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# Will It Be a Cold War Redux?

Understanding the Role of the *Committees on the Present Danger* in the Context of U.S.-China Strategic Competition

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# Executive Summary

**T**he **Committee on the Present Danger (CPD)** was an articulate and effective Cold War-era advocacy grouping that played an influential role in instilling an all-of-government-and-society response to the challenge presented by the Soviet Union. Stocked with a veritable ‘Who’s Who’ of the Beltway’s political and policy aristocracy, the **Committee on the Present Danger (CPD-I)** served as a bulwark against the influence of communism in the U.S. in the late-1940s/early-1950s and, resuscitated in the mid-1970s as the **Committee on the Present Danger II (CPD-II)**, played an equally pivotal role in the U.S.’ Cold War victory push in the 1980s.

In spring 2019, a new **Committee on the Present Danger: China (CPD:C)**, modelled on its Cold War forerunners, was launched by a hawkish assortment of distinguished national security practitioners, determined anti-China publicists, and anti-Establishment ‘America First’ theorists. The new Committee is no chip off the old block. That said, with Beijing’s ties with Washington in disarray and with a broad bipartisan consensus palpably evident regarding the imminent Great Power challenge of China at hand, the ability of a *re-constituted* Committee on the Present Danger: China to morph, down-the-line, into a powerful anti-China pressure group with widespread buy-in across the Beltway and beyond should not be dismissed.

So, what were the facilitative conditions, ingredients of success, and *modus operandi* that was instrumental to the storied achievements of the Cold War-era CPD’s? And what are the practical implications that derive or are relevant today, insofar as the CPD:C is concerned in particular?

First, the key national security policy divide during the Cold War was not between the national security ‘internationalists’ and the ‘isolationists’ but was *within* the mainstream ‘internationalist’ establishment. CPD-I and CPD-II was essentially about policy and bureaucratic competition within the internationalist-minded senior bureaucracy to capture the national security decision-making control tower, and thereby frame out and fill-in the means to implement ‘containment’. Relevant to today, a Committee on the Present Danger: China that is honeycombed in part with ‘America First’ sentiment will need to shed its populist and isolationist leanings if it is to have any chance of ‘going mainstream’ as the Beltway’s premier anti-China mobilizational operation.

Second, the *modus operandi* employed by CPD-I and CPD-II hawks to outmaneuver their realist-minded counterparts within the national security senior bureaucracy was to argue that: (a) the Soviets were an aggressive and immoral power; (b) hoping to elicit change in the Kremlin's international conduct for the better was an illusory notion; (c) to seek accommodation and coexistence was not just dangerous but defeatist and compromised the moral foundations of American foreign policy; and (d) what was needed rather was a qualitatively deeper commitment in men, money, materiel, and ultimately willpower to stare down and defeat the Soviet Communist challenge. A successful future CPD:C will almost-certainly employ this tried-and-tested playbook. Conversely, it is questionable if the fiscal means will be available, even if the appetite for conflict is undimmed.

Third, for CPD-I and CPD-II's provocative hardline arguments to gain traction within the larger body politic as well as the American public, it was essential to manufacture episodes of East-West tension as a moment of existential crisis for American national security. CPD proponents generated hysteria about Soviet intentions and overstated Moscow's capabilities. Sophisticated political advocacy and lobbying was deployed thereafter to delegitimize the supposedly weak-kneed response of the incumbent, realist-minded policymakers. A successful CPD:C will almost-certainly mimic this tried-and-tested playbook during a future flashpoint crisis with China. It is instructive to point out though that in the current age of mass media decentralization - and disinformation - the top-down manufacturing of the necessary 'public will', as was the case during the CPD-I and CPD-II eras, is no longer a straightforward proposition.

Fourth, the core membership of both Committees on the Present Danger shared three essential traits. First, they may have been hawkish to a fault but they were not anti-mainstream players. Second, they came from a diversity of occupations, and were therefore representative of a wide swathe of American society and success. And third, CPD-I and II's key leaders had significant experience at the senior-most levels of government and even once out of government, continued to enjoy impeccable access to the highest levels of government. The current Committee on the Present Danger: China, composed overwhelmingly as it is of the inbred mid-level reaches of the state's military-industrial complex, is lacking on each of these counts.

Fifth, the success of both Committees on the Present Danger derived from their long incubation periods outside government or at the lesser reaches of government, during which time their proponents were able to sharpen their ideological and political agenda and perfect their messaging to the political establishment and the American people. It also enabled them to establish excellent connections within government and parley an *'insider-outsider'* strategy to constrict the sitting Administration's national

security policymaking space and bend it to the Committee's harder-line policy will. Few among the current Committee on the Present Danger: China, by contrast, will be returning to the loftiest portals of government anytime soon.

Finally, CPD-I and CPD-II members originated from both sides of the political aisle but found their calling and voices primarily in Republican administrations. For any Committee on the Present Danger: China to go viral within the Beltway, it will need to possess cross-over bipartisan appeal – something that it currently lacks. Furthermore, the ideological moorings of the present-day Republican Party remain in flux too. Should the Party's slide towards the isolationist, anti-mainstream populism of its disenchanted white, working class constituents continue unchecked, it could commensurately cease to be an appropriate vehicle to transmit the new Cold War fight to Socialist China's door.

# Introduction

In the spring of 2019, a hawkish assortment of distinguished national security practitioners, determined anti-China publicists, and anti-establishment ‘America First’ theorists banded together to launch a hardline, advocacy grouping named the **Committee on the Present Danger: China (CPD:C)**. The choice of name was not incidental. It was named after and consciously styled on the **Committee on the Present Danger (CPD)**, the Cold War-era advocacy organization that had served as a bulwark against the influence of communism in the U.S. in the late-1940s/early-1950s and, resuscitated in the mid-1970s as the **Committee on the Present Danger II (CPD-II)**, had played an equally pivotal role in the U.S.’ Cold War victory push in the 1980s. This latest iteration, as its name suggests, of course, has its crosshairs trained on China. Drawing inspiration from its forerunner, the Committee on the Present Danger: China’s mission statement plainly notes that:

*As with the Soviet Union in the past, Communist China represents an existential and ideological threat to the United States and to the idea of freedom—one that requires a new American consensus regarding the policies and priorities required to defeat this threat.*

In this vein, it goes on to thereafter announce that CPD:C’s purpose is “to bring to bear the collective skills, expertise and energies of a diverse group of experts on China, national security practitioners, human rights and religious freedom activists and others” under a unified umbrella.

And in so doing, CPD:C aims to fulfil its mission of:

*Help[ing] defend America through public education and advocacy against the full array of conventional and non-conventional dangers posed by the People’s Republic of China.*

Left to its own devices, the launching of the Committee on the Present Danger: China would barely merit a noteworthy mention. The Cold War-era Committee(s) on the Present Danger were stocked with a veritable ‘Who’s Who’ of the Beltway’s political and policy aristocracy and each CPD constituted a formidably articulate and effective elite pressure group. Fully one half of CPD-I’s membership had served in the World War II-era Office of the Secretary of War or the Office of Scientific Research and Development, and many went on to serve afterwards in the Eisenhower Administration. For its part, CPD-II counted Candidate, and thereafter President, Ronald Reagan as one of its members, and the senior reaches of the Reagan presidency was staffed by dedicated CPD-II policy evangelists. By contrast, the current Committee on the Present Danger: China’s initial membership is by-and-large (although not entirely) composed of marginal Beltway figures as well as a smattering of crackpot ‘America First’ theorists – some of whom, one would be forgiven for assuming, would be more likely to attack the constitutional foundations of their own government than China’s. Among the leading lights on the Committee, and in the Vice-Chairman role no less,

includes one who has recently called for the Communist Party of China (CPC) to be designated as a 'Transnational Criminal Organization'. Good luck with that!

This having been said, it would be unwise to write-off the Committee as a coterie of cranks and charlatans. The current composition of the Committee on the Present Danger: China might not be, well, the sharpest knives in the drawer; however, the Committee's mere launch and existence as an entity, on the other hand, should ring small alarm bells in Beijing, given the storied history of its Cold War-era predecessors as a public education and elite pressure group and advocacy tool *par excellence* in the struggle against Soviet communism.

More to the point, the present circumstances in U.S.-China ties are also vastly dissimilar from that just a few years ago. In its *National Security Strategy* of December 2017, the Trump Administration took the profound decision to treat the Indo-Pacific theater as the primary geographic and geopolitical arena of strategic contestation. For the first time in a national security strategy document since America became an internationally engaged superpower more than a hundred years ago, Asia was prioritized over Europe in an overarching strategy document. Labeling China as a 'strategic competitor' was the natural corollary to this profound shift. The U.S.-China bilateral relationship has only deteriorated in the time since, with lasting damage inflicted to ties by the zero-sum politics and policies deriving from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. **The conflation of the China Challenge with the earlier ideological and geopolitical struggle with the Soviet Union is no longer a mere theoretical curiosity.**



*Steve Bannon, watched by Frank Gaffney, speaks at the launch of the latest iteration of the Committee on the Present Danger in March 2019.*

*Photo Attribution & Permissions: Robert Delaney, South China Morning Post*



It is also instructive to note in this regard that the success of the forerunners of the Committee on the Present Danger: China, i.e., CPD-I and CPD-II, benefitted from their memberships' long incubation periods in opposition or at the lower reaches of government before their entry or elevation to positions of significant authority *within* government. This spell on the sidelines or relative obscurity afforded CPD-I and CPD-II's members the time to unify and sharpen their ideological and political agenda and perfect their messaging to the political establishment and the American public. A Republican Party-leaning bent is also clearly detectable in the composition of both CPD-I and CPD-II, although this probably has more to do with the fact that Republican administrations tend to take a harder line stance on national security issues vis-à-vis China than Democratic ones.

**With the Republican Party solidly in the opposition now, with Beijing's ties with Washington in disarray, and with a broad bipartisan consensus palpably evident regarding the imminent Great Power challenge of China at hand, the ability of the Committee on the Present Danger: China to morph, down-the-line, into a powerful anti-China advocacy organization with widespread buy-in across the Beltway should not be dismissed.** Of course, CPD:C will not attain this exalted status under its present leadership. But the existing Committee could yet provide the nucleus around which a solidly bipartisan future coalition of core establishment political and national security figures coalesce and mobilize a new Cold War-style geostrategic call to arms against China – a call that proceeds to resonate thereafter across a broad swathe of American society far beyond the Beltway.

