

Conference Theme for the 60th Annual
Student Conference on United States Affairs (SCUSA 60)
At the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, November 5-8, 2008

SCUSA at 60: Measuring Progress and Defining New Challenges

In 1949, shortly after the close of a world war and at the dawn of a cold one, 126 student delegates gathered at the United States Military Academy for the first annual Student Conference on United States Affairs (SCUSA) to discuss U.S. policies for Europe. Dean Rusk, who was then an Undersecretary of State, spoke to that first conference of students from colleges and universities primarily in the American Northeast, as they grappled with the problems and objectives of the coming decade, the 1950s. Since that time, our world has changed dramatically, as has the United States' role in it, but student delegates continue to assemble on the banks of the Hudson River every year to constructively engage in lively debate on issues of U.S. national security. Now these delegates number over 300, and hail from 150 colleges and universities across the United States and around the globe, including students from 19 countries.

Over the years that followed, the student delegates of SCUSA dealt with a variety of issues. As the staff of this year's 60th SCUSA conference reviewed the topics and speakers from the past 59 SCUSA's, several recurring themes were immediately evident. The most striking was the theme of change and uncertainty, which harkens back to those early SCUSA pioneers who pondered what the coming decade would hold for the world's greatest power. This theme reappears regularly as our delegates consistently strain to see over the horizon and eagerly anticipate the challenges that lie ahead. Unsurprisingly, another pervasive theme was that of security and how to deal with security challenges ranging from the threat of Soviet Communism and decolonization to human security concerns and the rising challenges posed by non-state actors. A final common thread involves issues related to development and globalization and encompasses diverse topics such as poverty, disease, environmental challenges, state building, and migration. The United States has made significant progress in each of these issue areas. In fact, it has overcome many of its initial challenges, but new challenges, unintended consequences, and some enduring difficulties remain.

Now, in the ninth year of a new millennium, SCUSA delegates will again engage in debate over appropriate policies to deal with the plethora of challenges facing the United States of America. The policy recommendations that they develop over the course of the conference will be rooted in a careful appreciation of the progress that has been made regarding these enduring themes as well as others, and an assessment of the new challenges that lie ahead. Students will attempt to define the problems that the United States faces in a number of regions and interconnected issue areas and then craft appropriate policy recommendations that account for the diversity and complexity of our globalized world.

Uncertainty and Change

This globalized world is changing at an ever increasing rate. One sees evidence everywhere they turn in the form of new technologies, modes of communication and transportation, and new actors harnessing these technologies in new and innovative ways. All of this change creates a level of uncertainty in our world that makes many people uncomfortable. The recent economic downturn has only heightened this sense of uncertainty for many around the world. Americans and others enjoy the benefits of living under a set of laws and within the protection of a government that help to reduce many sources of uncertainty

for them, and yet it persists.¹ States in an anarchic international system fraught with peril and uncertainty are in an even more precarious situation.² States have attempted to reduce this uncertainty for millennia, forming alliances such as the Delian League and NATO, creating international laws, and developing collective security arrangements, regimes, and international organizations to overcome the anarchy.³ How effective are these mechanisms? In 1949, the United Nations was only four years old and NATO was a newborn, both with uncertain futures, but since then there has been a proliferation of international and regional organizations. What roles can the United States expect the UN and other international organizations to play in reducing uncertainty and promoting peace and security in our world? Should the United States invest resources to augment the capabilities of these organizations?

Alternatively, does the United States, as the world's sole remaining super power bear some responsibility for maintaining international peace and security as a sort of global enforcer in the image of Roosevelt's four policemen? What is the United States' proper role in the world? Recent events have clearly demonstrated that her power is not unbounded. How can it best be used to insure U.S. interests without making unacceptable numbers of enemies in the process? Should the United States have intervened in places like Rwanda? Does the United States have a responsibility to intervene in Darfur or other locations to stop ongoing violence or even preempt or prevent imminent violence? This question of the United States' role became particularly salient nearly 20 years ago as the Cold War came to an abrupt end, and the United States found itself struggling to define its purpose in the absence of its long time rival. Can NATO and other organizations continue to adapt to play bigger roles and share in the burdens of peace and security? Can and should the United States act to maintain peace and security unilaterally if necessary?

The past few decades have witnessed a dramatic shift in the level of integration and cooperation in the economic and trade arenas. Europe started with a coal and steel community in the year of SCUSA 3 and has since developed a complex integrationist web of agreements culminating in the creation of the European Union and the EuroZone. Although Europe is currently in a period of reflection after setbacks to the constitution's ratification in 2005, can it continue on its integrationist path?⁴ Different regions have developed free trade agreements and other venues for economic and political cooperation ranging from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. As the countries of the world become increasingly integrated, the ripple effects of problems in one part of the world are felt throughout as the economic downturn in the United States clearly demonstrates. What can be done to dampen these effects while still maintaining the positive aspects of cooperation and trade?

