



10 Steps for the United States to Succeed in a Complex Era of Great Power Competition

A White Paper
30 July 2020

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By John Rood with contributions from Greg Treverton¹

1 *The scale and complexity of the national security challenges facing the United States are unprecedented—and getting worse. The first step to success is a clear understanding of the complexity and nature of the challenges facing America today.*

There are many major national security challenges occurring simultaneously that in earlier periods *individually* would have dominated the focus of the government’s senior decision-makers. Dealing with multiple major challenges and crises at the same time is today’s reality. The stakes are higher too as we emerge from three decades of the post-Cold War period when the United States did not face a major threat to its security or to the values and individual freedoms cherished by Americans.

Heading the list of national security priorities is the global COVID-19 pandemic that as of July 28, 2020 has killed over 147,000 Americans and infected over four million others.² The pandemic has pushed the U.S. and global economy into recession and strained U.S. relationships with friends and allies and competitors alike. Dealing with the effects of the pandemic on U.S. national security, our alliances, and the Department of Defense (DoD) enterprise will be a major focus. The DoD enterprise alone is larger in scale and complexity than many countries, with about three million military and civilian personnel at hundreds of locations across the globe³, annual budgets and assets larger than the budgets of most countries, and healthcare, education, and repair and maintenance operations on par with many national systems.

Preparing to deal with future pandemics will be a major focus as well. Since the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003 that infected people in 29 countries⁴, the world experienced two other epidemics that threatened to grow to the scale observed in the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2009, the H1N1 (or swine flu) pandemic began. According the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in the United States there were over 60 million cases during the first year of the pandemic that killed over 12,000 people. Additionally, the CDC estimates that 151,000–575,000 people worldwide died from H1N1 during the same time period.⁵ The Ebola

¹ John Rood served as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy from January 2018–February 2020. Greg Treverton served as Chairman of the National Intelligence Council from 2014–2017

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19 data and statistics, July 21, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html>

³ Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), Military and Civilian Personnel by Service/Agency by State/Country, https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp_reports.jsp, March 2020

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Revised U.S. Surveillance Case Definition for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Update on SARS Cases—United States and Worldwide, December 12, 2003, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5249a2.htm>

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009 H1N1 Pandemic, <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/2009-h1n1-pandemic.html>

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outbreaks in Africa from 2014–2016, with over 28,000 cases that killed over 11,000 people according to the CDC, also threatened to become a global pandemic.⁶ Given the frequency with which pandemics (or near misses) are occurring, this will be an area of much greater focus for senior decision-makers going forward.

Yet despite the enormous impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the other major national security challenges confronting the U.S. have not stood still during the pandemic. Competitors and adversaries have not been content to stay at home nor forgo taking advantage of the current situation to gain ground in their campaigns at America’s expense. In particular, the return of great power competition with Russia and China, particularly the rise of China, has raised the stakes tremendously and should be the dominant focus of our national security agencies. There are credible scenarios that could lead to armed conflict between the world’s major powers for the first time in decades.

Both China and Russia are challenging the rules-based international system put in place by the United States and its allies in the decades following World War II. Russia under Vladimir Putin has increasingly sought to dominate its neighbors and shown a greater willingness to use force against states, like Ukraine, or political opponents, such as the chemical weapons attack on Sergei Skripal in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2018.⁷ Russia has also used disinformation and interfered in democratic elections to undermine and weaken Western institutions. It seems intent on sowing discord to undermine solidarity in the West.

Ideological competition has returned as well, with China proclaiming its authoritarian political system led by the Chinese Communist Party superior to democracy and free markets. State ownership and control of the major pillars of the economy, media, and other major components of society are held up as providing superior economic growth, more equitable distribution of the benefits of society, and a better ability for authoritarian governments to deal decisively with challenges like the coronavirus pandemic. Across the globe, China portrays the U.S. as a declining power, and through initiatives like the One Belt, One Road Initiative is growing its overseas presence and influence, with the ambition to create nothing less than a new world order with Beijing at its center.

