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Issue No. 590

June 17, 2024

How the Lack of a “Two-War Strategy” Erodes Extended Deterrence and Assurance*

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Introduction

For years following the Cold War, the United States was considered the sole superpower and the U.S. military was the preeminent fighting force in the world. In the wake of the demise of the Soviet Union, U.S. military strategy transitioned from a focus on deterring global conflict to one centered on regional contingencies. Accordingly, U.S. military planners designed a strategy that called on the United States to prepare to fight two major regional contingencies (MRCs) simultaneously.

This two-MRC construct was embedded in various unclassified U.S. military strategy documents and required U.S. forces to be sized and capable of successfully engaging adversaries in both Europe and Asia. It required a military that was sufficiently forward deployed and equipped with the most modern and sophisticated military technology that would ensure a U.S. advantage on the battlefield. This two-war standard became the benchmark against which the adequacy of U.S. forces was judged.¹

Over time, the two-war standard was modified and scaled back to focus on irregular warfare and defeating one regional adversary while imposing severe costs on another. With the re-emergence of sharp great power conflicting interests as outlined in the 2017 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* and the 2018 *National Defense Strategy*, the United States shifted its conceptual focus from irregular warfare and lesser regional contingencies to



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threats posed by Russia and China. Subsequently, the 2021 *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* noted, “Both Beijing and Moscow have invested heavily in efforts meant to check U.S. strengths and prevent us from defending our interests and allies around the world.”² Yet U.S. military forces remained ill-prepared to prosecute a two-war scenario, especially one involving Sino-Russian collaboration.

The critical question is whether the U.S. armed forces today have adopted or are postured to adopt a revised force-planning construct that prepares for simultaneous regional conflicts against nuclear peer adversaries in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. Failing to do so carries significant implications for both U.S. adversaries and U.S. allies: It likely encourages adversaries to challenge the United States militarily while simultaneously causing allies to question the credibility of U.S. security assurances.

A Dangerous Decline?

Any potential conflict with China is likely to rely heavily on U.S. air- and sea-based assets. In the 1980s, the Reagan Administration sought a 600-ship Navy. Today, the U.S. Navy has shrunk in size to fewer than 300 ships. While individual platforms possess greater capability today, the U.S. capacity to deploy forward as part of a deterrence strategy is much less than it was four decades ago. Likewise, the Air Force is cutting platforms, raising questions regarding the U.S. ability to deter Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific. As one Air Force official reportedly stated, “By any measure, we have departed the era of conventional overmatch” with respect to China. Beijing has “advanced so far and so fast in its air and space power that the Air Force’s ability to deter through conventional forces is at risk.”³ This decline in U.S. military capabilities has resulted in what has been described as a “brittle force.”⁴

In addition to reducing U.S. conventional military power, Washington has repeatedly delayed essential nuclear modernization programs. In fact, the current U.S. nuclear modernization program is a legacy of the Obama Administration and was proposed at a time when the era of great power rivalry was considered a remnant of the past. Indeed, the 2010 *Nuclear Posture Review* declared that Russia was no longer an adversary of the United States and the risk of a direct U.S.-Russia military confrontation had diminished substantially, noting, “The threat of global nuclear war has become remote...”⁵ Indeed, the 2010 NPR explicitly placed highest priority *not* on deterrence, but on nuclear non-proliferation and limitations on nuclear forces. In light of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the multitude of nuclear threats it has levied against the United States and the West in the past several years, such conclusions appear naïve at best, and the nuclear modernization program of record from the earlier optimistic era is now problematic.

