



## INTERVIEWS

As part of its continuing effort to provide readers with unique perspectives on some of the most significant national security issues of our time, National Institute has conducted a series of interviews with key subject matter experts on a variety of contemporary defense and national security topics. These expert views add important perspectives on current debates and how the United States can best prepare to address forthcoming challenges successfully. In this issue of National Institute's *Journal of Policy & Strategy*, we present an interview with Hon. Franklin Miller, Principal, the Scowcroft Group, and a Commissioner on the congressionally mandated 2023 Strategic Posture Commission, and Dr. Nadia Schadlow, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute and former Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategy. Mr. Miller discusses key findings in the bipartisan Commission's recently released consensus report on America's strategic posture, including the imperative of proceeding with a timely nuclear weapons modernization program and communicating to the U.S. public the vital national interests at stake in the worsening threat environment. This interview was conducted in November 2023. Dr. Schadlow discusses the dangerous changes in the international strategic environment and the relative decline in American power over the past several decades. She also comments on the Biden Administration's *2022 National Security Strategy* and how it differs from the Trump Administration's *2017 National Security Strategy*.

### **An Interview with Hon. Franklin C. Miller\* Principal, the Scowcroft Group and a Commissioner on the congressionally mandated 2023 Strategic Posture Commission**

***Q. Regarding the findings of the Commission, what are the most important developments in U.S. thinking and/or policy regarding: deterrence; extended deterrence; and the U.S. force posture, including Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD)?***

I believe there are several extremely important findings:

- First, international developments and the increased threat require the United States on an urgent basis to recognize that we now have to deter Russia and China simultaneously.
- Second, we need to realize that the strategic modernization program is necessary but not sufficient and that in the out years (mid-2030s and beyond), unless the threat picture improves dramatically, we will need to procure additional (i.e., more than

---

\* This interview is adapted from, "Conversations on National Security: An Interview with Hon. Franklin C. Miller," *Information Series*, No. 573 (Fairfax, VA: National Institute Press, January 22, 2024), available at [https://nipp.org/information\\_series/conversations-on-national-security-the-honorable-franklin-c-miller-no-573-january-22-2024/](https://nipp.org/information_series/conversations-on-national-security-the-honorable-franklin-c-miller-no-573-january-22-2024/).



twelve) Columbia Ballistic Missile Submarines (SSBNs), additional B-21s, and additional Long-Range Stand-Off Weapons (LRSOs).

- Third, in a change to U.S. policy of many decades, the Commission found that the United States needs to deploy an IAMD to deter and protect the U.S. homeland against limited “coercive” strikes by Russia and/or China. If adopted by the administration this would be the first time the United States would seek to deter and defend the homeland against ballistic or cruise missile attacks by Russia and China.
- Fourth, the Commission report highlights the need to modernize the infrastructure of the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) production complex and of the U.S. defense industrial base.
- All of the above said, there are 81 recommendations in the report and I believe all of them point to steps the United States must take in the near future to enhance deterrence and reduce the possibility of aggression and war.

***Q. What is the most important message articulated in the report?***

- The most important message is that the world has become a much more dangerous place over the past 10-15 years and that as a result the United States must recognize this and take urgent steps to enhance deterrence.
- A second message is that America’s leaders in both the Executive and Legislative branches need to inform the American people of the changes in the world described immediately above. Part of that message must include the fact that just as we are vital to our allies’ security so too are they vital to our security.

***Q. What do you see as the critical “to do’s” for implementing the Commission’s recommendations?***

- If the Commission’s recommendations are to be implemented, they need to be embraced by institutions which can make things happen. We have seen some enthusiasm from the Hill, from the Armed Services Committees on a bi-partisan basis. We have not had any official reaction from the administration. Speaking bureaucratically, writing “policy” (while often painful) is easy compared to implementing that policy. We need to have the administration and the Hill step up.

***Q. What would be the consequences of a failure to implement the Commission’s recommendations?***

- The Commission is clear that if its recommendations are not acted upon the United States will see a continued diminishment of its ability to deter aggression against itself and its allies.

***Q. How do the Commission’s conclusions compare to those of the 2022 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)?***

- In general, the Commission report is more robust than the 2022 NPR. That is certainly the case with respect to the urgency of the threat (and of the need to deter Russia and China simultaneously) and the need to expand the modernization program in the out years. On missile defense, the Report goes well beyond the 2022 NPR/*Missile Defense Review* by recommending a major shift in U.S. policy and calls for IAMD deployments to support that.

