

The Long-View: The Multifaceted War Between the United States and China—A New Strategy

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Anyone who believes the United States has its act together in its strategic approach to dealing with China will be disabused after reading this essay. Wayne Michael Hall, General Hall, Mike Hall is fearless in presenting a compelling case—actually, more than a compelling case—that not only is our strategy lacking, but a U.S. China-focused strategy is essentially just a fanciful artifact of one’s imagination. In making his case, the author presents potent facts, cogent argument and reasoned judgment.

The author’s unvarnished conviction is that the United States is in the midst of at least a century-long, non-traditional competitive war with China for global supremacy: a non-shooting—thus-far—war that he claims we do not even recognize or acknowledge. The intended reader—effectively anyone with an official, business, or academic interest or responsibility in seeing the U.S. “win” over China in the long-term—is in for an intellectual treat, an arduous treat for sure, but one worth their read, study, serious contemplation, and—if they are or plan to be a heeded, respected public leader—action!

Tackling this lengthy read, expect the following. First, you are treated to the author’s fuzz-free description of the problem. Second, he provides panoramic—plus detailed—discussion of significant influencing factors, views, conditions that bear upon either or sometimes both nations’ competitive approach. Third, and most useful for follow-on substantive debate and discussion are his views about the way ahead—both broad-gauge categories of effort but also critical issues that could or should be addressed within those categories. It is important to note that while the author labels many issues or items as “must-do,” most-critical to grasp is his intent. Standing above everything written is his visceral commitment and passion to right what he views as if not a sinking ship, at least a listing ship. In that context, this essay should not be thought of as a take-it-or-leave-it proposition, but instead as a *framework* that can fuel definitive, observable long-term progress—progress that nibbles not at peripheral issues but at the heart of the challenge he poses—winning the long-term competition with China.

That said, here are some glimpses of things to look for in the three categories.

The problem. General Hall lays the groundwork with this premise.

[The Chinese] have taken the parts and pieces of what makes America strong, as represented by our elements of national power. They *sliced and diced these elements into many small pieces*. They attack, subvert, manipulate, control, and infiltrate each of the small elements, which they think will yield immense dividends into their long-term (one hundred-year) marathon to dispose of the United States and replace it as the only super-power in the world via attacking the parts that make up our strategic whole. This is ingenious in that they can perform this multifaceted war/assault without our becoming alarmed because of the large numbers of moving pieces of national power, their disparate relationships, and subtle machinations of seizure and manipulation.

He labels this reality as “the clarion call to alarm, alert, and empower our strengths not only to react to China’s intentions, but in a positive sense, to set our own course against China.”

Important context. The author addresses significant conditions that help to define how and why China views the competition as they do. And he separately addresses significant issues and factors that frame the current U.S. behavior—or lack of it—toward China.

To some, categorizing China’s years-long, decades-long behavior as a war might seem to be overstatement. But the author’s description of long-standing—plus new, 21st Century—context, all characterized by: China’s deep-rooted cultural strategic thinking, its ongoing behavior and actions; U.S. indifference and lethargy; and the unprecedented effect of this century’s exponential increase in worldwide access to information soon have the reader nodding in agreement and saying to him- or herself, “Yep. We’re in an ongoing war, and we better confront it.”

The scope of conceptual thinking and matter-of-fact detail needed to capture the essence of China’s approach is wide and deep. General Hall describes centuries-old conceptual pillars that are still relevant and observable in China’s full-fledged ongoing *unrestricted war*. He discusses *shi*, China’s conceptual approach to strategy. He describes China’s use of the *Assassin’s Mace*, a form of asymmetric warfare where “the inferior defeats the superior,” where success “assumes it can ... lull the opponent into complacency.” He invokes Clausewitz, reminding the reader that while *On War* unsurprisingly addressed war, war’s goal has always been its “political object,”—exactly as it is with China’s *unrestricted war* of today. The author prophetically notes too the glove-like fit between Sun Tzu’s thinking more than two millennia ago and today’s Chinese thinking. The author usefully notes that Sun Tzu is required reading for all officers of the People’s Liberation Army. From Sun Tzu, he notes:

All warfare is based on deception; Pretend inferiority and encourage his arrogance; ... To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill; [W]hat is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy’s strategy; ... [S]upreme excellence in war is to attack the enemy’s plans. Next best is to disrupt his alliances; Thus, those skilled in war subdue the enemy’s army without battle.

