

# Interview with the Honorable Michèle Flournoy

Co-Founder and  
Managing Partner of  
Westexec Advisors, and  
former Under Secretary  
of Defense for Policy



**President Biden has pledged to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan by September 11<sup>th</sup>. Are the circumstances right to be leaving Afghanistan now?**

I understand that President Biden made an assessment that the Afghanistan situation cannot be resolved to anybody's satisfaction by military means alone at this point. I do understand his impetus for withdrawal. He has been wanting to reduce our commitment to Afghanistan for a very long time, dating back to when he was Vice President. I do wish that he had approached it in a somewhat different way. What do I mean by that? The small U.S. force presence that was left there by President Trump—who also wanted to withdraw all of our troops—has been in the position of the boy with his finger in the dyke.

As we removed U.S. forces, it unleashed a whole set of events. I wish we had taken more time to try to set and bound the conditions around the President's decision. For example, I would have liked to have seen one last push diplomatically with the United States in the lead, bringing our international partners together to really push the Taliban to fully meet the commitments made in the agreement that was signed with the Trump administration—a full break with al-Qaeda, the implementation of a national ceasefire, and their commitment to Afghan-to-Afghan negotiations for a political settlement, among others.

I would have liked to have seen that final diplomatic push to see if we could use the leverage of future assistance, future recognition, the willingness of the international community to stay engaged in Afghanistan to try to get some kind of political framework in place. I am not saying that would have been easy, but I would have liked to have seen us try harder than appears to have been the case.

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Second, I would like to have seen more time given to managing the risks associated with withdrawal in terms of an accelerated plan upfront for taking care of the Afghans who assisted us and their families, as opposed to a belated and chaotic scramble to do that. Also, a plan for how exactly we are going to prosecute continued counterterrorism operations against al-Qaeda if it reconstitutes, or against ISIS-K which has stated its aspiration to attack not just in the region but U.S. interests more broadly. How are we actually going to execute that? What does that look like and how do we set the theater for that?

And then finally, I would like to have seen extensive planning to help the Afghan government and particularly the Afghan security forces, to keep them from collapsing under the pressure of the Taliban offensive. What kind of assistance might we have provided to keep them viable? These are all questions that will be debated in after-action reviews. I would like to have seen more time and effort put into setting the conditions for withdrawal to try to mitigate the risk of a rapid Taliban takeover of the country.

**Do you think our departure from Afghanistan will benefit our adversaries Russia and China and if so, how can we prevent or mitigate the consequences of their attempts to capitalize on our departure from Afghanistan?**

While we've met certain narrow objectives in Afghanistan related to counterterrorism, the broader ambitions that several administrations have had for Afghanistan clearly have not been met. Our adversaries will use that to question our leadership, our credibility, our staying power, and our ability to get things done. We should expect that kind of propaganda, that kind of messaging from them.

I don't think there are huge gains for Russia or China. Russia can't be thrilled about the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan; they are concerned about ripple effects in their near abroad. But I do

think they'll use this to bludgeon us from a reputational perspective, and that's just an opportunistic approach that we should expect.

In terms of more concrete benefits, when things settle down China stands to gain the most economically. China has wanted to make serious investments in Afghanistan's mining and mineral sectors. Without the United States there to reinforce the rule of law they stand a good chance to get in there with contracts that will exploit Afghanistan. Obviously, their alliance with Pakistan will be affected by this as well.

**Moving away from Afghanistan towards the larger geo-strategic situation, in what ways does China threaten the national security of the United States? How would you characterize the threat?**

China is emerging as our principal competitor. In economic terms they may soon overtake the United States economy in size. Technologically they are seeking dominance or advantage in key areas such as semiconductors, 5G, synthetic biology; you can go through a long list. These are the technologies that will define the future both economically and from a national security perspective. China has been at that for at least a decade, really going after the advantage in those areas, though with mixed results.

Militarily, China has become the pacing threat; not only in terms of their technological investments and Anti Access/Area Denial systems designed to counter our power projection, but also in areas like cyber and space, and even in some aspects of the maritime domain.

Ideologically the big narrative in Beijing is: "Look at the United States! It's a mess. It's in decline. Our system is superior to democracy. We are performing better vis-a-vis COVID-19, etc." They are now competing ideologically from a systems perspective.