In the cyber domain, the U.S. has faced aggressive efforts by competitors like China and Russia that have struck at the core of America’s economic well-being and system of governance, including the theft of hundreds of billions of dollars of intellectual property and efforts to undermine confidence in democratic elections.⁸

In space, the United States also faces major—and growing—challenges. The U.S. has been the world’s foremost space-faring nation, in the process providing enormous benefits to our economy and society. From landing the first astronauts on the moon, to satellite communications, weather

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014–2016 Ebola Outbreak in West Africa, <https://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/history/2014-2016-outbreak/index.html>

⁷ Press Statement by Heather Nauert, State Department Spokesperson, August 8, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/imposition-of-chemical-and-biological-weapons-control-and-warfare-elimination-act-sanctions-on-russia/>

⁸ Report of U.S. Cyberspace Solarium Commission, March 2020, <https://www.solarium.gov/>

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monitoring, and the ubiquitous role of GPS in our lives, American innovations have led the way in providing both civil and military advantages for the world. Yet today, America's lead in space has eroded, and countries like China and Russia are challenging the U.S., acting in ways that put at risk the benefits we gain from space.⁹ Great power competition now extends to space, and America's past successes will not preserve our edge in the future.

Russia, China, and other states are also augmenting their nuclear weapons arsenals and other strategic weapons capabilities, like long-range missiles, including hypersonic and cruise missiles that threaten the United States. Over the last 20 years, the U.S. has substantially reduced its nuclear arsenal while Russia and China have gone the opposite direction.¹⁰ The U.S. is engaged in a major recapitalization of its nuclear triad in order to keep it vital to preserve deterrence.¹¹

The Defense Department is also working to catch up to Russian and Chinese advances in hypersonic weapons and to deal with the growing missile threat. This includes major programs to develop and field U.S. hypersonic missiles, as well as the continuing imperative to develop and maintain effective missile defenses to deal with a threat that continues to become larger and more advanced.¹²

Yet even with the scale and complexity of these major issues with the most consequential implications for America's security, other challenges also abound:

Afghanistan: America's longest war continues 18 years after it began following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. This has been a major focus for the Trump Administration, as it was for its predecessors. The conflict will continue to occupy substantial attention over the near-term to find a suitable end to the conflict in which Afghanistan does not again become a safe-haven from which al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups like ISIS can threaten the United States.

Notwithstanding the peace agreement with the Taliban signed by Secretary of State Pompeo on February 29, 2020, fighting continues in Afghanistan. The U.S., Afghan Government, and Taliban have accused each other of violating the terms of the agreement. Intra-Afghan negotiations that were scheduled to begin on March 10 under the peace agreement have yet to begin and seem unlikely right now.¹³ On May 12, Afghan President Ghani announced that Afghan forces would

⁹ Challenges to Security in Space, Defense Intelligence Agency, 2019, https://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/Space_Threat_V14_020119_sm.pdf

¹⁰ Page 9, Defense Department, 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, https://dod.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0218_npr/

¹¹ Defense Department, 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, https://dod.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/0218_npr/

¹² Prepared testimony of Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering Michael Griffin to House Armed Services Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, March 28, 2019

¹³ Washington Post, Afghanistan's civilian casualties rise following U.S.-Taliban peace deal, May 19, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/afghanistans-civilian-casualties-rise-following-us-taliban-peace-deal/2020/05/19/18c9e52a-99a6-11ea-ad79-eef7cd734641_story.html

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resume offensive operations against the Taliban.¹⁴ The U.S. publicly announced that under the peace agreement, it would reduce its troop presence to 8,600.¹⁵ Finding a way to achieve enough stability for the U.S. and our allies to draw down in Afghanistan remains a daunting challenge.

North Korea: Early in the Trump Administration, the North’s growing nuclear weapons and long-range missile capabilities arguably brought the U.S. and Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) the closest they have been to armed conflict since the Korean War. While tensions have subsided, they persist as the Administration continues the “Maximum Pressure Campaign” with allies and continues to pursue unprecedented personal diplomacy by President Trump with Kim Jong-un. During the Clinton Administration, similar concerns made North Korea a dominant security issue, yet today it competes for attention with a slew of other threats and on some days does not crack into the first tier.

Iran: The simmering low-intensity conflict between the United States and Iranian-backed militias came to a boil in January when the U.S. conducted a strike that killed the leader of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force, Qasem Solemani,¹⁶ and Iran retaliated by launching scores of missiles at a U.S. base in Iraq injuring 110 U.S. soldiers.¹⁷ This exchange was merely the culmination of smaller scale attacks and U.S. retaliation that had led the U.S. and Iran to the brink of a large-scale conflict, one with the potential to engulf the Middle East.¹⁸

Across the Middle East, the U.S. works with allies to counter Iran’s growing malign influence and to preserve freedom of navigation in the strategic Strait of Hormuz. Ongoing friction continues to pose a significant risk of leading to armed conflict.

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS): In President Obama’s second term, the growing threat from this global movement came to dominate the focus of national security agencies as the group conducted major attacks across Europe, Asia, Africa, and the U.S. while its expanding “caliphate” threatened the overthrow of the Iraqi government. During the Trump Administration, the U.S. and its allies, particularly the Syrian Democratic Forces and Iraqi armed forces, completed the destruction of the so-called “caliphate.” U.S. forces also killed the leader of ISIS, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in perhaps the most spectacular counter-terrorism raid since the death of Osama bin Laden.

