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STRATEGIKA

CONFLICTS OF THE PAST AS LESSONS FOR THE PRESENT

What Is the Likely Trajectory of Chinese-Japanese Tensions and How Will the United States Be Affected?

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Chinese-Japanese Tension and Its Strategic Logic

Miles Maochun Yu

The recent tensions between China and Japan are threatening to bring the world's top three economies—the United States, China, and Japan—into a major armed confrontation. There is little doubt that the tensions are related to China's rise as a global economic power with a formidable military willing to challenge the existing security arrangements and the geopolitical status quo in the Asia Pacific region. Japan, as Asia's reigning leader of global influence and with its strong alliance with the West, especially the United States, bears the brunt of communist China's revisionist challenges and provocations; if China wants to be the hegemon in the region, Japan must be reduced to a lesser status and its ties to the West broken into insignificance.

The Three Key Points of Contention

However, what is obvious and generally true is not always recognized as such by China. These tensions are often framed by Beijing in a historical, rather than geopolitical, context that broadly entails three major issues in order to legitimize China's ongoing provocations against Japan.

The first is the territorial dispute over the sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands, known in China as Diaoyudao. The second is the degree to which Japan has demonstrated remorse over its wartime aggression and atrocities against China, or whether Japan under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's conservative Cabinet is striving to revive "Japanese militarism and fascism." And the third is the history textbook controversy alleging that Japan is deliberately whitewashing its expansionist and militarist past.

Let's have a closer look at each of China's three historical grievances.

The Senkakus had always been claimed by Japan. Since the end of World War II, the US military had occupied these small islands, and administered them until the Nixon Administration returned them to Japan in the early 1970s. No governments, including those of China, Taiwan, Japan, and the United States, had ever challenged Japanese sovereignty over the Senkakus until the eve of America's handover to Tokyo, when Taiwan's Chinese Nationalist government sent Tokyo a note on July 20, 1970, seeking clarification

as to whether the Senkakus, known in Taiwan as Tiaoyutai, were part of the Ryukyu island chain, which stirred up an argument between Taipei and Tokyo.

The US government had always assumed that the Senkakus were part of Japanese territory, even paying rent to the Japanese owner of a Senkaku island for using it as a bombing range. Yet not willing to upset its Asian allies, the United States set up a "Tripartite Committee" consisting of Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea to meet in Seoul on November 12, 1970 to peacefully resolve the Senkaku issue between Taipei and Tokyo.

The Chinese communist government in Beijing had not challenged Japan's sovereignty over the Senkakus until this Seoul Tripartite Committee meeting that included Taiwan as a legitimate government of "China."

"The Seoul meeting triggered the 3 December 1970 PRC [People's Republic of China] accusation that the joint development plan was in reality a trick instigated by Japanese militarists, aided and abetted by 'the Chiang Kai-shek bandit gang and the Pak Jung Hi Clique,' and whose purpose was the plundering of the seabed and undersea oil resources of China and Korea," a thorough 39-page CIA research report, dated May 1971, concluded.[1]

That was the first time the Beijing government disputed Japan's sovereign right to the Senkakus. Cartographic publications prior to 1970 in China, Taiwan, Europe, and the Soviet Union had all given Japan the ownership, according to the 1971 CIA report.

In other words, China's challenge to Japan's Senkaku ownership is not based upon historical facts, but on Beijing's problem with Taipei's right to represent "China" in order to claim these islands from Japan. And China, of course, claims complete sovereignty over Taiwan.

The crux of the second issue between China and Japan, i.e., Japan's apologies for its wartime aggression and atrocities, is not that Japan has not apologized enough, but whether these repeated apologies are regarded by China as "sincere."

The fact is that since the 1950s, various Japanese government officials, mostly prime ministers, foreign ministers, and parliamentary leaders, but also including the emperors, have apologized on solemn occasions more than 50 times to nations, particularly China, for Japan's colonial and

POLL: How should the United States help Japan?

