



SMA – J39 SPEAKER SERIES: REALITIES, IMPERATIVES & PRINCIPLES OF GREAT POWER COMPETITION (GPC) TODAY & INTO THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION



Dr. Thomas F. Lynch III

Distinguished Research Fellow
Institute for Strategic Studies (INSS),
National Defense University (NDU)

Thursday, 18 March 2021
1000-1100 EDT



Obligatory Disclaimer



The analysis and conclusions in this presentation are the product of Dr. Lynch's own research and assessments and do not necessarily represent the policies or views of the National Defense University, the U.S. Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.



Realities, Imperatives & Principles of GPC Today & Into Biden Era

SMA SPEAKER SERIES SEQUENCE

IV. PREPARING TO COMPETE (Chapters 14-15)

• Essential Realities & Imperatives of GPC:

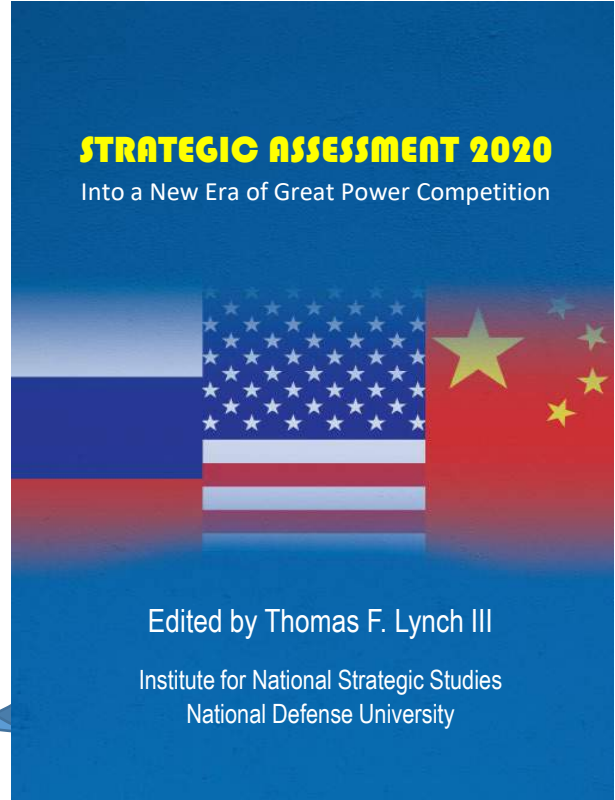
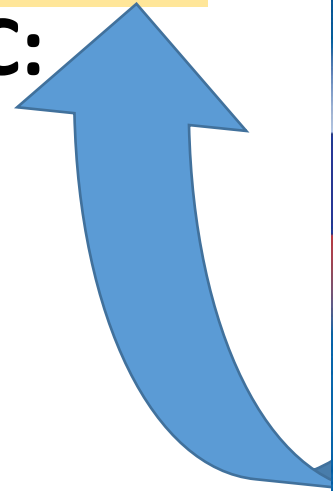
- Power, Greatness, Competition & Competitive Categories
- Power Transition, Rivalrous Dyads & Risks
- The Shift into a Contemporary Multipolar GPC Era

• Key Principles of GPC & Those “Not”:

- Firmness & Flexibility
- Partnerships & Alternative Geometries
- Poison of Mass Denigration
- Playing for Time

• Extensions & The Way Ahead:

- American Foreign Policy in Competition
- Contours of the Biden Administration



I. CONCEPTUALIZING A NEW ERA OF GREAT POWER COMPETITION (1-4)
II. WARFIGHTING, INNOVATION & TECHNOLOGY IN A NEW ERA OF GREAT POWER COMPETITION (5-8)
III. GEO-STRATEGIC INTERACTIONS IN A NEW ERA OF GREAT POWER COMPETITION (9-13)

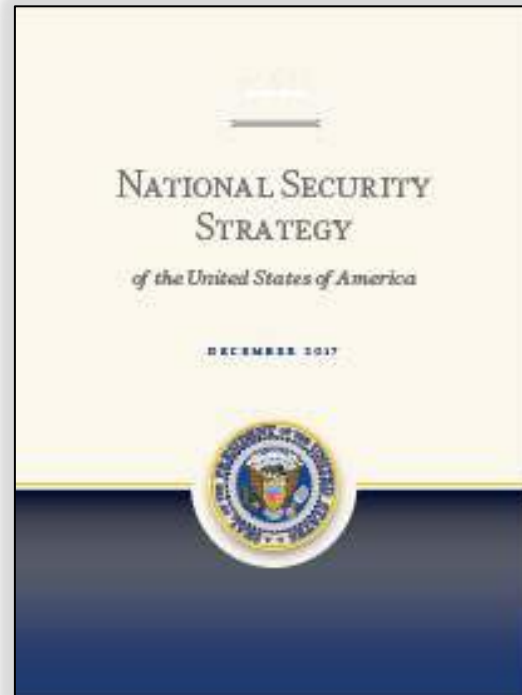
*(Available at URL....
<https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Publications/Books/Strategic-Assessments-2020/>)*



GPC Context: Concepts for Understanding the New Era of Great Power Competition



- Great Power Competition (GPC) is reemerging as Russia and China have transformed into **rivalrous states** – challenging two decades of **ascendant American power, influence & interests**.



“China and Russia challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity. They are determined to make economies less free and less fair, to grow their militaries, and to control information and data to repress their societies and expand their influence.... These competitions require the United States to rethink the policies of the past two decades—policies based on the assumption that engagement with rivals and their inclusion in international institutions and global commerce would turn them into benign actors and trustworthy partners. For the most part, this premise turned out to be false.”

United States National Security Strategy, December 2017

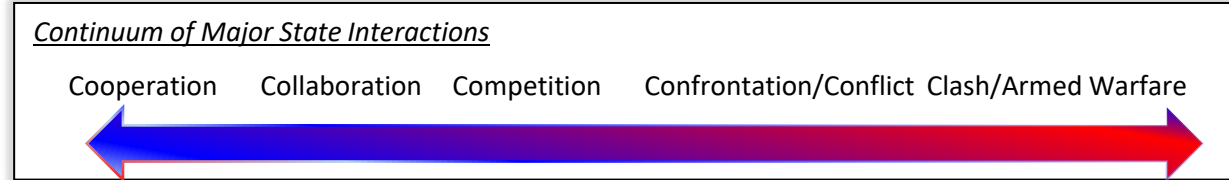
2-3



Essential Outlines & Imperatives of Great Power Competition (GPC)



- **Competition** is not conflict and not definitely not clash; it exists on a continuum of state-to-state interactions:



- **Power** is a multifaceted construct, including:
 - ‘**HARD POWER**’: *coercive* use of military or economics for influence as *payoff*;
 - ‘**SOFT POWER**’: influence by *attraction* from partnered economics, ideological appeal, social & cultural affinity, diplomatic acumen, reciprocal information exchanges.

