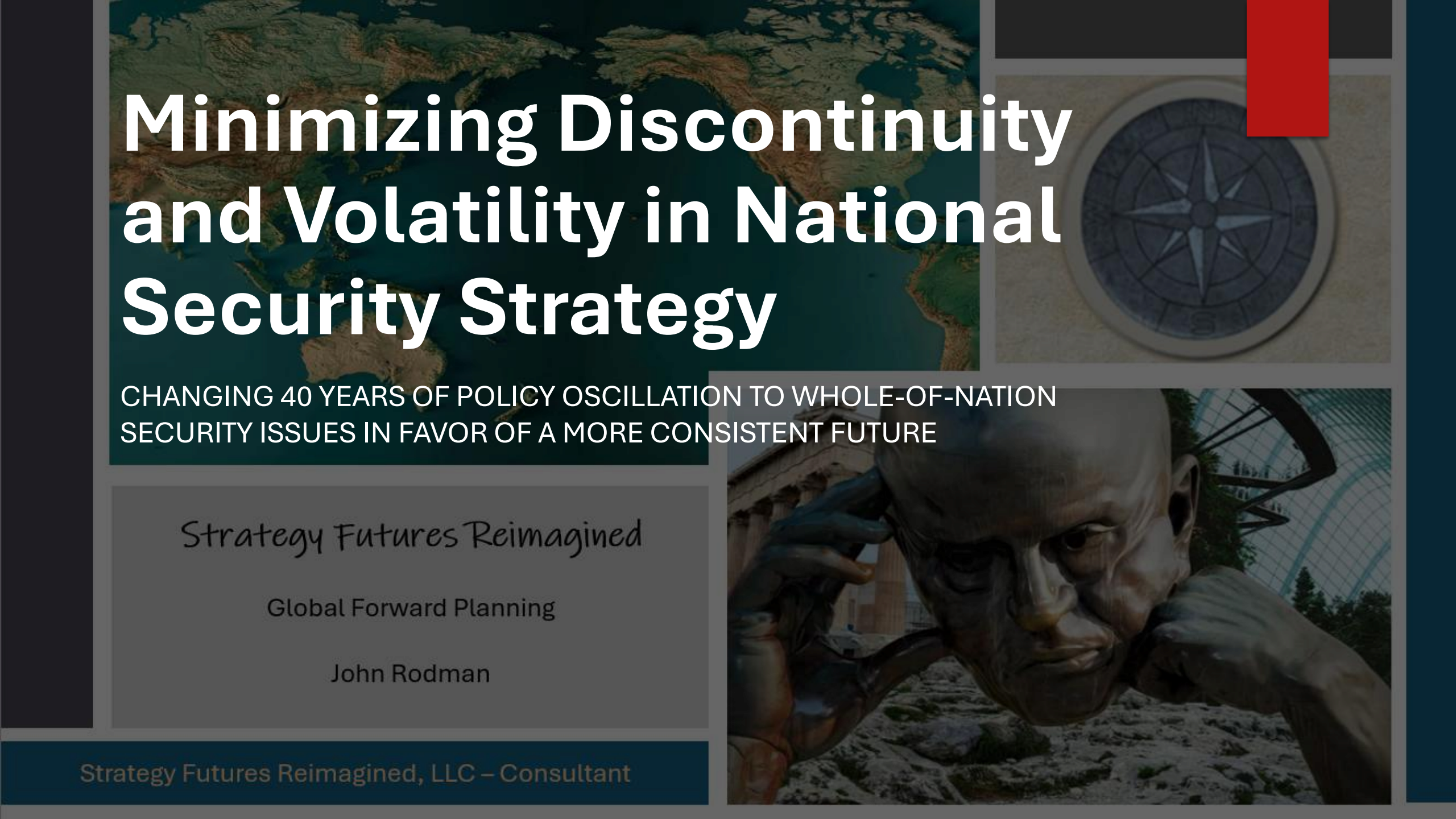




Minimizing Discontinuity and Volatility in National Security Strategy

CHANGING 40 YEARS OF POLICY OSCILLATION TO WHOLE-OF-NATION
SECURITY ISSUES IN FAVOR OF A MORE CONSISTENT FUTURE

Strategy Futures Reimagined

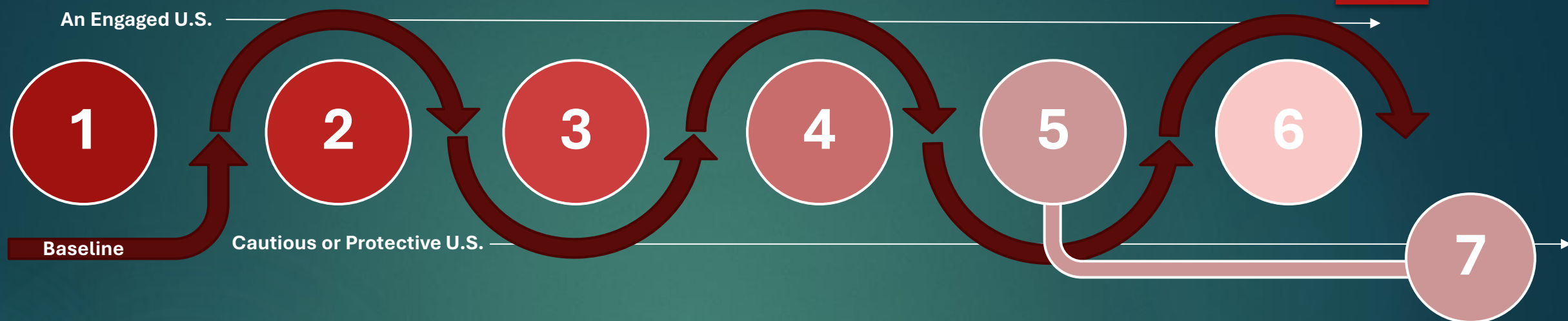
Global Forward Planning

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The National Security Policy Oscillation from 1987 to 2026

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1987-1992

Foundations

1987 NSS — First NSS submitted under Goldwater-Nichols.

1988 NSS — Continuation of Cold War strategic posture.

1990 NSS — Early post-Cold War transition under George H.W. Bush.

1991 NSS — Post-Gulf War strategic reassessment.

1992 NSS — Final Bush-era Cold War/post-Cold War hybrid strategy.

1993-2000

Engagement

1993 NSS — Early Clinton foreign policy framework.

1994–1996 NSS — “Engagement and Enlargement” series.

1997–1999 NSS — “A National Security Strategy for a New Century.”

2000 NSS — “A National Security Strategy for a Global Age.”

2002-2006

War on Terror

2002 NSS — Major strategic shift after 9/11; preemption doctrine.

