

Strategic Imperative: A Competitive Framework for US-Sino Relations

CAPT MICHAEL P. FERGUSON, USA

Abstract

Recognizing interstate competition between China and the United States as a strategic priority for the US defense enterprise is one issue that appears to transcend presidential administrations. But despite its merits, this notion of “great power competition”—or “strategic competition” as some prefer to term it—has led many in the foreign policy, defense, and academic communities to question the value of competition as a strategic tool for shaping policies against rogue and revisionist powers like the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). More cooperative approaches, some say, could yield favorable results. While competition and cooperation are not mutually exclusive, analysis of the current strategic environment reflects the former as more of a geopolitical imperative than a policy decision. This study presents evidence that forsaking the conceptual framework of competition could signal a return to toothless engagement policies of the twentieth century, overlook the human rights abuses of competitors, abandon critical allies, and concede global influence and access to regional powers emboldened by decades of US collaboration. Although there is room to debate the nuances of its supporting policies, denying the competitive environment’s existence is ill advised. The United States should build on the existing competitive framework in its future strategic documents if it seeks to prevent the CCP from achieving its clearly expressed, but rarely understood, strategic objectives at the cost of US values and national security interests.

This is what Philip has bought with all his lavish expenditure: that he is at war with you, but you are not at war with him!

—Demosthenes of Athens, 341 BCE

After the 2017 publication of Graham Allison’s wildly popular book *Destined for War*, the term “great power competition” has elicited reference to the Peloponnesian Wars and the risk of competition escalating into a conflict between major powers in the twenty-first century.

But the relationship between Athens and Macedonia might be a more suitable historical parallel. Demosthenes issued the above impassioned statement to a rather passive Athenian ecclesia during his Third Philippic speech, the final warning in a series of admonishments designed to promote awareness vis-à-vis the intentions of Alexander the Great's father, King Philip II of Macedon. Powerful as his words were, Athens would lose its independence to Macedonia three years later.¹ Quite plainly, Philip out-competed his Athenian opponents with a series of political maneuverings spread over more than a decade that culminated in the decisive Battle of Chaeronea (338 BCE). This precarious balance between strategic competition and cooperation warrants further reflection in light of US-Sino relations and the now controversial term "great power competition."² This article uses the term "strategic competition" as does, for example, the White House's 2021 *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* document.

Since its official reintroduction to the US national security lexicon in 2017, the strategic framework of interstate competition has faced resistance in terms of both style and substance from numerous foreign policy scholars and defense analysts.³ This resistance usually consists of two arguments. The first is that "competition" is too aggressive and simplistic a term to drive strategic formulation. The second is that prioritizing competition precludes international cooperation by increasing interstate tensions.⁴ Recommended alternative solutions typically amount to advocating for linguistic adjustments to status quo political cooperation in line with the "engagement" policies of Presidents George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton. These policies will become increasingly problematic as Beijing's leaders face charges of genocide and technological authoritarianism from the Western world.⁵ The United States and Canada have issued statements regarding the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) treatment of its minority Uighur population and the exportation of invasive surveillance platforms to authoritarian states.⁶ Curiously, these legitimate and deeply concerning accusations are presented almost parenthetically in much of the sterilized advocacy for a more cooperative approach to US-Sino engagement.⁷

To be taken seriously, any proposal for peaceful cooperation as a guiding foreign policy principle must also recognize the free world's obligation to openly condemn reports of genocide and systematic oppression through diplomatic channels as well as military readiness across the conflict spectrum. The resistance to competition as a strategic guidepost is evidence that many in the US national security enterprise have yet to recognize a problem with how the United States understands and applies competition with China. Similar to the conditions described by Demosthenes above,

the United States will remain in competition with other states whether it chooses to use the word in its strategic documents or not. This reality should not preclude cooperation but serve as a realist playbook that acknowledges and accounts for the inherent limitations of cooperation as a twenty-first-century foreign policy tool. Because Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin has identified China as the US's pacing threat and therefore primary competitor, this analysis is framed accordingly.⁸

To Compete or Not to Compete?

Georgetown University professor Daniel Nexon wrote recently in *Foreign Affairs* that the vague idea of competition as a strategic means is not specific enough to support the desired ends of US national security policy.⁹ His commentary reflects a growing outcry from foreign policy observers—and even some practitioners—that the conceptual framework of competing with other regional or global powers is an ill-conceived means of shaping policy.¹⁰ The arguments vary. Some suggest that the security threat from the CCP is overblown while others highlight the catastrophic nature of a potential conflict between nuclear powers. However, they seem to reach the same conclusion: the United States should tread more carefully in its approach to China.¹¹

Each of these proposals, however, appears to either misinterpret competition as simply a matter of arms races and intimidation tactics or make vague recommendations that mirror a return to the foreign policy stance of the US toward China for the last 40 years. Such policies may not have led to war, but that does not mean they deterred it. Certainly, they did little to increase the probability of success should deterrence fail, considering the Chinese military is more powerful, influential, and confrontational today than it was in Mao's era. More concerning is that the trepidation expressed by Western analysts in response to the 2017 competition mandate is an indicator that the CCP's strategy of increased military capacity and presence as a deterrent to Western encroachment is working.

A reluctance to compete for global influence born out of a fear of conflict with the prescribed opponent is the *raison d'être* of adversarial deterrence efforts. The hesitancy to recognize the CCP as a potentially bad actor that may require more than "engagement" to restrain is understandable given the extent of Beijing's integration into the world's economic and security infrastructure. It is also a contributing factor to much of the apprehension directed toward competition. Economic decoupling, as the process has come to be known, is a frightening prospect for nations dependent upon Chinese labor, technology, and transnational commerce to

prop up their economies.¹² The value of cooperation between great powers is not lost on the political establishment in the United States either.