There are key areas where it is very much in our interests to compete with China but also, areas to cooperate with China. For example, climate; there is no solution without getting China on board.

Non-proliferation, same thing. We must work together toward preventing the next pandemic.

The name of the game is managing the competition, which is multi-dimensional, and trying to keep it from erupting in an open conflict between two nuclear-armed powers. So, very challenging, but if you asked me—would you rather have the U.S. hand to play or the China hand to play, there is no question; I would rather have the U.S. hand. We just need to be playing it better and with greater urgency than we have been so far.

**We and our allies wish to preserve what we call the liberal, rules-based system. How would a China-dominated world order differ from that? What would it look like?**

We have seen from China's actions that, first of all, their autocratic system has been harnessing emerging digital technologies to create a true surveillance state. We have seen them start to export that model to other states around the world. It is not just that the Chinese people are being denied certain human rights and freedoms; it's that the Chinese are actually trying to export that model to other countries that they invest in or work with.

Something else we should expect to see—that we are already in fact seeing—is a might-makes-right approach. The Chinese have demonstrated that they are willing to throw their weight around, certainly in the region but also more broadly. They believe that a big power like China should be able to intimidate, coerce, and dictate to smaller powers in the region—for example, some of the smaller members of ASEAN. They are not going to treat those countries as equals and take disputes to international arbitration or negotiation. They are going to say, “We are the big power. We are the empire. Our will should stand as defining the status quo or the new status quo.” That is what worries me; selective respect for international law, a tendency to use coercive and even aggressive

measures to impose their will on weaker states, and an embrace of technology for the purposes of state control and surveillance. That is a very different world than the one we have been living in that has given us tremendous security and prosperity since World War II, and it is certainly not one that I would want to live in.

**Can you imagine or describe a scenario in which military conflict with China would be justified?**

I have two big concerns; one is the risk of miscalculation and accident. In the Cold War period we and the Soviet Union negotiated rules of the road, with the Incidents at Sea Agreement, the hotline, and various approaches to de-escalation should there be some interaction of our forces at the tactical level, to keep it from spinning out of control. Some of that, of course, was put in place years after the Cuban Missile Crisis, which was probably the best example of things spinning out of control. But we do not have that with China today. They really have not engaged with us seriously on that kind of de-escalation or confidence building measures. That's one concern.

But the other scenario is that China believes its own rhetoric. They think the United States is in decline and not coming back. They believe that they are on the rise and this is their moment, and they might decide to enforce their will using military means, whether it is an offensive against Taiwan or some disputed territory in the South China Sea. If they underestimate U.S. resolve and capability to respond, suddenly, we could be in a situation where our militaries are confronting one another. The only way that might happen is if China miscalculates.

That is the reason I have argued that the name of the game right now militarily is to shore up and reinvigorate deterrence and demonstrate to China that we do have resolve; and clarify for them what we are willing to defend. Then we must demonstrate the capabilities and concepts we possess to either deny or roll back the success of any aggression and/or to

be able to impose such costs that they understand it is really not in their interest to pursue the aggression in the first place. That is the name of the game in this next period.

**Many Americans are hostile to the idea of sending U.S. forces to fight in faraway places. How would you convince them that Taiwan is a partner worth protecting militarily, or do you believe that it is?**

If China were to attack Taiwan unprovoked—in the absence of any unilateral independence declaration or any other action by Taiwan—we would be defending a democracy in the region. The way to explain it is to say that if the United States and the international community were to ignore such aggression, we are giving China a green light to steamroll across the region as it sees fit. Not necessarily in strictly military occupation terms but in terms of being a bully, using coercive measures and using its military, its law enforcement capabilities, and its economic clout to routinely violate the sovereignty of smaller countries. You would be opening the door to the future we talked about earlier which is a very different future than we hope for, with Chinese rules rather than the existing international rules that have served us so well.

**Is our policy of strategic ambiguity with respect to Taiwan the right policy now or should we be more explicit in saying that we are prepared to defend Taiwan militarily if need be?**

The combination of the One-China Policy and the Taiwan Relations Act has always maintained that ambiguity. There is a certain inherent tension, but U.S. policy has generally gotten that right. At this time though, when China is doubting our resolve, they are unclear about how we see our interests and are becoming overconfident in their own military capabilities, it is very important to clarify the message that if Taiwan were attacked unprovoked, China should expect a U.S. and more importantly an international response.

