



The Promise and Perils of Historical Analogy: What the Pacific War Can, and Cannot, Tell Us About Asia Today

By Abraham M. Denmark

In 2012, Henry Kissinger returned to Harvard University after an absence of four decades. Asked by a student what someone beginning a career in foreign affairs should study, Kissinger [answered](#) “history and philosophy.” The idea that those engaged in the study and praxis of foreign affairs should study history is hardly revelatory. Indeed, Kissinger would quote the ancient Greek historian Thucydides—whose history of the Peloponnesian War is of particular relevance for some scholars today—who asserted that, “The present, while never repeating the past exactly, must inevitably resemble it. Hence, so must the

future.” He would then add: “More than ever, one should study history in order to see why nations and men succeeded and why they failed.”

As we mark the 75th anniversary of the end of the Pacific War, the instinct to look back and attempt to learn lessons from the past is inescapable. It can also be dangerous. As Richard Neustadt and Ernest May wrote in their study of the use of history in policymaking [Thinking in Time](#), historical analogies can be misleading when differences in context are not recognized and accounted for. In other words, learning the wrong lessons from history—or

applying the right lessons improperly—can have disastrous consequences for policymakers and the nation they serve.

In many ways, for example, the misuse of historical analogy was a key driver of the disastrous U.S. decision to fight a war in Vietnam. As French colonial forces in Vietnam neared defeat in the mid-1950s, President Eisenhower [invoked](#) Neville Chamberlain's failed attempt to appease Hitler at Munich: "If I may refer again to history; we failed to halt Hirohito, Mussolini, and Hitler by not acting in unity and in time. That marked the beginning of many years of stark tragedy and desperate peril. May it not be that our nations have learned something from that lesson?" This frame, however, constrained how the United States understood the problem and its available options. It drove the United States to view the communist insurgents fighting the French as tools of China and the Soviet Union in their scheme to aggressively spread communism around the world.

Yet there was one problem with this analogy: Vietnam was not Munich. The war in Vietnam was not evidence of dominoes falling at the behest of Moscow's commands, but rather a combined anti-colonial war of liberation and post-colonial civil war that had only limited implications for American national security interests. Robert McNamara, an architect of the Vietnam War who served as Secretary of Defense for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, [painfully acknowledged](#) his mistakes and those of his colleagues. He ignored or rejected any evidence that ran counter to Cold War orthodoxy: the Vietnamese communists were primarily motivated by nationalism, not loyalty to international Communism, and the domino theory was simply wrong. By misunderstanding the nature of the conflict in Vietnam, American presidents and officials drew improper historical

analogies that drove them towards disastrous policies costing millions of lives.

Understanding the Rise of China and its Competition with the United States

As China rises in geopolitical power and asserts its interests with increasing levels of aggression, scholars and policymakers have similarly looked to history for lessons that could help U.S. policymakers navigate the burgeoning competition between China and the United States. Yet, as with Vietnam and Munich, policymakers must be careful in their use of history to guide and inform policy decisions.

Probably the most famous historical analogy related to U.S.-China dynamics, Graham Allison's [Thucydides Trap](#) references the titular historian's assertion that "It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable." Allison argues that the Peloponnesian War was only one example of a rising power challenging a ruling, established power. He finds that between the year 1500 and today, a rising power had challenged an established power sixteen times and went to war in twelve of them. Using what the book's promotional materials call "uncanny historical parallels and war scenarios," Allison maintains that the trap identified by Thucydides represents "the best lens for understanding U.S.-China relations in the twenty-first century."

Yet as with any historical analysis, Allison's version of the Peloponnesian War—even as told by Thucydides is incomplete. Thucydides' own views on the causes of the war are subject to other interpretations, including as [a warning](#) about the damage a hyper-aggressive states driven by populism could wreak. Moreover, Thucydides' explanation for the cause of the war—the rise



of Athens instilling fear in Sparta—was not his statement on the causes of war generally. Rather, he famously [described the motivations of war](#) to be “fear, honor, and interest.” Moreover, the historian Donald Kagan has [written](#) that at the time of the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, Athenian power was in fact not growing, the balance of power had begun to stabilize, and Sparta was more worried about a slave revolt than it was concerned about the rise of Athenian power.

