

Forever War

Rate of Globalization	U.S. Economy	Perception of Threat to Security and Quality of Life	U.S. Concept of Sovereignty
Increasing	Weak	High	Expansive



This scenario is incomplete. What follows is the narrative introduction, sometimes called the future history, of one of the USCG Evergreen scenarios. Its purpose is to introduce the scenario to the reader, provide a story context linking that future to today, and provide background for the endstate. The endstate includes the rich, detailed assumptions about the future that are used for strategic planning.

Summary

Shortly after September 11, U.S. citizens were told that a new era had begun with a war on terrorism that would take a long time to win. In 2025 those words have a bitter and anguished ring to them. For the past 15 years, our Armed Forces have been engaged in combat across the globe against myriad enemies who strike with weapons of global terror at the U.S., its citizens, and its allies. And now China, once a partner, has become an adversary with impressive regional power, emerging global reach, and a world-class strategic weapons and space program. After a ten-year period of stable democratic rule in Iraq, the U.S. is now back in force to sustain the regime against fundamentalist attack. In so doing the U.S. has earned the hatred of Muslims generally, and Iran in particular. While the U.S. has earned the enmity of many for its actions in the Persian Gulf, it has also experienced significant multi-lateral successes including peace on the Korean peninsula, the “managed merger” of China and

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Taiwan, and the suppression of the global WMD threat. Domestically, however, the U.S. has suffered for its efforts. Fairly draconian security laws have left many Americans uneasy about their rights. The U.S. economy is very sluggish with high unemployment. The draft has been unpopular since it was reinstated in 2008. The domestic political scene is bitter, in-your-face, and often completely uncompromising.

San Diego Airport, March 2025, 7:30 in the Evening

It was a dark and stormy night. The driver of Metro Cab 254 needed only one more fare to make her night..... But the pick-up line at the San Diego airport was slower than usual – much slower. The TSA bio-screener at the cab security gate had warned her that several flights out of Washington had experienced a foul-up. Apparently there had been a huge electrical power surge that had fried some sensitive screening devices and scrambled the smart tags on luggage. *Crap, thought Joanna, brownouts at home are one thing, but during security screenings, at an airport, with backups?* Of course no one knew if the failure was another terr-war event or just lousy maintenance, so the passenger flights went on ahead and the luggage flights were delayed for two hours of hand inspections. All the passengers were waiting for their luggage. *My next fare is going to be in a great mood, she thought, and I still have mid-terms to grade when I get off shift!*

As Joanna sat in line, she thought that things really could be worse. She could still be at the CIA performing analyses that no one would read. Back ten years ago she and her colleagues had written several very pointed analyses of the likely Chinese response to a U.S.-Vietnamese joint reoccupation of the base at Cam Ranh Bay. However, in 2015 DOD did not want to hear that. In 2017 she was demoted for not pressing her views more forcefully after the vehemence of the Chinese reaction so “surprised” everyone. She was *so* lucky to have landed a teaching job at UCSD. So what if the pay is lousy and she has to take a second job! She had tenure now and Chinese Studies was one of the few areas of non-engineering in which the U.S. Government funded student fellowships generously.

Joanna reached over and turned on the radio. The voice-activated circuit no longer worked and the hand controls were not conveniently placed. She would have to turn it off as soon as a fare got in – strict company rule. It was hard to remember when radio changed to match cable programming. It must have happened a decade ago or more, probably more. Now there is no such thing as just a music station! Every station has an in-your-face editorial policy. There are “pro-war,” “anti-war,” “cynical-nostalgic,” “America-first,” and “Kum-bay-ya” programming. Those were Joanna’s categories. Others might have divided things up differently, but the fact was that *no* station ever said anything without brash, often ugly, and demonizing editorial commentary. The solution, of course, was music on slip films, and she laid one on the receptor plate. However, even her oldies, like the great album “Kid Rock does Perry Como,” would offend customers who thought only one kind of station played Kid Rock. So, once the door opened, she would peel off the slip film and embrace a silent cab.

