**Are We Preparing for a War with China?**

This is a very sensitive, but very critical issue, but I will limit this discussion to several basic issues. This is the opinion of a veteran with 32 years of military experience, been a China specialist since 1972, and served during five conflicts.

**First,** regarding conflict and war. War is bad and really bad for the loser. Few people know that in many U.S. -China war games practiced in the Pentagon, we usually lose. China is on the other side of the world, and it is very expensive and complicated to fight a major competitor from a long distance.

[***https://www.businessinsider.com/the-us-apparently-gets-its-ass-handed-to-it-in-war-games-2019-3?amp***](https://www.businessinsider.com/the-us-apparently-gets-its-ass-handed-to-it-in-war-games-2019-3?amp)

**Second**, war is very costly, not only in the loss of precious lives (for both sides), but war is very costly and requires a huge amount of resources. In a war with a major, 4 million sq mi) challenger like China, the cost of a war will be exorbitant (at least billion$, likely trillion$) and countless lives lost. The Vietnam War (only 128,000 sq miles), was unsuccessfully expensive, $1 trillion in 2021 dollars, and 58,000 lives.

**Third,** since victory is not guaranteed, a decision to go to war, must also address a bigger question, what if we lose? Certainly, unless our military superiority virtually guarantees victory, war should definitely be avoided. Losing a war with anyone is unacceptable. If we lose, will we become the United States of China?

**Why do some people want to go to war with China?**

The China hawks, concerned that China will continue to build their military until they are stronger than us, **logically** argue that we must militarily take on China while we believe we are much stronger. These hawks assume that with our powerful nuclear back up and our powerful Navy fleet (with a dozen aircraft carriers and 50 nuclear submarines) and strategic Air Force with long range bombers and and long range missiles, that China is no match (at this time). The Hawks believe we must take action soon, while we believe we are stronger.

While China may not be as powerful as America, it is not a powerless nation that will be easily bullied.

This discussion does not involve a nuclear war. China, a few years ago, according to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, had around 300 nuclear weapons. Our inventory of around 4,000 nukes gives us nuclear superiority, so we can really destroy China, if we choose. In retaliation, if 10% (30) of her weapons struck America, life would change forever. No nation is prepared to survive a nuclear winter, so we must not open the nuclear "genie," or risk the human race.

**This is the problem**. The Chinese are an economic and political opponent/challenger, but they are not challenging our military. Former Presidents, Whitehouse National Security Officers, Senior State Department officers, national China scholars, and senior military officers have public endorsed a statement that China is now our enemy.

**"China is not an enemy," By M. Taylor Fravel , J. Stapleton Roy , Michael D. Swaine , Susan A. Thornton and Ezra Vogel, t*he Washington Post*: July 3, 2019 at 9:00 AM**

**Today, this is the reality**. All major nations are focused on defeating Covid, an unrelenting killer, which mutates as long as it survives. It will not die soon. No major nation has resources to spare for warfare. The most important mission for all major nations is to gain control of Covid, to save lives, and avoid devastation to our economies. In America, we are a nation that is politically polarized, and too many of our fellow Americans are domestic terrorists. This requires domestic focus of our national and state military resources.

Recognizing the challenges facing our nation, this is the wrong time to talk about conflict with anyone, especially a major nation like China?

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**How the U.S. Could Lose a War With China**

**It’s not that the Chinese Communist Party would take over Washington. But in its own region, China has the advantage.**

[**KATHY GILSINAN**](https://www.theatlantic.com/author/kathy-gilsinan/)**, *The Atlantic*, JULY 25, 2019**

If a war broke out between the United States and China, the clash between two of the world’s most powerful militaries would be horrific. And the United States could very well lose.

That’s a concern among current and former defense officials and military analysts, one of whom [told](https://breakingdefense.com/2019/03/us-gets-its-ass-handed-to-it-in-wargames-heres-a-24-billion-fix/?utm_campaign=Breaking%20Defense%20Air%20&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=70605729&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-86naFKdrv1JEFe8b9Q2XyIaZ_TZIhHpkfWyoVs7Huk6Hr0S89II1_HKwS3fwqT4D3FZfovAhrsQTmjU9YGl2it6I1rTA&_hsmi=70605729) *Breaking Defense* earlier this year that in war games simulating great-power conflict in which the United States fights Russia and China, the United States “gets its ass handed to it.”