It is in this context that a study of the background, ideas, methods, and mobilization tools utilized by the storied Cold War-era Committee(s) on the Present Danger is instructive. What were their founding processes? What were the geopolitical and ideological currents of the time that inspired and sustained their mobilization? What were their aims and political agendas? What organizational strategies and tactics did they adopt in pursuit of their stated goals? And what were their achievements? This Report aims to furnish answers to these questions. CPD-I and CPD-II were not uncontroversial entities at the time of their founding and existence, given their unending advocacy for budget-busting, high-wire national security competition with Moscow. Modeled as the Committee on the Present Danger: China nevertheless is as a revivalist advocacy organization on the lines of its Cold War forerunners, the objective of this Report is to focus on the noteworthy aspects of CPD-I and CPD-II's playbook and thereby provide insight on the ingredients, and implications, of their respective successes in corralling a whole-of-government-and-society approach in the U.S.' struggle against Soviet communism.

Ultimately, the Report strives to answer two foundational questions: **Are the ingredients in place – or likely to be in place in the near future - in the current domestic and international political environment for a replication by the Committee on the Present Danger: China of the successes enjoyed by its Cold War-era forerunners, CPD-I and CPD-II? Do facilitative conditions exist for CPD:C to become a central fixture capable of shaping geostrategic outcomes in the likely U.S.-China contestation at hand going forward?**

The organization of this Report is as follows. It will study the Committee on the Present Danger I

and the Committee on the Present Danger II sequentially, starting with a discussion of the existing international geopolitical context within which each CPD was conceived, launched and promoted. In case of CPD-I, the early Cold War debates between national security hawks and realists on implementing containment against the Soviet Union will be reproduced; in case of CPD-II, the immediate post-Vietnam War era debates between the hawks and realists over the wisdom of implementing détente with the Soviet Union will be described. Thereafter, the Report will touch on the composition and membership of each grouping and follow that up with a discussion of the defining argumentative and organizational strategies that were employed by each Committee.

The Report concludes with a discussion of the key underlying common features, and their implications thereof today, that were essential to the respective successes of CPD-I and CPD-II. Whether the initial conditions for success exist or are transferable to the Committee on the Present Danger: China, be it in its current form or in a reconstituted future form, will be inferred. Because an excellent book-length study of the Cold War-era Committee(s) on the Present Danger already exists (*Peddlers of Crisis: The Committee on the Present Danger and the Politics of Containment*), this study will not dwell on an exhaustive introduction and description of each Committee. Rather, the aim is to home-in on the key insights that can be gleaned from these two Cold War-era advocacy groupings and apply them to present circumstances, with a relative emphasis on CPD-II because of the greater ease of availability of documented resources.

# Committee on the Present Danger I

## THE EARLY COLD WAR DEBATE ON *IMPLEMENTING CONTAINMENT* AND THE CONTEXT OF CPD-I'S FORMATION AND LAUNCH

**A**t the time of the early conceptualization of the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD-I) in the late-1940s, **the key divide in U.S. Cold War national security policy was between the 'internationalists' (Cold Warriors) v. the 'isolationists'**. The 'isolationists' must be understood in relative terms, and not in the classic sense as 'peaceniks'. Their political objective was not to withdraw America from global affairs; they were deeply reluctant, rather, to return America to the path of costly military obligations and fiscal commitments in Europe and Asia so soon after the heavy commitment in life and treasure during the Second World War. That be the case, this domestic political debate was won handily by the 'internationalists' over the 'isolationists'. **The former was united in their view of the threat at hand: Soviet Communism,** and the ideological and geopolitical threat that it constituted. The 'internationalist' Cold Warriors were also united in **the overarching strategy to be employed to confront Soviet Communism: containment of the Soviet Union.**

At its essence, 'containment' was posited on the belief that **Soviet Communism**, although solemnly clothed in the trappings of Marxism, **was essentially just an old-fashioned Russian dictatorial regime which, lacking moral and intellectual respectability, relied on an ideology-grounded fiction of external threat to maintain its domestic legitimacy.** Contained within its limited sphere of influence and left to its own devices, the regime would be wracked in time by its own internal convulsions and succumb ultimately to the germs of its internal disease. The role of the Western Powers was to hold the line during this interim so that Soviet conduct could not contaminate the international order and constitute a menace to the Western world.

From this core belief of Soviet conduct was derived the unflinching imperative to ensure that the **vital power centers in the international system**, i.e., areas of the world with industrially significant capabilities, **would not be permitted to fall into the hands of hostile forces** (the Soviet Union). Soviet hostility in and of itself did not pose a critical danger. It was only when it was coupled with or significantly reinforced by industrial war-making potential was there a legitimate cause for deep concern.

At the time of the framing the strategy of 'containment', there was deemed to be five centers of industrial and military power: United States, Great Britain, Germany and Central Europe, the Soviet Union and Japan (China at the time was still very poor and in the latter stages of its civil war). **Only one of these power centers was, at the time, in the hands of a country able to**



Checkpoint Charlie: the famous East-West crossing in the American Sector  
in Cold War Berlin

Photo Source: Pixabay License

**combine hostility with capabilities – the Soviet Union.** The primary interest of the U.S. in world affairs therefore was to ensure that no other power centers, especially Japan and Germany, would fall under such control. And control of two or more power centers by forces both hostile and militarily capable against the U.S. and its allies, would be considered a grave challenge to American national security. It followed from this reasoning, **therefore, that the objective of containment should be to limit Soviet expansionism, and especially the Soviets' ability to control major global power centers.**

### BOX I: Kennan's Long Telegram on Stalinist Russia and the China Challenge today

75 years ago, on 22 February 1946, the U.S. *charge d'affaires* in Moscow, George Kennan, dispatched a 5,300-word telegram to his superiors in Foggy Bottom in which he challenged assumptions held at the time in Washington, DC regarding the Kremlin's post-World War foreign policy worldview. Kennan forcefully argued that the Stalinist dictatorship in Moscow was simply the latest "of that long succession of cruel and wasteful [and insecure] Russian rulers who ha[d] relentlessly forced [their] country on to ever newer heights of military power in order to guarantee external security of their internally weak regimes ... no permanent *modus vivendi* that [was] desirable and necessary", as such, could be achieved with them.

In November 2020, a few months short of the 75th anniversary of the dispatch of Kennan's storied telegram, the Trump Administration's State Department released a 72-page document, *The Elements of the China Challenge*, with a key chapter titled *The Intellectual Sources of China's Conduct*. Much like Kennan had ascribed Soviet conduct to its despotic Tsarist inheritance, with Marxism-Leninism more-or-less serving as a fig leaf of moral and intellectual respectability, the State Department paper too reached back to China's pre-1911 imperial era behavioral drivers to explain the Chinese Communist Party's external conduct. **But how relevant or appropriate is the comparison between the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's persistent domestic behavioral drivers and external conduct in Kennan's day to the Communist Party of China's conduct today?**

In his description of the basic features of the Soviet Union's postwar outlook in the *Long Telegram*, Kennan alluded to **the Kremlin's belief in "antagonistic capitalist encirclement" as the underlying basis for the Soviets' firm assessment that no permanent peaceful coexistence could be had between East and West.** By contrast, the Communist Party of China's 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' aims to utilize capitalism's strength as a means of resource allocation, efficient market exchange and ultimately, as an engine of prosperity. And indeed, President Xi Jinping's doctrinal framing of U.S.-China relations as 'major power' relations, not 'great power' relations, was deliberately intended to transcend age-old Great Power rivalry and hopefully presage a more peacefully coexistent dispensation.

Kennan had chalked down the Kremlin's innate tendency to pursue "security only in patient but deadly struggle for total destruction of rival power; never in compacts and compromises with it" to **the "traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity" that was originally of a "peaceful agricultural people trying to live on vast exposed plain in neighborhood of fierce nomadic people ... [and to which was added the] the fear of more competent, more highly organized [Western] societies" with which it came into contact.** China, too, has faced its own millennia-long encounter with fierce steppe tribes on their periphery. The lessons the authorities drew on and their response was altogether different - and revealing. Patient but total destruction of a fundamentally insatiable rival power was futile; it was cheaper and less destructive rather to turn their rivals' avarice towards profit than war. The famous tribute system served, as one distinguished historian has described it, as an "institutionalized protection racket" by way of "which [the] Chinese traded[d] rich silks, porcelain, jewelry and money for bad horses, at a loss" in return for peaceful relations. A modern version of this playbook is already evident in the Chinese Communist Party's economic dealings with various branches of the West.

From the imperative for a "patient but deadly struggle for total destruction of rival power" would flow, Kennan argued, **the Kremlin's need to continuously exert "fluid and constant pressure to extend [the] limits of Russian [military and] police power [at home and abroad] ... solemnly clothed in trappings of Marxism".** Granted, that the history of Chinese dynasties is littered with constant skirmishing at shifting frontiers, which continues even today in a different form in the (uninhabited) Himalayan borderlands and the South and East China Seas. That said, these 'gray zone' episodes today are driven by local factors and always linked to a larger calculus of territoriality and sovereignty; pertinently too, these episodes are not attached to an overarching or subversive ideological or strategic doctrine of conquest and domination. Besides, over the past 40 years, China has fought no major or limited war and a mere hundred-or-so lives have been lost in anger on China's vast land and maritime frontiers.

Lastly, in the concluding section of the *Long Telegram* which dealt with his proposed response, **Kennan argued that the risks of confronting the Soviets and increasing the strains under which they could be forced to operate was manageable from the standpoint of American policy. This was because the U.S.' stake in the country, he observed, was "remarkably small".** The U.S. "ha[d] here no investments to guard, no actual trade to lose, virtually no citizens to protect, few cultural contacts to preserve". By contrast, in 2019-20, U.S. exports to China supported 1.2 million American jobs, the U.S.' stock of foreign direct investment in China totaled \$116 billion, overall annual bilateral trade in goods and services exceeded \$650 billion, and U.S. investors held more than \$1 trillion of Chinese equities. Indeed, in the years ahead, these stakes will almost certainly magnify as China becomes the largest economy in the world (at market prices) by 2030 and the largest consumption market by 2040.