- **Greatness** of a state is a three-fold construct:

- *Unusual Capabilities*
- *Uses those capabilities to pursue broad interests beyond its immediate neighborhood*
- *Perceived by other states to be major in nature*



Essential Outlines & Imperatives of Great Power Competition (GPC)



Figure 2.2: A Framework for Assessing the Aspects/Categories of Competition

Competitive Aspect/Category	Main Competitive Elements
Political and Diplomatic	Levels of influence in multi-lateral institutions, key posts held that control multi-lateral institutions, number and strength of political alliances.
Ideological	Values and political systems' appeal.
Informational	The manner and degree of transnational communications - open and transparent vs. closed and restrictive. Extent of denigration of "the other" in mass communications.
Military	Size, posture, technological edge of armed forces. Cohesion and capacity of military alliances.
Economic	Size, technological breadth, diversity and resource base of the national economy. The innovation ecosystem of a national economy, including its access to and management of financial capital.

Competitive Aspect/Category


- Political & Diplomatic
- Ideological
- Informational
- Military
- Economic

“Strategic Aim/Objective:
How to keep Great Power Competition (GPC) from becoming Great Power War???”



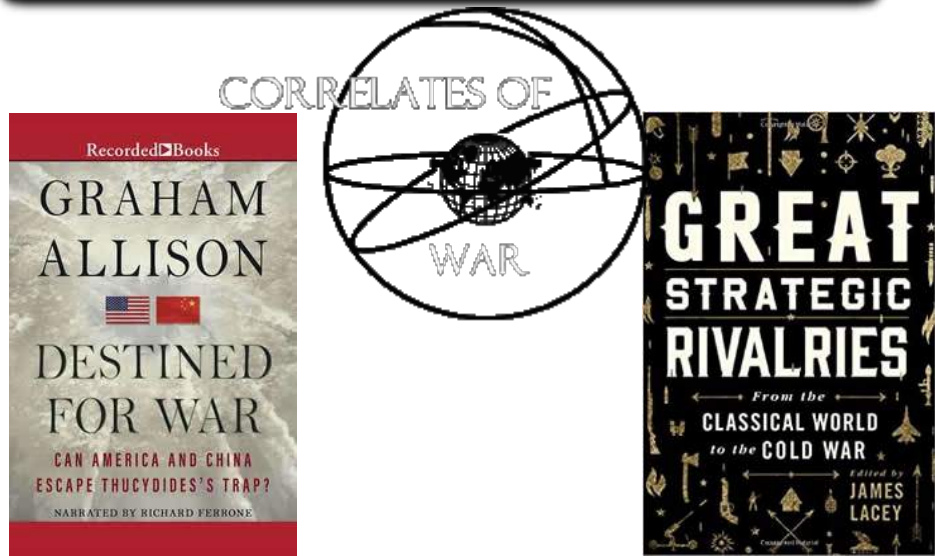
Essential Outlines & Imperatives of GPC - Major Power Transition & Risks of Major War



- Over the past 500 years, interactions between Great Power states in the international system normally are dominated by competition, with simultaneous elements of collaboration and conflict. Pure cooperation (unfettered peace and stability) and violent clash (war) between them have been the rarest forms of interaction.
- In the past five centuries, Great Power transitions have played out over decades, not years. **¾ of these transitions culminated with – or featured during – a destructive period of violent clash (war).** 
- The inevitability of direct war between Great Powers during times of relative power transition is not foreordained. Great Powers may channel or expend their worst animus in one of several other non-military categories of competition.

“The history of relations among great powers is a story of persistent rivalry and recurrent warfare, punctuated by occasional, usually brief, periods of peace....In the absence of a [global] higher power, states are always, in some measure, insecure...The mistrust, military buildups and diplomatic maneuvering...can sometimes result in periods of dynamic balance and tenuous stability,...however, these have always broken down eventually, given way to major wars.”

Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011) 38-39





Essential Outlines & Imperatives from Eras & Multipolar GPC & Major Power Transition

➤ Seven Main Insights from Selected Historical Analysis :

France/UK (18 th -19 th Centuries)	UK/ Germany (19 th -20 th Centuries)	U.S./UK (19 th -20 th Centuries)	U.S./Japan (Early 20 th Century)
--	--	--	---

- **Great Power transition challenges** rising states with the dilemma of how to assert their relative power gains without provoking outright clash with the dominant state(s). Transition also confronts the dominant, but relatively declining, state with a vexing choice of how to accommodate its rising challenger(s) in a manner that avoids both destructive military clash and an unacceptable change in its preferred status quo.
- **Alignment of conflictual demands** or grievances across the five major areas of interstate competition set the conditions for Great Power war
- Most reliable indicator of when a direct great power clash (war) will erupt is when one or both sides recognize a **shift in the relative alignment of economic and military power that is perceived to be immutable and untenable**
- A **lagging but reliable** indicator of approaching great power war is caustic **information exchanges denigrating the rival's people**.
- **Misperception of relative power matters** in drift from competition to armed clash; domestic bureaucracies and interest groups may retard proper adaptation to power shifts even when properly understood by governments
- **Dynamic technological change increases risks** of state overestimation/underestimation of combat power from new innovations – encouraging unwise drift toward clash/war
- **Extraordinary political leadership** matters during periods of intense great power rivalry and power transition – managing domestic factors often as (or more) challenging than international ones.

Competitive Aspect/Category
Political & Diplomatic
Ideological
Informational
Military
Economic

“Strategic Aim/Objective: How to keep Great Power Competition (GPC) from becoming Great Power War???”

- US Military Strength
- US Economic Strength & Values Emphasis
- Close Allies

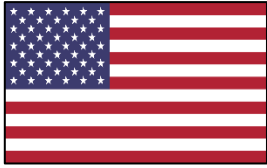
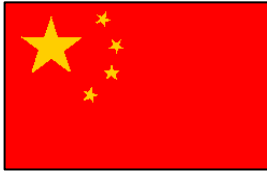


Essential Outlines & Imperatives of GPC – The Paradigm Shift (1)



➤ Paradigm Shift – from Cooperation/Collaboration to Great Power Competition (GPC):

DATES	ERA	MAJOR FEATURES
1992-2007	Post-Cold War Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - USSR dissolution & RU pursuit of western integration - China-USA economic cooperation, including WTO - US/West presumption of “convergence” with western norms, followed by ‘distractions’ in Middle East & South Asia
2008-2014/15	De-facto Great Power Competition (GPC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RU invasion of Georgia & CH domestic unrest (2008) - US/Western-led economic recession (2008-09) - ‘Colored revolutions’ (2011) - RU invasion of Crimea/Ukraine & US/west response (2014) - CH East China Sea Islands & cyber-espionage & US response (2014-2015)
2017 - Today	Formally Acknowledged GPC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - US National Security Strategy (2017) - US National Defense Strategy (2018) - US-CH Trade War (2018-Today)



“In the 1990s and 2000s, American leaders believed that Russia and China were converging with the West on basic questions of world order. Countries would work together on common challenges while old geopolitical rivalries would matter much less. The “era of convergence” came to an end because Russian and Chinese leaders concluded that if the liberal order succeeded globally, it would pose an existential threat to their regimes.”

