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Politics, Economics, and Security

Fourth Annual West Point Social Science Seminar: Special Report for the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

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Edited by
Jordan Becker, Amanda Monaghan,
Scott Limbocker & Adam Cucchiara
Department of Social Sciences
U.S. Military Academy

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Questions about content can be directed to Jordan.becker@westpoint.edu.
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ORIGINAL CALL FOR ABSTRACTS:

West Point Social Sciences Seminar: Call for Abstracts/Panels

Colleagues,

On 5-6 February 2025 at West Point, New York, the Department of Social Sciences will hold the fourth annual West Point Social Sciences Seminar in partnership with the Centre for Security, Diplomacy, and Strategy (CSDS) at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel; the Initiative for Global Security, Dickey Center for International Understanding, Dartmouth; the MESO Lab of the Ohio State University; and the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM). The seminar will result in a special report for the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (OCJCS), which will also be distributed to US and allied interagency/interministerial partners.

You are invited to submit abstracts for individual papers or full panel proposals by 3 September 2024 using the following link: https://forms.office.com/r/gXRb22vZiR

We look forward to hearing from you,

V/R,

Security Seminar Team

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Politics, Economics, and Security

Fourth Annual West Point Social Sciences Seminar: Special Report for the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

This seminar emerges – by design – from a collaboration between policy professionals, academics, and military leaders. It represents 14 topic-driven, transdisciplinary working groups, assembled from across professions, geographies, and nationalities. These working groups continue to function, and we hope they will be a resource for national and international leaders seeking to better understand critical economic, political, social, and technological questions at the heart of strategy.

This volume captures the work of over 300 professionals seeking to support and inform the joint, interagency, and multinational policy community at a time of significant uncertainty in the international system.

It is the fourth such report, of what we hope will be many more. The first report was prepared in support of the initial drafting of the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept by Secretary General Stoltenberg's Policy Planning Unit, led by Dr. Benedetta Berti, to whom we are immensely grateful for the impetus to create these working groups. We are also grateful for the contribution of the late, great, Bear Braumoeller, whose mentorship and support helped bring this seminar to life.

Jordan Becker, Amanda Monaghan, Scott Limbocker and Adam Cucchiara

Department of Social Sciences—U.S. Military Academy

Chapter 1

Merely a Buzzword? The Promise of Grand Strategy in the Age of Uncertainty

Maryum N. Alam

The liberal international order is dead. The institutions, incentives, and organizing principles that characterized the post-war international system no longer inform state behavior, especially that of the United States. This systemic change—most obviously exemplified by the return of Great Power politics, the resurgence of antidemocratic and populist movements within states, and the degradation of international norms that shaped international politics during the Cold War—corresponds to dramatic changes in state behavior as well. President Donald J. Trump's second administration has accelerated this process, for example, by upending the US commitment to the postwar order as a response to the rise of multipolarity and the erosion of American hegemony. For better or worse, we are living in an unprecedented period of systemic and foreign policy change.

The scope and scale of this change have raised several important questions about the durability, promise, and pitfalls of grand strategy as an intellectual and heuristic tool driving foreign policy. Can grand strategy serve as an effective anchor in the policy process, guiding decision-makers in this time of uncertainty and profound political change? Or is grand strategy a straitjacket that imperils the kind of flexible thinking needed to navigate a dynamic, multiplex international system? To address these broad questions, this working group convenes scholars from various disciplines and approaches to explore the sources and consequences of grand strategy. This paper proceeds as follows. First, I review the relevant literature to identify what grand strategy is—and what it is not—and how international and domestic structures can impede or facilitate its development. Next, I present the state of current research on grand strategy.[1] Finally, I derive and offer a few policy implications and recommendations.

I argue that strategy can be a valuable tool for policymakers as they navigate an uncertain world. A strategy uses limited means to accomplish unlimited ends, forcing decision-makers to continually analyze and assess trade-offs. While policies derived from a grand strategy may not necessarily be uniform or coherent all of the time, a degree of coherence is necessary for policymakers to develop and project America's reputation abroad. Grand strategy is part and parcel of US foreign policy identity and reputation. When well developed, it helps allies, adversaries, and internal audiences understand who we are and what we stand for. More succinctly, grand strategy refines and clarifies state repu-

1 *By profiling the work presented at the 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar.*

tations, and in turn, clear reputations make international commitments more credible in the long run. Now more than ever, a grand strategy can help US foreign policymakers navigate the complex and ever-evolving international system. What that strategy is and how faithfully it is executed, however, depends on its architects and executors.

GRAND STRATEGY: "MERELY A BUZZWORD"?

What is grand strategy, and what is it good for? The scholarly study of grand strategy is diverse and does not coalesce into a coherent research program.[2] This diversity can be attributed to the inability of scholars to agree upon a definition of the concept. According to Nina Silove, "no one has yet won the battle to be 'in charge' of the definition of grand strategy."[3] The conceptual, theoretical, and empirical ambiguity of grand strategy has contributed to skepticism of the utility of the idea (some, like Betts, refer to grand strategy as "merely a buzzword"[4]).

Still, two definitions have dominated both scholarly and policy-oriented discussions. First, Barry Posen defines grand strategy as "a political-military, means-ends chain, a state's theory about how it can best 'cause' security for itself."[5] Paul Kennedy, on the other hand, argues that grand strategy is "concerned with peace as much as (perhaps even more than) with war. It [is] about the evolution and integration of policies that should operate for decades, or even for centuries. It [does] not cease at a war's end, nor commence at its beginning."[6] Both definitions consider how states use political and military resources to secure themselves, and Kennedy elaborates on the temporal scope of a strategy. Another definition worth mentioning is that offered by John Lewis Gaddis: "the alignment of potentially unlimited aspirations with necessarily limited capabilities."[7] Thus, for Gaddis, strategic decision-making is rife with making tradeoffs and judging between choices and their alternatives.[8]

Time horizons, or how actors balance costs and benefits of actions in the short and long run, underpin most conceptualizations of grand strategy. Leaders with long time horizons, for example, are able to credibly commit and uphold policies in the long run.[9] Whether it is defined as a "long term orchestration of power and commitments to secure oneself,"[10] "something that has the characteristics of being long-term in scope,"[11] "the evolution and integration of policies that should operate for decades,"[12]

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2 *Silove, Nina. 2018. "Beyond the Buzzword: The Three Meanings of 'Grand Strategy.'" Security Studies 27(1): 27–57. doi:10.1080/09636412.2017.1360073.*

3 *Silove, 2018, 32.*

4 *Betts, R. K. (2001). The trouble with strategy: Bridging policy and operations. Joint Force Quarterly, 29, 23-29.*

5 *Posen, Barry. 1984. The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars. Cornell University Press, 13.*

6 Kennedy, Paul. 1991. *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*. Yale University Press, 13.

7 *Gaddis, John Lewis. 2019. On Grand Strategy. Penguin Press. London, England, 21*

8 *According to Gaddis, "If you seek ends beyond your means, then sooner or later you'll have to scale back your ends to fit your means. Expanding means may attain more ends, but not all, because ends can be infinite and means can never be. Whatever balance you strike, there'll be a link between what's real and what's imagined: between your current location and your intended destination. You won't have a strategy until you've connected these dots—dissimilar though they are—within the situation in which you're operating" Gaddis, 2019, 21.*

9 *Alam, Maryum N. Time Horizons and Foreign Policy Change. Manuscript in Progress.*

10 *Porter, Patrick. 2018. "Why America's Grand Strategy Has Not Changed: Power, Habit, and the US Foreign Policy Establishment." International Security 42(04): 9–46.*

11 *Silove, 2018.*

12 *Kennedy, 1991.*

or "a system that involves long-term planning, over decades and perhaps centuries,"[13] the literature identifies time horizons as a critical feature of grand strategy. Conversely, the absence of long-term planning is attributed to "not-grand strategy." According to Hal Brands, grand strategy "requires a far-seeing mind that can deal with the crisis or contingency at hand while simultaneously looking beyond it."[14]

In the US foreign policy and security discourse, five grand strategy "ideal types" have dominated conversations. These strategies include Restraint, Offshore Balancing, Deep Engagement, Liberal Internationalism, and Conservative Primacy (Avey, Markowitz, and Reardon 2018). These strategies differ in their assumptions about the sources of state power and the role of domestic and international institutions, and they offer divergent objectives and policy levers. Although these ideal types are useful for assessing contemporary debates in US Grand Strategy, we urge scholars and policy practitioners to use these frameworks as points of departure rather than destinations.

No matter how you define grand strategy or scope its conceptual boundaries and conditions, these scholars uniformly agree on the importance of this idea in foreign policy decision-making, even if it is often invoked as a buzzword for policy practitioners. Strategy allows states to develop plans and goals and offer the means by which those plans and goals may be achieved. These means and goals are probably more important now than ever, especially as states navigate an ever-changing and uncertain world. In the face of uncertainty, states can rely strategy as a compass for foreign policy. The following section explores the utility of grand strategy as a concept in various empirical and foreign policy applications.

STATE OF CURRENT RESEARCH

Learning, Adaptation, and Grand Strategy

Grand strategy can serve as a useful benchmark for decision-makers to acquire and evaluate new information in a changing international system. In the absence of a broader grand strategy, for example, some scholars have argued that learning, adaptation, and future power projection become difficult for states. For example, Miller examines the US Army's behavior over the course of the Vietnam War to explore how their behavior changes across contexts. The conventional wisdom on Vietnam revolves around the notion that the Army was unwilling or unable to adjust to the dynamic nature of the war, and especially the onset of guerrilla warfare. Organizational theorists argue that US efforts in Vietnam failed because the US applied a method of war (with an overwhelming focus on conventional tactics) that did not account for the context in Vietnam. Miller challenges this wisdom by showing that battlefield incentives actually forced the Army to adapt, and soldiers on the ground—across rank and file—adapted to a changing context.[15] These changes in tactical strategy, however, did not correspond with changes in the broader political strategy in Vietnam. In Vietnam, the US was able to secure territory in the short run, push back the North Vietnamese, but did not think of a long-term plan to hold and build institutions that would prevent North Vietnamese and the Vietcong from taking hold again. While learning and adaptation are possible in the absence of a grand strategy, having a broader strategy in

13 *Lobell, Steven E. 2003. The Challenge of Hegemony: Grand Strategy, Trade, and Domestic Politics. University of Michigan Press.*

14 *Brands, Hal. 2014. What Good Is Grand Strategy?: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush. Cornell University Press, 10.*

15 *Miller, Aaron W. "Understanding US Army Behavior in War: Lessons from the War in Vietnam" Working Paper.*

place facilitates the aggregation of learned practices and beliefs to civilian decision-makers.

Tom Ramos argues that a broader nuclear strategy is not necessarily as good as the tactical weapons a state may have at its disposal. More importantly, professional policy analysts—whether they are at elite universities, think tanks, or other institutions—are vital to the development of coherent grand strategies. This was the case in the development of Eisenhower's Massive Retaliation nuclear strategy in the mid-1950s, as well as Kennedy's Flexible Response strategy offered in 1961. According to Ramos, "that nuclear strategy took years of study to develop, and it needed intense collaboration with other members of the defense establishment, including the physicists of Livermore. Their achievement strikes one as being the product of professionals."[16]

Grand strategy can be mimetic, too. You are the company you keep, and as we develop grand strategies, so do our allies and adversaries. As China and Russia improve their cooperative ties, this task becomes increasingly important, especially if the grand strategic goal remains for the US to curtail and constrain China's influence in the Indo-Pacific. Constraining Russia through various economic tools, including sanctions and cornering the international oil market (for instance, by implementing a reduced oil cap), can disrupt Russia's attempts to expand and dominate European markets. And it would diminish its ability to bankroll its revisionist policies in Eastern Europe and beyond, as well as its ongoing prosecution of the war in Ukraine. This approach should be comprehensive and multilateral, allowing the US to reduce its military presence in Europe without creating opportunities for Russia to step into a vacuum, whilst also opening up resources and time to engage in the Indo-Pacific. Policies motivated by this consideration should also recall that Xi Jinping is keenly observant of how the US behaves in Europe. What our leadership does in Europe can set the tone for what may happen in the Indo-Pacific. Economic, diplomatic, and military means are not substitutes but complements. They can work in tandem and harmony if motivated by a united strategy.[17]

One example of the interdependence of grand strategy isIndia's competitive advantage in developing innovative technologies, including semiconductors. According to Anwar, "…despite having substantial market, India traditionally has been a consumer rather than producer of chips. However, recognizing the strategic importance of self-reliance in semiconductors, the Indian government launched several initiatives to build a robust semiconductor and chips manufacturing ecosystem."[18] The European Union's increased attention and prioritization towards energy security—especially in the aftermath of the onset of the Ukraine War in 2022—and shift away from a NATO-led security strategy is another pertinent example. According to Dimitar Atanasov, "…while NATO emphasizes the importance of energy security for its military operations, the EU's concern is driven by the potential impact on its hundreds of millions of citizens, leading it to securitize the issue more heavily."[19] In the horn of Africa, Somaliland has begun to exercise more control over its Berbera port as it negotiates its position between the US, Europe, and China.[20] Other states develop their own grand strategies on the interna-

16 *Ramos, Tom. "The Importance of Professional Nuclear Policy Analysts." Working Paper.*

17 *Radu, Delia. "EU's Foreign Security and Defence Policy – State Building Without a State." Working Paper.*

18 *Anwar, Kashif. "Semiconductor Power Politics and the Role of India" Working Paper.*

19 *Atanasov, Dimitar. "The EU and NATO – Who Has The Main Role in Ensuring Energy Security in Europe? Instances of Securitization of Energy Security on Part of the EU and NATO (2022-2024)" Working Paper.*

20 *Shaqale, Abdirasak M. "Leveraging Berbera Port to Offset China's Growing Presence in the Horn of Africa: Options and Limits for the U.S." Working Paper.*

tional stage, regardless of whether the US has one or not.

Strategic planning is important even when policymakers are working with "known unknowns" and "unknown unknowns" – i.e., different types of uncertainty. Uncertainty makes the importance of strategic planning even more salient. For example, Edward Salo argues that even random, environmentally contingent events like hurricanes and typhoons have implications for strategic planning for military operations and readiness. This includes "how the storms could damage critical bases and military fighting infrastructure, as well as the resiliency of bases and their personnel."[21] Resilience and preparedness can help states anticipate shocks and recover from them afterwards. Grand strategy helps policymakers connect seemingly disconnected policy domains—such as climate and security—and can offer mechanisms for actors to work synchronously. Moreover, this preparedness can act as an effective deterrent to potential adversaries: "…nations and non-nation states could see a devastating hurricane hit a major US city or port as an opportunity to conduct other terrorist type attacks…China may see the opportunity to conduct military operations if parts of the US fleet and aircraft are damaged or destroyed by a typhoon hitting Guam or Hawaii…"[21]

Military strategy and readiness can influence grand strategy from the bottom-up (as opposed to typical theoretical models that consider this process top-down, i.e., from the abstract and grandiose to the technical). Conklin and Gerstle ask how the Sino-American rivalry affects US domestic politics and the expansion of the security state. Both "outside-in" and "inside-out" influence the intensification of this rivalry, and are driven by multifaceted and complex considerations in both the economic and security domains.[22] Faced with these complex preferences at multiple levels of analysis, leaders are more likely to entrench themselves in preexisting policy pathologies and are more resistant to change. A related example includes how the US has changed its defense posture. As the US military's forward defense posture has steadily declined since the end of the Cold War, policymakers increasingly rely on a rotational forward presence, which makes rapid reinforcement—the introduction of conventional forces into vulnerable locations—more difficult. This shift away from a rapid reinforcement strategy slows systemic power projection, impedes structural and operational readiness, and arguably diminishes the US's deterrent capabilities vis-à-vis other Great Powers. Ryan Van Wie advances this argument by showing how the US military's structural readiness impacts the US rate of reinforcement in crises, and "…the US military's reduced size and decreased permanent forward presence will pose challenges in expediting future crisis deployments."[23] As existing tactical strategies become entrenched in military decision-making, civilian leaders might be more constrained in their ability to develop and execute broader grand strategies that require more flexibility in the use of military force. In these scenarios, states might be less willing and able to adapt to a dynamic conflict environment and international system.

STRATEGY AND INTERNATIONAL ORDER

Grand strategy is largely informed by and most concretely affects how states position themselves within a broader international order. States manage this positionality by assessing their status within

21 *Salo, Edward. "Trying to Reason with Hurricane Season: The Implications of Hurricanes and Typhoons in Modern Strategic Planning." Working Paper.*

22 *Conklin, Matthew J. and Gerstle, Samuel. "International Order Maker, Taker, and Breaker: Renewing the International Relations-American Political Development Research Tradition." Working Paper.*

23 *Van Wie, Ryan. "Are We There Yet? Readiness, Capabilities, and Tradeoffs during Crisis Rapid Reinforcement." Working Paper.*

the system and working to preserve or enhance it (by building institutions, forging alliances, pursuing multilateral economic integration on one end of the spectrum, or engaging in unilateral revisionism and territorial expansionism at the other). Strategies help states manage their position within a dynamic system. Anatoly Levshin, for example, explores how and why states pursue strategies of interstate pacification, a particular type of interstate cooperation in which states cede some of their sovereign rights in the present to deter future aggression. He argues that states use interstate pacification, such as the construction of the League of Nations and the United Nations, to manage the threat of runaway escalation. These "organizations of collective security reflected grand-strategic wagers about the utility of interstate pacification made by senior US, British, and Soviet policymakers in the immediate aftermath of the World Wars."[24] These networks of cooperation expand hegemonic spheres of influence and entrench the norms historically associated with the liberal international order. This cooperation is incentivized by both trust and long-time horizons.

As states respond to a shifting hierarchy by adopting new strategies, these new strategies effectively reshape the international system by creating different incentives for its agents. One major example lies in the ways by which the US adoption of unilateral primacy ("America First") and retrenchment from the liberal international order shapes the strategy(ies) of its partner states, and in turn, establishes the mechanisms by which orders are transformed from within. In other words, as strategic decision-making changes as a function of the international order, the international order is shaped by how states within this order learn and adapt to a new order. Hierarchy and strategy are inherently linked. Weber demonstrates this by investigating the extent to which the transatlantic component and the alliance dilemma affect how European states fortify their defense, especially in the context of a resurgent Russia. She argues that "the security policy of Europeans illustrates the alliance dilemma, as Europeans navigate the parallel risks of abandonment and entrapment."[25] The alliance dilemma and efforts to stabilize the regional and global order shape European strategy, and lately, this strategy has been predominantly shaped by the US abandonment of these alliances. While Weber does not investigate how Europe's shifting alliance priorities inform Russia's regional and global strategy, it is difficult to dismiss the impact of US retrenchment on Putin's resolve in Ukraine. The relationship between strategic adaptation and order is not unique to Europe, either. As the US shifts its position in East Asia "from hub and spoke to a latticework framework" it has created an opportunity for South Korea to expand its capabilities.[26] This expansion is driven both by a need to develop a counterweight with North Korea and China, but also internal desires to forge minilateral relationships regionally. South Korea is actively seeking new partners both within and beyond the Indo-Pacific. While it is still a ways away from becoming a true Great Power, Lee argues South Korea remains a "regional pivotal state," one that could lead other East and Southeast Asian states by example. Given these increasingly complex dynamics, US leadership needs a coherent grand strategy to ensure it secures its position in the international order. According to Doug Livermore, "…this leadership must be based on a clear understanding of American interests and values, combined with a realistic assessment of

24 *Levshin, Anatoly. "Strategic Uses of Interstate Pacification: a Survey of the Theory and Practice of Cooperative Regulation of the Risk of Runaway Escalation of Interstate Wars, 1816-2012." Working Paper.*

25 *Weber, Gesine. "European strategy in US-China competition: alliance dilemma revisited" Working Paper.*

26 *Lee, Jae Hyeok. "Assessing South Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy in Security Aspect: Can South Korea Become A Global Pivotal State?" Working Paper.*

the resources and capabilities required to achieve strategic objectives."[27] This will not only require consistent, sustained commitments, but also strategic patience and long-term thinking.

As states learn from each other and adopt their own grand strategies, the possibility for policy dissonance and divergence, and arguably inter-state rivalry and the probability of war, increases. One example includes Iran's aggressive posture in cyberspace, including its cyber-attacks on maritime infrastructure in the Middle East. This revisionism—anti-Western in its intent and execution—impedes China's ability to access secure trade routes and pursue economic integration in the region, including China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In the absence of inter-state collaboration to thwart these attacks and threats—a collaborative effort informed by an underlying theory of victory implicit in grand strategy—regional tensions might very well escalate rapidly.[28]

STRATEGY, REPUTATION, AND CREDIBILITY

A third consideration in the development and execution of grand strategy is its utility in establishing reputations. Actors with coherent grand strategies, clear to internal and external audiences, may establish clearer reputations. During the Cold War, for example, US foreign policy was informed by the *modus operandi* of anticommunism. This strategy offered a degree of consistency and reliability in US foreign policy behavior and undergirded a reputation for upholding liberal values in the international system. Even if the US deviated from this reputation or pursued this strategy in name only—as many have questioned the "liberal" basis of the liberal international order—policymakers used this reputation to signal their type. Grand strategy can offer guidelines for the kind of reputation leaders may project in the international system.

Grand strategy's reputational benefits are also apparent when we consider the multidimensional nature of its policy recommendations. Policymakers can derive multiple, interrelated, policies from a strategy, and these policies aggregate in favor of a particular reputation. This idea is hardly new, and harkens back to Henry Kissinger's notion of linkage. James Langan reiterates this point in his research on alliance reputation: if the US gets a reputation of abandoning allies in Europe, this might impede efforts to pivot to Indo-Pacific ("The perception of US reliability in the Indo-Pacific will be predicated upon its history of support for the European security architecture…").[29] Optimizing security in both Europe and the Indo-Pacific are not mutually exclusive, according to Langan, and this optimization "will enable a sustainable and credible implementation of dual deterrence." A grand strategy can enhance systemic deterrence of Great Powers by demonstrating how actions in one region relate to others, and vice versa; a state's reputation for resolve may be diminished if it cannot be implemented with high fidelity across regions. Alongside bolstering state reputation, grand strategy can help states secure their own credibility. The credibility of commitments and threats is most prominently examined in international politics, and states that have a history of reneging on commitments are less likely to forge durable international agreements in both war and peace.

In the contemporary environment, Israel's strategy in Gaza is touted as an effort to preserve its de-

27 *Livermore, Doug. "The Necessary Evolution of U.S. Grand Strategy: Learning from the Past to Address Modern Challenges in the Era of Strategic Competition." Working Paper.*

28 *Melella, C., Ferazza, F., Mersinas, K., and Lugo, R. "Port in a Storm: Iranian Cyber Operations and Chinese Strategic Interests in Middle Eastern Maritime Infrastructure." Working Paper.*

29 *Langan, James. "Make Alliances Great Again." Working Paper.*

terrent capability by credibly committing an effective retaliation for the October 7, 2023, attacks. As states prosecute wars, are they motivated by jus ad bellum or jus in bello thinking? Shifting war aims are one important reason why an actor might lose just cause as they exercise violence. If the reasons for initiating the war are not the same as during the war, it can become difficult to evaluate whether the violence is justified or accomplishes it goals. Is this a defensive or offensive war? Is the ultimate goal unconditional surrender? What are the observable implications of this outcome (i.e., what would that look like), and what would come about afterwards? Strategic thinking is important for policymakers as they grasp the scope, sources, and consequences of a foreign policy.

Nir Eisikovits challenges the reputational and credibility bolstering effects of Israel's all-out war in Gaza. He argues that the projection and use of force "…can sometimes motivate rather than deter an enemy by humiliating them." He questions whether deterrence is strategically crucial both politically and militarily, and contends that having clear strategic goals and, as a result, being taken seriously by your enemies is both different from and more coherent than the project of deterring them."[30] Parsons expands this argument by exploring the flaws in Israel's strategic objectives. According to him, "the closest thing Operation Iron Swords has to a strategic objective is the destruction or political incapacitation of Hamas."[31] He casts doubt that this or any military operation can achieve this objective. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, Parsons offers that even if the end of Hamas is achievable, Israel has next to no plans to manage the Palestinians afterwards. Without a clear end state in mind, Israel has no strategy—grand or otherwise. Israel does not have a theory of victory. Parsons highlights the numerous issues leaders encounter when they conflate the strategic level of war with the operational. He concludes by proposing that scholars and practitioners "reimagine the conventional rules of war so that they explicitly tie necessity and proportionality to strategic objectives."[31]

Finally, Mares and Brunstetter explore the legal, moral, and ethical consequences of Israel's strategy in Gaza, or lack thereof. Gabriel Mares suggests that just cause can be lost when the goals of a war change over the course of the conflict. He argues that scholars can and should employ the *jus ad bellum*—or the conditions under which states resort to the use of force—category of right intention to think through the strategic consequences of war, especially for the victims of violence.[32] By using *jus ad bellum* logic and reasoning, states may be more prudent and apprehensive with the use of force, especially as they consider how this force may produce downstream consequences. Even if states themselves do not engage in this type of long-range, strategic thinking, international actors might be able to intervene to encourage this process. Brunstetter pays special attention to the rhetoric of key leaders participating in the war in Gaza, and argues that the international community has a moral duty to de-escalate by intervening diplomatically in ongoing strategic discussions. This is especially the case as Israel breaks precedents for the use of limited force without a broader strategy: "The tit-for-tat exchanges between Iran and Israel highlight the tension between limited force as a justified response mechanism, setting and breaking precedents, and provocative escalation. The exploding tensions between Hezbollah and Israel illustrate the link between breaking tacit rules governing low-level hostilities and overriding the presumption against escalation."[33]

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30 Eisikovits, Nir. "October 7th and the Coherence of Military Deterrence," Working Paper.

31 Parsons, Graham. "Just War After Gaza," Working Paper.

32 Mares, Gabriel. "Jus ad Bellum and the Return of Right Intention in the 21st Century," Working Paper.

33 Brunstetter, Daniel R. "Just and Unjust Escalation: Jus ad vim, the Right to Respond, and the Duty to De-escalate," Working Paper.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Who are we, what do we stand for, and where are we going? Developing a grand strategy can help us develop answers to these questions. Grand strategy used to be confined to academic conversations, most notably in universities like Yale's Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy or Duke's Program in American Grand Strategy. According to leading scholars like Hal Brands and Peter Feaver, grand strategy can be a useful way to bridge abstract, theoretical ideas with on-the-ground policy realities: "…grand strategy makes history more relevant, political science more concrete, public policy more broadly contextualized, and economics more security-oriented."[34] We offer that not only can the US do grand strategy well, as executed containment during the Cold War, but grand strategy can be a useful tool to guide policy in an increasingly uncertain world. First, grand strategy can improve coherence and consistency in our policies across domains, especially when these policies serve a broader, clear goal. Coalescing these policies with consideration for a broader agenda can bolster US reputation and credibility. Policymakers should also take heed of how policies implemented in one realm—in both the short and long-run—may or may not affect policies in other arenas.

Second, a grand strategy can help rally internal and external audiences by clearly identifying the costs, benefits, and merits of policies, and how they aggregate in service of a broader, long-term plan. Many Americans are focused on domestic issues—rising inflation, then cost of living, and changes to our democracy—and this focus limits their support for internationalism. Similarly, our allies and adversaries may be reluctant to cooperate with us if our leadership is eager to renege on previously upheld commitments and agreements. By laying out a strategy—the means and ends, and the mechanisms that link them together—the US will be in a better position to credibly communicate its position and anchor the world in this time of systemic uncertainty. Finally, while this essay does not advocate for a particular grand strategy, we urge scholars to engage in grand strategic thinking. We urge policymakers to engage in strategic thinking by considering the short- and long-term consequences of policies. This includes accounting for the immediate, medium-range, and long-range costs and benefits of upholding a policy for audiences at home and abroad. Moreover, identifying what the "theory of victory" or ideal end state is crucial. This is not an easy task, and developing a grand strategy will require engagement between scholars and policymakers—across all echelons, civilian and military branches, and across party and ideological lines—but it is nonetheless an imperative task, especially if the US is to secure its position as a hegemon on the world stage.

34 *Feaver, Peter. 2009. "What Is Grand Strategy and Why Do We Need It?" Foreign Policy 8(8).*

Chapter 2

Futures Thinking and Defense Planning: Between Institutionalization and Integration

Gergely Nemeth

ABSTRACT

What is foresight for? This chapter examines the utility of strategic foresight in defense policy and planning, highlighting both promises and barriers to its institutionalization. While foresight is increasingly recognized as an essential form of alternative analysis for navigating uncertainty (and uncertainty does increase persistently), its adoption remains inconsistent, constrained by short-term policy cycles, institutional inertia, and misconceptions about both utility and predictive accuracy.

This study draws on insights and discussions from Working Group 2 of the US Army West Point Social Science Seminar to explore how foresight can support alternative analyses of regional security, inform force design amid technological and cultural resistance, and expand security thinking to address global catastrophic risks. Case studies ranging from Singapore's integrated foresight model to NATO's scenario-building exercises demonstrate both opportunities and limitations in embedding foresight into defense institutions. The conversation at West Point also highlights growing interest in these forms of alternative analysis as well as their military utility, and it shall pave the way for further conversations as the complex and cost-intensive army transformation efforts are taking off across the Alliance, with a view to the threat posed by Russia and systemic challenges posed by China.[1]

This conversation duly reflects on the numerous challenges and shortcomings of long-range analysis. Still, it also underscores that foresight's value lies less in prediction than in its capacity to stress-test assumptions, reveal overlooked dynamics, and prepare institutions for adaptive action.

The chapter concludes that foresight must move from theory to practice; it must be institutionalized as a continuous process of anticipatory governance that bridges strategic dialogue with applied defense planning.

1 *Several works cited with a 2025 date (e.g., Du Mont, Depledge, Hockers, Metcalfe, Agachi, Kinaci, Alaraby, Kallenborn, Pallas, Underwood, Brown) reflect papers and ideas presented during the 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar, Working Group 2. These contributions are cited here in anticipation of future publication but are not yet available in print.*

INTRODUCTION

Strategic foresight has long been considered an instrument for navigating uncertainty and enabling decision-making in complex environments. The RAND Corporation's pioneering use of systems analysis and scenario planning[2] in the late 1940s and 1950s laid the groundwork for structured strategic futures thinking under uncertainty (Hines, 2020). Later, Shell's scenario planning gained wide recognition for anticipating the 1973 oil crisis, showcasing how the private sector was also beginning to apply these techniques. These developments collectively marked an unfolding transition from ad hoc speculation to more institutionalized, policy-relevant approaches to thinking about the future and mitigating complexity.

Yet, despite its conceptual appeal and increasing relevance in a rapidly changing world, the institutional adaptation of strategic foresight remains uneven and often superficial. Two interrelated barriers stand out: the marginalization of long-term thinking and the limited institutional capacity to grapple with systemic complexity. Curry and Hodgson (2008) argue that most organizations are structurally inclined toward short-term objectives, making it difficult to adopt the kind of transformational, long-range thinking that foresight requires. OECD's foresight report (2019) reinforces this view, highlighting that political and policy cycles are inherently reactive, leaving little room for exploring emerging systemic shifts and long-range analysis. Monteiro and Dal Borgo (2019) further contend that immediate operational pressures often override the imperative to plan for long-range disruptions. As a result, foresight becomes paradoxical: it is both a critical response to complexity and a practice constrained by the very systems it seeks to inform.

Furthermore, constraints are not merely cultural or structural; they are also epistemological. The core of this problem is a misplaced expectation of predictive accuracy in domains where uncertainty and emergence are dominant. Critics of foresight often dismiss it for its imprecision, yet such critiques misinterpret its proper function. The challenge is not prediction but managing institutional expectations in the face of systemic unpredictability.

This tension between expectations and actual utility is particularly pronounced in the defense sector, where the demand for present-day precision coexists with the inherently unpredictable nature of future conflict environments. There is a long queue of critics who doom future thinking for its lack of precision and impact. Freedman (2008) emphasizes that predictive failures in strategic thinking are systemic rather than incidental, as paradigms often lag transformations in warfare. Similarly, Watts (1996) notes that strategic effectiveness cannot be disentangled from friction, nor can war be anticipated without acknowledging its chaotic, non-linear character.

While these critics are not wrong, they also point to an essential need for reframing the actual utility of strategic foresight for long-term military analysis and subsequent decisions. The real value of foresight lies not in its ability to forecast precise outcomes, but in its capacity to surface alternative futures, stress-test assumptions, and build cognitive and institutional resilience (Scoblic, 2021; Briggs

2 *In parallel, France's Délégation à l'aménagement du territoire et à l'action régionale (DATAR) pioneered territorial foresight in the 1960s, and the UK government initiated long-term defense planning through the Development Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC) and the Foresight" programme`, which emerged from futures research conducted by the Civil Service in the 1960s. In: Dulong, D., & Robert, C. (2024): Dreyer, I., & Stang, G. (2013)*

et al., 2022).

In this sense, credible strategies cannot omit anticipation, especially in the face of imperfect information. Strategic thinking must inherently contend with uncertainty and the opacity of the future. As Gray (2014) argues, "the very purpose of strategic planning is to prepare for situations that are, in large part, unknowable". The Cold War period exemplified this need, as the increasingly complex nature of warfare forced military institutions to diversify their capability portfolios. As showcased in the shape and form of complex, cost-intensive, and long-term projects like the Second Offset Strategy by the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) or the army transformation plans of the Soviet Union driven by the "Ogarkov doctrine" (Krepinevich, 2023), governments faced increasingly complex decisions to develop broad-based, adaptable defense systems amid technological volatility and shifting geopolitical conditions.

Further examples include the U.S. Navy's Maritime Strategy of the 1980s, which anticipated Soviet naval expansion and emphasized forward presence (Swartz, 2017), which proved to be a correct operational solution. DARPA's extremely cost-intensive early stealth aircraft programs could not omit various forms of foresight either, to anticipate and assess future radar-denial requirements before adversary air defenses matured (Sweetman, 1986).

NATO likewise institutionalized futures analysis through its Long-Term Defence Planning Process (Heuser, 1995)[3] (later NATO Defence Planning Process – NDPP from 2002), just as China reoriented its doctrine after the Gulf War toward "local wars under high-tech conditions" (Shambaugh, 2002). More recently, the UK Ministry of Defence has embedded foresight through its enduring Strategic Trends Programme, offering rolling 30-year outlooks to inform defense planning (UK MOD, 2018) amidst the increasing delivery timeframes of complex weapon systems. The solution for complex capability planning problems was thus, very often, more, and not less, long-range analysis. Uttley and Wilkinson (2019) also highlight that the value of futures analysis lies in guiding such developments, particularly in designing national defense capabilities for the decades ahead.