Speaking at the Aspen Security Forum last week, Admiral Philip Davidson, who oversees U.S. military forces in Asia, called China “the greatest long-term strategic threat to the United States and the rules-based international order.” He described China’s rapid military buildup in nearly every domain—air, sea, land, space, and cyber—and said that while China’s capabilities don’t outnumber America’s in the region for now, it’s possible they could overtake the United States’ within the next five years.

But the sheer number of ships, missiles, planes, and people doesn’t tell the whole story. What already gives the Chinese the advantage is geography.

The Obama administration’s ill-fated Asia pivot did not prevent the growth of China’s military and economic power in the region, as it built artificial islands, embedded itself in key infrastructure projects, and invested in its military. Meanwhile, President Donald Trump has called into question whether the United States would defend its treaty allies in the Pacific, such as Japan, with complaints about the expense. (Davidson said at Aspen that “there is no more important American ally in the world than Japan.”)

The question is what could actually cause the United States to fight China. What if China invades and occupies Taiwan, a democratic U.S. partner and arms customer? Would America actually risk World War III? What if China forces its claim to the Senkaku Islands, which the United States considers to belong to Japan? Does that fall within America’s treaty commitments to defend its ally?

There’s no guarantee that a U.S. president, especially Trump, would resort to war in either case. But these are among the scenarios war-gamers at the Rand Corporation have studied to see if the United States could prevent China from claiming territory by force. It’s not clear that the U.S. could.

Notably, the likeliest U.S.-China war scenarios take place in Asia—it’s not that a Chinese “victory” means the Chinese Communist Party takes over Washington, but that the U.S. can’t successfully eject China from Japanese-claimed territory or Taiwan. In an attempt to do so, besides cyberattacks, the United States could attack Chinese forces from the air or sea. The problem is that China has spent at least the past 20 years, partly informed by observations of how the U.S. conducted the Gulf War in the 1990s, preparing for exactly this kind of conflict, and investing in defenses that could violently thwart a U.S. approach.

It has missiles that can sink ships. It has missiles that can down airplanes. And it has missiles that could theoretically reach U.S. regional bases in Japan and Guam, leaving planes and runways vulnerable to attack. “Many Chinese observers suggest that missile strikes on air bases would be part of the opening salvos of a war,” notes Rand’s “[U.S.-China Military Scorecard](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR392.html).” Shutting down such a base even [for a matter of days](https://www.rand.org/paf/projects/us-china-scorecard.html), according to Rand, could be enough to change the course of the conflict.

“The Chinese don’t have to comprehensively defeat the United States militarily in order to achieve their near-term objectives,” David Ochmanek, a senior international and defense researcher at Rand, told me. “If their objective is to overrun Taiwan, that in principle can be accomplished in a finite time period, measured in days to weeks.”

Ochmanek participated in the Rand war games that showed the U.S. losing. “It’s not just that they’ll be attacking air bases in the region. They’ll be attacking aircraft carriers at sea,” Ochmanek said. “They’ll be attacking our sensors in space. They’ll be attacking our communications links that largely run through space. They’ll be corrupting the databases in our command systems. They’re going to try to suppress us in every dimension that they can.” They will try, but it’s also worth noting that many of these capabilities are untested and that, in contrast to the United States, China doesn’t have a lot of experience actually using its weapons in combat.

Yet the growth of Chinese capabilities represents a big change from about 20 years ago, when President Bill Clinton [sent aircraft carriers](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1998/06/21/us-and-china-nearly-came-to-blows-in-96/926d105f-1fd8-404c-9995-90984f86a613/?utm_term=.dd86bdaad6a5) near the Taiwan Strait to deter Chinese threats against the island. China at the time had been firing missiles toward Taiwan, but its missile arsenal was far less capable and precise. “When that carrier was deployed by President Clinton, the Chinese couldn’t even find it,” Chris Brose, the former staff director for the Senate Armed Services Committee, said at a separate talk at the Aspen forum. “And they’ve spent 25 years not only figuring out how to find systems like that, but how to overwhelm them with very large volumes of precision weapons.”

If the U.S. were to deploy an aircraft carrier near the strait when there was a real possibility of conflict, Brose said, “let’s put it this way, I wouldn’t want to be on that aircraft carrier.”

