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Hard Choices: Shaping America's Next National Defense Strategy

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The United States' position on the world stage today may be in its most tenuous state since the height of the Cold War. Threats to security are multi-fold and multiplying, spanning the persistent threat of global terrorism, rogue states seeking or possessing nuclear weapons, deteriorating climate stability, and great-power competition from a rising China and revanchist Russia. Amidst these threats, America finds itself beset by internal conflict and damaged credibility with its allies and adversaries.

The latest National Defense Strategy (NDS), released in 2018, represented one of the most significant Department of Defense (DoD) strategy updates in the post-Cold War era.¹ The document, critical to aligning U.S. defense activities toward a shared vision, marked a shift from the recent counterinsurgency focus to one of preparation for great-power competition. It set ambitious goals to reinforce American military superiority and deter threats across all domains. But finding the budget to resource those goals has proven difficult. As a result, there is a fundamental “threat and budget mismatch” that will dramatically challenge America's ability to rise to the occasion and deter truly catastrophic future conflict.

To avoid such an outcome, and to counter the growing narrative surrounding “America's decline,” the next NDS must embody a number of hard choices to be successful.

Risk and Resourcing

Despite fostering a profoundly different worldview than its predecessor, the Biden administration's interim National Security Strategic Guidance report preserves key tenants of the 2018 NDS. Principally, it contains an enduring focus on strategic competition, which is prudent. However, as security concerns of decades past continue to persist, DoD will be challenged to meet the growing demands of strategic competition. As such, the forthcoming NDS must clearly articulate not only threat priority, but proximity, to include areas where the United States is willing to accept additional risk.

The U.S. military instrument is increasingly stretched at the seams. For proof, one need only look to the rash of catastrophic mishaps suffered by U.S. Navy vessels since 2017.² To address these growing readiness concerns, the NDS should establish a framework that more effectively guides budgeting and force employment decisions using risk-based analysis to allocate limited resources. More specifically, the strategy should be optimized to enhance deterrence in the next five to fifteen years.

Testimony from Admiral Philip Davidson, former commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, in March 2021 suggested that the threat posed by the People's Republic of China toward Taiwan could manifest within the decade.³ Therefore, focused efforts like the Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI) should be prioritized and fully funded to specification.

On its surface, the Fiscal Year 2022 defense budget request's record-setting investment in Research, Development, Testing, and Evaluation (RDT&E) is promising. However, if one looks at investments in the PDI—a critical element of “integrated deterrence” directed at the United States' pacing challenger—the picture is concerning. Instead of resourcing the capabilities originally called for, it is crammed with planned procurement items detached from the stated intent.⁴ It is true that the United States should make long-term investments in “leap-ahead” technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) but doing so to the detriment of existing capabilities invites unnecessary danger.

Prioritizing Capabilities

To align limited means with the ambitious ends of U.S. national security objectives, the next NDS must identify and prioritize the military capabilities that matter most at the expense of those less critical. While there is a tendency to talk about prioritizing certain services and breaking the roughly even distribution of resources amongst them, service budget shares must be an output, not an input, of the strategy process.⁵ It is important to remember that the NDS document itself can only “inform” the sprawling bureaucratic process by which Pentagon budget requests are built. Funding, of course, is authorized and appropriated by Congress.

What the NDS can and should do is explicitly identify which capabilities contribute most to the strategy’s primary objectives, or are most sorely lacking, and declare them to be the priorities. This is one area where the 2018 NDS fell short. Having identified great-power competition as the “central challenge,” the document failed to identify what capabilities and capacities were most relevant and important. Like “transformation” in the 2000s, great-power competition could be—and was—used to justify almost anything the services wanted to include or retain in their budgets.

An official identification of what capabilities are most important to the NDS will help clarify the alignment of resources with strategy. Those priority capabilities will depend on other choices made by the NDS. If the NDS is focused, as we recommend, on deterring aggression by China and Russia in the near- to mid-term, some capabilities that seem particularly important are those that we have taken to calling the “six S’s.”

- Secure second-strike capabilities to maintain a stable nuclear deterrent.
- Surveillance systems to maintain situational awareness and provide targeting.
- Strike systems to hold enemy targets at risk conventionally from long range.
- Submarines to deny adversaries control of the seas.
- Special operations forces to conduct small-footprint ground operations.
- Space capabilities to protect U.S. interests in an increasingly contested domain.

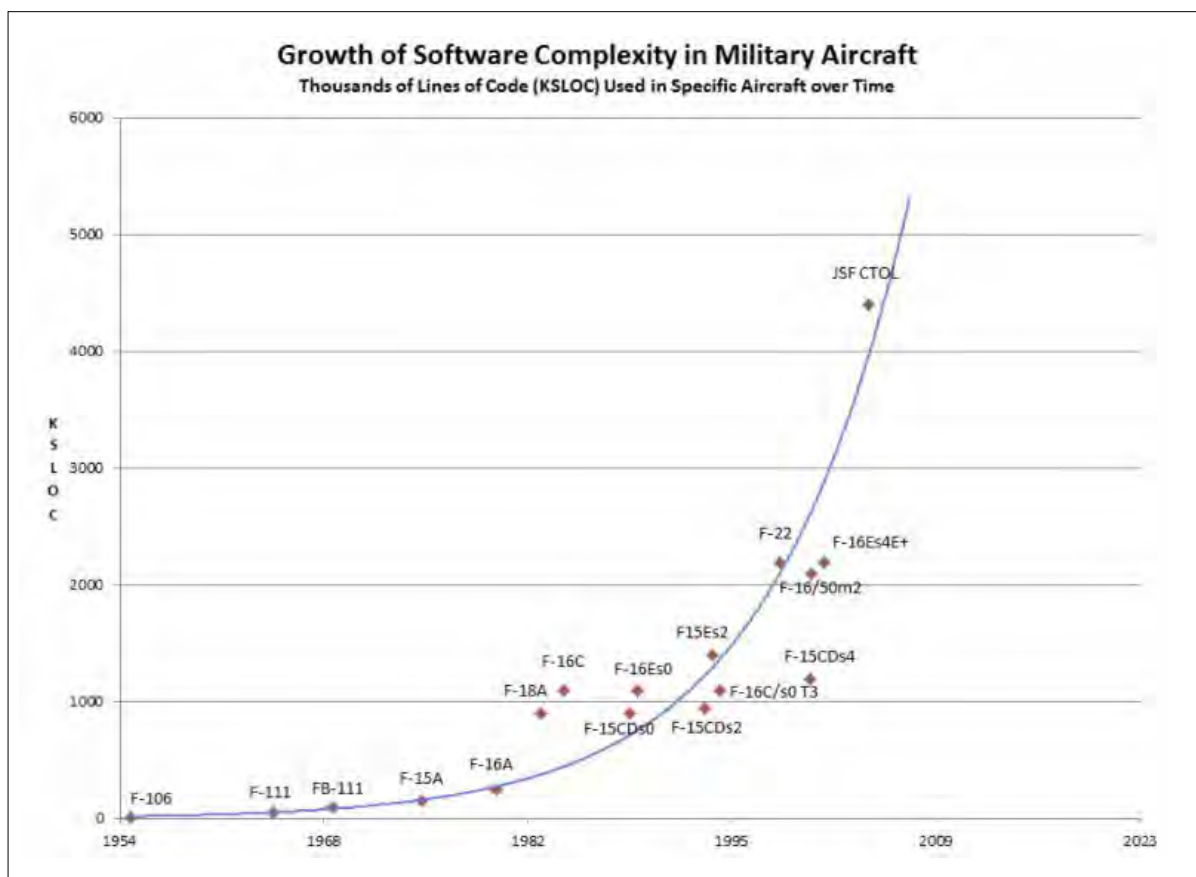
Of course, NDS pronouncements will not magically reshape the Pentagon budget overnight. The devil will remain in the implementation details. But a clear list of priority capabilities will help the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the White House bend subsequent iterations of the sprawling Pentagon budget process to their will. Some details may be reserved for the internal, often classified, force planning guidance documents that typically accompany the Pentagon’s strategy reviews, but it is important that the priorities be communicated to Congress and the American people so that they can better understand what needs to be done.

In all likelihood, any deviation from “fair” budget shares and current priorities will be opposed by the services and communities most adversely impacted, along with their allies in Congress. Rather than fighting the prioritization, those that stand to lose should adapt to provide what is most critically needed. The Marine Corps offers a good example of what should be done. The service is explicitly trading in its tanks, artillery, and military police units in favor of capabilities like anti-ship missiles that are of greater utility in deterring China. Leaders can incentivize such behavior by rewarding it in the resource allocation process. While “jointness” has provided many benefits, renewed competition among the services to provide the best and most cost-effective “ways” of achieving strategic objectives will ensure the best use of limited resources.

