

**Deterrence Through War Preparation:
Building Resiliency in U.S. Strategy**

Written Testimony by Dr. Daniel R. Green¹

**Before the U.S. House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party
Hearing on Deterrence Amid Rising Tensions: Preventing CCP Aggression on Taiwan**

May 15th, 2025

Introduction

As the true intentions of the People's Republic of China have become evident, the United States Government has sought to adapt its strategy, resourcing, organization, and concepts to deter aggressive PRC actions as well as prepare for war if deterrence fails. The last four U.S. presidential administrations (Bush, Obama, Trump, & Biden) have sought to refocus U.S. foreign and defense policy to the Indo-Pacific region. The invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, as a result of al-Qaeda's attacks on September 11th, as well as the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the rise of ISIS in 2014, complicated this shift in regional priorities. As the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq continued, successive administrations grappled with balancing military commitments in the Middle East and Central Asia with the growth in economic, diplomatic, and military strength of the People's Republic of China. The reorientation to the Pacific started by the Bush Administration in 2001 was undone by the attacks of 9/11 and the Obama Administration's "pivot to Asia" had to be balanced against enduring military commitments. The Trump Administration fundamentally reoriented the United States Government and the U.S. Department of Defense toward the Indo-Pacific and the threat of the People's Republic of China. The Biden Administration continued this focus and on March 4th, 2021, then U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin issued a message to the department to "Prioritize China as the Pacing Challenge" placing the threat of China over Russia which had been an outgoing Trump Administration recommendation. This prioritization was further echoed in the Biden Administration's 2022 National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy.

Trump Administration -- Great Power Competition

The publication of the Trump Administration's National Security Strategy (NSS) in 2017 and the U.S. Department of Defense's (DOD) National Defense Strategy (NDS) in 2018 started the major shift of the U.S. Government to the Indo-Pacific. The 2018 NDS explicitly stated that "inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security."² Later that year, then Vice President Mike Pence stated that the NSS "described a new era of 'great power competition'" and that foreign nations were attempting to "reassert their influence regionally and globally," and contest "[America's] geopolitical advantages and trying to change the international order in their favor."³ These views were echoed by then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph F. Dunford, USMC, who stated that China and Russia are trying "to establish pre-eminence, if not hegemony, in their respective geographic areas and both trying to assert greater influence on the world stage."⁴ While the Trump Administration sought, in the words of then Vice President Pence, to "build a relationship with China on a foundation of candor, fairness, and mutual respect, in order to achieve, in [President Trump's] words, 'a more just, secure, and peaceful world,'" the PRC continued its strategic direction of building its national power and asserting its military, diplomatic, and political influence.⁵

The 2018 National Defense Strategy translated this broad policy direction into specific guidance for the U.S. Department of Defense. While the central focus was on a reorientation away from fighting terrorism to deterring the PRC's and Russia's aggressive actions, it also further defined the military requirements to implement the National Security Strategy. Describing the recent era as one of "strategic atrophy," then U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis stated that "We face growing threats from revisionist powers as different as China and Russia are from each other, nations that do seek to create a world consistent with their authoritarian models, [and] pursuing veto authority over other nations' economic, diplomatic and security decisions."⁶ To deter these revisionist powers,

Secretary Mattis stated that the U.S. sought to “expand the competitive space with our adversaries, and rebuild our military advantage to three lines of effort.”⁷

First, was to rebuild the lethality of our force, making it more agile, more innovative.

Second, we wanted to strengthen and expand our robust constellation of allies and partners.

And third, so I could look all of you in the eye, so I could look Congress in the eye, and say that we are spending the money that you’ve given us as we should be, we needed to reform our department for performance, affordability and accountability.⁸

In practical terms, this direction to the department translated into placing more deterrent forces in the Indo-Pacific and making them more resilient, investing in and modernizing the nuclear weapons infrastructure, and building a robust alliance network of allies and partners in the region. It also required economizing across the department’s budget to realize savings to modernize deterrent forces as well as building force resiliency by embracing technology. Finally, it also necessitated a fundamental rethinking as well as robust conceptual development of how to wage war against the PRC, through the Joint Warfighting Concept, if deterrence failed.