Lastly, does the Peloponnesian War actually represent the best lens for understanding U.S.-China relations in the twenty-first century? While there certainly some important similarities in terms of the relative balance of power, there are several important differences. In Allison’s version of the Peloponnesian War as a stand-in for U.S.-China competition, the rising power Athens is the stand-in for China and the established power Sparta is a stand-in for the United States. Yet unlike China today Athens was democratic and the region’s dominant maritime power at the helm of a large network of alliances—qualities that better describe the United States. While Sparta was an authoritarian land power—qualities it shares with China. Additionally, both China and the United States have something that neither Athens nor Sparta had: nuclear weapons. In Allison’s analysis of sixteen rising powers and the twelve conflicts that resulted, it’s notable that no war between a rising and an established great power has emerged from this dynamic since the advent of nuclear weapons. It would be fair to argue that these distinctions are ultimately less significant than the impact of changes to the relative balance of power, but these distinctions and differences of context should at least be in the minds of policymakers as they read analogies between the wars of Ancient Greece and consider their applicability for contemporary geopolitical challenges.

Meanwhile, others have sought to draw parallels between China and Wilhelmine Germany. There certainly are some parallels: like China today, Germany was a relative newcomer as a great power; [had](#) rapidly industrialized; was autocratic; made massive infrastructure projects a centerpiece of their diplomacy; used its power to press a foreign policy agenda informed primarily by grievance and the accumulation of more power relative to its neighbors; and saw itself as held back by its stronger, established rivals. Moreover, as [noted](#) by James Holmes, British leaders at the beginning of the 20th century were concerned about the buildup of German naval forces and Berlin’s clear intentions to “contest Royal Navy supremacy in home waters—concerns that are comparable to current American concerns about the build-up of a PLA Navy that is tailored to challenge American naval power in East Asia and the Western Pacific. Then as now, the dominant sea power fretted about a rising challenger intent on building up sea power in its own environs.”

Yet as Holmes notes, there are important differences. Geography is one key distinction: whereas Germany was literally surrounded by its great power competitors, China’s neighbors are smaller and less powerful and its chief rival—the United States—is not resident in Asia. Moreover, China’s ambitions are more regional than those of the Kaiser, who had sought to build a global empire to rival those of his British and French adversaries. Additionally, [as argued by Joseph Nye](#): “To some extent, World War I was caused by the rise in the power of Germany and the fear that created in Great Britain, but it was also caused by the rise in the power of Russia and the fear that created in Germany, the rise of Slavic nationalism and the fear that created in Austria-Hungary, as well as myriad other factors.” And then there is again the factor that—unlike today—nuclear weapons did not deter direct wars between major powers.



Finally, there is the oft-repeated specter of the emergence of a “New Cold War” between China and the United States. While some [pundits](#) and [observers](#) have raised their [concerns](#) about this new frame to understand dynamics between Washington and Beijing, none added more fuel to the fire than a major speech about China by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. He leveled several undeniable accusations of China’s egregious behavior—including its theft of intellectual property; its unfair trade practices; its pressure on foreign companies; its efforts to interfere in the political processes of other countries; its repression of Hong Kong, Xinjiang and the Chinese people themselves; and its efforts to gain more influence in international institutions while undermining established international laws and norms. Yet Pompeo took these facts and framed them using rhetoric that was blatantly reminiscent of the [Cold War](#). His speech featured several comparisons between China and the Soviet Union, and repeatedly invoked the Cold War—while making no other historical allusions during his remarks. He described China as a threat “for our economy, for our liberty, and indeed for the future of free democracies around the world” before declaring:

The [Chinese Communist Party (CCP)] regime is a Marxist-Leninist regime. General Secretary Xi Jinping is a true believer in a bankrupt totalitarian ideology. It’s this ideology, it’s this ideology that informs his decades-long desire for global hegemony of Chinese communism. America can no longer ignore the fundamental political and ideological differences between our countries, just as the CCP has never ignored them.

Secretary Pompeo clearly sees the Cold War as a powerful lens to understand U.S.-China competition. As with Munich or Germany’s rise prior to World War I, policymakers should be careful about their use of historical analogies when making policy decisions. If their understanding is framed by an inaccurate reading of history, or if the important differences in content and context between analogies are not considered, the result could be disastrous. Concerningly, the content of Pompeo’s speech—and other rhetoric from the Trump administration on China—troublingly include description of the history of U.S. strategy toward China (and the Soviet Union, for that matter) that are simply inaccurate.