***Q. Critics of the report at the Federation of American Scientists claim that implementing the Commission's recommendations would “likely kick the arms race into an even higher gear.” How would you respond to these charges?***

- Those charges stem from what the late Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick dubbed the “Blame America First” school and are risible. Russia has been fielding modernized nuclear forces since around 2008 and continues to do so. China has been fielding new nuclear systems for at least the past five years. The U.S. modernization program has not fielded a new nuclear system since the late 1980s/early 1990s. To the degree there is a nuclear arms race today it exists between Russia and China; the United States has not even entered the race. Only in Russian and Chinese propaganda and within the “Blame America First” school could one characterize the U.S. effort to modernize our forces due to increasing age and the actions by the other two as “starting a nuclear arms race.” It’s truly a “through the looking glass” charge.

***Q. Why did the Commission recommend moving all “050” programs that are in NNSA under Defense appropriations subcommittees (House Appropriations Committee-Defense (HAC-D), Senate Appropriations Committee-Defense (SAC-D))?***

- The Commission believes that the expertise of the Senate and House Energy and Water Committees resides with energy and water programs—not nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons are part of our national defense, a subject under the auspices of the Senate and House Defense Appropriations Committees. The Commission believes therefore that the SAC-D and HAC-D are best equipped to deal with Department of Energy “050” programs.

\*\*\*\*\*

**An Interview with  
Dr. Nadia Schadlow  
Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute and former Deputy  
National Security Advisor for Strategy**

***Q. How do you assess the changes in the international strategic environment that have occurred over the past few decades? Is the United States facing a more or less dangerous strategic situation and are we better prepared now to confront likely security challenges in the future?***

A. Over the past few decades, the international strategic environment has shifted - to the detriment of the United States. U.S. relative power has declined, and some of the key “foundations” of American strength have eroded. These erosions include, for example, the lack of manufacturing in this country, the continuing decline in America’s public schools, and the difficulty of getting our defense establishment to make the reforms needed to absorb the innovations that abound in the private sector... and more.<sup>1</sup>

These trends are juxtaposed with the relative economic and military growth of China since its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), the proliferation of increasingly potent weapon systems around the world, and most recently, the determination of countries like Russia, China, Iran and North Korea to collude against the United States to challenge our interests and create dilemmas for us around the world. Today, relatively small armed groups such as the Houthis, with a handful of missiles, can wreak havoc on international shipping.

I am not sure that there is a great deal of disagreement over this observation of relative U.S. decline. It has been several years since the National Defense Panel pointed out that U.S. military superiority had “eroded to a dangerous degree.”<sup>2</sup> Policy makers from the left and from the right concur.

Disagreements, however, do rest in identifying the drivers of this decline. This is where the policy differences emerge. So, for example, those on the left will blame problems on “systemic racism,” climate change, and too much defense spending—assessments which then lead to a wrong set of policy choices. Most Republicans would argue that the problems are due to a lack of economic opportunity, the need for sensible energy policies, bloated entitlements, and a weaker defense enterprise.

---

<sup>1</sup> For over twenty years alarm has been raised. See this 2003 essay: Paul E. Peterson, “The Decline and Fall of American Education,” *Hoover Digest*, The Hoover Institution, available at <https://www.hoover.org/research/decline-and-fall-american-education>. Also see this 2023 commentary: George F. Will, “Why K-12 education’s alarming decline could be a dominant 2024 issue,” *The Washington Post*, June 28, 2023, available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/06/28/education-decline-campaign-issue/>. More examples abound.

<sup>2</sup> National Defense Strategy Commission, *Providing for the Common Defense: The Assessments and Recommendations of the National Defense Strategy Commission*, United States Institute of Peace, November 13, 2018, p. v, available at <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/providing-for-the-common-defense.pdf>.

Fifteen years ago, in 2009, Charles Krauthammer gave a speech: “Decline is a Choice.”<sup>3</sup> In it he offered that “nothing is inevitable. Nothing is written. For America today, decline is not a condition. Decline is a choice.” But he also noted that “facing the choice of whether to maintain our dominance or to gradually, deliberately, willingly, and indeed relievedly give it up, we are currently on a course towards the latter.” Are we? And if so, what are the consequences?