As a result, in today's environment, marked by accelerating instability, geopolitical fragmentation, and rapid technological change, many states and international organizations are indeed beginning to institutionalize foresight to inform strategic decision-making. The sense of - and exposure to - systemic geopolitical transitions, global catastrophic risks, and abrupt shocks, exemplified in events like COVID-19 or the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine, has also likely contributed to a revival of foresight practices. Notable examples of more structured approaches at the alliance level can also be traced to these developments, including NATO's Strategic Foresight Analysis (2023) and Science and Technology Trends (2025) reports, as well as the European Commission's Strategic Foresight Reports series.

These efforts reflect an emerging consensus that organizations in a deteriorating environment need to integrate long-term, systemic analysis into their strategic processes, and best practices suggest that, instead of aiming to predict specific outcomes, they should focus on preparing to adapt by envisioning a wide range of plausible futures. Crucially, many of these initiatives reject deterministic "crystal ball" approaches (the epistemological challenge) and signal a critical shift from prediction of

3 NATO Defence Planning Process – NDPP from 2002

futures towards assessing the extent and direction of change in the relevant operating environments. Thus, strategic foresight has emerged as an essential instrument for navigating complexity in both civilian and defense planning.

Yet its utility remains challenged by a wide range of critics. While its historical roots demonstrate its analytical power, foresight continues to struggle against entrenched institutional biases, political short-termism, and misconceptions about its predictive intent.

It is therefore critical to revisit the actual utility of foresight and assess its value not by the precision of its forecasts, but by its contribution to organizational preparedness and adaptability. The measure of foresight should lie in its capacity to anticipate plausible disruptions, to challenge prevailing assumptions, and to foster long-term strategic agility. In this respect, foresight provides a distinctive form of alternative analysis that no other method can easily replicate, as it transforms uncertainty from a paralyzing constraint into a catalyst for transformation, preparedness, and innovation in both civilian and defense planning, thereby enabling force designs that are better suited for future contingencies.

In doing so, however, a persistent problem remains despite growing awareness of its importance: strategic foresight is often poorly institutionalized, inconsistently applied, and unevenly integrated into decision-making processes. The disconnect between foresight's theoretical promise, and its practical adoption poses a major obstacle for governments, militaries, and organizations seeking to navigate an increasingly complex strategic environment. Foresight must thus evolve not only methodologically but institutionally, by moving from peripheral analytical exercises to embedded components of governance and planning architecture. Efforts like NATO's Strategic Foresight Analysis (2023) reflect this shift by connecting future operating environments to capability development, linking future thinking directly with the Allied defense planning process and the broader capability value chain. Such success, however, takes leadership, institutional buy-in, and a thorough understanding of its utility.

At such a critical juncture for this alternative form of analysis, conversations at West Point have advanced this conversation and raised awareness of both the potential contribution and related institutional barriers through a series of case studies provided by scholars from across the globe.

THE UTILITY OF STRATEGIC FORESIGHT: THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION CHALLENGE

Despite its recognized benefits, foresight remains inconsistently institutionalized within U.S. government frameworks. Greenblott et al. (2018) conducted a federal interview study across 19 agencies and found that strategic foresight remains heterogeneously practiced and only partially embedded in U.S. planning and decision-making routines, indicating uneven institutionalization rather than a coherent wholeofgovernment capability. Schmerzing (2021) highlights persistent "impact gaps" in implementing the actionable findings of the National Intelligence Council (NIC) Global Trends Report (GTR) due to institutional barriers and low perceived political salience that impede systematic uptake into agency strategies, despite the report's analytic quality. Additionally, there is still no comprehensive, whole-of-government approach to strategic foresight. Insights from the West Point Working GGroup have reinforced that without a shared understanding of strategic risks, interagency collaboration remains limited, leading to fragmented policy development.

Du Mont (2025) notes that while DoD maintains advanced foresight capabilities, they often operate in silos, limiting their broader impact. Structural barriers also hinder integration across national security agencies. The Department of Energy (DOE) demonstrates strength in technology foresight but lacks effective interagency links; DoD specializes in long-term military planning but lacks a coordinated foresight network; and the Department of State (DOS), while engaged in strategic policy, does not embed foresight into daily operations.

These disparities reflect uneven foresight capacities across agencies and deeper questions about how institutions choose which futures to prioritize. This concern is central to Depledge's (2025) critique, which shifts the focus from institutional capability to institutional authority in shaping strategic visions. The question is not just which futures are considered plausible, but also which futures are deemed desirable, and crucially, who has the authority to shape them. In this spirit, Depledge argues that foresight is an inherently institutional problem, as its challenges stem less from missing tools or expertise than from how institutions are structured, how they assign authority, and how they determine which futures are valued. His thesis is presented through the concept of sociotechnical imaginaries, underscoring that foresight is not merely about prediction but about shaping future realities. The prominence of AI-driven warfare discussions contrasts with the relative marginalization of low-carbon warfare, exemplifying how institutional power structures influence which foresight insights gain traction. Depledge's analysis of low-carbon warfare also highlights the potential of foresight in reimagining military structures. The global transition away from fossil fuels presents a fundamental shift in military operations, requiring not just technological adaptation but also cultural change in defense planning. He posits that sociotechnical imaginaries shape militaries' conceptualizations of future capabilities. AI and robotics were widely accepted as the future of warfare, yet green energy adaptation remains marginal. This illustrates how institutional inertia and entrenched material dependencies hinder foresight-driven transformations.

In response to these structural challenges, some foresight scholars and practitioners (Walker et al., 2020; Rohrbeck et al., 2018) have proposed capacity-building frameworks that focus on maturing institutional foresight capabilities over time. One such approach is technology-driven enablement for foresight, such as AI-assisted foresight horizon scanning, which provides a structured developmental pathway for organizations to assess and enhance their foresight integration. In this context, Kuosa et al (2025) introduce a "Foresight Maturity Model" across five stages of foresight maturity, from basic awareness to full institutional embedding, and emphasize the importance of aligning foresight ambition with organizational context and complexity. This model provides a practical toolset for diagnosing foresight readiness, identifying growth areas, and fostering a culture of anticipatory thinking. In addition, Kuosa argued that AI-assisted foresight platforms, including their own model, the Futures Platform, can play an enabling role by automating data gathering and trend monitoring, allowing human analysts to focus on sense-making, collaboration, and strategy development. These technologies enhance the agility and reach of foresight practices, especially in complex policy environments where time and cognitive resources are limited. They also demonstrate that institutionalization does not depend solely on structural reform but can also be supported through iterative, tool-supported learning processes enabled by machine learning that evolves over time.

Other cases of institutionalization included the successful example of Singapore. Hockers (2025) provided a compelling case study in institutionalized foresight. Since its founding in 1819 as a global

commercial hub, Singapore has prioritized long-term strategic planning to ensure economic and geopolitical resilience. The Centre for Strategic Futures (CSF), established in 2009, aims to go beyond traditional scenario planning by focusing on desirable futures rather than simply forecasting how they might unfold. Hockers notes that Singapore's foresight strategy was deeply tied to its economic survival: "Without free trade, Singapore would die." Unlike many nations that establish foresight institutions reactively, the national responses to COVID-19 in Singapore embedded foresight in governance from the outset. Thus, Singapore provides an alternative model, with a highly centralized foresight apparatus that mandates integration across agencies to ensure long-term strategic alignment.

The use cases explored in this conversation agree that while strategic foresight is increasingly acknowledged as a critical governance tool, its institutionalization remains uneven and contested. In many settings, particularly within large and complex institutions, foresight capabilities are often fragmented, siloed, or absent altogether. Structural barriers, short-term policy cycles, and institutional cultures that prioritize operational stability over anticipatory agility inhibit the integration of long-term thinking. As Depledge and others note, foresight is fundamentally about institutional authority and the sociopolitical dynamics that determine which futures are legitimized. Singapore's proactive model shows that integration is possible, but it requires deliberate alignment between foresight ambitions, organizational context, and policy mandates. In addition, evolving AI-assisted foresight tools can increase their efficiency beyond current limits, making them more attractive and widely usable for organizations.

But institutional foresight readiness is still not a matter of adopting new tools alone. It demands sustained investment in organizational learning, cross-agency collaboration, and the cultivation of futures literacy as a core governance competency. Lasting change depends on creating an environment where foresight is embedded into everyday decision-making. This shift entails moving beyond reactive, expert-driven forecasting toward participatory, iterative, and values-conscious approaches that help institutions not just anticipate the future but actively shape it.

THE UTILITY OF FORESIGHT IN ASSESSING LONG-TERM REGIONAL DYNAMICS

Building on earlier insights, recent research has further explored the utility of strategic foresight as an alternative approach to understanding regional dynamics and anticipate future trajectories within security complexes (Coward et al., 2024; Bilgin, 2016, NATO Strategic Foresight Regional Analysis series).

Scholars have examined through their own case studies during the West Point Social Seminar how foresight can inform security policy in contexts marked by instability, shifting power balances, and contested global orders.

Metcalfe (2025) uses Iraq's post-occupation landscape as a case study, arguing that strategic foresight must incorporate social and ecological signals, not only to anticipate conflict recurrence but also to support lasting peace. Two dimensions stood out: the rise in femicide and the degradation of water infrastructure. These indicators reveal how the aftershocks of war—especially in the north—continue to shape Iraq's human security and environmental resilience. Drawing on the peace contin-

uum framework (Davenport et al., 2018), Metcalfe highlights how structural violence, gender-based insecurity, and ecological collapse converge in residual war zones, complicating stabilization efforts. These findings highlight that foresight must account for different factors and interactions in complex, multi-actor environments. This kind of thinking can improve how military operations are planned and carried out in challenging settings.

Agachi (2025) introduced a scenario-planning model for transatlantic security and defense for 2035–2040. Based on a comprehensive trend analysis across political, economic, technological, and environmental domains, she developed a 2x2 matrix with two axes: the cohesion of European threat perception and the level of U.S. engagement. The resulting scenarios (Rebalancing, Dependency, Sovereignty, and Fragmentation) expose the fragility of the current NATO model under different geopolitical configurations. This foresight exercise points to a narrow window for transatlantic investment in deterrence and underscores the risks of deferred coordination amid multipolarity and internal political volatility.

Kinaci (2025) examined Russia-Iran relations using scenario planning and issue-based analysis to assess the implications of their growing partnership. While these states often act in strategic alignment, their collaboration has historically been contingent and fraught with mistrust. Kinaci's foresight assessment demonstrated the risk that a strengthened Russia-Iran alliance could provoke broader destabilization, particularly through asymmetric weapons proliferation and joint proxy operations. The study also cautioned against reading this axis as monolithic, stressing its transactional and reversible nature.

Alaraby (2025) analyzed the development trajectories of indigenous defense industries in the MENA region through Inayatullah's Futures Triangle. He illustrated the "weight of the past" (rentier-state systems, legacy dependency on arms imports), the "push of the present" (state-led defense investment in Saudi Arabia and the UAE), and the "pull of the future" (Fourth Industrial Revolution, population pressure). The future of defense innovation in MENA, he argued, hinges on whether national strategies can reconcile these temporal forces by transforming institutional legacies into adaptive capabilities, aligning current investments with sustainable human capital development, and positioning technological ambition within realistic socio-economic and geopolitical constraints.

These use cases on the utilization of long-range analysis to understand regional dynamics further highlight how foresight can support strategic thinking in fragile, post-conflict, and contested regions. Instead of predicting outcomes, strategic foresight proves most valuable when it spots and extrapolates overlooked variables while challenging assumptions about stability and security. It functions as a dynamic, integrative approach that focuses on hidden tensions, reframes risks, and helps decision-makers navigate volatile environments shaped by conflict legacies, shifting power structures, and complex socio-ecological dynamics. Case studies reinforced the utility of a foresight practice that moves beyond traditional metrics to consider layered indicators of fragility, including gender-based violence, infrastructure decay, and ecological stress. These often-overlooked signals were vital in assessing peace and resilience, as seen in Iraq. Likewise, future models, such as the transatlantic 2x2 matrix, highlighted the need for adaptive frameworks amid internal fragmentation and shifting threat perceptions. In cases like Russia and Iran, foresight exposed the fragility of apparent alliances, challenging simplistic interpretations. Discussions on indigenous defense innovation in the MENA region

showed how futures thinking exposes structural limitations (viability) of long-term ambitions.

THE UTILITY OF LONG-RANGE ASSESSMENTS IN OPERATIONAL AND FORCE PLANNING

Further cases demonstrate how strategic foresight supports future force and operational planning amid technological volatility, contested geographies, institutional inertia, and cultural resistance. The discussion at the West Point Social Sciences Seminar emphasized that force design is iterative, historically contingent, institution-bound, and politically negotiated rather than a linear, technology-driven process. Here, the foresight function is not to forecast warfare's future but to interrogate assumptions and trade-offs, informing early decisions in force and resource planning.

Kallenborn (2025) applies long-term technology assessment to assess the impact of Unmanned Ground Vehicles (UGVs), portraying them as tools that offer strategic flexibility under specific conditions. This is in stark contrast with the popular understanding of these systems as battlefield game-changers. According to Kallenborn, UGVs' utility lies in low-risk engagement, scalable allied support, and tactical experimentation. Their disposability and unmanned nature reduce political costs, enabling states to signal commitment or pressure without endangering troops. This is especially relevant in peacekeeping, crisis response, and contested withdrawals, where machines may overtake soldiers and shift domestic and international perceptions. UGVs can enhance allied capacity and service-level effectiveness by providing affordable mass, logistics collaboration, and situational awareness in difficult terrain. These incremental benefits could yield a cumulative impact in prolonged or sensitive operations. Kallenborn also emphasizes how UGVs affect military culture, personnel needs, and planning assumptions. He posits that as robotics proliferates, forces will require fewer traditional operators and more specialists in coding, remote warfare, and analysis. Foresight becomes crucial to prepare for these shifts as evolving changes in autonomy, logistics, and risk that influence escalation, alliance behavior, and doctrine. While not yet transformative, UGVs mark an inflection point in how militaries conceive of presence, control, and adaptability.

A second theme addressed operational geography within the context of long-term planning, focusing on Japan's Sakishima Islands in Taiwan-related force planning. Ji and Matsuda (2025) presented a strategic analysis showing how islands like Yonaguni, Ishigaki, and Miyako could enable an active denial strategy to constrain Chinese movement in the western Pacific. Just 70 miles from Taiwan, they offer the ideal ground for rapid deployment of A2/AD capabilities, such as PAC-3 MSE interceptors, anti-ship missiles, future drone swarms, and directed-energy systems.

Beyond proximity, their natural terrain and civilian infrastructure support dispersed, low-signature defense postures that increase survivability and complicate adversary targeting. Fortifying these islands raises China's potential costs, shifting a quick strike into a prolonged campaign. The panel highlighted how integrating such peripheral assets into broader deterrence reflects the power of foresight in operational planning—shaping the strategic environment through dispersion and redundancy rather than just firepower. As China's capability edge narrows, how assets are used, not just their scale, will define regional balance.

At the institutional level, Pallas (2025) reappraised the U.S. Marine Corps's transformation through

Force Design 2030, framing it not as radical but as the latest phase in decades of reform. Using archival materials from 1973 onward, he showed that many current changes—like divesting heavy armor or embracing unmanned systems—echo past reform cycles, including the Hogaboom Report (1956), Gray's Total Force 2000, and Krulak's Sea Dragon. These efforts consistently addressed enduring challenges: integrating technology, maintaining readiness, and managing change amid budget and political pressures. Pallas argued that Force Design 2030 continues this lineage. General Berger's stand-in forces resemble Krulak's agile units for distributed operations. Yet reform cycles always face resistance—from retired generals, doctrinal purists, and acquisition bureaucracies—often driven by concerns over institutional identity. Such critiques overlook past decisions, like tank and artillery reductions in the 1990s, which anticipated today's shifts.

These findings reinforce the assumption that foresight can enhance force design amid accelerating technological shifts and evolving threats. In its application to long-range defense planning, foresight is not a predictive tool but a diagnostic lens to surface friction points, assess readiness, and guide institutional change. Foresight interrogates present assumptions, helping planners manage uncertainty over time. As Carlton Haelig (chair) observed during the conversation, futures thinking often identifies friction within a system between actors who disagree on what forces, concepts, or threats should define the road ahead. Berkouwer`s work (2009) supports this by examining of discourse around foresight in US and UK defense policy, which results in struggles over which visions of the future should dominate, influencing capability development and institutional posture during periods of strategic upheaval and reform. In defense institutions, this tension plays out as a struggle over which strategic narrative gains dominance, ultimately influencing capability development and operational posture. This internal competition over futures is especially salient in periods of reform, when cultural identities and strategic paradigms are up for renegotiation. As a more recent example, the ongoing debate over the lessons of Ukraine for Taiwan has been prominent in US defense policy circles and offers a concrete example of this internal narrative struggle. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, discussions in US defense forums and among policy advisors turned to whether the Taiwan contingency should shape capability development. Reports from think-tanks like the Center for New America (CNA) and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) identify active policy debates over prioritizing asymmetric warfare concepts, defense reforms, service requirements, and technology investments in response to perceived parallels between Ukraine and Taiwan. These competing views—whether to center force structure and deterrence on China/Taiwan or continue large-scale support for Ukraine—often reflect deeper institutional and cultural divides over what future threat should define US strategic posture.[4]

Throughout, participants stressed how force transformation depends on the interplay of culture, structure, and technology. Adopting systems like UGVs hinges on cultures willing to embrace innovation, not only technical feasibility. Elite resistance often stems from power structures and identity preservation, not doctrinal logic. The Marine Corps' reform history, culminating in Force Design 2030, underscored that foresight must be embedded institutionally. Without it, even data-driven reforms risk fragmentation. Strategic foresight helps align change with long-term strategic realities, mapping constraints and assumptions to ensure future force planning remains adaptive, flexible, and informed by organizational memory.

4 CNA Report. "Taiwan Lessons Learned from the Russia-Ukraine War," 2024; Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). "Ukraine and Taiwan: Parallels and Early Lessons Learned," 2022

ALTERNATIVE ANALYSIS TO ANTICIPATE EXISTENTIAL GLOBAL RISKS

The evolving role of strategic foresight in identifying, understanding, and mitigating global catastrophic risks (GCRs) is also clear. GCRs are low-probability, high-impact events that could threaten the continuity of human civilization. These risks have been assessed as systemic, transboundary, and often lie beyond the horizon of conventional military and policy frameworks. The panel emphasized that strategic foresight must expand its scope, audience, and methods to remain relevant in addressing such unprecedented challenges.

A central insight from the discussion is the need to shift prevailing worldviews of security thinking. Participants argued for a movement from national to global perspectives, acknowledging that traditional security competition may intensify the very threats it seeks to contain. This includes adopting a cosmopolitan security paradigm, as advanced by Colonel Robert Underwood (2025), who argued that defense planning should prioritize the long-term survival of humanity over short-term geopolitical gains. Strategic compromise better serves global stability than escalation-prone competition. This shift requires rethinking the purpose and priorities of national defense, especially as existential risks increasingly arise from systemic breakdowns rather than state adversaries. This worldview transformation also requires expanding the target audience of foresight beyond the practitioner community. Foresight must engage decision-makers and publics more broadly, bridging the gap between analysis and application. Militaries and government agencies must not only prepare for disruption but must also build coalitions across society to sustain proactive governance. Security is no longer the exclusive domain of defense experts; it must be co-produced with societal stakeholders, including those in science, technology, civil society, and governance.

Methodologically, the conversation around the GCR reflects a growing need for tools that embrace complexity, non-linearity, and uncertainty. Lieutenant Colonel Jason Brown (2025) highlights threatcasting as a method for mapping deeply undesirable futures and identifying intervention points. By focusing on potential endpoints and working backward (backcasting), this approach reframes foresight from extrapolation to design. It emphasizes not prediction, but preparation through imaginative, multidisciplinary exploration. This further reinforces the necessity of “disciplined imagination,” i.e., creative thinking unconstrained at first but eventually limited by structured deliberation to identify actionable pathways. Complexity theory is also a critical concept to this effort, highlighted for its ability to address systemic volatility. Events such as the Arab Spring exemplify how micro-level triggers can generate macro-level consequences, defying linear causal assumptions. Recognizing the potential for distant, delayed, and disproportionate effects, foresight must account for emergent dynamics in interconnected systems. This demands new modeling capabilities and institutional flexibility.

Zachary Kallenborn et al (2025) outline how militaries intersect with GCRs across six domains: acts of violence, inter-actor dynamics, technology development, environmental impact, outer space operations, and catastrophic event management. While militaries can exacerbate risks, they are also uniquely equipped to prevent or respond to them, provided they adopt an anticipatory stance. Their proposal for a resilience-first approach to global catastrophic terrorism emphasized institutional adaptability, investment in critical infrastructure, and systemic awareness over coercive responses.

As Joseph Voros (discussant) noted, a shift is needed from a “soldier mindset” to a “scout mindset”:

one that seeks out alternative futures with intellectual humility and moral clarity. The need to embed foresight as a central capability within modern defense institutions was further emphasized, equipping them not only to respond to crises but also to anticipate and ethically shape the future security landscape.

Authors generally agree that strategic foresight must evolve to meet the demands posed by global catastrophic risks (GCRs), which lie beyond the boundaries of conventional defense planning and strategic doctrine. A foresight-enabled security approach must be reframed from national interest to cosmopolitan survival. Cooperative engagement with adversaries may prove more stabilizing than zero-sum strategies. This demands longer time horizons, planetary perspectives, and recognition of shared vulnerabilities in areas such as climate, technology, and biosafety. Rather than viewing GCRs as peripheral concerns, the panel argued they should be treated as central to the long-term survivability of societies, institutions, and ecosystems. Militaries are uniquely positioned to engage with these risks, due to their scale, infrastructure, and capacity for coordinated response. Still, they must rethink both their purpose and their planning methodologies to do so effectively. The panel further emphasized the importance of adopting a cosmopolitan orientation in security thinking. In the face of existential threats, conventional assumptions about national self-interest and strategic competition may prove counterproductive. Reframing security around collective survival and shared global responsibility would enable more ethically sound, strategically sustainable decisions. This shift, however, demands institutional adaptation: new roles (such as a National Intelligence Officer for GCR), new planning approaches (that integrate emerging technologies, cyber risks, and environmental stressors), and a new culture of foresight grounded in long-term thinking and humility.

Additionally, militaries should apply structured foresight tools, such as threatcasting, that encourage multidisciplinary thinking, expose blind spots, and guide early intervention strategies by identifying systemic vulnerabilities, early-warning indicators, and decision thresholds. Ultimately, the panel concluded that militaries must be transformed into more than just tools of deterrence into enablers of anticipatory governance in a world increasingly shaped by complexity, fragility, and interconnected risk. Strategic foresight is essential not only for preparing for catastrophe, but for preventing it altogether by reshaping how risk, responsibility, and resilience are understood in defense policy and practice.

CONCLUSIONS: FROM INSIGHT TO INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE

The discussions and papers presented in Working Group 2 at the 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar made it clear that strategic foresight is becoming a practical necessity in defense and security planning, amid increasing complexity and ever-longer time horizons. Whether the topic was institutional gaps, regional challenges, military transformation, or global risks, the emerging understanding is that foresight is not about predicting the future with precision. It is about shaping better choices today, in an environment defined by uncertainty. Building on this, effective policy and defense planning now require embedding strategic foresight into the core of institutional practice. Planners should use a wide, ever-increasing foresight toolset to reveal blind spots, anticipate disruptive shifts, and ensure that key decisions are robust across multiple possible futures.

Luckily, we are not starting from scratch. Throughout the sessions, participants shared examples of foresight already in action. AI-supported horizon scanning, scenario planning, and long-term capa-

bility development are helping planners think ahead and make better-informed decisions. But these examples also highlighted a limit: discussion and reflection alone are not enough. To increase its utility, foresight must become part of daily planning routines, spreading well beyond special projects or strategy papers. It should shape how defense institutions think, plan, and act.

Currently, a key institutional challenge for this alternative form of analysis is that foresight is still unevenly distributed and utilized across governments and military organizations. The level of foresight maturity at defense institutions varies greatly. It is often treated as a separate activity rather than a core part of planning. To change this, institutions should adopt best practices and lessons learned from across the Alliance, build dedicated foresight roles, foster collaboration across agencies, and ensure long-term thinking is reflected in both training and operations. Tools and digital platforms can support this shift, but only if they are matched by leadership support and a culture open to change.

Regional analysis showed that foresight can be especially useful in fragile, post-conflict, or contested areas. It helps uncover hidden risks, question existing assumptions, and provide alternative paths forward. Defense planners should use it to develop flexible strategies that can adapt to fast-changing environments. In the context of military transformation, foresight helps decision-makers examine trade-offs early. It shows where assumptions may no longer hold, where technology may disrupt existing doctrine, and where cultural resistance may block innovation. It is not about predicting the next war, but about making better choices in force design under pressure and uncertainty. Foresight also needs to be applied beyond the traditional defense sphere. It must help address long-term, high-impact risks like climate change, disruptive technologies, and biosafety threats. These challenges do not respect national borders or military boundaries. Defense institutions can lead the way by shifting from a narrow view of national interest to a broader commitment to resilience and risk reduction. This requires new mindsets, new tools such as threatcasting and systems mapping, and deeper partnerships across sectors.

The biggest obstacle today is the shortfall in operationalizing foresight where it matters most. Meaningful progress requires a shift from theory to action: defense institutions and policy communities should pilot, adapt, and embed foresight practices into their day-to-day activities, doing so faster and more efficiently than ever before. Real progress will come from practical experimentation, in the form of small-scale pilots within planning cycles, training programs, or operational routines, allowing organizations to test, refine, and ultimately integrate long-term thinking into core processes.

Looking ahead, utility must be the central metric for success. The future of strategic foresight in defense should be about proven impact, where anticipatory thinking translates to smarter choices, enhanced resilience, and greater adaptability.

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Chapter 3

Competition Across the Continuum

Umar Ahmed Badami, Henry Lavacude-Cola, Katherine Michaelson, Noah Rizika, Erin Lemons, and Ben Jebb

INTRODUCTION

Competition is a central feature of the current security environment – national security depends on the ability to compete effectively. Still, the US Joint Chiefs of Staff describe competition as a continuum ranging from cooperation to adversarial competition below armed conflict, to armed conflict or war. US doctrine states that to effectively operate across the competition continuum, it is important for commanders to "adopt a mindset of campaigning rather than of campaigns" and continually adapt with, if not ahead of, the operational environment.[1] However, despite achieving many tactical-level successes in recent history, the US has not achieved a similar degree of operational and strategic success. For instance, US troop surges in Iraq and Afghanistan reduced provincial-level violence, but they did not achieve enduring strategic successes in implementing the sociopolitical vision for those countries desired by US political leadership. In a multipolar world, situational awareness and the ability to work with allies and partners are critical to shaping events. Drawing on new scholarship[2], we compare how the US and strategic competitors gain situational understanding and how they work with allies and partners, and offer some modest recommendations to support US competitive strategy.

UNDERSTANDING THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Successful competition requires situation awareness – globally, regionally, and locally. The US and its partners can use this understanding to craft localized irregular warfare campaigns supporting strategic objectives. Traditionally, US competitors have held the advantage. For example, the Russian way of war critically relies on anthropological and psychological models of local sociopolitical and economic dynamics,[3] which may explain the relative success of its information operations in sub-Saharan Africa.[4] In contrast, the US often approaches cultural understanding as an afterthought; however, on the occasions when the US has focused on cultivating and leveraging local expertise by learning from partners, it has seen tactical and operational successes. This is clear when analyzing previous

1 *Joint Chiefs of Staff, JDN 1-19, Competition Continuum, June 3, 2019, 5.*

2 *Presented by scholars and practitioners at West Point's February 2025 Social Science Seminar*

3 *Olga Chiriac, "Resistance Concepts in Russian Strategic Calculus: Romania-Moldova Case Study" (Paper Presentation, West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 2025).*

4 *Collin Meisel and Adam Szymanski-Burgos. "Why Many Nigeriens Want Russia in and the West Out." TIME Magazine (August 2023). https://time.com/6301177/niger-african-support-russia/.*

US security force assistance (SFA) missions, such as in the case of El Salvador. The success of US SFA in El Salvador to combat a local insurgency was due to US advisors' deep understanding of the local environment.[5] By developing a deep understanding of their partners' motivations and the political landscape, the Special Forces troops involved with SFA were able to foster the Salvadorans' will to fight, while also enabling effective advisor integration with Salvadoran forces in kinetic operations. Likewise, the long-term sustainment of this effort allowed US advisors to continually deepen their understanding of local human terrain and overcome information asymmetries in the operational environment with respect to changing conditions.[6] Thus, both US and adversarial case studies demonstrate the criticality of understanding the operational environment and human terrain from a partner-focused lens to conduct campaigning effectively and deliver results across the competition continuum. A deep grasp of the local and regional operational environment is critical to conducting successful counterterrorism operations and supporting resistance movements effectively.[7]

WORKING WITH ALLIES AND PARTNERS

US strategic thinkers have emphasized the important role US allies play as a force multiplier on the international stage, as well as the power of allies and partners to assist US competitors. Allies and partners are critical in assisting the US in understanding the local environment and assisting in achieving local objectives with strategic implications. Furthermore, these relationships can yield political and ideological soft-power wins. However, the US needs to be cognizant of its allies and partners' domestic political constraints to work effectively with them. This is urgent work: US competitors, such as the People's Republic of China (PRC), continue to expand their outreach to their respective allies and partners. US strategic thinkers must have a clear view of the challenges presented by our rivals in this domain of competition.

THE PRINCIPAL-AGENT FRAMEWORK

Viewed through a principal-agent lens, the US acts as the principal in its partner relationships, with requests and expectations for allies (e.g., direct action against adversaries, internal political reforms, etc.). Allies and partners serve as the agents, expected to carry out tasks that advance US interests. This relationship generates considerable friction at times.

Agents can be a critical asset in the era of great power competition, but working with them is not necessarily easy: they face political challenges of their own and can lie and stymie their principal's plans. Based on case work about the US in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Vietnam, Soviets in Afghanistan, and India in Sri Lanka, Elias (citation) finds that, when principals request certain actions of their agent, three circumstances will impact whether the agent will comply or mislead the principal: limited local bureaucratic capacity, patron regime, and type of principal's request.[8] First, for limited local bureaucratic capacity, agents operate within their own resource and capacity restrictions, and when an agent is unable to perform a task requested of it by the principal, non-compliance is likely to occur. Second, the principal's regime type also matters: Local agents are more likely to comply with requests from

5 *Kyle Atwell, "Why and How the United States Intervened in El Salvador (1981-1992)" (Paper Presentation, West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 2025).*

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Nicholas Krohley, "NATO View of Support to Resistance" (Paper Presentation, West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 2025).*

8 *Barbara Elias, "Duck and Cover: How Local Proxies Manage Foreign Patrons in Counterinsurgency Wars" (Paper Presentation, West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 2025).*

autocratic states than non-autocratic states (for example, the Soviet Afghan government was willing to comply with much of what it was requested of it), but that compliance will not necessarily result in success. Lastly, the type of principal's request matters. Liberal principals will often expect agents to adopt rule of law reforms and reconciliation processes, but local agents are primed to avoid such efforts, fearing it will erode their political power.[9]

Similarly, the US should consider Ukraine's and Taiwan's domestic political situations when seeking to bolster resistance efforts against American adversaries. In Taiwan, there is a broad and deep divide between the civilian and military sectors of society. Furthermore, many state officials are sympathetic to the PRC.[10] Additionally, resistance is a taboo topic in Taiwan, with the Taiwanese military's approach to conflict being that civilians should get out of the way. Therefore, resistance organizations originate from civil society instead of under the direction of the military.[11] This state of affairs is not in line with NATO's view of resistance, indicating that local political dynamics risk leading to misunderstanding between partners, missed opportunities, and, in the worst case, leaving Taiwan unprepared for a PRC invasion and occupation.[12] The complicated politics around resistance in Taiwan must be better understood. In Ukraine, there is also a lack of unity between the Ukrainian state and civil society resistance organizations, stemming from a long history of state oppression of civil society. This has generated friction in the Ukrainian government's efforts to combat the Russian invasion, and the Ukrainians have struggled to coordinate their disparate resistance efforts.[13] Similar to Taiwan, the US must be aware of the multiplicity and disunity of Ukrainian resistance efforts when considering how to best coordinate and support any such efforts.

Despite these complications, cooperation is worthwhile because it can advance US interests. Atwell theorizes based on the El Salvador case that the size of US intervention forces affects building partner capacity non-monotonically.[14] Small forces will struggle to effectively monitor the host nation's forces to ensure proper training, compliance with human rights protocols, and more. In contrast, large-scale advisor deployments crowd out the partner force and take over the fight for them, hindering the creation of an indigenous force that can combat the threat independent of the US. Instead, policymakers should aim for a Goldilocks zone of operational advising: not too big, not too small.[15] This was achieved during the US advisor mission in El Salvador, where political pressures led to a firm cap of 55 advisors. Advisors were able to monitor their Salvadorian partners and ensure their long-term effectiveness. While some advisors ended up in combat, their small number prevented them from taking over combat for the Salvadorians. This Goldilocks zone approach allowed the US to prevent the collapse of El Salvador to Soviet influence.[16]

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9 Ibid.

10 Krohley, "NATO View of Support to Resistance."

11 Ibid.

12 Otto C. Fiala, Anders Löfberg, and Kirk Smith, "Resistance Operating Concept (ROC)," JSOU Press, May 1, 2020, https://jsou.edu/Press/PublicationDashboard/25.

