



## **Is the New Thirty Years War Already Escalating?**

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**November 2018**

### **Executive Summary**

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\* Beijing concludes that no amount of US pressure on Seoul or Pyongyang will now be able to reverse the mega-trends taking shape in East Asia and the entire Eurasia. Hence, the Korean Peninsula emerges anew as the potential flash point.

\* Beijing is pessimistic about the overall trends in relations with the US despite the efforts put into a series of summit meetings and high-level negotiations. The escalating trade war is the least of problems. For Beijing, the scenario feared more is of the new Thirty Years War till 2049 becoming increasingly belligerent.

\* Xi Jinping instructed the PLA to prepare for anti-US contingencies where "simple self-defense was no longer enough."

\* Beijing has given up any expectations for a trade deal anytime soon. Under such circumstances, the likelihood of the New Thirty Years War becoming a shooting war keeps growing.

### **About ISPSW**

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## Analysis

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The PRC continues to accelerate and expand the preparations for a future war with the US. These include profound doctrinal transformations of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Beijing is motivated by an increasingly alarmist analysis of the US intentions, as well as shared readings of US intentions by the Kremlin and key European powers. Beijing's analysis of the evolving policy of the Trump White House concerning the denuclearization of Pyongyang also plays a major role in the revised threat assessment of the Forbidden City.

The commonly accepted threat assessment of the Forbidden City and the Kremlin is that the specter of a global war pitting the US against a Eurasian bloc led by China and Russia is growing. A European alliance with the US is no longer guaranteed. The Forbidden City and the Kremlin believe that European neutrality is more likely, although some support for the anti-US camp cannot be ruled out completely. These prospects encourage both Beijing and Moscow to hold tough policies vis-a-vis the US. Still, the overall preference of both Beijing and Moscow is to consolidate the Eurasian Sphere without resorting to war. Alas, both capitals are no longer certain this is possible.

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The Forbidden City and the Kremlin are now convinced that it is no longer inconceivable for the White House to consider the desperate struggle against the consolidation of a Eurasian Sphere dominated by Russia and China and increasingly attracting Germany-led Europe escalating into a world war. The US grand strategy that evoked these apprehensions was originally articulated by Wess Mitchell, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs in the US State Department, in testimony to the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 21 August 2018. Mitchell stated that "Russia and China are serious competitors that are building up the material and ideological wherewithal to contest US primacy and leadership in the 21st Century. It continues to be among the foremost national security interests of the United States to prevent the domination of the Eurasian landmass by hostile powers. The central aim of the [Trump] administration's foreign policy is to prepare our nation to confront this challenge by systematically strengthening the military, economic and political fundamentals of American power." Simply put, the US will do everything, even go to war, in order to prevent the domination of the Eurasian Sphere by Russia and China. The US struggle against Iran and the tacit alliance with Turkey are key facets of this struggle.

The visit, on 22 October, of US National Security Adviser John Bolton to Moscow convinced the Kremlin of the imminence of the US threat. Bolton delivered a mixed message. On the one hand, he warned of a growing Chinese threat to both countries and urged Russia to join the US in confronting China. On the other hand, he delivered a series of threats to Russia regarding the INF, Iran, Ukraine, Syria and any other place where Russia is actively pursuing what the Kremlin considers vital interests.

Fyodor Lukyanov, the well-informed Chairman of the Council on Russian Foreign and Defense Policy, reflected the incredulity of the Kremlin. Bolton should have known that there could be "no people crazy enough to think that Russia would be willing to join an anti-China alliance" and yet he pushed the point. "There is no doubt that the Trump Administration has China on their minds - it's their policy. Russia, of course, will not join them." Overall, Bolton impressed his interlocutors that the gap with the US is irreconcilable.

The Kremlin resolved that Russia should prepare for war in the foreseeable future and so informed Beijing. The Kremlin's response to the Trump White House was articulated on 27 October by Andrei Belousov, the Deputy Head of the Department of Nonproliferation and Arms Control at the Russian Foreign Ministry. He



asserted that Moscow could no longer rule out a potential future conflict between the US and Russia and stressed that Russia “will defend [its] territorial integrity and principles in response to US aggression.” Belousov further stated that “Russia is preparing for war, I have confirmed it. We are preparing to defend our homeland, our territorial integrity, our principles, our values, our people - we are preparing for such a war.”