Partnering with Industry

Increased focus on strategic resourcing between the services must also be matched with better strategic utilization of industry. Since the end of the Second World War, the United States has partnered with private industry to deter conflict by creating military advantage through extremely sophisticated warfighting systems that offset numerically superior adversaries. However, technical advancements from peer rivals, such as China and Russia, and an increasingly constrained budget environment make staying ahead continuously more difficult. To meet this challenge, the DoD will need to make hard choices in how it chooses to engage and support industry.

Success in future conflict depends on systems featuring engineering and technology that are dramatically more complex than in the past. For example, the number of parts in a World War II-era aircraft would typically be fewer than 10,000. Today, they can number in the many millions. Further, the lines of software code required to run these systems have grown exponentially.⁶



Due to the growing cost and time required to field capabilities of such complexity, and the constrained budget and timeframe available to develop them in, the DoD must take a more considered approach with how it engages industry.

This starts with improving its ability to internally prioritize and externally articulate needed capabilities and requirements. For example, recent efforts to create grand new joint warfighting concepts built on a foundation of embedded-AI, autonomous assets, and highly integrated Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) are promising, but have all too often failed to descend from the realm of buzzwords and philosophy. Disagreement between the services, within DoD, and with Congress have resulted in development requirements drifting wildly, with uncertainty surrounding whether actual government funding will ever materialize. This has created great difficulty for private industry to invest in and actually engineer such capabilities.

As the DoD continues to invest in force modernization, it should bring greater focus to “real” capabilities that can both generate deterrence in the near-term and present strong candidates for future evolution. The new administration has shown some eagerness to shift investment from procurement to “leap-ahead” Science & Technology (S&T) projects. While such investments may help ensure deterrence in future decades, the administration should renew consideration of how it might make best use of recently matured programs and capabilities which are only now becoming battlefield ready after decades of development. To ensure investments in capabilities like JADC2 result in *real* capability, we should ensure they are rooted to our core platforms and warfighting systems either already in or entering inventory.

In addition, uncertainty for private industry extends beyond program requirements to include the actual future regulatory and business environment within which industry must operate. The defense industry, like other industries, is in the midst of modernizing with integrated supply chains and next generation “Industry 4.0” digital development tools. These initiatives—such as developing easy to upgrade modular systems within digital environments—can bring a step-change in cost reduction and speed-of-delivery. These efforts require heavy investment and risk-taking from industry, but could bring the DoD closer to its long-held goal of development programs that run more akin to those in Silicon Valley.

To securely make these investments, industry must have confidence that they will be allowed to benefit accordingly. If industry is expected to deliver outcomes at the level of speed and sophistication of the tech sector, it must also be allowed to act something like the tech sector. That may require the DoD to accept a more accommodating stance towards regulation, intellectual property rights, and vertical integration as industry supports the development of capabilities critical to the next NDS.

Closing Recommendations

The next NDS will need to demonstrate discipline in direction. It must guide the modernization of a joint force that leverages recently matured technologies, developed with decades of investment, to field real capabilities. In particular, the focus of these capabilities should lie in the “six S’s,” areas critical to providing flexibility in our deterrence against peer adversaries. Finally, the department should approach industry with both clearer requirements and an open mind to industry-led creative approaches to improving speed, cost-efficiency, and innovation.

Disclaimer: *The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not reflect the official policy or position of any specific Aerospace and Defense company, the Department of the Navy, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.*

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¹ Office of the Secretary of Defense. “National Defense Strategy.” U.S. Department of Defense, 2018. <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/Spotlight/National-Defense-Strategy/>.

² Sam LaGrone, “Lawmakers Survey: 94% of Sailors Say ‘Damaging Operational Failures’ Related to Navy Culture, Leadership Problems,” *USNI News*, July 12, 2021, <https://news.usni.org/2021/07/12/lawmakers-survey-94-of-sailors-say-damaging-operational-failures-related-to-navy-culture-leadership-problems>.

³ Mallory Shelbourne, “Davidson: China Could Try to Take Control of Taiwan In ‘Next Six Years,’” *USNI News*, March 9, 2021, <https://news.usni.org/2021/03/09/davidson-china-could-try-to-take-control-of-taiwan-in-next-six-years>.

⁴ Bryan Clark and Dan Patt, “Fix the Pacific Deterrence Fund—and the Deeper Problem It Reveals,” *Defense One*, June 23, 2021, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2021/06/fix-pacific-deterrence-fund-and-deeper-problem-it-reveals/174898/>.

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CTRL+ALT+DELETE

Paul Bezerra and Erik Jacobs

Xi Jinping has remade Chinese policy—both foreign and domestic—and now assertively exploits the American people and, in effect, the U.S.-led order.¹ Given this increased assertiveness and Xi's newfound ability to rule China without end,² the Biden administration must wholly remake the U.S.-China relationship if realizing a foreign policy for the American people is the administration's goal. But, the present approach defined by competition, collaboration, and adversarial relations is only a partial remaking and necessarily doomed to the same ill results of Biden's predecessors.^{3,4} These three words hold out hope that the U.S. and China can cooperate. This hope is not warranted any longer.

The Biden administration must end China's post-Cold War era of exploitation and expansionism, which has reached a pinnacle under Xi, to realize a foreign policy for the American people. Doing so will be diplomatically and economically challenging. But it is feasible if pursued through gradual decoupling that provides opportunities for Xi to reevaluate his present policies—unlikely as doing so may be—and opportunities for Japan, Australia, and other hesitant U.S. partners to likewise decouple in coordination. In short, the Biden administration must fully reset the U.S.-China relationship behind a different combination of words, CTRL+ALT+DELETE, and empower its partners and allies to do the same.

Neither scholarly treatments of cooperation nor U.S.-China relations under Xi support investing any further hope towards working with China. Robert Axelrod's *The Evolution of Cooperation*⁵ is among the most well-read in international relations on cooperation. Axelrod explains self-interested actors realize the best outcomes when using a “tit-for-tat” strategy. Tit-for-tat is simple. In a repeated bilateral engagement, Player A offers cooperation to Player B until Player B decides against cooperation. That is, to defect. Player A then reciprocates Player B's prior decisions. If Player B continues defecting, so does Player A. If Player B returns to cooperating, so does Player A. In the context of U.S.-China relations under Xi, neither practices tit-for-tat, nor is switching to tit-for-tat feasible for domestic reasons.

In Axelrod's language, Xi uses a “revised downing” strategy. Revised downing assumes one's counterpart is responsive to defections initially. In subsequent engagements, revised downing predicts whether one's counterpart is paying attention, or we would say is resolved to punish cheating, and chooses cooperation or defection accordingly. Suppose the U.S. fails to punish Xi's defections—e.g., stealing intellectual property⁶ or contravening WTO rules⁷—because it believes doing so will further U.S.-China interdependence and one day align China's interests behind those of the U.S. In that case, revised downing has Xi continue defecting. But, only for as long as Xi thinks the U.S. will continue overlooking his defections.

That Xi would use revised downing is unsurprising. Revised downing is consistent with a core Sun Tzuian principle: know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles, you will never be defeated.⁸ Until the Trump and now Biden administration, the U.S. has not used a strategy that meaningfully punishes defections, let alone one identified by Axelrod. If any, the U.S. used a strategy best described in Axelrod-ian language as “always cooperate.” In no shocker, the results have not been good for the U.S.

In recent examples, Xi's commitments to halting intellectual property theft, curbing climate change, and uncovering COVID-19's origins all demonstrate the revised downing strategy in action. Initially, allegedly beneficial cooperative commitments to action under careful, resolved U.S. scrutiny are present in each example. So, too, is self-serving defection that has gone largely unchallenged by the U.S. or only feebly checked until the Trump administration.

Under then-President Obama, Xi committed to combating intellectual property theft in 2015.^{9,10} Since that time, China remains the world's principal infringer of intellectual property,¹¹ and Chinese actors have repeatedly made headlines for as much.¹² Also, under Obama, Xi agreed to limit China's carbon dioxide emissions in 2014 and joined the

Paris Agreement in 2015—China’s first such commitments. Unfortunately, China again defected, notably by censoring and obscuring data on Chinese pollution,¹³ failing to produce a national plan for emissions,¹⁴ and building new highly polluting coal-fired power plants in China and abroad.¹⁵ All the while, senior Chinese leadership espoused the “right to emit...is a basic human right.”¹⁶ Recent efforts to uncover the origins of the COVID-19 virus may already be unfolding similarly, but only time will tell. Xi committed to the initial World Health Organization investigation into COVID-19’s origins,¹⁷ but China subsequently defected from a proposed follow-up phase in response to criticisms of the first.¹⁸ Not to mention, Xi moved quickly to economically coerce Australia after calling for an international inquiry into the virus’s origins. At this point, faulting Xi is difficult; his defections are a product of his environment. The Obama administration seldom, if ever, confronted Xi as Axelrod’s discussion of revised downing would prescribe. The Trump administration began to do so but largely plateaued. Now, the Biden administration risks similar mistakes.

