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**Thesis :**  
**"Charting a Course Beyond the Cold War:  
Lessons learned and Ongoing Strategies for US-China  
Relations"**

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## *Dedication*

*I dedicate this work first and foremost to my wife and sons, whose patience and unwavering support made it possible for me to complete this Master' s program. I would also like to sincerely thank my parents for providing the support and guidance that have made all my successes possible.*

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

USA : United States of America  
NATO : North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
CCP: China's Communist Party  
NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement  
PLA: People's Liberation Army  
ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations  
PRC: People's Republic of China  
BRI: Belt and Road Initiative

## **ABSTRACT**

The rise of China has become one of the most widely discussed topics of the 21st century, with its growing power seen as a challenge to a perceived declining United States. U.S. President Joe Biden's remark in 2021 that China might “eat our lunch” encapsulates this anxiety. China's leadership, under the Chinese Communist Party, seeks to restore its historical dominance in Asia and globally, using various resources such as military, economic, technological and ideological tools. Meanwhile, the U.S. aims to preserve the liberal international order it has long upheld, positioning itself as a counterweight to China's autocratic ambitions.

This research delves into the complex US-China relationship, moving beyond simplistic Cold War comparisons. It explores the lessons learned from the Cold War era and their applicability to the current strategic rivalry. With China experiencing rapid economic and military growth, the U.S. must balance diplomatic engagement with deterrence. The Cold War emphasized the importance of alliances, and in the Indo-Pacific, this strategy remains crucial. Additionally, maintaining technological leadership and fostering multilateral cooperation are vital for addressing global challenges and countering China's assertiveness.

By adopting a carefully considered, historically aware approach, the United States can navigate its relationship with China more effectively, ensuring both cooperation and competition are managed prudently to avoid escalating tensions or potential conflict.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview of the historical context

The "rise of China" might be considered the most widely discussed news topic of the 21st century. There's a general agreement, both in Washington and internationally, that a rising Beijing poses a threat to surpass an America perceived as being in decline. U.S. President Joe Biden after his first phone with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping said in 2021, "If we don't get moving they're going to eat our lunch."<sup>1</sup>

The CCP is devising strategies to establish a China-centered Asia and to restore its perceived historical status as the leading global power. Utilizing a diverse set of resources — military, economic, diplomatic, technological, and ideological — Beijing aims to preserve the authority and extend the reach of its harsh authoritarian rule. Meanwhile, the United States is endeavoring to safeguard the liberal international system it has upheld for many years and to thwart Beijing's efforts to dominate the 21st century with autocratic rule.

### 1.2 Aim and Methodology

This research dives into the complexities of US-China relations by going beyond simple Cold War parallels, aiming to analyze their applicability to the current dynamic. In the next chapter we will examine how the Cold War shaped their relationship and the challenges and opportunities that emerged after its conclusion. In chapter 3, we will analyze the factors behind China's economic and military rise, the effectiveness of its "Hide-and-bide" strategy, US responses, and China's ambitions. Afterwards, in chapter 4 we will discuss the current strategies across economic, military, alliance building, and global governance. Finally, the last chapter analyzes the lessons learned and how both countries can formulate policies for effective engagement and manage potential conflict. By employing the as said methodology, this research will move beyond simplistic comparisons to the Cold War and provide a nuanced understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the US-China relationship.

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<sup>1</sup> "China will 'eat our lunch,' Biden warns after clashing with Xi on most fronts", *Reuters*, February 11, 2021

## CHAPTER 2 THE AFTERMATH OF COLD WAR

### 2.1 A brief history of US-China relations during the Cold War

Throughout the tenure of Chinese leaders from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping, the United States has been perceived as a threat to the CCP's dominant political position although they had helped China maintain most of its territory after World War II by opposing Japan. Following Mao's victory in the civil war and his tilt towards the Soviet Union, the U.S. adopted a strategy aimed at undermining the CCP.<sup>2</sup> This included encircling China with military bases, attempting to sever Sino-Soviet ties, imposing severe economic sanctions, and even threatening nuclear action during the Taiwan Strait crises in the 1950s. Additionally, Washington backed Tibetan insurgents opposing the Chinese regime and also supported Taiwan's Chiang Kai-shek, endorsing his assertion as the legitimate ruler of China.<sup>3</sup> Since the establishment of Mao Zedong's Communist government in 1949, China had been in a state of antagonism with the United States, engaging in indirect yet intense conflicts in both Korea and Vietnam. Americans, accustomed to a potentially friendly China, were caught off guard by the hostility of Mao's communist government. This led to a strategic pivot: abandoning support for Asian nationalism wherever it seemed intertwined with communism. With widespread public backing, President Truman and his advisors committed the US to containing communism globally. In practice this policy became increasingly anti-Chinese, marking a significant change from past US interests. Prior to this point, the US might have intervened to protect China from external threats. Now, for the United States had become China's principal enemy.<sup>4</sup>

