

Competing with China Today

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Abstract

As the national security apparatus continues to shift toward great-power competition, there is still a significant lack of understanding about the nature of the current competition and how the armed forces can engage within the strategic reality. This article outlines the road to competition with China, as well as the nature of the struggle, to provide clarity on the challenge such competition poses. Within that context, this article provides recommendations for how the military can translate the strategic concepts found within the *National Defense Strategy* into more tangible actions.

Introduction

In 1997, the First Vice Premier of China, Zhu Rongji, stood up to give a toast at a lunch for hundreds of businesspeople in Sydney, Australia. When Zhu rose to speak, his country stood on almost two decades of remarkable economic growth as Beijing gradually opened China's economy to the outside world. With a broad grin, he declared to the delight of his audience, "Let's all get rich together!"¹ Such capitalist sentiment was music to the ears of Western leaders, despite that it came from a representative of an avowed communist party that ruled through a system known as "socialism with Chinese characteristics."

While the West welcomed the opening of the Chinese economy, leaders also hoped that economic liberalization would naturally lead to political liberalization. The expectation was that further engagement with the West would logically lead the Chinese to adopt Western attitudes about governance, international commitments, and economic practices. As H.R. McMaster summarized, the persistent assumptions that guided American policy since the 1970s were that "After being welcomed into the international political and economic order, China would play by the rules, open its markets, and privatize its economy. As the country became more prosperous, the Chinese government would respect the rights of its people and liberalize politically."² Three decades later, those assumptions are proving to be completely wrong.

The United States instead finds itself in a resurgence of great-power competition with an increasingly assertive China. As the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) outlines, "The central challenge to US prosperity and security is the re-

emergence of long-term, strategic competition by what the National Security Strategy classifies as revisionist powers.”³ While the national security apparatus is sluggishly awakening and adjusting to that reality, there is a significant lack of understanding as to the nature of the current competition and what competing with China actually means, especially as it relates to the armed services. Former Secretary of Defense James Mattis regularly spoke about expanding the competitive space and having a competitive mind-set. While the services have readily accepted that parlance, there is still much work to be done in translating the strategic concepts into tangible realities. What does a competitive mind-set entail? What does it mean to compete with China if we are not at war with them? While the *NDS* makes clear that the goal is not to be blindly confrontational but instead to uphold the international order, what is the role of the armed forces in that political endeavor? Before we can begin to answer these questions, we must first thoroughly understand the current competitive space and how we arrived here. Once we grasp the nature of the problem, several recommendations for action become apparent and provide more concrete ways for members of the armed services to engage within the current strategic reality.

The Road to Competition

In his groundbreaking book, *The United States and China*, John King Fairbank argued that historical perspective “is not a luxury but a necessity” for understanding Chinese actions.⁴ While many national identities are grounded in a territory or a people, China defines itself in terms of a history.⁵ Familiarity with that history, particularly the period following the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) rise to power, is fundamental to understanding how we reached the current competitive environment.

The reign of the CCP began in 1949 after a 20-year guerilla insurgency in the bloody civil war against the nationalist Kuomintang government. The communists’ victory ended a period in China’s history now referred to as the Century of Humiliation, which was marked by foreign intervention and subjugation of the empire to external entities. Both points are critical to appreciating the thinking and approach of the CCP.

China’s expressed foreign policy aims have progressed through several phases since that time. Mao Zedong’s tenure was largely marked by efforts to consolidate domestic control and achieve international recognition as the legitimate government of China. That focus began to change after the death of Mao in 1976, when Deng Xiaoping commenced economic reforms to open China to the international economy to spur growth and speed up modernization.⁶ While these reforms opened the door to increased engagement with the West, including Pres. Richard

Nixon's visit to China in 1972 and the United States' eventual recognition of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) in 1979, such engagement faced a major setback with domestic protests in 1989 that ended with brutal suppression at the Tiananmen Square massacre. Immediate international condemnation followed, and the United States imposed sanctions on China, citing human rights violations.

In response to the immense internal strife and external pressure, Deng introduced the idea of keeping a low profile while working hard over the long term to become an international political power. This later evolved into his "24-Character Principle," which translated to "observe calmly, secure our position, cope with affairs calmly, never seek leadership, hide brightness and cherish obscurity, get some things done."⁷ He encouraged China to hide its light and keep a low profile internationally, an approach that became known as "hide and bide." This remained the ruling thought of the CCP into the 2000s, as Chinese leaders worked to avoid conflict and improve relations with industrial nations to advance China's domestic situation.

