

Through the Joint, Interagency, and Multinational Lens: Challenges Posed by the National Security Strategy

Volume 4

David A. Anderson
Heather R. Karambelas
General Editors



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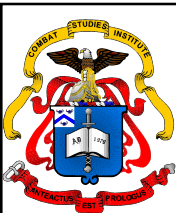
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Foreword

Periodically and especially after each election cycle, the Department of Defense (DoD) takes stock of the dynamic strategic and operational environment, the public's expressed priorities, and the different approaches favored by each new administration as it transitions into power. Decisions made and actions taken based on the understanding of these interacting factors will present differing risks, unique challenges, and new opportunities.

Through the Joint, Interagency, and Multinational Lens: Challenges Posed by the National Security Strategy marks the fourth volume of the series produced by the US Army Command and General Staff College, Department of Joint, Interagency, and Multinational Operations. In this volume, the authors draw on years of diverse experiences and acquired knowledge to offer their perspectives on a variety of factors that influence national security. The collected articles examine how recent versions of the National Security Strategy understand those influences and attempt to address them.

It is said that chance favors the prepared mind. In practical terms, a prepared mind is less likely to be caught completely off guard, more likely to anticipate developing trends and take action to benefit from opportunities. The expectation here is that these articles will help readers consider and weigh a variety of perspectives that they otherwise might not have and thus be better prepared to engage an uncertain security environment.

As in the previous volumes, the department faculty owes a great deal of thanks to Heather R. Karambelas and David A. Anderson for their work compiling and editing this edition. Thanks to their dedication to this project, many faculty members find their voice and a venue to express it.



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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	iii
Foreword.....	v
Introduction.....	xi
Chapter 1	
Strengthening Allies and Partners through Strategic Empathy and a Better Security Cooperation Definition	
David W. Bell.....	1
Chapter 2	
The Idyllic Imagination in US National Security Strategies	
Kurt P. VanderSteen	13
Chapter 3	
National Interests and their Expression in National Security Strategies	
Robert D. Spessert.....	25
Chapter 4	
The Spectrum of Conflict: War, Peace, Deterrence, and the Use of Power	
Phillip G. Pattee	53
Chapter 5	
North Korean Nuclear Diplomacy: A Roller Coaster Past and Uncertain Future	
Gary R. Hanson.....	63
Chapter 6	
Regional Impact of the Afghanistan Withdrawal on Indo-Pacific Allies and Partners	
David C. McCaughrin and Joshua N. Stephenson.....	75
Chapter 7	
Climate Change, the Fountainhead of Great Power Cooperation	
Paul Mostafa	85
Chapter 8	
Trade Agreements Are a Component of Integrated Deterrence	
Frank J. Klimas	95
Contributors	107

Table of Figures

Figure 1.1. China-US Aggregate Power Comparison.....	5
Figure 1.2. China-USA Aggregate Power Data.....	6
Figure 3.1. Comparison of the National Security Strategy, 1988 and 2010.....	28
Figure 3.2. Summary of the various categories for prioritizing national interests.....	32
Figure 3.3. Comparison of generic enduring national interests with those specified in INSSG 2021, NSS 2017, and NSS 2015.....	37
Figure 3.4. An overview of the NSS 2017 End-state.....	39
Figure 3.5. An overview of some of the INSSG 2021 policy ways.....	40
Figure 3.6. Comparison of Pillar 1.....	42
Figure 3.7. Comparison of Pillar 2.....	43
Figure 3.8. Comparison of Pillar 3.....	44
Figure 3.9. Comparison of Pillar 4.....	45
Figure 4.1. The spectrum of conflict.....	56
Figure 4.2. The competition continuum.....	59
Figure 7.1. US Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of State (DoS) budgets from 1962 to 2019 in current dollars.....	86
Figure 8.1. Countries that are members of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).....	100

Introduction

We must protect the very things that make America so special—most certainly including our civil liberties. But we cannot do so without strong national security and a thoughtful and informed discourse.

—Mike Pompeo, US Secretary of State

Like the rest of the world, the United States has faced many challenges in the years since the COVID-19 pandemic. The National Security Strategy provides executive direction and a framework for how US agencies and departments will address threats, challenges and opportunities facing the nation. This volume spans four years of writing and revisions by Department of Joint, Interagency, and Multinational Operations (DJIMO) faculty members, who used the National Security Strategy as a starting point to identify topics for thoughtful and informed discourse.

Volume 4 begins with a cautionary tale about the international relations impact when US leaders fail to demonstrate strategic empathy. Recent National Security Strategies all recognize that allies and strong diplomatic ties are essential for a strong United States. In applying the balance of threat theory, David Bell promotes a deeper understanding of how nations choose their allies—knowledge that US military planners can use to develop strategic empathy in promoting plans of mutual benefit.

In the next chapter, Kurt VanderSteen suggests that the “idyllic” imagination contained in the US National Security Strategy since the first was issued in 1987 should at least be reconsidered. He describes this idyllic imagination: “US strategies imagine the world as both a struggle for global freedom and equality against dark forces of autocratic nations, with the United States as ‘the light of freedom throughout the world;’ these strategies assume that ending international conflict and establishing world peace depends on all countries adopting democratic and liberal orders of government.”¹ In highlighting the flaws of idyllic imagination from past national security strategies, VanderSteen then recommends to consider the search for common human ground and a moral imagination in which many worldviews can work together for a better way ahead.

In Chapter 3, Robert Spessert moves beyond how nations should consider allies, and how the United States should consider itself in an international environment with many worldviews. He reviews recent and prior US National Security Strategies and provides a rubric for comparing strategies and assessing their ability, offering a clear path to help subordinate stakeholders achieve the objectives of the overarching strategy. Words matter, and in this case the author compellingly dissects how previous presidents have presented their visions.

Next Phil Pattee suggests reconsidering the competition continuum and presents a new model for evaluating power, war, and peace. This chapter presents that absolute war and absolute peace are nonexistent in the international security environment and posits that a more robust model would help strategists and planners better understand the interplay of different applications of power. In considering key premises from classic military theorists, the author effectively demonstrates a more precise approach to consider the application of power to achieve desired outcomes.

The next chapters shift toward specific regions within the national security environment. Gary Hanson reviews the evolution of nuclear strategy and diplomacy between the United States, the Republic of Korea, and North Korea as well as how this strategy impacts Northeast Asia security. He then promotes renewal of multilateral talks to move forward with denuclearization of the Ko-

rean Peninsula. In Chapter 8, Dave McCaughrin and Josh Stephenson review the implications of the Afghanistan withdrawal on opportunities for greater engagement as US forces shift from the Afghanistan mission to focus on other regional and country-specific security concerns throughout the US Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility.

The last two chapters address specific issues within the National Security Strategy that require deliberation. Paul Mostafa suggests climate change as the “fountainhead for cooperation” to effectively combat climate change. He promotes great power cooperation, rather than competition, to address climate change more effectively. Finally, Frank Klimas discusses how reinvigorated trade agreements can provide an effective counterbalance to China and preserve US influence to achieve the goals highlighted in recent national security strategies.

Although each author focuses on different issues, they all address concerns and specific threats, challenges, and opportunities through the lens of the National Security Strategy. Published just prior to the November 2024 presidential elections, these chapters span the transition from President Donald J. Trump to President Joseph R. Biden Jr. The goal of this volume is to prompt thoughtful and informed discourse to help achieve evolving national security goals.

Notes

1. Ronald Reagan, "National Security Strategy of the United States," The White House, 1987, 41.



Chapter 1

Strengthening Allies and Partners through Strategic Empathy and a Better Security Cooperation Definition

David W. Bell

If you know others and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles . . . if you do not know others and do not know yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle.¹

—Sun Tzu

In November 2020, Secretary of the Navy Kenneth Braithwaite announced the US Navy’s intention to establish a new fleet in the Indo-Pacific. To justify the new fleet and its potential mission, he pointed to recent conversations with allies and partners in the region and their concern over aggressive Chinese actions. Secretary Braithwaite indicated he hoped to place the new fleet in Singapore.² He seemingly believed Singapore and the United States shared a similar threat perception of China. Subsequently, a US Navy spokesperson walked back Braithwaite’s comments after Singapore appeared to balk at the idea, despite its history of hosting rotationally deployed US ships.

Defense analysts pointed out that Singapore would face several challenges in hosting a US numbered fleet, including the potentially high cost of supporting a “hard rebalance against China,” suspicion from its neighbors, and substantial domestic political opposition.³ Although Secretary Braithwaite’s comments may have been a “trial balloon,” it is just as likely that he did not have sufficient “strategic empathy” for Singapore and its strategic environment.⁴ Even as a trial balloon, it still represented a serious lack of strategic empathy and potentially weakened the United States-Singapore relationship by publicly disregarding Singaporean sensitivities. Lack of strategic empathy—a shortcoming not unique to political appointees—undermines US national security interests around the globe. In many ways, failing to have strategic empathy is more of a concern for combatant command staff officers because their *little ideas* can easily become senior leader *big ideas*.

This chapter is about developing better strategies and plans through strategic empathy and precise thinking about how security cooperation can strengthen relationships with partners.⁵ Historian Zachary Shore defines strategic empathy as “the skill of stepping out of one’s own head and into the minds of others.”⁶ Developing strategic empathy for a potential partner’s perspectives is essential for successful strategy creation and implementation. The 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance (INSSG) emphasizes the importance of strengthening US relationships with partners around the world as a key way for achieving US strategic ends.⁷ However, strong relationships are only possible where there is sufficient alignment of interests and sufficient engagement on those interests. Security cooperation is a primary Department of Defense (DoD) tool for strengthening partner relationships. Therefore, the DoD must understand alignment of national security interests, the intensity of those interests, and how security cooperation can improve relationships resulting from those alignments and effectively use security cooperation to strengthen partner relationships.

Combatant commanders and their staffs are the ones responsible to develop theater strategy for strengthening partner relationships through security cooperation. Therefore, US combatant commanders and their staffs must accurately assess US-partner alignment and clearly understand the expected results of security cooperation as they develop theater strategies and plans that invest scarce security cooperation resources. Joint Doctrine, however, provides limited assistance in assessing alignment of partner interests, and the official DoD definition of security cooperation sets

unrealistically high expectations. Both shortcomings make it difficult to assess the strategic and operational environments. This increases the potential for flawed assumptions about future partner action and value propositions for security cooperation activities.

Two doctrinal changes would facilitate better-aligned and more effective theater security cooperation. First, the DoD should amend its current security cooperation definition to better conform with the more nuanced Title 10 definition of security cooperation. Second, for improved strategic empathy, Joint Doctrine should include American political scientist Stephen M. Walt's balance of threat theory as a tool for assessing alignment of US-partner security interests and the intensity of those interests. This chapter discusses both proposals and provides Indonesia as an example of how the proposed solutions could help combatant commanders, with their staffs, develop better strategies and plans.

Security Cooperation: An Overly Aspirational Definition

The current DoD definition of security cooperation is needlessly aspirational and does not encourage inquiry into the precise expectations of specific security cooperation programs or activities. The definition matters because it serves as a piece of the foundation for all officers in the Joint Force. If the foundation is weak, it weakens the Joint Force. Some might argue there is sufficient institutional knowledge in the Joint Force to avoid the pitfalls of the current security cooperation definition. But a bad definition increases the risk that less experienced members will make bad assumptions that will be incorporated into theater strategy, plans, and operations. The Joint Force needs a better security cooperation definition.

Joint Publication (JP) 3-20, *Security Cooperation; The DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*; and DoDD 5132.03, *DoD Policy and Responsibilities Relating to Security Cooperation*, all define security cooperation as:

All Department of Defense interactions with foreign security establishments to build security relationships that promote specific United States security interests, develop allied and partner nation military and security capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide United States forces with peacetime and contingency access to allied and partner nations.⁸

This definition overuses the word “and.” Although the definition's required outcomes are desirable and might eventually emerge in some relationships, overusing the word “and” creates an overly aspirational definition where every security cooperation activity is expected to provide access to partner nations for contingency operations. Similar to clicking numerous filters on a dating app, the official DoD definition creates the expectation of an exquisite relationship rather than the varied relationships that actually exist across the continuum of partner nations. In this setting, security cooperation relationships can quickly become shorthand for broad expectations of contingency access in partner nations. This can easily lead to faulty assumptions about how security cooperation will affect strategic and operational environments.

Under the current definition, it is hard to gauge the strategic dividend of security cooperation within an overall strategy. If the Joint Force expects security cooperation to deliver all these outcomes, it becomes difficult to discuss what it cannot do. For example, a partner nation may be willing to conduct large bilateral training exercises to build its own self-defense capability but unwilling to allow contingency access to the US military. The current definition creates the expectation that all security cooperation leads to contingency access—leaving no room for a candid discussion

of its limitations. Although the DoD does have a program for assessing security cooperation, the current poor definition undermines it.⁹ Flawed assumptions about security cooperation's role in a strategy will lead to flawed assumptions about operational reach. Secretary Braithwaite's remarks regarding First Fleet, and Singapore's tepid response, are examples of flawed assumptions about the operational reach that security cooperation with Singapore provides.

Congress provided a better Title 10 definition of security cooperation, breaking the expectations into three parts and establishing that a Department of Defense security cooperation program and activity only needs to accomplish one of the three parts:

- a. To build and develop allied and friendly security capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations.
- b. To provide the armed forces with access to the foreign country during peacetime or a contingency operation.
- c. To build relationships that promote specific United States security interests.¹⁰

This Title 10 definition allows for nuanced outcomes from security cooperation, only requiring security cooperation "to achieve a purpose," rather than all of them. Instead of having a variety of filters preset on the notional dating app—setting expectations for an exquisite relationship—combatant commanders and their staffs can choose one or more purposes for their security cooperation with a partner nation.

With more nuance to the definition, security cooperation does not set the expectation of eventually obtaining contingency access. Under the Title 10 definition, commanders and staffs considering security cooperation with a partner nation identify which of the three purposes they expect to achieve. This allows them to evaluate the value proposition of the contemplated security cooperation activity. With either definition, the planners must make assumptions; but the expectations for security cooperation are explicitly more nuanced with the Title 10 definition, allowing for more precise thinking about security cooperation's role in the strategy. More precise thinking will ultimately lead to better assumptions and better strategy. With a better understanding of security cooperation's role, combatant commanders and their staffs make better use of limited resources—as long as they have strategic empathy for their partner's perspective.

Balance of Threat Theory: An Antidote for Strategic Narcissism

Lacking strategic empathy is a component of what Lt. Gen. (Ret.) H. R. McMaster, former national security advisor, calls "strategic narcissism."¹¹ He describes it as "the tendency to view the world only in relationship to the United States and assume that the future course of events depends primarily on US decisions or plans."¹² McMaster argues that strategic narcissism leads to either "overconfidence" or "resignation" by "attributing outcomes almost exclusively to US decisions and undervaluing the degree to which others influence the future."¹³ He further explains that this approach can result in "policies and strategies based on what the purveyor prefers, rather than on what the situation demands," and ultimately leads to failure to challenge "assumptions that underpin these policies and strategies."¹⁴ McMaster suggests strategic empathy as an antidote to strategic narcissism.¹⁵ Strategic empathy is essential for validating or rejecting assumptions about partners and their expected support in various situations based on a security cooperation investment. Failing to develop strategic empathy leads to weakened relationships built on false premises.

To avoid strategic narcissism and foster strategic empathy, combatant commanders and their staffs should use a tool to help them better consider their partner's point of view and identify

common areas of interest as well as limits for such alignments. Joint Doctrine emphasizes the importance of understanding the operational environment but only recommends using a systems perspective based on political, military, economic, social, informational, and infrastructural (PMESII) factors. Although it suggests that commanders and staffs seek out other tools to help them understand the operational environment, Joint Doctrine does not offer any specific method for evaluating the degree of alignment between the interests of the United States and its partners.¹⁶ Commanders and their staffs could make invalid assumptions about aligned interests. Using Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory, and its four associated factors, could help commanders and their staffs develop strategic empathy and reduce the risk of making bad assumptions.

Balance of Threat Theory, Strategic Empathy, and Indonesia

As Walt articulated in his 1987 international relations classic, *The Origins of Alliances*, perception of threat drives partner alignment.¹⁷ He arrived at his theory by researching elements of alliances that are relevant to combatant command strategy, planning, and security cooperation: “what causes states to support one another’s foreign policy or territorial integrity?” and “how do weaker states decide whose protection to accept? In short, how do states choose their friends?”¹⁸ Walt’s key finding was his balance of threat theory, nothing that states are more likely to align “to balance against threats rather than” merely raw power.¹⁹ Understanding the drivers behind a state threat perception is an important part of developing strategic empathy.

Walt’s balance of threat theory uses four variables to evaluate a state’s perception of threat: “aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions.”²⁰ He suggests that states consider all four variables because it is difficult to determine “which sources of threat will be most important in any given case; one can only say that all of them are likely to play a role.”²¹ Additionally, Walt found that foreign aid (economic or military) does not significantly affect a state’s alignment choices, nor does it ensure leverage over a recipient state.²² Thus, Walt’s theory implies security cooperation has a limited ability to align interests, but in areas where threat perception creates an alignment of interests, security cooperation can strengthen partner relationships.

To demonstrate how Walt’s theory can be an effective analytical tool to help develop strategic empathy, this chapter uses Indonesia *vis-à-vis* US-China competition to illustrate the balance of threat theory. Like many other states, Indonesia seeks to avoid choosing between the United States and China. As a founding member of the non-aligned movement and with a stated “independent and active” foreign policy, Indonesia works closely with partners on some issues but not at all on others, which makes it an excellent example of the convergence and divergence of interests; its foreign policy explicitly attempts to avoid aligning with one world power against another.²³ This examination of Indonesia is broadly applicable to other states in the Indo-Pacific and around the world because, similarly, many states seek to avoid being forced to choose between the United States and China. Since all states likely have a point where their threat perception would drive them toward the United States or China, understanding the conditions that underpin threat perceptions can help combatant commanders and their staffs manage or mitigate those conditions. Developing strategic empathy for Indonesia’s perception of threats can be a first step in developing strategic empathy for other similarly situated partners.

Because of its geopolitical position, Indonesia also has the freedom to choose its partners. This freedom to choose helps reinforce the applicability of Walt’s theory. As the world’s third largest democracy, largest Muslim majority country, and tenth largest economy—combined with its geographic position dominating the sea-lanes between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and its vast natural

resources—Indonesia is a desirable partner for both China and the United States.²⁴ Furthermore, both are actively courting Indonesia, which gives it the freedom to choose its partners and the issues it will work with them on. US-China competition highlights Indonesia’s freedom to choose its partners.

Applying Walt’s theory to Indonesia in the context of US-China competition is useful because the United States and China represent the two largest, and potentially most threatening, powers in the Indo-Pacific. Additionally, both are currently seeking partners in the region to strengthen their positions. The INSSG identifies China as a threat because of its capability and desire to remake the current international order. Furthermore, the US guidance emphasizes working with allies and partners to counter China’s efforts.²⁵ The United States naturally views Indonesia—a “strategic partner” since 2015—as an important part of its strategy.²⁶ Similarly, China accuses the United States of undermining international security through “unilateral policies” and provoking and intensifying “competition among major countries.”²⁷ Like the United States, China also seeks to strengthen its security and economic relationships with countries in the region. During President Xi Jinping’s 2013 visit to Indonesia, for example, China announced the maritime leg of the One Belt, One Road initiative and the upgrade of its relationship with Indonesia to a comprehensive strategic partnership.²⁸ This highlights the important role of Indonesia in China’s strategy. Both the United States and China clearly value a partnership with Indonesia. Nevertheless, Indonesia’s perception of threat from both countries may not be readily apparent. Walt’s theory and its four components of threat perception can help illuminate this.

The first factor of Walt’s balance of threat theory is aggregate power, which he equates to “total resources” such as population, economic output, technological capability, and military strength. He comments: “All else being equal, the greater a state’s total resources, . . . the greater potential threat it can pose to others.”²⁹ Walt suggests that commanders and their staffs can use simple assessments of US and Chinese aggregate power.³⁰ Similar to Walt, Figure 1.1 below compares China

	Population	GDP ¹	Number in Armed Forces	Defense Spending ²
China : United States	4.3 : 1	1.12 : 1	1.33 : 1	0.04 : 1
China : United States + Australia	4 : 1	1.05 : 1	1.27 : 1	0.38 : 1
China : United States + Australia + Philippines + Thailand	2.66 : 1	0.96 : 1	0.94 : 1	0.37 : 1
China : United States + Australia + Japan + Philippines + South Korea + Thailand	1.99 : 1	0.73 : 1	0.64 : 1	0.32 : 1

■ Chinese aggregate power advantage
■ US aggregate power advantage
■ Highlights difference of less than 10 percent

¹ Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is converted to Purchasing Power Parity (PPP).
² Defense Spending is converted to an estimated defense sector PPP.

Source: US Department of State, “World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 2021 Edition,” 30 December 2021, <https://www.state.gov/world-military-expenditures-and-arms-transfers-2021-edition/>.

Figure 1.1. China-US Aggregate Power Comparison. Created by Army University Press.

	Population (in millions)	GDP¹ (in trillions)	Number in Armed Forces	Defense Spending² (in billions)
United States	328.00	21.40	1,340,000	730.00
Australia	24.40	1.35	60,000	31.50
Japan	126.00	5.50	240,000	53.40
Philippines	108.00	1.01	130,000	6.19
South Korea	51.70	2.28	630,000	58.10
Thailand	69.60	1.34	360,000	14.60
United States & Allies	707.70	32.88	2,760,000	893.79
China	1,410.00	24.00	1,780,000	289.00

¹ Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is converted to Purchasing Power Parity (PPP).
² Defense Spending is converted to an estimated defense sector PPP.

Source: US Department of State, "World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 2021 Edition," 30 December 2021, <https://www.state.gov/world-military-expenditures-and-arms-transfers-2021-edition/>.

Figure 1.2. China-USA Aggregate Power Data. Created by Army University Press.

and the United States across key factors such as population, gross domestic product (GDP), armed forces size, and defense spending.³¹

Considered individually, Figure 1.2 above suggests China is much more threatening than the United States. Because the United States emphasizes its allies and partners, however, other states are likely to consider US-Allied combined aggregate power. When US regional allies are included, the US aggregate power threat profile overtakes China's. The Lowy Institute's 2021 Asia Power Index (API) confirms this relative advantage in US aggregate power. The index rated states across more than 130 power variables, including defense relationships, and concluded the United States had an approximately 10 percent power advantage over China.³² In terms of aggregate power, Indonesia likely sees the United States as at least as threatening as China, if not more.

The next factor Walt considers is geographic proximity. He suggests that since power projection declines over distance, the closer a state, the greater the threat it may pose.³³ At first glance, China appears closer and therefore definitively more threatening. Through its mutual defense treaties with Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand, however, the United States surrounds Indonesia in a way that China does not, bringing its power directly to Indonesia's door in a potentially threatening manner. China's occupation of features in the South China Sea also brings China closer to Indonesia, but not on the same scale or with the same potentially encircling feeling as the United States does through the territory of its significant security partners. Thus, in terms of geographic proximity, Indonesia could reasonably see the United States as more threatening than China.

Walt's third variable is offensive power. He believes aggregate power and geographic proximity have significant implications for offensive power but sees offensive power as a separate variable. According to Walt, offensive power is "the ability to threaten the sovereignty or territorial integrity of another state at an acceptable cost."³⁴ This includes traditional military capabilities as well as less

tangible capabilities such as the “ability to mobilize popular support” or employ “political propaganda and subversion.”³⁵ The United States has demonstrated it can harness its global network of partners to project power, which likely increases its offensive power threat profile. Although both the United States and China possess significant offensive power in terms of ships, planes, missiles, and armored vehicles, only the United States has demonstrated the ability to conduct significant military operations around the globe. Even if it is uncertain which US partners would support US operations, Indonesia should assume the United States could muster sufficient support for a global operation. The extent of US support and influence was demonstrated in 1999 after Timor Leste voted for independence from Indonesia.³⁶ Because the United States has the capability—demonstrated relatively recently in Indonesia through its ally Australia—Indonesia may be more threatened by US offensive power than China’s.

Walt’s final variable, aggressive intentions, produces more mixed results. Indonesia may perceive similar levels of aggressive intentions from the United States and China. Aggressive intentions is essentially that perceived hostile desires can shape the level of threat a state perceives from another state.³⁷ According to Walt, “States that are viewed as aggressive are likely to provoke others to balance against them.”³⁸ For example, if Indonesia thinks China intends to seize some or all of its territory, regardless of the concessions it might be willing to make, it will seek partners to balance the perceived threat from China. Because of the Archipelago’s long and sordid history with outside powers, many Indonesians feel threatened by the United States and China. Despite his optimistic outlook, former Indonesian Army General and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono reflects that belief in his comment about “a million friends and zero enemy [sic].”³⁹ In international affairs, if everyone is potentially a friend, they are also potentially an enemy. Indonesia’s worldview is shaped by the belief that major powers seek to divide it and take its resources for themselves. In fact, Indonesian Armed Forces staff colleges based their 2018 exercises on just such a scenario.⁴⁰ Furthermore, this belief is implicit in the anti-colonialism that was a major driver of the non-aligned movement that Indonesia helped found when it hosted the 1955 Bandung Conference.⁴¹ From Indonesia’s perspective, both the United States and China have aggressive intentions.

For US officers, it is easy to imagine Indonesia views China as having aggressive intentions toward it. US policy and strategy reflect that China is considered a threat to the world order that has broadly benefited all nations since the end of World War II. Therefore, China threatens every state. Furthermore, China’s excessive claims in the South China Sea and threatening actions toward other states with claims in the South China Sea, including Indonesia, make it relatively easy to see that China has aggressive intentions toward Indonesia.⁴² Chinese activities around the Indonesian Island of Natuna have led to tense interactions between the two countries, including several incidents that could have easily turned more violent.⁴³ To justify purchasing new weapons systems and reorganizing the country’s defense structure, Indonesian leaders consistently refer to Natuna—confirming that Indonesia sees China as a threat.⁴⁴

Perceptions of potential US aggressive intentions are less apparent to American officers. Without the focus of Walt’s theory, US officers are likely to emphasize perceptions that are baked into national-level strategic documents and overlook important differences in threat perception. For example, the United States’s “free and open Indo-Pacific” strategy and pledge to work with “like-minded partners” could lead US officers to assume Indonesia is aligned with the United States because it is a democracy and the strategy identifies Indonesia as a partner.⁴⁵ In this situation, “like-mindedness” becomes shorthand for alignment. Furthermore, they could easily think since US strategy focuses on maintaining a free and open international order, Indonesia should have

no cause for concern. As stated above, Indonesia likely perceives the United States and China as threats eager to manipulate its internal dynamics and steal its sovereignty and natural resources. Furthermore, Indonesia sees the US government's history of intervention in support of separatists in Indonesia and repeated demonstration of its willingness to use democracy and human rights to justify the use of military force around the globe.⁴⁶ Additionally, the United States's sanctioning of the Indonesian Armed Forces for human rights abuses in Timor Leste, and US support for Australian intervention there might lead to reasonable Indonesian perceptions of US aggressive intention—perceptions that might not be apparent without the focus that Walt's theory provides.⁴⁷

The ongoing insurgency in Indonesia's Papua Province provides a ready example of the threat Indonesia perceives from the United States. Many Indonesian elites imagine a scenario where the United States uses allegations of human rights abuses in Papua to justify US military intervention there.⁴⁸ For some, the real purpose of the imagined intervention, however, is to seize control of Papua's vast natural resources. The Grasberg mine is a typical example of these resources and the imagined US intervention. Until 2018, a US company was the majority owner of the Grasberg mine and remains a major co-owner with the Indonesian government.⁴⁹ The mine holds the "largest known gold reserve and the second largest copper reserves in the world," and many Indonesian elites see US activities near the mine as a potential threat to Indonesia.⁵⁰ For example, when the United States established US Marine Rotational Force–Darwin, many Indonesians considered it directly connected to the Grasberg mine and a threat to Indonesia.⁵¹ Indonesia views US and China intentions as similarly threatening.

This analysis of Indonesian threat perception using Walt's four measures suggests that Indonesia could reasonably see the United States as more threatening than China. The United States and China both present potentially threatening aggregate power profiles. China dominates the United States in terms of aggregate power one-on-one, but the United States leads when its allies are factored in. Likewise, Indonesia's inherent suspicion of all foreign powers, coupled with China's demonstrated willingness to infringe on Indonesian rights in the South China Sea, and the US penchant for values-based interventions, provide similarly threatening aggressive intentions profiles. Nevertheless, because of its network of partners, the threat of US offensive power and geographic proximity potentially make it more threatening than China.

The conclusion that Indonesia sees the United States as more threatening than China is not definitive. Reasonable people may disagree with some areas of this analysis. Staffs and commanders regularly disagree about a variety of topics, but there is still value in the debate. Balance of threat theory can provide an organized starting point for a more effective discussion about how a partner sees the threat environment and how perceptions about the threat environment drive alignment of interest with the United States. This would be better than Joint Doctrine's reliance on PMESII analysis and suggestion for commanders and planners to find their own analytical tools. Even if balance of threat theory does not lead to definitive agreement, it is still useful.

Security Cooperation Definition and Balance of Threat Theory Implications

Continuing with the Indonesia example, Walt's balance of threat theory helps expose why Indonesia might consider the United States to be more threatening than China. If Indonesia does see the United States as more threatening than China, or even as similarly threatening, alignment of US-Indonesian interests *vis-à-vis* China would be limited because Indonesia believes it needs a relationship with China to balance against the perceived threat from the United States. Nevertheless, since it also perceives significant threat from China, Indonesia values its relationship with

the United States as a balance against China. Unless Indonesia's sovereignty or territorial integrity is directly threatened, the United States should not expect an exquisite security cooperation relationship with Indonesia culminating in contingency access or troop contributions in the event of a US-China confrontation. For example, the United States should not expect Indonesia to provide contingency access should a US-China conflict erupt over Taiwan, as China is unlikely to directly threaten Indonesia in such a scenario. This is an important consideration since the US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) commander considers China to be the "most consequential strategic competitor to the United States and our allies and partners throughout the world" and sees Taiwan as the most likely scenario for war between the United States and China.⁵² By recognizing the limits that Indonesia's threat perception places on US-Indonesian alignment of interest and given a more flexible security cooperation definition, the USINDOPACOM staff can make better assumptions about using security cooperation to strengthen areas of alignment.