Currently, we are debating the nature of American dominance and strength and specifically, the degree to which that strength is linked to maintaining a leading role abroad. Does the United States need to shape international developments, or should we just be prepared to react to them?

Even if we could agree on the need for a path of sustainable growth and American strength, and we elect the right people to drive the right policies, actually getting things done remains hard. Any description of what we are facing must be paired with an assessment of whether we are able to craft and implement effective policies. On the latter, I’m worried. For example, we have seen well over 150 efforts on “acquisition reform.” Yet recommendations go unimplemented. Schools have been getting worse and presidents have lamented that for over two decades.

The sclerosis of government is a big problem and one which has gotten worse. We need to shift our focus from “new ideas” to understanding why past efforts at reform have failed.

Having said that, it is difficult to win from a position of doom. Thus, I like to remind myself of Samuel Huntington’s observation from the late 1980s: “Declinism is a theory that has to be believed to be invalidated.”<sup>4</sup> We need to believe we are on the cusp of it, and change course.

***Q. You have argued that the United States often fails to effectively implement its strategy and achieve its objectives “because we’ve failed to take into account the crucial element of time.” You have also noted that “Without incorporating time into our strategic calculations, we will always be too late.” Can you explain what you mean and what you believe the United States should do to avoid such an outcome in the future? <sup>5</sup>***

A. The essay in which I made that point, *The Forgotten Element of Strategy*, argued that we can no longer live off of the effectiveness of past generations: on the accomplishments of leaders and individuals who set forth ideas and were able to bring them to fruition, whether in building America’s national highway system, developing a nuclear arsenal, teaching children how to read, or putting Americans into space. In the past, leaders were encouraged to take risks; they were not suffocated by an overwhelming bureaucratic and regulatory system and culture.

---

<sup>3</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3jrrFycd3Y>.

<sup>4</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, “The U.S.—Decline or Renewal?” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 67, No. 2 (Winter 1988), p. 96.

<sup>5</sup> Note that portions of this answer are taken from that essay, available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/06/us-national-security-strategy-pentagon-time/674472/>.

One anecdote I like is about Col. Leslie Groves. Groves would later become a general officer and lead the Manhattan project. (He has a brief appearance in the Oppenheimer film). When Groves was in charge of building the Pentagon, he was known as the “biggest S.O.B. around,” someone who “had the guts to make difficult decisions” and demanded decisions in 24 hours or less—or an explanation. Can you imagine a Human Resources department today dealing with that type of leader? Are there many leaders today who have the authority to drive real change and have the backing of their superiors? If one goes back to most examples of America’s greatest moments, it is that kind of atmosphere that prevailed. Today, that’s much harder to find, especially in government.

The United States, for example, maintains that a key part of the effort to help Taiwan deter China is to provide Taiwan with the military equipment it needs. We do this through Foreign Military Sales (FMS). Yet in this critical theater of the world, Taiwan still waits years for the weapons systems it has been promised, which in turns degrades their deterrent effects. There is a three-year backlog in the delivery of \$14.2 billion worth of military equipment, including everything from F-16 fighters to the components needed for Patriot missile systems.<sup>6</sup> Sales of the F-16s were approved in 2019 but Taipei does not expect delivery until 2026.<sup>7</sup> DoD has blamed the backlog on Covid,<sup>8</sup> but delays like these have been problematic for years, all around the world.

The need to act faster has only become more important given the intense competition between the United States and China, in which our freedom is at stake. Technological advances will only increase the disconnect between what we promise and what we actually accomplish. Technology now disrupts existing political, economic, and regulatory architectures faster than they can be rebuilt. The ability to shift supply chains to improve U.S. resilience and reduce our vulnerabilities depends upon our ability to build manufacturing facilities faster, and more of them.

The data, while imperfect, exists today to allow the input of time as a consideration in a way that was not possible in the past. How long has it taken to develop a particular weapon system? How long has it taken to build a new recycling facility? How many regulations come into play for the permitting of a new mine? Requiring the input of such data forces an injection of realism onto the policy process. If we are naïve or willfully ignorant about time as an input, the promises of policy makers are in effect, hollow. On the international stage, this means disappointment, and on the domestic stage, it leads to disappointment and cynicism in our democracy.

