

Tackling Homeland Defense Challenges in the Indo-Pacific Era

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Abstract

The Indo-Pacific region stands at the forefront of global geopolitics, complete with unique opportunities and intricate challenges that demand a comprehensive and fresh global outlook while also prioritizing homeland defense. With increasing threats to the North American homeland ranging from cyber to environmental to biological to malign state actors, it is imperative that homeland defense becomes seamlessly integrated into our strategies, plans, and operations. This effort needs to be a coordinated one, involving combatant commands, services, interagency organizations and our allies and partners. The People's Republic of China uses economic, diplomatic, military, and technological means to establish a global sphere of influence. Meanwhile, Russia's actions in Ukraine demonstrate a real threat to all our partners and allies. While the Indo-Pacific region will clearly remain a priority region in global geopolitics, the significance of homeland defense within global plans must be recognized as global threats evolve. Resources must be paired to policy, and daily campaigning must incorporate the new realities both at home and abroad to safeguard our nation and prevent conflict around the world.

Throughout the twentieth century, the American way of war hinged on the ability to effectively project combat power from a secure homeland onto foreign shores. The homeland served as the core strategic support area, enabling mobilization, deployment, and the employment and sustainment of combat power against adversaries abroad. However, the current strategic landscape is different and presents a stark contrast. Anticipations for future warfare against near-peer adversaries envision a contested homeland. Threats, wielding both kinetic and virtual capabilities, loom, capable of obstructing and disrupting power projection and sustainment operations. Furthermore, the critical infrastructure underpinning power projection shows signs of age and vulnerability to attacks, while key processes and procedures remain partially outside the Department of Defense's (DOD) control. As we surge further into the twenty-first century, much has evolved. It becomes imperative to reevaluate our outlook and methodology for both defending the homeland and countering threats abroad.

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the epicenter of twenty-first-century geopolitics, presenting a complex landscape of challenges and opportunities that demand a global perspective on homeland defense and security. Authoritarian regimes,

flexing economic, diplomatic, military, and technological muscles, seek to undermine the existing rules-based international order. Among them, the People's Republic of China (PRC) stands out for its comprehensive efforts to establish a global sphere of influence, reshaping global maps both figuratively and literally.

In the current strategic security landscape characterized by ceaseless global competition, the imperative lies in adapting and integrating capabilities, force structures, authorities, and organizational culture. This adaptation enables swift comprehension, decision making, and action. Through better integration of our diverse forces and capabilities, both internally and in conjunction with our allies and partners, we enhance our capacity to deter potential adversaries.

An integrated deterrence approach is crucial because it stresses the importance of building strong and robust partnerships with allies and partners. This strategic outlook entails harnessing and combining strengths across warfighting domains, theaters, the spectrum of conflict, and instruments of national power. Such an approach not only deters rivals during competition but also facilitates de-escalation during crises and effectively denies or defeats adversaries in conflicts.

Moreover, it aids in countering the escalating kinetic and nonkinetic threats to the North American homeland from strategic competitors like the PRC and Russia. To realize this strategy's success, there must be a continued emphasis on deepening partnerships within the region and globally.

The PRC poses a multifaceted threat to global security, particularly to the United States and its allies and partners. Beijing's ambitious military modernization, encompassing advanced cyber tools, maritime capabilities, and hypersonic technologies, transcends regional ramifications. The PRC's actions in the Pacific, including joint military exercises with Russia and power projection efforts in the Arctic, highlight its expanding global influence. Concurrently, the Chinese government's counterintelligence activities, economic espionage, and cyber intrusions constitute a formidable menace to the economic well-being and democratic principles of the United States and our partners in North America and Oceania.

Amid the Indo-Pacific's elevation as a pivotal arena of geopolitical competition, it is essential to acknowledge the interconnectedness of security concerns and embrace a comprehensive strategy to safeguard national interests and confront homeland defense challenges. Homeland defense transcends being a reactive measure; it assumes a proactive and indispensable role within the overarching national security strategy. Leaders must recognize homeland defense's significance in operational plans and, when necessary, in projecting power projection abroad. The evolving threat landscape demands a holistic approach that surpasses conventional boundaries and mandates integration into contingency plans both domestically

and internationally. The Indo-Pacific's dynamic nature disrupts traditional paradigms of contingency planning.