Congress' better security cooperation definition can improve results when paired with balance of threat theory. For example, Indonesia perceives that all foreign powers have significant adverse intentions and is a significant force provider for United Nations missions.⁵³ This leads Indonesia to have a strong interest in improving its self-defense and multi-national operations capabilities—an interest the United States shares. With the improved security cooperation definition, USINDOPACOM can work toward this shared area of interest—unencumbered by expectations of some more exquisite result. USINDOPACOM can focus on the desired outcome. Additionally, clearly identifying this narrower alignment of security cooperation program interests and purpose can help avoid messaging fratricide. With the purpose of the security cooperation clearly identified, there is reduced likelihood that less-informed individuals will misrepresent the security cooperation activity as anti-China and risk Indonesian withdrawal. Narrowing the scope would not preclude the possibility of expanded engagement if Indonesia's threat perception became more favorable to the United States over time. In fact, it might help preserve the possibility because initial expectations were managed more carefully. Lastly, this narrower alignment of interests allows USINDOPACOM to avoid using resources intended to strengthen its position in a Taiwan conflict on security cooperation with Indonesia. The narrower alignment of interests will lead to more focused thinking. Focused thinking will lead to stronger relationships and potentially better results.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on developing strategic empathy for a partner and determining how security cooperation can strengthen partner relationships, resulting in better strategies and plans. A first step might be to develop a better security cooperation definition that allows for more flexibility of thought. By developing strategic empathy, combatant commanders and their staffs can avoid strategic narcissism and the flawed assumptions that flow from it. Seeing threats as a partner sees them is an important part of developing strategic empathy and identifying areas of genuine aligned interests. Given Joint Doctrine's limited advice on how to identify areas of alignment, Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory can be an important tool to help combatant commands uncover partner threat perceptions and true areas of alignment. The recommendations in this chapter are not a panacea to solve all strategy development challenges, but they provide an improved starting point and a useful tool in the strategy development toolbox. With a better understanding of their own security cooperation expectations and the shared interests of their partners, combatant commanders and their staffs will be better equipped to make necessary assumptions in developing sound strategy that more effectively applies limited security cooperation resources.

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Chapter 2

The Idyllic Imagination in US National Security Strategies

Kurt P. VanderSteen

“What was the final aim of all things,” she said, “for that is plainly what is desired by all: since we have agreed that that is the good, we must confess that the good is the end of all things.”

Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*

At their core, all published national strategies signal national security intentions and priorities to domestic and international audiences; they are not true strategies. Properly speaking, national strategies—often described as “Grand Strategies”—should explain how strategic actors intend to navigate uncertain futures by harmonizing means with desired ends to gain and maintain advantages in the international system. Some elements, such as interests, goals, objectives, and instruments of national power, are found in US national security strategies since they were introduced in 1987. However, their primary function is to communicate idealistic values to justify defense budgets and subsequent actions taken in the international arena. Those values are at odds with reality, constituting contradictions in our moral imagination. US strategies imagine the world as both a struggle for global freedom and equality against dark forces of autocratic nations, with the United States as “the light of freedom throughout the world;” these strategies assume that ending international conflict and establishing world peace depends on all countries adopting democratic and liberal orders of government.¹ Together, they’ve formed a dominant narrative over time that is fundamentally flawed, contains numerous contradictions, and leads to imprudent national security decision-making, as well as increased resistance from competing global powers and degraded influence with other nations. Missing from this narrative is a moral imagination rooted in human nature that acknowledges both lower moral impulses driven by greed and will-to-power, along with more noble intentions desiring a common human good.² How should the United States navigate an uncertain future currently characterized as multipolar and multicultural amidst swirling antagonisms and competing worldviews? Is there a universal ground for international relations that accounts for the diversity of today’s world and protects US interests? Modernism brought us individualism without connection to the greater good. Post-modern particularism, which rejects universals and only sees particulars in reality, denies the universalism of a greater good absent consequentialist ethical presumptions. National strategic strategies should be rooted in an imagination that synthesizes the particular and its diverse expressions with the universal sense of the good, the true, and the beautiful. The aim is a higher common good based on the “common human ground” of understanding described by philosopher Claes Ryn instead of competing idealistic visions found in our national security strategies, which cannot account for a diversity of global perspectives.³

This chapter discusses the idea behind a moral imagination, demonstrates how US national strategies since 1987 have exemplified a flawed “idyllic” imagination leading to imprudent decisions, and describes a different paradigm: the “common human ground” of moral imagination and understanding that should underwrite national values expressed in future national security strategies.

Moral Imagination at the Root of Strategic Thinking

According to Kenneth Payne, a political psychologist instructing in Defense Studies at King’s College London, “imagination is central to strategy.”⁴ The phrase “moral imagination” comes from Edmund Burke, a 19th century thinker and member of the British Parliament. In his book *Reflections*

on the Revolution in France, he wrote about “the wardrobe of a moral imagination” that includes all ideas, concepts, principles, and perceptions for the proper ordering of ethical life—not only for individuals but also for societies.⁵ Arguing against the excesses of revolutionary France, Burke makes the point that nations develop their social orders over centuries, and it is imprudent to reject this inheritance for radical visions of the future based on mere fancies and abstractions expressing ideals such as liberty, fraternity, and equality. Poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, famous for *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, was greatly influenced by the elder Burke. Coleridge had much to say about the imagination and its proper relationship to right reasoning. He distinguished between an imagination that is mere imagery absent reason, which he called “fancy,” and a creative imagination that grasps the dynamic, living possibilities that are always present in the moment and is legible through the power of reason.⁶ Fancy can only conceive “within the bounds of the picturable.”⁷ This passive and mechanistic view of reality focuses on “things” rather than the active and dynamic.⁸

The abstractions that motivated French revolutionaries drove their passions but did not include the imagination to conceive potential consequences that followed after they destroyed the old order. They “fancied” a moral order for an enlightened future but brought chaos and disorder, unleashing pent-up passions and unchecked will-to-power. Their focus was the abstract and not the living reality of true social order. A moral imagination conceived through reason and prudent deliberation rejects abstractions and hews closely to first principles known via experience.

Irving Babbitt, an early 20th century professor and literary critic, led an intellectual movement known as “New Humanism” or “American Humanism.”⁹ In his book *Democracy and Leadership*, Babbitt contrasted a moral imagination based on a realistic deliberation of human nature with an idyllic imagination that seeks to free itself from all social constraints limiting individual desire. Babbitt identified Jean-Jacques Rousseau as the architect of the idyllic imagination and one of the primary inspirations for the French Revolution.¹⁰ Rousseau’s idyllic view was that humans could return to a simpler, more noble nature of shared brotherhood that supposedly existed before civilization. “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains,” Rousseau said.¹¹ Babbitt points out that Rousseau’s statement delegitimizes political order and leads to absolutism.¹² While a Burkean moral order recognizes the value of compromise in the evolutionary establishment of moral order, the idyllic imagination brooks no compromise.

Rousseau upended centuries of moral imagination, shifting the focus from the common human good to the individual good. Society was to blame for all social evils, shifting responsibility for moral conduct from the individual soul. He sought to free the individual from all previous moral imperatives and duties. The focus was on individual rights and equality. Morality and ethical obligations to others was no longer based on the principle of charity but on pity.¹³ Babbitt wrote that to be virtuous was to pity: “His virtue is a glorification of the instinctive and subrational.”¹⁴ This simple proposition would lead to ideological impulses that later drove Woodrow Wilson to proclaim that the United States needed to intervene in World War I to make the world “safe for democracy.”¹⁵ Prompted by pity, Americans portrayed the German a “Mad Brute,” bayoneting innocent babies through atrocity propaganda that aroused the idyllic imagination.¹⁶ And pity today is the motivator for calls to intervene in Ukraine.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt famously proposed four freedoms; two of them, freedom from fear and want, formed the basis for the preamble in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which also included the freedom to live in dignity.¹⁷ However, declarations of universal human freedoms cannot be guaranteed globally. A moral imagination recognizes that there are limits to collective action because of the diversity of moral agency. The UDHR focuses on the

individual, ignoring intervening moral orders and traditions established at the societal level. Good intentions and noble sentiments are not enough. Prudence also requires acknowledgement that other countries will violently oppose universally applied moral orders. David Luban, a leading scholar in legal ethics, instead argues that universal rights “are not respecters of political boundaries and require a universalist politics to implement them.”¹⁸ The idyllic imagination represented by Luban’s statement can only lead to moral crusades imposing one world order over all societies. It destroys the particular for the advancement of the universal.

Throughout the latter half of the 20th century and into the 21st, the idyllic imagination continued to affect strategic thinking in later presidencies, leading to North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervention in Bosnia.¹⁹ The idyllic imagination—emphasizing the liberation of the individual from a morally ordered society, combined with equality and a messianic democratic vision of global order—leads to contradictions in how we imagine national security.

The Idyllic Imagination in US National Security Strategies

President Ronald Reagan’s National Security Strategy (NSS), published in 1987 as required by the Goldwater Nichols Act of 1986, exemplifies how the idyllic imagination influences US national strategies.²⁰ In 1987, the Soviet Union was still the primary existential threat to the United States. The first NSS reflected this priority throughout the document with a nod to international terrorism.²¹ Although most of the strategy focused on the Soviet Union, buried on the last page is the central theme and justification for the strategy. The idyllic imagination in the strategy declaims “that individuals and not governments should control their economic, spiritual and political destinies.”²² On the same page, the strategy proclaims that “time is on our side against those forces in this world that are committed to the elimination of freedom, justice, and democratic ways of life.”²³ Contradictions abound in these few statements, which have consequences in execution; the most insidious is that the individual is the basis for moral and political order.

The idyllic imagination supposes that society is the sum of individual desires “that rouse sentiments rather than reflections.”²⁴ The highest duty for the individual is to himself, his feelings and emotions, and his values, which reflect those goods that bring utility and pleasure.²⁵ As Aristotle pointed out, however, individuals are social animals born into a community and do not exist outside this context, including the government’s role. Utility and pleasure may drive individual desires, but identity with the social community causes individuals to value the collective good, chief of which is the security of the collective over the individual.²⁶ This is why governments exist. Max Scheler, an early 20th century German philosopher, argued that there is a “co-responsibility, sharing a community with others and sharing the responsibility for the community with others.”²⁷ There is thus a natural order presupposing a collective moral order whereby society is greater than the sum of the individuals. Perhaps the sentiment that “individuals should control their economic, spiritual, and political destinies” conveys the democratic ideal that government “of the people, by the people, and for the people” is the only legitimate political form.²⁸ That may resonate with the American public and other like-minded societies, but not with a majority of earth’s inhabitants.

In 1989, political scientist Francis Fukuyama famously published an essay in *The National Interest* proclaiming an end to the ideological struggle that had dominated international politics for most of the 20th century.²⁹ Influenced by Georg W. F. Hegel, a 19th century philosopher who viewed history as a progression of events leading to a deterministic future, Fukuyama concluded that the “End of History” would be marked by the ascendance of global “liberty and equality” combined with a modern economic market system that would end ideological political struggles.³⁰

Shortly before the Soviet Union disintegrated in December 1991 and a few months following victory in the Gulf, President George H. W. Bush outlined his aspirations for “A New World Order” in the August 1991 NSS. The strategy reflected Fukuyama’s thesis that there would be no more competitors to the US system or its ambitions to remake the world order that reflected US values; Bush explained: “We see our own role clearly. We must not only protect our citizens and our interests but help create a new world in which our fundamental values not only survive but flourish.”³¹ Creating a “new world” was hubristic and overly optimistic in its vision.

Calling for “A New World Order” led by the United States was a tone-deaf pronouncement that could only lead to international pushback. Other nations and commentators saw the *Pax Americana*, a world order characterized by US hegemony following the Soviet demise, created a “rigged” system where only the United States held both the power and legitimacy to use force in international politics.³² Chinese observers rejected the idea that the US unipolar moment that followed the Soviet collapse was the final say in world politics. Instead, in early 1994 they had predicted the US decline as a superpower.³³ On the one hand, the United States held to an idyllic imagination for world harmony, desiring an idealistic permanent peace free from the cold war’s terror of nuclear conflict. On the other hand, the United States still wanted to bestride the world, using its military muscle to impose its values, confident that the United States and its democratic allies held the keys to world peace. Despite proclamations that the wars of ideology were over, the United States and its Western allies continued their ideological confrontation with the rest of the world to fight for a “New World Order.” This contradiction—that we could shape the globe in our image yet also establish a more perfect peace—would grow stronger through the William Clinton, G. W. Bush, and Barack H. Obama administrations.

Clinton’s first NSS in 1993 continued the Bush Administration’s exploitation of the post-Soviet strategic environment to advance US leadership and sought a global political transformation with a strategy of “Engagement and Enlargement.”³⁴ Succeeding security strategies would refine this theme along with human rights and globalization. Part of Clinton’s desire for global transformation was promoting American values abroad, specifically democracy, with an attendant desire to see all other governmental forms as illegitimate. By May 1997, he began to look to the next century with a full-throated commitment to “universal human rights and democratic principles.”³⁵ The overall spirit of Clinton’s strategies was the advancement of abstract principles over more pragmatic national interests. Because there were no major threats on the immediate horizon, Clinton lost sight of the long-term consequences of meddling in the internal affairs of the rest of the globe.

Although the Soviet Union was no longer a threat, the United States sought to slay other dragons via peace enforcement and other interventions. The idyllic imagination demanded to mold the world with US values or face the only superpower—with force, if necessary. By 2000 and his final NSS, Clinton resurrected Truman’s notion that the United States should make “the world safe for democracy.”³⁶ Resistance to the new world order was escalating. At this point, Osama bin Laden was already planning his 9/11 attack precisely because he saw US interference in Middle Eastern affairs as illegitimate. He sought to draw the United States into a Middle East quagmire that would weaken US power, replacing Western-friendly Middle Eastern governments with Islamic leadership. Policies for preventing conflict yet continuing US intervention across the globe would lead to more than twenty years of imprudent decisions in the Middle East and elsewhere.

President G. W. Bush continued the view of the United States as the “indispensable nation.”³⁷ Emotionally invested from the 9/11 attack, Bush wanted revenge against anti-democratic and illiberal national and transnational figures, and his perspective was strictly binary: “You are with us

or against us.”³⁸ The infamous “Bush Doctrine” demonstrated a unilateral willingness to conduct a preemptive war.³⁹ Similar to Fukuyama and Clinton, Bush saw only “a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise.”⁴⁰ Anything else would be universal anathema. Bush later commented: “For freedom to thrive, accountability must be expected and required.”⁴¹ Again, abstractions take the place of concrete ideas. Whose freedom? Whose democracy? Which free enterprise? Since all universal claims must be considered part of traditions, the only tradition allowed is Western and specifically American.⁴² This is not a recipe for world peace given diverse perspectives across the globe, especially considering traditional Chinese views of international politics. The Bush Doctrine was offensive in its orientation, using instruments of power to overthrow governments across the world—creating chaos and ultimately failing to secure US national interests. This would lead to the “color revolutions” of the early 21st century and later to Russian intransigence and revolt against the US/NATO hegemony in Europe.

After the dissolution of the USSR, Russia became increasingly suspicious of US and NATO intentions toward its sphere of influence. The Russians felt helpless to protect their perceived interests with client nations besieged by the United States, including America’s 1991 intervention in Iraq; most of the Iraqi weapons were of Soviet origin. Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and later Kosovo also experienced US intervention when US-led NATO forces attacked Serbia. The color revolutions cemented Russian hostile feelings toward the West in general, and the United States in particular.⁴³

The 2006 NSS produced in the second term of the Bush Administration made it clear that the United States intended to seize any opportunity to impose American ideals worldwide.⁴⁴ This NSS started with ideals as the foundation rather than declaring interests then proceeding to objectives to secure those interests. Those ideals included freedom, justice, human dignity, and leadership of a “community of democracies.”⁴⁵ The ideals themselves were not objectionable; they fit perfectly within the context of Western values and American’s historical experience. As abstractions, these ideals were concrete through domestic political discourse. America’s insistence that its values should be global was problematic. How could these abstractions be concrete among the diverse families of nations with different values, histories, and traditions? This idyllic imagination in full bloom would continue through subsequent administrations, with only a brief pause in the pursuit of these ideals during the Donald J. Trump Administration.

President Obama validated the pursuit of American ideals in his strategies. The United States was still reeling from a devastating, sharp recession following the 2008 financial meltdown. Troops were still stationed in the Balkans, and although the Iraqi drawdown had begun, Afghanistan seemed to be a forever war. Obama’s NSS was hopeful and seemingly more humble than previous strategies, but repeated the same principles, including that the United States was to “champion mutual interests among nations and peoples.”⁴⁶ On the other hand, Obama insisted that US values equal international values. Despite a caveat that “America will not impose any system of government on another country,” the United States belied this notion with its 2011 overthrow of Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi.⁴⁷ Intervention and regime change would become politically acceptable if foreign governments did not reflect US or Western values.

By 2015, US leaders recognized that Russia and especially China were primary threats to America’s global interests. Gone were the halcyon days of American primacy. Great power competition was the new norm. The United States was also struggling with the aftermath of multiple Middle East uprisings known as the “Arab Spring.” Ironically, Obama was trying to extricate the United States from Iraq and Afghanistan. However, global moralists were still trying to increase American interventions in Libya and Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria.⁴⁸ The United States was also involved

in the February 2014 overthrow of Ukraine's elected government, also known as the "Maidan Revolution," which was replaced with one more amenable to Western interests. Russia seized the opportunity to occupy Crimea, striking back at the encroachment into what they saw as their sphere of influence.⁴⁹ In President Obama's second administration, his 2015 NSS announced a shift to the Pacific region and "rebalancing" of resources required to primarily engage China, essentially repudiating further adventurism in the Middle East.⁵⁰ Additionally, the NSS acknowledged that attempts to impose US values led to pushback "resulting in crackdowns and conflict."⁵¹ Despite this acknowledgement, Obama continued to advance US and Western values, such as "advancing equality" at the expense of prudent limits to global acceptance of those ideals.⁵² Further, advocating the US version of democracy now included sub-national engagement with societies, bypassing national leadership.⁵³ This meant that the strategy proposed deliberate intervention in the domestic affairs of sovereign nations to undermine and disrupt their civil orders. What it once accomplished diplomatically and by example, the United States now achieved by deliberately targeting civil society and the "Westernization of the World."⁵⁴ Imposing homogeneity based on Western values and focused attention on a new world order failed in the previous administrations, and it had no greater success during the Obama years. Recapping almost thirty years of national strategies to this point, the contradictions inherent in aggressively advocating US ideals inevitably led to foreign policy failures and imprudent interventions.

President Trump rejected the idyllic imagination with his highly controversial "America First" policy and 2017 NSS.⁵⁵ Despite a rhetorical attempt to assert a more realistic and less idealistic vision, Trump's NSS was fairly conventional in embracing the same national interests and policies found in previous strategies. Its departure was in the tone and substance of US engagement with other nations. The assumption was that nations transparently looking to their best interests are better partners for advancing shared interests. Concurrently, the America First policy used sovereignty as the first principle for foreign relations. This did not mean that Trump was immune to the siren call of the idyllic imagination that seeks to solve all global problems—in fact, he went along with continued intervention in Syria. Additionally, the United States would not abandon the championing of American values. But the United States also would not impose those values on other nations. No color revolutions or regime changes. Notably, Trump recognized "a world of strong, sovereign, and independent nations, each with its own cultures and dreams."⁵⁶ This is the starting point for a more realistic imagination, rooted in recognizing that others have moral agency independent from US interference. Despite this, the repudiation of the idyllic imagination expressed in the American First pledge was largely a chimera. When President Joseph R. Biden took office, however, it came roaring back with a far more aggressive policy for globally advancing US and Western values.

A few months after taking office, the Biden Administration published an Interim National Security Strategy in March 2021.⁵⁷ The incoming president faced several challenges, including a worldwide pandemic, wheezing economy, hasty withdrawal of US forces in Afghanistan leading to a Taliban takeover, domestic unrest, and an increasingly hostile strategic environment with China and Russia, which were assertively flexing their geopolitical muscles. In October 2022, the NSS solidified and reinforced the themes introduced in the interim strategy.⁵⁸

Biden proposed that the United States resume "leading the world" and defending equal rights based on US and Western values and ideals.⁵⁹ This would be accomplished through what Biden termed "global development."⁶⁰ Usually, this term would invoke images related to infrastructure investments and economic benefits. Global development is also a euphemism for aggressive advancement of liberal internationalism, with the United States leading attempts to make the world

safe for democracy and Western values through “smart” foreign assistance programs: “Global development is among our best means to articulate and embody our values.”⁶¹ The aim is “social cohesion” of a different kind, pursuing the American ideals of democracy, equality, and diversity in other nations so the United States can “Build Back Better.”⁶²

In his 2022 NSS, Biden articulated relatively unchanged national interests from previous strategies: “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.”⁶³ In the 2022 strategy, Biden reiterated the theme of supporting universal human rights but added a caveat suggesting a retrenchment from the idyllic mindset: “We do not, however, believe that governments and societies everywhere must be remade in America’s image for us to be secure.”⁶⁴ This was more in line with the second-term Obama NSS.

America is currently in an era characterized as “Renewed Great Power Competition,” with Russia and China as its leading competitors.⁶⁵ The unipolar moment following the Soviet collapse did not produce the imagined conditions for future peace; instead, it created a more hostile environment with the potential for major power conflict. In 2014, the best-known proponent of modern realism, John Mearsheimer, created an uproar in a *Foreign Affairs* article that squarely laid the blame for Russian control of Crimea at the feet of NATO’s enlargement policy.⁶⁶ Igniting controversy, he blamed the United States for Russia’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.⁶⁷ His target was liberalism, specifically US international liberalism, where “a liberal state ends up fighting to protect human rights and spread liberal democracy around the world.”⁶⁸ Mearsheimer rightly understood that encroachment in Russia’s sphere of influence would lead to conflict.

International liberalism is another name for the idyllic imagination in world politics, and Mearsheimer noted it leads to “militant democratizing” using military means that inevitably leads to conflict worldwide.⁶⁹ Largely failed interventions over the past thirty-plus years should alert Americans that the country’s national strategies are flawed. Yet, US leaders continue to accept the premises of the idyllic imagination as somehow fixed in reality. The United States needs a new paradigm, one that is rooted in an understanding of a moral imagination for the prudent development of strategies recognizing a common human ground for international security.

A Common Human Ground: Recognizing the Plurality of Global Governance

Philosopher Claes Ryn, a professor of politics at the Catholic University of America, sees a polarity in modern moral imaginations that Plato called “the one and the many.”⁷⁰ At one pole, there is a disorder characterized by multiplicities and particularities, the “many.” Modernism became post-modern with the rejection of the universal for the particular, thus stripping meaning from understanding, resulting in no common reference point for developing a common understanding of truth.⁷¹ At the other pole is “the one” as a universal characteristic, a unity based on the good, the true, and the beautiful.⁷² But the one without the many cannot exist. His thesis is that “the one and the many” can coexist in a synthesis that benefits international relations.⁷³ The problem is that Americans create a dichotomy of either/or rather than a synthesis of both/and. This is his common human ground. The idyllic imagination cannot accept alternatives to the Western political idealism that naturally lead to global conflict. As Ryn points out, “the ultimate source of either peace or war resides in the heart of human beings.”⁷⁴ Although the human heart is a universal phenomenon, its particularities are evident in the diversity of human political life; there should not be a singular solution to resolving international disputes. Diversity can work with universality.

Returning to Irving Babbitt, his humanism was the cultivation of diversity toward universally desirable ends. Ryn suggests: “What the world seems to need most is a cosmopolitanism that simultaneously affirms cultural uniqueness and pan-cultural unity and that does so on the basis of complete moral realism.”⁷⁵ An idyllic imagination destroys diversity and orders all to oneness; a moral imagination celebrates diversity and recognizes the legitimacy of other points of view. The new world order that the French Revolutionaries envisioned was a universalism of equality, liberty, and fraternity, and all were abstractions. Today, the new revolutionaries imagine that the only acceptable unity is a new world order of Western democracy supported by capitalism.⁷⁶

America’s relations with nuclear powers Russia and China are increasingly fraught with the possibility of armed conflict. Several pundits are calling for US and NATO armed intervention in Ukraine because it is a fellow “democracy.”⁷⁷ Little weight is given to risks of escalation and the potential for nuclear conflict. As Prussian military theorist Carl Von Clausewitz once observed: “It is absolutely essential that we Germans reduce the many political questions preoccupying us today to one fundamental question, that of *our existence*.”⁷⁸ It is time for US national strategies and actions to reflect this wisdom.

Conclusion

What works for the United States and other like-minded countries does not necessarily work globally, but the idyllic imagination insists otherwise. Since the United States entered the world stage as an important power in World War I, messianic crusades to impose US values have grown over time. Policy failures to implement national strategies designed to impose US values have also increased. Recognizing that there are limits to US power is a step in the right direction. More importantly, national strategies should appreciate the moral agency of other countries that also seek to defend their values. Each national strategy argued for a global moral order based on an idyllic imagination. America must replace the idyllic imagination with one that is rooted in the reality of a proper moral order based on the particularities of diverse national interests. This is a common human ground that other nations can recognize as being in everyone’s best interests.

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Chapter 3

National Interests and their Expression in National Security Strategies

Robert D. Spessert

Unified Action presumes US Executive Branch leaders first articulate overarching end-states.¹ Those objectives inform the initial operational design that leads to the operational approach that precedes detailed planning.² That strategic guidance and direction should arise from America's national interests. The Soviet Union's collapse extinguished a recognized ideological and existential threat to the United States and the requirement of the Cold War bipartisan national security policy of Containment. The absence of this threat, and then the lack of other peer competitors, removed a common vision of how to secure America's national interests. This lack of a common vision and understanding permitted the rise of alternate and competing strategic ends states—with a myriad of ways, means, and subordinate objectives to achieve them. The return of geopolitical competition, whether labeled “great power” or “strategic” —and the domestic venue's perceived loss of common values, interests, and goals—offers an opportunity to return to fundamentals and re-examine the influence of values on national interests and their combined impact on national security and foreign policy. This chapter examines US national interests and their discernment, articulation, and prioritization; proposes a rubric to assess strategies; compares and contrasts President Donald J. Trump's 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) with President Joseph R. Biden Jr.'s 2021 Interim National Security Strategy Guidance (INSSG); and applies the rubric to assess the six national security strategies of the 21st century.

US national interests create the lens through which Americans identify and assess foreign threats to domestic and international peace. Barring elevation of personal, party, or group interests that supersede; the national interests should provide the foundation on which the Government designs a strategy to achieve national objectives, determine policies, and plan, program, budget, and execute the various national power instruments to defend, advance, and achieve those interests.

The term “strategy” without other context can represent the final plan to achieve a goal or a methodology to accomplish that plan's objective. Yale Professor of History John Lewis Gaddis describes strategy using two components: the alignment of aspirations of what to achieve or acquire and the capabilities to accomplish it, whether at the micro individual or macro state level. This description omits the process of how, the presumption being that the actor will discern the actions necessary to leverage the capabilities to achieve the goal.³ In contrast, the US Army War College model of strategy employs three terms: ends—the end-state, goal, objective, vision, or Gaddis' aspirations written as noun conditions; ways—the how or tasks to accomplish written as active verbs; and means—the doers of actions which usually are nouns but could include subordinate objectives or policies. An imbalance of ends, ways, and means creates risks to achieving the ends and/or costs of lost resources.⁴

The words employed to articulate ends, ways, and means matter. With regard to national interests, end-states, ends, and objectives, the Army War College's “Guidelines for Strategy Formulation” advises to portray them as a condition comprised of a noun phrase without modifiers or verbs. This prevents potentially misreading a national interest or “end” as a policy “way” or action.⁵ Describing an end-state as a noun condition permits the reader to consider various ways or verbs to accomplish that objective. Conversely, using a verb to portray an end focuses on doing that specific action or task as opposed to achieving its objective. Attainment of the goal could arise through

alternative actions. Furthermore, employing verbs as ends risks prioritizing actions and doers that perform them instead of achieving the end-state. Attention to form permits a focus on function.

Applying the Army War College model to creating a national security strategy reveals it involves identification and formulation of an overarching end-state along with its subordinate objectives; articulation of ways, tasks, and policies to achieve them; and concurrent or later assignment or procurement of means, capabilities, and resources to accomplish the tasks.⁶ National interests then reflect end-states; national objectives become subordinate ends or goals; policies convey ways, tasks, or how to accomplish; and various instruments of national power are the means, or doers, that perform the ways.⁷ Competing ideologies, state plus non-state actors, and crises become threats to the extent of their impact on national interests.

However, the core values of the nation, its leaders, and the public influence perception and interpretation of foreign and domestic events and what constitutes a threat. Accordingly, different groups may prioritize the same values differently, advocate different end-states and subordinate objectives, or pursue alternative ways to achieve those values. Additionally, they may hold conflicting values.⁸

Politicians, pundits, and people often declare something resides within the realm of national security without defining “security,” specifying the underlying core values, or linking the claimed interest to those core values. Professor of International Relations at Yale University Arnold Wolfers characterizes security in two ways. Objectively, security exists in the absence of threats to acquired values. Subjectively, it is the absence of fear of an attack on those values.⁹ Princeton University political science professor David Baldwin reinterprets that as the “low probability of damage to acquired values.”¹⁰ He poses seven questions to focus the articulation of national security policies: Security for whom, which values, and what threats; how much, what means, and at what expense; and over what time period.¹¹ Addressing these questions provides a common background to develop and execute policies.

To inform and influence domestic and international audiences, presidents have used various venues to specify values, telegraph interests, advertise intent, identify threats, state strategy, promote policies, and advocate for Congress to authorize and appropriate money. These usually focus on specific topics, policies, or means. A determination of US core values, national interests, and policy goals previously required assembling and reviewing addresses, speeches, reports, and hearings spanning numerous administrations.¹²

The “United States Objectives and Programs for National Security,” otherwise known as National Security Council (NSC) paper 68, presented to President Harry S. Truman on 14 April 1950, commences by describing the beginnings of the Cold War. Chapter II identifies the “fundamental purpose of the United States,” and Chapter III contrasts that with the “fundamental design of the Kremlin.”¹³ Additionally, the paper identifies three specific American values: 1) Personal liberty as articulated in the Constitution and Bill of Rights; 2) Conditions and circumstances where the republic with its democratic system and free market may continue and prosper; and 3) The willingness to use force if necessary to maintain and defend our way of life.¹⁴ A subsequent subchapter asserts that the fundamental values of a free society determine its objectives.¹⁵ The paper’s initial TOP SECRET classification precluded various executive officials, legislative leaders, scholars, and the public from reading its contents linked Soviet threats to specific American core values, and becoming aware of proposed ends and ways to ensure security.

