

## **Inflection Point; A Call to Action in U.S.-China Foreign Policy**

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## Introduction

Per U.S. Code 50, Subsection 3043, the President is required to submit an annual National Security Strategy (NSS) report to Congress to guide the nation's vast national security apparatus.<sup>1</sup> Previous administrations have displayed varying degrees of compliance with this mandate over the past few decades.<sup>2</sup> Most recently, the Bush and Obama administrations each only delivered the report twice during two terms (2002, 2006, 2010, and 2015 respectively), and the Trump administration only released a single report in 2017.<sup>3</sup> On March 3, 2021, President Biden released his *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* delivering his "vision for how America will engage with the world [and to]...direct departments and agencies to align their actions... as we begin work on a National Security Strategy."<sup>4</sup> Considering previous precedents, the Biden Administration's release of interim guidance merely 103 days into his presidency is significant and suggests a unique sense of urgency in the White House to deliver its own message regarding the direction of U.S. national security policy.

While the contentious 2020 Presidential Election and divisive nature of modern party politics likely contributed to this early release of interim guidance and suggest a move by the administration to distance itself from its predecessor, there are compelling national security

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1. "U.S. Code 50, Subsection 3043; Annual National Security Strategy Report," U.S. Office of the Law Revision Counsel (OLRC), accessed September 12, 2021, <https://uscode.house.gov/>.

2. "National Security Strategy Archive," National Security Strategy Archive, accessed October 12, 2021, <https://nssarchive.us/>.

3. National Security Strategy Archive.

4. "Interim National Security Strategic Guidance," The White House (The United States Government, March 3, 2021), 4. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/03/interim-national-security-strategic-guidance/>.

reasons for a renewed sense of urgency in clarifying U.S. foreign policy, specifically with respect to China. As a result of China's exponential military growth, precipitous economic gains, steady rise to global power, and a relative U.S. decline in these three spheres over the last two decades,<sup>5</sup> time is running out for the U.S. to take action to prevent being supplanted and to ensure the continuity of the international rules-based order. These changing dynamics in U.S.-China competition underscore the urgent requirement for decisive action that guides domestic entities, reassures allies, and conveys U.S. resolve to its adversaries. More specifically, the U.S. must quickly close gaps in military competition through investment and reform, improve its economic footing by reducing global interdependence on China, and reassert U.S. global leadership by changing its narrative at home and abroad.

### **Part I: Imminent Military Parity**

In its 2020 Annual Report to Congress on the "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China (PRC)," the Office of the Secretary of Defense opens with a twenty-year retrospective and asserts that "given the continuity in the PRC's strategic objectives, the past 20 years offer a harbinger for the future course of the PRC's national strategy and military aspirations."<sup>6</sup> It goes on to warn that "the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has a strategic end state that it is working towards, which if achieved and its accompanying military modernization left unaddressed, will have serious implications for U.S. national interests and the

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5. It is important to emphasize the term "relative" here. Many analysts still acknowledge the United States as the preeminent global military, economic, and diplomatic force. However, its dominance in each field has significantly eroded when juxtaposed with China's relative advances.

6. "2020 China Military Power Report - U.S. Department of Defense," [www.defense.gov](https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF) (Office of the Secretary of Defense, September 1, 2020), ii.

security of the international rules-based order.”<sup>7</sup> The fact that the PRC has consistently set and achieved its national strategic aims over the last twenty years, combined with President Xi Jinping’s current aspirations to usurp the United States as the preeminent military power by 2049,<sup>8</sup> has rightfully energized the Department of Defense (DoD). The report, corroborated by additional intelligence assessments,<sup>9</sup> goes on to point out that “China is already ahead of the United States in... shipbuilding...land-based conventional ballistic and cruise missiles...[and] integrated air defense systems.”<sup>10</sup> While possession of advanced technology does not equate directly to a more effective force, People’s Liberation Army (PLA) leadership has also made “recent sweeping efforts” to improve “the PLA’s overall combat readiness...embrace new operational concepts, and expand the PRC’s overseas military footprint.”<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the PLA continues to modernize shipbuilding, aviation, nuclear, and space capabilities with dedicated investments in cutting-edge Artificial Intelligence (AI), quantum computing, unmanned systems, and biotechnology.<sup>12</sup> For the past two decades, China has maintained a steady commitment to achieving its long-term goals of military preeminence.