It was in the *means to implement* containment – as in, the means to limit Soviet expansionism - that a divide arose amongst the ‘internationalist’ Cold Warriors. There were two wings in this debate: (a) a mainstream, moderate-minded school of national security **realists**; and (b) an equally mainstream but hardline school of national security **hawks**.

For the **realists**, the ultimate **goal of containment of the Soviet Union was to elicit a modification over time of the Soviets’ concept of international relations, with a view to both incentivize as well as coerce Moscow to play by international rules and thereby bring about a managed settlement of outstanding East-West differences**. If the Soviet Union was ready to play by international norms, realists were willing to accommodate it within the international system and build a loose structure of peace based on a balance of power. With firmness and patience on the American side, the realists believed that Russian leaders could be brought to their senses in that their interests were better served by learning to live with a pluralized international order than by aggressively subverting and communizing that order to its own image. At the end of the day, the contest between Western free market capitalism v. Soviet-led communism would be decided on the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the respective systems; a rough-and-ready managed coexistence could be established during the interim. **Soviet communism, in itself, did not pose a threat; only to the extent that it was an instrument of that Soviet geopolitical expansion was it to be considered a threat**.

For the **hawks**, on the other hand, Soviet hostility stemmed from the inability of a totalitarian-authoritarian system to tolerate diversity in the very first place itself. As such, hoping to elicit change in Soviet behavior for the better was an illusory concept, a hopeless task. **A lasting negotiated settlement simply could not take place until the system (communism) was itself torn down or altered beyond recognition. And the only way to accomplish this was to defeat the Soviet Union ideologically by aggressively promoting human freedom overseas and squeezing it militarily by building and maintaining preponderant U.S. military superiority**. The latter, in particular, i.e., a military build-up to challenge Soviet aggression wherever it might take place was the key pre-requisite to sowing the seeds of the Soviets’ downfall. Implementing containment, therefore, required a sustained policy which, *by all means short of a hot war*, would: (a) block further expansion of Soviet power (b) expose the falsities of Soviet pretensions (c) induce a retraction of the Kremlin’s control and influence and (d) foster the seeds of destruction within the Soviet system – indeed, to the point that the Kremlin would concede its geopolitical and ideological challenge and come to abide by Western norms of international behavior.

From this conceptualization by the national security **hawks** would follow an operational policy on the ground called ‘**perimeter defense**’. Perimeter defense assumed that all ‘rimlands’ (or peripheries of the continental heartland) were of relatively equal importance, and Soviet aggression wherever it may occur along the periphery of Western Europe and the Eurasian ‘heartland’ should be resisted as a matter of policy. If such a policy regimen exaggerated the Soviet threat and overstated its capabilities, then so be it. For it would leave no doubt in Moscow’s mind of an asymmetry of motivation at the American end to counter its designs.

Insofar as the **realists** were concerned, operationalizing containment on the ground was thought to require a policy of ‘**strongpoint defense**’. Strongpoint defense posited a concentration of forces

only in defense of particular regions and their access routes, in contrast to defending along the entire periphery wherever aggression may occur. Such a defense concept permitted a selective concentration on areas, notably the centers of industrial and war-making capacity, which were both defensible and vital. The principal criterion for differentiating the 'vital' from the 'peripheral' in terms of interests was the presence of (a) industrial-military capacity, (b) source and access to raw materials, and (c) maintaining secure lines of communication. Insofar as Asia was concerned (and with China having gone communist), the strategy implied safeguarding selected island 'strongpoints' – Japan, Okinawa and the Philippines. Korea was not considered to be a 'strongpoint' at the time. **The objective of 'strongpoint' defense was not so much about control as it was about denial** – as in, denying these vital centers to the adversary.

Essentially, then, **the key policy competition among 'internationalist' Cold warriors during the period that overlapped with CPD-1 was within the U.S. national security political and bureaucratic establishment.** Both sides (*realists v. hawks*) sought to capture the control tower of this national security establishment and outline the means to implement containment against the Soviet Union on their own terms. And until the late-1940s, it was the realists who enjoyed the better part of this national security argument.

### *... and the Tipping of the Scales in favor of the CPD-I Hawks*

**Two 'great shocks' in 1949 tilted the debate away from the realist wing** of the national security establishment. In late-August 1949, the Soviet Union successfully conducted its first atomic test and eliminated the U.S.' nuclear monopoly. Barely a little over a month later, Mao Zedong hoisted the Communist Chinese flag over Tiananmen Square in Beijing. These near-simultaneous and sudden events in the Soviet Union and China in the early fall of 1949, which served as a dramatic challenge to American power in this post-War world, **were preceded by the gradual erosion of one of the principal pillars of containment - the economic stability and prosperity of Western Europe.** Despite significant Marshall Plan aid, the European economies were having difficulty getting off the ground, leading to fears that they may adopt an independent or more neutralist course in foreign relations and keep out of the developing East-West (Soviet-U.S.) Cold War struggle. This, in turn, fed into the narrative of the CPD-I hawks that U.S. national security



President Harry S. Truman confers with his Ambassador to the United Nations, Warren Austin, and his Secretary of State, Dean Acheson.  
Photo Source: U.S. National Archive

and the strategy of containment was facing a grave challenge, and that a qualitatively deeper human and budgetary commitment was required to stare down the Soviets geostrategically and ideologically.

**It is in this context that the Korean War, starting 25 June 1950, tipped the balance in the CPD-I hawks' favor.** There was almost immediate agreement in Washington that Korea, hitherto a peripheral interest, had by the nature of the brazen attack become vital if American credibility was not to be questioned elsewhere.

**The strategy of defending selected ‘strongpoints’ could no longer suffice; the emphasis would now have to be on defending the perimeter, with points along the perimeter accorded much greater, if not equal, importance.** What was thought to be required now was the ability to counter aggression at whatever level of violence it occurred, but without unnecessary escalation. And without downgrading the commitment to Europe’s defense, America had to qualitatively raise its strategic game in Asia too. A massive fiscal commitment was required; equally, an all-of-government-and-society ideological struggle against communism had to be embarked upon.

Up until the Korean War, the Truman Administration had wavered between adopting the more militaristic stance promoted by the hardline faction and the more traditionalist stance of holding the line on military commitments and expenditures promoted by the realist faction.

**That hesitation was resolved in favor of the hardline approach (favored by the CPD-I hawks) following North Korea’s attack in June 1950.** Later that year, James Conant, Vannevar Bush and Tracy Voorhees, the founders of CPD-I formally read out the manifesto of their Committee at the Willard Hotel in downtown Washington, DC, labeling the “present danger [as the consequence of] the aggressive designs of the Soviet Union.” To counter the threat, they stressed the urgency of European rearmament, the necessity of a greater commitment in aid, troops and materiel by the U.S., and a program of universal military service for American youth at age 18.

Three days later President Truman intoned an identical message to a nationwide radio audience that “our homes, our nation, all the things we believe in are in great danger. The danger has been created by the rulers of the Soviet Union.” The Soviet Union had comprehensively become America’s Cold War enemy. To meet this “present danger”, U.S. forces would be increased by 3.5 million men (the same figure put out by CPD-I proponents) and production of military equipment would have to be greatly increased. **The effect was most immediately felt in the U.S. defense budget; the authorization for fiscal 1951 came to \$48.2 billion, a 257 percent increase of the original White House budget request of \$13.5 billion.** That would be equivalent to an initial \$137 billion request, in 2021 dollars, topping off at year-end as a \$490 billion authorization! A little over a year later, many of the CPD-I’s proponents would assume front row seats in the incoming Eisenhower Administration. The national security hawks had won the debate on implementing containment, and the Committee on Present Danger was a pivotal vehicle to accomplish this goal.

## **BOX II: Defining Political and Organizational Moments related to CPD-I**

**March 1947** – President Truman proclaims in the context of the Greek Civil War that **it is “the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures”.** Totalitarian regimes that coerced “free people” would be considered a threat to international peace and the national security of the United States. The proclamation would come to be known in time as the **Truman Doctrine**.

**August-October 1949** – The USSR detonates its first atomic bomb at a testing range in Semipalatinsk in present-day Kazakhstan. A little over a month later, Chairman Mao formally proclaims the founding of the People’s Republic of China. **America’s nuclear monopoly is erased, and China is effectively ‘lost’.**



**Spring 1950** – Chester Barnard, Chairman of the Rockefeller Foundation, recommends to the Department of State-Defense Policy Review Committee to commission a group of elder statesmen to raise awareness among the American public of the scale and severity of the impending Soviet Cold War threat. He recommends General Eisenhower (at the time, President of Columbia University), James Conant (President of Harvard University) and Robert Sproul (President of the University of California) take the lead in this regard.

**April 1950** – ‘The Report by the Secretaries of State and Defense on United States Objectives and Programs for National Security’, better known as National Security Memorandum No.68 or NSC-68, is submitted to the President. **NSC-68 describes the Soviet challenge in cataclysmic terms, and thereafter goes on to provide a moral and military – and militarized - blueprint to defeat the Soviet Challenge.**

**June 1950** – Communist surrogate **North Korea crosses the 38th parallel** and launches an invasion of the South, a country hitherto deemed to fall outside the U.S. defense perimeter. The Truman Administration galvanizes into action, ordering air and naval units to the military theater. Conant (of Harvard Univ.) and Tracy Voorhees, former Undersecretary of the Army and a member of the National Security Council, get down that summer **to transforming the idea of a Committee on the Present Danger into a living entity.** Many of Committee’s eventual members trace their mutual ties and friendships in government and beyond to the months and years prior to America’s entry into the Second World War.

**December 1950** – James Conant, President of Harvard University, Vannevar Bush, engineer, inventor and science administrator, and Tracy Voorhees **announce the creation of the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD) at the Willard Hotel in downtown Washington, DC.** They announce a manifesto of action in order to counter “the aggressive designs of the Soviet Union”. Major newspapers carry the story of the formation of a Committee of “distinguished private citizens”. Three days later, President Truman elaborates on, and corroborates, the gravity of the Soviet threat in a primetime radio broadcast.