The author describes how such age-old thinking is playing out today in: China’s pursuit of economic superiority; its ongoing drive for regional—and eventual global—military superiority; its pedal-to-the-metal pursuit of information superiority; its intent to reduce the primacy of the U.S. dollar as the world’s preferred currency via pursuit of “monetary plurality”; its pursuit of regional primacy and others.

In terms of U.S. conditions that aid China’s efforts, the author is unsparing. He states: “we have failed to recognize the magnitude or the multifaceted nature of China’s grand strategy;” instead, our “strategy seems to stop at the military option”, mistaking it for grand strategy. We fail to recognize the ways that China is waging unrestricted war, and we do not think or plan for the long term. He adds, our “bureaucracies prove slow, dim-witted, and plodding, and do not know it, or if they know it, prove content to be unchanging, to resist new and creative ideas, and thus create a climate of mediocrity.” Continuing unabashed, he makes the case that our “political system includes, and harbors corrupt individuals motivated by aggressive Chinese influence peddlers, who exert sway, blackmail and even block our political leaders’ attention to our enemy.” He calls on leaders to “be realistic and acknowledge the truth.” “Our thinking and assumptions have been poor,” ...including that of “our intellectual elites”

especially since “our Cold War victory.” He notes, too, the significant impact of our two-, four- and six-year election cycles that too often serve as very real structural hurdles to the individual political leader who might otherwise be persuaded to adopt a longer-term view.

The author elaborates on the above in the essay, but these broad strokes are the essence of both the environment that surround China’s pursuit of its agenda and the circumstances which too often explain U.S. indifference or inaction. Regardless, these realities serve as the foundation for the author’s approach to righting the U.S. strategic posture toward China.

Solution framework. In brief, the author’s vision for the way ahead is the creation of a grand strategy, one that includes specific approaches that compel day-to-day, year-by-year U.S. commitment to its implementation. The strategy is creative—inspired by original, serious, imaginative thinking. And apart from the written word, what leaps from every page is the unmistakable personal investment by the author to frame a better way to deal with China.

Integral to the strategy are its key physical features, and—as important because they drive its direction and structure—critical mindsets the U.S. must bring to the challenge—four strategy-driving features. Regretfully, the reader will realize these elements are absent from our current approach to China. But without understanding and embracing them, there is no grand strategy. The grand strategy must:

✓ *Champion and incorporate the nature of 21st Century war.* Forever, the image of war has conjured up notions involving the clash of combat forces. But Sun Tzu noted long ago, “those skilled in war subdue the enemy’s army without battle.” Today, the world is awash in information. Like it or not, this reality is—or should be—driving major changes in our views of war. Data and information are abundant, and the resultant need for knowledge has become predominant. The traditional view of war recognizes the conduct of war in physical (air, land, sea, space) and functional (cyberspace, electromagnetic spectrum) domains. But the author believes this construct is passe. He believes that domains need to be relabeled dimensions of war, and he argues for two significant additions—*information and cognition dimensions*. He explains: “war is still the pursuit of policies and political objectives by other means. But ‘other means’ include tangible and intangible struggles.” Thus, he acknowledges that skillful thinking that leverages data, information, and knowledge can influence competition and lead one’s enemy to defeat...just as the employment of traditional combat force might. The notion that war now includes combat forces, but also other initiatives is the thinking behind *unrestricted war*, war by other means, or non-traditional war. This construct is the central idea and logical underpinning that, in the author’s words, enables the grand strategy to boast about having a clear *theory of victory*.

