



Rolling the Sleeves and Beating the Drums

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Executive Summary

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* A new phase in the Sino-US confrontation started on 18 December 2018 when Xi Jinping led the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the PRC's historic "reform and opening up" policy. He delivered a major speech articulating China's future course and the role of the Communist Party therein. Although the gist of the speech focused on the future - it had deep roots in China's history and viewed the future as an extrapolation of that long history. On 26 December, Xi Jinping was given greater powers in order to lead the ascent of China and the ensuing escalating confrontation with the US.

* Xi Jinping heralded the last phase of the century-long marathon for China to become the global Hegemon comes 2049. This last phase in China's ascent is the new Thirty Years War that has just begun. Under the tighter and more assertive leadership of the Communist Party, the struggle for the ascent of China will be more vigorous even if this entails both the escalation of the confrontation with the US and greater hardships for the people of China. Whatever the forthcoming challenges, Xi Jinping and his Forbidden City are convinced, being an historical turning point, China's ascent is irreversible and unstoppable.

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Analysis

The US and the PRC are sliding ever so quickly into escalating their confrontation - from trade to security issues. Beijing is convinced that China is being confronted by uncompromising hardline policies aimed to derail any chance for a success in bilateral negotiations during the 90-day truce presidents Xi Jinping and Donald Trump decided on in Buenos Aires. The Forbidden City is also convinced that this hardline approach intentionally aims to escalate the face-off between China and the US.¹

A new phase in the Sino-US confrontation started on 18 December 2018 when Xi Jinping led the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the PRC's historic "reform and opening up" policy at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. He delivered a major speech articulating China's future course and the role of the Party therein. Although the gist of the speech focused on the future - it had deep roots in China's history and viewed the future as an extrapolation of that long history. On 26 December, the Communist Party's Central Committee gave Xi Jinping greater powers in order to lead the ascent of China and the ensuing escalating confrontation with the US.

Xi Jinping started by emphasizing that the leadership of the Communist Party was the key to the achievements of the last 40 years and thus must be maintained and strengthened. In 1978, with the economy of China on the brink of collapse on account of the disastrous Cultural Revolution (1966-76), Deng Xiaoping realized that only drastic reform led by the Party would save the PRC from collapse. "China's modernization and socialism will be buried if we do not embrace reform and opening up now," Xi Jinping quoted Deng Xiaoping. And so it was, Xi Jinping declared. "Chinese Communists accomplished the most profound and the greatest social transformation in China's history and created the fundamental political conditions and the institutional foundation for all development and progress in China today." The cause of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" thus achieved "a great revolution in the history of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation" by embracing "the reform and opening-up."

The ensuing success is the outcome of hard work under the clairvoyant leadership of the Communist Party. "What we have achieved in the past 40 years was not a windfall, nor was it given in charity by others. It comes from the hard work, wisdom and courage of all members of the Party and the people of all ethnic groups in China," Xi Jinping explained. "The great spirit of reform and opening-up ... has significantly enriched our national character and become the most prominent hallmark of the Chinese people in the modern day." These great achievements to-date should serve as the guiding principles of the next phase in the development and ascent of China. "The practices of reform and opening up in the past 40 years have shown us that the Chinese Communist Party leadership is the fundamental character of socialism with Chinese characteristics ... east, west, south, north, and the middle, the Party leads everything," he said.

Xi Jinping warned about looming challenges. "Every step in reform and opening up will not be easy, and we will face all kinds of risks and challenges in the future and we may even encounter unimaginable terrifying tidal waves and horrifying storms," he explained. "Only by improving the Party's leadership and governance ... can we ensure the ship of reform and opening up will sail forward." And with the Party in firm control, Xi Jinping stated, it is possible to further implement socialism with Chinese characteristics. "A major country like China cannot afford any disruptive mistake on fundamental issues," he emphasized. "We must adopt a

¹ See: Yossef Bodansky, Huawei and the New Thirty Years War, ISPSW Issue No. 589, December 2018; Yossef Bodansky, Is the New Thirty Years War Already Escalating?, ISPSW Issue No. 586, November 2018; and Yossef Bodansky, The New Thirty Years War (2018-2049), ISPSW Issue No. 583, October 2018



strategic perspective, develop a dialectical approach to thinking and creative thinking, think in terms of the rule of law, and think about worst-case scenarios,” he explained. “We must show full tenacity and persistence to see all major reform measures through.”