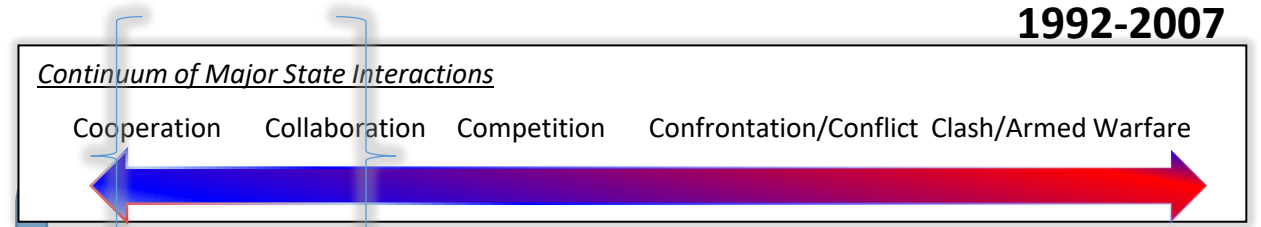
Thomas J. Wright, The return to great-power rivalry was inevitable *The Atlantic*, September 12, 2018 <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-return-to-great-power-rivalry-was-inevitable/>



Essential Outlines & Imperatives of GPC – The Paradigm Shift (2)



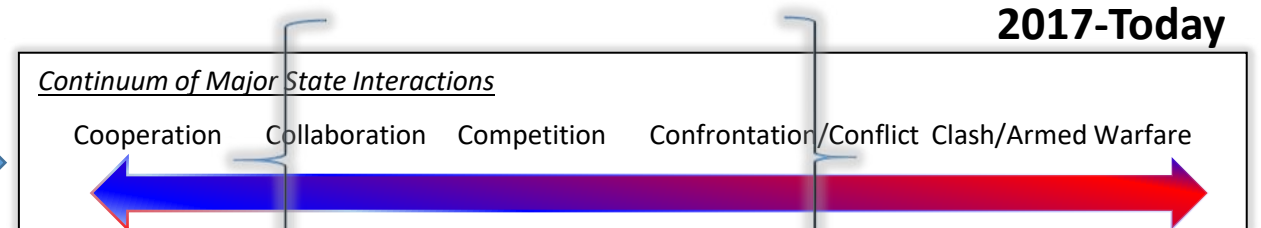
- **1992-2007:** Post-Cold War Cooperation between a single dominant power & much less powerful aspirants. Dominant interactions: Cooperation/Collaboration
- **2008-2014/15:** Transition into GPC – Russia asserts great power assets; China builds & begins to utilize great power capabilities. Dominant interactions drift toward from cooperation to competition.
- **2007-2020:** Fully acknowledged GPC. Dominant interactions competitive with wide potential for some cooperation and collaboration astride very real danger for drift toward confrontation & clash.
- **Paradigm shift** to GPC has major ramifications for behavior of Great Powers themselves, degree of stability in the system and behaviors of lesser powers in the system



Cooperating states are exceptionally aligned in geopolitical goals and means of achieving them, thus able to pursue means of attaining them harmoniously.

2008-2014/15

Collaborating states have very similar goals, and a general agreement on the means of achieving them



Competing states recognize that some, but not most, of their major goals are compatible and simultaneously disagree on the best means for attaining mutual gains in their remaining aligned goals.

Confrontational states are characterized by incompatible aims in almost all major goals and in general conflict about what constitutes legitimate means for attainment of national goals.



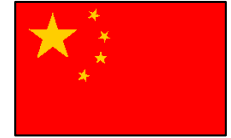


Essential Outlines & Imperatives from Eras & Multipolar GPC & Major Power Transition



➤ Alliances & Partnerships:

- The main US comparative advantage to China
- US array of historic allies & partners with common ideology and political values– nothing similar for China
- Robust if well treated – no stark economic choices
- Targeted economic disengagement – not decoupling

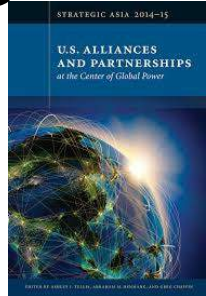


Competitive Aspect/Category
Political & Diplomatic
Ideological
Informational
Military
Economic



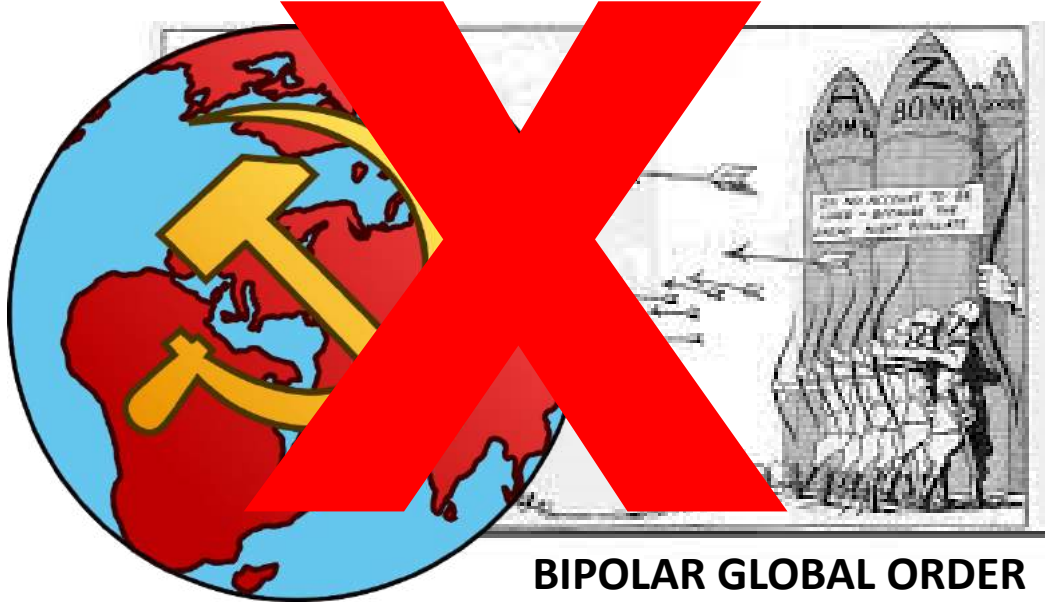
➤ US Gov't Role in Economic Competitive Advantage:

- US myth of pure “laissez-faire” economics – reality of targeted gov't incentives
- Especially necessary in period of GPC: pre-World War II; Cold War
- Can/must smartly invest in critical technologies & systems: AI, 5G, Quantum, IoT
- Gov't engage to assure AI leaps in critical security apps, not just those for commercial ones



