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# Expert Commentary on the 2022 National Security Strategy



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**Expert Commentary on the  
2022 National Security Strategy**

**Edited By**

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## Preface

This *Occasional Paper* is the second issue of the new year. It is devoted to assessing the 2022 U.S. *National Security Strategy* (NSS) and by doing so provides a variety of analyses of some of the most challenging national security problems.

The NSS communicates the President's national security priorities and, ideally, provides guidance on how to achieve them. As the number of non-American contributors to this issue demonstrates, the NSS is closely followed by U.S. allies too. The *Occasional Paper* offers a variety of useful perspectives on the NSS written by some of the best thinkers and professionals in the defense field. We hope you will find them valuable.

The contributors generally agree that the NSS appropriately and helpfully identifies China as the most significant state actor that challenges U.S. national security. However, they also generally agree that the document lays out too many priorities, causing the administration to fail in offering useful guidance on how to prioritize the government's limited resources and accomplish the administration's objectives. Others point to the document's partisan nature that will make it difficult to build and maintain a domestic consensus on national security matters.

Dean Cheng discusses the Chinese threat and assesses the Biden Administration's response to it as outlined in the recently published national security documents. Matthew Costlow observes that the NSS fails to distinguish between conditions that the United States can address and those that it cannot, failing to prioritize how to spend its limited resources, even as the administration correctly identifies some of the main national security challenges. Paul Dibb observes that Australia will continue to play an important role as a U.S. ally given the NSS's emphasis on the Indo-Pacific region. Michaela Dodge argues that the Biden

Administration's emphasis on the climate change agenda detracts from more immediate national security problems. Colin Dueck highlights the dissonance between the administration's aspirations and real-life effects of its policies, including weakening the U.S. economy and increasing polarization. Douglas Feith comments on the NSS's failure to distinguish between leadership and followership, and to provide the United States with necessary resources to fund its military power, a key enabler for exercising the U.S. leadership. Beatrice Heuser outlines a historical perspective on principles that guide states' security relations and places the NSS in this broader framework. Dominik Jankowski offers a NATO perspective on the NSS with a special emphasis on its future. David Lonsdale evaluates the relationship between ends, ways, and means and how the NSS ties them together. Thomas Mahnken explains the need to strengthen the U.S. munitions manufacturing base as well as for the Department of Defense to develop new concepts to improve how it fights - two issues described in the 2022 NSS. Francis Marlo makes the case that the administration's "integrated deterrence" concept is "old wine in a new bottle." Finally, Kenton White offers a United Kingdom/NATO perspective, highlighting a concern over the West's ability to produce the required weapons to support its strategy.

These esteemed professionals have provided their personal commentaries on the 2022 *National Security Strategy*. Their expressed views do not necessarily represent the positions of any institutions with which the authors are affiliated.

The editors would like to thank Sarah Scaife Foundations for making this *Occasional Paper* possible.

# China and the Biden Administration's Competing Priorities

By Dean Cheng

Over the last several months, the Biden Administration has released a slew of national security papers which provide some insight into the White House's perspective on key threats and challenges. These include the *National Security Strategy* (NSS), the *National Defense Strategy* (NDS), the *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR), and the *Missile Defense Review* (MDR). These documents, in combination, serve as a message to both U.S. security planners and the rest of the world of how the United States sees its security, what the most salient challenges are, and how it will, at least broadly, respond.

Not surprisingly, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia garner the greatest attention. As the two most well-armed potential adversaries, each fielding a substantial nuclear arsenal, China and Russia pose fundamental, existential threats to the United States.

As the various reports make clear, however, Moscow and Beijing pose very different threats.

*Russia* is portrayed as impatient. It is also seen as much more of a near-term threat, especially after its invasion of Ukraine. As important, the invasion marked an open rejection of the international order, continuing the process that begun with the Russian intervention in Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, overturning the Helsinki Accords' acceptance of European borders. Russia, however, has limited resources, and while it can disrupt the international system, it is far less likely to be able to replace that system.

*China*, on the other hand, is seen as a much greater long-term threat. The PRC, it is noted, has the resources and the desire to not simply induce chaos, but to ultimately replace



the international system. This is not only in terms of China's growing military, but as important, China's economic and technological base. Moreover, China has demonstrated an integrated approach, incorporating all the elements of national power in its policies. Thus, the PRC is seen as posing a *systemic* challenge to the current international order.

### **The Chinese Threat Is Comprehensive and Extensive**

Given China's substantial economy, global political influence, and growing military capacity, China has a more than a regional footprint, with the ability to influence not only the Asia-Pacific region, but globally. This, in turn, further aids China's efforts to reshape the global order, since it is not necessarily operating only in its near abroad, but is able to incorporate and co-opt states as far afield as South America and Africa.

Consequently, the PRC represents a much more multifaceted challenge to American security. The reports note repeatedly, for example, that the PRC exploits its non-market economy to abuse trade relationships. Such behavior ultimately undermines American economic security, which is the underpinning of overall American power.

These various non-military elements should not eclipse, however, the growing military threat posed by the People's Liberation Army (PLA). China's ground forces, air force, and navy have all steadily modernized. As important, not only has the PLA fielded new combat systems, but combat support and combat service support capabilities have improved as well. Similarly, while the PLA's ability to operate in the air, land, and sea domains have all grown, the Chinese military has also developed substantial capabilities

in “space, counter-space, electronic warfare and irregular warfare.”

This comprehensive modernization effort even includes China’s nuclear arsenal. For many decades, China maintained a minimal nuclear deterrent, numbering only a few score warheads capable of reaching the United States. The Chinese nuclear threat to the American homeland has radically increased, however, as the PRC has doubled its nuclear forces in just the period 2020-2022.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Biden Administration’s Response**

To counter this multi-faceted threat, the Biden Administration lists several measures. First is to implement an “integrated deterrence strategy.” This is termed the “centerpiece” of the 2022 NDS.<sup>2</sup> “Integrated deterrence” is described as “working seamlessly across warfighting domains, theaters, the spectrum of conflict, all instruments of U.S. national power, and our network of Alliances and partnerships.”<sup>3</sup> Such a strategy recognizes that countering China’s broad approach to influence and power cannot be achieved solely through military means, nor only by the United States.

The PRC’s efforts employ all the elements of “comprehensive national power.” This is defined by Chinese scholars as the total overall “strengths of a country

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Defense, *Report on Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, November 29, 2022, p. 97, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Nov/29/2003122279/-1/-1/1/2022-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF>.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, October 27, 2022, p. i, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

in economics, military affairs, science and technology, education, resources, and influence."<sup>4</sup> This is facilitated by the reality that the PRC is ruled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which extends across all of Chinese society. Consequently, the CCP can implement not only a whole-of-government approach, but a whole-of-society approach. Chinese companies, whether state-owned enterprises or nominally private, nonetheless have Party committees overseeing their actions. Chinese media will coordinate their messaging, as seen in the coverage of the recent 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress or the passing of Jiang Zemin.<sup>5</sup>

In order to counter this, as the NSS notes, there must be integration of American efforts. This must be:

*Across domains.* This not only refers to the war-fighting domains of land, sea, air, outer space and the electromagnetic spectrum, but in the Biden Administration's formulation, the "economic, technological, and information" domains.

*Across the spectrum of conflict.* The last decade has seen a stream of references to "hybrid warfare" and "irregular warfare." All of this denotes the reality that, whereas American decision-makers and the American public tend to think of war and conflict as standing in stark contrast to peace, China (and Russia, Iran, and other revisionist states) see war and conflict as far more intertwined. They are far more comfortable with operating below "the threshold of armed conflict," especially when they employ economic

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<sup>4</sup> China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, *Global Strategic Pattern – International Environment of China in the New Century* (Beijing: Shishi Press, 2000), cited in Hu Angang and Men Honghua, "The Rising of Modern China Comprehensive National Power and Grand Strategy."

<sup>5</sup> David Bandurski, "Looking at People's Daily in the Eye," *China Media Project*, December 1, 2022, available at [https://chinamediaproject.org/2022/12/01/looking-the-peoples-daily-in-the-eye/?ref=china-neican&utm\\_source=pocket\\_reader](https://chinamediaproject.org/2022/12/01/looking-the-peoples-daily-in-the-eye/?ref=china-neican&utm_source=pocket_reader).

pressure and enticement (e.g., investments), even through entities such as private military companies.

*Across the entire US government.* Given the diverse methods employed by the PRC, the Biden Administration recognizes that it must wield the full power of the U.S. government, including diplomatic, economic, and intelligence tools to counter Beijing. This is not to say that the military has no role, but the American response needs a full orchestra, not a soloist or two.

*Across regions.* China is seen as threatening to not only its neighbors in the Indo-Pacific region, but increasingly challenging to the security of the American homeland.

*With our allies and partners.* Given the global nature of the Chinese threat, the United States cannot counter it alone. All of these documents emphasize that the United States will need to work with its allies, not only in publicly countering China, but in improving the ability of all its partners in coordinating and interoperating everyone's various actions. There must be "cooperative posture planning, and coordinated diplomatic and economic approaches."

This last aspect, working more closely with allies, is also portrayed as a global effort. The Biden Administration seeks to incorporate not only key allies and friends in the Indo-Pacific region, but also European allies. This is especially important, if the United States is going to be able to bring economic as well as military means to bear. Moreover, in some cases, such as advanced X-ray lithography for making the most advanced computer chips, the key manufacturers are European, not American or Asian, companies.

Of particular importance are India and Taiwan. India is seen as a key player, given its size and economic potential. The Biden Administration notes the importance of cooperating both bilaterally and multilaterally, including through the Quad (Australia, India, Japan, and the United States).

Taiwan is also seen as a vital part of any effort to counter the PRC. The Taiwan Strait is also recognized as a major flash point. Given China's provocations and increasing aggressiveness towards the island (as seen in the wake of the recent visit by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi), it should not be surprising that Taiwan is also specifically identified.

The issue of Taiwan, and China's broader military modernization, demands that the United States improve its own defense capabilities, if only in order to keep pace with the improvements in the PLA. Moreover, integrated deterrence requires that the United States be able to counter Chinese military pressure, and demonstrate the ability to secure the American homeland as well as respond to any Chinese actions against allies or in strategic regions.

To do this, the NDS specifically charges the Department of Defense with:

- Maintaining an information advantage;
- Preserving command, control, and communications;
- Denying an adversary the ability to successfully commit aggression;
- Limiting an adversary's ability to undertake anti-access/area denial actions against U.S. forces; and,
- Preserving the ability to operate logistics and sustainment operations successfully.

The NPR and MDR, meanwhile, also note the importance of maintaining the viability and capability of the American nuclear deterrent force, and improving American missile defense capabilities.

The NPR, however, also notes the importance of lowering tensions and increasing mutual confidence. To this end, that document explicitly lists the goals of engaging the PRC in discussions on "military de-confliction, crisis communications, information sharing, mutual restraint, risk reduction, emerging technologies, and approaches to

nuclear arms control.”<sup>6</sup> In addition, it calls for China to become more transparent regarding its fissile material stockpile and production plans, and notes the ongoing effort to have the United States and other states fully implement the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

## Assessment

The combination of documents presents a coordinated view of American security challenges and responses. By presenting the NDS, NPR, and MDR as a single document, there is a greater sense of coordination among these key documents. This is a welcome change from the scattershot series of reports that typically dribble out over the course of months or years.

As important, by coordinating the messaging from these three documents, as well as the broader NSS, the Biden Administration can provide a single, consistent set of messages, with certain themes running through all the documents. This is especially clear in the portrayal of the nature and scope of the threat posed by the PRC.

Despite these strengths, however, it is not at all clear that there actually *is* a coherent strategy. While the various documents emphasize the importance of an “integrated deterrent,” for example, there is no indication, especially in the NSS (the over-arching, capstone document), of exactly how economic and financial tools will be meshed with traditional diplomatic and military efforts.

Indeed, Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo has repeatedly stated that trying to decouple the American economy from China’s is pointless. In September 2021, she stated that “There’s no point in talking about decoupling,”

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<sup>6</sup> Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review*, October 27, 2022, p. 17, available at <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF>.

stating that the Chinese economy was simply too large.<sup>7</sup> In another interview, with the *Wall Street Journal*, she argued that deeper trade relations would relax tensions.<sup>8</sup> Most recently, she emphasized that the United States is not interested in severing economic ties with China.<sup>9</sup> It is not at all clear exactly how the United States is going to have an integrated deterrence strategy, if it is not prepared to reduce economic reliance on the PRC.

As important, Raimondo's comments appear to ignore the reality that China itself is pursuing a mercantilist policy, and has been since 2015, when it promulgated the "Made in China 2025" strategy.<sup>10</sup> This strategy laid out ten key technology areas where the PRC should be largely self-sufficient, including not only such high technology areas as microchips and semiconductors and advanced robotics, but also railway technology, agricultural machinery, and medical equipment.

Thus, despite an effort to present an integrated approach through the simultaneous release of the various strategies, the Biden Administration has nonetheless made clear that its approach to the PRC is actually incoherent. This is exacerbated by its Inflation Reduction Act (IRA),

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<sup>7</sup> "US commerce chief pushes China trade despite 'complicated relationship,'" *The Financial Times*, September 28, 2021, available at <https://www.ft.com/content/f1b37340-fe64-4a93-a1a2-bac4013c1d5c>.

<sup>8</sup> Bob Davis, "Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo Aims to Strengthen Business Ties With China," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 24, 2021, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/commerce-secretary-gina-raimondo-aims-to-strengthen-business-ties-with-china-11632475802>.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Wiseman, "Raimondo: US isn't seeking to sever economic ties with China," *Associated Press*, November 30, 2022, available at <https://apnews.com/article/technology-china-donald-trump-united-states-beijing-8dff792aa5f6d6d4567a9ae6ecbb5cfe>.

<sup>10</sup> The State Council of the People's Republic of China, *Made in China 2025*, available at <https://english.www.gov.cn/2016special/madeinchina2025/>

which has alienated both European and Asian trade partners.

Under the IRA, American car companies would receive major subsidies to shift towards electric vehicles (EVs).<sup>11</sup> American consumers would also receive tax breaks for purchasing EVs, but only “if the product is assembled in the United States and the majority of components are sourced domestically or from a free trade partner.”<sup>12</sup> Canada and Mexico are free trade partners under the United States–Mexico–Canada Agreement, and therefore would qualify as a source of components, but Europe would not.

Consequently, European leaders have warned that the IRA, coming on the heels of rising energy prices due to the Ukraine war and the cessation of energy trade with Russia, is eroding the transatlantic relationship. “America needs to realize that public opinion is shifting [away from it] in many EU [European Union] countries.”<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, South Korean officials have warned that the IRA constitutes a

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<sup>11</sup> Anna Cooban, “‘Not how you treat friends.’ Biden’s climate plan strains trade ties with Europe,” *CNN Business*, December 6, 2022, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/06/business/eu-us-trade-tensions-ira/index.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Jorge Liboreiro, “Trade War Over Green Subsidies Looms Large Over EU-US Tech Summit,” *Euronews*, December 5, 2022, available at <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/12/05/trade-war-over-green-subsidies-looms-large-over-eu-us-tech-summit>.

<sup>13</sup> Barbara Moens, Jakob Hanke Vela, and Jacopo Barigazzi, “Europe accuses US of profiting from war,” *Politico*, November 24, 2022, available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/vladimir-putin-war-europe-ukraine-gas-inflation-reduction-act-ira-joe-biden-rift-west-eu-accuses-us-of-profiting-from-war/>.



violation of trade rules.<sup>14</sup> One official went so far as to term the legislation “a stab in the back.”<sup>15</sup>

This is the opposite of forging an integrated deterrent approach, and coordinating with our allies. Indeed, the financial threat posed by the IRA is arguably more real to many state leaders than the Trump Administration’s cavalier treatment of various alliances. At the end of the day, neither the North Atlantic Treaty Organization nor the U.S. alliances with Japan or South Korea were terminated. But the IRA poses a real threat to European and Asian jobs— and therefore to European and Asian voters.

Another gap between the enunciated strategy and actual policy is emerging with regards to Taiwan. In the nearly two years since the Biden Administration came into office, no major arms sales have been approved for the island’s defense forces. Indeed, one sale, of M109 self-propelled howitzers, which had been approved in August 2021 was subsequently delayed in September 2022, and has been reportedly rescinded.<sup>16</sup> The Administration has also made clear that it will determine what the island needs for its defense, and has concluded that E-2D airborne early warning aircraft are inappropriate.<sup>17</sup> This, despite the clear

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<sup>14</sup> Troy Stangarone, “Inflation Reduction Act Roils South Korea-US Relations,” *The Diplomat*, September 20, 2022, available at <https://thediplomat.com/2022/09/inflation-reduction-act-roils-south-korea-us-relations/>.

<sup>15</sup> Jeong-Ho Lee and Heejin Kim, “South Korea Sees ‘Betrayal’ in Biden’s Electric Vehicle Push,” *Bloomberg*, September 1, 2022, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-09-02/south-korea-sees-betrayal-in-biden-s-electric-vehicle-push?sref=61PyYII4&leadSource=uverify%20wall>.

<sup>16</sup> Teddy Ng, “Taiwan howitzers delayed, ‘crowded out’ of US production lines,” *South China Morning Post*, May 2, 2022, available at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3176220/taiwan-howitzers-delayed-crowded-out-us-production-lines>.

<sup>17</sup> Lara Seligman, “‘Deadly serious’: U.S. quietly urging Taiwan to follow Ukraine playbook for countering China,” *Politico*, May 19, 2022, available at <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/05/19/deadly->

lesson from the Russia-Ukraine war (and the Battle of Britain) that maintaining situational awareness of one's airspace is essential for conducting any kind of successful defense.

If the Biden Administration's foreign and trade policy have been at odds with the NSS and NDS, its defense policy has been even more problematic. Despite deep partisan divides, both of the Biden defense budgets saw bipartisan agreement that they were too low, with some \$40 billion added to the fiscal year 2023 budget.<sup>18</sup> Given the clear warnings about the growing sophistication and capability of the PLA, as well as concerns about overall force readiness and the draw-down of key munitions stocks in response to the Russia-Ukraine war, the unwillingness to improve defense spending is hard to reconcile with the stated goals in the various Biden documents.

Finally, the U.S. approach to China, especially its clear desire to work with China on climate change, has left it vulnerable to pressure from Beijing—pressure that Xi Jinping has openly exploited. In the wake of the visit by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan, China suspended most U.S.-China dialogues. Notably, it halted any further discussions regarding climate change.<sup>19</sup>

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serious-u-s-quietly-urging-taiwan-to-follow-ukraine-playbook-for-counteracting-china-00033792.

<sup>18</sup> Connor O'Brian, "Senators tack \$45B onto Biden's defense budget," *Politico*, June 16, 2022, available at <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/06/16/senators-tack-45b-onto-bidens-defense-budget-00040154>.

<sup>19</sup> The other suspended dialogues included three military-military talks, three on criminal and drug-trafficking issues, as well as discussions on illegal immigrants. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Announces Countermeasures in Response to Nancy Pelosi's Visit to Taiwan*, August 5, 2022, available at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx\\_662805/202208/t20220805\\_10735706.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202208/t20220805_10735706.html).

While U.S. climate envoy John Kerry welcomed the resumption of U.S.-China discussions at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27) meetings in Egypt, it is not clear what the United States may have conceded to China to get Xi to reverse his nominal position. What is clear, however, is that China continues to exploit coal, whatever the pressure from Washington. China has opened one-third of the world's new coal mines in 2022.<sup>20</sup> It is building half the world's new coal-fired power plants.<sup>21</sup> This massive ongoing expansion of China's coal reliance raises real questions about why the Biden Administration thinks its importuning of Beijing to engage in climate change talks are relevant, never mind successful.

Worse, it fails to take into account the obvious reality that Beijing sees discussions, whether between militaries or climate change envoys, as a favor it grants others; one it will withdraw, if Beijing is angered. This is a fundamentally different attitude towards discussions than the former Soviet Union. Both Moscow and Washington recognized that there was a mutual benefit to engaging in dialogue, if only in order to limit misperceptions and maintain an open channel. The PRC, by contrast, sees discussions as a favor it grants other states, with no intrinsic value, much like the imperial court viewed diplomacy for much of China's history.