President Joe Biden's administration recognized as much in its *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* by stating that "strategic competition does not, and should not, preclude working with China when it is in . . . [the US] national interest to do so."¹³ Coincidentally, Chairman Xi Jinping has made similar proclamations. Author and Tufts University professor Sulmaan Wasif Khan, a dispassionate observer of China's activities, suggests that Beijing "will cooperate with the United States where cooperation suits its interests."¹⁴ But if both leaders are willing to cooperate merely on these terms and each nation sees fit to expand its influence, ultimately, their interests will encounter disunity. In other words, the United States must account for the space in which interests do not intersect—and it is in that widening space that competition occurs.

As defense officials and policy makers struggle to balance cooperation and competition, most of the suggested vectors of cooperation between the United States and CCP—such as carbon emissions reduction, technological exchange, and disaster response and relief—remain less than promising. The White House's interim strategic guidance mentions climate change as a national security concern 27 times. According to 2020 data compiled by the International Energy Agency and published by the Union of Concerned Scientists, China is the single greatest carbon emitter on the planet (28 percent)—more than the United States (15 percent), India (7 percent), and Russia (5 percent) combined.¹⁵ Despite Xi Jinping's recent claim that his regime eradicated poverty, which might explain an increase in emissions due to industrial productivity, Martin Raiser of the World Bank estimates that China still has roughly 200 million people below the poverty line or 13 percent of its population.¹⁶

Regarding technological exchange and disaster response, the interim strategic guidance mentions the need to keep US technological research far from prying eyes in the CCP. Even China expert Michael Schuman admitted recently that "fueling Xi's rise by sharing our best technology is not a good idea." He proceeded to recommend sanctions as a response to Beijing's alleged human rights violations.¹⁷ The pandemic that swept the world in early 2020 provided unique insight into the CCP's practices of international information exchange and communication. In January 2021, the World Health Organization-sponsored Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response criticized China's slow reaction to the outbreak, while other reports cited Beijing's domestic stranglehold on information as a key factor in the spread of the virus.¹⁸

Although some may see these shortcomings as opportunities for further cooperation, one should bear in mind that they occurred at the apex of 40 years of cooperative US policies toward China—even in the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. According to former national security advisor Lt Gen H. R. McMaster, this retrenchment from the competitive space emboldened Beijing's leaders. As a result, China pursued aggressive policies toward its neighbor Taiwan, including constructing islands with military significance in the South China Sea.¹⁹ The United States must retain the option of cooperation, but it should not engage the CCP with the notion that cooperation is beneficial to US interests as long as it is approached earnestly. Nor should it prop up its strategic documents and therefore public expectations on a political reality that does not exist.

In what should be required reading for defense professionals examining this problem, National Intelligence University professor Dan Tobin's March 2020 testimony before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission explains much that is missing from the public discussion on Xi Jinping's ambitions—chiefly Xi's own words.²⁰ Though Tobin also takes issue with the term “great power competition” (this article adopts the term “strategic competition”), his feasibility assessment of a purely cooperative strategy with Beijing is less than sanguine. Xi Jinping's declared “new era of Socialism with Chinese characteristics,” delivered at the CCP's Nineteenth National Congress in October 2017, was a watershed moment of candid Chinese policy. The United States and indeed the entire free world must reconcile their aversion to competing with Xi's goal of making China “a global leader in terms of composite national power and international influence” before midcentury—and they must come to terms with what this world would look like.²¹ Comments from China's top diplomat, Yang Jiechi, during a March 2021 meeting with US officials in Anchorage, Alaska, made clear that the political ways and ends of the two nations have never been more divergent.²² Stated bluntly—and paraphrasing Demosthenes—the CCP competes with the United States even if the United States is not in competition with the CCP.

The Uses and Abuses of Cold War Analogies

Comparisons to the Cold War are inevitable, and there has been no shortage of juxtaposition between then and now in the professional literature.²³ That does not mean, however, that each comparison is viable. Xi Jinping is not Mikhail Gorbachev, China is not Soviet Russia, and it is not the 1980s. As Sir Michael Howard and Margaret MacMillan suggest, using history as a guide for current policy is somewhat of a double-edged

sword. It can arm its wielder with information suited to fit predetermined ends.²⁴ In the case of US-Sino relations, MacMillan's 2008 observation is important: "Today's world is far removed from the stasis of the Cold War. It looks more like that of the decade before 1914 and the outbreak of World War I or the world of the 1920s." MacMillan clarifies that "in those days, as the British Empire started to weaken and other powers, from Germany to Japan to the United States, challenged it for hegemony, the international system became unstable."²⁵

Perhaps it is the presumptuous Cold War scaffolding upon which many comparisons rest that stifles original strategic thought directed toward US-Sino relations in the first place. Using 30-year-old allegories to understand the present strategic environment, even as Xi Jinping couches his struggle in medieval references, exemplifies the conceptual fissures that separate US strategic thought from Beijing's reality. This observation is laid bare by Xi Jinping's fixation on "great national rejuvenation" following a period of humiliation at the hands of Western powers that he likens to the hundred years of Mongolian oppression China suffered in the thirteenth century.²⁶ Reducing the complexities of US-Sino relations to a Cold-War-or-not construct could do more harm than good in strategic formulation. This is not to say that Cold War analogies are outdated or irrelevant, only that they are not always the best lens through which one might capture a deeper understanding of current US-Sino relations.

Gorbachev was the first and last university-educated Soviet leader since Lenin. He charmed most with whom he parlayed, openly recognized fundamental problems with Russia's governing Marxist-Leninist ideology, and pledged a willingness to rid his country of nuclear weapons. He even welcomed Secretary of State George Shultz to teach classes on free market economics in Moscow (elements of which Gorbachev later echoed in his 1987 book *Perestroika*).²⁷ These developments occurred amid the backdrop of President Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative or "Star Wars" program that many chided as too confrontational. Although the prospect of Xi Jinping entertaining similar liberal tendencies is unlikely today, some nevertheless suggest that cooperation with Beijing is a favorable strategic approach because it bore fruit on occasion with Soviet leaders. Yet according to officials with access to recent US-Sino communications, Xi Jinping considers Gorbachev's example a political model to avoid. McMaster, for instance, argues that Beijing's leaders see Gorbachev's concession to Western values as causal factors in the Soviet Union's demise. This view has led them to burrow ever deeper into their "China model" as an alternative to the rules-based international order of the last 75 years.²⁸

Others have transplanted the strategic tissue of the Cold War into present challenges, describing the US-Sino competitive framework as a matter of arms races and military strength metrics. In reality, the current competition has less to do with numbers of tanks and more with the proliferation of information and the public's perception of truth. A common notion is that a war will be won only through aggressive, whole-of-government competition in the information space.²⁹ Xi Jinping's fascination with and desire to control Chinese history is emblematic of this environment, resulting in his reluctance to criticize Mao Zedong. Xi likely wants to avoid the same backlash Gorbachev encountered after expressing his lack of faith in Marxist-Leninism as a viable long-term political model.