The turning point for Chinese international thought occurred in 2008. Several events throughout the year served to boost China's confidence and help jumpstart an internal dialogue about revising its hide-and-bide strategy: they showcased China as hosts of the summer Olympics; they surpassed Japan as the second-largest economy in the world; they navigated the worst global recession since 1929 largely unscathed and resumed double-digit gross domestic product (GDP) growth only a year after it began;⁸ and they also increased in relative power with the United States, as America's global influence waned under the strain of the economic collapse and two stagnating wars. Emboldened by these developments, China's paramount leader, Hu Jintao, declared that Beijing should adopt a strategy of maintaining a "*continuously* low profile and *proactively* get[ting] some things done."⁹ Although this seems a tame alteration, its significance cannot be underestimated. CCP leaders spend an enormous amount of time vetting terms before they become policy concepts. The change indicated Beijing's sober understanding of the international order and its own rising power within it.¹⁰ While Beijing was still in a period of "strategic opportunity," Chinese leaders started to sense the time was approaching for a shift away from Deng's 24-Character strategy.

That shift came swiftly after Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, fueled by the great ambitions and fears that sit at the root of so many Chinese activities today—ambitions to restore China's greatness in the world and fears that the party was vulnerable to pressures at home.¹¹ Xi immediately discarded Deng's hide-and-bide strategy and replaced it with his own "striving to achieve the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."¹² His dream includes making China a "moderately well-off society" by 2021 and a fully rich China "closer to the center

of the world stage” by 2049, the hundredth anniversary of Mao’s founding of the PRC.¹³ Xi proposed a “New Type of Great Power Relations” between the United States and China, where the two nations would come together as equals.¹⁴ He approved maritime policies in the South China Sea that Hu deemed too aggressive.¹⁵ Xi also launched three ambitious and overlapping policies and programs to expand China’s influence and grow its power: Made in China 2025, Military-Civil Fusion, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).¹⁶

China’s assertiveness has only intensified with the rising tensions with the United States over trade practices, intellectual property theft, and the outbreak of COVID-19. What was once thought of as the peaceful rise of a nation destined to settle responsibly into the existing world order has gradually given way to the grim reality that the West is in the midst of a renewed great-power struggle with a rival that holds a fundamentally opposing worldview. As McMaster succinctly stated, “We had undervalued the degree to which ideology drives the Chinese Communist Party. As a result, we had indulged in this conceit over the years that we could change China by welcoming China into the international order. It was pretty obvious by 2017 that that didn’t work.”¹⁷

Current Challenge

The ideology that we undervalued lies at the very core of the current challenge China poses. Fundamentally, this is a war of ideas that centers on competing visions for the international order. In the aftermath of World War II, the United States and the West built a world order that aimed to keep the peace through collective military strength and shared prosperity. Such an order rested on security relationships between like-minded Western democracies and a network of international institutions implementing a rules-based order to enforce collective norms and values. Universal values, human rights, and the benefits of democratic ideals were among the primary concepts extolled by the order’s initiators. China, with its market-Leninism and authoritarian rule, explicitly rejects and derides the core tenets undergirding that world order and, thus, seeks to destroy it. As Andrew Michta has said, “What is unfolding before our eyes—and has been underway for three decades since the end of the Cold War—is the second, and possibly decisive and final stage of conflict between liberal democracy and communism.”¹⁸

While Western leaders have, at times, appeared ignorant to the fact that they are engaged in an ideological struggle, the CCP clearly defined Western values as an existential threat. As an example, a restricted memo known as Document no. 9, issued by the administrative engine room of the central leadership in 2012, reiterated China’s views about the centrality of ideology in this struggle and highlighted specific conceptual perils that they must guard against if they want to

avoid the fate of the Soviet Union.¹⁹ This document outlined seven taboos forbidden in public discourse, including Western constitutional democracy, universal values and human rights, promarket neoliberalism, Western ideas of an independent press, and Western concepts of civic participation.²⁰ Since the CCP views the realm of ideas as the primary threat to its domestic rule, it is only natural that an international system based on threatening ideas would be viewed as an existential issue, particularly in light of the Party's attempts to balance further engagement with the West with political control at home.