A False Choice

The current conflict in Ukraine has exposed severe limitations in U.S. military readiness and capabilities, as the U.S. defense industrial base struggles with the demands of supporting



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Ukraine with sufficient equipment and materiel without negatively affecting U.S. warfighting readiness. Moreover, there are those who are calling for the United States to shift scarce defense resources away from supporting Ukraine's fight against Russia and toward confronting China in the Indo-Pacific.⁶ Such calls reflect concern that the United States is ill-prepared to fight a two-front war with great powers. The situation is made even more precarious by the emergence of a hostile Sino-Russian entente that is threatening key U.S. allies in two different theaters. In addition, the United States now finds itself increasingly embroiled in a Middle East conflict that is likely to siphon additional military resources away from deterring great power rivals.

The current situation is a legacy of conscious decisions made by multiple U.S. administrations in the aftermath of the Cold War to reduce U.S. military capabilities in anticipation of a more benign strategic security environment. This was done without any apparent concern for the future assurance of allies in the event that the threat context dramatically worsened – which, unfortunately, has been the case. The expectation was that China would rise peacefully and that Russia would either be irrelevant to U.S. national security concerns or cooperative, i.e., a partner with the West rather than an adversary. As is now evident, those predictions did not materialize as expected. The international security environment today is arguably more dynamic, more uncertain, and more dangerous than ever before.

The view that the United States can only afford to prioritize defeating a single major adversary in one theater of operations carries significant ramifications for extended deterrence and assurance of allies. Indeed, it is increasingly unlikely that the United States can engage militarily in one regional contingency without eroding deterrence in another region. U.S. allies and strategic partners who rely on the United States as the ultimate guarantor of their own security surely recognize the increased risk that accompanies a U.S. military that is limited in its ability to respond to aggression in multiple theaters simultaneously.

Allied Queasiness Over U.S. Security Guarantees

In light of reduced U.S. military capabilities, concerns about an overextended U.S. presence abroad, and an apparent U.S. reluctance to commit military resources to ongoing conflicts in other theaters, even a focus on deterring China from attacking Taiwan has not been sufficient to quell Taiwanese anxiety over American willingness to come to Taiwan's defense should China seek to move militarily against the island. As one Taiwanese academic noted, "there is substantial skepticism" over the U.S. commitment to defend Taiwan in the event of overt Chinese aggression.⁷ Indeed, public opinion polls have highlighted a lack of faith among allied publics in U.S. extended deterrence commitments and assurances. When it comes to U.S. security guarantees, a recent poll found that only 34 percent of Taiwanese believe the United States is a trustworthy country.⁸ South Korean confidence in U.S. extended deterrence assurances is similarly low.⁹

Elsewhere in Asia, concerns over the credibility of U.S. security guarantees are growing, with both Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) openly questioning whether they should



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acquire their own nuclear deterrent. In the ROK, despite the U.S. reiteration of its “ironclad” commitment to South Korea’s defense in the 2023 Washington Declaration,¹⁰ polling data indicates that more than 70 percent of South Koreans support the deployment of nuclear weapons on their territory—either the re-introduction of American nuclear weapons or the acquisition of their own.¹¹ In Japan, public debate over acquiring nuclear weapons as a deterrent has reached unprecedented levels—a remarkable development for the only country to have suffered through two atomic bombings. This is a reflection of these allies’ growing threat perceptions and the simultaneous declining confidence in the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence.

In Europe as well, some of America’s traditional key allies are growing more concerned about the credibility of U.S. security guarantees. One survey of more than 15,000 respondents in 11 European countries found that a majority believe China is on the ascendancy and will overtake the United States in relative power over the next ten years. It concluded that Europe cannot depend on the United States to defend European security. The survey also exposed a belief that Europeans should invest more heavily in their own security and adopt a position of neutrality in any conflict involving the United States, China, or Russia.¹² As an analysis of the survey concluded, “The growing mistrust about Washington’s reliability and power is changing the nature of the transatlantic alliance.”¹³ Moreover, one study conducted by the Finnish Institute of International Affairs concluded that the lack of a U.S. two-war strategy could lead to opportunistic aggression, noting: “If two major wars occur either simultaneously or sequentially, US military capability will be put under great stress. In the event of a second war, the US may find itself in a situation of conventional military inferiority, which it might have to compensate for with greater reliance on nuclear weapons.”¹⁴

