

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
Committee on Oversight and Accountability  
Hearing on “Defending America from the Chinese Communist Party’s Political Warfare, Part II”  
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Congressional Testimony of James E. Fanell, CAPT USN (Retired)

## **Introduction**

Chair Comer, Ranking Member Raskin, and distinguished members of this Committee, thank you for the privilege and honor of inviting me to testify today.

I am honored to assist this Committee’s responsibility to investigate and provide oversight as to how senior U.S. government national security officials permitted the People’s Republic of China—that today poses an existential threat to our nation—to rise as peer competitor without forcefully alerting decision-makers and the American people in order to frame a national security policy and options to prepare our nation for response. Part in parcel with this failure, is the role of the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) success in waging Political Warfare against the United States government and the resultant devastating impact on our national security.

Over the course of decades the CCP effectively misled our Executive Branch to ignore the PRC as a rising existential threat. In particular, the Department of Defense and the Intelligence Community were deceived by the CCP’s skillful use of elite capture, deception, disinformation and propaganda programs. As a result, senior U.S. leaders unilaterally disarmed psychologically, intellectually, and militarily despite clear evidence that PRC had no intent to rise peacefully, and viewed America as its main enemy to be defeated through protracted war. Even worse, our leaders help fund and otherwise enable China’s military, economic, and technological advances needed to destroy our military forces in the field and destroy our society and economy.

While there were some within the government who gave warning, in general those officers who spoke out about the threat from the PRC and Chinese Communist Party were consistently rejected, ridiculed, censored, smeared and eventually silenced. I sit here today as one of those who gave warning.

Ten years ago, as the senior Intelligence Officer for the U.S. Pacific Fleet, I gave a public speech at the U.S. Naval Institute West Conference in San Diego where I talked of how the PRC had continued its maritime expansionism campaign. The speech which had been approved by my command, specifically warned that the PRC was modernizing the PLA Navy at an alarming rate and was preparing itself for what it called a “short, sharp war.” I warned that it was not just Beijing’s words, but the actions of the PLA Navy and the China Coast Guard that were responsible for upsetting the peace and stability of the Indo Pacific region.

For that speech I was publicly rebuked by the Department of Defense. The DoD spokesman stated that what the Secretary of Defense “believes is that we all continue to believe that the peaceful, prosperous rise of China is a good thing for the region, for the world.”<sup>1</sup>

Shortly thereafter, I was visited in my office Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility (SCIF) of the U.S. Pacific Fleet headquarters by an Office of Secretary of Defense Senior Executive Service officer. This officer directed me that I could no longer give speeches like I had given in San Diego in February 2014. This SES, whom I had known throughout my career, told me that the National Security Advisor was “beating up the SECDEF” for my remarks. It was irrelevant that my

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<sup>1</sup> Phil Stewart, “Pentagon plays down intelligence officer's provocative China assessment”, Reuters, 14 February, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/21/us-usa-china-pentagon-idUSBREA1K04B20140221/>

remarks were fact-based, and had been approved in advance, I had contradicted the unwritten policy of “not provoking” the PRC. Within a few months I was fired.

It is within this context, the CCP’s political warfare and influence within our government, that I provide the following remarks.

First, I will be addressing, how over the past 30 years the People’s Republic of China (PRC) rose from being a Third World state with limited global influence to being not just a peer competitor but an existential threat to the United States of America, both within the kinetic military battlefield, but also for the purposes of this hearing in the Political Warfare battlefield.

Second, I will detail why the U.S. and our national security community failed to recognize this increasingly dangerous strategic trendline and, consequently, failed to adopt a policy to stop the PRC’s rise. Now our nation faces a Herculean task of confronting and defeating Communist China’s existential threat. We are not prepared intellectually, ideologically, organizationally, nor militarily. The extend of the PRC’s Political Warfare is so deeply rooted with our government, that it is not clear at this point whether or not we can succeed in saving our nation.

Accordingly, third I will provide seven recommendations the House Oversight Committee can use to help assist you in solving the problems I have identified that are clear and present danger to the security of the United States.

### **A Captured Elite’s Strategic Mistakes**

The U.S. finds itself in this situation because of two fundamentally and related grand strategic mistakes.<sup>2</sup> First, we did not identify this threat from the PRC for decades. Second, we neglected to act to defeat it. Post-Cold War strategists squandered the gains of previous generations who won World War II and the Cold War, thereby creating *Pax Americana*—the period of stability in international politics made possible by dominant U.S. power. All our national security community had to do was to remain vigilant regarding rising totalitarian threats such as that posed by the PRC, and demonstrate the strength and will to stop it when before it had the capability to destroy us. But for reasons I will detail—none of which are acceptable—they did not. As a result, the U.S. again faces a formidable peer bent on global hegemony and the destruction of America and its values of democracy and freedom.

The U.S. is now in a new Cold War. The Sino-American security competition is the great struggle of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and promises to resolve the dispositive question of the age—whether the world will be free and protected by the U.S. or fall into a totalitarian abyss as sought by the PRC. The answer to this question will impact the lives of every American for generations. Specifically, the question will impact U.S. national security, those of its allies, the continuation of U.S.-led liberal order, and of the definitive political principles in international politics.

This perilous situation need not have happened. Over three decades, the U.S. had ample time to prevent the PRC’s rise and to retard its growth, even to support the overthrow of the CCP, but it did not. Those strategic choices must be explained—why did the U.S. assist, not prevent, the rise of its peer challenger? Was it entirely the result of a masterful, protracted Political Warfare campaign by the masters of deception, the CCP?<sup>3</sup>

### **Threat Deflation**

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<sup>2</sup> These issues are explored in James E. Fanell and Bradley A. Thayer, *Embracing Communist China: America’s Greatest Strategic Failure* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2024).

<sup>3</sup> Each of these critical questions is addressed in Fanell and Thayer, *Embracing Communist China*.

At its base, this situation was a historically unique case of *threat deflation*—underestimating the threat, year after year.<sup>4</sup> This persistent, deliberate *threat deflation* blinded elected officials, policy makers, and much of the American public to the CCP’s insidious intent and of China’s so-called “peaceful rise”. Consequently, our leaders failed to balance against it. In fact, this wishful thinking and willful blindness led the U.S. to become the greatest enabler of China’s malignant rise. The failure to honestly address the threat of PRC’s malignant rise is the gravest strategic mistake ever made by the U.S., one which today imperils the U.S. homeland, economic prosperity, and national security.

The proclivity of states is to occasionally identify threats accurately, but more frequently states are prone to overestimate them. Thus, *threat deflation* is rare and is understudied. The result is that too few strategists questioned the true nature and intent of the PRC’s rise and the consequences for the U.S. Further, threat deflation inhibited the creation of a *defined school of thought* regarding the PRC’s rise as there are on other major strategic issues such as, for example, U.S. grand strategy or nuclear deterrence. Faced with the PRC threat, too few national security strategists were willing or able to explain how the U.S. arrived at this position and why, decade after decade, America continued to support and fund the PRC’s growth or to even to acknowledge that America was even at risk from the PRC which today threatens U.S. national security interests across the globe. Threat deflation also blinded the national security community to the greatest challenge to the U.S. military’s ability to defend the country’s national interests in a highly competitive security competition since the Soviet Union.