13 Krohley, "NATO View of Support to Resistance."

14 Atwell, "Why and How the United States Intervened in El Salvador (1981-1992)."

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

THE SOCIALIZATION APPROACH

While the principal-agent framework represents a stick-and-carrot relationship between the US and its allies and partners, which is expected to fail as soon as the US withdraws the stick or carrot, the socialization approach captures a "stickier" relationship. One critical way the US engages with foreign militaries is through professional military education (PME). Socialization with partner forces through PME offers the opportunity to advance democratic norms in the partner nation. As foreign leaders learn, interact, and socialize with US leaders, these partners should internalize democratic norms, reshape their home countries to become more democratic and, ideally, strengthen US cooperation with the partner nation. Based on a study of US PME's effects on South America, Cal's findings indicate that, on an individual level, PME does not have (on average) a significant impact on attitudes toward individual norms, likely because individuals coming to the US for PME already hold democratic values.[17] However, Cal's findings show that, at the organizational level, a crisis event and strong domestic institutions create the conditions conducive for strong norm adaptation. For example, the Colombian General Carlos Alberto Ospina Ovalle fostered deep cooperation between the US and the Colombian military after graduating from US PME. These organizational-level democratic norms, which can be traced to an impactful experience with US PME, took root in the Colombian military, fostering an impressive adherence to democratic norms when a leftist government was elected in Colombia.[18] These findings indicate the powerful potential for PME to strengthen democratic norms in partner nations and expand cooperation with the US. Still, it should be noted that these efforts took time, as Ovalle had to rise through the ranks after US PME to reach a decision-making position, and such a rise was neither pre-ordained nor guaranteed. US leaders must understand that approaches like PME take time to pay off.

The US is not the only country that recognizes the importance of PME. Competitors like the PRC have been expanding their PME outreach to various countries. As China expands its PME outreach, US officials have emphasized several key points, including the higher quality of PME offered by the US, the higher prestige of US PME institutions, and the benefits of immersive English-language instruction offered in US PME. These virtues of US PME were put to the test by authors Lemons and Wu, who found that, when comparing students who attended English-language immersion PME at Fort Leavenworth with those who attended Spanish-language courses at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, there was no statistically significant difference in leadership roles between the groups.[19] If the traditional US English-language immersion style was superior for career advancement, the Leavenworth group should have demonstrated a higher degree of career advancement. Furthermore, when comparing the career attainment of graduates from US War College courses from English-speaking and non-English speaking African states, Lemons and Wu found that graduates from non-English speaking states were less likely to reach high levels of leadership in their countries' governments. This indicates that PME taught in English may be limiting some countries from sending offers with the highest promotion potential to the US for PME.[20] Lemons and Wu's findings indicate that the US may wish to reconsider its approach to PME in this era of great power

17 *Nerea Cal, "Educating the Guardians: U.S. Foreign Military Professionalization & the Socialization of Democratic Norms" (Paper Presentation, West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 2025).*

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Erin Lemons and Elizabeth Wu, "The Lingua Franca of Command: The Impact of Language of Instruction on International Student Outcomes," (Paper Presentation, West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 2025).*

20 *Ibid.*

competition. China, with its segregated PME model (students are taught in many different languages and segregated by language), may be able to reach more up-and-coming leaders.[21] PME generates change slowly internationally. Expanding access to US PME by removing language barriers can yield benefits for US national security in the future, but not immediately.

THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA'S APPROACH TO ALLIES AND PARTNERS

Outside of China's current expansion in PME provision, Beijing has also focused on a global security assistance campaign coupled with development aid packages. Much of their engagement is guided by this dual mandate of economy and security, aiming to leverage the finances and know-how exported from China to influence the systems and standards within beneficiary countries. Two primary goals direct China's engagement with foreign countries: 1) countering terrorist threats and 2) supporting internal regime security.

China-supported counterterrorism SFA packages include a mix of economic development tools from Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments, direct intervention, and joint-training.[22] Through investments predominantly in the extraction of oil and minerals, the PRC claims to address economic inequality and underdevelopment – both frequently cited as a root causes of insurgencies and domestic terrorism.[23] Such projects deepen the need for China to build security and diplomatic relationships with host countries, as BRI money often comes with an influx of Chinese workers, which China pledges to protect.

Alongside these investments, China has attempted to position itself as a provider of counterterrorism tools and training with a near-global reach. While the PRC has mostly conducted counterterrorism training in Central and Southeast Asia, exercises have also occurred in countries as far away as Belarus, Tanzania, and Mozambique.[24] China also cohosts multilateral counterterrorism dialogues with Russia as leaders of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. With these tools, China is building a reputation as a key provider of cross-spectrum solutions to terrorism, thereby gaining influence in critical areas of US interest.

Terrorist threats are not the only forces threatening the CCP's partner countries; instead, internal resistance and crime are perhaps even more critical threats to a country's day-to-day regime stability. Traditional US SFA strategies have largely focused on external threats and ensuring a country's regional security, leaving a wide gap in the global security provision regime. China has emerged to fill that vacancy, engaging with other nations' internal security apparatuses by providing surveillance technology and regime security expertise.[25] The PRC is flexible in choosing its partners and provides assistance to both authoritarian and democratic countries.

21 *Ibid.*

22 *Rachel Cifu, "PRC Counterterrorism" (Paper Presentation, West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 2025).*

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Katherine Michaelson, "China Signals Defiance to NATO with Military Drills in Belarus," VOA, July 12, 2024. https://www.voanews.com/a/china-signals-defiance-to-nato-with-military-drills-in-belarus-/7696140.html. Alberto Massango, "Military Exercise between Mozambique, China, and Tanzania Under Way," Agência de Informação de Moçambique, August 6, 2024. https://aimnews.org/2024/08/06/military-exercise-between-mozambique-china-and-tanzania-under-way/.*

25 *Sheena Chestnut Greitens and Isaac B. Kardon, "Regional vs. Regime Security: Security Hybridization under U.S.-China Competition," (Paper Presentation, West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 2025).*

The distinct roles that the US, being more externally focused, and the PRC, with its internal security directive, play in SFA has led to a "hybridization" of security goods consumption.[26] Countries, like the US's important regional partner Vietnam, can source security assistance from both Washington and Beijing, giving the PRC inroads and opportunities to undermine the investments we make towards strengthening the recipient country's defense capabilities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this research, we highlight some modest, evidence-based policy recommendations below.

FROM CAMPAIGNS TO CAMPAIGNING

1. **Gaining Situational Understanding.** It is critical for the Department of Defense, and the US government more broadly to holistically adopt a model of campaigning based on local conditions and the human terrain. It is challenging to surge language skills and deep sociopolitical knowledge. Therefore, the US government should continue to seek ways to incentivize individuals across the joint force and the government to maintain these skillsets in a multitude of regions throughout the world.

2. **Strategic Disruption Short of War.** Strategic disruption relies on carefully calibrated, often small-scale actions—frequently executed by special operations forces (SOF)—to delay, degrade, or deny an adversary's plans across the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic spectrum. The actual value of these campaigns lies not in achieving immediate, decisive victories, but in creating time, space, and opportunities for broader, joint-force strategic success.[27] In the short term, a successful campaign repeatedly causes the adversary to restructure their plan: it's an incremental, deliberate strangulation of an adversary's preferred options. It does not aim to directly prevent an adversary from achieving its goal, thereby lowering the risk of direct escalation. Disruption campaigns' future strategic benefits often occur in unpredictable ways and in domains other than the one disrupted, highlighting the need for joint forces to remain cognizant, adaptable, and take initiative.[28] Success requires institutional backing, including interagency coordination, deep adversary understanding—gained through a strong situational understanding—and headquarters focused on long-term, flexible planning.

3. **Emerging Technology Crucial for Joint Force Success.** To support these developments, DoD must continue to move toward an agile technology development process and embrace risk to increase rapid iteration and innovation in space, cyber, and generative AI.

4. **Modernize SOF for Irregular Warfare and Large-Scale Combat Operations.** Special operations forces operate across a wide strategic spectrum, from irregular warfare to large-scale combat operations. SOF's Major Force Program 11 budget cannot compete with the Army's

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Eric Robinson et al, "Strategic Disruption by Special Operations Forces: A Concept for Proactive Campaigning Short of Traditional War," Rand Corporation, December 5, 2023. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1794-1.html.*

28 *King, Bryan L. "Strategic Disruption: An Operational Framework for Irregular Warfare." Special Warfare Journal, published November 25, 2024. https://www.swcs.mil/Special-Warfare-Journal/Article/3977247/strategic-disruption-an-operational-framework-for-irregular-warfare/.*

Major Force Program-2 budget incentivizing the defense industrial base for mission-specific SOF ammunition production.[29] Since different weapons and ammunition are needed for operations in irregular warfare and large-scale combat operations, difficult tradeoffs emerge between availability and functionality. Further, the lack of mission-specific accessories can reduce effectiveness, suggesting the reintroduction of customizable solutions like special operations peculiar modification kits.[30] Ultimately, high-level decision-makers should understand and consider the down-on-the-ground implications that these tradeoffs have on soldiers' performance, as having refined and optimized tools is essential for enhancing operational effectiveness.

PARTNERS AND ALLIES

1. **Incorporate Analysis of Internal Political Dynamics of Partners into Best Practices and Doctrine**. US military doctrine does not formally define "deception detection," underscoring a key vulnerability for the planning of combat operations.[31] While deception detection is mostly considered with regards to US adversaries, the findings of these studies underscore that deception detection should be extended to partners and allies as well. US military leaders and national security officials must incorporate analysis of the internal political dynamics of partners into strategic planning to ensure US interests are advanced in the most effective way.

2. **Work With Allies to Expand PME Language Offerings**. Offering only English-language PME instruction may disadvantage the US in an era of great power competition. The US should engage allies to offer PME education in languages beyond English, enabling soft-power wins and the internalization of democratic norms that will pay off over time with partner nations.

3. **Play the Long Game**. Investment in partner capabilities is not instantaneous: whether it is a new weapons platform or expanding education opportunities for partner militaries, the results of these efforts take time to materialize. At the same time, the US should always consider the primary purpose behind programs. Is the main goal of PME to deepen an individual's adherence to democratic beliefs, or is it to strengthen the fighting competency of a partner nation's force? Different objectives might indicate different approaches. US policymakers need to be clear about their objectives and not be hesitant to reexaming conventional approaches in this changing environment.

4. **Understanding and Combating PRC Strengths:** The US should be cognizant of the PRC's strengths within SFA, including their ability and desire to provide partners with regime security. The PRC can provide fast and cheap methods to alleviate internal security woes that many countries in the Global South seek. The US can either meet this challenge head-on by competing in this market or offset this advantage by continuing to outperform the PC in external security provision, enabling "security hybridization" and thereby avoiding displacement.

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29 *Christopher E. Paul and Michael Schwille, "The Evolution of Special Operations as a Model for Information Forces," Joint Force Quarterly 100, February 10, 2021, https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2497069/the-evolution-of-special-operations-as-a-model-for-information-forces/.*

30 *George Puryear, "Tensions in SOF Modernization" (Paper Presentation, West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 2025).*

31 *Cole Herring, "Countering Chinese Deception in Modern Military Operations," Irregular Warfare Initiative, December 19, 2024. https://irregularwarfare.org/articles/how-to-challenge-chinas-military-deception-tactics/.*

Indeed, focusing on state security rather than regime security provides the US with opportunities for stable, long-term state-to-state relationships that are better able to weather regime changes and other domestic political restructuring.

Chapter 4

The Eurasian Axis and Potential Allied Responses to It

Jeffrey Reynolds, Frank Kuzminski, Max Hoell, Michael St. Pierre, and Alyssa Walker

The following is a conceptual paper for discussion purposes. It should not be viewed as an official policy for NATO or any of its Allies.

ABSTRACT

We define the Eurasian Axis (EA) of China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and Belarus as a unified adversarial construct, synthesizing their strategic alignment into a coherent threat spanning nuclear modernization and proliferation, use of hybrid warfare, coordinated military postures, economic leverage via sanctions evasion and strategic trade corridors, financial resiliency through alternative payment networks, and orchestrated cultural and ideological influence operations. Through recent agreements such as the Russia–China "no limits" comprehensive partnership, the 2024 Russia–North Korea comprehensive strategic treaty, and the 2025 Russia–Iran 20-year defense alliance, these actors have progressed from opportunistic coordination to systematic security cooperation. Their shared objectives—to challenge the U.S.-led liberal international order, degrade NATO cohesion, and bring about a multipolar world—emerge from overlapping geopolitical incentives and practical support mechanisms. We synthesize existing analyses to define the EA, characterize its current capabilities, forecast its trajectory over the next decade, and outline the implications for U.S. and Allied strategy and readiness.

DEFINITION OF THE EURASIAN AXIS

The Eurasian Axis refers to tightening strategic alignment among the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and the Republic of Belarus. Post-2014 geopolitical dynamics enabled deepening convergence around shared anti-Western objectives. Key milestones include the 2022 Sino-Russian "no limits" partnership declaration, the 2024 Russia–North Korea comprehensive strategic treaty, and the 2025 Russia–Iran 20-year defense alliance, each signaling an institutional shift toward collective posturing. Belarus's integration into Russian defense architecture, epitomized by hosting tactical nuclear assets on its sovereign territory, further cements its role as a frontline extension of this Axis.

Although ideological differences and historical mistrust remain among these regimes, practical considerations—such as sanctions evasion, arms transfers, and diplomatic support in international fora—

weaken those constraints. The EA operates through a network of interlocking agreements that enable technology transfers, coordinated military exercises, and shared intelligence, reflecting a novel form of autocratic security cooperation.

STRATEGIC COHESION AND SHARED INTERESTS

At its core, the EA is driven by a mutual interest in undermining the U.S.-led liberal order, reshaping norms on sovereignty, and contesting the West in almost every area of human endeavor. China seeks unchallenged primacy in the Indo-Pacific and strategic depth against the U.S., while Russia aims to preserve its near-abroad influence and circumvent Western sanctions. Iran views alliance with Russia and cooperation with China as means to break diplomatic isolation and strengthen its deterrence capabilities against regional adversaries, particularly Israel and the U.S. North Korea's calculus hinges on regime survival, leveraging alliances for economic relief and technical assistance to advance its missile and nuclear programs. Belarus, facing Western sanction threats for its complicity in Russia's Ukraine campaign, has tethered its security to Moscow in exchange for economic subsidies and military guarantees.

Operationalizing these shared interests, the Axis conducts joint military exercises, such as China–Russia naval drills in the Pacific and Russia–North Korea command-post exercises. Beijing and Moscow co-developed advanced weapons systems, including anti-ship ballistic missiles and hypersonic glide vehicles, facilitating technology diffusion across the Axis. Tehran's drone and missile transfers to Russia, and Pyongyang's ordnance supplied for Ukraine operations, exemplify the reciprocal military support that binds the Axis states. China's Belt and Road Initiative extends strategic infrastructure to Belarus and Iran, while energy-for-arms barter arrangements sustain Russia's war economy and Iran's proxy networks. The creation of forums such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization further institutionalizes the Axis by providing diplomatic platforms for coordinating policy positions.

NUCLEAR THREAT

China, Russia, and North Korea have accelerated nuclear force expansions, while Iran edges toward latent breakout capability. The Department of Defense (DoD) estimates that China's operational warhead stockpile exceeded 600 by mid-2024 and projects growth to over 1,000 by 2030, marking an unprecedented buildup contrary to treaty obligations. Russia maintains the world's largest arsenal with over 5,000 strategic warheads, augmented by tactical weapons deployed in Belarus to enhance regional coercion. Pyongyang has conducted six nuclear tests and is estimated to possess roughly 50 warheads deliverable by mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles, raising proliferation concerns.

EA members have signaled reduced adherence to no–first–use norms; Russia and China's joint statements envisage pre-emptive options in perceived existential scenarios. North Korea's 2022 nuclear law codifies massive retaliatory doctrines, and Tehran maintains ambiguous religious edicts that permit weaponization if strategic necessity arises. The proximity of Russian tactical warheads to NATO capitals via Belarus lowers the nuclear threshold, demanding calibrated Allied deterrence measures. Collective advancement in command-and-control networks and joint space-based early warning cooperation complicates NATO's strategic calculus by eroding crisis warning times.

MILITARY INTEGRATION

Russia and Belarus have merged air defense and missile units under joint command, deploying S-300 and S-400 systems in Belarus to dominate Eastern European airspace. Belarus hosts Iskander-M short-range ballistic missiles within striking distance of NATO's Suwałki Gap, enabling rapid conventional and nuclear response options. China's People's Liberation Army Navy has commissioned multiple carrier strike groups, extending power projection beyond the First Island Chain and challenging U.S. maritime dominance. The PLA Rocket Force fields DF-26 and DF-21D anti-ship ballistic missiles aimed at U.S. bases and carriers, underpinning Beijing's anti-access/area denial strategy. North Korea has modernized its submarine fleet and naval destroyers to threaten ROK–U.S. sea control, while its cyber units conduct disruptive operations against Allied networks.

Recent joint drills—such as the 2023 Vostok exercise involving China's 80th Group Army and Russia's Eastern Military District—demonstrate deepening cooperation amongst EA states. Moscow supplies advanced air defense radars and electronic warfare gear to Beijing and Pyongyang, while receiving North Korean munitions and Iranian unmanned aerial systems. Iranian ballistic missile expertise flows to Hezbollah and Hamas, with Chinese logistical aid ensuring delivery, illustrating the Axis's broader proxy cooperation model. The integration of Belarusian special operations forces into Russian rapid reaction brigades enhances combined-arms readiness for potential Eastern European contingencies.

ECONOMIC LEVERAGE

China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea operate elaborate sanctions evasion networks, including shadow fleets of tankers and barter trade mechanisms. Russia's state-affiliated tankers, frequently reflagged, transport oil to Asia while obscuring ownership to sidestep Western maritime sanctions. Initial barter agreements between Moscow and Beijing aim to bypass bank scrutiny, and revive pre-1990s commodity-for-commodity exchanges to sustain bilateral trade. Economic dependencies have surged: China became Russia's largest trading partner with over $220 billion in bilateral trade in 2023, while Iran's energy exports to China underpin Tehran's budget stability. Belarus functions as a transit corridor for sanctioned Russian goods into EU markets, undermining the unity of Western sanctions regimes.

The Belt and Road Initiative finances key rail, port, and energy infrastructure in Belarus and Iran, embedding China in critical Eurasian supply chains. Russian Gazprom and Rosneft pipeline projects sustain Europe-bound gas flows, creating economic coercion levers despite EU diversification efforts. Iran's petrochemical complexes, upgraded through Chinese joint ventures, generate export revenue and produce dual-use chemicals with potential military applications. Joint economic commissions institutionalize Axis coordination, aligning national development plans to mutual strategic objectives.

FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

In response to Western financial pressure, Russia developed the SPFS system to supplant SWIFT, and China expanded its CIPS network to facilitate renminbi-based settlements. HSBC Hong Kong's participation in CIPS underscores China's drive to internationalize the yuan and challenge dollar dominance in Asia. Tehran and Pyongyang tap into these platforms and explore crypto-enabled channels to launder sanctioned oil revenues. Axis states accelerate central bank digital currency pilots to reduce exposure to U.S. financial infrastructure.

China's $3 trillion foreign-exchange reserves underwrite Belt and Road obligations, providing a war chest for strategic investments. Russia shelters roughly $600 billion in hard currency reserves through opaque transfers to allied banks. Iran maintains a $120 billion sovereign reserve fund to stabilize its rial, while North Korea accumulates limited foreign assets through clandestine cyber operations. The Axis leverages these reserves to underwrite proxy operations and sustain defense production despite sanction-induced revenue losses.

CULTURAL AND IDEOLOGICAL INFLUENCE

State-controlled media outlets such as RT, Sputnik, and China's Xinhua deploy coordinated narratives that delegitimize Western governance models and promote multipolarity. Confucius Institutes and Chinese-funded academic partnerships in Belarus and Iran propagate Beijing's vision of "common prosperity" aligned with autocratic resilience. Russian cyber-enabled disinformation campaigns exploit societal fissures in NATO countries to erode democratic trust and fuel polarization. Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps–backed media amplify anti-imperialist rhetoric across the Middle East, while North Korean propaganda bolsters Pyongyang's image of defiance against U.S. hegemony. Belarus orchestrates hybrid warfare at its borders by directing migrant flows and conducting paramilitary provocations to pressure neighboring EU states.

ASYMMETRIC ADVANTAGE

As Allies prepare for high-end warfare and peer conflict, they must also reckon with a reality more amorphous and dangerous: the strategic use of asymmetric means by the Axis; each deploys unconventional capabilities with sophistication, patience, and synergy. These tools are not ancillary to great power conflict; they are central to it. Their combined asymmetric toolkit is designed not to achieve decisive battlefield victories but to sap Western cohesion, legitimacy, and will. Strategic countermeasures—counter-threat finance, offensive cyber capabilities, information resilience, and forward engagement in contested peripheries—are not supplemental; they are essential.

DISINFORMATION (ДЕЗИНФОРМАЦИЯ) AND HYBRID THREATS

Russia leads the Axis in disinformation campaigns and hybrid warfare, leveraging covert operations, propaganda, and proxy militias to maintain pressure across multiple regions. From Transnistria to Abkhazia, and most recently in Ukraine, Russia's model is the cultivation of "frozen conflicts" to fragment opposition and create pretexts for intervention (Galeotti, 2020). Belarus, as a client state, reinforces these tactics by abetting migrant crises and smuggling operations that exploit EU vulnerabilities (Secrieru, 2022).

UNRESTRICTED WARFARE (超限战) AND ECONOMIC COERCION

China pursues a doctrine of "Unrestricted Warfare" that integrates economic coercion, legal warfare, and cyber intrusions. The Belt and Road Initiative is both infrastructure diplomacy and a mechanism of entrapment, particularly across Africa and South America (Hurley et al., 2018). Russia similarly uses energy dependency and financial manipulation to hold Europe in strategic check (Siddi, 2019).

ORGANIZED CRIME AND STATE-BACKED ILLICIT NETWORKS

Iran's IRGC oversees global smuggling networks, trafficking arms and narcotics across Africa and South America, using diplomatic cover to support sub-state actors and terrorist groups (Levitt, 2020).

North Korea engages in cyber-heists, shadow shipping, and crypto-crime to fund its regime, sidestepping sanctions with technical sophistication and third-party enablers (Min, 2021).

CYBERWARFARE AND INFORMATION OPERATIONS

Russian troll farms, Chinese data-extractive platforms, Iranian disinformation campaigns, and North Korean ransomware units exploit the openness of democratic societies. These actors increasingly cooperate in targeting financial institutions and civil infrastructure in the West (Healey et al., 2020).

STRATEGIC INROADS IN AFRICA, THE CAUCASUS, AND LATIN AMERICA

Africa, the Caucasus, and Latin America are testbeds for Axis influence operations. China builds ports and digital infrastructure in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Brazil. Russia, via Wagner and its successors, stabilizes autocratic regimes from Mali to Venezuela. Iran supports Shi'a militias and political factions across the Levant and into South America. The Caucasus sees renewed instability as these powers exploit Armenian-Azeri tensions and Turkish ambitions (Stronski & Ng, 2018).

IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. AND ALLIED STRATEGY

The EA's coordinated advancements diminish the credibility of extended deterrence guarantees by complicating threat source attribution and crisis signaling. Allied air and missile defenses face layered challenges from combined PLA Rocket Force barrages, Russian S-400 deployments, and Iranian drone swarms. Economic coercion through energy cutoffs and supply-chain vulnerabilities necessitates diversified sources and strategic stockpiles. Financial decoupling from U.S. systems threatens to erode the effectiveness of sanctions, requiring enhanced multilateral enforcement and alternative tools.

NATO's Eastern European members perceive an immediate threat axis spanning from the Baltic to the Black Sea, urging an expanded forward presence and joint exercises. U.S. alliances in the Indo-Pacific must adapt to simultaneous pressure points in Europe and Asia, demanding flexible force posture concepts. Enhanced intelligence fusion among Allies is critical to detect Axis convergence efforts and preempt belligerent action. Integrated logistics frameworks and defense-industrial base resilience are essential to sustain protracted deterrence and, if necessary, collective defense operations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The EA represents a qualitatively different adversary construct, characterized by institutionalized cooperation across nuclear, military, economic, financial, and ideological vectors. It is a multi-domain battlespace that spans sea, air, land, cyberspace and space domains, and across the dimensions of physical, virtual, and cognitive. U.S. and Allied strategies must eschew siloed threat assessments in favor of holistic, cross-domain approaches that address the Axis's synchronized capabilities. Recommendations include upgrading missile defense architectures, expanding multilateral sanctions enforcement mechanisms, diversifying critical supply chains, and investing in strategic communication campaigns to counter Axis narratives. Strengthening Allied interoperability through joint command-and-control exercises, defense-industrial base partnerships, and coordinated R&D initiatives will bolster collective resilience. Ultimately, preserving the Western order requires sustained political

will and resource commitments to deter the integrated challenge posed by the Eurasian Axis.

1. STRATEGIC LEVERAGE—EXPLOIT AXIS VULNERABILITIES IN GLOBAL FLASHPOINTS

The EA derives strength not from a unity of purpose akin to NATO but from a confluence of grievances and opportunism toward the US-led Western order. Its projection of influence across flashpoints like Ukraine, Taiwan, Lebanon, Yemen, Gaza, and Syria reveals ambition—but also overreach. These nodes of engagement are fraught with structural weaknesses. Properly understood and targeted, they offer the U.S. and NATO rare opportunities to fracture, divert, and exhaust Axis resources across multiple theaters.

- **Ukraine: Russia's Strategic Sinkhole**

  Russia's war in Ukraine remains the fulcrum of Axis military overstretch. While peace on the European continent should be the immediate goal of all belligerents, continued conflict incurs multiple costs for Russia, with long-term consequences: human, financial, economic, diplomatic, and strategic. True, Russia has done a remarkable job re-orienting its economy toward China and reconstituting its forces with new capabilities; however, the cost of war in Ukraine leaves Russia with dimmer future prospects overall.

- **Taiwan: China's Strategic Gambl**e

  Taiwan remains the Axis's most volatile pressure point. The CCP's encirclement campaigns and gray-zone provocations betray both capability and insecurity. Taiwan's mountainous terrain, hardened infrastructure, and highly motivated population make it a porcupine, not a pushover (Easton, 2017). For all the discussion surrounding China's attempt to seize Taiwan as a fait accompli, there remain serious risks for Beijing, notably political, financial, and diplomatic. Seizure of Taiwan is hardly a sure bet for China.

- **Lebanon and Gaza: Iran's Overextended Influence**

  Hezbollah's dependency on Iranian financing amid Lebanon's economic collapse is a pressure point, not a strength. Increased scrutiny of illicit finance through Gulf and African nodes can sever lifelines and exacerbate intra-Shi'a rivalries (Levitt, 2020). In Gaza, Hamas's escalating dependency on Iranian rockets post-2023 also opens Iran to reputational risk and resource depletion.

- **Yemen: The Houthi Dilemma**

  Iran's support for the Houthis has become a strategic liability. Every missile launched into the Red Sea invites global retaliation and risks escalation beyond Tehran's control. Targeting Houthi radar, drone launch sites, and logistics convoys not only contains maritime disruption—it siphons Iranian ISR and advisors from other theaters. Intelligence-sharing with Gulf partners and support to anti-Houthi tribal coalitions offer asymmetric payoff.

- **Syria: Russian and Iranian Overlap**

  Syria is no longer a unified Axis success story. Russia's drawdown and Iran's attempt to fill the vacuum have created turf wars among IRGC units, Wagner remnants, and Assad's loyalists. Both Russia and Iran struggle for influence in a Syria that is poised to align itself with the U.S. and Allied powers.

EA engagement across these flashpoints is not strategic depth—it is strategic fragmentation. U.S. and Allied exploitation of EA contradictions, resource drains, and ideological fissures is a prudent strategy. Each localized victory weakens the whole. The EA is not invincible; it is overcommitted.

2. CRITICAL MINERALS—DECOUPLE SUPPLY CHAINS FROM THE EURASIAN AXIS.

Behind the glint of advanced weapons systems, semiconductors, and clean energy lies a largely unseen dependency: critical minerals. Lithium, cobalt, rare earth elements, and graphite—these are the sinews of the modern military-industrial base. The EA, especially China and Russia, holds disproportionate control over their extraction, processing, and export. This dominance is no accident. It is a deliberate strategy designed to convert supply chains into geopolitical leverage.

China processes over 60% of global rare-earth production and dominates lithium-ion battery production. Russia supplies 15–20% of the world's nickel, palladium, and titanium—essential for aerospace and armor-grade alloys (Humphries, 2022). Iran and North Korea, while smaller players, are embedded in illicit mineral trading and can serve as proxy exporters to skirt sanctions.

The overconcentration of critical minerals in Axis hands exposes the U.S. and NATO to cascading vulnerabilities. Any conflict scenario—from a Taiwan contingency to sanctions escalation—could trigger mineral cutoffs with immediate consequences for defense manufacturing. The 2010 Chinese embargo on rare-earth exports to Japan following the Senkaku Islands incident is a cautionary precedent (Kato, 2011). Yet, there are Pathways for reshoring and diversification:

- **Domestic Extraction and Processing:**

  The U.S. has untapped rare-earths reserves in California, Wyoming, and Texas. Recent investment in Mountain Pass and permitting reform in Congress are positive steps. However, permitting must be accelerated with national security exemptions where appropriate (DOE, 2023).

- **Allied Sourcing and Processing:**

  Australia, Canada, and the Nordic nations have stable geological and political environments for the development of critical minerals. NATO should integrate resource security into defense-industrial planning, including co-investment in refining capacity across partner countries (Andrews, 2021).

- **Strategic Stockpiling and Recycling:**

  Rare earths are not consumed—they are used. Establishing closed-loop recycling systems for electronics and weapon systems will reduce dependency. The Defense Logistics Agency and Allied counterparts should expand strategic stockpiles with wartime contingency in mind.

- **Economic Statecraft:**

  The U.S. should apply targeted trade finance, export credits, and development assistance to mineral-rich but vulnerable nations in Africa and Latin America. The goal: deny Axis states monopoly influence and secure new supply corridors that bypass Eurasian chokepoints (Mills & Lucas, 2020).

Critical minerals are not just commodities; they are the DNA of twenty-first-century deterrence. If the U.S. and Allies are to regain strategic advantage in critical minerals, then they must rewire their supply chains with the same urgency they apply to kinetic threats. Strategic autonomy begins not at the front line, but at the mine, the refinery, and the port.

3. REFORGE THE SHIELD—NUCLEAR MODERNIZATION FOR AN AXIS AGE

The Eurasian Axis presents a nuclear dilemma not seen since the Cold War. But unlike that bipolar contest, today's threat matrix is multipolar, asymmetric, and ideologically fractured. It ranges from Russia's aggressive doctrine of escalate-to-deescalate, to North Korea's tactical brinkmanship, to China's silent nuclear breakout. To ensure deterrence remains credible in this new age, the U.S. and NATO must overhaul both their nuclear postures and arsenals with a dual goal: strategic resilience and operational flexibility.

Russia maintains the largest nuclear arsenal in the world and has integrated tactical nuclear threats into its Ukraine strategy and Baltic exercises (Kroenig, 2022). China is building more than 300 new missile silos and pursuing a triad with quiet determination, aiming to achieve nuclear peer status by the early 2030s (DoD, 2023). North Korea has tested short-range systems with nuclear potential and is believed to be miniaturizing warheads for tactical delivery (Hecker, 2021). Iran, though not yet nuclear, retains breakout capacity under the shadow of advanced centrifuge development. The nuclear strategic calculus for the U.S. and NATO must consider the following imperatives:

- **Dual-Capable Forward Deployed Forces:**

  U.S. tactical nuclear assets in Europe (notably the B61-12) must be fully modernized and paired with upgraded delivery systems, such as the F-35. NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements—particularly with Germany, Italy, and Turkey—must be reaffirmed and technologically enhanced (Kristensen & Korda, 2023).

- **Sea-Based Deterrent Survivability:**

  The Columbia-class SSBN program and continued investment in stealth and communication redundancy are paramount. Submarines remain the most survivable leg of the triad and the best insurance against a first-strike scenario by either China or Russia (Woolf, 2023).

- **Low-Yield and Flexible Response Options:**

  Deterrence requires credibility and offensive capability. High-yield strategic-only options are insufficient against regional scenarios. Low-yield warheads such as the W76-2 offer tailored deterrence, especially against Russia's Kaliningrad deployments and North Korean provocations.

- **Allied Integration and Burden Sharing:**

  NATO's nuclear planning must include realistic exercises, rapid decision frameworks, and closer interoperability with the UK and French deterrents. This EA age demands a cohesive rather than fragmented deterrent architecture.

- **Next-Gen Command and Control (NC3):**

  The modern battlefield is saturated with cyber threats, drones and autonomous systems, electronic warfare, and space-based denial. U.S. nuclear command and control systems must be hardened, decentralized, and integrated into multi-domain awareness platforms.

The Eurasian Axis is not a single opponent but a networked array of nuclear-armed and near-nuclear actors operating increasingly in concert. The U.S. and NATO must respond not by matching volume for volume, but with agility, credibility, and survivability. Strategic deterrence is no longer static—it must evolve. To preserve peace, we must modernize the weapons that make war unthinkable.

4. HARNESS AI TO COUNTER THE EURASIAN AXIS

The Eurasian Axis is not merely leveraging geography or ideology; it is weaponizing information, economies, and influence. China has declared its ambition to become the global leader in artificial intelligence (AI) by 2030, embedding machine learning into its diplomatic, military, and economic strategies. Russia fuses AI with electronic warfare and disinformation. Iran and North Korea use AI-enabled cyber operations to project asymmetric power. NATO must no longer view AI as an emerging capability. It must treat it as foundational to warfare. Development of an AI military strategy, akin to a nuclear strategy, should be a priority for U.S. and NATO strategists.

AI is the new terrain of grand strategy. In diplomacy, economic policy, warfare, and influence operations, it offers decisive leverage. For NATO and the U.S., embracing AI must mean more than pilot projects. It must become a whole-of-alliance paradigm, fusing silicon with doctrine.

- **Military Decision Superiority**:

  NATO forces must develop AI-enabled battle networks that integrate ISR, logistics, and operational planning in real-time. NATO equivalents need to become interoperable or even integrated with U.S. Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2). Algorithms must provide commanders with predictive threat analysis and course-of-action generation before Axis forces can react (Work & Schmidt, 2021).

- **Diplomatic Forecasting and Influence Mapping:**

  AI, specifically Agentic AI, can rapidly model alliance cohesion, UN voting patterns, and Axis influence campaigns. It can identify shifts in global sentiment or economic dependencies vulnerable to Axis pressure. NATO diplomatic corps should be augmented with AI tools to enable anticipatory rather than reactive diplomacy (Binnendijk & Caves, 2022).

- **Economic and Industrial Shielding:**

  AI is crucial for mapping global supply chain risks and forecasting coercive economic actions. It can pinpoint critical dependencies in semiconductors, rare earths, and maritime chokepoints exploited by the Axis. The U.S. must deploy AI to monitor financial networks, shipping patterns, and industrial inputs at scale (Allen & Husain, 2021).