US combatant commanders confront an increasingly asymmetric challenge as adversaries prioritize the disruption or destruction of critical infrastructure supporting DOD facilities and functions. This infrastructure, often reliant on US civilian-owned utilities or host-nation assets for overseas installations, plays a crucial role in the deployment, operation, and lethality of US combat forces. Despite DOD efforts since 2012 to strengthen mission assurance through a holistic and integrated approach, adversaries are developing sophisticated cyber weaponry to target industrial control systems and other essential components of vital infrastructure. These include the electric grid, water systems, transportation connectors, seaports, and airports. The fusion of cyberattacks with information warfare and potentially kinetic strikes presents a substantial threat to national security. In any conflict, particularly with the PRC, the DOD must be prepared for adversaries launching cyber and physical attacks against critical infrastructure systems, potentially across multiple sectors simultaneously, triggering cascading failures.

As defined in Joint Publication 3-27, "Homeland Defense is the protection of U.S. sovereignty, territory, domestic population, and critical infrastructure against external threats and aggression or other threats, as directed by the President."¹ In the contemporary security environment, homeland defense heavily relies on a strategic framework comprising three key elements: all-domain awareness, information dominance, and decision superiority.

The first element, all-domain awareness, emphasizes the importance of creating a layered sensor network spanning North America. This network aims to enable early warnings for air and missile threats, cyber intrusions, and other potential attack vectors. To achieve this, modernization initiatives are pursued, leveraging advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning to augment detection, tracking, and attribution capabilities.

The second element, information dominance, stresses the necessity of amalgamating data from diverse sensors to attain a comprehensive understanding of the battlespace. This necessitates streamlining data architectures, enforcing standards, and fostering collaboration to ensure prompt and reliable processing, dissemination, and utilization of information.

The third element, decision superiority, empowers leaders with decision-making capabilities by harnessing insights garnered through all-domain awareness and information dominance. It emphasizes options extending beyond traditional kinetic

¹ Joint Publication 3-27, *Homeland Defense*, 10 April 2018, <https://www.jcs.mil/>.

defeat mechanisms, enabling proactive measures and broadening the decision space to deter potential adversaries.

Ultimately, this comprehensive framework aims to strengthen homeland defense by prioritizing early detection, informed decision making, and strategic deterrence, thereby safeguarding the nation and its interests.

For homeland defense to achieve success, it must be globally integrated. This entails aligning strategies, plans, and operations among combatant commands, allies, and interagency organizations to acknowledge the reality that the homeland faces threats from a diverse array of actors and actions. Presently, operational plans lack the necessary integration of homeland defense and strategic deterrence. A cultural shift is imperative, where combatant commands are perceived concurrently as both supported and supporting entities. The emphasis should be on creating global plans with regional components, encompassing strategies, force management, and architecture. The existing array of operational plans inherently fosters competition for resources and compromises response capabilities and valuable time.

As part of the necessary integration, each combatant command must actively engage in campaigns originating from and within North America. Defending the homeland is not only crucial for deterring adversaries but also for providing assurance to allies and partners. Aligned with the principles outlined in the United States' 2022 *National Defense Strategy*, the emphasis on campaigning underscores the need to synchronize activities over time, maintaining a competitive advantage and prioritizing defense objectives across combatant commands.²

This strategic approach emphasizes the significance of homeland defense within the different global and regional plans, ensuring the implications are comprehensively understood, regularly exercised, and adequately resourced. Furthermore, the campaigning process fosters close collaboration with regional allies, partners, organizations, and institutions, as they collectively pursue shared objectives. To bring about this transformative shift, commands must establish robust processes, meticulously orchestrating operations, activities, exercises, and investments. This institutionalization ensures a cohesive and synchronized approach, fostering a united front to tackle evolving challenges.

By aligning these efforts with a comprehensive strategy and complementary campaign plans, we not only strengthen our national defense capabilities but also convey a collective determination to safeguard our homeland. Homeland defense campaigning thus serves as a crucial demonstration of our nation's readiness,

² *National Defense Strategy* (Washington: The White House, 27 October 2022), <https://media.defense.gov/>.

capabilities, and resiliency against potential threats, signaling to adversaries that their actions will ultimately fail to achieve their overarching objectives.

