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China is not just a competitor. It is the defining test of American power in the 21st century. The 2022 National Security Strategy (NSS) calls China “the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it” (White House, 2022, p. 8). That is not hedging. That is the clearest expression of intent in the document. Strategic competition with China represents the most significant challenge to U.S. national security interests. At the same time, the greatest opportunity lies in the concept of integrated deterrence and the strength of U.S. alliances. The 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) does not merely echo this message. It operationalizes it. First, China is the pacing threat because it forces the U.S. to rethink speed, scope, and readiness. The NSS calls this a “decisive decade,” and the NDS echoes it with urgency. By calling China the “pacing challenge,” the NDS signals that every U.S. capability, plan, and partnership must measure up against Beijing’s rise (DoD, 2022, p. iii). This is not Cold War déjà vu. It is more dynamic, more digital, and more economically entangled. That is what makes it dangerous. And that is what makes focus essential.

Second, integrated deterrence is more than military signaling. It is the fusion of power: diplomatic, informational, military, and economic that is applied across domains and with allies

who matter. The NSS insists on alliances as a “force multiplier” (White House, 2022, p. 20). The NDS turns that into doctrine. Integrated deterrence, as defined, links operations with coalition, technology with trust, and military posture with political alignment (DoD, 2022, p. iv). This is strategy as architecture that is layered, resilient, and networked.

Third, both strategies embrace the need for long-term campaigning with China and integrated deterrence in mind. The NSS outlines strategic competition as a persistent, shaping effort. The NDS answers with a commitment to campaigning below the threshold of armed conflict, using forward presence, exercises, and posture to influence the environment and deny adversaries the initiative (DoD, 2022, pp. 12-13).

In summary, strategic competition with China is the top challenge to U.S. national security, and integrated deterrence offers the greatest opportunity to advance American interests. The NSS sets the vision. The NDS builds the scaffolding. Together, they reflect a clear and deliberate alignment of purpose, method, and execution.

References

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