**Moving to the economic domain, in 2013 China initiated the Belt and Road Initiative which is extremely ambitious and seems to be proceeding, though with some hiccups. How do we compete with something like that that is supported by almost a trillion dollars equivalent of investment?**

We cannot compete with it dollar for dollar. We have to think asymmetrically and strategically. What I mean by that is, first of all, along the Belt and Road Initiative path there are some places that really matter to us and affect our interests, and others that are not high up on our priority list. We need to focus; we need to make strategic judgments as to where we want to compete. And then, we need to think about what tools we have that play to our advantage.

I would suggest they are things like internet access, ubiquitous wi-fi, broadband, fiber optic cable. Helping to create more free and open economies and societies by connecting them to the world wide web. Rule of law assistance to counter some of the more mercantilistic and often predatory practices China brings with it into these countries. We can offer entrepreneurial coaching, investment, assistance to grow innovation hubs. There is some exciting work being done in Africa in this regard. We have to think strategically—where do we want to compete?—and then asymmetrically in terms of what do we have that other countries really want and need. It may not be the same dollar amount that China offers, but we will get higher impact with targeted areas of investment and assistance.

**Speaking of asymmetries, because they are autocratic countries that can command all of the elements of national strength for strategic purposes, China and Russia have certain advantages in terms of mobilizing all of these elements for strategic ends. What can we do to mitigate those advantages?**

Where we have real advantage is with our allies; we should not be doing any of this alone. There are so many areas where, whether it's dealing with China

or dealing with Russia, our interests and our values are very similar to those of our allies in Europe and with democracies across Asia. We should be looking to build out coalitions of the willing focused in these different areas so that we can pool our resources and focus them; we are more effective together than if we each try to go it alone.

**There is a purported gap between Washington and Silicon Valley with major American companies seeing their commercial interests served by a good relationship with China in ways that sometimes might compromise U.S. national interests. What is the best way for them to balance the competing interests of their shareholders who want maximum profits and access to the Chinese super-large market and our national security interests that may not be identical to the shareholder interests?**

The U.S. companies that I work with are U.S.-based but global in footprint and in their business. What they are trying to navigate is, how do I do my part as a responsible U.S. entity to ensure that I am protecting U.S. national interests, but at the same time, continue to compete effectively in the Chinese commercial market where I have to be careful about controls on IP, what I share, what activities I undertake, etc. These companies know they must be mindful of export controls and all of the compliance requirements, and must ensure that their activities in China don't advance Chinese national security; but it is the China market that will give them the revenue that allows them to create and keep American jobs, contribute to the GDP and economic growth, and in many cases, fund the innovation necessary to support their national security customers in the United States.

American companies are walking through this minefield every day trying to figure out how to navigate it. The first thing is to be thoughtful about a risk management framework, so that the right hand knows what the left hand is doing and that

they are mindful of the national security concerns that are genuine and real. But they should also help educate their partners across the U.S. government about what kind of work in China does not involve national security risk, is lawful, and is actually generating revenue that plows back into the U.S. economy and into U.S. innovation. This gets it into very detailed questions.

The same is true in terms of accepting Chinese investment in the United States, and this is what the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) process gets at. If it is purely passive investment in Silicon Valley—meaning there is no access to non-public intellectual property, and there are no decision rights, no observer status or seat on the board, no ability to influence the decision-making of the company—if it is truly just passive investment looking for a return on investment, that is blood in the bloodstream of our innovation engine. It hurts us to choke that off entirely, and this is how the CFIUS has evolved. CFIUS distinguishes between passive versus active investment and ensures that we are cognizant of that distinction. Because if we get it wrong we have a situation where sensitive IP gets handed to the Peoples Liberation Army and then we have hurt ourselves.

**What can the United States government do or should the United States do to encourage better cooperation and collaboration between the national security community and the private sector?**

Most of the companies that I talk to are very eager for that and they are trying to figure out how to plug in. More dialogue between senior government officials and their counterparts in the private sector is important, and more mutual education. The companies need to understand what the U.S. government is trying to protect and what they see as a national security danger. For their part, government officials need to understand exactly what these companies are and are not doing in China, how revenue from the Chinese

commercial market actually contributes to the U.S. economy in various ways, and when companies have been responsible by choosing to abstain from certain activities or business opportunities in China.