This multi-decade failing implicates the entire U.S. national security community. It reflects the woeful neglect of the PRC threat by presidential administrations, the U.S. intelligence community, centers of professional military education, national security think tanks, and Sinologists. It is also the result of external events like 9/11 and then the Iraq War which resulted in a decades-long involvement in southwest Asia. The military services adapted as ordered to the global war on terror, as did the focus of U.S. strategic thought. But in the process they were derelict in their duties by ignoring, and often abetting, the PRC’s rise.

Now the U.S. faces a situation where the PRC is no longer “rising.” It has risen—to the point where Beijing’s expansionist aggression against Taiwan and other U.S. interests in the Indo-Pacific will likely occur soon--within this decade. The period 2020 to 2030 is what I have long called “The Decade of Concern.”<sup>5</sup> In this decade, we will see the most catastrophic results of China’s successful Political Warfare campaign and its military trajectory over the past 30 years.<sup>6</sup>

As example, the U.S. now faces new PRC kinetic military capabilities, like supersonic and hypersonic weapons, are now targeting U.S. carrier strike groups, which have insufficient hypersonic defensive capabilities. The strategic terrain has been altered dramatically since the days of unrivaled U.S. military power, where U.S. capabilities provided overwhelming deterrence and warfighting capabilities against its foes. China’s massive military buildup combined with its Political Warfare successes across the Pacific Islands nations, Southeast Asia, Africa, and North and South America means that the U.S. now operates in an environment where the relative distribution of power has shifted against the United States.

America is going to be in this environment—a new Cold War—until it either defeats the PRC’s totalitarian expansionism or the PRC destroys our country as we know.

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<sup>4</sup> See Fanell and Thayer, *Embracing Communist China*, pp. 2, 58-66.

<sup>5</sup> James Fanell, “Now Hear This—The Clock is Ticking in China: The Decade of Concern Has Begun”, USNI Proceedings, Vol. 143/10/1,376, October 2017, <<https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2017/october/now-hear-clock-ticking-china-decade-concern-has-begun>>

<sup>6</sup> James Fanell, “Asia Rising: China’s Global Naval Strategy and Expanding Force Structure,” *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 72, No. 1 (Winter 2019), pp. 33-36. Available at: <<https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=7871&context=nwc-review>>. Accessed July 14, 2023.

## **The Three Reasons Why the U.S. Failed to Stop the PRC's Rise**

The United States underestimated the threat from the PRC for decades. There are three reasons why this occurred.<sup>7</sup>

**First, the U.S. national security community failed on a massive level, a failure that deserves the closest investigation by the House Oversight Committee.** It was at best derelict in its duties, seemingly oblivious to PRC deception but in some cases clearly co-opted by PRC Intelligence Operatives and Charm Offensives by United Front players. It is useful to recall the context of that era: the end of the Cold War yielded the triumphalism of the “End of History,” and thus caused the ideological and strategic disarmament of the U.S. where democracy and free market economics was triumphant. The U.S. did not perceive the PRC threat due to the dramatic change in the relative distribution of power in the U.S.’s favor due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Thus the U.S. was perceived to be without a peer threat as the PRC was a minor power economically, militarily and diplomatically. As a result, U.S. national security mindset entered a period of structural threat deflation, where U.S. dominance and minor wars prevented the U.S. national security community from meeting the peer competitive threat of China and the requirements of high intensity warfare.

The firm belief was that modernizing states, including the PRC, were on the path to democratization and free market economics. The elite consensus was that the future would be *globalization*, while power politics in great power relations was an artefact of the past—a dangerous and unhealthy aspect of great power behavior that they needed at one time but now could be discarded. It was Utopian thinking, of course—fatally flawed now in hindsight but quite fashionable in the 1990s and well beyond.

For more than 30 years there was a lack of leadership from successive administrations as they failed to sustain a focus on peer competitive threats. The major national security actors including the Department of State, Department of Defense, and particularly the Intelligence Community (IC), failed the elected leadership by their unwillingness to stand up against the prevailing flawed political consensus, despite increasing evidence the PRC’s rise would be malevolent and ultimately disastrous.

The Scarborough Shoal incident in 2012 was a watershed event in PRC’s expansionist strategy, and the Obama administration’s failure of this test of strategic leadership has resulted in the PRC’s current violent attacks against our treaty ally the Republic of the Philippines’ Navy, Coast Guard, and civilian vessels in the West Philippine Sea. When the PRC attempted to seize the shoal in 2012, the U.S. brokered an agreement for both PRC and Philippines to withdraw. As soon as the Philippine vessels withdrew, the PRC reneged on the agreement and swept in to take the shoal. The U.S., in fear as a result of masterful PRC Political Warfare, failed to back the Philippines and hold Beijing accountable. The PRC had established itself as the sole naval power at the shoal, formerly the sovereign territory of the Republic of the Philippines. The PRC’s maritime forces seized the sovereign rights from a U.S. treaty ally—something never done before—without firing a shot.

Even worse, after the Arbitral Decision in 2016 which declared most of the PRC’s claims to the South China Sea to be illegal, the Obama Administration pointedly refused to publicly support the Philippines on that decision. As a result of the PRC’s skillful employment of Political Warfare and the Obama’s natural inclination for timidity in the face of PRC aggressions, the CCP felt free to continue its coercion against South China Sea claimants, which resulted in U.S.-Philippines relations sharply deteriorated for more than five years.

The ramifications of the Scarborough Shoal incident were not just confined to the waters of the South China Sea. For instance, it is worth noting that the leader of the CCP Leading Group on maritime affairs that orchestrated the seizure was at that time not well known in the west, a man

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<sup>7</sup> The causes are examined in detail in Fanell and Thayer, *Embracing Communist China*.

named Xi Jinping, who had been selected to become CCP's next General Secretary, and thus dictator of the PRC, the following year.

Beijing soon realized that there would be no serious pushback from the Obama administration and that the PRC could continue its expansion in South China Sea. Soon thereafter in early 2013, the world began to witness the PRC's building of seven artificial islands in the Spratly Islands.<sup>8</sup> Three of the islands each contained a 10,000-foot runway capable of supporting PLA air force bomber, reconnaissance and fighter aircraft and enough pier space for any of the PLAN's aircraft carriers or large-deck amphibious ships. Despite assurances from Xi to Obama in 2014 that the PRC would not militarize the islands, today these are fully militarized bases, three of which are the size and capacity of Pearl Harbor.