- **Information Warfare Resilience:**

  Russian and Chinese disinformation campaigns increasingly use AI-generated content to manipulate opinion and seed confusion. NATO and Allies must deploy counter-AI to detect, trace, and neutralize deepfakes, troll networks, and synthetic narratives. Information *defense* is now information *offense*.

- **Ethical and Operational Integration:**

  NATO must lead in AI norms—not by ceding the field to diplomats alone, but by making ethical design an operational priority. Trustworthy AI increases alliance cohesion and ensures legitimacy in contested domains (Floridi et al., 2020).

AI is not a future advantage—it is the present battlefield. Leaders of the EA understand this and are moving fast. For NATO and the U.S., supremacy will not be won by scale alone but by speed, trust, and integration. To prevail in the age of algorithmic geopolitics, Allies "must code as they fight".

5. "BUILD MORE STUFF BETTER AND FASTER"—REBUILD THE INDUSTRIAL BASE FOR A NEW ERA

In an age of strategic competition with a reconstituted Eurasian Axis—industrial capacity is no longer an economic consideration alone; it is a pillar of deterrence and endurance. The protracted war in Ukraine, China's military buildup, and North Korea's missile proliferation underscore one truth: the West's current defense industrial base is optimized for efficiency, not urgency. This must change.

The U.S. and NATO face the triple challenge of replenishing depleted arsenals, supporting Ukraine, and preparing for future high-end conflict. While the EA integrates state-dominated defense ecosystems with rapid output (e.g., Russian tank production or Chinese missile expansion), the Western model remains fragmented and sluggish. We must move from just-in-time to just-in-case, ultimately to "just because"—pushing the limits on innovation and experimentation in the private sector while minimizing investment risk wherever applicable to defense production.

The industrial gap between Europe, Japan, Australia, Canada, and the U.S. must be reduced through structured transatlantic technology transfer. Too often, duplicative R&D, regulatory misalignment, and national protectionism limit efficiency and innovation. NATO's Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) must serve as a hub for binational R&D pipelines, from AI integration to hypersonic platforms (DIANA, 2023). Shared IP frameworks and export licensing reform will ensure trusted, accelerated innovation. More can be done to bolster technology transfer and synchronization:

- **Stand up regional defense production hubs:**

  Do so across the Alliance for key munitions and parts.

- **Create a NATO-wide Defense Innovation Clearinghouse:**

  Diversifying defense acquisition to include small and mid-size vendors—especially from allied states—will generate resilience and foster competition. Streamlined contracting through digital marketplaces, sandbox acquisition models, and pre-approved vendor pools can integrate startups into critical supply chains (Gansler et al., 2020). Alliances like AUKUS and NORDEFCO offer natural expansion pathways for such collaboration.

- **Embed dual-use innovation mandates:**

  Unlike China's coerced civil-military integration model, NATO can embrace a voluntary, values-based version. Dual-use industries—advanced manufacturing, AI, quantum computing, space tech—must be incentivized to contribute to defense innovation without distorting their civilian missions. Government seed funding, defense offsets, and challenge-based competitions will bridge commercial ambition with strategic necessity (Blank et al., 2022).

The sharpness of weapons alone does not decide victory in long wars, but by the speed and scale of their production. The U.S. and NATO must reforge the arsenal of democracies—not by looking backward, but by fusing liberal dynamism with defense purpose.

6. REORGANIZE FOR RIVALRY—ADAPT NATO AND ALLIED MINISTRIES TO THE THREAT

The Eurasian Axis constitutes a systemic, multidimensional challenge to the rules-based international order. Each member operates across different domains—military, cyber, economic, ideological—but with converging intent. Confronting this threat demands more than superior firepower. It requires a

restructuring of how DoD and NATO operate, prioritize, and integrate across domains and alliances. Potential areas for reform include:

- **Create a Joint Strategic Competition Command (JSCC):**

  The current COCOM structure must be augmented by a joint command dedicated to managing global competition with the Axis. This JSCC would synchronize economic, cyber, informational, and military operations across all theaters—integrating Indo-Pacific, European, and Middle Eastern lines of effort (Barno & Bensahel, 2021).

- **Realign NATO for Domain-Centric Readiness**:

  NATO must pivot from geography-based readiness to threat-function alignment. Instead of preparing for a specific region (e.g., the Baltic vs. the Black Sea), NATO should structure itself around cross-cutting threats such as disinformation, space denial, and targeting of critical infrastructure.

- **Fusion of Intelligence and Operations:**

  Intelligence is still stovepiped. A standing Joint Allied Intelligence and Action Group (JAIA) should integrate HUMINT, SIGINT, and OSINT with real-time operational planning to detect and act on Axis disinformation and covert activity. This would address adversary strength in ambiguity and tempo (Clark et al., 2022).

- **Defense Bureaucracy Streamlining:**

  Within DoD, programmatic decision-making must be accelerated. A Defense Innovation & Competition Board should be established to bypass standard acquisition pathways in emergencies and fund near-term asymmetric capabilities, especially in cyber and electronic warfare domains (Lord & Johnson, 2023).

- **Empower Hybrid Warfare Cells:**

  NATO and DoD should establish persistent hybrid warfare cells within all combatant commands and NATO military structures. These would coordinate offensive economic actions, strategic messaging, and counter-coercion diplomacy against Axis influence campaigns across Africa, the Caucasus, and Latin America.

In an age of convergent threats and fragmented responses, institutional reform is a strategic necessity. The US and NATO must operate not just as warfighting coalitions, but as agile, interdomain alliances capable of systemic counter-pressure. Victory in this long struggle will not go to the most powerful, but to the most adaptable.

7. CALL IT WHAT IT IS—REFRAME HYBRID THREATS AS "POLITICAL WARFARE"

The post-Cold War West has misdiagnosed its condition. While NATO seeks peace dividends and global stability, the EA wages uninterrupted, full-spectrum political warfare. The U.S. and NATO have called "hybrid threats"—cyberattacks, election interference, disinformation, paramilitary proxies—to downplay the "warfare" aspect of the activity for reasons that extended beyond the scope of this paper. But suffice it to say, they are not grey-zone anomalies. They are deliberate instruments of persistent political warfare. It is time to reframe the conflict and align our strategy accordingly.

The Nature of Political Warfare

Political warfare, as defined by George Kennan in 1948, is the employment of all means short of war to achieve national objectives. The Axis powers have modernized this doctrine through information operations, economic coercion, and the subversion of Western institutions. Russia deploys disinformation with military precision; China leverages economic statecraft and digital censorship; Iran and North Korea weaponize diaspora, religion, and cyber-disruption to destabilize pluralistic societies (Rosenbach & Mansted, 2019).

The West continues to treat these activities as crises to be managed or crimes to be prosecuted. This is a strategic error. From the 1990s destabilization of Baltic states to the 2007 cyberattack on Estonia, from Russia's 2014 Ukraine infiltration to China's TikTok and WeChat-based influence operations today, the Axis has not paused in its campaign to shape our political ecosystems (Galeotti, 2020).

The defining strength of NATO societies—openness—is also their greatest vulnerability. Disinformation campaigns exploit freedom of expression, social media algorithms, and fractured trust in institutions. From COVID conspiracy theories to election denialism, the Axis has mastered the art of turning liberty against itself. Protecting the information domain must now be viewed as a matter of national defense.

The U.S. and its Allies must reframe conflict in ways that shine a light on the EA's strategic vulnerabilities. One example is China's real estate market. Beneath the towering skylines of Shenzhen and Shanghai lies the soft underbelly of the People's Republic of China: its overleveraged and brittle real estate market. The CCP has tied its legitimacy to rapid urbanization, rising property values, and a mirage of middle-class prosperity. But this foundation is cracking. Real estate accounts for nearly 30% of China's GDP, and more than 70% of household wealth is tied up in property assets (Rogoff & Yang, 2021). The collapse of major developers like Evergrande and Country Garden is more than a financial crisis—it is a slow-moving social and political avalanche.

China's middle class has long tolerated authoritarianism in exchange for upward mobility, primarily delivered through property appreciation. As mortgage boycotts rise and unfinished "ghost cities" dot the landscape, this contract frays. To exploit this, we should amplify truthful but suppressed domes-

tic grievances—mortgage boycotts, unfinished developments, and misallocated bailouts. Strengthen digital proxies for China's banned social media to give voice to disillusioned citizens. Pressure on China's real estate market would likely force Beijing to reconsider some of its more ambitious military modernization and economic warfare activities, rather than rely on conventional demonstrations of military force or diplomatic manoeuvring. Political warfare must be understood as well as conventional warfare in Defense and NATO thought centers. Some ways to achieve this include:

- **Reframe Hybrid Threats as 'Political Warfare':**

  All NATO doctrine must rename and reclassify hybrid actions as persistent political warfare. This redefinition changes the threshold for collective response and prioritizes resilience over reaction.

- **Establish a NATO Political Warfare Response Agency:**

  A standing entity responsible for strategy, coordination, and response to disinformation, information operations, and malign influence. It would integrate military, intelligence, diplomatic, and civil society stakeholders (Stronski, 2022).

- **Harden the Information Environment:**

  Allies must invest in secure social media platforms, election infrastructure, and digital literacy. Deepfake detection, source authentication, and rapid response centers must become standard components of national security.

- **Use Offensive Political Warfare:**

  NATO and Allies should do more to expose corruption, human rights violations, and vulnerabilities within Axis regimes. Political warfare must be reciprocal. Strategic messaging, covert broadcasting, and support to dissidents are legitimate tools of competition.

We are already in conflict. Political warfare is not a precursor to war—it is war, conducted in slow motion. By failing to name it, we have enabled it. The time has come to harden our democracies, weaponize our values, and put political warfare at the center of U.S. and Allied grand strategy.

Chapter 5

Public Opinion, Elite Voices, and Foreign Policy: Understanding the Domestic Foundations of International Strategy

Nerea Cal and Matthew R. DiGiuseppe

ABSTRACT

International politics is an extension of domestic political processes (Putnam 1988). Yet, it is often unclear how the various elements of domestic politics constrain and shape foreign policy. We address three pivotal and related questions bearing on the interactions between public opinion, elites, and foreign policy:[1] (1) What determines public opinion on foreign policy issues, and how do these preferences constrain or enable policymakers? (2) How do political elites communicate about foreign policy, and what influences the effectiveness of strategic narratives? (3) How do domestic political factors shape security posture in peace and war? Scholarship in political psychology and public opinion research, as it relates to foreign policy, suggests that policymakers must recognize the bidirectional relationship between domestic and international politics, acknowledge the fragmented information environment that shapes public perceptions, and develop more effective communication strategies to build support for national security priorities. These insights offer practical guidance to the Department of Defense and other national security practitioners as they navigate a complex global landscape in which domestic support for international engagement cannot be taken for granted.

The traditional notion that "politics stops at the water's edge" has been thoroughly discredited in today's complex international security environment. Foreign policy is increasingly shaped by—and shapes—domestic political dynamics (Milner and Tingley 2015). Public opinion, partisan polarization, and elite messaging all play critical roles in defining a nation's approach to international engagement. This growing interconnection between domestic and international spheres presents both challenges and opportunities for policymakers seeking to craft effective strategies in an era of great power competition and political polarization (Schultz 2017).

The interaction between public opinion and foreign policy has far-reaching implications. It affects the US ability to respond to global challenges, maintain existing alliances, and pursue strategic objectives. As polarization increases and social media transforms how citizens consume information, securing domestic support for international engagement requires a nuanced understanding of how public attitudes form and evolve. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that even authoritarian regimes must consider domestic public opinion when formulating foreign policy. Chen Weiss (2019), for

1 *This essay emerges from a working group at West Point's February 2025 Social Science Seminar.*

example, contends that China's public sentiment plays a key role in pushing the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) toward more hawkish positions on certain international issues. As such, it is important for policymakers to understand how domestic politics shapes foreign policy choices and strategy, but also how foreign politics shapes the policies of rivals.

This report draws upon insights from the Public Opinion, Elites, and Foreign Policy Working Group at the February 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar, which examined various dimensions of the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy. By synthesizing findings from diverse panels on public opinion, elite communication, strategic narratives, and defense policy, and by situating those conversations within a broader literature, we offer new insights into the domestic foundations of international strategy. Our insights build on a rich tradition of scholarly research on public opinion and foreign policy, including studies on media influences (Baum and Potter 2008), the psychological foundations of foreign policy attitudes (Kertzer et al. 2014), and the implications of domestic polarization for international relations (Myrick and Wang 2024). We hope these insights will prove actionable and help policymakers navigate the complex interplay between public sentiment and strategic necessity as they confront pressing global challenges.

THE DOMESTIC FOUNDATIONS OF PUBLIC OPINION ON FOREIGN POLICY

Patterns and Determinants of Public Attitudes

To understand the impact of public opinion on foreign policy, scholars must understand the sources and limits of the public's understanding of foreign policy, and what may change their views. Several strands of research, both existing and emerging, take up this challenge.

Foreign policy is a difficult subject for many citizens to understand and, in most instances, is distant from their everyday concerns. Given its distant nature, most work assumes a top-down process in which citizens look to political elites and the mass media for cues to shape opinions on foreign policy (Berinsky 2009; Baum and Potter 2008). Partisan cues often serve as cognitive shortcuts when citizens evaluate complex international issues. Shamiev, Zavadskaya, and Brooks take a notable step of testing the effect of cues outside of the US context and examining how divisions among elites might shape which cues resonate with the public in Russia. They designed a survey experiment that randomly varies the source of foreign policy cues and disagreement cues in Russia. They show that elite disagreement between the military and the regime reduces support for policies such as peace in Ukraine and closer ties with China. This research suggests that elite cues are not always uniform and that, when in tension, can undermine one another in the arena of public opinion. Thus, policymakers should pay attention to multiple sources of cues in adversary states to get a better handle on the direction of public opinion during a war.

In contrast with this top-down approach, scholars also show there is room for a bottom-up process in which citizens bring their own moral values or rely on more immediate social network cues to inform their foreign policy views (Kertzer et al. 2014; Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017). Wyatt's examination of attitudes toward immigration in Latin America further underscores the importance of perceived economic and cultural threats in shaping public responses to international issues. Nationalism and

concerns about economic competition consistently predict negative attitudes toward immigration. This highlights how domestic insecurities can translate into foreign policy preferences. Van Beek, in "The Power to Hurt and Public Support for War," examines how insecurities in the public's perception of victory affect further support for military action by looking at how the public responds to reported enemy casualties – an indicator of success. Using an experiment varying information about the number of enemy troops killed in battle, Van Beek finds that success is self-reinforcing and that the ability to inflict damage builds domestic support. This is highly relevant for policymakers, as the public needs to know they are winning, or popular support will suffer.

Several existing studies demonstrate that information and actions taken abroad also influence public opinion on foreign policy. In an extension of Horowitz's (2016) experiment, DiGiuseppe et al. show that the public can also infer from the external threat environment in the absence of direct cues from politicians. They find that citizens increase their support for taboo lethal autonomous weapons when they are informed that other states are doing the same. This effect holds across hawkishness, which implies that opinions are not shaped by party identification and that citizens are willing to adopt a security dilemma (Jervis 1978) mindset on their own. The role of external events is echoed by Lee and Bowman, who hypothesize that the risk of nuclear escalation decreases support for conventional fighting due to the fear of the use of nuclear weapons. Further, Goodhart presents a hypothesis that Russian attempts to align itself with US culture wars are increasing support in the US for Russian foreign policy goals, with initial pilot results indicating that such attempts may alienate US voters, contrary to the hypothesis.[2]

In all, public opinion is important because it is a key input into the decisions of politicians who are concerned with re-election. Having research on what shapes public opinion, whether it be systemic features, economic stress, or messaging by the elites themselves, can help policymakers better predict the direction and changes of public attitudes both at home and abroad in response to their own policies, but also exogenous shocks.

THE ROLE OF INFORMATION AND ELITE FRAMING STRATEGIES

The previous section highlighted a key tension between bottom-up processes in forming foreign policy attitudes (Kertzer and Zeitzoff 2017) and the inescapable notion that the public can be influenced by elites and the media (Guisinger and Saunders 2017). In practice, both influences are likely to matter. Understanding baseline foreign policy preferences helps us understand when communication strategies are likely to shift attitudes in ways that can change policy support, and ultimately, policies. New research[3] addresses how actors, at home and abroad, strategically manipulate policies and how they might be successful.

Thomson's work on presidential religious rhetoric shows how Presidents strategically deploy value-laden language to increase public support for military action. By framing conflicts in moral or religious terms, Presidents activate shared values and cultural identities that may transcend partisan divisions. This potentially broadens support for foreign policy initiatives. Such approaches align with research on the relationship between moral values and foreign policy attitudes. For example, Kertzer

2 *A full study with an adequate sample size has yet to be conducted.*

3 *Presented in the form of working papers at the 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar.*

et al. (2014) demonstrate how appeals to different moral foundations can activate distinct foreign policy orientations, suggesting that moral framing can be a powerful tool for building public support. Thomson's work suggests that leaders can leverage strategies that rely not only on cues to shape opinion but also exploit underlying moral foundations to activate the "bottom-up" drives of foreign policy preferences.

In contrast, Landrum's analysis shows that while the option exists to connect foreign policy with values, communication from the US government's national security bureaucracy is less than strategic in its framing. Landrum's analysis of the National Security Strategy (NSS) examines how official government communications often fail to resonate with the broader public. His research found that six of seven key themes in the 2022 NSS had low resonance with the US public based on polling data. This disconnect between elite policy documents and public concerns illustrates the growing gap between how policymakers frame international challenges and how citizens perceive them. Essentially, it highlights a missed opportunity.

While bureaucrats might not be very strategic, Members of Congress are more judicious in their messages. Kenealy examines how US politicians strategically deploy their power to shape public opinion. Kenealy analyzes the press releases of members of Congress to show that leaders may exploit these cues by being highly strategic to protect their own careers. They are most likely to use their cueing power in foreign policy when the President is of a different party, and the foreign policy action deviates from their party's platform. Otherwise, they stay silent. This suggests that members of Congress are strategically undermining the "politics stops at the water's edge" norm in the name of electoral competition and shows why it is difficult to build bipartisan support for foreign policy.

Given the potential for strategic communication, policymakers might want to know where narratives that align or conflict with their interests are likely to be deployed. Looking at over 5 million online news articles, Stauber et al.'s work suggests that media narratives aligned with the US on the wars in Ukraine and Gaza are correlated with simple factors such as distance from the conflict and alignment with the US. They find strong evidence for this by examining over 5 million online news articles. These patterns reveal how narrative competition plays out at a global scale, with implications for alliance management and the deployment of strategic communication resources. While the direction of causality is unclear, it suggests that strategic communication might be more effective among non-allies and those farther from conflicts.

One way in which elites might direct strategic communication resources is through disinformation. Disinformation plays a key role in determining a politician's room to maneuver in international affairs by directly influencing what is acceptable to the home audience. These concepts are challenging to measure empirically, but theory offers a useful, though often overlooked, way of considering "why," "how," and "to what effect" states use disinformation to advance their foreign policy. Cantrell draws on Putnam's (1988) foundational two-level game of international negotiation to structure our thinking about how states might use disinformation, the actors and institutions they might target with it, and the value they might derive from it. Disinformation can, according to Cantrell, be used strategically to reduce the public's constraints on the policymaker's ability to make a deal, while also tying their hands so that agreeing to a deal closer to an adversary's ideal point becomes more costly from a domestic politics standpoint. In all, it provides a framework for understanding and ultimately countering

disinformation abroad.

Beyond anticipating disinformation, Vallone provides practical advice for bureaucrats on engaging in domestic competition for military resources in a time of austerity and fiscal pressure. Vallone used the increasingly mainstream language of WWE and wrestling to draw attention to the challenges that proponents of “overmatch” will face in the US. He warns that those who seek to increase military spending should not get distracted by internal debates over which military capabilities to pursue, but instead focus on improving public support for these measures while addressing the fears of bond markets. The research presented in the rest of the Working Group further informs how policymakers can bring public opinion to their side by focusing on external competition (DiGiuseppe et al.), relating to core values (Landrum, Van Beek), avoiding disagreement (Shamiev et al.), and considering how messages will be interpreted differently by partisans (Kenealy).

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Chapter 6

Guiding Principles for Civil-Military Relations in Polarizing Democracies

Jean-Christophe Boucher, Scott Limbocker, Manaswini Ramkumar, and Alexandra Richards

INTRODUCTION

The study of civil-military relations is undergoing a rapid reconceptualization. For decades, the field was anchored by Cold War frameworks developed by Huntington and Janowitz,[1] which explained how the transition from mass mobilization to professional standing forces reshaped the relationship between militaries and liberal democratic societies. Those theories remain influential, but they no longer fully capture the challenges facing today's democracies. The political and social environment of the 21st century has transformed civil-military dynamics in ways that demand fresh thinking.

This report advances two core arguments. First, civil-military theory must be updated by drawing on insights and empirical approaches from adjacent literatures, from political sociology to organizational studies. Second, both theoretical and empirical work must adopt a comparative perspective, recognizing that democratic militaries face similar pressures in diverse political and cultural contexts. By making these contributions explicit, we move beyond a simple restatement of traditional theory and highlight what is most urgent for leaders today. Framed this way, the report addresses three pressing challenges for contemporary democracies: the erosion of military professionalism, the politicization of the armed forces, and the subversion of long-standing norms of civilian-military interaction. To address these issues, we propose three guiding principles for civil-military relations in Western democracies, aimed at fostering a renewed dialogue about the military's role in society—one that move beyond frameworks rooted in the pre–All–Volunteer Force era. These principles are:

1. Democratic civil-military relations must ensure that deference to military expertise in warfighting is merited through performance and accountability, rather than being granted uncritically.

2. Effective civil-military relations require the military to remain closely tied to the institutions and core values of the society in which it operates.

3. Recognize that the evolution of war and society inevitably intertwines the military and politics, and ensure this relationship does not compromise the military's ability to achieve the objec-

1 *Peter Feaver, "The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civilian Control," Armed Forces & Society 23, no. 2 (January 1996): 149–78, https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X9602300203.*

tives of elected leaders.

PRINCIPLE 1: DEMOCRATIC CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS MUST ENSURE THAT DEFERENCE TO MILITARY EXPERTISE IN WARFIGHTING IS MERITED THROUGH PERFORMANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY, RATHER THAN BEING GRANTED UNCRITICALLY.

Huntington's objective control model, laid out in *The Soldier and the State*, has played a central role in shaping US civil-military relations. Huntington argued that democratic civil-military relations must satisfy two imperatives:[2] First, the functional imperative is the need to protect and defend society against external threats; second, the social imperative is the need for the military to remain aligned with civil society and under the control of the civilian government. In Huntington's view, there is an inherent tension between these two imperatives. Prioritizing the social imperative can hinder the military's operational effectiveness, whilst prioritizing the functional imperative risks military interference in political or societal affairs. To strike a balance between the two imperatives, Huntington proposed a model of objective control in which the military is granted independent control over a separate sphere of professional military activities in exchange for its political neutrality and loyalty to the elected civilian government. Thus, the civilian government decides when the military should be used and what political objectives it should achieve, but the military decides how best to pursue those objectives. Distance from political decision making, Huntington argued, contributes to the development of a professional ethos founded on discipline, duty, expertise, and a clear understanding of the military's role in society.[3]

Though the objective control model remains a highly influential and aspirational model in civil-military relations, Huntington's claim that there should be strict political separation between the military and civilian institutions is untenable. First, the realities of modern militaries and warfare mean that the line between socio-political and military activities is inextricably blurred. Several scholars of civil-military relations argue that modern military actions and institutions are inherently political.[4] In the US context, Feaver and Coletta argue that the political role and influence of the military have grown alongside the US' emergence as a global superpower, driven in part by the military's expansive fiscal footprint.[5] Additionally, hybrid tactics such as foreign information manipulation campaigns, cyberattacks, and terrorist attacks frequently target civilian infrastructure and civil society actors and countering these threats often requires close coordination between civil society, government, law enforcement, and military actors.[6] Bezhanishvili (2025) emphasizes, in the context of Georgia's security challenges, the

2 *Samuel P. Huntington, The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations, 19. print (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2002); Trent J. Lythgoe, "Are the U.S. Military's Nonpartisan Norms Eroding?" Armed Forces & Society 49, no. 2 (April 1, 2023): 310–29, https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X211072892; Feaver, "The Civil-Military Problematique."*

3 *Huntington, The Soldier and the State.*

4 *Feaver, "The Civil-Military Problematique"; Morris Janowitz, The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait, Free Press trade paperback edition (New York: Free Press, 2017); Rebecca L. Schiff, "Civil-Military Relations Reconsidered: A Theory of Concordance," Armed Forces & Society 22, no. 1 (1995): 7–24; Peter Feaver and Damon Coletta, "The United States: Politicians, Partisans, and Military Professionals," in Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, 2020, https://oxfordre.com/politics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-1863.*

5 *Feaver and Coletta, "The United States."*

6 *Mikael Weissmann et al., eds., Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021); Aaron Hoffman, "Cause and Effect: The Methodology of Experimentation," in Methodology and Emotion in International Relations: Parsing the Passions, n.d., 172–86; Orlin Nikolov, "Building Societal Resilience against Hybrid Threats," Information & Security: An International Journal 39, no. 1 (2018): 91–110, https://doi.org/10.11610/isij.3908.*

importance of societal resilience and civic self-defense training in protecting against or countering Russian aggression, terrorism, and cyberattacks. Similarly, according to Al-Jefairi, civil-military relations in Qatar encompass the Qatari public and society as part of the 'civil' side of the equation, in addition to the traditional understanding of civilian leaders. This new understanding has led to recent civil-military successes, like Qatar's participation in NATO's Military Strategic Partnership Conference in 2023 on human security and its effective response to domestic food shortages. These presentations suggest that the strict separation between political and military decision-making is not conducive to addressing hybrid threats, raising broader questions about the utility of the objective-control model for understanding current issues in US civil-military relations.

Second, the objective control model is inconsistent with the constitutions of the most democratic nations and is arguably anti-democratic. Indeed, Rosol and Limbocker note that Huntington himself considered his notion of objective control to be inconsistent with the separation of powers between the President and Congress in the US context. While the command of the US military rests with the President, Congress has the power to raise and support armies, authorize the use of force, and declare war. In Huntington's view, dividing civilian authority over the military between the President and Congress can leave the US military caught between competing political interests, threatening its political neutrality. Since this division of powers is entrenched in the US Constitution, it is unlikely that Huntington's objective control model could be achieved in the American system in a manner consistent with the existing constitutional order. Rosol and Limbocker also note that the idea that the US military should operate in the military sphere unimpeded by civilian or electoral oversight is anti-democratic, as the US government, including the military, should be answerable to the US electorate through their elected representatives. Thus, the objective control model may be both illegal and undesirable in the US system.

Rather than granting the military an independent sphere of activity, Rosol and Limbocker propose a model of *operationalized objective control*, in which the military, like other government agencies, receives limited autonomy and deference from political leaders based on demonstrated professional expertise and by earning trust through performance and adherence to democratic oversight. This model provides greater democratic accountability than Huntingtonian objective control, while still giving the military the independence it needs to operate effectively.

PRINCIPLE 2: EFFECTIVE CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS REQUIRE THE MILITARY TO REMAIN CLOSELY TIED TO THE INSTITUTIONS AND CORE VALUES OF THE SOCIETY IN WHICH IT OPERATES.

Both Canadian and US evidence suggest that the military's legitimacy depends on alignment with broader societal values. Civilian and military leaders must remain aware of these shifts, as failures to reflect them risk eroding public trust, constraining policy options, and undermining recruitment efforts. This perspective builds on—but also extends—standard civil-military approaches, which traditionally emphasize elite bargaining and institutional control, by highlighting the importance of societal dynamics in sustaining democratic legitimacy. While civil-military relations often center on the connection between political and military elites, civil society actors play a crucial role in these dynamics. As democratic political leaders operate at the behest of the electorate, public opinion and discourse on foreign and defense policy issues can limit or influence the policy options available to political

decision-makers.[7] Although they are not under the same level of electoral oversight as politicians, militaries depend on the public for political legitimacy, military recruits, and defense spending.[8] Thus, maintaining public confidence is not simply desirable but essential, as the military's ability to operate effectively depends on sustaining trust and legitimacy in the eyes of society.

Several panelists explored the factors contributing to public confidence in the military. Hilden discussed the factors contributing to diffuse and specific support for the US military, including partisanship, military performance, personal connection, and military scandals. Richards and Boucher hypothesized that generational identity and formative experiences may explain some of the observed generational differences in defense attitudes, including Millennials' and Gen Z's declining support for increased defense spending and overseas military operations. Although the literature is divided on intergenerational differences in defense attitudes, Richards and Boucher's findings suggest that generational shifts in socio-political values may have long-term consequences for US defense policy—potentially reducing support for military intervention, defense spending, and recruitment, and thereby constraining policymakers' options in the use of force.

Finally, using a survey experiment, Boucher et al. examined the effects of discrimination allegations against women and other equity-seeking groups on Canadians' trust in the military and their support for defense spending and military recruitment. They found that alleged discrimination against equity-seeking groups increased mistrust in the military and negatively affected support for defense spending and the willingness to recommend the military as a career. This research is supported by previous studies on civil-military relations, which suggest that democratic publics expect their military to reflect and align with their societal values.[9] The failure of militaries to align with these broad societal values risks eroding public trust and support for military institutions and personnel.

Taken together, these Canadian (Richards and Boucher; Boucher et al.) and US (Hilden) cases underscore a common challenge: militaries must maintain legitimacy by aligning with societal values, yet demographic and institutional shifts make this increasingly difficult. In the US, the military has traditionally enjoyed high levels of public confidence.[10] Yet even in the US context, such trust cannot be assumed. Studies have shown that public confidence in the military is influenced, in part, by personal connections between civilians and active military personnel and/or veterans.[11] As noted by Feaver, "the increase in the general population, the decrease in the size of the armed forces, and the passing of generations with larger cohorts of veterans—mean that over time the personal connection

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7 *Jean-Christophe Boucher, "Public Opinion and Canadian Defence Policy," in Canadian Defence Policy in Theory and Practice, ed. Thomas Juneau, Philippe Lagassé, and Srdjan Vucetic, Canada and International Affairs (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 159–78, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26403-1_10; Richard C. Eichenberg, "Public Opinion on Foreign Policy Issues," Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, April 5, 2016, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.78.*

8 *David C. King and Zachary Karabell, The Generation of Trust: Public Confidence in the U.S. Military since Vietnam (Washington, D.C: AEI Press, 2003); Peter Feaver, Thanks for Your Service, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press New York, 2023), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197681121.003.0002; Janowitz, The Professional Soldier.*

9 *Schiff, "Civil-Military Relations Reconsidered"; Feaver, Thanks for Your Service; Maja Garb and Marjan Malešič, "The Causes of Trust and Distrust in the Military," Defense & Security Analysis 32, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 64–78, https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2015.1130316.*

10 *Feaver, Thanks for Your Service; King and Karabell, The Generation of Trust.*

11 *Peter Feaver and Richard H. Kohn, eds., Soldiers and Civilians: The Civil-Military Gap and American National Security, BCSIA Studies in International Security (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2001); Feaver, Thanks for Your Service.*

prop is likely to diminish."[12] As fewer Americans have direct personal experience and connection with the military, the public's understanding of the military, including the values it represents and the work it does, will likely diminish, especially among younger generations. This lack of connection and understanding could lead to reduced trust and support for the military, as well as challenges in recruitment. Therefore, strategic communication and engagement between the public and the military may be necessary to address these lost connections. Given the importance of value alignment between the military and the public, the military should ensure that strategic communication initiatives clearly illustrate the US military's values and how they relate to shared American values such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

PRINCIPLE 3: RECOGNIZE THAT THE EVOLUTION OF WAR AND SOCIETY INEVITABLY INTERTWINES THE MILITARY AND POLITICS AND ENSURE THIS RELATIONSHIP DOES NOT COMPROMISE THE MILITARY'S ABILITY TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES OF ELECTED LEADERS.

As several papers observed, drawing a clear line that entirely separates the military from politics is neither realistic nor sustainable. While most scholars view the politicization of the military as a cause for concern, evolving societal dynamics increasingly draw military personnel into domestic and political arenas. Contemporary warfare is often fought against ideas and nonstate actors rather than against conventional armies on traditional battlefields. Veterans frequently transition into elected office, while retired flag officers—many of whom live decades beyond their service—often maintain significant moral authority and engage in public political debates. These developments, largely beyond the military's control, challenge traditional boundaries between the armed forces and political life. Simply regulating the actions of active-duty personnel is inadequate to guard against the broader, potentially harmful effects of military politicization.

In 2024, more than 80% of Americans believed the country was deeply divided over core values, representing a 27 percentage point increase since 2004.[13] This perceived divide is supported by a growing body of evidence that political polarization and division within American society have increased significantly since the early 2000s.[14] This trend of growing political polarization presents distinct challenges for Western democratic militaries, particularly for the US military, whose professional ethos is grounded in the principle of nonpartisan service. Although military nonpartisanship has historically been enforced through US government legislation and norms within the US military regarding appropriate professional conduct,[15] recent studies suggest that the growing partisanship in American society has eroded the norms of military nonpartisanship in the American military.[16]

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12 *Thanks for Your Service, 66.*

13 *Gallup Inc., "Americans Agree Nation Is Divided on Key Values," Gallup.com, September 23, 2024, https://news.gallup.com/poll/650828/americans-agree-nation-divided-key-values.aspx.*

14 *Shanto Iyengar, "The Polarization of American Politics," in The Routledge Handbook of Political Epistemology, ed. Michael Hannon and Jeroen de Ridder, Routledge Handbooks in Philosophy (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2021); Henry E. Brady and Thomas B. Kent, "Fifty Years of Declining Confidence & Increasing Polarization in Trust in American Institutions," Daedalus 151, no. 4 (November 15, 2022): 43–66, https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_01943.*

15 *Lythgoe, "Are the U.S. Military's Nonpartisan Norms Eroding?"*

16 *Ibid, Heidi A. Urben, "Wearing Politics on Their Sleeves?: Levels of Political Activism of Active Duty Army Officers," Armed Forces & Society 40, no. 3 (July 1, 2014): 568–91, https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X12467774; Risa Brooks, "Paradoxes of Professionalism: Rethinking Civil-Military Relations in the United States," International Security 44, no. 4 (April 1, 2020): 7–44, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00374.*

Several papers examined the causes and consequences of military partisanship in light of these trends. In the US, the public's confidence and trust in the US military are far higher than in other government institutions, with a high military ranking in terms of competency and professional ethics.[17] This confidence may offer active and retired US military personnel a credibility advantage over politicians and other civil society actors in politics, especially on topics related to foreign affairs, defense, or security. Indeed, research shows that when active US military personnel and/or veterans weigh in on political matters, the political landscape often tilts in their favor.[18] For example, Lupton examined the impact of military service on congressional foreign policy, referring to it as the "veteran effect." She found that all her veteran interviewees in Congress felt they were given a "credibility advantage" from their service, regardless of whether they believed they deserved it.