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<sup>20</sup> "China to Host Almost a Third of the World's New Coal Mines," *Bloomberg*, September 28, 2022, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-09-29/china-to-host-almost-a-third-of-the-world-s-new-coal-mines>.

<sup>21</sup> Adam Vaughan, "China is building more than half of the world's new coal power plants," *New Scientist*, April 26, 2022, available at <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2317274-china-is-building-more-than-half-of-the-worlds-new-coal-power-plants/>.

## Conclusions

The Biden Administration rightfully *says* that the PRC is the foremost threat to the international system. It correctly recognizes that the PRC is the only state with both the resources and the desire to change the rules of the international order.

To counter this comprehensive threat, its proposed strategy, entailing integration of all the tools available to the U.S. government, and working with key allies and partners, is a reasonable one.

But it seems clear that there is a failure to translate the ideas into a set of real policies. Above all, the Biden Administration in its remaining two years needs to set priorities and set a coherent direction. Is a massive domestic spending bill worth the likely disruption of key transatlantic and transpacific ties? Is it interested in marshaling economic and financial pressures against the PRC, or is it intent on maintaining and expanding economic ties? And finally, is it prepared to increase defense spending in order to reforge the U.S. military into the kind of force that can deter all the threats laid out in the NSS and NDS, especially a China with a burgeoning, modern military?

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# Can Everything be a Priority? Thoughts on the 2022 National Security Strategy

By Matthew R. Costlow

## Introduction

The 2022 *National Security Strategy* (NSS) is the product of a process—strategy by committee. Military strategists, economic advisors, political appointees, diplomats, technocrats, and bureaucrats all vie to include their top priorities, and the final result is that all of their issues become a priority. The White House was responsible for making the difficult choices by ranking these priorities, but it apparently failed to do so, adhering to Yogi Berra’s advice, “If you come to a fork in the road, take it!” Regrettably, this (in)decision will result in a rudderless national policy at a time when decisive direction is most needed for America’s strategic posture, both for today and the future.

Lest others construe this article as a wholesale critique of the 2022 NSS, it is important to note at the outset that the document arrives at many of the right answers, even if it asks the wrong questions. The 2022 NSS clearly recognizes the growing importance of the U.S. military in countering the revisionist intentions of China (the pacing challenge) and Russia (the most immediate threat). It also recommends improving the U.S. defense industrial base, strengthening alliances, and employing all the tools of state power toward achieving U.S. national interests—all commendable findings. Yet, it is distressingly unclear how U.S. officials will achieve these goals without a clear sense of priorities, especially when the 2022 NSS seemingly elevates the importance of so many other time-consuming, and even

contending issues, such as food insecurity, terrorism, and climate change.

This article, therefore, delves deeper into the nature of strategy, the role of priorities, and how the 2022 NSS scores on those fronts.

### **The American Approach to Strategy**

There are two fundamental driving forces behind the 2022 NSS, and likely any other comparable publications from governments around the world: the makeup of the organizations writing it, and the strategic culture in which they operate. Bureaucratic organizations have inherent interests (and threat perceptions) according to their given responsibilities, and political leaders often must act within the confines of what those organizations can, in reality, do. Strategic culture, in essence, defines the realm of “the possible” – it is those sets of values, assumptions, traditions, and histories in which officials responsible for national security have grown up learning, observing, and practicing. The final section of this article discusses how the overprioritized nature of the 2022 NSS is likely a product of the organizational process of such U.S. government documents, but at this moment, it is useful to dwell for a moment on U.S. strategic culture.

The eminent strategist, and dual U.S.-U.K. citizen, Colin Gray, once observed, “But Americans imbued culturally with a determination not to tolerate unsolved problems can have severe difficulty distinguishing among problems which can be solved [and] problems which really are conditions and hence cannot be solved soon (if ever)...”<sup>1</sup> President Biden’s preface to the 2022 NSS illustrates, almost to an embarrassing extent, the validity of Gray’s description

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<sup>1</sup> Colin S. Gray, *War, Peace, and Victory: Strategy and Statecraft for the Next Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), pp. 48-49.

of American strategic culture. After describing the generational challenges (conditions) of famine, disease, poverty, and autocratic assaults on democracy, President Biden proclaims, “We emerge stronger from every crisis. There is nothing beyond our capacity. We can do this – for our future and for the world.”<sup>2</sup> A quintessentially American response to be sure, but claiming “there is nothing beyond our capacity” risks instilling a mindset in the reader – and government officials seeking direction – that even conditions inherent to the international system can be overcome with enough unity of effort.

This naturally provokes the question: what then are the U.S. policy goals that the strategy aims to achieve? As stated in the 2022 NSS:

Our goal is clear—we want a free, open, prosperous, and secure international order. We seek an order that is free in that it allows people to enjoy their basic, universal rights and freedoms. It is open in that it provides all nations that sign up to these principles an opportunity to participate in, and have a role in shaping, the rules. It is prosperous in that it empowers all nations to continually raise the standard of living for their citizens. And secure, in that it is free from aggression, coercion and intimidation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, October 2022), p. 3, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> The White House, *National Security Strategy*, op. cit., pp. 10-11. Interestingly, these goals are all focused on shaping the international order in some way – an international perspective rather than a national perspective. The NSS could have said that the United States seeks this international order because it would provide the most conducive environment for securing U.S. national interests, but instead the focus is on what America can contribute to the world. The distinction appears notable, even granting that elsewhere in the document there are



The problem with these stated goals is not their merit, only their practicality. Indeed, strategy ought to be inherently practical—concerned with using concrete means to achieve realistic ends. Or, as Colin Gray put it, “Strategy is a constant dialectic between means and ends. Goals are not sensible if they are beyond the range of feasibility, while tactical success is not guaranteed to translate into strategic victory.”<sup>4</sup>

Defenders of the Biden Administration may respond that others should not read so much into the overwrought language of goals in the 2022 NSS—the document is meant to inspire action and thus justifiably employs lofty rhetoric. Yet, as the great Prussian strategist Carl von Clausewitz repeatedly emphasizes in his work *On War*, setting the political goal of a war is the most important act a political leader can perform. He states, “Since war is not an act of senseless passion but is controlled by its political object, the value of this object must determine the sacrifices to be made for it in magnitude and also in duration. Once the expenditure of effort exceeds the value of the political object, the object must be renounced and peace must follow.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, political goals determine how a state prepares for a war, whether a war must be fought, at what cost, for how long, and when the costs of war have exceeded the benefits of peace.

The goal of a “secure” world order that is free from “aggression, coercion, and intimidation” is utopian, and thus cannot be pursued realistically, versus a goal of, say,

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references to U.S. national interests. The fact that the goals in this section are stated so explicitly without reference to U.S. national interests may be indicative of how some in the Biden Administration may prefer thinking internationally first (what is best for the world?) and nationally second (how can the United States help?).

<sup>4</sup> Gray, *War, Peace, and Victory*, op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, *On War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993 ed.), p. 104.

defending U.S. national interests and those of our allies against aggression, coercion, and intimidation. The former goal is unattainable, while the latter, though admittedly vague, lies in the realm of reality, making progress possible. The 2022 NSS goal of achieving a secure world order is, based on history, impractical, thus making it impossible to arrive at *strategic* decisions on force sizing, policy, and doctrine. In the end, the decisions may lead to good, or less damaging, outcomes—but only because the United States stumbled into them by chance. Idealist goals have long driven real world strategies, but the incompatibilities always emerge in practice.<sup>6</sup> The 2022 NSS could have avoided this trap by linking its sensible recommendations on military means to more realistic political ends, but the Biden Administration chose not to, thus leading to a ship of state that may be well armed, but without direction.

### **The Priorities Problem**

Perhaps as a result of the Biden Administration failing to define achievable goals for U.S. security policy, the 2022 NSS lists a number actions the United States “must” take (the word appears 39 times), but it does not rank these priorities. For instance, the document states, “These shared challenges [climate change, food insecurity, communicable diseases, inflation, etc.] are not marginal issues that are secondary to geopolitics. They are at the very core of national and international security and must be treated as such.”<sup>7</sup> If geopolitics and shared challenges are equally important, then neither has priority and both would, ostensibly, consume equal amounts of time and treasure. This is obviously not the case, and for good reason. A

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<sup>6</sup> For more on this topic, see Keith B. Payne, *Shadows on the Wall: Deterrence and Disarmament* (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, 2020).

<sup>7</sup> The White House, *National Security Strategy*, op. cit., p. 6.

United States without sufficient defenses cannot lead the world in minimizing food insecurity. Indeed, a United States that reduced its defense budget dramatically and reinvested those funds into fighting climate change could make other “shared challenges” much worse, for instance, by incentivizing Russian and Chinese wars of aggression against U.S. allies while the United States lacks the military power to come to their aid.

How then should the United States think about its priorities? On this point, Colin Gray offers a simple test: “The most appropriate criterion for deciding upon priorities is damage to the national security in the event of malperformance.”<sup>8</sup> Inflation in Central Asia is concerning, but does not nearly affect U.S. national security as greatly as if deterrence fails in the Taiwan Strait. Terrorism in Africa is an urgent crisis, but its effects on U.S. national security are not nearly so great as failing to defend the U.S. homeland from conventional and nuclear missile strikes.

In short, successfully advancing U.S. national interests *allows* the United States to then advance international interests in “tackling shared challenges.” Maintaining national defense priorities first and international “shared challenges” priorities second is for the best because acting as if they are both equally “top” priorities makes it more likely the United States will perform poorly at both.

### **Time to Readjust**

The Biden Administration is unlikely to make any major changes to its recently released *National Security Strategy*, but there is still time for course corrections as it implements the 2022 NSS. For instance, the Biden Administration should clarify: is it trying to position the United States to fight or compete? Does the United States require the ability

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<sup>8</sup> Gray, *War, Peace, and Victory*, op. cit., p. 85.

to simultaneously fight two major powers, or fight one power and deter (however incredibly) the other? If the goal is to be able to fight one major power while deterring the second from opportunistic aggression, will that place additional stress on the U.S. strategic nuclear arsenal – and, if so, should there be significant changes to the desired size of the deployed arsenal?

On the topic of nuclear weapons and their place within the Biden Administration’s concept of “integrated deterrence,” senior Department of Defense officials should reiterate in testimony to Congress a message last heard five years ago by then-Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Paul Selva, who stated with admirable clarity, “Perhaps the clearest indicator of this prioritization is how we have chosen to spend our resources and the tradeoffs we have been willing to accept. Although our current nuclear strategy and program of record were developed before the Budget Control Act imposed strict caps on defense spending, we are emphasizing the nuclear mission over other modernization programs when faced with that choice.”<sup>9</sup> Such statements not only make the commander’s intent clear for other government officials, they also send deterrence and assurance signals to U.S. adversaries and allies respectively.

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Selva, *Statement of General Paul Selva, USAF, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff* (Washington, D.C.: House Armed Services Committee, March 8, 2017), p. 6, available at <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20170308/105640/HHRG-115-AS00-Wstate-SelvaUSAFP-20170308.pdf>.

## Conclusion

The 2022 *National Security Strategy*, by its nature, is a sweeping document that looks across the available tools of state power and applies them to the world's most pressing problems, as seen by the Biden Administration. Such grand strategy, as Clausewitz recognized, must encompass many different aspects of the state:

To discover how much of our resources must be mobilized for war, we must first examine our own political aim and that of the enemy. We must gauge the strength and situation of the opposing state. We must gauge the character and abilities of its government and people and do the same in regard to our own. Finally, we must evaluate the political sympathies of other states and the effect the war may have on them. To assess these things in all their ramifications and diversity is plainly a colossal task.<sup>10</sup>

The Biden Administration should be commended for taking on this “colossal task” and, in the process, getting a number of significant findings right – not the least of which is the need for tailored deterrence in an era when the consequences for deterrence failure appear to be growing more severe by the day.

The 2022 NSS errs, however, in setting unattainable goals for national security organizations awash in priorities but limited in capabilities. There is still time to more clearly rank U.S. national priorities according to the damage that would be done should the United States fail in its efforts – and, with those findings in mind, create realistic plans to meet practical goals. The United States has a wealth of tools at its disposal that, if employed *strategically*, can meet the

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<sup>10</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, op. cit., p. 708.

geopolitical and “shared” challenges described in the 2022 NSS, but that requires a better understanding of the nature of strategy and the importance of clearly defined priorities.

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# **An Australian View of the U.S. National Security Strategy 2022**

**By Paul Dibb**

As a former senior Australian defence policy officer, I have always been rather leery of national security strategies because they can cover endless subjects without a clear sense of priorities. By comparison, defence policy guidance demands clear strategic priorities and the definition of potential threats, as well as detailed financial guidance.

However, I must acknowledge that the U.S. *National Security Strategy* for October 2022 (hereafter NSS) is clear about the priority for key geopolitical threats in the years ahead. Naturally, it also covers in some detail such subjects as climate and energy security, pandemics and biodefence, food security and terrorism. But my purpose here is to address its judgements about America's global strategic priorities and what are America's key geopolitical challenges in the years ahead. I also want to focus on its judgements about the relevance of the Indo-Pacific region, which is the region of Australia's strategic concern.

## **Opening Judgements**

The introduction of the NSS by the President of the United States, Joe Biden, begins with the observation that our world is at an inflection point. He clearly states that we are amid a strategic competition to shape the future of the international order. In a welcome change from the previous President Trump's dismissal of the importance of allies, Biden calls for a further deepening of America's core alliances in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. There is a specific mention about the AUKUS Security partnership between Australia, UK, and



the United States, as well as the Quadrilateral Dialogue consisting of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States.

Biden identifies China as harbouring the intention and, increasingly, the capacity to reshape the international order in favour of one that tilts the global playing field to its benefit. He also observes that Russia's "brutal and unprovoked war on its neighbour Ukraine has shattered peace in Europe and impacted stability everywhere, and its reckless nuclear threats endanger the global non-proliferation regime."

He argues persuasively that autocrats are working overtime to undermine democracy and export a model of governance marked by repression at home and coercion abroad. He asserts that these competitors mistakenly believe democracy is weaker than autocracy because they fail to understand that a nation's power springs from its people. Biden concludes that the United States will continue to defend democracy around the world and that the rules-based order must remain the foundation for global peace and prosperity. As America's closest ally in the entire Indo-Pacific region, Australia fully endorses these principles that are being seriously undermined by both China and Russia.

### **The Threat from China and Russia**

In Part III of the NSS, it argues that China is the only competitor with both the intent to shape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it. Beijing has ambitions to create an enhanced sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific and to become the world's leading power. It is using its technological capacity and increasing influence over international institutions to create more permissive conditions for its own authoritarian model, and to mould global technology use and norms to privilege its interests and values. Beijing frequently uses its economic power to

coerce countries, such as Australia. China benefits from the openness of the international economy while limiting access to its domestic market and it seeks to make the world more dependent on the PRC while reducing its own dependence on the world.

The NSS further argues that China is also investing in a military that is rapidly modernising, increasingly capable in the Indo-Pacific, and growing in strength and reach globally – all while seeking to erode U.S. alliances in the region and around the world. Competition with the PRC is most pronounced in the Indo-Pacific but is also increasingly global. In perhaps its most important single sentence, the NSS argues that in the competition with China the next 10 years will be the “decisive decade.” It repeats that the United States stands now at the inflection point, where the choices it makes and the priorities it pursues today will set it on a course that determines its competitive position long into the future. The NSS then correctly observes that many of America’s allies and partners, especially in the Indo-Pacific, stand on the front lines of the PRC’s coercion and are rightly determined to seek to ensure their own autonomy, security, and prosperity.

Regarding Taiwan, the usual diplomatic statement is made that America opposes any unilateral changes to the status quo from either side, and Washington does not support Taiwan independence. No one expects Washington to be more specific but as America’s closest ally in the Indo-Pacific region, Australia finds itself uncertain about what Washington would expect of Australia in the event of a Chinese attack on Taiwan absent any any specific U.S. strategic guidance.

The NSS then issues an appropriately stark statement that Russia now poses an immediate and persistent threat to international peace and stability. The document asserts that this is not about a struggle between the West and Russia – rather it is about the fundamental principles of the

UN Charter, particularly with respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the prohibition against acquiring territory through war. Alongside its allies and partners, America is helping to make Russia's war in Ukraine a strategic failure. Across Europe, NATO and the European Union are united in standing up to Russia and defending shared values. The document further observes that NATO is strengthening the alliance's defence and deterrence efforts, particularly on the eastern flank of the NATO Alliance. The NSS observes that Putin's war has profoundly diminished Russia's status vis-à-vis China and other Asian powers such as India and Japan.

It also asserts that the United States "will defend every inch of NATO territory" and will continue to build and deepen a coalition with allies and partners to prevent Russia from causing further harm to European security, democracy, and institutions. It carefully notes that Russia's conventional military has been weakened, "which will likely increase Moscow's reliance on nuclear weapons in its military planning."

From an Australian perspective, these are important warnings being plainly sent to a Moscow that has seriously lost its reputation as a major power and which seems to be increasingly preoccupied with brandishing the threat of nuclear weapons—even though recently, Putin has appeared to deny there is any logical use for nuclear weapons in Moscow's war on Ukraine.

As far as Australia is concerned, it will continue to provide whatever military contributions to Ukraine it can make—such as locally manufactured armoured troop carriers. However, it must be plainly understood that Australia's defence force of only 60,000 is not capable of making a significant contribution to high-intensity, land warfare in Europe. Our priorities lie elsewhere—including, as far as I am concerned, with Taiwan. The critical threat

facing Australia foreseeably is from China and not directly from Russia.

### **Key Regional Interests**

Turning now to the NSS strategy by region, it is reassuring for an Australian defence planner to see the Indo-Pacific figuring first, followed by Europe, the Western Hemisphere, the Middle East, Africa, and the Arctic. For many of us, there was a real risk – given the dangers of an escalating war in Europe caused by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine – that Europe would come first in Washington’s considerations. It was, therefore, revealing to read in the section on “a free and open Indo- Pacific” an opening sentence stating: “The Indo- Pacific fuels much of the world’s economic growth and will be the epicentre of 21<sup>st</sup>-century geopolitics.” It goes on to argue that “as an Indo-Pacific power the United States has a vital interest in realizing a region that is open, interconnected, prosperous, secure, and resilient.”

Importantly from Australia’s point of view, this is followed by a sentence which reads: “And we will affirm freedom of the seas and build shared regional support for open access to the South China Sea – a throughway for nearly two-thirds of global maritime trade and a quarter of all global trade.” This is an important geopolitical statement because almost 60% of Australia’s trade passes through Southeast Asian waters. It is followed by the assertion that a free and open Indo-Pacific “can only be achieved if we build collective capacity.” It asserts that America is deepening its five regional treaty alliances and close partnerships in the region. That thought is reinforced by the United States affirming the centrality of ASEAN and seeking deeper bonds with Southeast Asian partners.

It is encouraging for Australia to read the NSS firmly stating that the Quad and AUKUS will be critical to

addressing regional challenges. The document reaffirms “our iron-clad commitment to our Indo-Pacific treaty allies—Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand.” It reaffirms America’s “unwavering commitment to the defence of Japan under our mutual security treaty, which covers the Senkaku Islands.”

Finally, it is also worth quoting the concluding thoughts of this document about the importance of the Indo-Pacific: “We have entered a consequential new period of American foreign policy that will demand more of the United States in the Indo-Pacific than has been asked of us since the Second World War. No region will be of more significance to the world and to everyday Americans than the Indo-Pacific.” Again, this sentiment is of central interest to Australia’s continuing confidence in the ANZUS alliance. America’s enhanced presence in the region includes the recent announcement that six B-52 bombers will be based in Darwin.