**Second, avarice and finance trumped strategy and set the perfect environment in which PRC Political Warfare could subvert U.S. national security interests from within.** U.S. business interests and financiers consistently and indefatigably sought economic cooperation with the PRC, treating the Chinese people as the source of cheap physical labor for manufacturing, investment, as well as inexpensive intellectual labor, including for research and development. This facilitated the PRC's rise through the sustainment of Most Favored Nation (MFN) trade status and its admission to the World Trade Organization (WTO). By engaging the PRC, the *Engagement School*, hereafter referred to as the *Pro-CCP school*, asserted, it would become wealthy and in time democratic. In addition, the U.S. welcomed hundreds of thousands of intelligent, serious, and diligent Chinese students to run U.S. and Western scientific labs and numerous academic departments in computer science and engineering, and in the life and natural sciences, especially chemistry, computer science, genetics, mathematics, and physics. By PRC law, each one of these Chinese citizens at U.S. institutions of higher learning must assist in PRC intelligence and Political Warfare operations. In essence, the U.S. willingly and enthusiastically taught and trained its enemy. Business interests and financiers also funded think tanks, including major national security think tanks, media, and universities which, in turn, contributed to a strong bias towards pro-CCP school, and thus the consistent underestimation of the PRC threat.

Importantly, the PRC did not accomplish this tremendous growth alone. The West truly made this possible. The PRC's rise was made possible because the U.S. allowed it to enter the world's free-trade system. The PRC has flourished precisely because it entered the West's economic ecosystem a generation ago. For decades, the PRC has used this ecosystem to grow rapidly.

The pro-CCP school held profoundly mistaken, naïve, and misguided assumptions regarding the behavior of the CCP. Lamentably, it was completely divorced from an understanding of the motivations and strategic objectives of the CCP, a strategic conception of U.S. national interests, and an understanding of importance of the relative distribution of power within the correlation of forces necessary for securing the U.S. position as the world's dominant military power.

The consequence was as the PRC became richer it siphoned off a substantial and consistent percentage of this new wealth to increase its military might, technological prowess, diplomatic influence, and Political Warfare capabilities. In addition, this new paradigm yielded a U.S. economy that was dependent upon the PRC for critical manufacturing and goods, including pharmaceuticals, personal protective equipment, and antibiotics. Today the PRC is more prosperous, more bellicose, and more determined to supplant the liberal order and the U.S. position in the world.

From a strategic perspective, there is no "Goldilocks" amount of safe trade in high tech with China. Indeed, the right amount is zero.

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<sup>8</sup> For specific details on what the PRC built in the Spratly Islands starting in 2013, see the CSIS Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative "China Island Tracker." Available at: <<https://amti.csis.org/island-tracker/china/>>. Accessed August 13, 2023.



**Third, the enemy of the U.S. was an exceptional strategist, particularly regarding Political Warfare and deception.** Political Warfare is not new: it has been the key to winning wars and building empires in what is now the PRC for thousands of years. Notably, though, the PRC advanced a political warfare strategy to promote threat deflation under Deng Xiaoping. Deng profited from studying and improving upon Soviet efforts to penetrate U.S. society as well as learning key lessons from the Soviet Union's mistakes in the Cold War. The PRC successfully caused threat deflation by adopting a complex strategy. They focused on elites in all aspects of U.S. and other Western societies, enriching them and shaping their perception of the PRC and of the CCP, while using the enticement of a growing market and lucre for their firms, organizations, interests, and for themselves, to influence their behavior. For a generation, the PRC masked their intentions and framed their expansion as economic rather than strategic, and an unalloyed good that would benefit the world. It was a masterful political warfare campaign.<sup>9</sup>

### **Why the U.S. National Security Community Failed: Focus on the IC**

Perhaps the best characterization of the purpose of having a national intelligence community was summarized eighty plus years ago by the now-renowned U.S. Navy Radio Intelligence Officer and principal architect of the U.S. Navy's victory over the Imperial Japanese Navy at the Battle of Midway, Commander Joseph J. Rochefort. When speaking of the prime directive for any intelligence officer, Rochefort famously remarked "that an intelligence officer has one task, one job, one mission. This is to tell his commander, his superior, today, what the [enemies] are going to do tomorrow. This is his job. If he doesn't do this, then he's failed."<sup>10</sup>

As such, the failures of the IC were first to identify the PRC as an existential threat—this would have included identifying Deng's political warfare strategy of threat deflation precisely as a political warfare strategy to obfuscate and conceal the PRC's vulnerability. Second, the IC did not compel senior national security decision-makers to address the PRC threat by illuminating the pernicious damage engagement policies were causing. At root, the IC aided Deng's political warfare strategy of threat deflation because the IC had for decades consistently promoted threat deflation via the policy of engagement. The IC never perceived the PRC through the lens of the distribution of power; for many the notion that the PRC would ever become a great power was always viewed through the lens of "decades away." Then when the PRC's comprehensive national power had become undeniable even to the most ardent supporter of engagement, the IC chose to promote the CCP-supplied assertion that one must not "provoke" the PRC or else one risks thermonuclear war.

As a basis of its continued national existence, the United States, like other nations, depends upon its intelligence organizations to define the capabilities and intentions of its enemies, and to aid the formulation of a response and measure its effectiveness. The U.S. spends more than any other state to provide U.S. decision-makers with best sourced and reliable intelligence and has created an intelligence community with unrivaled abilities, skills, and talents. When major intelligence failures occur, such as Pearl Harbor, the demise of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, before 9/11, and regarding Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) before the 2003 invasion, they always have mighty consequences for U.S. national security interests. As such, they compel an explanation of how such colossal failures could occur, and what lessons should be learned to prevent their reoccurrence.

As significant as those failures were, they pale in comparison to the U.S.'s greatest intelligence failure—the unchecked rise of the PRC. For a generation, the IC failed national security decision-makers, and the American people, regarding the growth of China's capabilities and intentions.

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed overview of PRC Political Warfare, to include its history, goals, strategies, and organizations, see Kerry K. Gershanek, *Political Warfare: Strategies for Combating China's Plan to "Win without Fighting."* First (2044 Broadway Drive, Quantico, VA 22134: Marine Corps University Press, 2020), [https://www.usmceu.edu/Portals/218/Political Warfare\\_web.pdf](https://www.usmceu.edu/Portals/218/Political_Warfare_web.pdf), pp. 3-58.

<sup>10</sup> RADM Edwin T. Layton, USN (Ret.), *And I Was There: Pearl Harbor and Midway Breaking the Secrets* (New York: William Morrow, 1985), p. 438.

Indeed, the PRC's military has grown in every respect. The PRC's nuclear capabilities have grown from a modest force to one that in the past three years, as noted by Admiral Charles Richard, former Commander of U.S. Strategic Command, has had a "strategic breakout."<sup>11</sup> The rapid, yet still opaque growth of the PRC's nuclear arsenal may very well exceed the U.S.'s by 2030, if not sooner. Beijing already possesses more tactical nuclear weapons and theater forces than does the U.S. Its conventional capabilities challenge, if not dominate, the U.S. military today in the Indo-Pacific, at sea, in the air, in the cyber domain, and in space. It utilizes this power to coerce Taiwan and Vietnam, as well as U.S. allies, including Japan, Australia, and the Philippines. Further, Beijing's diplomacy influences nations on every continent and from the Arctic to Antarctic. Its economic influence is ubiquitous, and is prevalent in the U.S. as well, where Silicon Valley keeps close ties to Chinese entities and where Wall Street continues to permit Chinese firms raise capital on U.S. markets and U.S. firms, such as Apple and General Motors, continue to invest in China. Where it is fair to say that today, the PRC's capabilities now match its Olympian ambitions.