✓ *Adopt and enforce a whole-of government approach.* Building upon the need to broaden our view in our own pursuit of an “unlimited war” with China brings with it specific requirements. Common sense and logic mandate that if war involves more than military force the strategy must include all parts of government. This phrase rolls off the lips with ease. But to make it real requires both an intellectual and practical framework—words plus actions. “Modern war in the Information Age will be battles and struggles of the parts and pieces of *all elements of one’s national power*. Some of these battles will involve violence; however, most will be nonviolent.” The author convinces the reader that the elements of national power are the core of a U.S. grand strategy that’s up

to the task of winning. He explains the need for a *national command and control apparatus*. He nominates a list of 50 elements that make up U.S. national power. Attesting to his view that the essay is a *framework*—not *the* solution—is his invitation to discuss, debate, and argue about the list. To help assess his list of 50, he offers the reader more than 30 considerations to help. He describes how to employ the elements to create a *calculus* capable of measuring competitive progress against China. And leveraging the *calculus*, he shows how progress could be tracked with a *national scorecard*. He concludes with a priceless diagram that illustrates how this all would work in a whole-of-government construct.

Although the above describes the tangible parts of the grand strategy, there is also a critical intangible—*WILL*—without which, General Hall asserts, there can be no strategy. At a macro level, he argues persuasively that U.S. national *WILL* is “the heart of our struggle” with China. He states, “the battle for dominance of *will* is central to all competition.” Underscoring how *WILL* breathes life into the grand strategy, he offers—what is arguably the best visual in the essay—his *18-element model of will*—not to be confused, cautions the author, with *willpower*. Convincingly underscoring the importance that he attaches to *will* is simply this: he wrote a book about it—*The Power of Will in International Conflict: How to Think Critically in Complex Environments*.

✓ *Embrace and support achieving mastery of how to think in “complex and dynamic conditions.”* Some of you might be saying to yourself, “Don’t tell me how to think; I know how to think.” Keep your powder dry ... please. The author asks, “How must we transform our thinking and institutions to prevail ... over the long run?” He asserts, “solutions involve our mental worlds”:

Let us be realistic and acknowledge the truth. Our assumptions and thinking among our intellectual elites were terrible over the past years since the end of World War Two (except our Cold War victory), particularly as we dealt with Korea and China, Viet Nam, invading Iraq (2003-2007), and Afghanistan (2001-2021). ... We have no systematic way, nor the mental energy, to circle back constantly, tackle our underpinning assumptions, check their validity, and change our strategies and plans and actions if circumstances and our enemies had changed. ... We have no system of thought appropriate for the complexity of Chinese thinking and their views of us and the world and their long-term aspirations for global dominance.

In a section of the essay labeled, “What Can America Do to Win?” he offers a small selection of innovative, creative answers. Among them is a page-after-page detailed discussion of his proposed *system of thought*. This is not uncharted terrain for the author. He has written several books. Each one deals with a different topic, but the bumper sticker sub-title for each might be “How to Think in Complex Environments.” Unique to this essay is that he concentrates on the how-to-think challenge in the context of our competition with China. He offers philosophy, logic, relationships, priceless techniques and more—all tailored to our specific national challenge—China. He coaches, saying high-level thinking must have an explicit, specifically-defined *basis* that can focus, guide and be used to assess progress and effectiveness of the grand strategy. In this case, he defines the *basis* for high-level thinking about China as a *theory of victory*. The author’s laser focus on winning is captured when he cites J.F.C. Fuller: “Politically, the decisive point is the [enemy’s] will.” ... think not of physical destruction, ... “but of *mental destruction*.” This is at the same time both a memorable and appropriate mental image for the long war ahead with China. Although Fuller stated that mental destruction is enabled by destroying the enemy’s *will*, it must also be well-noted that outthinking the enemy remains a—perhaps ‘the’—key to defeating China’s *will*; it certainly is vital to winning the China competition.

The author's advocacy for a system of thought concentrating on *victory* is in essence *the big idea*. But where he makes an impact are in his detailed descriptions of how to apply it. He coaches to apply the push to *victory*, the pursuit of *mental destruction* with respect to each of the 50 elements of national security, with respect to each of the 18 elements in his *Will Thought Model*...and more!