However, during this period, a more immediate threat emerged from the north. The Soviet Union, which was China's ally, became a source of hostility, leading to border tensions and fears of nuclear conflict. This deterioration in Sino-Soviet relations led Chinese marshals to assess the Soviet threat as more severe than that posed by the "U.S. imperialists" who would not dare to attack China rashly. They believed that the Soviet revisionists were creating tensions along the long Sino-Soviet border, concentrating troops in the border area and making military intrusions, creating anti-China public opinion and chaos on the international scene, while at the same time forcing some Asian countries to join an anti-China ring of encirclement with a stick-carrot method. All these are serious steps that the Soviet revisionists were taking toward preparing for a war of aggression against China.<sup>5</sup> In

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<sup>2</sup> Gordan H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China, and the Soviet Union, 1948–1972* (Redwood City, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1990)

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of State, "The Ambassador in China (Stuart) to the Secretary of State, Nanking, October 26, 1946"

<sup>4</sup> Warren I. Cohen, *America's response to china* (Columbia University Press, New York, 2019, sixth edition), p. 198-199

<sup>5</sup> "Report by Four Chinese Marshals, Chen Yi, Ye Jianying, Xu Xiangqian, and Nie Rongzhen, to the Central Committee, 'A Preliminary Evaluation of the War Situation', July 11, 1969, *Digital Archive, Cold War International History Project*

response, Mao sought a pragmatic alliance with the United States to counter the Soviet Union. This strategic shift was highlighted by President Richard Nixon's landmark visit to China in 1972, a moment he famously described as a week that "changed the world", significantly altering China's strategic landscape. The balance of power in the Cold War shifted dramatically and that scene was set for the building of a relationship that dominates international relations to this day.<sup>6</sup>

Soviet aggression inadvertently benefited China by opening the door to an alliance with America. This change was marked by the U.S. withdrawal of forces from Vietnam and Taiwan, strategically supporting China as a counterbalance to the Soviet Union. Henry Kissinger, playing a crucial role in U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War, shared sensitive intelligence with China regarding Soviet troop movements. Additionally, he issued a significant warning to Moscow, stating that any attack on China would be perceived as an attack on the vital interests of the United States.<sup>7</sup> As a result, China's integration into the global community accelerated, with the United Nations recognizing Beijing, major international institutions admitting China like the World Bank and IMF, and even former adversaries like Japan becoming significant aid donors.<sup>8</sup> This global recognition enabled China to establish a strategic presence around the Soviet Union. Moreover, the improved relations facilitated China's economic revival leading to a reduction in military spending, freeing up resources for investment in economic development. The lifting of trade sanctions and the opening of US markets to Chinese exports further stimulated China's economic growth. Remarkably, it was this reconciliation with Washington that liberated China from continuous insecurity and poverty, coinciding with the emergence of a Chinese government capable of capitalizing on these new opportunities, paving the way for China's rise to global prominence.

## **2.2 The shift in dynamics at the end of the Cold War: New challenges and opportunities**

After the fall of the Soviet Union, several favorable factors emerged for China. Firstly, the Asian Pacific region experienced relative political stability, and sustained economic growth, contrasting with the troubles faced by Europe after the Soviet Union's collapse and the Yugoslav conflicts. China benefited significantly from a reduced military threat from the North creating a more favorable security environment than at any time since 1949. Secondly, with the end of East-West confrontation, economic competitions among major powers like the United States, Japan, and the European Economic Community became more pronounced. The emergence of new economic groupings, such as the single European market, the NAFTA, and a potential East Asia economic bloc, provided

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<sup>6</sup> "The Week That Changed the World:" The 40th Anniversary of President Nixon's China Trip, *Wilson Center*, February 17, 2012

<sup>7</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), p. 233

<sup>8</sup> Hook, S. W., & Zhang, G. (1998). Japan's Aid Policy since the Cold War: Rhetoric and Reality. *Asian Survey*, 38 (11), p. 1051–1066



opportunities for China to benefit from global economic rivalries. Lastly, the domestic problems of the United States became more prominent post-Cold War, diverting its attention to issues arising from the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia's disintegration and the aftermath of the Gulf War.<sup>9</sup> This shift in the global landscape presented China with opportunities to navigate its own development amidst changing international dynamics.