Greater integration and globalization has been facilitated by the development of sophisticated new technologies, particularly in the realm of information technologies over the past 60 years. The advent of the internet, cellular phones, satellite communications beginning in the 1960s with Sputnik and the space race, global media networks, and the 24/7 news cycle have changed the way that events are viewed and decisions are made. These technologies and others have broken down barriers of time, distance, and national borders to facilitate the spread of information and ideas. State censors are finding it increasingly difficult to stay apace the changes, making both autocratic regimes and free people more vulnerable. These advances have increased awareness of global issues such as poverty and disease and have inspired

¹ For discussion of the social contract, see: Thomas Hobbes and C. B. Macpherson, *Leviathan*, Penguin Classics, (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), 190 & 223-4 and John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 1st ed. (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co., 1980), 12 & 66.

² There are many definitions for anarchy or the state of nature, but for the purposes of this paper, anarchy is simply the absence of a higher ruling body, see John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, London: W.W. Norton, 2001), 19.

³ Thucydides, Rex Warner and M. I. Finley, *History of the Peloponnesian War* [History of the Peloponnesian War.English], Rev. ed. (Harmondsworth, Eng.; Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), 45-46; Hammond, N.G.L. *A History of Greece to 322 B.C.* 2nd ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 254-6.

⁴ *Europa: Gateway to the European Union*, http://europa.eu.int/abc/index_en.htm(accessed April 27, 2008)

and empowered a large number of nongovernmental organizations determined to improve the world. How can states cooperate with these NGOs to fight virulent enemies such as HIV/AIDS, which currently afflicts an estimated 33.2 million people worldwide, famine with nearly 25,000 people dying daily from hunger, and poverty where over 1 billion people lack clean drinking water and 2.6 billion lack adequate sanitation?⁵

With all the new technologies, increases in population, and industrial development placing heavy burdens on the planet and the environment that sustains humanity, renewed emphasis is being placed on ways to mitigate climate change, which the 2007/2008 Human Development Report labels the “defining human development challenge of the 21st Century.”⁶ Ten years ago, there was debate over the scientific evidence for climate change, but now that debate is largely resolved, and the only question that remains is what to do? Can the United States lead the world in mitigating climate change without sacrificing economic prosperity and the standard of living to which people in the United States have become accustomed? Is this even possible or really necessary?

Security

The same technologies that empower NGOs and individuals to promote greater good are also available to both state and non-state actors with ignoble intentions. Early SCUSA’s, focusing on ideas such as containment, deterrence, and the domino theory, were overwhelmingly concerned with containing and defeating the threat of Soviet Communism, which posed an existential threat to Western ideologies and interests. The ultimate victory against Communism, combined with the largely successful integration of post-communist countries and the successful adaptation of NATO to facilitate this sometimes violent transition remains one of the great achievements of U.S. foreign policy. NATO evolved into a vehicle for cooperation with the Partnership for Peace program and even protected vulnerable Muslim and other at-risk populations in the former Yugoslavian states of Bosnia and Kosovo.

Scholars and policy practitioners often look back with a certain nostalgia for the clarity of purpose in the decades of the Cold War, yet it is striking that the same sorts of uncertainty plagued debate even in those “simpler” times, and it is far from clear that the singularity of purpose did not set the conditions for many of the challenges that the United States faces today. The unintended consequences of U.S. support for the Afghan mujahedeen’s fight against the Soviets in the 1980s laid the groundwork for Osama bin Laden and modern Al Qaeda, while U.S. support for the Shah of Iran as a counterweight to Soviet influence laid the foundations for the rise of an anti-American regime in that country.

Another major concern of Cold War SCUSA delegates was the complex process of decolonization as a realization of principles first espoused by Woodrow Wilson in his Fourteen Points speech to Congress in January 1918.⁷ The devastation of World War II left the colonial powers in no position to maintain their vast territories, and led to the emergence of scores of newly independent states struggling to stand on their own. U.S. efforts to assist in this development process met with mixed results, rendering the developing world a patchwork quilt of stability and instability, democracy and autocracy. These weak states are fertile ground for insurgents, terrorists, criminals, and militia warlords of varying sorts.