Congress recognized the need for the Executive to provide a single document outlining a strategy that linked national interests to end-state objectives with policy ways and capability means. To address this need, it enacted the “Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986.” In addition to streamlining the chain of command and restructuring the missions and relationships of the Military Departments and Services, the Goldwater-Nichols Act amended the National Security Act of 1947, which directed: “The President shall transmit to Congress each year a comprehensive report on the national security strategy of the United States.”¹⁶ The Act specified that the report, referred to in this chapter as a national security strategy report, address:

- US interests, goals, and objectives.
- Foreign policy, worldwide commitments, and national defense capabilities necessary to implement.
- Proposed national power instruments required to protect and promote those interests.
- The adequacy of the capabilities to achieve the objectives of the strategy.
- Other information necessary to inform Congress on national security matters.¹⁷

In response, President Ronald Reagan published the first NSS in 1987. His second NSS in 1988 reminded readers that the fundamentals of US strategy change little over time because they rest on a foundation of enduring values, and America’s national interests lie between its values and basic objectives for policies.¹⁸ A better restatement is that America’s core values determine what leaders consider to be the country’s national interests. The first NSS of President George H. W. Bush (#41) reiterated that idea and listed the Magna Carta, Declaration of Independence, and Bill of Rights as documents that convey those values.¹⁹

Specific references to the Constitution first appeared in the fifth NSS. President William Clinton cited the Preamble to the Constitution and argued that it set forth the basic tenets for America’s foreign and security policy objectives: “to provide for the common defence [*sic*], promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and posterity.”²⁰ The Constitution articulates the Federal Government’s purpose and process. Combined with the Declaration of Independence, it expresses the legal, philosophical, moral, and ideal values for the continuation of the American system. In addition to citing *who*, “We the People,” the *why*’s and *what*’s contained in the Preamble describe the common interests the previous Articles of Confederation failed to achieve; and concludes with the announcement of the Constitution. The Articles that follow explain *how*. Each of President Clinton’s NSSs quotes the Preamble, reminds readers that it encapsulates the basic objectives for the United States, and reiterates that foreign policy must serve the people.²¹

America’s post-World War II most conservative and liberal commanders in chief agreed on basic national interests. Figure 3.1 on the next page highlights similarities between the NSSs published by Presidents Ronald Reagan and Barack H. Obama. President Reagan’s first NSS clearly specified five national interests—arguably the last one is an objective which permits achieving the other four. He reiterated them in his second NSS. Both of his strategies articulated national objectives to achieve those interests.²² President Obama concurred that “America’s interests are enduring” and in different words identified four similar interests, albeit in a different order.²³

That Congress received strategies from these two different presidents that conveyed similar interests is not surprising. In his 1973 book *US National Interests in a Changing World*, Professor of International Relations Donald Nuechterlein reviewed the history of American foreign policy and assessed that the United States has four core national interests: security, economic prosperity, stable international order, and the promotion of American values.²⁴ Fifty years later, US Army Command

NSS 1988 ¹	NSS 2010 ²
“The survival of the United States as a free and independent nation, with its fundamental values intact and its institutions and people secure.”	“The security of the United States, its citizens, and US allies and partners.”
“A healthy and growing US economy to provide opportunity for individual prosperity and a resource base for our national endeavors.”	“A strong, innovative, and growing US economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity.”
“A stable and secure world, free of major threats to US interests.”	“Respect for universal values at home and around the world.”
“The growth of human freedom, democratic institutions, and free market economies throughout the world, linked by a fair and open international trading system.”	“An international order advanced by US leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges.”
“Healthy and vigorous alliance relationships.”	

¹ President Ronald Reagan, “National Security Strategy 1988,” The White House, January 1988, iv.

² President Barack H. Obama, “National Security Strategy 2010,” The White House, May 2010, 7.

Figure 3.1. Comparison of the National Security Strategy, 1988 and 2010. Created by the author and Army University Press.

and General Staff College and Army War College faculty assign their students to read Professor of International Relations Alan Stolberg’s article that teaches those same basic four interests.²⁵

“Security” encompasses the continued survival of the United States, the protection of the Republic, the safety of Americans at home and abroad, plus the continuation of existing US institutions and constitutional form of government. These equate to The Preamble’s objective to “Secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.” In his third NSS—published a month prior to President William Clinton’s inauguration, President George H. W. Bush summarized the security interest: “Foremost, the United States must ensure its security as a free and independent nation, and the protection of its fundamental values, institutions, and people. This is a sovereign responsibility which we will not abdicate to any other nation or collective organization.”²⁶ Therefore, security equates to the protection and continuation of the nation and its system of government.

“Economic prosperity” permits the continuation of the “American way of life.” The Preamble’s goals to “provide for the common defence [*sic*]” and “promote the general welfare,” or fund defense and domestic programs, requires the tax revenues that a healthy economy generates. President Clinton succinctly stated: “Our economic and security interests are increasingly inseparable.”²⁷ President Trump expanded on that idea. The first sentence in the NSS 2017 chapter “Promote American Prosperity” reads: “A strong economy protects the American people, supports our way

of life, and sustains American power.”²⁸ Secretary of State General George Marshall articulated the link between economic prosperity and international stability in his Harvard address on 5 June 1947, in which he outlined the Marshall Plan: “It is logical that the United States should do whatever it is able to do to assist in the return of normal economic health in the world, without which there can be no political stability and no assured peace.”²⁹ Accordingly, the economic prosperity of US Allies and partners enables their security, plus permits them to engage in international commerce that may support American businesses.

“A stable international order” enables economic prosperity and survival. Dr. Bruce Jones of the Brookings Institute articulated that the “International Order” has three historic functions: avoid conflict plus manage relations between great powers, generate prosperity and maintain a system of international free trade and finance, and defend democracy and spread freedom.³⁰ The liberal institutions created by the Allies at the end of World War II facilitated those goals. They permitted nations to traverse the global commons, access markets, and achieve economic growth within a framework of recognized rules and systems. Stability, or “perceived” stability, arises from the interactions between and among great powers, their proxies, and other less powerful nations.³¹

The promotion of “America’s values” ranges from democracy, fair trade, free market economy, liberty, open society, property rights, rule of law, and “universal human rights.”³² These reinforce liberal institutions and arguably lead to a stable international order. Presidents from different political parties address values in their NSSs. In his 1988 NSS, President Reagan proclaimed that the US national interest included: “The growth of human freedom, democratic institutions, and free market economies throughout the world, linked by a fair and open international trading system.”³³ Similarly, in his 2015 NSS, President Obama emphasized: “To lead effectively in a world experiencing significant political change, the United States must live our values at home while promoting universal values abroad.”³⁴ Continuing in the tradition of their predecessors, the first pages of both President Trump’s 2017 NSS and President Biden’s 2021 INSSG include advancing American values.³⁵

If the promotion of American values is in the national interest, then a corollary is that the diminution of those values, either at home or abroad, is a threat to our national interests. In the “Values” chapter in his 2015 NSS, President Obama contends that opposition to democracy and liberty by authoritarian states threatens American security.³⁶ The 2021 INSSG lists the rise of authoritarian powers and their challenges to democratic nations and erosion of international norms as a security threat.³⁷

A challenge exists to ensure actual national interests remain distinct from public, private, and foreign interests that compete for attention and resources. Politicians, pundits, and promoters often cite “national interest” to advocate specific actions, programs, or policies which may promote personal, corporate, or interest group agendas. To address this challenge, Professor Donald Nuechterlein defined “public interests” as those that relate to the well-being” of the American people and their enterprises within the United States, and that fall under the auspices of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of local, state, and federal governments.³⁸ In contrast, “private interests” reflect individual or corporate activities and aspirations and may be parallel or in opposition to public interests, national security, and prosperity.³⁹ He recognized that national, public, and private interests are not mutually exclusive; these different interests influence and impact each other.⁴⁰

The “real world” of finite and constrained fiscal resources mandates assigning a priority to a national interest. This ensures the higher valued end-states with their subordinate objectives have commensurate prioritized ways and receive the appropriate means. An interest’s value, and hence priority, exists independent of any threats to it. Threats pose risks to attaining the desired ends and determine whether the specified ways and allocated means permit achievement.

Two potentially adverse consequences arise when national security policy focuses on threats as opposed to preserving or advancing national interests. Without linking a threat to its impact on a national interest, then the government risks deploying forces and appropriating means to achieve an end that does not align with protecting or advancing an actual or higher value national interest. This wastes treasure and blood, reallocates means from other higher valued interests, and inflicts opportunity costs. The second consequence is the converse. If intelligence reveals no current threat, or decision makers discount a threat, an administration may become complacent and underfund the protection of valued national interests to allocate resources elsewhere. To determine the intensity and value of a national interest, Stolberg concurs with Nuechterlein and suggests dividing them into four categories: Survival, Vital, Important (which Nuechterlein labeled Major), and Peripheral.⁴¹

Survival interests are those critical to the continuation of the nation as well as protection of its citizens, institutions, values, and economic welfare. Prime threats to survival for most nations are invasion, major insurgency, or catastrophic attack. During the Cold War, the threat to the US survival interests was a nuclear attack. Nations will use all means at their disposal to ensure survival. President George H. W. Bush commented in his 1991 NSS: “The survival of the US as a free and independent nation, with its fundamental values intact and its institutions and people secure.”⁴² This statement combined the national interest of security with priority level of survival.

Vital interests consist of dangers to the homeland, allies, economic well-being, and a stable international order. Different from Survival interests, they do not immediately impact a nation’s continued existence. Yet without protection or action, including the use of military force, the loss of Vital interests creates dangerous political, military, or economic conditions which threaten core national interests.⁴³

The prime American Vital Interest followed by all Cold War administrations post WWII revolved around preventing a single hostile state from dominating the Eurasian Landmass.⁴⁴ This mirrors the “Europe First” strategy to defeat Germany in World War II and the subsequent “Marshall Plan” to rebuild Western Europe. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, President H. W. Bush recognized in his 1990 NSS that the success of Containment created new conditions and opportunities. He emphasized that America’s basic values and geopolitical realities remained constant, as did its strategy to prevent any hostile power from dominating Eurasia.⁴⁵

Next down this hierarchy are Important (or Nuechterlein’s “Major”) Interests, which pose a moderate, but not devastating, risk to the nation’s security and economic well-being, or to international stability. The marginal benefit derived from securing these interests in the short term may be modest, but their loss could escalate to impede Vital interests. Decision makers might use force to defend or advance an Important interest. It is a conveniently broad term that when proclaimed might dissuade a threat.

In contrast to the other classifications, threats to Peripheral interests do not jeopardize a nation or the well-being of its citizens at home. However, these might adversely impact some Americans overseas, certain private economic interests, the promotion of American values, and various policy agendas. Advancing American and democratic ideas abroad, performing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and advocating human rights fall in this category. Arguably they do not warrant the use of military force and associated risks of loss and escalation.⁴⁶

Survival and Peripheral interests may be easy to discern. Soviet nuclear weapons in Cuba impinged on American Survival interests and warranted responses that risked escalation. Coups in third-world countries, imprisonment of foreign human rights workers, suppression of religious

freedoms, and natural disasters in third world countries do not directly threaten American security and economic interests. Consequently, no substantial harm accrues due to inaction; some benefit might arise if action occurs.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union acted on their articulated Vital Interest to maintain positive control over Eastern Europe. Moscow's interests competed with Washington's to preserve and promote democratic values. The Dwight Eisenhower and Lyndon Johnson Administrations determined that the Red Army's responses to the 1953 East German Uprising, 1956 revolts in Hungary, and the 1968 Prague Spring revolution in Czechoslovakia revealed the Kremlin's actions to secure Soviet Vital interests. Accordingly, the White House refrained from risking American involvement to advance a Peripheral Interest, weighing the marginal costs as greater than the marginal benefits.

Debate and disagreement often arise regarding the distinction among Vital, Important, and Major Interests. Perceptions about the level of threat, sense of urgency, and impact on preferred policy agendas vary. In 1950, President Truman identified the defense of South Korea from North Korea's invasion as at minimum a major interest and worth using military force, despite its absence in Secretary of State Dean Acheson's "Aleutian Chain" speech and war planning documents that envisioned a retreat from the peninsula in event of war with the Soviets.⁴⁷ President Eisenhower rejected sending troops to Vietnam in 1954, but did send them to Lebanon and the Dominican Republic. President John F. Kennedy considered support to South Vietnam worthy of at least a major interest and sent military advisors. Then in 1965, President Lyndon Johnson perceived it to be a US vital interest in order to prevent the fall of other South East Asian nations to communism. Therefore, he increased troop commitments; yet concurrently imposed policy constraints on waging the war for fear of challenging perceived Chinese or Soviet Vital Interests.⁴⁸

President Clinton's second NSS contains a subchapter entitled "Deciding When and How to Employ US Forces." While strategies published by prior administrations included the terms vital and important, they refrained from defining those terms. In contrast to Nuechterlein's four categories, President Clinton identified three: vital, the survival, security, and economic vitality of the homeland plus our allies; important, those that "affect our national well-being and the character of the world in which we live;" and humanitarian interests.⁴⁹

Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 1-18, *Strategy*, follows the Clinton Administration model and offers three categories to prioritize national interests. It adopts the same terms employed in Clinton Administration NSSs and offers the following definitions. The first is Vital, those ends for which the government will commit soldiers to die. The JDN identifies national survival, citizen security, economic prosperity, and preservation of way of life. Interestingly, the Vital description omits protection of allies. The second is Important, objectives for which the government will use force. The doctrine note lists alliances, regional stability, access to global commons, and promotion of values. The third is Peripheral, goals that the government would be willing to fund.⁵⁰

Intrinsic in the word "peripheral" are the concepts of incidental, inessential, minor, tangential, and unimportant. Some national security professionals may use this term to identify interests that should receive less attention, funding, and priority than others. However, a leader or politician would likely be reluctant to publicly identify an interest as "peripheral." Furthermore, allies, partners, voters, and interest groups might object to hear American leaders use "peripheral" to describe something they perceive as important. Consequently, President Clinton's use of the term "humanitarian" better describes those specific values and perhaps reduces the perception that the US focuses solely on material interests.

Nuechterlein¹	NSS 1995²	Stolberg³	JND 1-18⁴
Survival	Vital	Survival	Vital
Vital		Vital	
Major	Important	Important	Important
Peripheral	Humanitarian	Peripheral	Peripheral

¹ Donald Nuechterlein, *U.S. National Interests in a Changing World* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1973).

² President William Clinton, "National Security Strategy, Engagement and Enlargement," The White House, February 1995.

³ Alan Stolberg, "Crafting National Interests in the 21st Century," in *National Security Policy and Issues*, U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Issues, vol. II, ed. J. Boone Bartholomees Jr. (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Army War College Press, 2012), <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB1110.pdf>.

⁴ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Doctrine Note 1-18, *Strategy* (Washington, DC: 2018), <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=810221>.

Figure 3.2. Summary of the various categories for prioritizing national interests. Created by the author and Army University Press.

Risk arises when Nuechterlein’s and Stolberg’s distinctions between Survival and Vital become merged into the single category of Vital. Leaders, allies, adversaries, and the public could mischaracterize a core value, fail to assess a threat’s potential damage to core values, or exaggerate or minimize a threat to US national interests. What might be a Vital interest in a four-tiered ranking system might fall into the category of Important in a three-tier system, thereby receiving less attention and assets than others in that middle tier. Using four separate categories helps distinguish direct Survival threats to US core values, homeland, and institutions; plus separate those Vital interests that might lead to a serious decline in American core values, prosperity, and way of life from those that are merely Important.

JND 1-18’s middle tier category of Important comprises the universe of that which is neither Survival/Vital nor Peripheral. The assumption is that the United States would fight for these interests. While good arguments exist for the concept of ambiguity in how the United States responds, a leader or politician proclamation that something is “an Important interest” followed by no use of force creates a “credibility gap” or “say-do gap.” Labeling a plethora of interests under “Important,” or using that term to assuage certain partners or interest groups creates a false sense of the priority. For national and foreign audiences, this could result in misunderstandings and mistrust. Within the US government, it could create internal and external divisions regarding the actual value of that interest.⁵¹

Comparing NSS 2017 and the Interim National Security Strategy Guidance

The evaluation of different strategies requires benchmarks to measure performance. Professor Baldwin's proposal that national security formulation should address values parallels President Reagan's assertion that values give rise to national interests. Linking identified values to specific national interests provides the first measure. Employing the Army War College model of clear articulation of ends, ways, and means; or another similar methodology to differentiate goals from tasks becomes the second measure. Accordingly, assigning specific values to definitively articulated national interests and applying the Army War College ends, ways, and means model creates a rubric to compare, contrast, and evaluate President Trump's 2017 NSS and President Biden's 2021 INSSG.

President Trump's NSS 2017 was different from those of his predecessors. Distinct from the four prior ones, two each from Presidents George W. Bush and Barack H. Obama, the Trump Administration's strategy emphasizes his campaign agenda, articulates an end-state vision, traces that back to core values, admits there is geopolitical competition, identifies America's national interests, proclaims supporting ends, lists general and specific ways, and relates means to accomplish the actions.

Two months after his inauguration, President Biden published INSSG 2021. It appears as a provisional NSS. The Forward provides "my vision [of] how America will engage with the world" and directs the executive branch "to align their actions with this guidance."⁵² After its publication, conventional wisdom was that the new Biden Administration would satisfy the legislative requirement to produce a NSS in its first year. This action would comply with the Goldwater-Nichols Act plus remove potential partisan criticism that his predecessor met that requirement. An opportune moment for delivery would have been on or before Biden's State of the Union address on 1 March 2022. However, after almost a year of posturing forces, Moscow's decision to invade Ukraine prompted the document to be delayed. Two weeks before Russia's 24 February invasion of Ukraine, *Politico's National Security Daily* predicted this delay, noting that a strategy focused on China as a peer competitor, and which relegates Russia as only a regional power to be managed, would appear incongruent with an actual Russian military action into Ukraine and its consequences for the West.⁵³

The NSS 2017 and INSSG 2021 forwards both deviate from those of prior administrations from the same party. The first paragraphs of Bush's 2002 and Obama's 2010 strategies remind readers that the 20th century ended with a victory of liberty over totalitarianism; that the nation is at war; that Americans rise to challenges; and the United States is in position to seize the opportunities of the new century.⁵⁴ The forwards in their second strategies advertise their successes in the national security policy and diplomatic arenas. In contrast to previous national strategies by predecessors from their political parties, NSS 2017 and INSSG 2021 contain language that appeals to their respective electoral base. President Trump's forward returns to his campaign agenda, reiterates a campaign slogan, and notes: "The American people elected me to make America great again. . . . This National Security Strategy puts America First."⁵⁵ NSS 2017 uses the Trump campaign slogan "America First" seven times.⁵⁶ President Biden's INSSG 2021 parallels President Trump's appeal to the electorate; the Biden campaign slogan "Build back better" appears five times throughout his guidance.⁵⁷

The NSS 2017 introduction articulates a vision, or end-state, for the country: "An America that is safe, prosperous, and free at home is an America with the strength, confidence, and will to lead abroad."⁵⁸ In contrast, a reader must search in the four prior strategies and the current INSSG for a clearly stated vision. President George W. Bush's NSS 2002 claims the end-state is a safer

and better world with political and economic freedom.⁵⁹ That appears as an ambiguous goal. President Obama’s NSS 2010 focuses on “renewing American leadership;” without explaining why that needs to be done.⁶⁰ His NSS 2015 contends that “strong and sustainable leadership” will safeguard America’s otherwise undefined national interests.⁶¹ Similar to the four strategies from the first two 21st century administrations, INSSG 2021 does not clearly state why Americans should invest in national security. Statements that “democracy holds the key to freedom, prosperity, peace, and dignity” and “democracy is essential to meeting the challenges of our time” focus on the method of governing, rather than the nation’s national interests and goals.⁶² It argues that the United States should lead the world: “It’s how we ensure the American people are able to live in peace, security, and prosperity.”⁶³ That is a way to achieve an objective, not an end-state in itself.

The Trump Administration’s NSS traces its end-state back to American core values. Administrations have incorporated values in their NSS in various ways. NSS 2017 references the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights and reinforces that these, plus the country’s beliefs, culture, and principles, have made America what it is today.⁶⁴ The strategy argues for the promotion of American values: “Governments that respect the rights of their citizens remain the best vehicles for prosperity, human happiness, and peace.”⁶⁵ The document further specifies those American values, listing equality, rule of law, plus the freedoms of religion, speech, press, and assembly.⁶⁶

This is consistent with how late 20th century administrations addressed values. President George H. W. Bush cited documents instrumental to the founding of our country, and President William Clinton’s strategies both quoted the Preamble to the Constitution. In NSS 2002, President George W. Bush proclaimed values found in the Bill of Rights as instrumental for human dignity, and President Obama’s NSS 2010 specified fidelity to values in the Constitution to ensure respect for rights at home and to promote them abroad.⁶⁷ However, neither President Bush’s NSS 2006 nor President Obama’s NSS 2015 cited America’s founding documents as a basis for the nation’s values. They employed the terms “common,” “democratic,” and “universal” values and emphasized the concepts of civil liberties to include privacy but abstained from defining or describing them.⁶⁸

INSSG 2021 continues that tradition in how it addresses values. Absent from its pages are references to the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, or Bill of Rights. Instead, the twenty-five instances of the term “values” employ modifiers: 36 percent of the time “our values,” not otherwise defined, followed by three instances of “democratic” and two of “universal.”⁶⁹ That omission misses the opportunity to remind domestic and international audiences of what Americans value and where common values and interests exist.

While highlighting the superiority of democracy, free markets, and liberty, NSS 2017 follows an international relations theory of realism and specifically states: “We are not going to impose our values on others.”⁷⁰ In contrast, President Biden’s INSSG 2021 argues that to counter authoritarianism, “**We must join with likeminded allies and partners to revitalize democracy the world over** [emphasis original].”⁷¹ This reflects a more liberalist international relations stance.

Similar to prior national security strategies, NSS 2017 describes the current security environment. Uniquely, it identifies the existence of political, military, and economic competitions; and criticizes prior administrations for their failed policies:

These competitions require the United States to rethink the policies of the past two decades—policies based on the assumption that engagement with rivals and their inclusion

in international institutions and global commerce would turn them into benign actors and trustworthy partners. For the most part, this premise turned out to be false.⁷²

The four previous NSSs, two each from Presidents Bush and Obama, refrain from stating that China and Russia engage in actions contrary to America's national interests. President Bush's NSS 2002 asserted a new reality for the 21st century; it concurrently welcomed "the emergence of a strong, peaceful, and prosperous China;" lectured that Beijing's delay of implementing social and political freedom plus its pursuit of advanced military technology threaten Asian neighbors; and asserted that the White House and the Kremlin are no longer adversaries⁷³

NSS 2006 focused on countering terrorism; its Forward commences with: "America is at war."⁷⁴ While acknowledging the war on terror, its East Asia subchapter states "The United States is a Pacific nation, with extensive interests throughout East and Southeast Asia"⁷⁵ The strategy discourages China from "following the old ways of thinking."⁷⁶ The earlier erroneous assumption was that as economic freedom in China expanded, so would political freedom. Therefore, the document encouraged leaders to make the right choices for their people. However, it concludes that the US strategy will hedge against other possibilities.⁷⁷

Despite Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's *Foreign Policy* article titled "America's Pacific Century," the Obama Administration's two NSS's had half as many references to China as did the same two documents from the Bush Administration.⁷⁸ The "Advance our Rebalance to Asia and the Pacific" subchapter in the NSS 2015 encourages cooperation, acknowledges competition, and rejects "the inevitability of confrontation" with China.⁷⁹ The first page of the NSS 2015 portrayed China in two different lights—lauding America's unprecedented cooperation with China and, in that same sentence, warning of China's military modernization and rejecting "any role for intimidation in resolving territorial disputes."⁸⁰ The sentences that referred to tensions in the East and South China Seas refrained from identifying China's actions as the cause.⁸¹

Following Russia's August 2008 invasion of Georgia, President Obama's NSS 2010 cited Russia only once as the subject of a sentence: "Russia has reemerged in the international arena as a strong voice."⁸² The other thirteen references related to aspirational, bilateral, or multilateral actions. After the Kremlin seized Crimea in 2014, the second Obama Administration's NSS 2015 used Russia or Russian fifteen times, yet never referred to the country as a threat to US national interests or employed the word as a subject of a sentence. Rather, Russia appears in the possessive form or as a noun modifier as in "Russia's aggression" or "Russian aggression." Twice in the same paragraph, Russia occurs as the object of the preposition: first time with respect to sanctions and second regarding cooperation.⁸³

With respect to China and Russia, NSS 2017 deviates from the indirect and obtuse language of its immediate predecessors. In the Introduction, the Trump Administration portrays the strategic security environment and asserts: "China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity."⁸⁴ Later the strategy elaborates: "China and Russia want to shape a world antithetical to US values and interests."⁸⁵ It notes: "After being dismissed as a phenomenon of an earlier century, great power competition returned."⁸⁶ The use of the active voice to identify the doer and the action provides clarity, avoids obfuscation, and prevents hiding responsibility that occurs when the passive voice appears.

The Biden Administration continues and expands on the Trump Administration's geopolitical perspective. INSSG 2021 while not employing the phrase, refrains from denouncing the concept of great power competition. It uses great powers, without defining them, when identifying challenges

that imperil American security.⁸⁷ The Biden administration continues the prior’s perspective of a changing geopolitical landscape, and informs Americans: “We must also contend with the reality that **the distribution of power across the world is changing, creating new threats** [emphasis original].”⁸⁸ The next sentence lists in order China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. Instead of great power competition, INSSG 2021 uses strategic competition in the latter fourth of the guidance as the label to define the relationship between the United States and China.⁸⁹ This substitution may represent an intentional effort to avoid linking the idea of inevitable conflict which often occurred during the great power competitions of the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries.

NSS 2017 implies that China and Russia are authoritarian.⁹⁰ The Biden Administration continues the perspective of his predecessor but is more candid. Reflecting reality, INSSG 2021 labels China and Russia as authoritarian states. However, while China and Russia receive almost equal attention in Trump’s NSS (thirty-two and twenty-five instances respectively), Biden’s INSSG 2021 refers to Russia a third as often as China (five to fifteen). The reduced mentioning of Russia likely reflected early assumptions that Washington could manage Moscow. Notice the omission in the sentence from the INSSG: “Taken together, **this agenda will strengthen our enduring advantages, and allow us to prevail in strategic competition with China or any other nation** [emphasis original].”⁹¹ Pundits pontificate that the draft NSS contained those same assumptions and required extensive rethinking and rewriting, thus delaying its release.⁹² The Forum for American Leadership advocates that the revised NSS should announce “the Post-Cold War era is over” and “reflect the world as it is and articulate a strategy to protect American interests effectively.”⁹³

Like Professor Nuechterlein’s taxonomy, the NSS 2017 introduction identifies four national interests, and it presents them in the same order as President Reagan’s NSS 1988. The general concepts of security, prosperity, stable international order, and promotion of American Values form the foundations of later chapters where the Trump Administration identifies ways to achieve the desired end-state.

Contrary to advice from the Army War College, NSS 2017 presents its first interest in the form of an infinitive phrase (“to protect”) while the remaining three follow as future tense verbs (the word “will” precedes the verbs “promote,” “preserve,” and “advance”).⁹⁴ The bold print provides context that these are national interests, though they also could be viewed as overarching ways or grand policies to achieve the end-state.

In contrast, President Obama’s NSS 2015, while lacking a definitive strategic end-state, applies the Army War College methodology and lists America’s enduring national interests using Nuechterlein’s taxonomy in the form of conditions.⁹⁵ INSSG 2021 refrains from employing traditional generic national interest language and instead uses the verb “protect” vice “the protection” for the security interest. Abandoning an attempt at parallelism, INSSG 2021 then addresses interests using the gerunds “expanding” and “realizing” to convey the economic and values interests.⁹⁶

NSS 2017 restates the four national interests as “Pillars”—each with its own chapter—to support achieving the articulated end-state. The idea of “pillars” that support a national security strategy first appeared in President George W. Bush’s second strategy, NSS 2006.⁹⁷

The generic interest of national security appears in NSS 2017 Pillar I as “Protect the American People, Homeland, and the American Way of Life.”⁹⁸ Pillar III readdresses the generic national interests of security and international stability, while Pillar II refers to the economy and Pillar IV to American values. Each Pillar specifies policy ways.

		INSSG 2021 ¹	NSS 2017 ²	NSS 2015 ³
End-State		Not clearly articulated	“An America that is safe, prosperous, and free at home is an America with the strength, confidence, and will to lead abroad.” ⁴	Not clearly articulated
Generic Interest	Its “End”	INSSG 2021 ⁵	NSS 2017 ⁶	NSS 2015 ⁷
Security	The United States and its way of life survives	“Protect the Security of the American people.”	“First, our fundamental responsibility is to protect the American people, the homeland, and the American way of life.” Or restated as a condition: The American way of life, people, and Homeland are safe.	“The security of the United States, its citizens, and US allies and partners.”
Economic Prosperity	The United States thrives	“Expanding economic prosperity and opportunity.”	“Second, we will promote American prosperity.” Or restated as a condition: America and its people continue to prosper.	“A strong, innovative, and growing US economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity.”
Stability	A stable international order exists and grows		“Third, we will preserve peace through strength by rebuilding our military so that it remains preeminent, deters our adversaries, and if necessary, is able to fight and win.” Or restated as a condition: Peace and stability overseas ensured through American strength.	“A rules-based international order advanced by US leadership that promotes peace, security, and opportunity through stronger cooperation to meet global challenges.” <i>(appears as the fourth bullet)</i>
Values	Liberty, rule of law, and human rights flourish	“Realizing and defending democratic values at the heart of the American way of life.”	“Fourth, we will advance American influence because a world that supports American interests and reflects our values makes America more secure and prosperous.” Or restated as a condition: American influence advanced; American values adopted by others.	“Respect for universal values at home and around the world.” <i>(appears as the third bullet)</i>

¹ President Joseph R. Biden Jr., “Interim National Security Strategy Guidance 2021,” The White House, March 2021.