One of the starkest expressions of concern over U.S. reliability was conveyed in a recent warning to European powers by two long-time scholars of transatlantic relations: “Recent events have shown that the United States will not vigorously and reliably defend you. The United States cannot credibly threaten escalation to defend our allies.” Their bottom-line summation: “Dear Allies: Do not look to the United States for your defense.”¹⁵

These changes in perceptions, in part, reflect concerns over official U.S. wariness to engage directly or indirectly in actions that could lead to escalatory outcomes. That wariness corresponds to the U.S. military retrenchment that began years ago with the movement away from a two-war strategy and the necessary procurement of military capabilities that could effectively execute that strategy.¹⁶

As U.S. military capabilities have declined, allies and strategic partners of the United States have become increasingly skeptical of U.S. security guarantees. Consequently, the Biden Administration has sought to publicly reassure partners in Europe and Asia of the “ironclad” nature of America’s commitment to their security.¹⁷ The need for such reassurances suggests recognition of a growing uneasiness among allies over the credibility of such guarantees.



Addressing the Challenge

The force expansion necessary to implement a two-war strategy will require additional fiscal resources beyond those currently budgeted. The resources to implement such a course of action will no doubt be sizable. Some in Congress have shown a willingness to go beyond the levels of defense spending requested by the Biden Administration. For example, the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Senate Appropriations Committee have approved levels of defense funding well in excess of the administration's budget requests.¹⁸ And the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024, signed into law by President Biden on December 22, 2023, also increased the level of defense funding to more than \$883 billion, well beyond that originally requested by the administration.¹⁹

Despite some positive signs, the results of recent budget negotiations are likely to constrain the procurement of the additional forces needed to implement adequately a two-war strategy. For example, anticipated reductions in the number of weapons platforms across all the Services, including F-35 fighters, nuclear submarines, and other military equipment as a result of defense budget caps signed into law by President Biden last year as part of the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 will seriously impact any move toward restoring a two-war defense capability.²⁰ Indeed, the president's proposed defense budget for fiscal year 2025 reflects only a one percent increase over the previous year—which translates to a real *reduction* in actual defense purchasing power given the rate of inflation.²¹ As Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin stated, the cuts will result in “targeted reductions to programs that will not deliver capability to the force until the 2030s...”²² This actual reduction in U.S. defense spending purchasing power is likely to preclude implementation of the current strategy, much less a two-war strategy.²³

The problems created by caps on U.S. defense spending and the corresponding lack of consideration of a two-war strategy are being exacerbated by increasingly aggressive adversary threats and closer collaboration between China and Russia. Indeed, the risks of opportunistic aggression by Moscow or Beijing, acting unilaterally or in concert, will likely grow without a concerted U.S. effort to adopt a more robust deterrence posture. This will also place increasing pressures on extended deterrence and assurance.²⁴

Nevertheless, there is considerable resistance in Washington to reinstating a two-war standard. Such a posture would require greater resources and investments by the Services in additional military capabilities, a prospect which some find unappealing. As one recent assessment has noted, “The [Marine] Corps has consistently maintained that it is a one-war force and has no intention of growing to the size needed to fight two wars, and both its annual budget requests and its top-level planning documents reflect this position.”²⁵

Today, the United States remains constrained by the choices it made decades ago. U.S. military prowess remains limited by a one-war standard (which, some argue, is really a one-half-war standard). With few exceptions, allies have not stepped up to take up the slack for their own defense.



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Some have suggested that it is up to America's allies to shoulder a greater burden of defense preparedness and that this should be a prerequisite for any increase in U.S. support to allies or strategic partners such as Ukraine that are engaged in their own efforts to counter military aggression.²⁶ While the issue of allied "burdensharing" has long been controversial, and greater allied defense investments should be encouraged, there is no substitute for American leadership. The U.S. inability to demonstrate both a willingness and capability to deter, and if necessary defeat, aggression in multiple theaters simultaneously – particularly in the face of a growing Sino-Russian entente – risks encouraging the very aggression U.S. defenses are intended to deter.