Ironically, the CCP has utilized many of the liberties they abhor to undermine international order from within and make way for something new. Beijing has exploited the free exchange of ideas, open civic participation, and free-market policies to wage China's campaign against those same liberal norms and the institutions that uphold them. In doing so, China's leaders are attempting to establish a modern-day tributary system in which countries can trade and enjoy peace with China in exchange for submission. Beijing is also not particularly shy about it. In a meeting at the 2010 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Chinese foreign minister bluntly told his counterparts, "China is a big country, and you are small countries."²¹ In the eyes of the CCP, the pathway away from liberalism leads to an alternative that is safe for authoritarianism—and one where China is sitting center stage.

China's attempts to reshape the current environment have also benefited from differing perspectives on war and peace. The Western tradition views war as an extension of politics with clean breaks between the two. For China, there is no binary difference between war and peace, there is only a continuum of struggle. China's lack of major geographical barriers forced its rulers to be innovative when planning their defenses and pushed them to harness all the resources of Chinese society for the effort. Sun Tzu, as early as 500 BCE, argued for using political, psychological, and noncombative means to achieve one's ends before fighting.²² This mentality, coupled with the CCP's familiarity with protracted warfare and its extensive experience with insurgency, has resulted in a much more fluid and continuous view of competition. Agnus Campbell, chief of the Australian Defence Force, described this broader view of war in a speech in 2019: "Its reach extends from what we would see as 'peace' right through to nuclear war. In other words, it is a constant of life. For these states, the strategic landscape requires a never-ending struggle. It's a struggle that has been maintained throughout history, and it's a struggle that's happening right now."²³

Clearly, the challenge facing the West is not simply the potential for war to interrupt the current peace, it is an ongoing and enduring struggle of ideology and interests. The fundamental driver of conflict with the CCP is the inherent clash

between liberalism and illiberalism.²⁴ Washington seeks to maintain the current world order built on liberal and democratic principles; the CCP seeks to undermine those principles, which it views as an existential threat to its rule, and replace the current arrangement with a modern-day tributary and mercantilist system that serves China's interests. What is more, China seeks to achieve those ends without its opponents ever knowing that it was happening. Like the analogy of a boiling frog, Beijing is pursuing China's objectives using methods that are so covert and seemingly benign that its adversaries never realize the trouble until it is too late. Sun Tzu captured it best: "attaining one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the pinnacle of excellence. Subjugating the enemy's army without fighting is the true pinnacle of excellence."²⁵ Political warfare is Beijing's means to achieving that excellence.

Political Warfare and Comprehensive Coercion

George Kennan famously described *political warfare* as "the employment of all the means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives."²⁶ While this definition broadly encapsulates the activities of China, others have used the term *comprehensive coercion* to capture the uniquely subversive, intrusive, and wide-ranging nature of the CCP's political warfare as compared to other nations, such as the United States.²⁷ Regardless of the term, the methods have been standard instruments of statecraft for the Chinese for centuries. Subversion, co-option, and coercion were essential to the survival, rise, and consolidation of power of the CCP. Years of being on the defensive against an international system that regularly challenged the legitimacy of the Party's political and economic system and reinforced norms that were inimical to its domestic control have only furthered Chinese leaders' paranoia.²⁸ That insecurity has fueled Beijing's aggressive use and continual refinement of these tactics for decades.

Even more than his predecessors, Xi has massively expanded CCP political warfare efforts to shape foreign opinions and influence foreign decision making. Consequently, CCP operations are vast and wide-ranging. The following is an overview of their primary characteristics²⁹:

- **Mobilizing ethnic diasporas**—Xi's strategy to harness the overseas Chinese population includes surveilling, recruiting, and "guiding" residents to push Chinese narratives, undertake basic intelligence functions, and report "unpatriotic" behavior. Refusal to cooperate has led to threats of adverse consequences for relatives in China and for their own prospects should they return home.³⁰ The CCP has also used ethnic Chinese as a political weapon. In 2017, a top Chinese official threatened leaders of the Australian Labor

party with mobilizing the 1.2 million ethnic Chinese in Australia against the party over an extradition treaty with the PRC, stating, “It would be a shame if Chinese government representatives had to tell the Chinese community in Australia that Labor did not support the relationship with between Australia and China.”³¹