There were many eyebrows raised in both Moscow and Beijing in mid-November following the release of a report of the National Defense Strategy Commission, as mandated by Congress, about the US military posture. The report, titled *Providing for the Common Defense*, identified the looming threats of conflict and war with Eurasian powers - starting with China and Russia - and concluded that the US military is woefully ill-prepared for the task.

The US is increasingly facing a myriad of security challenges. “Authoritarian competitors - especially China and Russia - are seeking regional hegemony and the means to project power globally. They are pursuing determined military buildups aimed at neutralizing US strengths. Threats posed by Iran and North Korea have worsened as those countries have developed more advanced weapons and creatively employed asymmetric tactics.” These high-quality threats enjoin the lingering legacy of the war on terrorism. “In multiple regions, gray-zone aggression - intimidation and coercion in the space between war and peace - has become the tool of choice for many. The dangers posed by transnational threat organizations, particularly radical jihadist groups, have also evolved and intensified. Around the world, the proliferation of advanced technology is allowing more actors to contest US military power in more threatening ways.”

Meanwhile, American military superiority has “eroded to a dangerous degree,” leaving the US in a “crisis of national security.” The report cast doubt about the US ability to withstand a major war with peer powers. “The US military could suffer unacceptably high casualties and loss of major capital assets in its next conflict,” the report stated. “It might struggle to win, or perhaps lose, a war against China or Russia. The United States is particularly at risk of being overwhelmed should its military be forced to fight on two or more fronts simultaneously. Additionally, it would be unwise and irresponsible not to expect adversaries to attempt debilitating kinetic, cyber, or other types of attacks against Americans at home while they seek to defeat our military abroad,” the report warned.

The report highlighted the political ramifications of the grave situation. “Rivals and adversaries are challenging the United States on many fronts and in many domains. America’s ability to defend its allies, its partners, and its own vital interests is increasingly in doubt. If the nation does not act promptly to remedy these circumstances, the consequences will be grave and lasting.” The US no longer enjoys the freedom of action it got used to since the end of the Cold War. “US military superiority is no longer assured and the implications for American interests and American security are severe.” The report blames the leadership in official Washington for the calamity. “Finally, due to political dysfunction and decisions made by both major political parties ... America has significantly weakened its own defense.”

What scares the Russians and the Chinese is the US approach to the dynamics of “great power competition” even if the US Armed Forces are in a bad shape. The close interconnection between US forces, major alliances and minor non-state players stemming from the mere presence of US and NATO forces in numerous trouble spots all over the world increases the risk of a small localized incident sparking a much wider conflict, perhaps even escalating into a global conflict nobody wants. As well, there exists the US penchant to use Jihadist and other questionable elements as proxies - from the mujahedin of Afghanistan to the “moderate Jihadists” of Syria - in order to directly challenge and harm the Kremlin’s vital interests. The ongoing build-up in northern



Afghanistan of large Jihadist forces - mostly originally from Central Asia, Siberia, the North Caucasus and Xinjiang - who “somehow” made their way safely from Syria-Iraq in the thousands, with weapons and funds, alarms both Moscow and Beijing that a major provocation is being prepared. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov recently warned that “foreign sponsors” are allowing Jihadism to “turn Afghanistan into a springboard for its expansion in Central Asia”. Erdogan’s unyielding commitment to the spread militant pan-Turkism in the Greater Central Asia and his assurances that he has Trump’s endorsement and support for this endeavor do not help calm these fears.

Russian senior officials often cite the interview of Zbigniew Brzezinski published in the 15-21 January 1998 issue of the *Le Nouvel Observateur* of Paris. He was asked whether he “regret[ed] having supported the Islamic fundamentalism, having given arms and advice to future terrorists?” Brzezinski was astounded by the question. “What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?” he asked rhetorically. Both the Kremlin and the Forbidden City are convinced that the 1998 logic of Brzezinski is still valid in the Trump White House.