**As such, the Congress should investigate and demand an explanation of how senior national security officials and the U.S. IC permitted the rise of a peer competitor without forcefully alerting decision-makers and the American people that this was occurring and framing options for the response.** Given the resources provided, and esteem given to the IC, warning and options to address the PRC threat should have been provided, consistently, for decades. If certain elements of the IC were providing this, and it was ignored, that is also important to understand why senior IC leaders in Washington chose not to act upon these indications and warnings.

Compelling the IC to explain this failure should be a priority for the Department of Defense, the Congressional China Committee and the Senate and House Intelligence Committees. The administration and Congress should examine the failure of the IC and of previous presidencies to identify the PRC threat. The most important steps now are to understand how it happened; which assumptions were made about the strategic objectives and motivations of the CCP; what multiple failures occurred; why they could not be corrected internally by the IC; what assumptions and biases existed that colored the intelligence community's reporting on China; as well as understanding who understood the threat but was ignored or punished for accurate assessments of the threat.

Equally, the IC may be only part of this fiasco. If the IC was conveying accurate intelligence, including unhappy truths about how the pro-CCP school was aiding the PRC, to policymakers, then why this intelligence was ignored must also be understood. Explaining each of these bipartisan failures should be a priority of Congress and the Executive Branch.

The greatest intelligence failure in U.S. history occurred overtly, year after year, for roughly three decades because the IC failed to understand the malign intentions of the CCP—it simply did not take Communist ideology seriously—and made gross errors based upon benign assumptions of the CCP's strategic goals and objectives.

This is significant today because there are revisionists within the IC and academia who subtly assert that "nobody knew this" or "the Chinese only changed when Xi took over." These assertions are false and if America is going to stay the course that President Trump set in motion, then historical accuracy must be maintained. Those who assert that "nobody knew" could have known, if they wanted to listen and examine the evidence, which they did not. Only willful blindness prevented it. It was all laid out 30 years ago in the "Outlook Section" of the *Washington Post* on a Sunday in a prominently featured opinion editorial entitled "Inside China's Scary New Military-Industrial Complex" written by William C. Triplett a former chief Republican counsel to the Senate Foreign

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<sup>11</sup> Charles Richard, former Commander, U.S. Strategic Command, "Virtual Event: A Conversation with Admiral Richard," Hudson Institute, August 26, 2021. Available at: <<https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/Transcript-%20A%20Conversation%20with%20Admiral%20Richard.pdf>>. Accessed July 10, 2023.

Relations Committee. In it Triplett gave a clear warning that “the West is about to be unpleasantly surprised by the emergence of a non-democratic military superpower in the world arena, armed with the most advanced nuclear and conventional arms.”<sup>12</sup> The message to the political class in Washington, D.C. was unmistakable, that the U.S. had better begin to adopt the required actions to prepare the U.S. for the reality of threat the U.S. confronts today. Unfortunately, those in the IC did not miss it, they purposefully closed their minds and denied it.



Figure 1: Front page of The Washington Post's 8 May 1994 "Outlook" section article "Inside China's Scary New Military-Industrial Complex" by William C. Triplett II. Copyright © Thomas Kerr.

Secondly, the IC failed to follow the prime directive for intelligence professionals—knowing where the enemy is today and predicting where they will be tomorrow—out of fear of making a wrong predictive assessment. Americans have seen first-hand how the impact of the 2004 Iraq WMD Commission Report almost single-handedly transformed the IC when it came to predictive assessments about the PRC. Due to the WMD Commission's unrealistic requirement that IC assessments have irrefutable source validation, intelligence analysts—especially younger members of the community—began to hedge their assessments and pull back on predictive analysis for fear of coming to a wrong conclusion about what the PRC and PLA may do in the future, thus adversely affecting their careers.

Third, and most worrisome, is the IC's adoption of a defensive attitude whenever their analysis and assessments are challenged in the public domain. This very same defensive attitude was prevalent among DC-based intelligence leadership, and their representatives in Hawaii, who spent more time trying to debunk and discredit challenges to IC assessment about the PRC, rather than in objectively assessing whether such challenges may in fact be valid.

There are many examples of the suppression of dissenting opinions in the IC as it relates to the PRC, but the most memorable is the issue of whether the PRC would pursue and build an aircraft carrier program. As early as 1992 the IC should have been cognizant of the PRC's stated intent to have an aircraft carrier program, but even as late as 2006, senior members of the intelligence community had made it clear that the PRC would not pursue an aircraft carrier program for decades, if at all. The effect of such messaging was to degrade, dilute and diminish IC collections, research, analysis and ultimately reporting on this critical issue. Now less than 20 years later we know the

<sup>12</sup> William C. Triplett II, "Inside China's Scary New Military-Industrial Complex," Washington Post, May 8, 1994. Available at: <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/1994/05/08/inside-chinas-scary-new-military-industrial-complex/24d132d0-a7aa-453f-bd11-cd87c938ced3/>>. Accessed August 18, 2023.



results of this threat deflation, the PRC has put three aircraft carriers to sea in just over a decade. Unfortunately, this example was repeated time and again, always towards downgrading or denying the PRC's intentions or emerging capabilities.

The threat from the PRC's political warfare program didn't just affect intelligence assessments about aircraft carriers, but was found to be rooted much deeper. For instance, former Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) Mr. Ron Monaperto who plead guilty in 2006 to illegally holding classified documents and to passing "top secret" information to Chinese intelligence officials.<sup>13</sup> During his 21 years in the IC, Mr. Monteparto had been part of a DIA program involving authorized contacts with Chinese embassy officials. He was known to be part of an group of pro-China academics and officials in the U.S. policy and intelligence community who shared similar benign views of PRC. The group, dubbed the Red Team by critics, harshly criticized anyone who raised questions about the threat posed by Beijing's communist regime. The revelation of Mr. Montaperto's espionage and influence activities in support of the PRC 18 years ago should have been a wake-up call and ushered in substantive reforms restricting the direct contact between IC analysts and the PRC's Ministry of State Security (MSS), the intelligence arm of the PRC.

Long gone where the days when intelligence analysts took large amounts of disparate pieces of source information and through experience, subject matter expertise, interpolation and extrapolation to come up with objective, predictive and non-politicized assessments. As it relates to the PRC, the result of these factors within the U.S. intelligence community has been a track record of underestimation and threat deflation at the strategic and operational levels of warfare.

Today, as U.S. policy makers assess the speed and sustainability of the PRC's expansion it is therefore useful to look back on previous assessments the IC has made about the PRC's military power. Reasonably, we should expect to find errors and misjudgments when we look back—assessments of the future are hard—but the most notable feature of the IC's China assessments is that their misjudgments have been in the same direction, that is underestimating the PRC, perfectly fitting the definition of systematic error.

