

REBOOTING AMERICA'S DETERRENCE APPROACH EMPLOYING A UNITED DETERRENCE STRATEGY WITH ALLIES AND PARTNERS

With ongoing wars in Europe and the Middle East and rising tensions in the Pacific, strengthening deterrence will be a key challenge for the next administration.

Reinforcing U.S. efforts in this realm will require that the United States and its allies develop a unified strategy to effectively manage relations with competitors. China in particular will be at the top of the list of a complex geostrategic ecosystem of overlapping challenges. A renewed deterrence strategy should emphasize integration of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic tools. It will require a coordinated interagency process beyond limited efforts taken to date. It is crucial to develop advanced, non-kinetic strategies paired with upholding the U.S. military edge to deter aggression and maintain peace amid these evolving global challenges. Creating and maximizing the impact of desired effects will require synchronized international actions. Further, coordinating aspects of relations with China will serve as an umbrella for broader and shared assurance and deterrence efforts to address nexuses with Russia, North Korea, and Iran.

The Case for Action

China's expanding military and economic power and its relationships with destabilizing states are aimed at reshaping the global order. China's efforts to displace the United States in the global order have prompted the United States and its allies to reassess the requirements of strategic competition. As China's influence grows, the international community has embraced a new and stark reality: the post-Cold War era is over, and we are in a new era of great power competition.

The 2017 and 2022 National Security Strategies and 2018 and 2022 National Defense Strategies have recognized this shift and emphasized the need for innovative approaches to address challenges from China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea. Policymakers navigate this complex geostrategic environment against the backdrop of significant military modernization by China and other countries.

The 2024 Commission on the National Defense Strategy assessed that, despite efforts over the past two years toward integrated deterrence, the United States has yet to achieve an actionable approach. As that bipartisan commission explained: "There is a dire need to better educate the American public to the nature of the threats (including to the homeland), the importance of U.S. global engagement, and what it will take in terms of personnel, funding, and (potentially) diversion from normal civic and economic life if deterrence fails."¹

Deterrence is here to stay. If the United States does not want it to fail, the United States—and its allies and partners—must get better at it.

Reinforcing U.S. efforts in deterrence will require a unified strategy with allies to manage relations with competitors, emphasizing integration of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic tools.

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Key Challenges and Opportunities

The development of a new National Security Strategy and nested National Defense Strategy is an opportunity to reboot and strengthen the U.S. approach. Within the executive branch, the current National Security Strategy refers to “strategic competition,” while the National Defense Strategy emphasizes “integrated deterrence.” This divergence in terminology leads to misalignment in policy execution and operational effectiveness, both domestically and internationally. The conflation of peacetime and wartime priorities further complicates the landscape, as deterrence is a component of strategic competition, with military tools serving to shape conditions and influence adversary decisions.

Creating and applying an integrated deterrence approach has faced challenges and opportunities. Such an approach aims to combine diplomatic, informational, military, and economic levers and aims to offer a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges posed by China and others. Such an approach aims to combine diplomatic, informational, military, and economic levers and aims to offer a comprehensive approach to addressing the challenges posed by China and others. It has pushed military thinking further in this integrated direction, yet it was not accepted as an interagency-wide approach to underpin the National Security Strategy. It is currently the Defense Department’s stated approach but is not accepted as an overarching framework for other departments and agencies to “integrate.”

Deterrence shapes adversary thinking to reduce the likelihood of aggression. Integrated deterrence has roots in nuclear deterrence theory, although significantly evolved and expanded to include whole-of-government efforts; this approach aims to manage strategic competition, create de-escalatory pathways, foster cooperation, and prepare for all contingencies. By leveraging all elements of national power across government and the private sector, the United States and its allies can develop a more effective and coordinated strategy to navigate the complex relationship with China and effectively deter aggression.

Integrated deterrence encompasses three key components: integration, deterrence, and the levers of national power. Integration entails a whole-of-government approach, uniting diverse capabilities to achieve targeted, strategic effects. It requires cooperation and coordination across various government entities, with allies and partners, and over multiple geographic regions. It requires the use of a range of tools such as diplomatic engagements, economic tools,

technology and information sharing, coordinated military capabilities and exercises, and synchronization of actions and words from across U.S. leadership. The objective of these activities is to deter an adversary from using force or less blunt forms of coercion against the United States and its allies by treaty obligation, and their partners when possible. This hinges on the collective ability of the United States, allies, and partners to influence adversaries’ decision making.