2006 NSS — Continuation of counterterrorism and global democratization.

2009-2016

Multilateralism

2010 NSS — Emphasis on multilateralism and global engagement.

2012 Defense Strategic Guidance — Pivot to Asia; long term shift toward China.

2014 Quadrennial Defense Review — Post Iraq/Afghanistan force restructuring.

2015 National Military Strategy — Rise of state competitors (Russia, China).

2017-2020

Great Power Competition

2017 NSS — Explicit shift to great-power competition with China and Russia.

2018 NDS — Major reorientation away from counterterrorism toward long-term competition.

2021-2025

Integrated Deterrence

2022 NSS — Continuity in great-power competition; emphasis on alliances.

2022 NDS — Integrated deterrence; China as “most consequential competitor.”

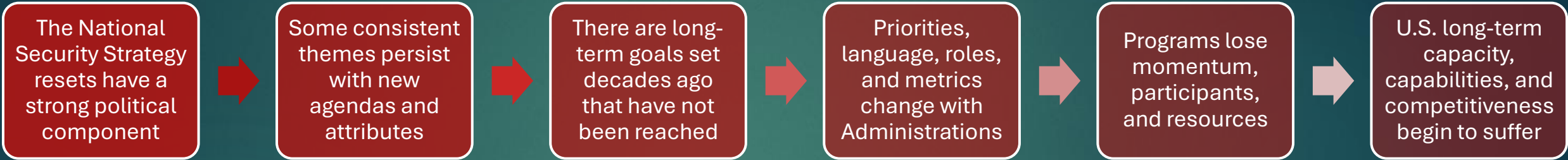
2026

Great Power Double Down

Discontinuity's Impact on Core Themes and Goals in National Security

As a hyper-connected world of advanced technologies erodes the U.S. 20th Century advantage, the impact of regularly resetting our national security planning, partnerships, and resource management is taking a toll.

