

US “Worldwide Threat Assessment” takes aim at China

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Amid a bipartisan escalation of US pressure on China, the US “intelligence community” published Tuesday its annual “Worldwide Threat Assessment,” ahead of testimony by US intelligence officials before the Senate Intelligence Committee that day.

While the media have largely focused on differences between the assessment provided in the document and the statements of the White House, in reality the threat assessment reflects a bipartisan escalation of US efforts to block the economic, military and technological development of Russia and China, with particular emphasis on China.

The publication of the document came just one day after the US Justice Department announced a series of trumped-up charges against the Chinese technology company Huawei, alleging that it conspired to evade US sanctions against Iran and stole technology from the US carrier T-Mobile.

Both the publication of the Worldwide Threat Assessment and the charges against Huawei set the tone for the White House’s trade negotiations with China, which reached an inconclusive outcome on Thursday.

In a development over last year’s document, this year’s threat assessment begins by warning of a growing alignment between Russia and China, declaring that the two countries “are more aligned than at any point since the mid-1950s, and the relationship is likely to strengthen in the coming year as some of their interests and threat perceptions converge, particularly regarding perceived US unilateralism and interventionism.”

The report adds, “At the same time, some US allies and partners are seeking greater independence from Washington in response to their perceptions of changing US policies on security and trade and are becoming more open to new bilateral and multilateral

partnerships.”

The assessment declares, “For 2019 and beyond, the innovations that drive military and economic competitiveness will increasingly originate outside the United States, as the overall US lead in science and technology (S&T) shrinks; the capability gap between commercial and military technologies evaporates; and foreign actors increase their efforts to acquire top talent, companies, data, and intellectual property via licit and illicit means. Many foreign leaders, including Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin, view strong indigenous science and technology capabilities as key to their country’s sovereignty, economic outlook, and national power.”

The report points to the critical role of artificial intelligence technology in this “strategic competition,” declaring, “The global race to develop artificial intelligence (AI)—systems that imitate aspects of human cognition— is likely to accelerate the development of highly capable, application-specific AI systems with national security implications.”

It goes on to state that “Foreign production and adoption of advanced communication technologies, such as fifth-generation (5G) wireless networks, most likely will challenge US competitiveness and data security, while advances in quantum computing foreshadow challenges to current methods of protecting data and transactions. US data will increasingly flow across foreign-produced equipment and foreign-controlled networks, raising the risk of foreign access and denial of service.”

The report alleges that “China and Russia are expanding cooperation with each other and through international bodies to shape global rules and standards to their benefit and present a counterweight to the United States and other Western countries.”

The two countries will “present a wide variety of economic, political, counterintelligence, military, and diplomatic challenges to the United States and its allies. We anticipate that they will collaborate to counter US objectives.”

It warns, “We assess that China’s leaders will try to extend the country’s global economic, political, and military reach while using China’s military capabilities and overseas infrastructure and energy investments under the Belt and Road Initiative to diminish US influence.”

It further warns that “Successful implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative could facilitate PLA [People’s Liberation Army] access to dozens of additional ports and airports and significantly expand China’s penetration of the economies and political systems of participating countries.”

Commenting on the document, the *New York Times* points to its correspondence with Trump’s focus on China. “The report also makes a reasoned assessment of some of the issues that Mr. Trump has focused on in his public statements... China is stealing trade secrets, spying and expanding its military and economic reach. From building islands in the South China Sea to working more closely with Russia than at any time since the mid-1950s, China has a ‘long-term strategy to achieve global superiority.’”

In response to this week’s developments, the primary concern of the *Washington Post* was to praise Trump’s belligerent stance toward China, while seeking to make sure he does not back down from his conflict with it in exchange for tactical trade concessions by Beijing.

“Mr. Trump is on much sounder footing in calling for a structural overhaul of China’s unfair system,” the *Post* writes. “What’s more, he deserves credit to the extent that his hardball tactics have forced China at least to discuss such issues.”

But it concludes, “now that a crisis has arrived, it shouldn’t be squandered. Mr. Trump and his negotiators must not settle for less than at least a start on bona fide structural change in China.”

The report, and the response to it, make clear that the US ruling elite is intent on responding to the decline of its global military and economic hegemony by escalating its economic, geopolitical, and military conflict with Russia and China by all means at its disposal.

In an ominous warning, the US and Russia announced the failure of talks to prevent the United States’ withdrawal from the INF treaty, setting the stage for a new global nuclear arms race.



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