A lot of mutual education is needed and a lot more transparency in communications. The best companies are already doing this. They are having conversations with their U.S. stakeholders before they make big decisions on China business, in order to make sure that they are getting the balance right and staying within the right lines of activity. A lot more of this is needed if we are going to stay competitive in key sectors while ensuring we don't inadvertently give away precious IP that needs to be protected.

**How can we protect our national interests against China without pushing China closer to Russia and vice versa? How can we protect our national interests vis a vis Russia without pushing Russia closer to China?**

In the case of China, we have to find ways to engage on those issues that require cooperation. As I mentioned, climate policy, pandemic prevention, non-proliferation, and even in some economic areas where there is not a national security implication. Russia is a harder nut to crack because under Putin I actually do believe Russia is a dedicated adversary. There are a few areas where we can cooperate—such as arms control—but Putin is not really interested in cooperation. That said, there are instances where China and Russia, from a tactical or opportunistic perspective, will see opportunities to cooperate to try to push back against us or counterbalance us.

The big announcements coming out of China-Russia summits are almost always much more lofty than the actual joint activities they are undertaking. There are natural limits to China and Russia cooperation. One limitation is that China does not view Russia as an equal. They see Russia as a declining power and not one they have to pay a lot of attention to. Russia is not a principal market for them. China is

interested in Russia's strategic resources and energy resources and minerals, but they are not a top priority.

In Moscow there is a tremendous amount of fear of China. Russia has a depopulated border with China and they are terrified of the prospect of Chinese aggression for which they have no response or capacity to counterbalance. Russia is very careful with China. They are trying to keep it friendly but there is a lot of fear and distrust there. I don't think they are natural allies. We could certainly play our cards poorly and push them together in opportunistic ways, but I do not think it's a natural or strong alliance.

**Russia takes every effort to drive wedges between the United States and our European allies. Does it serve our interest to try to, in a Kissinger/Nixon way, drive a wedge between China and Russia?**

We should certainly consider that as the opportunities arise but not the way it was done by the Trump administration which was so worried about them coming together that they picked one as the enemy—China—and picked the other—Russia—as a friend. Unfortunately, the Trump administration chose to try to befriend Putin and Russia, which is entirely contrary to our interests. The way they approached China pushed China from competitor to adversary, to outright enemy, then not being interested in exploring cooperation with China.

We need to focus on managing each relationship in its own right, looking for opportunities to prevent things that bring them together, while collaborating with each on issues that we care about. It would be a mistake to pursue a policy where in order to balance China, we cozy up to Putin's Russia; that is not in our interest.

**Putin appears to want to establish a sphere of influence in the former Soviet space. Why should or shouldn't we oppose that?**

By any objective measure, Russia is in decline economically, demographically, and politically. Putin

is trying to recreate a sphere of influence that will help him keep himself in power. Putin needs to have an external enemy to try to rally and create internal unity. We have seen the protests on the streets of Moscow. We have seen him so threatened by opposition figures like Navalny that he tried to have them assassinated. Failing that he has jailed Navalny and others and persecuted them. What Putin is most threatened by is democracy, actual democracy, true democracy coming to Russia.

He is looking not only to counter democracy at home but to discredit it in the United States and Europe as well, and that is what Russia's social media disinformation campaigns are about. That is what Putin's propaganda is about, and it is what his other covert means are about; creating the perception that we are in chaos, that democracy doesn't work, that it is a failing model, and therefore, you should appreciate the strong hand of an authoritarian leader. It is also about creating an insulating layer of non-democratic states that are in Russia's sphere of influence, that are dependent upon Russia for various things to create a buffer between Russia and the NATO democracies.

**Only a few years ago, Russia invaded and occupied Crimea. Is that something that we should allow to stand or do you see any future other than a frozen conflict there?**

It was appropriate to impose sanctions with regard to both Crimea and Ukraine. Neither the United States nor NATO define Crimea as a vital interest, so I do not see either of them intervening militarily. Crimea is an example of Putin creating a *fait accompli*. Ukraine is different. Putin faces continued sanctions, international pressure, and continued Western assistance to Ukraine in the support of its defense. He keeps trying to change the parameters of the Minsk Agreements, but the solidarity between the United States and Europe on this issue has been remarkable and will continue. I do not see a resolution anytime

soon but I also don't see Putin being able to take further, significant action in Ukraine without very strong international opposition.

