



A Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa®) Report

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Power Under Parity

Deeper Analyses
Clarifying Insights
Better Decisions

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What is ViTTa?

NSI's Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa) provides rapid response to critical information needs by pulsing a global network of subject matter experts (SMEs) to generate a wide range of expert insight. For the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Future of Global Competition and Conflict project, ViTTa was used to address 12 key questions provided by the project's Joint Staff sponsors. The ViTTa team received written response submissions from 65 subject matter experts from academia, government, military, and industry. This report consists of:

1. A summary overview of the expert contributor response to the ViTTa question of focus.
2. The full corpus of expert contributor responses received for the ViTTa question of focus.
3. Biographies of expert contributors.

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Question of Focus

[Q10] What are the long-term implications for the US of adopting an objective of strategic parity with China and Russia rather than military dominance?

Subject Matter Expert Contributors

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Summary Overview

This summary overview reflects on the insightful responses of fourteen Future of Global Competition and Conflict Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa) expert contributors. While this summary presents an overview of the key expert contributor insights, the summary alone cannot fully convey the fine detail of the expert contributor responses provided, each of which is worth reading in its entirety. For this report, the expert contributors contemplate strategic parity and the implications of the United States adopting an objective of strategic parity with China and Russia.

Power Under Parity

Contributors note that strategic parity cannot be understood divorced from its international contexts.¹ They reject mathematical definitions of parity. Parity does not occur when "one side has ten aircraft carriers and the other side has ten aircraft carriers."² Quantified approaches lack predictive power because the United States already possesses the "supreme monopoly of military dominance at the tactical and operational level."³ Parity is better conceptualized as dynamic region- and domain-specific measurements of effectiveness.⁴

As a dynamic measure, parity is ultimately about self-imposed limits on where and how the United States would seek to compete with the various combinations of China and Russia emerging out of a change of American strategic culture.⁵ A few contributors explicitly contrast the limits embedded in adopting a strategic doctrine of

¹ See contributions from Bernstein, Luttwak, McFate, and Milevski.

² See contribution from McFate.

³ See contribution from McFate.

⁴ See contributions from Bernstein, Denmark, Fabey, Milevski, and Rinna.

⁵ See contributions from Bernstein, Cheng, Denmark, and Layton.

parity with the alternative policy of "overmatch" with both China and Russia that would underpin a quest for dominance.⁶ Logically, parity would look different when thinking about China and Russia, in so far as the United States can choose between two types of parity: (i) to establish the relative advantage over either China or Russia, or (ii) to extend a limited set of critical advantages or capabilities over each China and Russia (See Figure 1).

Contributors also note that as adversarial competitors, China and Russia are very different from each other and, as a result, strategic parity would manifest differently for each case. Several contributors find little value in imagining parity with Russia, as it is not now, nor likely to be in the near-future, a peer competitor to the United States given its economic limitations.⁷ China, on the other, could evolve into a peer competitor, according to the contributors. Currently, however, Chinese latent power faces critical structural deficiencies (e.g., lagging birth rates and an aging population could result in economic stagnation if not addressed) and the United States possesses naval superiority (albeit in some areas at a diminishing level) over China, even within the First Island chain.⁸ Nonetheless, China's population is currently larger than the United States', and its economy may one day be larger as well.⁹

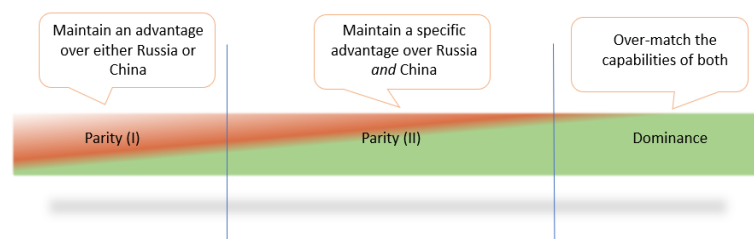


Figure 1: Defining Strategic Parity

Forecasting the Long-Term Implications of Parity

Many of the contributors can only imagine parity in apocalyptic terms (e.g., "strategic abandonment," "destruction of the global economic foundation") or note that the United States may not have a choice in whether parity can be achieved as its adversaries are currently quite relatively disadvantaged.¹⁰ Currently, only in terms of the number of fieldable infantry could the combined capabilities of China and Russia outnumber US forces.¹¹ Paul Bernstein of the National Defense University contrasts parity as discussed in the general context of great power competition with the concept of parity that features prominently in the "domain of nuclear weapons, missile defense, and advanced non-nuclear technologies with the potential to achieve strategic effects." The meaning—and desirability—of parity will vary by context. The specific long-term implications of pursuing parity are therefore best addressed in relation to the critical diplomatic, information, military, economic, financial, intelligence, and law enforcement (DIMEFIL) instruments of national power for achieving national objectives.

⁶ See contributions from Bernstein and McFate.

⁷ See contributions from Fabey, Layton, Matisek, and Véron.

⁸ See contribution from Matisek.

⁹ See contributions from Layton and Milevski.

¹⁰ See contributions from Cheng and Fabey.

¹¹ See contribution from Matisek.

Diplomatic National Power

Most contributors forecast that a shift to parity would entail constraining the United States' ambitions or increasing its uncertainty in the pursuit of foreign policy objectives. Specifically, contributors identify the following challenges for diplomatic elements of national power under parity:

- Fewer resources to counter revisionist Russian behavior, leading to greater accommodation of Russian influence.¹²
- Increased adversarial competition between Russia and China.¹³
- Reduced capabilities for allied reassurance during crises, which could lead to both US and allies' over-reaction to adversarial provocations.¹⁴
- Increased opportunities of Chinese miscalculation about its leverage relative to American capability and resolve concerning "contentious and provocative issues such as Taiwan and maritime sovereignty disputes."¹⁵
- Increased reliance on nuclear deterrence and escalation dominance to compensate for reduced conventional capability.¹⁶

The consensus that strategic parity would lead to a decline of American predominant influence and a possibly greater potential for alliance instability is not surprising given that even trying to imagine a road to parity involves a cultural shift in thinking about American foreign policy. Imagining parity requires identifying what the United States is not "willing to do" (i.e., at the more extreme levels, which allies will go left undefended? Which regions will the United States cede to its strategic rivals? Where does the United States not want to be a critical player?).¹⁷ Restraint, however, need not be characterized as loss or abandonment. Deepening and strengthening alliances are crucial in the pursuit of dominance, and will be even more so under parity, for United States foreign policy objectives such as building defense capacity, sustaining collective defense, and executing military operations.¹⁸ In fact, currently, the United States' network of diplomatic ties, friendships, and multiple sources of soft power are critical national assets offering the United States a considerable edge over both China and Russia, as they experience difficulty cultivating long-term partnerships.¹⁹

Anthony Rinna of Sino-NK highlights a mixed blessing of parity for diplomatic national power: China and Russia would face incentives to compete with each other as well as the United States, as a restrained, limited United States foreign policy would pose much less of a direct threat to their interests. The United States could exploit the activities either undertake against the other. Nevertheless, the drawback of increased three-sided competition is that the United States would have to manage China and Russia separately as distinct dyads, rather than as cooperating adversaries.

¹² See contribution from Bernstein.

¹³ See contribution from Rinna.

¹⁴ See contributions from Sankaran and Swaine.

¹⁵ See contribution from Swaine.

¹⁶ See contribution from Spalding III.

¹⁷ See contribution from Denmark.

¹⁸ See contributions from Bernstein and Milevski.

¹⁹ See contributions from Layton, Matisek, and Milevski.

Informational National Power

Only one contributor, Dr. Jahara Matissek of the US Air Force, illuminates the consequences of strategic parity for the United States government's informational elements of national power. Matissek offers that parity, by de-emphasizing military elements, would be a boon for increased reliance on current asymmetric advantages of United States soft power resources, which are better suited for countering Chinese and Russian influence. Under parity, the United States would be able to reap the benefits of investing in a strategic messaging campaign (i.e., propaganda) that highlights the "soft" power allure of being a beacon of democracy and capitalism but spotlights the ills of US adversaries to create both internal and international suspicion of Chinese and Russian activities. According to this view, purposeful efforts, such as "intelligence collection and media dissemination" would be able to establish the factual narrative that Russia is a "state-sponsor of organized crime" that is destabilizing its neighbors, and highlight that China is a supposedly "bellicose 'Dragon' that is engaging in subversive acts (e.g., stealing intellectual property, weaponizing the supply chain, etc.) and violating international law."

Military National Power

Contributors overwhelmingly emphasize that parity would cause the United States' structural advantages from being a multi-regional security guarantor and bulwark to obsolesce. Specifically, contributors forward that parity could lead to the following military implications:

- Strategic abandonment of one or more of the "critical regions of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East," which might invite adversaries to create crises to force trade-offs in American foreign policy objectives.²⁰
- Reduced conventional deterrent stability in Europe and Asia in the face of Chinese and Russian regionally-focused military capabilities and leverage.²¹
- Reduced United States global territorial and environmental footprint.²²
- Intensification of the nuclear-conventional stability-instability paradox, as countries with second-strike nuclear capabilities could gain the "freedom of action to use conventional and unconventional forces to achieve their strategic objectives" and escalate within lower levels of conflict ladder.²³
- Diversification of extended deterrence and security alliances.²⁴
- Greater Chinese and Russian challenges to US interests and positions, and increased instances of successful Chinese and Russia coercion of third-party states.²⁵

Bernstein notes, as well, that under parity the United States would need to develop greater capacity for "non-military approaches to complex security challenges" even as it maintained sufficient military power to deter aggression in crises. Additionally, Dr. Michael Swaine

"A goal of parity implies greater selectivity in military-technical competition, a more constrained pursuit of advanced military technologies, and a less privileged position for defense spending in relation to other budget priorities."

