on December 8, 2014, with Samantha Power, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, speaking about issues ranging from the U.S. relationship with Russia to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to the challenges of global diplomacy. On March 10, CSIS will welcome Anne-Marie Slaughter, president of the New America Foundation, for our second live event. Look for an invitation to that event in February.

Live events are just one aspect of SWSP. An Apple iTunes podcast is another. Nina Easton, Fortune Magazine columnist and chair of Fortune Most Powerful Women International, moderates both the live events and the podcasts. Guests have included high-profile women such as U.S. Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker, Senator Susan Collins (R-ME), and the State Department’s Ebola chief, Ambassador Nancy Powell. Podcasts have also featured women foreign affairs analysts from throughout CSIS (our staff is approximately 50 percent female) and the broader think tank community. Finally, the podcast has also tried to give voice to leaders who may not be household names, but who are doing extraordinary work. In one recent podcast, Easton interviewed a Syrian refugee who works for a nongovernmental organization in Turkey. She recounted the harrowing story of how she escaped the violence in her home country and is now helping other victims of the Syrian Civil War.

The SWSP Initiative aims to amplify the voices of women in foreign policy, national security, and international business. It provides a platform where top female leaders are seen and heard discussing critical global issues and offering solutions. The effort is bipartisan, and men are welcome at our events. We encourage everyone to join in the discussion on our Facebook and LinkedIn social media pages.

The CSIS Smart Women, Smart Power Initiative is made possible with support from Citi and presented in partnership with Fortune.

Media Highlights

“I think he’s going to be very much the same guy everybody knows... He’s very disciplined, he is out there trying to get things done, solve problems.”
—Andrew Hunter to Politico on Ashton Carter and his nomination to be secretary of defense.

“If you really wanted to reduce carbon emissions through nuclear, it was going to be incredibly expensive... You’d have to build an incredible number of power plants.”
—Sharon Squassoni to the New York Times on some on the difficulties with reducing carbon emissions through nuclear power.

“Time, I think, is the issue that is not being valued as highly anymore. Things are being pushed to the right all the time... Whether that is coming from the DoD end or the contractor end, depending on the program, I have very low confidence in any program not ending up with some delays.”
—Ryan Crotty to National Defense Magazine on the current defense budget environment and its impact on programs.

The United States has left the era of the Cold War behind, entering what author Paul Bracken calls a “Second Nuclear Age.” We have moved from a world of nuclear bipolarity to nuclear multipolarity. Regional rivalries and sectarian conflicts are now taking place in a nuclear context. While stated U.S. policy is to reduce reliance on nuclear
weapons, some nations are increasing their reliance. How well positioned is the United States to address the challenges posed by this new environment?

The CSIS Defense and National Security Group, led by Dr. Clark Murdock, explore this question in a forthcoming report entitled “Project Atom: A Competitive Strategies Approach to Defining U.S. Nuclear Strategy and Posture for 2025–2050.” In this zero-based, “blue sky” review of U.S. nuclear strategy and force posture, teams from three independent think tanks in Washington came together over the course of several months to debate, discuss, and ultimately identify what the U.S. nuclear strategy for 2025–2050 should look like and what U.S. nuclear posture would be needed to support it. While agreement was not always achieved, aspects of the future security environment became clear.

Today, the threats posed by nuclear terrorism and further nuclear proliferation—both to additional states and nonstate actors—are viewed as greater threats than those posed by established nuclear-armed states. Due to the limited utility offered by nuclear weapons in deterring and combating these types of threats, the nuclear mission has been neglected and reliance on nuclear weapons reduced as a matter of policy. The diminished role of nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy has damaged the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence among allies and ignores the possible strategic effects nuclear weapons can provide during a crisis or conflict, such as the ability of an adversary to escalate their way out of a conflict.

U.S. nuclear strategy going into the 2025–2050 timeframe will need to address these credibility issues. Concrete actions, such as forward-deploying U.S. nuclear weapons, may need to be taken. Relying on the strength of U.S. conventional power ignores the reason potential adversaries rely on their own nuclear capabilities. The United States must possess the ability to prevent or answer potential escalation at every level, including limited, discriminate nuclear use. Employable nuclear options at various levels make the option of nuclear escalation unattractive to those who compensate for conventional weakness through nuclear weapons use.

The Project Atom report explores these issues and many others that play into building a nuclear strategy for the future. The report is expected to be released in mid-March 2015.

**Recent Publications**

**READ** *Institutional Foundations of Federated Defense* for actionable recommendations on how the United States and its partners could integrate their defense capabilities in support of shared interests.

**READ** *Leveraging Global Value Chains for a Federated Approach to Defense*, which outlines ways that a federated approach can better harness global supply chain networks and increase the net capability available to allies and partners.

**READ** “The 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA),” a commentary by ISP experts on four key issue areas in this year’s NDAA.

**READ** *Assessing the Asia-Pacific Rebalance* for an evaluation of both public statements and visible implementation of the U.S. rebalance strategy, as viewed from both Washington and regional capitals.

**READ** “Europe Defense Trends: Briefing Update,” for an update on the key national defense budgetary trends of 37 European countries analyzed in a December 2012 CSIS report.