**Spring 1951** – The Committee hits the ground (and airwaves) running to champion two key pieces of national security legislation – **returning American troops to Western Europe to deter and “resist Communist aggression”;** and **passage of a universal military service bill to ensure an expanded system of conscription.** The Senate votes to approve the troop commitment of four divisions of approximately 100,000 men to Europe; there is less success on the universal military service front (it is endorsed in concept but never enacted), given the relatively isolationist mood prevalent within key constituencies in Congress in this still-early period after the end of the Second World War.

**Fall/Winter 1952** – With the election of Dwight Eisenhower – their favored candidate – as president, **the Committee begins to disband itself. Key members** of the Committee’s principally Republican membership **assume important positions within the Eisenhower Administration.**

## THE COMPOSITION, MEMBERSHIP, AND METHODS OF THE CPD-I HAWKS

The membership of CPD-I was primarily composed of WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) males with impeccable ‘Establishment’ credentials, which by-and-large set them aside from – and above – the rest of American society. They typically came from storied or upper-class family backgrounds, each had an Ivy League degree to his resume, they entertained at exclusive social clubs, were affiliated in some capacity with elite foundations, and generally belonged to the cream of American society. **One quality superseded all: they retained their good standing within ‘Establishment’ circles, regardless of whether they were in or out of government or power.** By-and-large, they also preferred to collegially conduct their policy-related deliberations far from the public eye.

The WASP ‘Establishment’ men that composed the membership of CPD-I **came from a cross-section of professions. They included corporate titans and media moguls, the scientific and technocratic elite, big bankers and financiers, heads of railroad and farm organizations, and even high-profile university educators.** Indeed, prestigious university presidents played an outsized role within CPD-I’s precincts and were instrumental in championing the public debate on universal military service – which, in turn was linked to the larger debate on returning U.S. troops to Europe. **By and large, many (although by no means all) of CPD-I’s members were Republicans,** and logically therefore, their key representatives entered the Eisenhower Administration when it was sworn into office in January 1953. And Gen. Eisenhower himself had briefly served in a high-profile university educator role, as President of Columbia University, before being elected to the Oval Office.

The WASP political and corporate elite that constituted the core membership of CPD-I had longstanding contacts with each other, and to the policy-making core of government. **The War Department of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Administration in fact served as a key breeding ground for many in this group. Seven of the twenty-five founding members of CPD-I got their key start in President Roosevelt’s War Department,** including Robert Patterson who himself went on to become the Secretary of War. Paul Nitze’s passage to high office too wended its way through the economic mobilization-related posts within the Roosevelt Administration before serving as a consultant to the War Department. After victory in the Second World War, many of these Roosevelt Administration appointees continued to maintain close relationships, including while in government, and served as key architects of early U.S. postwar foreign and security policy.

A key supplement to this group that would go on to play an important role in the founding of CPD-I was a **scientific and technocratic elite that, too, had received their start in the Roosevelt Administration – this time though in the Administration’s atomic bomb and weapons research programs.** CPD-I founder Vannevar Bush typified this science and technology cohort. Bush got his start as the head of Roosevelt’s National Defense Research Committee – an entity that was tasked with organizing the connective framework between the U.S. university laboratory system and the military-industrial complex’s need for research and development of weapons during (and after)



*President Harry S. Truman, center, presenting Dr. James B. Conant, at right, with the Medal of Merit and Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster. Dr. Vannevar Bush stands watching at left.  
Photo Source: The Harry S. Truman Library and Museum - Accession number: 59-1522*

the war. When the National Defense Research Committee was folded into the Office of Scientific Research and Development and tasked with the production of the atomic bomb, Bush became its director (and along with two future CPD-I colleagues was instrumental in formally recommending the bomb's use on Japanese cities). Interestingly, James Conant and Robert Sproul, two future CPD-I members, too served in the National Defense Research Committee before assuming their roles as President at Harvard and the University of California system, respectively. As such, **by the early-to-mid 1940s, this CPD-I science and technocratic cohort had been linked together, and bonded, in the course of government work with the national security policymaking elite**, and they would come to lobby jointly in due course for their preferred hardline foreign and national security policies as CPD-I members.

CPD-I's highly visible public championing of **legislative passage of a universal military service bill** – itself linked to the larger debate on returning U.S. troops to Europe and maintaining a robust defense posture after the fast-moving international developments of 1949-50 – provides a useful insight into the methods and scale of resources at the Committee's disposal. As earlier noted, the bill was a pet hobby-horse of the Committee, especially its university educators wing. As early as fall 1950, just prior to the formalization of the Committee, the President of the Association of American Universities (Henry Wriston, who would be active within CPD-I circles), organized a 'citizen's conference' featuring business, finance and media moguls to raise awareness of the universal military service issue.

In spring 1951, once the universal military service bill began to be debated within the halls of Congress, CPD-I mounted a full-court press to champion its passage. CPD-I members, including an editor at *The New York Times*, testified to Congressional committees on aspects of the bill, despite the prevailing negative sentiment on the Hill on the issue. Facing this headwind, **the Committee took to the airwaves, holding a series of national radio lectures that were broadcast over 500-plus affiliates of the then-dominant MBS (Mutual Broadcasting System) commercial network.** In addition, pamphlets, booklets and even a (General Electric-sponsored) film were produced and disseminated to a mass audience. **While the Committee preferred as a general rule to operate out of the public eye, it did not hesitate on the rare occasion to make its political muscle publicly felt on issues dear to its hawkish national security preferences.** In the end, CPD-I was unable to push the universal military service bill across the line; the Committee was nevertheless instrumental in overcoming residual 'isolationist' objections in the Senate to committing a large body of American men and materiel to the defense of Western Europe. The bill to this effect was passed in late-spring.

Set in motion formally in December 1950, CPD-1 played a critical role over the next few years and was dissolved in 1953, **primarily because its key office holders had by that time pivoted to the role of senior political appointees in the incoming (Republican) Eisenhower Administration.** James Conant became U.S. High Commissioner to Germany, a sensitive post in the key area of military rearmament and economic integration. Voorhees became Defense Advisor to NATO and Director of the Office of Offshore Procurement. Robert Cutler became Special Assistant to the president for National Security Affairs. And Vannevar Bush was appointed to a Committee that led to the reorganization and rationalization of the U.S. Defense Department. Many of the foreign and national security policies that they had championed were incorporated in the NSC-68-drawn policy blueprint, as well as in the Truman Administration's harder line posture and deployments in Europe and Asia. And what remained as yet unfulfilled was now within their grasp to institute and implement as senior Eisenhower Administration officials.

# Committee on the Present Danger II

## THE POST-VIETNAM WAR ERA DEBATE OVER *DÉTENTE* AND THE CONTEXT OF CPD-II'S REVIVAL AND LAUNCH

**B**y the time of CPD-II, patterns of continuity as well as change had emerged. **Insofar as change was concerned**, new and increasingly powerful interest groups had begun to enter the domestic political fray and intrude into the national security debate, writ large. **Foremost among these groups were the 'globalists' - business associations, multinational corporations, corporate lobbyists and economics and development-minded pressure groups.** In the wake of the global economic upheavals of the early-1970s (end of dollar-gold link and collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system; Middle East Oil Crisis; high inflation), these groups argued that the twin pillars of the Cold War (containment and militarism) were becoming less relevant. In the wake of the interlocking transformations in East-West relations, North-South relations and U.S.-Western Europe-Japan relations, the principal axis of conflict and division in the international system, in their view, was no longer East-West confrontation only but also involved schisms running along developed v. developing country and industrial economy v. raw material producing state lines. **Global trade and interdependence and devising equitable economic arrangements between North and South was essential to cope with these challenges.** Up to a point, the national security realists shared these views.

**Patterns of continuity, however, were much more pronounced** during the CPD-II period and, in fact, bore striking similarities with the late-1940s and early-1950s. Whereas the Soviet Union had only mustered an element of nuclear parity in the earlier period, they had now begun to pull abreast across a wider range of comprehensive national power indices. Simultaneously, the U.S. had sunk its resources ever deeper in a losing cause in Vietnam. And while both schools of thought (realist v. hawkish) loosely agreed that the U.S. had strategically and politically overcommitted itself in Vietnam, they arrived at diametrically opposite policy prescription to cope with its fallout. **In fact, this sense of a tipping-of-the-Cold War-geopolitical-scales in the wake of the Vietnam debacle endowed an element of added venom to the realist v. hawk competition unseen during the CPD-I era.**

At the realists' end, there emerged in place of the **Cold War hawks' delegitimized 'Containment Militarism' (which had bred the fiasco in Vietnam), a new 'Containment-Lite' approach championed prominently by Henry Kissinger.** Framed as *détente*, i.e., the easing of hostility and strained relations, this approach argued that it was in the U.S.' interest to try to move away from zero-sum competition with the Soviet Union and instead towards an alternative order in which stability would result not from the clash of competing ideologies and military arms-racing but from habits of mutual restraint and coexistence and, ultimately, structured cooperation on interest-based terms with the Soviet Union. There would be no effort to 'rollback' communism, especially from

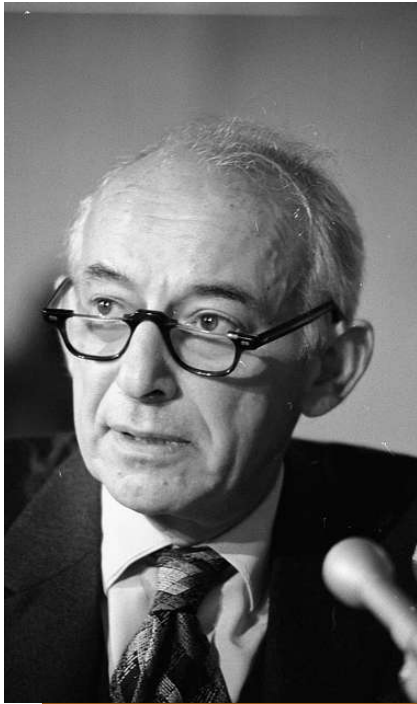
positions it had gained in Eastern Europe and in the Developing World from the end of World War II. And as a general rule, the realists set out to downgrade ideology as the chief criterion by which to identify strategic threats.