-- Paul Bernstein,
National Defense University

²⁰ See contribution from Cheng.

²¹ See contributions from Denmark, Fabey, and Rinna.

²² See contribution from Denmark.

²³ See contributions from Layton and Rinna.

²⁴ See contributions from Fabey and Milevski.

²⁵ See contributions from Bernstein, Fabey, and Rinna.

of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace believes that many of the above negative consequences of parity could be reduced or even eliminated by coordinated US/allied efforts to reach more stable understandings with China regarding not only force levels and deployments but also the handling of the most potentially volatile issues in the region, from the Korean Peninsula to Taiwan and maritime claims.

Economic/Financial National Power

Contributors envision the effects of parity on the economic and financial elements of national power to be mixed, as parity would lead to both positive and negative developments. On the positive side, the reduced costs of maintaining and supporting military elements of national power would free up economic resources to pursue other national objectives.²⁶ On the negative side, if the United States were to lose its role as the virtually sole protector of sea lanes, there would be concern about whether China would commit to maintain "free maritime lanes of commerce" accessible to all, absent an understanding with the United States and its allies.²⁷

Intelligence and Law Enforcement National Power

Strategic parity would also limit the United States' ability to harness the intelligence and law enforcement elements of national power. Parity would create openings for interference in the domestic affairs of others.²⁸ Similarly, marshalling organized crime syndicates is one of the most effective capabilities of the Russian government; parity limits the ability of the United States to engage in counter-smuggling operations to limit this area of Russian advantage.²⁹

Conclusion: Parity is a Strategic Culture of Restraint and Non-Militarization

The net effect of parity across the elements of national power are summarized below.

Element of National Power	Effect of Parity	Reasons
Diplomatic	↔	Fewer resources to direct the building of collective defense capacity and shape geopolitics; greater reliance on allies.
Information	↑	Increased resources to shape narrative perceptions of Chinese and Russian activities.
Military	↔	Reduced resources for limitless military-technical competition; diversification of the global security order (at the regional level); de-militarization of foreign policy.
Economic and Financial	↔	Increased resources to pursue homeland industrial policy; potential loss of free maritime lanes of commerce.
Intelligence and Law Enforcement	↓	Increased opportunities for foreign interference in domestic affairs; decreased resources to counter Russian crime syndicates.

²⁶ See contributions from Bernstein, Denmark, and Matisek.

²⁷ See contribution from Fabey.

²⁸ See contribution from Layton.

²⁹ See contribution from Matisek.

Adopting a policy of strategic restraint would not immediately disadvantage the United States, in absolute terms, in comparison to China and Russia. The United States currently enjoys dominance across all dimensions of national power relative to either(both) competitor(s). In the long-run, contributors expect that China, perhaps, may be able to gain relative advantage within the First Island chain of the Asia Pacific, if it can overcome fundamental domestic challenges (e.g., aging population, ethnic cleavages in the outer regions, etc.) and perhaps cultivate an alliance network as wide as the United States'. According to Swaine, this outcome would become more likely in the absence of efforts to create a stable balance marked by mutual restraint regarding both military deployments and the handling of volatile regional issues.

The main challenge for the United States under parity would not be its competitors, however, but its strategic culture of militarizing foreign policy objectives. Non-military elements of national power could flourish under a posture of strategic restraint. Furthermore, the United States' soft power is its strongest non-military asset and could maintain United States preeminence even within an environment of strategic restraint by promoting, as Matisek details, a "Strategic Brain Drain policy" to attract the "world's best scientists, engineers, doctors, and entrepreneurs," especially from China and Russia. Such a "Strategic Brain Drain" might, contra the fear of Dr. Sean McFate of the National Defense University, mean that some Americans' "grandchildren would be speaking Mandarin," but it also might mean that the United States possesses a larger toolkit with which to influence and shape world politics.

Subject Matter Expert Contributions

Paul I. Bernstein

Distinguished Research Fellow (National Defense University)

4 March 2019

The question presumes that the National Defense Strategy articulates unambiguously a vision or goal of comprehensive dominance. I think this can be challenged but will respond to the question based on this premise and then offer an observation.

Adopting parity as a goal *vice* dominance could have a number of implications.

- U.S. geopolitical posture/agenda.* Progress toward a goal of dominance would provide national leadership the opportunity to seek restoration of a unipolar international system characterized by a broad U.S. hegemony. Military dominance could underwrite an aggressive foreign and security policy to secure U.S. interests, explicitly contain Chinese and Russian influence and power, and otherwise minimize geopolitical risk for the United States. Pursuit of dominance is highly likely to generate significant counter-moves and challenges to U.S. power by these states, which are not prepared to accept U.S. dominance, and by lesser powers that are regional antagonists of the U.S. and fearful of U.S. power even today. A goal of parity implies a less ambitious U.S. geopolitical posture and a more restrained foreign and security policy. This would generate less robust balancing strategies, reducing one form of possible confrontation, but would require accommodating a higher degree of Russian revisionist behavior and growing Chinese power and influence. With greater freedom of maneuver, Moscow and Beijing would be more inclined to challenge U.S. positions and interests. The likely result would be a higher degree of risk in geopolitical competition and in the pursuit of influence and preferred security outcomes.
- The role of military power.* A goal of dominance could imply an elevated role for military power in relation to non-military instruments of power – especially if pursuit of military dominance parallels a trend of reduced emphasis on the development of diplomatic capacity. A goal of dominance suggests the development over time of a highly visible, highly ready military instrument that would be the preferred means to shape and if necessary impose favorable geopolitical and security outcomes. A goal of parity implies a lesser capacity to exploit military power for geopolitical advantage and greater caution in resorting to the use of force to defend interests. It would also necessitate a more balanced approach across DIME elements, underscoring the need to develop greater capacity and capability for non-military approaches to complex security challenges. Visible, ready military power would still be essential to enable effective political-diplomatic strategies and deter aggression in crises, but there would be less prospect for the broad “militarization” of U.S. external policy.
- Military competition.* A goal of dominance implies pursuit of comprehensive overmatch across all or most critical categories of military power. It implies commitment to an extended period of aggressive competition to achieve and sustain advantage, including the investment necessary to achieve timely breakthroughs in the most challenging and consequential military-relevant technologies. Dominance implies preferential spending on defense even during periods of fiscal contraction, and within the defense budget on advanced technology investments. A goal of parity implies greater selectivity in military-technical competition, a more constrained pursuit of advanced military technologies, and a less privileged position for defense spending in relation to other budget priorities. The DoD would still be expected to pursue dominance in selected capability areas, but in other areas it would not be able to anticipate overmatch and instead would have to rely on asymmetric approaches. Additionally, a goal of parity could be expected to generate more interest in regulating competition in disruptive technologies of greatest concern and strengthen the appeal of formal or informal regimes that sought to impose some degree of mutual restraint. The ability and intent of competitors to break out of such restraints would be an ongoing source of concern.
- Allies.* The NDS emphasizes alliances and partnerships as a unique form of U.S. competitive advantage that Russia and China cannot match. A strategy to achieve dominance would rest in part on pressing this advantage to the maximum, and thus likely would feature an aggressive effort to encourage and then exploit sustained improvement in allied military power to strengthen collective defense and support coalition military operations as needed. Those allies most anxious about Russian and Chinese power would be more inclined to welcome a strategy of dominance *vice* one of parity, and would view the latter as raising

questions about U.S. resolve to maintain stability and deterrence and make good on security guarantees. Some might fear *de facto* abandonment, possibly precipitating a crisis in alliance relations. Those allies less fearful of great power military threats might see a high degree of risk in a U.S. strategy premised on military dominance and a greater propensity to threaten and use force. They likely would view more favorably a strategy that emphasized stable balances of “Blue” and Red” military power and greater commitment to engagement and risk reduction, even within a competitive framework.

Certainly there is analytic and heuristic value in positing dominance and parity as wholly distinct visions and end states. Useful things can be learned from such a juxtaposition. In reality, though, our future relationships with Russia and China are likely to exist along a continuum characterized by elements of dominance, parity, and even U.S. disadvantage. The objectives of the National Defense Strategy are to defend the homeland, remain the pre-eminent military power in the world, maintain favorable regional balances of power, and advance an international order that favors U.S. interests, values and prosperity. The word “dominant” appears twice in the unclassified summary of the NDS. The NDS repeatedly calls for achieving competitive advantage for likely great power conflicts, but does not seem to call for comprehensive overmatch or primacy in relation to Russia and China. It seems to envision an end state that while certainly beyond parity is something short of dominance – at least in the sense these words are used in the question being answered here. Overall, the strategy seems more about “waking up” and “catching up;” closing the most critical gaps and not allowing others to widen; restoring, maintaining and extending the most important advantages; and sending strategic signals both inward (to catalyze rediscovery of a competitive mindset) and outward (to convey seriousness of purpose and resolve). An emphasis on more determined competition to achieve key operational advantages does not necessarily equate to an objective of dominance.