Xi Jinping stressed the magnitude of the challenges ahead. “To push forward reform and opening up in a country with 5,000 years of civilization and a population of 1.3 billion, there are no textbooks containing golden rules or teachers who can be arrogant to the Chinese people.” After 40 years of “reform and opening up,” China has reached the position of a great power that “would not be pushed around,” Xi Jinping declared. “No one is in a position to dictate to the Chinese people what should or should not be done,” he elaborated. And China alone will decide what to do next. “For those [issues] that ought to be changed or can be changed, we will change; but for those [issues] that shouldn’t be changed or cannot be changed, we will firmly not change.”

Xi Jinping emphasized the Chinese contribution of “China wisdom, China solutions and China power” to world peace and development. From now on, China will increasingly play the role of “a big responsible country” in support of developing countries and the pursuit of global governance. “China will never grow at the cost of other countries’ interests but will never give up its legitimate rights and interests,” Xi Jinping stated. “China’s development does not pose a threat to any other country. No matter how far China develops, it will never seek hegemony/tyranny” of the kind the US presently is. Xi Jinping declared that China will continue to “actively promote the construction of an open world economy, build a community of human destiny, promote the transformation of the global governance system, clearly oppose hegemonism and power politics.”

Xi Jinping concluded by stating the forthcoming status of the PRC as a global great power. “China is increasingly approaching the center of the world stage and becoming a recognized builder of world peace, a contributor to global development, and a defender of the international order,” Xi Jinping concluded. “We will create new and even greater wonders that will truly impress the world.”

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Concurrently, Xi Jinping and other senior leaders stressed that there must be a corresponding evolution of the PRC’s military doctrine and force modernization. The priorities of the PLA’s challenges can be summarized in three key aspects. Addressing PLA senior officers and defense officials, Xi Jinping reiterated that “all armed forces should be under absolute leadership of the CPC, that military-civilian integration in the new era should be deepened, and that real combat training should be enhanced.”

On 18 December, Xu Hui articulated in the *PLA Daily* the national security challenges facing the PRC as defined by the International College of Defense Studies of the PLA’s National Defense University. “At present, the security environment surrounding China is complex and changeable. In order to cope with possible threats and violations of national sovereignty, China needs a well-equipped, well-trained quick reaction force. Moreover, the ‘three forces’ of separatism, extremism and terrorism are eager for action; earthquakes, floods and other disasters also threaten the safety of people’s lives and properties. These complicated domestic security situations urge a strong armed force to shoulder its due responsibilities to protect the people. Due to the intricate international and domestic situations, China has to develop necessary military strength to better cope with the security environment. The in-depth national defense and military reform to realize modernization of national defense and military is the road China must take to maintain national security. It has nothing to do with military hegemony, let alone challenging the international order.” Thus, the PRC has to



build-up its military power in order to cope with both domestic and international challenges.

In order to meet these challenges, Chinese senior defense officials stress, special attention is being paid to force modernization and hi-tech weapon-systems. “After heavy investment, China’s next generation of weapons and military equipment nears readiness,” wrote Liu Zhen in the 23 December 2018 issue of the *South China Morning Post*. “Several key pieces that could significantly improve the capabilities of the People’s Liberation Army are expected to be completed or delivered next year.” Among the key weapon systems expected to join the PLA in 2019 are a myriad of ballistic missiles, aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines and sophisticated surface combatants. In order to expedite and improve the development of a new generation of nuclear weapons, the PLA is completing a new test facility to simulate thermonuclear explosions. According to PLA senior officers, the Chinese center will be much bigger than the comparable US center - the Z Pulsed Power Facility. As well, the PLA is acquiring a new generation of strategic stealth bombers, stealth fighter-bombers (including for future aircraft carriers), numerous aerial drones and a host of sophisticated guided munitions of several types. Most of these weapon systems are already being tested and are close to being declared operational and ready for combat service.

