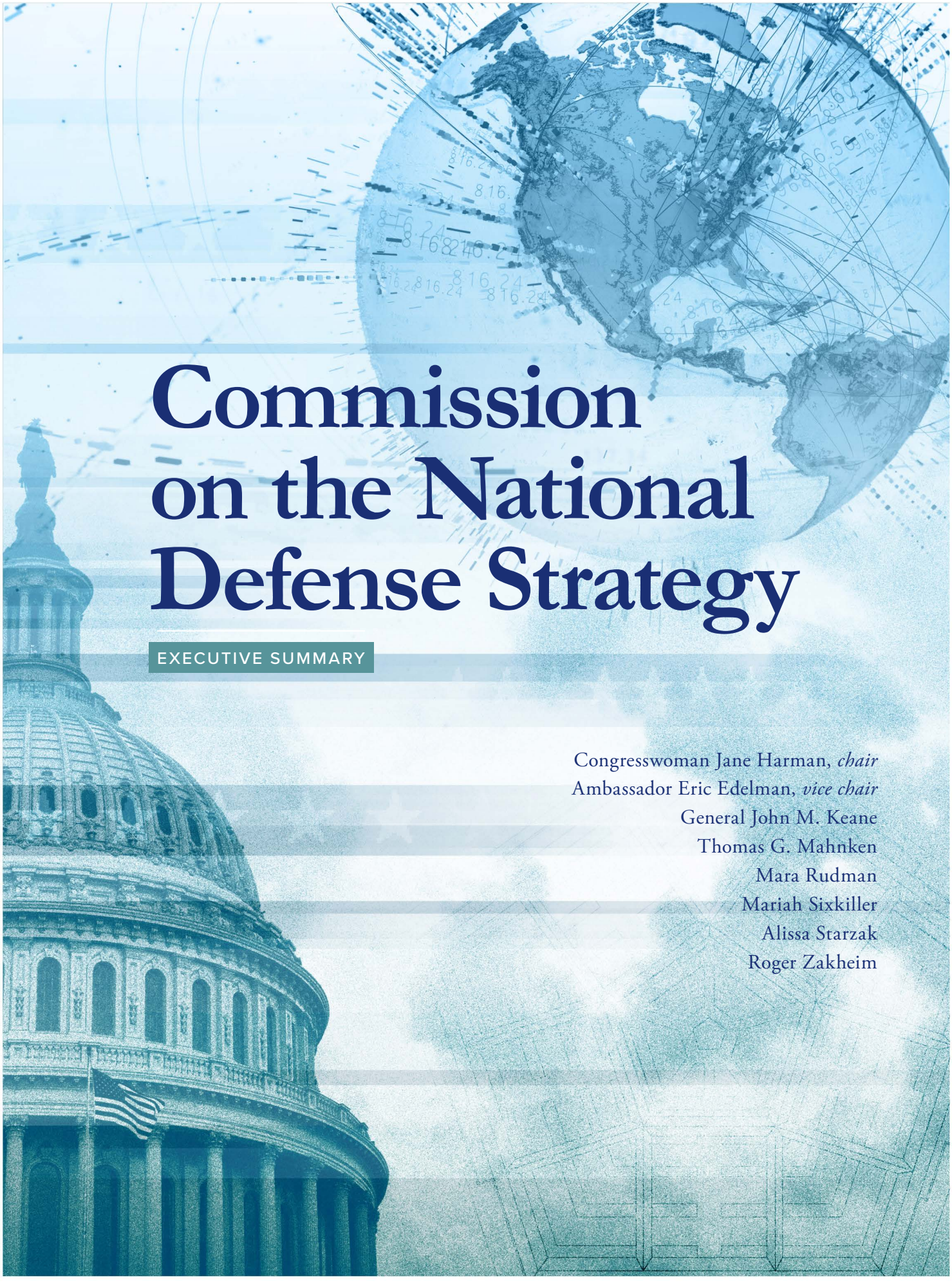

Commission on the National Defense Strategy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Congresswoman Jane Harman, *chair*
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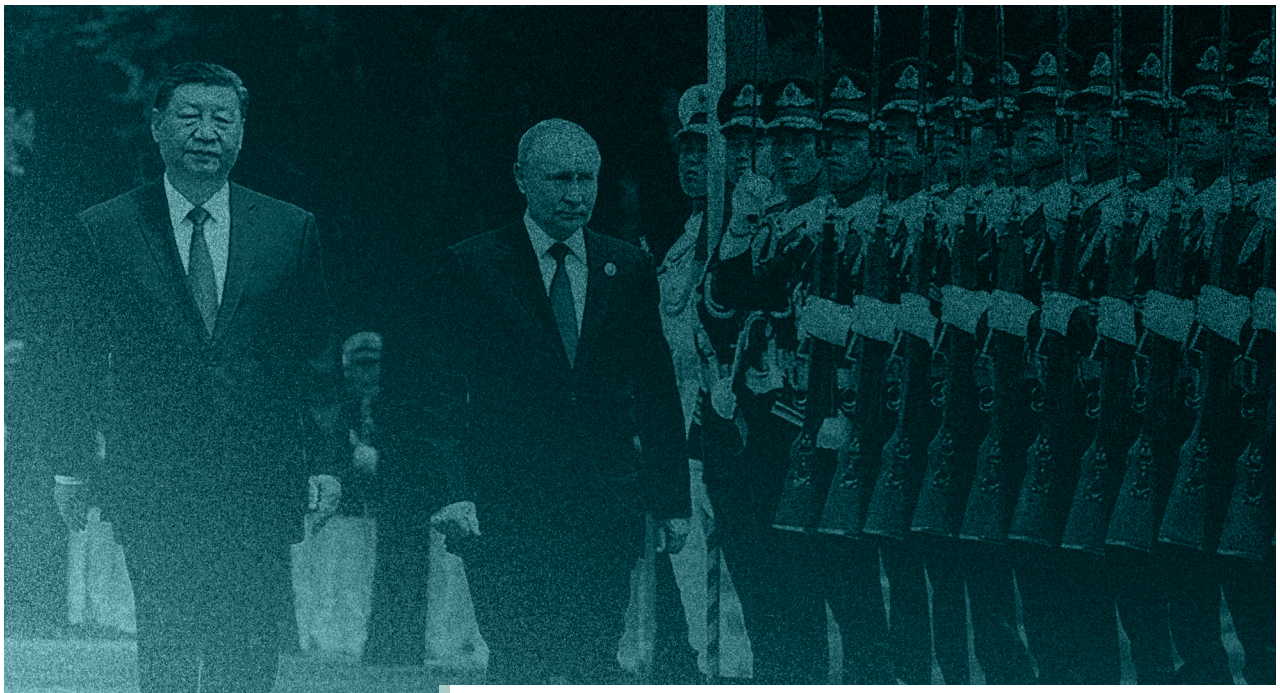


The threats the United States faces are the most serious and most challenging the nation has encountered since 1945 and include the potential for near-term major war. The United States last fought a global conflict during World War II, which ended nearly 80 years ago. The nation was last prepared for such a fight during the Cold War, which ended 35 years ago. It is not prepared today.

China and Russia are major powers that seek to undermine U.S. influence. The 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) recognizes these nations as the top threats to the United States and declares China to be the "pacing challenge," based on the strength of its military and economy and its intent to exert dominance regionally and globally.[1]

From right: Army Maj. Shaun Adams, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Cole Brown, and Capt. Daniel Reape, all assigned to the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, use a tactical mission data platform to communicate in a Stryker armored vehicle en route to Skopje, North Macedonia, during the Brave Partner exercise, December 1, 2023.

The Commission finds that, in many ways, China is *outpacing* the United States and has largely negated the U.S. military advantage in the Western Pacific through two decades of focused military investment. Without significant change by the United States, the balance of power will continue to shift in China's favor. China's overall annual spending on defense is estimated at as much as $711 billion,[2] and the Chinese government in March 2024 announced an increase in annual defense spending of 7.2 percent.[3]

Russia will devote 29 percent of its federal budget this year on national defense as it continues to reconstitute its military and economy after its failed initial invasion of Ukraine in 2022.[4] Russia possesses considerable strategic, space, and cyber capabilities and under Vladimir Putin seeks a return to its global leadership role of the Cold War.[5]

