

Washington's New National Security Strategy: Seeking to Reinforce U.S. Hegemony

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by Joseph Gerson

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The catastrophic Ukraine War is about much more than Ukraine. As the recently released U.S. National Security Strategy tells us, “The post-Cold War era is definitely over, and competition is underway between the major powers to shape what comes next.” The war is a primary front in the global competition for power and privilege. Even as Russia finds itself increasingly on the defensive, the current moment bears a deeply disturbing resemblance to the period before First World War that ushered in the “American Century” and the Soviet revolution: competition between rising and declining imperialist powers, arms races with new technologies, complicated alliance structures, economic competition and cooperation, wild card actors, and territorial disputes.

Putin’s invasion of Ukraine was designed 1) to counter expanding U.S./NATO influence on its borders which increased Moscow’s strategic vulnerability, 2) to reinforce Russia’s historic imperial ambitions, and 3) to reinforce the standing of Moscow’s ruling elite. All has not gone well for Putin. In addition to his setbacks in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Kherson, he has found that his partnership with Beijing is not “unlimited.” Beijing has its own priorities: reinforcing the Communist Party’s domestic and national security. Xi and company seek to ensure that Washington and NATO will need to continue concentrating military and economic resources in Europe in order to reduce the intensity of their containment challenge to China’s rise. And, with its nearly unlimited military and economic support for the great power proxy war in Ukraine, the Biden Administration seeks to reinforce and expand the four generation old Bretton Woods/NATO systems against Russia’s immediate threat to the so-called “rules based” order. Unlike Trump, Biden and company understand that the U.S. cannot do this unilaterally. Hence the priority given to integrating and consolidating their allies’ military, economic and technological power with that of the U.S. to contain China.

The Biden Administration’s new [National Security Strategy](#) is filled with patriotic pablum and contradictions. It reflects the U.S. elite’s commitments to contain and “out compete” China while “constraining Russia.” Consistent with U.S. “Manifest Destiny” traditions, the Strategy updates and revises Obama and Trump priorities: Obama’s “pivot” to Asia and the Pacific, Trump’s protectionist trade policies, and the insistence on maintaining the nation’s “unmatched” military – including nuclear, AI, and space

weaponry. President Biden has crowed that “the U.S. is back.” His National Security Strategy is designed to enforce that boast.

The Biden Strategy warns that China and Russia are increasingly aligned with each other” but acknowledges that the challenges they pose are “distinct.” Significantly, the China threat in the “decisive decade” is detailed first. China is seen as “the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly the economic, diplomatic, military and technological power to do it.” With its increased military spending, China’s military is described as “increasingly capable in the Indo-Pacific and growing in strength and reach globally”. The Strategy goes on to warn that Beijing uses its “technological capacity” and diplomatic influence to advance its interest at the expense of others. And technological primacy is understood to be determinative for military and economic power.

The Strategy calls for what is essentially a two-part containment strategy: massive investments to revitalize the U.S. economy and technological innovation to meet the Chinese challenge and deepening military, economic, and technological alignment with U.S. allies and partners. Biden made advances in fulfilling the Strategy’s first commitments with a \$560 billion boost for the U.S. economy, reinforced by a \$ 52 billion subsidy for the U.S. semiconductor and high-tech industry. And, to reinforce what have been four generations of U.S. Asia-Pacific hegemony, Biden and company consolidated the QUAD military alliance with Japan, Australia, and India. The nuclear AUKUS (Australian, UK, and US) alliance is being deepened, while South Korea and Japan are encouraged to paper over profound historic enmities to build a tripartite alliance. The new Marcos dictatorship has reembraced the U.S. military alliance. And NATO’s new strategic concept names Chinese containment as an Alliance priority. These nations’ militaries and technological resources are being further integrated, while the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity has been launched to serve as the economic glue

Taiwan is the hinge and most dangerous potential flash point of this geopolitical stew. For China, Taiwan, a province first severed from the mainland by Japan in 1895, is seen as strategically critical and as the final prize in overcoming the Middle Kingdom’s 150 years of humiliation. For the U.S. and now Japan, Taiwan is essential for bottling up China’s Navy, and it is a democratic society that cannot be sacrificed to Chinese authoritarianism. Beginning in the Trump era and accelerated by Biden, is the commitment to bring Taiwan fully into the U.S. sphere in violation of the One China Policy that has served as the foundation since 1979 for Northeast Asian stability, and to which the U.S. still gives lip service. With almost daily Chinese and U.S. military provocations an accident, incident, or miscalculation could escalate to military – even nuclear – conflict.