Resetting U.S. national security with each administration creates structural discontinuity, capacity, and resilience problems.



Core Long-term Themes

Great-power competition
(Russia, China)
Alliance management
Technological superiority
Deterrence and force posture
Global stability and
economic leadership



Disrupted Long-term Goals

Nuclear modernization
Shipbuilding
Microelectronics and
supply-chain reshoring
Space architecture
Climate resilience
Infrastructure modernization
Competitive and resilient civil
sector

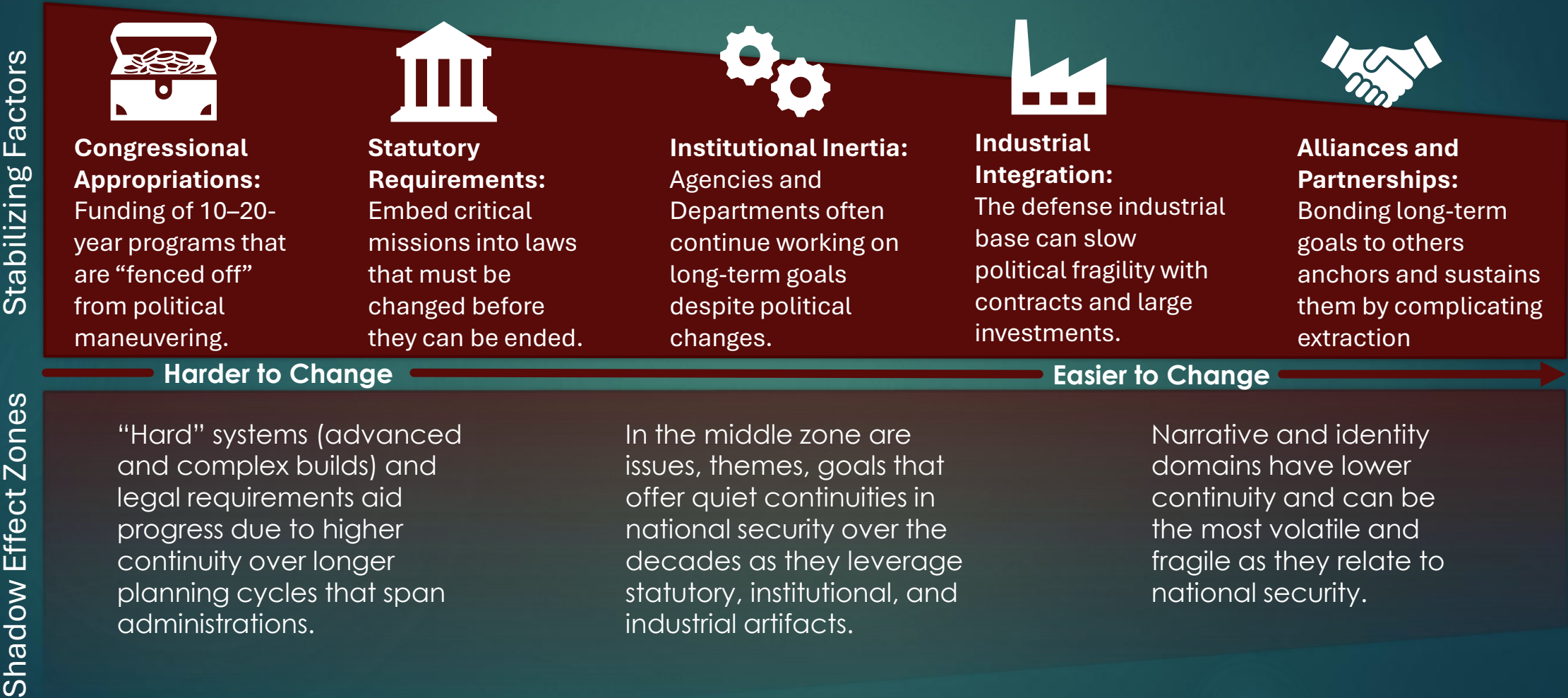


Discontinuity Impact

The impact is Strategic
Churn. Each
administration resets and
rebuilds national security
requirements as required.
Long-term goals and
measures of success get
reframed every 4 years or
less. Some things
survive...

