

Preface

The Russia–Ukraine War of 2022 shocked many from the complacency that suggested conventional war was a thing of the past. Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine has reminded many countries of the global threats that remain and has caused several to begin to rebuild their national defenses. It’s a message the U.S. should heed as well.

U.S. foreign policy has tended to oscillate between an overreliance on internationalism to remake the world to America’s liking and an urge to isolate ourselves behind our oceans. Neither policy is appropriate for American interests. The American people want—and deserve—a new approach to global leadership: policies that draw lessons from our realist and idealist traditions but apply those lessons narrowly to American interests rather than elite fantasies.

The world is more dangerous today than it has ever been. A strong military and effective strategies to project military strength to friend and foe alike are not luxuries, but necessities.

Times change; human nature does not.

In global affairs, as on street corners, ideals like justice, freedom, and human dignity, however true, are ultimately only as strong as their enforcers. If America is going to remain free, safe, and prosperous, it requires the military power necessary to ensure that its adversaries would never dare to challenge it on the battlefield. The leaders of Russia and China understand this.

In Washington, American “strength” is too often, and lazily, solely measured by military *spending*—as if courage, lethality, technology, and ingenuity were budget line items themselves rather than the byproducts of intelligent budgeting and inspiring leadership.

If the U.S. military is going to regain its preeminence, the Pentagon must act to be both more focused and more efficient. Procurement disasters such as the Littoral Combat Ship, the *Zumwalt*-class

destroyer, and the KC-46 tanker must never happen again. Wasteful spending on unnecessary programs to push the military to go “green” (which will cost \$3 billion in 2023) must be curtailed. Less effort should be placed on critical race theory and diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in favor of increasing readiness.

A strong U.S. military is all the more important because America’s existential threat—the People’s Republic of China—is expanding its strength and global influence with the cunning of serpents. The Chinese Communist Party has spent the past three decades methodically leveraging Western elites’ decadence and compromising American institutions to its own strategic advantage.

China has invested in an arsenal of missiles designed to target U.S. warships, has upgraded its fleet of fighter jets, and is fielding advanced equipment that is rivaling the U.S. military’s in quality. U.S. intelligence experts gauge that China has surpassed the U.S. in hypersonic missiles, space systems, and naval shipbuilding. It has initiated a massive increase in its nuclear capabilities. We should remember Vladimir Putin and Ukraine when thinking of China and Taiwan. America’s adversaries have shown a willingness to do more than simply invest in capabilities; they have also shown a willingness to use them.

Even if China had no hard military power, its rancid ideological ambitions, demographic urgency, and institutionalized technological aggression would make it our most dangerous adversary. That the Chinese navy is adding the equivalent of *the entire British navy* every year in new warships, is developing missiles designed to target U.S. warships, is upgrading its fleet of fighter jets, and now fields an army 50 percent larger than our own adds an exclamation point to the fact.

This *Index of U.S. Military Strength*, composed by experts who have studied these areas for decades,

provides an unvarnished assessment of the U.S. military. In many cases, the reports are troubling. The U.S. Army is the smallest it has been since 1940. The Air Force is the smallest and oldest it has been since its inception. The Navy is nowhere near its goal of 350 ships and is retiring more ships than it is building.

We need to do not simply *more*, but *better* to check Beijing's ambitions. A strong and modern military is not enough. Congress must finally close the soft-power gap, reclaim information and technological supremacy—and end the high-tech piracy on which China has built its economic and military power. We should deploy economic policy in the

effort too with tariffs, sanctions, economic and institutional disengagement from Chinese agents—and closer ties to Pacific allies.

We are in a new era, against a new enemy, wielding and deflecting new weapons. But the *fight* remains the same: to protect the American people, our interests, and our unique constitutional freedoms from oppressive tyrannies abroad and elite complacency and entitlement here at home. In this fight, as ever, success is not a battle to win, but a choice to make.

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