This means that the attainment of hi-tech and scientific-technological self-sufficiency and independence that are at the crux of the Made in China 2025 program are far more important than ever before. Nobody will be able to prevent China from attaining these goals, stressed an “expert assessment” in the *Global Times* of 24 December. “China can’t trade away the right to development,” the paper stated. “Today, the international environment poses significant challenges to China [and] those challenges will still bring great difficulties.” Most important is that “the international environment has undergone dramatic changes, with tensions seen in China-US relations, the most important part of China’s foreign relations.”

The quintessence of the dispute with the US, the *Global Times* explains, is over the future of China. “The recent rows between the two major economies are not just about the trade. ... In fact, all of [the US] requirements target issues beyond trade, which is actually meant to contain China’s development in an all-round way. By curbing our development in the high-tech field, the US intends to manage China’s future development in the way as they design, thus posing serious challenges to us. ... More importantly, they don’t want to see China develop high-tech industries, nor better their technology. That is to say, according to their design, changes must be made to the Made in China 2025 initiative and to the reform of State-owned enterprises so as to contain China’s development.”

This is not going to happen under any circumstances, the *Global Times* asserts. While the PRC is ready for compromises on trade and import issues, “we cannot give up the right to develop and we cannot give up our national sovereignty. The US containment of China will not keep us locked completely or derail our development. That is because today’s China is no longer the same as the one 40 years ago.”

Despite the claim for “new progress” in tariff and trade talks, there is little hope in Beijing for tangible results. Chinese senior officials point out that there is no US reciprocity to the Chinese resumption of the purchase of soybeans, lowering of tariffs on US-made cars, and other concessions made to the placate Trump’s Washington. Writing in the 20 December issue of the *Global Times*, Yu Jincui explained that “China is implementing the consensus reached between Chinese and US heads of state on the sidelines of the G20 summit on December 1 to alleviate trade tensions, and it’s expected the US will act reciprocally, avoiding any diversions that might curtail the chance of reaching an agreement within the 90-day framework for trade negotiations.” Nevertheless, the US keeps increasing the pressure on China through a host of venues. “China



will never yield to such political blackmail," Yu Jincui stressed. Despite the grim situation, Beijing still hopes for the success of the negotiations as agreed to in Buenos Aires. "It's hoped that the US could treat the trade negotiations with sincerity and not let political factors disrupt trade talks. The 90-day countdown has already started, and the risk of losing opportunities and its catastrophic impact cannot be underestimated." Beijing has little hope for success.

Hence, senior Chinese experts warn that Beijing's urging for the US to meet China at the half way are being ignored in Washington, and that the preparatory talks regarding reaching a solution by early March are going nowhere. Writing in the 19 December issue of the *Global Times*, Huang Panyue, the former president of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations and a senior researcher at the Taihe Institute, highlighted the frustration of Beijing. "Let China, US meet half way to reduce conflict," he urged, because "ties between Beijing and Washington are going down a slope." The primary obstacle to the trade and tariff negotiations has nothing to do with the declared subject. "China is emerging rapidly and posing a challenge to the US' status in the global arena," and the US cannot tolerate this development. "Americans need to find a scapegoat outside their country and they picked China." Indeed, "there is currently no practical way or method to solve the divergences on core interests on both sides."

Huang Panyue blames the US for the dangerous impasse. "China offered to build a new type of major power relationship to get rid of the tendency and will hold on to it even if the US does not respond." Therefore, China has no option but to take unilateral steps to secure its ascent while reducing, if possible, the threats of a crisis with the US. "China's mission is to deal with various challenges on the way toward peaceful rise and modernization. Handling its ties with Washington is a test that cannot be dodged. [China] must keep getting stronger while keeping all the risks of Sino-US competition under control, avoiding a repeat of the cold-war style confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union. The evolution of history is the alteration of substances and concepts. When both countries' power and mind-sets change, and they realize that a changed global order can better accord with their long-term interests, a new order will emerge."

Indeed, irrespective of the stated importance of the three-month truce and related "trade war talks", Beijing is rapidly reducing acquisition of strategic goods from the US when possible. For example, Chinese refineries all but ceased the purchase of crude oil from the US. The fear of US penalizing China by stopping oil exports haunts the PRC. "Chinese companies have little incentive to buy US crude due to the wide availability of crude supplies today from Iran and Russia," Seng Yick Tee of the Beijing-based SIA Energy told Reuters. "Even though the trade tension between China and the US had been defused recently, the executives from the national oil companies hesitate to procure US crude unless they are told to do so." Instead, Beijing encourages the purchase of oil and natural gas from Russia, Iran and Central Asia.

