



# STATE OF THE GAME

## BUILDING PACAF'S COMPETITIVE MINDSET

MAY 2020

## DISINFORMATION IN THE TIME OF COVID

**China's government spreads falsehoods to advance its aims; the US uses the truth to counter these efforts**

In March, high-level officials from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) falsely claimed COVID-19 was introduced by US military servicemembers participating in the Military World Games in Wuhan. In April, Twitter [suspended the account](#) of the Chinese Embassy in Sri Lanka for disseminating false and undiplomatic information. These are just two recent examples of the CCP using [disinformation](#) to further their interests. CCP disinformation about COVID-19 origins, concealing information in the early stages, and [false statistical reporting](#) are all coordinated attempts to cover up the damaging reality.

All nations participate in [information campaigns](#) in one way or another. The methods they choose

vary greatly, from Moscow-backed online [troll-farms](#) instigating discord, to the CCP's use of disinformation portraying themselves as benevolent during the [COVID-19 pandemic](#). Alternatively, shining a spotlight on fact-based, successful outcomes has proven to be a more impactful approach.

PACAF Airmen are constantly executing a multitude of positive events throughout the AOR both at homestation and with our Allies and Partners. Each one of these must be designed in furtherance of our larger themes. If the world knew our story, they would be believers. We just need to get that story out. The recently published PACAF [Commander's Messaging Strategy](#) shows us the way.

## MAY THE 4TH: WHAT IT MEANS IN CHINA

**In American pop culture, May Fourth is "Star Wars" Day; for China, however, it holds a much different meaning**

During World War I, China contributed significant resources and manpower in support of the allies. China hoped the support would help end what it viewed as unfair treaties and bring about the return of Germany's Chinese colonies after the war. Instead, the Treaty of Versailles ignored China's requests and gave the German colonies to Japan. Believing their country was humiliated, 3,000 Chinese students took to Tiananmen Square on 4 May 1919 to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the Chinese government and its inability to protect China's sovereignty.

Fueled by nationalism, the movement quickly caught support nationwide and succeeded in pressuring the Chinese government to address the protesters' grievances. This protest became known as the May 4th Movement. The [May 4th Movement](#) sparked political discussions and increased the distrust of Western European governments among the Chinese

intellectuals. As a result, it helped strengthen the Chinese Nationalist Party, and gave rise to socialism and the Chinese Communist Party. Seventy years later, students would again gather on Tiananmen Square to protest for reforms but would instead be met with severe and bloody opposition.

**Why it Matters:** To the Chinese, the May 4th Movement is a constant reminder of the humiliation they feel China suffered in the early 20th century. While this sentiment is not completely unfounded, the CCP shapes the domestic view of history, constantly reinforcing the notion of humiliation to strengthen its legitimacy. The CCP uses its projection of itself as the savior of China and the protector of sovereignty for legitimacy to rally nationalism and public support. For this reason, May the Fourth is very special to the Chinese.

# UNDERSTANDING THE COMPETITION

**For PACAF Airmen, “the other team” is China; to compete, we need to look beyond just their military capabilities**

If you’ve competed as an athlete, you’re familiar with the preparation that precedes a big game. You review tapes, you practice, and you talk game plan. It isn’t enough to know the strengths of your own team; a truly successful team understands the psychology and motivations of their opponent. A winning team gets inside the opponent’s head, anticipating the other team’s moves.

This premise was foundational to the China Symposium during the recent PACAF Commander’s Conference. China experts from [RAND](#), [China Power Project](#), the [China Aerospace Studies Institute](#) (CASI) and USINDOPACOM’s China Strategic Focus Group answered questions from General Brown and senior officer and enlisted leaders from across PACAF. The Q&A focused on understanding China and competing successfully in the region:

- **How does China define success?** Becoming a global leader in all facets of national strength, including having a “world-class” military and a decisive economic and technological lead.

- **Is China on track to achieve its goals?** President Xi sees danger. China is coming to the conclusion that the US has decided to oppose their rise and that overreach by rising powers is historically a path to losing in competition.
- **How can PACAF compete against China short of armed conflict?** The US’s greatest strategic advantage is its network of Allies and Partners. We compete with the PRC by showing up—and expanding that strength through exercises, engagements, and education/training opportunities.
- **Are pilots in the People’s Liberation Army Air Force encouraged to make independent decisions during flight ops?** After decades of “nanny style” ground control intercept doctrine, the PLAAF is beginning to allow independent thinking and decision-making in flight training operations.

Every PACAF Airman is a member of the team and invited to study the game tapes. The [unclassified briefings](#) are available on the SCT Intelink page.

## THE SPARK

**Information to grow knowledge of China and spark curiosity about the Indo-Pacific region**

In 2018, China approved multiple changes to their constitution; the most oft-discussed change was the removal of the two-term limit on their presidency, effectively allowing Xi Jinping to remain in power for life. Another change was the incorporation of an ideology called “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.” These two actions effectively raise Xi to the level of Chairman Mao Zedong in the Chinese leadership pantheon and set the stage for interactions with a leader with the time and political will to act on his strategic vision.

## NEXT ISSUE

- **Remembering the Tiananmen Square Massacre**
- **How the PLAAF Does Not Value Its Enlisted Force**

## COMPETE DAILY

**Want to learn more? The Strategic Competition Team recommends:**

- The [ChinaPower Podcast](#), hosted by China Symposium expert Bonnie Glaser from the China Power Project, dissects critical issues underpinning China’s emergence as a global power.
- [Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone](#) suggests that the United States can begin to treat the ongoing gray zone competition as an opportunity more than a risk.
- Want even more? Visit the [Strategic Competition Team’s NIPR Intelink page](#).

- **Social Scores in China**
- **Our Allies and Partners in Competition**



A monthly review of competition thoughts and activities from PACAF’s

**STRATEGIC  
COMPETITION TEAM**