Finally! Next fare is mine. Please, oh please, no jerks tonight! Tall guy; walks like he owns the place – probably a Seal on his way to Coronado. That’s great – a relatively short trip. He tossed



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his luggage in the trunk and opened the back door. “Evnin,” he said, “Crummy night. I’m going to the Scripps Institute in La Jolla and here is a government voucher.”

!!!! *Crap. Double crap! A long drive, unbelievable security at the other end, and a voucher means a tiny tip (plus delayed payments). Great, just great. I will be up all night on those mid-terms.* “Right, on our way. Please fasten your safety harness.”

“That’s strange,” he said after five minutes.

“What’s that, sir?”

“I can see your HUD display from here. That must mean that it’s hard for you to see it at all. By the way, your indicator says you are low on gas and the CV bearing heat indicator reads high.”

“Ah, well, you are right about the HUD and the CV heat. The optics for the HUD are screwed up – have been on this unit for a month. You know how hard it is to get good maintenance techs. I have to keep the HUD on because the HUD is the only way to get terr-war notifications. In fact, a MANPAD warning for this airport was only cancelled about six hours ago. The Continuous Velocity bearing heat will come down soon. These CV systems were optimized for driving and they heat up when you idle too long. Don’t sweat the gas readout. This unit uses the old pressure gauge system. The propane degrades the seals and gives false readings – I hope. Given that you’re military and going to Scripps, I’ll bet small talk about what you do is a waste of time.”

“Why do you think I’m military?”

“Why do I think the sun will rise tomorrow?”

“Okay, I give up. You can help me with something, though. Can I get a cab to go from Scripps to UC San Diego, or should I rent a car?”

A little startled at coincidence, Joanna said, “If you have a military ID, then rent a car. Campus Security typically stops cabs at the gate and you have to walk or take campus buses. With a car and a military ID you can go in and park anywhere. When you are getting your security scan ask the guards for a milpass. That will let you park anywhere.”

Joanna watched in her passenger mirror (the one that gives her a panoramic view of the back seat – a view that was the genesis of hundreds of cab legends about passenger activities). For the first time, her passenger looked hard and long at her chauffeur’s license and ID. He smiled a little and shook his head.

Scripps Institute, La Jolla, 10:30 that Night

Later that night in his quarters at the Institute, Lt. Colonel Dan Benton logged on to Intellink III and searched for Joanna Vance – his cab driver. The really odd thing was that he was going to do that anyway, once he got to his room. It had nothing to do with who his cab driver had been. He was stunned – quite literally stunned – by the coincidence. After a few days at the Institute, his



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first job was going to be to seek out Dr. Joanna Vance at UCSD and try to convince her to work for him on Chinese national security policy. Her maverick approach had gotten her into hot water eight years ago. Her maverick (and very keen) intellect was what attracted his attention now. He had read a conference paper of hers on the early stages of a Chinese military space doctrine a few weeks ago – it had been nothing short of brilliant in his view.

He put the large fold-out screen on the wall, adjusted his microphone, called for an upload file of her papers written over the past several years, and began to read. He skimmed over a number of her papers from several years first, just to get a feel for her style. Dr. Vance was clearly one of those analysts gifted at preparing multi-media papers. She was young when she was at the CIA, yet she was listed among the primary author group on several NIEs. *So, Dan reflected, she had two strikes against her. She enjoyed working across disciplines – not the favored approach these days – and she had been right when her bosses had been wrong!*

“Hal (he smiled to himself – only a few friends had any idea why he called his compassist ‘Hal’), open a new file with this label: Vance excerpts. Save it under: China project staff. All ‘save it’ commands go in that file until I say stop saving.” Dan glanced at the chrono window – 10:30 pm. It was late for him, but he popped a stimtab and decided on at least four hours of research. He had to be sure she was right for the team before discussing it with his colleagues tomorrow. He had looked over her prior military record several weeks ago. Like so many, she had taken advantage of the draft legislation for college tuition for combat veterans. Vance, an Intelligence Officer in the U.S. Army before joining the CIA after graduate school, rated expert in small arms, fluent in four languages, had been in three fire fights and won the Bronze Star and a Purple Heart. He knew from classified records that, while the citations said Iraqi Theater, in fact two of the three engagements had been deep inside Iran with Spec Ops. One year of her military record was not even available for him to review. *That probably means she was assigned to the WMD Hunters. A damn secretive lot – only the best Intel weenies get selected. That would explain the classified citation of excellence.*