- **Tasking Chinese students abroad to suppress anti-China views**—CCP organizations encourage students and academic organizations to confront and submit formal complaints against anyone who offers views contrary to Beijing’s narratives. Further, well-organized groups of students have descended on peaceful demonstrations supporting issues sensitive to the CCP and attempted to out-shout participants or break up the demonstrations, at times even resorting to violence.³²
- **Sponsor pro-regime educational institutions to promote pro-Beijing views**—Chinese companies and Chinese-funded associations have donated hundreds of millions of dollars to Western universities to influence research and public support.³³ Confucius Institutes, Beijing-administered centers devoted to language and cultural classes at universities, are a primary organ for funding and messaging, with more than 160 centers at US colleges. The CCP pays for all operational costs, textbooks, and teachers, which gives them complete control of the research and teaching agenda, while operating under the banner of academic freedom that comes with university association.³⁴
- **Providing substantial financial support and other assistance or favors to individuals or institutions that can or will support China’s interests**—CCP-associated entities fund numerous “independent” research institutes and prominent individuals, including politicians, officials, and reporters. Many are offered all-expenses-paid trips as well as access to senior CCP officials to foster pro-Beijing research and public opinion. After an Australian politician was caught softening his policies against Chinese activities to secure a 400,000 AUD donation, investigations unearthed that Chinese-linked businesses were the largest donors to both the Labor and Liberal parties, totaling more than 5.5 million AUD in two years.³⁵
- **Large-scale operations to influence and coerce Western media**—China has gone to great lengths to establish a “new world media order” under the control of Beijing. Along that vein, China has expanded the presence of China Global Television (CGTV) and state media organizations to virtually all key regions and cities throughout the world. Pro-Beijing entities have aggressively purchased almost all Chinese-language newspapers and social media platforms as well as shares in Western media. In April 2018, Bloom-

berg News reported that the CCP had invested three billion euros in acquiring shares in various media companies in Europe over the preceding decade. Where they cannot buy ownership, they have purchased space within prestigious international dailies across 20 countries, including *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal*, for their *China Watch*, an advertorial insert that appears to be part of the paper but is written entirely by the English-language propaganda newspaper *China Daily*.³⁶

- **Commercial pressure**—On numerous occasions, CCP officials have threatened “consumer-led” boycotts of organizations or companies that support policies antithetical to China. Chinese state-owned enterprises led a mass boycott of Lotte department stores, forcing the company to sell its assets in China, after Lotte permitted an American Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense system to operate on land it owned in South Korea.³⁷ After the owner of the Houston Rockets tweeted support for the antigovernment protests in Hong Kong, CGTV and Tencent suspended all broadcasts of the National Basketball Association preseason in China.³⁸
- **Leveraging trade and investment dependencies**—Beijing is notorious for its pattern of economic clientelism, as exemplified in the BRI. China offers developing countries loans for large-scale infrastructure projects without the strings that often come with lending from Western banks. Once the countries are in debt, the CCP uses the leverage to force alignment with China’s agenda. The debt trap becomes more ruthless when countries are unable to service their loans. For example, after agreeing to high-interest loans to finance construction on a port, Sri Lanka was forced to sign a 99-year lease to China for the port when Colombo could no longer afford the payments.³⁹
- **Mobilizing Chinese-owned companies to pursue strategic objectives**—Chinese companies are required by law to establish party organizations, which allows the CCP massive control over corporations. It is not unusual for the Party to encourage or even command companies to purchase a foreign asset or take part in a strategic international investment project. The pretense of companies operating independently of the CCP was laid bare to the Treasurer of Australia when the Finance Minister of China brazenly told him, “All I want is to buy 15% of your top 200 listed companies.”⁴⁰ If the Party tells Chinese businesses to partake in some venture, the companies do it.
- **Penetration of Western research and other institutions to access cutting-edge technology**—Chinese nationals with direct ties to the CCP, including a People’s Liberation Army (PLA) officer at Boston University, have been involved with research projects that have national security applications.

While testifying in Congress, FBI Director Christopher Wray said, “The use of non-traditional collectors, especially in the academic setting—whether it’s professors, scientists, students—we see in almost every field office that the FBI has around the country.”⁴¹

- **Theft of intellectual property**—China’s efforts to steal intellectual property, primarily through cyber means, are well documented. Gen Keith Alexander, then National Security Agency Director and Commander of US Cyber Command, said US companies lose about 250 billion USD a year through the theft, which he called “the greatest transfer of wealth in history.”⁴² Much of the theft has directly facilitated modernization of Chinese defense enterprises.
- **Use of paramilitary forces to seize, occupy, and militarize select areas**—China has used a series of maritime and land constabulary and militia forces, as well as commercial organizations, to conduct strategically important operations in places like the South China Sea. These gray-zone tactics provide some distance between the Party and the operations, but they are always backed by PLA forces lurking on the horizon.⁴³

This summary only scratches the surface of Chinese activities and is devoid of many specifics for brevity’s sake.⁴⁴ However, it serves to highlight how the nature of the current conflict is not one of conventional war but is instead grounded in political warfare and geo-economics.

