



**SSI** STRATEGIC  
STUDIES  
INSTITUTE  
United States Army War College

**ANNUAL ESTIMATE OF THE STRATEGIC  
SECURITY ENVIRONMENT**

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Strategic Research and Analysis Department

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August 2022



**STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE**

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# The United States Army War College

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The United States Army War College educates and develops leaders for service at the strategic level while advancing knowledge in the global application of Landpower.

The purpose of the United States Army War College is to produce graduates who are skilled critical thinkers and complex problem solvers. Concurrently, it is our duty to the US Army to also act as a “think factory” for commanders and civilian leaders at the strategic level worldwide and routinely engage in discourse and debate concerning the role of ground forces in achieving national security objectives.



The Strategic Studies Institute conducts research and analysis to solve geostrategic issues for the Army, the US defense enterprise, and the nation.



The Center for Strategic Leadership contributes to the education of world-class senior leaders, develops expert knowledge, and provides solutions to strategic Army issues affecting the national security community.



The Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute provides subject matter expertise, technical review, and writing expertise to agencies that develop stability operations, concepts, and doctrines.



The School of Strategic Landpower develops strategic leaders by providing a strong foundation of wisdom grounded in mastery of the profession of arms, and by serving as a crucible for educating future leaders in the analysis, evaluation, and refinement of professional expertise in war, strategy, operations, national security, resource management, and responsible command.



The US Army Heritage and Education Center acquires, conserves, and exhibits historical materials for use to support the US Army, educate an international audience, and honor soldiers—past and present.

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## Foreword

Today's warfighter, leader, and policymaker advance American interests while confronting a strategic environment that is dynamic and increasingly competitive. The 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance depicts the global security landscape as one characterized by new crises and accelerating challenges, many of which find their locus in governments or events far from our shores. Our nation continues to contend with adversarial state actors as well as familiar hazards inspired by terrorism and extremism. Yet we are also witnessing new challenges such as ramifications of climate change, threats engendered by scientific and technological innovation, intensified efforts to aggressively reframe or undermine the international order, and pursuits to expand the availability, reach, and potency of catastrophic weapons.

The National Defense Strategy prescribes a more resilient Joint Force to defend and preserve our nation's interests. It calls for a military that can align strategy and resources to deter and win against acute threats while proving capable of simultaneously managing other persistent challenges. Attaining and preserving a competitive advantage against these threats requires a truly comprehensive effort. The Army must lead innovation in the field as well as in the laboratories. It must prioritize modernization while preserving readiness amidst structural change. And underpinning these efforts is an imperative to prepare and educate strategic leaders for the complexities they face. Perhaps more than ever, the Army requires leaders that can anticipate change and align their organizations to successfully confront the swiftly evolving security environment.

The U.S. Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute has developed this *Annual Estimate of the Strategic Security Environment* to delineate the vast array of security challenges that face our nation. The primary focus of this strategic estimate is to provide a macro-level narrative to inform our students and inspire their scholarship while in strategic education – be it in residency, distance education, or a fellowship. The estimate is also intended to benefit the efforts of external researchers who advance the Army's mission. By harnessing the intellectual engine of these strategic leaders and leading thinkers, we can develop the ideas and provide the solutions to safeguard our nation's future.

Major General David C. Hill  
53rd Commandant  
U.S. Army War College



## Introduction

The Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) has been publishing a Key Strategic Issues List (KSIL) for over 22 years. This document has assumed various permutations in its history but its purpose has always remained steady - to serve as an intellectual guidepost for academics and practitioners in the defense community. Consistent with this tradition and informed by new methods of integrating the expertise resident at the U.S. Army War College (USAWC), SSI is pleased to provide its inaugural *Annual Estimate of the Strategic Security Environment*.

This document is the product of successive interdisciplinary workshops in which USAWC faculty surveyed the strategic environment, key strategic documents, and the guidance of senior leaders to identify specific security interests warranting further research or consideration. The Secretary of the Army's priorities, issued February 2022, were one such set of senior leader guidance and have been included here to provide a strategic orientation for the subsequent findings.

The enclosed estimate outlines numerous threats and challenges under the auspices of five dominant themes. Though replacing the KSIL, this product continues to be intended as a focusing agent to understand the wide-ranging issues affecting the Army. It is neither prescriptive or exhaustive, but rather exposes students and researchers to the broad strategic topics important to national security.

In addition to this estimate, SSI will continue to curate and inform a list of strategic issues resembling the more granular analysis of the former KSIL. This will assist in preserving a collective understanding of the particularized matters impacting defense organizations. Input for this list is gathered directly from the field through contributions of senior leaders across the highest echelons of the Army. In aggregate, it is hoped that the annual estimate and supplemental list enable students, faculty, and external researchers to advance Army problem-framing, options, and recommendations for its most pressing challenges.

Much as the security environment is never static, this strategic estimate will be updated on a recurring basis. The USAWC maintains a constant pulse on national security affairs through scholarship, research, and the professional experiences of its faculty. Their insights will be regularly integrated to develop a rich and relevant understanding of the challenges which confront the nation and our Army. Feedback and suggestions from the community of practice are always encouraged. Please send your input for this estimate or the supplemental issues list to LTC Robert Greiner, at [robert.t.greiner2.mil@army.mil](mailto:robert.t.greiner2.mil@army.mil).