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Meanwhile, Beijing identified the Eurasian Sphere as both the key to the long-term ascent of the PRC, and, consequently, an emerging major theater of confrontation with the US. In a November 6 article in the *Global Times*, Wang Haiyun of the China International Institute for Strategic Society, articulated the Chinese analysis of the region. “A grand Eurasia cooperation can provide antidote to unilateralism and hegemony,” he states. Therefore, Beijing “aims to forge a community of shared destiny with the central and eastern Eurasia at the center.” Little wonder that the US-led West embarked on a major campaign to reverse the rise of the Eurasian Sphere. “To control resources of the continent, scramble for Eurasian sphere of influence and check emerging countries including Russia and China, hegemonic power and its allies sensationalized neo-interventionism, neocolonialism, unilateralism and power politics, instigated Color Revolution and precipitated regime change.”

However, Wang Haiyun explains, the main venues by which the US is attempting to prevent and suppress the consolidation of the Eurasian Sphere are the overall US campaign against the ascent of China as a global power. “To prevent emerging countries from rising, hegemonic power has launched preemptory trade wars, attempted to protect the dollar’s hegemony and imposed sanctions on unwarranted charges. Furthermore, they schemed the Indo-Pacific strategy to contain China, tried to manipulate relations among emerging powers and threatened a new arms race, all of which require Eurasian nations to make concerted efforts to build a new international order.” Therefore, Wang Haiyun concludes, there is a limit to what can be done at the heart of Asia. “While superpowers are still ganging up, developing countries, especially emerging economies, should eliminate strategic suspicion and increase mutual trust, forge partnerships rather than alliances, set up a united front of emerging powers different from the West, and promote multilateral global governance to build a new international order where the developing world can have a say.” Ultimately, the PRC will have to bear the main burden of confronting the US in the other main theaters.

Indeed, for Beijing, the next political milestone has been the ramifications of what happened and what did not happen on Friday, 9 November, in the US. A minister-level US summit with China happened. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis met with their counterparts the Director of the Office of Foreign Affairs of the Communist Party of China Yang Jiechi and Defense Minister Wei Fenghe. A US summit with North Korea did not happen. Kim Yong-Chol, the DPRK’s intelligence supremo and top nuclear negotiator,



cancelled at the last minute his planned meeting with Pompeo. The Forbidden City is convinced that the overall context of both events sheds lights on the ominous path the US is desperately pushing the Far East and ultimately the entire Eurasia. The common denominator of both events, according to Chinese senior officials, is that there is nobody to talk to rationally in Trump's Washington. Hence, the likelihood of unwanted and preventable world war is growing.

Beijing is convinced that the US-instigated dynamics that led to the cancellation of the summit between Kim Yong-Chol and Pompeo made the Korean Peninsula emerge anew as the potential flash point. The US preconditions for the summit were irrational and unacceptable. On the one hand, there is the US adamant refusal to end the state of war with the DPRK. On the other hand, the US insists on the DPRK providing very detailed data (including GPS readings) on all nuclear and strategic installations. When the North Koreans complained that given the existing state of war such data can be used for a preemptive strike against them, the US interlocutors insisted: "You'll have to trust us" without providing any formal assurances. When the North Koreans mentioned the long history of US-imposed regime changes in a summit preparatory meeting - their US interlocutors broke the meeting. The summit was cancelled soon afterwards.

The last-minute cancellation of the US-DPRK high-level discussions in New York is indicative of the building mistrust. Pyongyang's frustration with the US insistence on rigid sanctions regime is growing. Both Pyongyang and Seoul are furious about the not-so-veiled threats by the US Embassy in Seoul to South Korean conglomerates interested in business and investments in the North. In Pyongyang, the *Rodong Sinmun* has published several editorials of defiance and there is growing hostility in the media toward the US.

Meanwhile, closed-door political briefings to the North Korean elites once again reiterate that the DPRK "will not give up nuclear weapons" irrespective of agreements and understandings with the US. Significantly, the briefings stress that Kim Jong-Un himself "has no intention to let go of nuclear weapons."