### **Some Concluding Thoughts**

In its conclusions, the NSS proclaims that America is motivated by a clear vision of what success looks like “at the end of this decisive decade.” Usefully, that includes modernising the U.S. military, pursuing advanced technologies, investing in America’s defence workforce, and strengthening deterrence in an era of increasing geopolitical confrontation. In achieving these goals, the document acknowledges there is “no time to waste.” That is certainly the view in Canberra because for the first time since the Second World War, we face the prospect of high-intensity conflict in our region with little or no warning.

My concluding thoughts are as follows:

First, it is a pity in this context that the NSS did not spend more space to address increasing concerns among

America's close allies in the Indo-Pacific about extended nuclear deterrence. The fact is that compared with the Cold War, Washington now faces the prospect of nuclear war with two major nuclear powers—Russia and China—as well as the dangers stemming from the proliferation of nuclear weapons in North Korea, India, and Pakistan.

Second, on 19 October, 2022, the Prime Ministers of Japan and Australia signed a Joint Declaration of Security Cooperation, which includes strengthening the exchanges of strategic assessments at all levels, intelligence cooperation, more sophisticated joint exercises and operations, mutual use of facilities including maintenance, asset protection, and personnel links and exchanges, as well as reinforcing security and defence cooperation, including in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, capacity building for regional partners, advanced defence science and technology, defence industry and high-end capabilities. However, the most crucial provision is as follows: "We will consult each other on contingencies that may affect our sovereignty and regional security interests and consider measures in response." This latter language is almost identical with that in the 1951 ANZUS Treaty between Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. In my opinion, this means that Japan is becoming to all intents and purposes an ally of Australia.

Third, Australians increasingly understand that China poses a serious military threat in the region and perhaps even against Australia itself. It is now quite urgent that Australia prepare itself for contingencies in the direct defence of the continent and its maritime approaches. To prepare for this, we must rapidly develop the capability to mount decisive long-range strikes in our region of primary strategic concern, which includes the eastern Indian Ocean, the whole of Southeast Asia, including the South China Sea, and the South Pacific. We will require even closer defence cooperation with the United States to prepare for this

contingency—especially through the rapid acquisition of long-range strike missiles.

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# **We Need Ammo, Not Green Policies: The Biden Administration’s National Security Strategy Is a Triumph of Hope and Wishful Thinking over Reality and Evidence**

**By Michaela Dodge**

In an era of the largest land invasion in Europe since the end of the World War II, one that also involves a nuclear-armed aggressor issuing repeated nuclear threats, the Biden Administration’s *National Security Strategy* (NSS) employs wishful thinking over reality and evidence. The document prioritizes policies to counter climate change over those that would increase U.S. strength to counter actors intent on revising the world order to America’s detriment. In fact, the Biden Administration mentions the word “climate” in the NSS more times than the words “China” and “PRC” combined.

The Biden Administration considers China the “only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to advance that objective.”<sup>1</sup> That language is realistic, even as the NSS offers very little by the way of concrete steps and strategy (connecting the nation’s ways and means to its ends) to deter (and if needed defeat) China in a long-term competition. In fact, many policies spelled out in the NSS, if implemented, would leave America more polarized domestically and weaken allied relations—and thus, leave the United States less able to counter China’s revisionist aims.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the White House, *National Security Strategy*, October 2022, p. 8, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.



The mismatch between the Biden Administration's stated aspirations and the likely effects of the policies it proposes to address today's challenges is staggering. In the United States, gas and food are significantly more expensive than two years ago, and while a part of the problem is the worsening international situation and lingering effects of the pandemic, the Biden Administration's domestic policies are to blame too, including terminating the Keystone Pipeline, restricting oil drilling, and passing a stimulus bill that stimulated inflation more than anything else. Rather than setting a corrective course at home to strengthen the foundation of American power, in the NSS, the Biden Administration doubled down on pursuing similar politically divisive and economically problematic policies on a global scale. U.S. resources would be better spent on preparing America to deal with more urgent challenges on which Republicans and Democrats agree rather than on a divisive domestic-driven agenda which appears to weaken the U.S. position at home and abroad.

"The climate crisis is the existential challenge of our time," says the NSS.<sup>2</sup> "Without immediate global action to reduce emissions, scientists tell us we will soon exceed 1.5 degrees of warming, locking in further extreme heat and weather, rising sea levels, and catastrophic biodiversity loss," the document states.<sup>3</sup> The Biden Administration is using the NSS to generate a sense of urgency domestically to strengthen compliance with and reduce the opposition to its controversial "green" policies. Billion-dollar domestic investments into dubious "green" technologies cannot appreciably alter the rate of climate change but they can (and do) hamper the U.S. ability to defeat its rivals on a global scale.<sup>4</sup> They also increase some other countries'

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Kevin Dayaratna, Katie Tubb and David Kreutzer, "The Unsustainable Costs of President Biden's Climate Agenda," The Heritage Foundation

resentment against the United States because they increase energy costs. The NSS leaves unsaid that scientists also tell us that “The general-circulation models of climate on which international policy is at present founded are unfit for their purpose. Therefore, it is cruel as well as imprudent to advocate the squandering of trillions of dollars on the basis of results from such immature models. Current climate policies pointlessly and grievously undermine the economic system, putting lives at risk in countries denied access to affordable, reliable electrical energy.”<sup>5</sup>

There simply is no scientific consensus that mankind’s efforts, let alone unilateral U.S. actions, can appreciably change the global climate, and no amount of the White House claiming otherwise can change this fact. There is not a scientific consensus on how to weigh different factors that contribute to climate change. Why the rush to regulate carbon emissions when scientists agree that “CO2 is not a pollutant. It is essential to all life on Earth. Photosynthesis is a blessing. More CO2 is beneficial for nature, greening the Earth: additional CO2 in the air has promoted growth in global plant biomass. It is also good for agriculture, increasing the yields of crops worldwide”?<sup>6</sup> Such realities should give pause to good stewards of taxpayers’ resources before committing the nation to spending significant amounts on green technologies at the expense of increasingly pressing defense needs in a dangerous threat environment, including ammunition, aircraft, and ships. Is U.S. security better off if the military services meet their recruitment goals and have sufficient arms, or have a fleet

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*Backgrounder* No. 3713, June 16, 2022, available at [https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/BG3713\\_0.pdf](https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/BG3713_0.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> See Guus Berkhout et al., “There is no climate emergency,” *Letter to the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres*, September 23, 2019, available at <https://clintel.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/ecd-letter-to-un.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

of all electric vehicles in the next decade? If the increasing threats to the United State and allies posed by Russia, China, North Korea and Iran were not so real and immediate, perhaps the promotion of the green agenda as the critical factor of national security could make sense; but those threats are increasing, real, and immediate. Yet, for the Biden Administration and its NSS, the answer appears to favor having a fleet of electric vehicles, which of course would impress America's adversaries far less than sufficient ammunition production.

Arming the United States to be able to respond to China's increasing military capabilities, improving the state of the U.S. nuclear weapons complex, and lowering the coercive potential of Russia's nuclear blackmail are all more urgent national security tasks than pursuing a global minimum tax or using trade to advance "climate priorities," especially when said "climate priorities" stand in the way of improving global standards of living, alliances, and partnerships. And this is leaving aside the lack of domestic consensus for such sweeping partisan proposals that, in the end, can only weaken the U.S. economic position and further polarize Americans (again, in direct contrast to the NSS's stated priority of making U.S. democracy stronger).

The NSS favors "reducing the risks of nuclear war" by "taking further steps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our strategy,"<sup>7</sup> as if the existence of U.S. nuclear weapons is the problem. But the United States has pursued policies to reduce the role of nuclear weapons since the end of the Cold War, effectively creating a massive Russian advantage in tactical nuclear force levels that gives Russia a coercive advantage today. China has pursued a "breathtaking"

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<sup>7</sup> Berkhout et al., "There is no climate emergency," *Letter to the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres*, op. cit., p. 21.

nuclear modernization and expansion program despite the U.S. decades-old reluctance to do either.<sup>8</sup>

The Biden Administration's commitment to "verifiable arms control" is in stark contrast with its lack of a forceful response to Russia's abrogation of inspection rights under the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START).<sup>9</sup> Further, the administration wishes to emphasize "measures that head off costly arms races."<sup>10</sup> But, as the eminent strategist Colin Gray reminded the strategic community some 50 years ago, arms races are a function of politics, not of particular programs.<sup>11</sup> China and Russia have been racing for over a decade with virtually no U.S. response. Heading off "costly arms races" appears to be the administration's codeword for more self-restraint in the face of China's rapid nuclear and conventional build up, and Russia's nuclear coercion. It is past time that the United States began responding to these activities.

The NSS calls for U.S. cooperation with other states, including somewhat puzzlingly with China and Russia, to address shared challenges. But Russia and China are the priority challenges the U.S. shares with allies. What does the NSS identify as the most important shared challenge? Again, climate change. The hope that Russia and China

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<sup>8</sup> Roxana Tiron, "U.S. Sees Rising Risk in 'Breathtaking' China Nuclear Expansion," *Bloomberg*, April 4, 2022, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-04/u-s-sees-rising-risk-in-breathtaking-china-nuclear-expansion>.

<sup>9</sup> Mark B. Schneider, "Trust Without Verification: The Wrong Approach to Arms Control," *Information Series* No. 532 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, September 1, 2022), , available at [https://nipp.org/information\\_series/mark-b-schneider-trust-without-verification-the-wrong-approach-to-arms-control-no-532-september-1-2022/](https://nipp.org/information_series/mark-b-schneider-trust-without-verification-the-wrong-approach-to-arms-control-no-532-september-1-2022/).

<sup>10</sup> Office of the White House, *National Security Strategy*, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> Colin S. Gray, "The Arms Race Is About Politics," *Foreign Policy*, No. 9 (Winter 1972-1973), pp. 117-29, available at <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148088>.

view climate change as important a security issue as the United States does is about as likely as Russia and China agreeing to a nuclear arms control deal that would be beneficial to U.S. interests—that is to say, it is hopelessly unrealistic. Russia and China will not spend significant resources to lower their respective carbon footprints, and certainly not at the cost of decreasing their competitiveness or deprioritizing their military spending. They are quite happy to see the United States do so. The goal to cooperate with Russia and China in this regard is in direct contrast with the NSS's aspiration to strengthen democracies and alliances abroad.

In many respects, the NSS is a triumph of hope and unrealistic thinking over reality and evidence. The NSS does not chart a path to make the United States more secure, and the opportunity costs inherent in implementing the administration's partisan policies far outweigh their purported benefits. The domestic effect of pursuing them will be more polarization and the weakening of domestic institutions as the administration squanders Americans' precious resources on implementing a partisan climate agenda and using the coercive power of the government to do so—all in the name of national security, per the Biden Administration's NSS. The consequence will be the exact opposite of what the administration says it wants—to strengthen U.S. domestic institutions and international position vis-à-vis China and Russia.

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# Assessing Biden's 2022 National Security Strategy

By Colin Dueck

In assessing the Biden Administration's 2022 *U.S. National Security Strategy*, it's useful to clarify what these documents can and cannot be expected to do. The American foreign policy system is president-centric. A commander-in-chief's genuine priorities are revealed through action over time. Nobody really expects any chief executive to simply sit down and read his administration's written national security strategy as the sole guideline for how to handle a series of international crises. The utility of these documents, if they are well crafted and reasonably indicative of presidential intent, is to act as a sort of signaling device. They signal key policy priorities to a variety of audiences, whether domestic, international, or bureaucratic.

To be fair, the 2022 NSS does stress several worthwhile concepts. One is that we have returned to an age of geopolitical competition where great powers are not converging on a single democratic model. Another is that China is the leading great power rival of the United States and a very serious challenge. A third is that domestic and international U.S. policies are inevitably intertwined and must be treated as such. This is all persuasive, so far as it goes. President Biden might not be interested in the comparison, but the fact is that all three points were stressed by the Trump Administration's 2017 *U.S. National Security Strategy*. So, it appears that Biden officials have quietly incorporated and continued at least some important innovations from the previous administration.

Having said that, I believe there are numerous problems with the 2022 NSS, some of them fundamental:

1. *Failure to specify the leading threat.* The NSS fails to clarify that China is the number one U.S. national security challenge. Instead, it gives equal if not greater weight to climate change. The document says: “of all the shared problems we face, climate change is the greatest and potentially existential for all nations.” And yet the NSS also says: “the PRC presents America’s most consequential *geopolitical* challenge.” (Emphasis added) In other words, the document deliberately refuses to name the greatest overall threat, on the pretense that climate change and China deserve something like equal time and attention in U.S. national security policy. The NSS attempts to square this circle by creating two silos, one containing geopolitical challenges and one containing transnational ones. But as the document itself concedes, these two silos interact, and the Chinese do not recognize any such clearcut division. In this NSS, more words are spent referring to climate change than on any other national security threat. A better approach would simply be to name the People’s Republic of China as the single greatest challenge, and act accordingly.

2. *Overestimating transnational cooperative possibilities with China.* The NSS seriously understates practical difficulties in cooperating with Beijing on transnational challenges. It states: “We will always be willing to work with the PRC where our interests align... That includes on climate, pandemic threats, nonproliferation, countering illicit and illegal narcotics, the global food crisis, and macroeconomic issues.” The problem is, Beijing does not see it this way. Chinese leaders, by their own choice, have pursued policies in these issue areas that do not at all align with American interests. Just to take an obvious example, it was China that actively obscured early international and U.S. attempts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The practical danger now is that the Biden Administration risks making unnecessary

concessions to Chinese government positions on transnational issues in the hope of kickstarting broader Sino-American cooperation. Beijing will simply pocket any such gains and move on to the next demand.

3. *Dysfunctional domestic policies that do not bolster American strength.* The NSS correctly says there is “no bright line between foreign and domestic policy.” It states that we must focus on “rebuilding our economy” and “build our resilience, at home” to be strong internationally. Unfortunately, the very same domestic policies touted in the NSS as strengthening America have mostly done the opposite. For example, the misnamed Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) celebrated in this document is an excellent example of government regulatory and deficit spending overkill. The Biden Administration seems to be addicted to this sort of thing. Such measures, when added together over time, weaken America’s domestic economic base rather than strengthening it. Similarly, the NSS refers more than once to the urgency of “prioritizing diversity, equity, inclusion;” “focus on the needs of the most marginalized, including the LGBTQI+ community;” and “root out systemic disparities in our laws, policies, and institutions.” Apart from the question of why these considerations are US national security imperatives – a point asserted, rather than made persuasively in the NSS – the document seems oblivious to the fact that incorporating and exporting domestically controversial social policies into US national security strategy undermines bipartisan political support at home while forcing unrecognized policy tradeoffs overseas.

4. *Industrial policy, yes. Progressive wish lists, no.* The NSS embraces a modern industrial and innovation strategy with the stated objective of more effectively competing with China. This is an admirable objective, so far as it goes. I’m less allergic than some other conservatives to the concept of a U.S. industrial policy versus Beijing. If anything, federal funding for genuine strategic necessities



still needs to be increased. In the case of the CHIPS Act, the original aim of boosting domestic manufacturing of semiconductors within the United States was certainly worthwhile. But the administration and its allies in Congress diluted this core necessity by using the act to provide increased funding for the usual progressive domestic interest groups and priorities. Unsurprisingly, many congressional Republicans objected. The pattern was even more true with the sprawling Inflation Reduction Act, which is not a strategically focused industrial policy at all but contains numerous domestic coalitional side payments to various left-of-center constituencies. If the Biden Administration would focus on true strategic necessities in such legislation, rather than its own domestic policy wish list, it would find more bipartisan support from congressional Republicans who look to counteract Chinese Communist Party influence worldwide.

5. *Stated energy and environmental policies are ill-advised and contradict the declared desire to push back against geopolitical rivals.* The NSS states that a major priority is to counteract authoritarian geopolitical rivals of the United States including Russia, China, and Iran. Yet its own declared approach toward environmental and energy issues contradicts that priority. The Biden Administration has waged a kind of war on America's oil and gas industry, for example, by making new leases virtually impossible to obtain, and by insisting that industry executives plan for a supposed national transition away from fossil fuels. In the case of leading oil exporter Saudi Arabia, President Biden began his tenure denouncing the Saudis as pariahs, squabbling with them over Yemen, arms sales, human rights, and climate change. Unsurprisingly, all these choices have consequences. Now that Russia has invaded Ukraine, and the United States along with the rest of the world faces increased energy prices, President Biden makes incremental alterations on energy policy and fist-bumps the

crown prince of Saudi Arabia while continuing to insist on environmentalist reforms. But the Saudis are not interested in the president's current requirements, and American oil and gas executives respond to disincentives specified by the White House that condemns them. Even more bizarrely, the administration proposes to counteract current energy shortages by reaching out to Venezuela, a hostile dictatorship denounced in the NSS. The climate change and energy policies praised in this document completely run against the urgent need for increased domestic oil and gas production, precisely so that the United States and its allies do not depend on the very same adversaries they are trying to counteract.

6. *Punting on trade as an adjunct of U.S. national security policy.* The NSS notes the Biden Administration's determination to "move beyond traditional Free Trade Agreements" (FTAs) as a tool in advancing broad American objectives overseas. However, it does not replace FTAs with any comparably bold and persuasive trade agenda. The Trump Administration used protective tariffs to pressure foreign governments for concessions on commercial and security issues. Cold War presidents from both parties used trade agreements and the promise of market access to boost U.S. alliances and partnerships overseas. What all these past efforts had in common was a certain boldness. President Biden, by comparison, has not adopted a confident approach incorporating trade into broader U.S. national security objectives. The NSS says that the administration will "use trade tools to advance climate priorities." But U.S. allies overseas, in East Asia for example, want market access, not lectures on climate change. The one existing trade initiative highlighted is the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), an agreement that mostly collects low-hanging fruit on matters unrelated to tariffs or market access. IPEF is no match for the large-scale foreign economic policy tools being deployed by the

People's Republic of China in East Asia and beyond. There appear to be deep divisions within the Biden Administration over how to handle U.S. tariffs against China, and profound fears of interest group pressure. There is more than one way to do this, but a bolder approach is required.

*7. The described connection between the administration's immigration policy and its national security policy is unconvincing.* The NSS states that "attracting a higher volume of global STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics] talent is a priority for our national security." If so, the administration might want to emphasize skills-based immigration rather than family reunification. Immigration also comes up, correctly, as a top priority in U.S. relations with Latin American countries. However, the document's description of the situation is completely unrealistic. Here, the NSS claims that President Biden pursues a "fundamentally fair, orderly" immigration policy. He does not. The situation along America's southern border is dysfunctional, disorderly, and unfair to those who wait in line for years to become U.S. citizens legally. Biden's weak, confused approach to the matter has only made things worse. What the NSS describes euphemistically as "the movement of peoples throughout the Americas" includes illegal border crossings from Mexico into the United States on a massive and growing scale. If President Biden cannot bring himself to enforce the law at the border of his own country - or even to describe illegal immigration as illegal - no wonder so many American citizens question his competence to promote basic U.S. national interests elsewhere.

*8. The description of the terrorist challenge is inadequate.* The NSS concedes that affiliates of ISIS and Al Qaeda have expanded geographically over time. Still, its attempt to turn America's humiliating defeat in Afghanistan into something other than a debacle is

unconvincing. In 2021, President Biden personally insisted on withdrawing all U.S. troops from that country. Very quickly, against the president's prior assurances, the Taliban triumphed. Even Americans who were tired of the conflict agree that the administration's troop withdrawal was characterized by catastrophic incompetence. The demise of Ayman al-Zawahiri a year later was certainly welcome but given the Biden Administration's insistence that Al Qaeda would receive no shelter from the Taliban, the question arises as to why al-Zawahiri was living comfortably in downtown Kabul in the first place. The NSS states a desire to get at the "root causes" of terrorism, as if these are still opaque and only in need of "governance," "stabilization," and "economic development." Plenty of regions around the world are ill-governed, unstable, and underdeveloped without breeding mass-scale terror attacks. In fact, the root cause of salafi-jihadist terrorism is the radical Islamist ideology that the NSS cannot bring itself to name. This is an unfortunate regression back to Obama-era gentilities regarding the matter. A president who cannot bring himself to name sworn enemies of the United States cannot be expected to counteract them effectively.