China and Russia's "no-limits" partnership, formed in February 2022 just days before Russia's invasion of Ukraine,[6] has only deepened and broadened to include a military and economic partnership with Iran and North Korea, each of which presents its own significant threat to U.S. interests. This new alignment of nations opposed to U.S. interests creates a real risk, if not likelihood, that conflict anywhere could become a multitheater or global war.[7]

China (and, to a lesser extent, Russia) is fusing military, diplomatic, and industrial strength to expand power worldwide and coerce its neighbors. The United States needs a similarly integrated approach to match, deter, and overcome theirs, which we describe as *all elements of national power*. The NDS and the 2022 National Security Strategy promote the concept of "integrated deterrence," but neither one presents a plan for implementing this approach, and there are few indications that the U.S. government is consistently integrating tools of national security power.

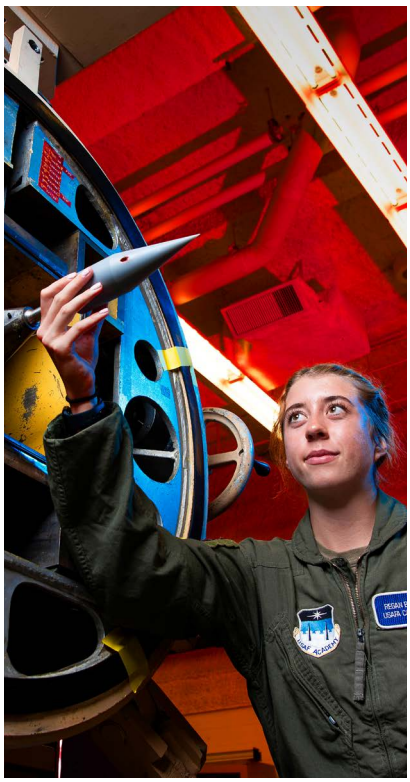
The U.S. military is the largest, but not the only, component of U.S. deterrence and power. An effective approach to an all elements of national power strategy

also relies on a coordinated effort to bring together diplomacy, economic investment, cybersecurity, trade, education, industrial capacity, technical innovation, civic engagement, and international cooperation.

Recognizing the indispensable role that allies play in promoting international security, the United States has successfully bolstered bilateral and multilateral alliances in the Pacific, strengthened the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and created new arrangements, such as AUKUS. The United States cannot compete with China, Russia, and their partners alone—and certainly cannot win a war that way. Given the growing alignment of authoritarian states, the United States must continue to invest in strengthening its allies and integrating its military (and economic, diplomatic, and industrial) efforts with theirs. Alliances are not a panacea, but the U.S. force structure should account for the forces and commitments from U.S. allies.

