

Assessing the Global Operating Environment

Military operations do not exist in a vacuum. They require capable combat and sustainment forces, a dedicated source of human capital, but also an environment in which they can operate. That physical environment includes not only free and open air and maritime lanes, but landmasses under the sovereign control of national actors. Those actors can provide overflight rights, basing rights, access through sea lanes or ground lines of communication, or important sustainment and logistics hubs. Allies enable the employment of force by providing many of the above requirements—just as adversaries can contest the ability of the United States and its allies to employ force.

The global operating environment in many ways underpins the ability of the United States to deter and, if necessary, defeat adversary aggression. Long-term basing rights with allies and interoperability of hardware, to include platforms and munitions, enable both the United States and its allies to achieve decisive effect on the battlefield. The long-term political stability of the allies, coupled with overlapping shared national interests, ensures that these relationships endure across administrations and host nation political changes. Many of these relationships have endured for decades and in many cases more than half a century.

At the same time, the global operating environment is under increased pressure as the free and open world order that has benefited the United States for more than eight decades is under increased strain. But not all is doom and gloom. Narco-terrorists in Latin America seek to export poison to the American homeland and destabilize and weaken the United States through human migration—but the United States finally is taking decisive action to counteract such threats. China's aggression and coercion against its neighbors in Taiwan, the Philippines, Japan, and elsewhere have caused

renewed interest among America's Pacific allies and partners in expanding their militaries. Russia's ill-fated invasion of Ukraine has caused immense damage to the country and people of Ukraine even as it has finally spurred action on the part of our allies in Europe to rearm and take seriously the threat posed by Moscow. Iran's attempts to orchestrate the destruction of Israel have had dire consequences for the Mullahs in Tehran. And North Korea's continued nuclear buildup and coercive threats against its neighbors and the United States have caused the United States, Japan, and South Korea to work in closer partnership.

Within the first year of the second Trump Administration, we are already seeing things change. The Administration has renewed efforts in the Western Hemisphere to mitigate illegal immigration as well as the flow of illicit narcotics. It also has focused on addressing the destabilizing efforts of the government in Venezuela through targeted anti-drug smuggling activities as well as by putting pressure on Venezuela's government, most notably by removing President Nicolás Maduro. It also has invested greater resources in targeting drug cartels in the region, particularly in Mexico, and has focused on reducing the destabilizing effects of the People's Republic of China's activities in the region. These efforts are consistent with the National Defense Strategy's emphasis on activities in the Western Hemisphere.

Additionally, the Trump Administration's actions aimed at destroying the Iranian regime's nuclear weapons infrastructure and capabilities have eliminated a persistent threat to the Middle East and, along with the military campaign against Hamas and Hezbollah following the attacks in Israel on October 7, 2023, have significantly improved security conditions in the region. Additional diplomatic efforts to recognize Israel's existence in the

region pursuant to the Abraham Accords also have reduced military tensions.

The global expansion of the People's Republic of China and its destabilizing and malign influence is evident in the global operating environment within which the U.S. operates. Beijing's aggressive pursuit of military basing, dual-use facilities, predatory economic practices, and key control of or influence on infrastructure such as the Panama Canal has created complications for U.S. forces and those of its allies and partners. There is a growing recognition of these trends, and many countries are beginning

to develop countermeasures and commensurate military capabilities to deter aggressive PRC military actions.

Operating conditions evolve from one year to the next and from one security setting to the next in ways that affect the ease or difficulty of conducting U.S. military operations. The following section informs our ability to assess whether or not the U.S. military can successfully deter or, if necessary, defeat adversary aggression in the prioritized theaters of operation: the Western Hemisphere, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.