Biden Administration -- Integrated Deterrence

The Biden Administration continued the Trump Administration’s focus on the Indo-Pacific and the People’s Republic of China by prioritizing the PRC as the department’s “pacing challenge.” The administration’s 2022 NDS stated that China represented “the most comprehensive and serious challenge to U.S. national security” and it restated, in a more formal manner, that the PRC was the department’s ‘pacing challenge.’⁹ In place of the Trump Administration’s focus on Great Power Competition the Biden Administration embraced the concept of “integrated deterrence” and sought to, in the words of then Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities Mara Karlin, “shift the conversation to strategic competition. . . . how do you integrate across domains . . . across the web of allies and partners.”¹⁰ The emphasis here was to build a strong enough deterrent in the Indo-Pacific, through more forward deployed forces and robust alliances, among other

innovations, to check aggressive Chinese actions and, through that, prevent conflict. Integrated deterrence also sought to build “more resilient combat systems, new warfighting concepts, and greater intelligence sharing,” improve “coordinating with allies,” and “bring all the tools of nation power together in a coordinated way.”¹¹

The then Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs, Eli Ratner, further clarified the meaning of the concept: “First, to strengthen our alliance capabilities; second, to develop a more distributed, resilient, and lethal force posture; and third, to build stronger networks of likeminded allies and partners.”¹² The then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley reinforced this strategic direction in testimony before Congress when he stated that “China: is our #1 geostrategic security challenge. . . . we need to keep our relationship at competition, not conflict. This is best done through integrated deterrence where the United States remains militarily strong relative to China and we retain military overmatch in all the various domains of war.”¹³ These efforts by the U.S. Department of Defense were also supported by the interagency including then U.S. Department of State as Secretary State Antony Blinken who stated that integrated deterrence meant “bringing in allies and partners; working across the conventional, the nuclear, space, and informational domains; drawing on our reinforcing strengths in economics, in technology, and in diplomacy.”¹⁴

The purpose of this approach, which is consistent with long-standing U.S. policy in the region, is not only to deter aggressive Chinese military actions and prevent war but to also promote the values, goals, and principles of a free and open Indo-Pacific. These goals were stated by then Secretary Blinken who said that “The United States shares the vision that countries and people across the region hold: one of a free and open Indo-Pacific where rules are developed transparently and applied fairly; where countries are free to make their own sovereign decisions; where goods, ideas, and people flow freely across land, sky, cyberspace, the open seas, and governance is

responsive to the people.”¹⁵ This philosophical and ideological component of U.S. strategy is in opposition to the autocracy of the Chinese Communist system and its attempts to coercive countries to follow its direction. Secretary Blinken further stated that “Beijing believes its model is the better one; that a party-led centralized system is more efficient, less messy, ultimately superior to democracy. We do not seek to transform China’s political system. Our task is to prove once again that democracy can meet urgent challenges, create opportunity, advance human dignity, that the future belongs to those who believe in freedom and that all countries will be free to chart their own paths without coercion.”¹⁶

While the Biden Administration hoped China would change its strategic trajectory, and encouraged it generally to do so, it was also aware of its continued military buildup and the increasingly aggressive rhetoric of its leaders. Blinken stated, for example, that “Under President Xi, the ruling Chinese Communist Party has become more repressive at home and more aggressive abroad” and that it was “‘determined to pursue’ unification on a ‘much faster timeline’ after deciding that the status quo over Taiwan was ‘no longer acceptable.’”¹⁷ He also stated that “China is the only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economics, diplomatic, military and technological power to do it. Beijing’s vision would move us away from the universal values that have sustained so much of the world’s progress over the past 75 years.”¹⁸ Further, “It’s rapidly modernized its military and intends to become a top tier fighting force with global reach. And it has announced its ambition to create a sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific and to become the world’s leading power.”¹⁹ The Biden Administration’s separate Indo-Pacific Strategy reinforced this perspective that the PRC is “combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological might as it pursues a sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific and seeks to become the world’s most influential power.”²⁰ Since China will not “change its trajectory,” the United States