For example, the Trump administration’s rhetoric about U.S. policy toward China is based on an inaccurate description of how past administrations handled China. According to their narrative, previous administrations were either blind or naïve about the realities of the Chinese Communist Party and “[got China wrong](#)” because— as described in the Trump administration’s 2017 [National Security Strategy](#)—“For decades, U.S. policy was rooted in the belief that support for China’s rise and for its integration into the post-war international order would liberalize China.” Others outside of the administration argue that the mere act of recognizing the People’s Republic of China in 1979 was the United States’ “[greatest foreign policy failure](#).” In this telling, The Trump administration portrays itself as the first to realize China’s true nature by rejecting policies that emphasize engagement and cooperation in favor of a more confrontational approach designed to maximize American interests.

The problem with this description is that it is far too broad and mischaracterizes the intent and



substance of U.S. strategy toward China going back to Nixon's trip to China in 1972—the realities and results of which were far more complex than the naïve capitulation described by the administration. For instance, Nixon's engagement with China (and those of his successors through Reagan) was not driven by a naïve hope for democratization, but rather by Cold War realpolitik calculus: that Beijing would be more helpful to the United States as a partner countering the Soviet Union. Indeed, Pompeo's quote of Nixon's famous *Foreign Affairs* article ("The world cannot be safe until China changes. Thus our aim, to the extent that we can influence events, should be to induce change.") misreads Nixon's argument—he was not arguing for China to become a democracy as Pompeo intimates, but rather calling on Beijing to focus on addressing its domestic problems. Indeed, the rest of the paragraph (which Pompeo did not quote) reads: "The way to do this is to persuade China that it must change: that it cannot satisfy its imperial ambitions, and that its own national interest requires a turning away from foreign adventuring and a turning inward toward the solution of its own domestic problems." The next paragraph demonstrates clearly that Nixon was not calling for engagement designed to change China into a democracy, because it argues that the Soviet Union itself made a similar change after World War II when NATO and the restoration of the European economies forced Moscow to accommodate the West and focus on its own internal challenges. Certainly, when the article was published in 1967 there had been no democratic progress to celebrate in the Soviet Union—for Nixon, this was all about geopolitics, not trust and hope for democratization.

Moreover, the degree to which senior U.S. officials believed that engagement would bring about China's political liberalization is broadly overstated in the Trump administration's

narrative. [As described by Neil Thomas](#), the term "engagement" was first introduced by the George H.W. Bush administration to describe efforts to sustain contact with China's leaders following the Tiananmen crackdown of 1989. It was during the Clinton years (1993-2001) that "engagement" became associated with China's political democratization, but both [Harvard's Alastair Iain Johnston](#) and [Brookings' Ryan Haas](#) have demonstrated that the Clinton administration's approach to China was far more pragmatic and focused on encouraging China to act according to established international laws and norms, with Haas adding that rhetoric about political liberalization was sometimes used by the Clinton administration to strengthen political support at home, but it was never the primary purpose of engagement with China.

While this may seem like an academic exercise over history, it has important implications for how the United States understands (or misunderstands) its history with China, which directly informs its approach to China today and in the future. For example, by citing Reagan's saying that he dealt with the Soviet Union on the basis of "trust but verify," Pompeo suggests that Reagan trusted the Soviet Union (he didn't—it was [originally](#) a Russian rhyming phrase that was meant ironically). Yet by re-wording the phrase to "distrust and verify," Pompeo seems to convey that we need to be skeptical today compared to those naïve predecessors who simply trusted Beijing's word.

By citing the Cold War and the Soviet Union as analogies and metaphors for U.S.-China competition today, Pompeo explicitly links problems with his preferred solutions. Pompeo's exhortations to his audience are, again, deeply reminiscent of the Cold War. He declared that "securing our freedoms from the Chinese



Communist Party is the mission of our time,” and “the free world must triumph over this new tyranny.” He called on “the freedom-loving nations of the world [to] induce China to change.” Finally, in a disconcertingly direct reference to Cold War invocations of Munich, he declared “If we bend the knee now, our children’s children may be at the mercy of the Chinese Communist Party, whose actions are the primary challenge today in the free world.”