Eventually, U.S. allies will be compelled to make tough choices: either work with the United States to seriously rearm; rearm themselves independently; or conciliate to the Sino-Russian entente. Without a demonstrable American commitment to reenact a two-war strategy, the last option may be increasingly inevitable for some allies.

A policy of accommodation or appeasement is unlikely to forestall any aggressive acts by a Sino-Russian entente. Some European states have demonstrated the will to increase their own defense capabilities in the face of growing Russian assertiveness and aggression. Yet there is no substitute for U.S. leadership and power; it falls on the United States, as the leader of NATO and the ultimate guarantor of European security, to shoulder much of the burden. Doing so undoubtedly entails moving expeditiously toward re-adoption of a two-war strategy and to procure the conventional and nuclear capabilities needed to implement that strategy. Only in this way will allied confidence in the credibility of U.S. security guarantees increase and the efficacy of the U.S. extended deterrent be preserved.

The need to reconsider a more robust force sizing construct to strengthen deterrence in an era of two great power rivals has received strong bipartisan support. Recently, the congressionally mandated Strategic Posture Commission concluded that a one-war strategy is inadequate and inappropriate to the contemporary military challenges facing the United States. It declared that "U.S. and allied conventional military advantages in Asia are decreasing at the same time the potential for two simultaneous theater conflicts is increasing."²⁷

This structural challenge facing extended deterrence and assurance cannot be solved with robust rhetoric from Washington and NATO. The 2022 *Nuclear Posture Review* (NPR) shows some recognition of the problem but eliminates "hedging" as a requirement despite the need for greater flexibility and adaptability in U.S. force preparedness. However, a renewed two-MRC standard would help provide a needed hedge against resurgent Russian revanchism, the rise of Chinese aggression, and a combination of both. Without such a hedging strategy, the risks of aggression, including opportunistic or coordinated aggression, will increase.²⁸

Conclusion

Over the past decade, there have been several calls for a return to a two-war strategy in light of contemporary security developments. The prospect of a revanchist China and Russia working together or engaging in opportunistic aggression to challenge U.S. national security



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interests worldwide suggests that the time has come to restore the two-MRC force-sizing construct as a means of bolstering deterrence.

As the congressionally mandated Commission on the National Defense Strategy of the United States concluded, “The United States now faces five credible challengers, including two major-state competitors, and three distinctly different geographic and operational environments. A two-war force sizing construct makes more strategic sense today than at any previous point in the post-Cold War era.”²⁹

Restoring a two-MRC standard will require greater regional power projection capabilities, including an expanded U.S. force presence abroad, along with a greater number of more flexible, technologically sophisticated, and survivable offensive and defensive military assets both in theater and capable of rapid deployment to theater as needed.

The impact of a less than two-war strategy on extended deterrence and assurance is manifestly detrimental to the credibility of U.S. security guarantees to allies and their corresponding assurance. The credibility of America’s security guarantees corresponds to the capability and willingness of the United States to act on its commitments, and to be seen as willing to do so. A failure of U.S. resolve in one region cannot help but raise doubts about U.S. steadfastness and resolve among allies and strategic partners elsewhere. The end result is likely to be a weakening of trust in the United States and a greater movement by friends and allies toward accommodation and appeasement of U.S. adversaries. In the emerging threat environment, where the United States faces not one but two nuclear peer adversaries, the U.S. ability to project power and make good on its extended deterrence and assurance commitments is more critical than ever.³⁰

* This *Information Series* is adapted from a forthcoming National Institute *Occasional Paper*.