**The essence of Kissinger and the realists' thinking was that the Soviet Union was a state with which, with firmness and patience on the American side, reasonable accommodations (or behavior modification) could be worked out.** Habits of restraint and coexistence could be cultivated, and the Soviet Union could be brought over time to accept the constraints and responsibilities of a stabilizing global role through a combination of pressure and inducements. **The goal was not to militarily impoverish or ideologically defeat the Soviet Union but to alter the calculus of Moscow's international relations-related objectives and practices.** Ideological competition was to give way to national interests-based geopolitical management; and nuclear weapons buildup and arms racing was to give way to strategic restraint. In the course of doing so, the Soviets could be integrated within the existing order and a stable equilibrium based on a "structure of peace" could be built that would limit the heightened nuclear, political and ideological tensions of the Cold War. **(Parallel to this strategy, Kissinger worked on drawing China into the anti-Soviet camp.)**

Like the realist architects of containment two decades earlier, the Vietnam and post-Vietnam era realists did not see Soviet communism *per se* as constituting a threat; rather, only to the extent that it was joined together as an instrument of Soviet geopolitical aggression was it deemed to be a threat. Besides, in the wake of the multi-billion-dollar Vietnam War and Great Society spending programs, budgetary means were limited, and distinctions had to be made accordingly between vital and peripheral interests. In the view of the realists, **the foreign policy problems of the past, including Vietnam, had in fact largely arisen from the U.S.' own errors, especially the over-militarization of the foreign policy strategy of containment.** This hardline, overmilitarized view was not an accurate portrayal of global realities and was particularly deficient as a means to resolve crises that were fundamentally political in nature.

For the **national security hawks, such as Eugene Rostow and Paul Nitze**, who were to form CPD-II's core leadership, on the other hand, the foreign policy problems of the past, including Vietnam, were a reflection of the growing challenges and complexity of geostrategic competition in the Cold War international system. The problems had not sprung from errors of grand strategy at the U.S. end. Rather, this heightened geostrategic competition demanded more – not less – strategic steadfastness, persistence and endurance at the U.S.' end so that the Soviet threat could be confronted and defeated. **The realists' central policy objectives – détente and arms control – at this moment of relative U.S. weakness would be construed by the Soviets as defeatist in attitude, and which in turn could boomerang and weaken America's will to challenge and defeat the Soviets.** Indeed, given that the Nixon-Ford years had seen the most substantial reductions in American military capabilities relative to those of the Soviet Union in the entire post-War period, they argued the national security realists were in fact presiding over the relative *dismantling* of the American military. The U.S. needed more, not less, military modernization and ideological competition. And the American public had to be awakened, first, to this unremitting and 'evil' Soviet threat.

The hawks went on to argue that while Kissinger and his companions were seeking to co-opt the Soviet Union within a system of restraint and peaceful coexistence, this was not how Moscow was approaching its relations with Washington. **Soviet strategy was geared rather towards the demonstration of such overwhelming military strength, both conventional forces and nuclear, that**



*U.S. Undersecretary of State Eugene Rostow  
Photo Source: U.S. National Archive*

**the U.S. would be forced to retreat when the next flashpoint crisis arose in world affairs.** Washington would be deterred from action and, in the process, the U.S. would end up signaling its strategic diffidence and cede its leadership role in world affairs. As Candidate Ronald Reagan, and future CPD II member, colorfully and hyperbolically put it during his failed presidential bid in 1976, the realists were yielding to America becoming 'Number Two'.

Finally, the hawks like Rostow and Nitze charged that by seeking accommodation with the Soviet Union, the realists were morally acquiescing to the emergence of a serious ideological peer, thereby weakening the moral foundations of American foreign policy and the U.S. as a nation. **At the end of the day, it was ultimately American moral strength and political willpower that was being put to the test.** And to ensure that this willpower did not buckle under Soviet pressure, it was imperative that the military and moral foundations of

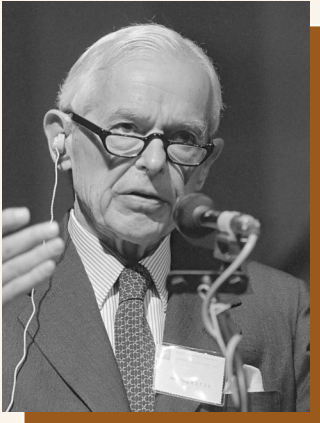
U.S. foreign policy needed to be revived and restored. **Ideological cleansing, vigorous opposition to strategic arms limitation, and a vast rearmament program would need to become the order of the day to restore America's capabilities, and willpower, as well as reestablish its leadership role in world affairs.**

The hardline school's anxieties were, if anything, greatly enhanced when Jimmy Carter entered office in January 1977 and appointed a cabinet stacked with, what they charged, were elements of the "left-of-center foreign policy network". **Of the four-dozen plus names submitted by CPD-II for the Carter Administration's consideration in the field of foreign affairs and national security, not one was tapped for service.** Defense Secretary Harold Brown was deemed to be a budget-minded administrator rather than a national security hawk. And incoming Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, was on record having opposed military arms racing and had rebutted the charge of an overwhelming Soviet military threat in the offing. This further unified the ideological and bunker-like mentality of the CPD-II proponents.

## BOX III: Defining Political Moments related to CPD-II

**Summer 1968** – President Lyndon Johnson’s Senior Advisory Group on Vietnam recommends to the President that U.S. military involvement in Vietnam be capped and gradually reduced thereafter. Among the Group’s members is Deputy Secretary of Defense **Paul Nitze, a containment hawk, who was the lead drafter of the containment strategy in the Truman Administration during the late-1940s/early 1950s.** Nitze’s argument for disengagement from the Vietnam War was that it exerted a negative pull on the U.S.’ attention to the critical East-West strategic balance.

**Summer 1974** – Paul Nitze resigns from his post as senior member of the U.S. arms control negotiating team in the Nixon Administration. He goes on to criticize Nixon and Kissinger by claiming that they are promoting a **“myth of détente”** with the Soviet Union.



*U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze  
Photo: Taken by Rob Bogaerts/Anefo, Nationaal Archief,  
CC 3.0*

**June 1976** – CIA Director George H.W. Bush invites a panel of seven specialist outsiders to review the U.S. intelligence community’s estimates of Soviet capabilities and intentions. The outsiders, **known as Team B,** include many national security hawks and future CPD-II members, including Nitze. **This Team B exercise opens the door at the highest level of government to CPD-II players,** who until that time had been marginalized within the national security decision process due to their deep association with championing the failed Vietnam War.

**Spring 1977** – When President Jimmy Carter releases his list of political appointees to the various high-level national security positions in his Administration, **not a single one of the 53 hawkish names suggested by CPD-II to the Administration is chosen.** Twenty-five *globalists* however are appointed to senior policy positions. This angers the national security hawks and accelerates their resolve to oppose and organize against the national security policies of the Carter Administration.

**August 1977** – Jimmy Carter invites members of CPD-II (in their private capacities) to the White House in order to obtain their support for his policies, or at least their abstention from harsh public criticism of his Administration. The meeting ends on a sour note but elevates the public profile of the Committee.

**Summer 1978-on** – **CPD-II relentlessly campaigns against** the signing - and thereafter against the ratification - of the **U.S.-Soviet SALT II arms limitation treaty.** They argue that the SALT process has not restrained Soviet expansionism and will not restrain the Soviet drive for military superiority at the U.S.’ expense.

**Winter 1978/79** – Following the Iranian Revolution of 1979 which witnesses the toppling of the U.S.-backed Shah regime, **CPD-II bitterly accuses the Carter Administration of incompetence and having casually tolerated the accelerated erosion of U.S. power and influence.** They mobilize and lobby for a marked increase in national security budgets and capabilities.

**January 1981** – **Ronald Reagan, a CPD-II member,** is sworn into office as President. Like the Eisenhower Administration, which was heavily staffed with CPD-I members, **as many as 30 high-level Reagan Administration national security officials are picked from the ranks of CPD-II.** The national security hawks – many of them neo-conservatives (Democrats who became Newly Conservative) – come full circle from being ‘outsiders’ following the Vietnam War disaster to becoming accomplished ‘insiders’ once again in the Reagan Administration.



### *... and the Tipping of the Scales in Favor of the CPD-II Hawks*

Unlike the case of CPD-I when the two great shocks of 1949 (Soviet atomic test; 'loss of China') plus the Europeans' flirting with neutralism, followed by the first shots fired in the Korean War tipped the scales decisively in favor of the national security hawks, there was no one single or similar precipitating shock in the mid-and-late 1970s that shifted the balance. Of course, the trauma of Vietnam and images of the ignominious evacuation from the rooftops of the U.S. embassy in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) was never far from the surface. And the fall of the Shah regime in Tehran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at decade's end did place East-West confrontation in a sharper frame. That said, **the hawk-realist national security debate of the 1970s was mostly played out in the nuclear strategy and arms racing arena.** And nowhere was the incendiary claim that the realists' consenting to détente was in fact tantamount to acquiescing to the ruse employed by the Soviet Union to mask its aggressive intent made with more purposeful vigor by the CPD-II hawks than on the topic of arms control.

The **U.S.-Soviet Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II)** of the mid/late-1970s provided the **platform for the (now-excluded from government) national security hawks** on which to confront their more mainstream colleagues. The CPD-II proponents argued that whatever their more realist-minded national security colleagues believed regarding the merits of détente, the Soviets at their end doctrinally adhered to and employed a 'strategy of victory' insofar as nuclear war was concerned. In Moscow's view, a nuclear war could be fought and won. The Soviet Union might talk up the value of détente and peaceful coexistence, but their actions were wholly concentrated on building up conventional and nuclear forces superiority. **Left unchallenged and should a flashpoint crisis situation arise, this preponderance of military power would be brought to bear to apply decisive pressure on Washington to break its will and coerce it to back down without a fight** – leading, in turn, to a severe loss of face strategically and ideologically within the international system.

The logical reply to Moscow's 'strategy of victory', the CPD-II proponents contended, was to overturn the very foundations of its logic in the mind of Soviet leaders. **This could be done by signaling to them that, rather than being lulled by the false promise of coexistence and détente, the U.S. would engage in a conventional and nuclear forces build-up of such vast proportions so as to erase all doubts in Moscow's mind that it could arm its way to strategic superiority.** For this to be the case though, the false promise of détente had to be first slayed at home, politically and intellectually. Two lines of argument were employed and repeated relentlessly. First, that the US-USSR Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT II) would restrain and dangerously lock-in quantitative and qualitative strategic force levels that would gravely threaten future strategic stability. And second, that a huge new round of arms buildup was necessary in order to confront and contain the Soviet Union from a position of preponderant military strength. Not for the first time was a moment of East-West divergence instrumentally used by the national security hawks as an existential crisis to overstate the adversary's intentions and capabilities in order to outwit domestic opponents and advance an aggressive policy agenda.