While the logic of an integrated deterrence framework appeared sound, the implementation has not worked as envisioned because other departments and agencies did not embrace it. Further, the mismatch of U.S. government approaches undercut the U.S. ability to maximize coordination of deterrent effects with allies and partners.

Beyond alignment challenges across the executive branch, the complexity of coordination within the U.S. government and with other governments requires improvements to develop clear strategies and ensure implementation. Managing integration across multiple regions and the full spectrum of activities adds layers of complexity. Yet, working toward a comprehensive or collective approach to deterring adversaries—akin to NATO’s hallowed Article 5 of “collective” defense but shifting left of conflict and focusing on deterring through a bigger network of like-minded allies and partners—is crucial for creating successful de-escalatory outcomes without losing advantage. By addressing challenges across geographic and operational spectrums, the United States, allies, and partners can better manage strategic competition and reduce the likelihood of escalation. This requires a nuanced understanding of regional dynamics and tools, and the ability to adapt strategies to varying contexts. Further, through fostering interagency cooperation and aligning efforts with international partners, the United States can enhance its strategic impact. This coordination is essential for leveraging diverse capabilities and achieving targeted, strategic effects.

As an example, we might consider two key components of integrated deterrence: one is the need to overcome economic coercion; a second involves the need to understand and influence adversary decision making.

Economic coercion by adversaries, particularly the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), poses a significant and growing challenge. To counter this, the United States must harness the levers that shape economic statecraft, including disruption of material or capital flow, power projection, or other forms of economic influence. This starts with recognizing economic security as a key element of a nation’s decision

calculus, either implicitly or explicitly integrated with other elements. The United States can address this by developing and employing strategies that include bolstering economic resilience, strengthening coordination through alliances and partnerships, and ensuring partners can mitigate the impact of economic coercive tactics. By promoting economic stability and cooperation, which complement military and physical security partnerships, the United States and its allies can more effectively counteract adversarial pressures and maintain strategic advantage.

In sum, effective deterrence relies on understanding and influencing adversary decision making. By gaining insights into the strategic calculus of entities like the CCP and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) by assessing military, economic, and other elements collectively, the United States and its allies can shape adversary thinking, gain or maintain relative advantage, and reduce the likelihood of aggression. The ability to influence perceptions and decisions will require improved approaches to connecting and employing a range of U.S., allied, and partner tools.

Recommendations

1. ESTABLISH AN INTEGRATED, COHESIVE APPROACH TO DETERRING ADVERSARIES ACROSS ALL DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES TO ENSURE THAT U.S. LEVERS OF NATIONAL POWER ARE USED IN CONCERT AND, IDEALLY, ARE REINFORCED BY ALLIES AND PARTNERS

This framework should be publicly ratified in the next National Security Strategy with classified annexes providing specificity for implementation. Most public U.S. strategies outline their intent and prescribed definitions for selected terms, as demonstrated with “integrated deterrence” in the current National Defense Strategy. Thus, the National Security Council (NSC), in close coordination with departments and exchanges with Congress, should set a consistent definition. Given that recommendations span the diplomatic, informational, military, economic, financial, intelligence, and law enforcement spheres, outcomes will be most effective when departments use the same language across agencies and with allies and partners. The ultimate terms should resonate widely so that stakeholders immediately appreciate the relevance and connective nature of their efforts in strategic competition and deterrence. This then becomes the baseline in working with allies and partners to establish a collective strategy or framework.

2. EXPAND THE SCOPE OF COORDINATION IN ALLIANCES AND PARTNERSHIPS AND CONSIDER NEW ARRANGEMENTS

Accelerate U.S. cooperation with allies for collective deterrence effects by deepening coordination and prioritizing relationships with nations with advanced economies and militaries. Collaborate with North American, Indo-Pacific, and European allies to foster development of economic prosperity and security. Establish dependable approaches to emphasize human talent development and cooperation, friend-shoring, and resilience in value chains, both short- and long-term. Continue to emphasize existing multilateral efforts like AUKUS, Five Eyes, NATO, the Quad, and Compacts of Free Association, especially in the Indo-Pacific, and encourage further cooperation between NATO and the Indo-Pacific. This cooperation should focus on deepening resilience to global and transregional challenges and coercion in cyber, space, economic, and information spheres.