“Hal, start with her latest lecture notes for her introductory class on National Security Policy.”
..... “Hal, line mark 27 to line mark 53 – save it.”

“If we hang tough, we will win”

“If we hang tough, we will be bankrupt.”

“If we run from our responsibilities, no one will respect us!”

“We have not succeeded in 15 years. No one respects us now!”

“We need to build a global security infrastructure that will.....”

“We need to rebuild our own decaying infrastructure before.....”

That debate is old and worn and the surprising thing is that many in the U.S. still care about it. Clearly many Americans have lost faith that the *War on Terror* has meaning or purpose any more. They have lost faith in the belief that a solution can be found. That group tends to point to the inability of the U.S. economy to pull out of lethargic growth. They focus their attention on the horrible quagmire of the Middle East and the attacks on the U.S. that DHS has not been able to prevent. Some, on the other hand, look to the multi-lateral successes of the U.S. (both diplomatic and military) in areas far from the Middle East. Despite huge handicaps, they point to the fact that



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the U.S. has avoided deep, prolonged recessions and has in fact managed to maintain some economic growth. They see the modest successes that all actors in the global economy have achieved to keep globalization and trade on track. Finally, a larger group every year is becoming apathetic and disinterested in anything but their own personal agendas. It is a complex and heady brew that is devolving into bitter and acrimonious politics overlaid on a plurality that just don't care (but can be swayed by issues such as Social Security, protection from terrorists, unemployment, and Medical coverage).

I'll bet her caustic writing style won her no friends at the Agency.....

“Hal, line mark 167 to line mark 203 – save it.”

..... So, the U.S. of 2025 looks vastly different from the U.S. of 2000 – well, no, or at least not much different. First, the terr-war, Homeland Security, and the astonishing national debt have usurped huge portions of the GDP, so there has been very little in the way of eye-popping new commercial products, modern architectural development, non-military technologies, or investment in new infrastructure. Cyber-terrorism has dampened enthusiasm for the great strides promised by the digital revolution. The nuclear weapon set off in St. Petersburg, Russia in 2007 has been a never-ending source of concern, since it was only one of three stolen. The bombings at Euro-Disney proved that even the best security could be breached (and proved that a terrorist group could force an American media icon into bankruptcy through the implied threat of doing the same in the U.S.). And, of course, the periodic bombings and shootings across the U.S. beginning in 2008 led to draconian border controls (which had only modest apparent effect) and a subsequent witch hunt for hidden terrorist groups within the U.S. The laws supporting that witch-hunt made the original Patriot Act look like it was drafted by the ACLU.

People still carpool to work, home repair is a necessity and personal auto customization is a huge fad. More baby boomers are retiring every day (albeit, often reluctantly in the face of economic uncertainty), and on top of high unemployment, both factors are putting political pressure on Washington and the states for improved social safety nets. The dollar is weakening and the U.S. economy is sluggish, but by no means on its knees. The U.S. is still an important component of the global trading system. Americans go about life – shopping, little league, work, vacations – expecting the next horrid terrorist attack at any time. People are tense and anxious – Pleasantville, it is not. While the DHS (with great fanfare and publicity) has thwarted many serious “blockbuster” attacks on the U.S., they have completely failed to stop the constant trickle of small ones, and the recent case in 2022 of the nuclear weapon in Rotterdam that almost made it to the Port of Boston sent shockwaves through the U.S. Abroad, U.S. facilities and citizens are constant targets.

“Hal, stop. Open the introduction to the World Status NIE from 2018” Hal, line mark 24 to line mark 68 – save it.”