The period of strategic ease for China continued for an entire generation after the Soviet threat had dissipated, and even after the violent suppression of the Tiananmen Square protests on June 4, 1989, which showcased the CCP readiness to employ extreme measures to maintain its power. Reflecting on this, former State Department official Thomas Christensen noted in 2015 that Washington's strategy towards China was almost the complete antithesis of its Cold War containment policy against the Soviets. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of China's ascent is the length of time it took for the world to begin a concerted response.<sup>10</sup> Observers acknowledged that a thriving China might eventually emerge as a regional and even a global competitor. In anticipation of this, several U.S. administrations maintained substantial air and naval forces in the Pacific as a precaution. Despite these measures, the United States continued to facilitate China's rapid economic expansion. American officials even encouraged Beijing to take on a more active and influential role in international affairs. Contrary to any notion of impeding Beijing's ascent, Thomas Christensen points out that American policy was largely focused on economic and diplomatic engagement, aiding in China's continual rise.<sup>11</sup>

The justification for the United States and other Western nations to pursue economic engagement with China had two main aspects: China posed a minimal military threat and presented a substantial opportunity for profit. With its population of 1.3 billion, a strategic location along a lengthy coastline in East Asia, and an authoritarian government willing to suppress dissent and overlook environmental concerns for economic growth, China was an irresistible market for consumer goods and a hub for low-cost manufacturing. Consequently, Western multinational corporations and financial institutions urged their governments to further integrate China into global supply chains. These governments complied, often justifying their actions by arguing that economic liberalization in China might lead to political openness over time. This sentiment was encapsulated by George W. Bush's statement, "Trade freely with China, and time is on our side," implying that engagement would eventually lead to positive changes in China's political landscape.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, aggressively containing China seemed unnecessary, given America's dominant global position. There was no perceived urgency to hinder China's growth, especially considering that its integration into the American-led global economy was contributing to its wealth. The prevailing belief was that Beijing would recognize the

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<sup>9</sup> Chen, Q. (1993). New Approaches in China's Foreign Policy: The Post-Cold War Era. *Asian Survey*, 33 (3), p. 237-251

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Christensen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* (New York: Norton, 2015), p. xv

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Christensen, op. cit, p. xiv

<sup>12</sup> "Bush Lays Out Foreign Policy Vision," *CNN*, November 19, 1999

benefits of this system and choose to support it. Furthermore, the era was characterized by the fall of many authoritarian regimes to the advancing tide of democracy, leading to the expectation that China would eventually follow a similar path. The assumption was that America would transform China into a "responsible stakeholder" in the global order, or perhaps even a liberal democracy, well before China could exert a significant influence on the American-led international system. This viewpoint reflects the optimism and strategic calculations of the time regarding China's rise and its potential alignment with Western political and economic models.<sup>13</sup>

The only thing that the US faced as a dilemma was China's human rights record. While critical of Soviet human rights abuses, the US turned a blind eye to similar issues in China, its new Cold War partner. American leaders like Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, aware of China's poor human rights record but prioritizing Realpolitik, chose not to criticize China's internal affairs. China's leadership under Deng Xiaoping and his successors offered a glimmer of hope. Compared to Mao's regime, their rule seemed more benign and promised economic reforms. While this reflected an American naivety about China eventually becoming a liberal democracy, some Chinese citizens also shared this vision of a more open society and a potentially tolerant Communist Party in its attempt to modernize the country.<sup>14</sup>

### **2.3 What Cold War have taught us**

The Cold War was a period of intense ideological and political rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies, the Western Bloc and the Eastern Bloc. The conflict began following World War II, leaving the two superpowers as the two most powerful states in the world. The US and the Soviet Union never directly fought each other in a war, but they competed fiercely for many years. This competition was like a big fight with many battlefields. This multifaceted struggle played out on various fronts: economic warfare aimed to cripple each other's economies, information warfare used propaganda and manipulation to control the narrative, covert actions like espionage ran in the shadows, and proxy wars in Korea, Vietnam, Angola, and Afghanistan saw the superpowers clash indirectly by supporting opposing forces. The Cold War had a profound impact on the United States, shaping its foreign policy, economy, and society for decades. The lessons that the United States learned from the Cold War continue to inform its foreign policy today.