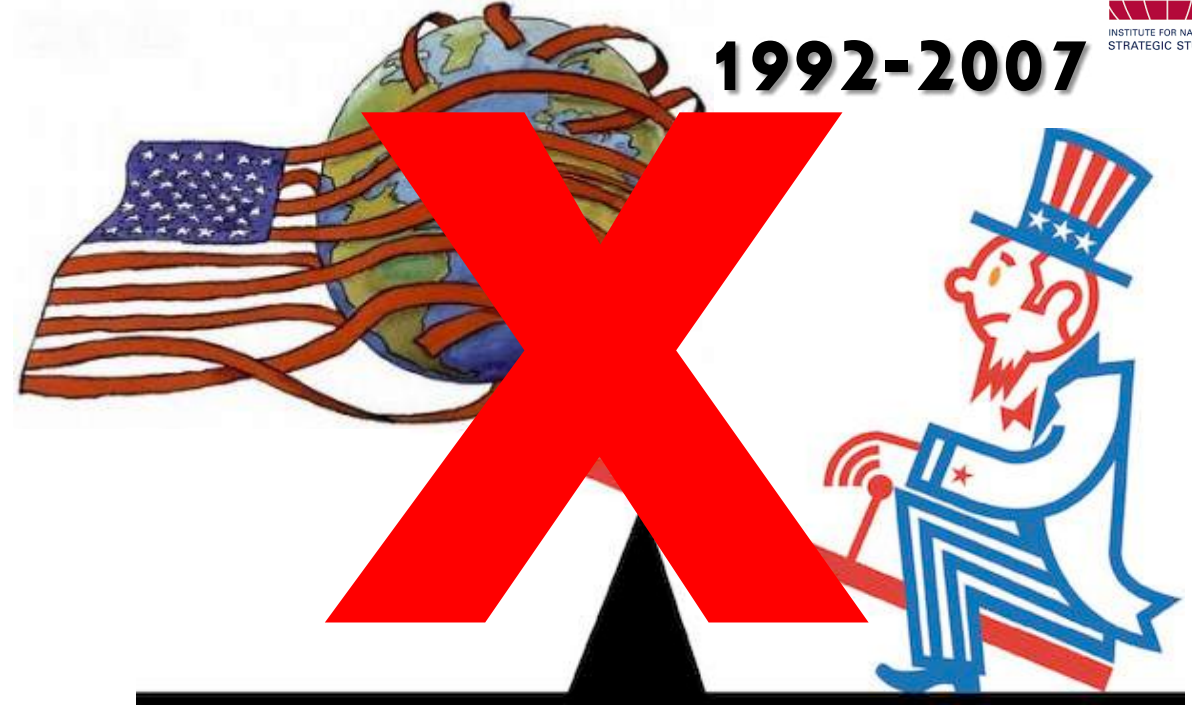
Key Elements of GPC and Those "Not" Great Power "NOT" #1a: A New Cold War

The Cold War 1945-1991

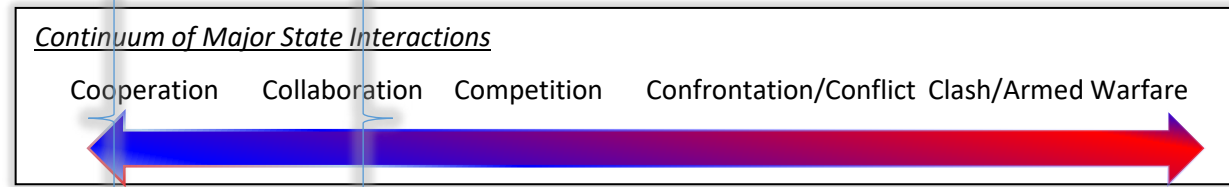
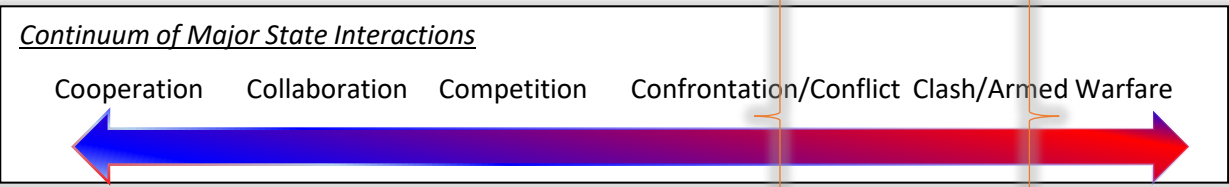


BIPOLAR GLOBAL ORDER

1992-2007



UNIPOLAR GLOBAL ORDER



Not the Cold War & Not the Unipolar Moment

Preparing to Compete



Key Elements of GPC and Those “Not” - “NOT” #1b: A New Cold War of Zero-Sum Ideology



- China not intent on replacing systems
- No global Communist movement / parties
- Very limited proxy warfare/sponsorship



Source: Michael Mazarr, RAND; 2020

Preparing to Compete



Key Elements of GPC and Those “Not” - “NOT” #1c: A New Cold War of Ideology Projection



China Has No
“Ideology” to
Promote

- State development model is not unique
- China’s success particular to its case, reflects changing priorities
- Growth from opening more than state control
- Autocratic system has very little global appeal