..... The world has begun to change, sometimes in dramatic (but not completely unanticipated) ways. What is more, important global actors now view the U.S. with decidedly complicated, ambiguous and dynamically shifting feelings. For example, while the U.S. has done well in multi-lateral foreign policy in many parts of the world, it has never – not once, through multiple Administrations – shown any strategic sense about the Middle East. U.S. decision-making about



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that tortured part of the world has been ever myopic, incremental, and largely deferential to U.S. domestic politics. Since 2012, when the Iraqi government asked the U.S. for help, we have been in there, always certain we could stamp out opposition and enforce the stability that would reform a successful Iraqi Republic like the one between 2005 and 2012. However, the only success we have had is managing to invoke irrevocable hatred among both Arab religious figures and secular leaders alike. From their point of view, we are no better than a defiler of religion and a colonial power. By 2015 we had 135,000 troops in Iraq helping the central government fight a guerrilla war, with both secular and religious themes, which is actively supported by bordering countries. (The rumor of an imminent invasion of Syria/Iran is as alive today as it was in 2003.)

Iran has fashioned itself as our implacable enemy supporting anti-American groups without apology. Its 2017–2025 arms purchases from China have boosted its traditional military power quite significantly (including Chinese help in refurbishing its small submarine force). Saudi Arabia experienced a “colonels coups” in 2008 led by Wahhabist officers. They expelled all U.S. (but only a few European) citizens and announced the establishment of a militant Sunni Theocracy. Over the years, they have been vocal political enemies of the U.S. and have led the movement to replace the Dollar with the Euro as the settlement currency for oil transactions. However, the practicalities of global economics (and mutual suspicion of Iran) have forced them to deal with the U.S. behind the scenes in limited ways. What that has not done is temper the Saudi tendency to sponsor anti-American groups around the world quite generously.

In the Persian Gulf the U.S. fights a guerrilla war in Iraq, fights a cloak and dagger war in bordering countries, faces a belligerent heavily armed Iran and deals with a hostile, but cautious, Saudi government. Meanwhile, oil flows heavily guarded through the Straits because no pipeline can be built through Turkey. Thank you, Kurds.

The U.S., its interests, and friendly governments around the globe are under constant threat of Islamic terror attacks, and the resulting stretch of U.S. attention has given license to many other disaffected groups to overthrow governments or just disrupt societies. Yet, outside of the Middle East, the U.S. has followed a multi-lateral approach to conflict resolution and terr-war suppression. “Not going it alone” has been the hallmark of U.S. actions in the Balkans, East and West Africa, across South America, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Indonesia, and the Philippines. The first of those multi-lateral endeavors was arguably among the most enduring and successful. Shortly after the St. Petersburg bomb, the U.S., Russia, Great Britain and Australia formed a multi-lateral force often called the WMD Hunters in the press. Shrouded in enormous secrecy, this force has been credited with the near-elimination of rogue-group/rogue-state threats to use WMD. Without apology, the U.S. has asserted a global sovereign right and duty to suppress the use of WMD by any means appropriate.

This two-tiered U.S. policy (unilateral in the Persian Gulf, multi-lateral elsewhere) has created a sense of confusion and ambiguity about the U.S. in global politics – an arrogant gunslinger bully in the Middle East, a multi-lateral actor who is part diplomat, part reluctant warrior in the rest of the world. Of course the constant element in all these efforts is “the U.S. military.” Far beyond other nations, the U.S. is the main contributor to the logistics support and military forces that spend weapons and blood in foreign lands. Everyone can see in the U.S. what they want to see.



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“Hal, stop.” *Let’s see, there was a section here on Asia.....ah.* “Hal, line mark 332 to line mark 361 – save it.”