**Both China and Russia employ tactics of conflict below the threshold of war to achieve strategic effect, and embrace a full spectrum approach to conflict. How do we counter these measures below the threshold of war?**

We have to get a lot better in terms of countering Russian and to a lesser extent, Chinese manipulation of our social media platforms. We have to get a lot better with regard to cyber security in terms of trying to prevent and stop attacks not only against our militaries and our governments but also against our societies. There is obviously a lot to be done in light of our recent experiences.

The best counter to propaganda is the truth, and we have to do a lot better at getting our message out. I have talked in the past about trying to figure out what is the digital equivalent of a United States Information Agency in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We have got to do better at getting the truth out in real time to counter Russian propaganda, which is ubiquitous in markets like Europe. It will take a lot of interagency effort because our tools are distributed, and the authorities to use these tools are distributed across multiple agencies; most of them are not within the Department of Defense. This is an area where we have to perform better and we have to try to get our NATO allies to do better as well.

**Both China and Russia appear to embrace concepts of conflict that are constant and comprehensive, while we in the west tend to embrace a binary concept of war and peace. Is that a vulnerability on our part?**

Not necessarily. People are seized with the notion of competition on a spectrum, and what the Chinese and Russians might see as war, we see appropriately as competition. That does not necessarily put

us at a disadvantage particularly because many of the instruments we have to mobilize and engage in competition are not military in nature. The thing I worry about in Russian doctrine is the notion of “escalate to de-escalate” which is very dangerous in the context of two nuclear powers. I worry about the Chinese doctrine of “systems destruction warfare” which explicitly envisions early massive cyber-attacks on our critical infrastructure to try to prevent U.S. forces from projecting from CONUS into the region, as well as early attacks on space-based assets which are very fundamental to the functioning of the global economy. I think they underestimate the impact that would have on U.S. resolve.

I think they intend to create such cost and chaos that we would give up before a war even started. If critical infrastructure around the eastern seaboard or the western military bases were attacked it would take down power grids that are powering hospitals and medical facilities. American civilians will almost certainly be harmed if not die. What is that going to do to a president’s resolve? That’s going to increase the president’s resolve. That’s going to be seen as an act of war.

China is completely miscalculating how we would react to early major cyber and space attacks. This is an area where we need some direct dialogue to say “this is what your doctrine says, but what you think will happen is the opposite of what almost certainly will happen. You will end up bringing the United States in faster with more commitment than if you didn’t pursue this approach.” That is the kind of candid conversation we need in strategic stability talks going forward.

### **What specifically are potential existential threats from Russia, China or both acting together that the United States must be able to deter?**

In a world of nuclear powers that includes some who see us as an adversary we still have to be concerned about nuclear deterrence. A smart

investment in modernizing a nuclear arsenal that is essential to deterrence has to be on our agenda, which is why you see that appearing in the budget not only of past administrations but the current administration’s as well. We can debate about particular systems and exactly how many of what is required, but the investment in keeping nuclear deterrence safe, secure, reliable, and effective is a foundational piece of our security.

We need to think in similar terms about cyber and space. Russian and Chinese doctrine are different, but they have this in common; they will both attack us in those domains in order to create *faits accomplis* thus avoiding traditional military conflict. We have a lot of work to do to better defend ourselves in the space and cyber domains and to make our assets there more resilient. And we should create both defensive and offensive capabilities to try to deter or constrain some of their actions or the effectiveness of their actions in these areas.

We really have to think through deterrence from multiple angles. Secretary Austin has coined the phrase “integrated deterrence.” He talks about it across multiple domains thinking not only as the United States, but with our allies, not only in military terms but also using other tools of power. We need an intellectual effort to rethink deterrence in this context similar to the intellectual efforts of Tom Schelling, Herman Kahn, and others in the early days of the Cold War when we were conceptually trying to get our heads around what is necessary to deter the Soviet Union. These questions need to be asked in a totally new context particularly with regard to China.