For now, the United States is countering China in calibrated ways that send a message of displeasure but that are not likely to provoke an aggressive response from Beijing. The United States has [stepped up its pace](https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/us-navy-ships-sail-taiwan-strait-5th-time/story?id=61299954) of sending Navy ships through the strait, as well as its freedom of navigation exercises in the South China Sea. France and Britain [have also conducted](https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2149062/france-britain-sail-warships-contested-south-china-sea) such exercises. And the United States is competing with or confronting China outside of the military realm as well, slapping high tariffs on Chinese imports in pursuit of a trade deal and banning the Chinese telecommunications firm Huawei from doing business in the U.S. Washington has, however, been less aggressive in pushing China on human-rights and democracy issues, including China’s mass detention of Uighur Muslims and its support of a crackdown on protesters in Hong Kong.

The United States knows a lot about China’s capabilities, but discerning its intent is another question. John McLaughlin, a former acting director of the CIA who now teaches at Johns Hopkins University, notes that Chinese officials have said they aim to be a [global power](https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/china-s-global-power-play), but what that really means is not clear. Are they trying to build a defensive buffer zone around their borders? A lot of countries do that. Or is their intent something more sinister?

“When I look at the world, you can sort of say there are certain countries that are hostile to us clearly,” such as North Korea and Iran, McLaughlin told me. “China still represents a huge uncertainty.”

Nearly a decade ago, then–Defense Secretary Robert Gates warned about the dangers of a “high end” war, and said that any defense secretary who advised sending a land army into Asia (or the Middle East or Africa) [should](https://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2011/02/25/gates-never-fight-a-land-war-in-asia/) “have his head examined.” The likely costs of such a conflict have only risen since then, and so has the reluctance of the commander in chief to get involved in expensive foreign entanglements.

As for the Democrats vying to replace Trump, many of the 2020 primary candidates have cited China as a major national-security threat, highlighting a bipartisan consensus on the issue in Washington. The policies that flow from that perception are still in most cases a work in progress, however.

There’s another uncertainty: War games are one thing and reality is another. Intangibles such as training could affect the outcome.“They haven’t fought many wars,” McLaughlin said. “So to some degree, their actual performance beyond war games is yet to be determined. And hopefully we won’t have to determine it.”

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**The US has been getting 'its ass handed to it' in war games simulating fights against Russia and China**

**Ryan Pickrell, *Business Insider*, Mar 8, 2019, 10:26 AM**

US artillery units hone their gunnery skills during an exercise near Dona Ana, New Mexico, April 28, 2018. U.S. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. Brittany Johnson

The US might very well lose a high-end fight against a near-peer threat like China or Russia, two war-gaming experts said Thursday.

"In our games, when we fight Russia and China, 'blue' gets its ass handed to it," said David Ochmanek, a RAND analyst, referring to a color code used for the US.

In these simulated fights, an aggressor force obliterates US stealth fighters on the runway, sinks US warships, destroys US bases, and takes out critical US military systems.

In war games simulating a high-end fight against Russia or China, the US often loses, two experienced military war-gamers have revealed.

"In our games, when we fight Russia and China, 'blue' gets its ass handed to it," David Ochmanek, a RAND warfare analyst, explained at the Center for a New American Security on Thursday, Breaking Defense first reported. US forces are typically color-coded blue in these simulations.

"We lose a lot of people. We lose a lot of equipment. We usually fail to achieve our objective of preventing aggression by the adversary," he said.

At the outset of these conflicts, all five battlefield domains — land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace — are contested, meaning the US could struggle to achieve the superiority it has enjoyed in the past.

In these simulated fights, the "red" aggressor force often obliterates US stealth fighters on the runway, sends US warships to the depths, destroys US bases, and takes out critical US military systems.

Read More: US Air Force F-35s wrecked their enemies in mock air combat — even the new pilots were racking up kills against simulated near-peer threats

"In every case I know of, the F-35 rules the sky when it’s in the sky," Robert Work, a former deputy secretary of defense and an experienced war-gamer, said Thursday. "But it gets killed on the ground in large numbers."

Neither China nor Russia has developed a fifth-generation fighter as capable as the F-35, but even the best aircraft have to land. That leaves them vulnerable to attack.

"Things that sail on the surface of the sea are going to have a hard time," Ochmanek said.

Aircraft carriers, traditional beacons of American military might, are becoming increasingly vulnerable. They may be hard to kill, but they are significantly less difficult to take out of the fight.

US aircraft carriers are the world's most powerful ships and are nearly impossible to kill — here's why

Naval experts estimate that US aircraft carriers now need to operate at least 1,000 nautical miles from the Chinese mainland to keep out of range of China's anti-ship missiles, according to USNI News.

"If we went to war in Europe, there would be one Patriot battery moving, and it would go to Ramstein [in Germany]. And that’s it," Work explained, according to Breaking Defense. "We have 58 Brigade Combat Teams, but we don’t have anything to protect our bases. So what difference does it make?"