² President Donald J. Trump, “National Security Strategy 2017,” The White House, December 2017.

³ President Barack H. Obama, “National Security Strategy 2015,” The White House, February 2015, 2.

⁴ President Donald J. Trump, “National Security Strategy 2017,” The White House, December 2017, 1.

⁵ President Joseph R. Biden Jr., “Interim National Security Strategy Guidance 2021,” The White House, March 2021, 9.

⁶ President Donald J. Trump, “National Security Strategy 2017,” The White House, December 2017, 4.

⁷ President Barack H. Obama, “National Security Strategy 2015,” The White House, February 2015, 2.

Figure 3.3. Comparison of generic enduring national interests with those specified in INSSG 2021, NSS 2017, and NSS 2015. Created by the author and Army University Press.

Pillar I, “Protect the American People, the Homeland, and Way of Life,” lists four Primary Ways. The way “Secure the US Borders and Territory” contains three separate lines of effort prior to identifying priority actions. The way “Pursue Threats to their Source” consists of two subordinate ways. In contrast, the remaining two Primary Ways forego subdivisions and proceed directly to list priority actions.⁹⁹

Pillar II, “Promote the American Economy,” continues in the manner that its predecessor concluded. It consists of five Priority Ways; each describes a situation then enumerates enabling priority actions.¹⁰⁰

Pillar III, “Preserve Peace through Strength,” differs from its predecessors. Its first Primary Way, “Renew America’s Competitive Advantages,” omits listing any priority actions. It criticizes prior administrations since the 1990s for entering “strategic complacency” by: assuming that American military superiority would continue, believing that “liberal-democratic enlargement and inclusion” would alter the “nature of international relations,” cutting the size of the military, delaying recapitalization, foregoing modernization, and presuming technological quality could compensate for insufficient quantity.¹⁰¹ The second Primary Way entitled “Renew Capabilities” identifies seven specific arenas that require attention.¹⁰² These nouns, which are means to perform other tasks, become subordinate Ends to achieve for their respective specific priority actions. The following example depicts this duality. The third arena in “Renew Capabilities” is Nuclear Forces.¹⁰³ The nuclear triad comprised of bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and ballistic missile submarines provide the means to conduct deterrence. These resources facilitate the way to achieve Peace through Strength. In Pillar III, Nuclear Forces appear as a subordinate objective. The priority actions to sustain nuclear force structure and modernize the nuclear arsenal become the ways to achieve the Nuclear Forces objective.

Pillar IV, “Advance American Influence,” asserts that American influence is positive and promotes peace and prosperity. It also warns that the “arc of history” fails to ensure that America’s free political and economic system will always prevail. The document rejects the idea of moral relativism. NSS 2017 proclaims: “There can be no moral relevancy between nations that uphold the rule of law, empower women, and respect individual rights and those that brutalize and suppress people.”¹⁰⁴ The strategy admits: “We are not going to impose our values on others.”¹⁰⁵ However, it states that Americans will continue to champion US values and encourage others to join the community of democratic states. The Pillar outlines three Primary Ways: “Encourage Aspiring Partners,” which comes in two varieties—“Developing Countries” and their associated three priority actions then “Fragile States” with three separate priority actions.¹⁰⁶ Consistent with the theme that “This National Security Strategy puts America First,” the Trump Administration reveals it will prioritize actions to bolster fragile nations “where state weaknesses or failure would magnify threats to the American homeland.”¹⁰⁷ The chapter concludes by addressing the remaining two Primary Ways and their respective priority actions.

Despite the lack of clearly identifying end-states and objectives, INSSG 2021 lists numerous ways, or policy actions, the Biden Administration perceives necessary to achieve America’s otherwise undefined national interests. Its section addressing national security priorities obliquely conveys three of four of the generic national interests: security, economic prosperity, and values but omits Professor Nuechterlein’s stable international order interest that Presidents Reagan, Obama, and Trump mentioned in their strategies. INSSG 2021 bulletizes three primary ways to achieve those interests. The first bullet to “defend and nurture the sources of American

End-State	“An America that is safe, prosperous, and free at home is an America with the strength, confidence, and will to lead abroad.”			
Generic National Interest	Its “End”	NSS 2017 Pillar	Pillar’s Primary Ways	Pillar’s Means
Security	The United States and its way of life survives	I. Protect the American People, the Homeland, and the American Way of Life	a. Secure the US Border and Territory b. Pursue Threats to Their Source c. Keep America Safe in Cyber era d. Promote Resilience	Missile defense system, Biomedical innovation, Border wall, Law, intelligence, CT operations, Law enforcement, Partners
Economic Prosperity	The United States thrives	II. Promote American Prosperity	a. Rejuvenate the Economy b. Promote Free, Fair, and Reciprocal Economic Relationships c. Lead in Research, Technology, Invention, & Innovation d. Promote & Protect National Security Innovation Base e. Embrace Energy Dominance	Regulations, Tax Reform, Infrastructure, Education, Economic Enforcement Actions, STEM Talent, Private Sector, Trade Policies, Intellectual Property, National Laboratories, Energy
Stability	A stable international order exists and grows	III. Preserve Peace through Strength	a. Renew Competitive Advantages b. Renew Capabilities	Military, Weapon Systems, Technology, Defense Industrial Base, Nuclear Forces, Space Architecture, Cyber Tools, Intelligence, Diplomacy & Statecraft, Economic Pressure, Information
Values	Liberty, rule of law, and human rights flourish	IV. Advance American Influence	a. Encourage Aspiring Partners b. Achieve Better Outcomes in Multilateral Forums c. Champion American Values.	Partners, Aid, Development Tools, Diplomacy, Multilateral Forums, International Institutions, “American Values,” Religious Freedom, Humanitarian Assistance, Rule of Law, Women’s Equality

Source: President Donald J. Trump, “National Security Strategy 2017,” The White House, December 2017, 1; Pillar I, 7–14; Pillar II, 17–24; Pillar III, 25–36; and Pillar IV, 37–44.

Figure 3.4. An overview of the NSS 2017 End-state, the national interest that each Pillar supports, each Pillar’s enabling Primary Ways, plus means mentioned to accomplish the tasks. Created by the author and Army University Press.

End-State	“The American people are able to live in peace, security, and prosperity.”			
Generic National Interest	Its “End”	INSSG 2021 “End” Expressed	Primary Ways	Articulated Means
Security	The United States and its way of life survives	“Protect the Security of the American people.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Defend and nurture sources of American strength, people, economy, national defense, and democracy at home b. Promote a favorable distribution of power c. Deter and prevent adversaries from directly threatening the US, allies, and interests d. Reinvigorate and modernize alliances and partnership e. Reaffirm, invest in, and modernize NATO and alliances with Australia, Japan, ROK. f. Equip armed forces to deter, defend, and defeat g. Streamline acquisition processes to develop, test, acquire, and deploy h. Develop capabilities to better compete and deter in the gray zone 	Diplomacy first, then Armed Forces
Economic Prosperity	The United States thrives	“Expanding economic prosperity and opportunity.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Rejuvenate the Economy b. Promote Free, Fair, and Reciprocal Economic Relationships c. Lead in Research, Technology, Invention, & Innovation d. Grow middle class e. Enforce existing trade rules f. Protect investments g. Create new trade policies h. Build infrastructure i. Explore outer space j. Reform WTO k. Partner with democratic friends l. Develop and defend critical supply chains m. Confront unfair and illegal trade practices 	Investment Trade Policy
Stability	A stable international order exists and grows	“Reinvigorate and modernize our alliances and partnerships around the world.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Lead and sustain a stable and open international system b. Answer China’s challenge 	Alliances, partnerships, International institutions
Values	Liberty, rule of law, and human rights flourish	“Realizing and defending democratic values at the heart of the American way of life.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Encourage Aspiring Partners b. Achieve Better Outcomes in Multilateral Forums c. Champion American Values 	

Source: President Joseph R. Biden Jr., “Interim National Security Strategy Guidance 2021,” The White House, March 2021, 2, 9–14.

Figure 3.5. An overview of some of the INSSG 2021 policy ways. Created by the author and Army University Press.

strength” addresses national defense, the economy, democracy, and the people.¹⁰⁸ This sentence encompasses three generic interests: security, prosperity, and values. The second and third bullets to “promote a favorable distribution of power” and “lead and sustain a stable and open international system” readdress security and imply the otherwise unarticulated generic national interest of international stability. The next page highlights the Biden Administration’s preferred way to achieve that: “**Reinvigorate and modernize our alliances and partnerships around the world** [emphasis original].”¹⁰⁹ Unlike the linkage of means to perform ways in NSS 2017, resources receive little mention in INSSG 2021.

Unique from prior administrations and INSSG 2021, NSS 2017 nests national security interests and primary ways, then specifies 103 priority actions, or subordinate ways, that the Executive Branch should pursue to support the strategy and achieve national interests.¹¹⁰ These priority actions telegraph where departments and agencies should focus their organizational efforts.

Figures 3.6 through 3.9 on the next few pages display how nine of the fourteen Primary Ways jump straight to their priority actions, two divide into subordinate lines of effort prior to listing their priority actions, two list specific arenas on which their priority actions should focus, and one does not specify priority actions.

NSS 2017 concludes with a “The Strategy in a Regional Context” chapter that acknowledges: “The United States must tailor our approaches to different regions” to protect and advance its national interests.¹¹¹ The chapter provides a situational context and lists US national interests in each region. This document foregoes the conventional terms of diplomatic, information, military, and economic (DIME) to depict the instruments of national power.¹¹² Rather, the strategy uses three synonyms for those instruments—Political, Economic, and Military and Security—as paragraph headers to telegraph means to conduct future actions.¹¹³ For the Indo-Pacific region: the Political means “will reinforce commitment to freedom of the seas,” the Economic means “will pursue bilateral trade agreements on a fair and reciprocal basis,” and the Military and Security means “will maintain a forward presence capable of deterring, and if necessary, defeating any adversary.” This specific application to regions parallels Reagan, Bush 41, Clinton, and Obama administration strategies, which contained separate subdivisions entitled “Regional Policies,” “Integrating Elements of Power,” “Integrated Regional Approaches, and “International Order.”¹¹⁴ In contrast, the nine lines of effort in Bush 43’s two strategies mention regions and countries as they apply to that line. The Trump Administration applies the strategy to regional areas and identifies specific ways and means to advance American interests. It has pages devoted to the Indo-Pacific, Europe, Middle East, South and Central Asia, Western Hemisphere, and Africa. Considering how well organized and crafted this document is, and the omission of alphabetical order, they likely appear in order of priority.¹¹⁵

INSSG 2021 continues this endeavor and also addresses regions. Under the “Our National Security Priorities” heading and in the middle of a paragraph that commences with building partnerships, the document reveals that America’s unspecified vital interests “compel the deepest connection to the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Western Hemisphere.”¹¹⁶ In this section the document abstains from specifying threats and—other than the commitment and investment in allies—refrains from immediately elaborating how to protect or advance US interests in the Indo-Pacific and Europe. In contrast, the following three paragraphs address specific actions and focal points in the Western Hemisphere, the Middle East, and Africa.¹¹⁷ The lack of specificity regarding the Indo-Pacific and Europe raises questions about whether the Biden Administration had yet to create or hesitated to telegraph concepts to secure and advance national interests with respect to China and Russia.

Pillar	Primary Ways	Lines of Effort/ Subordinate Ways	Priority Actions
Pillar 1: Protect the American People, the Homeland, and Way of Life	Secure the US Borders and Territory	Defend Against Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhance missile defense - Detect and disrupt WMD - Enhance counterproliferation measures - Target WMD terrorists
		Combat Biothreats and Pandemics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Detect and contain biothreats at their source - Support biomedical innovation - Improve emergency response
		Strengthen Border Control and Immigration Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhance border security - Enhance vetting - Enforce immigration laws - Bolster transportation security
	Pursue Threats to Their Source	Defeat Jihadist Terrorists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disrupt terror plots - Take direct action - Eliminate terrorist safe havens - Sever sources of strength - Share responsibility - Combat radicalization and recruitment in communities
		Dismantle Transnational Criminal Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve strategic planning and intelligence - Defend communities - Defend in depth - Counter cyber criminals
	Keep America Safe in the Cyber Era		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify and prioritize risk - Build defensible government networks - Deter and disrupt malicious cyber actors - Improve information sharing and sensing - Deploy layered defenses
	Promote American Resilience		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve risk management - Build a culture of preparedness - Improve planning - Incentivize information sharing

Source: President Donald J. Trump, "National Security Strategy 2017," The White House, December 2017, Pillar I, 7–14.

Figure 3.6. Comparison of Pillar 1. Created by the author and Army University Press.

Alluding to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the INSSG announces the Biden Administration will “avoid forever wars.”¹¹⁸ However, it reiterates an admission made by the Obama Administration in NSS 2015 that is absent, but likely presumed, in the intervening Republican administration’s NSS 2017. Both Democratic presidents mention the right to unilaterally use force. NSS 2015 di-

Pillar	Primary ways	Lines of effort/ Subordinate ways	Priority actions
Pillar II: Promote American Prosperity	Rejuvenate the domestic economy		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduce regulatory burden - Promote tax reform - Improve American infrastructure - Reduce debt through fiscal responsibility - Support education and apprenticeship programs
	Promote free, fair, and reciprocal economic relationships		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adopt new trade and investment agreements and modernize existing ones - Counter unfair trade practices - Counter foreign corruption - Work with like-minded partners - Facilitate new market opportunities
	Lead in research, technology, invention, and innovation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identify and prioritize risk - Build defensible government networks - Deter and disrupt malicious cyber actors - Improve information sharing and sensing - Deploy layered defenses
	Promote and protect the us national security base		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve risk management - Build a culture of preparedness - Improve planning - Incentivize information sharing
	Embrace energy dominance		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduce barriers - Promote exports - Ensure energy security - Attain universal energy access - Further America's technological edge

Source: President Donald J. Trump, "National Security Strategy 2017," The White House, December 2017, Pillar II, 17–24.

Figure 3.7. Comparison of Pillar 2. Created by the author and Army University Press.

rectly states: “The United States will use military force, unilaterally if necessary, when our enduring interests demand it: when our people are threatened; when our livelihoods are at stake; and when the security of our allies is in danger.”¹¹⁹ INSSG 2021 subtly reserves the right to unilateral action Within the sentence that mentions when events merit the use of force, the US will act as part of a multinational effort, the conditional phrase “whenever possible” appears.¹²⁰

Distinct from all its predecessors, President Biden’s interim strategy highlights domestic issues. It strays from the specified Goldwater-Nichols Act intent to address national security interests, goals, and objectives; foreign policy and national military commitments; the instruments of national power to achieve those interests; and the adequacy of capabilities.¹²¹ The Trump Administration emphasized traditional security in context of the state, geopolitics, and military risk. The Biden Administration expands the definition of security to address human security, a broad concept which encompasses access to, or the impacts of, climate change, crime, food, health, jobs, migration, poverty, and violence.¹²² The Biden Administration perceives an “existential risk posed by the climate crisis.”¹²³ INSSG 2021 showers domestic issues throughout its pages, then takes two pages to elab-

Pillar	Primary Ways	Specific Arenas	Priority Actions
Pillar III: Preserve Peace Through Strength	Renew America's Competitive Advantage	None	None. Commentary on the failure of prior administrations to act.
	Renew Capabilities	Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Modernize: Improve existing systems, seek new capabilities, eliminate bureaucratic impediments - Pursue new approaches to acquisition - Grow the force, field forces of sufficient scale - Improve readiness - Retain a full spectrum force
		Defense Industrial Base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand the problem - Encourage homeland investment - Protect and grow critical skills
		Nuclear Forces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sustain nuclear weapons - Modernize US nuclear forces and infrastructure - Maintain stable deterrence
		Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advance space as a priority domain - Promote space commerce - Maintain lead in exploration
		Cyberspace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve attribution, accountability, and response - Enhance cyber tools and expertise - Improve integration and agility
		Intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve understanding - Harness all information at America's disposal - Fuse information and analysis
		Diplomacy & Statecraft	<p>Competitive Diplomacy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preserve a forward diplomatic presence - Advance American interests - Catalyze opportunities <p>Tools of Economic Diplomacy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reinforce economic ties with Allies and partners - Deploy economic pressure on security threats - Sever sources of funding <p>Information Statecraft:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prioritize the competition - Drive effective communications - Activate local networks - Share responsibility - Upgrade, tailor, and innovate

Source: President Donald J. Trump, "National Security Strategy 2017," The White House, December 2017, Pillar III, 25–36.

Figure 3.8. Comparison of Pillar 3. Created by the author and Army University Press.

Pillar	Primary Ways	Specific Arenas	Priority Actions
Pillar IV: Advance American Influence	Encourage Aspiring Partners	Developing Countries	- Mobilize resources - Capitalize on new technologies - Incentivize reforms
		Fragile States	- Commit selectively - Work with reformers - Synchronize actions
	Achieve Better Outcomes in Multilateral Forums		- Exercise leadership in political and security bodies - Shape and reform international financial and trade institutions - Ensure common domains remain free - Protect a free and open internet
	Champion American Values		- Support the dignity of individuals - Defeat transnational terrorist organizations - Empower women and youth - Protect religious freedom and religious minorities - Reduce human suffering

Source: President Donald J. Trump, "National Security Strategy 2017," The White House, December 2017, Pillar IV, 37–44.

Figure 3.9. Comparison of Pillar 4. Created by the author and Army University Press.

orate on a domestic agenda. The articulated purpose is “the revitalizing our democracy.”¹²⁴ These issues include criminal justice reform, diversity, equality, systemic racism, and voting rights.

The subject of democracy runs throughout INSSG 2021; that word appears twenty-three times. In contrast, NSS 2017 employed it only five. Its first appearance is in association with how to renew the sources of America’s strength: “That begins with the revitalization of our most fundamental advantage: our democracy.”¹²⁵ Two incidents may have provided impetus for this focus. The first is external: the phone call that newly elected President Biden received from Chinese President and General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party Xi Jinping. In his May 2022 commencement address at the US Naval Academy, President Biden revealed that President XI had cautioned him that “Democracies cannot be sustained in the 21st century. Autocracies will run the world.”¹²⁶ The second, internal, may have been the hyper partisan domestic politics following the 2020 presidential elections and subsequent events culminating in January 6th. This hypothesis provides a rationale for the first page of the INSSG 2021 that acknowledges global dynamics have shifted, warns that others consider autocracy a better form of governance, and asserts the way to achieve US national interests involves a renewal of democracy at home.

Applying the Rubric: President Reagan’s Comment on Values and Interests and the Army War College Model of Ends, Ways, and Means

President Reagan’s second NSS articulated that between America’s values and basic objectives lay the country’s national interests.¹²⁷ Restated that means America’s core values provide the

foundation to discern, specify, and prioritize US national interests, which then provided the basis for US national security and foreign policy objectives. National security leaders must remind US adversaries, allies, citizens, competitors, and partners what Americans value and why. After articulating US national interests, opportunity, threat, and vulnerability assessments provide context to conceive, debate, and prioritize various policy ways; specify and select subordinate supporting objectives; and inform the authorization and appropriation of capabilities. The latter become the means to defend and advance American core values.

Applying the rubric regarding linkage of values to national interests to the comparison and contrast reveals that of the five actual and one interim national security strategies, NSS 2017 best follows the above restatement. Clearer than the strategies of the previous two administrations and President Biden's interim guidance, the Trump Administration's strategy articulated American values, linked them to founding documents, and recognized that US national interests derive from them. NSS 2017 points to values in the Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Bill of Rights, specifying that Americans value "the freedoms of religion, speech, the press, and assembly."¹²⁸ Those, plus the principles of "Liberty, free enterprise, equal justice under the law, and the dignity of every human life" become the values that inform the identification of US national interests.¹²⁹

The second part of the rubric applies the Army War College model to clearly articulate ends, ways, and means. In contrast with the national security strategies prepared by the Bush, Obama, and Biden administrations, NSS 2017 specifies a clear strategic vision or end-state. It directly addresses the "why" of the document and employs four Pillars to convey the four generic national interests of security, economic prosperity, stability, plus advancement of values. It then elaborates on overarching and subordinate ways to achieve them. Both Obama Administration NSSs present four similar national interests and better adhere to the Army War College's recommendation to state them as noun phrases. They then follow each with a list of general policy ways expressed as verbs. However, those two documents lack the specificity in NSS 2017. Their excessive verbosity trumpets achievements and obscures discernment of lines of effort and subordinate ways. The Bush 43 Administration's strategies each list nine policy ways and list "actions to do," yet omit identifying the national interests involved. Similarly, the Biden Administration's interim document does not articulate America's national interests, focuses on a litany of ways without linkage to goals, and avoids identifying means.

Withholding judgment on the merits of policies proposed, President Trump's NSS 2017 employs a better blueprint to more effectively communicate America's national interests and how to achieve them than the four previous strategies and Biden interim guidance. Its linkage to values plus application of an ends, ways, means model clearly articulates the why of the strategy, presents national interests, identifies primary and subordinate ways, lists priority actions, and focuses attention on specific areas. The chapter that applies the strategy to regions permits leaders and planners in various US departments, agencies, and commands to write policies, create plans, and implement lines of effort correctly nested with intent. Therefore, NSS 2017 provides more specific strategic guidance and direction than its predecessors and successor to the Executive Branch to enact and execute policy ways. It specifically responds to Congressional oversight as envisioned by the Goldwater-Nichols Act to inform legislators so they can exercise their powers to authorize and appropriate means. Furthermore, it better informs domestic and foreign audiences of what America values and intends to do to pursue its national interests.

Notes

1. Unified Action is “The synchronization, coordination, and/or integration of the activities of governmental and nongovernmental entities with military operations to achieve unity of effort.” The Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 1-02, *DoD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: 2018), 244. The necessary prerequisite is strategic direction and guidance. For further information see The Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 1, vol. 1, *Joint Warfighting* (Washington, DC: 2020), Chapter III.
2. The way that we leverage creative and critical thinking to identify solutions to enduring or emerging “problems;” also known as threats, crisis, or contingencies; prior to commencing detailed planning. See The Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Planning* (Washington, DC: 2020), xx–xxii, and III 1–8.
3. John Lewis Gaddis, *On Grand Strategy* (New York, Penguin Press, 2018), 21.
4. Harry R. Yarger, “Toward a Theory of Strategy,” in *Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy*, 2nd ed., US Army War College Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy, vol. II, ed., J. Boone Bartholomees Jr. (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College Press, 2006), 107–13.
5. “Appendix I, Guidelines for Strategy Formation,” in *Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy*, 387–91, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/resrep12025.32>.
6. J. Boone Bartholomees Jr., “A Survey of the Theory of Strategy,” in J. Boone Bartholomees Jr., *Theory of War and Strategy*, US Army War College Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy, vol. 1, 4th ed. (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College Press, 2010), 15.
7. Arthur F. Lykke Jr., “Toward and Understanding of Military Strategy,” in *Guide to Strategy*, ed. Joseph R. Cerami and James F. Holcomb Jr. (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College Press, February 2001), 179. His earlier version was “Military Strategy: Theory and Application” (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, 1985), 3–8, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ssi/00354.pdf>.
8. Melvyn Leffler, “National Security,” *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 1 (June, 1990): 145. See his discussion on 143–46.
9. Arnold Wolfers, “‘National Security’ as an Ambiguous Symbol,” *Political Science Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (December 1952): 485, www.jstor.org/stable/2145138. A 1933 émigré from Switzerland to the US, he taught at Yale, worked for the Office of Strategic Services during WWII, returned to Yale, and later became director of Johns Hopkins Washington Center of Foreign Policy Research.
10. David Baldwin, “The Concept of Security,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol 23 (1997): 13. Professor Baldwin directed the Institute of War and Peace Studies at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs from 1987–1994.
11. Baldwin, 11–17.
12. State of the Union messages articulated the: Monroe Doctrine, 1823; Roosevelt Corollary 1904; Four Freedoms and arguments to abandon isolationism, Roosevelt, 1941; and the Carter Doctrine, 1980. Addresses to Congress advocated: Wilson’s 14 Points, January 1918; Eisenhower and the Situation in the Middle East, January 1957. Press Conferences contained: Nixon Doctrine of Vietnamization, 1969. Speeches informed: Wilson’s tour to support League of Nations, September 1918; and the Truman Doctrine, March 1947. Reports to Congress included: Madison, War Message, 1812; and Nixon, *First Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy for the 1970’s* (a 160-page book), February 1970. Cabinet member speeches: Marshall, “Economic Crisis in Europe,” June 1947; Acheson “Aleutian Speech,” January, 1950, which omitted South Korea as an important interest, a precursor for Stalin to grant Kim Il-Sung’s request to invade South Korea.
13. The National Security Council, “NSC 68: United States Objectives and Programs for National Security” (7 April 1950), Chapter II, 5, and Chapter III, 6, https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/coldwar/documents/pdf/10-1.pdf. Originally TOP SECRET, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, in his concurrent role as assistant to the president for national security, declassified it on 27 February 1975.
14. The National Security Council, 5.
15. The National Security Council, 9.

16. Congress, Public Law 99-433, “The Goldwater-Nichols Act,” Sec. 603, which amended Sec. 104 of the “National Security Act of 1947” (1 October 1986).

17. Congress, 50 United States Code 404a (b) (1-5).

18. President Ronald Reagan, “National Security Strategy of the United States,” The White House, January 1988, iv. The Reagan Administration’s second NSS, hereafter NSS 1988.

19. President George H. W. Bush, “National Security Strategy of the United States,” The White House, March 1990, 1. The Bush 41 Administration’s first NSS, hereafter NSS 1990. It cited three documents with values instrumental to founding the Republic: The Magna Carta, Declaration of Independence, and Bill of Rights; plus four documents that incorporate those values: French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789, and the preamble to the current French Republic), UN Charter, UN General Assembly’s Resolution 217A—Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Helsinki Final Act (or Helsinki Declaration, 1975).

20. President William Clinton, “National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement,” The White House, July 1994, 2. Hereafter NSS 1994,” the Clinton Administration’s first NSS. The Preamble to the Constitution reads in full: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” Added by Gouverneur Morris of the Committee of Style during the concluding days of the Constitutional Convention, it received neither discussion nor debate. The Preamble conveys the spirit of the Constitution; it assigns no powers. See Forrest McDonald, “The Preamble,” in *The Heritage Guide to the Constitution*, ed. Edward Meese III (Washington, DC: Regency Publishing, 2012), 43–46.

21. In addition to NSS 1994, see NSS 1995, 2; NSS 1996, 3; NSS 1997, 4; NSS 1998, 1; NSS 1999, 1; and NSS 2000, published in December before leaving office, 1.

22. President Ronald Reagan, “National Security Strategy,” The White House, January 1987, 4. The Reagan Administration’s first NSS, hereafter NSS 1987.

23. President Barack H. Obama, “National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” The White House, May 2010, 7. The Obama Administration’s first NSS, hereafter NSS 2010. Noteworthy, the document contains 76 uses of the word “interest;” none preceded by the word “national.” The phrase “enduring American Interests” appears on the 17th use of the term “interest;” twelve pages into the document.

24. Donald Nuechterlein *US National Interests in a Changing World* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1973), 1–11. Nuechterlein summarizes that: Hans Morgenthau focused primarily on military and industrial power *In Defense of the National Interest*. He and George Kennan criticized President Wilson’s subordination of national interest to alleged universal principles; and Reverend Reinhold Niebuhr argued in *The Irony of American History* that power plus moral values must factor into the identification of national interests, formulation of foreign policy, and execution of endeavors. See also Nuechterlein’s article “National Interests and Foreign Policy, A Conceptual Framework for Analysis and Decision Making,” *British Journal of International Studies* 2, no.3 (October, 1976), 246–66. On page 264, he labels them as Defence [*sic*], Economic, World Order, and Ideological interests.

25. Alan Stolberg, “Crafting National Interests in the 21st Century,” in J. Boone Bartholomees Jr., *US Army War College Guide to National Security Issues*, vol. II (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College Press, 2012), 13–25; see specifically 15–16, <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB1110.pdf>.

26. President George H. W. Bush, “National Security Strategy of the United States,” The White House, January 1993, 3. His third NSS, published before President Clinton’s inaugural, hereafter NSS 1993.

27. NSS 1994, 15.

28. President Donald J. Trump, “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” The White House, December 2017, 17. The Trump Administration’s first NSS, hereafter NSS 2017.

29. George C. Marshall, “The Marshall Plan Speech,” address given at Harvard University, Boston, MA, 5 June 1947, draft prepared by Charles Bohlen; at <http://marshallfoundation.org/marshall/the-marshall-plan/marshall-plan-speech>.

30. Bruce Jones, “Characteristics of the International Order,” speech given at Brookings Institute, 25 February 2014, at <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2014/02/25/11-characteristics-of-the-international-order/>.

31. Bruce Jones, Thomas Wright, Jeremy Shapiro, and Robert Keane; *The State of the International Order*; Foreign Policy at Brookings, Policy Paper # 33 (Washington DC: Brookings Institute, 2014), 1–2.

32. See “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” United Nations General Assembly Resolution 217, 10 December 1948, <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>.

33. NSS 1988, 3.

34. President Barack H. Obama, “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” The White House, February 2015, 19. The Obama Administration’s second NSS, hereafter NSS 2015.

35. NSS 2017, 3; and President Joseph R. Biden Jr., “Interim National Security Strategy Guidance,” The White House, March 2021, 3. The Biden Administration’s interim guidance, hereafter INSSG 2021.

36. NSS 2015, 19.

37. INSSG 2021, 7.

38. Nuechterlein, *US National Interests in a Changing World*, 6.

39. Nuechterlein, 7.

40. Nuechterlein, 6–8.

41. Stolberg, “Crafting National Interests in the 21st Century,” 18–19. He adhered to the categories articulated by Professor Donald Nuechterlein in *US National Interests in a Changing World*, 1–11.

42. NSS 1990, 3. Also reiterated in President George H. W. Bush’s second NSS, August 1991.

43. Nuechterlein, *US National Interests in a Changing World*, 10.

44. NSS 1988, 1. “The first historical dimension of our strategy is relatively simple, clear-cut, and immensely sensible. It is the conviction that the United States’ most basic national security interests would be endangered if a hostile state or group of states were to dominate the Eurasian landmass—that area of the globe often referred to as the world’s heartland. We fought two world wars to prevent this from occurring. And, since 1945, we have sought to prevent the Soviet Union from capitalizing on its geostrategic advantage to dominate its neighbors in Western Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, and thereby fundamentally alter the global balance of power to our disadvantage.”