While the credibility advantage demonstrates the latent political power of the US military, it does not provide any insight into whether the military has leveraged this advantage for partisan objectives. Although there are individual exceptions, the US military has historically refrained from direct involvement in partisan politics.[19] Examining partisanship trends, Griffiths focuses on the political participation of US flag officers in federal elections. Using a dataset of 402 admirals and generals from 1980 to 2014, he discovered that National Guard and Reserve flag officers were more likely to be politically active than their regular force counterparts. Contributions to political campaigns by flag officers also increased by 35% after retirement. As flag officers live longer than they did in previous generations, this trend will likely result in more retired flag officers engaging in politics. Since active regular force officers exhibited lower levels of political participation than other groups in the study, this suggests that military nonpartisanship norms still constrain at least the upper echelons of the US military. However, recent studies indicate that the US military's internal norms regarding military nonpartisanship are eroding, with an increasing number of service members identifying with a political party and younger service members being more likely to be politically active than older service members.[20]

The growing partisanship among US service members raises questions regarding the desirability and potential repercussions of military partisanship. There are three common arguments against this phenomenon in the civil-military relations literature. First, within the framework of democratic civil-military relations theory, military partisanship is problematic because it undermines the ability of the elected civilian government to command the military. The most extreme example is a military coup, where the military, motivated by partisan political loyalty, overthrows the elected civilian government. Second, military partisanship could negatively impact the quality and competence of the US military. Currently, the US military operates as a meritocracy, promoting military officers based on their competence and professionalism rather than their partisan loyalties.[21] This meritocratic system enhances the quality of the U.S. officer corps and strengthens civilian leaders' confidence in the military advice they receive.

17 *Feaver, Thanks for Your Service.*

18 *Ronald R. Krebs, Robert Ralston, and Aaron Rapport, "No Right to Be Wrong: What Americans Think about Civil-Military Relations," Perspectives on Politics 21, no. 2 (June 2023): 606–24, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721000013; Feaver, Thanks for Your Service.*

19 *Mackubin Thomas Owens, "Military Officers: Political without Partisanship," Strategic Studies Quarterly 9, no. 3 (2015): 88–101.*

20 *Lythgoe, "Are the U.S. Military's Nonpartisan Norms Eroding?"; Risa A. Brooks, Michael A. Robinson, and Heidi A. Urben, "What Makes a Military Professional? Evaluating Norm Socialization in West Point Cadets," Armed Forces & Society 48, no. 4 (October 1, 2022): 803–27, https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X211026355; Urben, "Wearing Politics on Their Sleeves?"*

21 *Lythgoe, "Are the U.S. Military's Nonpartisan Norms Eroding?"; Eliot A. Cohen, Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen and Leadership in Wartime (Simon and Schuster, 2012).*

However, increasing partisanship within the ranks heightens the risk of internal political conflict, which can potentially undermine unit cohesion, morale, and discipline.[22] Finally, military nonpartisanship maintains the public's trust in the military. The US military is currently regarded highly by both Democrats and Republicans, partly due to its reputation for nonpartisan service.[23]

If the US military is perceived as loyal to one political party over another, it could erode that trust. Milonopolous and Blankshain's survey analysis captures public perceptions of (in)appropriateness towards varying levels of partisan and political actions from State Department officials, judges, and military servicemembers. They found that the public largely expects professionalism and non-partisan behavior from military personnel. As discussed in the previous section, failure to conform to the public's expectations can lead to military budget cuts, recruitment and personnel challenges, and the devaluation of military expertise.[24] In sum, growing partisanship within the armed forces could have far-reaching consequences for the operational effectiveness of Western militaries more broadly—not only by undermining internal cohesion and discipline, but also by eroding public trust and weakening the principle of democratic civilian control.

Now that we have established the potential negative consequences of military partisanship, we can direct our attention to the causes of this phenomenon. As this is a new trend in the US, we look to other countries to anticipate possible future repercussions of a politicized military. One panel on comparative civil-military relations across Indonesia, Myanmar, India, and Southeast Asia proved highly instructive. According to Arifianto's presentation on "Understanding Current Civil-Military Relations in Indonesia," in 2004, Indonesia initiated a commendable reform process aimed at depoliticizing the TNI (Indonesia's armed forces) and enhancing civilian oversight. However, the implementation of these reforms has been inconsistent, largely due to a preference for the status quo (with no military buy-in for the reforms) and to the ad-hoc approach civilian leaders have taken to carry them out, rather than investing in institutionalization. Inadequate state capacity led to a heavy reliance on the TNI, even leading to military officers being appointed to non-military political positions. The TNI's extensive political experience and influence culminated in the election of Prabowo Subianto, a former four-star army general, as the eighth President of Indonesia in 2024. What remains to be seen in the coming years is whether Subianto's appointment will strengthen civilian control over the military or further solidify the military's influence in politics.

Where Indonesia oscillates between civilian oversight and military influence in politics, Myanmar exemplifies a stratocracy where, in its 77 years of independence, the Tatmadaw (Burmese military) has ruled the country directly or indirectly for 66 years. Phone Pyae Soe's sweeping analysis of post-independence Myanmar outlines the fluctuations of Burmese politics, coups, the origins of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy, and the resistance movement following the 2021 coup. Lee's comparative analysis of the militaries of Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Thailand offers one possible explanation for authoritarian endurance in Myanmar – successful coups create autocratizing legacies that increase the likelihood of coup recurrence and other aspects of authoritarianism, such as underdeveloped civilian institutions and institutionalized coup knowledge within the military. While Indonesia and the Philippines experience civilian-led authoritarianism, Myanmar and Thailand

22 *Lythgoe, "Are the U.S. Military's Nonpartisan Norms Eroding?"*

23 *Feaver, Thanks for Your Service; Krebs, Ralston, and Rapport, "No Right to Be Wrong."*

24 *Feaver, Thanks for Your Service.*

maintain strong military governments that guarantee the stability and longevity of authoritarian rule.

Among the postcolonial states with coup experience, India stands out as a notable exception, characterized by strong civilian control over a large, professional, well-trained, and subordinate army. Ramkumar's presentation addressed the danger of a professional army being transformed into a partisan entity through undemocratic civilian encroachment. In her presentation, Ramkumar also emphasized the role that internal security deployments of the Indian military play in politicizing military service.

Despite differing political contexts, the examples above offer valuable insights into the drivers of military partisanship—insights highly relevant to the American context. One key pattern is that military partisanship often emerges when civilian institutions are weak or ineffective. When civilian authorities are unable or unwilling to address pressing societal challenges, the military is frequently called upon to fill the void. While this may yield short-term results, it often comes at a significant long-term cost: the military's expanded role in domestic affairs can undermine the development and funding of robust civilian institutions, thereby opening the door to military influence over civilian policymaking.[25] Therefore, preventing military partisanship in the US starts with maintaining and strengthening the capacity of US civilian institutions. This encompasses democratic institutions such as Congress and other governmental bodies engaged in law enforcement, health, defense, and infrastructure development.

Moreover, internal security deployments are politically contentious and risk involving the military in debates over domestic political issues. This, in turn, can result in allegations of military partisanship and a decline in public confidence in the military.[26] Therefore, in democratic societies, the involvement of the military in domestic security operations should be strictly limited. While hybrid threats, such as domestic terrorism, may necessitate coordination among the armed forces, law enforcement, and other governmental or civil society actors, the military should not assume a leading role in domestic affairs. Itshould instead defer to civilian agencies with the appropriate mandates. In the US context, as Banerjee notes, the National Guard offers a more suitable alternative. As a quasi-civilian, quasi-military force, the National Guard can be deployed for domestic security operations with greater public acceptance and less controversy than the active-duty military.

Third, as highlighted in research by Lee and Ariafianto, the factors driving military partisanship and politicization tend to reinforce each other. Ariafianto's case study of Indonesia demonstrated that officers promoted based on personal and political loyalty to President Suharto often resisted military reform, preferring to maintain existing power structures. The broader lesson for democratic societies is that, once military partisanship takes root, reversing it becomes exceedingly difficult. To mitigate this risk, political and military leaders in Western democracies must work together to maintain the apolitical nature of their armed forces. For the military, this involves maintaining a merit-based promotion system and embedding norms of political neutrality and civilian supremacy throughout professional

25 *Nicole Jenne and Rafael Martínez, "Domestic Military Missions in Latin America: Civil-Military Relations and the Perpetuation of Democratic Deficits," European Journal of International Security 7, no. 1 (February 2022): 58–83, https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2021.25; Timothy Edmunds, "What Are Armed Forces for? The Changing Nature of Military Roles in Europe," International Affairs 82, no. 6 (November 2006): 1059–75, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2006.00588.x; Rasmus Dahlberg and Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, "The Roles of Military and Civilian Forces in Domestic Security," in Handbook of Military Sciences, ed. Anders Sookermany (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 1–13, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-02866-4_33-1.*

26 *Jenne and Martínez, "Domestic Military Missions in Latin America"; Dahlberg and Dalgaard-Nielsen, "The Roles of Military and Civilian Forces in Domestic Security"; Edmunds, "What Are Armed Forces For?"*

military education and training. Civilian leaders, for their part, should refrain from involving military personnel in partisan political discourse or domestic security operations, and they must actively shield the military, including its internal personnel systems, from political interference. Moreover, relevant legislation regulating political activity among service members, such as the Hatch Act in the United States, should be consistently enforced and updated to address emerging challenges, including political activity on digital platforms.

CONCLUSION

This report from the Working Group on Civil-Military Relations examines emerging challenges in the field, including structural tensions within democratic civil-military relations and growing threats to military professionalism and nonpartisanship, particularly in the American context. Drawing on high-quality research presented at the 4th Annual Social Science Seminar, we propose three guiding principles to help policymakers navigate these challenges.

1. We advocate for an earned deference to military expertise in warfighting by civilian authorities. This deference is not absolute and can be lost if civilian authorities deem that the military is failing to achieve the objectives assigned to it.

2. Because public confidence and support are essential to operational effectiveness, the military must be aware of, yet exercise caution when engaging with, societal realities to remain connected to the public it serves.

   We address the pressing issue of military partisanship. Given its potential to undermine cohesion, discipline, and democratic control, civilian and military leaders must work to prevent its entrenchment. This includes exercising caution in using the military for domestic security operations and reinforcing norms and institutional safeguards that promote nonpartisan military service.

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Chapter 7

Innovation in Military Personnel Policy

Max Z. Margulies, G. Lee Robinson, Heather N. Jebb, and Ryan W. Pallas

ABSTRACT

The U.S. military is experiencing significant shifts in how it recruits, manages, and retains personnel. What enables changes to personnel policies? And what factors influence whether these innovations succeed? This essay examines the drivers and challenges of defense personnel policy reform, arguing that such changes are a critical—but often overlooked—form of military innovation. Drawing from military and public sector innovation literature, it explores how policy diffusion, societal trends, legal frameworks, and organizational capacity shape both the decision to change and the success of reform implementation. It highlights recent developments, such as expanded career flexibility and new recruitment authorities, while analyzing variation among the services in adopting these reforms. The essay concludes with three key lessons for policymakers: the importance of leadership and institutional support, the role of data in guiding reform, and the need to overcome bureaucratic resistance. As personnel policies increasingly impact military effectiveness, understanding how to drive successful innovation in this domain is essential for meeting future national security challenges.

The U.S. military is undergoing significant change in how it recruits, manages, develops, and retains its personnel. Just since President Trump took office for the second time in January 2025, the Department of Defense (DoD) has implemented or indicated its intention to consider a variety of policies about eligibility for military service, the role of civilians in its workforce, and workplace priorities.[1] Even before the onset of the new administration's agenda, the last few years featured personnel management changes to include the end of the combat exclusion rule for women, new retirement and talent management systems, and additional pathways for joining the military.[2]

1 *Charles Ezell, "Guidance on Implementing President Trump's Executive Order titled, "Restoring Accountability To Policy-Influencing Positions Within the Federal Workforce," United States Office of Personnel Management, January 27, 2025, https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/latest-memos/guidance-on-implementing-president-trump-s-executive-order-titled-restoring-accountability-to-policy-influencing-positions-within-the-federal-workforce.pdf ;Donald J. Trump, "Prioritizing Military Excellent and Readiness," January 27, 2025, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/prioritizing-military-excellence-and-readiness/; Jon Harper, "Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth issued a new memo with additional guidance on the ongoing DOD civilian hiring freeze," DefenseScoop, March 17, 2025, https://defensescoop.com/2025/03/17/dod-civilian-hiring-freeze-exemptions-hegseth-readiness-doge/.*

2 *Prominent guidance from military services relating to talent management includes the 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps, General David Berger, "Talent Management 2030," United States Marine Corps Flagship, November 2021, https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Users/183/35/4535/Talent%20Management%202030_November%202021.pdf, and the 40th Chief of Staff of the Army, General James McConville, "The Army People Strategy, October 2019, https://home.army.mil/jbmhh/7115/9112/8636/The_Army_People_Strategy.pdf.*

This essay focuses on the determinants of change in defense personnel policy, highlighting considerations for policymakers and policy implementers to drive successful innovation. Above all, successful changes in personnel policy should improve the warfighting capabilities of the military services. In this way, they can be considered a form of military innovation, which are "changes in the conduct of warfare designed to increase the ability of a military community to generate power."[3]

However, innovations in how militaries fight are distinct from personnel reform, which focuses on what scholars consider a non-military, but vital function of a military organization.[4] Furthermore, decisions on personnel policy take place within the larger context of change in public sector organizations and their unique constitutional, statutory, and political implications for affecting change. Therefore, lessons from public sector innovation, which we define as a program or policy that is new to the organizations adopting it, are also important to consider in the realm of military personnel policy.[5]

Given the importance of personnel policies to military power and the rate of personnel policy change in today's military, understanding personnel policy change is particularly relevant. Major military personnel reforms were relatively infrequent from the Cold War through the first decade of the 21st century;[6] however, recent years featured notable policies on gender integration, transgender service members, and workforce policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We approach this topic by focusing on two central questions: What enables changes to personnel policies? And what factors influence whether these innovations succeed?

First, successful reform is enabled by top-management support and dedicated organizational capacity, such as the creation of specialized task forces that can coordinate across bureaucratic boundaries. Second, data-driven decision-making is essential for identifying challenges, evaluating reforms, and building credibility for change. Third, the success of innovations depends on overcoming internal resistance, including bureaucratic inertia, leadership turnover, and cultural barriers.

We conclude by offering three lessons for policymakers: invest in leadership and organizational capacity to drive and sustain reform, prioritize data collection and analysis to guide implementation and measure impact, and create irreversible momentum by addressing cultural resistance and ensuring reforms outlast individual leaders or administrations.

DISTINCT APPROACHES, INTEGRATED LESSONS

Personnel policies are rarely examined as a form of innovation in and of themselves. Instead, they are often considered either in tandem with other forms of technological or doctrinal innovation, as preconditions for doctrinal or other policy changes, or as consequences of these other changes. For example, both Barry Posen and Elizabeth Kier include discussions about personnel policies in their

3 *Michael C. Horowitz and Shira Pindyck, "What Is a Military Innovation and Why It Matters," Journal of Strategic Studies 46, no. 1 (2023): 99.*

4 *Kurt Lang, "Military Organizations," 1st ed. (Routledge, 1965), 838, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203629130-23.*

5 *J.L. Walker, "The Diffusion of Innovations among the American States," American Political Science Review 63, no. 3 (1969): 881.*

6 *Gian Gentile et al., The Evolution of U.S. Military Policy from the Constitution to the Present (RAND, 2017), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1759.html.*

analysis of doctrinal change.[7] Posen identifies service contract length as a necessary condition for innovation, with the French military needing to extend contracts to three years to successfully employ their offensive doctrine that conscripts with shorter career timelines could not sufficiently achieve.[8] Kier, meanwhile, includes these changes in contract length as part and parcel of the broader doctrinal innovation. Both approaches discount the distinct and complex processes required to change personnel policies compared to those for doctrine.

The policies shaping how to recruit, assign, and retain personnel are distinct from those that describe how a military fights, and must be studied accordingly. For one, unlike the most cited examples of military innovation, personnel policy innovation is not predicated on technological advances. Technology can shape personnel policies, as, for example, has been the case with debates about how to attract, train, and retain people with vital skills in artificial intelligence or cyber operations, who may not otherwise find military service that attractive.[9] Yet, states may just as often adopt new personnel policies in response to changing social or demographic pressures, even without any technological imperative or immediate threat to their ability to meet their manpower needs. The repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and contrasting policies on transgender military service over the course of the Trump and Biden administrations demonstrate the political context–with all its concomitant legal frameworks–in which changes in military personnel policy take place.

Second, as with other kinds of military innovation, maximizing the effectiveness of personnel policy reform often requires developing new organizational practices and standard operating procedures. Just as the invention of the tank required the development of a new combined arms doctrine to realize its full potential, technological innovations in the military often demand corresponding changes in personnel policies. At the same time, reforms to personnel policy may themselves require further organizational or doctrinal adjustments to be fully effective. In other words, innovation in one domain—whether technological or human—often necessitates complementary changes in the other to ensure that militaries can adapt, fight, and win effectively.[10] In many cases, personnel reform is explicitly designed to improve military effectiveness and provide operational advantages, for example, by injecting expertise with new technology or more experience into the force.[11] As with other innovations, states often must reorganize their militaries or adjust their doctrine depending on the skills and expe-

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7 *Barry R. Posen, The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars (Cornell University Press, 1986), https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801468582; Elizabeth Kier, Imagining War : French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars, Princeton Studies in International History and Politics ; 153 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400887477.*

8 *Posen, The Sources of Military Doctrine, 116.*

9 *Michael Horowitz and Casey Mahoney, "Artificial Intelligence and the Military: Technology Is Only Half the Battle," War on the Rocks, December 25, 2018, https://warontherocks.com/2018/12/artificial-intelligence-and-the-military-technology-is-only-half-the-battle/; Jacquelyn Schneider, "Blue Hair in the Gray Zone," War on the Rocks, January 10, 2018, https://warontherocks.com/2018/01/blue-hair-gray-zone/.*

10 *Michael A. Hunzeker, Dying to Learn: Wartime Lessons from the Western Front, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca [New York]: Cornell University Press, 2021); Barry R. Posen, The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars (Cornell University Press, 1986), https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801468582; Stephen Peter Rosen, Winning the Next War : Innovation and the Modern Military, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).*

11 *Blaise Miszal, Jack Rametta, and Mary Farrell, "Personnel Reform Lives, But Don't Call it 'Force of the Future,'" War on the Rocks, August 9, 2018, https://warontherocks.com/2018/08/personnel-reform-lives-but-dont-call-it-force-of-the-future/.*

rience of their servicemembers.[12]

Third, implementing personnel policy reform is subject to many of the same challenges facing other types of military and public sector innovation. Militaries, as large bureaucracies, are often resistant to change because even minor changes to existing practices can upset entrenched interests.[13] They reprioritize the skills and professional profiles that the military deems operationally valuable, reordering intra-organizational hierarchies.[14] These challenges are particularly acute when it comes to personnel policy reform: while such disruptions facilitate the adoption of other military innovations, for personnel policy reform they constitute the innovation itself.

Therefore, the military innovation literature, which overwhelmingly focuses on the integration of technological and doctrinal developments, and the public sector innovation literature, which emphasizes the political and legal context in which innovation occurs, provide useful frameworks for thinking about many key questions related to when, why, and how successfully defense personnel policy reform happens. To answer the questions posed at the beginning of this essay, we next consider together lessons from both literatures to understand, first, the factors that are conducive to military and defense agencies deciding and trying to change in the first place, and second, when these changes become successful innovations.

DETERMINANTS OF POLICY INNOVATION

The first step of any innovation process is deciding to implement a change. The literature on innovation in the public sector points to two characteristics – diffusion of policies across governmental jurisdictions and societal changes –as determinants of the decisions to initiate a policy innovation process. First, policy diffusion among governments has played a significant role in shaping innovation in public-sector workforce management. In the early 2000s, reforms in both the U.S. and Europe aimed to improve workforce quality through strategic human resource management.[15] In the U.S. federal government, these efforts introduced systematic approaches to assess and align employee skills with organizational goals, as seen in the appointment of Chief Human Capital Officers in major U.S. federal agencies and the creation of a Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework for federal agencies.

These initiatives highlighted the growing importance of talent assessments and performance metrics, initiating reforms in federal agencies. State governments adopted similar civil service reforms that in-

12 *Elizabeth Kier, Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine Between the Wars (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Michael C. Horowitz, Erin M. Simpson, and Allan C. Stam, "Domestic Institutions and Wartime Casualties," International Studies Quarterly 55, no. 4 (December 2011): 909–36.*

13 *Michael C. Horowitz, The Diffusion of Military Power: Causes and Consequences for International Politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Shira Eini Pindyck, "Innovation and Inclusion in the Armed Forces" (PhD Dissertation, Philadelphia, PA, University of Pennsylvania, 2021).*

14 *For example, Rosen discusses how militaries will create promotion pathways in order to allow military innovations to take hold, guided by senior leaders. Stephen Peter Rosen, Winning the Next War : Innovation and the Modern Military, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).*

15 *Ali Farazmand, "Strategic Public Personnel Administration: A Conceptual Framework for Building and Managing Human Capital in the 21st Century," in Strategic Public Personnel Administration: Building and Managing Human Capital for the 21st Century, ed. Ali Farazmand, 1 (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 3–21; Sally Coleman Selden, Human Capital: Tools and Strategies for the Public Sector (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2009).*

creased flexibility in hiring and retaining skilled public employees.[16] In essence, this diffusion process is akin to the military innovation literature's description of observing and trying to emulate the most effective battlefield practices.[17] Change tends to happen when others have identified a successful practice for addressing a particular or novel problem, and when the organization's own mission set or environment seem to be particularly threatened by the status quo.

Societal changes also play a crucial role in driving innovation within the public sector, as institutions must adapt to shifting economic, social, and cultural dynamics. The transition to an All-Volunteer Force (AVF) in the early 1970s was one such innovation, responding to changing societal attitudes toward military service. The Gates Commission, appointed by President Nixon in 1969, concluded that a voluntary military would enhance the prestige of service but would require competitive pay, benefits, and career incentives to attract and retain talent.[18] Over time, policies such as the Montgomery GI Bill, tuition assistance programs, and graduate education opportunities were introduced to appeal to young people seeking career development, reflecting broader workforce trends that prioritize education and upward mobility.

As economic conditions evolved, so did the structure of military families, creating challenges for traditional personnel policies.[19] Decades ago, single-income military households were the norm, but today, most military spouses are in the workforce or seeking employment.[20] The rise of dual-income households places strains on families seeking to balance military career demands and family stability. Frequent relocations, which are common in military life, pose barriers to spousal employment, contributing to an unemployment rate among military spouses that is three times the national average.[21] These challenges highlight a growing disconnect between the AVF's traditional personnel policies and the modern labor market, where knowledge workers seek career flexibility and stability—attributes that the services have historically struggled to provide. This highlights a fundamental flaw with the Gates Commission. The Gates Commission "never considered that the military would have to become a more family-friendly institution."[22]

Beyond economic factors, societal familiarity with the military has also declined, influencing recruitment and retention efforts. As the children of Vietnam veterans aged out of service eligibility and large-scale deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan decreased, fewer Americans had direct ties to the

16 *Sally Coleman Selden and Willow Jacobson, "Government's Largest Investment: Human Resource Management in States, Counties, and Cities," in In Pursuit of Performance: Management Systems in State and Local Government, ed. Patricia W. Ingraham (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).*

17 *Joao Resende-Santos, Neorealism, States, and the Modern Mass Army (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007); David B. Ralston, Importing the European Army: The Introduction of European Military Techniques and Institutions into the Extra-European World, 1600–1914 (Chicago University Press, 1990); Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff, eds., The Sources of Military Change: Culture, Politics, Technology, Making Sense of Global Security (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 6.*

18 *"The Report of the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force," Studies Prepared for the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force. (Washington; For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. Govt. Print. Off.], 1971). The final report is a separate document with two volumes of supporting documentation and research as studies informing the commission.*

19 *Ryan Pallas, "The Sinking Ship of Theseus: Adapting the U.S. Military to the Modern Family - War on the Rocks," 2023, https://warontherocks.com/2023/03/the-sinking-ship-of-theseus-adapting-the-u-s-military-to-the-modern-family/.*

20 *According to the DoD's 2004 Profile of the Military Community, 38% of Active Duty officer spouses and 46% of enlisted spouses were employed in the civilian labor force. By 2021, 79% of Active Duty civilian spouses were in the civilian labor force.*

21 *Department of Labor, "Military Spouses Fact Sheet" (2023).*

22 *Bernard D. Rostker, "I Want You!: The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Force" (RAND Corporation, July 17, 2006), https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG265.html, 560.*

military.[23] This period of time coincided with a decline in trust of the military and interest in enlistment. Compounding this issue, the pool of eligible recruits has shrunk due to factors such as declining high school graduation rates, criminal records, and physical fitness concerns.[24] As societal trends continue to evolve, the military must innovate its policies to remain competitive in attracting and retaining a highly skilled force.

While much of the focus of defense personnel policy is on uniformed servicemembers, in the broader national security enterprise, the civilian workforce provides critical support, direction, and oversight for the military services. At the highest levels, civilian control of the military requires a robust cadre of civilian national security professionals. However, outside of direct military service, there are no clearly defined developmental paths that cultivate expertise in civil-military norms, foreign policy, and national security operations, thereby building a talent pool of civilian national security experts.

Research from the Center for a New American Security into the civilian national security workforce found that those aspirants to a national security civil servant career reported "a sense that the pathway to a career in government service was nonlinear and therefore difficult to plan."[25] In the post-9/11 era, the national security apparatus has increased opportunities for civilians to pursue a career in the national security workforce. Issues of civilian recruitment and talent management have become more relevant over time; however, they have garnered less attention than military manpower innovation. This is all the more important today, when technological change is largely driven by the private sector, which may make key skill sets more isolated from the military. There are important conversations to be had about the appropriate mission-sets, sizes, and composition of both civilian and military personnel components.

DETERMINANTS OF POLICY ADOPTION

While policy diffusion and societal changes describe why public sector organizations, including militaries, may innovate, it is also instructive to understand the factors that influence the extent of policy adoption across adopting units. This distinction is rarely made in the military innovation literature, which either tends to look at the success of policy or doctrine change in terms of its effect on the battlefield. However, as Kendrick Kuo has pointed out, not all military innovations are successful.[26] He emphasizes changes that are counterproductive, which are lumped in with changes that never catch on or are adopted in the rest of the military innovation literature. Yet the spread of military change throughout the organization is not a foregone conclusion either. Military changes must spread horizontally and vertically after their initial conception to gain widespread adoption.[27]

For this to happen at all, militaries and defense agencies must be receptive to change. This is most often described as a function of their organizational capacity, which can be affected by factors such

23 *Max Margulies and Jessica Blankshein, "Specific Sources of Trust in Generals: Individual-Level Trust in the U.S. Military," Daedalus 151, no. 4 (2022): 254–75, https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_01954.*

24 *Thomas Novelly, "Even More Young Americans Are Unfit to Serve, a New Study Finds. Here's Why.," Military.Com, 2022.*

25 *Katherine Kuzminski, Nathalie Grogan, and Celina Pouchet, "The Future of Civilians in National Security," Center for New American Studies, August 2023, 19.*

26 *Kendrick Kuo, "Dangerous changes: When military innovation harms combat effectiveness," International Security 47, no. 2 (2022) 48–87.*

27 *Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff, eds., The Sources of Military Change: Culture, Politics, Technology, Making Sense of Global Security (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 6; Horowitz and Pindyck, "What is a Military Innovation and Why it Matters," 94.*

as the organization's age, its culture, the culture of the society in which it is embedded, and political structures that incentivize oversight.[28] While these factors can also influence the decision to innovate in the first place, ultimately these all contribute to an organization's willingness to accept risk–a vital feature of military change.[29]

Legal constraints significantly shape policy adoption in public agencies by establishing the rules and procedures that govern personnel management. Like other public organizations, the Army operates within a framework of competitive selection procedures dictated by law. Officer promotion and selection decisions have traditionally been guided by the 1980 Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA) and Titles 10 and 37 of the U.S. Code, which enforce a structured, time-based approach to career progression. While these legal frameworks ensure consistency and fairness, they also limit the ability of the services to rapidly adapt to changing workforce needs. This makes innovation within personnel policies, especially in the officer corps, a gradual process dependent on legislative changes.

Since 2019, military personnel policies have undergone significant modernization due to new legislative authorities. The 2019 John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act (FY19 NDAA) introduced reforms that provided greater flexibility in officer promotions and career development. Officers in certain ranks can now opt in or out of selection boards based on their career goals, allowing more time for professional growth, such as completing graduate education before competing for promotion. Additionally, the act included a brevet promotion authority, enabling temporary promotions for officers in critical or hard-to-fill positions. These changes mark a shift from a rigid, time-driven system to a more talent-based approach, indicating a broader movement to modernize military personnel management.

Within DoD, there is significant variation among the services in the extent to which they have implemented new authorities granted through legislation, indicating that intraservice rules, norms, and culture also shape policy adoption. For example, an incentive provided to the military services, known as a brevet or temporary promotion, allows the services to temporarily grant the rank and pay for a given billet. This allows the military services to incentivize assignments that may be challenging to fill or incentivize high performers to take on greater responsibility.

The Army has used this authority since at least 2021, while other services, like the Marine Corps, are still researching its use and exploring alternative solutions.[30] Regardless, there are disparities between what authorities have and have not been used by the military services. This seems rational as each military service faces unique requirements while balancing different personnel levels. For example, the Army is the largest of the services, while the Marine Corps remained the smallest until the creation of the Space Force, which manages a fraction of the officers and enlisted service members

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28 *Horowitz, The Diffusion of Military Power; Emily Goldman, "Cultural Foundations of Military Diffusion," Review of International Studies 32, no. 1 (2006), 69–91; Dima Adamsky, The Culture of Military Innovation (Stanford University Press, 2010); Deborah Avant, Political Institutions and Military Change: Lessons from Peripheral Wars (Cornell University Press, 1994).*

29 *Kendrick Kuo, "How to Think About Risks in US Military Innovation," Survival 66 (2024): 85–98.*

30 *Janell Ford, "Three NTC officers apart of Army's return of Brevet Promotions," Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, December 4, 2020, https://www.dvidshub.net/news/393873/three-ntc-officers-apart-armys-return-brevet-promotions ; Michael Borgschulte, "Talent Management Update 2024" (United States Marine Corps, November 2024), https://media.defense.gov/2024/Dec/19/2003616410/-1/-1/0/TALENT_MANAGEMENT_UPDATE-NOVEMBER_2024.PDF; 12. The Marine Corps is exploring a more permanent promotion ability, categorized as "spot promotions."*

the Army is responsible for.

However, when looking at the challenges facing the services, technical skillset shortages plague each military service, regardless of size. A 2022 Government Accountability Office study found that the Army and the Marines, military services at opposing ends of personnel levels, face cyber shortages while failing to provide specific service guidelines for cyber personnel.[31] Even with a shortage of cyber personnel, and the authority to direct hire civilian expertise provided in the Fiscal Year 2019 National Defense Authorization Act, the Army and Marine Corps seem to have placed further constraints on the authority by requiring civilians with cyber experience to go through some type of basic training along with rank ceilings noticeably different than the original authority.[32]

The Marine Corps has implemented what appears to be the most restrictive requirements, placing a rank ceiling on individuals entering the program, remaining capped at Gunnery Sergeant (E-7). In contrast, the authority provided by Congress allows for direct commissioning up to the rank of Colonel (O-6).[33] This artificial rank ceiling limits the available compensation the military services can provide, creating a situation where the private sector can compensate for such a difference in a competitive labor market, something the original authority sought to offset.

These artificial constraints created by the military services reduce DoD's ability to quickly hire individuals with the skillsets the private sector is also seeking while elongating hiring timelines, something civilian leaders within DoD saw as detrimental to acquiring technical skillsets.[34] The outcome is the authority implemented with greater constraints offsets its intended purpose, leaving the military services in much the same position they were previously regarding a lack of cyber capability due to personnel shortages and competitive labor markets.

GUIDING SUCCESSFUL INNOVATION

The variation among the services, active-duty and reserve components, and civilian positions within the national security enterprise underscores the challenge policymakers and policy implementers face in guiding successful modernization efforts in personnel policies. We offer three insights below, based in the literature in military and public-sector innovation as DoD continues to modernize its personnel policies and practices.

To drive innovation in defense personnel policy, policymakers and implementers must recognize that effective change requires top-management support and dedicated capacity. Large-scale transformation, such as modernizing the Army's talent management system, demands substantial investment in

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31 *Government Accountability Office, Military Cyber Personnel: Opportunities Exist to Improve Service Obligation Guidance and Data Tracking, December 21, 2022, https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-105423.*

32 *U.S. Army Cyber Command, Army Cyber Direct Commissioning Program Fact Sheet, November 14, 2023, https://www.arcyber.army.mil/Resources/Fact-Sheets/Article/2060387/army-cyber-direct-commissioning-program/; Headquarters Marine Corps, Fiscal Year 2024 Marine Corps Talent Acquisition Pilot, MARADMIN 253/24, May 31, 2024, https://www.marines.mil/News/Messages/Messages-Display/Article/3792621/fiscal-year-2024-marine-corps-talent-acquisition-pilot/.*

33 *Fiscal Year 2019 National Defense Authorization Act, https://www.congress.gov/115/bills/hr5515/BILLS-115hr5515enr.pdf.*

34 *"Subcommittee on Personnel" (Russell SR-222: Senate Armed Services Committee, April 27, 2022), https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/to-receive-testimony-on-military-and-civilian-personnel-programs-in-the-department-of-defense-in-review-of-the-defense-authorization-request-for-fiscal-year-2023-and-the-future-years-defense-program. See Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness, Gilbert Cisneros, said in 2022, this authority from Congress would help streamline the hiring process to quickly acquire the skillsets the military needed, 4.*

leadership development, strategic planning, and organizational resources. Establishing specialized task forces can be an effective mechanism for implementing change, as they provide focused expertise and cross-organizational coordination. However, these efforts must be deliberately structured to avoid bureaucratic inertia and encourage innovative thinking. The Army's decision to create an independent task force underscores the importance of allocating the necessary personnel and resources to achieve meaningful, lasting reform.