The question is what to do next if realizing a foreign policy for the American people is the Biden administration’s goal. U.S.-China destiny is not cooperation under Xi. Cooperation requires follow-through on commitments and reciprocity. Rather than cooperation, Xi exploits the rules-based order where doing so enriches, empowers, and entrenches China at others’ expense. This suggestion is not to say the two are destined for war either—much as the absence of frequent cooperation did not destine the U.S. and the Soviet Union for war as history has revealed. To continue hoping otherwise will result in a foreign policy sure to fail the American people. Avoiding this outcome will require a complete reset of U.S. policy towards China behind three lines of effort that challenge Xi’s exploitative, non-cooperative tendencies. The first is controlling the narrative surrounding China’s position in world affairs. The second is providing alternatives to China’s economic overtures. Lastly, the third is deleting interdependence with China.

Xi fancies China an inevitable power.¹⁹ The U.S. must make greater efforts to counter this narrative. Least of all, because waging a strategic competition requires doing so, but most of all, failing to do so risks leaving the American population to believe China is inevitable. In reality, the U.S. was simultaneously unable to integrate China into the liberal order, yet enabled China’s meteoric rise. As such, China’s continued rise is not inevitable, and the U.S. may stymie Xi by using the order’s enforcement mechanisms to punish his deviance or even working to exclude China from that order. To this effect, the Biden administration must make forceful public statements to foster the perception the U.S. empowers. Still, the U.S. also adapts—and the U.S. will be adapting to expose China’s narrative, counter its patterns of exploitation and breach of commitments, and restore Americans’ confidence that U.S. foreign policy, and the liberal order, serve U.S. interests.

Controlling the narrative should be divided into two steps: words and actions. The Biden administration must begin broadcasting the words as soon as possible via diplomatic and media engagements. The actions, though, must be coordinated given hesitant domestic and foreign audiences and implemented gradually. Doing so gradually has two benefits: the Biden administration avoids inadvertently isolating the U.S. rather than China, and the U.S. provides Xi an off-ramp to act in a verifiable capacity on issues of global, regional, or partner-specific importance—even if Xi is unlikely to take such an off-ramp. Still, the Biden administration would demonstrate its actions are about more than U.S.-China interactions even if the U.S. stands to benefit significantly.

Stymieing Xi will require empowering others to do so, and others will require alternative goods and services from the U.S. if they are to shun China. Nowhere is this more imperative for the U.S. to appreciate than as it concerns the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Xi has chosen to exploit the developing world by funding and investing through the BRI where and how the West has quit, most notably in developing controversial infrastructure projects such as the Lower Sesan 2 Dam in Cambodia, Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, Ethiopia’s Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway, or Gwadar Port inside U.S. partner Pakistan. The 2019 creation of the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation is a start towards providing an alternative to the BRI. However, it only requested \$1.7 billion in programming funds for the 2022 fiscal year.²⁰ Likewise, the G-7’s Build Back Better World initiative is also an alternative to the BRI but is only conceptual. What the Biden administration must remember is Xi has already spent an estimated \$3.7 trillion on the BRI,²¹ and any alternative to it must work for the American people somehow through conditionality—a common if economically maligned, but politically expedient practice in development aid.

Providing alternative goods and services is necessary to enable the U.S. and partners to delete interdependence with Xi's China, sometimes called "decoupling." Xi has smartly realized one of the fastest ways to exploit and unwind the liberal order is to leverage the desirability of accessing China's domestic market and low production costs. By tightly controlling the terms on which foreign corporations access Chinese consumers and workers, Xi can bind others to China's values and interests—turning U.S.-based and other foreign organizations into de facto instruments of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).²² A foreign policy for the American people must sever these binds, albeit gradually and strategically.

Conflicting surveys question the American people's appetite for as much, yet do not rule out the appeal of doing so. The Chicago Council on Global Affairs found a plurality of support for increasing tariffs on Chinese imports (55 percent) and reducing U.S.-China trade (54 percent).²³ Likewise, a 2020 Pew Research poll found that 73 percent of Americans viewed China negatively.²⁴ The Center for Strategic & International Studies meanwhile found 20 percent of Americans wish to "end substantially" U.S.-China trade relations, and an equivalent 20 percent of U.S., European, and Asian "thought leaders" were in favor of doing just that.²⁵ To bring support along, the Biden administration should prioritize aggressively selling the benefits of doing so to domestic and foreign audiences jointly, first, in sectors where more support already exists and, second, by pursuing initiatives to offset losses incurred by the negatively affected. To mitigate these disruptions, the U.S. must seek to offset the burden of decoupling by otherwise incentivizing a turn away from China and toward areas within the U.S. needing revitalization, at best, or towards other members of the liberal order, at minimum. In effect, the Biden administration should incentivize each corporation's departure from China and turn exits from China into the next "Amazon HQ" competition. Third, the Biden administration should cautiously share the dangers of failing to do so where recent supply chain bottlenecks evidence the minimum risk. The maximum risk is Xi's unchecked exploitation continues feeding unchecked economic and military assertiveness leading to open conflict. In that case, hurried and unplanned separation would play out either on Xi's terms amidst economic coercion or amidst violence over Taiwan, the South China Sea, or any number of disputed territorial claims in Asia. Deleting interdependence will undoubtedly result in near-term economic disruptions. But mitigating these costs is not impossible, and decoupling is necessary to free states and organizations from the CCP's grasp.²⁶

The Biden administration is right to recast the U.S.-China relationship to pursue a foreign policy for the American people. However, the current effort does not go far enough. It is necessarily doomed to disappoint unless the U.S. abandons any pretense that it can realize mutually beneficial cooperation with China under Xi. Such an outcome is neither academically probable, nor probable based upon U.S.-China relations since Xi's rise to power. Moving forward, the U.S. ought to pursue a complete, not partial, reset of its relationship with China. Closing out the relationship with China will necessarily be difficult in the near term, but hitting ALT + F4 is nonetheless doable if the U.S. acts smartly to control the narrative, provide alternatives, and delete interdependence.

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Foreign STEM Talent is the Key to Future U.S. Competitiveness

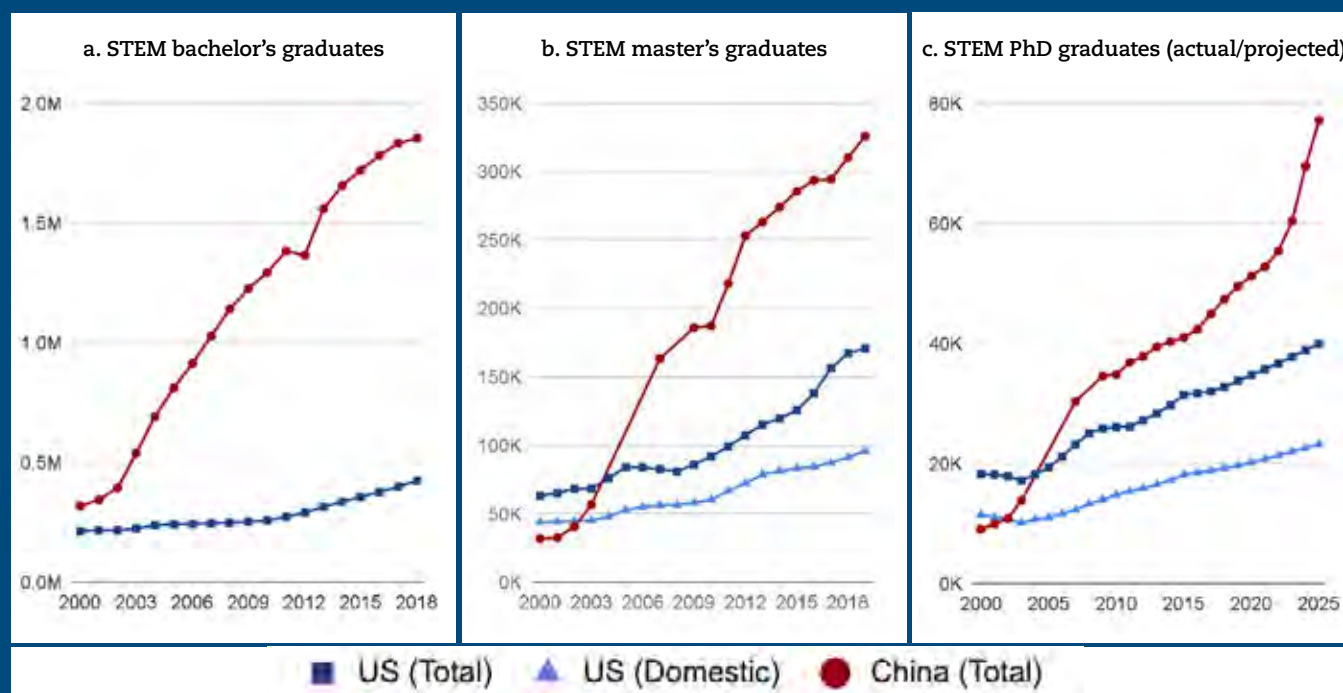
Helen Toner

U.S. technological leadership in the second half of the twentieth century did not derive only from federal government investments in research and development, nor from the relatively large and well-educated U.S. population. What really gave the United States an edge was the uniquely high proportion of the world's best STEM talent that chose to make this country their home, drawn by America's political freedoms, high standard of living, world-leading research universities, and favorable corporate environment. Scratch the surface of any major U.S. technological achievement and you will find immigrants involved. Since 1901, almost half of the world's Nobel Laureates have been U.S.-based scientists, about 10 times more than the size alone of the U.S. population would predict; in turn, immigrants represent a third of the U.S.-based laureates, also a disproportionately large share.¹ Immigrants are even more over-represented among successful entrepreneurs: more than half of U.S. startups valued at over \$1 billion have an immigrant founder, as do more than half of the Forbes 2019 list of "most promising" artificial intelligence startups.²