must “shape the strategic environment around Beijing to advance our vision for an open, inclusive international system” that is “widely shared throughout the region and the world.”²¹

In early 2023, then Director of the Central Intelligence Agency William Burns stated that “President Xi has instructed the PLA, the Chinese military leadership, to be ready by 2027 to invade Taiwan.”²² To this end, then U.S. Army Pacific Commander General Charles Flynn noted, “They are rehearsing, they are practicing, they are experimenting, and they are preparing those forces for something. . . . But you don’t build up that kind of arsenal to defend and protect. You probably are building up for other purposes.”²³ Similarly, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark A. Milley, remarked that “China is conducting large-scale exercises in the region with an emphasis on amphibious landing, joint fires, and maritime strike scenarios. These actions threaten our allies and partners’ autonomy, jeopardize freedom of navigation, overflight and other lawful uses of the sea, and compromise regional peace and stability. In short, China has and continues to develop significant nuclear, space, cyber, land, air, and maritime military capabilities.”²⁴ Consistent with the direction of President Xi Jinping, the PRC’s military is preparing to seize Taiwan militarily as part of a broader effort to reduce and eventually remove U.S. military power from the Indo-Pacific region.

Deterrence Through War Preparation

While much of the discussion about building effective deterrence against aggressive PRC actions revolves around many familiar themes, there are actions the United States can take which can bolster conventional deterrence while better preparing the U.S. for conflict. Many of these actions are relatively low cost and focused on internal U.S. processes but can have asymmetric effects on PRC calculations if undertaken and revealed in a strategic manner.

➤ Mass mobilization of Reservists

A war with the PRC will likely require the mass mobilization of reservists from all the services which will put immense strain on existing reserve infrastructure. In 2023, “Beijing promulgated a new law that would enable the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to more easily activate its reserves forces and institutionalize a system for replenishing combat troops in the event of war.”²⁵ The PRC also created new military readiness laws and new National Defense Mobilization offices throughout the country.²⁶ **A mass mobilization exercise should be conducted in order to identify gaps, weaknesses, and resource needs within the reserves in order to meet the requirements of a war with the PRC.**

➤ Addressing the Missile Gap

The war in Ukraine has underscored the weaknesses of U.S. munition procurement demonstrating that insufficient industrial capacity exists for even basic items such as artillery rounds. During the war in Ukraine, for example, its armed forces consumed an average of 100,000 rounds of 155mm artillery per month but U.S. defense industry could only replace 14,000 per month.²⁷ Similarly, these limitations also exist for Stingers, Javelins, and high mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS) which may play a role in any war with the PRC.²⁸ As Center for Strategic and International Studies Senior Fellow Seth Jones recently put it: “Certain critical munitions – such as long-range, precision-guided munitions – would likely run out in less than one week” . . . “[T]hese gaps undermine deterrence – the linchpin of the United States’ defense strategy – because they reveal to all that the United States cannot endure a lengthy war.”²⁹ Lacking multiyear contracts for many munitions, which is quite common for ships and airplane procurement, limits the ability for industry to plan for greater production.³⁰ The practical effect of these limitations in the defense industrial base is that U.S. war plans against the PRC cannot be achieved with existing stocks and the current industrial infrastructure. **The United States must undertake an exhaustive review of**

required munitions for a possible PRC war scenario and dedicate resources to closing the missile gap between war plans and the capacity of the defense industrial base.