There is building frustration in the Forbidden City about the hostile confrontational attitude of Trump's Washington that moves from one crisis to another. As far as Beijing is concerned, Washington is just looking for troubles in effort to muddy the water, complicate US-Sino relations, and find excuses for breaking the bilateral negotiations should the need arise. For Beijing, the recent revelations about Chinese cyber and economic espionage, including the indictments of Chinese citizens, are nothing new. All technologically advanced powers - including both the PRC and the US - are spying on each other and are penetrating each other's computer and communication networks, shrug Chinese senior officials.

Senior officials at the Forbidden City assert that the Trump White House's onslaught on Huawei and Chinese cyber and economic espionage as a whole has become the focus of the US ruthless campaign against Chinese



technological development and modernization. The US is adamant that the PRC does not become self-sufficient technologically, scientifically and economically, they state. While the US is formally discussing the trade and tariff war - the real objective is an all-out war against the ascent of China and its future capacity. Hence, the likelihood of the trade and tariff negotiations breaking down and the Sino-US face-off escalating to a cold, or even hot, war is growing, warn senior officials in Beijing.

If the Forbidden City needed any confirmation for these worst-case dreads - they could read the 22 December interview that White House trade adviser Peter Navarro gave to *Nikkei* of Japan. Addressing the on-going negotiations with the PRC, Navarro stressed that there could be “no half-measures” or compromises, and that the PRC would have “to address all of America’s concerns” before the two sides could “come to terms.” The primary challenge ahead is the scientific-technological developments in China, which, he stressed, are mainly based on illegally acquired US and allies’ know-how. “China is basically trying to steal the future of Japan, the US and Europe, by going after our technology,” Navarro stated. The Made in China 2025 initiative, he asserted, is a “label for a Chinese strategy to achieve dominance in the industries of the future” at the expense of the US, Japan and Europe. Whatever the assurances given to the US, Navarro concluded, “no one in Japan or the United States really believes that they have abandoned the goals of [Made in] China 2025.” With such an attitude, Beijing concluded, the possibility of real understanding with the Trump White House is rapidly fading.

Meanwhile, there is a growing “Huawei fatigue” in Europe and among other key allies. The US has failed to convince the allies about the threat Huawei constitutes. The beginning of the anti-Huawei campaign can be traced back to mid-July 2018 meetings of the intelligence chiefs of the Five-Eye states in Ottawa and nearby coastal Nova Scotia. According to Chris Uhlmann and Angus Grigg of *The Sidney Morning Herald*, the Americans argued, and the others concurred, that “the greatest emerging threat was China’s Communist Party.” The Americans then demanded from the attending states “to block Chinese tech giant Huawei from supplying equipment for their next-generation wireless networks.” They urged “a coordinated effort on banning Huawei from 5G networks.”

Alas, the US promises of detailed evidence and proof of the Huawei threat never materialized. When Five-Eye intelligence services complained to Washington, they got general answers not-too-different from what Navarro stated in his interview with *Nikkei* of Japan. Huawei’s smartphones “pose a clear risk in that ‘those phones can be used to spy on our citizens or our government’,” he explained. Even if these smartphones were to pass security inspection, it will not help because “the constant software updates were the main source of concern.”

Indeed, British senior officials remain satisfied with the GCHQ-run security center for Huawei products especially in lieu of the forthcoming Huawei-funded major up-grade. They note that a GCHQ report to the British Government explained, in the words of David Pegg of *The Guardian*, that “there were inconsistencies in how the company’s code was interpreted by computers, and that while there was no evidence of any compromise, it could not guarantee that any risks to national security had been fully mitigated.” Ultimately, British senior intelligence officials are most angry at the NSA’s second-guessing the GCHQ’s competence and decisions.

