



Forum for American Leadership

The United States Needs a National Security Strategy

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The United States is confronting Russia’s invasion of Ukraine – and its geopolitical implications – in the absence of a National Security Strategy (NSS). The NSS that the Biden Administration produces this year should reflect the world as it is and articulate a strategy to protect American interests effectively. The NSS should level with the American people about the following realities:

- The Post-Cold War era is over. A new era is under way. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) and Russia have thrust new Cold Wars upon us, despite our best wishes.
- The United States and our allies and partners must reckon with the failure to deter Russia from invading its neighbors and urgently reestablish deterrent capabilities and credibility against the PRC and Russia.
- The United States and our allies must rapidly and significantly boost our military and technological power so we can win long-term competitions with the PRC and Putin’s Russia.
- The United States and our allies must stop facilitating the growth of PRC and Russian economic power and must enhance our own instead.
 - We cannot continue to enable the economic and technological rise of the PRC, absolute and relative to the United States, at the same time as we purport to meet the challenge of a long-term competition with it.
 - The first priority must be to end the forms of “engagement” that mostly advance the PRC’s national security goals and economic strength while weakening ours.
 - That means beginning a strategic, selective economic decoupling from the PRC.

In December 2021, we released “[Priorities for the National Security Strategy](#).” It identifies the most significant national security threats to the United States and sets out the elements of an NSS that can best meet those threats and garner lasting bipartisan support at home and abroad. More comprehensive than this paper, it provides a blueprint for the Biden Administration as it takes the NSS back to the drawing board.

Recent events have made it especially important for the NSS to prioritize and underscore the following, each of which draws on our “Priorities for the National Security Strategy”:

I. Real, Major, and Sustained Increases in U.S. Defense Spending

- One of the most important steps we can take now to preserve peace and prevail in great power competition is to provide immediate, real, and sustained increases in the defense budget, and to encourage our allies and friends to do the same. Deterrence is only possible when the United States and its allies and partners are militarily capable and credible.
- Hard power is not the relic of a bygone era. Tyrants will subjugate other nations and peoples through the threat or use of force if they think they can get away with it.
- The recently passed FY22 Omnibus appropriations bill improves upon the Biden Administration defense request by providing real growth to the defense budget, avoiding a

net reduction in military resources. In the current and foreseeable global environment, more will be required.

- The NSS must prescribe immediate increases in defense spending of at least 5% growth *above inflation*, a number already cited by Senate Minority Leader McConnell. It should underscore the need for sustained, bipartisan support for increased defense spending to meet the growing threats to U.S. security. The United States must prioritize that over other choices.

II. Global Strategy to Counter Global Threats

- The United States must prioritize meeting the challenge from the PRC, first in the Indo-Pacific. Yet we have vital, enduring interests in Europe and the Middle East, in addition to those in the Indo-Pacific. The best American strategists have long understood that American security rests on the foundation of a favorable balance of power in each region.
- If we fail to secure those interests, the world will be more dangerous—that is, more likely to result in wars—and less conducive to allowing Americans to thrive economically.
- Preserving peace and stability in those critical regions is necessary to achieve our objectives against the PRC, which seeks to exercise global, not regional, power and influence.
- Preventing the domination or destabilization of Europe and the Middle East will help, not hurt, in meeting the comprehensive challenge posed by the PRC. If we fail to do so, it will backfire, making our competition with the PRC more difficult to pursue and to win: we will end up spending far more time, energy, resources, and attention quelling crises after they arise rather than heading them off before they begin.
 - If Putin’s conquest of Ukraine and subjugation of Belarus succeed, the NATO-Russian border will be even longer than it was during the Cold War. We will have to spend more resources shoring up the alliance, not less.
 - U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan enabled the Taliban takeover of the country, increasing the likelihood of terrorist attacks and making it more difficult for us to identify and strike terrorist cells.
- A strong, forward-deployed military posture is essential, particularly in the Indo-Pacific and Europe. Forward-positioned combat forces with world-class capability and sufficient capacity, acting together with complementary allied and partner capabilities, deter aggression. The United States should focus on getting combatant commanders the capabilities they need to deter aggression in their respective theaters; encouraging far stronger and complementary capabilities from allies and partners and expanding combined exercises with them; and expediting arms deliveries to threatened democracies.
- Our posture will and should be different in and tailored to each region.

III. Immediate Next Steps

The NSS must ensure that we take immediate steps to maintain deterrence in each major region:

Indo-Pacific

- We must act urgently to deter the PRC from the use of force against Taiwan or elsewhere. The ability of the United States and our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific to deter and, if necessary, win a future conflict in the region is increasingly open to question.