With regard to the SALT process, two key arguments were made by CPD-II proponents. **First,**

**the Interim Agreement (SALT-I) of 1972 had not restrained the Soviet Union's expansionism nor deterred them from their aggressive global agenda.** Despite various commitments of cooperation to President Nixon and President Ford, including the reaching of a preliminary framework agreement for SALT-II in November 1974, Moscow continued to engage in a policy of imperial expansion and outflanking of Washington in many local theaters. Second, the Interim Agreement (SALT-I) had not restrained the Soviet drive for strategic military superiority and the U.S.' advantage in accuracy and number of warheads and bombers which prevailed at the time of SALT-I was slipping away. **So why would SALT-II negotiations be any more successful in imposing enforceable limitations on Soviet strategic war-fighting capabilities?**

With regard to bolstering deterrence, **a huge programmatic emphasis on rearmament was championed with a view to reinvigorate American willpower to confront the Soviet threat.** Among the key items on the shopping list was the MX air-launched ICBM missile (the LGM-118 Peacekeeper), Trident II submarines, the B-1 bomber, improvements in the Minuteman ground launched-ICBM missile, ground-and-sea launched cruise missiles, and development and deployment of the Pershing II medium-range ballistic missile. Soviet and proxy aggression was to be countered in whichever geographic theater it might arise. Containment was a global mission in that its outcome rested on the balance of military strength between East and West, and that it was essential that the West maintain its decisive military superiority and influence. **More to the point, the will to counter Soviet and proxy aggression was to be unambiguously communicated to the adversary.**

CPD-II proponents exaggeratedly deployed these policy lines of attack during each defining political and organizational moment of opportunity (*see Boxes III and IV*) in the mid and late-1970s, particularly at times coinciding with moments of intensified East-West tensions. Following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which witnessed the toppling of the U.S.-backed Shah regime, **CPD-II members bitterly accused the Carter Administration of defeatism, incompetence and having tolerated the accelerated erosion of U.S. power and influence.** And just as CPD-I members utilized the breakout of the Korean War in 1950 to mobilize for a marked increase in national security budgets and capabilities, CPD-II members claimed that Soviet subversion in Iran, as well as its subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, was motivated by the larger design of controlling Persian Gulf oil and challenging a vital American interest. A vigorous rejoinder was called for, accompanied by a qualitatively greater fiscal commitment to military resourcing.

In the complex and challenging domestic and international environment of the late-1970s, this



*Test launch of the LGM-118 Peacekeeper intercontinental ballistic missile at Vandenberg Air Force Base.  
Photo Source: United States Air Force*

national security debate was incrementally won on the Hill, in the media, and ultimately in the popular view by CPD-II – such that by the time Ronald Reagan was elected and settled into the White House, there was a clear symmetry between CPD-II’s wish-list and the Administration’s foreign and strategic policy doctrine and underlying budgetary requests. Equally, it did not help that their more realist-minded establishment counterparts in government, intelligentsia, and the policy and corporate communities, who had earlier provided consummate leadership in response to the Soviet threat, were a house divided in their approaches now.

## THE INGREDIENTS OF SUCCESS: CPD-II’S ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES AND METHODS

In March 1976, at the prestigious Metropolitan Club in downtown Washington, DC, a core group of hardline (albeit mainstream) national security hawks began putting together the organizational structure of the entity that would become the Committee on the Present Danger II (CPD-II). The initial tasks at hand were to define the organization’s mission and its strategy of “going public”, particularly in the context of its nonpartisan status during a highly partisan election year.

Two features stood out within CPD-II’s membership. First, although they came from a range of backgrounds and professions much like their CPD-I predecessors, **they shared a few essential common traits**. They were, or had been, thoroughly mainstream (but hardline) establishment players; they were (mostly) elitists with a few in fact owning significant wealth, including some who were captains of industry; most had spent time within the senior national security bureaucracy in previous Administrations; their core leaders had significant experience within government, both as national security and political players, and these core leaders had deep contacts sometimes going all the way up to the president, a presidential aspirant, a defense secretary, a secretary of state or a powerful senator.

Uniquely, CPD-II was comprised of a large number of disillusioned national security hawks from the Democratic side of the aisle *also*, (CPD-I members had predominantly been Republicans). **These newly-conservative – or *neoconservative* Democrats - were to find their calling, like their CPD-I predecessors, in Republican administrations** – that is, until they flamed out *en masse* during the Republican George W. Bush Administration following their disastrous championing and mismanagement of the Second Iraq War.

Returning though to the immediate aftermath of the Vietnam War, **the Democratic Party had at the time basically fragmented into three foreign policy factions**: (a) a progressive faction that called for America to ‘come home’ and grapple with its domestic challenges; (b) an existing faction of national security hawks bent on pursuing Cold War containment militarism, and (c) a third faction that embraced global interdependence and called for a reconceptualization of the idea of American leadership in a multilateral order. **The great achievement of the CPD-II hawks was their political skill to elbow out their fellow Democratic Party factions and, working with national security-minded Republicans, construct a mainstream, bipartisan *but hardline* anti-Soviet political consensus** during the latter stages of the Cold War.

## BOX IV: Defining Organizational Moments related to CPD-II

**Summer 1972** – Eugene Rostow, former Under-Secretary of State in the Lyndon Johnson Administration and an ultra-hardline hawk helps **found the Committee for a Democratic Majority’s (CDM) Foreign Policy Task Force**. As many as 13 of 18 members of the CDM Foreign Policy Task Force go on to become the intellectual backbone of CPD-II. By 1980, almost all these neo-conservative – or ‘newly conservative’ - Democrats go on to join the Reagan Administration.

**Summer 1974** – Eugene Rostow releases a position paper (“*The Quest for Détente*”) highly critical of the Nixon-Kissinger policy of détente. At about the same time, **Paul Nitze** resigns from his post as senior member of the U.S. arms control negotiating team, criticizing the Administration for promoting a “myth of détente” with the Soviet Union.

**October 1975** – Rostow, Nitze and a half-dozen other ex-insiders get together and toss around the idea of forming a new Committee on the Present Danger.

**March 1976** – At the prestigious Metropolitan Club in Washington, DC, a small core group begins putting together the CPD-II’s organization. **Charles Tyroler II**, a key national security ideologue within the Democratic Party, is tasked with providing day-to-day leadership. Tyroler’s office becomes the permanent headquarters of CPD-II and 30-40 names are considered for membership.

**November 1976** – Three days after Jimmy Carter wins the 1976 presidential election, **CPD-II formally goes public** and releases its founding statement, “*Common Sense and the Common Danger*”. In the founding statement, the Committee reiterates a familiar theme lifted from CPD-I era National Security Council strategy paper NSC-68: “**the principal threat to our nation, to world peace, and to the cause of human freedom is the Soviet drive for dominance based upon an unparalleled military buildup.**”

**Spring/Summer 1977** – CPD-II associates itself with a network of ‘New Right’ conservative interest groups (American Conservative Union), national security-minded *ad hoc* coordinating committees (Emergency Coalition Against Unilateral Disarmament; Coalition for Peace Through Strength), and rich conservative fundraisers. CPD-II benefits from the grassroots organizational expertise provided by these interest groups; in exchange, CPD-II provides them access to elite influence and policy expertise.

**Summer 1978** – Prospective presidential candidate **Ronald Reagan makes strong overtures to CPD-II members**. He labels his national security-related radio broadcasts as Rostow I, Rostow II, Rostow III and Rostow IV.

**Summer/Fall 1978** – CPD-II spends large sums on a political and media campaign to oppose the ratification of the SALT II arms limitation treaty. During U.S. Senate hearings on the SALT II treaty, CPD Executive Committee and Board Members testify, by invitation, on 15-plus different occasions.

**November 1980** – In his first press conference as President-elect, **Ronald Reagan introduces his CPD II-heavy foreign policy transition team**, led by CPD-II Executive Committee member, **Richard Allen**. Allen goes on to become Reagan’s first National Security Advisor (NSA).

Once CPD-II formally came into existence in late-1976, **it adopted a *two-tier strategy* with the aim of effecting a pincer operation to squeeze President Carter’s policy hand on national security issues.** On the one hand, CPD-II sought to have a hawkish policy line reasserted inside the national security bureaucracy as a means to pressure the Administration (that was seemingly filled with ‘globalists’) *from within*. And on the other, CPD-II sought to build a like-minded coalition of hawkish Congressmen, groups associated with the U.S. military-industrial complex, and grassroots, right-wing American political operatives in order to mount a sustained Cold War ideological pressure campaign on the Administration *from the outside*. Essentially, then, **it was an ‘insider-outsider’ strategy to constrict President Carter’s national security policymaking space and force him to bend to the CPD-II’s hardline agenda.**

Four lines of outreach were employed by CPD-II in this regard. First, was a continuation and deepening of interaction with longstanding contacts within the national security bureaucracy, especially within the Pentagon. Next, was the ‘tutoring’ of Members of Congress and briefing of Congressional staff on the full gravity of the Soviet threat. **Third, was working and operating in concert with national security-minded ad hoc coordinating committees, rich conservative fundraisers, and a network of ‘New Right’ conservative interest groups with wide grassroots appeal.** And finally, was working through DC-based think-tanks and other non-profit nonpartisan organizations, the Washington press corps, and through friends and colleagues in the policy community to generate and disseminate relevant military and foreign affairs-related articles, op-eds, television programs, flyers, academic and policy papers, etc. to the widest possible mass audience.

An example of the scale of the success of this organizational effort can be gauged from **CPD-II’s accomplishments at the time of Congressional hearings in the late-1970s on the SALT II treaty,** following President Carter’s transmittal of the agreement to the Senate in June 1979 for its advice and consent. During the course of the SALT II hearings,

- CPD-II Executive Committee and Board Members testified on 15-plus different occasions before the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees;
- CPD-II Executive Committee and Board Members participated in almost 500 TV and radio programs, press conferences, debates, public forums and briefings;
- Almost 200,000 copies of CPD-II pamphlets, brochures and reports on the topic were disseminated to the public.