45. NSS 1990, 1–2. “In particular, for most of this century, the United States has deemed it a vital interest to prevent any hostile power or group of powers from dominating the Eurasian land mass. This interest remains. In the period since World War II, it has required a commitment to forward defense and forward military deployments, and a recognition of the lesson of the 1930s—that peace and security come only through vigilance and preparedness.” “The very success of containment has created new conditions and new opportunities for a new generation of Americans. We welcome this change. Yet our basic values—and our basic geopolitical necessities—remain.”

46. Nuechterlein, *US National Interests in a Changing World*, 10. Scholars neither concur on the number of interests nor their labels. A different interest taxonomy uses three categories: “Vital,” “Important,” and “Peripheral;” damage to the latter not endangering “core interests.” See Bartholomees, *National Security Policy and Strategy*, 413–20.

47. Dean G. Acheson, “National Press Club speech and the origins of the Korean War,” 12 January 1950, <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/speech-on-the-far-east/>, paragraphs 13–17. For perspective, see also Miles Maochun Yu article on the Hoover Institute Web Site that asserts the ambiguity of Acheson’s speech, <https://www.hoover.org/research/green-yellow-or-red-what-color-was-dean-achsons-speech>.

48. See Richard Neustadt and Ernest May, *Thinking in Time* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 75–89. This book addresses the use of historical analogies to make strategic decisions.

49. President William Clinton, “A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement,” The White House, February 1995, 12. His successive NSSs included subchapters on determining use of force predicated on the three priorities of national interests. See NSS 1996, 18; NSS 1997, 12; NSS 1998, terms bolded, 5; NSS 1999, 1; and NSS 2000, 5.

50. The Joint Staff, Joint Doctrine Note 1-18, *Strategy* (Washington, DC: April 2018), II-3–II-4, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=810221>.

51. Mr. Y, *A National Strategic Narrative*, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2011, 10–11, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/A%20National%20Strategic%20Narrative.pdf>. Mr. Y is the *noms des plum* for Capt. (US Navy) Wayne Porter and Col. (US Marine Corps) Mark Mykleby. They summarize America’s core values as Prosperity and Security, and their interdependence. See their YouTube video, filmed before Poptech on 16 November 2011, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5a-BOjhoiCw> at 6:25 into the video.

52. INSSG 2021, 4.

53. N. Toosi, A. Ward, and Q. Forgey, “Putin Is Delaying the National Security Strategy,” *National Security Daily*, POLITICO, 10 February 2022, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/national-security-daily/2022/02/10/putin-delaying-national-security-strategy-00007916>.

54. “The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom—and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise.” President George W. Bush, “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” The White House, September 2002, 1. President Bush 43’s first NSS, published a year after 9-11 and six months before invading Iraq; hereafter NSS 2002. “America is at war.” NSS 2006, 1. “Time and again in our Nation’s history, Americans have risen to meet—and to shape—moments of transition. This must be one of those moments.” NSS 2010, 1. “Today, the United States is stronger and better positioned to seize the opportunities of a still new century and safeguard our interests against the risks of an insecure world.” NSS 2015, 1.

55. “President Donald J. Trump, “The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” The White House, December 2017, i–ii. The Trump Administration’s first NSS, hereafter NSS 2017.

56. NSS 2017, i, ii, 1, 2, 3, 4, 37, 55.

57. INSSG 2021, 1, 2, 16, 17, 23.

58. NSS 2017, 1.

59. NSS 2002, 1. “The aim of this strategy is to help make the world not just safer but better. Our goals on the path to progress are clear: political and economic freedom, peaceful relations with other states, and respect for human dignity.”

60. NSS 2010, 1.

61. NSS 2015, 1. “This new National Security Strategy positions the United States to safeguard our national interests through strong and sustainable leadership.”

62. INSSG 2021, 1, 6.

63. INSSG 2021, 2.

64. NSS 2017, 1.

65. NSS 2017, 41.

66. NSS 2017, 37, 41.

67. NSS 2002, 3; and NSS 2010, 10.

68. Terms used but neither described nor defined: “Common Values” in NSS 2006, 7; and NSS 2010, 11, as well as “Democratic Values” in NSS 2002, 7; NSS 2006, 37; and NSS 2010, 5, 39, 42; and “Universal Values” in NSS 2010, 10, and NSS 2015, 2, 19.

69. INSSG, 3-24. Word search and analysis of terms.

70. NSS 2017, 37.

71. INSSG 2021, 19.

72. NSS 2017, 3.

73. NSS 2002, 7, 26, and 40.

74. NSS 2006, i. The first paragraph of the Forward reads: “America is at war. This is a wartime national security strategy required by the grave challenge we face—the rise of terrorism fueled by an aggressive ideology of hatred and murder, fully revealed to the American people on 11 September 2001. This strategy reflects our most solemn obligation: to protect the security of the American people.

75. NSS 2006, 40.
76. NSS 2006, 40–41.
77. NSS 2006, 42.
78. President Bush’s NSS 2002 plus 2006 contain the words China or Chinese fifty times, while President Obama’s NSS 2010 plus NSS 2015 have those two words only twenty-three times.
79. NSS 2015, 24.
80. NSS 2015, 40–41.
81. NSS 2015, 10.
82. NSS 2010, 8.
83. NSS 2015, “Russia’s aggression” at 2, 19, 25; “Russian aggression” at 4, 10, 25; and objects of the preposition: “impose significant costs on Russia” and “collaboration with Russia in areas of common interest” at 25.
84. NSS 2017, 2.
85. NSS 2017, 25. The paragraph continues: “China seeks to displace the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, expand the reaches of its state-driven economic model, and reorder the region in its favor. Russia seeks to restore its great power status and establish spheres of influence near its borders.”
86. NSS 2017, 27. Interestingly, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey’s *National Military Strategy of 2015* characterizes the strategic environment as reflecting great power competition, but without those specific words; see 1-4.
87. INSSG 2021, 9.
88. INSSG 2021, 7.
89. INSSG 2021, 19–21.
90. NSS 2017, 25, 33.
91. INSSG 2021, 19, 20.
92. Toosi, Ward, and Forgey, “Putin Is Delaying the National Security Strategy.”
93. Working Group on Strategic Planning, “The U.S. Needs a National Security Strategy Published,” Forum for American Leadership, 18 March 2021, <https://forumforamericanleadership.org/policy-product/the-united-states-needs-a-national-security-strategy/>.
94. “Appendix I: Guidelines for Strategy Formation,” in Bartholomees, *Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy*, 387–91, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/resrep12025.32>.
95. NSS 2015, 2.
96. INSSG 2021, 9.
97. NSS 2006, ii. “The first pillar is promoting freedom, justice, and human dignity—working to end tyranny, to promote effective democracies, and to extend prosperity through free and fair trade and wise development policies. Free governments are accountable to their people, govern their territory effectively, and pursue economic and political policies that benefit their citizens. Free governments do not oppress their people or attack other free nations. Peace and international stability are most reliably built on a foundation of freedom.” “The second pillar of our strategy is confronting the challenges of our time by leading a growing community of democracies. Many of the problems we face—from the threat of pandemic disease to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, to terrorism, to human trafficking, to natural disasters—reach across borders. Effective multinational efforts are essential to solve these problems. Yet history has shown that only when we do our part will others do theirs. America must continue to lead.” Written as gerund phrases (a verb + “ing” which when combined transforms the verb into a noun), “promoting values” and “confronting challenges” become subordinate goals to achieve the protection and security of the American people. NSS 2006 then lists nine different ways how to accomplish these goals. Each of these nine ways commence with an action verb. That strategy then devotes a chapter to each of these nine ways.
98. NSS 2017, 7–14.
99. NSS 2017, 7–14.
100. NSS 2017, 17–23.
101. NSS 2017, 26–28.

102. NSS 2017, 28–35. The seven are Military, Defense Industrial Base, Nuclear Forces, Space, Cyber-space, Intelligence, and Diplomacy and Statecraft.
103. NSS 2017, 30.
104. NSS 2017, 38.
105. NSS 2017, 37.
106. NSS 2017, 39–40.
107. NSS 2017, 39–40.
108. INSSG 2021, 9.
109. INSSG 2021, 9–10.
110. NSS 2017, 7–42. The Pillar and the number of priority actions are: Pillar I, 30; Pillar II, 24; Pillar III, 31; and Pillar IV, 18.
111. NSS 2017, 45.
112. The Joint Staff, *Joint Publication 1: Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: 2017), 1-12–13.
113. NSS 2017, 45-51.
114. See specific chapters on “Regional Policies” in NSS 1987; “Integrating Elements of National Power in the National Security Strategy,” subdivided by regions in NSS 1988; and “Integrated Regional Approaches” in NSS 1994, NSS 1995, NSS 1996, NSS 1997, NSS 1998, NSS 1999, and NSS 2000, and “International Order” in NSS 2010 and NSS 2015.
115. NSS 2017, 45–54.
116. INSSG 2021, 10.
117. INSSG 2021, 10–11.
118. INSSG 2021, 15.
119. NSS 2015, 8.
120. INSSG 2021, 14.
121. Congress, “The Goldwater-Nichols Act.”
122. Kathleen McCinnis, “The Interim National Security Strategic Guidance,” *Congressional Research Service*, IF 11798, 29 March 2021, 1.
123. INSSG 2021, 17.
124. INSSG 2021, 18.
125. INSSG 2021, 3.
126. President Joseph R. Biden Jr., “Remarks by President Biden at the United States Naval Academy’s Class of 2022 Graduation and Commissioning Ceremony,” the White House Briefing Room, 27 May 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/27/remarks-by-president-biden-at-the-united-states-naval-academys-class-of-2022-graduation-and-commissioning-ceremony/>.
127. NSS 1988, iv. “The fundamentals of our strategy change little from year to year; our interests and objectives are derived from enduring values.” An argument may exist that one or a combination of the following has contributed to the perceived lack of foreign policy consensus: ignorance, reprioritization, or repudiation of the values ascribed to by the Founding Fathers and successive generations; or adoption or proposing of new values that then creates a disagreement as to what are fundamental values. This chapter does not explore those issues.
128. NSS 2017, 41.
129. NSS 2017, 41.

Chapter 4

The Spectrum of Conflict: War, Peace, Deterrence, and the Use of Power

Phillip G. Pattee

The main reason to reassess the competition continuum and produce a new framework is because previous concepts differentiating between peace and war are not sufficient in the contemporary environment. Military theorist Carl von Clausewitz commented: “Wars can have all degrees of importance and intensity, ranging from a war of extermination down to simple armed observation.”¹ He viewed armed observation as a form of war. In contrast, realists in the late 1900s argued that a Cold War existed between America and the Soviet Union because the threat of nuclear war kept the peace. This highlights a long-ambiguous distinction between war and peace, especially at low levels of intensity. Also implied in these statements is that absent nuclear weapons, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Warsaw Pact countries would have fought. Although the United States and Russia both had formidable nuclear arsenals, war between them was considered unlikely during the 1990s and 2000s. Since then, aggressive Russian actions in Ukraine have renewed the specter of conflict between Russia and NATO. The Warsaw Pact, NATO’s erstwhile enemy, is now defunct; many of its former members are now democracies and part of NATO. Much more is at work here than a simple material balance of power. Previous models of power, war, and peace need to be revised.

General Joseph Dunford, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, plainly described the proposition: “We think of being at peace or war. . . . Our adversaries don’t think that way.”² Perhaps Americans shouldn’t either. A commonly held definition is that peace is the absence of war.³ In other words, the spectrum of conflict was assumed to be binary; one condition, peace, was defined by its relationship to the other, war. Because this definition lacks applicability, a more nuanced definition should replace it. This chapter will review Clausewitz’s definition and understanding of war, then present alternative definitions for deterrence and peace.

Clausewitz and the Paradoxical Trinity

Although Clausewitz never considered his book *On War* finished, his ideas have nevertheless stood the test of time. Clausewitz wrote *On War* to give military generals a guide to help them address problems they encountered in war rather than a prescriptive manual for the battlefield. He stressed that war is a continuation of politics by other means, a true policy instrument. Though Clausewitz limited his discussion to war rather than the full political spectrum, his words describe the spectrum of conflict, including war, peace, and deterrence:

As a total phenomenon, its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity—composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity—which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its element of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone. The first of these three aspects mainly concerns the people; the second, the commander and his army; the third, the government.⁴

Many have seized on the government, the people, and the army as the essence of Clausewitz’s paradoxical trinity. That interpretation is focused entirely on war between states. Instead, the framework proposed in this chapter recognizes the dominant tendencies of the trinity as first principles to

model a continuum of conflict. Christopher Bassford and Edward J. Villacres, long-time apologists for this Clausewitz interpretation, wrote that the paradoxical trinity reflects a relationship among competing or cooperating forces:

Far from comprising “the people, the army, and the government,” Clausewitz’s trinity is really made up of three categories of forces: irrational forces (violent emotion, i.e., “primordial violence, hatred, and enmity”); non-rational forces (i.e., forces not the product of human thought or intent, such as “friction” and “the play of chance and probability”); and rationality (war’s subordination to reason, “as an instrument of policy”).⁵

Bassford and Villacres emphasized that the trinity is composed of irrational forces, rational forces, and non-rational forces, or alternatively (as this chapter casts them) emotion, reason, and chance, respectively. Bassford concluded: “The point is that emotion and reason [i.e., irrationality and rationality] are both a matter of human intent, whereas chance/probability represents concrete reality—the [non-rational] real world.”⁶ Two of the trinity’s elements (emotion and reason) are internal to the human mind, while the last element (chance) is a way to perceive the external world.

Different from Bassford, who used more inclusive terms like irrationality and emotion, Clausewitz did not discuss the full range of human emotions in his description of the trinity. He only talked about those that gave rise to violent intentions, i.e., hatred and enmity. Clausewitz, however, did recognize that all emotions are present in warfare: “In considering emotions that have been aroused by hostility and danger as being particular to war, we do not mean to exclude all others that accompany a man throughout his life.”⁷ Armed conflict is motivated by a combination of hostile feelings and hostile intentions; the first is an emotion, and the second is a policy choice. Clausewitz did not conceive of hostile feeling without accompanying hostile intent. Moreover, he believed that war would never become a purely logical act, somehow devoid of passion.⁸ Together, these factors drive a decision for armed conflict and choices about how armed forces will conduct themselves (the play of chance and probability) to bring about desired changes in the world. If this combination of the three factors leads to war, then a different combination would lead to other conditions, such as peace and deterrence. An effective strategy not only takes into account the external environment but also must strike a balance between emotion and reason, ideally satisfying demands of all three.

Even those who do not read Clausewitz likely have heard that “war is a continuation of policy by other means.”⁹ As already discussed, Clausewitz concluded that as a total phenomenon, war is a paradoxical trinity. The trinity is a partial model of politics—the part that deals with warfare. Bassford and Villacres made this observation years ago:

The “remarkable trinity” is, in fact, Clausewitz’s description of the psychological environment of politics, of which “war is a continuation.” The only element of this political trinity that makes it unique to war is that the emotions discussed are those that might incline people to violence, whereas politics in general will involve the full range of human feelings.¹⁰

Recognizing Clausewitz’s trinity as a political model provides a foundation for creating a more holistic view of the competition continuum. Rather than considering only the emotions that incline toward violence, consider also the full spectrum of emotions, including fear, anxiety, friendship, and love. The range of emotion spans from hatred on one end of the spectrum to undying devotion and love on the other end. Beware of simplifying this idea into a linear concept. People are complicated—societies even more so—and hold widely differing emotions about different situations

and relationships simultaneously. Strategists must keep in mind the variability of emotion while exploring the idea of chance and probability.

With respect to the play of chance and probability, which in military operations mainly concern the joint force, many scholars and business people have already considered this in other venues, including economics, jurisprudence, and diplomacy. Familiar examples are found in insurance and reinsurance industries, gambling, operational risk assessment, and efforts to reduce variance in manufacturing processes. In each endeavor, managers consider the scope of chance and probability and its impact on their goals. These disciplines have developed methods to estimate the likelihood that a given activity will produce desired outcomes.

Theoretically, the odds that an outcome will occur, not limited to military operations, will vary from no chance of success (100 percent probability of failure) to absolute certainty of success (zero percent probability of failure). Each actor weighs acceptable risk for the benefit gained, or the necessity of acting promptly to avoid harsher conditions later.

Obviously, the spectrum of probability can be modeled as a line, but the play of chance and probability—as is the case for emotions—remains highly variable and non-linear. Likewise for policy, and its subordination to reason; policy makers consider all the policy options available to them, not just military operations. A policy can vary—using economics, information, and diplomacy in addition to military force—from 100 percent coercion and no enticements to 100 percent enticements and no coercion. Typically, policies use a mix of coercion and enticement, and all types of power.

Clausewitz asserted that war is an act of force to compel an enemy to do one's will.¹¹ When using force, three interactions tend to drive force to extremes. Each of the three interactions corresponds to one of the trinity's three elements: reason, emotion, and chance. The first interaction corresponds to reason and occurs because there is no logical limit to the application of force. This condition exists for all parties in a conflict, acknowledges the potential for reciprocal action, and leads to the extreme application of force. The second interaction is driven by emotion. The aim of warfare is to impose one's will on an enemy; to do this, the enemy must be disarmed. Again, both sides share this aim in a conflict. Until the enemy is disarmed, one must fear that the enemy can still defeat and disarm him. Mutual fear is the second interaction producing extreme effort. Finally, the third extreme occurs because of the need to use available material means to overcome the enemy's power to resist. However, since the enemy holds the same goal, each is compelled in theory to bring maximum resources to bear in the attempt to overthrow the enemy. This extreme, related to maximizing the probability of success while minimizing the chance of failure, correlates with the trinity's play of chance and probability.¹²

Absolute war is the term used here for Clausewitz's theoretical construct for an abstract type of war resulting from the three extremes described above.¹³ Clausewitz considered this construct theoretical because it simply did not correspond to how the real-world experiences war. A host of factors intervene in preventing absolute war. Time and space limit the ability to bring all force to bear. Additionally, the inability to perfectly execute plans stems from a variety of sources collectively known as friction, and the value of the desired result tends to drive the effort expended to attain it. Once the prospect of absolute war can logically be dismissed, then fear of it also diminishes. It will be helpful to keep these ideas in mind when discussing peace and deterrence.

Using logic analogous to how Clausewitz postulated absolute war, consider an alternate case defined by three extremes: the intellectual rejection of any use of force; emotion leading not toward violence, but empathy, love, and caring; and the same maximum expenditure of effort to ensure success. The first extreme is policy that strives only for inducement, enticement, and persuasion, swearing off any use of coercion—without any logical limit. The second extreme is driven by unconditional love that produces a maximum effort motivated by compassion, admiration, and mercy. Finally, unmitigated effort expended to assist, help, care for, and nurture, maximizing the chance of success. When these extremes are mutual, i.e., held by two or more actors, the abstract construct produces perfect peace.

Similarly, deterrence is produced when three extremes come together. The first is a rational extreme, the intellectual conclusion that coercion is morally wrong and an unacceptable policy option. The second is an emotional extreme, a dislike or hatred so that one would choose not to engage a particular group on any basis. The third extreme, rooted in chance and probability, recognizes that any action would be futile because there is no prospect for success; therefore, the choice is to take no action. In summary, the improbability of success precludes coercion, one’s conviction that coercion is morally wrong imposes a policy of self-restraint, and the severe animosity precludes seeking any sort of engagement. All three tendencies work together to forestall action. This is a pure form of deterrence.

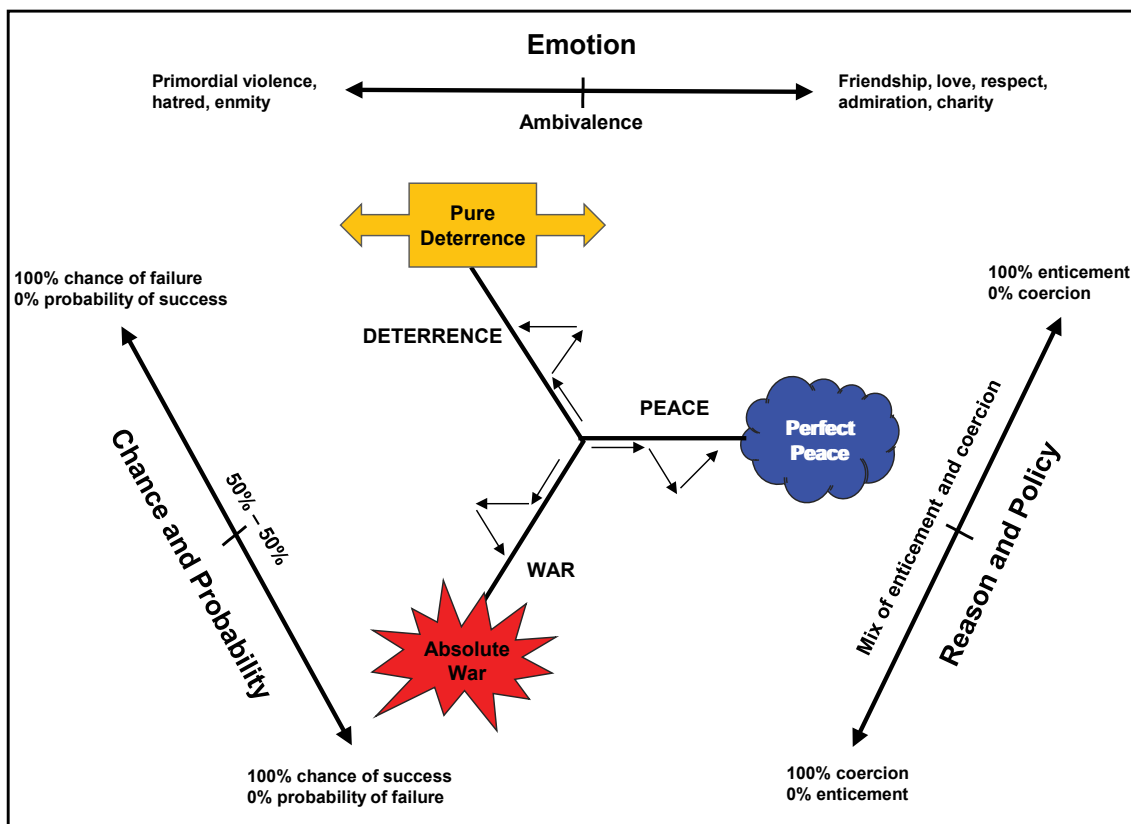


Figure 4.1. The spectrum of conflict. Created by the author and Army University Press.

If war is a subset of political intercourse—understood using the Clausewitzian trinity—then the reframed, expanded trinity provides context for modeling and understanding a broader spectrum, the competition continuum. This expanded trinity is shown graphically in Figure 4.1.

This logic produced definitions of absolute war, pure deterrence, and perfect peace; these are abstract concepts. All the factors that make absolute war only theoretical also operate against achieving perfect peace and pure deterrence. In the real world, absolute war, perfect peace, and pure deterrence do not exist; instead, there are various degrees of war, peace, and deterrence. For example, the United States can simultaneously be at war against international terrorists, at peace with the United Kingdom, in a contentious dispute with Mexico over border control, and in a state of deterrence with North Korea. The overall intensity of the competition or cooperation is a product of the interaction of the three forces. Higher-intensity competition lies nearer the extremes and provides clarity as to the relationship—whether war, peace, or deterred. Lower-intensity interactions are closer to the center and result in more ambiguity as to which state exists.

Implications of the Framework

Clausewitz described war as a continuation of policy by other means. He made this point because many during his time viewed warfare as separate and distinct from politics. Likewise, 1800s economists believed economics and politics were separate domains, or that economic laws were secondary to political laws as engines for history.

Today's scholars acknowledge the close link between economics and politics within the discipline of International Political Economy. Edward Hallett Carr, a noted twentieth century British history and international relations scholar, observed: "Economic forces are in fact political forces."¹⁴ Warfare and economics are both areas of competition, but competition is not limited to those domains. In its Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 1-19, *Competition Continuum*, the US Joint Force acknowledged that cooperation and competition in all domains—land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace—and with every kind of power available—military, economic, diplomatic, or informational—is continuous; activities in one area affects others.¹⁵ This is similar to another Clausewitz observation: military activity is not solely directed at material forces but also simultaneously at the moral forces which animate the enemy's will to resist.¹⁶ Regardless of which policy tools they use, strategists should consider that even if their intension is to have a material effect, there will also be a moral effect that impacts emotional and rational outlook. When strategists develop policies, they consider all available options and not just the use of force to compel an enemy to do their will. Typically, policies include a mix of coercion and enticement while considering all instruments of power. The important question is which types of power will generate the desired emotional, material, and rational outcomes.

As examples, using coercive military or economic means to initially gain some material advantage is likely to also produce animosity among the people against whom it was directed. Repeated acts of coercion and increased intensity typically produce higher levels of protracted animosity. Similarly, education and persuasion are intended to create new understandings, perceptions, and ideas for solutions that positively affect behavior for the long-term. Repeatedly using education and persuasion tends to build trust and, if successful outcomes are produced, increase confidence and admiration.

Deterrence, war, and peace are produced by differing mixes of emotion, reason, and chance. A shared understanding of the three elements act as a framework that helps strategists determine

context. Proper context informs decisions on the appropriate direction to take with policy and helps strategists determine the best available tools to bring about desired aims.

For example, hostility without fighting is neither war nor peace; this is deterrence, created when one or both parties have inaccurate information about the other; believe the enemy is stronger; or knows one's own side does not have sufficient resources to continue. Either side may opt for open warfare when the information or material deficit is resolved. If a party is deterred, that party seeks an opportunity to change the status quo then act on its original or modified agenda, as with Germany in 1930s Europe. That action could be simply waiting for things to improve based on another's actions, which might be likely when the hardship imposed by the opposing party appears to be transient.¹⁷ Therefore, deterrence is not inherently stable. All parties involved in the deterrence balance expend resources and might achieve nothing except to maintain deterrence—postponing the real issue. If the task becomes too expensive for some to maintain and effort is reduced, the deterrent effect is weakened. This may provide the opportunity for the opposing party to act.

Although maintaining a status of deterrence consumes resources and buys time, it does not achieve a resolution. In theory, modifying the material balance of power produce changes mainly along the play of chance and probability axis, moving the political relationship in the continuum between open conflict and deterrence. In a state of deterrence, the framework implies that movement along the “emotional” axis from hostile feeling toward respect and admiration is what will produce peace.

This requires an adversary to change its perspective. Urging a society to give up a previously held agenda—perhaps one embedded in its values—and rationally and emotionally accept its opponent's agenda is pushing for a significant change. While a rapid change in societal values cannot be ruled out, experience suggests that values change slowly over years or even generations as the society's experiences convince many that the new agenda is either superior to their current values—or more likely—causes no harm to their values and interests, or even promotes them.

Like war and deterrence, peace requires resources and effort. Some resources should be used to mend or prevent hostile feelings. Mutually held views—linked with emotions that lead to a spirit of cooperation, burden sharing, and outcomes beneficial to both parties—leads to peace. Because all involved parties work to maintain it, peace is cooperative and offers the prospect to be enduring. Each new problem, however, presents the possibility of conflict and introduces disputes over the best course of action. Attempts at workable solutions will result in failures and frustrations. Miscommunication and differing priorities will take their toll. Friction operates here too. Tools must showcase values and social systems in ways that competitors will find attractive. This kind of power is what American political scientist Joseph Nye refers to as soft power.¹⁸ Soft and hard power should be used in harmony to produce favorable policy. While hard military power provides a deterrent, soft power showcases national values, a flourishing society, and economic prosperity—typically attractive qualities. By clearly communicating the opportunity to share in those benefits, a strategy could, over time, bring about a tipping point in the emotional change required to move from deterrence to peace. For this framework, a crucial point is that without the attraction created by soft power, policy and material changes alone are unlikely to produce an enduring peace.

The Framework as a Basis for Campaigning

JDN 1-19, *Competition Continuum*, describes campaigning as a continuous process in a world that is engaged in an enduring competition that is a mixture of cooperation, armed conflict, and competition below armed conflict.¹⁹ As shown in Figure 4.2, this is sometimes depicted as three

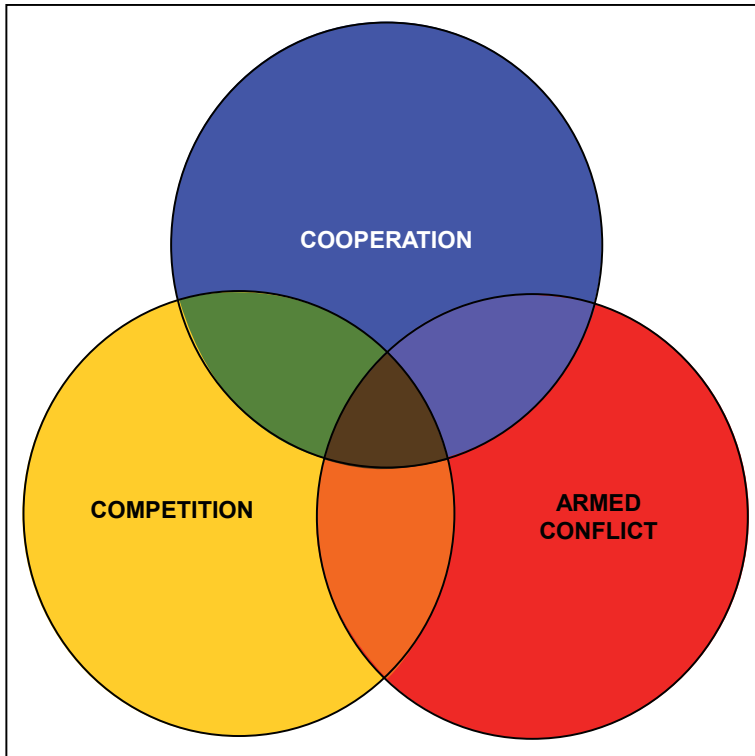


Figure 4.2. The competition continuum. From Maj. Malcolm Wilkerson, “Information Warfare Ethics” (presentation, Information Dominance Course, Army Management Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 10 March 2020).

overlapping circles in a Venn diagram. Cooperation, armed conflict, and competition below armed conflict are distinct yet exist and occur simultaneously. These domains neatly coincide with peace, war, and deterrence respectively. For campaigning, the idea is to transition from less-desirable conditions toward preferred conditions, with cooperation being preferable to competition below armed conflict and both preferable to open armed conflict. While the Figure 4.2 depiction recognizes this distinction, it provides no insights on how to manage the transitions. This is where the framework assists in campaigning.