Source: Michael Mazarr, RAND; 2020

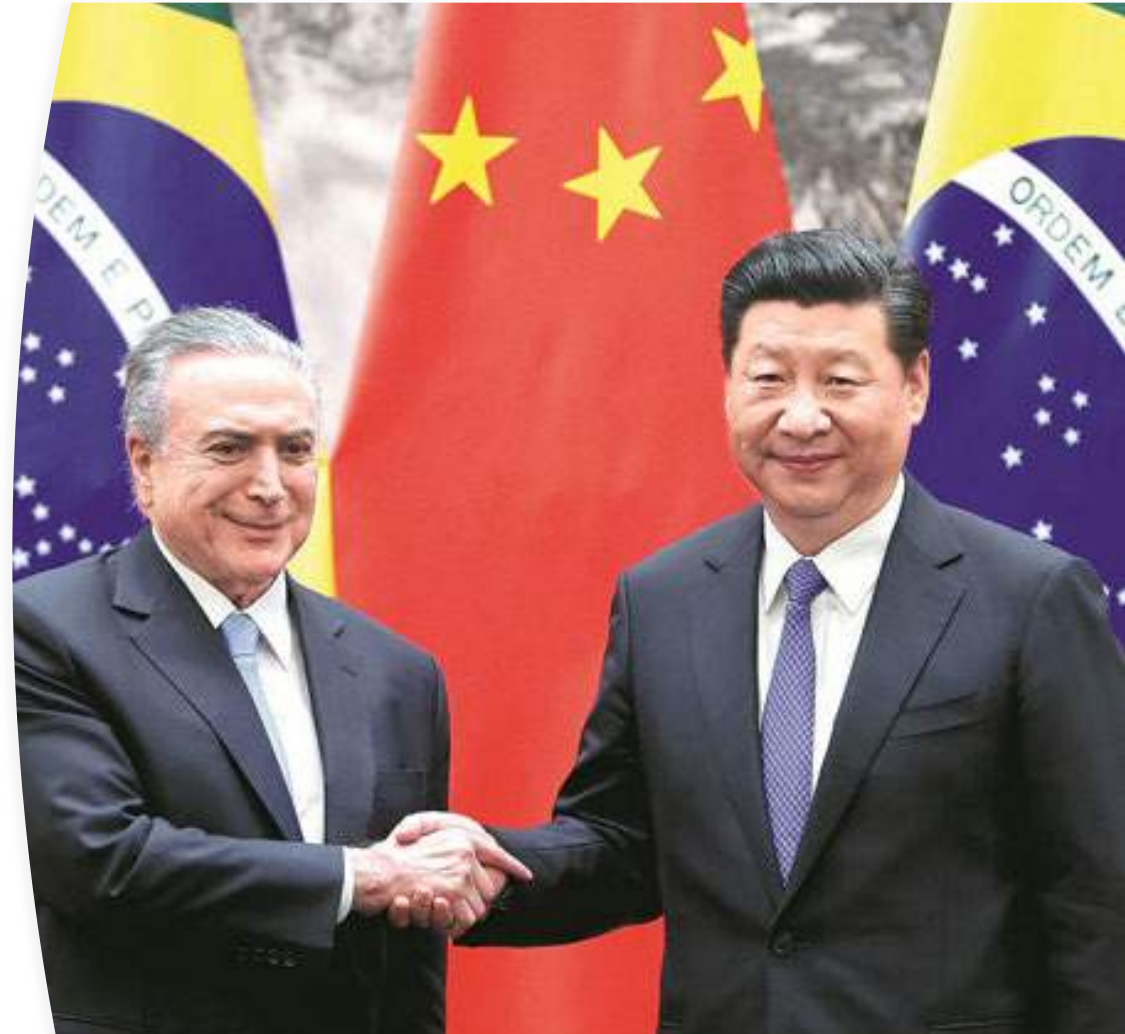
Preparing to Compete

Key Elements of GPC and Those “Not” – “IS” #1: Legitimate Authority

Legitimacy / Legitimate Authority

- Global perception of legitimacy is essential to national strength
- Historically, rising great powers have required a legitimization narrative to support their growth
- Grounded in community-wide belief in appropriate behavior; demands membership in shared identity
- Shapes what states think they want
- Indirect, paradigmatic, normative and institutional power is ultimately the most decisive ...
- Competition over legitimacy & “attraction” that reflects the true **ideological** framework today

Source: Michael Mazarr, RAND; 2020



Preparing to Compete



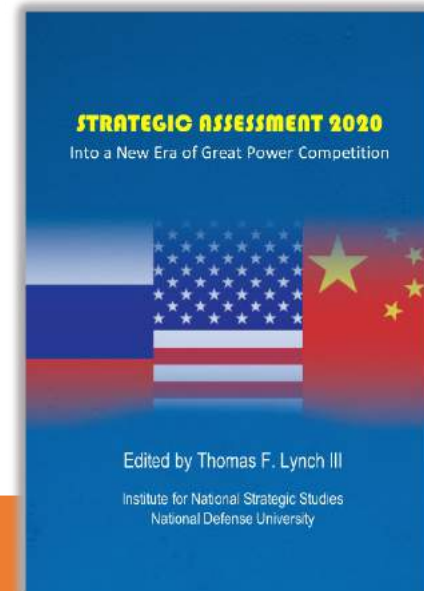
Key Elements of GPC and Those “Not” – “IS” #2: Relational Attraction & Authority



Competitive Aspect/Category	Main Competitive Elements
Political and Diplomatic	Levels of influence in multi-lateral institutions, key posts held that control multi-lateral institutions, number and strength of political alliances.
Ideological	Values and political systems’ appeal.
Informational	The manner and degree of transnational communications - open and transparent vs. closed and restrictive. Extent of denigration of “the other” in mass communications.
Military	Size, posture, technological edge of armed forces. Cohesion and capacity of military alliances.
Economic	Size, technological breadth, diversity and resource base of the national economy. The innovation ecosystem of a national economy, including its access to and management of financial capital.



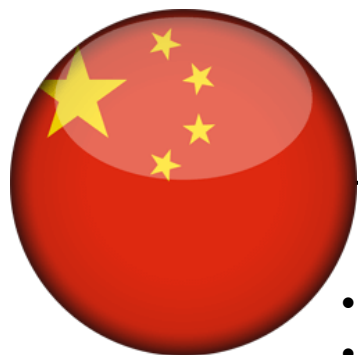
- **Interactive** with – not dominant over – other state-to-state competitive factors.
- **Relational** – not static.
- Influence “served-up” as either:
 - **Hard** (coercion)
 - **Soft** (attraction)





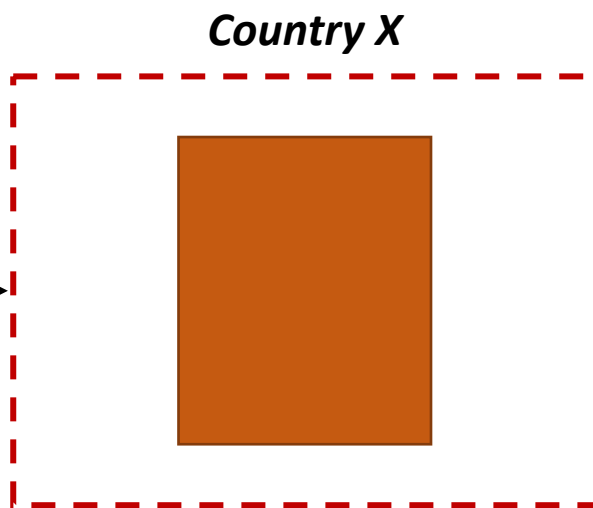
Key Elements of GPC and Those “Not” – “IS” #3: Setting Norms, Rules, Procedures

The Real Ideological Contest: Setting the Rules, Values and Structures of a System to a Great Power’s Advantage



China bilateral influence:

- Economic investments
- Direct coercion
- Information campaigns
- Security cooperation



Using the system to create incentives:

- Trade treaties
- Multilateral security cooperation
- Banking and finance system / standards
- Dominant socio-economic paradigm
- Global norms, standards
- International institutions
- Information networks
- Professional communities

Source: Michael Mazarr, RAND; 2020



Key Elements of GPC and Those “Not” – “IS” #4:

Economic ‘Disengagement, not De-Coupling’

Three Defensive Economic Goals from Reduced Trade w-China:

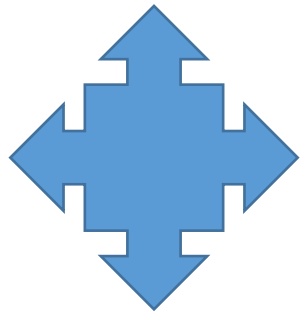
- Limit vulnerability to CCP surveillance & sabotage
- No supply chain dependencies enabling CCP coercion or disruption of supply chains
- Slow diffusion of innovation and tech to China critical to commercial leadership and military competitive edge