- ☐ We are treaty-bound to go to the defense of Japanese democracy in all scenarios—and must.
- ☐ We should explain to Japan candidly what the United States realistically can and cannot do to protect it.
- ☐ Japan will inevitably become nuclear and there is no sense stopping it.
- ☐ Japan is wealthy and powerful and should be left to its own devices to protect itself.
- ☐ We should stay neutral in their dispute—and keep out of it.

wartime atrocities.[2] Almost all of these apologies were expressed with words such as "deep remorse," "heart-felt sorrow," "deeply reproaches itself," and "profound regret."

In addition, Japan has never shied away from its obligations to pay fully war reparations to all nations, as guided by international treaties and regulations. In fact, in 1972, the Chinese government voluntarily renounced any claim for Japan's reparations from World War II in exchange for Tokyo's recognition of Beijing as the legitimate Chinese government,[3] but Japan went on to provide China with enormous economic and financial aid anyway in the ensuring three decades, a key factor in jump-starting China's current economic boom.

At present, China is playing the "sincerity" card adroitly because there really is no tangible way of proving whether an apology is sincere or not, subjecting Japan to the impossible situation of "damned if you do, damned if you don't."

The surest sign of Japan's remorse perhaps can be found in the irrefutable fact that post-war Japan has been transformed thoroughly into a democratic, innovative, affluent, generous, and peace-loving nation that has not fired a single shot in 70 years against anyone.

The third issue plaguing Chinese-Japanese relations is the history textbook controversy. The key factor here is the proportionality of Japan's right-wing sentiment whitewashing its militarist past.

Unlike China, Japan's government does not write the history textbooks for elementary and high schools. Instead, after the end of World War II, Japan adopted a system of encouraging private publishing companies to write textbooks with Japan's Ministry of Education approving the books' circulation to avoid any extremist effort to mislead and factually misrepresent history. However, an important catch here is, unlike in China, every Japanese school board has the final say in adopting textbooks for its schools. Over the decades, several extremist textbooks, by both the extreme Left and the extreme Right, have been tossed out by the government as factually misleading.

Currently, all but one of the 8 approved Japanese history textbooks are accepted by a great majority of Japanese schools as fair and factually accurate. The exception is the "New History Textbook" published in 2000 by the conservative group "Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform," which downplays Japan's imperial aggressions and its consequences.

Vehement official protests and violent anti-Japan demonstrations in China and South Korea continue on this issue, despite the fact that less than 1% of all of Japan's schools have selected and are using the controversial textbook—in 2001, the first year it was ready

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for adoption to schools, 0.039% of all schools in Japan chose this right-wing history book, and that number has not changed much to this day.

Japan is a democracy whose underlying principle is pluralism, allowing different voices to be heard. The overwhelming majority of Japanese have rejected the voices of historical revisionists. To complain about the insignificant proportion of these voices reflects China's political culture of intolerance and demand for intellectual unanimity.

To Become the Owner

If these three key points of contention cannot adequately explain the real reason for the ongoing Chinese-Japanese tensions, what is it then?

The current tensions with Japan are for the most part manufactured by Beijing not as a genuine expression of historical grievances, but as a shrewd geopolitical calculation aimed at a different target: the United States and the United States-led alliance in Asia Pacific whose bedrock foundation is the United States–Japan defense cooperation.

China has spared no effort to split that foundation to isolate Japan from the United States and vice versa. To do that, China must create a crisis that depicts Japan as a revisionist nation dedicated to reviving its fascist past and imperial glory that inflicted great harm on both China and the United States during World War II. To do this, China must also convince the United States that Japan remains unremorseful over its wartime crimes.

China's strategic culture has been heavily influenced by an unusual devotion to geopolitical realism that matured more than 2,300 years ago during the historical period defined by historians as the Warring States era. The most salient realist strategy collection favored by the Chinese Communist government is the "Thirty-Six Stratagems" popularized by the Beijing government in 1961.[4] It provides good explanations for China's entanglement with Japan and China's real intentions.

Chapter 4, "Chaos Stratagems," is one which calls for "Befriending a distant state [the United States, in this case] while attacking a neighbor [Japan]," based upon the assumption that neighbors are usually enemies and distant states can be better allies.