Both Beijing and Pyongyang were stunned by the publication of the CSIS report and the ensuing major exposé in *The New York Times* about the DPRK's nuclear and strategic infrastructure. Both capitals consider the publications intentional leaks orchestrated by the Trump White House. Hence, the publications constitute threats to Pyongyang, accusations of violation of agreements that never existed, and building anew a case for war. As far as Beijing and Pyongyang are concerned, Kim Jong-Un delivered on what he had promised Trump (cessation of testing and dismantling specific facilities) but ignored Washington's unilateral demands for detailed lists and unilateral freeze of strategic activities. In Beijing, senior officials cite approvingly the 13 November warning by Harry J. Kazianis in *The Hill* that Washington is on an "alarming path to war between North Korea and America".

Hence, the 16 November announcement of a weapon testing attended by Kim Jong-Un suddenly received political significance. The KCNA bulletin was mundane. Kim Jong-Un "visited the test ground of the Academy of Defense Science and supervised a newly developed ultramodern tactical weapon test." Kim Jong-Un "was so excited" after he witnessed "the power of the tactical weapon". Kim Jong-Un stated that the successful test was "a decisive turn in bolstering the fighting capacity of the Korean People's Army." Significantly, the weapon in question is the result of a long-term development program originally initiated and directed by Kim Jong-Il. As such, the weapon does not constitute a response to the negotiations with the US.

Meanwhile, the Trump White House continues to demand the list from North Korea as a precondition for the second Trump-Kim summit. In mid-November, US Vice President Mike Pence stated that it is "absolutely



imperative in this next [US-DPRK] summit that we come away with a plan for identifying all of the weapons in question, identifying all the development sites, allowing for inspections of the sites and the plan for dismantling nuclear weapons." He further stressed that the outcome of the summit must include a "verifiable plan" for the North Korean denuclearization.

Concurrently, presidents Xi Jinping and Moon Jae-In met and agreed to "work closely together", coordinate their handling of the second summit if one occurs, in order to achieve a "mutually beneficial conclusion." Xi Jinping told Moon Jae-In that the PRC will continue to play a "constructive role" on the Korean Peninsula. Significantly, both presidents stressed the commonality of their core interests. "In terms of cooperating with neighboring countries, pursuing peace and safety on the peninsula and implementing an equal, fair order, China and South Korea have similar positions," Xi Jinping stated. "As the two countries' strategic interests of peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia coincide, I hope we can cooperate more closely on the development of China-South Korea relations and the peace process on the [Korean] peninsula," Moon Jae-In echoed.

Actions on the ground confirm that the Chinese commitment to North Korea goes well beyond the Chinese effectively ignoring all possible sanctions. On 10 November, the PRC held a major public celebration to mark the completion of the final decking on a new bridge over the Tumen River connecting Namyang District in North Hamgyong Province and the Chinese city of Tumen. Chinese and North Korean officials in attendance noted that "the bridge is the result of shared economic interests between North Korea and China," and that "the bridge will likely help invigorate existing Sino-North Korean trade." The bridge will become operational in early 2019. On 16 November, Kim Jong-Un made a highly publicized guidance tour of the master-planning agency overseeing the marked expansion of the city of Sinuiju, North Phyongan Province, right on the Chinese border. Kim Jong-Un stressed that the construction of large projects, from housing complexes to transportation arteries, must be expedited to meet the demands of the rapidly expanding trade between North Korea and China.

Thus, the Forbidden City concludes, no amount of US pressure on Seoul or Pyongyang will now be able to reverse the mega-trends taking shape in East Asia and the entire Eurasia. Both Seoul and Pyongyang concluded, and Beijing concurs, that the crux of US policy is to make life for the DPRK unbearable through sanctions and pressure until the DPRK surrenders its entire nuclear program. The US is determined to have denuclearization achieved through unilateral extortion and not through rapprochement and building of trust. However, neither the two Koreas, nor the region's great powers - China and Russia - will let the US spoil their historic progress toward a genuine rapprochement in East Asia. Meanwhile, the drawing together of the two Koreas and the emergence of joint strategic transportation and energy projects are both the key to the further integration of South Korea and Japan in the Eurasian Sphere dominated by China and Russia, as well as to the banishment of the US. In this context, Beijing is increasingly looking at Moscow to provide the bridge that will bring together East and West into a new era of Eurasianism.