Berlin also rejected the NSA’s accusations and pressure. “For such serious decisions as a ban you need evidence,” said Arne Schönbohm, the president of the Federal Office for Information Security (BSI), and there are “currently no reliable findings” to support the US claims. He hailed the imminent opening of a Huawei-funded but BSI-run “security lab” in Bonn that is tailored after the GCHQ-run center in the UK. Berlin is also



furious at Washington's obstructions to the merger negotiations between Sprint and T-Mobile, that is owned by Deutsche Telekom, as added pressure on Germany to ban Huawei.

In Prague, the National Security Council (NSC) overruled the call to ban Huawei by the National Cyber and Information Security Agency because it relied solely on the NSA's warning and "was not based on technology analysis" done in Czechia. "Bidders for critical information infrastructure or major information systems procurement should not be put at a disadvantage, if there are no serious grounds related to national security," the Czech NSC decided.

Overall, senior European intelligence officials deplore what they call the "American hyperventilating" about the very serious and growing Chinese challenge. Even if the NSA's depiction of the extent of Chinese espionage is accurate - these Chinese activities pale in scope and depth when compared to the NSA's own practices as exposed by Edward Snowden and others. The NSA's deep penetration and manipulation of not only enemies but also the US's closest allies in Europe continue to alienate European senior officials and politicians. They are quick to remind the tapping of Angela Merkel's phone during the Obama Administration or the 1995 expulsion of CIA officers from France for economic/commercial espionage in the context of challenging the US sanctimonious demands for harsh steps against China. Official Beijing considers this a promising gap inside the US-led West to be nurtured and helped within both Sino-European bilateral relations and the framework of the rising Eurasian Sphere.

Meanwhile, there is growing frustration in Beijing about Washington's relations with Pyongyang. Chinese senior experts warn that the continued US pressure, additional sanctions and adamant refusal to consider reciprocity have already alienated and frustrated the DPRK to the point of sending Kim Jong-Un to rethinking his deals with Trump. The recent US "shock" about the North Korean interpretation of denuclearization as applying to the entire Korean Peninsula (and not just North Korea) alarms Beijing most. Beijing points out that Chinese and North Korean senior officials and experts have repeatedly explained the position of Pyongyang since early 2018 and particularly in the aftermath of the failure of US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's visit to Pyongyang in July. Yet, Washington has adamantly refused to acknowledge these differences.²

Similarly, Beijing has argued for a long-time now that there must be reciprocity in US-DPRK interaction so that Pyongyang could demonstrate achievements in return for concessions to Trump's Washington. There is now dread in Beijing and Seoul of the long-term ramifications of the just announced US three-month ultimatum for the DPRK to commit unconditionally to US-style denuclearization while ignoring and contradicting the call for reciprocity. The Chinese emphasize that Trump's Washington does not understand that the process of normalization and regional integration as championed by Beijing, Seoul and Pyongyang is by now irreversible, and that the US can only join the existing process or be left out. That, unless, of course, the US decides to resume the military confrontation with North Korea - a possibility that the Forbidden City increasingly dreads.

Most alarming from Chinese point of view is the fact that the US keeps coming up with new issues to confront China about. The latest issue, that infuriates Beijing, is the US intervention through legislation in what Beijing defines as the "internal affairs of China" - from Tibet to Xinjiang to Taiwan. The US legislative initiatives are perceived by Beijing as intentionally insulting and unpardonable. For the Forbidden City, this is a proof that, rhetoric about negotiations and reconciliation notwithstanding, the Trump White House is committed to a fateful long-term conflict and a cold war in order to prevent the ascent of China into becoming a global

² See: Yossef Bodansky, After the Pyongyang Talks, ISPSW Issue No. 561, July 2018



Hegemon or even a great power in its own right. Hence, Beijing resolved, China has no alternative but to further mobilize for the escalation of the long-term conflict with the US - the new Thirty Years War.

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The most recent articulation of the Chinese policy and grand strategy vis-a-vis the US, formulated in the framework of Xi Jinping's 18 December speech, constitutes the crossing of a major threshold in the overall context of the Chinese traditionalist quest for the status of a global Hegemon and the pursuit of the new Thirty Years War aimed to facilitate this ascent. Yet, this new phase is deeply rooted in the rich history and heritage of China. "China's historical course of reform and opening-up has made it clear to the world that only when conforming to the trends of history, actively responding to changes and spontaneously seeking changes, can we advance with the times," Zhong Sheng wrote in the 24 December issue of the *People's Daily*.