The Commission finds that the U.S. military lacks both the capabilities and the capacity required to be confident it can deter and prevail in combat. It needs to do a better job of incorporating new technology at scale.

The Commission finds that DoD's business practices, byzantine research and development (R&D) and procurement systems, reliance on decades-old military hardware, and culture of risk avoidance reflect an era of uncontested military dominance.[8] Such methods are not suited to today's strategic environment. There are recent examples that demonstrate that DoD can move quickly, break with tradition, and engage industry, including the rapid stand-up of the Space Force, the Defense Innovation Unit, the Office of Strategic Capital, and the Replicator Initiative, but these examples remain the exception rather than the rule. The larger elements of DoD must follow suit. DoD leaders and Congress must replace an ossified, risk-averse organization with one that is able to build and field the force the United States needs.



U.S. Air Force Academy Cadet 1st Class Regan Hansen inspects a control jet interaction model nose cone in the Department of Aeronautics Trisonic Wind Tunnel on August 29, 2023.

The Commission finds that the U.S. military lacks both the capabilities and the capacity required to be confident it can deter and prevail in combat. It needs to do a better job of incorporating new technology at scale; field more and higher-capability platforms, software, and munitions; and deploy innovative operational concepts to employ them together better. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated the need to prepare for new forms of conflict and to integrate technology and new capabilities rapidly with older systems. Such technologies include swarms of attritable systems, artificial intelligence–enabled capabilities, hypersonics and electronic warfare, fully integrated cyber and space capabilities, and vigorous competition in the information domain. Programs that are not needed for future combat should be divested to invest in others.

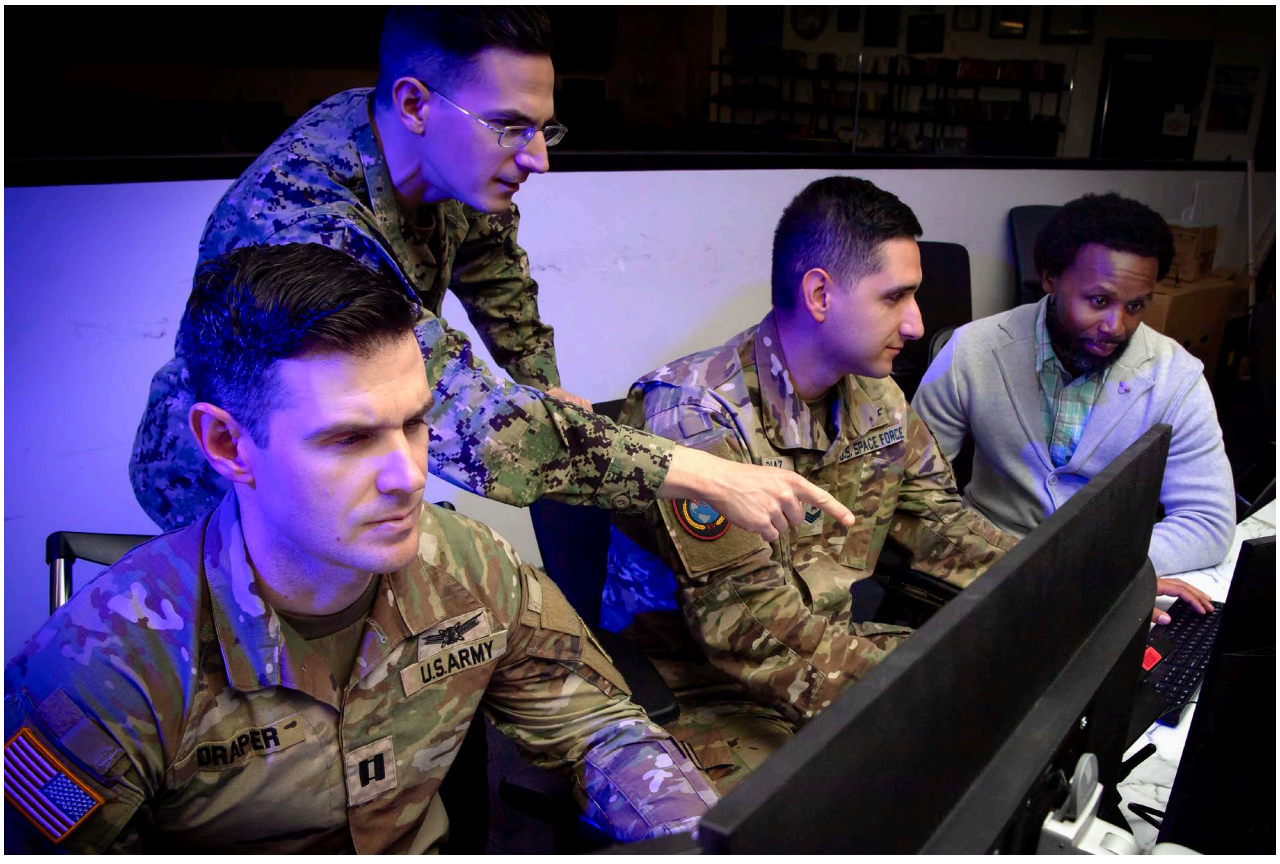
The Commission finds that the U.S. defense industrial base (DIB) is unable to meet the equipment, technology, and munitions needs of the United States and its allies and partners. A protracted conflict, especially in multiple theaters, would require much greater capacity to produce, maintain, and replenish weapons and munitions. Addressing the shortfall will require increased investment, additional manufacturing and development capacity, joint and coproduction with allies, and additional flexibility in acquisition systems. It requires partnership with an industrial base that includes not just large, traditional defense manufacturers but also new entrants and a wide array of companies involved in sub-tier production, cybersecurity, and enabling services. The United States

should coordinate and partner with its allies in mutually beneficial ways to increase industrial capacity, especially since the U.S. industrial base is unable to produce everything needed.