- We must arm and prepare our allies and partners, especially Taiwan, against the threat from the PRC.
- In the event of PRC aggression against Taiwan, U.S. and allied / partner forces must be able to quickly reinforce Taiwan and possess the capability to rapidly attrite the PRC's attacking naval and air assets.
- To bolster deterrence, the United States faces the urgent necessity of both enhancing readiness and increasing combat capability and capacity in the immediate term, while accelerating innovation and developing new concepts of operation. Both of those steps are essential and cannot be completed without defense budgets that stay well ahead of inflation.
- Priority areas for investment include capabilities that would allow us to counter the PRC's navy quickly: long-range fires, anti-ship missiles, submarines, smart mines, and unmanned vehicles; air and missile defense in the region; and air battle management capabilities.
- Continuing to build on integrated joint and combined operations and forward basing with allies and partners will be vital.
- The Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) nuclear submarine deal leveraged two American strategic advantages—nuclear submarine technology and our robust alliances—to U.S. advantage in the competition against the PRC. This deal is a credit to the Biden administration. We must exploit similar areas of comparative advantage wherever and whenever possible.
- Similarly, the Biden administration has successfully broadened engagement with the informal “Quad” alliance of the United States, India, Japan, and Australia. We must continue to work with these three critical democracies and others in the region to counter PRC aggression.
- The United States should provide a mechanism for closer economic ties and integration among U.S. allies and partners in the region to provide alternatives to economic reliance on the PRC, especially for some of the smaller Indo-Pacific countries.

Europe

- The United States and our allies and partners should help the Ukrainians bring about Russia's defeat in Ukraine by supplying the Ukrainian government and defense forces with weapons and vital materiel. Putin's invasion of Ukraine should be as painful as possible for the current Russian leadership. In the event that the Ukrainian army is defeated or the government forced into exile, we should support resistance movements that combat Russian occupation.
- Putin's war is a hinge moment in Europe. Germany has committed to meeting the NATO standard of 2% of GDP spent on defense. Numerous other NATO allies have announced that they are boosting defense spending. We must commend our allies for their spending increases and encourage them to keep their newfound inclination to spend more on defense—now and for years to come.
- U.S. allies and partners throughout Europe must implement serious plans to diversify energy supplies and turn away from energy dependence on Russia. The United States must encourage them to do so and help them do so.
- Xi Jinping is watching the war in Ukraine. How we respond to Russia's invasion of its neighbor may influence his calculus about when, how, and if he is able to subjugate the free people of Taiwan by force, for example.
- The imposition of enormous costs on Russia will also help create tension and uncertainty in the Beijing-Moscow partnership.

- Xi should be made to shoulder blame and responsibility for his partnership with Putin, which they jointly announced—just weeks ago—had “no limits.”
- Russia’s economic isolation may force the PRC to make choices between risking second-order effects from supporting Russia, or starting to distance itself from its partnership with Putin. Enforcing sanctions against Russia, and secondary sanctions on PRC actors that support Russian sanctioned entities, will advance U.S. goals in competing with both the PRC and Russia.
- Russia shares a long border and a sometimes-bitter and violent historical enmity with the PRC.
- In the near term, Russia’s economic isolation may incentivize Putin to attempt to turn even more toward the PRC. Yet the relative power balance between Russia and the PRC, already vastly in favor of the PRC before the invasion of Ukraine, is now in free-fall on the Russian side. That may hasten the moment when Russia will have to choose whether it will become merely a vassal to the PRC or to pursue a different course.

Middle East

- Technological innovation has greatly reduced American dependence on Middle Eastern energy resources, but those energy resources remain essential to many of America’s allies and partners, including in the Indo-Pacific. And strategic U.S. leadership and coordination with friends and partners in the region could be an advantage in the long-term competition with the PRC, given the PRC’s energy vulnerabilities.
- In the immediate term, the Biden Administration should seek to work with major Arab oil producers in the region to counteract Russia’s coercive energy diplomacy.
- The Administration should abandon any effort to use a nuclear agreement with Iran to bring Iranian oil back to the marketplace. In doing so, the Administration would be relying on Russia to reintegrate a major Russian strategic partner into the international system. And it would be re-empower an Iranian regime determined to undermine the essential interests of the United States and our friends and partners in the region.
- The Biden Administration can seek to cauterize PRC and Russian influence in the Middle East by supporting friends and partners dedicated to countering Iran and preventing further Russian expansionism. The NSS should recognize and respond to the growing security cooperation between Iran and the PRC. That relationship threatens core U.S. interests and will make Tehran more powerful and less susceptible to pressure from the West.
- The NSS should underscore the need to build a more unified and capable U.S., Arab, and Israeli coalition to respond to the threat from Iran. Combined military exercises can play a vital role in that effort, while sending a positive deterrent message. The Abraham Accords present a historic opportunity to expand regional peace and prosperity, provide a counterpoint to Iran, and constrain malign influence from the PRC and Russia.

