

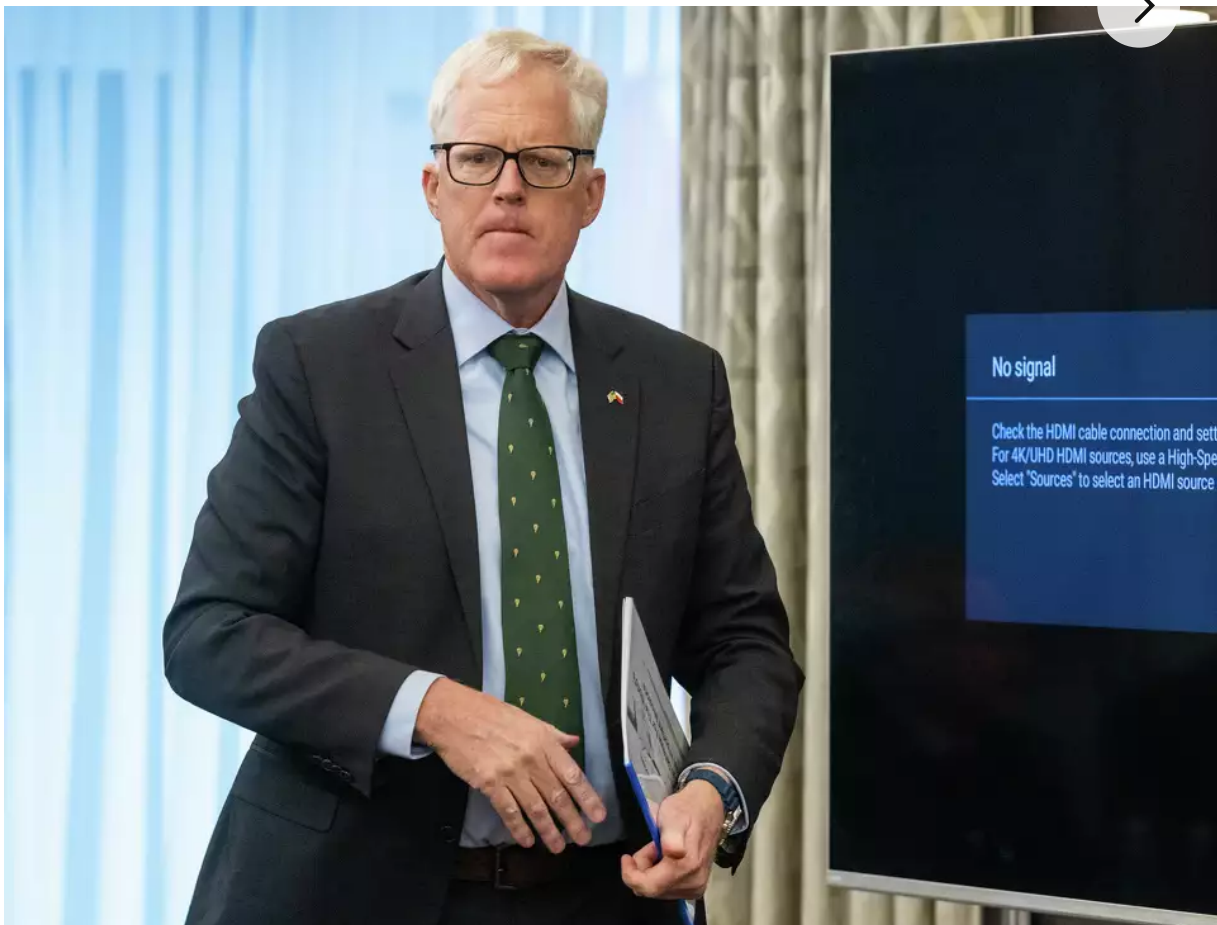
OPINION // OPEN FORUM

Project 2025 put a key Jan. 6 figure in charge of military strategy. His plan is as dangerous as you'd imagine

By **Brett Wagner**

Aug 4, 2024

Gift Article



Christopher Miller, former acting secretary of defense in the Trump administration, proposes a radical overhaul of the U.S. military in Project 2025.

Andrzej Iwanczuk/NurPhoto/Getty Images 2023

Few Americans in our nation's history have demonstrated as poor judgment or dereliction of duty as the Pentagon official who, on Jan. 6, 2021, had the authority to send in the National Guard to defend the U.S. Capitol, but chose not to do so: then-Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller.

And yet it was Miller (likely auditioning here for a full-time gig as secretary of defense under a second Trump administration) who was tasked by the Heritage Foundation-backed Project 2025 to draft what could turn out to be the most radical overhaul of U.S. national security and defense policy since the end of the Cold War.

Simply titled "Department of Defense," Miller's contribution to Project 2025 envisions a world in which the U.S. slashes its military commitments and related funding to such draconian levels that we would cease to be a global superpower (a term he never uses).

Central to Miller's vision is the rejection of any notion of America being the leader of the free world in favor of a return to the Great Power Competition in which the U.S. is merely one great power among many. That's the same chaotic world order that ruled the day — spawning two world wars and helping bring on the Great Depression — before America assumed its leadership role and ushered in an era of unprecedented stability and prosperity.

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Never before has someone who served at the top levels of the Defense Department suggested something so clearly antithetical to U.S. interests. So, who is this guy, and what

makes him tick?