The Commission also believes that it is critical to develop innovative joint operational concepts to employ new capabilities and technologies. DoD's Joint Warfighting Concept (JWC), now in its third iteration, was intended to position the Joint Force for modern warfare against peer competitors. The JWC deserves credit for attempting to break down service stovepipes, but more work is needed to develop ways to overcome strategic challenges, impose costs and challenges on U.S. adversaries, and increasingly integrate U.S. allies.

Congress, DoD, and other agencies will need to rewrite laws and regulations to remove unnecessary barriers to adopting innovation, budgeting, and procurement. New authorities may be needed to promote jointness, strengthen the DoD workforce, and supplement the national security authorities of other agencies. Integration with allies requires dismantling barriers to information-sharing, coproduction, and exports.

The consequences of an all-out war with a peer or near peer would be devastating. Such a war would not only yield massive personnel and military costs but would also likely feature cyberattacks on U.S. critical infrastructure and a global economic recession from disruptions to supply chains, manufacturing, and trade.[9] Adversaries could seek to deny the United States access to critical minerals and goods needed to run the U.S. economy and build weapon systems. They



From left: U.S. Army Capt. Dahlin Draper, special technical operations deputy chief; U.S. Navy Lt. Cdr. Thomas Kasmer, future operations planner; U.S. Space Force Sgt. Daniel Diaz, space battle manager; and Jonathan Shark, deputy director of training, observe computer screens at Schriever Space Force Base, Colo., May 10, 2024.

could also hold at risk U.S. space assets, which underpin much of our daily lives and are essential for military capabilities. Even short of all-out war, the global economic damage from a Chinese blockade of Taiwan has been estimated to cost $5 trillion, or 5 percent of global gross domestic product (GDP).[10] War with a major power would affect the life of every American in ways we can only begin to imagine. Deterring war by projecting strength and ensuring economic and domestic resilience is far preferable to and less costly than war.

Top: A Falcon 9 rocket carrying satellites launches from Kennedy Space Station, Fla., April 7, 2024.

Bottom: A 1943 poster by J. Howard Miller that is commonly referred to as "Rosie the Riveter."

The U.S. public are largely unaware of the dangers the United States faces or the costs (financial and otherwise) required to adequately prepare. They do not appreciate the strength of China and its partnerships or the ramifications to daily life if a conflict were to erupt. They are not anticipating disruptions to their power, water, or access to all the goods on which they rely. They have not internalized the costs of the United States losing its position as a world superpower. A bipartisan "call to arms" is urgently needed so that the United States can make the major changes and significant investments now rather than wait for the next Pearl Harbor or 9/11. The support and resolve of the American public are indispensable.

The 2022 NDS force construct does not sufficiently account for global competition or the very real threat of simultaneous conflict in more than one theater.[11] We propose a *Multiple Theater Force Construct*. This is distinct from the bipolar Cold War construct and the two-war construct designed afterward for separate wars against less capable rogue states—essentially, one in northeast Asia and one in the Middle East. Neither model meets the dimensions of today's threat or the wide variety of ways in which and places where conflict could erupt, grow, and evolve.

Our proposed force construct is the military backbone of our comprehensive approach. It reflects the likelihood of simultaneous conflicts in multiple theaters because of the partnership of U.S. peer or near-peer adversaries and incorporates the U.S. system of alliances and partnerships.

The United States must engage globally with a presence—military, diplomatic, and economic—to maintain stability and preserve influence worldwide, including across the Global South, where China and Russia are extending their reach.[12]

Specifically, the Commission finds that the Joint Force must leverage technology, expertise, and allies across domains to maintain existing and develop new asymmetric advantages against U.S. adversaries rather than seek-

ing to match them platform-to-platform. We recommend that the Joint Force be sized and structured to simultaneously

1. defend the homeland, maintain strategic deterrence, prevent mass casualty terrorist attacks, maintain global posture, and respond to small-scale, short-duration crises
2. lead the effort, with meaningful allied contribution, to deter China from territorial aggression in the Western Pacific—and fight and win if needed
3. lead NATO planning and force structure to deter and, if necessary, defeat Russian aggression
4. sustain capabilities, along with U.S. partners in the Middle East, to defend against Iranian malign activities.

This force construct, even with more-capable allies, new operational concepts, and better technology, will require a stronger and integrated innovation ecosystem and DIB, as well as a larger Joint and Total Force. Although the DoD workforce and all-volunteer force provide an unmatched U.S. advantage, today's is the smallest force in generations. It is stressed to maintain readiness today and is not sufficient to meet the needs of strategic global competition and multitheater war.

