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STUDIES

Avoiding a Strategy of Bluff: The Crisis of American Military Primacy

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If strategy is the calculated relation of means to ends, then today America is careening toward strategic insolvency. Following the Cold War, the United States possessed unrivaled military primacy, both globally and in all the world's key strategic theaters. Yet today, Washington faces military challenges that are both more severe and more numerous than at any time in decades, precisely as its own defense cutbacks have significantly reduced U.S. military capabilities.

The United States confronts challenges from revisionist great powers such as China and Russia, aggressive rogue states such as Iran and North Korea, and international terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. At the same time, constant-dollar defense spending fell from \$768 billion in 2010 to \$595 billion in 2015, the fastest drawdown - in percentage terms - since the Korean War. The result has been a creeping crisis of American military primacy, as the margin of superiority to which the United States has become accustomed has diminished, and a growing gap between U.S. commitments and capabilities has emerged. Closing that gap will require a significant, sustained defense buildup in the years to come.