

Our Other War with China



A detail from Zhang Xiaogang's "Bloodline: The Big Family No. 3."

by [Eric Rozenman](#) (September 2021)

That China threatens the United States is no secret. "Since 2010, I have been pounding the drum about how serious a threat the People's Republic of China's military modernization program is to the ability of the United States to project power into the Indo-Pacific, and more broadly our ability to protect our interests and values around the world. ... While America is still the dominant military power on the planet, we are being more effectively challenged militarily today than at any ... other time in our history," U.S. Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall [said in September.](#)

Anticipating the Air Force secretary by a year was Dan Blumenthal, director of Asian studies at the American Enterprise Institute. Speaking to a Jewish Policy Center video webinar in September, 2020 Blumenthal called China under President Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party “the most dangerous challenge the United States ever faced.” Its explosive economic growth—enabled by a U.S.-led push to include China in global trade—has given Beijing an economic base the Soviet Union never possessed to support sweeping international ambitions, he said.

China does have a significant non-military vulnerability. But official Washington shows no public sign of recognizing, let alone exploiting it. The weakness is ideological.

“A government is not legitimate merely because it exists,” Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, President Ronald Reagan’s first ambassador to the United Nations, famously observed. President Xi and his ruling Communist Party know this. They are, after all, heirs to the regime that ordered the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, in which People’s Liberation Army troops, tanks and armored personnel carriers killed somewhere between several hundred and 10,000 [anti-government demonstrators](#). In the back of their minds Xi and his colleagues also carry another memory from 1989. It is the collapse of communist regimes in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania—with Romania’s Nicolae Ceausescu going in one week from dictator to accused criminal to firing squad—and disintegration of the Soviet Union two years later.

So, in addition to building history’s most pervasive surveillance state, Xi and the party relentlessly attempt to mold public opinion by rewriting history in their favor. Doing so, they simultaneously deprecate the United States in particular, Western liberal democracy in general.

The president’s historical revisionism stimulates anti-Western grievances in Chinese youth over their country’s “century of

humiliation" imposed by colonial powers. Paul Wolfowitz, former deputy secretary of defense and researcher Bill Drexel, both now at the American Enterprise Institute, say Xi's "assault on historical truth" reinforces a feeling of "belligerence [that] could [lead China to war.](#)"

George Orwell's oft-cited observation in 1984, his dystopian novel of a totalitarian future, holds that "he who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past." This explains Xi's compulsion to rewrite history.

There is a contemporary cautionary lesson in just how dangerous such psychological or information warfare can be. It is the success of the false Palestinian Arab "narrative" of dispossession, subjugation and even genocide by Jewish Zionists returning to a part of their ancient homeland—600,000 of them Jews expelled from Arab countries. From the Soviet-inspired, Arab League-promoted slander that "Zionism [the Jewish national liberation movement] is racism," adopted by the U.N. General Assembly in 1975, to today's anti-Israel boycott, divest and sanction (BDS) movement, the legitimacy of the Jewish state has been under unprecedented assault.

The resolution's repeal in 1991 made little difference. It already had taken root in Western academia through "post-colonial studies." The discipline's fathers included Columbia University literature professor Edward Said, a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization's national council and a leading anti-Israel propagandist.

From the late 1970s on, the Palestinian Arab inversion and appropriation of the League of Nations/United Nations-confirmed return of the Jewish people to a fragment of the former Ottoman Empire went septic. It spread from Middle East studies curricula through news media into politics and popular culture. As it did so, it both provided cover, as anti-Zionism, for the resurgence of antisemitism, and infantilized

Western academic analyses of [Arab-Islamic culture](#).

A successful rewrite of modern Chinese history, especially under the Communist Party, in accordance with “Xi Jinping Thought,” could similarly hobble Western strategic planners. Hence, countering Xi’s xenophobic revisionism deserves a priority in Washington along with modernizing and expanding the U.S. Navy and decoupling the American economy from China’s.

The government Xi and the CCP control is as hard and yet ultimately brittle as cast iron. Celebrating its 100th anniversary last year, the party lavished praise upon itself and its century of putative success at “national rejuvenation” and called for more. To impose its invalid rhetoric, China deploys a high-tech police state, ever more intrusive and brutal at home, more intimidating and expansionist abroad. The objective is to suppress domestic dissent and foreign resistance by destroying facts and silencing the vocabulary that sustain independent, contrary thought.

A political entity compelled to trumpet its legitimacy and rewrite its history and that of the people under its rule is vulnerable to a campaign from the opposite direction, one of delegitimization. Yet in countering the danger from China, few if any in U.S. political leadership and supporting foreign policy intelligentsia call for a psychological warfare offensive.

