Twitter Thread by Tanvi Madan

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1/ Secretary of Defense nominee Lloyd Austin at Senate Armed Services Committee confirmation hearing:

"Globally I understand that Asia must be the focus of our effort and I see China in particular as a pacing challenge for the Department"

2/ SecDef nominee Lloyd Austin on advance policy Qs

"Globally...most significant challenge I will face will be to ensure DOD's contd efforts to prepare & strengthen the US military for a dynamic, future security landscape driven by accelerating competitions w China & w Russia.."

What do you consider to be the most significant challenges you will face if confirmed as Secretary of Defense and what are your plans to address each challenge?

The most urgent challenge we face is the pandemic. If confirmed, I will immediately review DOD's support to the broader U.S. government effort and increase the speed and scale of our support, while maintaining military readiness. Globally, I believe the most significant challenge I will face will be to ensure the Department of Defense's continued efforts to prepare and strengthen the U.S. military for a dynamic, future security landscape driven by accelerating competitions with China and with Russia -- with China as our pacing threat in most areas-- while still ensuring our ability to deter today's range of threats. DoD, in concert with our interagency and international partners and allies, will play a crucial role in deterring Chinese and Russian aggression, while still contending with threats emanating from Iran and North Korea and countering terrorism. We must also address risks to the U.S. Homeland, including demands for defense support to civil authorities.

3/ SecDef nominee Austin in written answers says strategic competition w/ China & Russia primary challenges but "because of its ascent and the scope and scale of its military modernization, China is the top priority"

The 2018 NDS outlines that the United States faces a rising China, an aggressive Russia, and the continued threat from rogue regimes and global terrorism.

In your view, does the 2018 NDS accurately assess the current strategic environment? What do you perceive as the areas of greatest risk?

I believe the 2018 NDS correctly identifies strategic competitions with China and with Russia as the primary challenges animating the global security environment; however, I believe that because of its ascent and the scope and scale of its military modernization, China is the top priority. I am also concerned about transnational threats as the security landscape evolves (e.g., amid COVID-19) and believe that our defense strategy must adapt accordingly. As required by law, if confirmed I will review the NDS and where necessary revise or update it in the 2022 National Defense Strategy.

The continued erosion of U.S. military advantage vis-à-vis China and Russia, in key strategic areas, remains the most significant risk the Department must address. If left unchecked, this continued erosion could fundamentally challenge our ability to achieve U.S. national security objectives – and limit DoD's ability to underpin other U.S. instruments of power.

4/ SecDef nominee Austin in written answers on his assessment of the military threat posed by China...

What is your assessment of the military threat posed by the People's Republic of China?

I assess that the rapid development and operational focus of the People's Republic of China (PRC) constitutes a significant and long-term security threat to the United States and to our allies and partners. This threat is an outgrowth of nearly two decades of intense efforts by China to modernize and reform the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and other forces into an increasingly capable joint force able to conduct the full range of military operations across every warfighting domain. In addition to a significant buildup and modernization of its strategic forces, the PLA is advancing its capabilities and concepts for conducting information, cyber, space, and counterspace operations. China has also made it clear that it expects the PLA to be a global military actor that is able to secure China's growing overseas interests and advance other PRC objectives abroad. These changes are coupled with the PRC's aggressive and at times coercive activities 7 aimed at advancing its military influence through forging closer ties with foreign militaries, attaining overseas military bases, and expanding the PLA's presence worldwide.

5/ SecDef nominee Austin on whether the NDS needs to be revised notes: "For example, the pace of China's military modernization, its increasingly aggressive actions in the INDO-PACIFIC and its ability to threaten the US Homeland are concerning and must be continually reexamined"

If confirmed, would you revise or adjust the 2018 NDS as a result of changes in assumptions, policy, or other factors? If so, in what ways?

Yes. Many of the core concepts in the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) are fundamentally sound. At the same time, there are notable changes occurring in the global security environment that warrant deeper evaluation, and which should compel DoD to periodically reexamine and update the strategy and its path to implementation. For example, the pace of China's military modernization, its increasingly aggressive actions in the INDO-PACIFIC and its ability to threaten the U.S. Homeland are concerning and must be continually reexamined. The NDS also assumes sustained defense budget growth, but that has not fully materialized. The NDS anticipated a global rebalancing of U.S. commitments, notably from the Middle East to the INDO-PACIFIC, but that has proven challenging. In light of these developments, if confirmed, I plan to undertake a comprehensive strategic review in consultation with my leadership team to ensure we can achieve our defense objectives.

If confirmed, I would direct my team to evaluate where changes are emerging relative to the U.S. security and fiscal environments; demands on defense-wide and military roles and missions; our military's approach to future warfighting; the state of our network of allies and partners; and the ways DoD is implementing the strategy. Examination of these elements would of course be nested in the broader context of any change in priorities directed in our National Security Strategy. These insights would inform how the Department may update the defense strategy and its implementation.

6/ SecDef nominee Austin in APQs emphasizes "strength of this network of defense relations" w/ allies & partners as crucial "especially in global competitions with China and Russia"

Are there significant opportunities that, in your view, DOD has been unable to leverage, or has leveraged only in part, since the NDS was published in 2018? If so, how would correct this situation, if confirmed?

Our alliances and partnerships globally – including the defense tools at our disposal to engage them, and more fundamentally the mutual security commitments and interests we pursue to maintain them – are an asymmetric strategic advantage that our competitors do not possess. The strength of this network of defense relations cannot be taken for granted, though, especially in global competitions with China and Russia. If confirmed, I would seek ways to build on DoD's alliance and partnership efforts as a core element of defense strategy.