Dr. Carol V. Evans  
 Director, Strategic Studies Institute and  
 U.S. Army War College Press



## Message from the Secretary of the Army to the Force

*Published February 8, 2022*

Whether it is defending the country at home or overseas, our nation counts on the United States Army to be the first line of defense. We stand ready to deter and defend around the globe, as the tip of the spear in Europe and the backbone of joint operations in the Indo-Pacific. The Army surges in times of crisis and is ready when called upon to fight and win the nation's wars.

We are navigating an unpredictable future, and our nation and our Army are at an inflection point. Building on our strong foundational priorities of people, modernization, and readiness, I have defined six objectives to help guide the force through these shifting times. Through these objectives, my goal is to enable the Total Army to achieve specific and tangible outcomes that we can continue to advance in the years ahead.

As we emerge from two decades of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations, **my first objective is to put the Army on a sustainable strategic path amidst this uncertainty.** The Army must find a way to field the cutting-edge formations we need to conduct multi-domain operations while facing increased fiscal pressures. This means difficult choices must be made to sustain and strengthen U.S. deterrence with China as the pacing challenge and Russia as an acute threat we also confront. Charting this path requires a commitment to innovation and experimenting with new ways of operating. The work that is being done in Project Convergence to bring together our sister Services to test new operational concepts and digital technologies is the kind of innovative approach we need to win the future fight. **My second objective is to ensure the Army becomes more data-centric and can conduct operations in contested environments, which will enable our ability to prevail on the future battlefield.** Doing so will allow us to embrace emerging technologies to become a more effective and efficient force that can project power in cyberspace and defend our networks, weapons, and data from cyber threats.

**My third objective is to continue our efforts to be resilient in the face of climate change.** As the planet warms, the polar ice caps melt, and extreme weather becomes commonplace, the Army must adapt its installations, acquisition programs, and training to be able to operate in a changing environment and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Our future readiness depends on it.

The cornerstone of America's Army is our people. Three of my six objectives are focused on caring for our Soldiers, families, and Army civilians who are the very foundation of Army excellence. **My fourth objective is to build positive command climates at scale across all Army formations.** This starts with continued Army leadership and must be developed both from the top down and the bottom up. Character and culture matter, and I am committed to ensuring that we select the best possible leaders and give them the tools and resources to care for their



Soldiers. **My fifth objective is to reduce harmful behaviors in our Army.** This is integral to sustaining a positive command climate at scale. We need to shift from responding to harmful events after they have happened to finding ways to prevent them. To do that we must develop and institutionalize prevention-oriented approaches that year after year will reduce the frequency of harmful behaviors such as sexual harassment and assault, extremist activity, racism, and domestic violence. We need to do more to prevent suicide in the Army. I call on leaders to continue making clear that there is no stigma associated with taking care of yourself and your family. We should strive to connect our Soldiers with the necessary resources for their wellbeing. The Army is its people, and a strong, healthy, resilient, trained force is the most important indicator of our readiness. Finally, the Army is the world's premiere land fighting force because we have brought the nation's best into our ranks. But the talent and recruiting landscape is changing rapidly, so **my sixth objective is to strategically adapt the way we recruit and retain talent into the Army in order to sustain the all-volunteer force.** We need to tell the Army's story in new ways to ensure we remain the first choice for Americans who want to serve their country. We need to reach out to Americans from all backgrounds, talents, and geographies and give them multiple reasons to come in and stay in our great Army. My goal is to help all Americans to be able to see themselves in what the Army has to offer.

I am excited to continue working with General McConville, Sergeant Major of the Army Grinston and senior leaders throughout the force on the extraordinary opportunities that lay before the Total Army. I look forward to hearing from all of you about how things are across the force. The tasks ahead of us are bigger than any one of us and need every Soldier's and Army civilian's efforts if we are to be successful. Army Strong.

Christine E. Wormuth  
Secretary of the Army



◀ Soldiers of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) prepare for a parade to commemorate the PLA's 90th anniversary (Source: DIA photo)

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, Chinese president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, delivers an important speech at a ceremony marking the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CPC in Beijing, capital of China, July 1, 2021 (Source: Xinhua/Ju Peng ) ▶



◀ Elements of the PLA Navy Marine Corps storm ashore from landing crafts in an exercise on the mainland coast close to Taiwan (Source: eng.chinamil.com.cn)

## Issue: Competing with and Preparing for Conflict with the People’s Republic of China (PRC)

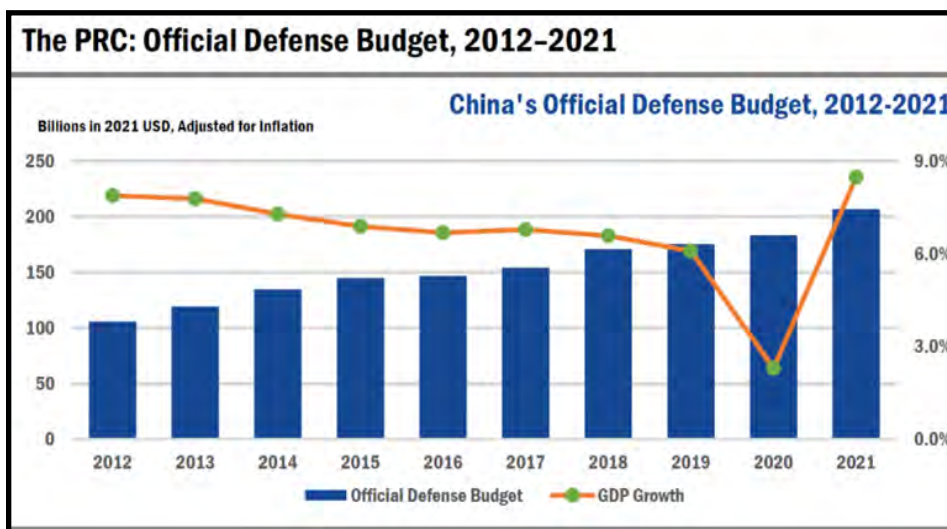
*The rapid advance of PRC global influence presents the greatest threat to U.S. security objectives*