*9. National defense is underfunded relative to specified U.S. international commitments, and priorities are sometimes skewed.* Most serious U.S. defense analysts believe there is now a growing gap between America's existing strategic commitments overseas and its military capability to meet those commitments. Basically, there are two ways to close this gap: either scale back commitments or boost capabilities. The NSS does not propose to scale back American alliance commitments. It describes them as "iron-clad." This necessarily means the United States must boost defense spending significantly. Best estimates indicate that an additional three to five percent increase per year beyond inflation would be required. The National Defense Authorization Act passed by the Senate in

December is a start but it's still not enough. Bipartisan congressional coalitions have been forced to intervene repeatedly to supplement the administration's inadequate defense proposals.

As with so much of the NSS, the section on "Modernizing and Strengthening Our Military" is more than a little detached from reality. Any administration's true national defense priorities are revealed in the time, attention, and funding it devotes to competing concerns. The Biden Administration devotes considerable time, attention, and funding to its campaign for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) inside the U.S. armed forces as elsewhere. But as Thomas Spoehr of the Heritage Foundation notes, this emphasis carries potential tradeoffs in terms of U.S. combat readiness, recruitment, morale, cohesion, and available resources.<sup>1</sup> A more convincing set of priorities, given the urgent nature of the threat posed by China across locations such as the Taiwan Strait, would be to increase U.S. military spending; emphasize weapons procurement; reconstitute America's depleted defense industrial base; launch a U.S. naval buildup; boost shipyard capacity; and place particular stress on the production of much-needed missiles currently in short supply given the administration's arms shipments to Ukraine. If deterrence breaks down because of inattention on these matters, the administration will not want to plead that it was earnestly promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion while neglecting combat effectiveness.

Many passages of the NSS are unobjectionable. The document is quite right to say, for instance, that "the PRC is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it."

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Spoehr, "The Rise of Wokeness in the Military," *Imprimis*, Vol. 51, Nos. 6/7 (June July 2022).

Unfortunately, the policies pursued by President Biden do not correspond to the scale of the challenge, and several of the priorities laid out in the NSS contradict the needed effort.

The conceptual premise of the NSS is that two silos exist in U.S. national security policy: measured competition with authoritarian great powers including Russia and China; and cooperative global efforts around shared challenges involving transnational issues such as terrorism, energy, nuclear non-proliferation, and the COVID pandemic. The claim that multilateral cooperation over transnational issues was neglected by the previous Republican presidency has characterized every Democratic administration since the 1970s. Another way to look at it is to notice that leading nation-states tend to cherish their own interests, independence, security, and prosperity, regardless of who sits in the Oval Office. The transnational issue areas described by the NSS as inherently cooperative are not necessarily so. Overseas, different national approaches toward energy issues, nuclear weapons, public health, and counterterrorism are deep-rooted and not always amenable to well-intentioned American desires. In practical terms, a liberal internationalist administration like Biden's risks offering unnecessary concessions—for example, over nuclear non-proliferation—in the false hope that this will kickstart novel patterns of global, regional, or bilateral cooperation. Prudent leaders will understand that supposedly cooperative transnational issue arenas contain competitive elements as well - and that these competitive elements may be leveraged precisely to encourage cooperation on American terms.

The 2022 NSS is problematic. A better approach would begin by clarifying vital U.S. national interests, in plain English; laying out threats to those interests; and then describe the necessary policies to follow. It would name China as the single greatest challenge to U.S. national

security, unambiguously. It would lay out fuller and better coordinated efforts across every dimension to counteract that great challenge. It would revise existing U.S. energy and environmental policies to supplement rather than hobble those efforts. It would abandon the attempt to shoehorn left-liberal domestic politics into U.S. national security policy. And it would call for a U.S. military buildup to match the scale of the threat.

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# The Biden Administration's National Security Strategy

By Douglas J. Feith

The Biden Administration's national security strategy, as released to the public, has some praiseworthy elements, stressing, for example, the "need for American leadership." But it does not take its own words seriously enough. Its discussion of "leadership" is confusing, and the administration is not providing for the kind of military strength that would make U.S. leadership effective.

## A Preliminary Word on Precision

A strategy should not use vague and ambiguous language (let alone mind-numbing repetition). Having said that no nation is better positioned than the United States to compete in shaping the world, as long as we work with others who share our vision, the strategy declares (the italics are mine), "This means that the foundational principles of self-determination, territorial integrity, and political independence *must* be respected, international institutions *must* be strengthened, countries *must* be free to determine their own foreign policy choices, information *must* be allowed to flow freely, universal human rights *must* be upheld, and the global economy *must* operate on a level playing field and provide opportunity for all." The fuzziness – incoherence – of using the word "must" should be obvious.

For example: "The United States *must* . . . increase international cooperation on shared challenges even in an age of greater inter-state competition." But "some in Beijing" insist that a prerequisite for cooperation is a set of "concessions on unrelated issues" that the U.S. government



has said are unacceptable. So the strategy effectively declares that cooperation with China is a “must” even when China says we cannot have it. In other words, the word “must” doesn’t really mean “must.” In this case, it expresses no more than the administration’s impotent preference.

This strategy is 48 pages long. It uses the word “must” 39 times. To drive home that President Biden is not his predecessor, the strategy constantly emphasizes allies and partners. It uses the word “allies” 38 times and “partner” or “partnership” an astounding 167 times. Meanwhile, it does not use “enemy” even once. Two of the three times it uses the word “adversary” it is referring to “potential” rather than actual adversaries. The third time, it says only that America’s network of allies and partners is “the envy of our adversaries.”

### **Enemies and Hostile Ideology**

The strategy identifies, correctly in my view, America’s “most pressing challenges” as China and Russia. China is described as the only “competitor” with both the intent and power to “reshape the international order.” Russia is called “an immediate threat to the free and open international system,” while the Ukraine war is rightly characterized as “brutal and unprovoked.” The discussion of enemies, however, is euphemistic and misleading and does not give explicit guidance on confronting them. Alluding to China and Russia, it talks of “competing with major autocratic powers” as if everyone in the “competition” is playing a gentlemanly game with agreed rules. That creates a false picture of the problem.

The strategy states that China “retains common interests” with the United States “because of various interdependencies on climate, economics and public health.” In discussing “shared challenges” – such as climate change or COVID – it implies that Chinese leaders see these

challenges the same way the administration does, but the well-known recent history of Chinese secretiveness about COVID, for example, refutes that assumption.

There are references to pragmatic problem-solving “based on shared interests” with countries like China and Iran. The strategy does not explain, however, what U.S. officials should do if such cooperation is inconsistent with other U.S. interests. Should they work with China at the expense of opposition to genocide against the Uighurs? Should they work with Iran at the expense of that country’s pro-democracy resistance movement?

Iran and North Korea are called “autocratic powers,” but being autocratic is not the key to their hostility and danger. Rather, it is that they are ideologically hostile to the United States and the West.

There are two passing references to “violent extremism,” though no discussion whatever about anti-Western ideologies. U.S. officials are given no direction to take action to counter such ideologies. The strategy is entirely silent on jihadism and extremist Islam.

### **Leadership and Followership— Ties to Allies and Partners**

While it properly calls attention to the value of America’s “unmatched network of alliances and partnerships,” the strategy does not deal adequately with questions of when the United States should lead rather than simply join its allies. It does not acknowledge that there may be cases when the United States is required to go it alone. President Biden is quoted as telling the United Nations, “[W]e will lead. . . . But we will not go it alone. We will lead together with our Allies and partners.” But what if American and allied officials disagree? Sometimes the only way to lead is to show that one is willing to go it alone.

Failing to distinguish between leadership and followership is a major flaw. While asserting that America aspires to the former, the strategy declares that “we will work in lockstep with our allies.” Such lockstep would ensure that the United States is constrained by the lower-common-denominator policy of our allies. If President Biden really believes what he is saying here, he is telling his team to refrain from initiatives that any or all of our allies might reject. Instead of soliciting ideas from administration officials that would serve the U.S. interest even if they require campaigns to try (perhaps unsuccessfully) to persuade our allies to acquiesce, his strategy discourages initiative and efforts to persuade. That is the opposite of leadership.

The strategy says that “our alliances and partnerships around the world are our most important strategic asset.” But that is not correct; our military power is. This is a dangerous mistake. Our alliances can be highly valuable, but to suggest that they are more important than our military capabilities is wrong and irresponsible.

The document says, “Our strategy is rooted in our national interests.” This assertion is at odds with the insistence that America will not act abroad except in concert with our allies and partners. The strategy claims that “Most nations around the world define their interests in ways that are compatible with ours.” That, however, is either banal or untrue. Our European allies have important differences with us regarding China, Iran, Israel, trade and other issues. Before the Ukraine war, they had major differences with us regarding Russia.

The strategy says, “As we modernize our military and work to strengthen our democracy at home, we will call on our allies to do the same.” What if they do not heed the call, however? For decades, U.S. officials complained vainly that NATO allies underinvested in defense, confident that the United States would cover any shortfalls – what economists

call a free-riding problem. Along similar lines, the strategy declares that America's alliances "must be deepened and modernized." But how should U.S. officials deal with allies who act adversely to U.S. interests, as Turkey has so often done under Erdogan—in buying Russian air-defense systems, for example—and as the Germans did, before the Ukraine war, in increasing their dependence on Russian natural gas?

Interestingly, on strengthening the U.S. military, the strategy does not say that U.S. allies have to agree or cooperate. It says "America will not hesitate to use force when necessary to defend our national interests." This part of the document reads as if it had different authors from the rest.

### **Nuclear Deterrence**

The strategy makes an important point about nuclear deterrence as "a top priority" and highlights that America faces an unprecedented challenge in now having to deter two major nuclear powers. It makes a commitment to "modernizing the nuclear Triad, nuclear command, control, and communications, and our nuclear weapons infrastructure, as well as strengthening our extended deterrence commitments to our Allies." But the administration has not allocated resources to fulfill its words on deterrence and Triad modernization.

### **Promoting Democracy and Human Rights**

"Autocrats are working overtime to undermine democracy and export a model of governance marked by repression at home and coercion abroad," the strategy accurately notes, adding that, around the world, America will work to strengthen democracy and promote human rights. It would be helpful if it also explained why other country's respect

for democracy tends to serve the U.S. national interest. This is not obvious and many Americans, including members of Congress, show no understanding of how democracy promotion abroad can help the United States bolster security, freedom and prosperity at home.

The strategy does not explain how its championing of democracy and human-rights promotion can be squared with its emphasis on respecting the culture and sovereignty of other countries and not interfering in their internal affairs. Nor does it explain how officials should make trade-offs between support for the rights of foreigners and practical interests in dealing with non-democratic countries. Officials need guidance on such matters. The public also would benefit from explanations.

The administration just announced that Saudi Arabia's crown prince, who is also prime minister, has immunity from civil liability for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist who worked for *The Washington Post*. The strategy does not shed light on how the relevant considerations were weighed. It says the United States will make use of partnerships with non-democratic countries that support our interests, "while we continue to press all partners to respect and advance democracy and human rights." That's fine as far as it goes, but it does not acknowledge, for example, that we sometimes have to subordinate human rights concerns for national security purposes, as when President Franklin Roosevelt allied with Stalin against Hitler. A strategy document should be an aid in resolving complexities, not a simplistic list of all the noble things we desire or wish to be associated with.

## **Refugees**

Regarding refugees, it is sensible that the strategy reaffirms the U.S. interest in working with other countries "to achieve sustainable, long-term solutions to what is the most severe

refugee crisis since World War Two—including through resettlement.” But there is no mention of why U.S. officials should press Persian Gulf states to accept more refugees from the Middle East, given that those states share language, culture and religion with those refugees.

### **Willing Ends Without Providing Means**

The strategy does a lot of willing the end but not specifying or providing the means. As noted, the administration is not funding defense as it should to accomplish its stated goals. On Iran, the strategy says, “[W]e have worked to enhance deterrence,” but U.S. officials have been trying to revive the nuclear deal that would give Iran huge financial resources in return for limited and unreliable promises.

The strategy says, “We will support the European aspirations of Georgia and Moldova . . . . We will assist partners in strengthening democratic institutions, the rule of law, and economic development in the Western Balkans. We will back diplomatic efforts to resolve conflict in the South Caucasus. We will continue to engage with Turkey to reinforce its strategic, political, economic, and institutional ties to the West. We will work with allies and partners to manage the refugee crisis created by Russia’s war in Ukraine. And, we will work to forestall terrorist threats to Europe.” But these items are presented simply as a wish list, without explanation of the means we will use, the costs involved or the way we will handle obvious pitfalls along the way.

### **Setting Priorities**

A strategy paper should establish priorities, but this one simply says we have to do this and that, when the actions are inconsistent with each other. It is line with the quip attributed to Yogi Berra: When you get to a fork in the road,

take it. It says we should act in the U.S. national interest, but we should also always act with allies and partners. We should oppose Chinese threats, but always cooperate with China on climate issues. We should pursue the nuclear deal with Iran even when Iran is threatening its neighbors and aiding Russia in Ukraine (and, as noted, crushing its domestic critics). We should insist on a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict while the Palestinian Authority remains unreasonable, corrupt, inflexible and hostile.

A strategy should not set up choices that involve trade-offs and then give no guidance on how to resolve the trade-offs. If it promotes arms control and other types of cooperation (on COVID, for example) with Russia and China, it should forthrightly address problems of treaty violations and specify ways to obtain cooperation when it is denied.

Such a document cannot specifically identify all possible trade-offs and resolve them, but it can set priorities and do a better job than this strategy does in informing officials on how to handle easily anticipated dilemmas.

### **Strategic Guidance or Campaign Flyer**

The administration's strategy combines valid points and unreality. It is unclear whether it is a serious effort to provide guidance, directed at officials, or a boastful campaign document, directed at the public. Mixing the genres is not useful.

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# The World in Transition, and What the Biden Administration Tries to Do About It

By Beatrice Heuser

This article places the Biden Administration's *National Security Strategy* (NSS) of the autumn of 2022 in a very much larger historical context, as we are going through a period of transition in the way states relate to each other. In recorded history, there have been recurrent behavioural patterns in the relations between governments. These range from anarchy in which might is right, to some form of order, or better: ordering principles, openly or tacitly recognised rules guiding governments in their behaviour towards one another.

What we can see, especially in European history (where the largest body of recorded evidence for this exists) is that often two, sometimes three ordering principles coexisted in competition with one another.<sup>1</sup> At the risk of great oversimplification, one can identify four patterns, if we leave aside complete anarchy.

The first and probably most natural was that of a number of polities—city states in Ancient Greece and Medieval Italy, larger principalities in Ancient India and medieval and early modern South-East Asia—trading with each other but also vying for pre-eminence. Several times, this became a balance-of-power contest, with alliances forming to check an increasingly rich or even visibly expansionist power or rival alliance. Bordering on the anarchic, such counter-balancing behaviour frequently degenerated into war, including preventive war. Underpinning ideologies like that which grew on the back

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<sup>1</sup> Until global navigation came into existence at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, of course, no pattern of relations between entities, and no such principle, could span the globe.



of Hinduism in India and then Southeast Asia or in China, describing the predominance of one such power over all others, as a “mandate of heaven”, or in the Christian and Islamic case, linking predominance with a divine injunction to proselytize, or Communism with its missionary zeal, often led to wars when there was resistance to conquest, the latter checked only, eventually, by the danger of nuclear war.

It is interesting to note that since 1945, despite occasional (usually French) calls to see America as rival rather than as benevolent ally, and despite at times strong political divergences between American governments and those of its friends and allies in NATO and in non-NATO Europe, the latter have never been seriously tempted to counterbalance the USA when it embarked on its steady path to becoming the world’s sole superpower by the 1990s. For the bid for pre-eminence and even total domination can take any form along a long spectrum: from utterly malevolent, incarnated by Adolf Hitler and his strategy for the domination of the Aryan race and the extermination and enslavement of what he saw as inferior races, to intentions of truly bringing peace and prosperity to all of mankind. For all their sins, and the admixture of the craving for power and enrichment, Islam, Christianity, Communism and the Western democracies’ promotion of human rights all aimed to benefit the rest of mankind. This quest for a universal system ensuring peace, then, was the ordering principle opposed to balance-of-power relations: the ideal, only ever partly realised, of a world in which all entities were integrated into a larger union ensuring peace among them. Persians, Romans, some Habsburg court philosophers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century dreamt of this, but it remained a dream: even if often referred to as a “universal” monarchy or rule (i.e. *imperium* in its original Latin meaning), only ever applied to a large region of the world, and never encompassed the whole world before the League of Nations

and then the United Nations (UN) were founded to create such a universal system, a world-wide order of peace. It should make America's enemies think, that the USA never endeavoured to establish a world empire based on universal physical dominion.

From the early times of Rome's expansion, there were among Rome's new subjects, cities like Numantia or whole tribes like the Batavii or the Icenii or the Cherusci who resented Rome's domination and sought independence. This insistence on independence would be found again in medieval polities outside the borders of the reborn (Holy) Roman Empire that defended their independence against interference from emperor or pope. And at various points also polities that were part of the Empire, notably the north Italian city states of the Renaissance, or parts of the Habsburg possessions scattered throughout Europe tried to assert their sovereignty (the recognition of *no* superior), claiming their right to (what would later be called) self-determination. Entities thus making their independence the highest principle guiding their policies were at loggerheads with the inferred or open claim to universal authority made by the two successive Roman Empires. When they were not opposing a power showing signs of imperial expansionism, sovereignist polities would revert to balance-of-power strategies among themselves, and to settling quarrels by war. Thus, the insistence on sovereignty and the reversion to the ordering principle of balances of powers was indeed antithetically opposed to the aim of creating a larger union or sphere of peace.

A third ordering principle emerged when among multiple competing powers there were a handful of powers greater than the others who felt entitled to determine the fate of the world. Three times, such a group of five great powers jointly set out to bring order to the world by adjudicating the quarrels of minor powers: with the Congress System that existed in Europe in the first half of

the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the League of Nations created in 1920, and again with the UN founded in 1945. All three pentarchies were flawed, however. Already in the first, the great powers did not put aside their own national and colonial ambitions which led them both within and outside Europe. The Congress System that had aimed to settle issues for the greater good of Europe as a whole was thus contaminated by balance-of-power thinking among the five great powers, to which it gave way altogether by mid-century. The great powers defended their narrow imperial interests and their spheres of interest in Europe and on other continents. Their colonies, and national military service where it was introduced, brought greater resources to these wars than the world had previously known. These great powers' direct clashes in Europe—the wars over Italian independence, the Crimean War, the Austro-Prussian War, the Franco-Prussian War—and their wars outside Europe in the long 19<sup>th</sup> century ended with the First World War, and with the admixture of clashing ideologies, in the Second.

Fourthly, several times in history balance-of-power patterns were fused with alignments of powers according to ideology (counting religious or confessional differences as ideologies). These could take several forms: alliances of ferociously selfish (i.e., nationalist) powers, keeping each other's backs free when they set out on wars of conquest or fought a common enemy, or a hunted down a common prey as Hitler and Stalin did in their joint occupation of Poland in 1939. By contrast, alliances sharing values that they believed should spread to all of humanity, such as a proselytising religion or ideology, proved more enduring. Alliances of Western democracies, not least due to their joint decision-making, have proved less aggressive as there tended to be some member(s) that would voice concerns and veto action. This applies to NATO which is self-restrained by its pledge to uphold the UN Charter, and to

the European Union (EU), which is of course more than an alliance yet not quite a federation as the USA. This also explains why, among the Permanent Five members of the UN's Security Council, the USA, Britain and France never seriously became adversaries.

As noted initially, such ordering principles usually existed alongside and in competition with one another. After 1945, there were, in parallel: the UN as an attempt to bring peace to the world; then the European communities that eventually took the name of EU, aiming to transform at least large parts of Europe into a system of peace; the Permanent Five, a pentarchy of great powers, permanent members of the UN's Security Council with the power of vetoing any decision, yet effectively ruling the UN; and alignments of states on ideological lines, including two opposing military alliances, North Atlantic and the Warsaw Treaty alliances.