In other words, for much of the twentieth century the combination of U.S. homegrown talent and highly-skilled immigrants added up to a significant scientific and technological advantage for the United States. This advantage is now eroding. As technological competition with China heats up, the United States must recognize high-skill immigration as the core national security issue that it is.

China, long home to the world's largest population but lacking economic and educational clout, has now come into its own as a technological power. Leveraging science and technology to boost national power has long been a major component of Chinese government planning documents, and in the 2010s these efforts began to bear fruit. Many of China's flashier achievements, including high-speed rail, monkey cloning, and 5G dominance, have drawn international attention. At least as important, however, is the underlying infrastructure that has powered these achievements, such as its increasingly capable education system.

China has made and continues to make major, sustained investments in its education system, including in higher education. The result is that China now vastly outproduces the U.S. in STEM graduates each year at the bachelor's, master's, and doctorate levels (Figure 1). The rise of high-end doctorate education, and its associated R&D, is the result of deliberate actions by the Chinese government. For example, at the government's behest, more than 1,300 new PhD programs were created between 2003 and 2007, producing a spurt of new home-grown Chinese research scientists.³ Higher education spending by the Chinese Ministry of Education roughly doubled in the years between 2012 and 2021, supporting a large increase in enrollments.⁴ Figure 1c combines data on current enrollment patterns with historical graduation rates to project how this will lead to another huge increase in STEM PhD graduates by 2025.

FIGURE 1

Source: Remco Zwetsloot, “Winning the Tech Talent Competition” (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2021).

What these charts make clear, in addition to the success of Chinese educational reforms, is how indispensable foreign STEM graduates are for the United States. Improving U.S. domestic education is often raised as an alternative to increasing high-skill immigration. These charts make plain how untenable that strategy is. Make no mistake: building a modern, equitable education system for American-born students is an urgent priority. But no matter how highly we prioritize education reforms, or how successfully we improve outcomes for domestic students, this alone cannot compensate for the U.S.-China discrepancy in STEM talent. This should not be a surprise: China’s population is more than four times larger than the United States’, and it still has room to grow before it reaches U.S. per capita education levels. It is inescapable that as the Chinese education system grows and matures enough to provide opportunities to Chinese students, the United States will only be able to keep up by drawing talent from all around the globe.

Fortunately, the United States is in the enviable position of being a highly desirable destination for top scientists and engineers. Surveys show that around 60 percent of international scientists say they would consider moving to the United States, versus only around 10 percent who would consider China.⁵ Immigrants are drawn by the political freedoms and high standard of living enjoyed by U.S. residents, as well as by the prospect of joining world-leading research groups at U.S. universities and working for (or starting) innovative U.S. companies. What’s more, China recognizes this dynamic as a major threat to its technological plans: complaining, for instance, that “the number of top talents lost in China ranks first in the world.”⁶

Against this backdrop, current U.S. immigration policies amount to shooting ourselves in the foot. Numerical caps, unclear requirements, increasingly lengthy processing times, and other problems are both a barrier and a deterrent to top STEM talent deciding to move to the United States. With countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom revising immigration rules to better attract these immigrants, it becomes even more urgent for the United States to keep up.

High-skill immigration has been in political stalemate for decades, with both parties agreeing it is valuable to the United States, but holding the issue hostage to immigration reforms with less bipartisan consensus. This approach was always questionable, but now that it is clear how important STEM talent is for technological competition with China, further inaction is unconscionable. Although executive authority can make some changes, congressional

action is required to achieve reforms of the scale necessary to meet the challenge at hand. At the time of writing, the reconciliation bill moving through Congress contains provisions that would meaningfully ease the barriers to STEM talent staying in the United States. If passed, these measures should be seen not only as an enormous economic boon, but also as a major national security victory. If, on the other hand, these provisions are watered down or dropped, then seeking alternate avenues to exempt STEM advanced degree holders from green card caps, create a statutory student-to-worker visa pathway, or otherwise ease the process of coming to—and staying in—the United States must become a major priority. The options are many; what is lacking is a broad acknowledgment of the urgency of the problem, particularly in Congress.

Washington already understands the critical role of science and technology in strategic competition with China. Bills such as the United States Innovation and Competition Act would provide a needed boost to research funding, research security, and other areas. But if these initiatives neglect the vital part played by human capital—and fail to fix long-standing problems with U.S. STEM immigration policy—other measures will be in vain.

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Countering Partisanship and Threat Inflation in U.S.-China Policy

Rachel Myrick, Catherine Eng, and Zoe Weinberg

In Congress, U.S.-China policy is often perceived as an area that unifies Republican and Democratic legislators.¹ Commentators note that policymakers “sound shockingly similar” when discussing how the United States should respond to a rising China.² And despite major differences on almost all other areas of foreign and domestic policy, the Biden administration has maintained much continuity with Trump-era China policy.³

Yet with congressional polarization at its highest levels since the late nineteenth century, salient foreign policy issues—including U.S.-China policy—will eventually be subsumed by the partisan divide.⁴ Legislators will face partisan pressures to inflate the threat posed to the United States by China. In turn, politicians will have incentives to weaponize the China threat by discrediting their opponents for being “soft on China” and portraying themselves as “tough on China.” These deliberately vague phrases hold little meaning when considering the multidimensional nature of the China challenge that includes military competition, trade, human rights, and technology policy, where “toughness” does not correspond neatly to progressive or conservative politics.

Such extreme partisanship makes it increasingly difficult for Congress and the White House to craft pragmatic China policy. In an era where competition with China is one of the most complex and contentious challenges to the United States, theatrical posturing will not lead to thoughtful or nuanced policymaking. While bold and decisive action may be warranted in some instances, competition with China requires complex strategy, carefully tailored for each dimension of the bilateral relationship. As Secretary of State Antony Blinken explained, U.S. policy towards China should be “competitive when it should be, collaborative when it can be, [and] adversarial when it must be.”⁵ Politicizing the China threat is the quickest way to dismiss that complexity, resulting in unduly reckless policymaking.

To preempt partisanship in U.S.-China relations, the United States should focus on restoring its own strengths rather than stoking the China threat. Such a strategy will best prepare the country for a range of potential outcomes with Beijing—irrespective of whether the relationship becomes more adversarial in the future. There are also potential areas for bipartisan cooperation, including human rights and technological competition.

Partisanship and the China Threat

In recent years, American rhetoric regarding the China threat has become increasingly hostile. In some respects, this shift in discourse appears bipartisan. Prior to the 2020 presidential election, Democratic presidential candidates adopted the Trump administration’s hawkish rhetoric around China. Then-candidate Joe Biden’s rhetoric shifted dramatically in 2020 as he urged the United States to “get tough with China.”⁶

Once in office, President Biden’s China policy deviated from the previous administration in a few ways. For one, Biden rejected Donald Trump’s “America First” framework in favor of a multilateral approach to confronting China.⁷ The administration also took a tough stance on China’s human rights abuses, officially labeling China’s repression of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang a “genocide.”⁸ Overall, however, Biden’s China policy closely resembles Trump’s. Like his predecessor, Biden has continued to criticize Chinese leadership, expand U.S. relations with Taiwan, and maintain many Trump-era tariffs.⁹

On Capitol Hill, China rhetoric is growing progressively incendiary. According to a search conducted through Quorum, in the past two years, legislators have been increasingly likely to invoke the “China threat.”¹⁰ For example, Senator Mitt Romney (R-UT) spoke of China as a “perilous threat” under a headline decrying China as an “existential threat.”¹¹ Representative Mike Waltz (R-FL) described China as “the biggest existential threat the nation has ever faced.”¹²

As the hostility between Beijing and Washington grows, policymakers are beginning to weaponize the issue, labeling political opponents as “soft on China.” In the summer of 2021, for instance, Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) tweeted: “Biden is weak on China. And appeasement never works.”¹³ Amidst this trend, some experts argue that a “China litmus test” is emerging in Congress.¹⁴ Some Senators have indicated they would withhold support for administration nominees who are not sufficiently aligned on confronting China.¹⁵

Public opinion polls foreshadow a similar dynamic among the American public. Polling shows that Republicans and Democrats are more likely than ever to view China in a negative light in 2021 relative to years past.¹⁶ However, these attitudes are also highly susceptible to politicization. To demonstrate this, Duke University conducted an original survey on a nationally representative sample of 1,000 American adults in October 2020, directly before the 2020 presidential election.¹⁷ Half the respondents were told to imagine a hypothetical scenario in which Biden won the election while the other half were told to imagine a situation in which Trump won. Both sets of respondents were informed that “despite all the tough talk,” the respective presidential candidate would be “soft on China if elected.” We then asked how respondents thought the United States should approach China policy.