Simply put, the US military bases scattered across Europe and the Pacific don't have the anti-air and missile-defense capabilities required to handle the overwhelming volume of fire they would face in a high-end conflict.

**US networks and systems crumble**

In a conflict against a near-peer threat, US communications satellites, command-and-control systems, and wireless networks would be crippled.

"The brain and the nervous system that connects all of these pieces is suppressed, if not shattered," Ochmanek said of this scenario. Work said the Chinese call this type of attack "system destruction warfare."

The Chinese would "attack the American battle network at all levels, relentlessly, and they practice it all the time," Work said. "On our side, whenever we have an exercise, when the red force really destroys our command and control, we stop the exercise and say, 'let's restart.'"

**A sobering assessment**

"These are the things that the war games show over and over and over, so we need a new American way of war without question," Work stressed.

Ochmanek and Work have both seen US war games play out undesirably, and their damning observations reflect the findings of an assessment done from last fall.

"If the United States had to fight Russia in a Baltic contingency or China in a war over Taiwan, Americans could face a decisive military defeat," the National Defense Strategy Commission — a bipartisan panel of experts picked by Congress to evaluate the National Defense Strategy — said in a November report.

The report called attention to the erosion of the US's military edge by rival powers, namely Russia and China, which have developed a "suite of advanced capabilities heretofore possessed only by the United States."

The commission concluded the US is "at greater risk than at any time in decades."

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***The Washington Post***: **China is not an enemy**

**By M. Taylor Fravel , J. Stapleton Roy , Michael D. Swaine , Susan A. Thornton and Ezra Vogel**

***The Washington Post*: July 3, 2019 at 9:00 AM**

**Dear President Trump and members of Congress:**

We are members of the scholarly, foreign policy, military and business communities, overwhelmingly from the United States, including many who have focused on Asia throughout our professional careers. We are deeply concerned about the growing deterioration in U.S. relations with China, which we believe does not serve American or global interests. Although we are very troubled by Beijing’s recent behavior, which requires a strong response, we also believe that many U.S. actions are contributing directly to the downward spiral in relations.

The following seven propositions represent our collective views on China, the problems in the U.S. approach to China and the basic elements of a more effective U.S. policy. Our institutional affiliations are provided for identification purposes only.

1. China’s troubling behavior in recent years — including its turn toward greater domestic repression, increased state control over private firms, failure to live up to several of its trade commitments, greater efforts to control foreign opinion and more aggressive foreign policy — raises serious challenges for the rest of the world. These challenges require a firm and effective U.S. response, but the current approach to China is fundamentally counterproductive.

2. We do not believe Beijing is an economic enemy or an existential national security threat that must be confronted in every sphere; nor is China a monolith, or the views of its leaders set in stone. Although its rapid economic and military growth has led Beijing toward a more assertive international role, **many Chinese officials and other elites know that a moderate, pragmatic and genuinely cooperative approach with the West serves China’s interests**. Washington’s adversarial stance toward Beijing weakens the influence of those voices in favor of assertive nationalists. With the right balance of competition and cooperation, U.S. actions can strengthen those Chinese leaders who want China to play a constructive role in world affairs.

3. U.S. efforts to treat China as an enemy and decouple it from the global economy will damage the United States’ international role and reputation and undermine the economic interests of all nations. U.S. opposition will not prevent the continued expansion of the Chinese economy, a greater global market share for Chinese companies and an increase in China’s role in world affairs. Moreover, the United States cannot significantly slow China’s rise without damaging itself. If the United States presses its allies to treat China as an economic and political enemy, it will weaken its relations with those allies and could end up isolating itself rather than Beijing.

4. The fear that Beijing will replace the United States as the global leader is exaggerated. Most other countries have no interest in such an outcome, and it is not clear that Beijing itself sees this goal as necessary or feasible. Moreover, a government intent on limiting the information and opportunities available to its own citizens and harshly repressing its ethnic minorities will not garner meaningful international support nor succeed in attracting global talent. The best American response to these practices is to work with our allies and partners to create a more open and prosperous world in which China is offered the opportunity to participate. Efforts to isolate China will simply weaken those Chinese intent on developing a more humane and tolerant society.