Competing Today

Having outlined the road to competition and the nature of the current struggle, recommendations for how the armed forces can employ a competitive mind-set, expand the competitive space, and compete today begin to come into focus. Such recommendations entail not only generic prescriptions for competing that extend to the entirety of the United States, including the armed forces, but also specific steps that the military must take to contend with China.

As a start, *we must recognize that we are already in a competition.* The China problem is not just one of a growing military power and the potential for war—it is an enduring struggle of ideology over competing visions of the future. For clarity’s sake, we define *competition* as “the application of attention and resources necessary to gain and maintain a sustainable position of advantage while remaining a dominant player in the enduring struggle of international politics.” To compete, therefore, we must accept the perpetual rhythm of struggle that characterizes international relations. It does not necessarily mean we should partake in all their methods, but it does mean that we need to operate with eyes open to the reality of political warfare. It also does not mean that we should lose ourselves in com-

peting just for the sake of competition—we cannot exchange the wishful thinking of engagement with wishful thinking of competition. China is too big of an economic power and too integrated within global institutions to merely be challenged on all fronts. We must be prepared to live with it as a major power and a significant trading partner, which means our attitude should entail elements of both competition and cooperation. As Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan outlined, “The best approach, then, will be to lead with competition, follow with offers of cooperation, and refuse to negotiate any linkages between Chinese assistance on global challenges and concessions on U.S. interests.”⁴⁵

Next, given the nature of political warfare and China’s current efforts, *we must enable transparency and exposure of their activities*. The effectiveness of Beijing’s coercive methods is contingent on ambiguity and remaining below the level of awareness. An informed public reduces such coercion’s impact and increases the scrutiny of such activities. As we have seen in Australia, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, and India, exposure led to more public inquiry, tighter legislation against foreign influence, controls on foreign investments, and enhanced resourcing of defense initiatives.⁴⁶ Increased awareness of the extent of Chinese incursions into Australia led to a 20-percent drop in the number of Australians who trusted China, and 75 percent of respondents said authorities should do more to restrict China, even if it means sacrificing some economic benefits.⁴⁷ Further, in Western countries it allows for two of our biggest strengths to come in to play—a boisterous and independent press as well as robust public discourse. The free exchange of ideas can be an enormous advantage and an engine for innovation that can help generate new approaches to dealing with China’s tactics. As Princeton professor Aaron Friedberg said, “sunlight is the best disinfectant.”⁴⁸

The *United States and the West must also re-enter the arena of ideology*. After years of contending with communism, we victoriously emerged with the assumption that universal values, the importance of human rights, and the virtues of representative government would go unchecked. To make matters worse, a values-based foreign policy fell out of favor after the Iraq War. Ideology became dangerous and idealistic rather than a source of American strength. We need to reinvest in our societal resilience by reaffirming the republican principles that have driven the country throughout its existence, and we must begin defending them on the international stage once more. This has the added benefit of raising the cost on China. In championing liberalism and contrasting it with the brutal, oppressive, corrupt, and controlling characteristics of the CCP, we strike the Party’s most sensitive nerve. The CCP fears ideas above all else and, thus, is hypersensitive to criticism and frightened of information that does not support its fabricated narrative. Consequently, efforts to compete ideologically will have a disproportionate

effect on Beijing's calculus. All attempts to do so must be sensitive to that reality and ensure that they are measured rather than excessively provocative, but we should no longer ignore those differences in hopes to not offend.

Defensively, there are several steps that should be taken. *Foremost among them is upholding and strengthening alliances.* Alliances are one of our greatest strengths and serve as the foundation of the international order that we seek to uphold. We need to offer an alternative to which our allies and partners still want to be connected. Further, all our efforts should accord with the rules-based system we work to maintain, as deviations undermine our message and challenge our reliability as a partner. If we cannot stand as a dependable ally and defender of the order, others will be forced to succumb to China's wishes out of necessity. We should also fortify our alliances through sharing intelligence on China's activities as well as best practices for addressing the challenges these activities pose. Our allies provide complementary capabilities, perspectives, access, relationships, and information that are critical to competing with China.