➤ Establish Detention Infrastructure for Enemy POWs

Any conflict with the PRC will entail the capture of enemy Prisoners of War and the necessity of interrogating them for valuable intelligence. This will require not only greater detention facilities than currently exist but a robust ability to interrogate, interpret, translate, and process captured enemy prisoners, documents, material, and weapons system. **The United States should evaluate the necessary requirements for the mass detention and interrogation of POWs if conflict were to break out between the United States and the PRC.**

➤ Civil-Military Structure Review

One of the central lessons from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq is that the initial war plans, while sufficient for a conventionally organized opponent, were inadequate for the insurgencies the U.S. faced on the timelines that our opponents chose. In the end, both conflicts were mis-conceptualized at the outset, poorly implemented in practice, and adaptations to the unique requirements of both wars took place way too late after the American people had already lost their patience. We need to ask the hard questions as to why our initial war plans for Afghanistan and Iraq were insufficient and whether our institutional arrangements are best suited for planning for deterrence and, quite possibly, conflict with the PRC. One area to look into is the U.S. Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1958 which took the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) out of the chain of command. The practical effect of this reform is that a vital leadership and information loop which linked fielded forces with the JCS was severed. It also removed a mediating layer between fielded forces and civilian leadership which also served a vital role of delineating strategic choices as part of extensive roles and missions discussions among the different services. Additionally, the JCS provides civilian leaders with necessary political cover to change course during a conflict wherein

under current civil-military arrangements civilian leaders are more directly implicated in war planning decisions. **The United States should conduct a review of civil-military structures focusing on the advisability of reinserting the Joint Chiefs of Staff into the chain of command.**

➤ Rolling Back Global PRC Influence

While the bulk of U.S. military forces will be focused on repulsing a PRC offensive to seize Taiwan, China's military forces are also located in a number of bases around the world. Further, the PRC conducts a significant amount of "gray zone" operations to increase its military footprint, weaken U.S. allies, co-opt countries, and expand its influence. **The United States should explore the option of designating U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) the lead agency within the U.S. Department of Defense to degrade, displace, and destroy Chinese military capabilities outside the Indo-Pacific as well as focus on its "gray zone" operations.**

➤ Preparing for a post-Xi China

President Xi Jinping is the central driving force for the PRC's aggressive military policies in the Indo-Pacific and around the world. While the CCP bolsters and supports his actions, and many Chinese Communist leaders also support Xi's goals, his removal from power would greatly dissipate China's militaristic trend. If a war with China were to take place and it went poorly for China, there might be an opportunity to facilitate the removal of Xi from power.³¹ An initial step in this strategy would be to craft a political warfare capability within the United States Government that highlights not just the human rights violations of the CCP but its poor governance, corruption, and overall weaknesses with the Chinese people. It will also require a thorough examination of political factions within China and the nurturing of an opposition movement either within China, which will be challenging, or outside it as well as a planning for a post-Xi China. **The United States should explore creating a political warfare capability to weaken Communist rule within China and facilitate the removal of PRC President Xi Jinping.**

Conclusion

All too frequently effective deterrence is viewed narrowly in terms of the quantity and quality of the military capabilities of the U.S. and the People's Republic of China. While essential considerations, there are other policy options which can augment these deterrence efforts while better preparing the U.S. for conflict in the Indo-Pacific. A combination of war preparedness efforts and publicly revealed studies and reviews can offer deterrent signals to the PRC below the threshold of escalation while simultaneously preparing the United States for conflict if it were to occur. Additionally, these efforts can save the U.S. crucial time in a broader mobilization of the military and the country if a conflict were to break out with the People's Republic of China. While substantial investments must be made in the fighting capabilities of the U.S. military, many other efforts can also be undertaken at minimal cost but have great influence on the war calculations of China's leaders.