At the end of the day, CPD-II and its partners outspent those in favor of ratifying SALT II by a hefty margin and were instrumental in ensuring a delay in the consideration of the treaty on the Senate floor during the Carter years. SALT II was never ratified once Ronald Reagan entered the Oval Office.

**Coalition-building** with national security-minded *ad hoc* coordinating committees and grassroots right-wing conservative interest groups was the key trump card employed by CPD-II. **These grassroots groupings provided CPD-II a network of mass organizational outreach; in exchange, CPD-II provided these grassroots interest groups access to elite influence and policy expertise in Washington.** Soon after President Carter's national security team entered office, an ad hoc organization called the **Emergency Coalition Against Unilateral Disarmament** was formed comprising an alliance of CPD-II ideologues and hardline dissenters within the U.S. intelligence community. The coalition worked out of the CPD-II office in downtown Washington. The steering committee of the Emergency Coalition brought under its umbrella (in addition to CPD-II members) the **American Conservative Union**, the **National Conservative Political Action Committee** as well the **Conservative Caucus**. These groupings were linked, in turn, via the Emergency Coalition to **right-wing multimillionaires** (such as Richard Mellon Scaife) and **connected Beltway political operatives** (such as Richard Viguerie, who pioneered the largest political mail operation in the U.S.). A novel participant that added intellectual heft to this mix were the two main right-leaning think tanks in Washington, the **American Enterprise Institute** and the newly established **Heritage Foundation**.

Down-the-line, **this coalition of neoconservatives and 'New Right' conservative interest groups was joined by representatives of the military-industrial complex.** And akin to the formation of the Emergency Coalition, the harder-line members of the military-industrial complex too formed their own ad hoc political coalition called the **Coalition for Peace Through Strength**.



*President Ronald Reagan presents Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter and Paul Nitze with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. The East Room of the White House, Washington, DC, 7 November 1985.  
Photo Source: Ronald Reagan Presidential Library*

The leadership of the Coalition for Peace Through Strength was supplied by retired military men of high rank and its membership comprised many of the country's top defense contractors (Honeywell Corporation, General Electric, Lockheed, McDonnell-Douglas, etc.).

Together, the visible cooperation among these *ad hoc* coalition lobby and outreach groups – CPD-II, military-industrial lobbyists, 'New Right' political groupings, conservative grassroots organizations, rich financiers, think tanks – was instrumental in defeating the Carter Administration and its realist/globalist allies to the punch in the course of mobilizing public opinion against the Administration's national security policies. Each constituent interest group championed the interests of its coalition partners as its own, placing a unified focus on the supposedly resurgent Soviet threat. And **a key ingredient of CPD-II's success was its skill in providing control tower leadership over the constituent groups within this political advocacy coalition**, utilizing their high-level insider standing and contacts within the Beltway Establishment.

**As was the case with CPD-I and the Eisenhower Administration, CPD-II proponents enjoyed the fruits of their successful effort in the form of top policy posts in the Reagan Administration.**

Forty-six CPD-II members served in advisory task forces linked to the Reagan presidential campaign and transition process, and almost three dozen or so of them went on to occupy high-level national security positions in the ensuing Administration. They included Richard Allen who became Reagan's National Security Advisor; Jeane Kirkpatrick, the U.S. Representative to the United Nations, with Ken Adelman as her deputy; William Casey, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency; Charles Tyroler II, Member of the Intelligence Oversight Board; Paul Nitze, Chief Negotiator for Theater Nuclear Forces; John Lehman, Secretary of the Navy; Fred Ikle, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy; Max Kampelman, Chairman of the U.S. Delegation to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe; and Richard N. Perle, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy, among others. **And at its apex, of course, was CPD-II member Ronald Reagan.**

Back atop the commanding heights of the senior national security bureaucracy, these hawks could once again put into practice the policies they had preached. The symmetry between CPD-II's wish-list and the eventual policies of the Reagan Administration was significant because the national security senior bureaucracy was essentially riddled with these CPD-II members and their associates. These hardline proponents, many of them Democrats who had gone 'neoconservative' and who, as a group, disparaged arms control as a product of Soviet deception and American retreat, had come full circle from being 'outsiders' following the Vietnam War debacle to becoming accomplished 'insiders' once again in the Reagan Administration. The **'insider-outsider' format, a modus operandi dating back to CPD-I's formation in the late-1940s and early-50s had proven its mettle again.** With its essential purpose accomplished, CPD-II wound itself down institutionally.

# Conclusion

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE PAST (CPD-I AND CPD-II); LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE (CPD:C)

So, what does this narration of the background, ideas, methods and mobilization tools of the Cold War-era Committee(s) on the Present Danger amount to at the end of the day? How is it relevant to the Committee on the Present Danger: China? Are there implications relevant to CPD:C in the successes of CPD-I and CDP-II? More to the point, and as the Report has asked in the introduction, **do facilitative conditions exist – or are likely to exist in the near future - in the current domestic and international political environment for a replication by the Committee on the Present Danger: China of the successes enjoyed by its storied Cold War-era predecessors, CPD-I and CPD-II?** A reconstituted future CPD:C could, after all, yet come to provide the nucleus around which a solidly bipartisan coalition of the Establishment’s core political and national security figures coalesce and mobilize for a new Cold War against Communist China.

A number of practical deductions and implications derive from the description and methods of the two Cold War-era Committee(s) on the Present Danger.

First, and at the outset, it must be borne in mind that CPD-I and CPD-II were classic products of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. Any explanation of CPD-I and II’s successes must necessarily be understood, first and foremost, in the context of the Cold War. The China Challenge today is unlike to the one scrutinized by the early Cold Warriors (*as hinted in Box I*), and it is even debatable whether a loose policy of containing China is even purpose-fit and implementable in the 21st century age of multipolarity and complex power distribution across interrelated policy domains.

Second, the key divide in national security policy during the Cold War was not one between the ‘internationalists’ and the ‘isolationists,’ but one *within* the mainstream ‘internationalist’ national security establishment. The ‘internationalists’ outwitted their opponents’ flirtations with isolationist appeals in the immediate wake of the deadly Second World War, and after the overextension in Vietnam. **CPD-I and CPD-II was essentially about policy and bureaucratic competition to capture the decision-making control tower *within* the national security establishment,** and thereby frame out and fill-in the means to implement ‘containment’ against the Soviet Union. **Relevant to today, a Committee on the Present Danger: China that is honeycombed in part with ‘America First’ sentiment will need to shed its populist and isolationist leanings** if it is to have any chance of ‘going mainstream’ as the Beltway’s premier anti-China mobilizational operation.

Third, the key political and national security policy line of attack employed by both CPD-I and CPD-II proponents to outmaneuver their realist-minded counterparts and capture the control tower of national security policymaking was that: (a) the Soviets were an aggressive and immoral power with



which the U.S. could not deal on any basis other than resistance; (b) hoping to elicit change in the Kremlin's international conduct for the better was an illusory notion; (c) to seek accommodation and coexistence with the Kremlin was not just dangerous but defeatist and compromised the moral foundations of American foreign policy; and (d) what was needed rather was a qualitatively deeper commitment in men, money, materiel, and ultimately willpower to stare down and defeat the Soviet Communist challenge.

Each of these points was hammered relentlessly in the policy debate and in the public arena. Unsurprisingly, in both instances, loud calls for a budget-busting military build-up were the order of the day. **A successful future Committee on the Present Danger: China (if that is to be the case) will almost-certainly employ this tried-and-tested playbook. On the other hand, it is questionable if the fiscal means will be available, even if the appetite for conflict remains undimmed.** The U.S. economy has struggled to break through the average 2 percent GDP growth mark over the last two decades (it grew at almost 4 percent on average in each of the last six decades of the 20th century) - even as the federal government's debt-to-GDP ratio has tripled over the past two decades and has crossed the sensitive 100 percent of GDP threshold.

Fourth, for CPD-I and CPD-II's provocative hardline arguments to gain traction within the larger body politic as well as with the American public, **it was essential to manufacture episodes of East-West tension as a moment of existential crisis for American national security. Both the Committees on the Present Danger perfected this *modus operandi*, especially CPD-II.** During such episodes, especially if coinciding with or accompanied by a period of economic anxiety at home, hysteria was generated about Soviet intentions and its capabilities were overstated in order to delegitimize the supposedly weak-kneed response of the realist-minded incumbent policymakers. Astutely deploying their political advocacy and lobbying cards thereafter, the CPD hawks were able to build a political head of steam that successfully, in time, managed to seize the national security policymaking apparatus.

**This having been said, it is instructive to point out that in this current age of decentralization – and disinformation (fake news) – of mass media, it is no longer as easy to generate the necessary 'public will' as was 'manufactured' during the earlier CPD-I and CPD-II eras.** Barriers to entry, and thereby the ability to shape the narrative of the public square, have literally been lowered to accommodate anyone with an internet connection. The rollout of a streamlined media influence campaign spearheaded by 'Establishment' voices and 'captains of industry', as was crafted during the Cold War, is no longer a straightforward proposition. Staying with the original point though, a key implication nevertheless going forward is that **a major future flashpoint crisis with China, coupled with domestic economic hardship or discontent at home, is relatively more easily susceptible to being hijacked by hawkish – or even anti-mainstream - interest groups that are well-resourced and have a geopolitical axe to grind.** Donald Trump's populist revolt against globalization, globalists, and China, with lasting damage to the bilateral relationship, could be a preview of worse to come the next time around - be it outfitted in CPD:C clothing or other. Beijing would be wise to exercise restraint rather than provocation.

