



China's Grand Strategy

Trends, Trajectories, and Long-Term Competition

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To explore what extended competition between the United States and China might entail out to 2050, the authors of this report identified and characterized China's grand strategy, analyzed its component national strategies (diplomacy, economics, science and technology, and military affairs), and assessed how successful China might be at implementing these over the next three decades.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS



- How successful might China be at implementing its grand strategy goals by 2050? These goals are based on national-level strategies in the areas of diplomacy, economics, science and technology, and military affairs.
- What will U.S.-China relations look like by 2050?

KEY FINDINGS



Any one of the four scenarios analyzed—*triumphant China*, *ascendant China*, *stagnant China*, or *imploding China*—is possible three decades hence

- A triumphant China is least likely because such an outcome presumes little margin for error and the absence of any major crisis or serious setback between now and 2050.
- An imploding China is not likely because, to date, Chinese leaders have proved skilled at organizing and planning, adept at surmounting crises, and deft at adapting and adjusting to changing conditions.
- By 2050, China most likely will have experienced some mixture of successes and failures, and the most plausible scenarios would be an ascendant China or a stagnant China. In the former scenario, China will

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be largely successful in achieving its long-term goals, while, in the latter scenario, China will confront major challenges and will be mostly unsuccessful in implementing its grand strategy.

These four scenarios could produce any one of three potential trajectories in U.S.-China relations: *parallel partners*, *colliding competitors*, or *diverging directions*

- The parallel partners trajectory is a continuation of the state of U.S.-China relations in 2018. This trajectory is most likely to occur with a stagnant China and probably an ascending China.
- The colliding competitors trajectory is most likely to manifest in a triumphant China scenario in which Beijing becomes more confident and assertive.
- The diverging directions trajectory is most likely to occur in an imploding China scenario because Beijing will be preoccupied with mounting domestic problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS



- The likely scenarios call for greater attention to improving joint force capabilities and preparing to operate with much longer logistics tails. For the U.S. Army, this means efforts to optimize key units and capabilities for available airlift and sealift to get soldiers to the fight quickly or to a hot spot before the fight breaks out.
- Because China probably will be able to contest all domains of conflict across the broad swath of the region by the mid-2030s, the U.S. Army, as part of the joint force, will need to be able to respond immediately to crises or contingencies at various points of contention. To be inside the wire at the outset of a crisis or conflict will require a combination of forward-based forces, light and mobile expeditionary forces, and interoperable allied forces.
- The U.S. Army and allied forces must also develop and train on concepts to reinforce conventional extended deterrence and keep competition from becoming conflict.
- The ability of highly capable, responsive, and resilient maritime and air forces to quickly and effectively suppress China's burgeoning reconnaissance-strike system, along with specific special operations and Army capabilities, will largely determine the extent to which China's leadership remains risk averse when considering military options to resolve regional disputes.