A campaign first might lay out what kind of relationship currently exists with another actor(s). The relationship is some form of peace, deterrence, or war. The greater the intensity of the competition, the farther from the center of the framework diagram. Low-intensity competition would plot closer to the center. The actors involved depend entirely on the issue(s) at stake and might include an enemy alliance, a terror organization, or even an individual. For example, a country engaged in major theater war or large-scale combat might plot a center of mass of that relationship in the enmity side far from ambivalent on the emotional vector and perhaps 40 percent to 60 percent probability of success side on the chance and probability vector. Obviously, this would require heavy amounts of coercion. In contrast, a country engaged in tit-for-tat cyber operations might plot itself quite close to the center of play of chance and probability and slightly toward the enmity side of the emotion vector while limiting the policy to using small to moderate amounts of coercion.

The second step is to examine the preferred outcome for that relationship and lay out a path toward that goal. A likely path from armed conflict to peace would be to seek a cease-fire. This is a move from war toward deterrence. Subsequent steps would be along the emotional vector from enmity to ambivalent co-existence, and then to genuine friendship. Consider the journey of the United States relationship with the United Kingdom following more than a century of mutual distrust after American independence. Although hard power and soft power are not mutually exclusive, movement within the play of chance and probability is most quickly induced by hard power; change along the emotion vector is mainly prompted by soft power. This reality should guide the type of power selected for the major effort. A third consideration is changeability in the relationship, especially given the time horizon for the change. If the primary obstacle is simply material, direct application of hard power can make a difference in a hurry. On the other hand, if an adversary society holds radically differing values, norms, and social structures, changes to bring about enduring peace might be centuries away if not altogether unattainable.

Conclusion

Clausewitz understood war as fighting and a “trial of moral and physical forces through the medium of the latter.”²⁰ As discussed in this chapter, politics is a trinity made up of emotion, reason, and probability, and emotion and reason are moral forces internal to the mind while probability reflects the external world and how one works with it. Campaigners need to discern how and when to use power appropriately. Hard power mainly acts against the real, material, external world then produces a moral effect. Soft power works against moral forces then, as behaviors change, produces a material effect. Soft power acting against emotional forces is required to bring peace. The bottom line is that although achieving peace is the highest foreign policy goal, it may not be achievable in a period of a few years or with every actor in the international arena.

Notes

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4. Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.
5. Edward J. Villacres and Christopher Bassford, “Reclaiming the Clausewitzian Trinity,” *Parameters* 25, no. 3 (Autumn 1995): 10.
6. Christopher Bassford, “Teaching the Clausewitzian Trinity,” Clausewitz.com, accessed 18 February 2022, <https://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/Trinity/TrinityTeachingNote.htm>.
7. Clausewitz, *On War*, 139; see pages 137–40 for a general discussion of emotions in war.
8. Clausewitz, 76.
9. Clausewitz, 87.
10. Villacres and Bassford, “Reclaiming the Clausewitzian Trinity,” 11.
11. Clausewitz, *On War*, 75.
12. Clausewitz, 77.
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16. Clausewitz, *On War*, 137.
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20. Clausewitz, *On War*, 127.



Chapter 5

North Korean Nuclear Diplomacy: A Roller Coaster Past and Uncertain Future

Gary R. Hanson

The diplomacy among the United States (US), Republic of Korea (ROK) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) concerning nuclear programs and security on the Korean peninsula has significant implications for US and North East (NE) Asia security. Tensions in NE Asia over the DPRK nuclear program were at their height in the Fall of 2017. The DPRK continued to increase underground nuclear testing, culminating with an estimated 200 kiloton explosion in September 2017. A series of DPRK short-, medium-, and long-range unarmed missile tests ramped up regional tensions. Rhetoric between DPRK and US leadership added to the tension. The United Nations (UN) Security Council placed a series of sanctions on the DPRK during this period that are notable as Russia and the PRC continued to vote for UN sanctions as they had since 2016.

As 2017 drew to a close, the DPRK began to change its public posture as missile launches and nuclear testing activity stopped. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un delivered his 2018 New Year's Address to the North Korean People and Worker's Party of Korea (WPK) cadres that included overtures to South Korea and the United States concerning Winter Olympics in South Korea, inter-Korea relations, and changes in relations with the United States. Cooperation between the Koreas during the 2018 Olympics was notable and did reduce regional tensions. After a flurry of public and private diplomacy, a series of summits occurred in 2018 between the leaders of the DPRK and ROK and the DPRK and the United States. A series of agreements were reached during the 2018 summits. While there was some progress achieving goals from agreements signed at these summits, there was little progress on the core issue of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. This chapter will examine past and present nuclear agreements related to the DPRK, their unfolding, and paths to future progress.

Past Nuclear Agreements with DPRK—1985 through 2017

Past nuclear program negotiations with the DPRK involved bilateral negotiations with the ROK, the United States, and the multilateral Six-Party Talks. As a former signatory to the 1985 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), North Korea was prohibited from developing, possessing, and proliferating nuclear weapons and materials.¹ At the time, the DPRK linked its full compliance with the NPT to the United States withdrawing nuclear weapons in South Korea. North Korea continued to operate the Soviet-era Yongbyon nuclear reactor and associated plutonium reprocessing equipment without International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) oversight. As the Cold War threat from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) receded, the United States announced plans to withdraw nuclear weapons in South Korea in September 1991. In November 1991, South Korea unilaterally pledged it would not develop, possess, store, or use nuclear weapons and would not reprocess plutonium or operate a uranium fuel cycle. The US and South Korean 1991 actions and pledges placed the onus on North Korea for IAEA monitoring under the NPT that DPRK leaders had signed in 1985 and not yet fulfilled.²

This led to the first denuclearization agreement between North and South Korea. In the January 1992 Joint Declaration on Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, each side pledged not to develop, test, possess, or use nuclear weapons and to only use nuclear energy for solely peaceful purposes.³ North Korea then agreed to comprehensive safeguards with the IAEA under the NPT,

which was ratified by its government and followed by the required nuclear material declarations to the IAEA. What followed in 1992 and 1993 were a series of IAEA inspections and reports that alleged North Korea was not complying with the NPT. In March 1993, North Korea announced its intention to withdraw from the NPT. The IAEA reported it would not guarantee North Korea had not diverted plutonium for weapons in April 1993. In June 1993, the United States and North Korea negotiated; the result was the North agreed to stay in the NPT and the United States agreed not to use force, including nuclear weapons, or interfere with North Korean internal affairs.⁴ These agreements led to 1994 IAEA inspections of North Korean facilities to clear up discrepancies from the 1992 declaration and the 1993 inspections. IAEA inspectors were refused access to plutonium reprocessing facilities at Yongbyon, and North Korea also moved spent fuel from the Yongbyon reactor, violating the NPT. North Korea announced in June 1994 that it would remain in the NPT but withdraw as a member state from the IAEA organization. This announcement prompted personal intervention by former president Jimmy Carter, who negotiated a freeze in North Korea nuclear weapons programs leading to the Agreed Framework negotiations.

The 1994 Agreed Framework between the United States and North Korea required North Korea to halt operation and construction of nuclear reactors suspected of being used as part of a nuclear weapon program. In return, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) was established to provide North Korea with two light water nuclear reactors that had safeguards against use in nuclear weapons programs. Additionally, the United States pledged to provide North Korea with heavy fuel oil while the KEDO nuclear reactors were under construction.⁵ The agreement to build the reactors was signed in December 1999 after very complex negotiations and a series of provocative missile tests and proliferation activities by North Korea.⁶

In 2000, North and South Korean leaders signed the 15 June South-North Joint Declaration that included pledges of North-South reunification, family visits, and economic cooperation. The 2000 agreement did not include any specific language related to denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula or other military issues.⁷ Ongoing talks on implementing the Agreed Framework continued for the balance of the year, with the United States and North Korea also discussing limiting missile proliferation and missile testing. Near the end of the Clinton Administration, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright negotiated with Kim Jong Il regarding missiles, nuclear transparency, normalization of relations, and a possible summit with President Bill Clinton in Pyongyang. The US-North Korea summit never materialized due to lack of progress on Agreed Framework and missile negotiations before the end of Clinton's term. In 2001, the Bush Administration pledged to forge ahead on nuclear and missile negotiations with North Korea after reviewing the entire program, including comprehensive verification of nuclear and missile programs. During 2001, the United States sanctioned North Korea over missile proliferation under US law; these sanctions elicited angry responses from North Korea, which halted planned bilateral talks with South Korea.⁸

Early in 2002, in the wake of the September 2001 terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush labeled North Korea as a member of the "axis of evil," along with Iran and Iraq, due to missile and nuclear proliferation. While Bush would not certify North Korea compliance with the Agreed Framework, he did issue an April 2002 waiver to continue funding the KEDO. In August, the KEDO held a ceremony marking the beginning of construction of light water reactors in North Korea. Additional US sanctions on North Korea for missile proliferation to Yemen complicated progress on the Agreed Framework. Assistant Secretary of State James A. Kelly visited Pyongyang in early October 2002 to meet with North Korean leaders and discuss the country's nuclear program, missile program, conventional force posture, and human rights.⁹ Kelly accused North Korea

of hiding a uranium-enrichment program in violation of the Agreed Framework, NPT, and IAEA safeguards.¹⁰ North Korea admitted to having the uranium enrichment program, and the United States suspended fuel oil deliveries to North Korea under the Agreed Framework. Then the IAEA passed a resolution asking for clarity about the North Korean uranium enrichment program. North Korea responded by informing the IAEA it was restarting the Yongbyon reactor and operating nuclear facilities shuttered under the Agreed Framework. At the Yongbyon complex, all IAEA seals were broken, monitoring equipment was dismantled, and IAEA inspectors left North Korea by the end of the year.¹¹ The Agreed Framework collapsed as 2002 came to a close.

In 2003, the DPRK withdrew from the NPT, and this led the international community to establish a multilateral framework for North Korean nuclear negotiations.¹² North Korea agreed to participate in multilateral negotiations hosted by Beijing. The Six-Party Talks began in August 2003 and included China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Russia, and the United States. The purpose of the Six-Party Talks was to create conditions for North Korea to return to the NPT after the country withdrew in January 2003. After several rounds of negotiations, a 2005 agreement was reached with North Korea pledging in the Six-Party Framework to return to the NPT and abandon “all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs.”¹³ North Korea did conduct a nuclear explosion using plutonium in 2006, prompting UN Security Council sanctions and a call to conform to the Six-Party Framework agreements. Negotiations continued and in 2007, the parties agreed to an “action plan” to implement the 2005 agreement; North Korea would halt a nuclear-related activities at Yongbyon in return for a shipment of 50,000 tons of heavy fuel oil. The “action plan” spawned additional working groups for economic and energy cooperation, denuclearization, Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism, North Korea-US relations, and North Korea-Japan relations.

In 2007, North and South Korean leaders held a summit for the first time since 2000. The 2007 North-South summit concluded with the Declaration on the Advancement of South-North Korean Relations, Peace, and Prosperity. This agreement included ending the Korean War Armistice and establishing a permanent peace regime through multilateral negotiations. South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun and North Korean leader Kim Jong Il also pledged cultural interaction, military-to-military talks, work on economic projects, and further political negotiations. As described in the Declaration on the Advancement of South-North Korean Relations, Peace, and Prosperity: “The two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the peaceful denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and agreed to work together toward their goals.”¹⁴ The Six-Party Talks framework did make progress on creating a forum for negotiations and reaching agreements.

In 2008, Six-Party Talk activities included a bilateral agreement between North Korea and the United States that called for North Korea to declare its plutonium program and provide details about its uranium enrichment program and other nuclear proliferation activities. North Korea provided 18,000 pages documenting nuclear reactor and plutonium reprocessing activities dating back to 1986. The country admitted that it reprocessed thirty kilograms of plutonium and used two kilograms of plutonium in the 2006 fission explosion. Back and forth negotiations and discussions concerning verification regimes and methodologies did not result in any tangible progress toward achieving the original 2005 agreement reached in the Six-Party Talks. By 2009, North Korea abandoned the Six-Party Talks framework agreements due to disagreement over verification of North Korean compliance and a provocative North Korean missile launch. However, the remaining five members encouraged North Korea to keep its 2005 pledges and return to the Six-Party Talks. Members called for Six-Party Talks in 2010 to no avail. In 2014, North Korea told the Russians they were willing to return; however, no talks occurred. Then in 2017, China suggested resuming

talks, but nothing materialized.¹⁵ During the time when the Six-Party Talks collapsed from 2009 through 2017, the DPRK continued to develop its strategic weapons programs, including numerous underground nuclear tests and missile launches.¹⁶

Four 2018 Summits

Kim Jong Un's 2018 New Year's Address led to the North-South rapprochement during 2018. Diplomacy resulted in 2018 summits between the DPRK and ROK and the DPRK and the United States. The DPRK and ROK held two summits in Panmunjom and Pyongyang that resulted in two signed agreements. The DPRK and United States held two summits in Singapore and Hanoi that resulted in one signed agreement in Singapore. Each of the summits and agreements are discussed chronologically.

DPRK leader Kim Jong Un and ROK President Moon Jae-in held a summit meeting in Panmunjom on 27 April 2018 and signed the Panmunjom Declaration. The three themes in the declaration were to advance inter-Korean relations, alleviate military tensions on the peninsula, and establish a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula. Efforts to advance inter-Korean relations included dialogue and negotiations to determine the future of the Koreas without outside interference and to adopt past agreements. Reducing military tensions on the Korean Peninsula included ceasing hostile acts in all domains (land, sea, air), transforming the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) into a peace zone, and holding frequent military cooperation meetings. As part of establishing a permanent peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, both sides reaffirmed a mutual Non-Aggression Agreement, phased disarmament, pursuing an agreement to end the Korean War, and complete denuclearization and a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.¹⁷ This summit was followed by the DPRK-US summit several months later in Singapore.

President Donald J. Trump and Kim Jong Un signed the 12 June 2018 Singapore Declaration that included significant policy goals. Trump pledged to provide security guarantees to the DPRK such as not attacking the DPRK and not seeking regime change.¹⁸ Kim Jong Un reaffirmed his "commitment to the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula."¹⁹ Both leaders agreed that "new US-DPRK relations would lead to peace and prosperity, building mutual confidence in order to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula."²⁰ They enumerated four goals in the Singapore Declaration:

- Establish new US-DPRK relations in accordance with the desire of the peoples of the two countries for peace and prosperity.
- [The United States and DPRK should] join efforts to build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.
- [Reaffirming the April 2018 Panmunjom Declaration], the DPRK commits to work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.
- [The United States and DPRK] commit to recovering POW/MIA [prisoner of war/missing in action] remains, including repatriation of those already identified.²¹

The agreement recognized that diplomats needed to hold follow-on negotiations to implement the broad goals enumerated.²² The Singapore summit committed both leaders to "cooperate for the development of new US-DPRK relations and for the promotion of peace, prosperity, and security of the Korean Peninsula and the word."²³ President Trump did suspend US-ROK military exercises after the Singapore summit for cost savings and as confidence building for the negotiations.²⁴ The largest exercises cancelled during 2018 were the annual Ulchi Freedom Guardian normally held in August and Vigilant Ace in December.²⁵

In the ensuing months, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo worked with his North Korean counterpart to make progress on the Singapore Declaration, and North Korea did return remains of fifty-five Americans who died in the Korean War. President Moon visited North Korea for a summit with Kim Jong Un and agreed to the Pyongyang Joint Declaration of September 2018.²⁶ This agreement focused on advancing the April 2018 Panmunjom Declaration as well as independence and self-determination of the Korean nation, possibly leading to reunification. There were six main points enumerated in the agreement:

- Reduce the military posture along the DMZ by implementing the military annex to the Panmunjom Declaration and activating the Inter-Korean Joint Military Committee to improve communication.
- Advance mutual prosperity and economic development through interconnecting east and west coast railways, negotiations over the Gaeseong industrial complex, Mt. Geumgang Tourism Project, special economic and tourism zones, and cooperation on ecology, medicine, and pandemics.
- Increase humanitarian cooperation related to families separated by the war through family reunions at Mt. Geumgang and exchanging family video messages.
- Implement cultural and artistic exchanges, cooperation on future Olympic Games, and jointly celebration of Korean independence.
- Turn the Korean Peninsula “into a land of peace free from nuclear weapons and nuclear threats, and that substantial progress toward this end must be made in a prompt manner.” North Korea would also dismantle the Dongchang-ri missile engine test site and progress on dismantling nuclear facilities at Yongbyon if the US took corresponding actions in the spirit of the Singapore Declaration.
- Plan a reciprocal summit in Seoul.²⁷

Following this summit, US and North Korean diplomats continued to make progress on objectives from the Singapore summit and prepare for a second DPRK-US summit. Secretary Pompeo met with Kim Jong-Un in October 2018 to discuss a declaration to end the Korean War in exchange for “dismantlement and destruction of North Korea’s plutonium and uranium enrichment facilities.”²⁸ These actions by both sides would advance provisions from the Singapore Declaration. Leading up to the Hanoi summit, DPRK negotiators focused on dismantling the Yongbyon complex in exchange for lifting UN sanctions imposed on the DPRK since 2016. The United States told DPRK negotiators that the proposal to trade dismantling of Yongbyon facilities for relief from all the sanctions imposed since 2016 was not acceptable. However, limited sanctions relief for humanitarian assistance in exchange for fissile material production suspension, inspections, and eventual dismantlement of Yongbyon were discussed. The February 2019 Hanoi summit between the DPRK and United States ended without a joint statement and agreement. The Hanoi results are important to analyze regarding the position of both parties. At Hanoi, President Trump did not accept the DPRK’s proposal to dismantle Yongbyon facilities in return for sanctions relief. The rationale for rejection included that missile and fissile production facilities outside of the Yongbyon complex would remain intact and sanctions relief would be a source of income to fund weapons programs.²⁹ Trump did offer a Grand Bargain to the DPRK to trade all nuclear weapons, materials, and facilities for an end to US-led sanctions affecting North Korea’s economy. Kim Jong Un would not accept Trump’s Grand Bargain and Trump would not trade dismantling the Yongbyon complex for sanctions relief.³⁰ The Hanoi summit ended without agreement. However, the United States did gain a

better understanding of what the DPRK really wanted beyond sanctions relief. The DPRK desires “new US-DPRK relations” and lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula; both are principles in the Singapore Declaration.³¹ While visiting the ROK in September 2019, President Trump proposed and Kim Jong-Un accepted an impromptu meeting at the DMZ. It is notable that Kim Jong Un accepted on short notice and agreed to meet. No written agreements came from the short meeting at Panmunjom.³²

Progress on Negotiations Since 2019

Progress concerning the 2018 inter-Korean Panmunjom and Pyongyang Joint Declarations was limited. The North and South did remove some DMZ guard posts and weapons around Panmunjom. The two Koreas held meetings on a variety of economic projects including railways, with little tangible progress so far. North Korea destroyed its underground nuclear test site and tunnels at Punggye-ri and the Dongchang-ri missile engine test site in 2018.³³ Big-ticket negotiation items such as a Korean War Peace Treaty and a mutual non-aggression pact remained elusive, as did denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Progress from the Singapore Declaration has been limited to the transfer of POW/MIA remains to the United States, the Hanoi summit, and several rounds of negotiations between US and DPRK officials. There has been no tangible public progress on the Singapore Declaration goals for a framework for denuclearization, a new era of DPRK-US relations, or a lasting and stable peace on the Korean Peninsula.

On 1 January 2020, the DPRK released Kim Jong Un’s speech from a WPK Central Committee meeting that occurred in the final days of 2019.³⁴ This address codified changes to DPRK denuclearization policy which were different from pledges made in the 2018 Panmunjom, Pyongyang, and Singapore Declarations. Kim Jong Un stated the DPRK was no longer bound by “denuclearization, disarmament and non-proliferation commitments.”³⁵ Further, the DPRK indicated it would maintain a nuclear deterrent because the United States had maintained a hostile policy, a durable peace mechanism did not exist, and Kim Jong Un did not expect the United States to lift economic sanctions.³⁶ The DPRK noted that the US hostile policy included economic sanctions and lack of progress toward a durable agreement to transform the Korean War Armistice to a peace treaty. Also, North Korea was threatened by the US security posture in North East Asia, including the US-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty, presence of US military forces on the Peninsula, and US Extended Deterrence guarantees to the ROK.³⁷ Kim’s rationale for the policy reversal was that the United States did not take reciprocal steps when the DPRK halted nuclear and Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) tests from 2018 to 2019. Kim Jong Un expected bilateral military exercises and deployment of additional military equipment to the ROK to stop and for economic sanctions to be lifted. He made it clear that the United States needed change its actions toward the DPRK before further negotiations.³⁸ There was no tangible progress or negotiations during 2020 beyond both sides posturing in public, working level negotiations that stalled, and a variety of missile launches by North Korea.³⁹

The 2021 Eighth Worker’s Party of Korea Congress included announcements about the DPRK’s nuclear weapons and missile programs and diplomatic posture. The DPRK declared they would continue ICBM and space-launched ballistic missile [SLBM] development as well as miniaturize nuclear weapons, hydrogen bombs, and missiles with 15,000-kilometer range.⁴⁰ At the same time, the DPRK signaled the Singapore Declaration would remain a viable framework for

advancing US-DPRK relations with important conditions. As noted in Kim Jong Un's translated speech to the Eighth Worker's Party of Korea Congress, "the WPK to approach the US on the principle of answering force with toughness and good faith in kind in the future, too, stating that a key to establishing a new relationship (emphasis added) between the DPRK and the US lies in the US withdrawal of its hostile policy towards the DPRK."⁴¹ The DPRK viewed ROK relations as strained and returned to the animosity that existed prior to the 2018 Panmunjom Declaration. Areas of concern to the DPRK were US-ROK military exercises as well as ROK purchases and development of modern military equipment especially ballistic and cruise missiles. The DPRK considered itself to be a responsible nuclear power with a no-first-use policy. As this chapter was being finalized, there was no indication that the DPRK would denuclearize or diminish its strategic capabilities given their view of the security situation.⁴²

Starting in April 2021, the DPRK paused missile testing to evaluate the Biden Administration's North Korea policy. Public details about the Biden Administration policy included the ultimate goal to denuclearize North Korea, coupled with serious and sustained diplomacy.⁴³ In June 2021, during the Third Plenary Meeting of the Eighth Central Committee, Kim Jong Un identified the need to be prepared for dialogue and confrontation; then DPRK missile tests and nuclear facility activity resumed.⁴⁴ While North Korea had not tested a nuclear weapon after September 2017, the country retained its nuclear program, including plutonium and uranium nuclear fuel cycles, and continued to periodically test ballistic missiles.⁴⁵

In January and February 2022, North Korea tested a dozen short and medium range missiles, and the US responded with more sanctions. Construction and repair activity at North Korea's nuclear test site and renovations at their ICBM test launch complex were also reported early in 2022 before North Korea conducted two ICBM tests in March. These were the first ICBM-class test launches since 2017.⁴⁶ The first test failed, and the second test demonstrated that the weapon was capable of reaching the US mainland.⁴⁷

What Next?

US strategy regarding the DPRK remains to completely denuclearize the Korean Peninsula.⁴⁸ Based on the proceedings from the 2021 Eighth Party Congress, the United States should explore progress on the Singapore Declaration. First, agree on the end state of what the provisions of Singapore Declaration mean to both sides. Second, agree on the definition of "denuclearization" on the Korean Peninsula. The generally accepted US denuclearization definition is different from the DPRK. The DPRK views denuclearization as the entire Korean Peninsula, including US Extended Deterrence, and verification of a nuclear-free South.⁴⁹ With the end state and denuclearization defined, negotiations on achieving the remaining goals of the Singapore Declaration would be next. These would be to end the Korean War with a peace treaty and a normal DPRK-US relationship. Only with these steps can denuclearization be achieved from the DPRK perspective. The hard work of a phased action-for-action plan would be possible and difficult. The United States must understand that the DPRK will not eliminate its weapons programs without corresponding actions by the United States. Additionally, the United States needs to test the DPRK in these negotiations to find out if it is serious about the Singapore Declaration. If the DPRK does not want to move forward with the Singapore Declaration, that is also instructive and leads to the next step.

A return to multilateral negotiations similar to the Six-Party Talks would be the next logical approach toward denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. When the DPRK left the Six-Party Talks,

the remaining parties left the door open for the talks to resume. Given Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, it is unlikely Russia would be an acceptable participant. The multiparty framework is valuable and showed progress toward negotiated agreements. The DPRK did agree to abandon nuclear capabilities in 2005 and in 2008 provided its most comprehensive accounting of nuclear activity within the Six-Party Talks framework. Modifying the Six-Party Talks framework to exclude Russia and attempting to engage the DPRK on denuclearization would be an approach worth trying. If the DPRK is unwilling to go forward with multilateral negotiations, the solution to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula is likely beyond diplomacy.

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Chapter 6

Regional Impact of the Afghanistan Withdrawal on Indo-Pacific Allies and Partners

David C. McCaughrin and Joshua N. Stephenson

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan and subsequent takeover of the country by the Taliban prompted pundits and experts the world over to criticize harshly the United States and the Biden Administration. Criticism came from across the political spectrum; Fox News's Sean Hannity denounced the withdrawal as a "debacle" and added that it "destroyed America's credibility around the world."¹ Hannity's political leanings are well-known; however, criticism was not limited to the political right wing.

The Brookings Institute, an outlet which generally supported the Biden Administration, similarly stated that the decision to withdraw was "not the morally correct one."² A common theme uniting detractors from the right and the left was that the withdrawal damaged America's international credibility. If America does not honor its security commitments in Afghanistan, according to the pundits, how can it be trusted to honor security commitments anywhere? Have America's adversaries been emboldened and strengthened to act more aggressively toward US Allies and partners? Perception of the Afghanistan withdrawal as a harbinger of doom for US security guarantees is false. On the contrary, US security relationships with Allies and partners remain strong in the Indo-Pacific. America's global rivals, particularly the People's Republic of China (PRC), have not benefitted, as feared, from the Afghanistan withdrawal; and India, a neutral power with a vested interest in US success in Afghanistan, has not backed away from its limited but salient cooperation with the United States.

Afghanistan in the Context of US Security Cooperation

From the fall of the Soviet Union to the terror attacks of 9/11, US military activities supported an evolving foreign policy approach; for the first time in modern history, a single nation possessed a monopoly on military power, capacity, and capability.³ For the first time since World War II, the US military did not have a clear peer competitor and, subsequently, partnerships shifted from containing the Soviet Union to broader security cooperative activities and initiatives.⁴ Arguably, the nature of bilateral and multilateral military activities changed, and the US military capitalized on cooperative military-to-military engagements rather than focusing on specific regional or global threats.

The 9/11 terror attacks launched a paradigm shift for US military operations on a global scale. Stateless terrorist actors like al-Qaeda provided a nebulous aggressor for expanded military cooperation across a larger range of both new and old partners. Terrorism, as a global threat and common security interest to all nations, provided a new avenue of dialogue with many allies and partners. Though military actions centered on the Middle East, many activities took place far from the battlefields of Afghanistan.

Under the new paradigm of confronting terrorism, US forces engaged partners across the Indo-Pacific region through exercises, exchanges, and dialogues that focused on confronting terrorism and bore direct effects within the territory of partners facing violent extremist movements. US military forces weighed heavily toward the Afghan and Iraq fronts, but also expanded engagement with Indo-Pacific Allies and partners. Although this expansion served as an economy of force from a US perspective, US interlocutors built and cultivated necessary relationships. Cornerstone, multi-

lateral events like the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC) in the waters off Hawaii, Cobra Gold in Thailand, and others steadied the foundations of key international security relationships.⁵ The actions in Afghanistan focused on stabilizing that country and were not directly linked to US commitments throughout the region. Furthermore, the rise of the PRC introduced an increasingly important role for the United States as an offshore balancer hedging against excessive PRC influence.

The withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan was inevitable. Every US president since George W. Bush described conditions for the US military departure, and no US president ever expressed a desire for a permanent US military presence in the country. By December 2011, eighty-five countries supported the idea of a “decade of transformation” beginning in 2015, and necessarily concluding with the end of coalition military operations in Afghanistan.⁶ On 27 May 2014, President Barack H. Obama specified US combat operations would end in 2014, and military activities would transition to a train, advise, and assist mission in 2015.⁷ The Trump Administration ultimately continued the downward trajectory of US forces through an open withdrawal arrangement with the Taliban and announced a troop reduction to 2,500 by 15 January 2021.⁸ And President Joseph R. Biden Jr. did not waiver from the trend, ultimately withdrawing all US forces by August 2021.

The US Congress also signaled through law that the country would not invest in a permanent presence in Afghanistan. Despite authorizing billions of dollars for reconstruction and security assistance to Afghanistan’s rebuilt military, Congress specified as early as 2009 that it would not allow construction of permanent US military facilities in the country. The proverbial writing was on the wall: The United States did not intend a permanent presence in Afghanistan. Allies and partners across the globe, including the Indo-Pacific, watched US forces slowly reduce in number over time, and none believed the United States would indefinitely continue operations in Afghanistan.

Although some Indo-Pacific Allies and partners like Australia, New Zealand, and Mongolia contributed directly to the international mission in Afghanistan, other partner contributions were less direct and often not military in nature. For the most part, there is no evidence that an Indo-Pacific partner’s self-interest and relationship with the United States hinged on efforts in Afghanistan. Troop surges and troop withdrawals did not adversely affect the tone or success of the multitude of military engagements throughout the region. Cornerstone exercises with Indo-Pacific partners continued to evolve throughout the tenure of multinational operations in Afghanistan. Partners discussed activities in Afghanistan in bilateral and multilateral engagements, but Afghanistan was not leveraged to assure partners of America’s commitment to shared bilateral security interests.

Despite pundit finger-wagging that the United States is no longer a trusty security partner, American relationships in the Indo-Pacific are made of sterner stuff. While Middle Eastern countries may re-examine relations with the United States, the Indo-Pacific is less likely to be similarly shaken.⁹ The major powers in the Indo-Pacific never relied on Afghanistan as a lever to test American resolve. US partnerships preceded Afghanistan, and many survived bilateral disagreements greater than US actions in a third-party country.

