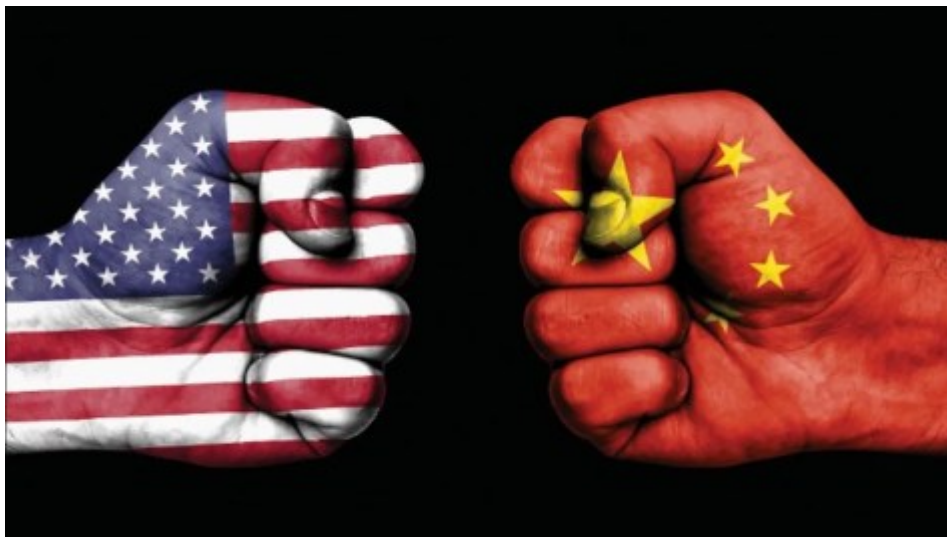


America's "Strategic Thinkers" Can't Think that America's Power is Fading

Description

By [DAVID P. GOLDMAN](#)



Russia's War On Ukraine Won't Likely Bring The US And China Together. Image: Twitter

NEW YORK – Prominent American strategists whom I have known for years and who previously displayed signs of rationality have gone mad at the prospect of American strategic decline. China is the obvious winner in the present international crisis. It has the luxury of choosing between two outcomes that increase its power: to act as a friend of all the parties in the Ukraine dispute and mediate the conflict, or to gain the battered Russian Federation as an ally. It probably can do both. The United States put Ukraine on track for a violent confrontation with Russia by undermining the Russian-backed Minsk II agreement, which would have kept Ukraine out of NATO and allowed home rule for the Russophone provinces Donetsk and Luhansk within a sovereign Ukraine. Russia charged that Washington intended to move nuclear missiles to the Russia-Ukraine border 300 miles from Moscow, and invaded Ukraine to preempt this. Whether the Biden administration insisted on Ukraine's option to join NATO out of design or incompetence, US policy is now in ruins. That leaves Washington debating how to deal with a China that fields 400 city-buster nuclear weapons and the ICBMs that would be needed to deliver them, as well as about 1,300 medium-to-long-range surface-to-ship missiles that probably can sink US aircraft carriers – not to mention a host of other strategic weapons. It also leaves Washington a couple of steps away from a nuclear confrontation with Russia, which last October tested a submarine-launched hypervelocity glide vehicle, a super-fast cruise missile that could hit Washington in 60 seconds from a submarine a hundred miles offshore. And it also leaves the United States with the prospect of the union of Russia's formidable technical talent, including a cadre of engineers as large as America's, with China's burgeoning high-tech industry. The simplest solution, in the view of former Defense Department official Seth Cropsey, is military confrontation with China. "One would expect the Russian invasion to formalize the return to traditional great-power politics, what theorists of international relations call 'multipolarity,' a system in which multiple political and military centers of gravity exist," Cropsey wrote in the [Wall Street Journal](#) on

March 9.

“This prediction is alluring and wrong,” Cropsey added, because of China’s lust for conquest: “China remains the crucial actor. The Communist Party under Mr Xi ... drew a unique lesson from the Soviet collapse. The Soviets failed not because they didn’t integrate capitalist insights into their economy but because they never went far enough in their external expansion.”