Key Elements of GPC and Those “Not” – “IS” #5: The ‘Key FOUR PRINCIPLES’

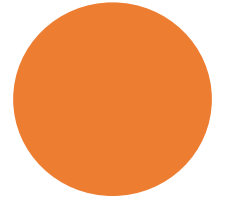
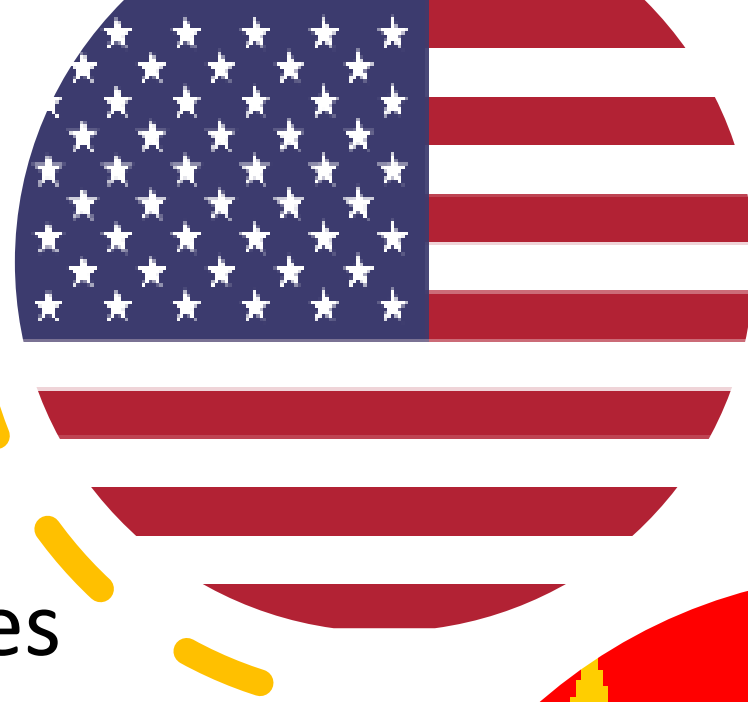


- Firmness & Flexibility
- Partnerships & Alternative Geometries
- Poison of Mass Denigration
- Playing for Time





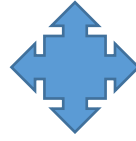
'Key FOUR PRINCIPLES' **FIRMNESS & FLEXIBILITY**



- Assess & clearly signal non-negotiable strategic aims....
- Negotiate other strategic desires
- Demonstrate allied/partnership cohesion – exercises, commitment...
- Adapt tactics & techniques within partnerships
- Near-term = Chinese power disadvantage in almost all scenarios



'Key FOUR PRINCIPLES' **PARTNERSHIPS & ALTERNATIVE GEOMETRIES**



- Imperative and principle for successful Great Power competition
- Willing coalitions against Napoleon, Imperial Germany, Fascism, USSR vs. vassal state arrangements
- “High Cards” in strategic competition
- Economic, diplomatic & political geometries as options to China

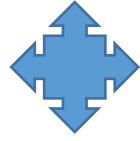


Preparing to Compete

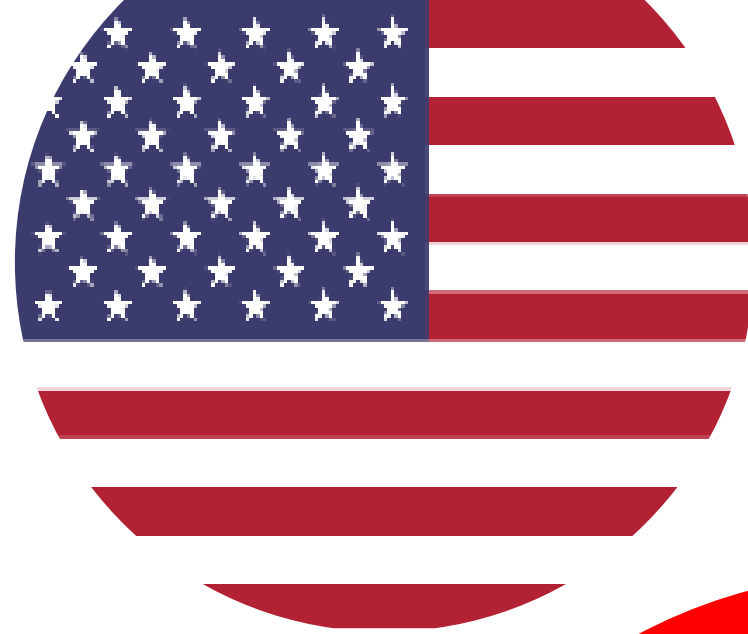


'Key FOUR PRINCIPLES'

POISON OF MASS DENEGRATION



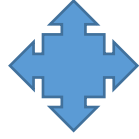
- Reciprocal mass denigration of societies a “lagging indicator” of competition descent into clash.
- External rhetoric & actions matter..
- So too does domestic treatment of ethnic groups
- Done badly = stoke virulent nationalism
- Calibration tricky but necessary >> Call-out policies & leaders, not entire peoples
- View Chinese expats as an asset