The rules of interstate behaviour supposedly prevalent after 1945 contained a contradiction within themselves. The UN Charter spelled out the right to self-determination, yet defended states against intervention in domestic affairs which states could always claim if they repressed a minority. Only belatedly did a right to intervene to prevent genocide begin to garner consensus, at least in the West. Moreover, the UN Charter talks about the sovereign equality of member states, but the pentarchy dominating the UN's Security Council makes them decidedly more equal than others. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights of 1948, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of 1966 both spell out individual human rights and enable, through the protection of religions, of political self-determination and the right to "freely determine their political status", the election of intolerant regimes that can go a long way to oppress minorities of which they disapprove before any

foreign state will complain let alone intervene. States trying to support human rights find themselves at a loss of what to do when free elections produce the return of intolerant, war-mongering, terrorist-supporting or ultra-nationalist governments.

Nor are all signatories always in compliance with the Covenants of 1966. A few states such as, unsurprisingly, Saudi Arabia nor the United Arab Emirates have not even signed them, and the USA signed, but never ratified the ICESCR. The states signatories (that include China and Russia as successor to the USSR) committed themselves legally to applying them and integrating them into their own domestic legislations, yet many have not done so, or indeed ignore their own legislation. The first change we note is that an increasing numbers of governments jointly representing a growing proportion of the world's population claim that individual rights must take second place to the interests of the greater majority, along values defined by their ideology/religion. Writing from Germany, I cannot but be reminded of the Nazi slogan: "You are nothing, your *Volk* [nation] is everything." And of course, the Nazis took this to its logical conclusion of annihilating those they defined as unfitting to be part of their *Volk*. Conveniently, rule ostensibly in the interest of the majority also protects ruling elites who are the self-proclaimed judges of what these interests are.

Yet there are still many nations and state governments that subscribe to the values embodied in these Covenants, and to renunciation of the recourse to war as an instrument of national policy.

The second big change is taking us from a world in which, by state governments' consensus, human rights values and non-aggression principles were accepted as normative by all governments that signed up to the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, and the two Covenants of 1966, to one in which great

powers can get away with aggressive war or human rights abuses on a colossal scale—Hitler and Stalin would have been impressed—while having succeeded in making large parts of the world economically dependent on them.<sup>2</sup> We see a return to great power competition and balance of power behaviour, with three great powers rather than five: India has not yet quite reached global power status, and the EU is underplaying its potential strength. The Big Three are divided by their approach to human rights, but similar in their disregard—admittedly to varying degrees—for the rules of interstate behaviour when it suits their interest. Meanwhile, the economic power financing aid schemes underpinning American attempts to persuade governments around the globe to uphold human rights and accept the UN's ordering principle is diminishing; China's foreign investments are growing, but with no strings attached, we are told—as yet.

The new world is also marked by a shift away from the inclusive multilateral International Organisations, most of them outgrowths of the UN or founded on the UN's encouragement of regional co-operation through such institutions, which were favoured by many states over the last 70 years, even if some of these organizations were little other than talking shops. Others were at the mercy of great power domination, and only a few did very impressive jobs. Instead, we currently see a shift away from binding commitments that were designed to be long-lasting, in NATO and the EU and of course the UN, to *ad-hockery*, alliances of convenience and of temporary convergences of interests, which undermine the ordering principle of firm

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<sup>2</sup> That the latter is as much the fault of governments and enterprises who in quest for economies and enrichment accepted this dependency and failed to diversify their sources of key imports from gas to grain, under pressure to produce prosperity for their share-holders and populations, is also true.

mutual commitments based on common values that pertained during the Cold War.

So how is the Biden Administration trying to influence this transition with its new NSS? What role is it trying to play?

Essentially, there are three main options when confronted with such a transition, the fourth being a mix of them. The first is to try to stem the tide, the second is to stand aside, and the third is to hasten it. Unsurprisingly, neither the second nor the last are true options for the great power that contributed most to bringing the current order into being, even if it has occasionally shrugged off its rules to act as it saw fit. Equally unsurprisingly, then, we find a mix of approaches in the new U.S. NSS of October 2022.

NSSs are by their very nature compromise documents, carefully crafted not to ruffle feathers unnecessarily, and one must not assume too much coherence: often, they take a “having one’s cake and eating it” approach. Yet differences become clear when contrasted with the previous Trump Administration’s NSS of 2017. They are, first and most obviously, that the Biden NSS of 2022 recommits America to uphold the UN’s norms which was relegated to a much lower ranking in the previous NSS of 2017 issued under President Trump.<sup>3</sup> The latter had adopted a “Realist” view of International Relations, assuming that “a contest for power” was “a central continuity in history”. It had recognised “that the United States often views the world in binary terms, with states being either ‘at peace’ or ‘at war,’ when it is actually an arena of continuous competition.” This airbrushed out of the picture the muting of this contest for power that existed in its place, among the powers who

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<sup>3</sup> *National Security Strategy* (The White House: 2017), <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>, accessed on October 30, 2022.

prioritised, since 1945 if not since 1928, the year of the Briand-Kellogg Pact, peaceful interaction globally where at all possible, even peaceful coexistence with ideological rivals, and close, restricting co-operation with likeminded nations. The Trump NSS went on to say, “Our adversaries will not fight us on our terms. We will raise our competitive game to meet that challenge, to protect American interests, and to advance our values.” By implication, this accepted the result of the transition, the return to something very akin to the Great Power Competition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that killed off the Congress System, by changing one’s own game to mirror the adversary’s. The strategy adopted by the Trump Administration aimed to “shift trends back in favor of the United States, our allies, and our partners”, but it was ready to do so by accepting the new rule of the game: power struggle. In keeping with Donald Trump’s overall policies, the 2017 NSS put the strengthening of America’s *sovereignty* above that of any international co-operation – an approach to the sovereignty of their own states on which both Putin and Xi Jinping would have agreed.

There is of course, in America, just as among other states founded on philosophical ideals, e.g., Communist regimes past and present, the assumption that what is in the American (or what is Communist) interest is ultimately in the interest of the world, as countries the world over would benefit from having the same constitution and way of life as one’s own. If what is good for General Motors is good for America, even the most selfish American policies can always be explained as being in the interest of the world. But the Trump NSS so clearly prioritised American interests (in a narrow sense of homeland security and safety and prosperity) that everything else was clearly subordinated to this aim, however diplomatically Trump’s diplomatic advisers tried to put this. Human rights were mentioned but once (p.42). In sum, the Trump Administration was set to return to the retraction from European affairs that had



characterised American foreign policy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the interwar years. Putin also wants to go back in time, yearning to restore the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian Empire, while China is turning from the *Zhongguo*, a power content to be the Middle Kingdom, into a global power with financially and economically dependent states on all continents.

By contrast, the Biden Administration is endeavouring to stem the transformation of the international system, maintaining the liberal commitment to create and uphold “institutions norms and standards ... [with] mechanisms [that] advanced America’s economic and geopolitical aims and benefited people around the world by shaping how governments and economies interacted ... in ways that aligned with U.S. interests and values.”<sup>4</sup> Secondly, it commits itself by implication to upholding the two International Covenants of 1966;<sup>5</sup> human rights and the need to uphold them are mentioned 20 times. It is unlikely that the President will try to push through a ratification of the ICESCR by Congress, given that over half a century has now passed and none of his predecessors have succeeded or even tried. But we might look out for further echoes of lines from the Covenants.

Flowing logically from the Biden Administration’s recommitment to the international order, there is thirdly, its commitment to uphold alliances that bind America to like-minded states. Fourthly, and compromising on its second principle, the new 2022 NSS signals willingness to cooperate with those governments that do not necessarily enforce all the elements of the 1966 Covenants, but still show themselves committed to upholding the norms of

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<sup>4</sup> “Shaping the Rules of the Road” in *The National Security Strategy* (The White House, October 2022), p. 32f.

<sup>5</sup> *The National Security Strategy* (The White House, October 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>, p. 12, accessed on October 15, 2022.

international behaviour. This is an adaptation to the return to great power competition. We also see a pragmatic embracing of “minilateral” arrangements, which in the case of the US in the Indo-Pacific is actually a step towards greater multilateralism: previously, its security arrangements in that part of the world were generally bilateral.<sup>6</sup>

In short, the 2022 NSS is trying to find a middle way between the preservation of the great *acquis* of the rules-based order enshrined in the UN, and the reality of competition from a militarily dangerous Russia and an economically powerful China with an alternative set of values, attractive to many oligarchies and autocracies, and financial power set to exceed that of the USA. It is still infused with the ideal of a universal applicability of human rights, but implicitly concedes that the United States must prioritise stopping the world from sliding back into wars of anarchy, even while its relative power to do so has decreased. We thus see the shift from Trump’s “Realist” NSS to a realistically-ambitioned NSS issued by the Biden Administration. It tries to preserve as much as possible of the post-1945 rules-based international order, in cooperation with the like-minded governments, while optimistically asserting that its internal values allow the U.S.A. to retain a competitive edge vis-à-vis its competitors. America’s friends and allies can only hope that this optimism is well-founded.

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<sup>6</sup> The non-binding ANZUS Treaty of 1951 involved both Australia and New Zealand, but had in many ways, prior to the signing of the AUKUS Treaty in September 2021 that replaced New Zealand by the UK, had been little other than a bilateral consultation mechanism between the USA and Australia.



# Assessing the 2022 National Security Strategy: A View from NATO's Eastern Flank

By Dominik P. Jankowski

The first *National Security Strategy* (NSS) by the Biden Administration surprised no one. The document underlines that U.S. security demands protecting democracy, enhancing industrial and technological capacity at home, constraining Russia, and out-competing China. The United States must also lead the creation of new global and regional institutions of democracies, win the support of the Global South in the global competition with autocracies, build food security, lead global action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, maintain a nuclear triad, prevent nuclear proliferation, stop pandemics, and suppress corruption.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the usual security strategy aspirational language continues with the plans for every region of the world. Christopher S. Chivvis rightly pointed out that “bureaucrats sometimes joke that strategy writing in the government is like ornamenting a Christmas tree – everyone gets a chance to add their favorite issue and, in the process, the strategy gets lost.”<sup>2</sup>

The year 2022 required a document that was much more clear-eyed and stark in its description of a world falling apart. What some Allies expected, especially after February

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<sup>1</sup> Justin Logan and Benjamin H. Friedman, “The Case for Getting Rid of the National Security Strategy,” *War on the Rocks*, November 4, 2022, available at [<https://warontherocks.com/2022/11/the-case-for-getting-rid-of-the-national-security-strategy/>].

<sup>2</sup> Christopher S. Chivvis, “The Three Important Shifts Tucked Within the New National Security Strategy,” Carnegie Endowment Commentary, October 13, 2022, available at [<https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/10/13/three-important-shifts-tucked-within-new-national-security-strategy-pub-88160>].

24, 2022, was a strategy that would visibly prioritize among competing goods—saying that some goals are more important than others—and thus become a practical guide in the process of decision-making and resource allocation. In fact, 2022 has been the most dangerous year in the transatlantic history since the end of the World War II. Russia’s all-out invasion of Ukraine has thrust the world into a volatile era. Russian President Vladimir Putin wants to undo Europe’s post-Cold War settlement, control the neighboring states, and disrupt the influence of open democratic societies. He is determined to use military force as well as political and economic coercion to change Europe’s map. He is not afraid to threaten nuclear blackmail. He appears to be a more risk-acceptant leader than many previously assessed. The Russian Armed Forces are committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine on a daily basis proving that the Western community once again failed to deliver on the “Never Again” promise. The overall implications of the Russian war against Ukraine are profound, not only for the future of Russia, Ukraine, Eastern Europe, and Euro-Atlantic area, but for the world.

In those circumstances, from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO’s) Eastern Flank perspective, setting a clear list of priorities—to be implemented as a matter of urgency in the era of strategic competition—is a must. Based on the NSS, three elements—where the U.S. leadership and a close U.S.-European cooperation are prerequisites for success—come to the front: containing Russia, boosting NATO’s deterrence and defense posture, and supporting Ukraine.

### **Containing Russia**

The NSS describes Russia as an “immediate threat to the free and open international system, recklessly flouting the

basic laws of the international order today, as its brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has shown.”<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the NSS introduces a clear distinction between Russia and the People’s Republic of China (PRC): “Russia poses an immediate and ongoing threat to the regional security order in Europe and it is a source of disruption and instability globally but it lacks the across the spectrum capabilities of the PRC. [...] The PRC and Russia are increasingly aligned with each other but the challenges they pose are, in important ways, distinct.”<sup>4</sup>

Once compared with the NATO 2022 *Strategic Concept*, agreed to by Allies at the 2022 Madrid Summit, there is a discrepancy in how Russia is being depicted in both strategic documents. The *Strategic Concept* points out that Russia “is the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. It [Russia] seeks to establish spheres of influence and direct control through coercion, subversion, aggression and annexation. It uses conventional, cyber and hybrid means against us and our partners. Its coercive military posture, rhetoric and proven willingness to use force to pursue its political goals undermine the rules-based international order. [...] Moscow’s military build-up, including in the Baltic, Black and Mediterranean Sea regions, along with its military integration with Belarus, challenge our security and interests.”<sup>5</sup>

From NATO’s Eastern Flank perspective, Russia—under its current leadership—remains a belligerent imperialistic state, openly declaring an intention to continuously violate principles of international order if it suits its interest, including through annexation of further territories. The threat Russia poses goes far beyond Ukraine.

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<sup>3</sup> *National Security Strategy*, October 2022, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11 & p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*, June 29, 2022, p. 4.

In fact, Russia constitutes a direct multifaceted threat to the Euro-Atlantic area and the entire Western community. Therefore, the United States must take decisive action, especially through the NATO alliance, to contain Russia and ensure its strategic defeat in its war against Ukraine. This new containment policy – based on a combination of military and non-military instruments of power – will, in fact, also serve as a benchmark for effective actions against other strategic competitors, first and foremost China.

The implementation of the NSS should lead to the following practical actions where U.S. leadership is needed. First, the United States and Allies need to safeguard international law. This should be done through sanctions and isolation policy until Russia withdraws from the territory of Ukraine, brings those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity to justice and pays for reconstruction. In a longer term, this will also mean creating political and military conditions that will prevent any future use of the Russian Armed Forces against Ukraine and other Eastern European states. Second, the United States and Allies need to effectively change the paradigm of our relations with Russia. This should include building full and strategic independence from the Russian economy and energy resources, rejecting the existing cooperation framework – first and foremost the NATO-Russia Founding Act and the NATO Russia Council – which does not fit into the strategic competition reality – and enhance our resilience against Russian malign activities, including by defying *Russkiy Mir* ideology, which constitutes an ideological underpinning of Russia's wars. The redefinition of our relationship with Russia should also aim to weaken the Moscow-Beijing partnership. Third, the United States and Allies need to maintain a constructive and forward-looking agenda by increasing support to Russian opposition and parts of the civil society which opposes the authoritarian regime and its aggressive policies. This

should be primarily done in a close coordination between the United States and the European Union (EU).

### **Boosting NATO's Deterrence and Defense Posture**

The NSS sets out a general level of ambition with regard to deterrence and defense, including by laying out the parameters of the concept of integrated deterrence. The NSS underlines that “the United States has a vital interest in deterring aggression by the PRC, Russia, and other states. More capable competitors and new strategies of threatening behavior below and above the traditional threshold of conflict mean we cannot afford to rely solely on conventional forces and nuclear deterrence. Our defense strategy must sustain and strengthen deterrence, with the PRC as our pacing challenge.”<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the NSS points out that “together with our NATO Allies, we are strengthening our defense and deterrence, particularly on the eastern flank of the Alliance. [...] As we step up our own sizable contributions to NATO capabilities and readiness – including by strengthening defensive forces and capabilities, and upholding our long-standing commitment to extended deterrence—we will count on our Allies to continue assuming greater responsibility by increasing their spending, capabilities, and contributions.”<sup>7</sup>

This description is generally in line with the level of ambition set out in the NATO *Strategic Concept*. At the NATO 2022 Summit in Madrid, Allies agreed to:

...significantly strengthen our deterrence and defense posture to deny any potential adversary any possible opportunities for aggression. To that end, we will ensure a substantial and persistent presence on land, at sea, and in the air, including

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<sup>6</sup> *National Security Strategy*, October 2022, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26 & p. 39.



through strengthened integrated air and missile defense. We will deter and defend forward with robust in-place, multi-domain, combat-ready forces, enhanced command and control arrangements, prepositioned ammunition and equipment and improved capacity and infrastructure to rapidly reinforce any Ally, including at short or no notice. We will adjust the balance between in-place forces and reinforcement to strengthen deterrence and the Alliance's ability to defend. Commensurate with the threats we face, we will ensure our deterrence and defense posture remains credible, flexible, tailored and sustainable.<sup>8</sup>

Boosting NATO's deterrence and defense posture, as mandated by the *Strategic Concept*, should become a priority in the practical implementation of the NSS. From a conceptual point of view this should start by fully embracing the concept of deterrence by denial. As Sean Monaghan emphasizes "the shift towards deterrence by denial is not just about territorial defense – it also updates and broadens the concept for the modern strategic environment, confirming that hybrid, cyber, or attacks in space could 'invoke Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.'"<sup>9</sup> Moreover, a more robust deterrence and defense posture – based on deterrence by denial – would also add credibility to a new Russia containment policy.

NATO can take three important steps to contribute to the implementation of the NSS. First, NATO should deploy additional credible forward-based conventional forces to

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<sup>8</sup> NATO 2022 *Strategic Concept*, June 29, 2022, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Sean Monaghan, "The Sword, the Shield, and the Hedgehog: Strengthening Deterrence in NATO's New Strategic Concept," *War on the Rocks*, August 23, 2022, available at [<https://warontherocks.com/2022/08/the-sword-the-shield-and-the-hedgehog-strengthening-deterrence-in-natos-new-strategic-concept/>].

the Eastern Flank. This should start by scaling up as soon as possible the existing battlegroups to brigade-size units in the three Baltic states and Poland. This should be achieved under the leadership of the four framework nations – the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Canada. The force packages should be combat capable, permanently positioned in forward locations, and set up for the long term, given the likelihood that Vladimir Putin or a similar successor will remain on the scene for many years.

An additional U.S. presence should also be considered. Michael E. O’Hanlon recommends that “additional American force posture would include an Army brigade combat team, an Army combat aviation brigade, and two to three squadrons of Air Force tactical aircraft, all permanently stationed in the Baltic states.”<sup>10</sup> This would mean additional 10,000 to 15,000 U.S. troops on NATO’s Eastern Flank. Moreover, following the U.S. decision to create a permanent headquarters for its Army V Corps in Poland – the first permanent installation of this kind on NATO’s Eastern Flank – NATO Allies should also increase their permanent military foothold. This should lead to a creation of a “forward defense hub” in Poland comprising, among others, a second NATO Land Command (LANDCOM), augmented stocks of prepositioned equipment for follow-on forces, an additional NATO battlegroup designed to tackle the Russian threat emanating from the territory of Belarus as well as the extension of the NATO Pipeline System – a crucial fuel supply solution for military operations – to Poland and other Eastern Flank countries.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Michael E. O’Hanlon, “Strengthening the US and NATO defense postures in Europe after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine,” Brookings Institution, June 21, 2022, available at [<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/strengthening-the-us-and-nato-defense-postures-in-europe-after-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/>].

<sup>11</sup> Currently, the only Allied Land Command is located in Turkey.