In MacMillan's estimation, Gorbachev's exposure of the Soviet Union's dark associations with Nazi Germany led to its downfall. This verdict further reinforces McMaster's assessment of the central role of information in the China model: lose control of the past, and the CCP could lose control of its future.³⁰ These observations reflect two strategic imperatives. The first is to be wary of the eagerness with which one cooperates. Over the long arc of history, this proclivity may result in entanglement with unsavory bedfellows that damage a nation's standing. The second is to recognize the power of information in shaping strategic outcomes. If information was influential before the advent of the Internet and social media, then it is transformational now. History is undoubtedly an important tool for promoting understanding, but leaders may need to cast their net beyond the Cold War to find the most instructive lessons it has to offer. When choosing to cooperate, the United States must be sure who is dictating the terms of cooperation. Otherwise, that relationship becomes the very zero-sum game that so many decry in competition.

Cooperation as a Strategic Formula for US-Sino Relations

For all the attention it has received in recent years, cooperation as a strategic approach to managing rival powers is little more than a rebranded model of twentieth-century "engagement" policies, and the same shortfalls remain intact. The Bush and Clinton administrations were forced to deviate from their engagement construct when Beijing overstepped. In 1999, for instance, President Clinton forbade the sale of communications equipment to a Singapore-based company because of its links to the People's Liberation Army (PLA).³¹ Such circumstances led to soul-searching in the US defense community regarding the utility of engagement as a means of shaping China's behavior. By the end of the twentieth century, many experts agreed that engagement had been an insufficient framework for ne-

gotiating US policy toward China when it violated international norms.³² Concurrently, members of the engagement camp maintained that confronting China on its human rights abuses would be damaging to its fated liberalization.³³ It appears as though this approach has served as the CCP's means to an end, allowing it to accumulate power and influence via Western engagement even as it pursued illiberal social, economic, diplomatic, and security policies. Before the United States could formulate a comprehensive response to these developments, the 2001 terrorist attacks on New York City and the Pentagon reoriented US national resources toward the Middle East for the next 16 years.

In the twenty-first century alone—and while the United States combatted global terrorism—the PLA more than tripled the strength of its navy (surpassing the number of ships in the US fleet by a margin of 60 or more). The PLA also expanded its archipelago of ersatz islands in the South China Sea and developed a robust suite of counterspace defense capabilities. Numerous projections suggest that China will become the world's largest economy by 2035 and by 2050 will have an economy roughly twice that of the United States.³⁴ Such developments imply military potential far removed from the “technically backward and operationally immature” force plagued by funding shortages described in professional journals near the end of the twentieth century.³⁵ Perhaps most worrisome is a critical disconnect that seems to be developing between the popular consensus about the CCP's threat and the assessments of career China experts. Dan Tobin and Gregory B. Poling, director of the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, have each commented on this pattern contributing to growing misunderstandings surrounding Beijing's capabilities and intentions.³⁶ A byproduct of this confusion is the artificially magnified strategic value of cooperation.

The above developments serve as bargaining chips that will ultimately carve out a new paradigm of global cooperation over time—much of which will likely be pursued in contention with US and allied national interests. This reality brings to light a fundamental point: competition is not a bipolar exercise. It is as much about empowering and protecting allies as it is securing US interests. In terms of options, China as a regional hegemony reduces those available to the United States and its partners to cooperation alone. This situation, which is a plausible corollary of Beijing's grand strategy, is also coincidentally the argument put forth by many critics of competition: cooperate or risk war.³⁷ If these are the only two options, then there is no option, no matter how egregious the CCP's transgressions. And if the options available to the United States become so

restricted, where does that leave its vulnerable partners? This paradox was the same binary construct submitted to President Ronald Reagan by State Department officials before he delivered his ill-advised but now world-renowned 1987 speech calling on Gorbachev to “tear down this wall!”³⁸ Cooperation as the driving factor of foreign policy during eras of heightened interstate competition is typically rooted in lofty assumptions.

One of these is that the United States can defend its national security interests—and those of its allies and partners—while cooperating with increasingly brazen revisionist powers with often opposing national interests and, perhaps more significant, incompatible values.³⁹ In the years following the Second World War, most notably between the 1945 Bush Plan and the Soviet Union’s “unexpected” test of an atomic bomb in 1949, the United States went to great lengths to cooperate with Russia on nuclear counterproliferation efforts.⁴⁰ But further exposure of Soviet espionage as the United States and Great Britain began decrypting the intercepts in 1946 led to a perception that the ends of the two nations’ cooperative means were in a contest—making competition inevitable.⁴¹ Similar dynamics are evident in China’s proliferation of artificial-intelligence-powered surveillance technology, continued theft of US intellectual property, and espionage directed against the United States.⁴² A 2020 report found that out of 152 public instances of Chinese-linked espionage since 2000, 74 percent occurred between 2010 and 2020 (Xi Jinping assumed power in 2011).⁴³ As of April 2021, over 500 scientists in the United States were under investigation for potentially illicit interactions with Chinese companies or officials.⁴⁴ Certainly, the United States must compete to lessen the damage of these efforts. It cannot do so without a strategic mandate because the historical default involves US government agencies cooperating despite such aggressive activities.

