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Critical National Security Threats Facing the United States of America

The U.S. has myriad national security threats facing it now, spanning from domestic terrorist attacks to a global pandemic circulating the world. The three top issues of today would be China's increasing growth rate and encroaching military operations, the U.S.'s growing cybersecurity concerns and cyber attacks on government systems, and terrorism both abroad and here at home.

China's increasing economy, more brazen military tactics against its neighbors and its flagrant disregard of the UN is a massive threat to U.S. security. In the years since 2000, China's GDP has more than quadrupled (Mark Purdy, 2013), and is nowhere close to stopping. According to Terri Moon Cronk, "China wants...to become the world's largest and most influential economy", and it has no intention of backing down. But it's not the economic advancement we're so afraid of, it's the military progression being made with the money brought about by the economic boom. Cronk noted on what Undersecretary John Rood said, "You're starting to see China develop overseas military bases, overseas intelligence collection locations" (Cronk 2019). The concern, as Undersecretary Rood put it, is China's 750% military defense spending increase over the last decade. In the last few months, China has been responsible for the

sinking of Vietnamese fishing boats, harassment of Malaysian energy offshoots, and surrounding Philippine outposts with maritime militia (David Stillwell, 2020). China has also been militarizing the Spratlys and artificial islands it's built (the number is thought to be over 20), as well as creating unlawful fishing bans on the SCS under the idea that it has indisputable sovereignty, says Stillwell. All in an attempt to gain control of the major economic resources of oil, gas, and fish. China also appears to have no interest in obeying international laws. In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague ruled in favor of the Philippines against China in a dispute over the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which China ignored. They did not care for the verdict made against them, so they essentially pretended it never happened by "refusing to accept the court's authority", and maintained their forceful tactics against those in the South China Sea (SCS) (CFR, 2020). If China is not stopped sometime soon, they're likely to try and completely take over the SCS area. If it does not care about international law and its repercussions, and it has the funds and military to support a war with the SCS countries, then there's no doubt that China would try its luck. The only thing holding it back is the threat of America joining the war if any of the SCS countries are attacked, two of which are a part of NATO. But China isn't going to hold back forever, and if we want to halt the progression of a possible world war III threat, we need to deal with China. The FBI considers counterintelligence against China its current top priority (FBI, 2020), and it should be ours too. So far, America has sanctioned China with embargoes and tariffs, causing economic problems for the rising hegemon. Most of these sanctions have been done on the grounds of human rights issues over in China, with China being banned from International Military Education and Training (IMET), Foreign Military Financing (FMF), and Foreign Military Sales (FMS) for its high rate of human trafficking (Uni. of Pittsburgh, 2020). Just recently, the U.S. passed the

Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2020, which requires the U.S. to report on the human rights abuse instances from China against the Uyghurs. The U.S. has also been financially supporting and backing Chinese targets like Taiwan and the Philippines. The U.S. is closely connected to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations(ASEAN) as well, which acts as a deterrent to China in the SCS area, though that deterrent is slowly getting weaker. In my personal opinion, the U.S. is on the right track for now, but it's veering left. Our main priority with China should be to *avoid* any and all conflict. We should try to limit our arguments as much as possible, and compromise. However, that doesn't mean we should give up on fundamental rights and let China get away with its crimes. We need to have a strict, but friendly relationship with China, one where we respect each other as equals and understand that neither should cross the line. It would be a good idea to negotiate a better trading system with China than the one we have now. While the tariffs on China are effectively useless as a punishment, they're not hurting American citizens either (Derrick, 2019). According to Derrick Scissors, inflation rates in America right now "neutralizes them as a macroeconomic threat". The only thing they're doing is hurting U.S. Chinese relations, and they need to be removed. We either need to make a punishment that hurts the Chinese government, or we need to compromise. I say we compromise, and work out a better deal, all the while building up our relations with China. The more dependent they are on us, the less they'll want to fight us. As we stand now, our relationship with China is degrading, and although I believe we've responded the right way to the majority of the situations between us in the last two decades, I think we could do better. We need to push for better communications between us and recognize China as an up and coming equal to the U.S.

The U.S. has had increasing concerns over numerous cybersecurity threats to government systems in the last 10 years, most notably after the attack in 2016. It was in that year that Russian hackers infiltrated the American internet society (Polyakova, 2019), and hacked into former Secretary of State Hilary Clinton's Chief of Staff John Podesta's email. With this, Russia easily gained access to various classified documents, including ones that would dirty Clinton's reputation. The hackers were only interested in finding dirt on Clinton, so they didn't actively pursue any further past the classified documents released to the public. However, they were able to majorly swing the election in President Trump's favor, and influence tons of our own citizens with fake social media accounts (Polyakova, 2019). This is a serious threat, so much so that even the Defense Science Board (DSB) has decided that the U.S. no longer has the ability to defend against cyberattacks from other countries (O'Hanlon, 2017). And they would've been proven right this year if it hadn't been for the swift communication between the U.S. and the European countries affected. According to Erik Brattberg, the European countries that obtained 5G from Huawei immediately had security concerns and began removing and banning 5G in their country. This is a worrisome indication, whether true or not, that China is trying to infiltrate the world's top Government information facilities. If this was a true incident, and China was trying to hack into world governments, then we all need to be on high alert. Russia already got away with it, and China's a major concern, we need to start focusing on the cybersecurity of the U.S. right now. And it's not just Government secrets at risk, personal data of American citizens stored by the Government for identification is at risk too (DHS, 2020). One of American's most common fears is stolen information, like identity or credit information. This stuff can be stolen from the Government by someone who wants to sell personal information if they can break through the Cybernet put up by the U.S. government as a defense. But as we've