Second, NATO should agree on a successor to the 2014 Defense Investment Pledge which mandated Allies to meet the 2% of GDP guideline for defense spending and the 20% of annual defense expenditure on major new equipment by 2024. The new pledge – which should be agreed at the 2023 NATO Vilnius Summit at the latest – will have to be more robust and comprehensive in nature. The 2% of GDP guideline for defense spending should not be seen as a ceiling, but rather as a starting point for future defense spending. The new target should be at least 2.5% of GDP to be achieved preferably by 2030. At the same time, the capabilities pillar of the pledge should be supported by new defense industrial policy aimed at increasing production and mitigating supply chain constraints. The new pledge should also include allied spending on collective resilience, in line with the increased role of resilience in NATO. Resilience is Allies' ability to resist and recover from an attack (conventional, cyber, hybrid, CBRN) and combines both civil preparedness and military capacity. This may, however, require the development of a detailed methodology to determine national contributions to collective resilience.

Third, NATO should enhance Allies' collective resilience, which constitutes an important backbone of the deterrence and defense posture. Anna M. Dowd and Cynthia R. Cook suggest that this could be done by developing a NATO Resilience Planning Process akin to the NATO Defence Planning Process that will be instrumental in harmonizing and integrating national resilience plans, strategies, and capabilities to organize NATO's strong collective response.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Allies should consider creating a NATO Resilience Fund to support the resilience

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<sup>12</sup> See more: Anna M. Dowd and Cynthia R. Cook, "Bolstering Collective Resilience in Europe," *CSIS Briefs*, December 9, 2022, available at [<https://www.csis.org/analysis/bolstering-collective-resilience-europe>].

capacity of the most vulnerable Allies and priority partner nations, first and foremost Ukraine.<sup>13</sup>

## Supporting Ukraine

The NSS underlines that “the United States will continue to support Ukraine in its fight for its freedom, we will help Ukraine recover economically, and we will encourage its regional integration with the European Union. [...] We have marshalled near-record levels of security assistance to ensure Ukraine has the means to defend itself. We have provided humanitarian, economic and development assistance to strengthen Ukraine’s sovereign, elected government and help the millions of refugees who have been forced to flee their homes.”<sup>14</sup>

The NSS is, in fact, much more detailed on how to support Ukraine than NATO’s *Strategic Concept*. In principle, the NATO document signals that Ukraine will become a member of the Alliance as agreed at the 2008 Bucharest Summit and that a “strong, independent Ukraine is vital for the stability of the Euro-Atlantic area.”<sup>15</sup>

U.S. leadership will remain crucial to boost the global support for Ukraine. First, the global West needs to increase both the scale and range of military support for Ukraine, which should include more NATO-standard weapons than before. Western military aid has played a key role in Ukraine’s ability to preserve its independence, but it is still insufficient to allow it to break Russia’s offensive potential, to recapture Russian-held territory, or even to stop Russia’s next possible offensives—in short, to end the war. According to the latest report by the Polish Institute of International Affairs, six essential types of needed

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<sup>13</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>14</sup> *National Security Strategy*, October 2022, p. 26.

<sup>15</sup> *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*, June 29, 2022, p. 1.

capabilities are: heavy barrel and rocket artillery, tank and motorized troops, longer-range missiles, air power, drones (UAVs) and loitering munitions, and air defence systems.<sup>16</sup> In light of shrinking European capabilities and limits of the production capacities of Western defence industry, there is a necessity for additional sources of deliveries. These gaps might be filled by U.S. allies and partners in the Middle East and Asia, yet this would require effective high-level U.S. diplomacy.<sup>17</sup>

Second, NATO—following the EU example—should offer a clear political perspective for Ukraine’s membership in the Alliance. This should start with redefining the political framework of the NATO-Ukraine relationship. As a first step, the NATO-Ukraine Commission should be transformed into a political body that operates at “31” (equal political footing between Allies and Ukraine) rather than at “30+1” (Ukraine politically treated just as a partner). This would underline the uniqueness of this relationship and constitute a clear signal that politically Ukraine is equal to NATO Allies, without crossing the Article 5 threshold. Such an approach should be solidified in a new NATO-Ukraine framework document which would replace the outdated 1997 Charter on a Distinctive Partnership. From a military perspective, the Alliance should increase Ukrainian presence in NATO command and force structures. This should include creation of a NATO-Ukraine Joint Training, Analytical, and Education Center (JTAEC) which could be

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<sup>16</sup> See more: Marcin A. Piotrowski, “Military-Technical Assistance to Ukraine An Assessment of Its Short- and Medium-term Needs,” *PISM Report*, December 2022, available at [<https://www.pism.pl/publications/pism-report-military-technical-assistance-to-ukraine-an-assessment-of-its-short-and-medium-term-needs>].

<sup>17</sup> Marcin A. Piotrowski, “Gauging the Potential of Heavy Weapons Deliveries For Ukraine,” *PISM Bulletin*, September 28, 2022, available at [<https://pism.pl/publications/gauging-the-potential-of-heavy-weapons-deliveries-for-ukraine>].

developed based on the experience of the Polish-Lithuanian-Ukrainian Brigade located in Poland.

Finally, Ukrainian victory is just the first step. The material and financial losses caused by the Russian invasion since February are estimated by the Ukrainian authorities at around €600 billion, but as the war continues, that number keeps growing. The Ukrainian authorities expect an international reconstruction program for Ukraine modelled on the Marshall Plan. It would cover the costs of infrastructure reconstruction and modernization of the economy, and would be based on assumptions worked out by Ukraine. In this context, a comprehensive U.S.-European plan must be prepared to start delivering on the long-term reconstruction of Ukraine. From the Eastern Flank perspective, an independent, democratic, and stable Ukraine is one of the key factors for ensuring stability in Central and Eastern Europe, and the continent as a whole.

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# 2022 National Security Strategy: A Grand Strategic Illusion?

By David J. Lonsdale

## Introduction

Since 1986, the incumbent administration is required to produce a national security strategy. Although such a requirement has merit, one wonders whether those responsible for this mandate understood the conceptual challenges involved in producing and running grand strategy. For that is what we are discussing here. For all intents and purposes, national security strategy is the grand strategy of a nation state. As will become evident in this paper, grand strategy is a conceptually contested term. Moreover, even if one can agree upon a definition of grand strategy, the practice of it is fraught with potentially insurmountable challenges. Indeed, some theorists and practitioners alike have rejected the notion that success in grand strategy is possible. With these thoughts in mind, this paper is divided into two sections. The first section grapples with the conceptual nature of grand strategy, ultimately providing a workable definition for this complex socio-political activity. Having established a theoretical foundation, the paper will assess the 2022 *National Security Strategy* (NSS) as a basis for U.S. grand strategy in the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The paper concludes that although the new NSS has some operational merit, it struggles to clearly define key objectives and the process underlying U.S. grand strategy.



## Defining Grand Strategy

When seeking to understand and define grand strategy, we are faced with an immediate and fundamental problem. Does grand strategy actually exist? Is it merely an illusion or an academic construct? Echoing the thoughts of many former policy makers, former Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, reports that President Clinton certainly did not subscribe to the theory or practice of grand strategy. Talbott recalls Clinton stating that “strategic coherence ... was largely imposed after the fact by scholars, memoirists and ‘the chattering classes.’”<sup>1</sup> As Tami Biddle notes, rather than practicing a coherent form of grand strategy, those responsible often are reduced to “a kind of enlightened and informed muddling through.”<sup>2</sup>

This problem of identifying and practicing grand strategy has many causes. Of particular note is the tyranny of events, which buffet policy makers from crisis to crisis. In this sense, grand strategy is more likely to be reactive rather than purposive. Related to this point is the complexity of the international environment. Since “everything relates to everything else,”<sup>3</sup> it is impossible for anyone, especially when operating within large complex modern bureaucracies, to oversee and command the full gamut of strategic activities at the national level.<sup>4</sup> Bernard Brodie identifies an even more fundamental problem. Since any form of strategy, grand or otherwise, must begin with an

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Hal Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Tami Davis Biddle, *Strategy and Grand Strategy: What Students and Practitioners Need to Know*, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and US Army War College Press, 2015), p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy*, (London: Penguin, 2018), p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> David J. Lonsdale & Thomas M. Kane, *Understanding Contemporary Strategy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), p. 130.

identification of the desired goal (ends), it is worrisome that vital national interests are often poorly understood and/or articulated.<sup>5</sup> In the absence of clear goals, the process of grand strategy can neither begin nor adequately function.

Whilst not fully rejecting the inherent challenges of grand strategy, there is a body of literature that regards grand strategy as not only extant but inevitable. Edward Luttwak, for example, argues that grand strategy can be identified in patterns of behaviour.<sup>6</sup> Hal Brands, though acknowledging that grand strategy is often iterative rather than formalised, still concludes that “grand strategic choices are inherent in the process of governing.”<sup>7</sup> Or as Colin S. Gray notes, grand strategy “is the theory and practice of statecraft itself.”<sup>8</sup> In this way, grand strategy emerges from the process of engaging in international politics. This somewhat echoes what Peter Layton identifies as *Opportunism*, whereby a general direction of policy travel is identified, with the details adjusted as opportunities arise.<sup>9</sup> Since, then, the emergence of grand strategy is inevitable, it surely makes sense to formalise and plan such an important socio-political activity, however difficult that be and however rare success is.<sup>10</sup>

There are many workable definitions of grand strategy.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the best place to start is the well-established ends, ways, means taxonomy; where *ends* are

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<sup>5</sup> Bernard Brodie, *War and Politics* (London: Cassell, 1973), pp. 343-345.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> Brands, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Colin S. Gray, *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> See Biddle, p. 52.

<sup>10</sup> Brands, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> For an excellent discussion of the definitions, see Paul Kennedy (ed), *Grand Strategies in War & Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 1-7.

the objectives sought, *means* are the resources available, and *ways* are the policies and actions used in pursuit of the ends. Problematically, goals are often unlimited, whilst resources are inherently limited.<sup>12</sup> In this way, grand strategy amounts to a trade-off between ends and means in the search for equilibrium.<sup>13</sup> Although limited, the means of grand strategy are quite varied. They include instruments that belong to the more traditional DIME classification: diplomacy, intelligence, military and economics. Beyond these well-established instruments of grand strategy, we may also include cyber, education, energy, technology, morality, etc.<sup>14</sup> As is evident from this short illustrative list, and as Kennedy points out, grand strategy is complex, multi-layered, cannot be fore-ordained, and relies upon judgement and the careful husbanding of resources.<sup>15</sup>

Importantly, grand strategy is concerned with integrating the various means and policies.<sup>16</sup> In this way, Brands describes it as an integrated scheme of interests, threats, resources and policies. Or, to put it another way, grand strategy is “the intellectual architecture that lends structure to foreign policy.”<sup>17</sup> Despite the tyranny of events, grand strategy must look beyond the immediate, it should be concerned with principal medium to long-term interests.<sup>18</sup> All told, grand strategy assumes a degree of bounded rationality. That is, within the limits of what is possible, actors should identify their key interests and goals, and then understand how to best pursue them with the limited means available. This leaves us with the following

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<sup>12</sup> Basil H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Praeger, 1957), and Gaddis, pp. 12 & 20.

<sup>13</sup> Brands, p. 2

<sup>14</sup> Biddle, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> See Kennedy pp. 4-6, and Biddle, p. 13

<sup>16</sup> Lonsdale & Kane, p. 127.

<sup>17</sup> Brands, pp. 1-3.

<sup>18</sup> Biddle, p. 40.

definition of grand strategy: *the process of coordinating and converting the instruments of power into long-term policy effect.*

Now that we have a working definition of grand strategy, is it possible to identify principles for success? John Gaddis certainly believes principles are discoverable, despite the aforementioned complexity of the subject. In this, he references the work of Sun Tzu, which shows that simplicity can coexist with complexity; that a few principles can be tethered to the wide variety of strategic practice.<sup>19</sup> This requires a degree of systematic thinking, not least of which is clearly defining objectives; whilst maintaining the spirit of improvisation and opportunism.<sup>20</sup> In this way, grand strategy must be robust, resilient, and proportion aspirations to capabilities in an ever-evolving environment.<sup>21</sup> In summary, effective grand strategy requires clear goals and a coherent, realistic, holistic, integrated approach that coordinates all activities and resources towards the attainment of objectives that serve vital national interests, but in a way that is flexible.

### **The 2022 NSS as Grand Strategy**

Based on the above, the paper will assess whether the 2022 NSS clearly identifies ends, ways and means, and whether, under the direction of the NSS, the process of grand strategy can function effectively. This is an appropriate methodology because in the prologue to the document President Biden describes the NSS as a roadmap for how the United States will achieve its goals.

Before embarking upon our analysis, it is important to briefly discuss the context provided by the 2022 NSS, for

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<sup>19</sup> Gaddis, pp. 65-66, and Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. By Samuel B. Griffith (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

<sup>20</sup> Brands, pp. 3-5, Gaddis, p. 24, Lonsdale & Kane, p. 130.

<sup>21</sup> Biddle, p. 59, Gaddis, p. 117.

this sets the background for the proposed security strategy. The NSS identifies two interacting strategic challenges: great power competition and cross-border challenges. With reference to the former, Russia is described as the most immediate threat, but China (PRC) is regarded as the most consequential geopolitical challenge. Taken together, these two state-based threats produce an international system defined as autocracies versus democracies, with the future shape of the international order at stake. The rising threat of China also explains the emphasis given to the Indo-Pacific region, which is defined as the epicentre of 21<sup>st</sup> century geopolitics. The cross-border challenges identified are climate change, food insecurity, communicable diseases, terrorism, energy shortages and inflation. To tackle these challenges, the NSS outlines an active and leading role for the United States to help shape the international order.

### *Ends*

With this context in mind, does the NSS identify clear goals for the United States? Perhaps not unsurprisingly (when dealing with issues of a political nature), the answer to this question is both yes and no. On the positive side, the NSS states: “Our goal is clear – we want a free, open, prosperous, and secure international order.”<sup>22</sup> It then goes on to briefly define what these terms mean. Free “allows people to enjoy their basic, universal rights and freedoms;” open “provides all nations that sign up to these principles an opportunity to participate in, and have a role in shaping, the rules;” prosperous “empowers all nations to continually raise the standard of living for their citizens;” and secure “free from aggression, coercion and intimidation.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: 2022), p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 10-11.

This seems reasonably clear. However, elsewhere in the document, further goals appear to be identified, albeit classified as national interests: “to protect the security of the American people; to expand economic prosperity and opportunity; and to realize and defend the democratic values at the heart of the American way of life.”<sup>24</sup>

Elsewhere in the document, anti-corruption is defined as a core national interest. Moreover, particular goals are identified in relation to China and Russia. Specifically, the United States seeks to outcompete China and constrain Russia. In this way, one might ask whether the NSS contains different levels or layers of goals that support one another. This is hinted at in relation to China, whereby outcompeting the PRC is described as a way of defending U.S. interests and building a U.S. vision of the future. In this way, we can see the country-specific goals as serving the broader national security objectives and vision for the international community. However, these connections are not made clearly enough.

Taken together, the varied discussions of goals produce a lack of clarity regarding the ends of U.S. grand strategy. For example, do the national security goals have primacy, and if so, do they serve the international order goals, or are they served by the latter? An alternative way of looking at this may be to distinguish between vision and goals. Do the international order goals actually represent a broader vision, within which the national security elements represent more solid goals? Part of the problem here is the nature of the NSS document, which is rather lengthy (48 pages) and wordy.

The NSS further exacerbates this problem by including “foundational principles”: “This means that the foundational principles of self-determination, territorial integrity, and political independence must be respected,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

international institutions must be strengthened, countries must be free to determine their own foreign policy choices, information must be allowed to flow freely, universal human rights must be upheld, and the global economy must operate on a level playing field and provide opportunity for all.”<sup>25</sup>

Again, it is not clear whether these represent further goals, or ways by which the national security and international order goals will be achieved.

A final problem with the enunciation of goals is that some of them are rather nebulous. For example, what does the enjoyment of one’s freedoms actually look like? The same question can be asked of giving states an opportunity to shape the rules of the system. The goals of prosperity and security are perhaps the clearest, in that prosperity can be measured (although no standards are offered in the NSS) and one can assess whether states are free from aggression and (to a lesser extent) coercion. Interestingly, the NSS does provide a metric by which to evaluate its success. Unfortunately, the metric offered is itself vague: that life will be better, safer, and fairer for the U.S. population, whilst also uplifting other peoples and countries.

The above analysis may seem somewhat semantically pedantic. However, if the process of grand strategy begins with the identification of goals, then it is imperative that they be clearly enunciated and tangible. In the absence of clear and achievable goals, the process of allocating means and determining ways cannot properly function. Ultimately, the above analysis seems to validate Brodie’s comment that objectives are often poorly articulated in grand strategy.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

### *Means*

The NSS is on more solid ground when it comes to the discussion of the means or sources of grand strategic power: “Our approach encompasses all elements of national power—diplomacy, development cooperation, industrial strategy, economic statecraft, intelligence, and defence...”<sup>26</sup> Importantly, the NSS displays some understanding of the process of grand strategy when it states that enhancing the sources of power will better enable the United States to shape the international order. In this way, there is recognition, at least in general terms, of how means translate into policy effect via different ways. To take one example, in the section dedicated to China, there is recognition that enhancing the U.S. means of grand strategy will enable it to outcompete the PRC in key areas (military, technology, economic performance, etc.). More broadly, “Investing in our Strength” (Part 2 of the NSS) outlines how the sources of power are to be strengthened by industrial and innovation strategy, investing in “our people,” strengthening U.S. democracy, building the strongest coalitions (transformative cooperation), and modernising and strengthening the military. The NSS makes the reasonable point that U.S. power abroad must be premised on domestic strength and stability. Other measures to be taken include modernising the Department of State, adapting the Intelligence Community, increasing the resources of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, bolstering and reorganising elements of the Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security, etc.

All told, the 2022 NSS takes a reasonably straightforward approach to the means of grand strategy. The document recognises that success in grand strategy requires a broad set of tools. Moreover, by acknowledging

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 11.



the symbiotic relationship between the foreign and domestic policy areas, the NSS further acknowledges the integrated nature of grand strategy.

### *Ways*

Possibly the richest area of the 2022 NSS is that concerned with the manner (ways) in which the objectives are to be achieved. Indeed, over half of the entire document is dedicated to the methods to be employed. These are developed in Parts 3 and 4, “Our Global Priorities” and “Our Strategy by Region,” respectively. This includes general responses, as well as those dedicated to particular regions, countries and issues. In general, three main approaches are identified: “We will use these capabilities [means] to outcompete our strategic competitors, galvanize collective action on global challenges, and shape the rules of the road for technology, cybersecurity, and trade and economics.”<sup>27</sup>

At times, the NSS offers a reasonable degree of detail. For example, under the general approach of constraining Russia and outcompeting China, the document clearly states that the United States will build and maintain military forces adequate to deter aggressive acts by these two powers. Again, there is some evidence that the authors of the NSS appreciate how strategy functions, at least to some degree. The NSS discusses, for example, shaping the environment to influence the behaviour of China and Russia. In relation to the former, the NSS articulates three approaches: investing in means (to outcompete), establishing coalitions of like-minded states to shift the geopolitical balance in favour of the United States (again, to outcompete), and finally to compete responsibly. The latter is designed to help shape the international order in a

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

positive direction whilst not antagonising China, who, the NSS recognises, is a required partner to deal with global challenges such as climate change.

Clarity and purposive actions are also on display in relation to food insecurity, via such actions as the “Roadmap for Global Food Insecurity.” Similar approaches are evident in relation to biodefence, climate change, arms control, and establishing common rules within cyberspace, technology, trade and economics, etc. Indeed, promoting a rules-based order in many areas of international activity is a strong theme of the NSS, and speaks to the U.S. desire to shape the international system. This is further evident in the expressed desire to modernize and strengthen international institutions and regimes, such as the United Nations and the non-proliferation regime. In relation to Russia, much is made of the role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as a constraining power (especially in its support for Ukraine), including approval for the membership applications of Sweden and Finland.

In relation to geographic regions, the Indo-Pacific is a good example of the different ways proposed to achieve stated objectives. Specifically, in this key geopolitical theatre the United States is interested in shifting the balance away from China. The NSS hopes to achieve this goal by promoting a free press, democracy, and freedom of the seas; by strengthening key alliances such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and AUKUS; maintaining regional defence commitments; and taking action on climate change to ensure prosperity and stability.