These errors have not been unnoticed, as former Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, Admiral Robert F. Willard, noted in 2009, "I would contend that in the past decade or so, China has exceeded most of our intelligence estimates of their military capability and capacity every year. They've grown at an unprecedented rate in those capabilities." Two years later, the Director of Naval Intelligence, Vice Admiral David J. Dorsett, similarly stated the PLA's emerging military capabilities have "entered operational capability quicker than we frequently project."<sup>14</sup>

The U.S. and the world cannot abide more of these kinds of devastating acts from the PRC, it is time for an accounting as to how it is the IC failed. As was done during the Church and Pike Committees in the post-Watergate Era, the U.S. intelligence community needs to be examined for these failures and systemic repairs enacted, not the least of which is an open rejection of the philosophy of threat deflation that has dominated the IC for the past 30 years.

### **Why the U.S. National Security Community Failed: Focus on the DoD**

Failures to recognize and prepare for the rise of the PRC are not limited to the IC, the Department of Defense, and specifically the uniformed military leadership are also accountable for America's current state of unpreparedness.

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<sup>13</sup> Bill Gertz, "Ex-DIA analyst admits passing secrets to China", *Washington Times*, 23 June 2006, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2006/jun/23/20060623-120347-7268r/>

<sup>14</sup> James E. Fanell, "China's Global Navy—Today's Challenge for the United States and the U.S. Navy," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 73, No. 4 (Autumn 2020), p. 26.

Over the course of 20 years, the U.S. Navy went from having a 76-warship advantage in 2005 to having a 39-combatant deficiency in 2023 based on similar ship and submarine comparisons. That is a swing of 115 naval platforms in 23 years, a strategic trend line that sees no serious interruption for at least the next decade.

Today, the PLA Navy is the largest in the world, as has been concurrently documented, for the first time, in the 2021 annual Defense Department report to Congress on military and security developments involving the PRC.

This advantage is not just in numbers of warships and submarines, but it also includes raw tonnage, where the PLA Navy has commissioned more tonnage than the U.S. Navy for most of the past decade. Add in platforms like the PLA Navy's 12,000-ton *Renhai*-class cruisers with its 112 vertical launch tubes for over-the-horizon weapons like the 300-kilometer ranged YJ-18 supersonic, anti-ship cruise missile (ASCM), and it is not a stretch to say that the PLA Navy now has achieved qualitative parity, if not superiority in the ASCM arena, with the U.S. Navy.

This compels the question of how it could be that for nearly 30 years that senior uniformed members of the Department of Defense allowed this to happen. While there was a small cadre of Flag and General Officers who were cognizant of the rise of the PRC and the threat from the PLA, they were, as one retired officer noted, "swimming against the tide." The U.S. Navy flag officer corps devolved from being an institution that had the moral integrity to "revolt" over principled disagreements about our national security strategy and budget allocation in 1949 to a U.S. Navy today that is arguably outgunned by the PLA Navy without one Admiral publicly speaking out in dissent or resigning.

In September 1994, the *New York Times* ran an article, again by William Triplett, that effectively expressed concerns members of the U.S. Senate were having regarding continued high-level PLA visits and engagement with the Pentagon and various elements of the U.S. military. For instance, the report noted that "a group of high-ranking Chinese Army officers have toured American war colleges. As guests of the Pentagon, they are being briefed on the state of the art of U.S. military technology and strategy." Triplett went on to warn that the "visit is the forerunner of a potentially dangerous program of military cooperation with China that the Clinton Administration has undertaken without informing Congress."<sup>15</sup>

The situation became so dire that by the end of the decade, there was so much "yelling and screaming on Capitol Hill" about the problem of the Pentagon's "open door" approach to mil-to-mil engagement with the PLA that a series of specific "Thou Shalt Nots" were crafted from a bipartisan group from within the U.S. Senate's Armed Services Committee (SASC).<sup>16</sup> The drafting of these "Thou Shalt Nots" was led by Senator Bob Smith (R-NH) along with strong support by Senator Daniel Inouye (D-HI) and Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK).<sup>17</sup>

Ultimately the Pentagon's refusal to curtail, or even reduce, its mil-to-mil engagement with the PLA led to the U.S. Congress passing the 2000 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) which issued a series of restrictions to the Department of Defense that was designed to specifically limit the amount of military-to-military engagement between the U.S. Department of Defense and the PLA. For instance, NDAA 2000 prohibited the Secretary of Defense from authorizing any military contact with the PLA that would "create a national security risk due to an inappropriate exposure" of the PLA to 12 operational areas of the U.S. military: force projection operations; nuclear operations; advanced combined-arms and joint combat operations; advanced logistical operations; chemical and

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<sup>15</sup> William C. Triplett II, "Dangerous Embrace," *New York Times*, September 10, 1994, Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/1994/09/10/opinion/dangerous-embrace.html?searchResultPosition=167>>. Accessed July 10, 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Triplett, August 15, 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Triplett, August 15, 2023.

biological defense and other capabilities related to weapons of mass destruction; surveillance and reconnaissance operations; joint warfighting experiments and other activities related to transformations in warfare; military space operations; other advanced capabilities; arms sales or military-related technology transfers; release of classified or restricted information; and access to a DoD laboratory.<sup>18</sup>

As one Congressional veteran from this era remarked, “Can you imagine how bad things were for the U.S. Congress to expressly forbid the Secretary of Defense and the Department from conducting these very clearly destructive engagement activities? Further, can you imagine the Congress ever having to issue such ‘thou shalt nots’ during the Cold War against the Soviet Union?”<sup>19</sup>

What is even more alarming is to understand that even with NDAA 2000 in place, the Department of Defense essentially found work arounds to this Congressional oversight. For example, as I personally experienced, during a February 2005 Hong Kong port call a delegation of PLA officers from the Hong Kong Garrison were invited by the DoD aboard the USS *Kitty Hawk* for lunch and touring around the aircraft carrier.<sup>20</sup> While the DoD and Navy undoubtedly believed they were following the letter of NDAA 2000, it is clear that they were not following the spirit of those restrictions.

Another instance was in 2007, when the PLA Fleet Commander Admiral Wu Shengli was given tours of the U.S. Navy’s largest and most important, East Coast base in Norfolk, Virginia, where the then Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Mike Mullen, ensured that Admiral Wu was allowed to visit a U.S. Navy aircraft carrier and even a U.S. nuclear submarine.<sup>21</sup> Feedback from firsthand observers indicated that for every 100 questions Admiral Wu and his delegation asked during these visits, they received 99 transparent answers from their American hosts. But such transparency was not reciprocated. Whenever a U.S. officer would ask a question of their PLA Navy counterparts, they would be met with obfuscation or just no response.

In terms of why U.S. Navy flag officers would adopt such a profoundly dangerous attitude towards unconstrained and unaccountable engagement with their PLA Navy counterparts or their failure to understand evidence and thus fight for building a Navy that could deter China’s naval expansion and aggression, there are three main reasons.

**First is the culture of the flag officer corps, which can be best described as “going along to get along.”** Long gone are the days when scrupulous flag officers like an Admiral Arleigh Burke or an Admiral Hyman Rickover, the father of the nuclear navy, were promoted to positions of seniority and responsibility within the U.S. Navy for their singular focus on the Soviet threat and the U.S. Navy’s ability to meet its missions in the face of potent Soviet naval and land-based power. This placed a great demand upon naval officers, NCOs, and men, and those who could not meet that demand were separated from the service.