¹ Department of Defense, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review*, May 1997, p. 12, available at <https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/quadrennial/QDR1997.pdf?ver=qba2TZwCFGcITKIgPIpNvg%3d%3d>.

² The White House, *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, March 2021, p. 8, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>.

³ Mackenzie Eaglen, “The Bias for Capability Over Capacity Has Created a Brittle Force,” *War on the Rocks*, November 17, 2022, available at <https://warontherocks.com/2022/11/the-bias-for-capability-over-capacity-has-created-a-brittle-force/>.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Department of Defense, *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, April 2020, pp. iv, 3-4, available at https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/NPR/2010_Nuclear_Posture_Review_Report.pdf.

⁶ See, for example, Elbridge A. Colby, *The Strategy of Denial: American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), pp. x, xvi.

⁷ Damien Cave and Amy Chang Chien, “Taiwan’s Doubts About America Are Growing. That Could Be Dangerous,” *The New York Times*, January 22, 2024, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/20/world/asia/taiwan-united-states-views.html>.



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⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Peter K. Lee and Kang Chungku, “Comparing Allied Public Confidence in U.S. Extended Nuclear Deterrence,” *Issue Brief*, The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, March 27, 2024, available at

<https://www.asaninst.org/contents/comparing-allied-public-confidence-in-u-s-extended-nuclear-deterrence/#:~:text=A%20December%202023%20survey%20by,6%20percentage%20points%20to%2039.3%25.&text=I n%20short%2C%20South%20Korean%20confidence,extended%20deterrence%20commitment%20remains%20low.>

¹⁰ The White House, “Washington Declaration,” April 26, 2023, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/04/26/washington-declaration-2/>.

¹¹ Toby Dalton, Karl Friedhoff, and Lami Kim, “Thinking Nuclear: South Korean Attitudes on Nuclear Weapons,” Chicago Council on Global Affairs, Lester Crown Center on U.S. Foreign Policy, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 2022, available at <https://globalaffairs.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Korea%20Nuclear%20Report%20PDF.pdf>. See also, “South Koreans want their own nukes. That could roil one of the world’s most dangerous regions,” *The Associated Press*, November 30, 2023, available at <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/15070825>.

¹² Jana Puglierin and Pawel Zerka, *Keeping America Close, Russia Down, and China Far Away: How Europeans Navigate A Competitive World*, European Council on Foreign Relations, Policy Brief, June 2023, available at <https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Keeping-America-close-Russia-down-and-China-far-away-How-Europeans-navigate-a-competitive-world-published.pdf>.

¹³ Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard, “The crisis of American power: How Europeans see Biden’s America,” *Policy Brief*, European Council on Foreign Relations, January 19, 2021, available at <https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-crisis-of-american-power-how-europeans-see-bidens-america/>.

¹⁴ Jyri Lavikainen, “China as the Second Nuclear Peer of the United States,” *FIIA Briefing Paper No. 383*, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, February 2024, p. 2, available at https://www.fiia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/bp383_china-as-the-second-nuclear-peer-of-the-united-states.pdf.

¹⁵ Michael Hochberg and Leonard Hochberg, “Our Restraint Destroys Your Deterrence,” *RealClear Defense*, February 10, 2024, available at https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2024/02/10/our_restraint_destroys_your_deterrence_1010986.html.

¹⁶ While some attribute growing allied concerns over American security guarantees to domestic U.S. politics – in particular concerns over how U.S. policy might change in a second Trump Administration – the inability of the United States adequately to defend its global interests in an increasingly contested international security environment characterized by two peer nuclear adversaries has arguably contributed to the belief that the United States may not be a reliable security partner. It has also fueled the controversy over whether and how the United States must choose between deterring adversaries in multiple potential theaters of conflict.