First and foremost, if confirmed, I will make it a priority to rebuild strong defense relationships with our allies and partners around the world, many of whom have felt 9 unsure of U.S. commitments and insufficiently consulted in recent years. In addition to renewing the foundations of our defense relationships, I also understand the Department recently released new guidance to guide efforts to more strategically engage with its network of allies and partners through defense relations, security cooperation, force planning, and elsewhere. If confirmed, I would look to better understand how DoD is framing and implementing this guidance and ensure it is fundamental to broader DoD efforts to review and update defense strategy and its implementation

7/ SecDef nominee Austin in APQs on resources for non-DOD agencies: "imperative" they "receive sufficient funding"

"I do not believe current funding levels for security assistance & development programs are pacing the challenges posed by China and others in these areas"

Do you believe non-DOD departments and agencies have been sufficiently resourced to appropriately contribute to U.S. national security objectives?

It is imperative that non-DoD departments and agencies receive sufficient funding to be able to contribute their respective parts in addressing the complex array of security challenges confronting this Nation. I do not believe current funding levels for security assistance and development programs are pacing the challenges posed by China and others in these areas. The Department of Defense alone cannot shoulder this burden – the Department's success requires its interagency partners to be resourced sufficiently. Each department and agency leader must act with responsible fiscal stewardship as he or she sets resource requirements for respective missions in the context of the overall National Security Strategy. If confirmed, I would look to these leaders to determine the appropriate resource levels for their departments and agencies and would partner with them to advocate for sufficient funding.

8/ SecDef nominee Austin in APQs re DoD priorities in Africa: "countering
1) violent extremist organizations (VEOs) that
threaten the homeland and U.S. national security interests and
2) competitors such as China and Russia"

9/ SecDef nominee Austin in APQs re his assessment of Chinese & Russian goals in Africa.

(among other things, notes concern re their overseas basing plans)

What is your assessment of the strategic objectives of Russia and China in Africa? In what areas, if any, do these oppose U.S. and partner objectives?

Over the past five years, Russia has increased its engagement with African nations to bolster global power projection, access raw materials, expand arms sales, and undermine Western influence. Russia views investment in Africa as part of its global influence strategy. China's strategic objectives in Africa include securing access to economic resources, opening new markets, and gaining operational military experience through 25 peacekeeping and counter-piracy operations, while portraying it as a responsible global actor. I am also concerned about China and Russia's overseas military basing ambitions and the PLA's expanding global military presence. The PRC has a well-established air and naval base in Djibouti, which they continue to expand, and is also looking for other African basing locations including along the Atlantic coast. China also uses multilateral forums and international organizations like the Belt and Road Forum to generate new opportunities to strengthen its political influence, promote strategic messaging that portrays it as a responsible global actor, advance its development interests, and limit outside interference in and criticism of its initiatives.

Given Africa's diverse political, economic, social, and security landscape, it is difficult to generalize how Russia and China "oppose partner objectives." However, we have seen how heavy-handed Russian private military companies' operations in Mozambique, Central African Republic, and Libya have exacerbated local tensions and alienated members of the public. These actions undermine our efforts in African countries to promote civilian control of the armed forces, transparency, and accountability.

10/ SecDef nominee Austin in APQs re US strategy to compete vs China & Russia in Africa.

Says must not just compete, but win. Reqs whole of govt effort & addressing mutual security concerns

What is your assessment of the efficacy of the current U.S. strategy to compete against Russia and China and to be the security partner of choice in Africa? What changes, if any, would you recommend in this strategy, if confirmed?

The current U.S. strategy focuses on African partnerships – building capacity, working toward shared objectives, operating transparently, and promoting institutions and good governance for sustainable security – while highlighting and exposing the dangers associated with dealing with China and Russia. DoD's competitive security edge lies primarily in (1) the superior quality of the equipment, training, education, and other security assistance we provide; and (2) our support to counterterrorism operations. In the face of motivated and capable competitors, we must work to enhance our ability not only to compete, but to win. This means continuing our whole-of-government commitment to stay engaged and develop partnerships and address mutual security concerns in Africa, which will critically involve other agencies strengthening their non-military tools.

The Department has made notable progress implementing the National Defense Strategy to advance our lines of effort to compete with Russia and China in Africa. This includes enhancing our alliances and partnerships in Africa through efforts like the signing of the 10-year Roadmaps for Defense Cooperation with Morocco and Tunisia. If confirmed, I look forward to reviewing and advancing our strategies to protect and secure U.S. interests in Africa.

11/ Will circle back to APQs, picking up on the actual SASC hearing....

12/ Sen. Reed asks re Pacific Defense Initiative & solidifying ties w/ Australia, Japan, South Korea, & expanding w/ other Pacific nations.

Austin: refurbishing alliances "critical", hopes to "build add'l capacity where possible"

"the region will be one of my first stops."

13/ Sen. Reed talks about "strength in numbers" & security cooperation w/ Pacific partners being the "best deterrent we could think of with respect to the aspirations of China."

Austin says he agrees.

14/ Sen. Wicker asks if he agrees w/ assessment that China's goal is to devp a military by mid-century equal or superior to that of US.

Austin says he agrees & "I wld intend to make sure that never happens."

Talks abt maintaining competitive edge.

I would agree that is their goal. My job, if confirmed, is to make sure we develop the capabilities, plans and operational concepts to ensure we maintain a competitive edge. While that may be their goal, I would intend to make sure that never happens.