Meanwhile, Xi’s historical revisionism strengthens his bid to become president-for-life, to enlist nationalist (than is, ethnic majority Han) enthusiasm and make bogeymen of the West, especially the United States. So, exposing Xi, general secretary of the country’s Communist Party and chairman of its central military commission in addition to being president, as a naked emperor and the party as China’s prison warden is urgent.

Not only the American and European publics but also the Chinese should know that the party and communist China's first ruler, Chairman Mao Zedong (in power from 1949 to 1976), directly and indirectly murdered 40 million to 80 million Chinese. That makes "the Great Helmsman" history's [leading mass murderer](#), outstripping even Josef Stalin and Adolf Hitler. And it confirms the party as accomplice.

Something up Xi's sleeve

At their mid-November summit-via-Zoom, Xi and U.S. President Joseph Biden spoke of cooperating on climate change. Beijing also has expressed a willingness to discuss nuclear weapons with Washington. Such diplomacy is akin to the magician's distracting patter while performing his tricks.

More to the point is that under Xi, the ruling Communist Party continues rapidly modernizing the country's offensive capabilities. These include hypersonic missiles apparently designed to overcome U.S. missile defenses and whose recent tests [surprised U.S. intelligence](#); cyberwarfare that not only might cripple American communications but also fry the electric grid, plunging the United States into chaotic dark and cold; and a large and growing navy to threaten Taiwan, intimidate other allies including Japan, Australia and South Korea and potentially dominate key international shipping lanes. Regarding potential nuclear talks, Secretary of State Antony Blinken has warned of "the rapid growth" of [China's nuclear arsenal](#); the Pentagon expresses concern over the country's move to an edgy launch-on-warning posture.

U.S.-China competition is more than the latest iteration of history's recurrent great power rivalries. If one follows Viktor Frankl (the psychiatrist and survivor who after the Holocaust posited there are only two "races," one decent and the other not) through Samuel Huntington (whose post-Cold War "clash of civilizations" forecast movements of reactionary cultural-religious identities pressuring Western liberal

democracies) one understands that America-versus-China is this generation's heavyweight title fight.

But not one whose outcome is merely of sporting interest. Rather, like the Cold War between the U.S.-led NATO countries against the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact surrogates or the battle between the World War II Allies and the Axis powers of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan, the U.S.-China conflict is another struggle between good and evil with global implications.

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum has a center for the prevention of genocide. Its recent report on China's continuing erasure of the country's Muslim Uyghur minority is titled "To Make Us Slowly Disappear." The document unmasks—if further revelations were necessary—the regime's savage essence.

It tells of intense surveillance, mass detentions, forcible sterilization, separation of Uyghur men and women through incarceration, coerced marriage of the women to Han Chinese men and mass removal of children to state "boarding schools"—indoctrination camps. Apparently, at least 180,000 fewer babies were born last year to the 12 million Uyghurs than otherwise would have been the case.

Beijing's relentless albeit slow-motion destruction of the Uyghurs recalls an earlier, still continuing example—its abrasion of Tibet, its people and their culture. Having first conquered and then spent decades grinding its boot into the country, China under Xi now wants to compel Tibetan Buddhist monks to study and publish only in Mandarin Chinese, to wipe away the Tibetan language and culture with it.

Xi and the CCP repeatedly stress "national rejuvenation," Tibetan scholar Dhondup T. Rekjong noted recently. This means "unification"—disappearance—into Han China. It "requires the destruction of minority cultures," he warned.

In its drive for domination, Xi's China required something similar of quasi-democratic Hong Kong—Beijing's "one country, two systems" pledge be damned—and requires it of Taiwan—which unpardonably provides an example of a free, prosperous, non-coercive Chinese political and economic system. And beyond Taiwan and its 24 million people, the CCP under Xi seek global supremacy.

Tennis, anyone?

If unfolding genocide of the Uyghurs sounds horrible but impersonal, perhaps repression of an individual, even one with status, connects as human interest. On November 2, tennis star Peng Shuai posted a social media message accusing former Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli of sexual assault. The post lasted less than half an hour. Then Peng vanished.

Fifteen days later, China's state broadcaster posted what it said was an e-mail from Peng to the Women's Tennis Association retracting the allegation against Zhang and saying she was safe and "fine." WTA head Steve Simon responded, "I have a hard time believing that Peng Shuai actually wrote the e-mail we received or believes what is being attributed to her."