What has replaced this era of principled service is a system of tutelage where officers are groomed for selection to flag rank based upon their obsequiousness and deference to the flag officers over them, despite their oath of allegiance to the Constitution and the principles for which it stands. This certainly does not reflect all officers. But the fact remains that for 20 years, not a single U.S. Navy admiral spoke out, in public, against the slide that was occurring to the U.S. Navy, while the PLAN was concurrently growing faster than any navy since World War II.

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<sup>18</sup> Caitlin Campbell, “China Primer: U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relations”, Congressional Research Service, January 4, 2021. Available at: <<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11712>>. Accessed July 31, 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Triplett, August 15, 2023.

<sup>20</sup> See Fanell and Thayer, *Embracing Communist China*, pp. 102-104..

<sup>21</sup> David Lague, “U.S. Commander Given Tour by Chinese Military,” *New York Times*, August 21, 2007. Available at: <<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/21/world/asia/21cnd-china.html>>. Accessed July 10, 2023.

That is in direct contrast to the Cold War, when admirals were acutely conscious of the growth of the Soviet Navy and conveyed that alarm in appropriate forums such as congressional testimony. Although now retired Admirals Michael Gilday and Richard, among others, have spoken about the China threat and the danger posed by that navy, their predecessors did not possess a focus on China's navy and its growing danger, year after year, to U.S. national security interests. Naval shipbuilding and personnel have not been tested by the unending and prodigious demands of Cold War stresses, and so it is not known if today's Navy will meet them.

**Second is the impact of the pro-CCP school of thought, which argued that engagement with the PRC would normalize their behavior within the existing system of international norms that was created out of the aftermath of World War II and the Cold War.** Not only were civilian analysts in the national security system susceptible to this philosophy of engagement, but stunningly so too has been a generation or more of U.S. Navy admirals.

For example, just six days after the July 12, 2016, ruling by the PCA in the Hague that the PRC had “no possible entitlement” that would have justified China's environmental destruction, seizure of resources, and military construction within the exclusive economic zone of the Philippines, the then U.S. Navy Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral John Richardson was photographed in Beijing shaking the hand of PLA Navy Chief, Admiral Wu Shengli, the same Admiral that had masterminded the PRC's maritime revanchism against America's ally, the Republic of the Philippines in the South China Sea.<sup>22</sup> Not unsurprisingly, the PRC propaganda machine loudly carried Admiral Wu's message that “China has no intention of stopping its island building campaign.” At the same moment, PLA Navy ships were enjoying the hospitality of the international community at the Rim of the Pacific Exercises in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.<sup>23</sup>

CNO Richardson's visit to China, in the aftermath of the PCA ruling, raises the question of the rational for, and effectiveness of, the policy of military-to-military (mil-to-mil) engagement with PRC. This reflexive response represents an ideological belief strongly held by senior U.S. Navy, and other uniformed officers who sought to justify their ideological beliefs based on the thesis that says, “when they're talking, they aren't shootin'.” Suggesting that if some engagement is good, then more must be better.<sup>24</sup>

Accordingly, there is a pattern evinced. The former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Bill Owens demanded that “America must start treating China as a friend.”<sup>25</sup> Like many other retired U.S. flag and general officers, Admiral Owens seemed oblivious to the fact that PLA plays a very significant role in PRC Political Warfare, through its Political Warfare Department (PWD). The PWD establishes and facilitating the activities of a multitude of friendship and cultural associations such as the *China Association for International Friendly Contact* (CAIFC). CAIFC is a significant organization in co-opting foreign elites, legislators, senior active-duty and retired military officers, and executive assistants supporting senior civilian and military officials. Such co-option of foreign officials can reap significant Political Warfare benefits. Consequently, this former Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff wrote a guest editorial for a major publication and allegedly illegally lobbied Congress to support the PRC against Taiwan, and worked for *Huawei* to obtain for it entry into major U.S. markets. Owens was not alone: CAIFC officials co-opt foreign retired officials with lucrative business deals if they are willing to “publish editorials supporting China's position on regional issues”.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> “Freedom of Navigation Patrols May End 'In Disaster': Chinese Admiral,” *Reuters*, July 18, 2016. Available at: <<https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/freedom-of-navigation-patrols-may-end-in-idUSKCN0ZY0FJ>>. Accessed August 11, 2023.

<sup>23</sup> James Fanell, “Stop ‘Engagement at All Costs,’” *USNI Proceedings*, September 2016, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Fanell, “Stop ‘Engagement at All Costs,’” p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Bill Owens, “America Must Start Treating China as a Friend,” *Financial Times*, November 17, 2009. Available at: <<https://www.ft.com/content/69241506-d3b2-11de-8caf-00144feabdc0>>. Accessed September 7, 2023.

<sup>26</sup> CRS, “U.S.-China Military Contacts: Issues for Congress” (Congressional Research Service (CRS), January 5, 2015), 33–34, [https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20150105\\_RL32496\\_c568174a7b783237c7d89d015f864210b0046888.pdf](https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20150105_RL32496_c568174a7b783237c7d89d015f864210b0046888.pdf); Hsu

The former Director of National Intelligence and Pacific Command Commander, Admiral Dennis Blair alleged that “Taiwan is the turd in the punchbowl of U.S.-China relations.”<sup>27</sup> Most recently, the former Indo-Pacific Commander Admiral John Aquilino speaking at length with PBS News Hour publicizing his numerous attempts to get his PLA counterparts to speak with him or in inviting the Chinese Navy to an exercise in the Rim-of-the-Pacific (RIMPAC) in Hawaii.<sup>28</sup> U.S. Navy admirals have demonstrated they put more faith in unconstrained engagement than they appear to take when it comes to fighting for the world’s biggest and most powerful navy.

**Third, and finally, there is the “frog in the pot” syndrome.** In addition to the pernicious impact of going along to get along, the CCP has been very skillful in the timing and tempo of their military expansionism. Starting with Jiang Zemin’s efforts to modernize the PLA, Hu Jintao’s directives to the PLA to have the capability to take Taiwan by 2020, and on to Xi Jinping’s overt operations militarization of the seven bases in the South China Sea in 2015 to firing ballistic missiles around Taiwan in 2022, these actions were all done in a way so as to not compel the U.S. Department of Defense into taking the actions necessary to mitigate the effects of this dramatic shift in the correlation of military forces in the Western Pacific. Hence, much like the proverbial frog in a pot of water, even as the temperature is raised one degree at a time until it is boiled to death, so too have U.S. Navy admirals been numbed into inactivity against China as it seemed there was always a greater priority in the Middle East or Europe.