The key finding from the survey was that both Republicans and Democrats were most likely to express hostility towards China when told the candidate from the *opposing party* was “soft on China.”¹⁸ In other words, the easiest way to stoke anti-China sentiment was to frame the opposing party as weak on China. The survey demonstrated that partisan pressures to inflate the China threat may generate further polarization.

The Risks of Weaponization

The Chinese Communist Party has proven itself to be a repressive regime. Its actions abroad—including trade practices, cyber espionage, human rights abuses, and theft of intellectual property—jeopardize many American values and national interests. However, the hyperbolic rhetoric of Congress is becoming dangerously counterproductive and risks manifesting in four negative consequences.

First, labeling China an “existential threat” is hardly suited to accurately describing the nature of the challenge. Recent invocations of a “new Cold War”¹⁹ with China echo past Manichean attempts to galvanize the public against a clear villain: a communist threat, an “Axis of Evil,” or the specter of transnational terrorism.²⁰ Policymakers would do well to avoid such references given both the limitations of the analogy²¹ and evidence suggesting foreign threats are not always likely to unite the country.²²

Second, exaggerated narratives stoke xenophobic sentiment and warp domestic public opinion in both countries, all while doing little to contain China’s ambitions. In 2021, leaders of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus and over sixty activist groups warned policymakers to refrain from “xenophobic rhetoric” and to speak more responsibly about U.S.-China relations to prevent escalation of anti-Asian sentiment.²³

Third, linking foreign policy with extreme rhetoric constrains Washington’s flexibility in recalibrating its relationship with Beijing. Inflammatory statements hamper the administration’s ability to pursue constructive policies to confront China, a country with whom the United States still needs to cooperate on transnational issues. American officials should be unrestricted in making balanced risk calculations from a dispassionate standing in accordance with American objectives.

Finally, overheated, partisan rhetoric diverts attention from opportunities for bipartisan legislation that would increase American competitiveness. The specter of China’s rise could be a powerful motivator for political action. However, American efforts should be channeled towards strengthening domestic capabilities rather than stoking an adversarial relationship with Beijing.

Towards a More Bipartisan U.S.-China Policy

While the China threat is multifaceted, four areas tend to dominate the political dialogue—trade, military competition, human rights, and technology competition. Each has its own constituency on Capitol Hill, and some inspire greater division than others. Trade and military competition are most at risk of politicization given relevant stakeholders inside and outside of government. By contrast, human rights and technology competition provide more promising avenues for bipartisan cooperation.

The issue of trade with China galvanized the American business community, which collectively has \$124 billion in direct investments in China.²⁴ Companies have pressed the Biden administration to lift tariffs on Chinese goods and demanded clarity about its Beijing economic agenda.²⁵ While unraveling tariffs would provide price relief to Americans, it would also likely open the administration to Republican criticism that Biden is “soft” on China.²⁶

Positions on military competition and the defense budget with respect to China are also likely to be politicized. For example, Republicans in Congress advocated for Biden to increase defense spending to 3-5 percent above inflation to compete with China. House Armed Services Committee Republicans called on the administration to “reject demands from many on the left to cut or freeze defense spending.”²⁷

Other less politicized issues reflect core American values and interests. Human rights is one area of global moral leadership, and technology development is critical for ensuring American security in competing with Beijing.

Legislation responding to human rights abuses in China has remained relatively bipartisan. The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act, which bans imports from China’s Xinjiang region unless firms prove they are not made with forced labor, unanimously passed the House and Senate in December 2021.²⁸ The same week, the Biden administration called for an economic and diplomatic boycott of the 2022 Beijing Olympics to protest what the administration calls an “ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang.”²⁹

At a time when America’s international reputation has taken a hit, placing core values above profits could help restore America’s global standing as it seeks to rebuild relationships with allies to counter a rising China. As House Speaker Nancy Pelosi remarked, “If we do not speak out for human rights in China because of commercial or economic ties, we lose all moral authority to speak out against human rights violations anywhere in the world.”³⁰

Similarly, technology competition with China is a rare topic of relative consensus for legislators. In June 2021, the Senate passed the U.S. Innovation and Competition Act (USICA).³¹ The \$250 billion bill aims to counter China’s technological ambitions, investing in areas such as semiconductor research, design, and manufacturing, and an overhaul of the National Science Foundation. The bill passed 68-32 in the Senate, reflecting its broad support across party lines.³²

Other examples of successful bipartisan efforts related to technology and national security abound. The bipartisan Artificial Intelligence Caucuses in the House and Senate have drawn attention to the security risks of AI.³³ These caucuses were critical in the creation of the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence and similar efforts to counter China.³⁴

Domestic investments to maintain American competitiveness are increasingly viewed as the best option. Attempts to stonewall or limit the development of China’s tech-powered economy are unlikely to be successful. And the Chinese and American economies are too intertwined—China remains one of the largest trading partners of the United States—to withstand effective sanctions.³⁵ American industries are also heavily dependent on Taiwan’s semiconductor industry, meaning that the U.S. likely needs to avoid directly provoking China, which could prompt aggression toward Taiwan.

Now more than ever, legislators should cooperate to ensure American competitiveness for the future. The Trump administration’s policies did little to spur America’s technological edge. The United States underinvested in research and development and failed to implement proactive technological security measures. China benefits from key asymmetric advantages in the technology competition, including favorable demographics and population size, and its prioritization of science and technology. Moreover, Beijing enjoys a permissive regulatory environment and close coordination between the public and private sectors.

In spite of these dynamics, the United States continues to attract the best talent with one of the most vibrant innovation ecosystems in the world. In 2020-21, over 300,000 Chinese students studied in American universities, making China the top sender of international students to the United States.³⁶ Policymakers must overcome partisan differences and remember these core advantages to prioritize investment in critical technologies. These include key inputs like semiconductors, data-driven innovations in artificial intelligence, digital currencies and Web 3.0, and platform technologies that underlie and enable other technologies. Focusing on technology policy could allow congressional leaders to set aside inflammatory partisan rhetoric and make tangible progress for the sake of American security.

Conclusion

While U.S.-China relations are generally perceived as an area of bipartisan cooperation, the current political climate threatens to undermine agreement across party lines. Instead, extreme partisanship within Congress will lead legislators to weaponize the China threat as a political tactic. Reductionist accusations of being “soft on China” neglect the nuance and complexity of the U.S.-China relationship. These accusations also obscure areas of common ground which could unite both parties.

Pragmatic policy on issues—including human rights and technology competition—requires level-headedness and substantive debate. Empty partisan rhetoric will not get us there. To shape the future of American leadership internationally, policymakers must craft a thoughtful and robust agenda that cements our technological edge and our moral red lines. Legislators must put politics aside and take account of the nuances and complexities of the U.S.-China relationship. Long-term American success depends on it.

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Detering Cyberattacks from Russia and China in the Era of Digital Great Power Competition

Alyza Sebenius and Brittany Carter

When President Joe Biden took office, the new administration's cyber team had its work cut out. A month earlier, in December 2020, a cybersecurity company had discovered a sprawling attack on the United States of America, in which Russian hackers¹ compromised widely-used SolarWinds software, delivering malicious software updates to as many as 18,000 software users, and breaking into 100 American companies as well as nine American agencies.² The breach of the federal government through SolarWinds' software was a widespread and sophisticated hacking campaign that prompted changes to policy and operations in a heightened effort to rid foreign entities from federal networks. But the task of removing Russian hackers from federal networks was only the beginning for the new administration. In a separate cyber campaign discovered in March, Chinese attackers³ exploited vulnerabilities in Microsoft's Exchange Server for email to hack tens of thousands of organizations.⁴

These incidents were anything but isolated. Cyberattacks by adversaries, competitors, and criminals have been, for years, an all-too common feature of the American digital landscape. Importantly, however, the recent attacks also serve as a reminder that the renewed great power competition that the United States faces with China and Russia has a critical cyber dimension. While it is clear that deterring attacks on American networks is crucial to addressing China's rise and Russia's renewed aggression, viewing the cyber threat in terms of great power competition may also provide a mechanism for bridging the partisan divide in order to legislate and govern in a manner that protects American networks.