..... So the U.S. is spending its national treasure on global security, making its assets a constant target, while the rest of the world participates with less effort and, therefore, is able to invest more in economic growth. With the U.S. economy experiencing sluggish growth, the rest of the world, particularly Europe and a surprisingly vibrant “China-Korea-Japan,” can do no better than modest growth – but that they do manage. With a sluggish U.S. economy (2.25% growth) and modest growth in Europe (3%) and Asia (6-7%), the world economic setting is adjusting slowly toward more equality. While the weak dollar has helped to boost U.S. exports, the U.S. economy, U.S. technology, and American social energy are not the undisputed global kings anymore. Although the U.S. military has no clear rival, recent Chinese decisions may change that, as well.

When news has not focused on the Middle East, much of the action of the world has been in Asia. The U.S. Government, over a seven-year period, displayed statesman-like leadership in controlling (with UN and regional power partnerships) a very volatile situation in North Korea. From moments when it appeared that nuclear weapons might lash out at Seoul and Tokyo, to a peaceful resolution of a war that had lasted since 1950, the U.S. used diplomatic, military, and economic tools and patience to encourage a peaceful end to North Korea’s dictatorship. Under UN protocols, the Koreas unified after Kim Jung Il’s untimely (and uninvestigated) death. Soon Chinese and Japanese investment was flowing into the country. By 2012 China and Taiwan completed a de facto reunification – actually more of a corporate merger – and China was slowly emerging as a source of stability in the region. Its modestly growing navy helped suppress piracy and provided some patrol relief in the mid 2010s to an over-extended U.S. Navy, which was more and more often called to the Middle East. Indeed, relations between China and the U.S. were progressing well until 2016.

However, events were developing that would derail the emerging U.S.-Chinese partnership. It began with a growing regional adversarial role between China and Vietnam. Vietnam began chafing at the growing Chinese assertion of “regional sovereignty.” This included a heightened dispute over the Spratly Islands, a renewed dispute over the Sino-Vietnam border, the Chinese tendency to write bi-lateral trade treaties that forbid Vietnamese trade, vessel inspections by China, the expulsion of ethnic Chinese from Vietnam, and anti-China rhetoric by Vietnam in regional forums.

At the same time this local animosity was brewing, the U.S. was looking for a forward base for operations in South East Asia and accepted a Vietnamese invitation back to Cam Ranh Bay without discussing the decision with China. China objected strenuously to U.S. incursion into “its region,” particularly the subsequent ceding of maritime authority in Vietnamese waters to the U.S. From China’s point of view, the long-established pattern of the U.S. attempt to contain China was now confirmed. The strong U.S. presence in Russia, the Persian Gulf, India, the strengthening of ANZUS, and now Vietnam all appeared threatening. After extreme Chinese diplomatic pressure and aggressive naval exercises, the U.S. put a carrier task force in the region. Within a year, there were incidents at sea and serious jurisdictional disputes over boardings of suspicious vessels.



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Seeing such an obvious U.S. threat, China launched a dedicated effort to secure a dominant political, economic and military position in its region. By 2025, it had become a major exporter of sophisticated weapons across the world (especially to Iran). It is close to becoming a peer regional power with a growing blue-water navy that lacks only aircraft carriers. China is now the world's second largest nuclear power with a triad of its own and a robust space program that includes a manned outpost on the moon.

“Hal, stop saving.” I am beat, but I know who I want on my team. In fact I think I know who I want to run the West Coast Center. Now I have to convince my colleagues, and, probably more difficult, to convince her.

Two days later, sitting in the office of Dr. Joanna Vance, with only 15 minutes before she insisted she open the door for student office hours, Dan was wondering what argument he had left to present.

“Look, here’s my best offer. You keep your faculty position, but give up your non-academic duties and give up the taxi job. That puts you at a little less than half-time with my group. How much did you make with Metro Cab? No more than \$50,000 a year, right? Your faculty salary is a matter of record at \$105,000. I didn’t make this world, Joanna, but you are truly brilliant at what you do and you can barely make ends meet. I will get you \$200,000 for part-time work. That gives you enough for a comfortable living even if you don’t get rich *(She still looks uninterested)*and I will set aside \$800,000 in my yearly budget for student internships.”

“Lt. Colonel Benton, you just met my price. We have a deal.”