Ultimately, this creates a necessary shift in focus from transatlantic and transpacific to Indo-Pacific and European collaboration, with the United States providing framework support. Strengthen economic and national security ties between Indo-Pacific and European nations. Recognize NATO's role in the Indo-Pacific and its responsibility to counter the CCP's coercive and predatory behaviors in Europe, but with intentionality and a deliberate scoping of collaboration focused on asymmetric, global, and non-military tools. While collaboration on non-kinetic tools ultimately combines with and enables military capabilities, NATO military forces, operations, and activities should remain regionally focused with room for better synchronization as coordination matures.

Consider how this countering of hybrid threats is linked to ways NATO could support Taiwan, even if Article 4 or Article 5 is not invoked by NATO allies in this potential conflict scenario. Resilience of NATO allies is a national responsibility, as enshrined in Article 3, and NATO can increase its coordinated efforts to strengthen resilience when nations face shared hybrid threats and challenges. Further, Article 4 remains a powerful tool that every ally and select partners can leverage to cohere urgent deterrence efforts.

NATO should expand its Indo-Pacific Four partnership platform and program of work. With a clear rationale based on the connectivity of space, cyber, trade, information,

economics, and other transregional links to stability and security, willing allies should connect to pursue this Atlantic-Pacific collaboration as part of a broader resilience and collective deterrence strategy. The European Union (EU) also must be invited to exchanges that intersect with its responsibilities to avoid duplication of effort. Goals should include concrete steps to increase interoperability; establish and/or expand shared standards; accelerate counter-disinformation and misinformation efforts; and exchange logistics, cyber, space, and critical infrastructure lessons learned to identify iterative objectives. Depending on concerns of military limitations and risk, the option to focus on non-military capabilities can be an impactful first step. A NATO office in the Pacific is worth consideration and locating this on U.S. soil is also an option, especially if NATO considers accepting a partner nation's offer to host a NATO office in the region as above its escalation risk tolerance threshold.

As group size grows, complexity also grows, and consensus requirements can slow progress or water down results. Within larger groups, the United States should consider expanding quad and quad "squared" approaches, integrating two of the existing quad frameworks by involving the United States, Australia, Japan, and India as well as the United States, Japan, Republic of Korea, and Taiwan into combined dialogues. Another quad squared approach could include a NATO quad with an Asia-Pacific quad. These combined quads can rotate, iterating on next steps in collective deterrence. An initial important example could be to investigate new routes linking the United States, Europe, and the Pacific through the Arctic or develop shared economic concepts to support military deterrence.

Another option is the establishment of a National and Economic Security Alliance. The purpose of this alliance would be enshrining a commitment of specific nations' integration of economic tools to uphold the rules-based international order, strengthen resilience, and counter coercive activities. Similar to NATO's construct, consultation and collaboration would serve as a peacetime baseline; negotiation on conflict and wartime alignment of economic tools could also be negotiated.

Possible members include Japan, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and select NATO European allies, to deepen economic security and economic statecraft efforts in confronting adversary

nation states, especially China and Russia. The United States should lead discussions with allies and partners to determine the feasibility of such an alliance. If an alliance is beyond the range of acceptable solutions, a platform that complements the G-7 and other policy coordination groups should be considered as a starting point. The United States could use these platforms or offshoots to develop a broader range of offensive options, including novel ways to deny our adversaries access to materiel or basing or overflight permissions. This will require improving processes within the executive branch to effectively operationalize these options in bilateral or multilateral constructs and needs to be worked in parallel with discussions about industrial and trade policy. The working partnership with the departments of Commerce, Treasury, State, and Defense and the Intelligence Community (IC) will require refinement.

At the military operational level, leverage the International Joint Requirements Oversight Council (I-JROC), modeled after the U.S. JROC, to assess capabilities, identify gaps, and strategize solutions. Begin with the most militarily capable allies, including Australia, France, Japan, South Korea, and the United Kingdom, to achieve interoperability and interchangeability, learning from I-JROC lessons on AUKUS Pillar II advanced capabilities. In parallel, leverage and connect aspects of the NATO Defense Planning Process, including processes of using operational plans to identify requirements, establish shared capability codes, and assign targets based on agreed baselines.