¹⁴ Washington Post, Brutal attack on mothers and newborns prompts Afghanistan to resume offensive operations against Taliban, May 12, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/gunmen-storm-kabul-maternity-ward-killing-13-including-2-newborns/2020/05/12/416a9174-9428-11ea-87a3-22d324235636_story.html

¹⁵ U.S.-Taliban agreement as posted on State Department website, February 29, 2020, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Agreement-For-Bringing-Peace-to-Afghanistan-02.29.20.pdf>

¹⁶ Department of Defense Press Release, Statement of the Defense Department, January 2, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2049534/statement-by-the-department-of-defense/>

¹⁷ ABC News, 29 soldiers receive Purple Hearts following Iran missile attack, May 5, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/29-soldiers-receive-purple-hearts-iran-missile-attack/story?id=70510632>

¹⁸ New York Times, Iran Quietly Lowers the Temperature with U.S., May 19, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/19/world/middleeast/iran-us-relations.html>

Yet ISIS remains active and growing around the world. In many ways, ISIS has taken the mantle from al-Qaeda as the most prominent hardline Islamist terrorist group. While al-Qaeda continues to attract adherents and remains active globally, particularly in Africa, it increasingly competes with ISIS and in some cases this friction has erupted into armed conflict between the groups.

Even where it has suffered setbacks, ISIS has proven resilient. The group threatens to regain territory in Syria and Iraq, where the U.S. and its allies continue to have troops deployed and engaged in combat operations. In Africa, U.S. troops are engaged in counter-terrorism operations against ISIS (and al-Qaeda), and the U.S. works closely through the 82 member Defeat ISIS Coalition to counter the growth of the group's affiliates in other locations like Southeast Asia and Europe.¹⁹

Syria/Iraq: U.S. troops remain deployed in Syria and Iraq where they work with local forces and NATO Allies to conduct combat operations against ISIS, train and build the capacity of these local forces to eventually take over these missions on their own, and counter Iran's growing influence in the region.

Both Syria and Iraq present immensely complex political and military challenges. Iran's leaders have publicly discussed their intentions to work with proxies in Iraq to drive the U.S. out of the country, combining continued military pressure with action by the Iraqi parliament to expel U.S. forces.²⁰ Being forced out of Iraq would be a strategic defeat for the United States and a major victory in Iran's campaign to dominate the region.

In Syria, Bashar al-Assad's government, with support from Russian and Iranian forces, has brutally suppressed the revolution that threatened his rule, killing over 500,000 of his own people in the process.²¹ Here too, Iran and Russia seek to push the U.S. out of Syria, and for Russia this is the primary area in which Moscow believes it can cement its role as a major power broker in the region, thus reducing U.S. influence.

Israel: Israel has engaged in a set of ongoing military operations against Iran's presence in Syria. Israeli leaders like Prime Minister Netanyahu have publicly and repeatedly stressed that Israel will not tolerate Iranian military positions in Syria near its borders and have fought to turn back the tide of this encroachment. Israel has publicly encouraged the U.S. to retain its military presence in Syria. The U.S. maintains deep defense and security relations with Israel, and when tensions flare in the region, senior decision-makers will need to spend considerable time working that connection.

¹⁹ Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS website, <https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/>

²⁰ Newsweek, Iran Refutes Reports of Syria Withdrawal, Wants to Partner with Iraq to Expel U.S. from Middle East, May 19, 2020, <https://www.newsweek.com/iran-refute-reports-syria-withdrawal-ties-iraq-mideast-1505219>, and AFP, Iran's Khamenei says US will be expelled from Iraq, Syria, May 17, 2020, <https://news.yahoo.com/irans-khamenei-says-us-expelled-iraq-syria-194325280.html>

²¹ Reuters, Syrian Observatory says war has killed more than half a million, March 12, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria/syrian-observatory-says-war-has-killed-more-than-half-a-million-idUSKCN1G013M>

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The Trump Administration recently rolled out a major peace initiative with Israel. Peace initiatives in the Middle East have been a major focus for senior leaders of past administrations. This time, the Trump Administration's Middle East Peace Plan, led by Jared Kushner, has been well-received in Israel, but Palestinian leaders have rejected it and serious negotiations seem unlikely.