Indeed, one can argue that the strategy does not reflect a stark choice of dominance over parity, but rather recognition of a dynamic competitive environment in which military leaders will need to balance areas of advantage, parity, and disadvantage, none of which may be fixed for extended periods of time. Still, a number of DoD and national leaders are deploying the language of dominance. They may believe this reflects the true underlying intent of the NDS and the key to robust deterrence. Or this language may represent a form of signaling. Recall that in 2017, then-Secretary of Defense Ash Carter asserted that “a force meant to deter can only succeed in deterrence if it can show that it will dominate in a conflict.” While one can think of cases where deterrence should be achievable without complete dominance of a peer competitor (the Baltics come to mind), one can also see the value of this and similar formulations as an exhortation to the national security community and a signal to both competitors and partners.

This suggests a corollary question that credits this complexity and asks how best to manage a likely continuum of advantage, parity, and deficit.

Consider one example, perhaps wholly idiosyncratic but nonetheless instructive. The term “strategic parity” in the question is clearly intended to be applied broadly, but also points to a particular dimension of great power relations in which concepts such as dominance and parity are prominent – namely, the domain of nuclear weapons, missile defense, and advanced non-nuclear technologies with the potential to achieve strategic effects. Importantly, nothing in the NDS or the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) suggests a goal of achieving superiority in great power central nuclear deterrence relationships. Such a goal would reverse decades of established policy in favor of pursuing an even greater investment in nuclear weapons than is currently planned through the Triad replacement program and new nonstrategic weapons outlined in the NPR. The United States does not seem well-postured fiscally or politically for a more or less unconstrained nuclear competition with Russia and China. Indeed, current plans to modernize U.S. strategic and nonstrategic nuclear forces are not intended to secure a position of nuclear dominance, but to allow the United States to keep pace and avoid the emergence of strategically significant shortfalls in nuclear deterrent forces. In this domain, while there are those arguing for “nuclear overmatch,” strategic parity rather than dominance seems the appropriate goal for the United States. The U.S.-Russia bilateral strategic arms control process, assuming it can be sustained, embodies this policy imperative.

Some would posit an alternative thesis that the United States in fact does seek strategic dominance at the expense of strategic parity and pursues this not through nuclear policy alone but through a combination of nuclear and missile defense policy, as well as through the development of global-range precision strike systems. Russia (and to a lesser extent, China) have been making this argument for years, accusing the United States of seeking to abandon mutual deterrence in favor of “absolute security” based on offensive and defensive technologies that would negate Russia’s secure second strike capability -- technologies in which Russia does not compete well. While this does not reflect U.S. policy, those continuing to make the argument will offer a reading of the 2019 Missile Defense Review (MDR) that attempts to validate it. In this reading, the MDR significantly loosens constraints on U.S. missile defense policy and technology development, and points to Russian and Chinese missile developments as the rationale for a more aggressive approach to

missile defense, to include the possibility of placing interceptors in space.

Regardless of where ground truth or personal opinion stand on this issue, it is a discrete example of the dynamic nature of great power competition, one in which concepts of dominance and parity are deeply strategic and highly consequential.

Dean Cheng

Senior Research Fellow, Asian Studies Center, Davis Institute for National Security and Foreign Policy
(Heritage Foundation)
13 March 2019

American strategic parity with only one of these states will mean the effective strategic abandonment of either Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, or, in all likelihood, failure in all three. Strategic opportunism means that, in the event of a crisis in one region (especially the Middle East), one or both states can take advantage of the situation to make inroads. This need not mean military activity (and this may be VERY unlikely in Asia), but expanded political and diplomatic inroads, especially if US forces are “swung” to the threatened region. Given the existence of THREE strategic regions, each not supporting the other, parity with ONE player is not a wise choice.

Abraham M. Denmark³⁰

Director, Asia Program (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars)
11 March 2019

Much would depend on what is meant by “strategic parity.” In the nuclear realm, the U.S. and Russia have long sought a general level of parity while China was comfortable with maintaining a significantly smaller nuclear capacity. If trilateral nuclear parity were to be achieved, it would constitute a significant challenge for the United States, as it would need to maintain nuclear deterrence against two potential rivals simultaneously without a numerical advantage in either direction.

Yet if the U.S. were to allow for “strategic parity” at the conventional level with the Russian military and China’s People’s Liberation Army, stability in both Europe and Asia would be significantly undermined. Neither Russia nor China have global responsibilities, and parity with either would mean a disadvantage toward both. The United States military, if reduced to the level of parity with the Russian or Chinese militaries, would not be able to credibly deter or respond to crises around the world. In effect, an acceptance of parity would lead to the eventual establishment of spheres of influence for Moscow and Beijing in Eastern Europe and East Asia respectively, with the ability of the U.S. to influence regional geopolitics and defend its regional interests significantly restricted.

In fact, to pursue “parity” or “dominance” is an unwise metric for how to size the U.S. military, as the former would always be changing (as well as the other problems identified above), and the latter would be limitless. Instead, the U.S. should continue to focus on ensuring that it has the capabilities necessary to carry out the missions identified by U.S. political leadership. If the U.S. were to accept anything less than that, the U.S. would need to identify what it was not willing to do—which allies will go left undefended? Which regions will the U.S. cede to its strategic rivals? Where does the U.S. not want to be a critical player?

³⁰ The views expressed in this submission are those of Mr. Denmark alone.

Michael Fabey

Americas Naval Reporter (Jane's Fighting Ships)

US Editor (Jane's Fighting Ships)

6 March 2019

This questions assumes the US possesses – or could possess -- military dominance over Russia and China and has a choice in the matter. In the case of Russia, that certainly appears to be true and demonstrably so. Except for the undersea realm, as noted in a previous answer, Russian military forces really cannot match those of the US and the America should make sure that remains the case as there is little in strategic value in any kind of parity with Russia.

The situation with China is much more complex. In a previous answer, I concluded US forces would best Chinese forces in the end of an overall conflict. But that would also result in the destruction of the global economic foundation as we knew it, for which all would suffer greatly. That kind of consequence should be avoided.

Some argue that to avoid such a scenario, the US should achieve a strategic parity with China, essentially allowing China to maintain security in the Western Pacific, taking over that role from the US. But the problem with that kind of arrangement is that while the US had established and maintained those free maritime lanes of commerce to support American interests, it did so in such a manner that guaranteed security for all, including China. There is nothing in China's past – or little in its more recent history – to suggest China would keep those lanes open in the same manner. Pirate attacks on certain-flagged ships could rise. Hijackings at certain ports could become common. China ALWAYS does what's best for China, and it's impossible to predict how that could payout in a Chinese-controlled Western Pacific.

But neither can the US strive to achieve “dominance” over China. Instead, what America needs to do, is to maintain its rights in international waterways, as it has done and as any nation has the right to do. Indeed, I'd argue the US needs to act even more vigorously to protect those rights with US Navy, Marine Corps and even US Coast Guard assets.

Dr. Peter Layton

Visiting Fellow, Griffith Asia Institute (Griffith University)

22 February 2019

The international system is seemingly transitioning from a time of US uni-polarity to a US, Chinese and Russian multi-polarity. This shift suggests that the earlier US strategic dominance may also shift towards strategic parity. This is of course not the first time such a change has occurred. In the Cold War, the US initially held nuclear force dominance that progressively shifted to strategic parity with the USSR. This historical case highlights that different individuals can understand the term 'strategic parity' in different ways.

In the nuclear arena, strategic dominance appears less significant. Given second-strike forces, any adversary would suffer unacceptable damage regardless of the scale of the nuclear forces acquired. In many respects nukes are astrategic, in that their use can serve no rational strategic purpose given the damage and large-scale depopulation they would cause. From this perspective, nuclear forces are acquired to deter - not fight - wars.³¹ So long as the US maintains a credible, even if minimal, second-strike capability it retains strategic parity in the nuclear domain.

The implication of this strategic parity though is that others with similar second-strike capabilities have similar freedom of action to use conventional and unconventional forces to achieve their strategic objectives. Nuclear weapons give escalation dominance but do not mean that military action at the lower levels on the conflict ladder is not possible.

³¹ Campbell Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan: Total War in the Realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau and Waltz*, Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2003.

In terms of conventional forces, it is unlikely the US can maintain strategic dominance with China and possibly not even strategic parity – at least in an order of battle accountancy sense. China is on track to be the world's largest economy and on current trends will be able to outspend the US in the longer term. Moreover China's 1.4bn people far outnumber America's 330m. In qualitative terms, assuming technological superiority and having more highly trained combat personnel may be problematic over the longer term. Strategic parity, in the sense of being able to fight each other to a standstill, may in the future need to rely on having a better strategy that maximises US advantages and minimizes China's. In this regard, geographic differences may help swing the issue.

In considering Russia, US dominance in the conventional domain would appear assured. If Russia became allied with China though, the conventional force balance would become much more problematic. Geographic differences might than favour the China-Russia alliance making any US conflict with them at the best protracted and very costly in blood and treasure. In the event of major conventional war, the US might need to retreat back to the North American bastion and await better times.