**T**he rapid advance of **PRC influence** both globally and especially in Southeast Asia presents the single greatest threat to U.S. security objectives. **Expansion of PRC military power** is evident given its advances in missile technology, hypersonic weapons, naval presence, and development of its nuclear deterrent. Though conventional force projection is its most tangible asset for regional influence, the PRC will also continue to engage the United States in competition by other practical means. These will include skillful integration of its **diplomatic assertiveness, economic leverage,** and highly developed **electronic and informational tools** of statecraft.

The Army must evaluate what it can do to enable allies and partners to combat PRC influence now and in conflict. This is

especially true of partners that would likely be conducting or contributing to the ground fight against forces of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). To this end, we must better understand how key **allies and partners** will view and respond to conflict in the region. For example, how might Japan or the Republic of Korea react should armed contest over Taiwan manifest? Perhaps more importantly, to what extent will partner nations enable or actively participate in Taiwan’s defense and what measures must be in place to fully leverage their contributions?

Countering an increasingly assertive PRC also includes understanding the potential expanded **role of European partners in the Indo-Pacific region.** For the first time in history, NATO nations have aligned in their concern over the ambitions, coercive policies, and inimical



Though still a distant second to the United States, this graph depicts the consistent growth of China’s defense investment in U.S. dollars (Source: Department of Defense 2021 Annual Report to Congress on Military and Security Developments Involving the PRC)



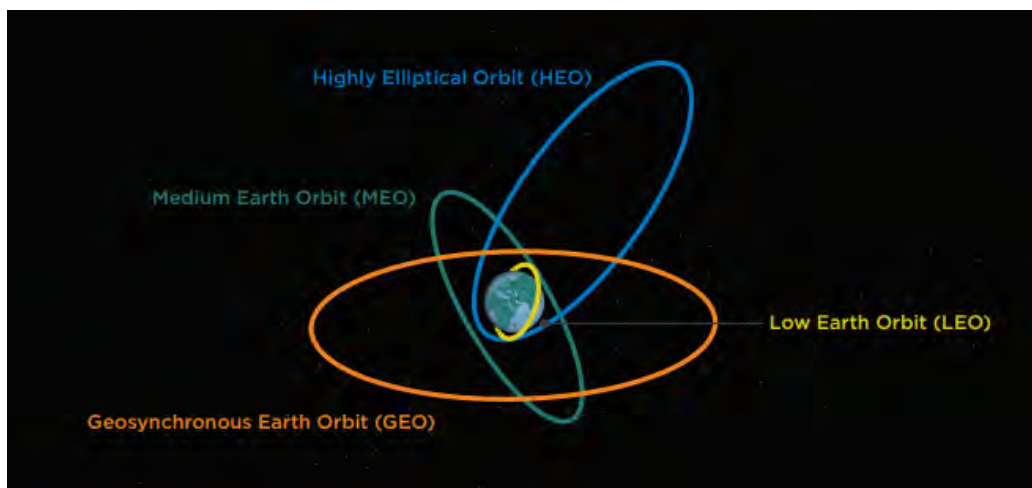
practices employed by the PRC in an effort to reframe the international order. The United States should fully leverage this common perception of the threat posed by the PRC and seek to integrate capabilities and interests with all like-minded nations, including those outside the immediate region.

Despite the continued expansion of its conventional military power, the PRC is likely to leverage hybrid or “grey” means such as cyber, electronic, and information to **wage war below the threshold of armed conflict** against the United States and its other rivals. The Army must consider how it will actively add value to these realms in today’s contested environment while anticipating needs and vulnerabilities should tensions escalate to armed conflict.

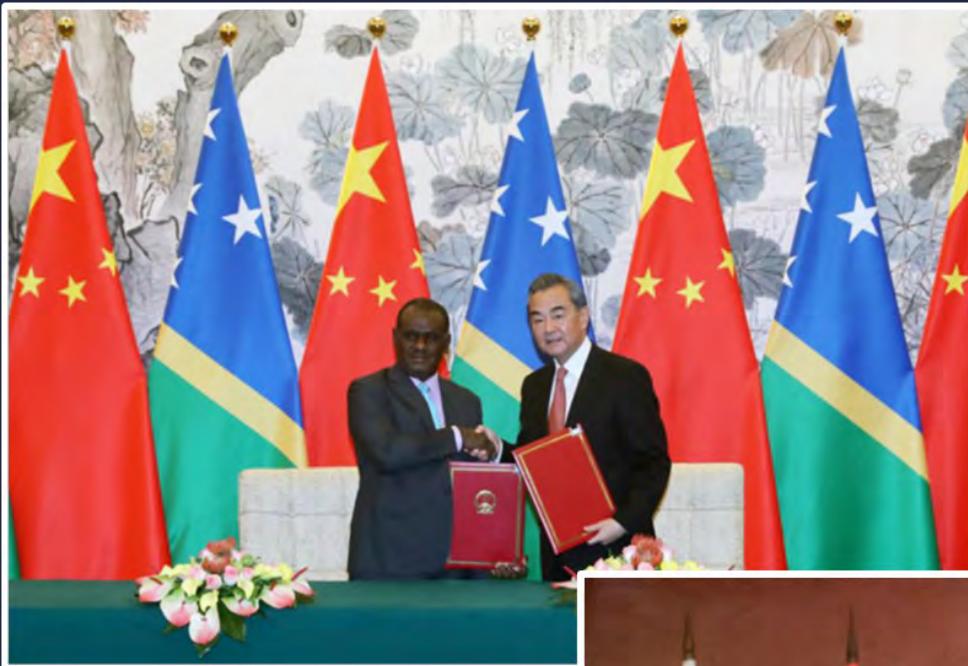
Similarly, the Army must seek to fully appreciate the inherent landpower challenges a potential conflict would entail. The Army does not have a solid understanding of the PLA and how the PRC will behave militarily. While a large body of knowledge and experience exists