The intelligence community has been clear on the cyber threat posed by these powers. "China's cyber pursuits and proliferation of related technologies increase the threats of cyberattacks against the U.S. homeland, suppression of U.S. web content that Beijing views as threatening to its internal ideological control, and the expansion of technology-driven authoritarianism around the world," Biden's Director of National Intelligence (DNI) Avril Haines wrote in April.⁵ "Moscow will continue to employ a variety of tactics this year meant to undermine U.S. influence, develop new international norms and partnerships, divide Western countries and weaken Western alliances, and demonstrate Russia's ability to shape global events as a major player in a new multipolar international order." This assessment echoed President Donald Trump's DNI Daniel Coats who wrote in 2019 that "at present, China and Russia pose the greatest espionage and cyberattack threats."⁶

While recent administrations have been significantly divided on many ideological and national security issues, these assessments nevertheless reflect intelligence consensus on the contours of the cyber threat. Even so, cyber has been a politically charged topic: after the American intelligence community found that Russia interfered in the 2016 election to Donald Trump's benefit and to Hillary Clinton's detriment,⁷ President Trump cast doubt on the finding.⁸ In the wake of Russia's election meddling and the domestic fallout in America, protecting U.S. elections became a key—and politically fraught—cybersecurity priority. However, zooming out and reframing American cybersecurity in terms of broader geopolitical threats to the homeland can be both a source of common ground for politically divided Americans as well as a strategically beneficial vantage point from which to approach the growing cyber threat.

In order to come together to combat the cyber threat, law and policy makers should approach the defense, deterrence, and retaliation against Russia and China in cyberspace through the lens of great power competition. This is a promising strategy given that there is already a consensus in Washington that great power competition is once again defining America's role in the world.

Both of the recent administrations have described this reality in their national security strategies. “China and Russia want to shape a world antithetical to U.S. values and interests,” the Trump administration wrote in its 2017 National Security Strategy.⁹ It went on to warn that the two countries “are contesting our geopolitical advantages and trying to change the international order in their favor.”¹⁰ Correspondingly, the Biden administration’s interim National Security Strategic Guidance, published in March 2021, described challenges posed by “an increasingly assertive China and destabilizing Russia.”¹¹ The following month, the White House elaborated on a call with reporters: “The past two administrations chose to focus on what they saw as the predominant national security challenges facing the country: transnational threats in one instance, and great power competition in the other,” a Biden official explained. “Our view is that we don’t have that luxury to choose between those challenges.”¹²

In Congress, efforts to frame the cyber threats from Russia and China in terms of great power competition—coupling the commonalities in understanding the threat posed by their hackers and elements of shared understanding on the geopolitical threat posed by the two countries—have been productive. For example, the Cyberspace Solarium Commission, a bipartisan group of lawmakers, intelligence officials, and others, published a 2020 report that sought to find a “consensus” on how the United States should strategically defend itself from major cyberattacks.¹³ Many of its recommendations—which ranged from government reorganization, to setting international norms, and building collaboration among the public and private sector—have been implemented, including through legislation and executive order.¹⁴ With respect to Russia and China, the commission framed the issue in terms of the broader geopolitical struggle: “Great powers like China and Russia use cyber operations to enable their warfighting capabilities, advance their interests short of armed conflict, and undermine American economic strength, political will, and military might.”¹⁵

To be sure, the cyber threat transcends Russia and China. The United States has suffered significant cyberattacks from North Korea, Iran, and non-state actors. In a vivid example of the power of cybercriminals, Russian-based criminals¹⁶ conducted a ransomware attack on Colonial Pipeline last year, raising gas prices as it caused fuel shortages along the East Coast of the U.S.¹⁷

Yet, the intelligence community has made it clear that Russia and China are the prevailing priorities and that the U.S. will not be safe until these countries are convinced that the benefits of attacking American infrastructure are not worth the costs. This means a combination of network defense, imposing costs on bad actors, and a concerted bipartisan effort to integrate the U.S. cyber strategy into its renewed approach to great power competition. Reframing the cybersecurity competition with Russia and China in terms of great power competition will allow the United States to sidestep partisan differences. Furthermore, it may also be a unifying first step that leads to a greater strategic emphasis on American defense, deterrence, and retaliation in cyberspace.

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- ⁷ “Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent U.S. Elections,” Office of the Director of National Intelligence, January 6, 2017, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf.
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- ¹¹ “Interim National Security Strategic Guidance,” The White House, March 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>.
- ¹² “Background Press Call by Senior Administration Officials on National Security and Foreign Policy in President Biden’s First 100 Days,” The White House, April 27, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2021/04/27/background-press-call-by-senior-administration-officials-on-national-security-and-foreign-policy-in-president-bidens-first-100-days/>.
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- ¹⁴ “2021 Annual Report on Implementation,” United States of America Cyberspace Solarium Commission, August 2021, <https://www.solarium.gov/public-communications/2021-annual-report-on-implementation>
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The Brewing Crisis in the Arctic

James Di Pane and Joshua Wofford

The United States has a number of economic and strategic interests in the Arctic, which are challenging to defend given the remoteness, harsh environmental conditions, and lack of American infrastructure in the region. Since acquiring Alaska in 1867, the United States has had territory above the Arctic Circle and a hand in influencing Arctic policy as a sovereign member of the Arctic Council, a group of eight nations that have territorial claims on natural resources in the Arctic.

Protecting these natural resources and maintaining relevance and influence in the region is imperative, especially as dramatic changes in ice conditions over the past few decades have created massive opportunities for the shipping industry to reduce transit distances by thousands of miles and enabled commercial entities to harvest previously inaccessible natural resources. As economic interests heat up in the Arctic, there is increasing evidence that the era of great power competition is shifting north, as both Russia and China increase their presence in the region, take actions to regulate the shipping lanes, and search for ways to capitalize on Arctic resources.

To put the scale of U.S. interests into context, the territory and resources at stake are far from trivial. The U.S. controls over 1 million square miles of territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) above the Arctic Circle. Within that territory, there is an estimated \$3 billion worth of seafood in the Alaska industry, \$1 trillion worth of rare earth minerals, approximately 90 billion barrels of undiscovered oil reserves, and 30 percent of the world's undiscovered natural gas.¹ Additionally, shifting ice conditions have created opportunities for greater economic access to this region, opening shipping lanes and prompting an increase in adventure tourism. As the sea ice continues to melt, these opportunities have the potential to greatly increase the risk of maritime and environmental disasters in areas that are difficult to reach with conventional Coast Guard cutters. Lack of access and delayed response to such incidents could prove catastrophic to the region's wildlife, indigenous peoples, and fragile ecosystem that plays a key role in regulating the world's climate.

While the U.S. has military assets that patrol above the Arctic Circle, most of the coverage takes the form of Air Force aircraft and Navy submarines. U.S. Naval vessels that could be diverted to this mission are not capable of breaking ice and are not properly suited to fulfill federally mandated missions that are badly needed in the Arctic, like enforcing U.S. laws and treaties. The primary tool for maintaining a federal presence, exerting "soft power," and enforcing U.S. laws and treaties in this region is the U.S. Coast Guard. With the acquisition and deployment of National Security Cutters, the Coast Guard has maintained an effective patrol of the Bering Sea. However, the capabilities and strategic outlook of the Coast Guard's polar icebreaking fleet have significantly degraded as the need for them has increased over the past decade. If the U.S. government mismanages the overhaul of this vital component of national security, we place ourselves at a grave risk of losing the capability of projecting into the Arctic and protecting our national interests in a region that is quickly becoming an area of increasing maritime activity. Admiral Schultz, the U.S. Coast Guard Commandant recently stated that "presence equals influence in the Arctic. And right now...we're woefully lacking as a nation in terms of our capacity."²

As U.S. Arctic capabilities continue to decline, Russia and China have increased interest in the region, with Russia attempting to exert greater control over the Northern Sea Route despite U.S. and international objections to their disregard of Law of the Sea norms and freedom of navigation operations. Russia has taken efforts to reconstitute long abandoned Arctic military bases and has begun efforts to build more icebreakers and upgrade their fleet with

more powerful, nuclear-capable icebreakers. Russia has the world's largest nuclear and non-nuclear icebreaker fleets with more than forty icebreakers in operation, more than all other Arctic nations combined.³ While their significant number of icebreakers should be tempered with the understanding that Russia has nearly twenty-two times more Arctic coastline than the United States, the fact that they are willing to invest in their icebreaker fleet in anticipation of increased activity in the region should be a point of concern.