Such a gloomy perspective highlights that the US holds a trump card in the sense that both China and Russia have trouble forming meaningful alliances. They have client states not important partners. A determined effort by the US to bring multiple others to its side offers the possibility of achieving at least strategic parity in conventional forces. However, this would be a US-alliance parity not a US parity; the US would be the first amongst equals not the dominating partner. American strategic culture may find such a shift challenging; for example, bringing India into the fold would not be an easy shift for anyone.

Moving beyond the abstractions of conventional force balances though, strategic parity opens up the likelihood of Russia and China being much less constrained. Russia has already demonstrated peripheral warfare in the Ukraine, and regional interventions and proxy warfare in Syria. China has also moved into gray zone warfare where territory is taken while staying below the level of armed conflict and without the use of military force. China may also have some ability to use its client states of North Korea and Pakistan to put pressure on nearby nations and disturb US regional interests. Strategic parity means such adventurism will probably occur more frequently in the next ten years.

Such a strategic environment is beginning to sound similar to that of the period from the mid-1960s to mid-1980s when the USSR willingly and sometimes unwilling became involved in distant third-world affairs. Strategic parity allowed Soviet adventurism but it proven costly even without US pushback. Future Chinese and Russian foreign involvements may similarly reduce their relative military power compared to the US not increase it.

The 1960-1980s also saw increasing US support for the opponents of the Soviet backed entities with the assistance given to the Afghan insurgents historically significant. There are clear suggestions here of 'bait and bleed' strategies that exploit proxy wars to purposefully reduce Russian and Chinese military power. This would be a dangerous, very confrontational path but the notion highlights that strategic parity cuts both ways. Parity allows the US to be a 'rogue' state as well.

Strategic parity also gives an opening for interference in the domestic affairs of others. The next ten years are likely to see increasing efforts at societal disruption by external powers. The intention may be creating chaos, changing specific states policies extending all the way to regime change. This may be undertaken not just against third parties but also potentially against US, China and Russian societies. The opportunities created by strategic parity and technological developments appear combining to make the homeland a contested environment.

Summing up, strategic parity seems inevitable. Investments in irregular warfare – as broadly conceived – now appear prudent to provide some useful strategic options.³²

³² By coincidence this was the conclusion of a recent foray into alternative futures not based on geostrategic issues as this article discusses. In that paper, the alternative futures were based on two, more generic, drivers: firstly, states having more or less power in the international system and secondly, states being cooperative or competitive towards each other. See Peter Layton, *Tomorrow's Wars Insights From Our Four Alternative Futures*, Canberra: Air Power Development Centre, 2018.

Dr. Edward N. Luttwak

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14 February 2019

Instead of adopting “parity” it would be better to just give in. It is a matter of arithmetic. First, parity with China *or* Russia is obviously insufficient, because they can & do combine against the US in ways large and small whenever they can. Second parity with China *and* Russian combined amounts to an overwhelming superiority against either of the two, with enough left over to paralyze the other as well.

Because the US is engaged globally but lacks the huge force multiplier of an imperial culture (whereby, e.g. the population applauds the use of efficient exemplary punishments in counter-insurgency settings..), it needs to offset that great weakness with military superiority (i.e., a tad over parity with China and Russia combined).

Dr. Jahara Matisek

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8 March 2019

Outlasting China and Russia: An Alternative American Way to Victory in the 21st Century

If we consider long-time horizons, the U.S. is poised to outlast China and Russia, but only through an indirect approach. A winning strategy for the United States (U.S.) in the 21st Century cannot be a direct military confrontation with China or Russia. Instead, the U.S. is strategically and structurally poised to remain a hegemon – but only if ‘wrong’ policy choices are avoided. This requires strategic ‘soft’ power decisions by U.S. leadership, such as continuing to be a beacon of democracy and capitalism. It also means retaining the foundations of an American society that is welcoming to immigrants, while respecting the rule of law with robust property rights. Moreover, American engagement requires for the coordination of the global information environment to be favorable to the U.S. and her allies, while creating suspicion about China and Russia (to also include Iran and North Korea) by showcasing all of their ills.

Countering China and Russia requires purposeful efforts, such as intelligence collection and media dissemination, by the U.S. (and her allies). This would create the correct narrative about Russia being a state-sponsor of organized crime that is trying *Russify* neighboring states, while highlighting that China it not the docile ‘Panda’ that it portends to be, but a bellicose ‘Dragon’ that is engaging in subversive acts (e.g. stealing intellectual property [IP], weaponizing the supply chain, etc.) and violating international law.³³ For instance, while China appeared generous in building the African Union headquarters in Ethiopia, it was eventually revealed that China had ‘bugged’ the building for the purposes of cyber espionage.³⁴

Moreover, as one Swedish military officer put it, who had grown up with Russia always being a threat (Cold War and post-Cold War), noted that “Russia is weak, but the only thing they have mastered is ‘misdirection’.”³⁵ This speaks to the nature of belligerent actions by Russia in pursuing various strategies that ‘attack’ countries throughout Europe, but without ever firing a shot. Russia ‘misdirects’ in Europe by bribing politicians, funding extremist political parties, and sowing domestic dissent through information warfare. In addition, the only effective capability that Russia has is in its ability to marshal organized crime syndicates to act on their behalf to collect intelligence, smuggle, and eliminate rivals and dissenters abroad.

³³ Rob Gifford, “Panda-Huggers and Dragon-Slayers: How to View Modern China Today,” *Social Education* 74, no. 1 (2010): 9-11.

³⁴ “African Union Bugged by China: Cyber Espionage as Evidence of Strategic Shifts,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 7, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/african-union-bugged-china-cyber-espionage-evidence-strategic-shifts>

³⁵ Interview, Swedish Air Force officer, March 8, 2019.

To combat China and Russia, requires America to pursue a 'soft' power strategy – not "hard" power – because of the structural realities facing China and Russia. For example, while China is expected to surpass the U.S. as the largest economy around 2030, this should only be viewed as a fleeting Chinese victory, as lagging Chinese birth rates and an aging population will result in economic stagnation.³⁶ Moreover, China's growing shift towards authoritarian control of citizens (e.g. social credit rating score, etc.), and their recent moves to 'cleanse' and 'reeducate' Uighur's in eastern China, make China all the more vulnerable to civil strife and brain drain.³⁷ In Russia's case, it is literally a dying country in terms of falling life expectancy rates and one of the lowest birth rates and a revisionist leader (Vladimir Putin).³⁸ Any hostile acts by Russia should be viewed through the lens of a country and people that used to be as powerful as America during the Cold War, but now has a shrinking economy that is smaller than Texas. While Russia has attempted to build their own version of Silicon Valley in Skolkovo, this will be a failing venture as the country lacks the necessary laws and protections needed to have conditions favorable to innovation. With Russia moving towards creating its own internet, this will only further reinforce authoritarian tendencies, making the livability of Russia that much lower. What is the U.S. to do in exploiting these Chinese and Russian vulnerabilities? The most reasonable (and cheapest) solution is non-military: Promoting pro-immigration policies, to attract the best and brightest from around the world, but especially in China and Russia.

The U.S. needs a *Strategic Brain Drain* policy to take advantage of the shift from the industrial age towards an economy of information, service, and knowledge. As the 21st century progresses further into the information age, the number of people in a country will matter less, whereas the quality of human capital will matter most in achieving efficiencies and markets of scale. A post-industrial age economy that is dependent upon being digitized, rather than factories and manufacturing, means that this should also be reflected in how the U.S. recruits citizens worldwide – and also with how the U.S. military develops its warfighting capabilities of the U.S. military. As it is highly unlikely that any citizen would want to immigrate to, and live in an authoritarian state, such as China and Russia. The U.S. has a great comparable advantage with the internationally recognized perception of "The American Dream" and the associated upward social mobility that a new immigrant in the U.S. might have by making a good living through hard work and dedication. This is an important narrative for the U.S. to promote in recruiting some of the most educated and talented individuals from authoritarian states, which increases the human capital of the American economy, and can result in technological advancements for the U.S. military. Moreover, such a brain drain approach by the U.S. would make it difficult for many of these authoritarian states to be economically and militarily competitive.

While it may come as a surprise to many threat-inflators in the Beltway, the American military is not weak or losing its competitive edge relative to China and Russia, despite annual reports generated through *The Heritage Foundation's* "Index of U.S. Military Strength."³⁹ The problem lies in how many think tanks and other hawkish alarmists view arbitrary U.S. military standards for training and readiness in absolutist terms instead of as relative values, especially in relation to competitors such as China and Russia. This is an important fact to recognize because even if one were to hypothetically create a scenario of the U.S. military up against the hypothetically combined military forces of China and Russia, the only edge this duo would have is the number of infantry.⁴⁰ Beyond that, the U.S. easily surpasses both countries combined in practically every military capability, which is a function of the U.S. military budget being so much larger relative to this hypothetical example.⁴¹ But most importantly, the greatest edge the U.S. maintains is its network of alliances and friendships with over 100 countries, which means the continuation (and fostering) of positive relations is a viable strategy, as long as American "soft" power remains a benchmark.⁴²

Aspirations by U.S. political and military leaders (and Beltway pontificators) to always be exponentially more powerful than rising near-

³⁶ Yvan Guillemette and David Turner, *The Long View: Scenarios for the World Economy to 2060* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2018).