Back around 1980, at the launch of the "reform and opening up" policy, Deng Xiaoping first introduced the principle of "keeping a low profile and biding our time" as the crux of all Chinese policies. In the late-1980's, Deng Xiaoping formulated his strategy in twenty-eight characters: "Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership." This principled approach still dominates the quintessence of the PLA's grand strategy toward the US. In the mid-1990's, for example, Lieutenant General Mi Zhenyu, the former Vice-Commandant of the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences, explained that in dealing with the US, "for a relatively long time it will be absolutely necessary that we [the PLA] quietly nurse our sense of vengeance. ... We must conceal our abilities and bide our time."

As he was climbing in power and focusing on the attainment by China of the historic role as global Hegemon, Xi Jinping gradually abandoned the low-profile doctrine of Deng Xiaoping. Instead, Xi Jinping introduced and increasingly emphasized the centrality of unique Chinese patriotism nurtured by the revival and reclaiming of China's historical manifest destiny and heritage. In so doing, explains China expert Francois Bougon's in his 2018 book *Inside the Mind of Xi Jinping*, Xi Jinping adopted the policy line of the Chinese Hawks who have long urged the flaunting of China's unique global role and posture. Huang Jisu, one of the authors of the 1996 immensely popular book *China Can Say No* and the 2009 equally popular book *Unhappy China*, stressed the importance of heritage to the ascent of China. "If it wants to feature among the leaders of the world, China must absolutely equip itself with superior assets ... It must not lose the achievement of five thousand years of history. We need to reclaim a large part of what we have shunned ... Not only must China save itself, but it must also save humanity ... The Chinese people must shoulder this task, no matter how heavy."

Once in power, Xi Jinping repeatedly acknowledged the significance of Chinese history and philosophy of governance, as well as the importance of heritage, to his leadership. In June 2013, an article titled "Important Thinking of Comrade Xi Jinping on the Study of History and The Practical Guidance We Can Get From It Today" (translated by David Cowhig) highlighted the importance of history for Xi Jinping. "As Comrade Xi points out, if we don't respect the guiding role of Marxism in the teaching of history, China could go down the wrong path again as it did in the 1980's. In the mid 80s there were even people who, taking advantage of the urgent desire of Chinese to modernize rejected all of China's history and culture and proclaimed that China must move from the old Chinese 'yellow culture' towards the 'blue culture' of the West." In an October 2014 speech, Xi Jinping further elaborated on the importance of heritage and history. "Throughout the ages, the reason why the Chinese nation has had status and influence in the world is not because it relied on militarism, nor external expansion, but because of the powerful appeal and attraction of Chinese culture." He added that "The five



thousand years of Chinese civilization are an intellectual strength” that still empowers and emboldens the PRC.

Official Beijing stresses even more the significance of the historical and heritage roots of both the 40 years of “reform and opening up” policy and the new era being ushered in by Xi Jinping. On 18 December, *Xinhua* published a lengthy profile titled “Xi Jinping: The Man Who Leads China’s Reform into a New Era.” The article concluded with the official line on Xi Jinping’s goals and policies - stressing their uniquely Chinese quintessence. “The People’s Republic of China will celebrate its 70th anniversary next year. The Chinese nation with a history of humiliation has stood up, grown rich and is becoming strong. Xi’s reform has laid a firm foundation for the Chinese nation’s rejuvenation. It will be the first time in human history that a country of more than 1 billion people march into modernization as a whole. China’s reform has inspired the world: developing countries can walk a new path to modernization that is different from the West. It breaks the ‘end of history’ and ‘Western-centered’ mentalities.”

Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, China will acquire a unique and leading role in the world derived from its own long history and rich heritage. This distinct ascent should help ameliorate the growing crisis with the US. “What Xi [Jinping] aims to develop is a model of how a rising country can avoid confrontation with an established one. It will show that different civilizations can enrich exchanges and co-exist peacefully.” The Forbidden City has no illusions that the Trump White House is adamant on blocking and reversing the ascent of China irrespective of its history and heritage. To realize its manifest destiny, the PRC will have to confront the US. “Xi [Jinping] has many challenges ahead. With great courage, he is ready to lead the Party and the country to forge ahead with the reform.” Xi Jinping’s 18 December speech is a turning point in China’s quest and ascent - the beginning of a new road to glory. “A lot of progress has been made over the past few years,” Xi Jinping is quoted by *Xinhua*. “But much can still be achieved as we embark on the new journey.”