Beijing believes, and rightly so, that Moscow is increasingly focusing on East Asia as the key to rejuvenating the entire Eurasian Sphere both strategically and economically. As such, Russia's strategic interests increasingly overlap China's. Writing in the *Global Times* on 15 November, Dr. Cui Heng of the Russian School, the Dalian University of Foreign Languages, identified "a stepped-up priority for East Asian countries in Russian diplomacy." He stressed that this is an integral part of a global mega-trend. "Driven by the rapid economic development in Asia-Pacific countries such as China, Japan and South Korea, the focus of international politics and economy has shifted from both sides of the Atlantic to the two flanks of the Pacific since the beginning of



the 21st century. The Asia-Pacific region has been playing an increasingly important role in Russian diplomacy, embodying the Kremlin's policy shift to Asia."

Moscow is adamant on capitalizing on and exploiting this mega-trend, Cui Heng argues. "Integrating into the Asia-Pacific economic process and participating in the reform of governance in East Asia is of vital significance to Russia." Little wonder, he stresses, that "Russia's pivot to the Asia-Pacific region is accelerating." Under these circumstances, "Russia will have an important role to play in regional governance, thus allowing the Kremlin to boost its international standing in regional and global affairs." He emphasizes the significance of the Russian pivot to East Asia to "the Greater Eurasian Partnership which was proposed by Putin and includes the pursuit of a new regional pattern and transnational economic and security cooperation. In essence, it is Russia's strategic defense layout in response to economic crisis and diplomatic isolation." Cooperating with China in the pursuit of common objectives, Cui Heng concludes, "has made the Greater Eurasian Partnership more achievable and also contributed to Moscow's efforts to increase its influence in the regional integration process." Little wonder that the Forbidden City is convinced that the comprehensive geo-strategic and geo-economic cooperation with the Kremlin in East Asia and throughout the Eurasian Sphere will keep intensifying.

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Beijing is pessimistic about the overall trends in relations with the US despite the efforts put into a series of summit meetings and high-level negotiations. The escalating trade war is the least of problems. For the Forbidden City, the scenario feared more is of the new Thirty Years War till 2049 becoming increasingly belligerent.<sup>1</sup> "Chinese officials are open for talks with their US counterparts to end the ongoing trade war, but they are also aware that fundamental differences between the two countries are not likely to be solved anytime soon and they are preparing for a prolonged battle," Wang Cong wrote in the *Global Times*. "The rivalry between China and the United States extends far beyond their ongoing trade war and top-level diplomatic and security talks between the two countries in Washington are unlikely to change that," Lee Jeong-ho concurred in the *South China Morning Post*. Professor Zhang Baohui, the Director of the Center for Asian Pacific Studies at Lingnan University in Hong Kong, warned that the PRC was facing "the beginning of a new cold war... The US and China are becoming fiercely competitive across all domains... This is the hallmark of a cold war."

On 9 November, during the Washington summit talks, the US demanded that the PRC canceled the acquiring and attaining of self-reliance in key/core electronic technologies. This is the crux of the US-urged canceling of the Made-in-China-2025 program. These demands take the trade war to a new level unacceptable to Beijing. Bai Ming, the Deputy Director of the International Market Research Institute under the Ministry of Commerce, concluded that "the fundamental differences between China and the US over the trade dispute will not be addressed immediately." There is no point in compromises with, and concessions to, the US because "all these agreements led nowhere because the US backed out of their promises every time." The onus was in official Washington. "China has been very clear from the beginning that we are always open for dialogue, but we are not going to give up our core interests just for the sake of a deal," Bai Ming stated.

The security discussions were equally bitter and futile. "The Chinese side made it clear to the United States that it should stop sending its vessels and military aircraft close to Chinese islands and stop actions that undermine China's sovereignty and security interests," Yang Jiechi stated. The US pointedly refused to

<sup>1</sup> See: Yossef Bodansky, *The New Thirty Years War (2018-2049)*, ISPSW Issue No. 583, October 2018



consider the issue and rejected the warning by China. Mattis stated that “the United States will continue to fly, sail and operate wherever international law allows,” while Pompeo criticized China’s “militarization” of the South China Sea. As well, senior US officials told their Chinese counterparts to “remove missile systems” in the South China Sea.