³⁷ Kate Lyons, "Uighur leaders warn China's actions could be 'precursors to genocide'," *The Guardian*, December 6, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/07/uighur-leaders-warn-chinas-actions-could-be-precursors-to-genocide>

³⁸ Nicholas Eberstadt, "The Dying Bear-Russia's Demographic Disaster," *Foreign Affairs* 90 (2011): 95-108.

³⁹ "2019 Index of U.S. Military Strength," *The Heritage Foundation*, 2019, <https://www.heritage.org/military-strength>

⁴⁰ Chinese military comparison: https://armedforces.eu/compare/country_USA_vs_China. Russian military comparison: https://armedforces.eu/compare/country_USA_vs_Russia

⁴¹ Tom O'Connor, "How Does U.S. Military Compare to Russia, China and North Korea? Rivals Attack Trump National Security Strategy," *Newsweek*, December 19, 2017, <https://www.newsweek.com/how-us-military-compare-russia-china-north-korea-blast-trump-national-security-752778>

⁴² Without allies, the U.S. might lose a war against China and Russia combined. For a humorous video on this hypothetical scenario, refer to *The Infographics Video*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lv-vccX1H-M>

peer states is a cost-prohibitive strategy that will undermine economic growth in the long-term. A more productive “soft” power strategy focused on capturing *brain drain* would be the best policy for dealing with rising authoritarian states with hegemonic ambitions. Hence, American policies that rely on taking the world’s best scientists, engineers, doctors, and entrepreneurs, is a needed strategy to have a comparative advantage in a globalized economy that will increasingly become transformed by the information era.⁴³ Such a suggestion is not without merit, as Jewish refugees escaping Nazi Germany in the 1930s, “revolutionized U.S. science and technology,” and many were vital members of the Manhattan Project, which contributed to the creation of the atomic bomb.⁴⁴ If the U.S. can create a targeted strategy of citizen recruitment in the most authoritarian states, who knows what new weapon systems and technological advancements the U.S. might make to offset competitors like China and Russia.

Dr. Sean McFate⁴⁵

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7 March 2019

What are the long-term implications for the US of adopting an objective of strategic parity with China and Russia, rather than military dominance?

Dr. McFate: I am not sure what “strategic parity” means. I think “strategic parity” is a good idea, and one in which the Cold War model does not serve us well. Strategic parity does not mean, for example, that one side has ten aircraft carriers and the other side has ten aircraft carriers. I would argue that we may already be at war with China and Russia, and part of their strategies involves keeping us from thinking that we are at war—because they are manipulating this notion of war and peace and our own paradigm against us knowing that if they can keep the superpower at peace, we will remain docile. And I think they try to do that. So, I think strategic parity has to be a little bit more aggressive than what we are doing currently. I think what we are doing at the moment is a bit too passive. Now, some of the more aggressive things that I might suggest are just things to think about, and not things that I would necessarily advocate for because while I think they are feasible, they may not be acceptable to the American people. But, at the same time, do we want our grandchildren to be speaking Mandarin?

Some experts have pushed back on the use of the terminology “military dominance” in this question. What are your thoughts on US military dominance vis-à-vis China and Russia? Do you think that the US currently has military dominance?

Dr. McFate: In my opinion, the US has the supreme monopoly of military dominance at the tactical and operational level. But that is not where war is won. War is won at the strategic level. We learned from Vietnam that you can win every battle but lose the war. Our enemies are operating at the strategic level of war. We are focusing on a tactical combat overmatch, but it makes no difference in modern war. So, what I am advocating for is a more strategic-level approach to global competition, rather than focusing entirely on military combat overmatch. We already have military combat overmatch—and we do not need more of that. We are bad at strategic communications—and there are some reasons for that, but it is hard to imagine how the country that invented Hollywood and Madison Avenue cannot do better at strategic communications.

⁴³ Peter A. Hall and David W. Soskice, *Varieties of capitalism: The institutional foundations of comparative advantage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁴⁴ Petra Moser, Alessandra Voena, and Fabian Waldinger, “German Jewish émigrés and US invention,” *American Economic Review* 104, no. 10 (2014): 3222-3255; “Scientist Refugees and the Manhattan Project,” *Atomic Heritage Foundation*, June 20, 2018, <https://www.atomicheritage.org/article/scientist-refugees-and-manhattan-project>

⁴⁵ Dr. McFate’s contribution consists of excerpts from a longer interview session. For access to the full interview session, please contact George Popp (gpopp@nsiteam.com).

Dr. Lukas Milevski

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2 March 2019

Parity is not necessarily simple. *Military* parity is parity in pure military capability, while *strategic* parity is parity in the ability to shape outcomes using that capability. Moreover, both forms of parity have two vital dimensions in common, and strategic parity has a third as well. They share geography and logistics as dimensions. Parity's geographic dimension is never measured globally but only regionally—two states may have parity in one region but not another—which means, by extension, that logistics becomes vital in shifting military capability among regions, especially in sufficient time for it to matter. Strategic parity also has a third, political dimension, the needed combination of interest and resolve to contest an extant or forthcoming undesirable outcome.

This picture is also complicated by two facts. First, military parity will be an ever moving target as Russia and China continue to improve their militaries. Second, given Russian and Chinese emphasis on asymmetric means, it will be difficult to judge whether any particular US military capability will be sufficient to achieve the desired outcomes. Military superiority, let alone parity, is largely meaningless if through a lack of political interest and resolve it cannot be translated into strategic parity. Globally, the US remains militarily dominant, but regionally the picture changes in both military and strategic terms.

Clearly, in eastern Europe and even Europe more broadly, parity already *does not exist*. US (and even NATO) military strength is well below parity with Russia, and the logistical capability to shift forces quickly and effectively from the continental United States to Europe, as well as across Europe itself, has been largely lost since the end of the Cold War. (This question of inequality in military, as well as anticipated strategy, parity with Russia was, of course, also a constant theme during the Cold War itself). Despite the lack of parity, thus far at least, the United States has broadly managed to achieve its desired outcomes in Europe both during and after the Cold War, albeit always with a considerable degree of uncertainty throughout the process. Some combination of factors has kept Russia either deterred or irresolute toward overt military action against the West, but one cannot know what that combination is, whether it has endured in that single specific combination from the Cold War to the present, and whether it will last.

In the Middle East, while the United States may have military parity or even superiority with Russia, there is strategic disparity. Here, unlike Europe (other than Ukraine), Russia has demonstrated its ability to shape outcomes, especially in Syria by ensuring the survival of Bashar Al-Assad, which suits its interests but is inimical to the declared political interests of the West.

In the Asia-Pacific, the United States possesses clear naval superiority over China. Nonetheless, this has not prevented China from apparently being more effective than the US at shaping the regional environment by acting consistently just below the US political threshold, especially in the South China Sea.

Despite regional military and strategic disparities throughout the world, these disparities *are* buttressed by a relatively global US military dominance which still endures despite poor performance in Iraq and Afghanistan—or which United States' great power competitors must prudently assume still endures. Any overall deterioration in US military power is bound to have negative consequences eventually.

An initially weakened US military seems unlikely to result in a greater, more overt Russian or Chinese use of force. Open, clearly aggressive actions may incentivize a United States with a hypothetically declining military to revitalize that military. Moreover, although they require patience, current Russian and Chinese policies of employing non-military methods (as described in question 2) are attaining variable but still substantial degrees of success. As long as they can afford to wait, there seems to be no reason for Russia or China to change course now to rely on military power more than they do currently. The exception would be if they become convinced that hypothetical US decline from dominance is irreversible.

Moreover, the US nuclear arsenal, as a factor separate from the question of US military decline, will continue to provide a capability with sufficient probable deterrence value to discourage increased use of overt force, especially against core or relatively core US interests. Asymmetric, especially non-kinetic, instruments are far more reliable means than military force for China and Russia to penetrate the US, or any other, nuclear umbrella to affect US core interests negatively.

Implications of US military decline for US policy and strategy essentially depend on the resultant level of US ambition in international affairs. Alliances both add to (or make more concrete) already existing US commitments and interests and also contribute to their defense. If US ambitions and commitments do not scale down in proportion with military decline, alliances will become increasingly important for achieving US objectives abroad. Despite possible ups and downs, US alliances are likely to survive, as any exasperation with the United States will probably continue to be more than outweighed by feelings of threat emanating from neighbors such as Russia (in eastern Europe especially) or China (in the Asia-Pacific). However, whether or not US allies will be capable of picking up the slack is a different question altogether.

In this context, Europe is a major concern. It holds the distinction of being the second heart, after the United States, of the West's liberal, relatively global international order, as well as being a major hub for US global logistics. Simultaneously, however, it hardly has sufficient usable military strength to defend itself. In its Brussels Summit Declaration, paragraph 14, NATO committed itself to improving its readiness through the 4x30 policy: 30 major naval combatants, 30 heavy or medium maneuver battalions, and 30 kinetic air squadrons, at 30 days' readiness or less. Although commendable and necessary, to reach this level will take time. For example, Germany is aiming to have four deployable brigades by 2031(!), assuming that its efforts do not get waylaid along the way. One cannot know whether in the unforeseeable future the United States and Europe may not be directly and seriously challenged in Europe before either is ready to respond effectively.