In contrast, recent analyses of the DoD have identified severe shortcomings in the U.S. military’s ability to keep pace and suggest a genuine danger of being eclipsed by China in the

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7. 2020 China Military Power Report, ii.

8. 2020 China Military Power Report, v.

9. “Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community,” [www.dni.gov](http://www.dni.gov) (Office of the Director of National Intelligence, April 9, 2021), <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ATA-2021-Unclassified-Report.pdf>.

10. 2020 China Military Power Report, i.

11. 2020 China Military Power Report, ii.

12. Annual Threat Assessment, 20.

next decade. In its report to Congress in 2018, the Commission on the National Defense Strategy (NDS) delivered a stern warning regarding U.S. military readiness in competition with China.<sup>13</sup> According to the Commission, “the security and wellbeing of the United States are at greater risk than at any time in decades. America’s military superiority—the hard-power backbone of its global influence and national security—has eroded to a dangerous degree” and “America’s ability to defend its allies, its partners, and its own vital interests is increasingly in doubt.”<sup>14</sup> Specifically, the Commission argues that “due to political dysfunction ...and particularly due to the effects of the Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011 and years of failing to enact timely appropriations—America has significantly weakened its own defense.”<sup>15</sup> The unclassified summary of the 2018 NDS, authored by Secretary of Defense Mattis, paints a similar picture, albeit with an understandably more guarded tone.<sup>16</sup> Secretary Mattis points out that contrary to previous decades where the U.S. “enjoyed uncontested or dominant superiority in every operating domain...today, every domain is contested—air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace.”<sup>17</sup> Reading between the lines, it becomes clear that senior DoD leaders are keenly aware of serious shortcomings. Mattis informs Congress that “we cannot expect success fighting tomorrow’s

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13. Eric Edelman and Gary Roughead (Co-Chairs), “Providing for the Common Defense,” United States Institute of Peace, July 3, 2019, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2018/11/providing-common-defense>.

14. Providing for the Common Defense, v.

15. Providing for the Common Defense, vi.

16. James Mattis, “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy20,” [www.dod.defense.gov](http://www.dod.defense.gov) (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2018), <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

17. Mattis, 3.

conflicts with yesterday’s weapons or equipment” and that “our backlog of deferred readiness, procurement, and modernization requirements has grown in the last decade and a half and can no longer be ignored.”<sup>18</sup> While the DoD has taken some corrective action since 2018,<sup>19</sup> the impact of recent military investments and appropriations has not manifested an appreciable change in U.S.-China military competition to date.<sup>20</sup> As a result, the window to act before losing the competitive military edge with China is closing.

## **Part II: Imminent Economic Parity**

In addition to setting and systematically accomplishing goals that challenge U.S. military superiority, China continues to reinforce its status as the premier economic force in the Indo-Pacific. Debate persists regarding when and if China might eclipse the U.S. in overall economic power,<sup>21</sup> but the Covid-19 pandemic has created a clear inflection point for the two economies. What the Biden Administration does in the near term will be crucial to either precipitating or avoiding this transfer of power. A December 2020 report released by the Centre for Economics and Business Research reported that "China will overtake the United States to become the world’s biggest economy in 2028, five years earlier than previously estimated due to the

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18. Mattis, 6.

19. The 2018 NDS listed "acquisitions reform" as one of its three lines of effort, and the DoD reports this reform as a continued top priority. A May 14, 2021, Defense News report by David Vergun titled “Acquisition Reform Is Making Rapid Progress; Defense Official Says” delivers a positive outlook on these reforms, although readers must consider the source.

20. Submission of the Pacific Deterrence Initiative to augment the FY 2022 budget reflects another positive step, but whether Congress will fully fund its contents remains to be seen.