The “US-China diplomatic and security talks failed to produce a way out of the morass,” Chinese senior officials reported, unnerving Beijing. The interlocutors failed to reach agreement on all other issues as well - including human rights, the Uighurs, Taiwan, the New Silk Road (or BRI), Iran and North Korea. Both Yang Jiechi and Wei Fenghe concluded that the whole 9 November experience constituted a firsthand proof from the highest authorities in Washington that Beijing’s dread of war and no economic agreements is indeed correct and pragmatic. After the talks, Wei Fenghe warned that any future “accidental clash” between the US and Chinese navies “could erupt into a global war.” He added that he had warned Mattis that “a confrontation” between the two countries would “spell disaster to all”. As well, the meeting between Yang and Bolton was also a failure, including the discussion of prospects of success for the planned Xi-Trump summit during the G20 Summit in Buenos Aires.

The crisis escalated further in the aftermath of the 13 November conversation Vice President Pence had with Josh Rogin of the *Washington Post*. “When President Trump meets Chinese President Xi Jinping in Argentina later this month, the escalating tension between the world’s two global powers will face a crucial test. If China wants to avoid an all-out cold war with the United States and its partners, it must fundamentally change its behavior,” Pence told Rogin. “The United States ... won’t back down.” There would be improvement in Sino-US relations “only if Beijing is willing to make massive changes that the United States is demanding in its economic, military and political activities.” Pence warned that “this is China’s best (if not last) chance to avoid a cold-war scenario with the United States.” “In addition to trade,” Pence elaborated, “China must offer concessions on several issues, including but not limited to its rampant intellectual property theft, forced technology transfer, restricted access to Chinese markets, respect for international rules and norms, efforts to limit freedom of navigation in international waters and Chinese Communist Party interference in the politics of Western countries.” US patience is running thin. “If Beijing doesn’t come up with significant and concrete concessions, the United States is prepared to escalate economic, diplomatic and political pressure on China,” Pence warned. Ultimately, Pence confirmed all of the worst-case assessments of Xi Jinping and the Forbidden City.

On 19 November, President Trump flatly rejected Xi Jinping’s offer of trade concession and slight modification of the Made-in-China-2025 program. “It’s not acceptable,” Trump quipped.

By now, the Forbidden City has given up on reduction of tension with the US. Xi Jinping capitalized on a Central Military Commission meeting (13-14 November) in order to further accelerate the PLA’s war preparations and reforms in order to meet the challenges of a future confrontation with the US well into the middle of the century - till 2049.

On 13 November, Xi Jinping addressed the senior generals. He instructed the PLA “to reform its policy system to form a solid foundation in order to build a world-class force.” Xi Jinping stressed that “a systemic and deep reform is urgently needed to resolve deeply rooted conflicts and problems inside the policy system, extensively strengthen the effects of the ongoing military reforms, open a new chapter in Chinese armed forces’ development, and obtain the upper hand among world powers as well as in any future wars.” He ordered the PLA to “establish regulatory mechanisms on joint operations, fine-tune combat-readiness system,





and set up a modern institution that governs the use of military forces.”

On 15 November, the PLA High Command issued instructions regarding long-term force build-up. The instructions alluded to the adoption of a new assertive and offensive-oriented doctrine. The PLA’s “forces must not be caught out by the rapid evolution of warfare and technology in the 21st century and must prepare to move beyond a strategy of simple self-defense,” the instructions read. “Better planning would allow the military to anticipate and control the course of land warfare.” PLA commanders and planners must demonstrate “greater recognition of the need for closer cooperation with the air force and the development of cyberwarfare capabilities in response to evolving threats on new battlefields.”

The PRC must anticipate and forestall the enemy’s designs. “Proactive planning could break the passive situation and completely control how warfare should come out,” the PLA’s instructions read. “If a land war is fought according to pre-designed plans, troops ... can strike enemies by surprise and make maximum use of weaponry, bringing the possibility of victory closer in leaps and bounds.” The instructions concluded by alluding to their anti-US focus. “As China’s interests abroad had expanded,” the instructions explain, the PLA is now “in closer contact with the US and [its] world’s largest military.” Under such circumstances, “simple self-defense was no longer enough,” the PLA instructions concluded.