Conversely, Allies and partners find opportunities for greater engagement as US forces shift from the Afghanistan mission to focus on other regional and country-specific security concerns. The 2017 National Security Strategy and 2021 Interim National Security Strategy Guidance clearly indicated that the US focus had shifted to competition with China. With more time, resources, and national guidance—and little interest in Afghanistan—Indo-Pacific partners are likely viewing opportunity, rather than abandonment.

United States Security Relations with East Asian Countries

There exist many key differences in the respective relationships of US Indo-Pacific Allies and partners in comparison to Afghanistan. South Korea has hosted a US military presence for seven decades to help ensure its survival. Many South Koreans seek a foreign policy that allows more wiggle room for Seoul between Washington and Beijing. Some have challenged that the country's strong attachment to the United States has sometimes cost South Korea in its lucrative economic relationship with the PRC.¹⁰

Unlike with Afghanistan, the United States has a mutual defense treaty with South Korea that has been in effect since soon after the Armistice was signed in 1953. Under Article III, each treaty signatory “declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.”¹¹ Conversely, the most authoritative document the United States signed with Afghanistan, the Joint Declaration dated 29 February 2020, committed the United States to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan within fourteen months.¹²

Additionally, South Korea has devoted considerable effort to both economic modernization and democracy over the course of its relationship with the United States. It has developed from a backward economy largely based on subsistence agriculture to a thriving, first-world market economy. The ROK government, which remained a military-backed autocracy for many years, has transitioned into a stable, thriving, multi-party democracy. The 2022 election of Yoon Suk-Yeol as president—after campaigning on a platform that included strengthening the alliance with the United States—indicates that South Korea is far from seeking to cut security ties.¹³

Finally, the United States has made clear that East Asia is now far more important than distant Central Asia to US strategy. Leif Eric-Easley, assistant professor of International Studies at Ewha Women's University in Seoul, commented: “Washington won't pull its troops off the peninsula anytime soon because that would be perceived as geopolitically ceding Asia to China.”¹⁴ The US-South Korea alliance may preclude ceding Asia to China, but it exists primarily to protect South Korea from North Korea.

Japan has a much more contentious relationship with China, linked to historical baggage from World War II as well as territorial disputes concerning possession of the Senkaku Islands and seabed mineral rights in the East China Sea. As a further residual consequence of World War II, Japan's own armed forces are constitutionally limited in scope. Among US Allies, Japan arguably stands to benefit the most from the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Japan hosts the largest contingent of US military personnel stationed in another country. The country's new prime minister, Fumio Kishida, has advocated for a stronger Self-Defense Force to better partner with the United States and confront the increased threat posed by China. In November 2021, Kishida's cabinet passed a supplemental defense budget that brought Japan's total defense budget to 6.1 trillion yen, equivalent to \$53.2 billion and a new record high under the post-World War II constitution. This represents about 1 percent of Japan's gross domestic product (GDP), which is customarily the maximum Japan will allot to defense.¹⁵ The prevailing preference in Tokyo is to keep the US-Japan alliance strong in the wake of the increasing threat from China, as well as North Korea and Russia.

Japan's key benefit from the US withdrawal was increased prioritization of US strategic security assets. Strategic bombers that had provided close air support to ground troops in Afghanistan

are now available to increase patrols over contested East and South China Sea areas. The United States no longer needs an aircraft carrier stationed in the Indian Ocean to provide air support over Afghanistan. These few vessels can pay greater attention to security concerns in the Western Pacific. These assets are also more available to exercise with Japan's small but technologically advanced Self-Defense Force.

Taiwan is watching carefully, and with concern, as the United States adjusts after withdrawing from Afghanistan. A prominent US security concern has been the global media focus on whether the US exit from Afghanistan would be a harbinger of abandonment if the PRC invaded Taiwan.¹⁶ The PRC continues its familiar drumbeat of threats and aggressive actions against Taiwan, both through increasingly bellicose verbal official statements and increasingly aggressive air incursions into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone.¹⁷

Taiwan is far more geostrategically significant to the United States than Afghanistan. Afghanistan held very little utility to the United States until it sheltered the terrorists who planned 9/11 and other terrorist attacks. Taiwan, conversely, sits at the nexus of the East and South China seas—offering the ability to control the seaborne approaches to China from most directions. Furthermore, the continued existence of a successful, thriving democracy on the island flies in the face of the PRC's continued autocracy. Taiwan's importance to the global semiconductor industry also cannot be overstated.¹⁸ Finally, Taiwan has few other options for security cooperation. Most nations, including the United States, had to eschew any formal diplomatic relationship with the Republic of China government on Taiwan as a condition for establishing relations with Beijing. The United States, however, maintains informal security ties under the provisions of the Taiwan Relations Act, and further outlines its commitments under the Six Assurances issued by President Ronald Reagan in 1982.¹⁹

United States Security Relations with Southeast Asian Countries

US Allies and partners in Southeast Asia are more inclined to hedge; unlike Japan and Taiwan, these countries are not necessarily firmly in the US camp. They have longstanding security ties with the United States but are also hugely reliant on PRC trade and investment. These countries, theoretically, would be more likely than East Asian countries to swing their allegiance to the PRC if they were convinced by the Afghanistan withdrawal that the United States is no longer a reliable partner.

Thailand and the Philippines have little choice other than to continue balancing Chinese and US relations. While both nations' relationships with the United States have evolved beyond the foundations that made them treaty allies, they remain equally burdened by the realities of economics, geography, and China's influence in their neighborhood. These countries are in an uncomfortable position given their dependence on PRC commerce; Thailand and the PRC traded more than \$80 billion (US) worth of goods and services in 2020, and the Philippines and the PRC about \$47 billion (US).²⁰ Additionally, both countries are geographically closer to China than the United States. The fact that these countries continue to hedge and maintain security cooperation with the United States indicates that the United States serves as a necessary bulwark against excessive Chinese influence. There is little advantage for the United States to force these countries to choose either China or the United States. China could force the issue to its own peril. The United States has treaties of alliance with both Thailand and the Philippines.²¹ These countries' actions to preserve valuable security engagement with the United States underscore the importance of maintaining strong relations with the United States and help preclude excessive Chinese influence.

The Philippines perhaps causes more anxiety in Washington. Recent President Rodrigo Duterte threatened to permanently end the US Visiting Forces Agreement but did not follow through on his threat—a clear indication that this oft-difficult ally continues to see value in security cooperation with the United States.²² Despite close economic ties with the PRC, ongoing territorial disputes in the South China Sea remain an area of sharp contention between Beijing and Manila.

The US-Philippine security relationship is not related to US activities in Afghanistan. Starting in 2016, Duterte's administration openly courted Chinese development and threatened the very treaty that has bound the United States and the Philippines together since 1951. US policy makers would have ample justification to abandon the treaty.²³ Yet, the United States continues to offer security cooperation initiatives and the Philippines continues to welcome US assistance. The United States continued to support the Philippines during a tumultuous period of US/China hedging during the Duterte Administration, and even assisted the Philippine military with key logistic support in its own fight against Islamic fundamentalists on the southern island of Mindanao during Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines.

Friction in the Thai-US relationship did not begin with the Afghanistan withdrawal. The Thai tradition of military coups since 2006 already created enough friction. The United States has sharply reduced security cooperation several times in the past to protest military overthrow of an elected government. Despite this, the relationship stands—in no small measure because of China's growing role in the region. The United States needs Thailand as a reliable ally in Southeast Asia; Thailand needs the United States to safeguard against Chinese dominance and retain access to US markets, one of its top three trading partners. The Thai government has little worry that the United States will abandon Thailand based on US withdrawal from Afghanistan, which has virtually no cultural, religious, political, or economic linkage to Thailand. While many fissures exist in the Thai-US relationship, the withdrawal from Afghanistan is not the straw to break the camel's back.²⁴

Australia, one of America's most stalwart allies from any region, had committed its own troops in support of the US-led coalition in Afghanistan for the entirety of the operation. In September 2021, just after the withdrawal, Australia signed the AUKUS Treaty with the United States and United Kingdom. The treaty will enable Australia to acquire its own nuclear submarines, greatly extending its ability to project power in the Southwest Pacific as well as deepening other means of security cooperation. The signing of this treaty just weeks after the withdrawal is an obvious sign of a steady relationship built on continued trust with the United States.

Australia conditioned its own withdrawal from Afghanistan on the US decision; then-Prime Minister John Howard reminded the nation that Australia's presence was “conditional on the United States presence in Afghanistan.”²⁵ Instead of threatening the US-Australian security relationship, the withdrawal eliminated a military requirement for both countries, creating space for greater cooperation in other security arenas. A strong bilateral relationship remains critical as Australia seeks an ideal balance between long-held Western ideals and Chinese resources and markets.

For decades, Australia had carefully built closer trade ties with China—in some respects seeking to hedge its economic and security relationships as Thailand and the Philippines had done. However, Australia pushed back when China attempted to establish undue influence in the country through investment, and then bore the dragon's wrath after Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison proposed an objective, independent investigation into the origins of COVID-19. China immediately placed restrictions on Australian exports, which failed in its intent to cow Australia into compliance.²⁶

Dealing with the China Challenge

The PRC government and its media mouthpieces predictably spiked the football on the perception of American failure. The PRC Foreign Ministry accused the United States of “pursuing power politics in the world” through its “hegemonic nature,” and mockingly urged the United States to “learn profound lessons and assume their due responsibilities” for the rapid Taliban takeover post-withdrawal.²⁷ Although the PRC did not waste the opportunity to poke the United States for the failed withdrawal and resulting chaos, this criticism was hardly atypical of the PRC. Authoritative and non-authoritative media had long criticized the US presence there, and no setback was safe from propaganda exploitation as a sign that US “hegemony” was nearing its end.

China did not begin predicting the demise of the United States with the Afghanistan withdrawal. This messaging has been a prominent theme of PRC media for quite some time. China has made it clear that it intends to promote its model of technocratic, non-democratic governance as an alternative to Western democracy. Less than a month after the fall of Kabul, Xi Jinping delivered an ambitious video speech to the UN General Assembly in which he asserted his vision and proposals across eight key areas of governance. At the conclusion, he tied these proposals to the PRC’s “Community of a Shared Future,” sometimes translated “Community of Common Destiny,” which is widely considered a philosophical framework for a PRC-led global order.²⁸ This is not new; Kabul’s fall did not push this to the front and center. The PRC’s global ambitions did not suddenly spring from America’s withdrawal from Afghanistan. Finally, the United States had been signaling the intent to scale down and end operations in Afghanistan for years; well before the United States and Taliban agreed in Doha under the Trump Administration to withdraw, the eventual end of the US mission there had hardly been a closely guarded secret.

The US departure from Afghanistan actually creates a multifaceted security dilemma for China. China’s own official commentary in the wake of the US withdrawal, in addition to criticizing the United States, also bemoaned the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan. The PRC accused the United States of shunning “its unmistakable responsibility for the chaos in Afghanistan” and promoted its own efforts to coordinate with other countries bordering Afghanistan.²⁹

First, the United States now has much more flexibility to shift attention and resources to the Indo-Pacific. The Department of Defense has made clear that China is the long-term pacing challenge to the United States; this will not change despite Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. This is not just a shift of existing resources; weapons procurement and doctrine development now also prioritize large-scale, high-intensity combat against a near-peer competitor. Although these initiatives began well before the Afghanistan withdrawal, ongoing operations can no longer compete with Indo-Pacific initiatives for precious budget dollars.

Second, Beijing worries about the rise of a militant Islamic government just outside China’s northwestern border. China fears radicalization of its restless Uighur population and will want to prevent any flow of foreign fighters across the narrow, remote seventy-six-kilometer border with Afghanistan’s Wakhan Corridor. China moved very quickly to recognize the Taliban government and pressured the Taliban not to aid the East Turkestan Independence Movement (ETIM), which Beijing has labeled a terrorist group.³⁰ China also fears jihad directed against Beijing based on narratives that the country mistreated the Uighur population in Xinjiang, including concentration camps and government regulations that impinge on Islamic practices.

Third, China does not want any threats to its investments in and near Afghanistan under its One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative. Within Afghanistan, China’s signature investment is the

large Mes Aynak copper mine in Logar Province, a project running well behind schedule.³¹ Additionally, China has built rail and cellular infrastructure. Perhaps most important to China, Afghanistan adjoins the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a long-running initiative subsumed under OBOR. CPEC success hinges on geopolitical stability in the area, and a chaotic or militant Afghanistan looks much less stable to investors than one with a government propped up by the United States.

Finally, for China to oust the United States as a regional security provider, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) may need to step into Afghanistan and fill a critical security vacuum. Under Taliban control, Afghanistan could easily devolve into a regional security problem. Even prior to the US withdrawal, Niva Yau and Raffaello Pantucci describe what might result:

With Washington present in force, Beijing can largely apportion blame and responsibility to the U.S. for anything that happens. Once the U.S. is gone, this excuse may still have some rhetorical currency, but it will lack tangible use on the ground. And while China may be able to ensure that its security concerns are addressed, its neighbors in Central Asia will expect it to use its weight and gravitas to play a more substantial role in stabilizing the situation. None expect China to replace the United States in military terms, but Central Asia may hope Beijing will play a more forward and substantial role in Afghanistan—a role that actually helps stabilize and calm the situation—rather than hedge and watch while it collapses in on itself.³²

The PLA does not have nearly the depth of experience of the US military for projected ground deployments. A few infantry battalions have deployed in support of UN Peacekeeping missions in Africa, but large-scale PLA ground forces have not deployed for an actual combat mission since the dubiously successful 1979 incursion into Vietnam. Should attacks against Chinese interests launch from an unstable Afghanistan, PRC decision makers would face an uncomfortable choice; do they have the stomach to commit ground troops to stability operations in Afghanistan after the fate that befell the Americans and Soviets before them?

US Security Relations with India

Any discussion of a perceived fear of US abandonment in the Indo-Pacific cannot exclude India's key role. Neither a treaty ally nor a national security strategy-described competitor, India is a major power both within and beyond the subcontinent. Since the Obama Administration's pivot to the Pacific in late 2011, many observers contend US-India relations have progressed beyond the accepted norm of post-Cold War bilateral ties. However, this should not be interpreted as Indian acceptance of US policy and security expectations. Conversely, India-US relations will likely not recede to pre-2012 levels following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The relationship—complicated by India's strongly independent, strategically autonomous foreign policy—is still tenable. This is due in no small part to Indian support of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Freedom's Sentinel and its long historical rivalry and ongoing conflict with Pakistan. Although these considerations provide context to US policy makers for engaging India, the reality of India's traditions on the world stage present far greater barriers than the United States could construct on its own.

India, regardless of US posture or incentives, will move at its own pace. The Indian military continues to focus on China and Pakistan as their country's greatest strategic threats. The Indian military invested for the first time in some major US military end items (such as AH-64s, M777s,

and CH47s); however, these do not negate India's heavy reliance on Soviet/Russian military hardware.³³ This reliance is deeply entrenched despite US engagements. Furthermore, India will adhere to its own foreign policy, and legacy of its non-aligned history, regardless of differing perceptions of the policy's current utility. Moreover, a casual glance at mainstream Indian media highlights pervasive pro-Russian and pro-US sentiment. Consequently, these political and domestic tendencies will preclude New Delhi from ever drawing too close to Washington's regional policy preferences.

America's withdrawal from Afghanistan actually supports India's foreign policy. India's desire to cooperate with the United States is very measured. India will deliberately remain measured regardless of the country's ruling political party. In the case of Afghanistan, India's autonomy worked in favor of the United States following the Afghanistan withdrawal. The US presence in Afghanistan—on Pakistan's western flank—supported India's rivalry with Pakistan. However, India never relied on the US presence in Afghanistan to pursue efforts to counter Pakistan. The Indians have also never explicitly relied on the US presence to counter China. From India's perspective, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan affects regional stability, but only indirectly as India looks far more toward Pakistan as the source of regional terrorism.

Conclusion

In the wake of the withdrawal, attention quickly turned to how America's international rivals, particularly the PRC, would be emboldened to expand its influence and warn other partners that America could not be trusted to intervene or otherwise protect a partner in need. In particular, the pundits focused on how China would be more inclined to invade Taiwan and pressure US allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific. Per the critics, these partners could no longer trust the United States to support them. These voices hyperventilated that it was the end of American influence in the region and made the globe safe for Chinese autocracy.

China's rise has been a long-term movement of more than four decades; Beijing's territorial assertions and attempts to increase its geopolitical influence were not sudden or prompted by America's Afghanistan withdrawal. The PRC has not suddenly exerted its will without fear of American reprisal, nor have US Allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific suddenly decided they can no longer trust Washington. Conversely, lack of US attention to Afghanistan has complicated the PRC strategic calculus, and America's Indo-Pacific Allies and partners do not suddenly believe that the United States will not honor its security commitments. Finally, India will maintain its strategic neutrality, and US actions in Afghanistan have little effect on the slow-but-positive trajectory of this important relationship.

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Chapter 7

Climate Change, the Fountainhead of Great Power Cooperation

Paul Mostafa

Although the term collective security is relatively new, originating from the 1919 League of Nations, the concept of collective security dates back to the very first moments of human existence—when family units provided mutual support and safety in the face of external threats.¹ As humans have developed over millennia so too has the concept of collective security: families became tribes then towns, towns became cities then city states, and city states became nation states then international alliances. The consistent thread in this progression has been the presence of humans and mutual interests. Shared interests have driven humans to continually scale the concept of collective security. As those interests were increasingly threatened in scope and scale over time, humans united to meet those threats. The evolution of threats to human security does not occur in a linear, stepped fashion. Because of lengthy overlaps between contemporary and emerging threats, collective security has expanded in a two-steps-forward-one-step-back fashion. As family units grew into tribes, there was still friction between families in those spaces where their interests did not completely overlap, just as allied states do not necessarily share a utopian peace today. Collective security's scale expanded as shared interests proved of greater importance than differing interests. The same theme played out across the expansions noted above. The world is currently experiencing a collective security inflection point, primarily driven by climate change; threats to human security are expanding beyond the scope of the current approach to collective security. This emerging challenge to collective security requires humans to clearly identify the importance of threats as well as overlapping interests across the broader human collective. In doing so, humans will need to challenge contemporary concepts of collective security, and the strategies they use to meet emerging threats.

American Joint doctrine recommends a system to prioritize US interests and associated threats. Joint Doctrine Note (JDN) 1-18, *Strategy*, includes guidance on categorizing interests at the national level into three categories: Vital, Important, and Peripheral. Vital interests are “security of the home territory, safety of citizens at home and abroad, economic prosperity, and preservation of the national way of life,” arguably all key factors in collective security at both the national and global level.² Important interests are “freedom of access to the global commons, regional stability, secure alliances, or the promotion of the state's values.”³ Through the Interest category lens, this chapter proposes that climate change, and the associated international challenges, represents a shared threat to US and Chinese Vital interests. Climate change policy can thus be an opportunity to expand collective security and transition from great power competition to cooperation. Dilma Rousseff, president of Brazil from 2011 to 2016, offered this comment on the situation:

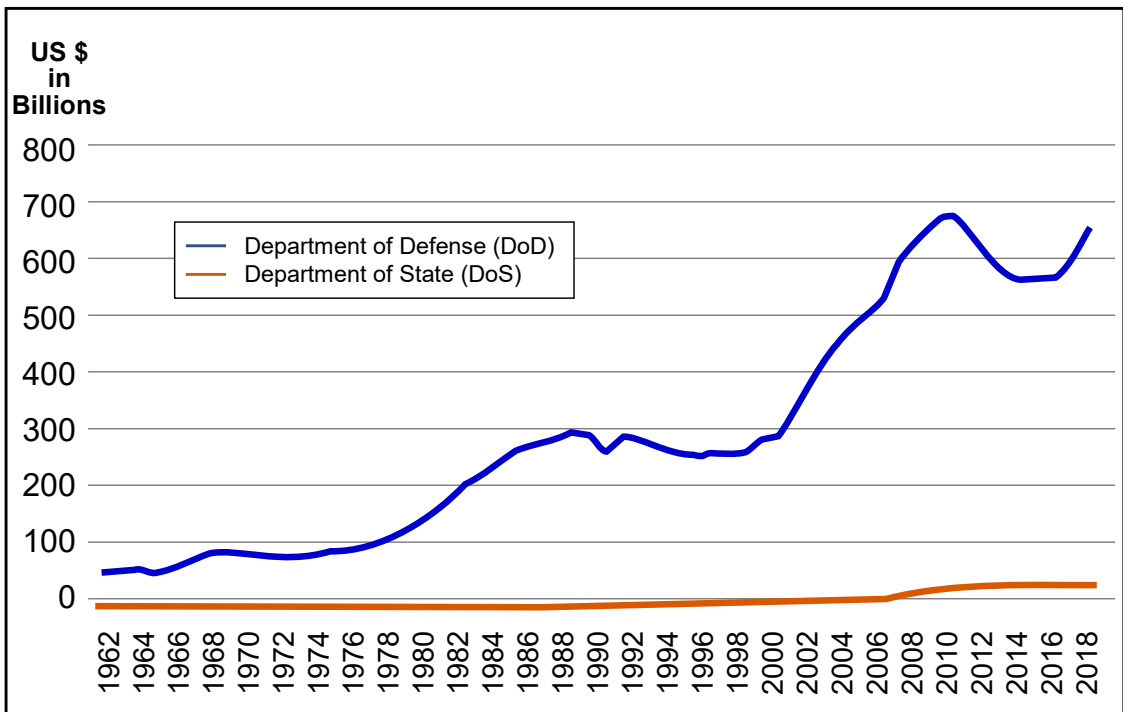
The current generation of world leaders—our generation—is also being called to face significant challenges concerning peace, collective security, and the environment. We have been unable to solve old disputes and to prevent new threats. The use of force is incapable of eliminating the underlying causes of conflict.⁴

Great power cooperation, not competition, offers the optimal approach to address current and future challenges.

The Importance of Knowing, and Saying, What Is Important

President Joseph R. Biden Jr.’s 2021 Interim National Security Strategy Guidance (INSSG) articulates the broad range of threats that impact US national interests. These range from traditional threats to security from “antagonistic authoritarian” state actors like China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea to non-traditional international/trans-regional challenges such as pandemics, the escalating climate crisis, international economic disruptions, violent extremism and terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction that “respect no borders or walls, and must be met with collective action; . . . none can be effectively addressed by one nation acting alone.”⁵ While the listed threats represent a challenge to US interests and collective security, the 2021 INSSG does not rank or prioritize these. Biden articulated three national security priorities: “to protect the security of the American people, . . . expand economic prosperity and opportunity, . . . [and] realizing and defending the democratic values at the heart of the American way of life.”⁶ However, these priorities are not prioritized.

In any strategy, the apportionment of resourcing should reflect the prioritization of goals, the means available to achieve the ends.⁷ With no formally articulated prioritization, the resourcing cannot be extrapolated to identify the strategy’s prioritized ends. American strategist Bernard Brodie’s observation that “strategy wears a dollar sign” rings as true today as it did when he made it in 1959.⁸ Although the 2021 INSSG states that the US will “lead with diplomacy,” Figure 7.1 shows there is a significant gap between the funding lines of US Department of Defense and US Department of State, which represent the military and diplomatic elements of US national power.⁹



Source: Office of Management and Budget, “Table 4.1—Outlays by Agency: 1962–2025 in Fiscal Year 2021,” 2021, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BUDGET-2021-TAB/xls/BUDGET-2021-TAB-5-1.xlsx>.

Figure 7.1. US Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of State (DoS) budgets from 1962 to 2019 in current dollars.

The White House's FY2022 budget request apparently sought to remediate this in percentage allocation terms with an 11-percent increase to the DoS budget compared with a 1.3-percent increase to DoD, reversing a trend from the previous administration's budget allocation. However, because the DoD budget is much larger in comparison, DoS will only receive an additional \$6.3 billion vice \$11.3 billion for the DoD.¹⁰ Given that 2021 INSSG did not prioritize the outlined threats, the assumption might be that threats within the purview of the DoD are far greater priority than those of DoS—or that interstate competition and conflict represent the highest threat to US security, with international challenges a very distant second.

The language used—and the resource apportionment—matters; it not only vectors in the federal departments but also impacts the lens by which security interests are viewed by the general public. The average citizen is unlikely to read the 2021 INSSG but will have digested it through subsequent interpretations by the media. A document that focuses on Important (inter-state competition and conflict) over Vital (international threats) thus plays out in the media. The second- and third-order effects are that the voting public responds more to policy that treats Important interests as more important than Vital. Politicians and lawmakers will apportion their efforts accordingly, creating a vicious cycle of policy making.

The 2021 INSSG messages are as much for the international audience as they are for the domestic. The listed threats send a clear message to the rest of the world, including antagonistic authoritarian powers, about areas where the United States wants to cooperate and where it wants to compete. Prioritization of these threats allows the global collective to understand United States preferences for shared interests over divergent ones. In the absence of clearly articulated priorities, the international audience, both allies and competitors, can reach the same conclusions about the balance of US interests.

Climate Change as a Vector for Cooperation

Climate change accelerates the array of international threats detailed in the 2021 INSSG; it is the fountainhead of threats to US Vital, and Important, interests. A recently published Australian Strategic Policy Institute report describes climate change as “a global systemic crisis with disruptions that will transform the geopolitical landscape,” leading to extreme weather events, pandemics, terrorism, international economic disruptions, and interstate conflict—the majority of the threats identified in the 2021 INSSG.¹¹ Changing climatic conditions increase the interaction between humans, pests, and pathogens, increasing the likelihood of global pandemics such as the recent COVID-19 threat. Interruptions to food and water security undermine governments, creating environments that malign non-state actors. Sea level rise and extreme weather events cause significant shock to global trade and the broader economic system, as well as contributing to mass migration, creating cascading humanitarian crises.¹² In *Climate Change and National Security: Implications for the Military*, author Albert Palazzo elegantly articulates the threat that climate change represents to global security, as well as national security's central role in responding to climate change.¹³ Addressing climate change represents the greatest possible payoff in meeting both contemporary and emerging challenges to US and global collective security.

The current US approach to collective security is primarily based on meeting contemporary threats to security. The 2021 INSSG elevated the issue of climate change significantly from the preceding 2017 National Security Strategy, which referenced climate one time and only in relation to increasing US energy security.¹⁴ However, the 2021 INSSG approach to collective security is still

framed around democratic alliances and “like-minded partners,” rather than broader global cooperation to include China.¹⁵ Although alliances have historically proven highly effective in meeting collective security challenges from external threats, they have yet to be scaled to encompass the global effort.

The United States understands that the climate change challenge cannot be overcome without great power cooperation. Regarding international and trans-regional threats, the 2021 INSSG states: “None can be effectively addressed by one nation acting alone.”¹⁶ The National Intelligence Council’s 2021 “Climate Change and International Response Increasing Challenges to US National Security Through 2040” report articulates that a global collective response is required to address the impacts of climate change and suggests that unilateral attempts to counter the effects could have a destabilizing effect.¹⁷ These threats to collective security on a global scale require a globally coordinated response, led by cooperation among the great powers.

Climate change challenges cannot be addressed without China’s cooperation. China has the world’s largest population and, as a result of several decades of rapid industrialization, is also the world’s largest emitter of greenhouse gases.¹⁸ According to the Global Carbon Project, China emitted more CO₂ than the next five largest emitters combined in 2020—or, alternatively, China emitted more than the North American and European continents combined.¹⁹ The success or failure of any international climate change efforts will depend largely on China’s support to achieve the pledged climate goals.²⁰ Moreover, if global nations are to implement new adaptation measures called for in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s most recent report, China and the United States will need to work together to build global consensus—a challenge without increased focus on great power cooperation over competition.²¹

China is acutely aware of risks associated with climate change and has a Vital interest in addressing them. A 2012 national climate survey conducted by Beijing’s Renmin University of China, with assistance from Yale University, found that “93 percent of Chinese people think climate change is happening, and the majority of respondents believe that it will harm themselves and their own family.”²² In 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping stated: “Addressing climate change and implementation of sustainable development is not what we are asked to do, but what we really want to do and will do well.”²³ He followed up in 2017 by saying that China would “tak[e] the driving seat in international cooperation to respond to climate change.”²⁴ Climate change is a significant threat to both the people and the leadership of China—a Vital interest shared with the people and leadership of the United States.

The Virtuous Cycle of Cooperation

Achieving global cooperation on climate change should be viewed as an opportunity, not a constraint. In 1994, Henry Kissinger observed:

Nearly every country looks to America to create a stable, long-term framework which will integrate both China and Japan—an option which is forfeited vis-à-vis both countries by Sino-American confrontation. . . . The key to Sino-American relations—paradoxically, even on human rights—is a tacit cooperation on global, and especially Asian, strategy.²⁵

While Kissinger’s remarks were not focused on climate change, the issue represents a significant overlap of mutual interests between all great powers, and provides an opportunity to pivot from great power competition toward increasing cooperation.

Prioritizing the current array of threats through the correct interest category lens matters. Through the military element of national power and competition as the steady state, the focus is on acting against antagonistic authoritarian states, vectoring the DoD as it is comfortable and built to do—only constrained by the secondary needs to address other international threats. Alternatively, prioritizing the diplomatic element of national power and cooperation as the steady state would lead to action against international threats as a global collective, united in mutual Vital interests, only constrained by the relations between great powers through legacy friction.

Great power cooperation can create a virtuous cycle of international progress. Cooperation requires understanding and compromise that can spread to assist in reducing inter-state friction.²⁶ China’s climate envoy to the United Nations (UN) articulated this assessment of climate change at the 2021 UN climate conference, COP 26:

There is more agreement between the US and China than divergence, making it an area of huge potential for cooperation . . . by working together our two countries can achieve many important things that are beneficial not only to our two countries, but the world as a whole.²⁷

This approach to addressing international threats was encouraged by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in October 2021: “We need to come together to bridge great divides and solve our challenges through enhanced international cooperation.”²⁸ The more cooperation that can be achieved via shared interests, the more scope there is to mediate against divergent interests becoming a threat to the global system.