21. Two illustrative articles are William Pesek’s “China is \$8 Trillion Away from Eclipsing Trump's Economy" in Forbes Magazine and a Reuters report published by CNBC titled "China Set to Surpass U.S. as World's Biggest Economy by 2028, Says Report." Full citations provided in Bibliography.

contrasting recoveries of the two countries from the Covid-19 pandemic.”<sup>22</sup> At the end of 2020, the belief that China was on track to overtake the U.S. as the top global economy was prevalent and supported by China’s “skillful management of the pandemic”<sup>23</sup> in contrast to rising U.S. case numbers and a perceived mishandling of the virus. As Eric Zhu and Tom Orlik point out in their article “When Will China Rule the World? Maybe Never?,” Chinese leadership did “their best to present the [U.S.-China] baton-change as imminent and inevitable” during the CCP 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations this summer.<sup>24</sup> They also explain that if Xi Jinping “delivers on growth-boosting reforms, and his U.S. counterpart...is unable to push through his proposals for renewing infrastructure and expanding the workforce, forecasts from Bloomberg Economics suggest China could grab the top spot—held by the U.S. for well over a century—as soon as 2031.”<sup>25</sup> Further complicating economic competition with China are lessons learned from Covid-19 regarding the fragility of global supply chains. China’s infiltration of the farthest reaches of the global market through proliferation of inexpensive goods—from textiles, basic metals, and machinery, to a vast array of electronics—and substantial role in global shipping has created an international system of already vulnerable supply chains that are increasingly

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22. “China Set to Surpass U.S. as World's Biggest Economy by 2028, Says Report,” CNBC (CNBC, December 26, 2020), <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/12/26/china-set-to-surpass-us-as-worlds-biggest-economy-by-2028-says-report.html>.

23. China Set to Surpass.

24. Eric Zhu and Tom Orlik. “When Will China’s Economy Beat the U.S. to Become No. 1? Why It May Never Happen,” Bloomberg.com, July 25, 2021. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2021-07-05/when-will-china-s-economy-beat-the-u-s-to-become-no-1-why-it-may-never-happen>.

25. Zhu and Orlik. It is important to note, as their title suggests, that Zhu and Orlik acknowledge that China’s economic supremacy over the U.S. is not a foregone conclusion and remains uncertain.

dependent on China.<sup>26</sup> While the speed with which the U.S. economy seems to be rebounding has surprised some experts and placed China's takeover in doubt, the U.S. is clearly approaching a critical economic moment, made more problematic by increased interdependence on China.

### **Part III: Chinese Ascendence and Erosion of U.S. International Standing**

Gradually achieving its strategic military and economic objectives, China has also embarked on an ambitious campaign to establish itself as a premier diplomatic power; it has done so despite simultaneously testing the limits of the rules-based international order.

Balancing cooperative engagement and economic investment exemplified by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with controversial actions in the South China Sea<sup>27</sup> and relations with Hong Kong and Taiwan,<sup>28</sup> China has managed to expand its global footprint while carefully avoiding escalation to violence. Seeking to remake the international order in line with CCP ideology, “China has embraced a new diplomatic framework” that increases bilateral and multilateral relationships to create “a ‘comprehensive global partnership network’...in order to form a global

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26. Lee Nee Yen, “5 Charts Show How Much the U.S. and Chinese Economies Depend on Each Other,” CNBC, September 28, 2020, <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/09/29/5-charts-show-how-the-us-and-chinese-economies-depend-on-each-other.html>. Specifically, the U.S. and China have been the main trading partners for each other for several years with the U.S. importing more merchandise goods than it exports to China, while China imports more U.S. services than it exports to the U.S.

27. Tom Phillips, Oliver Holmes, and Owen Bowcott, “Beijing Rejects Tribunal's Ruling in South China Sea Case,” *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media), July 12, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/12/philippines-wins-south-china-sea-case-against-china>. The July 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague invalidated China's claims and ruled in favor of the Philippines over several disputed geologic features in the South China Sea. China immediately rejected and still refuses to acknowledge the validity of these findings.

28. Chris Buckley, Vivian Wang, and Austin Ramzy, “Crossing the Red Line: Behind China's Takeover of Hong Kong,” *The New York Times*, June 28, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/28/world/asia/china-hong-kong-security-law.html>.