Beyond leadership and organizational structure, data-driven decision-making is critical in defining challenges and ensuring that policy changes are grounded in empirical evidence. Policymakers must allocate sufficient funding and resources to collect, analyze, and apply data effectively, allowing them to assess the impact of reforms and make necessary adjustments. Policymakers face pressure in public organizations to implement initiatives quickly due to frequent shifts in political leadership and short tenures for political appointees.[35] Without robust data to guide decision-making, even the most well-intentioned initiatives risk failing to address underlying problems or producing unintended consequences if evaluation is not considered during policy design and implementation. A commitment to data-driven decision-making strengthens policy implementation and builds credibility and trust in the reform process.

Finally, policymakers must acknowledge that the greatest obstacles to change often come from within the organization itself. Bureaucratic inertia, shifting political leadership, senior leader turnover, and cultural resistance can hinder the adoption of new policies. To counter these challenges, leaders must act decisively and create "irreversible momentum" for change, ensuring that progress continues beyond any single administration or leadership tenure. While the pace of change in public organizations may not always follow an ideal sequence, flexibility and adaptability are essential in navigating the complexities of institutional reform. Ultimately, successful innovation in military personnel policy is not just about adopting new systems or technologies—it requires a fundamental shift in organizational culture and mindset.

35 *S. Fernandez & H. Rainey, "Managing Successful Organizational Change in the Public Sector," Public Administration Review, 66 (2006): pg 170.*

Chapter 8

The Transformative Effects of Russia's War in Ukraine

Mark Temnycky, Isak Kulalic, and Robert Person

ABSTRACT

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, it forced the United States, NATO, and the European Union to re-evaluate fundamental aspects of their national security and defense policies. Before the invasion, only six of NATO's 30 members allocated 2% of their gross domestic product to defense, and very few European countries prioritized their defense capabilities and national security. As of Summer 2025, 23 of NATO's 32 members have met the overall defense spending target, and 29 allies have met the equipment spending target (20% of defense budgets). Russia's war in Ukraine has clarified the need for collective security across the European continent, and it has reminded the Western world that it should not take security for granted. In short, Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine has had transformative effects on national security for the United States (U.S.), Europe, Russia, and Ukraine.

This essay examines how Russia's war in Ukraine has transformed strategic, tactical, political, and social approaches to security in the West, and it calls for the U.S. and Europe to further enhance their defense capabilities. Prioritizing U.S. and European defense and strengthening transatlantic ties, while studying Ukraine's successes during the war will lead to a safer, more secure European continent.

INTRODUCTION

The Second World War decimated Europe. Scholars and economists said that reconstructing Europe would cost tens of billions of dollars, and world leaders wanted to ensure that such a great catastrophe would not occur again. To prevent future devastation, several European countries, the U.S. , and Canada came together to establish the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This group was created to "protect the freedom and security of its members through political and military means."[1] The organization was also formed to provide several countries with security against the

1 *U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "About NATO," U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, accessed 6 February 2025, https://nato.usmission.gov/about-nato/#:~:text=Formed%20in%201949%20with%20the,its%20global%20network%20of%20partners.*

Soviet Union.[2] Following its inception in 1949, members of the organization came together to ensure peace and stability on the European continent.[3]

NATO achieved these objectives. By the time the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, NATO members had successfully prevented another large-scale ground war on the continent. Other Western and Central European countries would later join the Alliance, which further led to cooperation and collaboration among member states as they discussed the importance of national security and defense on the European continent and beyond.

This attention to defense capabilities, however, changed after the Soviet collapse. Believing that there were no longer direct threats to Western values, democracy, and security, many European countries deprioritized their national defense.[4] Several allies cut back their defense budgets, believing they should focus on economic power instead.[5] Many of these members believed that defense spending was no longer a priority. Several countries reduced the size of their militaries. In other words, there was a sense of peace and stability on the European continent from 1991 to 2021.

As a result, NATO shifted its strategy from "threat-based planning" to "capabilities-based planning."[6] At the time of its foundation, NATO perceived the Soviet Union as a threat. The Alliance developed strategies to identify and counter Soviet capabilities effectively. Once the Soviet Union collapsed, however, NATO adopted a new approach that focused on developing core strengths and resources for a broad spectrum of missions and challenges in the absence of a major state-based threat or challenger.[7]

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 would change this mindset. With the war in its fourth year, NATO members have begun to place more emphasis on defense spending, national security, and the defense industrial base. Russia's war has also influenced how the U.S., the European continent, Russia, and Ukraine perceive national security, defense, and other capabilities.

What lessons have the U.S., NATO, and the European Union learned during Europe's most significant land war since the Second World War? What are the transformative effects on U.S. and European national security?

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2 *U.S. Office of the Historian, "North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), 1949," U.S. Department of State, accessed 6 February 2025, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/nato#:~:text=The%20North%20Atlantic%20Treaty%20Organization,security%20against%20the%20Soviet%20Union.&text=NATO%20was%20the%20first%20peacetime,outside%20of%20the%20Western%20Hemisphere.*

3 *Robert Person and Michael McFaul, "Why NATO Is More Than Democracy's Best Defense," Journal of Democracy, April 2024, https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/why-nato-is-more-than-democracys-best-defense/.*

4 *Paal Sigurd Hilde, "European Defense Capabilities During the Russian Invasion of Ukraine," Paper presented at 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 5-6 February 2025, West Point, NY.*

5 *Robert Kagan, "New Europe, Old Russia," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 6 February 2008, https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2008/02/new-europe-old-russia?lang=en.*

6 *MAJ John Christianson, "Threat-Based and Capabilities-Based Strategies in a Complex World," United States Air Force, 2016, https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/AD1021927.pdf.*

7 *Ibid.*

NATO AND EU SECURITY ARCHITECTURE DURING RUSSIA'S WAR OF AGGRESSION IN UKRAINE

Russia's full-scale military incursion in Ukraine in February 2022 has forced the U.S., NATO, and the EU to reconsider national security and defense strategies. For example, the war has prompted NATO members to increase their defense spending beyond the 2% of GDP target set by the 2014 Wales Pledge.[8]

Since 2022, allies have been exploring how to strengthen their security posture following the surprise Russian invasion in February 2022 that caught many NATO and EU members off guard. It has challenged their understanding of peace and stability on the European continent, and both NATO and the EU have stated their full commitment to supporting Ukraine during this period. However, positions vary across individual member states.

Delivery of assistance to Ukraine, however, has been challenging. Aid to Ukraine has compelled the U.S., NATO, and the EU to revitalize the defense industrial base.[9] To date, the U.S., NATO, the EU, and dozens of other countries around the world have provided hundreds of billions of dollars in defense, humanitarian, medical, and financial assistance to Ukraine.[10] In the case of defense aid, the U.S., NATO, and the EU have sent millions of rounds of ammunition, various types of weapons, defense equipment, and vehicles.

The situation has not been helped by the simple reality that Ukraine's rate of consumption of said aid has far outpaced both the defense production capabilities of Western partners and allies, as well as the rate at which aid can be sent to Ukraine.[11] As a result, the U.S., NATO, and the EU have been forced to reconsider industry standards in supply chain management and defense acquisition. Doing so has involved addressing burden sharing amongst allies as a means of reducing defense production redundancies while enhancing the abilities of the U.S., NATO, and the EU to pool their resources.[12] If successfully implemented, such moves would not merely lessen the burden upon defense industries in Western countries, but they may also strengthen ties between NATO and EU members by fostering a more collaborative model of contributing to the defense-industrial sector.[13] This would allow allies to develop a robust defense collective, which will be necessary in independently tackling European security concerns whilst the U.S. reconsiders its defense priorities.[14] Resolving these is-

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8 *Clara Falkenek, "Who's at 2 Percent? Look How NATO Allies Have Increased Their Defense Spending Since Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," Atlantic Council, 8 July 2024, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/econographics/whos-at-2-percent-look-how-nato-allies-have-increased-their-defense-spending-since-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/; NATO, "Funding NATO," NATO, 19 December 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/em/natohq/topics_67655.htm#:~:text=The%202%25%20defence%20investment%20guideline,ensure%20the%20Alliance's%20military%20readiness.*

9 *NATO, "The Hague Declaration," NATO, 25 June 2025, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_236705.htm.*

10 *Mark Temnycky, "Three Years Later, Despite Critics' Claims, the World Still Stands with Ukraine," The Hill, 26 February 2025, https://thehill.com/opinion/international/5163035-global-support-for-ukraine/.*

11 *Mark Temnycky, "Ammunition War Between Russia and the West," Kyiv Post, 3 April 2024, https://www.kyivpost.com/opinion/30517.*

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Mark Temnycky, "How Ukraine Can Build Western Weapons at Home - And Win," 19FortyFive, 19 February 2025, https://www.19fortyfive.com/2025/02/how-ukraine-can-build-western-weapons-at-home-and-win/.*

14 *James Rogers, "Europe: Britain Looks East," Britain's World, 3 February 2025, https://www.britainsworld.org.uk/p/the-memorandum-02-2025.*

sues in a timely manner, however, has proven to be a struggle.[15]

Europe must also find a way to increase its defense capabilities. Over the past four years, Ukrainian forces have successfully defended their country against the ongoing Russian invasion. With Western weaponry, technology, and assistance, and with Ukrainian grit and resilience, the Ukrainians have decimated the Russian military. Despite Ukraine's successes, Russia has attempted to shift the narrative of the war.[16] Throughout the war, Russian officials fabricated their battlefield reports. They have exaggerated and misreported their successes to sway opinions about their capabilities.[17] These attempts are not only to influence the Russian government about its continued involvement in the war in Ukraine but also to wear down Western countries and their willingness to continue aiding Ukraine.[18]

As a result, Europe needs a coalition that will continue to commit itself to helping Ukraine, especially as the Trump administration reevaluates - and likely reduces - American support to Kyiv. This will not only strengthen Ukraine's defense abilities while fighting against the Russian invasion, but it will also help strengthen European security, ensuring that future land wars do not occur. In other words, enhancing defense capabilities and readiness will deter future Russian aggression.

What might this European defense collective entail? One solution may be the need for a European defense force. During Russia's war, the EU has toyed with establishing a defense force. It has also considered an EU defense budget. This European security collective could be created through intergovernmental means, which would include non-EU members.[19] Empowering intergovernmental actors would ensure that EU member states could not veto defense priorities and proposals when seeking to strengthen European national security. It would also provide a voice to non-EU member states, as their security on the European continent is equally important. For example, Ukrainian officials have frequently met with their NATO and EU counterparts to discuss matters related to Russia's war. This continued communication ensures that Ukraine, NATO, and the EU will move forward on defense as a collective. It also strengthens their position on the national defense of the European continent.

Creating a unified European defense collective would also resolve any ambiguity in discussions about defense between European states. Under NATO, Article 5 states that an attack on one member state is considered an attack on all. But there are no legal consequences if member states do not uphold Article 5.[20] Currently, each NATO member state can interpret how it will respond to a call for Article 5, and nothing prohibits members from being inactive.

Furthermore, under NATO Article 3, there is no agreement on what it means for member states to

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15 *Temnycky, "Ammunition War Between Russia and the West," Kyiv Post.*

16 *Hans Petter Midttun, "I Am Confident Russia Will Lose This Year. Here's Why," Euromaidan Press, 9 January 2025, https://euromaidanpress.com/2025/01/09/i-am-confident-russia-will-lose-this-year-heres-why/.*

17 *Ruslan Leviev, "Russian Military Reporting on the War," Paper presented at 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 5-6 February 2025, West Point, NY.*

18 *Tom Rostoks, "Strategy of Attrition," Paper presented at 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 5-6 February 2025, West Point, NY.*

19 *Pierre Harroche, "An Adult Year: Some Priorities for EU and NATO," Paper presented at 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 5-6 February 2025, West Point, NY.*

20 *Federica Fazio, "NATO and Collective Defense: A Contextual Analysis of Article 5 in Light of the War in Ukraine," Paper presented at 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 5-6 February 2025, West Point, NY.*

maintain and develop their ability to resist armed attacks by aggressors. Differences in the interpretation of the treaty text have led some European states to enhance their defense capabilities, while others have not prioritized their defense readiness. In addition, if a defense collective were formed in Europe, this initiative would outline clear expectations for what is necessary to ensure that each European country can defend its borders and those of its neighbors. The Europeans could draw on the existing framework in NATO and the EU when creating this new European defense collective.

During this process, it will also be critical for European countries to reach a consensus on security threats. For example, as Russia's war in Ukraine enters its fourth year, not all European members have perceived Russian aggression as a threat to the European continent.[21] NATO and EU member states in Eastern Europe and Scandinavia have prioritized assistance to Ukraine, recognizing the urgency of the Russian threat. Meanwhile, some Western and Central European countries have yet to prioritize defense capabilities as they view other matters as more pressing than the Russian invasion. The different perceptions of Russian aggression have led to disagreements between NATO and EU states, and it has caused rifts in levels of commitment to defense spending and aid to Ukraine. Creating a joint NATO and EU collective security strategy for the European continent's defense, however, would lead to a better-defended and more secure continent.[22]

Finally, not only would these discussions enhance European resolve on national security, but they would also align with the current defense objectives outlined by the U.S. Creating a European coalition for defense would lead to a stronger and more unified continent, which would bolster deterrence and support peace.

As the Europeans continue to discuss the need for peace and security, the new U.S. presidential administration under Donald Trump has highlighted the need for a philosophy of "peace through strength."[23] In a statement issued by the new Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth, DoD has vowed to revive its defense industrial base, reform its acquisition process, and reestablish deterrence. The Trump Administration believes that achieving these objectives will enhance the U.S.'s defense posture and capabilities, resulting in greater peace and stability. Europe would be wise to find manners to adopt the Trump Administration's "peace through strength" philosophy and align with DoD's evolving posture by seeking opportunities for both reinforcing existing partnerships with the U.S., as well as seeking new opportunities for transatlantic collaborations which will serve to fulfill mutually-shared security objectives.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM UKRAINE'S DEFENSE CAPABILITIES DURING RUSSIA'S WAR

In addition to being the impetus for structural reforms in European defense at the grand strategic and political levels, Russia's war in Ukraine has also spurred transformation at the tactical and operational levels. In this case, the U.S., NATO, and the EU have studied Ukraine's defense capabilities

21 *Edouard Xia, "Belgium in Contemporary Uncertainty: The War in Ukraine and the Return of National Interest," Paper presented at 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 5-6 February 2025, West Point, NY.*

22 *Paul Cormarie, "The Return of Great Debates in French Strategic Culture," Paper presented at 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 5-6 February 2025, West Point, NY.*

23 *U.S. Department of Defense, "Secretary Hegseth's Message to the Force," U.S. Department of Defense, 25 January 2025, https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4040940/secretary-hegseths-message-to-the-force/.*

during Russia's ongoing invasion. In particular, they have examined Ukraine's response to Russia's cyber-kinetic capabilities, the successes of Ukrainian special operation units against Russia, and Ukraine's usage of drone warfare.

On February 23, 2022, one day before the full-scale invasion, Russian operatives launched successful cyber-attacks aimed at disabling Ukraine's critical infrastructure. Given these events, several media outlets and international experts believed a Russian victory was inevitable and expected it to occur quickly.

For example, Microsoft's report, *An Overview of Russia's Cyberattack Activity in Ukraine*, indicated that Russia's "cyber and kinetic operations appeared to be concentrated and synchronized."[24] Despite these successful cyberattacks, the Ukrainian military stood firm and defended itself against Russian attacks. Microsoft's report then examined the connection between Russian cyberattacks and Russian troop movements in Ukraine. In addition, Microsoft studied critical gaps in Russian decisions so that international experts could understand Russia's capabilities to synchronize cyber and kinetic operations to achieve military victory.

Microsoft's report also prompted a collaborative effort between the Army Cyber Institute Analysis (ACIA) team and Columbia University to conduct an investigation by utilizing the same data sets as Microsoft had to determine the cause of the discrepancy. In contrast with the Microsoft report, the ACIA report noted a failure to find any correlation between cyber and kinetic operations.[25] Their findings revealed that the Microsoft research team made the mistake of interpreting "any cyber event within a certain proximity of a kinetic event and within a specific timeframe as synchronized."[26] In contrast, the on-the-ground situation reflected vast disproportionality in the ratio of cyber-to-kinetic operations as the majority of events consisted of "explosions or remote violence"[27] separated by such times and distances from cyber events as to render the two unrelated.

Furthermore, the Microsoft report found that trench warfare at the front lines had served to incapacitate the capabilities of Russian forces to carry out an effective "hybrid war" by launching kinetic attacks against Ukrainian targets after they had first been attacked by hacktivist groups. As such, Russian troops often could not attack and seize said targets in Ukraine. This caused a transition in the conflict from a "hybrid" to a "more conventional" war.[28]

SUCCESSES OF UKRAINE'S SPECIAL OPERATIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

In the face of Russia's war in Ukraine, Ukrainian Special Operations Forces (SOF) have demonstrated remarkable adaptability of their capabilities by quickly transitioning from peacetime training and stability missions to operationally effective large-scale conventional operations, which have ultimately

24 *MAJ Daniel Eerhart, "Cyber-Kinetic Synchronization in Ukraine," Paper presented at 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 5-6 February 2025, West Point, NY.*

25 *Eerhart, "Cyber-Kinetic Synchronization in Ukraine."*

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Robert, Person, Isak Kulalic, and John Mayle, "Back to the future: the persistent problems of hybrid war," International Affairs 100, no. 4 (2024): 1749-1761; Marzena Żakowska and Larry Goodson, "Evolving War in Ukraine: From Hybrid Warfare to Frozen Conflict," Paper presented at 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 5-6 February 2025, West Point, NY.*

held back Russian forces.[29]

Despite vast economic and military disparities, Ukrainian SOF have proven remarkably effective at mounting a resistance against Russia. These capabilities were developed in the aftermath of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, when the Ukrainian SFO began receiving military and financial assistance, along with training, from the West.[30] At that time, the Ukrainians also began implementing structural reforms aligning with NATO standards, thus allowing the formation of effective anti-Russian resistance networks. The decentralized command structure of the Ukrainian SFO enabled them to adapt swiftly to ever-changing battlefield environments. This adaptability has been further demonstrated on two fronts: tech integration and unconventional warfare tactics.

Regarding tech integration, Ukrainian SFO combined Western-supplied military technology with repurposed civilian technology to carry out strikes on Russian targets while avoiding direct engagement with Russian forces. This has included the use of drones, including the repurposing of civilian drones that drop bombs on Russian military targets and supply lines.[31] In situations where direct combat is deemed a necessity for destroying Russian military equipment, the Ukrainian SFO implemented small unit tactics. The capability of Ukrainians to effectively carry out such missions has been greatly aided by their reliance upon Starlink to calculate and conduct strikes.[32]

As for unconventional warfare tactics, Ukrainian SFO have proven highly skilled in implementing guerrilla tactics and carrying out sabotage operations against Russian forces. Doing so has comprised a combination of disrupting supply lines and communication centers, targeting key military infrastructures and command centers, and carrying out targeted strikes on "high-value targets."[33] Furthermore, in their opposition to the Russian invasion, Ukrainian SFO have been heavily reliant on psychological warfare. In particular, deception operations have complicated Russian military planning and operations, and they undermine the morale of Russian forces while maintaining the support of civilian populations under Russian occupation.[34] Finally, the capabilities of Ukrainian SOF to effectively integrate with conventional forces allowed Ukrainian military forces to maximize their results despite limited resources.

MILITARIZATION OF THE RUSSIAN STATE DURING THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Finally, the war in Ukraine has had transformative effects on the Russian Federation itself. Russia's war in Ukraine has irrevocably changed the Russian Federation's relationship with the U.S., NATO, and the EU, as well as other countries and organizations throughout the world. When the war began, the international community came together to impose stiff sanctions on Russia to punish it for the war.

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29 *Doug Livermore, "Ukraine Special Operations Forces and the Lessons Learned for Large-Scale Combat Operations," Small Wars Journal, 31 January 2025, https://smallwarsjournal.com/2025/01/31/ukraine-special-operations-forces/.*

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Livermore, "Ukraine Special Operations Forces and the Lessons Learned for Large-Scale Combat Operations," Small Wars Journal.*

32 *Nick Patton Walsh, Alex Marquardt, and Florence Davey-Attlee, "Ukraine Relies on Starlink for Its Drone War. Russia Appears to be Bypassing Sanctions to Use the Devices Too," CNN, 26 March 2024, https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/25/europe/ukraine-starlink-drones-russia-intl-cmd/index.html.*

33 *Livermore, "Ukraine Special Operations Forces and the Lessons Learned for Large-Scale Combat Operations," Small Wars Journal.*

34 *Ibid*

These penalties resulted in a decline in the Russian economy, and the Russian state lost hundreds of billions of dollars.[35] In response, Russian society adopted a more militarized and hostile approach toward relations with the West. These events have also seen a dramatic increase in expressed Russian patriotism.

Post-colonial scholars have observed that leaders of newly independent states often face instability due to a fragile relationship with their national militaries, driven by fears of deep-seated conflicts between political leaders and military officers. Militaries in such states often retain a degree of influence by the former colonizing power and may prompt the latter to stage a coup.

These concerns are particularly poignant in light of the dual considerations. For example, states commonly consist of low-capacity authoritarian regimes that lack the resources to develop and maintain monopolies of force over their territories and constituencies. Furthermore, between 1946 and 2008, some two-thirds of authoritarian governments fell to elite-led coups.[36] In light of such circumstances, post-colonial states have commonly differed in creating paramilitary organizations to operate alongside formal institutions for state-building and regime protection against coups. Given the relatively low costs of employing paramilitary forces, it is also a means of overcoming resource scarcity.[37] Finally, post-colonial governments have commonly sought to foster nationalistic and patriotic organizations (particularly youth organizations) at the civilian level.

The Russian dynamic is somewhat different, given that Russia's centuries-long status as a colonial empire places it at the opposite end of the dynamic between colonizer and colonized. The breakup of the Soviet Union and, subsequently, the Russian Federation's inability to integrate into Western institutions rendered the former colonial power in a similarly precarious position. Anxieties surrounding the lack of resources and concerns about potential military coups have led the Russian government to pursue the development of a Soviet-style "military-educational complex"[38] to foster ideological loyalty and promote broader civil society involvement in civil defense training and preparation at the civilian level. This ultimately bolsters Russia's defense capabilities as future generations of young males come of military age.[39]

This has been pursued via the formation of political, economic, and discursive networks to achieve said aims. Political socialization networks have ranged across Russia but have concentrated in Volgograd, Rostov on Don, and Russian-occupied Crimea.[40] The political networks consist of "historic and cultural centers, veteran's groups, youth groups, and Cossack groups," demonstrating the Kremlin's commitment to disseminating its militarizing ideologies across communities of varying faiths and

35 *Vladimir Milov, "Oil, Gas, and War: The Effect of Sanctions on the Russian Energy Industry," Atlantic Council, 23 May 2024, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/content-series/russia-tomorrow/oil-gas-and-war/.*

36 *LT COL Megan Cumpston, "Inside the Panopticon: Coup Prevention and Military Capabilities in Surveillance States," Paper presented at 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 5-6 February 2025, West Point, NY.*

37 *Matthew Dearing, "The Movement of the First: Entry Point to Paramilitarism in Russia," Paper presented at 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 5-6 February 2025, West Point, NY.*

38 *William E. Odom, "The Soviet Military-Educational Complex," in Civil-Military Relations in Communist Systems, ed. Dale R. Herspring and Ivan Völdyes (New York: Routledge, 1978), 79-104, https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429043161-5/soviet-military-educational-complex-william-odom.*

39 *Jennifer G. Mathers and Allyson Edwards, "Political, Economic and Discursive Networks of Youth Militarization in Russia," Paper presented at 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 5-6 February 2025, West Point, NY.*

40 *Dearing, "The Movement of the First: Entry Point to Paramilitarism in Russia."*

ethnicities.[41]

Economic networks operate through state-subsidized grants, to which the various centers and groups mentioned above apply to secure the necessary funding. Receiving grants is essentially contingent upon demonstrations of ideological alignment with the Kremlin as well as demonstrating "some connection to the military and values associated with the armed forces of the history of the nation at war."[42]

Discursive networks serve as the Kremlin's means of addressing long-held concerns that Russian history has long been distorted, leading to a lack of historical understanding and respect for Russia's place in history across Russian society. This could result in the erosion of patriotism, rendering Russian society increasingly difficult to govern. As a means of addressing such concerns, in 2001 (during Putin's first term), the Russian government introduced a policy of "Patriotic Education,"[43] which typically espouses glorified representations of Russian history in support of the state's ideology. To maximize the "Patriotic Education" in Russian society, the Russian government sought to distribute its funds sufficiently to encompass a range of projects from small towns and villages to big cities. An emphasis is placed on medium-range projects that promote recognition of the Soviet role in the Second World War. This is intended to reach the largest number of people.[44] As such, discursive networks at the local level provide Russian youth with creative and immersive projects that aim to enhance historical understandings with the ultimate aim of fostering youth enthusiasm for future military service as well as weakening the prospects of future political opposition to the Kremlin.[45]

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, and more so its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, has rendered these discursive networks increasingly vital to the Kremlin as it has sought to present the Russian state, and by extension, the "Russian World" (or Russkiy Mir) as existentially threatened by a hostile, U.S.-led, international order. Russia believes it has a moral right to challenge this worldview.[46] In the context of Ukraine, this has taken the form of false narratives referencing the role which the Red Army played during the Second World War by portraying the invasion as a necessary "special military operation" aimed at defeating Western-supported Ukrainian Nazis.[47]

The Russian state has also invested resources into developing tandem youth and adult paramilitary organizations, such as the "Movement of the First" and the "Russian Imperial Movement." The "Movement of the First" was established to inculcate Russian nationalism through the teaching of history and culture to Russian youth whilst emphasizing the necessity of future military recruitment against the backdrop of the aforementioned Western-backed "existential threats" facing Russia.[48] Presently,

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41 *Ibid.*

42 *Mathers and Edwards, "Political, Economic and Discursive Networks of Youth Militarization in Russia."*

43 *Mathers and Edwards, "Political, Economic and Discursive Networks of Youth Militarization in Russia."*

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*

46 *Ibid.*

47 *Allyson Edwards and Jeff Hawn, "Putin's Golden Calf," New Lines Institute, 5 March 2022, https://newlinesinstitute.org/state-resilience-fragility/putins-golden-calf/.*

48 Matthew Dearing, "The Movement of the First: Entry Point to Paramilitarism in Russia," Paper presented at 2025 West Point Social Sciences Seminar, 5-6 February 2025, West Point, NY.

the organization claims its membership to be five million strong.[49] In a similar vein, the "Russian Imperial Movement" is a far-right nationalist organization with an adult-only membership whose ideology lies at the intersection of Russian monarchism and the Russian Orthodox Church.[50]

CONCLUSION

Overall, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 rejuvenated the conversation about national security within the U.S., NATO, the EU, and beyond. Several Western countries have prioritized updated defense strategies to meet the moment, while highlighting the need to strengthen coalitions among Western states. It has also challenged the U.S., the European continent, Ukraine, and Russia on how they perceive national security. This has led to transformations within their respective defense apparatuses.

During the ongoing war, two-thirds of NATO members met their defense spending targets. They have improved their defense capabilities. The U.S., NATO, and the EU have explored the need for defense sharing to lessen the burden on the defense industrial base. They have also begun addressing supply chain issues and prioritizing their collective defense. North America and Europe have found it necessary to discuss national security matters and prepare for global threats rather than thinking inward about domestic affairs. This has promoted a sense of unity and strength among NATO and EU members, leading to a stronger, more secure North American and European continent.

The Westerners also have Ukraine to thank. During the war, the Ukrainians demonstrated that they could repel the world's second-strongest military force despite having a smaller military force, fewer weapons, and a smaller economy. In addition, the Ukrainians are using innovative methods to ensure their security, and the Westerners are taking notice. For example, the Ukrainians have launched several special operations against the Russian military, which have decimated the Russian army. They have capitalized on drone warfare to ensure that Ukrainian soldiers are not put in harm's way, they have manufactured weapons to fight against the Russians, and they have reminded the West about the importance of defending freedom, democracy, and Western values.

Russia's war in Ukraine also demonstrates that hybrid warfare can escalate into conventional war and even lead to a state of total war. The success of Ukrainian forces against the Russian onslaught provides lessons for the U.S. and its allied militaries. Military organizations must strive toward greater flexibility and adapt to the ever-changing nature of threats and warfare. This includes a combination of enhancing capabilities for integrating new technologies and investing in advanced communications systems that are resistant to jamming. Conventional forces can also strive toward improving their coordination with special forces when such needs arise, as well as emphasizing decision-making at the levels of command to be flexible in the face of ever-changing situations. Meanwhile, as warfare takes on an increasingly ""hybrid" nature, the U.S., NATO, and the EU should not assume that instances of inefficient and ineffective synchronization of cyber and kinetic tactics result from a lack of experience or institutional knowledge on the part of adversaries.

Finally, these past four years have demonstrated the tendency of authoritarian regimes to rely on paramilitary organizations, often as a means of substituting for a lack of state capacity to provide for

49 Matthew Dearing, "The Movement of the First: Entry Point to Paramilitarism in Russia."

50 Ibid.

their constituency, as well as for a lack of legitimacy in the eyes of that constituency. This is particularly the case when the officer class of the official militaries of these countries is not aligned with the views of the autocrats in power. It is important to note, however, that the often militant and violent nature of paramilitary organizations threatens to "exacerbate violence, undermine formal institutions, and enhance authoritarian rule," all to the ultimate detriment of the capacity of the state to function.[51]

The time for the U.S., NATO, and the EU to address defense capabilities is now. The example set by the Ukrainian military serves as a precedent for future generations.

51 *Dearing, "The Movement of the First: Entry Point to Paramilitarism in Russia."*

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Chapter 9

Security and Sovereignty in Southeast Asia: Regional Contestation, Economic Pressures, and Domestic Politics

Dotan Haim and Renard Sexton

ABSTRACT

Southeast Asia sits at the center of intensifying strategic competition between the United States and China. We draw on research presented at the West Point Social Sciences Seminar to examine how regional states navigate the challenges of domestic insecurity, economic interdependence, and international coercion. A common thread emerges across diverse issues from Islamist radicalization to cybercrime, grey zone tactics, and economic pressure: Southeast Asian countries face real constraints but continue to exercise agency in shaping their security choices. While China leverages both hard and soft tools to reshape the regional order, efforts by actors such as the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam show that strategic diversification, legal resilience, and diplomatic innovation remain viable paths. These findings hold important implications for U.S. and allied policymakers: regional influence will be won not just through military presence, but through investment in governance, narrative, and local capacity. The credibility of the U.S. presence in the region is also likely to guide the level of assertiveness that Southeast Asian countries are willing to use.

INTRODUCTION: THREE FRONTS IN A REGIONAL CONTEST

This paper brings together insights from a working group that explored how Southeast Asian states are navigating rising strategic pressures. As U.S.-China rivalry intensifies, states in the region are being pulled in multiple directions. Yet the papers and discussions highlight an important theme: Southeast Asian countries are not passive players. Instead, they are actively confronting threats, exercising agency, and shaping their own security and development paths.

We cover three distinct but interconnected themes. The first explores diplomatic contestation and regional order, focusing on the symbolic, legal, and narrative dimensions of power. China and the US are not just using economic or military means to reshape the region. They also use discourse, civilian vessels, and public diplomacy to alter norms, shift baselines, and erode resistance. These "grey zone" strategies allow Beijing and Washington to influence key players without triggering open conflict. But states in Southeast Asia are pushing back. Nowhere is this more visible than in the Philippines, where policymakers have used international law, public transparency, and new trilateral partnerships to assert sovereignty and counter disinformation. Taiwan's New Southbound Policy, which focuses on education, tourism, and cultural exchange, offers another example of how states

can address insecurity through soft power. The research makes clear that narrative control and legal resilience are an important complement to hard power in the current environment.

Our second focus is on the economic-security nexus, asking whether economic ties translate into political or security alignment. A simple assumption has often guided policy thinking: countries that trade more with China will inevitably drift into its political orbit. But the papers in this panel challenge that view. They show that Southeast Asian governments are more strategic and selective than often suggested. Trade is not investment, and economic engagement does not always lead to political loyalty. While China may dominate in trade volume, other countries such as Japan, South Korea, and the U.S. retain deeper and more durable economic influence through infrastructure, energy, and digital governance projects. These sectors often come with longer time horizons and stronger transparency norms, giving them added political significance. As Southeast Asian states seek to avoid overdependence, they are leveraging this diversity to extract economic benefits while maintaining political autonomy.

The third focus is on how Southeast Asian governments are confronting internal security challenges that fall outside conventional military threats, including Islamist radicalization and transnational cyber scams. Limited coordination, entrenched bureaucratic interests, and political blind spots allow these problems to fester. Domestic threats like these do not just destabilize individual states; they also open doors to authoritarian influence, cross-border crime, and citizen mistrust in key alliance partners. These vulnerabilities also complicate regional cooperation, making it harder to build collective responses or share intelligence. External partners seeking to help must navigate these internal constraints as they design support for regional stability.

Across all three areas, a few big takeaways emerge. First, the competition for Southeast Asia's future is as much about ideas, legitimacy, and legal frameworks as it is about ships or dollars. Second, economic leverage does not guarantee political outcomes. And third, domestic political capacity remains a core determinant of how well states can navigate external pressures. As the following sections show, understanding Southeast Asia's strategic landscape means taking seriously the diverse ways that power is exercised, resisted, and reimagined.

DIPLOMATIC CONTESTATION AND REGIONAL ORDER IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Southeast Asia is a key battleground in the broader competition over the future of international order. This contest is not only about infrastructure or military power; it is also about ideas, norms, and institutions. China is no longer just offering roads and ports. It is promoting a model of governance rooted in state sovereignty, non-interference, and centralized control, positioning itself as an alternative to Western liberalism.