Stabilizing Factors to Political Resets: Shadow Effect Zones

The vulnerability of long-term themes and goals to successful implementation can be due to wide swings in political agendas. A stabilizing factor are the slower, sometimes decadal strategic commitments that continue regardless of administration changes, national strategy rewrites, or political/rhetorical shifts – in the policy shadows.



Identifying Decadal Continuity of Themes by their Strategy Volatility

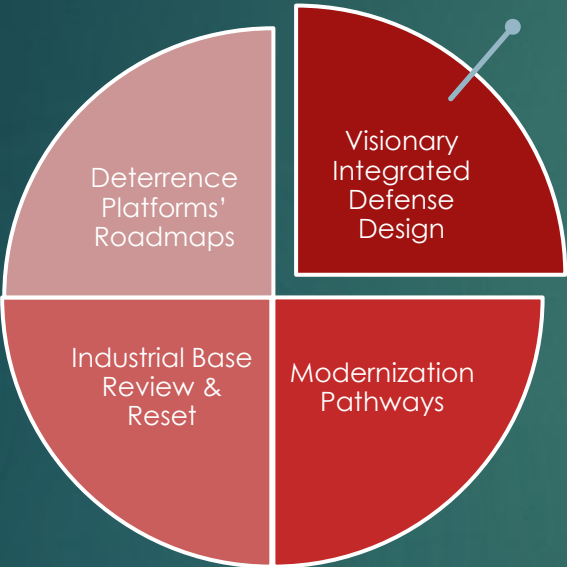
Programs can get renamed with new initiatives restarted under new branding with each new National Security Strategy. This can cause long-term plans to be rewritten before execution. Understanding the relationship between long-term continuity and near-term volatility could help policy-makers strengthen our country’s position.

Area of National Security Planning		Decadal Continuity	Volatility	Why These Areas are Ranked This Way
High Continuity	Nuclear deterrence & modernization	Very high	Very low	Statutory, existential, multi-decade programs of record that are currently in an expansion mode
	Alliance structure (NATO, Japan, ROK, AUKUS, QUAD)	High-medium	Low-to-medium	Deep institutional, military, and political entrenchment that has retreated and retrenched
	China as primary long-term competitor	High	Low-to-medium	Framed differently by administrations, but underlying assessment is stable
Medium Continuity	Defense industrial base & supply chains	High	Medium	Direction is stable (onshoring, resilience), although tools, branding, and momentum change
	Cyber & space as core domains	High-medium	Medium	Mission endures; org charts, authorities, & national doctrine can integrate or devolve to state and local
Low Continuity	Counterterrorism posture	Medium-low	Medium-to-high	Infrastructure persists; priority and resourcing fluctuate depending on threat and funding
	Climate & energy transition	Medium-low	High	Direction oscillates sharply with party control, despite long-term need to improve resilience
	Immigration & border policy	High-medium	Very high	Legal, rhetorical, and operational swings across administrations around mgmt. and oversight
	Domestic social policy / Equity Issues	Low-medium	Very high	Narrative and emphasis change dramatically with political control, but always highly debated
	Economic strategy branding (“Build Back Better”, “America First”, etc.)	Substance: medium Branding: very high	Very high	Core concerns (growth, jobs, competitiveness) persist; framing and tools churn, volatility grows