Similarly, Japanese, and Chinese competition for the uninhabited Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea, and competition for control over the resources and sea lanes of the South China Sea (over which 40% of World trade including Middle East and Indonesian oil essential for East Asia’s economies transits) could trigger a catastrophic war. And not to be forgotten is the nuclear confrontation between North and South Korea. The Yoon Government in Seoul seeks the return of U.S. nuclear forces to the peninsula, and Japan is increasingly committed to acquiring non-nuclear first-strike

capabilities to incapacitate Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal. Recently renewed and expanded U.S.-South Korea wargames designed to defeat and oust the Kim Dynasty have fueled frequent North Korea's missile tests, with the tensions transformed into a mutually reinforcing and spiraling military escalation dynamic.

The U.S., NATO, Russia and the Ukraine War

The Biden Strategy warns that "Russia now poses an immediate and persistent threat to international peace and stability." Certainly, Vladimir Putin bears principal responsibility for the Ukraine War. Yet, as Anatol Lieven has written, there is sufficient moral ambiguity to go around. Few remember the 1990s European Common Security commitments: The Paris Charter, the NATO-Russia Founding Act, and the 1999 OSCE memorandum. They all enshrined the commitment that no nation would seek to augment its security at the expense of another.

There were several precipitating causes for the Russian invasion, including Putin's commitment to restore Russia's century's old empire and to restructure domestic support for his regime. But even as Germany and France blocked Ukraine's entry into NATO, Moscow's elite was anxious about strategic vulnerabilities resulting from NATO's advance to Russia's borders and by the deepening integration of Ukrainians' military into NATO's systems. Recall Napoleon's the Kaiser's and Hitler's devastating invasions of Russia. Remember too the warning sounded by George Kennan, author of the U.S. Cold War containment doctrine, that President Clinton's initial expansion of NATO was a "tragic mistake" that would result in an "adverse" Russian reaction. More recently, Fiona Hill warned George W. Bush against pressing Ukrainian and Georgian NATO membership, saying that it could provoke Moscow.

This is the "order" that Biden's Strategy states that Russia seeks to 'overturn..' Worth noting is that two months before Russia's invasion, it proposed a draft treaty. It would have banned Ukraine from ever joining NATO, but more, it would have banned deployment of NATO military forces and weapons in eleven existing NATO nations – including the Baltics, Romania, and the Czech Republic. The Kremlin certainly understood that it was a provocative non-starter, but one signaling its security and imperial ambitions.

The Biden Strategy wants it both ways, weakening Russia while recreating strategic stability. It states the U.S. commitment to ensuring the Ukraine War ends with Russia's "strategic failure." And Biden has not been shy about saying that he seeks to weaken Russia and hope that Putin will be toppled. The Strategy stresses the commitment to a united NATO front, to "constraining Russia's strategic economic sectors, and to countering Russia in multilateral institutions. Yet the strategy also claims that the U.S. "retains an interest in preserving the strategic stability" that the war has shattered, to pursuing arms control, and to "rebuilding European security arrangements." Given the war, these seem to be tasks for future Russian and U.S. governments!

Toward a Common Security Future

When the resources and energies of the world's richest and most powerful nations, and those of their allies, should be focused on taking humanity's foot off the accelerator on

what U.N. Secretary General Guterres describes as ““a climate of climate hell”, and preparations and tensions for nuclear apocalypse build , the great powers are sleepwalking toward catastrophe. But, as another U.N. General Secretary, Ban-Ki Moon once advised, governments will not alone deliver the world essential for human survival. Pressure below from movements and civil society is essential.

Noam Chomsky has reminded us that we know the solutions to the greatest threats we face. Today that means building popular pressure for a ceasefire and negotiations leading to a sovereign, secure and neutral Ukraine to prevent the Ukraine war from expanding and escalating. It means honoring former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s urgent appeal to establish guard rails to contain dangers of an avoidable and catastrophic U.S.-Chinese War. It means winning commitments for renewed OSCE (Euro-Atlantic) negotiations for the creation of a 21st century Common Security architecture for Europe. Midst our efforts to win more ratifications for the Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, it means pressing for a U.S. no-first use nuclear doctrine to match China’s, multi-lateral negotiations for a Northeast Asian nuclear weapons free zone, and mutual reduction of provocative military operations related to Taiwan and in the East and South China Seas.

Yoko Ono told us that “The War Is Over (If you want it). Joe Hill’s dying words were “Organize Organize.” And we have a roadmap in the Common Security 2022 Report. Against the odds, it’s up to us.

Joseph Gerson is President of the Campaign for Peace, Disarmament and Common Security, Co-founder of the Committee for a SANE U.S. China Policy, Vice President of the International Peace Bureau and member of the board of Massachusetts Peace Action. His books include [Empire and the Bomb](#), and [With Hiroshima Eyes](#).