Additionally, the DOD is actively tackling a spectrum of threats by prioritizing mission assurance during execution of combatant command operational plans. This shift, as articulated in DOD Directive 3020.40, underscores the necessity of identifying dependencies on installations, support functions, and infrastructure, emphasizing infrastructure resilience as a core warfighting requirement.³

Mitigating risks associated with potential attacks forms a crucial aspect of deterrence by denial. Various measures can be employed to achieve this, including intercepting incoming attacks, reducing damage through hardening or dispersal, and fielding credible rapid recovery capabilities. Adopting a risk management approach is crucial for comprehensive improvements in joint force lethality. Strategies such as integrating cybersecurity into mission assurance, addressing mission assurance shortfalls, and refining operational plan development processes are recommended.

Additionally, the DOD emphasizes the importance of forging partnerships with critical infrastructure owners, particularly in areas like microgrids and power restoration. Collaborating with the private sector and government agencies is vital for identifying critical assets, while addressing supply-chain risks necessitates cooperation between the private sector and government.

This emphasis extends to mission assurance abroad, recognizing adversaries' expanding control over critical infrastructure globally. The overarching resilience objective aims to proactively confront potential threats and bolster joint force lethality in the face of asymmetric challenges. Sharing lessons learned and seeking best practices from partners and allies are essential, as collective efforts can enhance our resilience.

In the Indo-Pacific theater, the strategic significance of homeland defense cannot be overstated—it facilitates proactive security measures, safeguards power projection and sustainment, ensures a unified military response, protects critical assets, enables adaptability to emerging threats, and fosters public confidence in the government's commitment to safety and security. As leaders navigate the multifaceted challenges presented by this dynamic theater, a fundamental acknowledgment arises—every plan, exercise, and policy decision must intricately weigh the necessity of defending the homeland, particularly amid competing demands for forces and evolving threats to global campaigning.

This strategic imperative demands a profound recalibration of defense strategies, compelling leaders to sharpen their focus on developing key attributes essential

³ DOD Directive 3020.40, *Mission Assurance*, 29 November 2016, <https://irp.fas.org/>.

for navigating future challenges. The essence of this recalibration lies in cultivating depth, fostering flexibility, harnessing advanced technologies, and fortifying supporting infrastructure. These elements collectively form the bedrock of a robust defense framework, equipping leaders to respond effectively to the nuanced and evolving security landscape of the Indo-Pacific region.

The Indo-Pacific theater holds significant importance in the concept of a globally integrated layered defense, encompassing forward regions like Guam, Hawai'i, and American Samoa—strategic areas where proactive defense measures can be implemented to detect and deter threats before they reach the homeland itself. Additionally, the infusion of advanced technologies into defense strategies is deemed crucial for maintaining a competitive edge in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world. Leaders are encouraged to leverage innovations in surveillance, communication, and response mechanisms to enhance overall defense capabilities.

Simultaneously, the strategic imperative underscores the importance of strengthening supporting infrastructure—logistical support, strategic bases, and communication networks—capable of enduring and recovering from potential disruptions. In essence, the strategic imperatives for homeland defense, especially within the Indo-Pacific theater, mandate a holistic and forward-thinking approach, seamlessly integrating considerations for the safety and security of the homeland into military decision-making processes, exercises, and policy formulations.

A capable and persistent defense at home lays the foundation for projecting power globally, ensuring the United States can deter adversaries, de-escalate crises, and effectively deny and defeat in conflicts. The future is defined by global integration, facilitated through proactive planning and real-time collaboration across all domains and combatant commands. The triad of all-domain awareness, information dominance, and decision superiority, coupled with critical infrastructure resilience, strengthened partnerships, and rapid flexible options forms a holistic approach to fortify national defense capabilities. By embracing these principles, the United States can navigate the complexities of the contemporary security landscape and safeguard its interests in an interconnected world.

The threats to our homeland have evolved, as have our adversaries. We must live in the present as we plan for our future, recognizing the very real threats both abroad and to our homeland. Those very real and constantly evolving twenty-first-century threats demand twenty-first-century planning and responses. Fortunately, there is no better group than the United States and its allies and partners to confront such challenges in the Indo-Pacific and around the world. 🌐

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