3. ACCELERATE RE-ARMING EFFORTS ACROSS U.S. ALLIES AND CREATE AN ALLIED DEFENSE INDUSTRIAL BASE MARKETPLACE

To increase collective deterrence capabilities, the United States and key allies and partners must increase weapon production, pool platform availability for operations, share maintenance resources, and boost resilience through redundancy with close allies. This will require cooperation, and EU, ASEAN, AUKUS, and NATO conceptual buy-in, especially in identifying ways to increase multinational customer bases, multiyear commitments to buy products and services, and co-production options. Governments and companies must regularize processes to support industry sustainability, efficiency, and growth.

Strengthen defense production resilience by revisiting bilateral agreements and selectively increasing pre-positioned stockpiles. This should be done in conjunction

with new co-production deals that build incentives and flexibility into contracts for surge requirements. Accelerate the establishment of robust military system production and research and development technological collaboration at forward locations in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. This is vital for supporting allied and U.S. forces, especially if U.S. critical infrastructure is attacked, potentially hindering military mobilization and logistics to key areas of need. Further, it creates shared laboratories overseas to accelerate sharing of lessons learned—as seen on NATO's Eastern Flank today, often providing insights that are applicable in other regions.

Update “Buy America” provisions and the national security industrial base perimeter to include select allies meeting specific criteria. Align and synchronize International Traffic in Arms Regulations, Export Administration Regulations, the National Technology and Innovation Base, and the Defense Production Act to facilitate trusted supply, production, maintenance, and sustainment. Initiate this effort with the Five Eyes and Japan, expanding to other qualified countries as warranted. Additionally, explore making a fully fledged AUKUS free-trade zone, either stand-alone or within the existing United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement framework.

4. REDUCE SUSCEPTIBILITY TO ECONOMIC COERCION AND DISINFORMATION

Assist nations in confronting China's coercive actions by sharing threat intelligence and mitigation strategies. Consistently expose the impacts of China's predatory deals, particularly in developing nations. Develop playbooks that nations can use to counter economic coercion and disinformation and roll back efforts that exploit resources through predatory lending and debt-trap diplomacy. Highlight successful cooperation efforts and support resilience and resistance forces, especially in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. Resilience to resist or swiftly respond to and recover from attacks, as defined in NATO's Article 3, must continue to evolve given emerging hybrid threats, and it starts with each nation embracing self-defense at societal levels.

Create and support alternatives to China's Belt and Road Initiative. Offer a coherent alternative for infrastructure, trade, and development, particularly for developing countries, to compete with China's initiatives. This should be an integrated effort from North America, Europe, and the Indo-Pacific, with nascent efforts integrated and

accelerated. The next administration should establish a meeting of national economic advisors who are given the task of framing these alternatives—noting this effort could nest with a National and Economic Security Alliance as previously discussed.

New approaches to compete in the economic sphere should be designed in tandem with strategic communication and information operations strategies. The State Global Engagement Center and the Department of Defense's information operations work have not yet collectively found an optimal footing to orchestrate efforts to strategic effect. The United States should revisit more successful historic models for information coordination that started with deliberate U.S. objectives, then included coordination with allies and partners to refine delivery and effects. This will require an overlay of new technologies and platforms. The power of intelligence sharing and public messaging should also be calibrated, as demonstrated in the lead-up to Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

5. DECREASE VULNERABILITIES TO ADVERSARY ATTACKS ON CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND ACCELERATE RECOVERY AND RESPONSE OPTIONS

Restrict companies posing clear and direct threats to critical infrastructure integrity, following the example of actions taken against Huawei by the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia. Implement domestic measures to protect critical infrastructure and coordinate best practices with allies and partners. Ensure the security of interconnected global economic and military activities. Focus U.S. efforts on regions west of Guam (e.g., Japan, Taiwan, Philippines, Australia) and the eastern front of NATO. Consider how Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States-like functions are executed in these countries and identify information-sharing and capacity-building options. Develop scenario-based response options in advance, including counterattacks, and determine how best to signal potential deterrence by denial as well as possible deterrence by punishment responses.