But in this case, befriending the United States is only a means to destroy Japan. The very next stratagem calls for "borrowing the resources of an ally [the United States] to attack a common enemy [Japan]. Once an enemy is defeated, use those resources to turn on the ally that lent you them in the first place."

And the ultimate Chinese objective lies in another strategy in the collection that's known as "Make the host and the guest exchange roles" tactic—"Usurp leadership in a situation where you are normally subordinate. Infiltrate your target. Initially, pretend to be a guest to be accepted, but develop from inside and become the owner later."

"To become the owner" thus is the real impetus for China to create the current Chinese-Japanese tensions that seeks to replace the United States as the current "owner" in the Asia Pacific region and beyond.

Therefore, the trajectory of the current Sino-Japanese tensions rests entirely on one of these two scenarios: 1. The United States buys China's propaganda and continues its current "engagement with China at any cost" approach to damage Japan's confidence in the bilateral alliance. This will further embolden China to be more cantankerous, raising the tension levels until Japan surrenders to Chinese territorial demands. The result will be to jeopardize the United States–Japan defense alliance, thus fulfilling a Chinese strategic objective; or 2. The United States stands firm with Japan in rebuffing China's attempt to drive a wedge between Washington and Tokyo, which will greatly reduce the Sino-Japanese tensions as China will no longer test America's resolve and strategic bottom line.

By choosing option 1, the United States will lose its preponderance of influence existing since the end of World War II, erode Japan's confidence in the alliance, and force Japan to move more independently to forge alliances with more reliable partners that see China as a common threat, including India, Vietnam, or even Russia.

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1 Central Intelligence Agency, "Intelligence Report, The Senkaku Islands Dispute: Oil Under Troubled Waters?" (May, 1971), http://cryptome.org/2013/07/guccifer-cia-senkaku.pdf.

2 Wikipedia, "List of war apology statements issued by Japan", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_war_apology_statements_issued_by_Japan.

3 Exploring Chinese History, Politics: Government Documents, "Joint Communications Between Japan and China", http://www.ibiblio.org/chinesehistory/contents/03pol/c02sc01.html#092972.

4 Wikipedia, "Thirty-Six Stratagems", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirty-Six_Stratagems#Befriend_a_distant_state_while_attacking_a_neighbor.

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The Main Obstacle

Angelo M. Codevilla

As in previous millennia of history, China's objective for its periphery—the East Asia/Western Pacific region—is subordination of some kind or degree. Japan, being the only indigenous major power in the region, and allied formally with the United States (Russia having ceased to be an Asian power), is the main obstacle to that desired suzerainty. Removing that obstacle without war is Chinese foreign policy's most perilous task, on which depends the success of the rest of China's ambitions. For the past generation, Japan and China's economic lives have depended substantially on intimate relations between themselves and with the United States. But, as so often in history, economic interest is not stopping geopolitical and racial antagonisms from leading both nations along a trajectory of conflict.

Here is the essence of China's Japan problem: the more China succeeds in its many-faceted efforts to separate Japan from American power, the more China isolates Japan from other countries in the region, the more China stimulates Japan to abandon its post-1945 anti-militarism and to rearm. Although Japan has but a tenth of China's population, confronting Japan's capacity for war, especially for nuclear weapons, is something that China absolutely wants to avoid. Hence, China's strategy for dealing with the main obstacle to its ambitions must be like that for boiling a frog, namely to turn up the heat so imperceptibly that the frog does not leap from the pot. That is difficult, and requires an insensitive frog.

Not least of the assets that China's strategy enjoys are: first, the racial and historical enmity against Japan that is nearly universal (Taiwan excepted) throughout the region; second, the United States' maintenance of its alliances in the region at the same time as the United States empties them of material and political substance. That strategy's chief liability is the all-too-quickly-mounting evidence of its success, magnified by China's own truculence.

China's approach to Korea exploits the racial and historic fundamentals in an exemplary manner. To this day, there stands a mound in Kyoto (*Mimizuka*) under which are buried some 100,000 noses and ears sliced from Koreans living or dead during Japan's 1592–98 invasions of Korea. By comparison, Japan's rape and abuse of countless Korean "comfort women" to satiate its troops during WWII looms small in the historical memory of Koreans. The Chinese, who also suffered massive Japanese atrocities between 1931 and 1945, always find both North and South Koreans eager to agree about who the common enemy is.