⁵ *AIDS Epidemic Update*, UNAIDS, December 2007, pg 1, accessed:

http://data.unaids.org/pub/EPISlides/2007/2007_epiupdate_en.pdf; *Facts and Figures*, World Food Programme, 2008, accessed: http://www.wfp.org/aboutwfp/facts/hunger_facts.asp; *2006 Human Development Report*, United Nations Development Program, 2006, pg v, accessed: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr06-complete.pdf>.

⁶ *2007/2008 Human Development Report: Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World*, United Nations Development Program, 2008, pg 1, accessed: http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/hdr_20072008_en_complete.pdf.

⁷ Woodrow Wilson, *The Fourteen Points*, Address to Congress, January 8, 1918.

The events of September 11, 2001 clearly demonstrated that such actors no longer needed “great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger the American people and our nation.”⁸ Domestic and international terrorist groups armed with radical ideologies have demonstrated an uncanny ability to harness the tools of globalization to hide from authorities, recruit new members on the internet, plan attacks, and spread the message of their destructive ideologies to inspire other independent but affiliated actors. What can the United States do to combat these terrorist groups? How can the United States defuse some of the grievances that these groups exploit to recruit new members to their cause and improve its image abroad? The nexus of these groups and weapons of mass destruction technologies has been deemed a grave threat by the United States and is the logic behind the counter terrorism efforts that until recently have been known as the Global War on Terror.⁹

The United States has worked assiduously to strengthen the nuclear nonproliferation regime which has been in force since 1970, and has even made efforts to bolster this regime through a related proliferation security initiative to safeguard nuclear materials and technologies and prevent their transshipment. On the home front, energy has been devoted to improving border and port security, but there is much work that needs to be done. How can borders be secured properly yet still cope with the necessary flow of goods and people through them? Tens of thousands of shipping containers arrive in U.S. ports every day, and they are critical to the survival of the nation, but only a small fraction can be scrutinized.¹⁰ With the continuation of the USA Patriot Act designed to improve the government’s ability to counter terrorism, is there a trade off between individual liberties and the cost of being secure? If so, is that cost worth it?

Terrorist groups often seek and find sanctuary in failed or failing states, as Osama bin Laden did in Sudan and then Afghanistan. This fact, combined with the increased capabilities of transnational terrorist networks to harness new technologies to conduct attacks appears to suggest that neither the United States nor others can afford to remain indifferent to the plight of these failing states; is this true? Does the United States have a vested interest in helping to insure the stability of these ungoverned places? If so, how should this goal be accomplished? What is the proper role of the United States and how should it identify and define its security objectives? Under what authority can and should the United States act to bolster these states? Must it be invited, does it require Security Council authorization, or are considerations of preemptive and preventive self defense sufficient?

Generally, interventions by members of the international community are increasingly justified by a responsibility to protect, or a form of conditional sovereignty over more traditional interpretations of sovereignty which emphasize nonintervention in the fundamentally internal affairs of a state.¹¹ The rise in the importance of the rights of individuals and the inherent responsibility of states to protect those rights can be traced back to the writers of the enlightenment and is evident in a series of international conventions including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Genocide Conventions among others. This has led to a new way of conceiving security in human terms. Does the United States have a right to intervene to protect people and prevent atrocities? Or should the United States focus simply on calculations of its self interest? How does this decision affect the perception of the United States in the world? Are humanitarian interventions just an imperialist pretext for invasion? With the rise in individual human rights, should there be increased acceptance of national claims for self determination, autonomy, or independence? How far can these claims be pursued before they threaten the viability of the international state system? Is the recognition of Kosovo/Kosova setting a dangerous precedent?

⁸ George W. Bush, Remarks at 2002 Graduation Exercise of the United States Military Academy, June, 2002.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Graham T. Allison, *Nuclear Terrorism: The Ultimate Preventable Catastrophe*, 1st ed. (New York: Times Books/Henry Holt, 2004), 107.

¹¹ Secretary-General United Nations, *An Agenda for Peace Preventive: Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-Keeping*, (June 17, 1992), para 17; United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, (June 26, 1945): Ch 1, Art 2, accessed: <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/>.

Traditional conceptions of security are not only evolving to include human security, but also environmental security. The world is accustomed to conflicts over resources or land, but the effects of environmental degradation and climate change present a new type of security challenge for states and, indeed, the entire world. The predicted effects of climate change include “extreme weather events, drought, flooding, sea level rise, retreating glaciers, habitat shifts, and the increased spread of life-threatening diseases.”¹² The implications of these effects are enormous and have the ability to fundamentally alter current ways of life. The 2006 National Security Strategy of the United States of America recognizes some of the inherent dangers of climate change and degradation and warns that they could “overwhelm the capacity of local authorities to respond,” spark political instability in the event that governments are unable to meet societal demands, and “act as a threat multiplier for instability in some of the most volatile regions of the world.”¹³