The second assumption is that there will be ample opportunities for productive cooperation and at least two parties willing to sacrifice some of their interests to do so.⁴⁵ The DOD, however, will struggle to cooperate with the CCP on matters such as defense technology and information sharing while Beijing proliferates oppressive surveillance tools and spreads black propaganda about US intentions and activities globally.⁴⁶ Similar to the conditions laid out in the short-lived uranium enrichment agreement between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran, the CCP should meet particular conditions if it expects cooperation. One of these would be the immediate halt to its Uighur detention program.⁴⁷ As of this writing, no such conditions exist, and the majority of arguments against a competitive strategy for US-Sino relations frame cooperation with the

CCP in unconditional terms. In fact, they put the onus to cooperate on the United States. If cast upon any other state, suspicion of widespread human rights abuses would preclude the United States from engaging in security cooperation endeavors with the said nation. Surely the same standards should apply to a regional power with the largest navy in the world.

Despite the tendency to frame competition as a military endeavor, neither diplomacy nor defense has a monopoly on the concept. Most peacetime DOD activities fall under the umbrella of a specific task known as security cooperation. It often involves close coordination with State Department officials and other agencies—meaning competition has little chance of success when it is interpreted as a matter of military confrontation.⁴⁸ Calls to compete more seriously in the diplomatic realm have characterized the urgings of everyone from George Kennan to M. Taylor Fravel of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in his 2021 testimony on US-Sino relations.⁴⁹ Strategic competition should not prevent diplomatic engagement, only shape the contours of its agenda. And if by nature the DOD must be prepared to compete and fight an adversary, then it should have some notion of who it might contend with. The conceptual framework of competition supports both diplomatic and defense efforts, while the well-meaning theory of cooperation or engagement does not. Further, while cooperation can and should be an implied and underlying current of competition, the inverse is not true. If instructed to cooperate with its competitors generally, then the capacity for the United States to compete aggressively with specific adversarial capabilities will stagnate. And so, according to the 2018 National Defense Strategy, it has.⁵⁰

The Inevitability of a Competitive Framework

A senior China studies fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, Elizabeth C. Economy, testified recently before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the “U.S.-China relationship remains overwhelmingly competitive.” She added that supporting this framework is “essential to U.S. competitiveness with China, not to mention the future well-being of the international system.”⁵¹ Her testimony made clear, however, that this reality should not close the door to cooperation with China’s leaders when opportunities arise—likely a nod to her 2019 testimony on “smart competition.”⁵² It is the scarcity of such opportunities amid a growing list of troubling CCP activities with which the United States must compete that poses the most significant risk to US-Sino cooperation.

Despite the relatively nascent boon to China-watching spurred by language in recent strategic documents, China’s rise as a global power has

been a slow and steady one. A 1999 RAND Corporation report presented the realist perspective that a China with an economy equal to the United States, and therefore “roughly comparable military potential,” would become a “rival for world power.”⁵³ Additionally, “according to this theoretical outlook, a China that approached or equaled the United States in power would seek to vindicate its territorial claims, attain regional hegemony, increase its status in global terms, and alter the rules of the international system to its advantage.”⁵⁴

The Pentagon’s 2020 report to Congress on the People’s Republic of China (PRC) made some bleak assessments within the context of Xi Jinping’s self-described goal of becoming a “world-class” military power by 2049.⁵⁵ The report states that Beijing will likely seek a military equal or superior to that of the United States. It also submits that the PLA is “already ahead” of the United States in several key areas, including shipbuilding, land-based ballistic and cruise missile development, and integrated air defense systems. Further, the PRC uses the PLA as a tool of statecraft to advance global interests and reshape the international order.

Uncomfortable as it may seem, the DOD is just beginning to take seriously a competitive environment to which its adversaries are already well adapted. The United States drafted its Irregular Warfare Annex to the 2018 National Defense Strategy largely out of a recognized need to improve its whole-of-government capabilities in the gray zone where Beijing has dedicated the preponderance of its security resources since at least 1999.⁵⁶ Surely the United States cannot honor the guidance in this document without an enduring strategic mandate to counter these influence mechanisms. China’s systems warfare and unrestricted warfare, much like Russia’s new generation warfare, aim to apply all instruments of national power to an opponent’s strategic pressure points—which consist of ever fewer traditional military weaknesses.⁵⁷ China and Russia are each focused on competing primarily with the United States across the conflict spectrum and specifically below the threshold of total war. The spirit and letter of these approaches to political warfare do not reflect an urgent desire to cooperate for mutual benefit. Instead, they demonstrate a capacity to achieve warlike objectives in the competitive space. Like King Philip, competitors of the United States are already competing aggressively. Like Athens, the United States is still engaged in an impassioned internal debate over whether it should rise to the challenge.

According to the International Monetary Fund, China’s economy will experience 8.1 percent growth in 2021 (3 percent more than the US). With a 6.8 percent increase to its defense budget the same year, these trends put

China on a path to achieve its goal of becoming a comprehensive military power by 2035.⁵⁸ It is important to remember that China's government does not have a clear separation of powers. Therefore, China can mobilize all instruments of national power, if required, for military purposes through its military-civil fusion (MCF) model.⁵⁹ As a result, using China's comparatively small defense budget as a metric to gauge national strength amounts to mirror-imaging that fails to account for fundamental differences between the two nations. If the United States goes to war, the Pentagon goes to war. If China goes to war, China goes to war—"private" companies and all. The same appears true in competition as Xi Jinping promotes international cultural solidarity while pursuing interests in locales that should be of little concern if the CCP was constrained to merely negotiating its domestic troubles, as some of the literature indicates.⁶⁰