The collective impact of these three areas of failure has left America’s national security today at great risk in the Indo-Pacific. The situation has become so undeniable, that even the former Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Gilday’s *Navigation Plan 2022* noted that America’s security environment has witnessed an “erosion of credible military deterrence” particularly due to China’s “investments in offensive warfighting systems—across all domains—are aimed at the heart of America’s maritime power.”<sup>29</sup> As the document rightly admits: “China designs its force for one purpose: to reshape the security environment to its advantage by denying the United States military access to the western Pacific and beyond.”<sup>30</sup>

Hence, if there is conflict with the PRC, it will be on, over, and below the high seas, from Okinawa to Guam to Honolulu, all the way to the West Coast and into the U.S. homeland. This will be a conflict the likes of which the U.S. has not experienced since World War II.

Today U.S. national security, in the face of this prodigious PRC threat must explain how the U.S. Navy arrived at this position of weakness against the enemy and to advance a plan to rebuild America’s maritime power, just as American naval strategists did with the June 1940 “Naval Expansion Act,” that dramatically funded and built the U.S. Navy at the start of World War II.<sup>31</sup>

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and Cole, *Insidious Power: How China Undermines Global Democracy*, 67; and P. Charon and J.-B. Jeangene Vilmer, *Chinese Influence Operations: A Machiavellian Moment*, Second, Report by the Institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM) (Paris: Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2021), 122-23.

<sup>27</sup> Bill Gertz and Rowan Scarborough, “Inside the Ring: Abandoning Taiwan,” *Washington Times*, July 30, 1999, p. A11. The authors also acknowledge that Admiral Blair attempted to defend those comments a decade later when testifying before the Senate for his nomination by President Obama for the position of Director of National Intelligence, see William Lowther, “U.S.’ Blair defends ‘turd’ comment, Taiwan record,” *Taipei Times*, February 19, 2000. Available at: <<https://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2009/02/01/2003434953>>. Accessed September 5, 2023.

<sup>28</sup> Nick Schifrin and Dan Sagalyn, “Indo-Pacific Commander Discusses Rising Tensions with China, Future of the Region,” *PBS News Hour*, December 15, 2022. Available at: <<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/pacific-commander-of-u-s-navy-discusses-rising-tensions-with-china-future-of-region>>. Accessed July 5, 2023.

<sup>29</sup> *Chief of Naval Operations: Navigation Plan 2022*, United States Navy, Chief of Naval Operations, 26 July 2022, p. 3. Available at: <<https://www.dvidshub.net/publication/issues/64582>>. Accessed September 10, 2023.

<sup>30</sup> *Chief of Naval Operations: Navigation Plan 2022*, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> *United States Statutes at Large*, 1939-41, Vol. 54, Part 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941), pp. 394-396. Available at: <<https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/world-war-ii/1941/prelude/naval-expansion-act-14-june-1940.html>>. Accessed September 10, 2023.



Fundamentally, what is needed is a change of the culture of U.S. flag and general officer corps so that the enemy may be confronted and defeated, not engaged.

The Department of Defense also did not examine its assumptions regarding the PRC threat. There were three major assumptions that hindered the ability to define and respond to the PRC threat. Each had a significant effect and retarded the ability of the U.S. to see the existential threat developing in clear sight.

**First, there was an overarching assumption that history was at its end, and great power threats were an artifact of the past.** The influence of the “End of History” mindset was considerable and gave rise to the conceit that the U.S. was the acme of political and economic development and thus possessed the right structure to lead the world and cooperate with other states to assist them on the path to history’s end. Thus, as great power politics was of the past and did not frame the present, the “End of History” logic resulted in conclusion that the PRC will be positively transformed through the coterie of engagement policies, which included mil-to-mil cooperation. Such cooperation was supported by U.S. Pacific Command leadership, including Admiral William “Fox” Fallon, who even invited PRC military observers to U.S. exercises around Guam, and Admiral Timothy Keating who provided advice on carrier operations, were firm believers in mil-to-mil cooperation with the PLA.

**Second, there was a bias that the U.S. had the luxury of time to address future problems and existential threats to the U.S.** There existed through this time a corrosive assumption that the PRC remains “decades away” from being a threat to our national security community—that mindset exists today. And for decades, there was always a more demanding task or issue to confront than the PRC threat. The PRC threat advanced relentlessly but relatively slowly in relation to the minor war of the day, or the actions taken by Iran or North Korea, or the humanitarian or other crises which invariable demanded immediate attention.

**The third assumption was that no one took Communism seriously anymore and that the PRC will be positively transformed through the coterie of engagement policies.** This assumption was based on the belief that the CCP’s ideology was not credible by the metric of the “End of History” and was not really believed by the CCP leadership, who it was asserted were more interested in capitalism, despite a lagging effect, would result in greater freedom for the Chinese people. Too few analysts and senior officials took Communism seriously. A “Team B” group should have existed to “think like Communists” and provide different assumptions in order to provide contrasting analysis of the PRC’s grand strategy and national security policies, how the CCP defined threats to their grand strategy, and the means they would employ to advance them.

Another set of problems is that analysts became defensive around a certain narrative, such as the PRC’s intentions are benign, or U.S. actions are responsible for compelling the PRC’s expansion and belligerence. Analysts were invested in an explanation or in a school of thought, such as the pro-CCP school, and so that school of thought must be defended. Thus, fundamental challenges to the pro-CCP school that necessarily required major changes to U.S. policies was resisted. Focused leadership was necessary to ensure that the intellectual framework analysts possessed was altered in recognition of the enormity of the PRC threat to U.S. national security. That leadership did not happen.

The examination of assumptions is always difficult for an organization to accomplish, and more so when analysts are pressed for time in response to their day-to-day duties addressing major national security problems. The urgency and ubiquity of responding to the demands of day-to-day issues precludes time devoted to the focus on peer competitive, longer-term threats. Due to the necessity of having a constant attention to never ending data effectively reduces thinking long-term thinking and problem solving of the existential threat from the PRC. Presently, there is a constant focus on the daily briefing within the 24-hour cycle of the Department of Defense. As such, there is

little time for senior defense officials to think about long-term, strategic issues, no matter how significant. In essence, analysts are on an endless treadmill.

Accordingly, there is value for a strategic team to be appropriately allocated to study national security threats within a longer-term period. For example, stronger connecting tissue between Intelligence and Plans is in order for our OPLANS to be informed by major threats without self-limiting thinking due to budget constraints or the preconceived assumptions already mentioned. The reason for having these analysts should not be to focus on immediate data or a brief but to consider emerging threats and significantly different scenarios to compel the questioning of assumptions and ensure that decisions are made in CONPLANS and OPLANS in the context of the principles of strategy. Thus, they are viewed through the lens of U.S. power and maximizing U.S. relative power over present and possible future adversaries so that U.S. dominance is sustained.

While the Department of Defense may improve the identification of the peer threats through the coordination of intelligence and operational analysts and planners; fundamentally, this is not a Department of Defense matter but is one for the National Security Council to formulate a national strategy that identifies the peer threat and marshals the government to respond. This must be beyond the policy guidance of published documents like the National Security Strategy or Defense Strategic Guidance or as it surfaces in Quadrennial Defense Reviews.