Recent recruitment shortfalls have decreased the size of the Army, Air Force, and Navy.[13] Redoubled recruiting efforts, new incentives for service, and more flexible personnel systems are needed to offset a lack of propensity for and interest in military service among the eligible population. Military retention remains high, demonstrating that personnel in service largely choose to remain in uniform. The nation must also consider the possibility that future conflict could overwhelm the capacity of the active-duty force and should plan now to better prepare the reserve components and, potentially, a broader mobilization.[14] More broadly, we support calls for increased levels of public and civil service to help provide a renewed sense of engagement and patriotism among the American people.

A Night of Arrival staff member motivates new recruits as they line up inside the Golden 13 Recruit Inprocessing Center at Recruit Training Command on April 19, 2023. More than 40,000 recruits train annually at the Navy's only boot camp.

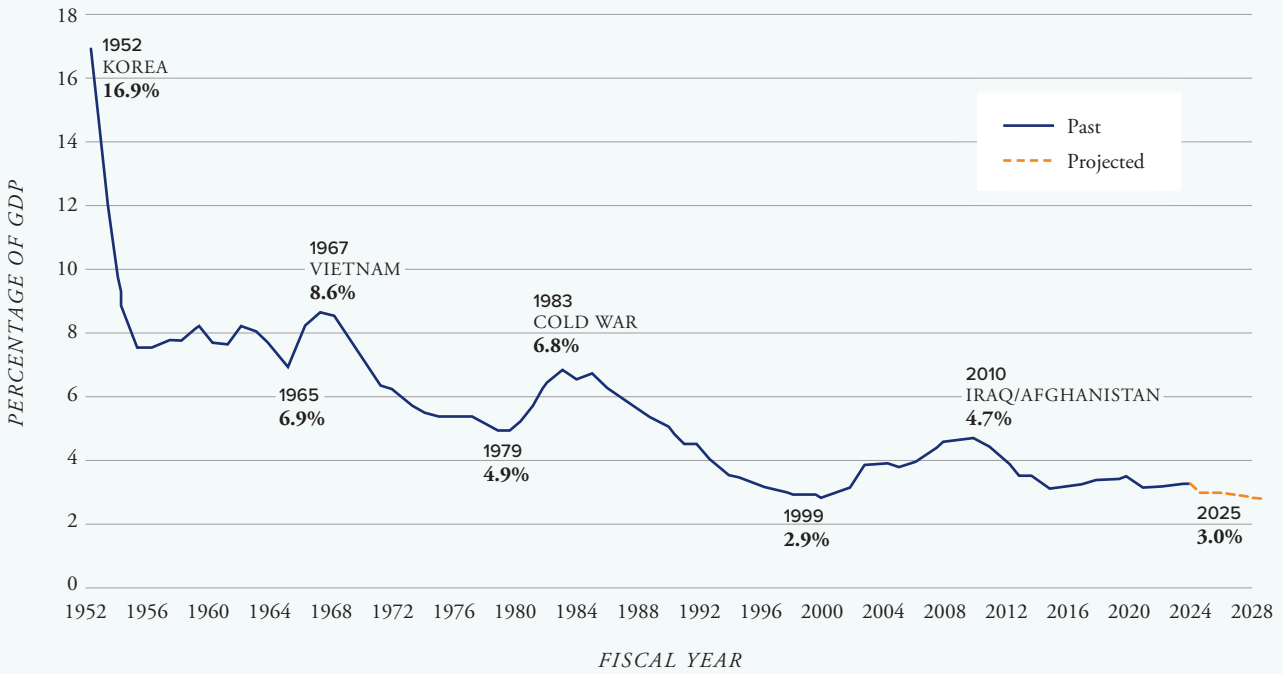
This proposal for strengthened national power is needed as the

United States faces the most challenging and most dangerous international security environment since World War II. It faces peer and near-peer competitors for the first time since the end of the Cold War.

During the Cold War, including the Korean War and Vietnam War, DoD spending ranged from 4.9 percent to 16.9 percent of GDP (Figure S.1). The comparison to that period is apt in terms of the magnitude of the threat, risks of strategic instability and escalation, and need for U.S. global presence. It does not reflect many significant differences between that period and today. Among these are advances in technology that fundamentally change the character of war and the shift from the government to the private sector as drivers of investment, R&D, and procurement and commercial production of hardware and software.[15] When paired with improved operational concepts, these changes in the technological landscape have enormous national security potential that place the United States (and others) on the cusp of a revolution in military affairs. Another difference from the Cold War is how the network of U.S. alliances in NATO and Asia reshapes how the United States prepares for, deters, and wins conflicts.

FIGURE S.1

Defense Department Budget Authority as Percentage of Gross Domestic Product, FY 1952 to FY 2029



SOURCES: Features information from Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2025*, Tables 1-1 and 6-8, pp. 6 and 138–145; U.S. House of Representatives, "Division: Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2024," pp. 94–98; U.S. House of Representatives, "Division: Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2024," pp. 299–313; Keys and Nicastro, "FY2024 National Security Supplemental Funding," p. 4; and Office of Management and Budget, Fiscal Year 2025 Historical Tables, Table 10.1.

NOTE: Includes DoD discretionary, mandatory, and supplemental funding.