concerning Russia land capability, comparatively little is known about **China’s employment of land forces**. The Pacific region has long been assumed as one predominated by air and sea. However, as history attests, the land domain remains an essential feature in sustaining operations, consolidating gains, and ultimately prevailing over an adversary. Additional analysis and resources, both intellectual and physical in nature, should be applied to **understating the role of land forces from allied and oppositional perspectives**.

Finally, the United States should closely assess indications and sources of **China’s internal societal, political, and economic instability** as means of understanding its national security interests and anticipating its external behavior. A thorough evaluation of China’s external behavior should include the prospects of **cooperation or alignment with Russia or Iran** in areas of mutual interest such as nuclear advancement, anti-satellite technology, and cyberwarfare. ■

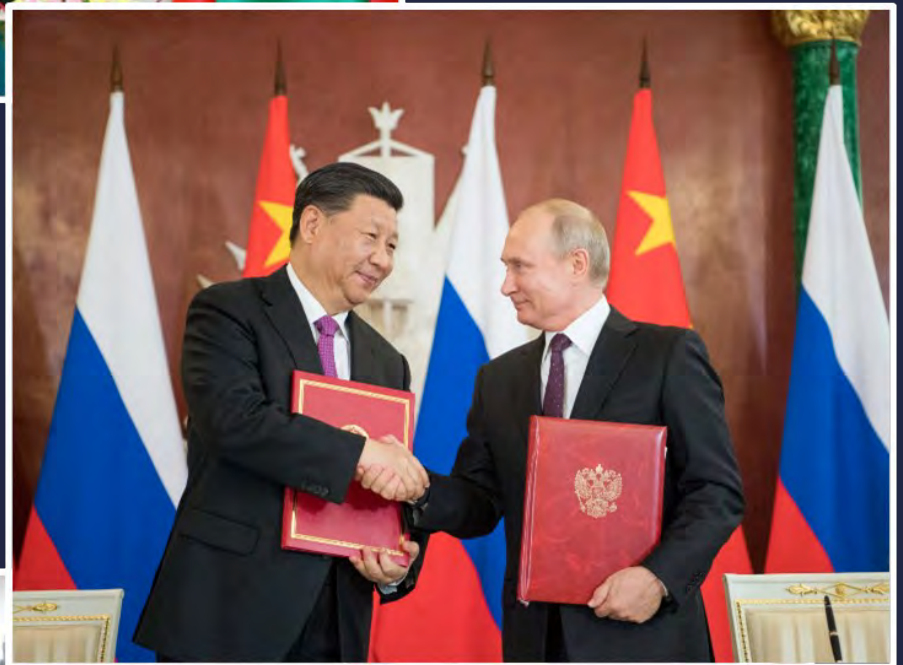


A depiction of the various types of orbit within which China is actively competing for space dominance. Significant investment has enabled China to place nearly 500 assets in orbit, second only to the United States (Source: Defense Intelligence Agency)



◀ PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Solomon Islands Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manele attend a 2019 signing ceremony in Beijing signaling the establishment of diplomatic relations. A subsequent security pact signed by both officials in April 2022 has sparked concern in Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the United States (Source: PRC Embassy in U.S.)

Russian President Vladimir Putin and PRC President Xi Jinping shake hands during a signing ceremony expressing their shared views on several regional and global issues (Source: SCMP / Xinhua) ▶



China revealed the DF-17 hypersonic missile in 2019 (Source: CCTV) ▼





## Issue: Dealing with the current threat and future ramifications of Russian aggression

*Russian adventurism as a destabilizing agent and threat to European security*

**R**ussia continues to present an acute albeit regionalized threat to U.S. national security interests as opposed to that posed by China. The latter is accumulating national strength from economic prosperity, population growth, and assimilation into the fabric of the global market. Russia, however, faces prospects far more daunting given its languid progress as measured against each of the same categories. Russia's influence as a result of its **depreciating means and diminished power status** has greatly constrained its influence, though potentially not its ambitions, to the immediate region.

Russia has long acted as a spoiler to democratization and the rules-based international order. It deftly wields subversive activities to exert regional influence and exercise its preferences. These are frequently violent but usually below a threshold of obvious state-sponsored armed conflict. Russia's heavy-handed repertoire for international affairs has recently featured assassinations in foreign countries, attempted toppling of democratic institutions, propping up pro-Russian governments, and annexing sovereign territory - typically through the employment of proxy forces.