This effort is playing out across multiple fronts. Allin describes China's strategy as "epistemic influence": a campaign to shape how Southeast Asian elites understand global politics through think tank exchanges, elite training, and curated forms of knowledge production.[1] The message is clear:

1 *Allin, Peggy-Jean. 2025. "Knowledge and Narratives: The Politics of China's Southeast Asian Management Strategy." Paper Presented at the West Point Social Science Seminar, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY.*

development and order don't require liberal democracy. Cao extends this point to the digital realm, showing how China promotes its model of cyber governance.[2] This model combines infrastructure and surveillance, and centers on information control and "cyber-sovereignty." Together, these efforts promote an institutional vision that favors state authority over transparency, pluralism, or individual rights. China's soft power is not about charm or attraction. It's about shaping the menu of governance models that Southeast Asian states perceive as legitimate and attainable.

Tran and Woodaz offer a glimpse into the U.S. response, analyzing the State Department's Integrated Country Strategies for Vietnam.[3] Their preliminary analysis suggests that U.S. engagement emphasizes the rule of law, health governance, and institutional reform. This reflects a broader contrast: while China stresses state control and strategic autonomy, the U.S. promotes legal accountability and liberal institutional partnerships. But these ideas are in direct competition, and, in many cases, Southeast Asian governments are navigating between them. An important terrain of competition is how regional leaders define their national interests, and what kinds of relationships and institutions they see as viable.

These ideological divides are reinforced by growing security tensions, especially in the maritime domain. Kinney shows how China's use of civilian fishing vessels and maritime militias (so-called grey zone tactics) has exposed ASEAN's weaknesses.[4] ASEAN's consensus model makes it ill-equipped to confront coercion that skirts conventional rules of engagement. In response, some states are reconsidering their institutional alignments. Fabe's analysis of recent Philippine defense strategy documents shows a clear turn away from ASEAN-led approaches in favor of informal trilateral cooperation with the U.S. and Japan.[5] This reflects a broader shift: as ASEAN struggles to coordinate collective action, Southeast Asian governments are building more flexible, often informal partnerships to defend their sovereignty and security.

Related research by one of the WG chairs (Sexton) elucidates how diplomatic contestation also links to domestic politics in Southeast Asian countries bordering the South China Sea. Leaders in these countries regularly make hawkish statements and threats toward China (or their neighbors) to appeal to domestic constituencies, even though they often quickly walk them back. A set of survey experiments in the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia shows that these empty threats raise job approval scores among citizens as opposed to taking no action. Leaders see an opportunity to signal to their populations that they are tough on issues of sovereignty and national pride, without actually getting into real conflict with China.

The big picture is this: Southeast Asian states are not passively balancing between major powers. They are actively choosing among competing institutional models, narrative frames, and forms of alignment. For U.S. policymakers, competing effectively means more than offering deterrence or

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2 *Cao, Sarah. 2025. "Charting a New Course: Taiwan's New Southbound Policy in the Wake of China's BRI." Paper Presented at the West Point Social Science Seminar, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY.*

3 *Tran, Brandon, and Joshua Woodaz. 2025. "Vietnam-US Relations: A Text Analysis." Paper Presented at the West Point Social Science Seminar, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY.*

4 *Kinney, Cecelia. 2025. "Coercive Currents: China's Use of Fishing Vessels in the South China Sea. A Power Projection Perspective." Paper Presented at the West Point Social Science Seminar, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY.*

5 *Fabe, Amparo Pamela. 2025. "Philippine Maritime Security Resilience in the South China Sea." Paper Presented at the West Point Social Science Seminar, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY.*

development assistance. It requires sustained engagement in the institutional and ideational arenas where Southeast Asian governments are redefining their options.

THE ECONOMIC-SECURITY NEXUS

Southeast Asian states are often described as walking a tightrope between economic entanglement with China and a security umbrella provided by the U.S. But this framing masks a more complex reality. Rather than passive recipients of external pressure, states in the region actively manage their economic relationships to preserve political autonomy. They do so by distinguishing between different forms of economic engagement, exploiting the diversity of external partners, and asserting agency in their foreign policy choices.[6]

A key point is that not all economic relationships are equal in their political or security consequences. Trade, for instance, generates interdependence but does not necessarily translate into leverage. Oh's study of China's involvement in Southeast Asian global value chains illustrates this well: while China is the region's dominant trade partner, it has largely remained a supplier rather than a capital investor or governance leader within regional value chains.[7] In contrast, countries like Japan, South Korea, and the United States have established deeper influence through investment, especially in sectors like infrastructure, digital governance, and energy, where long-term commitment and transparency norms carry greater political weight. This matters because investment tends to create deeper, longer-term ties than trade. It often comes with rules, oversight, and shared standards that influence governance. Southeast Asian governments seem to recognize this: by welcoming diverse investors and favoring infrastructure linked to Western or Japanese norms, they can benefit economically from China without handing over political leverage.

Kaufmann's contribution helps clarify why this kind of compartmentalization is possible.[8] Rather than assuming that economic ties lead directly to political alignment, she constructs composite indices that place each country on a continuum between China and the United States across economic, political, and security dimensions. These indices combine multiple indicators such as trade flows, aid, FDI, UN voting, arms sales, and joint exercises into a single measure for each dimension, allowing for a direct comparison of strategic alignment across domains. Her results show that while states with deeper trade and investment ties to China may engage in more limited forms of security cooperation, these ties do not produce broader political convergence. The effects on security are small, and political alignment remains largely unaffected. The inference is important: even in cases of deep economic interdependence, countries in the region are maintaining space to pursue independent political and diplomatic strategies.

This reinforces the idea that agency remains central. Even when heavily economically intertwined with China, countries like Vietnam or Indonesia have used multivector diplomacy to hedge against dependence. They extract benefits from Chinese trade and investment, while simultaneously deepening strategic ties with the U.S., Australia, Japan, and India. This reflects both an awareness of domestic

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6 *We thank Haemin Jee for her panel paper, which provided substantial insight for this section.*

7 *Oh, Yoon Ah. 2025. "Reassessing China's Economic Power in Southeast Asia during the 2010s: Insights from the Nexus of FDI-Driven Manufacturing and GVC Trade." Paper Presented at the West Point Social Science Seminar, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY.*

8 *Kaufmann, Jane. 2025. "The Political and Security Impacts of Economic Dependence." Paper Presented at the West Point Social Science Seminar, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY.*

political constraints (such as nationalist public opinion or elite factionalism) and a strategic reading of global shifts. Taken together, the papers suggest that economic dependence does not lead inexorably to political alignment. Instead, it is filtered through a complex set of institutional, strategic, and normative mediators. Southeast Asian governments are not simply reacting to Chinese pressure or U.S. offers, nor are they simply fence-sitting. They are leveraging the competition through calculated diversification.

There are implications here for U.S. and allied policymakers. First, economic influence must be understood in institutional terms: who invests, under what conditions, and in which sectors matter more than raw trade volume. Second, regional influence will hinge not just on countering China's moves but also on offering positive-sum alternatives that reflect local priorities such as governance, transparency, digital access, and sustainable infrastructure. Third, analysts should avoid overdetermining the effects of economic interdependence. Southeast Asian states operate with constraints, but they are also shaping the rules of the game.

THE POLITICS OF DOMESTIC SECURITY THREATS

While strategic competition in Southeast Asia often centers on maritime disputes and military posturing, the most immediate security challenges facing many governments are non-traditional.[9] Terrorism, cybercrime, and human trafficking threaten not only public safety but also regional governance and sovereignty. Weak or fragmented state responses to these threats create openings for transnational actors, external influence, and internal distrust.

One of the longest-running concerns is Islamist extremism, particularly in Indonesia. Since the 2002 Bali bombings, foreign-funded religious schools have often been blamed for radicalizing students. Yet, as Nanes shows, preliminary evidence complicates this view: government-run religious schools may, in some cases, be more likely to foster support for political violence than foreign-linked madrasas.[10] This challenges key assumptions in counterterrorism policy and suggests the need to shift focus away from foreign curricula toward domestic institutions and peer networks that enable radicalization. For international actors, this means rethinking where and how to invest in counter-extremism. This should be focused less on headline reforms and more on strengthening regulatory oversight and internal monitoring within national ministries and religious education systems, where radicalization risks are most likely to be institutionalized.

Another major domestic security threat in Southeast Asia is cyber scam operations, which highlight a broader pattern in the region: domestic governance failures create vulnerabilities that transnational actors exploit, often in ways that draw in external powers. As Welsh shows, scam compounds in Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines have blended online fraud, forced labor, and trafficking on an industrial scale, with many operations run by Chinese syndicates linked to Belt and Road infrastructure.[11] China's eventual response (a series of joint crackdowns with regional governments in 2023) reflects not only a domestic concern for Chinese victims but also a strategic move to assert

9 *We thank Yoon Ah Oh for her panel paper, which provided substantial insight for this section.*

10 *Nanes, Matthew. 2025. "The Madrasa Hypothesis: Does Foreign-Funded Religious Education Contribute to Extremism?" Paper Presented at the West Point Social Science Seminar, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY.*

11 *Welsh, Bridget. 2025. "A Growing National Security Threat: Transnational National Crime in Southeast Asia." Paper Presented at the West Point Social Science Seminar, U.S. Military Academy, West Point, NY.*

leadership in shaping regional law enforcement norms through platforms such as the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation initiative. Like radicalization, these scams illustrate how non-traditional security threats expose weak state control and invite outside actors to fill the vacuum.

Non-traditional threats are not side issues; they are central to how power and influence operate in Southeast Asia. For international actors, especially the U.S., this means moving beyond narrow investments in counterterrorism or cyber capacity. Effective engagement must address the political and institutional failures that enable threats like radicalization and cyber scams to take root. Regional influence will depend as much on helping states strengthen internal governance and oversight as on traditional defense cooperation or deterrence.

CONCLUSION AND TAKEAWAYS

Southeast Asian states are not passive bystanders in the U.S.–China rivalry. They are actively managing external competition to protect their autonomy and advance their own priorities. Across economic, security, and diplomatic arenas, governments in the region are leveraging great power competition to diversify partnerships, shape institutional alignments, and pursue flexible strategies suited to local needs.

Economic engagement in Southeast Asia is strategic and selective. While China is the region's largest trade partner, much of that commerce is transactional and short-term. In contrast, long-term investment, especially from the U.S., Japan, and South Korea, often brings deeper political influence by supporting infrastructure, governance, and capacity-building efforts that align with domestic priorities. At the same time, domestic security threats such as cyber scams, trafficking networks, and extremist violence affect how Southeast Asian governments evaluate external support. These threats push countries to look beyond military aid and assess which partners can help them strengthen institutions and build public trust. Finally, regional order is being contested not only through military presence or economic leverage, but through competing ideas about how states should be governed. China advances a model centered on sovereignty, state-led development, and noninterference. The U.S. and its allies emphasize transparency, the rule of law, and multilateral cooperation. These different visions now lie at the heart of strategic competition in the region.

Southeast Asian governments are responding to this contest with strategic creativity. The weakening of ASEAN and the rise of informal security partnerships reflect a shift toward more flexible, interest-based alignments. For the U.S. and its allies, staying relevant means investing not just in hardware or deterrence, but in sustained, grounded engagement across governance, infrastructure, and institutional design.

One major challenge for the U.S. is that Southeast Asian countries want greater economic integration with the U.S., primarily through market access, something that has seemingly evaporated as a possibility since the demise of U.S. participation in the TPP trade deal.

Instead, U.S. trade barriers are on the rise, and most imports from the U.S. are digital services, which are often not subjected to taxes or tariffs -- but this can change. Digital services taxes, data localization laws, content regulation, etc., can punish the US in the trade space. US Defense ties serve as a strategic offset, making countries think twice about going after US firms and services trade, or about

getting too close to China in the investment or transshipment space. Thus, maintaining the U.S.'s edge in providing defense cooperation and, in some cases, guarantees keeps the economic relationship from becoming untenable.

Chapter 10

Strategic Language: Modern Chinese in CCP Discourse and Global Impact

John Gregory

This Working Group was composed of two panels, each with three scholars presenting their papers. In each panel, one scholar declined to have their presentation included in the report. The following summarizes the four presentations from the two panels.

The first panel was "PRC Discourses on New Technology," focusing on the "People's Liberation Army's (PLA)" strategic language on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and China's perspectives on stability and deterrence in space. Drawing on analyses of official Chinese sources, military writings, and state media, these papers shed light on the driving forces, objectives, and potential implications of China's technological ambitions in these crucial domains.

A central theme in "How the PLA's Language on AI Shapes its Strategy," presented by Captain Matthias Schachtler from the Military Academy (MILAC) at the ETH Zurich in Switzerland, is the PLA's technological modernization pathway, described as an evolution from "Informatisation" (信息化) to "Intelligentisation" (智能化). "Informatisation" broadly describes integrating information technology across military operations. "Intelligentisation," the subsequent and current stage, focuses on the extensive application of AI to enhance warfighting capabilities, decision-making, and automate processes. This shift was spurred partly by events like AlphaGo's victory over human Go champions, which highlighted AI's strategic potential. A significant focus within Intelligentisation is "Artificial General Inteligence (AGI)", defined as AI capable of performing any intellectual task a human can, or even surpassing human ability. The CCP has heavily invested in AGI development, viewing it as potentially an "assassin's mace weapon" (杀手锏) capable of blunting an adversary's strengths. Discussions within the PLA concern the level of human involvement with AI in decision-making, debating whether humans should remain "*in* the loop" (人在回路中), making final decisions, or shift to a position "*on* the loop" (人在回路上), overseeing autonomous decisions. Some PLA discourse even explores a future "singularity" (奇点) where AI might far outpace human intelligence. Underlying this strategic technological push is the CCP's deep-seated "technology optimism," rooted in the materialistic underpinnings of Marxist-Leninist ideology. This view sees technological progress as essential to societal advancement, economic growth, political survival, and the strengthening of party control, aligning with Lenin's emphasis on technology for revolutionary guidance. The CCP appears to be adopting a utilitarian approach to technology, believing it can address challenges like falling productivity and demographic decline. This ideological perspective, combined with a one-party system allowing for

quicker decisions with fewer checks and balances, raises concerns about the potential for rapid adoption of powerful, potentially risky AGI.

China's space strategy also reflects this blend of technological ambition and strategic goals. In "Stability and Deterrence in Space: The Chinese Perspectives," Ms. Zhuoqi Dong pointed out that while advocating the peaceful exploration and use of space as a "commonwealth of mankind", China simultaneously develops robust military and counter-space capabilities for national security and deterrence. This approach has evolved across administrations, from initial growth (Jiang), to emphasizing deterrence and unified development (Hu), and culminating in Xi's focus on "air and space integration" (空天一体), information control, and making "Military-Civil Fusion (MCF)" (军民融合) a national strategy. MCF integrates civilian/commercial technology and talent into the defense sector, enhancing dual-use capabilities. Key technological areas include the Beidou navigation system, ASAT weapons, AI, and quantum encryption. While the historical stance included offensive elements, a transition towards a more defensive deterrence posture under Xi has been observed.

The intertwined nature of China's AI and space strategies is most evident in the context of US-China relations, characterized by significant competition and potential cooperation. Key areas of confrontation include military satellites, counter-space weapons (like ASATs and cyber capabilities), and disagreements over space governance norms. China's pursuit of technological self-reliance further contributes to this tension. However, potential areas for cooperation includemanaging space debris, engaging in scientific missions, establishing crisis communication protocols, and collaborating on commercial space standards.

In conclusion, China's strategic approach in AI and space is driven by an integrated vision of technological advancement, ideological belief in progress, and national security imperatives. The focus on Intelligentisation, AGI, and MCF aims to achieve a world-class military and gain a strategic edge, particularly over the United States. While rivalry is escalating, understanding China's perspectives and identifying areas for dialogue and cooperation are crucial for managing risks and potentially fostering stability in both AI development and the space domain.

In the second panel, presentations explored how the CCP uses language and discourse to shape political understanding and maintain control. COL Gregory's paper "Mimicking Political Modernity: Liberal-Democratic Simulacrum in China's Dual Political Discourse" introduced Baudrillard's concepts of mimicry and simulacrum to analyze contemporary Chinese political discourse. Assuming political participation is a hallmark of modernity in democracies, he argues that the CCP orchestrates discourse to project legitimacy and control the domestic political narrative. This is done through a duality of discourse. First, the domestic mode of political discourse is characterized by a didactic, propagandistic approach to domestic political events, emphasizing procedural correctness and stability and devoid of critical analysis. Examples included reports on local elections, such as Xi Jinping's "unanimous re-election," highlighting social and political consensus, smooth processes, and collective will. By contrast, a second mode of discourse exists for analyzing foreign political events for domestic audiences. This critical, analytical mode for foreign political events (especially when the subject of "analysis" is the US and Taiwan) scrutinizes processes and highlights flaws, drawing its criticism from the logic of liberal-democratic reasoning, the latter type of reasoning being completely absent in the domestic mode of political discourse. While often polemic in tone, the rhetorical structure of articles

analyzing foreign elections drew from liberal-democratic logic and criticism. This duality creates a "simulacrum," or "hyperreal," as described by Baudrillard. By allowing critical discourse only towards politically unfavored foreign democratic systems, the CCP simulates critical political engagement, validating citizens as modern participants (a form of mimicry). However, this simulation replaces genuine domestic critique, reinforcing the perceived superiority and flawlessness of the Chinese system, which is never subject to critical liberal-democratic logic. The study is based on content analysis of Chinese platforms (Baidu, Weibo, QQ, Douban) and is corroborated by anecdotal student comments showing critical views of US democracy but accepting China's system.

Dr. Ho's "Humanist Resistance: T.A. Hsia's Study of the Language of the Chinese Communist Party (1961-1965)" focused on the early work of the humanist literary scholar T.A. Hsia, who studied changes in the CCP's language in the early 1960s. Hsia used a humanistic, historical, and encyclopedic approach within the *Studies in Chinese Communist Terminology* series at UC Berkeley. His motivation was to understand daily life under CCP rule and how new vocabulary was used for control and mobilization. Key findings from Hsia's three booklets are: first, in *Metaphor, Myth, Ritual and the People's Commune* (1961), Hsia found widespread use of military metaphors and rituals during the Great Leap Forward to mobilize masses. This created a "World of Strange Language" with inverted concepts to maintain social control and support. Second, in *A Terminological Study of the Hsia-Fang Movement* (1963), Hsia demonstrated how political movements weaponized vocabulary for thought control through deliberate dissemination and study. Finally, in *The Commune in Retreat as Evidenced in Terminology and Semantics* (1964), Hsia argued that the Communes had inherent contradictions between terminology and reality. He noted the emergence of policies that directly contradicted the commune ideal. Hsia highlighted that the semantic disconnects did not necessarily force the Party to change course, as if it were a "Cassandra prophecy." Dr. Ho concluded that Hsia's humanistic perspective provides valuable historical context and insights for understanding contemporary CCP language practices.

Both presentations reported here illustrate the CCP's consistent, strategic manipulation of language and discourse. Dr. Ho examined how Hsia's historical work shows the deep roots of using language to create alternative realities and control thought, while Gregory's analysis reveals how these tactics manifest today through a dual discourse that simulates critical engagement to bolster the domestic system's legitimacy. Together, they underscore how the CCP constructs linguistic environments to manage public perception and restrict genuine political participation.

CHAPTER 11

REVITALIZING THE DEFENSE INDUSTRIAL BASE: A STRATEGY FOCUSED ON THE SUB-BASE FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND STRATEGIC DETERRENCE

Caleb Stenholm

Revitalizing the DIB will require utilizing a variety of supply side approaches focused on the defense sub-industrial base coordinated across the entirety of government and in close coordination with allies.

The evolving landscape of geopolitical rivalry has elevated the revitalization of the defense industrial base (DIB), to a central position in national security strategies. Decades of relative peace following the Cold War led to atrophy in the DIB, leaving it potentially inadequate to meet the demands of contemporary great power competition.[1] The U.S. DIB currently faces significant challenges, including insufficient capacity, lagging innovation, and brittle supply chains.

Demand signal problems continue to hinder DIB revitalization. The uncertainty surrounding procurement prevents firms from investing in long-term capacity increases. Cumbersome acquisition processes and a focus on cost-plus contracts rather than fixed-price agreements discourage innovation and efficiency. Changing trade conditions and regulations, like the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) limit international demand.[2]

While traditional defense economics has often focused on market structure and acquisition practices, the "new economics" of industrial policy provides an updated framework, emphasizing the centrality of market failures as the rationale for intervention and the need for policy alignment and complementarities between instruments.[3] Addressing the DIB's long-term capacity issues requires a strategic approach that moves beyond solely relying on demand-side procurement policies, which cannot achieve the necessary objectives alone.

Supply-side inputs include intellectual property, labor, capital investment, raw minerals, and processed materials. A persistent shortage of skilled labor, particularly in manufacturing and shipbuilding, directly limits the ability to expand production capacity. Reliance on foreign, and sometimes adversary, nations for critical minerals, components, and materials create supply chain vulnerabilities.

1 *CNAS Report*

2 *Heritage Foundation Report.*

3 *Novella Paper, pg. 2.*

Investments in basic and applied research yield knowledge spillovers and critical intellectual property that benefit society broadly, often beyond the initial investor. Governments across the world recognize this externality and invest heavily in various R&D programs through grants and subsidizing critical research infrastructure.[4] The DoD directly supports R&D efforts through extensive grant funding and operates a national labs system.

Emerging intellectual property must be developed through additional development, scaling, and marketing – a process known as commercialization. Private venture capital investors play a key role in this process by providing upfront capital, industry expertise, and management oversight.[5] These investors receive outsized compensation for taking on additional risk. Investors in mature companies also accept risk on their investments in exchange for higher returns. Geopolitical uncertainty increases risk and reduces the likelihood of investment.

The education system and immigration serve as the main sources of laborers. The government must align existing government and private sector upskilling programs with strategic priorities and incentivize US laborers to return to manufacturing jobs.[6] An easier short-term solution revolves on reforming immigration policies to allow the flow of skilled laborers into the United States.

Creating and sustaining long-term excess industrial capacity, particularly in critical sectors, is a key requirement for effective deterrence and national security. The market fails to provide adequate excess capacity because the benefits of maintaining idle, yet surge-ready, production lines are primarily externalities enjoyed by a whole nation in times of crisis, rather than generating financial returns for individual firms.

Investments in critical infrastructure like manufacturing facilities and raw material extraction also produce positive externalities by securing essential supply chains, reducing dependence on potentially unreliable foreign sources.[7] The provision of critical materials and maintaining resilient supply chains possess characteristics of public goods, where the market alone may not ensure sufficient availability or robustness. The high costs associated with capital formation, including investment in new equipment and facilities, further impede growth. Regulatory burdens and complex permitting processes add to the cost and time required for industry expansion.[8]

THE WAY FORWARD

A good strategy will coordinate industrial policy tools at the national-level, and focus on the defense sub-industrial base, and leverage the comparative advantages of our allies through friend-shoring and near-shoring.

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4 *Large Hadron Collider and Livermore National Labs serving as prime examples.*

5 *James & Scarce presented a paper with initial findings that investment into EU early-stage defense firms has increased from $110M in 2017 to over $1B in 2024.*

6 *Unlikely to work given sticky human preferences and labor economics research.*

7 *James & Pishchulov presented a paper on using natural language processing to map industrial supply chains. Defense firms in the US are required to report Tier 3 suppliers, but supply chains often extend far beyond three tiers.*

8 *St-Pierre & Salamis highlighted the US's mine development timeline as the second longest in the world and challenges from permitting for critical mineral extraction in Canada.*

No single national-level entity exists in the US government to coordinate industrial policy.[9] Economic statecraft efforts fall under at least ten different departments each subject to changes in leadership among different administrations. Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) and Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs (MOEA) serve as excellent examples of government organizations that rely extensively on public-private partnerships to achieve economic outcomes and thwart adversarial economic warfare efforts. Data from US intelligence collection capabilities can be combined with private sector market expertise to drive decision making.

Given these challenges, focusing industrial policy on the defense industrial "sub-base" (DISB) is the optimal strategy for creating long-term capacity, fostering economic growth, and enhancing strategic deterrence. The DISB refers to the domestic market for fundamental, lower-value-added inputs essential for higher-value defense projects, such as metals, alloys, ores, compounds, minerals, plastics, and active pharmaceutical ingredients. This approach aligns well with the goals articulated by both the Trump and Biden administrations to revitalize domestic manufacturing, foster hardware innovation, and strengthen critical supply chains.

Focusing on the DISB offers several strategic advantages. First, it provides a more effective pathway for building a broad and durable political coalition necessary for sustained reform. Unlike the concentrated nature of prime contractors or high-value sectors like semiconductors, the production of basic materials and components is geographically distributed across many states, facilitating broader congressional support and private sector engagement. [10]

Second, interventions aimed at the DISB can lower and stabilize input prices by de-risking supply and pulling demand forward for key commodities. By ensuring a more reliable and affordable supply of fundamental inputs, the real purchasing power of the defense budget is increased over the long term. This effectively yields greater capability for the same nominal spending.

Third, strengthening this foundational layer improves the resilience and capacity of the entire DIB. Bottlenecks at the raw material or component level can halt production of complex systems; addressing these base-layer issues creates a more robust and responsive industrial ecosystem.

Finally, revitalizing the domestic production of DISB inputs directly fosters broader economic growth. Investing in mining, refining, and basic manufacturing stimulates economic activity across multiple sectors and regions, contributing to the overall strength of the national economy. This aligns to leverage defense spending for broader economic benefit while remaining focused on increased lethality.

These tools should be deployed as part of a unified Western effort.[11] Western nations can generate more demand for components in the industrial base through friend-shoring or near-shoring.[12] Allowing capital, labor, and goods to flow freely through open trade practices will lower the cost of capital and

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9 St-Pierre and Salamis highlighted the existence of a World War II production board that used a variety of government tools to achieve production targets.

10 Delafield used the CHIPS Act as a case study to argue for the importance of building a broad-based coalition from a political economy perspective.

11 Orsi argues that the government should eliminate barriers to technology transfer to foster working with allies and partners more closely.

12 Bannerjee & Tkach showed how an entente between India and Taiwan led to increased submarine manufacturing capability.

allow firms to benefit from economies of scale and comparative advantages. While these connections are not riskless in times of increased geopolitical tension,[13] firms may accept this risk in exchange for access to U.S. markets.[14]

Future research should focus on the efficacy of different industrial policy tools on achieving desired outcomes. A wealth of research exists on the positive benefits of R&D funding and labor force restructuring. There is a considerable gap in the research on capital market interventions. Research should also be conducted into the organizational structure of a national-level economic statecraft office.

Revitalizing the U.S. defense industrial base to meet the demands of great power competition requires a comprehensive strategy that addresses underlying market failures and systemic impediments. While various tools exist, a focus on strengthening the defense industrial sub-base (DISB)—the foundational domestic market for critical inputs—offers a compelling pathway to simultaneously build long-term excess capacity, foster broader economic growth, and enhance strategic deterrence.

13 *Houttekier & Du Bois developed a geopolitical risk measure based on large language model analysis of firm annual reports. They found that increasingly connected firms faced more geopolitical risk.*

14 *Author's note - firms will likely assume this risk in exchange for access to larger markets.*

APPENDIX A: SPECIFIC TOOLS DISCUSSED

Procurement Certainty and Demand Signals: Expanding the use of multi-year contracts and promoting long-term contracting are crucial for reducing demand uncertainty and incentivizing industry to invest in capacity. Clarifying acquisition pathways, especially for hardware, and potentially utilizing future purchase agreements for commoditized DISB inputs can provide the stable revenue signals needed for investment and growth. Increasing the ratio of procurement spending relative to research and development could also send a stronger demand signal for fielded systems, which, in turn, drives demand for inputs.

Direct Funding for Excess Capacity: While increasing procurement is expensive for solely building capacity, targeted grant programs could fund the fixed costs of maintaining excess productive capital for specific critical items in the DISB. This directly addresses the externality of maintaining surge capacity, but at a very high cost to the government.

Capital Market Incentives: Capital market interventions from the Office of Strategic Capital (OSC) and the Small Business Administration (SBA) play a vital role in lowering the cost of capital for all phases of commercialization and can crowd in private capital for the scaling required in raw materials and component production. Providing tax credits and loan guarantees to fund improvements in industrial processes and critical infrastructure needed for DISB production addresses bottlenecks by increasing returns to equity. Implementing full and immediate expensing for capital investments and R&D eliminates double taxation of capital, further increasing returns to equity holders.

DISB-Specific Interventions: Expanding strategic commodity stockpiles under the management of entities like the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), potentially through new executive orders and supporting legislation, pulls demand forward and stabilizes supply for critical inputs. This leverages executive authorities to complement congressional appropriations.

Workforce Development: Implementing and expanding labor-training programs, improving initiatives such as SkillBridge, and aligning education policy with defense needs are vital to addressing the labor shortage in manufacturing and trades relevant to the DISB.

Regulatory Reform: Streamlining permitting processes for mining and manufacturing facilities is essential for expanding domestic production of raw materials. Reforming contracting methods, moving away from cost-plus towards fixed-price contracts where appropriate, and generally reducing the excessive regulatory burden placed on companies can lower production costs and encourage new entrants throughout the supply chain.

International Cooperation: Leveraging the shared industrial might of allies through co-development, co-production, and utilizing allied capacity for manufacturing and maintenance significantly increases aggregate capacity and enhances resilience. Facilitating foreign military sales also increases the demand signal for DIB products and their underlying inputs. Informal collaborations between partners, such as the potential for Taiwan and India to cooperate on value arms components like submarine parts, can enhance capacity and resilience while navigating geopolitical sensitivities. This requires organizing force, potentially from the U.S., to facilitate these firm-to-firm engagements.

R&D Investment: Increasing government funding for basic (TRL 6.1) and applied (TRL 6.2) research is necessary to generate new ideas and de-risk technologies relevant to the DIB. Improving the technology transfer process helps bridge the gap between research and commercialization.

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CHAPTER 12

GREAT POWER COMPETITION AND THE ECONOMIST'S TOOLKIT: REFLECTIONS ON ECONOMICS OF NATIONAL SECURITY ASSOCIATION SESSIONS AT WEST POINT, FEBRUARY 2025

Eli Berman

Geoeconomics is everywhere. A critical factor in CENTCOM's use of kinetic attacks to suppress Iranian nuclear capabilities is the effect on global oil prices. Taiwan's deterrence strategy vs. an invasion from the mainland depends crucially on a global 5-year lead in microprocessor technology –a fundamentally dual-use component of both military and civilian AI applications. Other examples abound: food insecurity due to strategically interrupted grain shipments from Ukraine and interrupted natural gas supplies from Russia to Europe are but two of many.

My aim in this short contribution is to sketch how the Economist's Toolkit help us understand current Great Power Competition in conventional economic logic, covering not only geoeconomics but also statecraft more broadly. To add a flavor of what ongoing research by economists has to offer, I have illustrated with results from a smattering of relevant research projects.

It helps to clarify terms at the outset: *Geopolitics* is literally the politics of the entire planet –yet in current usage it means either or both of two things: first, international relations of the great powers, especially their deterrence of foes and alliances with friends; second, global public goods, including security, climate, energy, and more recently health (i.e., pandemic control).

Geoeconomics, then, describes economic aspects of geopolitics: global markets (e.g., oil and food), climate and energy, great power trade (tariffs and sanctions), technology (semiconductors and AI), and economic aspects of great power deterrence and alliances.[1]

Economic Statecraft usually refers to state strategies in geoeconomics. Important for optimizing those strategies is characterizing these multilateral relationships in game-theoretic terms familiar to students of economics: positive-sum, negative-sum and, more recently, 'frenemies.' Actions in positive-sum relationships benefit all sides (e.g., most trade, pandemic control, and international counterterrorism). Actions in negative-sum relationships hurt both sides (e.g., most conflicts, deterrence). A novel aspect of current geopolitics is the ubiquity of "frenemy" relationships (e.g., Russia/EU; US/China) in which countries simultaneously engage in positive- and negative-sum exchanges.

1 *For an excellent introduction, see The Oxford Handbook of Geoeconomics and Economic Statecraft, Tai Ming Cheung and Vinod Agrawal (editors), 2024. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197673546.001.0001*

Applying an economist's toolkit to security discussions requires clearing up a common misunderstanding about how coercion enters economic thinking – more precisely, why it enters economic thinking at all. Why, an emerging student of economics might ask, all these treaties, alliances, and governance? Did not Adam Smith teach us that all transactions are efficient – even without extra agreements?

No. Adam Smith's groundbreaking contribution was indeed that market transactions provide a (Pareto) efficient outcome. But only under fairly stringent assumptions, including costless enforcement of contracts, perfect information, and the security of property (and human) rights. National security institutions (such as domestic law enforcement and legal institutions) can be thought of as the coercive means by which those contracts are enforced.

Nobel Laureate Ron Coase taught us that under very similar assumptions, it is not just markets that are efficient –technically Pareto efficient, but **all** (uncoerced) contracts. So, what is wrong with being 'transactional'?

"Transactional" is not a kind term among economists when it is used the way most people use it, as a trade that offers short term benefits but undermines a longer-term relationship or institution. For example, transactional sex may be consensual but could still have negative externalities for other (perhaps longer-term) relationships or institutions.

The trade-offs between short-term and long-term choices will come up again when we discuss alliances and trade, below. For now, the main point is to anchor coercion (in the form of contract enforcement) in an economic framework, as a necessary component of markets and geopolitics.

STATECRAFT OUTSIDE OF AGREEMENTS

A current challenge related to coercion is understanding how best incentivize desired behaviors of a counterpart through threats of coercion (i.e., conduct deterrence) in a context where treaties and other contracts are *unavailable*.

For instance, a current example of theoretical progress on failure to reach Coasian bargains can be found in Sandeep Baliga's model of protracted conflict, from a game-theoretic perspective. Baliga shows[2] that under a broad set of commonly accepted assumptions, all it takes is for one side not to share private information about their own capacity for a Coasian bargain to be prevented -implying that both sides persist in bluffing and fighting rather than negotiating a mutually beneficial settlement. That pessimistic result is accompanied by a productive discussion on telltale signs of a bluff-lengthened conflict, and the benefits of appropriate third-party intervention.