‘circle of friends.’”<sup>29</sup> The BRI includes “economic policy coordination, trade, and investment facilitation, dispute settlement, tourism, student and personnel exchanges, and cooperation in research and development, standards, media, and health.”<sup>30</sup> While packaged in cooperative and inclusive language, CCP international engagements, including BRI projects, are undeniably designed to advance China's strategic interests,<sup>31</sup> and while critics may be skeptical of the benevolence of these relationships in the long term, developing nations are willing to work with China in the absence of other offers. Coupled with the BRI, China has also made a concerted effort to take visible roles in U.N. peacekeeping missions,<sup>32</sup> Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA/DR) efforts, and delivery of medical supplies in response to the pandemic;<sup>33</sup> regardless of potential ulterior motives, it has successfully advanced its role in the international community.

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29. 2020 China Military Power Report, 6.

30. “China’s ‘One Belt, One Road’ Initiative: Economic Issues,” *Congressional Research Service*, January 22, 2021, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11735>. According to the Congressional Research Service, “while initially focused on Asia, Europe, and Africa, the scope [of BRI] has become global and encompasses over 100 countries, including the United States.”

31. One of the BRI’s primary goals is the economic interdependence discussed above. BRI reinforces China’s supply chains while entwining itself more deeply in those of other nations.

32. Yew Lun Tian, “China Shows Off Defence Diplomacy with Multinational Peacekeeping Drill,” [www.swissinfo.ch](http://www.swissinfo.ch), September 15, 2021, <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/reuters/china-shows-off-defence-diplomacy-with-multinational-peacekeeping-drill/46949146>.

33. Lily Kuo, “China Sends Doctors and Masks Overseas as Domestic Coronavirus Infections Drop,” *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, March 19, 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/19/china-positions-itself-as-a-leader-in-tackling-the-coronavirus>.

These increases in Chinese influence throw current U.S. global standing in stark relief and place the nation at a critical inflection point. The world has changed drastically in twenty years, and today's America glaringly contrasts with the nation that stood united on 9/12/2001 and mobilized a global community against terrorism. The double-edged sword of American Democracy is the transparency that it demands of itself. The same openness and access that enable U.S. successes to serve as a global example are expected in times of struggle and outright failure. As a result, early inability to combat Covid-19, deep political polarization, struggles with systemic racism and immigration, and most recently, the dramatic conclusion to twenty years in Afghanistan have all played out on an international stage. Along with messages of isolationism and retrenchment, "America First" diplomacy, and withdrawal from previous agreements and partnerships, these recent public struggles have combined to raise doubts about America's resilience.<sup>34</sup> Tom McTague, a London-based writer for *The Atlantic*, voices these concerns in his June 2020 article "The Decline of the American World."<sup>35</sup> As the world watched protests in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd, he writes that "as citizens of the world the United States created, [Europeans] are accustomed to listening to those who loathe America, admire America, and fear America (sometimes all at the same time). But feeling pity for America? That one is new" and goes on to say that "if it's the aesthetic that matters, the U.S. today simply doesn't look like the country that the rest of us should aspire to, envy, or

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34. America's withdrawal from the Iran Nuclear Deal and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, along with President Trump's rhetoric regarding international burden-sharing, have raised particular doubts among current and potential partners.

35. Tom McTague, "The Decline of the American World," *The Atlantic* (Atlantic Media Company, August 3, 2020), <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/06/america-image-power-trump/613228/>. While McTague's perspective of American domestic issues primarily consists of commentary on the aesthetic of the Trump Presidency, he paints a clear picture against the backdrop of a rising China.

replicate.”<sup>36</sup> Significantly, his description of a “moment of American introspection and division, as it withdraws from its role as the world’s only superpower”<sup>37</sup> precedes the dramatic conclusion of the 2020 election, the storming of the Capitol, and the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan. If there were doubts about America’s stability before these events, their presence in the aftershock is certain.

