

## **Peace and Security: The Highest Policy Priorities**

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In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Empire, Americans lapsed back into two longtime tendencies: to disarm precipitously after a major conflict and then to believe that we are invulnerable – either due to our strength or our putative isolation from most centers of conflict elsewhere in the world. So began a decade-long siesta from concerns about national security affairs.

The reveries of that siesta included the assumptions that security is a free good, that secure international lines of transportation and communication somehow inhere in nature, and that our policies and culture are good enough that they shouldn't inspire strategically significant adverse reactions elsewhere in the world. In this dream world, many of the traditional instruments of power no longer needed to be used, because now economic strength would be the defining index of international influence. The final dream of this long afternoon nap was that the government was successfully taking care of all relevant matters of peace and security and that there was no need for private initiative in these fields.

A concrete manifestation of these attitudes was the considerable decline in support for research, education, and advocacy in national security affairs by most of America's great philanthropic organizations and individuals. There were a few precious exceptions to this rule and thanks to them, The Institute of World Politics was able to find sustenance. Then came the September 11 attacks and the siesta ended. Americans came to realize that in a climate of terror and insecurity, commerce, travel, and other elements of our public life cannot continue normally. With the anthrax attacks and then the snipers shooting random individuals in the Washington, D.C. area, we all witnessed once again the paralysis of daily life.

If attacks of various kinds escalate to warfare on our soil, the paralysis becomes the norm rather than the exception it has turned out to be.

The lesson is simple but so often overlooked: security (or if you prefer, a secure peace) is the highest of all public policy priorities. Nothing in public life is possible without it: neither commerce, domestic governance, organized charitable work, nor such luxuries as the protection of the environment or most forms of leisure activity.

If this proposition is indeed true, then it follows that learning, analysis, advocacy and debate on matters of this vital field ought to be priorities of all citizens, corporations, and foundations concerned about the future of our country. As I will discuss in a future letter, because our government occasionally fails to take care of these matters effectively, there is a most meaningful role that private institutions such as ours can play to contribute to the proper functioning of the most important, sensitive and legitimate function of government.