Turkey: Turkey has occupied portions of northern Syria, which has caused major disruptions to U.S. military activities in the area and threatened to unravel hard fought gains achieved against ISIS. U.S. work with the Syrian Democratic Forces, led by Kurdish groups that Turkey considers a threat to its stability and a terrorist group, has been the primary strain in bilateral relations. Those relations have been growing more strained for several years as President Erdogan implements authoritarian rule by his Islamist party, bolters relations with Russia, and becomes more disruptive within North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

NATO/Europe: NATO remains the most successful military alliance in history and is a substantial asset to the U.S. ability to counter threats around the globe, including Russia's efforts to undermine Western democracies and threaten their sovereignty. A major Trump Administration initiative to boost burden-sharing and to keep NATO "fit for its purpose" has borne fruit with allies increasing defense budgets by \$130 billion since President Trump took office, improving readiness in the process.²²

Yet, the transatlantic alliance has seen substantial strains from a campaign by some in the European Union (EU) to pursue a more independent defense and foreign policy in ways that undermine NATO. The UK's Brexit decision has removed the traditional brake within the EU on efforts by France and the European Commission to create parallel structures to those used by NATO for things such as command and control, defense investments, and even operational deployment of forces. These efforts undermine transatlantic cohesion and could lead to a decoupling of security ties. This will continue to require significant attention from senior leaders if the U.S. is to retain its traditionally strong alliance relationships in Europe, ones that have been a major strength in our ability to deal with the greatest threats to America's security.

Indo-Pacific: Over the coming decades, global influence, trade, and wealth are projected to continue to shift to the Indo-Pacific region. The U.S. is a Pacific power, and the health of our economy and national security is increasingly tied to this vital region. China is also determined to dominate the region and undermine both U.S. influence and the rules-based international system. It is therefore essential that the United States strengthen our relationships with existing allies in the region and develop deep relationships with new friends and allies. The U.S. will need to continue shifting its military presence and capabilities to the region, which will also require agreements with host governments.

²² NATO press release, NATO Secretary General announces increased defence spending by Allies, November 29, 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_171458.htm?selectedLocale=en

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And there are many other challenges that will also occupy the attention of senior decision-makers. Below are a sample in order of priority:

- The erosion of **U.S. technology leadership** in key areas like telecommunications and fifth generation technology (5G);
- Preserving the ability of the U.S. **defense industrial base** to maintain our technological edge, while reducing supply chain vulnerability to disruption and penetration in critical areas like semiconductors, cyber, telecommunications, and rare earth elements;
- Preserving and growing relationships with U.S. allies in the **Arabian Gulf**—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain—that play a major role in the region and global energy markets;
- Developing a sustainable and effective approach to the **Arctic**, which will soon play a major role in global commerce as climate change opens up northern shipping routes, and where Russia and China have taken significant steps to be the dominant players in this region of growing economic and security importance;
- Addressing the growth of terrorist groups affiliated with ISIS and al-Qaeda in **Africa**, and China and Russia’s growing influence on the continent; and
- Dealing with challenges in **South and Central America** such as China’s growing presence in the region, Venezuela under the Maduro regime, the drug trade with heavily armed cartels, and mass migration.

2 *What to do about all these challenges? The National Defense Strategy (NDS) provides an outstanding blueprint for how to deal with them, setting clear priorities and making tough choices.²³ Step 2 in a successful approach lies in implementing the strategy, including the tough choices it makes.*

Since its release two years ago, the NDS has been implemented by the DoD leadership to a greater extent than major strategies in the past. Across the DoD enterprise, it is understood as providing strong guidance for how to operate and plan. Strategy-driven budgets have matched the NDS priorities, and the document has been used to guide tough decisions about posture, readiness, and doctrine.

The strategy clearly identifies great power competition with China and Russia—including their efforts to challenge both the international rules-based system and the sovereignty of other nations—as the primary threats that need to be addressed. Of these two threats, China is ranked as the greatest long-term danger. North Korea, Iran, and terrorism are identified as the next highest priority threats. The prioritization is simplified as “2+3” in ranking threats. To address them, the NDS sets out three lines of effort:

- **Increase the lethality of the force.** A clear recognition that the U.S. military’s highest calling must be to prevail in combat against all adversaries. The guidance to DoD elements is to focus on activities that ultimately result in increasing the ability of the force to prevail in

²³ Department of Defense, 2018 National Defense Strategy, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>

combat as a more lethal force, and to avoid activities that don't contribute to what must be the critical essence of our military.

- **Strengthen alliances and attract new partners.** To compete effectively in global competitions with the world's major powers, the United States must have strong alliances and capable partners. This has been a core competency of the United States and was critical to our success in World War II and the Cold War when we were last locked in struggles with the world's largest powers.
- **Reform the Department for greater performance and affordability.** This has been a major focus for the Department's leadership and will remain so going forward as the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will squeeze budgets.