Ultimately, permanently downsizing the US military is likely to result in the geography of the West's preferred international order shrinking as commitments are defaulted due to a lack of ability, interest, or will to fulfill them. Unsupported countries or whole regions will, not necessarily under pressure from military force, be compelled to find alternative arrangements to secure their individual or collective futures. Any alternative order which replaces that of the West, if there is one, or several, at all, will not be as advantageous to the West because the West will not be its author. This is already happening to some extent, but the US remains sufficiently strong that it may have the future opportunity to reclaim influence as its competitors possibly exhaust themselves in extra-regional adventures. This is quite likely in Russia's case but less so in China's as the latter is too economically strong to be diverted to exhaustion. A substantial decline in US military power would preclude the possibility of reclaiming influence from its competitors.

Anthony Rinna

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4 March 2019

If the United States enters strategic parity with China and Russia, Beijing and Moscow will subsequently have greater leverage in challenging the US militarily. Indeed, the US cannot trust that China and Russia will adhere to the principles of parity. Furthermore, the US will be faced with maintaining strategic balance between different dyads (China-US and Russia-US, respectively), as well as contending with developments in Sino-Russian bilateral strategic relations.

Even if the US enters a state of equilibrium with China and Russia, both Beijing and Moscow may attempt to clandestinely pursue an advantage over the US in terms of weapons systems. One potential way to mitigate this is by implementing mutually-agreeable treaty obligations. Yet the US has recently seen the stark truth that treaties provide no guarantee of adherence to mutually-agreed principles, namely in persistent Russian violations of the INF. Furthermore, even if China and Russia are bound by treaty agreements aimed at maintaining parity, this does not mean that the PRC and the Russian Federation can't find other ways to tip the balance in their favor, as exemplified by Russia's increasing employment of hybrid warfare.

As Matthew Kroenig's research shows, countries with nuclear superiority have an increased chance of winning nuclear crises with those of nuclear inferiority⁴⁶. Aside from the diminished possibility of the US winning in a nuclear crisis, the other risk inherent in attempting to maintain parity with China and Russia, there will be no undisputed insurer of strategic stability between China, Russia and the United States. The US will likely be forced to manage parity at the bilateral levels with China and Russia separately. With two

⁴⁶ Matthew Kroenig (2013). Nuclear Superiority and the Balance of Resolve: Explaining Nuclear Crisis Outcomes. International Organization, 67, pp 141-171

sets of bilateral relations to maintain, it is possible that the US's pursuit of parity in the context of a China-US dyad (for example) will affect the way Russia views the state of strategic balance between itself and the US. What's acceptable for China in terms of parity with the US may not be acceptable for Russia-US parity, or vice versa due to discrepancies such as technical capabilities or differing strategic priorities.

By extension, the absence of domination by one single power has implications for not only the US's strategic relations with China and Russia respectively but also China and Russia's strategic relations with each other. If China and Russia achieve strategic equilibrium with the US, even if the specter of a strategically-dominant US has been removed, China and Russia have the potential to then seek dominance over each other, to which the US will invariably be forced to respond. Just as one country (such as China) may have different criteria than Russia for what constitutes parity with the US, any attempt between Beijing and Moscow to tip the balance in their favor vis-à-vis each other will most likely disrupt equilibrium with the United States.

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8 March 2019

The US has accepted strategic nuclear parity with Russia and China. For instance, the 2019 Missile Defense Review states that "the United States relies on deterrence to protect against large and technically sophisticated Russian and Chinese intercontinental ballistic missile threats to the U.S. homeland." Russia and China's challenge to this assertion may be best viewed as a manifestation of the security dilemma phenomenon. They argue that U.S. regional missile defense has an inherent ability to be scaled up against them in the future, while the U.S. has continued to insist that its intentions are transparent. Cooperative mechanisms will help mitigate but not eliminate the security dilemma.

However, the U.S. does not and should not accept broad military parity with the U.S. and Russia. While, in practice, there may be instances where the U.S. has had to concede ground (such as Ukraine), generally speaking, the efficacy of American deterrence (against adversaries) and reassurance (to allies) depends on the belief in American military superiority.

Dr. Robert S. Spalding III

Brigadier General (ret) (US Air Force)

24 February 2019

The US economy may not permit a military force that achieves strategic parity with Chinese and Russian combined power. In this case, it may be necessary to invoke the fear of unacceptable damage to deter conflict. This is China's stated nuclear strategy. This can be a successful strategy for two reasons 1) China and Russia are both developed countries whose societies have grown accustomed to the privileges of modern life and 2) Nuclear weapons are extremely effective at damaging the critical infrastructure needed to keep modern societies functioning.

Dr. Michael D. Swaine

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21 March 2019

China's continued growth in military and economic power and influence in Asia, and the resulting relative decline in U.S. maritime predominance, will eventually create an unstable rough parity between China and U.S./allied states within at least the First Island Chain. This could cause China to overestimate its leverage and ability to advance its interests on contentious and provocative issues such as Taiwan and maritime sovereignty disputes. At the same time, it could also cause the United States and Japan to overreact to

such behavior, partly to disabuse China and others of the notion that the United States is losing its dominant position.

Without adequate communication and a clear sense of each other's red lines, and without reassuring understandings on limits and intentions, such miscalculations could easily escalate into tests of relative resolve, with neither side willing to make accommodations to reach a middle ground. Although Beijing and Washington could perhaps avoid letting such a crisis devolve into actual military conflict, even a major nonviolent confrontation could severely, and perhaps irreparably, damage U.S.-China relations well beyond anything seen thus far.

Given these considerations, the best optimal outcome for both nations is the development of a stable and cooperative balance of power in the Western Pacific, in which the most vital interests of both the U.S. and its allies and the Chinese are protected and neither side enjoys the clear capacity to dominate the other militarily within at least the first island chain.

In addition, the U.S., its allies, and China must also work to build a more integrated and dynamic regional economic network of benefit to all---as a bulwark to a stable military balance.

For the U.S., the security balance should center on retaining a robust yet defense-oriented U.S./Japan alliance, supplemented by an expanding set of mutually verifiable understandings with Beijing and other Asian powers.

Such understandings would be aimed at stabilizing the military balance with China at a level that both sides can live with. This level could be conceived as one in which each side possesses capabilities sufficient to deter the other from using force to resolve serious differences, but with each lacking the clear superiority that could, in the eyes of the other, foster aggressive intentions. Such a balance is most compatible with a so-called mutual denial strategy.

Such understandings must also aim at defusing and demilitarizing the most contentious issues in the region, from the Korean Peninsula to Taiwan and maritime disputes across the Asian littoral. This can be attained most optimally in the context of a defense-based regional military balance.

The goal of a more integrated and dynamic economic region would require the U.S., China and other Asian economies to strengthen their domestic economic growth and deepen their commitment to free trade. Most importantly, successful long-term integration will depend on getting Beijing and Washington to join a common trade architecture, creating an eventual region-wide free-trade agreement, and conducting more active and focused U.S. economic diplomacy.

The creation of such a stable balance of power in the Western Pacific will require American initiative and strength, not passivity and certainly not one-sided concessions. Conditionality, reciprocity, and a willingness and ability to suspend or reverse actions taken or contemplated are central to this process.

It will also require the development of domestic consensus, allied and friendly support, sustained U.S.-China dialogue, and interlinked changes in several existing regional security policies on both sides.

Many will argue that a stable Asian balance of power is impossible, due to the depth of Sino-U.S. suspicions, the inertia of large and complex governments, and the primacy oriented outlook present on both sides. However, such excuses are a recipe for paralysis in the face of transformational change.

Any objective, clear-headed, long-range assessment of the Asian situation leads to the conclusion that current and future security trends and features call for more than just muddling through on the basis of longstanding assumptions about continued U.S. maritime predominance or a Chinese belief either in naïve, diplomatic win-win outcomes or a Sino-centric Asia.

Maintaining prosperity and stability in Asia, and within the U.S.-China relationship more broadly, will require new ways of thinking, new approaches, and some risk-taking. But the alternatives are far less attractive.

Nicolas Véron

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11 March 2019

Here again, there is no compelling reason to bundle Russia and China together. There is no plausible prospect of Russia achieving strategic parity with the United States, while that is not out of possibility in the case of China. The question may therefore be understood as being about China alone. I am not in a position to comment about the military aspects though.

Subject Matter Expert Biographies

Paul I. Bernstein

Distinguished Research Fellow (National Defense University)



Mr. Paul I. Bernstein is a Distinguished Research Fellow at the Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction, National Defense University, Washington, D.C., and a member of the University's Research Faculty. He leads the Center's practice in strategic security analysis, and is engaged in policy support, research, and professional military education activities related to WMD, nuclear policy, deterrence, missile defense, threat reduction, and regional security. He works in collaboration with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Staff, combatant commands, and defense agencies. Mr. Bernstein has been an advisor to the Defense Science Board and the DoD Threat Reduction Advisory Committee, and is a contributing author of the Department of Defense Strategy for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction. He is a regular guest instructor in the CAPSTONE program, and at senior war colleges and other professional military education venues, and has developed multiple curricula for nuclear and WMD instruction. He is author most recently of "Exploring the Requirements of Integrated Strategic Deterrence," "Countering Russia's Strategy for Regional Coercion and War," "Making Russia Think Twice About Nuclear Threats," and "Deterrence in Professional Military Education." He holds a Master's Degree in International Affairs from Columbia University.