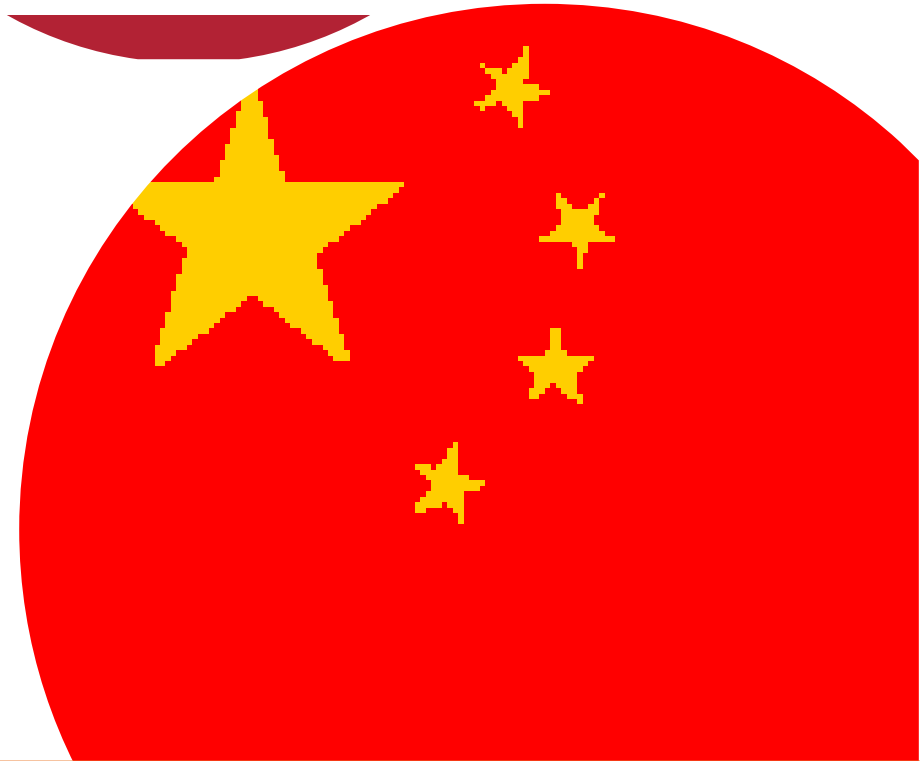
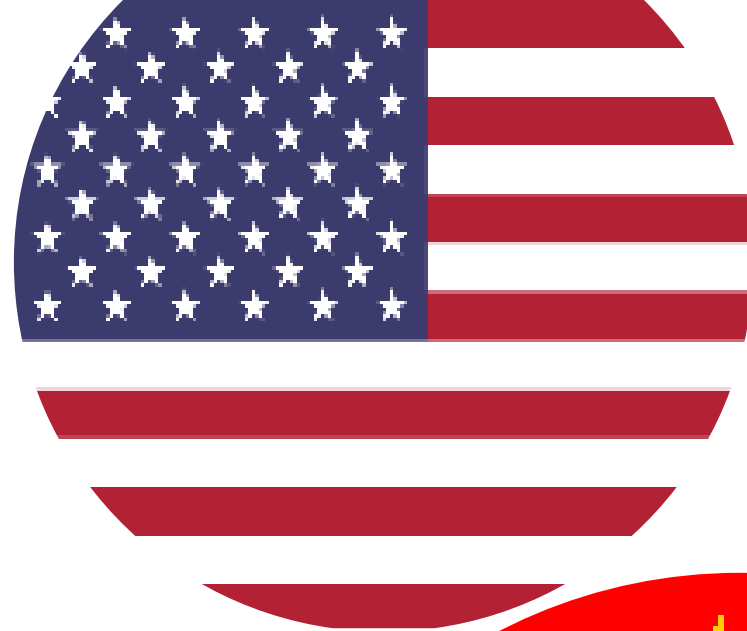


'Key FOUR PRINCIPLES'

PLAYING FOR TIME



- Near-term over-reaction a danger
- Time not always in favor of rising power:
 - Ascent not always rapid
 - Ascent not always linear
- CCP challenges non-trivial, include:
 - Aging, less productive population
 - Income inequalities & vast corruption
 - Environmental degradation
 - Restive regions
 - Political power abuse & poor human rights
- US rejuvenation & resilience better than strategic over-reaction





The Way Ahead in GPC and the Biden Administration (1)



• President Biden must confront some 30-35 percent of American voters who are jaded about international commitments and unwilling to sign-up for spending American resources leading other “rich” nations in combatting major international problems.”

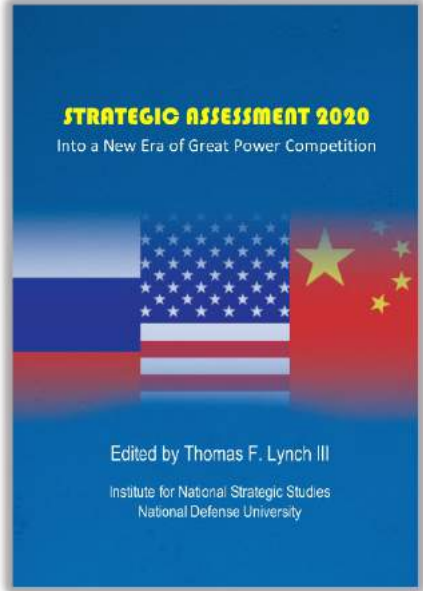
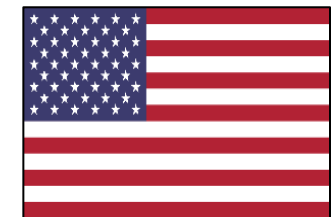
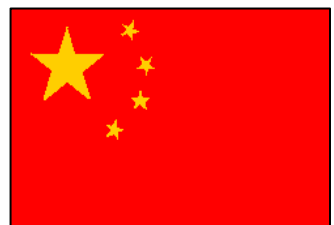
Competitive Aspect/Category
Political & Diplomatic
Ideological
Informational
Military
Economic

AMERICA’S BEST CHOICE:

- Gain & sustain attractive/legitimate influence
- Ideologically & politically aligned states
- No stark economic choice as cost to participate

•fully decoupling America from the Chinese economy would be a difficult and with a cost that will be unacceptably high, ...especially in trade, capital markets, and currency markets. Washington lacks the economic capability to enforce a full-blown economic de-coupling from China upon its most important partner states.

• A dominant power best wins influence with other states by amplifying points of strategic commonality and minimizing points of friction. U.S. will compete best with China by gaining and sustaining influence with ideologically and politically aligned states – without making them choose severing economic ties with China as a cost of participation.





The Way Ahead in GPC and the Biden Administration (2)



• Competition Without Catastrophe

How America Can Both Challenge and Coexist With China

Foreign Affairs

By Kurt M. Campbell and [Jake Sullivan](#)

September/October 2019



“Historically, the U.S. has sought to cooperate first and compete second with China. Beijing, meanwhile, has become quite comfortable competing first and cooperating second,...this must reverse.” Campbell & Sullivan

Competitive Aspect/Category

Political & Diplomatic
Ideological
Informational
Military
Economic

“Despite the many divides between the two countries, each will need to be prepared to live with the other as a major power...competition [cannot] force [China’s] capitulation or even collapse...instead competition must seek coexistence on terms favorable to U.S. interests and values....”



US policy toward China seeks to, *“broaden and deepen practical cooperation on issues of shared concern; it directly confronts and then tries to resolve or narrow our differences wherever we can; and where we can’t to manage those differences peaceably.”*

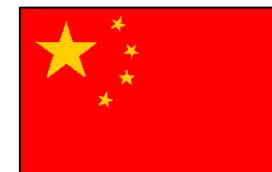


[Anthony Blinken](#), Then-US Deputy Secretary of State before Congress, April 27, 2016

(also cited in Shigeo Kikuchi and Hiromu Arakaki, Ch7, The United States: Addressing the “Return to Great Power Competition” in East Asian Review (July 2017))

DOMINANT THEMES:

- Acknowledged Great Power Competition (GPC) – with greater attention to collaborative opportunities whenever feasible
- Emphasis on alliances & partnerships – lead/enable
- Clear limits to American largesse – commitment/reciprocity
- Not “Going Back” – GPC diagnosis accurate; GPC implementation of “America alone” wrong & must be supplanted