¹ Dr. Daniel R. Green is a Research Fellow at The Heritage Foundation. He served as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Force Development from 2019-2021. He is the co-editor of *Confronting China: U.S. Defense Policy in an Era of Great Power Competition* (Bloomsbury, 2024). This written testimony is drawn from his book chapter "Strategy: Preparing for Great Power War" and has also been updated. These views are his own and do not necessarily represent the U.S. Department of Defense.

² Hal Brands & Francis J. Gavin, editors, *COVID-19 and World Order: The Future of Conflict, Competition, and Cooperation*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland, 2020), pg. 319

³ Vice President Mike Pence, "Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration's Policy Toward China," The Hudson Institute, October 4, 2018

⁴ Jim Garamone, "Dunford Describes U.S. Great Power Competition with Russia, China," [defense.gov](https://www.defense.gov), March 21, 2019

⁵ Vice President Mike Pence, "Remarks by Vice President Pence at the Frederic V. Malek Memorial Lecture," Conrad Hotel, October 24, 2019

⁶ Jim Garamone, "National Defense Strategy a 'Good Fit for Our Times,' Mattis Says," *DOD News*, January 19, 2018

⁷ U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, "Remarks by Secretary Mattis on National Defense Strategy," Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, Dec. 1, 2018

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Seth G. Jones, "America's Looming Munitions Crisis," *Foreign Affairs*, March 31, 2023; Assistant Secretary of Defense for INDO-PACOM Security Affairs Ely S. Ratner, Statement before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, February 9, 2023

¹⁰ John Grady, "New National Defense Strategy Must Focus on Competing 'Where It Makes Sense,' Pentagon Officials Says," *USNI News*, December 10, 2021

¹¹ Joel Wuthnow, "How to Out-Deter China," *Foreign Affairs*, March 24, 2023.

¹² Assistant Secretary of Defense for INDO-PACOM Security Affairs Ely S. Ratner, Statement before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, February 9, 2023

-
- ¹³ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark A. Milley, Statement, Department of Defense Budget Hearing, Senate Appropriations Committee, June 17, 2021
- ¹⁴ Antony J. Blinken, U.S. Secretary of State, “The Administration’s Approach to the Peoples Republic of China,” The George Washington University, May 26, 2022
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Jesse Johnson, “Former U.S. Indo-Pacific commander underscores threat to Taiwan’s outlying islands,” The Japan Times, January 25, 2023; Antony J. Blinken, U.S. Secretary of State, “The Administration’s Approach to the Peoples Republic of China,” The George Washington University, May 26, 2022
- ¹⁸ Antony J. Blinken, U.S. Secretary of State, “The Administration’s Approach to the Peoples Republic of China,” The George Washington University, May 26, 2022
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Assistant Secretary of Defense for INDO-PACOM Security Affairs Ely S. Ratner, Statement before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, February 9, 2023
- ²¹ Ibid.; Antony J. Blinken, U.S. Secretary of State, “The Administration’s Approach to the Peoples Republic of China,” The George Washington University, May 26, 2022
- ²² Hope Yen, “CIA Chief: China has some doubts on ability to invade Taiwan, Associated Press, February 26th, 2023
- ²³ Zamone Perez, “The Time is Now to Prepare for China conflict, Army leaders say,” *Defense News*, February 28, 2023
- ²⁴ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark A. Milley, Statement, Department of Defense Budget Hearing, Senate Appropriations Committee, June 17, 2021
- ²⁵ John Pomfret and Matt Pottinger, Xi Jinping Says He is Preparing China for War,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 29, 2023
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Antulio J. Echevarria, “It’s Time to Recognize Sustainment as a Strategic Imperative,” *War on the Rocks*, February 15, 2023
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Seth G. Jones, “America’s Looming Munitions Crisis,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 31, 2023
- ³⁰ Ibid.; Congress has recently given authority to the U.S. Department of Defense for the multi-year acquisition of some munitions.
- ³¹ Cai Xia, “The Weakness of Xi Jinping,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2022, pg. 107