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To South Koreans, the Chinese say: "America is not the key to the status and security you want, never mind Japan. America can't protect you against Pyongyang's nuclear weapons, much less help with reunification. We are the ones who can help, and we are willing to do that." They point out the obvious: North Korea is China's pawn. They suggest that they are willing to sacrifice that pawn for the sake of something they value far more: some form of a grand bargain. "We Chinese can undo the Democratic Republic of Korea in a way that suits everybody except the Japanese. Please come under our security umbrella. As you do so, we can make reunification happen in a peaceful and orderly manner. All we ask is that you loosen if not cut your political-security ties with the US/Japan—you can keep the economic ones just as we Chinese have economic ties to these countries—and prosper more than ever. Don't worry about the Americans because they really prefer us to Japan, and will always prefer Japan to you."

Japan's reaction to China's courtship of South Korea—an economic powerhouse with the capacity for nuclear weapons—has been to try to improve its relations with the starving, primitive North. This might be less nonsensical were the North anything but the Chinese pawn that it is.

In short, while Japan worries about the shadows that China is casting on Korea as well as on the nearby Senkaku Islands and the South China Sea; and while it is annoyed at Washington's analgesic talk about China's peaceful rise, as well as being concerned with America's military decline; and while all of these concerns have prompted much talk and some action about Japan taking responsibility for its own security, Japan is still in the position of the proverbial frog in the pot of warming water.

The point for us to consider is threefold. First, that water will only get hotter because nothing we can imagine is likely to turn down China's flames. Second, no one can tell what may happen if and when the Japanese frog jumps. Third, in the unlikely event that Japan accepts the role that China is shaping for it, China indeed will live up to its own name, *Zhongguo,* Center Country, and the United States will face the Western Pacific coast entirely under the influence of a single power.

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Japan's Pivotal Position

Mark Moyar

If underlying geopolitical factors are the overriding cause of the recent decline in relations between China and Japan, then the current trajectory is likely to persist, for there is little reason to believe that those factors will change. The most obvious of the underlying factors is competition for natural resources. China, with its burgeoning economy and massive population, has an enduring need for the hydrocarbon and fishing rights in the East China Sea that it is seeking to wrest from Japan. The Japanese also have great numbers of automobiles to fuel and mouths to feed, and hence are unlikely to lose their interest in hydrocarbons and fish.

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A less obvious, but perhaps no less powerful, underlying factor is the desire of the Chinese and Japanese governments for preeminence in East Asia. Both China and Japan have held the role of East Asia's dominant power in the past, and both have nationalists among their ruling classes who believe that their country's rightful place is located at the top of the East Asian pecking order. Nationalist sentiments are stronger in China, where nationalism has largely supplanted Marxism-Leninism as an ideological force. In Japan, the ghosts of World War II have left a lingering suspicion of nationalism, imperialism, and militarism, but nationalism has been resurgent of late, fueled by perceptions of a rising threat from China.

The chances of a full-blown war between China and Japan appear low, thanks mainly to nuclear weapons. But the Chinese may try to test the limits of Japanese and American forbearance with seizures of islands, maritime rights, and airspace. They are keenly aware that pacifist sentiment remains significant in Japan, and that the current US administration has been disinclined to take a stand against aggressors, as seen most prominently in the case of Russia's land grabs in Ukraine. The Chinese Navy's strong-arming of its Philippine counterpart at the Scarborough Shoal in 2012 offers a worrying portent of what could follow in East Asia.

Japan's ability to deter and defeat Chinese burglary in the East China Sea will depend on the US

Navy, as Japan's Navy is much smaller than China's. The US naval presence is scheduled to diminish precipitously next year, when US aircraft carriers will be absent from East Asia for four months, the first time since World War II that the United States will have no carriers in the region. Thanks to ill-considered cuts to the US defense budget and the present troubles in the Middle East, the world's greatest naval power cannot maintain one carrier in the region to which the White House not long ago promised to "pivot."