Comparable long-term modernization processes are taking place in the PLA’s Air Force and Navy. Formal implementation started in mid-November.

The PLA Air Force adopted “a roadmap for building a stronger modern air force in three steps” that will be “in line with the overall goal of building national defense and the armed forces.” Lieutenant General Xu Anxiang, Deputy Commander of PLA Air Force, explained that “the first step is to, by 2020, build a strategic force that integrates aviation and space power, and strike and defense capabilities, in which the fourth generation of equipment serves as backbone and the third generation of equipment as mainstay. The systematic combat capabilities will be enhanced. The second step requires the air force to improve strategic capabilities and modernize its theory, organizational structure, service personnel, and weaponry. The building of a modern and strategic air force will be basically completed by 2035... The third step will see the air force fully transformed into a world-class force by mid-21st century.”

Senior Colonel Wang Zhonghua, the Head of the Planning Bureau of the PLA Air Force’s Equipment Department explained that the Air Force “intends to expand its presence into space as part of its plan to become a world-class force.” He stressed that “the Air Force spares no efforts in handling all threats, and is gearing up to extend its reach beyond the clouds and into space.” Consequently, “the Air Force is undergoing revolutionary changes that will generate a system that can function in future warfare scenarios.”

Meanwhile, senior PLA Navy officers declared that “China is boosting its South China Sea naval fleet in the face of America’s increasingly assertive attempts to challenge Beijing’s claims to the disputed waters.” In this endeavor, the PLA Navy is “on track to meet the American military challenge” in the Indo-Pacific by 2035. The Navy senior officers are convinced that “China will be able to contest US operations throughout the entire Indo-Pacific region by 2035 - if not before.”

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The Forbidden city is most apprehensive about the outcome of the summit-dinner between Trump and Xi Jinping in Buenos Aires now scheduled for 1 December. Chinese senior officials are not even certain that such a meeting will take place on account of Trump’s ever-changing schedule and the White House refusal to settle



on an agreed upon agenda or the number of participants. The officials believe that the US would like “to put this dispute on hold”, but are nevertheless apprehensive that Trump will suddenly exacerbate further the confrontation over the trade and tariff war.

Beijing has given up any expectations for a trade deal anytime soon. “The best hope is that the US and China will agree to a truce to the trade war,” said Professor Shi Yinhong of Beijing’s Renmin University.

On 20 November, top White House economic advisor Larry Kudlow confirmed Beijing’s dread. US-China tensions “will come to a head at the G20,” he said. “China would have to agree to significant policy changes to make a trade deal possible.” Kudlow specified that “any deal between the two countries has got to be in American interests... It’s got to include IP theft. It’s got to include changes in ownership. It’s got to include the forced transfer of technology. It’s got to go to zero tariffs and zero non-tariff barriers. It’s got to have enforceability. It’s got to have strict timetables.” This long list of demands includes many issues that Beijing has already formally refused to consider.

Little wonder that well-connected Chinese experts and senior officials see no likelihood for improvement in Sino-US relations in the foreseeable future. On 21 November, Cary Huang of the *South China Morning Post* articulated Beijing’s quandary. “As Trump and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping both dream of making their respective countries great again, it exaggerates the incompatibility and competition between the US and China. ... Worryingly, both Washington and Beijing are pushing the US-China relationship towards divergence, rather than convergence, as they adopt confrontational approaches and adversarial politics.” Under such circumstances, the likelihood of the New Thirty Years War becoming a shooting war keeps growing.

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**Remarks:** Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.



### About the Author of this Issue

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Yossef Bodansky has been the Director of Research at the International Strategic Studies Association [ISSA], as well as a Senior Editor for the *Defense & Foreign Affairs* group of publications, since 1983. He was the Director of the Congressional Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare at the U.S. House of Representatives between 1988 and 2004, and stayed on as a special adviser to Congress till January 2009. In the mid-1980s, he acted as a senior consultant for the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of State.

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