While DoD remains committed to implementing the NDS, world events and the dizzying array of challenges facing the U.S. make fulfilling the strategy a challenge. For example, the NDS calls for reducing resources committed to the Middle East to give greater focus to the Pacific. Yet tensions with Iran and the risk of conflict have led DoD to increase, not decrease, force deployments to the region in recent months. The NDS calls for less emphasis on Africa as an economy of force theater. Here too, the growing threat from terrorism has challenged implementation.

3 *Recognize that the major challenges facing the United States need whole-of-government responses. The administration has struggled to form and implement multi-agency plans, and parts of the government outside DoD at times diverge from the priorities established in the NDS. Doing better in this area should be a key focus for senior leaders going forward.*

The DoD culture seeks to match resource allocations with priorities. Resource allocations are a zero-sum effort, for if troops or funding are increased against one threat or deployed to one part of the world, then they are unavailable for other challenges.

While the NDS is consistent with the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) released by President Trump, the need to adhere to the NSS priorities and a commitment to its implementation is not always adhered to by key players at the State Department, National Security Council (NSC), or others in the White House (to include President Trump). The United States must ruthlessly prioritize and take care to prevent various regional challenges such as the Maduro regime in Venezuela, the conflict in Libya, or even countering more serious threats like Iran to siphon scarce resources away from our highest national security priority of great power competition with China and Russia.

The stakes are too high in great power competition to do otherwise. Failure in the competition with China and Russia would jeopardize America's freedoms and values, our economic well-being, and the safety and security of our people. The stakes in other areas are simply not in the same league in terms of their potential consequences.

4 *Focus on creating and maintaining close and enduring relationships with Allies and partners, which is critical for the United States to succeed in great power competition. Defense and intelligence relationships are especially important as they serve as a “ballast” that steadies the ship through the inevitable ups and downs in relationships that occur over the years.*

Relationships with allies and partners in the defense and intelligence spheres take many years to build. Trust must be gained for nations to commit their sons and daughters to dangerous missions in combat together. The infrastructure of defense and intelligence relationships also takes time to build, with delicate arrangements at times requiring great pains to sustain.

Arrangements for basing forces, agreements on the nature of training and operations permitted by the host government, particularly those involving more sensitive or dangerous operations like aircraft flight operations and live fire training for ground troops, and the myriad legal agreements for things such as information sharing, movement of people and equipment through customs and other taxation procedures, environmental regulations, etc. typically take several years to negotiate. Building interoperability can take a generation as new equipment is procured and standard interfaces developed. Joint planning, training, command arrangements, information security practices and other ways to operate effectively with allies can take many years to mature to the level of readiness and combat capabilities that U.S. forces have attained with allies and partners like South Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and with NATO members.

Strong relationships with non-state partners are also critical. Over the course of 20 years of hard-learned lessons in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency warfare, the U.S. has also learned the critical importance of working “by, with, and through” local partners to achieve lasting success.²⁴ Such partners have the local knowledge, cultural sensitivity, and networks to collect intelligence and act effectively. In the fight against ISIS in Syria and Iraq, the United States worked closely with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a non-state group of Kurds and Arabs who did the bulk of the fighting and suffered the bulk of the casualties to liberate ISIS’s so-called “caliphate.”²⁵ In Iraq, Peshmerga fighters from the Kurdistan region played a critical role in rolling back the gains of ISIS. U.S. forces played the role of enablers, while the local partner forces did the bulk of the front-line fighting.

In both cases, putting in place stabilization efforts and local governance after clearing terrorist groups from the territory was critical. Doing so with non-state groups proved more effective than past U.S. efforts by American and coalition troops who were foreign to the area and conducted clearing operations only to struggle with preventing insurgency and terrorist cells from returning.

²⁴ Department of Defense report to Congress, Justification for FY 2020 Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) COUNTER-ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND SYRIA (ISIS) TRAIN AND EQUIP FUND (CTEF), March 2019, page 4

²⁵ Task and Purpose, US-backed group in Syria says it suffered more than 11,000 killed and 21,000 wounded fighting ISIS, March 25, 2019, <https://taskandpurpose.com/news/sdf-casualties-isis-syria>

Here too, trusted relationships are both crucial and difficult to maintain. Such relationships can't be easily built, and a loss of trust can end the partnership. If local partners view the United States as a fickle or unreliable partner who cannot be counted on in the breach, then we will not be able to attract future partners when we need them.