China has had "Arctic Council Observer Status" since 2013, but it holds no territorial claims in the region.⁴ However, its self-declaration as a "Near-Arctic State" combined with a stated desire to develop a "Polar Silk Road" to support increased trade routes and the harvesting of natural resources in the region could be a catalyst for increased economic activity and marine traffic.⁵ To date, they have completed two icebreakers and are currently in the process of constructing a third. For a country that has no territorial claims in the Arctic, their efforts to pursue commercial endeavors in the region should be closely monitored. While they have expressed an intent to respect the Law of the Sea and existing treaties, their track record in other regions (particularly the South China Sea) warrants a healthy skepticism of their overall goals.

For the U.S., its own capabilities for operating in the region have fallen behind. The primary tools for providing presence are the icebreakers, but the current fleet is woefully inadequate to meet the growing demand. The remoteness of U.S. waters in the region means that often a Coast Guard icebreaker is the only available infrastructure for projecting U.S. influence, earning a reputation as a "keystone capability." They enable a range of operations that would otherwise be impossible. The current fleet is comprised of two operational icebreakers—a heavy icebreaker, the Polar Star, and a medium icebreaker, the Healy. Of the eleven Statutory Missions that the Coast Guard is required to fulfill, these cutters are expected to meet nine in the Arctic Region. A Government Accountability Report showed that from 2010-2016, these two cutters were only capable of meeting 78 percent of the Coast Guard's Arctic obligations.⁶ In the past five years, the United States experienced severely limited capabilities of projecting into the Arctic as the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Healy suffered from an engine fire that required significant repairs,⁷ and during a 2019 McMurdo resupply mission in the Antarctic, the forty-five year old Polar Star suffered electrical issues, a compartment fire, and flooding that required divers to repair. While continued mission success can be credited to the ingenuity and resourcefulness of Coast Guard operators, it is unreasonable to place this burden on them without a plan to provide better equipment. Our severely aging fleet of icebreakers are barely able to meet their current mission requirements and are woefully unequipped to handle any changes in Arctic activity.

The Coast Guard is currently working to modernize its icebreaking capabilities by acquiring new ships. The Polar Security Cutter (PSC) program, meant to replace the Polar Star with three new heavy icebreakers in the coming years, has received some support in recent Coast Guard budgets. The program has received \$1.75 billion in funding so far, providing full funding for the first two ships. The FY2022 budget request for the Coast Guard includes an additional \$170 million that would cover the long lead time materials of the third ship. The first of these new Polar Security Cutters is scheduled to be delivered in 2024. After the PSC is complete, the Coast Guard plans to acquire three new medium icebreakers that will be referred to as Arctic Security Cutters, for a total of six new vessels if both programs are successfully completed.⁸

If the Coast Guard receives full funding for the acquisition program, it will be well over a decade before we have an adequate supply of vessels to protect our Arctic interests. Any misstep in the acquisition process could be costly, leading to a need to further extend the life of the current Arctic cutters. An extension would require costly maintenance and capital expenditures that could be put to better use innovating other areas of the Coast Guard. While the Coast Guard will have to make do with its current fleet for a few years, the PSC program must be completed on time to support U.S. strategic goals in the Arctic.

To this end, it is imperative that the U.S. government take seriously the threat that looms on the horizon. One of the most often-stated mottos of the Coast Guard has been "do more with less," but that attitude, while admirable, has not led to an effective outcome in the Arctic. As China and other nations aggressively pursue financial opportunities in this region, the possibility for two very distinct outcomes emerges in the absence of U.S. influence. On one hand, China's desire to establish a "Polar Silk Road" and a pursuit of natural resources in the Arctic region increases the odds

of an environmental disaster or worse, territorial infringements that we are incapable of resolving in a non-escalatory manner. On the other hand, if we concede influence in the Arctic to countries like Russia that have a greater capability of projecting into the region, we will lose an important strategic advantage and key influence, potentially leading to undesired outcomes. Simply put, the U.S. cannot afford to fall behind in such an important region and must make every effort to ensure that the Coast Guard receives these much-needed icebreakers.

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Creating a Foreign Policy of the Middle Class

Mari Manoogian

In February 2021, national security advisor Jake Sullivan clearly defined the overarching theme of President Joe Biden's foreign policy strategy as "foreign policy for the middle class."¹ The Chicago Council for Global Affairs contends that this Biden doctrine "recogniz[es] the linkages between American domestic strength and U.S. ability to maintain international competitiveness."² Under this new framework, foreign policy decisions, Sullivan indicated, would use the following simple rhetorical question as a basic metric for success: "Is it going to make life better, safer, and easier for working families?"

Critics of this framing and metric have said that it is a dressed-up version of former President Donald Trump's America First approach—simply removing the fearmongering or demonizing of the Trump years on topics like global engagement, trade, or immigration. However, that is an unnuanced, cynical view of this administration's approach to foreign policy decision-making. While there remains a focus on domestic investments to spur international influence and strengthen national security, the Biden approach centers on an appeal to our better angels. It understands that the potential to create a foreign policy and national security strategy that will achieve this administration's goals lies in not only the policies themselves, but also re-envisioning the makeup of the team who will make and carry them out and how we structure the institution tasked with pursuing these policy goals.

To get to the heart of Sullivan's question, however, the approach cannot only consist of engaging the people who already play an outsized role in the shaping of our foreign policy—people who are already embedded in the establishment. To truly build a foreign policy for the middle class, our foreign policy decision makers and practitioners must be of the middle class, bridging the divide between the folks who are traditionally recruited to work in this field and those who are too often shut out of these conversations.

There are two approaches that are essential to achieving a foreign policy of the middle class. First, we need to recognize that we must make a greater effort to fundamentally alter how we recruit and train our diplomats and other foreign policy practitioners to be more reflective of the American people. This would change the face and culture of what former Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes called "the Blob," which is the foreign policymaking establishment that, following 9/11, erred more on the side of interventionist decisions. Second, foreign policy practitioners must engage at all levels of government and civil society to learn from the people who would be impacted by the decisions made in Washington. Both approaches are essential to have a successful foreign policy strategy that positively impacts the American people in their everyday lives.

Changing the Face of the State Department: Recruiting a Foreign Service that Reflects America

In early 2021, articles with the headlines "The State Department Has a Systemic Diversity Problem"⁴ and "The State Department Has a Diversity Problem" ran in *Politico* and *Foreign Policy* respectively. The Department of State, established in 1789, is the nation's oldest cabinet department. It has a tradition of recruiting from and deepening ties with institutions and populations that have a history of being well-represented within the Department's ranks. According to the Truman Center's March 2021 report "Transforming State: Pathways to a More Just, Equitable, and Innovative Institution," "racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and discrimination based on disability have challenged the State Department since its inception."⁵ The report specifically cites the lack of diversity in the Department, and references a Governmental Accountability Office (GAO) report that indicated "the State Department is behind other

federal agencies in employing ... historically underrepresented groups, especially at senior levels.” Moreover, the GAO reported “that Black women made up 2 percent of the Foreign Service in 2002, and the number only went up to 3 percent in 2018,” with “racial or ethnic minorities in State’s Civil Service ... 4 percent to 29 percent less likely to be promoted than their white coworkers with similar education, occupation, or years of federal service.”⁶

Not only does the State Department have a diversity problem, simply by the numbers, it also has no chance of fixing it using its current recruitment and promotion toolkit. For example, alumni groups and social networks are important tools that are often used in recruiting and door-opening, but they also play a role in perpetuating the cycle of students from elite institutions entering policy positions, creating an insular pipeline of talent. While the study by the GAO revealed that roughly nine percent of the 23,160 Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) examined in a study from 2002 through 2018 had a degree from an Ivy League university, their odds of earning a promotion are significantly higher than their non-Ivy-pedigreed colleagues. At times throughout their careers, the odds of earning a promotion are more than 20 percent higher for FSOs who attended an Ivy League university than those who did not.⁷

State must proactively increase its university engagement to bring more diverse young people from outside of these Ivy League bubbles into the fold. Professors who teach and research at public universities and colleges—particularly Historically Black Colleges and Universities—are often themselves ex-practitioners or well-connected within this space, usually having policy experience or high levels of engagement with policymakers as part of their work. They should be given the tools by State to work with bright, talented young people who would be an asset to foreign policy and national security and encourage their students to avail themselves of opportunities to embark on careers in these fields, such as the Presidential Management Fellowship, the Pickering Fellowship, and the Rangel Fellowship.

This conversation on reforming the Department also comes at a time when corporate America is facing a reckoning of how to diversify corporate board rooms.⁸ Unsurprisingly, the policy recommendations for diversifying these spaces—both corporate America and the public sector’s oldest cabinet post—are very similar. The Center for American Progress suggests that corporations could consider “partnering with new membership or entrepreneurship organizations in diverse communities—such as the National Urban League, the NAACP, the National Council of Negro Women, the Black Economic Alliance, and the National Economics Association—to identify potential Black candidates.”⁹ Indeed, active engagement with minority social groups, business coalitions, or even religious groups could be pathways for the State Department to consider when attempting to widen the recruitment net for the next class of the Foreign Service.