Meanwhile, both official Beijing and the Chinese public, particularly the educated elites, are cognizant of the growing challenges ahead. There is a widely accepted realization that China is facing a long and arduous struggle with the US. This notion is reflected in the immense popularity of a new book titled *Re-reading On Protracted War* that is a reprinting of a collection of speeches given by Mao Zedong in 1938 and then published as a book titled *On Protracted War*. Writing in the 24 December issue of the *Global Times*, Yu Jincui emphasized the importance and relevance of Mao’s 80-year old book to the understanding of the current challenges facing China.

The key theme of Mao Zedong’s book that is most relevant for Xi Jinping’s China is the urgent imperative for all Chinese to mobilize for the protracted struggle and hardships ahead. “Mao’s *On Protracted War* is a product of specific historical conditions. Facing Japanese aggression, a poor and weak China had no other choice but to encourage and unify its people for a protracted struggle. Since the US launched a trade war against China, quite a few Chinese economists and international relations scholars have projected a long-term competition between China and the US. But their prediction is based on structural contradictions in bilateral relations and the fact that the US has defined China as a strategic rival that must be contained. Does China want a protracted confrontation with the US, closing itself to the outside world and biding time to win over the US? Of course not. But there are always people in the US who view China as a foe.”

Yu Jincui explains that the only way for China to rise in the world is through a struggle with a hostile US. The fact that China is gaining widespread recognition and support only encourages the US to escalate the confrontation. “China is integrating with the world. We hope to get involved deeper with the international



system and build a community of a shared future for mankind. In spite of external pressure from the US, we will promote reform and opening-up in accordance with our designed pace and timetable. In this sense, the significance and application of On Protracted War nowadays lie in that it has taught us to be persistent - in meeting our targets through continuous reform and opening-up." Yu Jincui concludes with an observation of Mao Zedong from 1938: "We should be prepared to see this stage last a comparatively long time and to weather its hardships," Mao Zedong implored. "It will be a very painful period for China."

The Forbidden City is cognizant of the immense challenges ahead. Therefore, a "special key meeting" of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China was convened in secrecy in Beijing on 25-26 December. Xi Jinping chaired the meeting. The participants "stressed strengthening the Party's consciousness of the need to maintain political integrity, think in big-picture terms, follow the leadership core and keep in alignment." Echoing Xi Jinping's priorities, they resolved to "strengthen the Party's confidence in the path, theory, system and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics." The main resolution was to underline the "core status" of Xi Jinping and give him more power and influence. Xi Jinping stressed that "democratic centralism is the fundamental organizational principle and leadership system" of the Communist Party. According to participants, Xi Jinping was given the greater powers as the Core Leader so that he could better lead the global ascent of China and the ensuing escalating confrontation with the US.

Thus, Xi Jinping heralded the last phase of the century-long marathon for China to become the global Hegemon comes 2049. This last phase in China's ascent is the new Thirty Years War that has just begun. Under the tighter and more assertive leadership of the Communist Party, Xi Jinping stated on 18 December, the struggle for the ascent of China will be more vigorous even if this entails both the escalation of the confrontation with the US and greater hardships for the people of China. Whatever the forthcoming challenges, Xi Jinping and his Forbidden City are convinced, being an historical turning point, China's ascent is irreversible and unstoppable.

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



About the Author of this Issue

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.

He is the author of eleven books – including *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (New York Times No. 1 Bestseller & Washington Post No. 1 Bestseller), *The Secret History of the Iraq War* (New York Times Bestseller & Foreign Affairs Magazine Bestseller), and *Chechen Jihad: Al Qaeda's Training Ground and the Next Wave of Terror* – and hundreds of articles, book chapters and Congressional reports.

Mr Bodansky is a Director at the Prague Society for International Cooperation, and serves on the Board of the Global Panel Foundation and several other institutions worldwide.



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