The problem with all of this is that the Soviet Union and the Cold War are not strong analogies to understand China and the burgeoning U.S.-China competition. Fitting U.S.-China competition into a cold war frame would be a significant stretch and require either a broader definition of “cold war” that has little distinction from “competition” or “rivalry,” or—as Pompeo did at times in his speech—a mischaracterization of the challenge posed by China as similar to that which was posed by the Soviet Union. It’s not. In some ways, the challenge posed by a powerful and assertive China will be far more complex and vexing than the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

As Pompeo acknowledged in his speech, the Soviet Union was not integrated with the broader international economy—including that of the United States—while China today is a major economic power.

Yet there are far more differences, especially in the structure of the competition between China and the United States. The fundamental clashes in the Cold War were both ideological and existential—neither side believed its system could peacefully coexist with the other, and both believed success could only be achieved by the destruction of the other. Competition between China and the United States, on the other hand, is not existential nor fundamentally ideological—despite having some

[important ideological elements](#). Indeed, the strategy the U.S. eventually pursued during the Cold War—to contain and pressure the Soviet Union until it crumbled under the weight of its own internal contradictions—does not apply to the United States and China. Even among those calling for regime change in China, few are calling for the United States to trigger the collapse of Chinese society itself.

Moreover, the nature of the Cold War competition was primarily military and especially intense in the nuclear realm that creating a dynamic that was costly and at times brought the world to the brink of nuclear annihilation. The United States and Soviet Union fought each other and one another’s proxies on battlefields around the world. Today, the United States is not fighting proxy wars against Chinese forces in far-flung corners of the world, and China is not supporting insurgencies designed to overthrow the political systems of U.S. allies and partners. While competition between China and the United States certainly involves military and security issues, they have yet to become a primary driver of the competition. Moreover, the danger of disputes between China and the United States over Asian hotspots escalating into a nuclear confrontation—though serious and troubling—are not nearly as intense as those in the Cold War over Berlin or Cuba. It’s a problematic and difficult competition to be sure, but it has yet to become explicitly violent or existential.

In some ways, China represents a more challenging rival than the Soviet Union. [As described by Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan](#), “China today is a peer competitor that is more formidable economically, more sophisticated diplomatically, and more flexible ideologically than the Soviet Union ever was.” Competition between China and the United States will be



far more complex than the Cold War, involving all elements of national power and involve the pressuring of middle powers around the world—including several U.S. allies—to make difficult choices between American security or economic engagement with China.

Suffice it to say, the challenges and dynamics of U.S.-China competition are profoundly different from those during the Cold War. By applying a Cold War analogy to U.S.-China competition, Secretary Pompeo and others raise the risk of misunderstanding the issues at hand, unnecessarily limit the scope of U.S. policy responses, and drive both countries toward a dynamic that is completely avoidable.

Learning the Right Lessons from the Pacific War

As we mark the 75th anniversary of the end of the Pacific War, it is inevitable that we try to learn lessons to prevent the repeat of such a catastrophe. The fact that this anniversary comes at a time when China is increasingly powerful and assertive, and the sustainability and reliability of American power is being questioned, brings added salience and attention to these issues. And, as this essay has demonstrated, we must be careful to be clear about what lessons may, or may not, apply to today. While there are important lessons to be learned from the Pacific War, one must be careful to avoid stretching the metaphor too far.

First, the lessons learned. As each video produced by the Wilson Center for this initiative explores, there are several lessons that the United States can learn from the Pacific War. Militarily, as described by former Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work, the United States must remain flexible in building its military capabilities to reflect emerging technological realities. In the 1930s, that meant building aircraft carrier capabilities while

much of the world still believed battleships to be the *sine qua non* of naval power. As discussed with Dr. Martin Sherwin, memories of the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end the war can today be remembered as a deterrent against future nuclear use, a reminder of the horrible costs of the use of war, or a cynical effort by Washington to intimidate the Soviet Union in preparation for the Cold War that was about to emerge. Dr. Kenneth Pyle discussed how U.S. efforts to impose a very liberal constitution on a defeated and previously conservative Japanese society poses significant contemporary challenges in defining a role for Japan in today's unpredictable strategic environment. And Harvard Professor Joseph Nye reviews how the geopolitics of Asia today—from the hub-and-spoke structure of U.S. alliances to the continued division of the Korean peninsula—are ongoing reflections of the legacy of the Pacific War.

