

CHAPTER
9

PROTECTING AMERICA

IDEA 17

America should make it a national priority to have the most efficient, most effective, and most powerful military in the world to protect democracy at home and abroad.

Republican president Ronald Reagan believed America could achieve “peace through strength,” warning that “war comes not when the forces of freedom are strong, but when they are weak.” Four decades earlier, Democratic president Franklin Roosevelt said that America must be the “great arsenal of democracy,” with a military force “so strong that by its very existence, it will keep the threat of war far away from our shores.”

Today, most Americans understand there is growing danger in the world and, like Reagan and Roosevelt, believe in the importance of American military power. They want Washington to invest more in the military so we will be prepared to fight a two-front war against Russia and China if that is necessary, even as we all hope it never is.

But America is not adequately prepared. By most measures, America still has the strongest military in the world. However, our lead is shrinking. We may not have enough ships to deter Russia and China

and to patrol the Pacific and critical sea lanes, while the Army and other branches are missing their recruiting goals. America’s military spending as a share of our economy is less than half what it was 40 years ago.

Meanwhile, China actually has more manpower, ships, and submarines than the US. A recent war game showed that Chinese hypersonic missiles could sink American aircraft carriers.

Our government shouldn’t just blindly dump more money into the Pentagon—especially amid reports from early 2023 that military contractors have been overcharging and billions have been wasted on unnecessary or ineffective weapons systems.

So America undoubtedly needs to spend more to protect our security in a dangerous world, but we need to do so with much less waste and with *zero* corruption.

IDEA 18

A world led by America is safer than a world led by Russia and China would be.

Since World War II, the US-led world order has seen the longest period of major power peace in modern history. We built a system of rules and alliances that deepened trade ties, enhanced security, and helped lift millions out of poverty.

Russia and China are intent on upending this order. Listen to Chinese President Xi Jinping, who accuses the West of “all-round containment, encirclement and suppression against us,” or Russian President Vladimir Putin, who says, “America has nothing to

offer the world except domination.” Listen to them both say Russia and China are forging a “friendship without limits,” and it’s obvious they aim to create a new, more dangerous and less stable order where they can bully other countries into submission.

Americans don’t think we’re a perfect country, but most think we have been—and continue to be—a force for good in the world. Our next president should govern with that same assumption.

IDEA 19

It's in America's interest to work with our allies to advance our mutual interests.

If you agree, as most Americans do, that adversaries like Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea are trying to challenge or undermine American influence globally, then you should agree that it helps America to have friends.

Take America's European allies and partners as an example. With their support, we've built an incredible security network across much of the Northern Hemisphere, particularly through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which now includes 31 countries. NATO is premised on the idea of collective defense: if one member is attacked, it's considered an attack on every member. That means when America is attacked—as we were on 9/11—NATO comes to our defense. NATO also makes adversaries think twice about violating the sovereignty of any NATO member, because they know if they do, they're picking a fight with 30 other countries.

In 2023, NATO members collectively maintained approximately 20,800 military aircraft, 2,400 ships (including sixteen aircraft carriers), and 1.03 million combined ground combat vehicles (including 12,500 tanks).

Beyond Europe, key US allies like Japan, South Korea, Israel, and Australia have their own formidable firepower to defend our mutual interests. Those four countries alone provide 2,175,500 personnel, 4,000 aircraft, 420 ships,

and 350,000 combined ground combat vehicles, helping defend the vital Indo-Pacific and Middle East regions.

These alliances are built on more than collective military strength—they're about advancing our shared values and economic interests. Our allies and partners push back against powers like Russia and China that challenge the rules-based global order. We work together to exert political, economic, and diplomatic pressure on rivals, using the leverage of multinational and intergovernmental organizations like the World Trade Organization to promote human rights and the rule of law.

In every community across America, there are jobs and businesses selling American-made products and services all over the world. In 2022, US exports to NATO countries plus Japan, South Korea, Israel, and Australia totaled nearly one trillion dollars. That equates to millions of American jobs in sectors ranging from manufacturing and construction to engineering and energy.

America is a sovereign country, and the commonsense majority wants our leaders to prioritize the interests of America. But in a world that is increasingly interconnected, the US can't afford to go it alone. Our alliances and partnerships aren't just nice-to-haves; they are critical components of our national security, economic prosperity, and global leadership.

IDEA 20

America should lead the world in the development of ethical artificial intelligence.

In 2023, with the release of large language models like OpenAI's ChatGPT, Americans were forced to reckon with the awesome and alarming possibilities of AI, which has already proven its ability to ace the bar exam and spread convincing false images, voices, and videos across the web.

This is just the beginning of the disruption. AI will affect many of our jobs, making us more productive and creating new jobs, but at the same time making some jobs obsolete. It could help solve many problems—enhancing our ability to cure diseases, combat climate change, and fight terrorism—while worsening others, like polarization, privacy concerns, and the spread of misinformation.

AI-integrated war systems also have the potential to significantly accelerate the pace of decision-making on the battlefield. At the same time, AI introduces fresh dangers, like the possibility that AI decision-making could proceed faster than humans can oversee it.

So far, America has been the leader in AI breakthroughs. A study from the Paulson Institute found that nearly 60 percent of top-tier AI

researchers are employed at American universities and companies and that 18 of the 25 most productive AI research institutions are in the US. Our AI research network benefits from top talent but also from a more open regulatory environment than places like Europe, where multiple governments have already sought to put the brakes on AI development until stricter regulations can be implemented.

Some AI innovators and thinkers are so concerned by the technology's implications that they've signed letters calling for a pause on all AI development until proper guardrails to guide its development can be put in place. However, there is little precedent for any embargo on the advancement of science.

That is why it is so important for America to remain the pacesetter in AI development, because China is eager to surpass the US and implement its own vision for the technology. China also appears to be planning offensive cyberoperations with AI. In June 2023, the US government's lead cybersecurity

official called Chinese cyberespionage and sabotage the “defining threat” of our time. While US government and tech leaders are trying to spur conversations and develop frameworks to ensure AI is developed for ethical purposes, the Chinese Communist Party has already used its AI advances to conduct unprecedented levels of surveillance and repression of the Chinese people.

As a first step in tackling the AI challenge, the next president should create a commission to handle two big objectives: ensuring America remains the world leader in its development and ensuring that development puts the world on a path toward ethical, safe AI.

Such a national commission on artificial intelligence could be modeled on the President’s Council on Bioethics (created by President George W. Bush) and the National Bioethics Advisory Commission (created by President Bill Clinton), which studied and advised on the implications of medical advances like cloning and stem cell research.

It could also build on bipartisan legislation in the Senate to establish an office of global competition analysis to regularly evaluate how America stacks up regarding AI research compared to other nations to help guide US policy, determine where public AI research dollars could best complement private sector research, and protect our competitive edge.

Artificial intelligence is going to change everything, so let’s ensure that the country that values human rights and freedom leads in the development of AI.