Counterterrorism and counter-insurgency partnerships with states are also key. At earlier periods of U.S. involvement in conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, U.S. forces played the lead role. For example, at the height of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, 100,000 American troops were deployed in that country along with about 30,000 coalition troops.²⁶ Later after transitioning to a strategy focused on supporting Afghan security forces, roughly a tenth as many American troops were deployed to Afghanistan and so U.S. casualties were much lower than in earlier phases of the conflict.²⁷

5 Give priority to Asia and the Indo-Pacific. One of the megatrends remaking the world is the ongoing shift of global wealth and influence toward Asia and the Indo-Pacific Ocean regions.

Countries like Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore were the first Asian economies to catch up to Western economies in the 1980s and 90s. Yet in the 30 years since then, China's economy has vaulted to become the world's second largest economy after the United States (and by Purchasing Power Parity is already the largest).

As the *Financial Times* pointed out in 2019 in an article on Asia's rapid economic growth:

"Asia is already home to more than half the world's population. Of the world's 30 largest cities, 21 are in Asia, according to UN data. By next year, Asia will also become home to half of the world's middle class...The *Financial Times* tallied the data, and found that Asian economies, as defined by the UN trade and development body UNCTAD, will be larger than the rest of the world combined in 2020, for the first time since the 19th century...to put this in perspective, Asia accounted for just over a third of the world output in 2000."²⁸

China's economic rise, the major growth in its military budget and capabilities, and Beijing's increasing assertiveness in challenging the U.S. and the international rules-based system are sufficient reason on their own to place greater emphasis on the region. However, several other Asian nations are poised to play a much bigger role on the world stage.

India has also seen its economy grow by about six times its size only 20 years ago, according to the World Bank and is today is the world's 7th largest economy as measured by GDP.²⁹ Many economists predict that in 2020, India's GDP will grow to surpass that of France and the UK,

²⁶ Associated Press, A Timeline of the U.S. Military Presence in Afghanistan, September 8, 2019, <https://apnews.com/fd2ec2085b0b4fd3ae0a3b03c6de9478>, and BBC News, Afghanistan War: Trump's Allies and Troop Numbers, August 22, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-41014263>

²⁷ Associated Press, A Timeline of the U.S. Military Presence in Afghanistan, September 8, 2019, <https://apnews.com/fd2ec2085b0b4fd3ae0a3b03c6de9478>

²⁸ Financial Times, The Asian Century is Set to Begin, March 25, 2019

²⁹ 9 Incredible Facts About India's Economy, John Stevens, *Markets Insider*, July 23, 2019

making it the world's 5th largest economy.³⁰ India boasts a large military that is increasingly capable, and it has slowly begun to exert more political clout internationally. Over the past 25 years, the United States' relationship with India has improved tremendously, and today the world's two largest democracies have much in common; political, economic, and military cooperation is at an all-time high and continuing to grow. The U.S.–India relationship shows great promise for the future and should remain a major focus for senior U.S. leaders.

Care should be given to maintaining and continuing to grow traditional relations with U.S. allies and partners like Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines. While challenging at times, these relationships are at the core of the U.S. successfully operating in the region and countering China's growing influence.

Key opportunities to build new allies are also present in Asia, particularly with Vietnam and Indonesia. Vietnam is one of Asia's fastest growing economies. In recent years, U.S.–Vietnam relations have surged, with the former foes engaging in defense trade, holding military exchanges, and cooperating to deal with shared challenges such as China's aggressive steps to claim much of the South China Sea as its territorial waters. Geographically, Vietnam lies along the flank of the South China Sea, making it key terrain.

In Indonesia, the U.S. has sought to rebuild defense relations torn apart by human rights abuses by Indonesian military officers in earlier decades. Indonesia sits along strategic waterways through which roughly half of the world's maritime traffic flows. According to the World Bank, the economy of Indonesia, which is the world's fourth most populous country, continues to experience impressive economic growth. It is the 16th largest economy in the world by GDP, and 10th largest when measured in Purchasing Power Parity.³¹

The U.S. has significantly improved its defense relationship with Indonesia in the past couple of years, getting past most of the legacy human rights issues. A substantial opportunity exists to build a more lasting defense relationship. This could be a major part of an effective U.S. strategy to build a new constellation of allies to preserve a free and open Indo-Pacific region in response to China's increasingly aggressive stance in the region.