An example of empirical progress is current research by Dr. Daniel Klinenberg (with Berman and Klor), estimating game-theoretic response curves in mutual deterrence relationships with a *frenemy* component. Econometrics and game theory may seem esoteric, but he reports progress in estimating strategic responses using high-frequency real-world data from Israel/Gaza. Though not fitted using data from a great power conflict, the technical and modeling tools developed could be applied to high-frequency aspects of mutual deterrence relationships in cyberspace, freedom of navigation,

2 *"Long wars," Baliga, Sandeep and Sjöström, Tomas (2023), Rutgers University WP 2023-01.*

disinformation, or limited intensity conflicts –all of which great powers are currently engaged in, with mixed success. An encouraging result is that the simplest possible model of a repeated-stage game does an excellent job of describing the data as a sequence of de-escalating stage games that converge to equilibria. Unfortunately, those equilibria are not fully peaceful. Klinenberg, Berman, and Klor contend that this equilibrium tool well describes many current festering conflicts worldwide and can be used to diagnose which of these might intensify. Newer research examines how economic actions in positive sum space (such as trade in goods and labor services) influence the aggressiveness of response curves in negative sum spaces in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[3]

INDUSTRIAL POLICY AND SECURITY

Industrial policy, and within it, research and development policy, are central to modern geoeconomics. Taiwan (to return to the example above) has gambled the resources of a small country on an extremely expensive R&D strategy focused on microprocessors. It paid off; Taiwan has achieved a five-year technological lead over all rivals (including the US and Europe) in dual-use technology critical to both military and civilian AI applications. As a result, should Taiwan's allies allow a successful invasion, AI would be set back globally. Moreover, should the PRC capture and exploit that hardware, it would gain a substantial lead in both microprocessor manufacturing and AI–civilian and military.

Why would countries less threatened than Taiwan need an R&D strategy? Two major arguments have influenced US policies in the postwar period. First, basic research generates large positive spillovers in productivity that cannot be captured by firms, so firms will not invest in that research without a subsidy. Second, basic research with military applications should be controlled by the US government (and perhaps trusted allies) to maintain a qualitative advantage over adversaries and to control spillovers (through knowledge leakage) that could generate negative security externalities.

On leakage, there's recent progress. Dr. Milan Quentel of Stanford, uses archival information from the East German *STASI* to investigate how it implemented industrial espionage, a crucial aspect of their economic statecraft.[4] This research reports the first (open source) quantitative evidence on the productivity of spies, revealing that material incentives work particularly well; spies become more productive with experience, and are much more useful on promotion.

For a technological leader, a geoeconomic strategy is more about optimally generating research – rather than stealing it. How to incentivize research progress in a network of research establishments covering a vast array of topics–many of them relevant to security? Recent progress includes research by Professor James Adams of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, who quantifies the concept of centrality in research networks through citation measurement. He then argues that science policy that identifies network centralities and supports centrally located research can maximize network productivity. The same methods can be used to quantify the damage to research productivity resulting from cyclical waves of R&D budgeting, relative to a counterfactual of stable funding. That damage is due

3 *Deterrence Through Response Curves: An Empirical Analysis of the Gaza-Israel Conflict, Eli Berman, Prabin B. Khadka, Danny Klinenberg, and Esteban F. Klor, NBER WP #33273, 2024.*

4 *'Spies,' Albrecht Glitz, Sekou Keita, and Milan Quentel (2024), Hoover Institute. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MGn1_IwI5lx2cv9RwgualNVWbg7PXesr/view*

to the loss of experienced, productive researchers.[5]

HEGEMONIC ALLIANCES AND THE ECONOMIST'S TOOLKIT

The most salient current topics return us to international relations and the concept of a *Hegemonic Alliance*.[6] Alliances are easy to justify using basic game theory. In a one-period prisoner's dilemma, two weak actors might each be extorted by a bully into giving up their lunch, even if their combined strength would allow them to deter the bully. In a multi-period prisoner's dilemma game, with a credible mutual defense commitment, they can deter lunch-stealing bullies. The more actors join the alliance, the greater the efficiency–as they spread deterrence costs among them. Shared R&D to develop bully-deterring weapons further increases efficiency. Trade agreements, climate accords, international financial arrangements, and mutuality in enforcing laws and international public health enforcement create a hegemonic relationship between alliance members and between the alliance and nonmembers.

Dwelling for a moment on trade agreements, note that the same prisoner's dilemma logic that rationalizes alliances works here as well. In a single-period game, two countries might each be tempted to institute tariffs to boost exports and employment. If they do, the inevitable response is countervailing tariffs, leading to higher prices and lower employment. The solution in a multiperiod game is to commit to a long-term optimal trade agreement with lower tariffs (or none at all). Worth noting is that gains from efficient trade, while large, pale in comparison to the gains from successful deterrence–which avoid the horribly negative-sum outcome of invasion or war.

That simple economic logic (of prisoner's dilemmas) describes the postwar dominance of the US and its Western democratic partners (in all of geopolitics, not just geoeconomics). The massive efficiency of that alliance structure in preventing negative sum activity (wars) has allowed an unprecedented proportion of world GDP to be allocated to positive sum activity (production and trade), yielding exponential growth in population, GDP/capita and global wellbeing.

A related logic, now increasingly salient, is free-riding or defection in alliances. A common complaint in the domestic politics of alliance members is that the benefits of dangerous, expensive deployments in faraway places are small and vaguely defined. So why not reduce both expenditures and commitments? The response that resonates in U.S. domestic politics is that other countries are free-riding, even in defense of Europe, while the U.S. bears a disproportionate economic burden and risk to personnel.

An economic tool for addressing the question of fairness in alliance burden sharing is the Shapley Value–named after Nobel Laureate Lloyd Shapley, which calculates contributions relative to the value to each member if they leave the alliance or enter a smaller, reconfigured alliance. The formula is complex, as there are many possible alliance permutations, but the basic intuition is simple: members who benefit most (relative to several counterfactuals) also pay most. For instance, Canada–which even outside an alliance, benefits from massive geographical advantages in distance from threats,

5 'Evolving Networks of Scientists and Engineers: Strategic Complementarity and Science Policy,' James D. Adams, Ameya M. Haté, J. Roger Clemmons, January 2025.

6 Lake, David A. Hierarchy in International Relations. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009.

and an umbrella of U.S. air defense optimally deployed in northern Canada anyway, has a relatively small fair Shapley contribution. Poland, on the other hand, has none of these advantages. To be sure, both Canada and Poland benefit greatly from NATO membership, but Poland enjoys more surplus from joining, so its Shapley contribution would be larger.

Returning to the repeated prisoner's dilemma logic of alliances, how does one *enforce* the alliance contract? In very concrete terms, how do NATO members know that in the event of an attack, all alliance members will come to their aid? An answer from economic theory comes in the form of club models. In the absence of complete information about the future commitments of members, clubs extract costly signals of commitment from prospective members, which provide reassurance.[7] An alternative way to select committed members is by pursuing "shared values." The logic is that voters in liberal democracies empathize so much with citizens of fellow democracies that they can effectively commit their own governments to mutual defense, as in NATO's Article 5.

A current weakness in that last argument stems from the strategic intermingling of trade and mutual defense agreements (alluded to above): voters in NATO member countries may feel betrayed by a "transactional" approach to trade agreements and thus feel less committed to mutual defense agreements. Of course, in the broader scheme of geopolitics, the gains from trade are small compared to those from mutual defense, so the gains from aggressively renegotiating trade agreements would be even smaller than the costs of weakening alliances.

An important *long-range challenge* to that alliance structure is the rapidly shrinking share of Western allies in the world's population. Combined with rapid economic growth in GDP per capita of low- and middle-income countries, demographic forces are shrinking NATO's share of global GDP and, therefore, of world security expenditures. Kotlikoff provides very long-run estimates for 2100, based on a range of plausible assumptions about demographics and national technological progress and productivity. In those, China (27% of global GDP) and India (19%) become the world's largest economies, ahead of the U.S. and Western Europe (12% each).[8] Alternative assumptions yield different results for China, India, and Africa, but generally leave the NATO partners with no more than a quarter of global GDP by the close of this century.

Until a decade ago, the conventional response to the long-run challenge of declining economic power was that this: the alliance could retain its hegemony by adding newly-democratizing countries–which owe their own prosperity and prospects of continued peaceful growth to the alliance-created international institutions that enable trade, investment, and security, preferentially for democracies. A current weakness in that argument is the backlash against those same institutions *within* member democracies. An additional vulnerability frequently aired is that many countries with rapidly growing economies are skeptical of Western democratic models and not particularly interested in burden-sharing in mutual deterrence–some preferring China's assistance in ensuring regime stability.

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7 *"Religion, Terrorism and Public Goods: Testing the Club Model." Eli Berman and David Laitin, Journal of Public Economics 92(10-11), 1942-1967, (2008).*

8 "The Future of Global Economic Power," Seth G. Benzell, Laurence J. Kotlikoff, Maria Kazakova, Guillermo *Lagarda, Kristina Nesterova, Victor Yifan Ye, and Andrey Zubarev, Boston University WP (2023).*

CONCLUSION – THE TOOLKIT AND THE PLUMBING

Geopolitics is much more complex than it was during the Cold War, as the plumbing of international relations includes a jumble of subterranean pipes, old and new: security, economic, migration, cyber, and treaty relationships, merging and diverging, and sometimes leaking and intentionally blocked.

Economists, like other social scientists in the security space, have a diagnostic toolkit to understand those relationships, test hypotheses, and suggest improvements. I've sketched a framework that applies to a few fields above, without touching on others: arms races, R&D measurement, optimal interventions in subnational conflicts, optimal sanctions, vulnerabilities of terrorist organizations, for example. A hallmark of the Economics of National Security Association (ENSA) and Empirical Studies of Conflict (ESOC) members, on these and other topics, is an enthusiasm for working across fields (political science, data science, security studies), integrating empirics and hypothesis testing on the one hand, and embedding results in overall frameworks of conflict modelling (such as deterrence and geoeconomics) on the other.

CHAPTER 13

ECONOMICS OF FINANCIAL READINESS

Jim Walker

BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Financial health and well-being are critical readiness issues for the U.S. Army and the military. Financial stress, uncertainty, and anxiety have been linked to several detrimental workforce issues, including increased risk of suicidal ideations, divorce rates, depression, and lower ratings of life satisfaction. Despite the military's efforts to improve financial literacy and transition to a holistic health framing that encompasses financial well-being, many Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines lack competency in basic household finance skills. This detracts from individual, family, and community welfare and negatively impacts readiness across the services.

The working group Economics of Financial Readiness brought together academics, practitioners, and military members to discuss, share, and collaborate on policy development and means through which the military can improve its readiness posture through financial well-being. We examined the impacts and outcomes related to the transition from the traditional High-36 military retirement system to the Blended Retirement System (BRS), analyzed total compensation trends and reward programs, and how the military is communicating its total benefits program to current members and prospective recruits, and discussed the mapping of factors that contribute to military families' well-being. Furthermore, the working group dissected emerging threats to military financial readiness, including the rise of technology and the growth of online gambling and sports betting. Finally, members presented and discussed how we can effectively measure financial knowledge and current literacy rates of cadets, enlisted, and officers within the military. While financial health remains an important readiness issue, this working group highlighted that the military is making progress. Nonetheless, the conclusions reached show there is still much work to be done to improve the well-being of our workforce. Actionable steps can be taken now to enhance preparedness through financial literacy.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Understanding Compensation at the Time of Recruitment

As a fighting force, it is critical that we attract and recruit the best to serve as the future leaders of our armed forces. U.S. Army MAJ Justin Erwin from the Army Marketing Agency identified four "brand gaps" currently existing among the general population. There is first a knowledge gap amongst po-

tential recruits. Young Americans know little about the Army, and the views they do possess may be misguided or inconsistent. In addition, there is a reliability and trust gap between younger generations and the Army as an institution. Finally, there is a culture gap where potential recruits have developed preconceived notions about what it is like to serve in the military. Potential Army recruits are looking for passion, purpose, belonging, and a competitive benefits package. Moreover, prospects have little knowledge about the military's extensive pay and benefits offerings. In a survey of a Generation Z sample, only 53% knew about military tuition assistance, 44% knew that servicemembers receive free healthcare, 43% were aware of the Army's financial education programs, and only 34% knew about home-buying benefits for military service. This research again highlights the need for our leaders to receive formal education on the total compensation package that military service affords and engage current and future Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines with these benefits in mind.

Financial and retirement benefits are only a couple of the components of a "Total Rewards" program that can be leveraged to attract and retain talent. In their presentation, "Learning from Private Sector Total Reward Strategies and Approaches," Matt Bahl and Michael Barry highlighted the effectiveness of being able to communicate a "Total Rewards" program that encompasses transactional rewards, collective rewards, relational rewards, and individual rewards in attracting and keeping talent within an organization.

Almost all private-sector companies have moved toward market-based pay structures compared to the military's traditional salary grades. Furthermore, companies are aggressively marketing their benefit suites to go beyond financial implications to include physical, social, emotional, and career development. Military service offers an extensive suite of benefits, including access to financial counseling, VA home loans, tuition assistance, and free legal services; however, these portions of a servicemember's total compensation are often neglected or not understood. In addition, military service offers free and highly subsidized family healthcare, as well as basic allowances for housing and sustenance, which are exempt from federal and state taxation. They conclude that, whether private or public, it is critical that leaders within the organization understand the total compensation package and can effectively communicate and educate their workforce on the benefits of the plan. NCOs and Officers must be trained and educated on the total compensation package that is afforded to military personnel, and they must actively discuss and educate their subordinates to retain our best and brightest.

In the private sector, money talks when getting new employees in the door; however, culture and differentiation cause people to stay or leave, according to Michael Barry and Matt Bahl's research. In order to recruit and retain the best and brightest, leaders throughout the military need to ensure they are fostering positive workplace environments and developing a culture of professionalism and purpose.

UNDERSTANDING THE RETIREMENT OFFERINGS IN DOD

For decades, the military's pension program, a traditional defined-benefit plan, was a cornerstone of its "total rewards" program. Members who served twenty years or more received a pension payment equal to their years of service, multiplied by 2.5% of their highest thirty-six months of salary. Those who did not serve twenty years had no portable retirement plan or benefit.

In 2018, the Blended Retirement System (BRS) was introduced, providing transportable retirement benefits similar to those of commonly used private-sector 401(k) plans and a reduced pension amount

for those who served beyond the 20-year mark. One of the challenges that is presented with the transition to the BRS is that servicemembers are now required to allocate their funds amongst five primary investment options (C, S, I, G, and F funds) and/or several target age funds called Life Cycle Funds within the government's Thrift Savings Plan (TSP).i The TSP options include the G Fund, which invests only in short-term U.S. Treasury bonds; the F Fund, which tracks the Barclays Capital U.S. Bond Index; the C Fund, which tracks the S&P 500; the S Fund, which tracks the Dow Jones U.S. Completion TSM Index; and the I Fund, which follows the MSCI EAFE Index.

Member elections default to one of the Lifecycle Funds in accordance with their age. However, changes to allocations can be made at any time by members. LCDR Nick Sougiannis, from the U.S. Naval Academy, utilized portfolio theory and mean-variance optimization to identify that the current allocations of investments in the Lifecycle Fund Series lie below the efficient frontier. Essentially, servicemembers who are invested in the Lifecycle Funds could be earning a higher return on their investments per unit of risk. He finds that the inefficient allocation of the Lifecycle Funds results in a net reduction in benefits to servicemembers of approximately $155,000 in comparison to the High-36 plan.

Furthermore, a portfolio allocation on the efficient frontier could result in net retirement earnings that exceed the High-36 plan. LCDR Sougiannis' findings highlight the need for greater scrutiny to be placed on the allocations within the Lifecycle Fund Series that the vast majority of servicemembers invest in and increased educational content for investees on how their funds are allocated within the Thrift Savings Plan. LCDR Sougiannis' research also reinforces the need for increased financial education within the force. As we transition to a defined contribution model and away from the traditional defined-benefit plan, servicemembers must actively allocate their investments based on their individual goals and time-horizons especially if the Lifecycle Funds lie below the efficient frontier.

UNDERSTANDING A SOLDIERS FINANCIAL HOMEFRONT

Retirement savings, pay, healthcare benefits, and many other components of the military's total compensation proposition impact not only individual servicemembers but also their families as well. In "Mapping Factors that Contribute to Military Families' Financial Well-Being", Dr. Catherine O'Neal and Dr. Mallory Lucier-Greer reviewed over 150 peer-reviewed articles related to military family financial well-being. They note that financial well-being has significant downstream implications for relationships, individual health, and risk factors such as depression and potential suicidal ideation.

Drs. O'Neal and Lucier-Greer developed a Social-Ecological Model that aims to capture financial well-being at the individual, family, community, and military/societal context. These levels are subsequently divided into direct (what DoD can address directly), indirect (what DoD can influence), and external (what is outside DoD's control).

The DoD has largely focused its efforts on addressing the individual level of financial wellness through mandated training and education programs. However, DoD has opportunities to address components at the family and community level through indirect means. Specifically, DoD should incentivize and expand its financial literacy programs and resources to encompass community and family members. As an example, the Air Force has documented some success with attracting spouses to financial education through other, more well-established family-oriented programs and leveraging incentives such

as raffles and gift cards, contributing to reduced family conflict and improving Airmen's readiness.

THREATS ON THE HORIZON TO FINANCIAL READINESS

Several technological and emerging threats could undermine DoD's efforts to improve the financial readiness and health of the force. Online and mobile banking and investing now make it easier than ever for individuals to make and execute financial decisions with a single click. Furthermore, media consumption habits are changing as younger generations rely on social media platforms for financial content, some of which can be detrimental to their well-being.

Mobile sports betting, now legal in over 30 states, poses a significant risk to the military's financial readiness. As Dr. Scott Baker highlights in his research, "Gambling Away Stability: Sports Betting's Impact on Vulnerable Households," the mobile betting industry has increased financial strain on young and lower-income households. In 2023, Americans wagered $120 billion on legal sports betting.

Dr. Baker's research analyzes ten years of data from over 230,000 households to evaluate the impact of mobile sports betting on financial wellness. His (and his co-authors') findings show that the majority of households construe betting not as a form of entertainment but as a substitute for investing and that this is likely crowding out long-term savings behavior. Their Two-Stage Least Squares regression shows that a $1 bet results in a reduction of $0.99 in investment. This effect size is even larger for financially constrained households. Furthermore, they find that constrained households that already have below median savings allocate twice as much to betting activities as a percentage of their income and are more likely to overdraft their checking accounts and increase credit card debt following the initiation of betting activity.

This research has important implications for military readiness. Many of our junior servicemembers live in fiscally constrained environments and may be vulnerable to displaying behavior similar to that of households studied by Dr. Baker. The DoD must make a conscious effort to educate the workforce about the dangers of mobile betting, why investing is distinct from gambling, and ensure that resources are available for those who develop gambling issues. We must take a proactive approach before this becomes an endemic issue and undermines the financial and military readiness of our service members. Mr. Tom Naratil and LTC(R) Jim Walker have completed a white paper on the threat mobile sports betting appears to have on service members and hope to publish it soon.

Chapter 14

Cyber, Energy, and Institutional Resilience: Exploring Security Frameworks, Challenges, and Solutions

Brian Retherford, Shawn Lonergan, Aki Nakai, Raffi Gregorian, Matthew Hurtt, Charlie Lewis, and Edward Canuel

ABSTRACT

The intersection of resilience and security extends across multiple disciplines. While the concept of resilience has evolved into a tool increasingly integrated into both the public and private sectors, there is still no overarching definition of resilience. As global threats grow more complex and interconnected, a pervading question grows: how should both the public and private sectors conceptualize and understand resilience? Our working group invited public and private sector experts from multiple disciplines to explore resilience and security interrelationships. We conclude that building adaptable, resilient systems must become not just a policy goal, but a strategic necessity. A shift in the mindset of actors involved – from viewing resilience as a cost to treating it as a strategic enabler – will enhance systemic preparedness and continuity; bolster adaptability; and lead to innovative, enduring strategic security solutions.

Resilience is a cross-cutting concept, discipline, and tool increasingly integrated into governmental, military, private-sector, and academic strategies, planning, and decision-making. Without a universal resilience definition, stakeholders wrestle with multiple facets of resilience at the international, domestic, and substate levels. Resilience is an even more complex subject when its evolving layers of structural, organizational, community, and personal elements are considered. Accordingly, without a "one-size-fits-all" definition, we often seek sectoral or situational framing guidance on what resilience means, not only in textbooks but also in practice. As global threats grow more complex and interconnected, how should both the public and private sectors conceptualize and understand the concept of resilience? For example, we often hear of resilience "branches" including cyber resilience, operational resilience, critical infrastructure resilience, and personal resilience. Our working group invited experts from both sectors of multiple disciplines and explored resilience and security interrelationships. Resilience is commonly identified with four key stages: prepare, withstand, adapt, and recover. From that standpoint, the "prepare" resilience phase and security are inextricably linked. What resilience ultimately seeks to address is disruption—whether caused by natural hazards, technological failure, cyberattack, societal unrest, or other forms of systemic shock. Understanding the sources of disruption requires an all-hazard, risk-based approach: identifying potential threats across domains and prioritizing capability development against the most plausible and consequential scenarios. We conclude that building adaptable, resilient systems must become not just a policy goal,

but a strategic necessity. Exploring resilience and security interrelationships in both public and private sectors reveals resilience's multiple dimensions and its overarching implications for strategy, particularly through analyzing stakeholder perspectives and challenges across the following four areas: ***cyber systems, regulatory and legal frameworks, energy infrastructure and resource availability, and trauma-informed personal resilience***. A shift in mindset– from viewing resilience as a cost to treating it as a strategic enabler – will enhance systemic preparedness and continuity; bolster adaptability; and lead to innovative, enduring strategic security solutions.

We note that within cyber systems, resilience plays a crucial role across overlapping ***cyber domains***, including structural tensions between Operational Technology (OT) and Information Technology (IT), the complexities of evolving government regulations, and the development of legal standards that impact critical infrastructure security. In the digital age, U.S. critical infrastructure faces escalating cyber threats from state and non-state actors. With nearly all infrastructure in private hands, coordinated cybersecurity becomes paramount. Recent high-profile attacks (e.g., SolarWinds, Colonial Pipeline, and Change Healthcare) have exposed vulnerabilities in healthcare, energy, and communication networks. State actors like Russia and China have also targeted these sectors, and the disruption of core systems would cause billions in economic damage.[1] Resilience in this domain rests on securing OT, fortifying supply chains, and fostering public-private collaboration.

Contrasting OT and IT underscores the friction that arises when operational systems—often custom-built and idiosyncratic—attempt to interface with the more standardized and homogenized world of traditional IT infrastructures. Unlike OT, IT benefits from decades of established frameworks, best practices, and robust cybersecurity investments. Many OT systems are purpose-built, optimizing for functionality but not for long-term maintainability or integration with mainstream technologies. Such customization, however, may lead to siloed mindsets, where OT technicians focus on the operational domain and, as a result, may lag in adopting security practices that their IT counterparts take for granted. The result is an organizational schism: OT and IT reside in parallel, occasionally intersecting, but rarely operational under a unified, strategic security umbrella.

Solutions for bridging the OT/IT gap include creating a common governance structure that merges the responsibilities of OT and IT under a single authority, such as a Chief Resilience Officer. By consolidating oversight, a single leader can implement uniform policies, especially across cybersecurity, risk management, and data governance. Additionally, effective incident response in cyber necessitates an all-hands approach, uniting everyday operations, executive leadership, and external stakeholders in a coordinated effort. Governmental regulations often play a paradoxical role in this matrix. While regulations can impose certain baseline requirements, the burdens they create may inadvertently stifle innovative solutions or lead to "check-the-box" compliance. Unexpectedly, less regulated or unregulated entities sometimes adapt more rapidly, incorporating pragmatic solutions without being saddled by prescriptive rules that might not align with specific circumstances.

The second area explored is the interrelationship between regulatory legal frameworks and resilience.

1 *For example, see David Klepper, "Countries shore up their digital defenses as global tensions raise the threat of cyberwarfare," Associated Press, April 21, 2025: https://apnews.com/article/cybersecurity-trump-china-russia-iran-north-korea-9eceaf30ddc984ed482f067db5dee405 (accessed on July 22, 2025); and Frank Bajak, "Microsoft: State-sponsored Chinese hackers could be laying groundwork for disruption," Associated Press, May 24, 2023: https://apnews.com/article/microsoft-china-hacking-us-infrastructure-d4a4faefcc5d4d3c9f72e9acc24a71f9 (accessed on July 22, 2025).*

Shifting legal frameworks also ***shape and affect regulators*** enforcing resilient cyber systems. For example, the *Chevron*[2] deference afforded agencies wide latitude to interpret ambiguous statutes, on the premise that executive branch experts were best equipped to elaborate on technical policy matters. *Loper Bright*[3] effectively dismantled that legal framework, finding it violated the separation of powers. Courts will now likely apply the less deferential *Skidmore*[4] framework, which grants agencies respect only to the extent that their explanations are consistent, thorough, persuasive, and made with appropriate expertise and formality. As a result, the agencies spearheading the resilience of multiple critical infrastructure sectors, including cyber systems, could lose flexibility and adaptability in practice. As threats quickly evolve, static regulations may become irrelevant. This marks a dramatic legal shift, injecting uncertainty into the regulatory environment that underpins critical infrastructure security and resilience. For agencies identified as Security Risk Management Agencies (SRMAs) under the 2024 National Security Memorandum-22, the pivot away from *Chevron* deference introduces uncertainties. The statutory and regulatory foundations supporting these agencies may be subject to fresh legal challenges, as challengers may more effectively question the authority or logic of agency actions and, based on the 2024 U.S. Supreme Court case *Corner Post, Inc. v. Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System*,[5] also have a more flexible timeline to do so. Forum shopping could proliferate, as claimants seek out judicial venues that are more likely to apply *Skidmore's* factors[6] in their favor (or not at all), leading to inconsistent outcomes.

Regarding energy infrastructure and resource availability, resilience is a motivating factor in establishing secure ***energy pathways and infrastructure***, including the increasing need for raw materials. From a global perspective and ensuring national security, a telling example: the U.S. strategy toward the Indo-Pacific would be unthinkable without Japan's resilience in potential contingencies in the Taiwan Strait, the Korean Peninsula, and the South China Sea. Japan's energy insecurity, with a domestic self-sufficiency rate at 15.2% (FY2023),[7] particularly illustrates how geopolitical dynamics intersect with resilience planning. Heavily dependent on fossil fuel imports (84.8% of the annual consumption) from volatile regions (i.e., the Middle East, formerly Russia)[8] and facing an assertive China in regional sea routes (the South China Sea), Japan's vulnerabilities highlight broader Indo-Pacific energy risks. China's territorial claims may enable economic coercion of Japan, including through trade blockades. Diversification of energy sources (e.g., potential liquified natural gas (LNG) invest-

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2 *Chevron U.S.A. Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc., 467 U. S. 837 (1984).*

3 *Loper Bright Enterprises et al. v. Raimondo, Secretary of Commerce, et al., 603 U.S. 369 (2024).*

4 *Skidmore v. Swift Co., 323 U.S. 134 (1944).*

5 *Corner Post, Inc. v. Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 603 U.S. 799 (2024)(The Corner Post opinion overturned precedent defining the default six-year statute of limitations for suits against the United States under the Administrative Procedures Act (5 U. S. C. §551) as beginning at when the plaintiff is injured by final agency action rather than upon publication of the final rule. If a regulation is still causing injury, a previous defeat under Chevron can be reinitiated, with the help of Corner Post, for a new challenge under Loper Bright.)*

6 *Loper Bright, 603 U.S. at 140 ([W]hile not controlling upon the courts by reason of their authority, [agency interpretations] do constitute a body of experience and informed judgment to which courts and litigants may properly resort for guidance. The weight of such a judgment in a particular case will depend upon the thoroughness evident in its consideration, the validity of its reasoning, its consistency with earlier and later pronouncements, and all those factors which give it power to persuade, if lacking power to control).*

7 *FY2023 Energy Supply and Demand Report (Preliminary Report), The Agency for Natural Resources and Energy (ANRE), November 22, 2024: https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2024/1122_003.html (accessed on May 12, 2025.*

8 *2021 – Understanding the current energy situation in Japan (Part 1), The Agency for Natural Resources and Energy (ANRE), August 12, 2022: https://www.enecho.meti.go.jp/en/category/special/article/detail_171.html (accessed on May 12, 2025).*

ment in Alaska),[9] investment in renewables, and regional alliance-building are Japanese strategic imperatives. As a key U.S. ally, Japan's resilience is integral not only to its own stability but also to U.S. strategic influence in the Indo-Pacific.

Control over critical minerals, particularly through the frontier area of Deep Seabed Mining (DSM), rests at the intersection of security and resilience. DSM is the process of extracting sediment and mineral resources from the seafloor at water depths of 200 meters or greater, generally occurring in areas beyond a country's exclusive economic zone.[10] Deep-sea critical minerals include lithium, cobalt, and rare-earth elements essential for energy and defense technologies, airplane gas turbine engines, EV batteries, and smartphones. Globally, critical mineral deep-seabed reserves are estimated to be worth between $8 trillion and $16 trillion.[11] With China dominating global critical mineral supplies and terrestrial alternatives hampered by resource nationalization and human and environmental security concerns, DSM offers a potential solution. Balancing strategic mineral access with ocean conservation (given DSM's own potential to cause environmental degradation) requires a well-planned, multilateral governance framework that considers risk management and investment practicability at the international (UNCLOS, the International Seabed Authority) and federal, state, territorial, and tribal levels.

The Working Group also considered personal resilience in the context of national security. The United Nations' emphasis on resilience, particularly through its *Pact for the Future* (2023), reflects a growing consensus that psychological and societal well-being are critical to national security, ***particularly for military service members who have suffered trauma.*** Trauma-informed psycho-social approaches, originally developed in support of terrorism victims, include legal, social, and psychological support for victims and families. These pathways offer a model for institutions like the U.S. Armed Forces, where service members often carry pre-existing trauma (e.g., abuse, economic hardship). Moving forward, integrating the military's resilience strategies, that reflected the full preventive and health treatment lifecycle for service members—from recruitment to veteran care—strengthens both human capital and operational readiness. For example, early mental health intervention reduces suicide rates and long-term healthcare costs.

CONCLUSION: INTEGRATED RESILIENCE

The intersection of resilience and security extends across multiple disciplines, including cybersecurity, regulatory oversight/legal frameworks, energy autonomy and resource security, and military trauma healthcare. Further, resilience, once a passive descriptor, has evolved into a proactive, strategic pillar across multiple military, technological, environmental, and geopolitical sectors. As global threats grow more complex and interconnected, building adaptable, resilient systems becomes not just a pol-

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9 *John Calabrese, "Japan's LNG Future: Balancing Energy Security With Sustainability Commitments," The Diplomat, September 14, 2024: https://thediplomat.com/2024/09/japans-lng-future-balancing-energy-security-with-sustainability-commitments/ (accessed on May 12, 2025); Katya Golubkova, Yuka Obayashi and Tim Kelly, "Alaskan officials to seek investors in Japan as Trump touts LNG," The Japan Times, March 18, 2025: https://www.japantimes.co.jp/business/2025/03/18/alaska-investors-japan/ (accessed on May 12, 2025).*

10 *Caitlin Keating-Bitonti, Seabed Mining in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction: Issues for Congress, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Reports, December 5, 2022 (website last reviewed May 1, 2025).*

11 *Bruno Venditti, The Metals Company Calls Video of Mining Waste Dumped Into the Sea Misinformation as Stock Sinks, MINING-DOTCOM (January 12, 2023), https://www.mining.com/the-metals-company-calls-video-of-mining-waste-dumped-into-the-sea-misinformation-as-stock-sinks/ (website last reviewed May 1, 2025).*

icy goal, but a strategic necessity. Ultimately, the nexus between security and resilience focuses on a risk-mitigation process that involves preventative threat measures. In such a context, resilience is identified as the flexibility and ability of systems, institutions, and individuals to adapt to, and recover from, changing security conditions, including disruptions and attacks. As threats quickly evolve, static regulations may become irrelevant. Instead, regulations should function organically—continually refined as new malicious activity emerges. This iterative approach to systems, regulations, and people is akin to agile development in software: the systems infrastructure depends on ongoing feedback loops, beta testing, and continuous improvement.

Resilience has become a unifying strategic imperative involving multidisciplinary approaches, intergenerational awareness, cross-sector collaboration, and international engagement. Once seen as a reactive concept, resilience now denotes proactive capacity-building, systems thinking, and adaptive governance in response to persistent, multifaceted threats. The newly evolving post-*Loper* regulatory landscape affects the work of agencies. In turn, OT and IT leaders must grapple with potential post-*Loper* uncertainties that may delay or undermine broad-based risk mitigation, particularly as relevant agencies may find themselves entangled in litigation over directives that may be challenged, including those requiring coordination of resilience measures with private sector organizations.

A call for unity across sectors, and dismantling bureaucratic (or, in the case of personal resilience, particularly in the military, a stigma of resisting seeking or offering institutional assistance for traumatized service members) may ultimately safeguard resilience and security. Collaborative efforts could allow effective collaboration within organizations and across regulatory bodies, industry peers, legal systems, and individuals. Leaders must walk a tightrope, balancing practical security considerations with organizational transformation while keeping pace with evolving legal and policy directives—and taking appropriate measures to maintain a talented and engaged workforce. Successful policies perceive resilience as an ongoing—one that demands continuous improvement, creative problem-solving, and, above all, seamless alignment among structuring/utilizing technologies, regulations, governances, and managing talent.

At the crux is the recognition that today's cyber, energy, and human talent ecosystems are neither static nor neatly separated into discrete fiefdoms. For example, OT systems, once isolated, now interconnect with IT networks to facilitate data analytics, process automation, and digital transformation. The benefits of convergence are immense—greater efficiency, real-time monitoring, and predictive maintenance—but so too are the risks, as malicious actors exploit any seams or weak links in the chain. A truly holistic resilience model acknowledges these realities, integrates the expertise from multiple stakeholders, remains flexible amid shifting requirements (e.g., laws, administrative rules, and regulations), and aligns with leadership structures capable of rapid adaptation. If organizations fail to act on these insights, they risk becoming vulnerable, trapped in outdated silos and burdened by a set of reactive legal, regulatory, personnel, and market uncertainties that cannot be easily influenced, anticipated, or otherwise effectively addressed. A shift in mindset—from viewing resilience as a cost to treating it as a strategic enabler—may enhance systemic preparedness and economic and systemic continuity; bolster adaptability; and lead to innovative, enduring solutions.

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