In contrast to these areas of clarity, other ways require further clarification. This is evident, for example, in relation to democracy. The NSS is quite clear that democracy is the preferred model of governance. Consequently, the United States seeks to defend and strengthen democracy around the world. However, driven by the theme of inclusivity and diversity, and one suspects the chastening experience of

Afghanistan, the NSS states that other nations should not be made in the image of the United States, nor should it engage in nation-building (remaking societies). Consequently, we are left to conclude that strengthening democracy is more a vague desire, rather than an active and carefully planned way to achieve objectives.

More importantly, there are missing steps in the process of strategy as outlined in the NSS. For argument's sake, let us assume that the United States does indeed outcompete China in the areas of economy, technology & innovation, and even alliances. How exactly do these advantages translate into the identified objectives of a free, open, prosperous, and secure international order? The NSS contains some reference to a contest between autocracies and democracies, and delivering benefits for democratic people and the wider international community, but again the relationships amongst ends, ways and means is vague. Even if the international environment has been favourably shaped to some degree, can one thereby control the actions of a powerful country such as China? Does technological and economic advantage mean that China cannot then influence the actions and policies of its neighbours? These, and other such questions remain unanswered.

## **Conclusion**

All told, for what it is, the NSS is not a bad document. It is reasonably clear on the means available for grand strategy, and how they can be enhanced. Moreover, although the discussion of ways is rather dense and contains some missing steps, there is some evidence that the authors understand how strategy functions. In this way, and in some areas, the NSS is quite strong on the operationalisation of grand strategy. However, in general, the document fails to enunciate clear and attainable ends for U.S. grand strategy. Taken together, the stated goals, national security

interests, and fundamental principles in the NSS somewhat overwhelm the intellectual senses, and leave us without a clear identification of viable goals. In combination with the so-called missing steps of strategy, the absence of clear goals means that the NSS cannot fully articulate the process of grand strategy.

In conclusion, the 2022 NSS, despite its strengths, may be further evidence that grand strategy is an illusion. That, even when formally mandated, it is beyond the wit of man to cogently bring together the numerous strands of statecraft in a coherent and viable fashion. Perhaps grand strategy is too complex, and contains too many components and interactions? Or, maybe we need simplified forms of grand strategy, with fewer and less ambitious goals?

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# **The National Security Strategy: Preparing for a Challenging World**

**By Thomas G. Mahnken**

There are deep continuities between the Biden Administration's 2022 *National Security Strategy* (NSS) and its predecessor from the Trump Administration. Indeed, the two resemble one another more than either veterans of the previous administration or appointees serving the current one would like to admit. These continuities are evidence of the challenging security environment that we currently face. For the foreseeable future, we face multi-dimensional competition with China and Russia, both individually and, increasingly, together. We also face the growing possibility of war with each, or both. The 2022 NSS recognizes that reality, but does not go as far as it might to outline the steps necessary to prepare the nation for the challenges we face.

China and Russia each pose a significant threat to the global order. Moreover, as the 2022 NSS notes, "the PRC and Russia are increasingly aligned with each other" (p. 23) and document contains multiple pages to explaining how the United States can constrain both countries going forward (pp. 23-27). The war in Ukraine is likely to be protracted, thanks to the ability of Kyiv and Moscow to sustain a conflict as well as the irreconcilability of their aims. In addition, the conflict could escalate in ways that bring the United States more directly into the fight (a fact that Putin's nuclear saber rattling makes readily apparent). Chinese leader Xi Jinping, perceiving a window of opportunity to act, could try and seize Taiwan as the war in Ukraine rages on. The United States could thus conceivably be drawn into simultaneous conflicts with China and Russia.

But despite Washington's professed focus on both Beijing and Moscow, U.S. defense planning is not

commensurate with the challenge at hand.<sup>1</sup> To the Biden Administration's credit, the NSS notes that "by the 2030s, the United States for the first time will need to deter two major nuclear powers, each of whom will field modern and diverse global and regional forces." (p. 21). However, the deterrence challenge is both more comprehensive and nearer-term than the NSS admits. There is an urgent need to prepare for the possibility of either two major, near-simultaneous regional conflicts against China and Russia, or a multi-theater conflict involving them.

The gap between the resources allocated to defense and the need to defend American interests in a challenging security environment is long-standing, but was only exacerbated by the 2012 Budget Control Act. In 2015, the Department of Defense abandoned its longstanding policy of being prepared to fight and win two major wars in favor of focusing on acquiring the means to fight a single war. The impact of this policy shift, which has remained in place ever since, shows. Much of the U.S. force structure—its aircraft, ships, and tanks—date back to the Reagan defense buildup of the 1980s. The country also has limited supplies of important equipment and munitions, so much so that it has had to draw a large portion of its stocks down to support Ukraine. This is a long-standing problem, but one that the present conflict has highlighted.

These challenges would prove particularly vexing in simultaneous conflicts. If the United States found itself in a two-war situation in Eastern Europe and the Pacific, the commitment would likely be lengthy in both cases. China's expanding interests and global footprint suggest that a war with Beijing would not be confined neatly to Taiwan and the Western Pacific but instead stretch across multiple theaters, from the Indian Ocean to the West Coast of the

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<sup>1</sup> This essay draws upon Thomas G. Mahnken, "Could America Win a New World War? What it Would Take to Defeat both China and Russia," *Foreign Affairs*, October 27, 2022.

United States. The United States, which is used to striking an adversary's homeland while its territory remains off-limits, could see China launching cyber-attacks or even missile strikes on the United States in an attempt to blunt American military power. The United States needs to create deep munitions reserves, stockpile of high-quality gear, and come up with creative battlefield techniques if it hopes to win such fights.

The Defense Department, Congress, and American industry need to work together to expand and deepen the U.S. defense industrial base. The Defense Department and armed services need to collaborate to develop new joint operational concepts that maximize U.S. military strengths. They also need to think seriously about the strategic contours of a multi-theater war, including where they would focus most of the U.S. military attention, and when. Such a war could break out in any number of ways and proceed along different paths, but could feature a Chinese attempt to take Taiwan coupled with escalating Russian aggression in Europe. And the U.S. government can do a better job of coordinating and planning with allies, who will be indispensable—and quite possibly decisive—to the successful outcome of a worldwide military conflict.

### **U.S. Needs to Strengthen Its Munitions Manufacturing Base**

In some ways, the United States and its allies will have an advantage in any simultaneous war in Asia and Europe. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that modern precision weapons are highly effective, and most of these weapons are made by the United States, which must supply not only the U.S. armed forces, but also its allies and friends.

U.S. weapons stockpiles are, however, limited, as is the U.S. industrial base, and it will likely take years to replenish many of the munitions that the United States has provided



to Ukraine. This should not come as a surprise. In 2019, the congressionally-mandated National Defense Strategy Commission (NDSC) warned that the United States didn't possess enough munitions to prevail in a high-intensity conflict, and it argued that the country needed to expand production. The report also found that Washington would need to modernize its defense manufacturing in order to create munitions and other weaponry at a faster pace.<sup>2</sup>

The Department of Defense also must look beyond Ukraine. Russia's ongoing war offers a valuable set of data, but if China initiated a military operation to take Taiwan, forcing the United States and its allies to respond, the conflict would likely take place mostly at sea and have very different requirements. It will demand lots of long-range weapons and anti-ship missiles, and right now, the United States has meager supplies of both. A protracted war across the Taiwan Strait would likely require many more Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles – Extended Range (JASSM-ER) and Long-Range Anti-Ship Missiles (LRASM) than the United States currently possesses.

The United States clearly needs to increase its defense manufacturing capacity and speed. Congress will have to allocate more money to increase production. But to keep U.S. stockpiles from falling too low in the future, the country will need to do more than make *ad hoc* investments. Congress should also pass legislation that establishes minimum supply levels for munitions, with money automatically allocated for topping off stockpiles as the United States and its friends draw them down. Creating such a system would do much more than just guarantee consistent munitions supplies. To innovate, the United States also needs new firms that can complement existing manufacturers, and having guaranteed demand will give

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<sup>2</sup> *Providing for the Common Defense: The Assessment and Recommendations of the National Defense Strategy Commission* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense Strategy Commission, 2018), p. 41.

venture capitalists and entrepreneurs new incentives to invest in the defense industry.

Of course, the United States cannot rapidly expand all parts of its defense industrial base: it does not have unlimited resources and financing. That means the country will need to think creatively about how it can use the manufacturing it does have to best bolster its forces. The U.S. Navy, for instance, cannot easily hasten the production of aircraft carriers, yet it can think about how to expand these ships' effectiveness by equipping them with better aircraft. The Air Force, for its part, will not always be able to rapidly scale up plane manufacturing. But it can multiply the effectiveness of its most advanced aircraft by matching them with increasingly capable, low-cost, and easier-to-make unmanned systems to sense, communicate, strike, and protect their manned counterparts. By teaming manned and unmanned systems, the United States can multiply the effectiveness of the U.S. air fleet and help prevent the United States from getting stretched thin in a future multi-theater conflict.

Finally, the United States should work with its allies to increase their military production and the size of their weapons and munitions stockpiles. Washington will need to be able to backstop its partners, but as the war in Ukraine clearly illustrates, it is good if frontline states have enough munitions to fight without the United States drawing down its own stocks. Some U.S. allies, such as Australia, are making considerable investments to build up their own munitions industry, while others, such as Japan, face considerable barriers to doing so. More needs to be done to provide a munitions base robust enough to meet the needs of the United States, its allies, and others in an era of protracted warfare.

## Department of Defense Must Get Creative

Weapons and munitions are just one part of war. To win a conflict against both China and Russia, Washington also needs to come up with new fighting techniques. As the 2019 NDSC put it, “The United States needs more than just new capabilities; it urgently requires new operational concepts that expand U.S. options and constrain those of China, Russia, and other actors.”<sup>3</sup>

The Department of Defense has produced a “Joint Warfighting Concept” to help guide the development of doctrine and establish funding priorities, but progress has been patchy. It is unclear exactly if or how the department’s document – or the process that produced it – has influenced the size and shape of the U.S. armed forces or the composition of the defense budget. Moreover, efforts by the U.S. armed services to solve pressing operational challenges have come under attack from traditionalists. The Marine Corps’ new Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations doctrine and Marine Littoral Regiment, for example, would devote Marine forces to complementing the Navy in countering the Chinese fleet in the Western Pacific. Traditionalists, steeped in the experience of the last twenty years of warfare in the Middle East, bemoan decisions to divest the Marine Corps of its tanks and reduce its complement of artillery.

To improve how it fights, the Department of Defense needs a vigorous contest of ideas spurred, supervised, and supported by its senior leadership. The Pentagon needs to develop new concepts to project and sustain forces against enemy precision strike systems, to resupply forces under fire, and to protect critical bases of operations, both at home and abroad, against attack. The United States also needs to

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<sup>3</sup> *Providing for the Common Defense: The Assessment and Recommendations of the National Defense Strategy Commission* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense Strategy Commission, 2018), p. viii.

work with its allies and partners on new approaches to deterrence. As envisioned in the Biden Administration's Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness, the U.S. should work with its allies to harness the power of unmanned systems to detect and thus hopefully deter acts of aggression.

As it develops new combat techniques, the United States also needs to think seriously about strategy more broadly: how to structure the military and construct its operations. This will likely require breaking from the military designs of recent decades. Today's theater command structure, for example, is an artifact of the 1990s and 2000s. It features a series of six geographic fiefdoms presided over by increasingly powerful geographic combatant commanders. This made sense when the United States was mostly interested in discrete, local conflicts against, say, Iran or North Korea, and terrorist organizations – a civil war in the Balkans, insurgents in Somalia. But the threats the United States faces today do not conform to carefully drawn geographic boundaries, nor do the strategies needed to counter them. A war with China could easily spill from east Asia into the Indian Ocean, which connects China with its sources of energy in the Middle East, and even to the Persian Gulf and Djibouti in the Horn of Africa, which hosts a Chinese base. It could also include attacks on the United States itself. In such a war, it might be better to have a command structure that's not so geographically constrained.

That said, as defense strategists game out simultaneous conflicts against China and Russia, they will need to figure out how to prioritize U.S. military action based upon the relative threats in Europe and Asia, the geography of the theaters, and the allies Washington has in each region.

In World War II, the United States emphasized one theater of conflict over the other at different moments, depending on which was more urgent and where it was

most needed. At the outset, the United States followed a Europe-first strategy, focused on beating Nazi Germany because it posed the gravest threat to the United States and its allies. Today, however, it would need to initially focus on Asia. Although the war in Ukraine has necessitated great U.S. support, it has exposed the limits of Russian military power as well as the effectiveness of concerted North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) action. As it stretches on, the war will continue to diminish Russia's conventional military in ways that Moscow cannot quickly repair. NATO, meanwhile, will grow more capable, particularly with the additions of Sweden and Finland. The United States would still have a key role to play in the European side of the war, particularly in maintaining nuclear and conventional deterrence of Russian aggression against NATO. But Washington's European allies will be able to take the lead in many areas, such as supplying ground forces. They will not need U.S. aid and direction for every element of combat.

The situation in the Western Pacific is different. China has a stronger military than does Russia, and it poses a graver danger to the prevailing regional order. The United States has capable local allies in Australia and Japan, but there is no NATO equivalent. There are many capabilities that only the United States can bring to the table, including nuclear deterrence; key naval, air, and space capabilities; as well as vital logistical support such as munitions.

## **Conclusion**

Although there is now somewhat of a consensus that we face an era defined by competition with China and Russia, the full implications of that situation for U.S. national security and defense strategy are still nascent. Russia is trying to conquer land in Europe, and its violent quest risks spiraling outward, bringing other parts of the continent into combat. China's increasing belligerence toward Taiwan

means that conquest could also return to Asia. The United States and its allies must plan for how to simultaneously wage—and win—wars in Asia and Europe, as unpalatable as the prospect may seem. As if that were not challenging enough, such conflicts would occur under the shadow of the U.S., Russian, and Chinese nuclear arsenals, which would constrain military operations and raise the stakes of escalation. Indeed, China's growing nuclear arsenal and Russia's investment in new nuclear capabilities would greatly complicate the American deterrent calculus.

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# Integrated Deterrence: Old Wine in New Bottles

By Francis H. Marlo

It has become a Washington tradition for an incoming administration to coin a buzzword suggesting that it has developed a new approach for solving (what are usually) very old problems. Unfortunately, in most cases the only thing truly innovative about these catchphrases is the packaging. For the Biden Administration, it appears that one of the shiny new objects is the idea of “integrated deterrence.” Initially mentioned in Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin’s first major speech on April 30, 2021, the concept of integrated deterrence is now enshrined in both the 2022 *National Security Strategy* (NSS) and the *National Defense Strategy* (NDS). As explained in the NSS and reinforced in the NDS, integrated deterrence rests on the recognition that “we cannot afford to rely solely on conventional forces and nuclear deterrence” and must take a new approach to deterrence that is integrated across domains, across regions, across the spectrum of conflict, across the interagency, and in partnership with our friends and allies.<sup>1</sup> A close analysis of the concept, however, suggests that it is little more than a restatement of what deterrence, properly understood, has always been. Every element of the integrated deterrence concept has been part of the U.S. deterrent posture for decades.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the White House, *National Security Strategy*, October 2022, p. 22, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>.



## Domains

Per the NSS, the first pillar of integrated deterrence is integration across domains. The NSS states that the U.S. “recogniz[es] that our competitors’ strategies operate across military (land, air, maritime, cyber, and space) and non-military (economic, technological, and information) domains—and we must too.”<sup>2</sup> While there is certainly nothing incorrect in this observation, there is also nothing novel about it, either. After all, the military does not dwell on the complexities of “naval deterrence” or ponder the challenges of “air deterrence.” Instead, it has recognized for decades that deterrence (whether conventional or nuclear) is inherently a joint responsibility which cuts across all the warfighting domains. The addition of both cyber and space as distinct domains, while appropriate, does not change this simple, well-understood fact.

As for the need to have U.S. deterrent strategies include non-military domains, there is again nothing new in this recognition. Discussions of national-level deterrence policy have always considered how best to use America’s non-military capabilities to reinforce its deterrence efforts. Indeed, one of the longest-running debates within the national security community during the Cold War was over this very issue. For some, demonstrating diplomatic firmness and resolve was the key to deterring Soviet aggression. Operating on the assumption that the Soviets only respected strength and power, they argued that drawing clear “lines in the sand” and establishing close economic and political partnerships with anti-communist regional allies was the best way to deter Soviet misbehavior. Others, however, insisted that such demonstrations were counterproductive. These critics, believing that most of the Soviets’ hostile actions were driven by fear and a sense of

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

insecurity, instead argued that arms control and economic cooperation would break down mistrust and thus deter Soviet adventurism. The détente policies of the 1970s were largely founded on this theory. But both camps well understood the crucial role that non-military efforts played in America's overall deterrent posture. Every administration since the end of the Cold War has faced a similar challenge of deciding what mix of firmness and accommodation would best deter a given regional threat. The varying approaches that successive administrations have taken towards Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea since 1993 reflect, in part, different assumptions about how to use the non-military instruments of power to support deterrence.

## Regions

The second pillar of the concept calls for the integration of deterrence across regions, based upon our "understanding that our competitors combine expansive ambitions with growing capabilities to threaten U.S. interests in key regions and in the homeland."<sup>3</sup> Here, again, the challenge of cross-regional deterrence has been well understood since the emergence of the United States as a superpower following the Second World War. Apart from the obvious creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to deter a Soviet attack on Western Europe, the United States also sought to deter Soviet aggression in the Middle East via the (failed) creation of Central Treaty Organization and the later expounding of the Carter Doctrine. America's recognition of the Soviet threat in Asia led to its alliance relations with Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and Australia. In short, even during the Cold War, the United States understood the need for regional deterrence.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

In addition, contrary to popular belief, the Soviets were not the only adversary the United States sought to deter during the Cold War. Lesser, but still considerable, effort went into deterring, among others, China, North Korea, Iran, Libya, and Cuba from engaging in regional destabilization or adventurism. Since the end of the Cold War, America has sought to deter numerous regional actors, to include Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. In all these cases, the United States tailored its deterrent efforts based on regional dynamics and the specific actor in question. While it has not always been successful at deterring regional conflicts (either during the Cold War or after), its failures were more due to its misunderstanding its adversaries than in adopting a “one size fits all” approach to deterrence.

### **Spectrum of Conflict**

Of the five pillars of integrated deterrence laid out in the NSS, the third, “integration across the spectrum of conflict,” is perhaps the most conceptually confused. According to the NSS, integrating deterrence across the spectrum of conflict will “prevent competitors from altering the status quo in ways that harm our interests while hovering below the threshold of armed conflict.”<sup>4</sup> Taken literally, such a statement transforms every U.S. policy effort, no matter how minor, into an exercise in deterrence, thereby stretching the concept of deterrence well beyond the breaking point. Adversaries such as Russia and China are taking actions that change the status quo *daily*. When China clamps down on COVID protesters in Shanghai or moves another group of Uyghurs into concentration camps, it is altering the status quo in a way that harms U.S. interests. Would the authors of the NSS suggest, then, that our

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

inability to prevent these actions represents a failure of deterrence? One would hope not.

If, instead, the NSS is referring to smaller-scale aggression such as China's ongoing militarization of the South China Sea, then the "discovery" of the need to deter such activity becomes unremarkable. Deterrence theorists as far back as Herman Kahn and Albert Wohlstetter understood both the need and the difficulty of deterring not only a full-scale nuclear attack but also a wide range of other actions. Indeed, the premise that nations are capable of deterring a wide range of hostile activities that fall below the level of armed conflict is the foundation of Kahn's much-discussed escalation ladder. While the administration is right in highlighting the importance of addressing this behavior, there is nothing new in its recognition of the need to deter it. America's deterrent posture has never been solely aimed at preventing full-scale nuclear war. From the Cold War fielding of tactical (and, later, intermediate-range) nuclear forces to the current freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea, the United States has consistently taken actions to deter a broad array of aggression below the level of general nuclear war.