6 *Pool resources in coordinated efforts with allies to provide a key advantage in great power competition. This is one of the primary requisites of success for the United States in this era of intensifying great power competition; without it we are unlikely to prevail.*

With the smallest military force since World War II, the United States must deal with a myriad of challenges, including facing a larger military force in China and a large Russian military force both armed with increasingly sophisticated capabilities. In critical areas such as telecommunications infrastructure (including 5G), cyber, intelligence-gathering, export controls, and effective responses to global health emergencies like pandemics, close coordination and pooling of resources offer major advantages.

³⁰ 9 Incredible Facts About India's Economy, John Stevens, *Markets Insider*, July 23, 2019

³¹ The World Bank in Indonesia, www.worldbank.org, updated April 7, 2020

10 Steps for the United States to Succeed in a Complex Era of Great Power Competition



A shared outlook on the world and common values are major ingredients of success in persuading nations to pool resources in structures like NATO. For example, the U.S. must continue to gather the momentum it has started to gain in persuading allies of the major challenge posed by China and of the need for coordinated action in response.

7 *Recognize that the information age continues to transform our lives and act with urgency to succeed. The U.S. must step up its efforts in areas like cyber, information operations, and artificial intelligence as the ability to manage, protect, and use information could be the defining characteristic of success in modern warfare and intelligence.*

In recent decades, the U.S. has enjoyed information dominance on the battlefield. Advances in information-enabled military operations provided by the Global Positioning System (GPS), rapid satellite communications, and the situational awareness of knowing where both adversary and friendly forces are operating has provided the U.S. military with a major edge. This edge is now being tested as Russia and China develop advanced capabilities for cyber, electronic warfare, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. Advances in artificial intelligence also hold the promise of transforming warfare, and China and Russia have put a priority on developing world-class capabilities. Operating without an information edge would put U.S. forces at a major disadvantage, particularly against a much larger Chinese military.

The U.S. and its allies should continue to deepen their capabilities for cyber operations and give them the same priority as given to other forces used on land, sea, in the air and in space. A greater recognition of the blending between offensive and defensive operations in the information realm is also important. Like effective counterterrorism which cannot simply be a “goal line” defense and requires operations conducted in forward theaters to disrupt terrorist groups and their operations, the same is true for cyber. As the Defense Department’s 2018 Cyber Strategy states, “The Department must take action in cyberspace during day-to-day competition to preserve U.S. military advantages and to defend U.S. interests. Our focus will be on the States that can pose strategic threats to U.S. prosperity and security, particularly China and Russia. We will conduct cyberspace operations to collect intelligence and prepare military cyber capabilities to be used in the event of crisis or conflict. We will defend forward to disrupt or halt malicious cyber activity at its source, including activity that falls below the level of armed conflict. We will strengthen the security and resilience of networks and systems that contribute to current and future U.S. military advantages. We will collaborate with our interagency, industry, and international partners to advance our mutual interests.

During wartime, U.S. cyber forces will be prepared to operate alongside our air, land, sea, and space forces to target adversary weaknesses, offset adversary strengths, and amplify the effectiveness of other elements of the Joint Force. Adversary militaries are increasingly reliant on the same type of computer and network technologies that have become central to Joint Force warfighting. The Department will exploit this reliance to gain military advantage. The Joint Force will

employ offensive cyber capabilities and innovative concepts that allow for the use of cyberspace operations across the full spectrum of conflict.”³²

Preserving this information edge requires not only preserving the ability of U.S. and allied forces to withstand electronic warfare and cyber-attacks or to use them in offensive attacks of their own. We must also recognize that diplomacy and warfare involve shaping perceptions of friends and adversaries alike, and that information age approaches need to be developed.

In one of the ironies of the early phase of the information age, the U.S. and other Western societies which invented and popularized the ubiquitous use of the internet and social media have found themselves less adept at using these tools to shape opinion than authoritarian regimes and terrorist groups. Russia, China, the Taliban, ISIS, and others have developed well-honed approaches to using information and disinformation to shape the narrative, influence world opinion, and at times to sow divisions and create tensions within the societies they regard as their adversaries.

The U.S. and its allies need to develop the ability to act and respond at the speed of relevance to proactively shape the narrative initially, and adapt and respond as needed throughout a campaign, as the information space evolves. The information space should be seen as another field where competition will occur—sometimes over very extended periods.

The U.S. and its allies also need to get dramatically better at countering disinformation and efforts by adversaries to sow divisions. Mark Twain once observed that, “A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.” That was before the internet was invented. Today that lie can circle the globe many times in that same period while government officials work through cumbersome clearance processes to make a remark or post a comment. We must develop new approaches and new procedures that move at the speed of relevance in the information age, so we no longer cede this advantage to our adversaries.