¹⁷ Over a one-day period, President Biden, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Ely Ratner all publicly reasserted that U.S. security guarantees to Japan, the Philippines, Israel, and South Korea were “ironclad.” As a DoD press release noted, the United States “affirmed its ironclad commitment to extended deterrence....” See Aamer Madhani and Zeke Miller, “Biden says US support for Philippines, Japan defense ‘ironclad’ amid growing China provocations,” *Associated Press*, April 11, 2024, available at <https://apnews.com/article/japan-philippines-trilateral-kishida-marcos-biden-03e6288c5b5155af1bb693a464de875d>; Tweet by Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, April 11, 2024, available at <https://twitter.com/SecDef/status/1778570526396424598>; and Department of Defense, “Joint Press Statement for the 24th Korea-U.S. Integrated Defense Dialogue,” April 11, 2024, available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3739122/joint-press-statement-for-the-24th-korea-us-integrated-defense-dialogue/>.

¹⁸ The Senate Armed Services Committee approved a level of defense funding roughly \$45 billion more than what the administration requested. See Senate Armed Services Committee Press Release, “Reed and Inhofe File Fiscal Year



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2023 National Defense Authorization Act,” July 18, 2022, available at <https://www.armedservices.senate.gov/press-releases/reed-and-inhofe-file-fiscal-year2023-national-defense-authorization-act>. The Senate Appropriations Committee also added significantly to the administration’s defense request. See “Senate appropriators seek \$850 billion for defense, largest total of 4 key committees,” *Breaking Defense*, July 28, 2022, available at <https://www.google.com/amp/s/breakingdefense.com/2022/07/senate-appropriators-seek-850-billion-for-defense-largest-total-of-4-keycommittees/amp/>.

¹⁹ Senate Armed Services Committee, “Summary of the Fiscal Year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act,” available at https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/fy24_ndaa_conference_executive_summary1.pdf.

²⁰ Lara Seligman, Connor O’Brien, Lee Hudson, and Paul McLeary, “Pentagon slashes weapons programs to stay under debt deal,” *Politico*, February 21, 2024, available at <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/02/21/pentagon-slashes-weapons-programs-debt-deal-00142465#:~:text=The%20Biden%20administration%20struck%20a,stay%20under%20the%20spending%20caps..>

²¹ See Tony Capaccio, “Biden to Seek 1% Increase in 2025 Defense Budget Under Cap,” *Bloomberg*, March 6, 2024, available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-03-06/biden-to-request-1-increase-in-2025-defense-budget-under-cap?embedded-checkout=true>. Also see Brad Dress and Ellen Mitchell, “Biden seeks modest bump for record \$895B defense budget,” *The Hill*, March 11, 2024, available at <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/4524735-biden-record-895b-defense-budget/>. *The Wall Street Journal*’s editorial board referred to this as “a military budget fit for 1991” and stated that “the U.S. military is in a state of managed decline.” See The Editorial Board, “Biden Shrinks the U.S. Military,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 12, 2024, available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/biden-defense-budget-pentagon-u-s-military-china-russia-israel-ukraine-ba7fd46b>.

²² Department of Defense, “Department of Defense Releases the President’s Fiscal Year 2025 Defense Budget: Statement by Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III on the President’s Fiscal Year 2025 Defense Budget,” March 11, 2024, available at <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3703410/department-of-defense-releases-the-presidents-fiscal-year-2025-defense-budget/>.

²³ Some in Congress have reportedly argued that the defense budget is more than \$400 billion below what is required to meet current commitments. For example, Sen. Roger Wicker (R-MS) called for a defense budget of \$1.3 trillion, or five percent of U.S. Gross Domestic Product. See Senator Roger Wicker, *21st Century Peace Through Strength: A Generational Investment in the U.S. Military*, May 2024, p. 7, available at