already heard, our defense against cyber attacks is relatively weak. The good news though, is that we've already begun taking steps in the right direction. Just recently, in 2018, President Trump passed a new law, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency Act of 2018. This law makes it so the DHS can focus more on cybersecurity than ever before, creating the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency(CISA). The CISA is now responsible for national cybersecurity and is partnered with the federal government to provide government agencies with the training and tools to defend against cyberattacks (DHS, 2020). And back in 2015, President Obama signed an act allowing the federal government to impose sanctions on suspected cybersecurity threats to keep them at bay. The Government Accountability Office(GAO) is also working to provide federal agencies with new techniques to defend against cyberattacks. However, out of the 3000 recommendations, at least 600 still have yet to be implemented and practiced, which is a cause for concern (GAO, 2020). Worse yet, according to the Heritage Foundation, there have been several fights over bills on cybersecurity, leading to them not being as effective, or not being passed at all (Heritage Foundation, 2020). With this as the ceasing point for cybersecurity action, I believe there needs to be a change. We can no longer continue to kick around the bush. Instead, we must begin focusing on the rapid development of cybersecurity protocols and mechanisms. We may also look to outsourcing, like Apple, for cybersecurity ideas. Currently, the government keeps a list of individuals who are a potential cybersecurity threat as well. O'Hanlon also had a great idea of keeping "a playbook of sorts, in advance, to guide response to a significant cyberattack." If we just focus on increasing our cybersecurity defense rather than playing trade wars with the enemy, we'd stand a much better chance at victory.

The threat of terrorism has been an ever-looming fear in the minds of Americans for years now, but terrorists have only been expanding, both domestically and internationally. In the last five years, domestic terrorism has increased by tenfold (New America, 2020). Four years ago, over 40 were killed in a 2016 shooting by an American citizen, and just last year, another American citizen took more than 20 lives in a 2019 shooting. Wars between the U.S. and terrorist organizations have also been draining the U.S. for decades now, causing the U.S. global image and soft power to drop, and costing us billions of dollars (FBI, 2002). So far, the U.S. has increased its security for transportation into the country. It's also waged war against the terrorist organizations and states suspected of supporting them, such as during the Bush presidency. Currently, we're lightly pulling away from the conflict in the middle east, but not by much. However, due to the involvement the U.S. has created with other organizations (in terrorist active zones) like with the YPG, relationships have been strained with other countries (like Turkey). I find this to be foolish, as we're only shooting ourselves in the foot by destroying relations with other countries for a group we never needed to have a connection with. We should have discussed the alliance with the YPG with Turkey before it was set in place to avoid conflict, but we failed to do that (Laub, 2017). Our actions towards terrorism in the middle east have been downright manic at times, like choosing to assassinate an Iranian general, Qasem Soleimani, in Iraq, 2020 (Moore & Ramptom, 2020). And here at home, especially in the past, we haven't been able to stop terrorist attacks. In the last 6 years, terrorist attacks have grown at home by right-wing activists (Jones et al., 2020). I have many ideas I'd like to bring to the table for counterterrorism tactics, many of which are also from Roberta Wohlstetter. One of the first things, and one that has always been on the table, is stopping major contributors to U.S. terrorism

that aren't countries like ISIS, Al Qaeda, and Jihadists. Secondly, we need to finish the fights we've started with countries over terrorism, and try to fix our relations. It's better to have a neutral or even positive relationship with the countries that are known to have high terrorism(against the U.S.) rates. Then we need to stop getting involved in other countries' conflicts again unless we're obliged to by a treaty of sorts. Also, countries that are known terrorist supporters should be put on a watch list and punished for their actions (Wohlstetter, 2000). Wohlstetter also suggested putting countries that aren't in full compliance with counterterrorism actions, like Pakistan and Greece, should receive punishment as well. I think the punishment should be a lighter one since they're not directly supporting terrorism, however, the type of punishment is not specified by Wohlstetter. And finally, I believe we should increase discussions with the UN over strengthening sanction punishments and monitoring for countries that support terrorism.

It should be clear now that the U.S.'s safety is at risk and the need to do something is only growing. China's aggressive tactics to increase its authority in the SCS and growing economy, increasing concerns over the U.S.'s weak cybersecurity and the rising number of terrorist attacks at home and abroad need to be addressed properly. It's up to the U.S. to solve its own problems, and we need to start now. No more sitting around twiddling our thumbs and taking messy, poorly planned action. It's time to start filling in the holes causing our problems so that we can focus on other important problems, like climate change and current inflation trends in America.

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