Over the long term, dwindling American military power in the Pacific could cause Japan to build its own aircraft carriers. That outcome would have the benefit of shifting some of America's defense burdens to an ally. But it would also mean a decline in influence for the United States, as the Japanese would use their carriers to promote their own interests, which do not always align with those of the United States. It would increase the propensity of the Japanese to view themselves as a superpower and to pay less heed to the Americans on a wide range of political, economic, and military matters of high importance to the United States. In any event, designing and building carriers will take the Japanese at least a decade, by which time the Chinese may be able to take what they want in the East China Sea.

Americans like to think that the Japanese are destined to remain a US ally against China because the Japanese share America's liberal democratic values and object to the autocratic ways of the Chinese, or because fear of rising Chinese power will inevitably cause Japan to "balance" against China by siding with the United States. But there exists a real risk that Japan could one day lose interest in its American alliance and cozy up to China. On a number of occasions during the Cold War, the United States feared that Japan was getting too close to China, and the fear remains a valid one today. Just last week, Japan and China issued a "Principled Agreement on Handling and Improving Bilateral Relations," which some observers hailed as an initial step towards a rapprochement, though only time will tell whether the agreement has more than symbolic value. If the United States continues to grow weaker in the Pacific, its attractiveness as an ally will diminish further, which the Chinese may seek to exploit by offering the Japanese enough concessions to lure them away from the United States.

Japan's future relations with China will depend not just on geopolitical factors, but on the decisions of individual Japanese and Chinese leaders, who are influenced by culture, ideology, and personality, as well as by hard geopolitical realities. Some Japanese political parties are distinctly more inclined towards accommodation with the Chinese than others. China could at some point undergo a political liberalization that the Japanese would find especially attractive. The United States must do its best to influence these decisions, while recognizing that it may have to deal with decisions it does not like.

Mark Moyar is a senior fellow at the Joint Special Operations University. He holds a BA, summa cum laude, from Harvard and a PhD from Cambridge. His books include *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* (Yale University Press, 2009); *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); and *Phoenix and the Birds of Prey: Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism in Vietnam* (Naval Institute Press, 1997; University of Nebraska Press, 2007). He is currently writing a book on national security strategy during the Obama administration.

The Trajectory of North Pacific Tensions

Angelo M. Codevilla

Korea is the ever-sharpening focus of the growing tensions between China and Japan because moving Korea out of the security alliance led by the United States and Japan is the proximate objective of China's grand design for the North Pacific.

President Xi Jinping's five visits to South Korea since his inauguration last year are part of a courtship based on exploiting Korea's deep racial and historical resentment of Japan. The essence of China's pitch to South Korea—other than generous offers of increased economic opportunities—is to point out, again and again, that China shares Korea's resentment of Japan's beastly treatment of Koreans but that the United States is so committed to Japan as to overlook it. China's approach has led South Korea to join China's "Asian Infrastructure investment Bank"—the rival of the US-sponsored Asian Development Bank.

But to achieve its strategic objectives, China is playing its biggest card: its life-and-death influence over North Korea. South Koreans fear the North's nuclear program as well as its big army, and know that only China—not America, never mind Japan—is in a position to protect them. South Koreans yearn for reunification. They know that only China can make it happen. As in his July 3, 2014 visit to Seoul, President Xi expressed support for a denuclearized Korean peninsula. Continually, the Chinese speak in terms of the entire peninsula.

It is increasingly clear that China is offering South Korea some form of a "grand bargain": loosen if not cut your political-security ties with the United States and Japan—you can keep the economic ones just as we Chinese have economic ties to these countries. In exchange, we Chinese can undo the Democratic Republic of Korea. Only as you come under our security umbrella, can we make sure that reunification happens in a peaceful and orderly manner.

At the present time, Japan's only counter to China's approach to South Korea has been an effort to improve ties with the North. Vis-à-vis the North, this is impotent. Vis-à-vis the South, it is counterproductive in the extreme.