### **What role might U.S. nuclear-armed allies play in balancing against China and Russia in this two against one deterrence approach?**

The NATO alliance remains important particularly from a political solidarity perspective and sending a message to Russia that it is not just the United States alone, but all NATO allies that are a part of

this endeavor of nuclear deterrence. We have an interest in making sure that there is appropriate burden-sharing there. This will be a big question as some of the older dual-capable aircraft systems, for example, age out and need to be modernized. Will countries like Germany and others actually go forward with nuclear-capable systems given the additional cost? Unless and until we can negotiate an arms control regime for non-strategic nuclear forces in and around Europe, we need to make sure that NATO's part of the deterrent remains strong as well.

**There are increasing indications that a Biden-Xi summit might be in the cards. How would you advise the president to approach such a summit? Does a personal touch matter in the Biden approach and would such a summit become a headline grabbing event with little to show for it?**

There has been a lot of behind the scenes work to set the conditions for such a summit meeting. We should not expect huge momentous breakthroughs. A leader-to-leader meeting of that kind sets the tone for how we will work together, how we will approach areas where we have differences, and how we will approach areas where we need to cooperate. How will we create frameworks for working on some of the differences we're going to try to at least manage if not resolve.

Presidents Biden and Xi will be taking each other's measure but it's more about what kind of working relationship we will have with China even as we continue to compete and invest in the drivers of our own competitiveness and our allies and partnerships that give us such strategic advantage. I don't expect it to be a big breakthrough with many important deliverables or surprises, but I do expect it to unplug the system and allow things to start moving forward.

**Will China and Russia attempt to keep conflicts and competition in the gray zone? What is their escalation calculus if conflict crosses into the conventional domain?**

I don't think either power seeks to have a direct conventional military confrontation with the United States because I don't think they have parity at scale, not just quantitatively but qualitatively. They will try to manage the competition to keep it below that level using the various hybrid warfare means we have talked about. That said, because we do not have great communication or negotiated rules of the road, and because we lack de-escalation mechanisms in place, we must be prepared for a failure of deterrence and have the ability to quickly re-establish it on terms favorable to us.

That is why I think we need to spend a lot more time thinking through Moscow's and China's respective hierarchies of interests and, also, the different scenarios where we might find ourselves in conflict. How would we protect our interests while also de-escalating before things get to the nuclear level?

**Isn't it fair to characterize China's behavior as merely the mirror image of America's effort to achieve global dominance through military, technological, and financial means?**

China is competing in a very different way; it is not parallel because of the state's deep involvement in their economy. China is motivated both by the fact that there are areas of technology where they have encountered limits or bans or difficulty getting western technology, which drives them to double down on developing that technology indigenously. But China also seeks to dominate in some areas because they believe these technologies will define the future economically and they want to export their products, whether it's Huawei and 5G or what have you.

They want to export those technologies to fuel their domestic imperative which is bringing millions and millions of Chinese people out of poverty and getting them to buy into the Communist Party and its one-party rule. Ultimately, everything the Chinese leadership

does is about keeping the Party in power. A lot of their international economic activity is designed to create the revenue needed to maintain domestic stability. They have a lot of motivations to compete in these areas, but they don't want fair and open competition on a level playing field. We do. That is where we excel, but that is not what China is interested in.

**What recommendations do you have to address the recent spate of hacking and ransomware most notably involving Russia but not exclusive to Russia?**

We have to up our game in cyber security and that will require new types of public-private partnerships. I think the best examples have been in the U.S. financial sector. They were targeted early and often. A real collaboration emerged between the U.S. government and the financial sector working as an industry to try to really enhance their protection, and they've had very good results particularly in providing threat intelligence, sharing best practices, etc. Another example that is still a work in progress is the Defense Industrial Base where there is a lot of public-private collaboration happening.

We need to move that kind of model into a number of areas of critical infrastructure, most of which in the United States is owned by and operated in the private sector, as we witnessed with the Colonial Pipeline, with our electrical grid and so forth. There is some technological innovation coming in this area. We have been in a constant offense-defense battle trying to catch intrusions when they occur and shut them down as quickly as possible. There is a lot of discussion about a different approach, and some companies are actually executing a different approach called "runtime security." I would encourage you to look into this. Basically, runtime security goes below the level of apps to the actual monitoring of runtime.