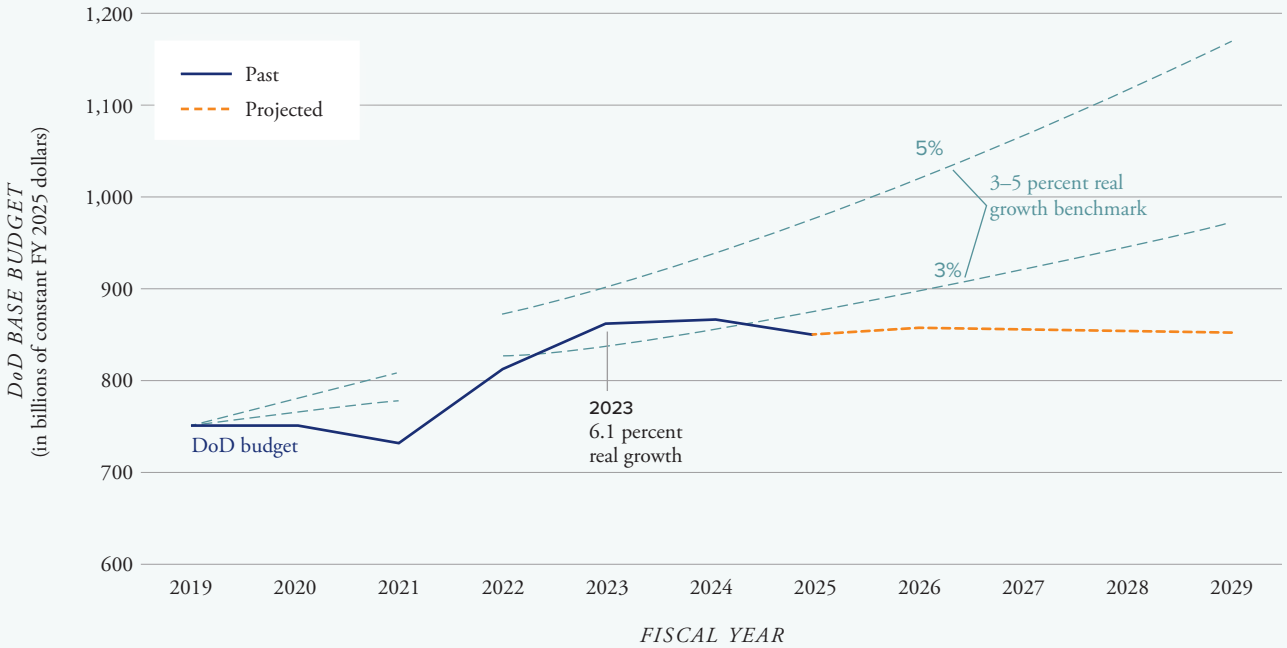
The biggest difference between today and the Cold War is in the homeland. The Cold War demanded a national mobilization for military service, an economy geared more toward production for national security, and a unity of effort across government (including Congress) behind shared security missions that are missing today. Defense spending in the Cold War relied on top marginal income tax rates above 70 percent and corporate tax rates averaging 50 percent.[16] Using the Cold War as a benchmark for spending should be accompanied by acknowledging the other fundamental changes that could supplement America's efforts to deter threats and prepare for the future.

U.S. spending on defense far outweighs other elements of national power and will continue to do so. However, all these accounts (i.e., national security missions at the departments of State, Treasury, Homeland Security, Commerce, Education, and others) must be considered as part of a notional, overall national security budget.

The 2018 NDS Commission recommended increasing the base defense budget at an average rate of 3–5 percent annually above inflation. That has not been consistently achieved, and the world has grown more dangerous since that recommendation was made (Figure S.2).[17]

FIGURE S.2

Defense Department Base Budget Has Not Kept Pace with the Recommendations of the 2018 National Defense Strategy



SOURCES: Features information from Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2025*, Tables 1-1 and 5-6, pp. 6 and 63; Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)/Chief Financial Officer, "Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request: Defense Budget Overview," p. 24; Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)/Chief Financial Officer, "Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Request: Defense Budget Overview," p. 7-1; U.S. House of Representatives, "Division: Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2024," pp. 94–98; and U.S. House of Representatives, "Division: Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2024," pp. 299–313.

NOTE: Discretionary base budget authority in constant FY 2025 dollars. FY 2022 benchmark values adjusted upward by $42.1 billion to reflect merging $14.3 billion for direct war requirements and $27.8 billion for enduring requirements into the FY 2022 base budget.

U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Bridget Brink meets with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, June 2022.

The Commission makes the following resource recommendations for DoD and Congress:

- DoD should immediately review all major systems against likely future needs, emphasizing battlefield utility and prioritizing agility, interoperability, and survivability. The Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff should be more empowered to cancel programs, determine needs for the future, and invest accordingly. DoD should invest more in cyber, space, and software, which have enabled warfighting for decades but are now central to conflict and have global reach.

- Congress should pass a supplemental appropriation immediately to begin a multiyear investment in the national security innovation and industrial base. Funding should support U.S. allies at war; expand industrial capacity, including infrastructure for shipbuilding and the ability to surge munitions production; increase and accelerate military construction to expand and harden facilities in Asia; secure access to critical minerals; and invest in a digital and industrial workforce.

- DoD should immediately begin making structural changes and prioritization adjustments to spend national security funds more effectively and more efficiently. DoD should address its recruitment challenges, rewrite regulations to speed defense procurement (and address cultural impediments and risk aversion), and shift the R&D paradigm to adopt technological innovation from outside the department for warfighting purposes. The U.S. government should review national security authorities for agencies other than DoD and look for ways to enable and facilitate information-sharing, coproduction, and export controls to better work with allies.