Simon and the WTA displayed the courage the much larger, wealthier National Basketball Association and Disney Studios, for example, lacked. The WTA now has canceled lucrative tournaments in China. The NBA and Disney, blinded by mammoth Chinese markets, kowtowed to Beijing. Houston Rocket's General Manager (quickly ex-G.M.) Daryl Morey's short-lived "fight for freedom, stand with Hong Kong" tweet during the territory's 2019 pro-democracy demonstrations offended China. [Disney took care](#) last year to thank the regime's propaganda and security agencies for helping it film in Xinjiang province, center of Uyghur oppression.

To insulate February's Winter Olympics from calls—including by Boston Celtic center Enes Kanter, an NBA non-corporate profile

in courage—to remove it from China, Beijing and the ethically compromised International Olympic Committee staged a video in which Peng re-surfaced and was shown autographing tennis balls and saying she was happy. Kanter described Xi as an [“insecure tyrant.”](#)

The United States and other Western countries have yet to cancel participation in the Winter Games. The Biden administration announced a “diplomatic boycott”—it will not send an official delegation to the opening. That’ll teach ‘em.

Or not. Major U.S. companies paying millions to sponsor the games, including AirBnB, Coca-Cola, Dow, General Electric, Intel, Panasonic, Proctor & Gamble and VISA continue to reject calls to pull out of what Beijing intends as a [global propaganda show.](#)

In mid-November, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that “U.S. firms and their China affiliates are ramping up investment in Chinese semiconductor companies, aiding Beijing’s bid for chip-sector dominance and complicating Washington’s efforts to preserve America’s lead in the critical technology.”

This at the same time the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, a group of experts convened by Congress, urged that America act more aggressively to strengthen defense of Taiwan and to reduce commerce with China due to increased [national security risks.](#)

The commission cautioned that “U.S. businesses and investors must recognize that their participation in the Chinese economy is conditioned by the CCP’s policy priorities and subject to its control.” Xi maneuvers to “assert unassailable authority” over his country’s businesses mean ostensibly private enterprises must operate like CCP-overseen state firms.

Psych them out

No one in the White House, State Department, Congress or even

the news media should have a hard time understanding the implacable nature of the police state the party led by Xi is running. Or the president's insecurity, which might prompt rash decisions. Nor should the American public forget that how a regime treats its own people is how it would treat others given the opportunity.

Xi is this generation's personification, as Josef Stalin was to his, of 1984's Big Brother. In November, he pushed the CCP to elevate "Xi Jinping Thought." That politically expedient ideology in large measure rehabilitates Mao, [whitewashing](#) The Great Leap Forward and mass famine and the Cultural Revolution with its murderous Red Guards.

Xi now erases the free market changes introduced by Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping, and the somewhat looser social and cultural atmosphere that accompanied China's stunning rise to the world's second largest economy. According to former Australian President Kevin Rudd, Xi and his diktats now rank as "objective historical truth." To criticize the president is to attack the party and China itself. Likely results? Making Xi politically untouchable, emboldened and in power indefinitely.

Expanding the U.S. Navy, hardening American communications and power infrastructure, strengthening Taiwan, bulking up alliances—the new AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom and United States) coalition is a start—are all necessary. But not sufficient.

America must work to delegitimize the Chinese Communist Party, its leadership and false historical narrative. Contemporary equivalents of Cold War anti-Soviet "soft power" such as Radio Free Europe, but aimed digitally at China; circumventing the regime's Internet-suppressing "Great Firewall of China"; cultural contrasts that, however, indirectly, expose Beijing's oppressive brutality—all should be part of a wide-ranging information war counter-offensive. America should spotlight

Taiwan as the real Chinese success that the mainland, for all its recent economic growth, is not. The veil needs to be torn off not only for Westerners, but also and especially the Chinese themselves.

One obstacle will be America's own deeply divided public. To those on the left, a United States it disdains as fundamentally racist and exploitatively capitalist might have no business opposing a "socialist" China. To the right, a U.S. military and political establishment that failed to secure national security interests in Iraq or Afghanistan might not be trusted to take on China.

But when it comes to China, the time for such American self-blame and self-constraint has passed. Part of deterring war, or winning it if deterrence fails, is successful psychological war, and one left not just to the Women's Tennis Association and an honest, outspoken basketball player.

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Eric Rozenman is author of *Jews Make the Best Demons: "Palestine" and the Jewish Question* (2018, New English Review Press) and *From Elvis to Biden, Eyewitness to the Unraveling; Co-Starring Nixon, Warhol, Clinton, The Supremes and Obama!* (forthcoming this September from Academica Press). This essay draws in part on *Jews Make the Best Demons* and a July Zoom presentation for Adath Israel Congregation, Cincinnati.

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