The way it works is by monitoring for any departure from the normal runtime pattern; even a

nanosecond deviation indicates something is wrong and you can shut it down in the next nanosecond. There have been hackathon experiments where the best hackers in the United States spent a week launching thousands upon thousands of attacks on a system with this kind of security and they have zero intrusions. That is the wave of the future. It is a fundamentally different approach to cyber technology. If widely adopted, this will dramatically improve cyber security for both the U.S. government and for American companies.

**Does it make sense for the United States to have a more robust counter response to these types of attacks and conduct a more aggressive overall response in order to show resolve against such attacks?**

We should be able to impose a cost for these attacks. The response does not have to be symmetric, i.e., a cyber response to a cyber-attack. We need to look at all of the instruments that we have and how we can combine them most effectively to impose cost. Again, this is an area where we have some work to do conceptually and in terms of developing a strategy. After the 2016 Russian cyber meddling in our election cycle there was a lot of concern about similar meddling but using novel techniques in the 2018 elections. The White House authorized CYBERCOM to conduct a series of offensive cyber operations against the Russian perpetrators of the 2016 attacks to impose a denial-of-service attack on them; as a result, they were so preoccupied trying to get their own systems back online that they were unable to launch any attacks on us during that period. That is an example of forward defense in cyberspace. When someone—an adversary—has proven their willingness to attack us using cyber means in ways that are strategic and very harmful, we need responses that complicate or even prevent those attacks.

### What can we do to improve education on strategic deterrence?

Part of it is going to school on how the Chinese think about this the way we went to school on how the Soviet Union thought about deterrence. We tend too often to project our calculus onto them as opposed to really understanding how they think about things and how they might see things differently. We should be developing a cadre of national security professionals who really understand China, who deeply understand how the Chinese think about these issues.

The second piece is the new big bets and technology investments that the Department of Defense will make. How do we hasten the adoption cycle for innovative capabilities and integrate them into the force more quickly and at scale? Perhaps a key part of this—maybe the key part of this—is concept development.

We are so accustomed to being the dominant force on the field that others adopt asymmetric means against us. Yet we continue to think conventionally. We are now going to be in a situation if we are dealing with crisis in the Indo-Pacific, where we are outnumbered because of China's geographic proximity and its multi-decade investment in anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) capabilities. There are going to be times when we are really challenged, our networks are going to be constantly disrupted and taken down.

We have to do some serious conceptual work about how are we going to operate effectively and achieve our objectives in that very different environment where we won't have domain superiority. We want to have it early and even when we get it, sometimes it won't necessarily be persistent. That is a fundamentally different problem set that requires new concepts, and the best way to get that is not some huge bureaucratic exercise. It is by competing ideas and solutions. The more the war colleges and institutes can set up opportunities, war games, simulations, and concept development exercises to allow people to compete creative new

approaches, the greater our chances of success. That is a long-term investment.

### There is much speculation surrounding the PLA's strategic support force and its ability to potentially field emerging technologies including artificial intelligence (AI). Should we be anticipating a strategic or operational surprise in this space and if so, how should we best prepare?

We should devote more resources to understanding exactly what the Chinese are doing in AI. I would commend to you the National Security Commission report on AI. It is one of the most consequential commissions we have had since the 9/11 Commission. Hopefully Congress and future administrations will fully implement their recommendations.

If you look at different dimensions of AI, there are several areas in which the Chinese have already gained parity and they're working very hard to catch up in the other areas. We can no longer assume that China is not going to catch up or even surpass us in some areas. The concern I have about China's progress in AI is that I don't believe that they have the same ethical constraints regarding AI as we have. Because we are a democracy the first thing the Department of Defense does is publish a set of ethical principles on how we will govern the use of and integration of AI in our defense. The Chinese do not have such concerns. The risk that they will use AI in ways we deem irresponsible or unacceptable is very real—and if we encounter such uses on the battlefield we might be caught by surprise because we would never think to do those things.

The most important near-term application of AI is enabling a more resilient network of networks; what we are now calling Joint All-Domain Command and Control. Number two is enabling human decision support so that we can sort through the vast amounts of information and intelligence faster and more accurately to make better, faster decisions than our competition. And three, enabling

human-machine teaming so that a single human platform can control many unmanned systems, providing clear command and control with a huge force multiplier and thus being able to send unmanned systems to do really tough missions in contested or lethal environments. Those are three areas of AI where we absolutely have to accelerate our progress and aim to be dominant, just as a start.

