



STATE OF THE GAME

BUILDING PACAF'S COMPETITIVE MINDSET

JULY 2020

CONTROLLING MORE THAN OIL AND FISH

The PRC strives for total information dominance against its neighbors in the South China Sea.

The South China Sea (SCS) is known for its massive oil reserves and rich fish stocks. It also hosts some of the world's busiest shipping routes. The common perception is that the People's Republic of China (PRC) seeks to control these assets through militarization. While that argument is valid, there are [other implications](#) to PRC militarization in the SCS.

The PRC's military buildup offers the People's Liberation Army (PLA) unique strategic advantages. [As one author points out](#): “[The outposts] primary purpose is *not* military power projection and the deployment of weapons, but information power.” To the PLA, “information power” is far more important than the firepower and maneuver which factor so prominently in the Western approach to war.

The hardened manmade islands in the SCS offer the PLA superior battlespace awareness and intelligence.

In the event of a conflict, at least initially, the PLA will be able to dominate in battlespace information collection.

In addition to providing air and maritime domain awareness through shore-based and airborne sensors, these bases provide the PLA the capability to actively contest the information environment by positioning a variety of active jamming capabilities to degrade allied battlespace awareness.

This is not to suggest that the PRC has won *de facto* control of the SCS—it is to highlight the PLA approach to war. [The author emphasizes](#), “Both the Chinese and U.S. militaries have profound strengths as well as critical vulnerabilities. Whether the PLA's information-centric operational concepts can win out over American concepts centered on firepower and maneuver is worthy of debate.”

COUNTERING FALSE EQUIVALENCY

All nations strive for change—but democracies maintain free speech, the right to assemble, and an open press.

In June 1989, triggered by the death of a democratic reformer, the Chinese people engaged in a peaceful protest for more liberal reforms that was eventually put down violently. To this day, the PRC continues to suppress information about the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

Fast forward to June 2020 when the death of George Floyd triggered protests around our country. By contrast, no media outlets were banned from reporting the events.

The PRC's official statements and media about the ongoing civil unrest in the US paint a bleak picture: protests, riots, looting, police—and even the military—using force on their fellow citizens. It's a propaganda

bonanza for a regime the US routinely criticizes for its human rights abuses. It is true that protests are ongoing, that there has been looting, arson, and that the police and the National Guard have used force to control the crowds. But while the PRC works to stifle and control the Chinese media, Americans and the world watched the protests, the violence, and the social commentary openly across social media and the news. Even in places where there has been an elevated police presence, the response has largely been more peaceful protests.

Free speech, the right to assemble, and an open and transparent press—examples of what can only be done in a stable, confident, and resilient democracy.

THE PRC'S GREAT PROLETARIAN CULTURAL REVOLUTION WAS NO ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

Forty-four years later, the Chinese Communist Party's stranglehold on dissent is still unmatched.

The Italian Renaissance marked a period of cultural revival after the centuries popularly known as the “Dark Ages.” This period is famed for its achievements in the arts, sciences, humanities, and exploration—and its impact on the world continues to resonate. However, China’s version of a cultural movement continues to stifle the potential of its people.

Following a period of foreign and domestic strife, the PRC’s Chairman, Mao Zedong, reinvigorated his idea of “continuous revolution” and launched a vicious assault on his own Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and people known as the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.” The result was up to 20 million deaths and a people crushed under the boot of ruthless CCP policy. Mao’s loyalists, aided by the development of propaganda like a collection of Mao quotations known as the “Little Red Book”, effectively deified Chairman Mao and cast him as the savior of world revolution.

In Mao’s name, revolutionaries attacked the “Four Olds”—old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits—that in Maoist thinking had kept China weak. As a result, Mao’s Red Guard loyalists incited countless

massacres and at least three million party members were purged, including future PRC Communist Party General Secretary Deng Xiaoping, who later earned infamy for directing the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

Beyond the grotesque human toll, the Cultural Revolution directly attacked the rich cultural legacy of the Chinese people when the Red Guard destroyed Confucius’ gravesite, closed all universities, and destroyed more than 5,000 sites designated as places of historical interest.

A country that had prided itself on continuity and deep wisdom from antiquity was now mob-ruled. While loyalists and global revolutionaries glorified Mao in propaganda-fueled magazines, movies, and documentaries, the CCP tore itself and the Chinese people asunder and left China on the brink of renewed civil war.

The Italian Renaissance gave the world Caravaggio, Raphael, and da Vinci, while the Cultural Revolution gave it the “Little Red Book”, inspiration for radical communism around the world, up to 20 million dead, and a CCP with a nearly unmatched record of brutality.

THE SPARK

Information to grow knowledge of China and spark curiosity about the Indo-Pacific region

Taking a page from another president for life—Chairman Mao and his “Little Red Book”—a smartphone app called “Study the Great Nation” brought Chairman Xi Jinping’s and the Communist Party’s propaganda initiative to the information age in 2019. But are people downloading the app (which includes tests and Xi quotes) out of pure interest? As one snarky [reviewer](#) who gave the app a one-star rating put it: “Everybody is installing this app voluntarily; nobody is forcing us.”

COMPETE DAILY

Want to learn more? The Strategic Competition Team recommends:

- Learn about China’s ambitions to lead the world in setting technical standards in this episode of the [China Power Project’s podcast](#), hosted by Bonnie Glaser.
- How does the People’s Liberation Army Air Force recruit and develop its next-generation pilots? [Read more](#) from the China Aerospace Studies Institute.
- Want even more? Visit the [Strategic Competition Team’s NIPR Intelink page](#).



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