In Africa, for instance, China has been laying security and telecommunications groundwork for decades; making direct cash payments to African leaders; and funding federal buildings, infrastructure projects, and police stations. Simultaneously, it has sought greater oversight of interstate commerce and port security activities through a process some call "palace diplomacy."⁶¹ One study found that since 1966 Chinese companies have built hundreds of government buildings in Africa, including presidential residences, the opulence of which are conspicuous amid an otherwise underdeveloped backdrop.⁶² China's investments on the continent have earned the approval of current and former African government officials, such as W. Gyude Moore, who now works at the Center for Global Development and remains an outspoken critic of US foreign policy in Africa.⁶³ From 5G platforms in Kenya to billion-dollar energy investments in Nigeria, each policy is portrayed in Chinese state media through the comparative lens of US activity. Such juxtapositions are to the extent that after public outcry over China's handling of the coronavirus, China's top diplomat, Wang Yi, claimed his country was fighting two viruses in Africa—the coronavirus and the US "political virus."⁶⁴ In 2021, as Chinese officials seem keen to export their party-controlled military model to developing nations in the region, it is hard to overstate the value of competing to promote liberal values and secure governing configurations there.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, China's naval base in Djibouti—its first foreign military headquarters—appears to be expanding.⁶⁶ Some predict that China will lead the world in increased overseas security spending by 2023, and the PLA's goal to become a "global strategic force" supports these projections.⁶⁷ Since 2005, China has invested more than \$2 trillion overseas, roughly \$83 billion of which went to Sub-Saharan Africa. China's exports in the

region amount to more than those of the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, and India combined.⁶⁸ With little attention from the international community, Chinese military fortifications on the Red Sea can now provide maritime access via the Suez Canal to NATO's Mediterranean underbelly. Importantly, certain African leaders have also cushioned the CCP from international outrage. Beijing enjoys broad support from its African partners in the United Nations on critical votes concerning everything from maritime disputes in the South China Sea to human rights abuses.⁶⁹ By no means do these developments make China an enemy—especially not the Chinese people. Nevertheless, these are not the actions of a regional power simply trying to survive, and US strategic thought should reflect that somewhat disquieting reality.

Recommendations and Implications

As Dan Tobin explained to the author, it would be a straw man to say that arguments exist for purely competitive or exclusively cooperative strategies toward the CCP.⁷⁰ Most China experts are rather measured in their approach, and even doves agree that a tougher stance is warranted. But as explained in this article, many also see value in purging the great power or strategic competition narrative altogether. Doing so would erase gains already achieved in how security professionals view the present operational environment. It would also nullify studies completed within that conceptual space and force the national security enterprise to revise countless publications and doctrinal references for what amounts to little more than a stylistic amendment. This change would further contribute to the already dizzying array of jargon bombarding security professionals and produce minimal substantive benefit to US national security. The United States should reinforce the competition imperative in its next tranche of strategic documents, with a particular focus on the CCP's intended proliferation of socialism with Chinese characteristics. US strategic guidance should describe the concept as a political model antithetical to the liberal values shared by the world's free nations. Such clarification would provide two key opportunities for the US defense enterprise.

First, it would license a much-needed injection of awareness and education initiatives into the DOD vis-à-vis Chinese history lessons, translated public statements of CCP officials, and instruction on the ideological architecture of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Contrary to assertions that the current rivalry between the United States and China is nonideological, Beijing officials have for years championed their ideological system as the preferred way ahead for developing nations. At a recent

Anchorage meeting, Mr. Yang demanded that the United States “stop advancing its democracy in the rest of the world” because many Americans “have little confidence in the democracy of the United States.”⁷¹

Xi Jinping himself proclaims that his personalized brand of socialism will eventually be at the helm of global influence and military power. In his 1 July 2021 speech commemorating the Chinese Communist Party centennial, Xi described Marxist-Leninism as fundamental to the “soul of our party.” He pledged to wield Marxist and Maoist thought as tools to “observe, understand, and steer the trends of our times.”⁷² Thus, it stands to reason that the greater US national security enterprise—from military cadets to elected officials—should be intimately familiar with the ideology’s topography. Such educational reforms during the Cold War armed defense officials, diplomats, and elected leaders not merely with the knowledge to understand an opponent and therefore counter him more effectively. They also engendered the empathy to prevent careless or ignorant mistakes that lead to unnecessary conflicts or costly policy decisions.

Second, ratifying the competition imperative in the next national security strategy would allow the Pentagon to further refine its already expansive modernization efforts with a priority mandate. These efforts would not simply pertain to conducting large-scale combat operations or cornering the market on artificial intelligence and space capabilities. The CCP is adept in political warfare and strategic irregular warfare to a degree that makes Western powers accustomed to force-on-force military engagements uncomfortable.⁷³ If the United States and its allies want to broaden their competitive toolsets in this realm below the threshold of war, they must recognize not only that the realm exists but also that they are entering a game their opponent is already well versed in. China’s government is especially skilled in exploiting all instruments of national power in competition for information dominance and global influence.⁷⁴ Affirming the mandate to compete would serve both of these critical interests.

Conclusion

Samuel Huntington articulates the value of cooperation as well as any before him or since: “The futures of both peace and Civilization depend upon understanding and cooperation among the political, spiritual, and intellectual leaders of the world’s major civilizations.”⁷⁵ He is right. But had Huntington uttered these words to Demosthenes in 341 BCE, they may have lost some of their instructive quality. Context matters. By its nature, cooperation requires two or more willing parties. The view that there are pearls of useful collaboration waiting to be plucked from the

geopolitical sea if the United States would only toss aside its competitive syntax is based more on wishful thinking than any historical reality. A framework of cooperation with revisionist powers suggests that all or most US interests and values are mutual or negotiable with regimes that have wildly different views of the world. This is simply not true.

Historian Margaret MacMillan wrote that “if the study of history does nothing more than teach us humility, skepticism, and awareness of ourselves, then it has done something useful.”⁷⁶ Thousands of years of history considered, the belief that the United States can maintain the same prosperous international order it has enjoyed for 75 years without competing assertively with a challenger is a display of strategic hubris that might have surprised even the late Alistair Horne.⁷⁷ Although competition and cooperation are not mutually exclusive, one must indeed take priority over the other. Competing for influence, strategic access, and ultimately options should take priority while cooperating when and where feasible with revisionist powers remains a supporting function. If the concept of competition is simple, then in an age of such strategic complexity that simplicity should be welcomed.⁷⁸ There is certainly room to build on the 2017 and 2018 documents—and the Biden administration seems to be doing just that. However, the solid foundation they established should not be ripped asunder over a semantic grudge match. Even reformed CCP doves are beginning to entertain a more realist stance toward Beijing in light of its recent activities.⁷⁹