5. Although China has set a goal of becoming a world-class military by midcentury, it faces immense hurdles to operating as a globally dominant military power. However, Beijing’s growing military capabilities have already eroded the United States’ long-standing military preeminence in the Western Pacific. **The best way to respond to this is not to engage in an open-ended arms race centered on offensive, deep-strike weapons and the virtually impossible goal of reasserting full-spectrum U.S. dominance up to China’s borders. A wiser policy is to work with allies to maintain deterrence, emphasizing defensive-oriented, area denial capabilities, resiliency and the ability to frustrate attacks on U.S. or allied territory, while strengthening crisis-management efforts with Beijing**.

6. Beijing is seeking to weaken the role of Western democratic norms within the global order. But **it is not seeking to overturn vital economic and other components of that order from which China itself has benefited for decades**. Indeed, China’s engagement in the international system is essential to the system’s survival and to effective action on common problems such as climate change. The United States should encourage Chinese participation in new or modified global regimes in which rising powers have a greater voice. A zero-sum approach to China’s role would only encourage Beijing to either disengage from the system or sponsor a divided global order that would be damaging to Western interests.

7. In conclusion, a successful U.S. approach to China must focus on creating enduring coalitions with other countries in support of economic and security objectives. It must be based on a realistic appraisal of Chinese perceptions, interests, goals and behavior; an accurate match of U.S. and allied resources with policy goals and interests; and a rededication of U.S. efforts to strengthen its own capacity to serve as a model for others. Ultimately, **the United States’ interests are best served by restoring its ability to compete effectively in a changing world and by working alongside other nations and international organizations rather than by promoting a counterproductive effort to undermine and contain China’s engagement with the world.**

We believe that the large number of signers of this open letter clearly indicates that **there is no single Washington consensus endorsing an overall adversarial stance toward China**, as some believe exists.

SIGNED:

**M. Taylor Fravel** is a professor of political science at MIT. J. Stapleton Roy is a distinguished scholar at the Wilson Center and a former U.S. ambassador to China. Michael D. Swaine is a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Susan A. Thornton is a senior fellow at Yale Law School’s Paul Tsai China Center and a former acting assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs. Ezra Vogel is a professor emeritus at Harvard University.

The above individuals circulated the letter, which was signed by the following:

●**James Acton, co-director, Nuclear Policy Program and Jessica T. Mathews Chair, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace**

**●Craig Allen, former U.S. ambassador to Brunei from 2014–2018**

**●Andrew Bacevich, co-founder, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft**

**●Jeffrey A. Bader, former senior director for East Asia on National Security Council 2009-2011 and fellow, Brookings Institution**

**●C. Fred Bergsten, senior fellow and director emeritus, Peterson Institute for International Economics**

**●Jan Berris, vice president, National Committee on United States-China Relations**

**●Dennis J. Blasko, former U.S. Army Attaché to China, 1992-1996**

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**●Jerome A. Cohen, faculty director, US-Asia Law Institute, New York University**

**●Warren I. Cohen, distinguished university professor emeritus, University of Maryland**

**●Bernard Cole, former U.S. Navy captain**

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**●Lee Hamilton, former congressman; former president and director of the Wilson Center**

**●Clifford A. Hart Jr., former U.S. consul general to Hong Kong and Macau, 2013-2016**

**●Paul Heer, adjunct professor, George Washington University; former National Intelligence Officer for East Asia, 2007-2015**

**●Eric Heginbotham, principal research scientist, Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Center for International Studies**

**●Ambassador Carla A. Hills, former United States Trade Representative, 1989-1993; chair & CEO Hills & Company, International Consultants**

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**●Jonathan D. Pollack, nonresident senior fellow, John L. Thornton China Center, Brookings Institution**

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**●Shelley Rigger, Brown Professor of East Asian Politics, Davidson College**

**●Charles S. Robb, former U.S. senator (1989-2001) and former chairman of the East Asia subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; governor of Virginia from 1982 to 1986**

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**●Scott D. Sagan, the Caroline S.G. Munro Professor of Political Science, Stanford University**

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**●James Steinberg, former deputy secretary of state, 2009-2011**

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**●Strobe Talbott, former deputy secretary of state, 1994-2001**

**●Anne F. Thurston, former senior research professor, School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University**

**●Andrew G. Walder, Denise O’Leary and Kent Thiry Professor, School of Humanities and Sciences, Stanford University**

**●Graham Webster, coordinating editor, Stanford-New America DigiChina Project**

**●David A. Welch, University Research Chair, Balsillie School of International Affairs**

**●Daniel B. Wright, president and CEO, GreenPoint Group; former managing director for China and the Strategic Economic Dialogue, Treasury Department**