The term “like-minded” doesn’t have to be bounded by values. Both the 2021 INSSG and the February 2022 US Indo-Pacific Strategy speak to the desire to work with like-minded partners. From a values perspective, there are clear differences between the United States and China. The May 2021 DoS “US Relations With China” bilateral relations fact sheet states that the United States will “stand up to Beijing when PRC [People’s Republic of China] authorities are violating human rights and fundamental freedoms.”²⁹ Doctrinally, the promotion of states values falls within the Important category of interests; however, pursuit of this objective is not necessarily incompatible with the need to achieve progress on US Vital interests. The elevation of this difference in US diplomacy, within a competition frame, has resulted in a coercive rather than cooperative approach to addressing divergent values.

Cooperation, not coercion, is the optimal approach for promoting national values. Ryan Hass, National Security Commission China director to President Barrack H. Obama, observed: “If the United States cannot bend Cuba to its will, then it is unrealistic to expect it will be able to do so with China.”³⁰ Through a virtuous cycle of cooperation, however, dialogue and virtue sharing can be more readily achieved. Prioritizing the Vital interest of cooperation on climate change creates the opportunity for this to occur in ways that competition cannot. As Kissinger wrote: “Clearly the United States cannot abandon its traditional concern with human rights and democratic values. The problem is not America’s advocacy of its values but the degree to which all aspects of Sino-American relations are made conditional on them.”³¹ This approach fails to prioritize the Vital over the Important.

The evolution toward collective security on the global scale—within the framework of great power competition—does not mean there will be a utopian peace. In his 1989 “The End of History?” paper, American political scientist Francis Fukuyama asserted that the “victory of liberal-

ism” represented the “end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”³² His claim did not age well over the following thirty years. Shared interests, not values, create the conditions for growth of collective security. Regardless, viewing collective security through a global lens is not a cure for all the challenges that exist between the world’s peoples. Conflict and competition will remain within the global system at all levels, from the individual to the state, where interests and values do not align. Just as states suffer from internal friction but generally manage to function in pursuing their shared national interests, however, so too could the global collective as long as those shared interests are prioritized.

The Vicious Cycle of Competition

Conversely, great power competition can lead to a vicious cycle, drawing states away from the common ground where mutual progress would otherwise be possible. The COVID-19 outbreak represented a global scale threat to collective security. However, despite shared interests and because of prioritized great power competition, neither the United States nor China found much common ground coordinating an international response.³³ This failure, which primarily stems from prioritizing competition over cooperation, reflects the security dilemma theory whereby the actions of one state to increase their own security are perceived as a threat to another.³⁴ American political scientist Graham Allison speaks to the interaction between the United States and China in his book *Destined for War*. He proposes the idea of a Thucydides’ Trap, describing it as “the natural, inevitable discomobulation that occurs when a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power” and that it is “most dangerous in international affairs.”³⁵ For historical precedence, he cites the Harvard Thucydides’ Trap Project, which identified sixteen cases over the last 500 years “in which an ascending power challenged an established power;” twelve resulted in war.³⁶ Great power competition does not have a very good track record in preventing conflict.

Disrupting the country’s development could limit the extent to which China will play the role of a responsible actor. China’s October 2021 white paper on climate change indicated that the Chinese see addressing climate change as vitally important. However, it also shows that China still sees itself, or at least wants to be seen, as a developing country: “Developed and developing countries shoulder different historical responsibilities for climate change. . . . It is unreasonable and unfair to enforce uniform restrictions on them.”³⁷ The longer China retains its designation as a developing country, the longer it will take for Chinese leaders to accept accountability for their role in addressing climate change. Actions taken to disrupt China’s development in the pursuit of competition make it difficult to achieve cooperation on climate change.

There Is More Work to Be Done

US domestic approaches to achieving cooperation on key issues can be instructive on meeting global challenges. Professor Derrick Bell introduced Interest Convergence Theory in his 1980 “Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma” article: “The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites.”³⁸ This theory can be scaled to the global level; where great power interests converge, there is opportunity for progress—on both interests and values. In highlighting interests that converge over those that diverge, there is greater scope for cooperation and progress.

The evolution of collective security to the global scale may require an evolution in the levels of strategy. JDN 1-18 recognizes four levels of strategy. The highest of these, grand strategy, “aims to secure and advance a nation’s long-term, enduring, core interests over time . . . orienting on those interests deemed most important; interests for which virtually any nation will spend, legislate, threaten, or fight to defend or advance.”³⁹ More simply, grand strategy utilizes *national* elements of power to address collective security threats at the *national* level. If the concept of collective security is scaled to the global level, then logically a strategy would need to enable the theoretical *international* elements of power to be coordinated against international threats, beyond the scope of existing international systems such as the United Nations. While this proposal is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is a concept worth further consideration.

Conclusion

Climate change represents an evolutionary threat to collective security, beyond the scope of individual nations to address. Although the 2021 INSSG recognized the need to address climate change, it did not rank or prioritize this against the range of other threats to US national interests. The absence of prioritization is a missed opportunity to clearly articulate which threats impact US Vital interests over Important ones. Climate change accelerates the array of international threats detailed in the 2021 INSSG; it is the fountainhead of threats to US Vital interests. The United States understands that climate change cannot be “addressed by one nation acting alone” but apparently does not fully realize that great power cooperation, not competition, is needed to meet this challenge.⁴⁰ Climate change is a threat to shared Vital interests with all nations, including China. By prioritizing shared interests, there is an opportunity to re-orient global politics toward a more virtuous cycle of international progress through great power cooperation. To do this, the United States will need to abandon its focus on lower order threats and interests oriented on competition, especially great power competition. It also needs to understand that its values can be more effectively promoted through cooperation than coercion. As collective security scales to the global level, a global theory of strategy will be required that enables international instruments of power to be orientated toward shared international threats and interests. The threat of climate change is only increasing; the question now is how long the world will wait for the great powers to realize that it can only be met by prioritizing cooperation over competition.

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Chapter 8

Trade Agreements Are a Component of Integrated Deterrence

Frank J. Klimas

Contrary to popular notions and the Pentagon’s formal doctrine, the purpose of America’s military is not to win wars. War is a whole-of-government endeavor requiring full participation of every available resource; the *nation* is at war. Perhaps a better explanation of the US military’s purpose is to fight battles to create conditions that “ripen” the alternatives to starting or continuing a war. War is about creating a better peace, but the interim destruction and loss of life is destabilizing and leads to undesired realities. The White House placed competition with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) foremost in the country’s recent national security documents, which articulate a full toolbox of national “power tools” as alternatives to military confrontation. The March 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) conveys integration of all national power instruments, known as integrated deterrence, for strategic action across the whole-of-government. Many consider America’s *military* tool of national power to be the most powerful the United States offers in confronting China’s growing influence in the Indo-Pacific. It is not the right tool, however, to rally support from international partners to help challenge this growing influence. Americans sell the nation short if they fail to fully utilize the far greater power and influence of the *economic* instrument. Opposition to China as a strategic theme is neither necessary nor sufficient to build a framework of cooperation with Pacific-rim nations, many of which rely on regional trade with the economic juggernaut. Instead, confrontation should principally be articulated through economic cooperation and trade agreements in concert with military efforts. The United States will do better to confront China by strengthening economic ties that offer mutual benefit, economic growth, and other incentives which benefit the region’s residents through trade agreements—like the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)—than by direct or coercive military force.

China’s Threat to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific

In March 2019 during the Donald J. Trump Administration, Adm. Philip S. Davidson, US Indo-Pacific Command commander, testified before the House Armed Services Committee to deliver the command’s posture statement and characterize China’s destabilizing activities. Admiral Davidson warned that China is “undermining the international order from within the system by exploiting its benefits while simultaneously undercutting [international] principles and rules of the road.”¹ These activities are counterproductive to a stable international order in the Indo-Pacific. Just two years later at the beginning of the President Joseph R. Biden Jr.’s term and at the end of his own Combatant Command commander role, Davidson forecasted a trend detrimental to conventional deterrence. He discussed how the PRC has been a growing threat to America’s national vision of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” due to a loss of US military quantitative advantage in the region and because the United States is losing its qualitative advantage because of weapons system technological advances for China’s military, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).² More recently, China has flexed this qualitative advantage, sending a message to opposing countries by testing a hypersonic missile designed to defeat US missile detection systems and nullify nuclear responses. China clearly meant these events to signify Beijing’s strategic opposition on a “free and open” Indo-Pacific and its intention to use military force to achieve those aims. If PRC leadership is sending a message, it has been received by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who called the test a near-Sputnik

moment and noted that the United States was caught off guard by the display.³ Despite its military technology developments, China has yet to match US military power but is a strategic pacing threat for the United States and potentially dominant in the region. The PLA is closing the defense technology gap because the Chinese economy is fueling the capital needed for this development. This presents new problems for the West to keep the Indo-Pacific free and open.

Some characterize the lifespan of a war as starting when diplomacy fails and ending when diplomacy takes hold. This may be an oversimplification, because diplomacy continues throughout armed conflict, and military operations span the conflict continuum from readiness exercises through strategic deterrence during peacetime. Winning a war takes a strategy, but military strategist Carl von Clausewitz famously described war as “a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means.”⁴ To wit, war is a component of policy and only ends when political end-states are met rather than when military objectives are fulfilled; alternatives to military hard power are hard to find. If the conditions for peace are not sufficiently brought to maturity in war, diplomacy fails. Diplomacy is soft power and works better when the threat of hard power is its backstop. What is needed today is strategic operationalization of America’s other hard power, economic, to create a better peace instead of relying principally on military power. However, the first thing to understand is that America’s current situation with China is of its own doing.

China’s Strategic Contradiction

Since the end of the Cold War, China’s trade relationship with the United States has been mutually beneficial and emerged during a time that felt freer and more open after the end of the Cold War. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States was the world’s sole superpower and embraced a policy of economic engagement with China because some American policy leaders believed that trade would encourage democracy formation. This belief stems from a component of Democratic Peace Theory that requires liberal regimes to have market economies.⁵ The hope was that a free market economy in China would create the wealth to support a transition to democratic civil society there. Encouraging economic interdependence with the United States might precipitate a need for cooperation to maintain security and stability. This new optimism characterized the peace dividend that would reap swords to plowshares benefits from redirecting defense spending into economic development, and trade with China was interpreted as a boon for the US economy. Manufacturing costs were lower in China, where an educated workforce earned modest wages, but the opportunities for selling *in* the China market were even bigger than just settling for wider production margins. For a US firm, even a one-percent market share in China would be a substantial increase because of the monumentally large and growing Chinese population. Western business leaders saw future growth in the Chinese markets, which were bolstered when President George W. Bush gave the go-ahead to bestow permanent most-favored-nation status on China in his first year in office after promising as a candidate that “trade with China will promote Freedom.”⁶

Blame for China’s rise resulting from its increased wealth creation from open economic policies cannot be placed solely on “Bush 43.” Every president from Jimmy Carter to Barack Obama supported economic openness with China. President Bill Clinton led the effort to grant most-favored-nation status that ultimately led to China’s entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO), and President George H. W. Bush committed to engaging with China even before the end of the Cold War following the deadly spectacle at Tiananmen Square in 1989. He claimed that economic incentives would “help create a climate for democratic change.”⁷ Despite recent efforts for economic entanglement in the name of Democratic Peace Theory and commerce, the roots of China’s

economic rise may have started as early as President Richard Nixon's landmark 1972 visit to the PRC that recognized the primacy of mainland China and fostered its split from alignment with the USSR; a solid great power competition maneuver.

Clearly, China has benefited from the international order with unprecedented economic growth and political influence orchestrated by US leadership, and it was good—until it was not. Distinguished University of Chicago political science professor John Mearsheimer notes that confrontation was a feature of America's influence in China's economic rise: "Once China grew wealthy, a US-Chinese cold war was inevitable."⁸ So, where did America go wrong? Why does the PRC seek to de-legitimize a US-led international order when it has benefited from the relationship? Power transfer theory may explain China's realist aspirations. The PRC is challenging international norms and opposing the United States even though it cannot match the United States militarily. Trade is considered a key component of integrated deterrence to challenge China and reduce conflict, consistent with the 2018 NDS and the 2021 Interim National Security Strategy Guidance (INSSG).

The 2018 NDS recognizes the PRC's efforts to upend the international order and challenge the United States by claiming sovereign rights in adjacent international waters: "China is a strategic competitor using predatory economics to intimidate its neighbors while militarizing features in the South China Sea."⁹ The danger is that in addition to striving to control territory, China seeks to upend the status quo ante of the international order outside the region in a challenging and belligerent way. The Biden Administration indicated its opposition to this dangerous trend in its INSSG:

China, in particular, has rapidly become more assertive. It is the only competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system.¹⁰

The international system that the United States has led for decades provides a vehicle for the PRC to showcase its contributions to international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the WTO. Further, China has dramatically increased its standard of living since the 1970s through trade with the United States as a strategic plan starting with Deng Xiaoping. So why does China challenge the US-led international order when it benefits from participation in the status quo ante and gains legitimacy through participation in the international system?

Confronting China through Economic Power

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) wants China to be the hegemon in its own region and influence matters that concern it. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to connect Asian, European, and African continents through land and sea networks, will operationalize the PRC's economic power to cement this hegemony. The CCP is seizing opportunities to use its overwhelming capital in the Indo-Pacific to mutually benefit its neighbors. The Asian Development Bank estimates Asia faces an infrastructure deficit of \$26 trillion through 2030; and the BRI, along with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation, and other regional organizations seek investments to bridge this gap.¹¹ The PRC's grand strategy to connect the world through BRI has the potential to accelerate China's capital inflows once complete and represents a major strategic win. Markets in seventy-one countries representing more than one-third of the world's gross domestic product (GDP) and two-thirds of the world's population are expected to be connected by BRI.¹² By extending its influence beyond the Indo-Pacific, China will control a significant amount of the world's trade. This is strategically important to the United States.

When did China adopt this strategy and why? Some argue that the country's leaders are striving to return China to its historical leadership as the Middle Kingdom after the Century of Humiliation. One international relations luminary offers insight on the PRC's actions. A.F.K. Organski, former University of Michigan political science professor and a pioneer in grand strategy, categorized this phenomenon as power transition theory. Organski's theory—introduced in his 1958 book, *World Politics*—explains that a weaker state or group of states will challenge the static rules of the international system because it cannot defeat or directly compete with a hegemonic power. This challenge is characterized by a dynamic change in the growth rate of the weaker state or states. Essentially, when a weaker state increases its relative power, in this case economic, it seeks to upend the status quo and set rules that favor weaker states rather than face the stronger power head-on. The outcome of this power transition is likely to be conflict when the differential growth rate of the challenger reaches levels of the challenged.¹³ PRC leaders knew they could never challenge US power militarily for many decades; but China's growing economy could check US influence, end the humiliation, and feed the country's national coffers to grow the PLA.

Through economic growth, the PRC—now the world's second largest economy—is increasing its global influence by funding modernization of its military. According to the World Bank, China's 2018 GDP amounted to US\$13.61 trillion; a close second to US GDP of US\$20.54 trillion, which was expected to narrow near the year 2023.¹⁴ Japan was a distant third at 4.97 trillion and declining.¹⁵ China is a rising regional hegemon in large part because of its economic growth. In 2000, the PLA was assessed as a sizable but archaic military; but in 2017, Chinese General Secretary Xi Jinping announced commitments for the PLA to become a “world-class” military by the end of 2049.¹⁶ While the PLA at this mid-point assessment is not yet a match for US military power, it seeks asymmetric vulnerabilities to challenge the United States.

A policy solution should seek to include the PRC in regional power structures with US Allies and to recognize the growth in China's economic and military power. As US leadership in the western Pacific wanes, the regional nations should confront China rather than allow China to lead. A block of nations backed by the United States can dilute China's asymmetrical influence while also bolstering the current international order. The NDS provides direction toward this goal:

Expand Indo-Pacific alliances and partnerships. A free and open Indo-Pacific region provides prosperity and security for all. The United States will strengthen its alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific to a networked security architecture capable of deterring aggression, maintaining stability, and ensuring free access to common domains.¹⁷

Denying China a seat in a regional power structure reinforces a condition of power transition so the rising power can wrest control. Organizing the many weaker states into an organized block coalesces a balancing power legitimized and backed by the United States. If this block fosters growth in combined national GDPs, it can challenge the PRC's influence and attempt its own power transfer to challenge China. Forming an alliance or bloc centered on military confrontation will only lead to an arms race and further escalation. Nations in China's sphere of influence could be coerced against joining or are strategically too vulnerable to join a Western-led military alliance to counter the PRC. Yet for most others, opposing China may not be in their national self-interest. Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd explains these tensions and the source of China's interest:

Neighboring states occupy a particular place in China's strategic memory. Historically, they've been the avenue through which China's national security has been threatened, resulting in successive foreign invasions. . . . For these reasons, modern Chinese strate-

gic thinking has explored different approaches. First and foremost, through political and economic diplomacy, China wishes to secure positive, accommodating, and, wherever possible, compliant relationships with all its neighboring states.¹⁸

Thus, US trade policies favoring Indo-Pacific countries and international free-trade blocs among China's neighboring states may be more strategically advantageous than military coalitions.

Although the White House changed some priorities from the 2017 NDS, efforts to confront China's influence in the Indo-Pacific remain constant. Rather than confront the PRC directly, the current and successive administrations should strengthen ties with nations in the Indo-Pacific region through existing international organizations, such as ASEAN and others, to bolster trade policy. President Biden indicated in his 2021 interim guidance that this type of diplomatic and economic effort could be part of the next NDS.¹⁹ The INSSG committed the United States to bolster international alliances to preserve America's strength in democratic values, but at the same time specifically singled out China to bring it into compliance with international rules.²⁰ The administration took action on this front by continuing Trump Administration successes related to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue with Japan, India, and Australia, known as "the Quad," which aims to increase security cooperation through bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral exercises designed to stand against PRC influence and expansion.²¹ In addition to national security priorities identified in the 2021 INSSG, March 2021 meetings with the Quad demonstrated that countering China continues to be a major part of US foreign policy, that there is space for US leadership in the Indo-Pacific, and that the United States will build alliances on this front.²² In addition to members of the Quad, the 2021 INSSG named partners in America's vital national interests in the Indo-Pacific like New Zealand, Singapore, Vietnam, the ASEAN member states, and Pacific Island states; this could mean greater opportunities for cooperation have already begun.²³ However, a long-term alliance will be necessary to confront China's rapidly growing military power and challenge its regional security overreach amidst its strong economic dominance.

The clearest testament to the strategic effect and power of its economic power is contemporary China itself. Annual most-favored-nation (MFN) status, which later became Permanent Normal Trade Relations, led to China joining the WTO—the necessary and sufficient condition that allowed the CCP to build a state powerful enough to bully its neighbors, challenge US power and authority, and flaunt international norms and respect for human rights. While President George W. Bush's December 2001 endorsement of China's WTO membership was an offering to the business community, it could have been an offering to defuse tensions between the two nations after the April 2001 Hainan Island Incident when a US Navy EP-3 collided with a Chinese Navy J-8 interceptor. While the motivation may not have squared with the US grand strategy, it did placate domestic rumblings on both sides of the Pacific.

After China entered the WTO, it embraced the modern economy. The country's leaders even distanced themselves from communist economic ideology so far that the CCP could be referred to as the Chinese *Capitalist* Party. CCP capital flows—fueled by copyright theft, unethical (or illegal) technology transfers in joint ventures, computer hacking, and other corporate espionage—funded its energetic modernization of PLA forces and weapons systems. Mearsheimer comments that it is too late to stop or even arrest China's economic rise now that it is a member of the WTO; the University of Chicago professor believes the best time to stop the rise was in the 1980s, or it might have been slowed in the 1990s.²⁴ So, if US economic power is so effective, why not aim its impact elsewhere to check China's power? American economic power can be the dominant force against

China. Perhaps economic power can be visualized in US military joint operational parlance as a domain of warfare—such as air, land, sea, space, and cyber domains—and as a medium to project power or compel an adversary. However, with respect to China, economic power is bigger than any one military domain because its national economy affects the multi-domain conflict spectrum. This is why strategy writers and operational planners should include economic power as an operational component of integrated deterrence.

Mixing It Up Makes a Stronger Cocktail

The CPTPP provides trade and investment access among eleven Pacific-rim nations and a buffer against China’s growing economic influence in the region. Signed in 2018, it is one of the world’s largest free trade agreements, comprising 13.5 percent of global GDP.²⁵ The agreement protects a considerable slice of global commerce among some of the region’s fastest-growing economies. The agreement advanced from the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a proposed agreement signed by President Barack Obama in 2016. However, President Trump withdrew from the TPP shortly after taking office in 2017, and as a result, the participating nations could not ratify the original agreement. The CPTPP corrects Trump’s withdrawal by offering the same agreement among the original TPP signatories—attempting to revive the original agreement without the twenty-two US-proposed measures, which centered mostly on protecting intellectual property. Currently, ten additional nations have expressed interest in joining the CPTPP, but remarkably the Biden Administration indicated no plans to rejoin it.²⁶

Trade agreements would ease the use of economic punishments. It would be easier to punish an aggressive China using a unified block to affect trade than to make a series of agreements with nations to join a sanctions coalition. Economic punishments are what the CCP leadership most fears because they know the United States has both the means and the resolve to do it, and it would be more specific and actionable than sanctions. What the CCP most feared in 1989 was that the United States would flex its coercive economic muscles as it did in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union across four categories: Sanctions, MFN Status, Section 301 investigations, and technology transfer. High-level party leaders identified these coercive instruments of economic power tools and feared they would undermine CCP independence.²⁷

After the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests and massacre, the US Congress imposed sanctions on China, but the sanctions were tepid at



Figure 8.1. Countries that are members of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Created by Army University Press.

best. American business interests were concerned about trade disruptions with China. President George H. W. Bush could have punished China by revoking the country's annual MFN status based on its violations of human rights, which became controversial in the 1990s. The House of Representatives passed legislation to that effect, but it was vetoed—twice. The Bush administration and later the Clinton administration never followed through on punishing China through its MFN status. Despite this missed opportunity to show resolve by affecting China's access to US markets, the Tiananmen controversy delayed normalized trade relations for China for the rest of the decade.

Clearly, China's trade has been central to its long-term strategy, and the architect of this strategic goal was the PRC's late leader Deng Xiaoping, who met with President Carter in 1979 to "secure access to American markets, capital, and technology to fuel China's economic development."²⁸ Deng wanted to move China toward a modern economy and away from a pure Maoist and autarkic model. The future would be to harness capitalism in China under PRC-centralized control in order to provide capital and opportunities for trade; Deng desired access to the international economy, but that would come later.²⁹

International condemnation in the aftermath of Tiananmen Square delayed China's entry to the WTO; so in 1992, Deng worked to reinvigorate economic reform to open China when US businesses believed China could not live up to reforms it had promised to make.³⁰ The CCP leadership changed behavior by downplaying communism and fostering Chinese nationalism to manifest public unity, and curtailed suppression of pro-democracy protests in order to change public opinion in the West and obtain its goal: entry into the WTO, which arrived in 2001.³¹ The power of direct trade interference is more effective against a modern China than individual sanctions and will have a quicker and more powerful effect, meaning it can have an influential strategic deterrence effect.³²

Other advantages of trade agreements are the positive side effects that manifest when nations work together. Nations that work together on big issues stay involved to help in other issues, which can lead to cooperation in mutually shared security issues. One example was the 1940 Destroyers-for-Bases deal. The United States provided fifty outdated destroyers to the United Kingdom in exchange for ninety-nine-year leases to eight military bases in the Western Hemisphere. The value of the agreement was not limited to the value of ships and real-estate or even their utility in the defense of convoy ships against German U-boat attacks in the entire Battle of the Atlantic, but in what working together continues to produce more than eighty years later. This deal was the beginning of the Anglo-American alliance that led to D-Day victory, the establishment of NATO, intelligence-sharing agreements, nuclear weapons basing, and other reciprocal benefits that stem from a very special relationship. The deal also opened the door to synergistic opportunities that benefited not just the United States and the United Kingdom but countries throughout the world. For instance, long-term European stability through security agreements, investments, and diplomatic efforts stemmed from cooperation during World War II. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill promoted the deal in his 1940 remarks to the British Parliament:

Undoubtedly, this process means that these two great organizations of the English-speaking democracies, the British Empire and the United States, will have to be somewhat *mixed up* [emphasis added] together in some of their affairs for mutual and general advantage. For my own part, looking out upon the future, I do not view the process with any misgivings. I could not stop it if I wished; no one can stop it. Like the Mississippi, it just keeps rolling along. Let it roll. Let it roll on—full flood, inexorable, irresistible, benignant, to broader lands and better days.³³

Evidence of success from mixing-up national affairs for mutual and general advantage is manifest in ASEAN, which promotes intergovernmental cooperation among its ten member states and other Asian nations in economic, political, security, military, educational, and sociocultural integration. Southeast Asia is one of the fastest-growing and economically dynamic regions in the world; even though the United States is not an ASEAN member, it has been a partner in Southeast Asia's development alongside ASEAN since 1977.³⁴ In 2008, the United States became the first non-ASEAN country to appoint an ambassador to the political-economic union, but is not the only outsider to have influence on the political and economic union. China is a Dialogue Partner in ASEAN, which means China does not have a seat but has influence as ASEAN's largest trading partner since 2009 and, according to 2019 data, as the fourth largest source of Foreign Direct Investment among ASEAN's Dialogue Partners.³⁵ What started as an organization opposed to communist China now includes China in regional and economic affairs. China stepped up interaction with ASEAN beginning in 2003, even provided US\$80 million in assistance to ASEAN countries after the 2004 tsunami, and established a permanent mission in ASEAN in 2011.³⁶ Through unified dialogue, smaller nations can speak as one voice against big nations, yet direct confrontation is diffused. In 2006, ASEAN was granted observer status at the UN, which allows the organization to attend UN General Assembly sessions. The question is what can the United States effect through ASEAN? Engagement through the ASEAN-US Plan of Action (2021–25) bolsters peace, security, and prosperity in the region; on 12 April 2022, the United States reaffirmed its commitment to expand its strategic partnership at a joint meeting held at the ASEAN Secretariat.³⁷ This represents successful implementation of integrated deterrence through this relationship, but there is room for improvement. White House strategy writers need to craft a comprehensive strategy that addresses China's strategic influence by using the whole-of-government approach to capitalize on past US success with ASEAN. Enacting revitalized trade-policy leadership in the Indo-Pacific would help build strategic partnerships based on economic investment like China did with BRI. Security cooperation initiatives alone will not provide enough capital incentives and will likely be slow to implement—not to mention politically contentious—and risk an arms race.

A formal trade agreement would allow the United States and other partner nations in the Pacific to get “mixed up” together in similar ways. The CPTPP could be the catalyst for a strong trans-Pacific American alliance by providing a mechanism for cooperation that extends beyond the limits of the original deal and could spur a collective security alliance to protect the interests of trade agreement members. However, forming a military alliance or coalition based solely on shared security issues might not be enough incentive to persuade China's neighbors to signal strong opposition to their closest hegemon. A military alliance of this nature would make cooperation with China on other issues much more difficult—especially efforts to curb climate change since China is the world's largest polluter.³⁸

Unfortunately, the United States may have missed the window to fully implement the advantages of a comprehensive trade agreement like the CPTPP. China is one of ten nations that have announced interest in joining the CPTPP and has formally applied to join. This application may largely be symbolic since China was excluded from the original TPP; it is not likely that a trade agreement designed to confront China's influence would allow it as a member. Not to miss an opportunity to curb American influence in the region, however, China launched its own Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) with fourteen other nations in January 2022—described as “one of the world's largest regional free trade agreements,” affecting 2.2 billion people.³⁹ Signed in November 2020, the RCEP includes US allies Australia and Japan, which shows both

the appetite for nations in the region to seek free trade relationships with Western powers and the resident nation's impatience to wait for the United States to act on trade. However, all is not lost at the threshold of RCEP. Viewed through the power transition theory lens, China's inclusion in the agreement along with US friendly allies and partners defuses the competition of the potential hegemon. The agreement will only check Chinese power if the other RCEP signatories have an equal voice. To be clear, RCEP is not directly competing with CPTPP since the latter is more far-reaching and includes wealthier countries than the former, but it provides increased cooperation with China in Churchill's context of mixing up together.

The influence of the United States is waning under the current circumstances and a US-led security initiative may fall embarrassingly flat, which is why joining the CPTPP would allow US leaders to save face and plug into an existing framework. The result could provide a greater check on PLA modernization, which is manifesting another arms race—a race that reveals no winners. America's strategic resolve to curb China's influence in the Indo-Pacific is less decisive, less effective, and less credible when economic interests disconnect from the country's military actions and stated shared national values. A trade policy in concert with other instruments of national power that implements an integrated deterrence strategy would create opportunities to operationalize economic hard power that offers cooperation incentives and an alternative to direct military confrontation.

Creating a Better Peace

China aims to usurp US dominance in the international system by flouting recognized, rules-based norms and instituting a Sino-centric dominance in its place. Narrowing GDP between the two countries motivates the PRC to achieve power transition to surpass the United States in every contested space that it occupies in the international system, despite China's weaker military. Diluting China's rising influence by promoting the influence of other regional states and organizations like ASEAN through trade agreements diminishes the probable outcome of conflict due to waning US influence in the region. Using the lens of power transition theory, the 2022 NDS and 2021 INSSG provided assurances to Indo-Pacific partners to create the needed counterbalance to China's rising influence fueled by its growing economic power. As the combined GDP of these smaller states increases, they close the gap with China's GDP, create pressure, and provide opportunities and capital for security cooperation.

Strategically, this preserves US influence by providing an opportunity for future administrations to live up to the national security goals stated in the 2021 interim guidance, which seeks legitimacy by adhering to international norms and operationalizes integrated deterrence in the 2022 NDS. Russia's war in Ukraine clearly demonstrated that economic tools, used in concert with a block of unified nations, are more effective against coercive influence by modern-day China than military power projection into the South China Sea. A reinvigorated trade agreement in the Indo-Pacific, in concert with a cohesive strategy including integrated deterrence, would be the strongest and most appropriate tool in the toolbox. Instead of a zero-sum strategy in the Indo-Pacific resulting in direct military confrontation that results in war, America's economic power can operationalize deterrence and be like a rising tide lifting all boats for a better peace leading to regional stability.

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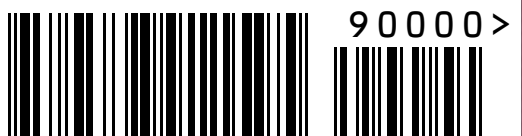




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