There are several other lessons that should be drawn from U.S. experiences in the Pacific War. Japan's successful surprise attack on Pearly Harbor in 1941 highlights the importance of readiness and intelligence in what at least appears to be a relatively benign strategic environment. Japan's decision to initiate a conflict with the United States, which some in Tokyo [believed to be a desperate gamble](#) that was preferable to the certain collapse of the Japanese empire they believed would be the result of U.S. sanctions on oil exports to Japan, has important lessons for those who believe deterrence can be achieved with military superiority alone. Moreover, [as argued](#) by a scholar from the U.S. Army War College, the road to the Pacific War was built on misunderstandings and miscalculations: the U.S. "underestimated the role of fear and honor in Japanese calculations and overestimated the effectiveness of economic sanctions as a deterrent to war, whereas the Japanese



underestimated the cohesion and resolve of an aroused American society and overestimated their own martial prowess as a means of defeating U.S. material superiority.”

Yet there are also important distinctions that limit the applicability of the Pacific War to current security calculations in the Indo-Pacific. First, China is not Imperial Japan. By the time war started in 1941, Japan had been at war for much of the previous 47 years, having defeated China (twice), Russia, Germany’s colonies in Micronesia and China, and French colonial forces in Indochina. As a result of its victories, Japanese military forces occupied today’s Vietnam, maintained a brutal colonial presence in Korea, occupied Taiwan, and supported the puppet state Manchukuo in northeast China. Yet despite well-deserved concerns about Chinese ambitions and its assertiveness along much of its periphery, as well as justified criticisms about its domestic human rights record, China has not by any measure been a militarily aggressive military power like Imperial Japan.

Additionally, the United States is not the same kind of power it was in 1941. While the U.S. had some military presence in the Philippines and in China, it was not nearly as capable or formidable as U.S. forces forward based in Asia today. Moreover, U.S. allies and partners today are far more capable at defending themselves and contributing to coalition operations today than they were in the 1940s. By any measure, the U.S. represents a far more formidable opponent to China today than it did to Imperial Japan in 1941.

Another obvious, though critically important, difference between the Pacific War and a potential U.S.-China conflict is the existence of nuclear deterrence. Both China and the United States have significant nuclear capabilities—[although the](#)

[U.S. nuclear arsenal is far larger](#)—which should drive both sides to seek to avoid a war that would be far costlier and more destructive than what was endured before.

Finally, one critical aspect of the Pacific War has not changed significantly since 1941, and it has significant implications for a potential U.S.-China conflict, but too often it goes under-examined: geography. Japan understood that land-based air power was a critical asset, as its longer range gave it a significant advantage over carrier-based aircraft. Once war with the United States began, Tokyo went about securing its control over dozens of critical small islands across the Pacific Ocean in order to keep the United States out of the Western Pacific—a mid-century version of what American military planners would call an anti-access, area denial strategy, similar to what China seeks to impose today. This strategy by Japan forced the United States to pursue a brutal and costly campaign of island hopping—difficult, contested amphibious landings on small islands now made famous with names like Guadalcanal, Midway, Iwo Jima, and Wake Island. Those islands continue to exist today, and control of the land still provides some valuable military advantages when trying to project military power—either Westward or Eastward. Thus, for broadly similar reasons, China and the United States are embroiled in a political and economic competition for influence and access over many of the same islands that Japanese and American troops fought and died over. In a potential war between China and the United States, the outcome of this competition will be of tremendous significance.

Context is King

The randomness of historical events, and the outsized role they can play in driving nations to war, may drive some to believe that world



events are too complicated for history to teach us anything useful. The assassination of Archduke Ferdinand triggering World War I is a great example—it forces one to consider the counterfactual, If Archduke Ferdinand had not been assassinated, would World War I have been avoided? Similarly, one may ask what would have happened if Abraham Lincoln had lost the election of 1860 to John C. Breckinridge or if Giuseppe “Joe” Zangara had successfully assassinated then-President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt on February 15, 1933 instead of killing Anton Cermak, the Mayor of Chicago. Would there have been a U.S. Civil War? Would the U.S. have entered World War II the way it did?

