by James Jay Carafano, Ph.D.

The United States should resolve to help make the world a better place with initiatives that keep Americans safe, free, and prosperous in the coming year. Here is a short list of commitments Washington can offer:

1. Finish the Job in Iraq. A stable, secure, and free Iraq remains a worthy long-term U.S. goal, but this project now rests primarily in Iraqi hands. However, America still has a vital role to play in training and supporting Iraqi security forces and building the instruments of governance for a fledgling democracy. Meeting these obligations should be the most important factor in determining the pace of the drawdown of U.S. forces in Iraq.

2. Finish the Long War. Rooting out the al-Qaeda sanctuaries in Pakistan would be a severe--if not fatal--blow to the transnational Islamist terrorist movement. Achieving that end will require an integrated policy that gets Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India working together jointly toward that end.

3. Don't Mess with Homeland Security. U.S. law enforcement has thwarted a number of post-9/11 conspiracies aimed at killing Americans. Meanwhile, FEMA has just completed a record year of responding to floods, forest fires, and hurricanes. Further major reorganization or changes in the Department of Homeland Security's mission are wholly unwarranted.

4. Build Missile Defenses. Of all the threats of the modern era, the danger of a ballistic missile attack on the U.S. is most troubling. While the U.S. has built land-based interceptors capable of dealing with a missile fired from North Korea, much more needs to be done. America as well as friends and allies in the Middle East and Europe would be largely defenseless against an Iranian ballistic missile threat. To address that, the U.S. needs to, as it promised to NATO, build land-based missile defenses in Poland and the Czech Republic. In addition, the United States must field land- and sea-based regional assets, such as the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense and the Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense systems. More work also needs to be done on developing "boost-phase" interceptors capable of knocking down enemy missiles right after they are fired and are their most vulnerable. Finally, we need to continue, with our friends and allies, to develop a global command and control network capable of dealing with new missile threats wherever they might come from.

5. Do Something about Space. Space is the "ultimate" high ground, not just for the military but for the private sector as well. U.S. assets and assured "access" to space are vulnerable to disruption and direct attack. At a minimum, the United States needs to develop better "space awareness" with hardened and redundant capabilities to track both what is being sent into space and activities in earth-orbit. Washington can get the ball rolling by funding a space-based platform for experimentation this year.

6. Worry about Iran. Iran routinely employs terrorism as instrument of foreign policy. It is developing long-range ballistic missiles to threaten other nations. It supported insurgents in Iraq who targeted American soldiers and fermented ethnic-civil war. It may test a nuclear weapon at any time. For starters, the U.S. must lead an international coalition to impose the strongest possible targeted economic sanctions against Iran and mobilize allies to contain and deter Iran's drive for regional hegemony.

7. Build Better Border Security. The Bush Administration has made significant progress in making America's borders more secure, from a host of measures for thwarting terrorist travel to the Merida Initiative--an effort to promote U.S./Mexican cooperation in combating transnational smuggling in drugs, people, arms, and money. Terrorists see post-9/11 America as a hard target, not easy to get to. Meanwhile, both the unlawful population in the United States and the number of attempted illegal border crossings are on the decline. Successful programs--from building border obstacles to enforcing immigration laws and strengthening the surety of identity credentials like driver's licenses--need to continue. Stopping now would roll back progress.

8. Get Smart on Cybersecurity. Many in Washington have rightly expressed concerned over the surety of information technology and control systems that serve our economy. Most, however, are woefully ignorant about the nature of these systems and the threats to them. Even as Washington wrestles with issues concerning organization, authorities, responsibilities, and programs to deal with cyber competition, it must place more emphasis on developing leaders who are competent to engage in these issues. This will require a professional development system that can provide a program of education, assignment, and accreditation to develop a corps of experienced, dedicated service professionals who have an expertise in the breadth of issues related to the cyber environment. This program must be backed by effective public-private partnerships that produce cutting-edge research, development, and capabilities to operate with freedom, safety, and security in the cyber world.

9. Stop Doing Stupid Security. A number of congressional national security mandates have proven unnecessary and unworkable, consuming precious time, manpower, and money to implement measures of little value at great cost. Requirements such as 100 percent scanning of cargo sent to the United States have been documented by the Department of Homeland Security and the Government Accountability Office as extremely problematic. Congress should repeal ill-advised mandates and refrain from imposing excessive regulatory restrictions in the name of national security.

10. Don't Let the Military Go Hollow. A military is hollow when it lacks the resources to conduct current missions, maintain adequate trained and ready forces, and prepare for future threats. There is no way to prevent the armed forces from becoming inadequate to defend the nation's interests and provide for our men and women in uniform other than robust defense budgets year in and year out. Changes in strategy, cuts in acquisition programs, and promises to slash fraud, waste, and abuse are all chimeras--smokescreens to cut costs without appearing weak on national security. The United States must spend at least 4 percent of its annual GDP over the next decade to recover from the long post-Cold War "peace dividend" of the 1990s and refurbish the military after years of fighting the long war in Iraq and Afghanistan. To plan to do anything less over the foreseeable future will put both the nation's security and the lives of our

troops in jeopardy.

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