Strategic competition should be viewed less as a gateway to escalation and more as a realist alternative to the decades-old status quo of often-abandoned laissez-faire policies designed to counter the expansionist illiberal conduct of China’s leaders. It merely affords the US national security enterprise a frame of reference for the environment in which it operates, without telling it how to negotiate its complexities. That challenge is and should be left to the individual departments and services. Strategic competition is not a policy; it is a statement of geopolitical reality. The United States should acknowledge that reality and continue using it to refine its defense policies even as cooperation remains preferable when two or more willing parties enjoy shared interests. **SSQ**

CAPT Michael P. Ferguson, USA

Captain Ferguson is an author and analyst with nearly 20 years of infantry and intelligence experience in dozens of countries across four continents. His research focuses on applied history, strategic theory, and irregular warfare. He is a senior military advisor assigned to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and coauthor of a forthcoming book from Routledge on the legacy of Alexander the Great.

Notes

1. Ian Worthington, *Demosthenes of Athens and the Fall of Classical Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 335–37.

2. Zack Cooper, “Bad Idea: ‘Great Power Competition’ Terminology,” *Defense 360*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1 December 2020, <https://defense360.csis.org/>.

3. The 2017 National Security Strategy reframed the strategic environment as one driven by heightened interstate competition. See The White House, *2017 National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2017), <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/>; and Evan A. Feigenbaum, “Why the US and China Forgot How to Cooperate,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 28 April 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/>.

4. Austin Doehler, “Great Power Competition Is Too Narrow a Frame,” *Defense One*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.defenseone.com/>; Daniel H. Nexon, “Against Great Power Competition: The U.S. Should Not Confuse Means for Ends,” *Foreign Affairs*, 15 February 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/>; Sharon Squassoni, “Why Biden Should Abandon the Great Power Competition Narrative,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 12 January 2021, <https://thebulletin.org/>; and Emma Ashford, “Great-Power Competition Is a Recipe for Disaster,” *Foreign Policy*, 1 April 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/>.

5. Zalmay Khalilzad et al., *The United States and a Rising China: Strategic and Military Implications* (Washington, DC: RAND Corporation, 1999), 63–69, <https://www.rand.org/>.

6. Edward Wong and Chris Buckley, “U.S. Says China’s Repression of Uighurs is ‘Genocide,’” *New York Times*, 19 January 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/>; Steve Scherer, “Canada’s Parliament Passes Motion Saying China’s Treatment of Uighurs Is Genocide,” *Reuters*, 22 February 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/>; and Sheena Chestnut Greitens, “Dealing with Demand for China’s Global Surveillance Exports,” Brookings Institution, April 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/>.

7. Ewelina U. Ochab, “British Lawyers Find Credible Evidence of Genocide against the Uyghurs in Xinjiang,” *Forbes*, 8 February 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/>; and Matthew Hill, David Campanale, and Joel Gunter, “Their Goal Is to Destroy Everyone: Uighur Camp Detainees Allege Systematic Rape,” *BBC News*, 2 February 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/>.

8. Mallory Shelbourne, “SECDEF Nominee Austin Affirms Threat from China, Will ‘Update’ National Defense Strategy,” *US Naval Institute News*, 19 January 2021, <https://news.usni.org/>.

9. Nexon, “Against Great Power Competition.”

10. Robert Sutter, also of Georgetown University, testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 2010 on the merits of a “less confrontational” strategy to counter the CCP’s illiberal activities. See *Principles for US Engagement with Asia: Hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee*, 111th Cong., 2d sess. (21 January 2010) (statement of Robert Sutter, faculty, Georgetown University), <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/>. By 2021, likely due in no small part to Xi Jinping’s presence, Sutter’s stance on US policy toward the CCP had hardened significantly. See *US-China Relations at the Chinese Communist Party Centennial: Hearing before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review*

Commission, 117th Cong., 1st sess. (28 January 2021) (statement of Robert Sutter, professor, George Washington University), <https://www.uscc.gov/>.

11. Ryan Hass, "China Is Not Ten Feet Tall: How Alarmism Undermines American Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, 3 March 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/>; Kathy Gilsinan, "How the U.S. Could Lose a War with China," *The Atlantic*, 25 July 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/>; and Jeff Schogol, "The United States Risks Getting into Another Cold War with China," *Task and Purpose*, 13 March 2021, <https://taskandpurpose.com/>.

12. Valbona Zeneli and Joseph Vann, "The Real Strategic End Game in Decoupling from China," *The Diplomat*, 18 September 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/>.

13. The White House, *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

14. Sulmaan Wasif Khan, *Haunted by Chaos: China's Grand Strategy from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 219.

15. "Each Country's Share of CO2 Emissions," Union of Concerned Scientists, 12 August 2020, <https://www.ucsusa.org/>.

16. John Ruwitch, "What China's 'Total Victory' Over Extreme Poverty Looks Like in Actuality," NPR, 5 March 2021, <https://www.npr.org/>.

17. Michael Schuman, "Xi Jinping Turned Me into a China Hawk," Politico, 5 March 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/>. The Biden administration announced on 17 March 2021 that it will impose sanctions on China and several other states for their supposed interference in the 2020 US presidential elections. See Chun Han Wong, "Biden Imposes His First Sanctions on Chinese Officials Ahead of Bilateral Meeting," *Wall Street Journal*, 17 March 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/>.

18. Alexa Lardieri, "China, WHO Fumbled Coronavirus Pandemic Response, Independent Panel Finds," *U.S. News & World Report*, 19 January 2021, <https://www.usnews.com/>; and "China COVID-19: How State Media and Censorship Took on Coronavirus," BBC News, 29 December 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/>.

19. H. R. McMaster, *Battlegrounds: The Fight to Defend the Free World* (New York: HarperCollins, 2020), 125–29.

20. "A China Model?" *Beijing's Promotion of Alternative Global Norms and Standards: Hearing before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, 116th Cong., 2d sess. (13 March 2020) (statement of Dan Tobin, Faculty Member, China Studies, National Intelligence University), <https://www.uscc.gov/>.