It is important to acknowledge that similar notions of America’s eroding global standing have been prevalent at home as well as abroad. In an article preceding even the death of George Floyd, Terence Roehrig, a Professor of National Security Affairs at the U.S. Naval War College, addresses the international response to the DoD announcement of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept. According to Roehrig, the FOIP calls “for free and fair trade, freedom of the seas, protecting state sovereignty, promoting good governance, and maintaining a regional order based on international law” while very clearly identifying China “in unambiguous language as the chief challenge to the regional order.”<sup>38</sup> Domestically and internationally, many thought the “U.S. had already ceded too much to China heading into this period of great power competition,”<sup>39</sup> while others “worry that U.S. power is in such a decline that Washington may not have the ability or commitment to follow through with its FOIP strategy.”<sup>40</sup> Compounded by

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36. McTague. He clarifies that he doesn't believe it is only the aesthetic that matters and suggests that these events also raise important questions about European leadership failures to act in the face of changing international dynamics.

37. McTague.

38. Terence Roehrig. “The United States and Asia in 2020: Free, Open, and Worried?” *Asian Survey* 61, no. 1, 11-20 (2021).

39. Roehrig, 12.

40. Roehrig, 12.

U.S. military and economic parity questions with China, doubts in its domestic stability and diplomatic credibility have placed the United States at the edge of an international security precipice.

#### **Part IV: A Call to Action**

The culmination of China’s precipitous rise to military, economic, and global power, juxtaposed with America’s struggles to keep pace and maintain global leadership, highlights the need for prompt and decisive U.S. action. While the Biden Administration’s instinct to provide interim guidance may signify an appreciation for this urgency, the moment requires tangible results in all three spheres. To secure America’s national security and reassert itself as a stabilizing force, it must begin by recapturing its competitive military edge. A credible military deterrent force must serve as the backdrop to foreign policy; as Secretary Mattis points out, “achieving peace through strength requires the Joint Force to deter conflict through preparedness for war.”<sup>41</sup> Maintaining legitimate military parity with China will facilitate diplomatic and economic solutions that enable conflict avoidance, but only if foreign cost-benefit analyses determine military conflict with the U.S. is too costly to risk.

To regain and maintain the military parity required to support diplomatic and economic solutions, however, requires significant investment in current and future capabilities and a whole-of-government approach to streamlining acquisitions processes to ensure their efficient delivery. Multiple DoD documents, including the 2020 China Military Power Report, the FY22

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41. Mattis, 6.

Budget Request,<sup>42</sup> and the Pacific Deterrence Initiative<sup>43</sup> have correctly identified the need to “prioritize China and its military modernization as our pacing challenge” and accurately layout the service-specific budgeting requirements to do this.<sup>44</sup> It is now up to the Biden Administration to work closely with the DoD and legislature to meet these needs. A Congressional Research Report released on October 7, 2021, once again acknowledged that “some U.S. observers are expressing concern or alarm regarding the pace of China’s naval shipbuilding effort and resulting trend lines regarding the relative sizes and capabilities of China’s navy and the U.S. Navy.”<sup>45</sup> The report goes on to point out that “ONI states that at the end of 2020, China will have 360 battle force ships, compared with a projected total of 297 for the U.S. Navy at the end of FY2020. ONI projects that China will have 400 battle force ships by 2025, and 425 by 2030.”<sup>46</sup> Shipbuilding serves as a critical example of the contrasting military investments by China and the U.S., and while the argument can be made that investments in

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42. "United States Department of Defense Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Request; Defense Budget Overview," <https://comptroller.defense.gov/Budget-Materials/> (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), May 2021), [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY2022\\_Budget\\_Request.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY2022_Budget_Request.pdf). As such, I will not argue for the specific programs that should receive the preponderance of DoD spending, but the executive branch and the legislature must support the recommendations and requests of DoD leadership.

43. “United States Department of Defense Budget Fiscal Year (FY) 2022; Pacific Deterrence Initiative,” <https://comptroller.defense.gov/> (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), May 2021), [https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/fy2022\\_Pacific\\_Deterrence\\_Initiative.pdf](https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/fy2022_Pacific_Deterrence_Initiative.pdf).

44. FY 2022 Budget Request.

45. “China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress” (Congressional Research Service, October 7, 2021), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33153/248>.