U.S. marines inspect a load of cargo secured to a Tactical Resupply Unmanned Aircraft System before flight at a coastal defense site during Archipelagic Coastal Defense Continuum on Kamuning Beach, Palawan, Philippines, May 15, 2024.

- Congress should revoke or override the caps in the 2023 Fiscal Responsibility Act that serve as the basis for the FY 2025 budget request.
  - For FY 2025, real growth in defense and nondefense national security spending is needed and, at a bare minimum, should fall within the range recommended by the 2018 NDS Commission. While the reforms recommended above are being made and investments in capacity from the supplemental appropriation are underway, increased spending should be allocated to emphasize near-term readiness demands to restore and reinforce deterrence.
  - Given the severity of the threats, the FY 2027 and later budgets for all elements of national power will require spending that puts defense and other components of national security on a glide path to support efforts commensurate with the U.S. national effort seen during the Cold War.
  - Larger amounts of defense spending should be accompanied by sufficient resources to build capacity at the departments of State, Commerce, and Treasury; intelligence, trade, and investment agencies; the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Department of Homeland Security and focus these organizations on national security missions. The United States should continue to provide support to its allies, which it relies on to fight with (or for) it.
  - The ballooning U.S. deficit also poses national security risks. Therefore, increased security spending should be accompanied by additional taxes and reforms to entitlement spending.

The lack of preparedness to meet the challenges to U.S. national security is the result of many years of failure to recognize the changing threats and to transform the U.S. national security structure and has been exacerbated by the 2011 Budget Control Act, repeated continuing resolutions, and inflexible government systems. The United States is still failing to act with the urgency required, across administrations and without regard to governing party.

This report proposes a new approach to spur the speed and scale of change. Implementing these recommendations to boost all elements of national power will require sustained presidential leadership and a fundamental change in mindset at the Pentagon, at the National Security Council and across executive branch departments and agencies, in Congress, and among the American public writ large.

Notes

1 U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), *2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States*. The 2022 *National Security Strategy* notes, "The PRC [People's Republic of China] is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it" (White House, *National Security Strategy*, p. 23). The NDS refers to Russia as an "acute" threat. We believe this term inappropriately suggests a limited duration and prefer to label Russia a "chronic threat."

2 Eaglen, "America's Incredible Shrinking Navy." This estimate was reinforced by Adm. Samuel Paparo, Commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command: "According to Paparo, China's military budget is likely three times what Beijing publicly claims, which would put it at about $700 billion annually" (Rogin, "The U.S. Military Plans a 'Hellscape' to Deter China from Attacking Taiwan"). Other estimates of China's defense spending are lower; see Fravel, Gilboy, and Heginbotham, "Estimating China's Defense Spending."

3 Wu and Bodeen, "China Raises Defense Budget by 7.2% as It Pushes for Global Heft and Regional Tensions Continue." The 7.2 percent increase was in relation to China's official figures for defense spending, not the more accurate "all-in" estimates.

4 Cooper, "Another Budget for a Country at War," pp. 8, 19; Dixon, "In Putin's Wartime Russia, Military Corruption Is Suddenly Taboo."

5 Cavoli, "Statement of General Christopher G. Cavoli, United States Army, United States European Command."

6 Kremlin, "Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development."

7 In addition to the military and economic support that Iran, North Korea, and China are providing to Russia's war in Ukraine, the Director of National Intelligence testified in May 2024 that "we see China and Russia, maybe for the first time, exercising together in relation to Taiwan and recognizing that this is a place where China definitely wants Russia to be working with them, and we see no reason why they would not" (Senate Committee on Armed Services, "Hearing to Receive Testimony on Worldwide Threats," p. 39). This partnership also complicates economic and financial sanctions and restrictions on proliferating technology to any of the four nations.

8 See, e.g., Mazarr, *Defending Without Dominance*, p. 37: "The biggest barrier to effectiveness is arguably not defense spending . . . . It is a crushing bureaucratic managerialism that, in so many overlapping ways, drains the lifeblood from U.S. defense endeavors."

9 According to U.S. government agencies, "PRC state-sponsored cyber actors are seeking to pre-position themselves on IT networks for disruptive or destructive cyberattacks against U.S. critical infrastructure in the event of a major crisis or conflict with the United States," and they have "compromised the IT environments of multiple critical infrastructure organizations" (Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, "PRC State-Sponsored Actors Compromise and Maintain Persistent Access to U.S. Critical Infrastructure"). See also DoD, "DOD Support to National Security Memorandum 22."

10 The cost of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan is estimated at $10 trillion, or 10.2 percent of global GDP (Welch et al., "Xi, Biden and the $10 Trillion Cost of War over Taiwan").

11 The NDS "sizes and shapes the Joint force to simultaneously defend the homeland; maintain strategic deterrence; and deter, and if necessary prevail in conflict" while still "deter[ring] opportunistic aggression elsewhere" (DoD, *2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States*, p. 17).

12 See, for example, Richardson, "Statement of General Laura J. Richardson, Commander, United States Southern Command"; and Langley, "Statement of General Michael E. Langley, United States Marine Corps, Commander, United States Africa Command." See also Stavridis, "China and Russia Are Beating the US in Africa."

