

August 6, 2021

The Honorable Josh Hawley
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Hawley:

I appreciate the opportunity to again address your questions regarding the Department's approach to China and the Force Planning Construct as they relate to the National Defense Strategy. As we discussed, both are critically important. This perspective represents my personal views as it relates to both issues and, if confirmed, I commit to fully exploring these issues in the National Defense Strategy and to consulting with Congress throughout the review process.

The Department should prioritize deterring Chinese aggression against Taiwan given our commitments pursuant to the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) and in light of increasing Chinese coercion against the people of Taiwan. I believe strongly that deterrence by denial should be prioritized when it comes to China, and Taiwan in particular. Deterrence by cost-imposition or deterrence by punishment can complement but should not supplant deterrence by denial when it comes to deterring China. Cost imposition is invariably limited as an approach given questions of resolve. Similarly, horizontal escalation's effectiveness in such a scenario will be limited and could take resources from the primary effort.

I believe China will remain the pacing threat for the Department—as Secretary Austin has repeatedly underscored. I believe that the force planning construct should prioritize and focus on China unless and until the security environment changes dramatically (which, I hasten to add, does not currently appear to be the case given China's robust military modernization and aggressive approach). In particular, the threat China poses to Taiwan should be a priority in this vein. While the U.S. military will invariably need to juggle other challenges simultaneously, it would need to reprioritize those should a conflict with China arise.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,
Mara E. Karlin, PhD