We also need to *harden our telecommunications infrastructure* against Chinese equipment, companies, and penetration. For too long we have operated as if Chinese companies were outside of the reach of the CCP. While awareness is growing, much more attention and resources should be devoted to securing our telecommunications backbones and protecting our country from cyber vulnerabilities. It is an incredibly difficult task devoid of easy answers, but our current exposure demands that we explore all options, including measures like regulation of service providers and public investment in future technologies. These two steps will go a long way toward defending against further Chinese aggression.

While these prescriptions apply to our nation as a whole, including our armed services, they also have specific manifestations within the military. *We need to do a better job at understanding the current threats and educating our entire force on the challenges they present.* Not only do we need a more robust effort to learn about Chinese culture, history, and language, but the lowest levels of the military need to understand that we are in competition today as well. Our mind-set and behaviors change when we step off a plane in a combat zone, because we are aware of the threat before us—we need to think along those lines now. Some support missions and career fields have traditionally operated as if they were immune to the threat because they were not directly involved in the fight. Knowing it is overmatched conventionally, Beijing has made it a point to deliberately target areas like communications, transportation, acquisitions, and logistics as strategic pressure points to allow China to compete asymmetrically. Therefore, every member of the defense enterprise must adopt a competitive mind-set that assumes they are a target and

think through the implications within their own work centers. It is not merely the combat forces that need to prepare for great-power competition, all of us do.

Not only does a competitive mind-set entail a realization of the threat and the existence of struggle even in what is ostensibly peacetime, it also consists of an *entrepreneurial approach to pushing back*. The US Embassy in Beijing subtly but brilliantly challenged the CCP by beginning to regularly post the air quality for Beijing in its Twitter feed.⁴⁹ Pollution is a hot button issue for citizens in China, and simply posting hourly updates challenged the CCP's own reports that downplayed the problem, irritating the Party to no end. Our military commanders need to foster and reward that kind of innovative thought in their organizations. Long before any fires are exchanged, members need to be taught how to understand risk and become more comfortable with prudently accepting some in order to compete with China.

With regards to applying the attention and resources necessary to gain and maintain influence from a position of advantage, the entire defense enterprise must *continue to reassess mission sets and force posture in accordance with the strategic reality of great power competition*. The past two decades have served as a reminder that the military and America cannot do everything and be everywhere. Consequently, tough decisions will need to be made with regards to force posture and support levels. This is an area where we can lean on the strengths of our alliances. We cannot continue to underwrite global security by ourselves; many of our allies and partners can and should do more by taking a more active role within their sphere of influence. We should help them do so and assist any other nation willing to uphold the international order and struggling against the overreach of authoritarian states.

Finally, we will have to *rethink how we compete in great-power competition*. Up until now, it has meant more planning for war in China's backyard as well as increased spending on big defense acquisitions. Increasing the US ability to project credible power and survive in a contested environment is necessary and should not be abandoned wholesale, but we need to devote more time toward planning for war in the information space as well as investing in capabilities that allow us to control and operate in that space. If the United States solely focuses on prevailing in a high-end, break glass war, China will achieve its aims without firing a shot. The competition has already begun, and we need a proactive and integrated information operations campaign to compete in the grey zone now. We need to pursue actions designed to impose costs, create surprise, magnify misperceptions, demonstrate capability, and divert attention to shape the calculus of Chinese leadership. China is intent on winning without fighting. If we continue to focus on winning in the fight, Beijing will achieve China's ends before we can push back.

The gears are beginning to turn in the shift toward great-power competition, but much more attention and reprioritization is required before the United States is fully ready to meet the challenge.

Conclusion

Little doubt remains about the aims, intentions, and challenges of China's rise. The United States is in an ideological struggle over the future of the international order, and we must compete now if we want to maintain the rules-based order that enabled our security and prosperity for the past 70 years. Understanding that the CCP is engaged in enduring political warfare helps the United States and its armed forces to grasp what competition entails today. We need to realize potential venues to gain or maintain advantage where we can, while also operating in the rules-based system we seek to uphold. It requires commanders at all levels to accept risk to foster a culture of aggressiveness, opportunism, and innovation to be able to prevail within this environment. If we take the steps to compete now, we might be able to maintain a strategic advantage in the realm of international politics. If we do not, we will lose the war before the battle even begins. 🌟

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46. Mahnken, Babbage, and Yoshihara, "Countering Comprehensive Coercion."
47. Hartcher, "Red Flag," 71.
48. Friedberg, "Competing with China," 59.
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