The United States is deeply engaged in some of these volatile regions, with operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan where principles of counterinsurgency are being used to help defeat dangerous and elusive enemies while bolstering the capabilities of the Iraqi and Afghan governments. The Iraq War, in particular, has become increasingly unpopular with a large segment of the U.S. population, and the path to victory is less clear. The various Presidential candidates endorse differing views about the appropriate course of action for ending the war in Iraq in a way that leaves behind a peaceful and stable state and avoids greater regional instability. How can these goals best be achieved? Should the United States continue its missions in Iraq and Afghanistan? How can the United States effectively engage other regional powers to assist in maintaining stability? Will the new government in Pakistan cooperate with U.S. counter terrorism efforts, or will the peace they seek with the tribes in Waziristan lead to greater instability in Afghanistan? As the country has grappled with the appropriate answers to these questions relating to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, there has been a great deal of attention focused on the topic of civil-military relations and the appropriate role of military commanders in advising their civilian leaders. Some analysts have been critical of the generals for failing to fulfill their responsibilities, while some generals have criticized their civilian leaders for ineptitude.¹⁴ What is the proper relationship between the military professional and the civilian master? How can this relationship be improved to promote a more coherent and effective policy to strategy match?

Early SCUSA conference had the benefit of a known enemy up through the end of the Cold War, but since then, the concept of enemy has been much more nebulous. In addition to the stability operations being conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States faces continuing challenges from more traditional state actors in the form of Iran and North Korea who are alleged to be pursuing nuclear weapons material and technology. Six Party talks with North Korea make sometimes ephemeral progress, while the United States remains reluctant to engage Iran directly. The United States also wrestles with questions about how to deal with a resurgent Russia governed by a ruler with strong authoritarian tendencies who appears reluctant to relinquish the reins of power, and is buoyed by profits from record oil prices. The United States is similarly perplexed by a rapidly industrializing China that was eager to please the world because of the 2008 Olympics, but reluctant to tolerate dissent in Tibet and in Xinjiang by Uighur Muslims.¹⁵ Should these states be treated as potential threats? Will efforts to guard against these threats become self-fulfilling prophecies? Or will efforts to accommodate Russia and China be seen as weakness and leave the United States vulnerable?

Development and Democratization

¹² *National Security and the Threat of Climate Change*, CNA Corporation 2007, 6.

¹³ George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: March, 2006), 47-48; *National Security and the Threat of Climate Change*, CNA Corporation, 2007, 3.

¹⁴ Paul Yingling, "A Failure in Generalship," *Armed Forces Journal* (May 2007).; Richard J. Whalen, "Revolt of the Generals," *The Nation* (October 16, 2006).

¹⁵ Steven Erlanger, "For the West, Many Tough Calls on China," *The New York Times*, April 13, 2008.

The last theme is the least prevalent, but the concepts and challenges in this area are deeply interconnected with many of the other topics previously addressed. At the time of the first SCUSA, the United States was working diligently to create a liberal economic order on an international scale that would help pull the world from the ashes of World War II. The Bretton Woods agreements and many other subsequent efforts have successfully rebuilt Europe and Japan, reduced conflict among states, and increased stability in the world, but much remains.

Since that first SCUSA, the United States, at first, then other Western powers have disbursed billions of dollars in development aid to a host of countries around the globe. Some of the early success stories such as Japan and Western Europe have since become donor nations, and there have been some impressive turnarounds since, but largely the development funds have failed to achieve significant progress in many states.¹⁶ The Millennium Development Goals were created to reverse this trend. In the United States, President Bush proposed the Millennium Challenge Corporation as a bold plan to reward the most capable developing states with large packages of development aid as an incentive for good governance.¹⁷ Have these efforts proven any more fruitful than previous attempts? How can U.S. aid efforts be more productive? Some people cite poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunity that are a reality to many of the world's citizens as permissive causes of radicalism and terror. Can effective U.S. development endeavors degrade the recruiting capabilities of extremist groups?

As nations attempt to develop, a critical challenge that has the ability to determine the success or failure of their efforts is their ability to secure adequate resources to feed their population and fuel their further development. These resources can include raw materials, energy resources, and resources such as fresh water. Currently, several major powers, including China and India are scrambling to secure sufficient energy resources to fuel their needs of their growing economies, while Russia seeks to expand its role as an energy supplier. The urgency of this need for energy combined with the nature of these regimes have contributed to a willingness to overlook serious humanitarian issues in places like Sudan in favor of access to vital energy reserves. High oil prices, energy shortages, and dependence on outside sources can contribute to a dangerous sense of vulnerability and increase the potential for conflict. Can renewable energy sources be harnessed to reduce this potential for conflict while also satisfying the need for continued development? Are these sources worthwhile if they drive up world food prices and exacerbate global food shortages? As water resources become increasingly scarce, shared water sources could also become powerful points of friction among countries. As more countries industrialize, there is an increasing burden placed on the environment. Should developed and developing countries be treated equally in climate change negotiations? Or should developing countries be exempted from new regulations?