The Ultimate Trajectory of Chinese-Japanese Tensions

Miles Maochun Yu

Chinese-Japanese tensions are partly a corollary to the century-old bilateral animosity beginning with the Sino-Japanese War of 1894.

However, China has historical animosities with many other countries too, including Great Britain, France, Russia, and the United States, yet none has matched the one with Japan in its intensity and explosiveness as witnessed in the last five years.

In fact, the current tensions with Japan are for the most part manufactured by Beijing not as a genuine expression of historical grievances but as a shrewd geopolitical calculation aimed at a different target: the United States–led alliance in Asia Pacific whose bedrock foundation is the United States–Japan defense cooperation.

China has spared no effort to split that foundation to isolate Japan from the United States and vice versa. To do that, China must manufacture a crisis to depict Japan as a revisionist nation dedicated to reviving its fascist past and imperial glory that inflicted great harm to both China and the United States during World War II. To do this, China must also convince the United States that Japan is unremorseful over its wartime crimes.

Therefore, the ultimate trajectory of the current Sino-Japanese tensions rests entirely on one of these two scenarios: 1. The United States buys China's propaganda and continues its current "engagement with China at any cost" approach to damage Japan's confidence in the bilateral alliance. This outcome will further embolden China to be more cantankerous, and raise the tension levels until Japan surrenders to Chinese territorial demands, thus jeopardizing the United States–Japan defense alliance and fulfilling a Chinese strategic objective; or 2. The United States stands firm with Japan in rebuffing China's attempt to drive a wedge between Washington and Tokyo, which will greatly reduce Sino-Japanese tensions as China will no longer test America's resolve and strategic bottom line.

Discussion Questions

What is the likely trajectory of Chinese-Japanese tensions and how will the United States be affected?

1. In terms of relative strength, is a much smaller Japan able to counter China?

2. How are our other allies positioning themselves—Taiwan, South Korea, Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand—in this dispute?

3. Is Japan in any realistic danger of massive air or amphibious attack from China?

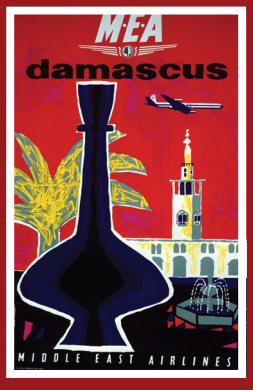
4. Does Japan bear any responsibility for the decline in Japanese-Chinese relations?

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Alastair Ian Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton University Press, 1998).
- Ralph Sawyer (trans.), *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China* (Basic Books, 1993).
- Central Intelligence Agency, "Intelligence Report, The Senkaku Islands Dispute: Oil Under Troubled Waters?" (May 1971), http://cryptome.org/2013/07/guccifer-cia-senkaku.pdf.
- "Thirty-Six Stratagems" ("Sanshiliu Ji"), a Chinese strategy collection popularized by China in 1961. Available at Wikipedia, "Thirty-Six Stratagems", http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirty-Six_Stratagems#Befriend_a_distant_state_while_attacking_a_neighbor.

In the Next Issue:

How might the US reboot its Middle East policy and restore confidence in US power and influence?



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Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict

The Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict examines how knowledge of past military operations can influence contemporary public policy decisions concerning current conflicts. The careful study of military history offers a way of analyzing modern war and peace that is often underappreciated in this age of technological determinism. Yet the result leads to a more in-depth and dispassionate understanding of contemporary wars, one that explains how particular military successes and failures of the past can be often germane, sometimes misunderstood, or occasionally irrelevant in the context of the present.

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Strategika is a journal that analyzes ongoing issues of national security in light of conflicts of the past—the efforts of the Military History Working Group of historians, analysts, and military personnel focusing on military history and contemporary conflict. Our board of scholars shares no ideological consensus other than a general acknowledgment that human nature is largely unchanging. Consequently, the study of past wars can offer us tragic guidance about present conflicts—a preferable approach to the more popular therapeutic assumption that contemporary efforts to ensure the perfectibility of mankind eventually will lead to eternal peace. New technologies, methodologies, and protocols come and go; the larger tactical and strategic assumptions that guide them remain mostly the same—a fact discernable only through the study of history.

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