While Russia will continue to rely on subterfuge and furtive manipulation, its recent aggression against Ukraine evinces increased willingness to overtly operate outside of the rules-based international order. The result of Russia's large-scale

attack has yet to be determined. However, even casual observation of the evolving situation exposes Russia's strategic miscalculation of the environment and a generous underestimation of Ukraine's will to resist. But Russia is not the only nation to demonstrate a reliance on misinformed assumptions. The United States has also been surprised by the extent to which it may have overestimated Russia's military capability and the impact of a decade-long investment in **military modernization**. Russia's failed initial operations and its difficulties generating tactical momentum paint a far bleaker picture of a nuclear equipped but conventionally inferior adversary.

Whether Russian aggression is a consequence of **NATO's expansion** into its historic sphere of influence or an opportunistic effort to realize or restore national interests, the upshot remains a tense and corrosive relationship with the West. This may be exacerbated if both sides in the conflict reach parity in terms of will and means to continue prosecuting



Military leaders meet to discuss collective defense at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, May 19, 2022 (NATO photo)



◀ A Russian Su-35 aircraft unsafely intercepts a P-8A Poseidon patrol aircraft assigned to U.S. 6th Fleet over the Mediterranean Sea, May 26, 2020. Officials protested the unsafe and unprofessional behavior of the Russian pilots (Source: Navy photo)

President Putin meets in Tehran on July 19, 2022 with President Sayyid Ebrahim Raisi. In his remarks, Putin lauded the trade growth and cooperation between the two countries on international security (Source: Kremlin photo) ▶



◀ A RS-24 Yars intercontinental ballistic missile makes its way through Red Square during the May 9, 2022 Victory Parade (Source: Kremlin photo)



◀ Destroyed Russian armored vehicles line the streets of Bucha following an attack on April 4, 2022 (Source: photo taken from official website of President Zelenskyy)

Emergency workers in Lozova respond to damages after intense Russian shelling of a residential area, May 20, 2022 (Source: photo posted to social media by the Ukraine's Main Directorate of the State Emergency Service) ▶



◀ A grain field in Ukraine is set ablaze by Russian forces. Once a leader in agricultural commodities — the destruction of crops, targeting of infrastructure such as railways, bridges, and storehouses, and obstruction at ports have effectively paralyzed Ukraine's ability to export these globally traded products (Source: Wiki Commons)

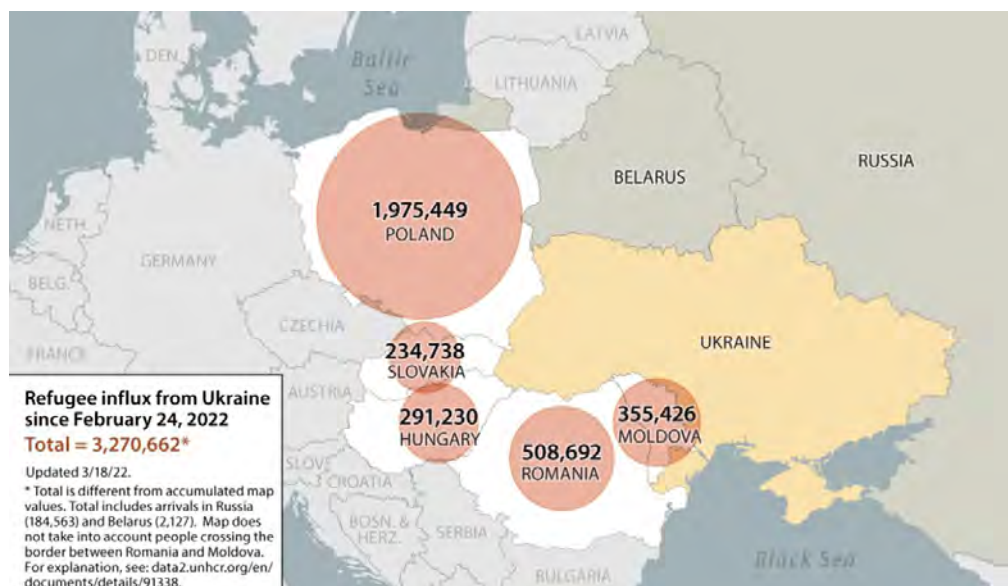




the war without compelling the other side into appeasement. The result of such a frozen conflict could significantly impose upon the stability of Europe. Continued conflict carries with it significant risk of **vertical or horizontal escalation**. **Interruption to commodities trade** such as the production or sale of grain and gas has demonstrable cascading implications far beyond the region. And a perpetual conflict exacerbates the economic, humanitarian, and security impacts inherent to the migration of **externally or internally displaced persons**.

population incensed by Russia's **war crimes and atrocities against noncombatants** (such as indiscriminate employment of long-range fires).