Persistent global social issues alluded to earlier such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, and disease can place a further burden on development efforts in struggling countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa which accounts for 35 percent of all people living with HIV. Eight individual countries have HIV/AIDS prevalence rates that exceed 15 percent of their populations, and place enormous strain on the capabilities of those states to cope.¹⁸ Does the United States have a responsibility to assist in stemming the tide of HIV/AIDS infections? Are there security implications to HIV/AIDS or other disease pandemics? Is it appropriate to spend so much effort to cure the world's ailments when millions in the United States lack adequate access to health care?

¹⁶ For a discussion and analysis of the variety of approaches to development over the past several decades, see: William Easterly, *The Elusive Quest for Growth: Economists' Adventures and Misadventures in the Tropics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002).

¹⁷ Steve Radelet, "Will the Millennium Challenge Account be Different?" *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2003), 171.

¹⁸ *AIDS Epidemic Update*, UNAIDS, December 2007, pg 11 & 16.

The last two National Security Strategies of the United States have espoused democratization as a critical pillar to promoting international peace and stability.¹⁹ The West's Cold War victory and the subsequent wave of democratization in most post-communist countries was a tremendous triumph of ideas. Should we actively encourage the spread of these victorious ideas to the rest of the world? Does democratization and the development of robust, capable, liberal democracies offer the key to perpetual peace and the solution to the world's development, poverty, and disease concerns as well as the remedy to the United States' security dilemma?²⁰

Some states have made important gains in consolidating their democratic credentials, but many more have fallen short and are wracked with violence, corruption, and a lack of civil society or political participation, including Mugabe's Zimbabwe. Democracy in much of Latin America also continues to be extremely shallow, while others, such as Kenya, have seen dramatic reversals in their fortunes. Is it reasonable to expect that these countries can develop democratic institutions and norms in such short time spans when it took the United States and Western Europe centuries and episodes of terrific bloodshed to reach a stable and inclusive form of liberal democracy? Is democracy appropriate for all states and all cultures? How can the United States, EU, and NATO successfully foster democracy in states undergoing transitions? Should democracy be actively promoted or passively supported? Can state-building or peace-building missions in Africa and elsewhere yield successful liberal democracies that embrace the norms and institutions of democracy? How can the international community avoid creating illiberal democracies that opt for simple elections over safeguarding individual rights and human security?²¹ Does democratization actually increase or perhaps undermine U.S. security and the spread of Western values? Should the West accept the risk of promoting democracy when the results are uncertain, particularly in the Middle East? What can the United States and others learn from the ostensibly successful democratization efforts in Islamic countries like Indonesia, Mali, and Turkey? In short, what should be the fate of the policy of democratization? Is it truly the answer to the world's social, environmental, and security concerns?

Defining Future Challenges

In spite of the tremendous progress that has been achieved since the first SCUSA sixty years ago, many challenges remain and many new challenges have emerged. The world continues to be uncertain and ever changing, but armed with an understanding of the efforts to deal with uncertainties related to security and development, delegates have the tools to develop policy recommendations to allocate finite resources to achieve critical interests at home and abroad. The United States faces threats from state actors who are taking advantage of its commitment in Iraq and Afghanistan to advance their interests. Meanwhile, non-state actors, including terrorist groups, are increasingly empowered by the modern technologies associated with globalization and the information revolution. Somehow, the United States must address these threats in a manner that does not sacrifice the values and ideals that make it unique. Issues related to development, the environment, and social concerns are increasingly salient and require sound policy choices to manage security concerns against the need for cooperative approaches to address these common challenges. Is democratization the single, simple answer to all these challenges? Delegates will meet in tables dedicated to specific regions or issue areas, but as they develop their thoughtful

¹⁹ George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: , September, 2002).; George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: March, 2006).

²⁰ Immanuel Kant and Hans S. Reiss, *Kant: Political Writings*, 2nd, enl. ed. (Cambridge England; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 100-105.

²¹ Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 6 (November/December, 1997) distinguishes between truly liberal democracies that exhibit constitutional liberalism and illiberal democracies.

recommendations, they must take care not to focus too narrowly and neglect the complexity of these issues that have confounded bright, critical thinkers for the past 60 years.