

What Is the Real Threat to the U.S.?

Mainstream Media and Organic Views

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Michael Beckley, an Associate Professor of Political Science at Tufts University, a Jeane Kirkpatrick Visiting Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, and the author of *Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the World's Sole Superpower*, recently published an article, entitled, *America Is Not Ready for a War with China - How to Get the Pentagon to Focus on the Real Threats*, in *Foreign Affairs* (June 10, 2021). In this article, Professor Beckley accepts the thesis that China is a threat to the U.S. but claims that the current and previous Administration have not carried out an effective strategy to deter China. His main points are: The U.S. outspends military budget far more than China. The Administration leaders overburdened the main military forces with too diversified missions wearing their ability to focus on the real threats. Beckley's entire article did not clarify what is the real threats to the U.S. other than targeting China as a threat and China may solve the Taiwan issue by force. In such a scenario, Beckley feels that the current Pentagon strategy is faulty in wasting resources on obsolete forces and non-vital missions and Washington's current defense posture doesn't make military sense. Beckley suggests that the Biden administration must explicitly and repeatedly order the military to focus on deterring China and downsize its other missions. However, there are some ambiguity whether it is the Administration which overburdens the military with missions that may be dealt with by other departments or it is the Pentagon getting used to let commanders focusing their own missions ("The combatant commanders oversee sprawling mini-Pentagons, travel the world like heads of state, and handle a wide array of issues. Instead of advocating the relatively cheap and easy deployment of cruise missiles that would be crucial in a war with China, they instead push for big military units and massive military platforms (such as aircraft carriers and destroyers) that can handle a variety of peacetime missions.

The title of the above *Foreign Affairs* article explicitly states that the U.S. is not ready for a war with China and offers suggestions to Pentagon to focus on the real threats to the U.S. which presumably means only the China threat. Beckley's article is narrowly confined in the military strategy domain. Given China as a threat to the U.S. and given Taiwan as a vital military strategic spot of the 'island chain' for the U.S. to confine and deter China, Beckley's article does raise some valid points on how the pentagon budget should be codified, how military operations should be executed, and how military weapons (carriers and submarines vs drones and missiles, etc.) and military forces should be deployed. If one raises the 'threat' issue to a higher political level, then Beckley's article offers nothing but a position (The U.S. is not ready for war if China choose to take Taiwan by force). That kind of discussion is too narrow minded similar to 'Taiwan lobbyist' arguments. In a political analysis, one may ask why would or should China take Taiwan by force? What is the real threat to the U.S., recognizing that China's taking Taiwan is just one issue among many issues existing between the U.S. and China. In this column, we shall make a political discussion above the military one about the threat issue. It is obvious that the U.S. and her citizens do feel a threat in the sense of their future, from economic status, personal prosperity, world status to American exceptionalism points of view. However, these 'threat' feelings are not rooted in the military

domain. As Beckley states in his essay, the U.S. is still a super-power with vast resources and strong military capability to counter China or any other country. Then what is the real threat to the U.S.? Let's elaborate on this question below.

There is no question that China is a rising power, mostly economically. China's military strength, although expanding rapidly recently, shows a clear trace that she focuses on 'defense' rather than 'offense' and she is reacting to foreign pressure to develop military capability rather than charting an expansionist intrinsic plot to conquer others. China's history does offer evidence of adhering to peaceful foreign policies. In the recent two centuries, China was a victim of aggression by foreign powers, but yet there is no sign of hatred nor revenge, clearly evidenced by her peace treaties signed with defeated nations post WW II. Politically speaking, China's doctrines such as peaceful rise, lifting her citizens out of poverty, not using nuclear weapon against any nonnuclear nation and pursuing joint economic development for mutual prosperity are all policies being rigorously followed. The 'threat' feeling the U.S. developed gradually since the demise of the Soviet Union, should not be rooted in China. The real threat to the U.S. is more complex than targeting China as politicians prefer to do. Understanding of the real threat to the U.S. must come from a sincere self-reflection on what and how the U.S. has lost the 'competitive edge' in many areas, government efficiency, economic development, commerce and trade, even technology. This loss is not due to the weakening of the U.S. military strength, perhaps, due to over and unwise spending of military budget (Beckley has given some data showing this point).

To diagnose the above complex scenario is not a simple task, however, if we analyze the issue under the causality principle, we may discover the root cause for losing the competitive edge. Any achievement is based on the following factors, idea, policy, plan, execution, and completion. All these factors depend on human talents and hard work. The U.S. is never short of ideas and talent pool, the problems lie in the process of forming consensus to establish policies, develop plans and budgets and complete the execution with efficiency. The root of the above problems is closely related to the deterioration of our bipartisan political system in decision making, be it electing officials, legislating policies, passing budgets or managing execution. After WW II, our two-party system has become deeply entrenched in our democratic system however with an ever-diverging ideology dividing the nation along party line. This division is the root of the problems making our government inefficient. Our private enterprises can thrive under capitalism creating wealth for a few but not necessarily beneficial for the mass or the nation. The deterioration of our infrastructure, ever growing expensive education system, healthcare system and big government are contributors to the problems because they take away a big chunk of our budget and resources. In addition, our military has spent 19 trillion dollars (16 trillion more than China spent) since the end of Cold War for scattered purposes which may have earned the superpower title but actually have lost our manufacturing base, infrastructure update and any substantial economic gain for the mass of people.

Therefore, it is not enough to call on our Administration to revise military strategy regarding competing with China; it is far more important to acknowledge the real threat to the U.S. In the true spirit of democracy, forming consensus and minority yielding to majority must be obeyed.

Otherwise, activists become divisive forces, and will make the U.S. losing her competitive edge.