Absent the unforeseeable event of direct intervention, the United States should focus on updating its **net assessment** of Russia's intent and capabilities while seeking to **balance evolving security commitments, posture, and concepts** with other – potentially more dangerous – global challenges. Further, decisionmakers must



(Source: CRS)

The stability of Europe and security of the United States' Euro-Atlantic partners will most certainly dictate an active role and continuing presence in the region. It is unlikely the United States will deliberately intervene in the conflict unless incited. This could take the form of a military provocation should Russia attack the United States or one of its allies. Or, U.S. involvement could be politically induced at the instigation of an American

use caution to avoid hasty **conclusions that may be misinformed or incomplete** while being careful not to **misapply lessons from this conflict** to other strategic contexts. To this end, the Army should critically assess the conflict as soon as possible to garner accurate operational insights and discern the key strategic implications. ■



## Issue: Acute threats directly against the homeland

*The emergence of new technologies and proliferation of existing capabilities promote an array of challenges that make U.S. physical security increasingly vulnerable*

**P**rotection of the U.S. homeland has been a security imperative since the nation's founding. While geography and amicable neighbors have historically buffeted the nation against threat of attack or overt coercion, the emergence and rapid diffusion of new technologies have made the world "smaller," increasingly bringing distant powers into relative proximity and eroding the U.S. advantage of geographic separation.

State actors in competition with the U.S. have made significant gains in the development of hypersonic capabilities. These weapons – blending speed and maneuverability – increasingly place the U.S. homeland at risk of attack. This expanded means of force projection, particularly if merged with the specter of nuclear capability, affords coercive power to U.S. adversaries. Further, the absence of effective defensive measures against hypersonic missiles erodes the **strength of U.S. deterrence**, undermines the potency of its assurance measures, and alters the outlook of allies and partners when evaluating the **veracity of U.S. security guarantees**. Effectively countering the hypersonic threat requires a modernization of existing ballistic missile defense systems and acquisitions processes.

Contrary to the prospect of **hypersonic overmatch**, not all threats against the homeland are conventional or latent in application. Adversaries increasingly rely upon and actively employ other strategic

means to influence, coerce, or directly attack the United States within its borders. Significant **advances in science and technology** have engendered an unprecedented rate of discovery, invention, and commensurate operationalization of new capabilities. Rapid innovations in areas such as **computer learning, automated intelligence, and quantum computing** all aid in the weaponization and exploitation of **cyberspace**. Global disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic gives veracity and allure to the potential effectiveness of **biological and germ warfare**. Collectively, these rapid developments expand our adversaries' current and potential toolkit from which to attack the United States.



Rows of beds and equipment are installed as CenturyLink Field in Seattle, Washington is converted into a hospital by the military as part of its Coronavirus response efforts (Source: Army photo)

The barrier to entry for such emerging technology is far less than the costs associated with developing and maintaining a hypersonic arsenal. Yet the

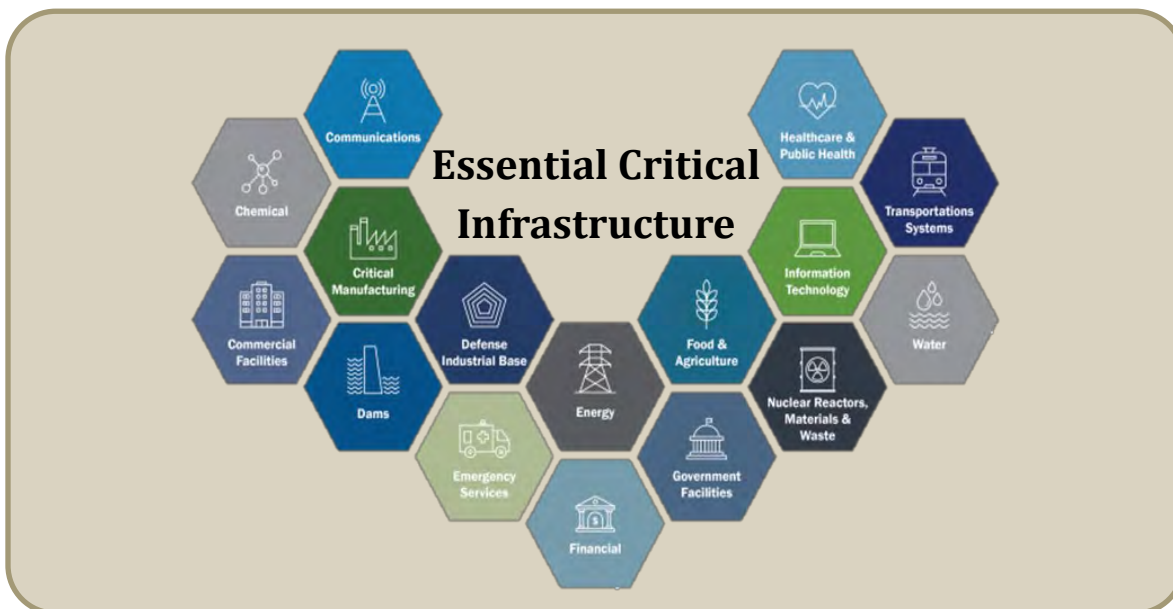
impact can be just as devastating in terms of human and economic toll. Such attacks are comparatively easier to undertake, harder to detect, far more difficult to attribute, but analogous in the breadth of defensive challenges they present. Weapons enabled by science and technology are an accessible and relatively affordable option and therefore remain a preferred method for nation-states, extremist organizations, and **terrorist groups** alike.