### **Interagency**

Integrated deterrence's fourth pillar calls for integration "across the U.S. Government to leverage the full array of American advantages, from diplomacy, intelligence, and economic tools to security assistance and force posture decisions."<sup>5</sup> This pillar, in many ways, mirrors the first pillar's discussion of integration across non-military domains. As such, the observations made above about America's long history of utilizing non-military actions to

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

support deterrence largely apply here. The United States has always used such tools as diplomatic alliances and partnerships, economic agreements, and intelligence sharing to reassure friendly nations and discourage adversary aggression.

The focus of this pillar, however, seems to be more on the *process* of taking deterrent actions than on the actions themselves. If that is the intent of this component, it is a welcome, but well-understood, call for an improvement in the interagency process. For decades, the national security community has known that the process is fundamentally flawed. More than a decade ago, the Project on National Security Reform issued its report calling for significant changes to the interagency system.<sup>6</sup> These and countless other efforts to improve the process have been (largely) stillborn. Given that the Administration has taken no discernable action to improve the structure or functioning of the system, this pillar describes, at best, a common aspiration. In any event, any reform of the system will need to focus on improving the overall policy process, not the narrow goal of strengthening deterrence, integrated or otherwise.

### **Allies and Partners**

The fifth and final pillar of integrated deterrence is “[i]ntegration with allies and partners through investments in interoperability and joint capability development, cooperative posture planning, and coordinated diplomatic and economic approaches.”<sup>7</sup> Once again, as demonstrated above, strengthening relations with allies and partners has been a long-standing component of the U.S. deterrent

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<sup>6</sup> Project on National Security Reform, “Forging a New Shield,” November 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Office of the White House, *National Security Strategy*, op. cit., p. 22.

posture. Given that much of America's deterrent effort has focused on preventing attacks on its friends and allies around the world, it would be impossible to develop a reasonable deterrent policy without close coordination with these countries. Efforts to improve interoperability, jointly develop capabilities, and cooperate on force posturing have been going on for decades, based on the recognition that these improvements have a powerful deterrent effect. In fact, one would be hard-pressed to come up with a solid reason for doing these things *other than* their value in improving our collective warfighting ability and, thus, strengthening deterrence. Similarly, as discussed above, the United States has long understood the deterrent value of taking diplomatic, economic, and other non-military actions with its allies. To suggest, as the NSS does, that incorporating these actions represents a departure from or improvement in America's deterrent policy is simply inaccurate.

In conclusion, far from being a new or innovative take on deterrence, the Biden Administration's concept of integrated deterrence is little more than a conventional restatement of long-standing U.S. deterrent policy. In fact, the only way one could see this concept as new is if one were under the erroneous perception that the sole purpose of deterrence is to prevent a nuclear attack on the U.S. homeland. Given that the men and women who drafted this idea (should) know better, one is left with the question of "Why?" Given the enormous challenges facing the United States today, surely the administration could have found a better use for all the time, money, and talent it spent pouring old wine into new bottles.

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# The Biden-Harris Administration's National Security Strategy: A UK/NATO Perspective

By Kenton White

## Introduction

“China is not our enemy” stated Senator Joe Biden in a visit to Shanghai in 2000. The somewhat idealistic view of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the coming decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries was that commerce and liberty go hand-in-hand. As China engaged in international commerce, and became a member of the World Trade Organisation, it was expected that the Chinese Communist Party's iron-fisted control of the country would ease. Biden's statement echoed the optimism following the end of the Cold War. The cost of the Cold War had been immense. “The Cold War is over, and we have won it. The West is secure, and its societies enjoy considerable material comfort.”<sup>1</sup> Scholars drew this conclusion in 1989 after Gorbachev's opening of East-West relations and the fall of the Berlin Wall, and many in the West agreed. Globalisation and the prospect of a new world order after 1991 promised an even more comfortable and prosperous existence for Western nations.

However, the conclusions were false, and the assurances they provided to NATO and the United States led to broad security and defence vulnerabilities. The immediate response in the West to the end of the Cold War was to cut defence spending and to reduce the extensive military and civilian capabilities and infrastructure then available to NATO governments. For politicians in Western countries, gone was the formulation of long-term policy

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Booth and John Baylis, eds., *Britain, NATO and Nuclear Weapons: Alternative Defence Versus Alliance Reform* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 3.



upon which national and NATO strategy could be based. This led to problems in devising other facets of civilian and armed forces' capabilities. The Western nations are only now beginning to emerge from this post-Cold War hangover.

As a response to this crisis, the Biden-Harris administration's *National Security Strategy* (NSS) is very much like the curate's egg—good in parts but not quite satisfactory. It attempts to tackle the apparent contradiction between containing the threats from Russia and China, whilst simultaneously encouraging cooperation with them. The latter may be a hangover from Biden's previous optimistic outlook, and an attempt to deflect charges of nationalism and protectionism.

The world seems to be returning to the structurally unstable, multipolar system of pre-1914. NATO and the European Union stand as a bastion against this increasing instability. However, for the United States, national self-reliance is becoming the order of the day: national policy must work in this unstable system. This poses great danger to those nations that depend on stable international relations for their trade and development. The United States and NATO require a greater degree of self-reliance in the manufacture and supply of those vital assets upon which their security depends. The Biden-Harris NSS identifies this weakness and sets out a series of objectives to rectify it, but is less clear on how they will meet those objectives.

Russian aggression in Ukraine and Chinese recalcitrance in the South China Sea have led some to conclude that we are facing a new Cold War where collective defence and credible deterrence will be not just important, but vital. Rising tensions in Europe pose a much more direct threat to NATO. If one looks at the position of Kaliningrad, separated from the mother country, it is not too far a stretch to compare it to East Prussia in the 1930s, or West Berlin during the Cold War, to see it as a potential

location for conflict. We have already seen the agitation provided by ethnic Russian minorities in Eastern European states as evidence that Russia, whatever the outcome in Ukraine, sees Eastern Europe as within its sphere of influence.

The United States, and by extension NATO, must realise, again, that Russia and China do not play by the same rules as they do.

### **Managing Competition**

The strategy as laid out by President Biden and Vice President Harris demonstrates a level of cognitive dissonance that is not immediately obvious. The United States must, "... outcompete our strategic competitors ...,"<sup>2</sup> whilst being, "... willing to work with the PRC where our interests align."<sup>3</sup> China is characterised as a nation which "... poses a challenge to international peace and stability – especially waging or preparing for wars of aggression, actively undermining the democratic political processes of other countries, leveraging technology and supply chains for coercion and repression, and exporting an illiberal model of international order."<sup>4</sup> China has weaponised trade to a point where many Western nations, including the United States, have become dependent on it for their prosperity. It is difficult to see how a nation that acts in this way might share any interests with the democratic nations of NATO. Both Russia's and China's activities pose a direct threat to the rule of law symbolised by the United Nations (UN). But the United States is not immune to criticism. It

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<sup>2</sup> 'Biden-Harris Administration's National Security Strategy' (The White House, October 2022), 11.

<sup>3</sup> 'US National Security Strategy,' 25.

<sup>4</sup> 'US National Security Strategy,' 8.

must remain cautious in the use of its hard power lest it become a mirror of what it seeks to undermine.

The strategy continues: "... countries cannot enjoy the benefits of global integration while trampling on the core tenets of the UN Charter."<sup>5</sup> China's behaviour contradicts this statement. From the occupation of Tibet to the creation of military outposts in the South China Sea, it has not been challenged, nor can it be, unless military force is used, or a new political group takes control. Whilst NATO may, in its new Strategic Concept, have recognised a potential military opponent in China, the political and economic systems in Europe have not.<sup>6</sup> President Biden may have trouble convincing some European governments to distance themselves from China economically. China's trade with Russia has increased since its invasion of Ukraine: we are already seeing a polarisation of nations around opposing political ideologies.<sup>7</sup>

The United States and NATO seek to manage confrontation, but not all opponents will allow themselves to be managed. It is in the opponent's interests that confusion is multiplied, which can lead to disagreement within the NATO political leadership. To believe otherwise, and to base one's own strategy on this assumption, is naïve. Removing the conditions for conflict only works if both sides of the potential conflict wish those conditions to be removed. NATO cannot always assume that other nations wish for peace and stability. Their interests, unlike NATO's members, are oftentimes best served by destabilisation.

NATO is seen as "... stronger and more united than it has ever been, as we look to welcome two capable new allies

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<sup>5</sup> 'US National Security Strategy,' 26.

<sup>6</sup> 'NATO 2022 - Strategic Concept' (NATO, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> Ana Swanson and Lazaro Gamio, 'How Russia Pays for War', *New York Times*, October 30, 2022. India +310%, China +64%, Brazil +106%, Turkey +198%.

in Finland and Sweden.”<sup>8</sup> This may be wishful thinking, with disagreements within the Alliance over sanctions against Russia and supplying matériel to the Ukrainians. The view from, for example, Estonia or Poland is significantly different to that from Germany, Turkey or Italy.

### U.S. Leadership

The current, and previous, U.S. administrations assume that, “Around the world, the need for American leadership is as great as it has ever been.”<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the United States should address other nations as partners, rather than as needing leadership. This statement implies that nations are directionless, or incapable of deciding their own fate. Nothing could be further from the truth in the case of Europe generally. The Biden administration might not like the direction Europe is taking, however implying that U.S. leadership is necessary is confrontational at best, and downright patronising at worst. This leadership is further called into doubt by the latest news that the Biden administration is reportedly, “... privately encouraging Ukraine’s leaders to signal an openness to negotiate with Russia ...”<sup>10</sup> This reflects the rift between Republicans and Democrats within U.S. politics but does nothing to reassure the U.S. NATO allies of its unstinting support in times of international crisis. If anything, it casts doubt on the reliability of the United States.

U.S. “leadership” has been inconsistent. Regarding China, “... the next ten years will be the decisive decade.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> ‘US National Security Strategy,’ Introduction.

<sup>9</sup> ‘US National Security Strategy,’ Introduction.

<sup>10</sup> Missy Ryan, John Hudson, and Paul Sonne, ‘U.S. Privately Asks Ukraine to Show It’s Open to Negotiate with Russia,’ November 5, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> ‘US National Security Strategy,’ 24.

In truth, the last two decades were pivotal as both Russian and Chinese governments strengthened their domination at home whilst extending their influence and control abroad with little opposition. But U.S. foreign policy was lacklustre when confronting the increasing bellicosity of both nations.

### **Extended Deterrence - The American Assurance**

The old adage goes that “to defend everything is to defend nothing.” The Biden-Harris strategy attempts to “defend everything.” We know that policy changes happen, policy focus moves. But this strategy is less clear on identifying those areas of *vital* concern both to the United States and its allies. NATO is less clear of its overall focus and cannot see that the United States is any clearer on where it should concentrate its power. Despite President Biden’s reiteration of the message that, “... the United States will defend every inch of NATO territory and will continue to build and deepen a coalition with allies and partners to prevent Russia from causing further harm to European security, democracy, and institutions ...,”<sup>12</sup> a potential change of policy by the next administration might throw this assurance into question.<sup>13</sup> Troublingly, these changes trickle down into the lowest functions of the armed forces at the tactical and doctrinal level. The wherewithal to function in one theatre of operations may not work in another, and so flexibility of capability is key for all military forces. Operations in desert conditions are not the same as those in Estonia, for example. This places additional strain on the credibility of the U.S. assurance to defend against the global expansion of aggressive opponents.

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<sup>12</sup> ‘US National Security Strategy,’ 26.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Munich Security Conference 2017,’ in *Speeches*, 2017, <https://securityconference.org/en/msc-2017/>.

The strategy states, “Our NATO and bilateral treaty allies should never doubt our will and capacity to stand with them against aggression and intimidation.”<sup>14</sup> Despite this statement there is uncertainty in Europe regarding the U.S. commitment, both psychological and military, to NATO. From the perspective of Britain, now outside of the EU but still firmly within NATO, it is one thing for the British government to say that it will work ever more closely with the United States. It is another to suggest that if U.S. interests diverge from Britain’s that the United States would mourn too much the loss of Britain’s military cooperation. In 2018, U.S. General Mattis reminded the then-Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson if Britain wished to retain its role as a loyal ally, that this “... will require a level of defense spending beyond what we would expect from allies with only regional interests ...”<sup>15</sup> General Carleton-Smith, Chief of the UK General Staff (CGS), has observed that geopolitics was changing the focus of U.S. policy, and that Europe was slipping into a period of great power competition.<sup>16</sup>

European belief in the U.S. commitment to the Alliance was thrown into doubt by unilateral decisions, such as the decision to leave Afghanistan. Despite comments regarding consultation between NATO members, Jens Stoltenberg “... acknowledged that the consultation was somewhat artificial, because once the decision had been made to withdraw, he said, ‘it was hard for other allies to continue without the United States. It was not a realistic option.’”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> ‘US National Security Strategy,’ 17.

<sup>15</sup> Robin Emmott, ‘U.S. Includes Main Ally Britain in Letters Demanding Higher Defense Spending’, *Reuters*, July 3, 2018, <https://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCAKBN1JT1S3-OCATP>.

<sup>16</sup> Mark Carleton Smith, ‘CGS Keynote Address’, in *RUSI Land Warfare Conference* (London, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> Steven Erlanger, ‘NATO Chief Backs Biden, Saying Europe Was Consulted on Afghanistan’, *New York Times*, September 10, 2021,

European nations have a long history of cooperation with the United States on security and defence, but the continent is also increasingly its own player in the global arena. European countries have their own economic and political interests that diverge from those of the United States. Europe is more interested in fostering closer economic and political ties with Asia, while the focus for the United States is divided between Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Europe also has a different approach to the use of force. Many European countries prefer conciliation and oppose the use of force in international affairs, whereas the United States, and Britain, have a history of military interventions around the world. Europe is more hesitant to engage in military operations. A factor in this reluctance to use force is the cost of maintaining a military capability equal to the task. This is expensive, and in many respects European NATO nations are willing to cut their costs knowing U.S. power will habitually take up the slack. NATO's essential military capabilities such as heavy lift have been exposed as inadequate in Afghanistan. This "free-riding," especially for the smaller NATO nations, is nothing new. Limiting costs goes back to the very genesis of the Alliance and has never been successfully countered.

Prominent academics and strategists have accused Western governments (especially the United States and the United Kingdom) of having an inability to formulate coherent strategies.<sup>18</sup> A consistent strategy which addresses the threats to NATO countries and their interests is vital. Economic dependence on nations which may be potential

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<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/10/world/europe/afghanistan-europe-stoltenberg.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Colin S. Gray, *The Future of Strategy* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2015); Hew Strachan, 'The Lost Meaning of Strategy', *Survival* 47, no. 3 (October 1, 2005): 33–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396330500248102>; Patrick Porter, 'Why Britain Doesn't Do Grand Strategy', *The RUSI Journal* 155, no. 4 (August 1, 2010): 6–12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2010.514098>.

enemies is a fundamental weakness in the current political, economic, and military strategic development for NATO. Energy, technology, and manufacturing amongst many other things are purchased from countries such as China and Russia without thought to the longer-term consequences of those goods being denied. We have seen how this can affect us all through the COVID pandemic and now the war in Ukraine. Western nations were shown to be dependent on supplies from nations which do not work to the same standards as those in the EU or NATO.

During the Cold War the West had a clear technological edge. Technology could not be sold to selected countries, most notably the USSR and China, allowing this edge to be maintained. This edge has gone. Indeed, the West is so reliant on foreign manufacturing that supplies can throttle availability of simple consumable items as well as complex technology. The “considerable material comfort” is dependent on the good offices of nations seen as direct opponents in international affairs.

### **Defence and Security**

There is also a risk that the borders between defence and security become so blurred that each loses its identity, and thus its capability and accountability. Despite modern trends, the two are not synonymous. Security is a broad church and is the goal of being free from danger or threat. It is something to be achieved. Defence, on the other hand, is an action, or an ability to act, usually militarily. Defence provides security, but not the other way around.

NATO's expansion has left it with a vulnerable Eastern flank which cannot be defended in the way the inner German border was against the Warsaw Pact. Forces were permanently stationed in West Germany in direct and open opposition to the Warsaw Pact. NATO cannot station several armoured divisions in the Baltic states, or Poland.



This reluctance is both political and military. NATO leaders consider that such an action might be viewed as provocative by Russia. The Russian leadership would certainly use it for propaganda purposes. Militarily it may be difficult to generate this kind of force from the much-reduced Western equipment stocks. But if we are to learn anything from the Cold War it is that deterrence is not created by timidity. Deterrence works only when capability and credibility are communicated to the opponent, along with surety of action. Miss any one of these, and deterrence may fail.

### **Failure of Deterrence**

Deterrence, as recognised by NATO, has indeed failed in Ukraine. The implication is that Russia either misjudged the international response, or doesn't care. The suspicion, reinforced by events, is that the latter is probably more accurate.

The Alliance must not be drawn into a situation faced by Britain and France in 1938 and 1939—supporting a country against invasion without the wherewithal to provide help and engage the enemy. The hardware used by the armed forces must fulfil a tactical need in order for any strategy to work. Ammunition, fuel, mobility, and resilience all need to be available. A major flaw in NATO's strategy has been shown in the inability of many major nations to manufacture replacement matériel for that provided to Ukraine. Over the long-term NATO has expected to fight a "come-as-you-are" war against an enemy. This is identified in the NSS: "The war in Ukraine highlights the criticality of a vibrant Defense Industrial Base for the United States and its allies and partners. It must not only be capable of rapidly manufacturing proven capabilities needed to defend against adversary aggression, but also empowered to innovate and creatively design solutions as battlefield

conditions evolve.”<sup>19</sup> An enemy will be aware of the inadequacies of NATO’s manufacturing capacity, both in terms of heavy industry and digital technology. Exploiting political weakness and the limited attention span of the public can be relatively easy for autocratic regimes who do not answer to an electorate.

A need for cyber capability is evident in the strategy but is focussed on our civil society. The NSS states, “Our societies, and the critical infrastructure that supports them, from power to pipelines, is increasingly digital and vulnerable to disruption or destruction via cyber attacks.”<sup>20</sup> A reliance on the U.N. “... framework of responsible state behaviour in cyberspace ...” demonstrates a mistaken belief that adversaries will play by the same rules as the United States.

The armed forces, too, rely on digital technology. In the event of a conflict involving cyber capability, the ability to operate *without* computers will be crucial. Any initial cyberwarfare will inevitably result in most, if not all, computer systems becoming either unavailable, or at least unreliable to the point of uselessness. Recovery plans will be needed as society faces reverting to pre-information technology operation. An acceptance of this vulnerability is missing, not only from Biden’s strategy, but from that of NATO generally.

## Conclusion

A frank assessment has been needed of what role the United States wants to play, and what it can play, and deciding on the choices to be made - enlightened self-interest, collaborative expeditions, or nation building? From the perspective of a U.K. observer and analyst, the outcome is

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<sup>19</sup> ‘US National Security Strategy,’ 21.

<sup>20</sup> ‘US National Security Strategy,’ 34.

unclear. Inevitably there will be a cost, the level of which will depend on the choices made by the U.S. administration. America can generate capable forces, and can create mass, albeit in only one theatre, and with a limited time of operation.

These choices must be clearly explained to the U.S. politicians and public alike—if defence spending is to rise, the public must support it. U.S. internal politics currently makes this a delicate balancing act. There must be clear feedback between what the politicians demand of the armed forces, and what the armed forces require to fulfil those demands. The relevance to NATO, as well as the Indo-Pacific, must be clear not only in the minds of the U.S. administration, but in its relationship with its Alliance allies.

The key to long-term capability for any strategy is the flexibility to respond to different threats, of different levels, at different times. Flexibility of capability minimises the need for any radical change in defence posture once a threat clearly manifests itself. Any policy must allow the government or organisation to choose the battlefield upon which it decides to fight, and not be wholly reactive.

The Biden-Harris strategy begins to move the United States in the right direction. However, the United States has a lot to do to convince allies and enemies alike that it has the internal strength to take on a challenge which may last as long as the first Cold War.

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