I should add that Cropsey, a dedicated amateur cellist, is a personal friend; I have dined at his home in Washington and think him personable and literate. But the above statement suggests that he is subject to a maniacal delusion. China’s strategic thinking says exactly the opposite, that expansion caused the downfall of the Soviet Empire.

On this topic, I recommend a recent essay by [Professor Wen Yang](#) of Fudan University, a prominent columnist for the leading Chinese news site “The Observer.” Wen writes: “World hegemony exercised in the name of liberalism must be opposed by the people of the world, and world hegemony exercised in the name of communism also must be opposed by the people of the world.”

From the ashes of Ukraine, Cropsey avers, will arise a strategy for world domination that I would characterize as straight out of Fu Manchu:

China will use Russia’s increasing isolation to transform Moscow into a petrochemical satellite, taking advantage of Western sanctions to secure Russian energy flows indefinitely. In turn, China hopes that Russia, humbled or emboldened by its Ukraine adventure – and with or without Mr. Putin at the helm– will occupy Western attention as Beijing gobbles up the choicest Pacific possessions and extends its economic and diplomatic tendrils into the Middle East, Africa and Eastern Europe. Far from accepting independent Russian action, China is counting on Russian failure to accelerate the satisfaction of its boundless appetite.

Another old friend, former Pentagon official Elbridge Colby, has taken the opportunity of the Ukraine war to promote his “Strategy of Denial,” which amounts to mining the Taiwan Strait and otherwise reinforcing Taiwan to forestall the mainland attack on Taiwan that Colby, like Cropsey, believes to be imminent.

I have known the affable Mr Colby – grandson of the late CIA chief William Colby – since he was a law student at Yale. I reviewed his book [here](#), concluding:

There is a close analogy here to the outbreak of war in 1914. An American attempt to deny China access to Taiwan would have the same effect as the Russian mobilization that triggered the conflict, in Christopher Clark’s authoritative account.

If one side mobilizes, the other must also try to avoid a catastrophic disadvantage – and this is how great powers “sleepwalk” (Clark) into wars they do not want and cannot win.

I have asked Colby numerous times in public forms how likely he thinks it is that China’s DF-21 or DF-26 missiles could target and destroy an American carrier under full steam. Answer came there none. If the US takes military measures that make it possible to ditch the One China policy and establish Taiwan as a sovereign state, China may well act preemptively and seize the island by force. If US planes try to stop this, China may sink the carrier that launched them. That could start a nuclear war, as Admiral James Staviridis describes in his 2021 thriller 2034.

Colby’s reluctance to answer the decisive question – whether Chinese missiles can sink US carriers – puts him in the company of the naval strategists of 1940 who watched torpedo bombers sink their battleships from Taranto to Singapore to Pearl Harbor.

Military logic, though, has little to do with these outbursts. Cropsey, Colby and other old friends simply cannot wrap their minds around the miserable fact that American power is fading, the consequence of thirty years of grotesque blunders following the end of the Cold War. They cannot bear the idea that America might have to share power with a rising China, and in their heart of hearts, they prefer a war, even a losing one. to this sort of humiliation.



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China is thinking, “Why the hell should we do the United States any sort of a favor? We’re not going to get rewarded for it.” We still have the tariffs in place that the Trump Administration put there, even though they’re not working. So why don’t we lift those? Why won’t we offer to have a new communique with China, a new broad agreement – they just had one with Russia – where we talk about among other things, something that’s important to them, the One China Policy.

We can be committed in some ways to Taiwan but in a way that reassures China Why can’t we open up new cooperation on Afghanistan? North Korea’s getting into the business of testing missiles and, for all I know, nuclear weapons. We need an agenda. But right now,

you have this bipartisan unity of bashing China, and this is not the time for it. Putin is the more immediate strategic adversary and threat to our interests. China is a longer-term challenge.

We have to sequence this. We have to prioritize. We have to figure out a way of getting China more distant from Mr. Putin. Imagine what it would be if Xi picked up the phone and called Putin and said, 'This isn't working for me. I don't want to get caught up in these secondary sanctions that the Americans are putting on. That isn't helping me get what I want, my third term. Cool it, Vlad.' Imagine if we could engineer that kind of phone call? Follow David P Goldman on Twitter at [@davidpgoldman](https://twitter.com/davidpgoldman)