There are two other important approaches to consider when engaging individuals from a variety of backgrounds earlier to show the possibilities of careers available in the foreign policy apparatus. First, similar to the way that various branches of our military recruit within our high schools, colleges, and universities, the State Department should consider establishing a Junior Foreign Service Corps, which would function like the Reserve Officers’ Training Corps. This would create a pipeline of junior officers that would be prepared to serve in the Foreign Service upon completion of the program. Second, Americans should be exposed to the variety of roles within the State Department that are not policy-related or Foreign Service Officer positions. This will offer not only a wider array of opportunities to serve, but also break the misconception that working for the State Department or other national agencies requires a degree from an elite university or interest in the policymaking aspect of the national security apparatus. This includes promoting Foreign Service Specialist positions including Medical Officer roles, Office Manager positions, Diplomatic Security, Regional English Language Officers (we have former educators in the field at embassies around the world to promote the teaching and learning of American English as a tool in the public diplomacy toolkit), and Construction Engineers. Each of these positions can open doors to foreign policy and national security careers to populations that may not otherwise consider working in this arena.

National leaders in the international affairs decision-making space, like Congressman Joaquín Castro (D-TX-20), Vice Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and co-chair of the Truman Center report, are leading the charge at the congressional level to codify measures that would create hard, statutory means and requirements to increase diversity at the State Department. Congressman Castro has been vocally critical of the Department’s efforts, or lack thereof, to diversify its ranks, saying that “for years, the State Department has failed to look like the face of our country and the lack of diversity in the diplomatic corps is appalling.”¹⁰

To this end, Congressman Castro and several others introduced H.R. 4589, the Diversity and Inclusion at the Department of State Act, which, according to the Congressional Budget Office, “would require the Department of State to take several steps to promote diversity and inclusion in the department’s workforce and operations and to report annually to the Congress on those efforts.” The bill establishes a position of Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer and ensures there are senior advisors tasked with a similar role in each of the department’s bureaus. The legislation also mandates the implementation of mentorship programs “for employees in underrepresented groups by pairing them with more experienced employees,” and would establish a “council of leaders to coordinate policy and initiatives promoting diversity and inclusion.”

An important factor to consider when recruiting a more diverse workforce is the barriers to entry into the State Department that underrepresented populations may face. Along with Congressman Lee Zeldin (R-NY-1), Congressman Castro is also the lead sponsor of bipartisan legislation that would provide funding for the State Department to pay its interns,¹¹ which is an important step that would help to level the playing field for those who may not be able to afford to work an unpaid internship.

Meeting Americans Where They Are: Making the Case for Why Diplomacy Matters

In addition to recruiting a workforce that is more reflective of the diversity of America, the Department must also make some structural changes that will make diplomacy more relevant and accessible to the American people. The Truman Center’s report outlines several potential opportunities for further engaging the American people, namely the creation of a National Diplomacy University that is modeled on the Department of Defense’s National Defense University, which would be a great way to ensure easy access to continuing education for the vast workforce of the Department. The report also suggests the creation of several other offices that could expand the American people’s imagination and conception of what diplomacy is and what it can be. (While admirable, some of the offices suggested, like the Office of Entertainment Diplomacy, could simply be functions of a gutsier and more outgoing public affairs approach, rather than a separate office entirely.) However, there is one office that should be created to deepen engagement with those who engage in diplomacy and trade at other levels of government. As our world becomes more connected at the individual level, and with local and state governments pursuing transnational relationships through partnerships like sister cities and trade missions, the State Department could better understand and facilitate local diplomatic relationships through the creation of an Office of State and Local Diplomacy within the department, helping to ensure some of the key diversity and equity measures are met while these engagements are happening. In July 2021, Congressman Ted Lieu (D-CA-33) reintroduced the City and State Diplomacy Act (HR 4526) with bipartisan support,¹² and Senators Chris Murphy (D-CT) and John Cornyn (R-TX) introduced similar legislation in the Senate.¹³ The legislation would codify the creation of an Office of City and State Diplomacy, which would be led by an Ambassador-at-Large, “to maintain international networks and reduce duplication and inefficiency in outreach by mayors and governors to create jobs, promote economic development, improve public health, and protect the environment.”¹⁴

There are many ways that a future State and Local Diplomacy office could be utilized, including through the expansion of the Pearson Fellowship for the Foreign Service and additional civil service positions, for which the Truman Center advocates. This could allow for up to 60 fellows to be placed in every state and tribal territory, thus providing an on-the-ground linkage back to Washington to ensure that policymaking is not simply a top-down exercise in imposition. A re-imagined role of a Pearson Fellow could be one that functions as an interlocutor between other State Department staff—such as those serving as a Diplomats in Residence—and alumni of the Department and of its exchange programs, and international relations-focused non-profits and forums, like the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

A person in the role could also develop relationships with local and state-level elected and appointed leaders working in this space, presenting potential opportunities for collaboration in the context of city and state diplomacy or with the public to engage groups often siloed from traditional foreign policy channels, and creating a formal way to determine the success of such engagements through data collection and benchmarking. Developing relationships with local and state leaders, like statehouse members or county-level officials, could help leaders who have great potential but little experience in this arena further their understanding about the importance of international engagement at their level of governing—and potentially even provide the Department another pipeline of informal advisors or future employees.

For example, in late August 2021, I—in my capacity as a member of the House of Representatives of the state of Michigan—hosted Earl Provost, the Ontario Agent-General in Chicago for a roundtable in Birmingham with county and city officials, including Oakland County Executive Dave Coulter, Birmingham Mayor Pierre Boutros, and economic development officials from both the county and city. Canada and the State of Michigan have a long-standing relationship dating back to before Michigan's statehood. People in the local community can tangibly see the impact of this relationship in everything from the price of a gallon of gasoline at the pump, to seeing Canadian brands, such as the iconic Roots apparel store, when walking downtown. Further developing these natural relationships between local communities and different countries or cities, including leaning into Sister City relationships, is a way for communities to bring foreign policy and diplomacy to the local level, making the pursuit of these relationships meaningful and worthwhile to the people local leaders serve. While my previous work experience and university background in international affairs was crucial to convening the aforementioned meeting, not all elected officials have the experiences that would lend themselves to making or fostering these relationships. Having a Pearson Fellow assist in making these relationships and connections would be a tremendous asset to bringing the work of the Department to more Americans.

Conclusion

For the Biden administration's "Foreign Policy for the Middle Class" approach to diplomacy to be successful, there are some major structural shifts that must happen. The State Department should modernize its approach to recruitment and retention of staff, not only to ensure they are recruiting the best and brightest our nation has to offer in this field, but also so that the new staff that is recruited—as well as the staff that remains in the department year after year—is reflective of the diversity of the people and individual experiences of our country. This will help ensure that the diplomacy of our nation is a product of the needs of the American people, specifically opening doors for middle class Americans to see themselves reflected in diplomatic engagement. There also must be a fresh approach to engaging the American people by bringing the work of the Department to places where diplomacy is often happening without any State Department engagement, namely through the creation of the Office of State and Local Diplomacy. Instead of viewing these necessary changes as burdens that a department with a long and rich history must bear, these changes can and should be viewed as great opportunities to improve the work of the Department and chart a new course for stronger, deeper diplomatic relationships in the future at all levels of government, which will result in real benefits for the United States domestically, as well as opportunities for the United States to lead and be competitive on the world stage.

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- ¹⁰ Congressman Joaquín Castro, "Congressman Castro Introduces Comprehensive Bill to Promote Diversity and Inclusion at the U.S. Department of State," news release, July 21, 2021, <https://castro.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/congressman-castro-introduces-comprehensive-legislative-to-promote-state-statement-diversity-and-inclusion>.
- ¹¹ U.S. Congress, House, "To Establish the Department of State Student Internship Program as a Paid Internship Program to Provide Students with the Opportunity to Learn About a Career in Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs, and for Other Purposes," HR 1109, 117th Cong., 1st sess., introduced in House February 18, 2001, <https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr1109/BILLS-117hr1109ih.pdf>.
- ¹² U.S. Congress, House, "To Establish an Office of City and State Diplomacy Within the Department of State, and for Other Purposes" HR 4526, 117th Cong., 1st sess., introduced in House July 19, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/117/bills/hr4526/BILLS-117hr4526ih.pdf>.
- ¹³ Senator Chris Murphy, "Murphy, Cornyn Introduce Legislation to Establish City and State Diplomacy," news release, October 26, 2021, <https://www.murphy.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/murphy-cornyn-introduce-legislation-to-establish-city-and-state-diplomacy>.
- ¹⁴ Senator Chris Murphy, Murphy, Cornyn Introduce Legislation to Establish City and State Diplomacy," news release, October 26, 2021, <https://www.murphy.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/murphy-cornyn-introduce-legislation-to-establish-city-and-state-diplomacy>.