**Is China's current muscle flexing in Hong Kong just testing the water for Western response? It would seem based on the news media that the Western response to China and Hong Kong has been more bark than bite.**

China is always testing the waters and Hong Kong is no exception. There have been strong political and diplomatic sanctions in response to Hong Kong but not more than that. The danger is that China concludes that because it got away with it in Hong Kong it can do the same in Taiwan. I actually think the international response on Taiwan would be different. Again, Chinese leaders are in danger of setting themselves up to miscalculate how the international community will respond.

**What should the United States do regarding Chinese activities in the South China Sea?**

We should continue to press the issue diplomatically and legally, in the context of international law, and with our military means through freedom of navigation exercises, by refusing to recognize their land grabs as legitimate, and by supporting our allies and partners in the region. We should try to create international diplomatic pushback on China whenever they overstep and violate international law in trying to create a new status quo. We have had some success in doing this in the past that has forced China to recalculate and step back, but if we are not consistent about it, they will keep pushing and pushing, and eventually, change the status quo—which is what they have succeeded in doing so far.

**As you just highlighted an outright military confrontation may be an outcome of a miscalculation on the part of China; what, in your view, might be a U.S. miscalculation that could lead to a military confrontation with China?**

We are so accustomed to thinking about it as Chinese miscalculation that we rarely give any thought to how the United States might miscalculate, but this is a very good question. The Chinese, particularly in this period, have a lot of bluster about them with their “wolf warrior diplomacy” and some very aggressive rhetoric. There is a risk that we might think it’s just rhetoric or bluster when they actually intend to do something. The risk is if we assume China will not take an action and we fail to take preventive measures, we might be forced into a hasty military response, and find ourselves on the escalation ladder that we might have prevented had we been more discerning about what is bluster and what is real. We should give that a lot more thought as we develop concepts for the future.

**In 2005, Russia's defense minister stated that Russia is fighting an undeclared war with the West. Sun Tzu says that the state that doesn't recognize that war is being waged against it is at risk of losing the war. How does the United States confront undeclared war against peer adversaries that believe they are already fighting us in the competition space?**

Our eyes have opened up on Russia, particularly after the 2016 elections. We may not call it a war but we certainly see the nature of their actions. There should be a concerted effort to counteract that sort of gray zone conflict, if you will. On the Chinese side, people are framing it differently. They are framing it in terms of a multi-dimensional competition with strategic implications. We recognize that we are in a serious competition that risks becoming open conflict in some areas if we're not careful.

The best way to prevent that is to actually do well in the competition by, for example, investing in the drivers of our own economic and technological competitiveness here at home. That includes everything from science and technology funding, research and development funding, proper incentives and investments from the public sector to draw the private sector into the big bet technology areas where we absolutely need to win. We need a smart immigration policy to attract the best and brightest to the United States and encourage them to develop their new ideas and their businesses here as we have been so successful doing in the past. We need 21<sup>st</sup> century infrastructure.

All of this is part of being able to compete effectively as the United States and then finding areas where we have allies and partners that have particular assets to bring to the table in key technology areas, and combining forces and resources with them more effectively. With China, we need a process of mobilizing at a national level and hopefully, at an international level, to compete effectively and to be able to underwrite deterrence so that we do not go into open conflict.

Legislation needs to move on The Hill and the administration needs to do more. But even in a time when we are very polarized, this is actually one area of remarkable bipartisan consensus.

### **Is there any final thought you would like to leave with us?**

Just a call to action, if you will, to take on this conceptual work, whether it is toward a better understanding of how the Chinese think and how best to deter them, or at the more operational level; we need new concepts. Think in two timeframes. One in the near term, based on what we already have in hand; how do we combine capabilities in new ways and use them in new ways to get better results? And then in the longer term, as investments and new capabilities come online, how do we leverage

those in ways that really take full advantage of what they bring to bear and that will require new concepts of operations.

This effort will take many years and require many minds. It needs to be open and competitive. It cannot be done as a deductive bureaucratic exercise like writing a consensus document or policy. We must submit these new concepts and solutions to competition, testing, and experimentation with new approaches if we are to harness our own strength which is real creativity, innovation, and human capital. That is our real source of advantage. **PRISM**