### **Seven Recommendations to Address These Problems**

In essence, today the United States faces the same reality as does a patient going to the doctor and being told that they have a cancerous tumor in their abdomen and that if left untreated the patient, America, will die. The cancer patient understands that if the treatments prescribed by the doctor are not followed, that the patient will die. So too is America standing today in the doctor's office and hearing that they have a cancer—elite capture by the CCP—and that this cancer must be treated and excised from the body politic. Those treatments will be varied, multiple, and painful.

**The first recommendation to recovery is for the U.S. national security community to admit they failed.** The dominance of the *Pax Americana* that their strategic forefathers gave them, they lost. Hence, either of their own volition, led by a new President, or mandated by Congress—they must admit that they betrayed their mission, they did not recognize the existential threat of the PRC. Moreover, by promoting the engagement strategy of the pro-CCP school out of fear of provoking the PRC, they have strengthened the greatest national security threat the U.S. faces.

**Second, American's must understand the existing distribution of power within the U.S. national security community is resistant to withdrawing from the pro-CCP school—their predilection will be to return the rudder of the ship of state to amidships and the course towards engagement with the PRC.** The current national security system and culture established after the 1947 National Security Act has forgotten its original charter and has instead allowed group think and careerism to supercede that their prime directive of protecting the nation from strategic surprise.

For example, the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS), created in 1975 to lead a multi-agency review of the national security implications from foreign investments in American companies, has been largely irrelevant on the question of Chinese investment in America. Led by the Treasury Department, the committee's priorities have long been dominated by economic interests. While CFIUS became more active and focused on safeguarding America's national security during the Trump administration, under the Biden administration there has been a reversion back to the prior course of approving questionable sales of American companies to the PRC.

The solution is relatively simple, take the chairmanship of CFIUS away from Treasury and give it to the Defense Department. There are other areas where the federal bureaucracy could follow suit, but this is where the fight to change our system will be fought as the pro-CCP Engagers will resist such structural changes in order to maintain their lock on power. This "lock on power" must be

systematically deconstructed and resistance from the pro-CCP school anticipated if the U.S. is ever going to be able to survive what the CCP has planned for America.

**Third, it should also be expected that executing this rudder change within the foreign policy community will take years of consistent effort to reverse—as can already be clearly seen from the sudden resumption of visits to the PRC by senior cabinet level officials from the current administration.** Unfortunately, America does not have years to correct course. This Cold War with the PRC is not like the first Cold War because the strategists who built America’s power during this fight with the Soviet Union experienced less resistance from the national security community compared to the present. Today, many American national security elites in and outside of the government are more interested in sustaining their involvement with the PRC—and because if this they will more actively fight against measures to confront and challenge Beijing’s agenda of global expansionism.

**Fourth, yet America’s victory over these internal and external forces is only possible if action is taken now.** Given the shift in the balance of power towards Beijing and the existence of the CCP’s “timeline” for the Great Rejuvenation, our nation’s leaders must understand that action to prevent the final destruction of the nation must be taken immediately. The defense of the national interest from the war that is being waged by the CCP must be brought front and center and made a key part of our national political dialogue and selection of political leaders. Past policies promoted by the pro-CCP school that have been based on the false assumptions that the CCP’s capabilities are “decades away” must be rejected and there needs to be a sense of urgency and immediacy infused into our actions as a nation, across the whole of government.

**Fifth, the Intelligence Community needs to create a dynamic “Team B” to address the threat.** Team B was created in the 1970s to challenge the IC’s benign assumptions about the Soviet threat. Team B was comprised of people from academe, industry, think tanks, and those with previous-governmental experience. It provided an alternative perspective, that the Soviet Union was aggressive and needed to be confronted. Thus, détente had to be rejected as did policies of accommodation with the Soviet threat. In Team B were found the seeds of President Reagan’s solution to the Cold War: “we win, they lose.” Consequently, a Team B for the PRC is needed that would bring together individuals from industry, scientists, negotiators, academics, and government service, and those who have track records of confronting the CCP’s Political Warfare to create “quick fixes” to the immediate problems of the PRC threat.

**Sixth, the U.S. needs to have the same familiarity with the PLA’s doctrine and ideology as with Soviet Communism during the Cold War.** America’s national security community, especially within the DoD and IC, must understand the CCP’s priorities for investment, research, and force structure development, and the missions and options that force structure would support. During the Cold War, Soviet doctrine was well studied by the U.S. national security community to discern where the Soviets were investing, what they were developing, and the force structure they were creating and the missions that force structure could support. Information about this should also be brought into the public sphere to inform the debate regarding the PRC’s bellicosity and capabilities for aggression.

**Seventh, the U.S. needs to take bold action to target the CCP directly.**<sup>32</sup> This requires a multifaceted approach, that will include the rollback the PRC’s gains in the South China Sea, and the defeat of the PRC in its attempts at future territorial seizure like the PRC is currently conducting against the Philippines at Second Thomas Shoal. The U.S. and its allies should even be prepared to evict the PLA from facilities they have created in other countries like Djibouti, or are in the process of creating in Ream, Cambodia. Those are important and necessary measures to place Beijing on the strategic backfoot. But the center of gravity that the U.S. must attack is the CCP itself to ensure that the CCP, the Chinese people, and all global audiences know that it is illegitimate and that the U.S.,

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<sup>32</sup> Lianchao Han and Bradley A. Thayer, *Understanding the China Threat* (London: Routledge, 2023), pp. 163-186.

working with the Chinese people and allies, is working to expel it from power. This requires employing all the arrows in the U.S. quiver, including a focus on political warfare that the U.S. did well during much of the Cold War, like the Active Measures Working Group, but has allowed to fall into disrepair in the post-Cold War years.<sup>33</sup>

These various tasks must be authorized and synchronized by competent authority in the form of, perhaps, a resurrected U.S. Information Agency. The key is to do it quickly across all levers of national power. The Engager's "it will take years" to fix mindset, while true to a degree, cannot overshadow or retard the impetus to act today. In essence, Americans must recognize that we are truly, for the first time since the Cold War, in an existential fight for our national survival.

### **Conclusion**

As I conclude, I remain extremely concerned that our national defense has been and continues to be degraded by those who favor engagement with the CCP despite the overwhelming evidence of the malicious intentions and credible comprehensive national power that the PRC threatens the United States. Just as America must begin rapidly build the platforms and weapons necessary to deter and defeat the PLA, the U.S. government must also start fighting the PRC's Political Warfare operations, that have so badly subverted America's defenses. This must be done immediately.

While I have identified significant challenges, I remain optimistic because of America and the great strengths that come from our Declaration, Constitution, and the almost two-and-a-half centuries of history. This history is defined by individual liberty, limited government and moral responsibility have proven superior and more durable than compared to the incoherent, tyrannical, and failed political ideology of communism, collectivism, and coercion that are the hallmarks of the PRC and the CCP's one party state.

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<sup>33</sup> Fletcher Schoen and Christopher J. Lamb, "Deception, Disinformation, and Strategic Communications: How One Interagency Group Made a Major Difference", *Institute for National Strategic Studies Strategic Perspectives*, No. 11, National Defense University Press Washington, D.C. June 2012, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/inss/Strategic-Perspectives-11.pdf>