13 Only the Marine Corps and Space Force met their fiscal year (FY) 2023 active duty recruiting goals, and only the Marine Corps met its reserve component goals (DoD, "Department of Defense Announces Recruiting and Retention Numbers for Fiscal Year 2023").

14 National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, *Inspired to Serve*, pp. 93–123. See also Kuzminski and Sylvester, *Back to the Drafting Board*.

15 In 1960, U.S. defense spending accounted for 36 percent of global R&D, but that figure was down to 3.1 percent by 2019 (Fontaine, "Foreword"). Eleven of the 14 critical technologies identified by DoD as "vital to maintaining the United States' national security" are primarily non–defense specific (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, "USD(R&E) Technology Vision for an Era of Competition," p. 3). See also DoD, *National Defense Science and Technology Strategy 2023*.

16 Ingraham, "The Tax Code Treats All 1 Percenters the Same. It Wasn't Always This Way"; Peter G. Peterson Foundation, "Six Charts That Show How Low Corporate Tax Revenues Are in the United States Right Now."

17 The combination of merging Overseas Contingency Operations funds into the base budget and Congress increasing the FY 2022 and FY 2023 base budgets brought spending above the 3 percent benchmark in total, but budget projections are flat. Funding for allies, munitions, and submarines in the April 2024 supplemental appropriations law is also significant.

Abbreviations

DIB	defense industrial base
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
FY	fiscal year
GDP	gross domestic product
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDS	National Defense Strategy
PRC	People's Republic of China
R&D	research and development

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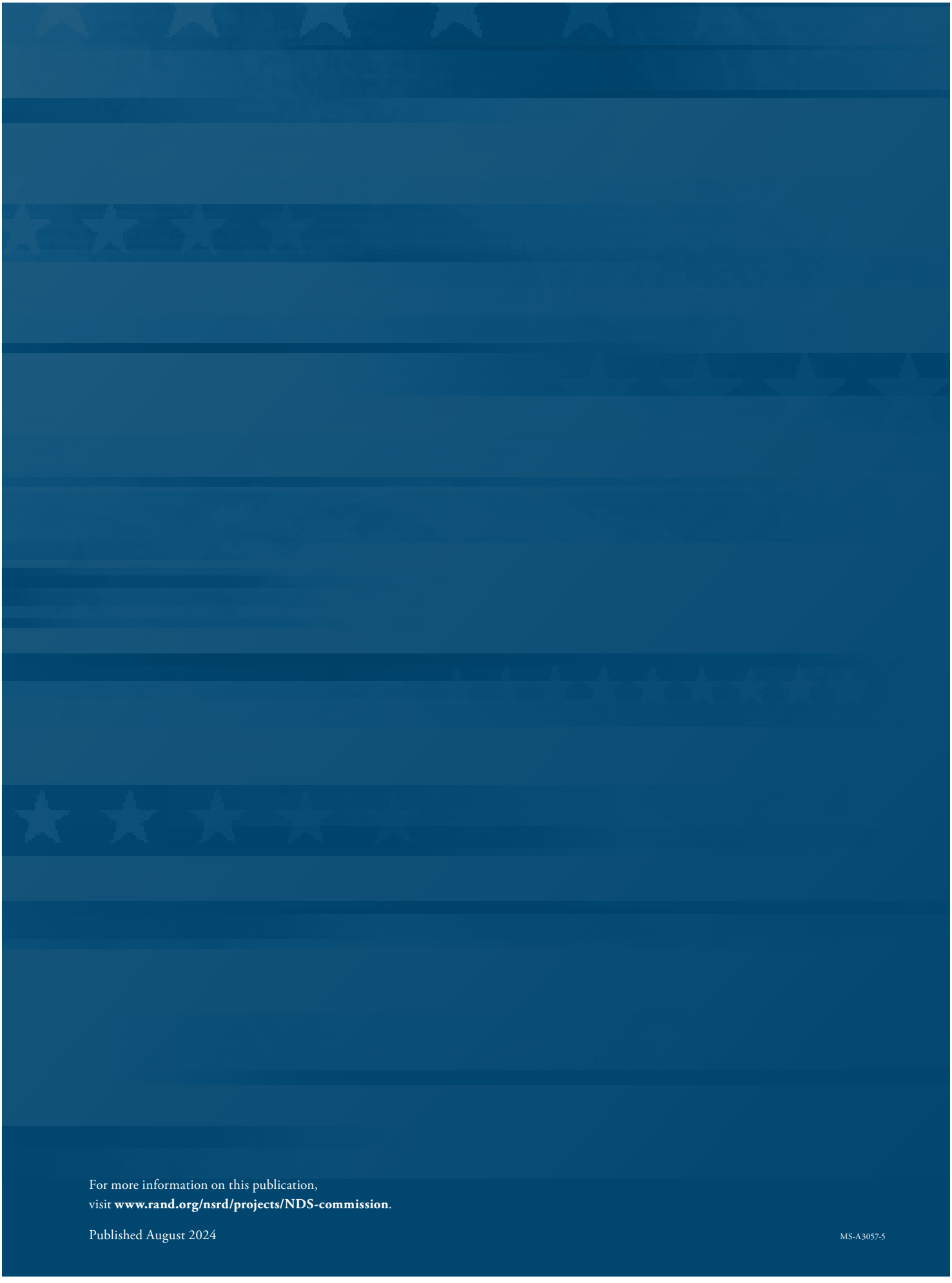

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