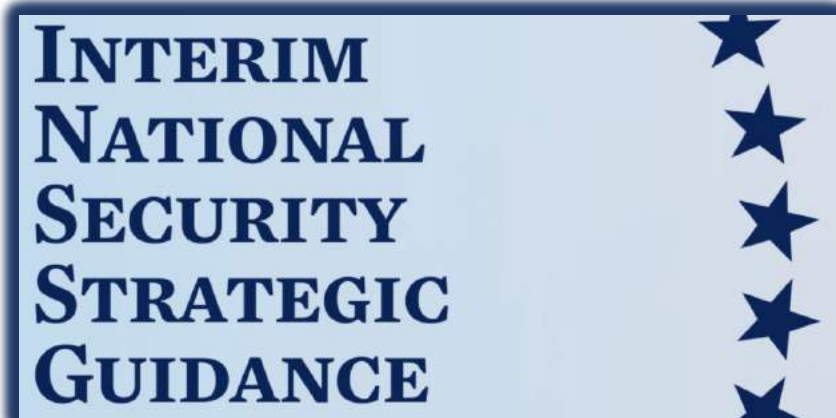


So-Called, **Summit of World’s Democracies** (DTG TBD), [Biden](#) Campaign web site, Summer/Fall 2020

Preparing to Compete

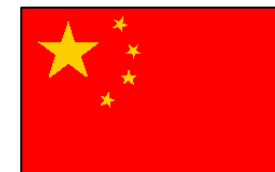


The Way Ahead in GPC and the Biden Administration (3)



Competitive Aspect/Category

- Political & Diplomatic
- Ideological
- Informational
- Military
- Economic



March 3, 2021

A Foreign Policy for the American People

Anthony Blinken, US Secretary of State

- Stop COVID-19, build global health security
- End econ crisis, build more inclusive global economy
- Renew democracy – it's under threat
- Humane, effective immigration system
- Revitalize ties with US allies & partners
- Tackle climate crisis, drive green energy revolution
- Secure U.S. leadership in technology
- Manage challenging relationship w-China

March 3, 2021

U.S. INTERIM NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGIC GUIDANCE

President Joe Biden & Jake Sullivan, US National Security Advisor

- Biggest global challenges require collective action
- Democracies under siege – need protection
- Changing global power begat China & Russia challenges
- US rules, norms, procedures being tested
- Ongoing tech revolution
- **Defend U.S. strengths**
- **Promote favorable power distribution**
- **Lead & sustain international system**

CROSS-THREADED THEMES:

- Reality of Great Power Competition (GPC), especially with China
- US will lead with diplomacy, backed by a strong military
- Engage China from position of strength – compete when should, collaborate when can, confront when must.
- Alliances & partnerships will be key

Preparing to Compete

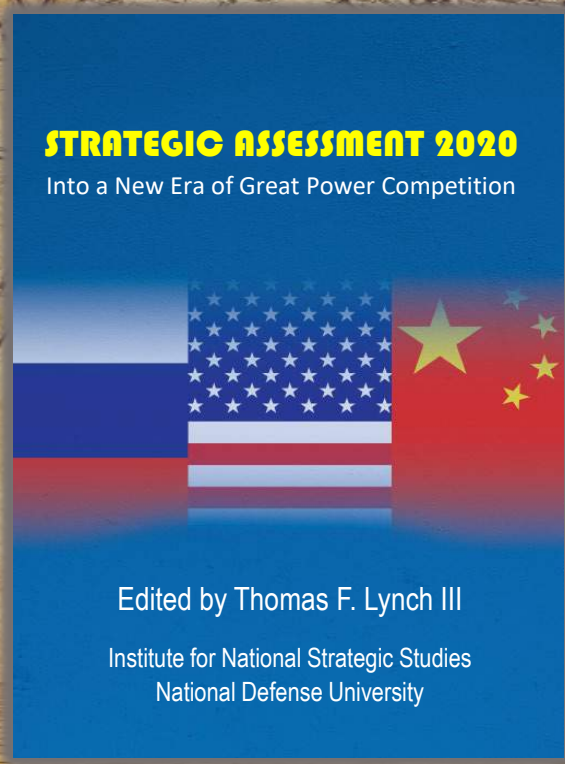


SMA – J39 SPEAKER SERIES



**COMMENTS/
QUESTIONS/
DISCUSSION**

Dr. Tom Lynch, NDU-INSS
March 18, 2021



**Strategic
Assessment
2020:
Into a New Era of
Great Power
Competition**

*(Available at URL....
<https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Publications/Books/Strategic-Assessments-2020/>)*



Dr. Thomas F. Lynch III
Distinguished Research Fellow
Institute of National Strategic Studies (INSS)
National Defense University (NDU)
Washington, D.C.

SMA-J39 Speaker Series
Thursday, March 18, 2021

PRESENTATION TITLE: Realities, Imperatives, & Principles of Great Power Competition (GPC): Today & Into the Biden Administration

PRESENTATION DESCRIPTION:

*This presentation updates and extends the concluding chapter of the NDU-Press, October 2020 book, **Strategic Assessment 2020: Into a New Era of Great Power Competition**, edited by Dr. Thomas F. Lynch III. It highlights several major framing characteristics of this new era. It then analyzes three main imperatives for American success in Great Power competition (GPC) by observing that: the Sino-American dyad is not a new Cold War; successful competition with China must feature a wise choice of U.S. allies; and the U.S. can only succeed if the national government smartly intervenes in the economy to fortify American competitive advantage. It offers historically based analysis demonstrating that four competitive principles are most critical to U.S. success in a long-term competition with China: firm yet flexible policies, prioritization of partnerships and alliances, confronting China's leadership not its people, and playing for time. It concludes with an in-stride assessment of how the Biden Administration seems most likely to pursue U.S. policy and security interests in this new era of GPC.*

SHORT BIOGRAPHY:

Dr. Thomas F. Lynch III is a Distinguished Research Fellow at the Center for Strategic Research (CSR) at the Institute of National Strategic Studies (INSS) of the National Defense University (NDU) in Washington, D.C. Dr. Lynch researches, writes, lectures, teaches, and organizes workshops and conferences for Department of Defense customers on the topics of Great Power Competition (GPC) & geopolitics, India's strategic rise, Afghanistan-Pakistan & wider South Asia, the Gulf Arab States, and the past & future trajectory of radical Islam. His primary ongoing research is focused on GPC and on India's strategic rise and implications for Indo-Pacific security and stability. Dr. Lynch has published three books including as editor of *Strategic Assessment 2020: The Into a New Era of Great Power Competition* (NDU Press, October 2020) He also has published more than a dozen book chapters and thirty feature monographs and journal articles.

Dr. Lynch joined INSS after a 28 year career in the active duty U.S. Army, serving in a variety of command and staff positions as an armor/cavalry officer and as a senior level politico-military analyst including as a Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff & Deputy Director of the Chairman's Advisory & Initiatives Group; Commander of the U.S. Army War Theater Support Group in Doha, Qatar; Director of the Advisory Group for the Commander, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM); and Military Special Assistant to the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan.

Dr. Lynch is a regular multi-media analyst and commentator on national and international programs. He is a member of the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and an adjunct professor in the Security Studies Program in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. He holds a B.S. from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, a Master's in Public Administration (MPA) and a Masters (M.A.) & Ph.D. in International Relations from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University.

<https://inss.ndu.edu/Media/Biographies/Article-View/Article/634130/lynch-iii-thomas-f/>