---

<sup>6</sup> Bryant Harris, “Taiwan is buying US weapons, but Washington isn’t delivering them,” *Defense News*, August 30, 2022, available at <https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2022/08/25/chinas-neighbors-are-buying-us-weapons-washington-isnt-delivering/>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Bryant Harris, “Document reveals \$14 billion backlog of US defense transfers to Taiwan,” *Defense News*, April 14, 2022, available at <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2022/04/14/pandemic-delays-spark-14-billion-backlog-of-us-defense-transfers-to-taiwan/>.



***Q. U.S. officials have referred to China as the “pacing challenge” to the United States today. How big of a threat to U.S. security is China? And is Russia today as much of a threat to the West as the Soviet Union was then?***

A. China is the most pressing challenge for the United States—not the only one but perhaps the most complex given our economic interdependence. As the 2017 *National Security Strategy* (NSS) noted, China seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific and expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model. Biden was right to call China the most “consequential” threat to the United States. As is now well-appreciated, China is competing militarily, economically, and technologically. Its technological ambitions are inextricably linked to the development of its military. Its diplomatic overtures around the world are a problem too, because these efforts are fundamentally rooted in an ideology that aims to directly counter the American system. We are in a systemic rivalry with China—the President of the European Union (EU) was right to call it that.<sup>9</sup> Russia doesn’t offer much of a model for anyone; nor does Iran or North Korea. But China, even as it is now struggling with lower rates of growth and facing economic difficulties, fundamentally offers other countries an alternative form of governance—an orderly, techno-authoritarian system. This ideological component of the competition worries me because it comes at a time when so many American leaders continue to sow doubts about the United States and to divide our society into ever more granular (and often absurd) racial, ethnic, and religious differences—as opposed to what binds us together as Americans, as citizens of the country that has flourished on the basis of liberty and that, while imperfect, has been among the greatest forces for good in the world.

***Q. What are some elements that you might change in the 2017 National Security Strategy? How did the Biden Administration’s 2022 National Security Strategy differ? It acknowledges the threats to U.S. interests posed by both China and Russia. But its prescriptions and recommendations for dealing with these dual challenges appear to diverge significantly from the 2017 document that you helped to prepare. How do you assess the Biden Administration’s national security approach? Is it sufficient to ensure that the United States remains the dominant power in the world?***

A. Virtually all of the policy issues and lines of effort identified in the 2017 *National Security Strategy* still hold. The four pillars of that strategy—protect the homeland, grow the American economy, preserve peace through strength, and advance American influence—remain sound and provide a basis for specific operational lines of effort. Of course, the issue is the specific policies undertaken within each broad strategic pillar. In this case, too, much of the Trump plan was correct and remains so. Protecting the homeland requires not only increased funding for missile defenses but also a crackdown on our border—sovereignty

---

<sup>9</sup> Today, I’d add the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP’s) displacement objectives may indeed be broader than the Indo-Pacific.

matters. On growing the American economy, reducing taxes and regulatory burdens remain critical, as does the position of the United States (then) as a net energy exporter—which makes it economically and geostrategically strong. The Trump strategy highlighted the importance of U.S. energy dominance and used that phrase. The 2017 NSS also highlighted the importance of hard power and advocated for a larger military and greater defense spending. On advancing American influence, the acknowledgement was the United States can catalyze developments but can't do everything itself. But it did acknowledge unabashedly that the United States is the greatest nation out there. On many of these issues, the Biden policy has drifted from these policy prescriptions. While the Biden NSS does highlight China as a key threat, elevating climate issues as an existential threat creates inherent tensions and reduces the focus on China. The Biden strategy deemphasizes the importance of hard power and elevates multilateral processes and institutions. And most recently, the Biden Administration has taken steps to slow or halt the ability of the United States to export liquefied natural gas (LNG) from new projects. This reduces a key source of economic strength for the United States and ignores the fundamental disconnects in a Biden climate strategy that is focused on wishful thinking as opposed to the practical reality of how to achieve a sensible energy transition.

One of the key geopolitical shifts since the 2017 strategy, however, is the growing collusion among Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea. It is real and it is worrying and will shape geopolitical events that will be problematic for the United States in the near and longer term. This development will need to be addressed in a future strategy.