Next, the core membership of both Committees on the Present Danger was part of and deeply integrated within the Beltway's political and policy aristocracy. Most were elitists with impeccable

**TABLE I: Committee on the Present Danger: China – Member List**

<b>MEMBER</b>	<b>CREDENTIALS</b>
<b>Brian Kennedy</b>	Chairman; Former President, Claremont Institute; President of American Strategy Group
<b>Frank Gaffney</b>	Vice Chairman; Executive Chairman, Center for Security Policy; President and CEO, Save the Persecuted Christians
<b>Hon. Steve Bannon</b>	Former Chief Strategist to President Trump; former Chairman, Breitbart News
<b>Hon. William Bennett</b>	Former Secretary of Education; former Drug Czar
<b>J. Kyle Bass</b>	Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Hayman Capital Management
<b>Lt. Gen. William “Jerry” Boykin, (Ret.)</b>	Former Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence; former Commander, Delta Force
<b>José Cardenas</b>	Former Acting Assistant Administrator of US AID; former NSC, State Department official
<b>Hon. Robert Charles</b>	Former Assistant Secretary of State; former White House official; naval intelligence officer
<b>Amb. Henry Cooper</b>	Former Director, Strategic Defense Initiative; former Ambassador, Defense and Space Talks
<b>Dr. Anders Corr</b>	Former civilian staff member for U.S. military intelligence on China; published editor
<b>Hon. Kenneth DeGraffenreid</b>	Former Special Assistant to the President for Intelligence
<b>Hon. Paula DeSutter</b>	Former Assistant Secretary of State for Verification, Compliance, and Implementation
<b>Gunnery Sergeant Jessie Jane Duff, USMC (Ret.)</b>	Military Advisor to Committee on the Present Danger: China
<b>Sam Faddis</b>	Former CIA operations officer, published author, and national security commentator
<b>Capt. James Fanell, USN (Ret.)</b>	Former Director of Intelligence and Information Operations, U.S. Pacific Fleet
<b>Richard Fisher</b>	Senior Fellow, International Assessment and Strategy Center; Author, China’s Military
<b>Kevin Freeman, CFA</b>	Author; host of Economic War Room with Kevin Freeman
<b>Rosemary Gibson</b>	Senior Advisor, The Hastings Center; author, China Rx
<b>Dr. Sasha Gong</b>	Former Director, VOA Mandarin Desk, author filmmaker
<b>Chadwick R. Gore</b>	Former Staff Director, European Subcommittee, House Foreign Affairs Committee; Fellow
<b>Lianchao Han</b>	Visiting Fellow at Hudson Inst.; founder and vice-president of Independent Federation of Chinese Students and Scholars
<b>Mark Helprin</b>	Author and essayist; Senior Fellow, Claremont Institute
<b>Rich Higgins</b>	Senior Fellow, Unconstrained Analytics; former Program Manager, Irregular Warfare, Department of Defense
<b>Peter Huessy</b>	President of Geostrategic Analysis
<b>Bradley Johnson</b>	Former Senior Operations Officer and Chief of Station, Central Intelligence Agency; Founder and President, Americans for Intelligence Reform
<b>Dr. Phillip Karber</b>	President of the Potomac Foundation; former Director, Defense Department’s Strategic Concepts
<b>Ratko Knezevic</b>	Board Member and Chief Strategic Officer, Aiteo Group
<b>Dr. Xiaoxu Sean Lin, PhD</b>	Executive Director, Global Alliance Against Communist Disinformation and Propaganda, Microbiologist, Former US Army officer, Survivor of Tiananmen Massacre

<b>MEMBER</b>	<b>CREDENTIALS</b>
<b>Reggie Littlejohn</b>	Founder and President Women's Rights Without Frontiers
<b>Clare Lopez</b>	Former Clandestine Service Officer, CIA
<b>Jay Lucas</b>	Founder and Chairman of The Lucas Group
<b>Col. Robert Maness, USAF (Ret.)</b>	Founder and owner of Iron Liberty Group LLC, host of The Rob Maness Show at LifeZette.com
<b>Richard Manning</b>	President, Americans for Limited Government
<b>Rod Martin</b>	Former Senior Advisor to the founder of Pay Pal; Founder and CEO of the Martin Organization
<b>Hon. Tidal McCoy</b>	Former Acting Secretary of the Air Force
<b>Faith McDonnell</b>	Director for the Religious Liberty Programs at the Institute on Religion and Democracy
<b>Hon. Robert McEwen</b>	Former Member of Congress from Ohio; Executive Director, Council for National Policy
<b>Lt. Gen. Thomas McInerney, USAF (Ret.)</b>	Former Assistant Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force
<b>Col. John Mills, USA (Ret.)</b>	Former Director, Cybersecurity Policy, Strategy, and International Affairs, Office of the Secretary
<b>Greg Mitchell, Esq</b>	Co-Chairman, International Religious Freedom Roundtable
<b>Stephen Mosher</b>	President, Population Research Institute
<b>Maura Moynihan</b>	Tibet specialist, former Radio Free Asia/Nepal bureau chief and columnist with The Asian Age
<b>Chet Nagle</b>	Former naval aviator and Defense Department official; former Director, Committee on the Present Danger
<b>Benedict Peters</b>	Businessman, entrepreneur and energy industry pioneer; CEO of Aiteo Group
<b>Miles Prentice, Esq.</b>	Attorney, entrepreneur
<b>Dr. Peter Pry</b>	Former CIA Senior Analyst Nuclear Weapons and Strategy; former Chief of Staff, Congressional EMP Commission
<b>Dr. Mark Schneider</b>	Former Senior Executive Service official, Department of Defense; former Foreign Service Officer
<b>Dr. Suzanne Scholte</b>	Seoul Peace Prize Laureate; President, Defense Forum Foundation; Chair, North Korea Freedom Coalition
<b>Mark Stokes</b>	Executive Director, Project 2049 Institute
<b>Dr. Bradley Thayer</b>	Fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and St. Antony's College, Oxford
<b>Hon. Ed Timperlake</b>	Marine aviator, former Assistant Secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs
<b>Dr. Arthur Waldron</b>	Lauder Professor of International Relations, University of Pennsylvania
<b>Hon. Frank Wolf</b>	Former Member of Congress
<b>Hon. R. James Woolsey, Esq</b>	Former Director of Central Intelligence; former Under Secretary of the Navy
<b>Dr. Jianli Yang</b>	Former Chinese dissident; founder of the Foundation for China in the 21st Century
<b>Lt. Col. James Zumwalt, USMC (Ret.)</b>	Marine Infantry Officer, Vietnam Veteran, Author
<b>Greg Autry</b>	Former White House Liaison NASA, coauthor of Death by China (with Peter Navarro)

Source: Committee on the Present Danger (April 2021) <https://presentdangerchina.org/members-2/>

educational credentials and some even owned tremendous wealth. **Overall, though, they shared three essential common traits.** First, **they may have been hawkish to a fault, but they were not anti-mainstream political/policy players;** their views and activities were conducted firmly within the guardrails of mainstream American politics. Second, by professional background, **they came from a diversity of occupations, and were therefore representative of a much wider swathe of American society and success.** It was not uncommon for the Chairman of the Board of a Fortune 500 company, a Wall Street titan, or a renowned publisher to be on the Committee. Such cross-fertilizations enriched the Committee's depth, stature, and coalition-building ingenuity. And third, CPD-I and II's **key leaders had significant experience at the senior-most levels of government,** and even once out of government, continued to enjoy impeccable access to the highest levels of government.

By contrast, the current Committee on the Present Danger: China is entirely lacking in each of these departments (give or take a name or two). It is by-and-large composed of China-antagonists originating overwhelmingly (although not fully) from the inbred mid-level reaches of the state's military-industrial complex. Without a much wider diversity of representation of professions in the mix and without a jettisoning of its anti-mainstream credentials, the CPD:C as currently constituted will languish on the fringes.

Sixth, members of the academic or policy intelligentsia played a critical – and, in fact, outside – role in shaping the intellectual terms on which the CPD national security hawks engaged and outmaneuvered their more moderate-minded realist colleagues. Before the realist v. hawk debate was won politically and bureaucratically, the scales had to be tipped ideationally, after all. **University educators had been at the forefront of CPD-I; think tanks, such as the American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation along with neo-conservative academics and intellectuals provided the fiercely penetrating insight for CPD-II.** By contrast, the current Committee on the Present Danger: China contains a mere smattering of the intellectually gifted, and only a few so far that have been able to make a mark in the 'China Challenge' policy debate (although Steve Bannon's significant role to the contrary must be acknowledged).

Seventh, the success of both CPD-I and CPD-II derived from the fact that both **enjoyed long incubation periods outside of government, or at the lesser reaches of government, before ascension to the highest levels of authority within government,** during which time the CPD hawks were able to unify and sharpen their ideological and political agenda and perfect their messaging to the political establishment and the American people. The core of CPD-I had worked together in government a full ten years



*President Ronald W. Reagan and his wife, Nancy, wave to the public as they ride down Pennsylvania Avenue during the inaugural parade, after the swearing in ceremony at the Capitol.  
Photo Source: The U.S. National Archive*

before they formally established the Committee in 1950. The core of CPD-II was formed in 1974 and worked in unity outside government through the rest of the decade, until they joined the Reagan Administration as a group and immediately left a stamp on national security policy. **This incubation period, both in-and-out of government, allowed CPD-I and II players to establish excellent insider-outsider connections that was key to their ‘insider-outsider’ strategy to constrict the sitting Administration’s national security policymaking space and force it to bend to the Committee’s hawkish or harder-line policy will.**

As for the current Committee on the Present Danger: China, their members might have enjoyed spells in the mid-to-senior levels of government, but it is unlikely that a few, or any, will be returning to the loftiest portals of government anytime soon. The Committee, as currently constituted, is destined to remain and play an outsider role.

Finally, CPD-I and CPD-II members **originated from both sides of the political aisle but found their calling and voices primarily in Republican administrations**, given the latter’s typically harder-line posture on national security issues (which is evident even today, vis-à-vis China at least). And indeed, the great achievement of the CPD-II hawks was their political skill to elbow out their fellow Democratic Party factions and, working with national security-minded Republicans, construct a mainstream, *bipartisan* anti-Soviet political consensus during the latter stages of the Cold War. **For any Committee on the Present Danger: China to go viral within the Beltway, it will need to possess cross-over bipartisan appeal, and it will probably find release in a future Republican administration.** Democrats on the current CPD:C appear to be few and far between in numbers, however.

On the other hand, the ideological moorings of the present-day Republican Party remain in flux, as the political coalition that President Reagan constructed continues to buckle under the weight of Trumpian ‘America First’ populism. Should the Republican Party’s slide towards the isolationist, anti-mainstream populism of its disenchanted white, working class constituents continue unchecked, it could commensurately cease to be an appropriate vehicle to transmit the new Cold War fight to Socialist China’s door.

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– SG

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