Dean Cheng

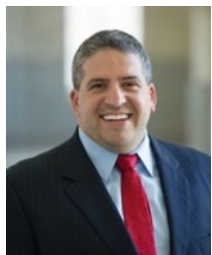
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Dean Cheng brings detailed knowledge of China's military and space capabilities to bear as The Heritage Foundation's research fellow on Chinese political and security affairs. He specializes in China's military and foreign policy, in particular its relationship with the rest of Asia and with the United States. Cheng has written extensively on China's military doctrine, technological implications of its space program and "dual use" issues associated with the communist nation's industrial and scientific infrastructure. He previously worked for 13 years as a senior analyst, first with Science Applications International Corp. (SAIC), the Fortune 500 specialist in defense and homeland security, and then with the China Studies division of the Center for Naval Analyses, the federally funded research institute. Before entering the private sector, Cheng studied China's defense-industrial complex for a congressional agency, the Office of Technology Assessment, as an analyst in the International Security and Space Program. Cheng has appeared on public affairs shows such as *John McLaughlin's One on One* and programs on National Public Radio, CNN International, BBC World Service and International Television News (ITN). He has been interviewed by or provided commentary for publications such as *Time* magazine, *The Washington Post*, *Financial Times*, *Bloomberg News*, *Jane's Defense Weekly*, South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo* and Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*. Cheng has spoken at the National Space Symposium, National Defense University, the Air Force Academy, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Eisenhower Center for Space and Defense Studies. Cheng earned a bachelor's degree in politics from Princeton University in 1986 and studied for a doctorate at MIT. He and his wife reside in Vienna, Va.

Abraham M. Denmark

Director, Asia Program (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars)



Abraham M. Denmark is Director of the Asia Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, which conducts independent research and hosts frank dialogues to develop actionable ideas for Congress, the Administration, and the broader policy community on issues related to the Asia-Pacific. He also holds a joint appointment as a Senior Fellow at the Wilson Center's Kissinger Institute on China and the United States. Prior to joining the Wilson Center, Mr. Denmark served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia, where he supported the Secretary of Defense and other senior U.S. government leaders in the formulation and implementation of national security strategies and defense policies toward the region. Mr. Denmark previously worked as Senior Vice President for Political and Security Affairs at The National Bureau of Asian Research, a Fellow at the Center for a New American Security, and held several positions in the U.S. Intelligence Community. Mr. Denmark has authored dozens of articles and edited several books on the Asia-Pacific and U.S. national security, including several editions of the *Strategic Asia* book series. He has testified multiple times before the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, as well as the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. His commentary has been featured in major media outlets in the United States and in Asia, including *Foreign Affairs*, National Public Radio, *the Financial Times*, the *National Interest*, *Foreign Policy*, and *the Atlantic*. In January 2017, Mr. Denmark received the Secretary of Defense Medal for Outstanding Public Service. He also received the Order of the Resplendent Banner from the Republic of China (Taiwan), was made an Honorary Admiral in the Navy of the Republic of Korea, and was named a 21st Century Leader by the National Committee on American Foreign Policy. A Colorado native, Mr. Denmark holds an MA in International Security from the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at the University of Denver, and received a BA in History with Honors from the University of Northern Colorado. He has also studied at Peking University. He lives with his wife and son in Maryland.

Michael Fabey

Americas Naval Reporter (Jane's Fighting Ships)
US Editor (Jane's Fighting Ships)



Michael Fabey is an award-winning journalist who has more than three decades of experience writing for newspapers, magazines and online news sites. As author of *Crashback*, he gained unparalleled access to the Chinese naval command after 15 years covering the Pentagon. The result is the much-anticipated book about the U.S. and China power clash in the Pacific slated for publication by Scribner (a division of Simon & Schuster) in October 2017. Now the Americas Naval Reporter for *Jane's* and the US Editor for *Jane's Fighting Ships*, Fabey has reported on military matters throughout his career, writing for such publications as *Aviation Week*, *Defense News* and *Janes*. As a foreign correspondent, he worked in newsrooms around the globe for *The Economist Group*, *O. Estado de S. Paulo* and a variety of other publications.

Dr. Peter Layton

Visiting Fellow, Griffith Asia Institute (Griffith University)



Peter Layton is a Visiting Fellow at the Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University and a RAAF Reserve Group Captain. He has extensive aviation and defence experience and, for his work at the Pentagon on force structure matters, was awarded the US Secretary of Defense's Exceptional Public Service Medal. He has a doctorate from the University of New South Wales on grand strategy and has taught on the topic at the Eisenhower College, US National Defense University. For his academic studies, he was awarded a Fellowship to the European University Institute, Fiesole, Italy.

His research interests include grand strategy, national security policies particularly relating to middle powers, defence force structure concepts and the impacts of emerging technology. He contributes regularly to the public policy debate on defence and foreign affairs issues and is the author of the book *Grand Strategy*.

Dr. Edward N. Luttwak

Senior Associate (CSIS)



Edward N. Luttwak is Senior Associate, Center for Strategic and International Studies of Washington DC., Chairman of AP Fleet, (aircraft leasing), Dublin, Ireland, and is active as a consultant to governments and international enterprises. He founded and heads a conservation ranch in the Amazon. Has served/serves as a consultant to the US National Security Council, the White House Chief of Staff, the US Department of Defense, US Department of State, US Army, US Air Force, and several allied governments. At present he is working as a contractor for the Office of the Secretary of Defense OSD/NA. Has taught at Johns Hopkins and Georgetown. Has been an invited lecturer at universities and higher military schools in the US, UK, China, Israel, Japan, the Russian Federation and other countries. His book *The Rise of China versus the Logic of Strategy* (Harvard University Press, 2012), reflects an engagement with Chinese affairs that dates back to an extensive visit in 1976. His previous books, which include *Strategy: the Logic of War and Peace* and *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* have also been published in 23 foreign languages, including Chinese, Japanese, Hebrew, Korean and Russian. C.V. Born in Arad, Transylvania in 1942, attended schools in Sicily and England, then the London School of Economics (B.Sc.Econ) and Johns Hopkins University (Ph.D.). LLD Honoris Causa University of Bath (UK). Worked for some years in London and Jerusalem before moving to Washington DC. Speaks several languages.

Dr. Jahara Matisek

Major (US Air Force)

Assistant Professor, Military and Strategic Studies Department (US Air Force Academy)
Non-Resident Fellow, Modern War Institute (US Military Academy)



Jahara “Franky” Matisek is an active duty officer in the US Air Force, currently serving as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Military and Strategic Studies at the US Air Force Academy and a Non-Resident Fellow with the Modern War Institute at West Point, US Military Academy. He is a former C-17 Pilot with over 2,000 hours of flight time, to include over 700 hours of combat time, and was a T-6 Instructor Pilot at the prestigious Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot program. Franky has a BS from the United States Air Force Academy, an MPA from the University of Oklahoma, an MS from Troy University, and a Graduate Certificate in African Studies and PhD in Political Science from Northwestern University. His current research projects explore the impact of technology on future warfare, security force assistance, hybrid warfare, and the way weak states create effective militaries. He is a contributing editor at *Over the Horizon: Multi-Domain Operations & Strategies* and has published in the *Joint Force Quarterly*, *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *Defense & Security Analysis*, *Small Wars Journal*, *Civil Wars*, *The Strategy Bridge*, *The National Interest*, *African Security*, and many other outlets on the topic of military affairs.