First and foremost, it was Miller who spearheaded, against the advice of military commanders, the disastrous drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan during the last weeks of the Trump presidency. Miller's gross miscalculation left fewer boots on the ground than would be required to defend their positions, ignoring the overwhelming threat posed by the Taliban (with whom his boss had just signed a deal) proclaiming instead that we were "on the verge of defeating Al Qaeda and its associates." Never mind that his strategy was leaving the Taliban in place and that it was the Taliban that had been supporting and offering safe refuge to Al Qaeda all along.

Contrary to Miller's predictive powers, not only was Al Qaeda not defeated, but under the Taliban's protection, it's returning to pre-9/11 levels.

Conveniently, in his Project 2025 writings, Miller fails to acknowledge his role in what he refers to, in his opening paragraphs, as "our disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan." He seeks instead to pin the whole thing on the Biden administration, which he had painted into a corner, weakening America's hand, as if by design, on Donald Trump's way out of office.

Miller, a retired Army colonel, has long argued that the Pentagon's budget should be slashed by 40% to 50%, declaring that what our country needs is "someone with the courage and experience to get in there and get it done."

In his Project 2025 document, he reveals just how he plans to "get it done": a huge drawdown of U.S. forces overseas, the likes of which we've never seen, and for which he's proven in the past to be such a colossal failure in judgment and leadership. But as is so often the case: The devil is in the

details.

Fallacies abound in the colonel's 40-page meandering diatribe, beginning with his patently and demonstrably false assertion that "China is by any measure the most powerful state in the world other than the United States."

Any colonel worth his salt, for example, should know that Moscow enjoys more than an 8 to 1 advantage over Beijing in the number of nuclear warheads ready to launch at the U.S.

Is *that* not a measure?

Miller further asserts that "U.S. access to the world's most important market," China, is one of "America's core interests."

I respectfully suggest, as someone who served as a graduate professor at the War College where Miller got his master's degree, that he review his old textbooks on the meaning of "core" interest. Because "access" to a "market" doesn't even come close. A core interest is something for which, by definition, the U.S. must be prepared to go to war.

Is that what Miller is suggesting? That countless American lives should be spent to keep China's consumer market open to our companies? Because that would be a hawk of a feather with which I am not familiar.

As for the threat posed by Moscow, Miller seeks to minimize its consideration by simply lumping Russia in with other threats posed by Iran, North Korea and transnational terrorism. Threats one and all, to be sure, but hardly on a par with Russia. In fact, to my eye, Miller's only real policy recommendation to counter Russian President Vladimir Putin's aggressive and militaristic regime is maintaining the "nuclear deterrent."

Meanwhile, Miller would rework entirely America's security relationship with our longtime European allies. NATO, for example, is given such short shrift that he mentions it only once by name, and then only in the context of "reducing the U.S. force posture in Europe." In other words, hamstringing U.S. support for NATO at the very moment the Atlantic alliance has expanded under American leadership — and while Europe and our allies are deeply embroiled in Ukraine — the largest ground invasion on the continent since World War II — and a war which, by any measure, is knocking at NATO's door.

Challenging, and perhaps redrawing, the strategic balance of power on the continent. Remind me — whose interests is this meant to serve?

In stark contrast to Miller's effort to downplay the threats posed by Russia — and, with it, Putin's challenge to the global order — is his central premise that "U.S. defense strategy must identify China unequivocally as the top priority for U.S. defense planning."

In real terms, what he's advocating for is prioritizing U.S. conventional force planning "to defeat a Chinese invasion of Taiwan" even if that means denying resources "to other missions."

This is a false either/or choice he never justifies.

What Miller ignores, of course, is what should be obvious to even the most casual observer: that America's current forward-looking defense strategy based on overwhelming and ever-evolving U.S. military superiority, combined with strong alliances throughout the region, is right now, and every day, deterring such an invasion.

Full stop.

To believe otherwise is to believe China is doing us and the world some kind of favor by not invading Taiwan. That is obviously not the case.

Miller also turns a blind eye toward the former (and perhaps future) president's gushing admiration for Chinese President Xi Jinping, effusive praise for Putin and "love letters" to North Korean leader Kim Jung Un. Perhaps these glaring omissions explain why there is no mention of the growing alliance among these three dictators — as evidenced by their mutual support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Coincidence? I think not.

All of this leads to what I might suggest is really at the heart of Project 2025's military strategy: A denial that global alliances for peace are worthy of discussing, much less defending.

The global order for the past 75 years has been based on America's commitment to defend democracy and the international rule of law against the forces of tyranny that would rule by force and force alone. Meanwhile, the open hostility toward democratic norms and the rule of law within the Republican Party — which has reached such a fevered pitch as to full-throatedly embrace bogus claims that the 2020 election was stolen, and the corollary refusal to guarantee that they will accept the 2024 election results should they lose — mirrors the rise of other authoritarian movements such as Trump ally Viktor Orbán in Hungary.

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Miller's contribution toward this goal is a "how-to" for realigning U.S. interests away from supporting democratic, freedom-loving countries toward a New World Order of transient, transactional alliances where we're just as likely to support Russian aggression toward freedom-loving nations such as Ukraine, as not.

Trump's recent boast that he told the president of one of our NATO allies, "No, I would not protect you — in fact, I would encourage (Russia) to do whatever the hell they want," provides all the information one needs to know regarding what Project 2025 envisions for the future of U.S. defense policy and international security.

Brett Wagner, now retired, served as a professor of national security decision-making at the U.S. Naval War College, and adjunct fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Aug 4, 2024

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