6. POOL CAPITAL INVESTMENT AND INCREASE INFORMATION SHARING FOR PROSPERITY AND SECURITY

The United States and allies should build on their cooperation in responding to aggressive actions by China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran in recent years. Pooling of

investments or research and development funds, such as NATO Defense Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic or AUKUS exchanges, complemented by sharing of information have paid dividends in preparing allies and partners, delegitimizing adversary false narratives, and developing effective capabilities to address asymmetric, hybrid, and military threats.

A shared deterrence strategy could serve as an umbrella for continued efforts at bilateral and trilateral levels, such as recent collaborative programs between the United States, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom, as well as through established groups such as AUKUS, NATO, and others.

Within NATO, the United States could opt to join the NATO Innovation Fund (NIF). The NIF supports cutting-edge science and technology startups that enhance defense, security, and resilience across NATO. This may require authorization language in the National Defense Authorization Act for organizations like the Office of Strategic Capital to expand their mission of scaling private capital for national security to the international allied community.

Additionally or alternatively, the United States could further empower the NATO Industry Advisory Group. As a corollary, coordination vis-à-vis NATO's Allied Capital Community, composed of strategically aligned investors committed to advancing and sustaining allied defense innovation and industrial bases, should be better leveraged. Business leaders increasingly recognize their vulnerabilities and the geopolitical risks posed by China, which uses promises of market access for aggressive objectives.

This transatlantic capital community has the potential to help reduce productivity impacts on U.S. importers as policies aim to reduce supply chain reliance on China, noting that China has benefited from decades of interdependence in manufacturing capacity and shipping networks.

7. POOL TALENT BASES ACROSS INNOVATION AND DEFENSE INDUSTRIAL BASES

Talent is essential for driving defense production and innovation. It serves as a force multiplier for strengthening deterrence, but talent movement can also create vulnerabilities. Develop a comprehensive strategy with allies and partner nations, in coordination with the private sector, to establish objectives that counter threats in company

governance, legal liability, public relations, business operations, intellectual property, and workforce protection.

Streamline and reconcile vetting processes for personnel movement across innovation bases, focusing on academia and research institutions, and leveraging immigration reform to allow skilled labor movement. Enable personnel movement for select defense industrial base production sites and supply chains to enhance workforce resiliency and redundancy. U.S. and allied governments should also identify and remove barriers to enable more flow of talent between sectors, especially once a baseline of governance practices to ensure security from adversary talent-pilfering and-poaching is clear and enforceable.

Implementation Considerations

- The transition teams for the next administration will identify key positions, recommend appointees, and translate priorities for enacting the next president's vision. The recommendations in this document address challenges and opportunities across departments and agencies, and therefore should be reviewed and guided by the National Security Council, and potentially the strategic planning directorate, as part of transition efforts. The development of a deterrence strategy that is extended to include allies and partners should be considered in tandem with the National Security Strategy from inception to execution.
- The United States should bring key allies into the discussion as an initial step in shaping the art of the possible, from floating this chapeau "strategy" to intentionally designed compartments within it. Where possible, regularly scheduled events at presidential or ministerial levels should be considered in the discussion and development process (e.g., the G-7, G-20, NATO Summits, and other leader meetings by region or grouping).
- Departments and agencies currently have structures, staffs, expertise, and resources to commit to the implementation of these recommendations. Therefore, a key step is alignment. Alignment across agencies should encompass terminology, taxonomy, and clarity of key central objectives. Regular NSC Interagency Policy Committee, Deputies, and Principals Committee meetings should be used at the onset of the administration to establish new frameworks, thereby also calibrating long-term strategic planning efforts with near-term focus areas and reactive, crisis-centric allocation of personnel time.

- Once this strategy and/or related frameworks and objectives are developed, NSC-led meetings should be established to ensure coherence of these efforts with regular business and activities.
- The departments of State, Defense, Homeland Security, Treasury, and Commerce, as anchors for implementation of many of these recommendations, should designate an appropriate leader at the under-secretary level to cohere input and actions from across these respective departments in the formulation and execution phases.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Commission on the National Defense Strategy. Final Report. July 2024. Available: https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/nds_commission_final_report.pdf