While I certainly agree with critiques of previous administration’s approach China as overly valuing dialogue with Beijing or pursuing it at the cost of other interests, one cannot in good faith describe engagement with China as a complete failure. After Nixon’s engagements, China became a helpful partner for the United States in the Cold War and halted its efforts to spread permanent revolution around the world. With the death of Chairman Mao and the rise of Deng Xiaoping, China began to change into a country that—gradually—embraced aspects of capitalism that allowed its economy to flourish and its geopolitical power to grow.

Some may certainly perceive the seeds of today’s competition as a result of these efforts to engage. That China’s actions have certainly been troubling in recent years and that China is more powerful today because of U.S. actions and the international system that allowed Beijing to focus on its own development in a peaceful, stable, and trade-conducive environment remains undeniable. It is also undeniable that engagement with China has not accomplished nearly as much as one would hope or expect. Yet that should not be interpreted

as engagement’s wholesale failure. Moreover, a strategy that includes engagement cannot be judged on its own: it must be compared to alternative policy options. As Nixon wrote in the same *Foreign Affairs* article cited by Pompeo, “we simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations, there to nurture its fantasies, cherish its hates and threaten its neighbors. There is no place on this small planet for a billion of its potentially most able people to live in angry isolation.”

This essay has primarily focused on U.S. actions and decision-making in the context of historical metaphors and analogies while ignoring the critical role that China itself will play in defining the nature and intensity of its competition with the United States. It’s undeniable that China’s aggression across its periphery, as well as its increasingly oppressive treatment of its own people, inflames competitive dynamics with the United States and reduces American interest in, or appetite for, cooperation. Yet this is not the focus of this essay, primarily because Chinese scholars apply a completely different set of historical analogies—some appropriate and some problematic—to understand its relationship with China—few of which involve the Pacific War.

Some metaphors are more applicable than others, certainly. But the complexities of history should not dissuade us from using history as a tool for analysis and policy development. As argued by historian Robert Crowcroft:

Most fundamentally, history teaches us to look past the ephemeral and search out the underlying, long-term dynamics of problems. As a matter of routine, historians probe the roots of a situation and endeavor to trace causalities. Indeed, historians ought to grasp causality better than any other



expert group. If one can pinpoint the factors that brought a situation about, one can make helpful observations about how likely a proposed course of action is to succeed, or temper one's ambitions for a simple resolution.

Ultimately, the path to war is a complex mix of the structural and the specific, the predictable and the random. World War I may have been caused proximately by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, but in reality, that was only the incident that spurred a continent ready for war. The disintegration of empires, the establishment of new and aggressive powers, the stationing of militaries in situations where they must be used or lost, the rise of nationalism, and the ideology of war itself created a situation in which the killing of an obscure noble could start a war that killed millions. The lesson to be drawn from this history is not to protect all Archdukes, but rather to prevent a similar situation from developing again.

As Dr. Joseph Nye [noted](#), "Metaphors can be useful as general precautions, but they become dangerous when they convey a sense of historical inevitability." He employs a compelling metaphor for the impact of events on human decision-making: "the funnel of choices." He argues that are times when leaders have a tremendous amount of leeway in optionality in their decision-making. Yet, "events close in over time, degrees of freedom are lost, and the probability of war increases." His point is that there is nothing inevitable in human decision-making, but choices made narrow the options available in the future.

Conclusion

As of this writing, neither side has committed to a path that makes war probable, let alone inevitable. Yet, the danger is growing. Leaders in both Washington and China have the opportunity to

find a better path. For American policymakers, that means devising a strategy that defends the United States, our allies, and our interests and allows for both competition and cooperation. This approach, what some have described as "[competitive coexistence](#)," envisions a strategy that secures U.S. interests in critical domains while avoiding the kinds of threat perceptions and dangerous escalatory spirals that defined the Cold War.

Today, as the United States and China attempt to understand the nature of their burgeoning competition, it would be a mistake for U.S. policymakers to constrain themselves by misapplying historical analogies that limit their options or blind them to options and possibilities that are unique to this particular competition. Ultimately, navigating the dangerous complexities of U.S.-China competition will require learning from the past without being beholden to it.

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