46. China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities

other areas may counter this specific mismatch, a deterrent force in the Indo-Pacific without a comparable naval force seems untenable. In addition to supporting the procurement and budget requests made by DoD entities (including U.S. Navy shipbuilding), the entire government must continue to streamline acquisitions and fielding processes to optimize the money Congress authorizes. Defense spending must focus on efficient delivery of personnel, platforms, technology, and training required to compete with China, regardless of special interest groups, cumbersome government contracting vehicles, and congressional pork-barrel politics.

However, U.S. military strength only represents a preliminary step for deterrence and stability; it must be paired with solid global partnerships and consistent U.S. engagement to reduce global dependence on China. To prevent China from reshaping the international order in its image, the U.S. must abandon recent isolationist leanings and reengage with the international community on multiple fronts. Investing both economically and diplomatically, the U.S. must reaffirm and strengthen old commitments while developing new partnerships worldwide. Specific opportunities include revisiting agreements like the Trans-Pacific Partnership and seeking creative ways to positively engage with previously marginalized nations. Doing so will prevent China from filling uncontested economic, military, and diplomatic leadership voids and strengthen the rules-based order. Other opportunities include engagement with Pacific Island nations where U.S. involvement has traditionally been limited to Micronesia; mutually beneficial relationships may be available in Melanesian, Polynesia, and beyond.<sup>47</sup> Factoring these regions into U.S. economic and foreign policy and engaging their members in international dialogue now will pay dividends in various ways in the future. New partnerships across the Indo-Pacific

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47. Patrick Dupont. "The United States' Indo-Pacific Strategy and a Revisionist China: Partnering with Small and Middle Powers in the Pacific Islands Region." Honolulu: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2021.

provide opportunities for diversified supply chains, the potential for advanced military resupply locations, support for the current rules-based order, and the corollary resistance to China's destabilizing actions.

Finally, the military, economic, and diplomatic changes that have brought the U.S. to this critical point have also laid bare its most significant challenge. No level of military deterrence or international cooperation will succeed without a drastic revision of the U.S. domestic narrative. The success of the national security apparatus depends on the political will of the American people and a unity of effort between all branches of government that can be seen from afar. As Robert Kagan asserts in his article "A Superpower, Like It or Not: Why Americans Must Accept Their Global Role," the U.S. must ensure its citizens appreciate the necessity of preventing Chinese global dominance and the singular role that America plays in the international order.<sup>48</sup> Kagan astutely points out that "the time has come to tell Americans that there is no escape from global responsibility...they need to be told honestly that the task of maintaining a world order is unending and fraught with costs but preferable to the alternative" and that the aim must not be "scaring the hell out of them about China...but trying to explain, again, why the world order they created still matters."<sup>49</sup> In addition, the government must seek a paradigm shift to overcome the divisive polarity of party politics and present a unified approach visible to both allies and adversaries alike. While resolving party dissension may not be achievable in the short-term to

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48. Robert Kagan, "A Superpower, Like It or Not: Why Americans Must Accept Their Global Role," *Foreign Affairs*, New York Vol. 100, Iss. 2, (Mar/Apr 2021).

49. Kagan. It must be acknowledged here that the Biden Administration has shown signs of appreciating the urgency of this aspect of National Security. On the same day that President Biden released the *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*, Secretary of State Blinken addressed the American people with remarks aimed at framing international engagement in domestic terms for average Americans. The coordinated delivery and language of this message represent another positive step.

prevent China's ascendancy, national security leadership—with the full force of the Executive Branch—must demand bipartisan cooperation and unity of effort, *at least* on the foreign policy front. U.S. global leadership is no longer a question of American colonialism, altruistic democratic idealism, or a shallow desire to preserve American prestige. If China goes unchecked, it will have the ability to reshape the international community and present serious economic and security threats both at home and abroad.

### **Conclusion**

While comparative strength of global powers has ebbed and flowed throughout history and U.S.-China competition may prove less dangerous than some analysts envisage, America's leadership and its citizens must understand the gravity of the moment and appreciate that isolationism and retrenchment are no longer possible. To ensure the continuity of the rules-based international order in the face of globalization and Chinese influence, the U.S. must urgently pursue renewed investment in military deterrence, economic and diplomatic engagement, and a revision of the U.S. domestic narrative. While the Biden Administration has taken a critical first step in recognizing the need for new national security guidance, its true test will be in execution across these spheres of influence.

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