<https://www.wicker.senate.gov/services/files/BC957888-0A93-432F-A49E-6202768A9CE0>. Also see Bryant Harris, “A nearly \$1 trillion defense budget faces headwinds at home and abroad,” *DefenseNews*, March 7, 2024, available at [https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2024/03/07/a-nearly-1-trillion-defense-budget-faces-headwinds-at-home-and-abroad/?utm_campaign=dfn-ebb&utm_medium=email&utm_source=sailthru&SToverlay=2002c2d9-c344-4bbb-8610-](https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2024/03/07/a-nearly-1-trillion-defense-budget-faces-headwinds-at-home-and-abroad/?utm_campaign=dfn-ebb&utm_medium=email&utm_source=sailthru&SToverlay=2002c2d9-c344-4bbb-8610-e5794efcfa7d#:~:text=As%20the%20Pentagon%20seeks%20to,and%20where%20it's%20falling%20short.;)

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²⁴ As one analyst noted, “the premise that the United States will only need to fight one adversary in one part of the world seems like a bad bet. The United States may not yet be confronting a true ‘axis of evil,’ but American adversaries are becoming more tightly aligned, leaving the United States with a one-war force for an increasingly multi-war world.” See Raphael S. Cohen, “Ukraine and the New Two War Construct,” *War on the Rocks*, January 5, 2023, available at <https://warontherocks.com/2023/01/ukraine-and-the-new-two-war-construct/>. Also see Greg Weaver, “Part I: US Deterrence Requirements In The Coming Two-Nuclear-Peer Threat Environment,” in Greg



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²⁵ Dakota L. Wood, ed., *2024 Index of U.S. Military Strength*, The Heritage Foundation, January 2024, p. 518, available at https://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/2024_IndexOfUSMilitaryStrength.pdf.

²⁶ See, for example, Rep. Mike Waltz, “Europe must do more for Ukraine; U.S. has to protect its own border,” *The Highland County Press*, September 26, 2023, available at <https://highlandcountypress.com/europe-must-do-more-ukraine-us-has-protect-its-own-border#gsc.tab=0>.

²⁷ Madelyn R. Creedon, Jon L. Kyl, et al., *America’s Strategic Posture: The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States*, October 2023, p. 90, available at <https://ida.org/-/media/feature/publications/a/am/americas-strategic-posture/strategic-posture-commission-report.ashx>.

²⁸ Gouré, op. cit., p. 4. Also see Mark Gunzinger and Lukas Autenried, *Building A Force That Wins: Recommendations for the 2022 National Defense Strategy*, The Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, Air Force Association, June 2021, pp. 5, 22, 45, available at <https://mitchellaerospacepower.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Building-a-Force-that-Wins-FINAL.pdf>.

²⁹ *Providing for the Common Defense: The Assessment and Recommendations of the National Defense Strategy Commission*, November 2018, pp. 35, 66, November 2018, available at <https://www.usip.org/publications/2018/11/providing-common-defense>.

³⁰ As two former senior U.S. officials have commented, “Credibility among allies and potential enemies alike depends on our perceived will to maintain our longstanding commitments to support and defend like-minded democratic states.” A failure to do so, such as in Ukraine, “will cause all of our other allies and friends (including Taiwan) to question whether we would at some point abandon them too.” They argue, “Because American security commitments are not severable, such a loss of confidence would cause longtime allies to drift away, to be more accommodating of our potential enemies to our detriment, all leading, therefore, to a weakening of our own ability to shape world events.” Indeed, they conclude that anything less than a two-theater defense planning construct “is no longer sufficient in the two nuclear peer world in which we now find ourselves,” and that “Any suggestion that the U.S. military is too weak to engage in two theaters simultaneously – and therefore to deter in two theaters simultaneously – fundamentally misunderstands the nature of potential wars in NATO and in the Pacific.” See Eric S. Edelman and Franklin C. Miller, “We Must Return to and Maintain the Two Theater Defense Planning Construct,” *RealClear Defense*, August 1, 2023, available at https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2023/08/17/we_must_return_to_and_maintain_the_two_theater_defense_planning_construct_973522.html.

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INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 590 | June 17, 2024

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