Defense of the United States requires appropriate focus on the rapid advancements that most threaten our security in the physical and cyber domains. The nation should be prepared for cyberattacks against its homeland defense capabilities and **critical infrastructure**. This includes the ability to marshal the

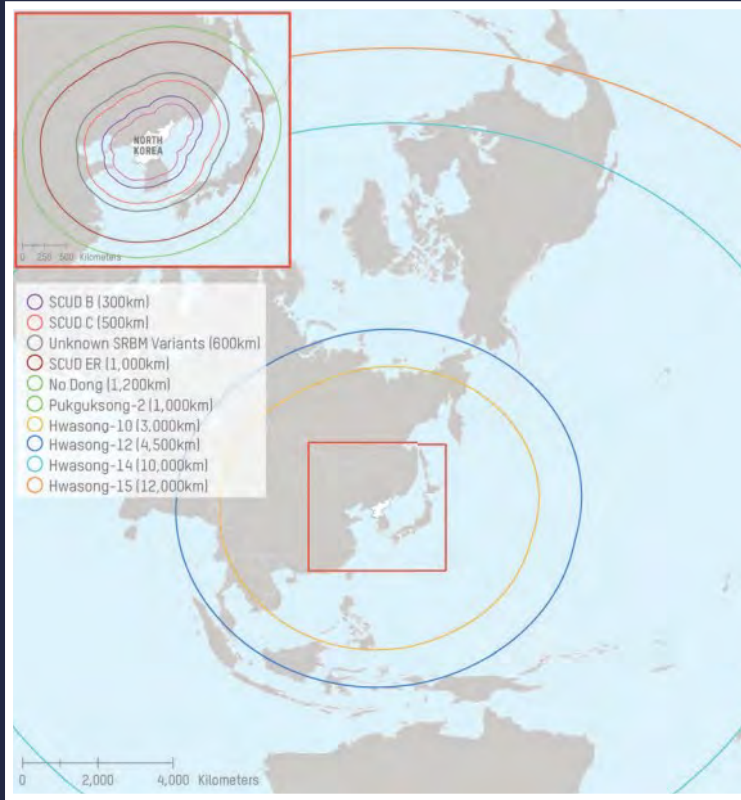
nation’s significant resources to defend and respond in a coordinated manner across **civil-military boundaries**. Simultaneously, the United States should continue exploring how to gain its own competitive advantage through advancements in the fields of science and technology. ■



Rendering of the Falcon Hypersonic Test Vehicle by the Defense Advanced Research Products Agency (Source: DOD image)



Presidential Policy Directive 21 (PPD-21) identifies 16 critical infrastructure sectors as those “systems and assets, whether physical or virtual, so vital to the United States that the incapacity or destruction of such systems and assets would have a debilitating impact on security, national economic security, national public health or safety, or any combination of those matters” (Source: CISA.gov)



North Korea Hwasong-15 (above) and Hwasong-14 (below) intercontinental ballistic missiles (Source: NASIC photo)



▲ Ranges of various ballistic missiles in North Korea's arsenal (Source: DIA graphic)



◀ A satellite-carrying rocket takes flight from an undisclosed location in Iran on June 26, 2022 (Source: Iranian Ministry of Defense photo)

## Issue: Pervasive global threats with potential to impact U.S. security interests

*U.S. security is increasingly tested by an array of natural and manufactured challenges*

Competition with China for geopolitical, economic, and moral influence presents the greatest trial to U.S. security interests in the foreseeable future. However, the United States must simultaneously contend with an array of additional challenges. These issues, whether aggregated or in isolation, may foster more urgent or direct impacts on national security even though they fall below the traditional threshold of great power conflict.

States such as **North Korea** and **Iran** continue to behave in ways that present persistent challenges to U.S. interests. Given the imbalance of relative power, these actors will likely avoid a unilateral conflict with the United States. But each openly contests U.S. preeminence in the global order and actively seeks to create conditions or leverage existing opportunities to assert their own interests.

North Korea and Iran continue to pursue technology and capabilities which they perceive will empower their nations with coercive means necessary to counter U.S. influence. Their continued commitment down this path risks putting U.S. allies and partners under threat and undermining regional stability. Of note is North Korea's growing nuclear program and its focus on improving delivery platforms to extend the range

of its power projection. These not only bring U.S. interests closer into range but can impact current U.S. security agreements with Japan and the Republic of Korea.



Iranian loitering munitions, also known as “suicide drones,” are proudly displayed at a parade in Tehran celebrating National Army Day, April 18, 2022 (Source: Tasnim News Agency)



Kim Jong Un stands in front of a ballistic missile while in discussion over a model nuclear warhead (Source: KCNA via KNS/AFP)





Further complicating the security environment is the failure of U.S. campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. These have damaged the nation's military and reputational standing around the world as a reliable partner. The resultant loss of **U.S. credibility**, waning confidence in the **value of its security guarantee**, and uncertainty in the United States' **will and ability to safeguard the rules-based international order** undermine prior investments and future efforts. This loss of authority, real or perceived, is translative and will certainly complicate U.S. **security cooperation efforts with allies and partners** – potentially the United States' most valuable asset in its ability to deter and compel rivals.