21. "A China Model?," 1.

22. Mr. Yang Jiechi ran the gamut from accusing Secretary of State Antony Blinken and national security advisor Jake Sullivan of hypocrisy to suggesting that Western values are not universal values, even criticizing democratic systems of government as inherently flawed. See Justin McCurry, "The US and China Publicly Rebuke Each Other in First Major Talks of Biden Era," *The Guardian*, 18 March 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/>.

23. Andrey Lungu, "The U.S. Needs an Endgame before It Plunges into the Next Cold War," *Foreign Policy*, 24 September 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/>.

24. Michael Howard, "The Use and Abuse of Military History," *Parameters* 11, no. 1 (1981), <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/>; and Margaret MacMillan, *Dangerous Games: The Use and Abuse of Military History* (New York: Modern Library, 2008).

25. MacMillan, *Dangerous Games*, 11.

26. Michael Schuman, *Superpower Interrupted: The Chinese History of the World* (New York: Public Affairs, 2020), 128–31, 310–12.

27. John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 233.
28. McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 103.
29. For a view of modern competition with twentieth-century characteristics, see Robert Spalding, “Yes, We Can Win the Cold War with China—Here’s How,” *The Hill*, 13 June 2020, <https://thehill.com/>. For the role of information in the current environment, see Doowan Lee and Philip Reynolds, “The Strategic Offensive against the CCP,” *The Cipher Brief*, 8 February 2021, <https://www.thecipherbrief.com/>; and Michael P. Ferguson, “The Evolution of Disinformation: How Public Opinion Became Proxy,” *The Strategy Bridge*, 14 January 2020, <https://thestrategybridge.org/>.
30. MacMillan, *Dangerous Games*, 138; and McMaster, *Battlegrounds*, 101.
31. Khalilzad et al., *Rising China*, 67.
32. H. R. McMaster made this observation more recently in *Battlegrounds*, 128. Also see Khalilzad et al., *Rising China*, 67–68.
33. Khalilzad et al., 65–66.
34. For PLAN strength and space capabilities, see Department of Defense, *Military and Security Development Involving the People’s Republic of China 2020* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2020), <https://media.defense.gov/>; Brad Lendon, “China Has Built the World’s Largest Navy. Now, What’s Beijing Going to Do with It?” *CNN*, 5 March 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/>. A 2010 report from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has aged remarkably well. Its prediction that China’s economy will outgrow that of the United States by 2035—and be roughly twice its size by mid-century—remains consistent with more current reports. See Uri Dadush and Bennett Stancil, “The World Order in 2050,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, April 2010, <https://carnegieendowment.org/>.
35. This quote, taken from the 1990 edition of *Jane’s Fighting Ships*, appears in *Red Star over the Pacific*, along with a litany of other predictions casting a “regionally oriented Chinese Navy” as “implausible until 2020.” See Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star over the Pacific: China’s Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 214–16.
36. Gregory B. Poling, “The Conventional Wisdom on China’s Island Bases Is Dangerously Wrong,” *War on the Rocks*, 10 January 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/>. For Dan Tobin’s comments, see Tobin, *Testimony before USCC*, 2020.
37. Zhou Bo, “The Risk of China-US Military Conflict Is Worryingly High,” *Financial Times*, 25 August 2020, <https://www.ft.com/>.
38. President Reagan gave the speech on 12 June 1987. See Gaddis, *Cold War*, 235.
39. Robert B. Zoellick, “The U.S. Doesn’t Need a New Cold War,” *Wall Street Journal*, 18 May 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/>. In terms of values, it is important to highlight that senior CCP officials have repeatedly stated that the United States and the West do not have a monopoly on universal values. See also Hal Brands and Zack Cooper, “U.S.-Chinese Rivalry Is a Battle over Values,” *Foreign Affairs*, 16 March 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/>.
40. US Department of Energy, Office of History and Heritage Resources, “Nuclear Proliferation (1949–Present),” accessed July 2021, <https://www.osti.gov/>.
41. John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 8–23, 287–330.

42. Ross Andersen, “The Panopticon Is Already Here,” *The Atlantic*, September 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/>; and “China Exports AI Surveillance Tech to over 60 Countries: Report,” *Nikkei Asia*, 19 December 2019, <https://asia.nikkei.com/>.

43. Of note, these numbers do not include the more than 1,200 cases of alleged intellectual property theft filed by US companies against Chinese-linked organizations during the same period. See “Survey of Chinese Espionage in the United States Since 2000,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, accessed July 2021, <https://www.csis.org/>.

44. Matthew Impelli, “Over 500 U.S. Scientists under Investigation for Being Compromised by China,” *Newsweek*, 23 April 2021, <https://www.newsweek.com/>.

45. Julian Brave Noisecat and Thom Woodroffe, “The United States and China Need to Cooperate—for the Planet’s Sake,” *Foreign Policy*, 4 February 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/>.

46. Eric Chan and Peter Loftus, “Chinese Communist Party Information Warfare: US-China Competition during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, 1 May 2020, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/>.

47. Natasha Turak, “Iran’s Uranium Metal Production Is ‘Most Serious Nuclear Step’ to Date, but Deal Can Still Be Saved,” CNBC, 16 February 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/>.

48. Joint Publication 3-20, *Security Cooperation*, 23 May 2017, <https://www.jcs.mil/>.

49. For Kennan’s famous telegram that informally began the Cold War, see Wilson Center Digital Archive, “George Kennan’s ‘Long Telegram,’” 22 February 1946, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/>. For Fravel’s comments, see *US-China Relations at the Chinese Communist Party’s Centennial: Hearing* (statement of M. Taylor Fravel, director, Security Studies Program, Massachusetts Institute of Technology), 20, <https://www.uscc.gov/>.

50. Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: DOD, 2018), <https://dod.defense.gov/>.

51. *Advancing Effective U.S. Policy for Strategic Competition with China in the Twenty-First Century: Hearing before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee* (17 March 2021) (statement of Elizabeth Economy, senior fellow, China Studies, Council on Foreign Relations), <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/>.