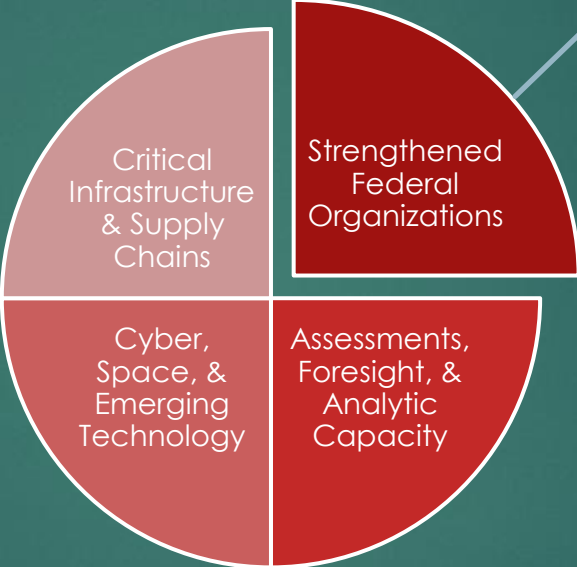
National Security Key Drivers in the Continuity/Volatility Zones

In each continuity/volatility zone there are three drivers that can impact U.S. competitiveness and deep strength. National security is more than military might. It is defense suitability, a strong government hand where appropriate, and a society that functions cohesively and with the skills and verve needed to sustain a nation.

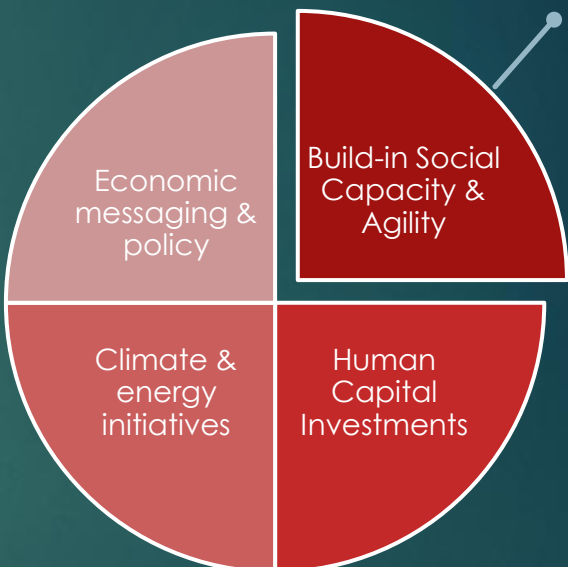
Rapid technology advances and competitors are affecting this sector's integration with cascading impacts on other sectors, the defense budget, and what is left over for civil programs.



Drastic cuts to authorities, missions, and personnel in the federal structure negatively impact U.S. capability to foresee threats and its capacity to mitigate their effects.



Wide and rapid swings in social investment negatively impact economic and environmental security and limit diverse and innovative contributions.



Zone 1: High continuity that involves long-term capability planning (10–30-year builds) that right-sizes military capacity to the complex and unconventional battlespace.

Zone 2: Medium continuity with organizational missions that may be competitive and contentious between but have the greatest impact with foresight and if strengthened.

Zone 3: Low policy continuity that is dominated by issues that fluctuate with administrations or party politics but may significantly impact people's daily lives.

Shadow Effect of Consistent Planning with Minimal Volatility

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The Shadow Effect of a focused and resourced government in national security planning is like a stabilizer on a rocket. Without it, the increasing momentum of events, economics, and technology can push the nation off course and eventually destabilize it. The U.S. global position is wobbling and the upward trajectory shifting.

The Shadow Effect of a focused and resourced federal government

Addresses 21st Century Threats:

- Reassess traditional forces and advanced tech/weapons to create a low and high cost, quick and slow development balance.
- Make the Defense Industrial Base competitive, transparent, and faster.
- Revisit strategic deterrence vs. strategic value as more accurate targeting and nonkinetic attacks become more lethal.
- Limit defense growth and expand allies.

Recreate a Strong Federal Role:

- Immediate (weeks–6 months): See positive direct operational impacts.
- Medium-term (6–18 months): Rebuild procedures and a new civic culture.
- Long-term (1.5–5 years): Integrate strategic, structural, & systemic effects into continual planning.
- Long, long-term (5-10 years): Progress toward a balanced/equitable budget.

Reignites Our Civil Potential:

- Expand technical training ensures advanced tech research and oversee AI expansion in vulnerable skills/work.
- Invest in more efficient infrastructure, alternative energy manufacturing, & appropriate green energy.
- Set economic goals and policies for affordable middle-class living and guard against undue corporate influence.

Consistent, long-term national goals for real national security