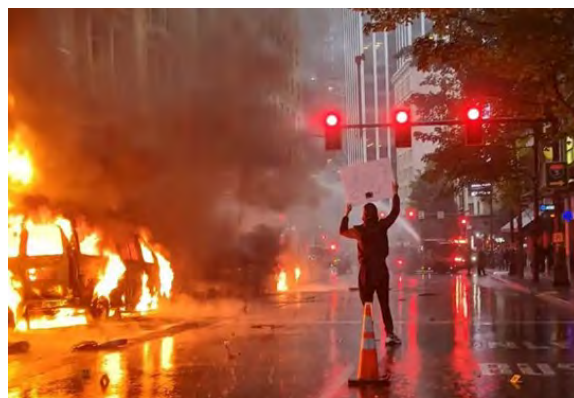
U.S. credibility is not only a product of events abroad. Global perceptions of U.S. **domestic and political instability** also contribute significantly to the erosion of its physical and **moral authority**. Accordingly, the United States will continue to cede **diplomatic, economic, and military influence** as alternative options in international relations gain traction. For example, U.S. economic volatility and its ongoing sanctions campaign aimed at punishing Russia through **weaponization of the dollar** has engendered alarm or at least a renewed awareness of the potential vulnerability a nation assumes by participating in the U.S. controlled monetary market. Countries such as the PRC may pursue options to distance themselves from the dollar and insulate their economies from similar reprisal.

The United States must contend with each of these national security threats while confronting increasingly prevalent

transboundary challenges. The impact of the **coronavirus pandemic** and tangible indications of **climate change** are both natural occurrences which directly influence U.S. national security calculus. Add to these the ongoing tumult induced by **supply chain disruptions**, a worldwide economic slump that may yet engender **global recession**, and cascading consequences caused by a **strain on commodities** such as grain and oil. Each of these challenges have the potential to impinge upon or fundamentally alter the geo-strategic context in which U.S. security interests are maintained. ■



Protestors occupy the stairs of the U.S. Capitol shortly before forcibly entering the building on January 6, 2021 (Source: Wiki Commons)



Violent protests, vandalism, and looting occurred in Seattle, Washington during a period of intense civil unrest in the summer of 2020 (Source: Wiki Commons)



◀ A map indicating the route of China's Polar Silk Road initiative, launched in 2018. Both Russia and China have expressed ambitions of increased access and normalized presence in the arctic region (Source: Army Arctic Strategy)

U.S. Army paratroopers with the 25th Infantry Division jump in Alaska during an exercise on March 24, 2022 demonstrating arctic dominance (Source: Air Force photo) ▼



The Producer Price Index offers a measurement of prices received by U.S. producers for the sale of goods and services. The 25% increase following the pandemic is one metric of wholesale inflation (Source: U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee) ▶





## Issue: Understanding the changing landscape of war and warfare

*Global trends are influencing the character of war*

**W**ar is a social endeavor. Even in the current era of pervasive technological advancements, the **genesis of conflict** and its conduct remain extensions of human interaction. Prussian theorist Carl von Clausewitz metaphorically describes war in terms of a relationship, a duel, a wrestling match, or a similar contest between interacting forces. In this regard, human and societal aspects remain foundational in forming the trendline by which to seek an indication of future characteristics.

Basic human needs and matters of governance will continue to instigate and influence conflicts. Analysis of the global environs at an individual level reveals that **mass migrations** are a predominant contemporary feature. Once considered an episodic concern organic to large scale war, these extensive movements of entire populations are redefining the human landscape while altering internal security and economic dynamics of nations. These migrations are driven by myriad factors but are most often symptoms of regional conflict, economic speculation, or the consequences of severe **climate change**.

When viewed from a state-level analytical perspective, **competition for natural resources** may present a leading source of interstate friction which could drive governments into confrontation. Extraction and consumption of finite resources have seen exponential growth commensurate with rising populations, continued industrialization, and urbanization. Access to and exploitation

of fresh water, precious minerals, fossil fuels, and even sand are on an unsustainable trajectory. An imbalance in natural distribution or the widespread exhaustion of key resources should be studied for their impact on U.S. national security and international relations writ large.



A vessel engaged in illegal fishing seen just before interdiction by the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG). According to a 2020 USCG report, 93 percent of the world's major fish stocks are now classified as fully exploited, overexploited, or significantly depleted (Source: USCG photo)

Lastly, from an international or systems-level analytical perspective, rising powers seeking to challenge the existing political order will be the basis of strategic competition if not armed conflict. Of particular note, smaller nations are increasingly under pressure to **align with great powers**. The



resultant web of alliances and partnerships, specifically of those **balancing** or **bandwagoning** vis-à-vis a rules-based international order, will greatly influence the outcome of U.S. security interests.

Consequent near-term conflicts involving the United States will most likely entail **irregular warfare** through nonstandard forces such as **insurgents** or **proxies**. Adversaries will adopt hybrid strategies that deny a conventional force-on-force fight unless doing so proves uniquely advantageous. They will use proxy forces that provide **plausible deniability** while achieving their objectives without risking a wider conflict. Irregular operations will be conducted in a manner short of war and potentially in concert with terrorist or **criminal activities**. These will be designed to present an unfavorable cost-benefit decision to U.S. political leaders and challenge the country's capacity to enforce stability or directly confront adversaries.

**Conventional large-scale war** is a precarious scenario that the nation cannot afford to get wrong. However, planning for a potential peer-on-peer conflict should not negate necessary preparations for more likely scenarios. The nation should prepare

for and credibly deter conventional war without sacrificing flexibility to respond to these irregular provocations. ■



A High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) is fired during a training event. The United States has committed 16 such systems to Ukraine as well as other equipment and funding (Source: USMC photo)



Palletized U.S. ammunition and supplies are prepared for delivery to Ukraine in support of their resistance to Russian aggression (Source: Air Force photo)



A photo released by the Security Service of Ukraine alleges to show members of the Wagner Group operating at an undisclosed location. This mercenary group is a semi-private military force that provides a degree of deniability to the Russian Ministry of Defense and President Putin (Ukraine government photo)



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