52. *Smart Competition: Adapting U.S. Strategy Towards China at 40 Years; Hearing before the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs*, 116th Cong., 1st sess. (8 May 2019) (statement of Elizabeth Economy, director, Asia Studies, Council on Foreign Relations), <https://www.congress.gov/>.

53. Khalilzad et al., *Rising China*, 17.

54. Khalilzad et al., 17.

55. Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2020*, Annual Report to Congress (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2020), <https://media.defense.gov/>.

56. Department of Defense, *Summary of the Irregular Warfare Annex to the U.S. National Defense Strategy* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2020), <https://media.defense.gov/>; Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Operating in the Gray Zone: An Alternative Paradigm for U.S. Military Strategy* (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Press, 2016), <https://apps.dtic.mil/>; and Charles T. Cleveland with Daniel Egel, *The American Way of Irregular War: An Analytical Memoir* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), <https://www.rand.org/>.

57. Phillip A. Karber, “Russia’s New Generation Warfare,” National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, 4 June 2015, <https://www.nga.mil/>; David A. Deptula, “Mosaic

Warfare,” *Air Force Magazine*, 1 November 2019, <https://www.airforcemag.com/>; and David Barno and Nora Bensahel, “A New Generation of Unrestricted Warfare,” *War on the Rocks*, 19 April 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/>.

58. International Monetary Fund, “World Economic Outlook,” January 2021, <https://www.imf.org/>; and Bonnie S. Glaser et al., “Understanding China’s 2021 Defense Budget,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, 5 March 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/>.

59. For a brief overview of MCF, see US Department of State, “Military-Civil Fusion and the People’s Republic of China,” <https://www.state.gov/>. For a more detailed analysis, see Elsa B. Kania and Lorand Laskai, “Myths and Realities of China’s Civil-Military Fusion Strategy,” Center for a New American Security, 28 January 2021, <https://www.cnas.org/>.

60. For instance, see Stein Ringen, *The Perfect Dictatorship: China in the 21st Century* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016).

61. Joshua Meservey, “China’s Palace Diplomacy in Africa,” Heritage Foundation, 29 January 2020, <https://www.heritage.org/>; and Will Reno and Jesse Humpal, “As the US Slumps Away, China Subsumes African Security Arrangements,” *Defense One*, 21 October 2020, <https://www.defenseone.com/>.

62. Meservey, “Palace Diplomacy.”

63. W. Gyude Moore, “A New Cold War Is Coming. Africa Should Not Pick Sides,” *Mail & Guardian*, 21 August 2020, <https://mg.co.za/>.

64. “Coronavirus: China Accuses U.S. of Spreading ‘Conspiracies,’” *BBC News*, 24 May 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/>.

65. Paul Nantulya, “China Promotes Its Party-Army Model in Africa,” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, 28 July 2020, <https://africacenter.org/>.

66. Peter Suciú, “China’s Naval Base in Africa Is Getting Bigger. Is a Network of Bases Next?” *The National Interest*, 11 May 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/>.

67. Paul Nantulya, “Chinese Security Contractors in Africa,” *Carnegie Center for Global Policy*, 8 October 2020, <https://carnegietsinghua.org/>.

68. For data on Sub-Saharan Africa investment, see “China Global Investment Tracker,” *American Enterprise Institute*, 2021, <https://www.aei.org/>.

69. Wang Chen and Chen Xiaochen, “Who Supports China in the South China Sea and Why,” *The Diplomat*, 27 July 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/>; and Catherine Putz, “Which Countries Are For or Against China’s Xinjiang Polices?” *The Diplomat*, 15 July 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/>.

70. Dan Tobin (faculty member, China Studies, US National Intelligence University), interview by the author, 19 March 2021.

71. See, for instance, Jeffrey A. Bader, “Avoiding a New Cold War between the US and China,” *Brookings Institute*, 17 August 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/>. For Mr. Yang’s comments, see Matthew Lee and Mark Thiessen, “US, China Spar in First Face-to-Face Meeting under Biden,” *Associated Press*, 18 March 2021, <https://apnews.com/>.

72. “Full Text of Xi Jinping’s Speech on the CCP’s 100th Anniversary,” *Nikkei Asia*, 1 July 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/>.

73. The Irregular Warfare (IW) Annex to the 2018 National Defense Strategy began moving in the right direction, but realizing its vision will require a comprehensive embrace of IW across the US defense enterprise. See Linda Robinson et al., *The Growing Need to Focus on Modern Political Warfare* (Washington, DC: RAND Corporation, 2019), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/other/2019/07/>.

www.rand.org/; and Jacques deLisle, “Political Warfare, Sharp Power, the U.S., and East Asia,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, 6 April 2020, <https://www.fpri.org/article/>.

74. Ainikki Riikonen, “Decide, Disrupt, Destroy: Information Systems in Great Power Competition with China,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (Winter 2019): 122–45, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/>. See also Conrad Crane, “The United States Needs an Information Warfare Command: A Historical Examination,” War on the Rocks, 14 June 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/>.

75. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Free Press, 2002), 321.

76. MacMillan, *Dangerous Games*, 169.

77. While Horne’s thesis connects hubris to “overreach” in war, his final chapter, “Echoes of Verdun,” explores the perils of powerful nations that come to believe certain contests are “unlosable,” such as the postwar French Army in Indochina. Alistair Horne, *Hubris: The Tragedy of War in the Twentieth Century* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), 314.

78. Josh Kerbel, “The US Talks a Lot about Strategic Complexity. Too Bad It’s Mostly Just Talk,” Defense One, 9 March 2021, <https://www.defenseone.com/>.

79. Schuman, “China Hawk.”

Disclaimer and Copyright

The views and opinions in *SSQ* are those of the authors and are not officially sanctioned by any agency or department of the US government. This document and trademarks(s) contained herein are protected by law and provided for noncommercial use only. Any reproduction is subject to the Copyright Act of 1976 and applicable treaties of the United States. The authors retain all rights granted under 17 U.S.C. §106. Any reproduction requires author permission and a standard source credit line. Contact the *SSQ* editor for assistance: strategicstudiesquarterly@au.af.edu.