8 *Look to the skies to see where the next conflict could start as adversaries are increasingly turning to space and missiles to negate U.S. advantages. The U.S. must elevate our focus and attention to dealing with this trend.*

Space has become a contested domain as Russia, China, and other potential adversaries look both to put at risk U.S. advantages and gain an edge themselves. Reliable access to space is essential to enable critical functions like communications; positioning, navigation, and timing; and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. As competitors gain greater capabilities, the U.S. must move to a more resilient space architecture capable of both offensive and defensive operations.

As the Defense Department’s 2019 Missile Defense Review pointed out, potential adversaries are fielding an increasingly diverse range of modern missiles that threaten the U.S. and its allies

³² 2018 Department of Defense Cyber Strategy, page 1, https://media.defense.gov/2018/Sep/18/2002041658/-1/-1/1/CYBER_STRATEGY_SUMMARY_FINAL.PDF

and partners.³³ It is noteworthy that when nations—the United States, Israel, South Korea, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, for instance—have obtained substantial advantages over their adversaries with capable air forces, these adversaries have turned more and more to missiles as an alternative and less costly response.

For example, Iran and North Korea have both fielded large and capable missile forces rather than seek parity in the air.³⁴ The same is true for China, which has deployed a large and advanced missile force capable of striking its neighbors and continues to grow its long-range missile force capable of striking the United States.³⁵ With an array of capabilities available, Iran chose to launch scores of missiles at U.S. forces to respond to the strike that killed Qasem Solemani, injuring 110 U.S. troops.³⁶ Missiles are seen as providing an edge to adversaries and the U.S. must continue to invest in significant missile defenses to defend our people, deployed forces, allies, and to preserve our freedom of action.

9 *Seek out the best expertise where you can find it. Look to leverage advances and expertise in the commercial world.*

The edge in technology, analytics, and expertise enjoyed by America’s defense and national security establishment over the commercial sector continues to erode, and in many sectors the commercial world has outpaced government efforts. Yet barriers to entry remain for commercial companies, which regularly point to the difficulty of doing business with the Defense Department and Intelligence Community as reasons they focus purely on commercial endeavors.

Advanced analytics and modeling capabilities have also lagged in the government compared to the private sector. There is much that the Defense Department and Intelligence Community could gain from closer collaboration with the commercial technology sector. For example, military officers are taught symbols and techniques to depict the lines of friendly and opposing forces on the battlefield. Yet today’s battlefields increasingly reside in the realms of cyber, electronic warfare, and in space where tools to analyze and visualize interactions between friendly and opposing forces are lacking. It is simple to depict where an enemy armored column has broken through friendly lines and how friendly forces are maneuvering to counter it. What does that look like in cyber, across the electromagnetic spectrum, or in space?

The need to reach out for expertise outside of the government when necessary should include industry, academia, and even former officials when they can help. The reality is that in today’s complex security landscape, no department or agency, including the Defense Department and Intelligence Community has as much expertise resident in its halls as it would like.

³³ Department of Defense, 2019 Missile Defense Review, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jan/17/2002080666/-1/-1/1/2019-MISSILE-DEFENSE-REVIEW.PDF>

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ ABC News, 29 soldiers receive Purple Hearts following Iran missile attack, May 5, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/29-soldiers-receive-purple-hearts-iran-missile-attack/story?id=70510632>

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Recognize that American values are our greatest strength.

Despite the challenges and vigorous debates at home, American values and ideals of individual freedoms, democracy, human rights, free market capitalism, free expression, and innovation remain highly admired around the world. In the growing ideological competition we face, authoritarianism and state-led capitalism lack the ability to animate and touch the hearts and minds of people around the world in the same way as these American ideals.

During my tenure as Under Secretary of Defense, I regularly heard from nations around the world that the most powerful advantage that the United States possessed was our values and a call for us to be more vocal in promoting them to counter the growth of authoritarianism led by China and Russia. The current passionate discussion, debate, and protests in the United States on racism and police reform should not dissuade us from promoting our values. It is because we live in an open society in which dissent, free speech, and free association are fundamental rights of all individuals that we can have these debates and protests and openly work to improve our society.

Government leaders need to take this lesson to heart and proactively remind all of the benefits of the rules-based approach used by the United States for international commerce, protection of intellectual property, resolution of disputes, and a deep belief in human rights and individual freedoms. We must take care to preserve the nature of our free and open society, including our free market economy which has been the source of America's relative prosperity.

To be sure, the United States faces an unprecedented set of complex challenges to our security and way of life. The competitors we face have made great strides in recent years. Yet no nation on earth is better positioned for this competition than the United States, and no weapon in our arsenal is more powerful in changing the global landscape than the enormous power of our values.