✓ *Be tenacious in insisting upon competent, performance-driven leaders with a moral compass.* This essay "identifies mistakes and what America has not done well in its foreign affairs with China." A critical shortfall has been an inability to fill the leadership void—leadership that transcends election cycles, leadership that places national interests above political intrigue and personal agendas. The author says, "[w]e need leaders who perceive, think, plan, decide, act, assess, and adapt faster and better than the Chinese. ... We need leaders who understand the ... enemy, his grand strategy, and develop and enact [our own] grand strategy."

The author discusses the need for strong leadership throughout the essay, discussing how the presence or absence of leadership can be a key influencing factor in each element of his solution framework. Interestingly, he also argues for a "moral revitalization," inferring that some of our challenges reside solidly in the moral domain. The reader will find sketches of negative ethos issues manifested in both institutional and high-profile individual behaviors.

But he wisely avoids a moral harangue. Instead, he deftly introduces the reader to George Kennan, who with his 1946 State Department cable emerged as a thoughtful, previously unknown—but eventually acclaimed—critical instigator of our Cold War grand strategy of *containment*. Although not initially recognized as a leader, Kennan's cable embodied the moral ideal of speaking truth to power. He planted the seed that grew into a *national united effort*—one that eventually led in the late 1980s to the defeat of communism and the demise of the Soviet Union. The author provides a glimpse of what Kennan wrote.

- 1) Our first step must be to apprehend and recognize for what it is the nature of the movement with which we are dealing.
- 2) We must educate the public about the realities of the Russian situation. I cannot over-emphasize importance of this. Press cannot do this alone.
- 3) Much depends on health and vigor of our own society. World communism is like a malignant parasite which feeds only on diseased tissue. This is the point at which domestic and foreign policies meet. Every courageous and incisive measure to solve internal problems of our own society, to improve self-confidence, discipline, morale, and community spirit of our own people, is a diplomatic victory over Moscow.
- 4) We must plan and put forward for other nations a much more positive and constructive picture of the sort of world we would like to see than we have put forward in the past.
- 5) Finally, we must courageously and confidently adhere to our own methods and conceptions of human society, which include our history, philosophy, freedoms, standard of living, security, and ideology, because Americans built their collective soul on imagination and democratic ideals.

The reader can draw his or her own conclusions about what if any parallels exist between what Kennan said in 1946 and what Hall writes in this essay. The reviewer sees distinctive parallels: a focus on identifying the problem; characterization of relevant U.S. and Russian context that frames ways to solve the problem; and significantly—for today's China challenge—Kennan's implicit, perhaps even

unrecognized by him, plea for both a whole-of- government approach and a silent but unmistakable call for leadership to take on the problem.

The author sees each of the four components of a *solution framework* as essential. But competent, performance-oriented leadership guided by a moral compass is probably the scarcest natural resource in the United States. Without definitive leadership, this approach to developing and implementing a grand national strategy to win the China competition will face significant hurdles just getting out of the starting blocks.

So what?

The author has done the heavy lifting and rendered exceptional service to America by writing this essay. If you plan to or have read General Hall's essay, the experience is not unlike reading James Michener. At the end, you might exhale and congratulate yourself for having stuck with it. His thinking is both wide and deep. He leaves no rock unturned; he leaves no blind alley unexplored. But no reader will end this experience without knowing that he is genuinely authentic.

Mike Hall, my professional colleague and friend for more than half a century cares, he cares. He wants serious people to read this, think about it, and help influence the development of U.S. long-term strategy toward China.

That too is my hope. As I write this, it is in vogue to complain about ... well, almost everything. But I know there are men and women, serious, committed people, who just like Kennan, are out there in the trenches and who care as much as Mike Hall. Some, maybe many, are in positions to influence kick-starting a grand strategy to win the China competition. This paper is for you. Happy reading. Drive on!