Dr. Sean McFate

Professor (National Defense University)



Dr. Sean McFate is an author, novelist and foreign policy expert. He is a professor of strategy at the National Defense University and Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service in Washington, DC. Additionally, he is an Advisor to Oxford University's Centre for Technology and Global Affairs. A specialist in national security strategy, McFate was a think tank scholar at the RAND Corporation, Atlantic Council, Bipartisan Policy Center, and New America Foundation. Recently, he was a visiting Scholar at Oxford University's Changing Character of War Program, where he conducted research on future war. McFate's career began as a paratrooper and officer in the U.S. Army's storied 82nd Airborne Division. He served under Stan McChrystal and David Petraeus, and graduated from elite training programs, such as Jungle Warfare School in Panama. He was also a Jump Master. McFate then became a private military contractor. Among his many experiences, he dealt with warlords, raised armies for U.S. interest, rode with armed groups in the Sahara, conducted strategic reconnaissance for oil companies, transacted arms deals in Eastern Europe, and helped prevent an impending genocide in the Rwanda region. In the world of international business, McFate was a Vice President at TD International, a boutique political risk consulting firm with offices in Washington, Houston, Singapore and Zurich. Additionally, he was a manager at DynCorp International, a consultant at BearingPoint (now Deloitte Consulting) and an associate at Booz Allen Hamilton. McFate's newest book is *The New Rules of War: Victory in the Age of Durable Disorder* (William Morrow). Admiral Jim Stavridis (retired), the former NATO Supreme Allied Commander, said: "Stunning. Sean McFate is a new Sun Tzu." McFate also authored *The Modern Mercenary: Private Armies and What They Mean for World Order* (Oxford University Press) which explains how the privatization of war is changing warfare. The Economist called it a "fascinating and disturbing book." McFate also write fiction based on his military experiences. He co-authored the novels *Shadow War* and *Deep Black* (William Morrow), part of the Tom Locke series. *New York Times* #1 bestselling author Mark Greaney said: "I was blown away.... simply one of the most entertaining and intriguing books I've read in quite some time." A coveted speaker, McFate has appeared before the British House of Commons, top universities and popular audience venues. He has written for the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Republic*, *Foreign Policy*, *Politico*, *Daily Beast*, *CNBC*, *Vice Magazine*, *Aeon*, *War on the Rocks*, *Military Review* and *African Affairs*. He has appeared on CNN's *Amanpour*, MSNBC's *Morning Joe*, *Fox and Friends*, NPR, BBC, *Economist*, Vice/HBO, The Discovery Channel, and American Heroes Channel. As a scholar, he has authored eight book chapters in edited academic volumes and published a monograph for the U.S. Army War College on how to raise foreign armies. McFate holds a BA from Brown University, MPP from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, and a Ph.D. in international relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). He lives in Washington, DC.

Dr. Lukas Milevski

Assistant Professor (Leiden University)



Lukas Milevski teaches strategy, grand strategy and war-related topics as a tenured Assistant Professor, Program in International Relations, Institute of History at Leiden University (Netherlands). His core competence is strategic theory, studied under Colin S. Gray, and his research interests include all aspects of military strategy in concept, history, and contemporary analysis, for education and policy support. Currently also a Foreign Policy Research Institute Baltic Sea Fellow, Milevski has partnered with Oxford University's Changing Character of War Programme for a Sasakawa Peace Foundation project on NATO intra-alliance diplomacy for deterrence, as a Smith Richardson Strategy and Policy Fellow on Baltic defense, and as a Visiting Research Fellow on Anglo-American grand strategy. Milevski has spoken at the US National Defense University, Naval War College, and Military Academy; UK Defence Academy; Military Academy of Lithuania; as well as many academic and professional venues. Major publications include *The Evolution of Modern Grand Strategic Thought* (OUP, 2016), *The West's East: Contemporary Baltic Defense in Strategic Perspective* (OUP, 2018), and *Grand Strategy is Attrition: The Logic of Integrating Various Forms of Power in Conflict* (US Army War College Press, 2019), plus over 40 journal articles in peer and non-peer reviewed sources. The national defence colleges or national universities of the US, UK,

Canada, Australia, Singapore, and the Baltic, as well as private institutions such as King's College London/War Studies include his works in their syllabi. Besides his direct interest in his subject, Milevski aspires to leave the field of strategy in a stronger position than when he entered it.

Anthony Rinna

Senior Editor (Sino-NK)



Anthony V. Rinna is a Senior Editor at Sino-NK, a research organization dedicated to the study of the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia. Rinna specializes in Russian foreign policy and Northeast Asian geopolitics. His expertise has been sought for research conducted by the Australian and Indian foreign ministries, as well as DoD. His views have been cited in the BBC, CNBC, Reuters and the Washington Post. Rinna, a US citizen, has a working knowledge of Korean, Russian and Spanish, and has lived in South Korea since 2014.

Dr. Jaganath Sankaran

Assistant Professor (University of Texas at Austin)



Dr. Sankaran works on problems that lie at the intersection of international security and science & technology. Sankaran spent the first four years of his career as a defense scientist with the Indian Missile R&D establishment. His work in weapons design and development led to his interests in matters such as the balance of military power, strategic stability, and arms control. Sankaran received his Ph.D. (in international security Policy) in 2012, writing his dissertation on the role of deterrence, dissuasion, denial and arms control in preserving peace and stability in outer space. The current focus of Sankaran's research is Asia-Pacific. Sankaran studies the growing military and nuclear weapons capabilities of China and the counter military balancing undertaken by the United States, Japan, India and other states. Sankaran has also worked on U.S.-Russia strategic stability and nuclear arms control. Sankaran has

held fellowships at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University and at RAND Corporation. Sankaran has published in International Security, Contemporary Security Policy, Strategic Studies Quarterly, Arms Control Today, Bulletin of Atomic Scientists and other outlets. His research has also been published by the RAND Corporation and the Stimson Center.

Dr. Robert S. Spalding III

Brigadier General (ret) (US Air Force)



Dr. Rob Spalding is an accomplished innovator in government and a national security policy strategist. He has served in senior positions of strategy and diplomacy within the Defense and State Departments for more than 26 years. He was the chief architect of the framework for national competition in the Trump Administration's widely praised National Security Strategy (NSS), and the Senior Director for Strategy to the President. Dr. Spalding is globally recognized for his knowledge of Chinese economic competition, cyber warfare and political influence, as well as for his ability to forecast global trends and develop innovative solutions. Dr. Spalding's relationship with business leaders, fostered during his time as a Military Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, allowed him to recommend pragmatic solutions to complex foreign policy and national security issues, which are driving positive economic outcomes for the nation. Dr.

Spalding's groundbreaking work on competition in Secure 5G has reset the global environment for the next phase of cyber security in the information age. Dr. Spalding is a skilled combat leader, promoter of technological advances to achieve improved unit

performance, and a seasoned diplomat. Under Dr. Spalding's leadership, the 509th Operations Group—the nation's only B-2 Stealth Bomber unit—experienced unprecedented technological and operational advances. Dr. Spalding's demonstrated acumen for solving complex technological issues to achieve operational success, was demonstrated when he led a low-cost rapid-integration project for a secure global communications capability in the B-2, achieving tremendous results at almost no cost to the government. As commander, he led forces in the air and on the ground in Libya and Iraq. During the UUV Incident of 2016, Dr. Spalding averted a diplomatic crisis by negotiating with the Chinese PLA for the return of the UUV, without the aid of a translator. Dr. Spalding has written extensively on national security matters. He is currently working on a book concerning national competition in the 21st Century. His work has been published in *The Washington Post*, *The Washington Times*, *Foreign Affairs*, *The American Interest*, *War on the Rocks*, *FedTech Magazine*, *Defense One*, *The Diplomat*, and other edited volumes. His Air Power Journal article on *America's Two Air Forces* is frequently used in the West Point curriculum. Dr. Spalding is a Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute and a Life Member of the Council on Foreign Relations. He has lectured globally, including engagements at the Naval War College, National Defense University, Air War College, Columbia University, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory and other Professional Military Educational institutions. Dr. Spalding received his Bachelor of Science and Master of Science degrees in Agricultural Business from California State University, Fresno, and holds a doctorate in economics and mathematics from the University of Missouri, Kansas City. He was a distinguished graduate of the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, and is fluent in Chinese Mandarin.

Dr. Michael D. Swaine

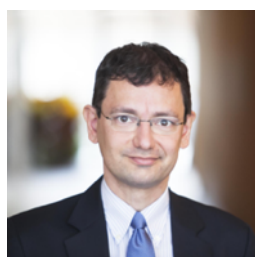
Senior Fellow, Asia Program (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace)



Michael Swaine is a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and one of the most prominent American analysts in Chinese security studies. Formerly a senior policy analyst at the RAND Corporation, Swaine is a specialist in Chinese defense and foreign policy, U.S.-China relations, and East Asian international relations. He has authored and edited more than a dozen books and monographs and many journal articles and book chapters in these areas, directs several security-related projects with Chinese partners, and advises the U.S. government on Asian security issues. He received his doctorate in government from Harvard University.

Nicolas Véron

Senior Fellow (Bruegel and Peterson Institute for International Economics)



Nicolas Véron cofounded Bruegel in Brussels in 2002-05, joined the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington DC in 2009, and is currently employed on equal terms by both organizations as a Senior Fellow. His research is primarily about financial systems and financial services policies. He frequently briefs senior economic policy officials in Europe, the United States and Asia, and has testified at parliamentary hearings in the US Senate, European Parliament, and in several European member states. A graduate of France's Ecole Polytechnique and Ecole des Mines, his earlier experience includes senior positions in the French government and private sector in the 1990s and early 2000s. He is also an independent board member of the global derivatives trade repository arm of DTCC, a financial infrastructure company that operates on a non-profit basis. In September 2012, Bloomberg Markets included Véron in its yearly global "50 Most Influential" list with reference to his early advocacy of European banking union, a topic on which he has worked and published near-continuously since 2007.

Author Biography

Dr. John A. Stevenson

Principal Research Scientist (NSI, Inc.)



Dr. John A. Stevenson is a Principal Research Scientist at NSI, Inc. Prior to joining NSI, Dr. Stevenson worked as a lead investigator and senior researcher in the DHS Center of Excellence, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland, College Park. At the University of Maryland, he also served as the elected representative of research and professional faculty to the University Senate. His academic research interests revolve around: the determinants of foreign policy, international law, violent non-state actors, postcolonial states, social revolution, mass killing/genocide, counter-terrorism, emergency management, and IDPS/refugees.