IV. Foreign Policy for the Middle Class

Successfully competing against the PRC, and Russia, requires that the United States and our allies and partners both: 1) cease enabling the PRC’s and Russia’s economic and technological power relative to ours, and 2) bolster our own comprehensive economic and technological strength—and thus national security.

The United States can accomplish this by prioritizing:

High-Tech Agenda

- Funding for key defense technologies will not only assist in combating adversaries, but create jobs.
- Ensuring that the U.S. military maintains a dominant technological advantage will also result in direct applications for the domestic economy.
- This means securing U.S. and allied technological leadership through investments that increase R&D for domestic innovation on essential defense technologies, such as AI, quantum, telecommunications, and nanotechnology; fostering onshore high-tech production, including for semi-conductors; and bolstering America's defense industrial base.

Economic Resilience

- The dangers—even the absurdity—of the United States and our allies and friends relying on our *principal adversaries* for crucial resources, materials, supplies, and goods should be evident.
- The NSS should prioritize a turn away from this potentially calamitous vulnerability of the United States and our allies and partners, and set our and our friends' economies on a course to be stronger, more resilient, and far less dependent on the PRC or Putin's Russia.
- Our attempt to integrate Russia's economy is now being unwound in haste, at some cost to us and our allies.
- The same process with respect to the PRC would be exponentially larger and more costly if we were to be faced with a crisis brought about by the PRC—such as the use of force by the PRC against Taiwan or elsewhere. If an immediate decoupling from Russia has proven disruptive, the consequences of doing so with the PRC amidst an escalating crisis would be far greater.
- Despite short-term adjustment costs, we must begin a planned and proactive strategic, selective economic decoupling from the PRC to avoid the potentially catastrophic consequences of a hasty and reactive fracture amidst a future crisis.
- The NSS ought to set out that strategically necessary course clearly and forthrightly.
- The United States must restructure supply chains to reduce dependence on Chinese sources of critical products, components, and raw materials. Our allies and partners must be encouraged to do so to the maximum extent possible.
- The NSS should make clear that all strategically significant U.S. industries and entities must examine how they might be dependent upon PRC material, supplies, goods, manufacturing, financing, transportation, and markets, and take steps—now, before it is too late—to reduce and eliminate those dependencies.
- Reshoring production of necessary high-end manufactured products, such as semiconductors, not only creates high-paying jobs in the United States, it can also create stronger economic ties with allied and partner nations.
- Better monitoring and regulations of China's hitherto virtually unrestricted access to our markets, technology, and capital are essential.
- That includes much closer and more effective scrutiny and controls over not just technology, but also capital flows—in both directions. And it will almost certainly require stringent

disclosure requirements of certain investments in both directions, and creation of an outbound investment review process.

Energy Security for the United States and Our Allies and Partners

- American production and export of energy creates good jobs, reduces gas prices, and strengthens U.S. national security. It can best be achieved by increasing production of oil and gas, boosting energy exports, and building nuclear power plants, alongside continued development of renewable energy sources.
- Producing and exporting more natural gas would reduce European dependence on Russian energy, create high-quality American jobs, and be good for the environment.
- The United States must be careful not to pursue ostensible solutions to climate change that leave us more vulnerable to PRC or Russian resources or supply chains—dependencies that they will be eager to accrue and exploit.

V. It Can Be Done

- The Biden Administration should view Putin’s war as an “NSC-68 moment.” In 1950, spurred by the conclusions of the Truman’s Administration’s NSC-68 strategy and the shock of the onset of the Korean War, President Truman and Congress changed the course of U.S. policy and significantly increased defense spending. Successive administrations and Congresses worked to sustain necessary defense spending over the long haul.
- In 1979, the Carter Administration, chastened by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and other geopolitical challenges, turned toward a strategy that boosted defense from its post-Vietnam decreases and policy choices made earlier in the Carter Administration and bolstered U.S. hard power.
- The Biden administration can and should produce an NSS that sets the United States on a course to prevail—peacefully, meaning based on deterrent strength—in the long-term competitions our adversaries have thrust upon us. Such a strategy would deserve, and should obtain, bipartisan, lasting support.

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