The Cold War was a time of intense military competition, and the United States learned that it needed to maintain a strong military to deter aggression from its rivals. In the wake of the United States' use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin recognized that conventional warfare, which he believed emphasized bloodshed, was no

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<sup>13</sup> Robert B. Zoellick, "Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility?" *U.S. Department of State*, September 21, 2005

<sup>14</sup> Warren I. Cohen, *op. cit.*, p. 233-234

longer the sole determinant of global power. The United States' acquisition of nuclear capabilities shifted the balance of power in favor of those who possessed the most advanced military technology. Stalin's response to the U.S. nuclear detonation was swift and decisive. He authorized a crash program to develop Soviet nuclear capabilities, driven by the urgent need to restore the balance of power. The use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, he declared, had "shaken the whole world," necessitating a Soviet response to ensure national security. Stalin's actions exemplified the Cold War's intense focus on military strength. The two superpowers, locked in an ideological rivalry, engaged in a relentless arms race to procure the most advanced weaponry. This competition shaped the geopolitical landscape for decades, demonstrating the enduring importance of military power in international relations.<sup>15</sup>

In the past, defeating a major enemy like Nazi Germany meant a full-scale war where everyone fought until one side completely gave up. But after the Soviets built their own atomic bomb in 1949, things changed. American leaders worried that traditional war might not be possible anymore. The Soviets quickly built a lot of powerful nuclear weapons, creating a situation called "Mutually Assured Destruction" (MAD). This means that if either the US or the Soviet Union attacked first with nuclear weapons, the other side could still launch a devastating attack back. Basically, if one country tried to destroy the other with nuclear bombs, they would also destroy themselves. Nuclear weapons are so powerful, they could destroy all life on Earth. Any leader considering a nuclear attack knows they'd likely kill millions of their own people too. In Ronald Reagan's oft-quoted one-liner: "A nuclear war cannot be won and must therefore never be fought."<sup>16</sup> The Cold War created a situation where the US and the Soviet Union were like twins who couldn't kill each other. Both wanted to dominate the other, but nuclear weapons made war too risky. They had to find ways to compete without starting a war that would destroy them both. Nuclear weapons make war impossible to win, but they also give an advantage to any country that's willing to risk using them.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, both the US and the Soviet Union had to be careful not to push things too far. President Kennedy and Chairman Khrushchev knew they were basically partners in avoiding a disaster. But here's the problem: if one country isn't afraid to use nuclear weapons, they could potentially force the other country to back down, even if it meant risking war. This means leaders might have to make dangerous choices to protect their interests. After the crisis, Kennedy, recognizing how close the two superpowers came to a devastating nuclear war, took decisive action, achieving the first arms control agreement (Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty) in 1963. As he said, nuclear powers must prevent those confrontations that bring an adversary to the choice of either humiliating defeat or nuclear war.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Gaddis, John Lewis, *The Cold War: A New History*, New York: Penguin Press, 2005, p. 25-26

<sup>16</sup> George P. Shultz, "The War That Must Never Be Fought," *Hoover*, March 12, 2015

<sup>17</sup> John F. Kennedy, American Univesuty Commencement Adress, *Jfklibrary*, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1963

The US and the Soviet Union, aware of the dangers of surprise attacks and accidents, took steps to reduce those risks. They negotiated arms control treaties that allowed them to see each other's weapons, building trust and lessening the fear of a surprise nuclear attack. Additionally, they established clear rules for air and sea travel to prevent accidental collisions between airplanes and ships. Over time, an unspoken agreement emerged between the two superpowers, the three no's: no using nuclear bombs, no directly attacking each other's military forces, and no military intervention in each other's recognized sphere of influence.<sup>18</sup>

The United States learned that it could not stand alone in the world and that it needed to build alliances with other countries to counter the threat of communism. Henry Kissinger, a prominent figure in international relations and diplomacy, has written that “Historically, alliances had been formed to augment a nation’s strength in case of war; as World War I approached, the primary motive for war was to strengthen the alliances.” In his book “Diplomacy”<sup>19</sup> he emphasized the significance of constructing alliances in navigating global challenges. According to Kissinger, the United States, as a major player on the world stage, cannot effectively address complex threats or geopolitical issues in isolation. He underscores the imperative for the U.S. to build strategic alliances with other nations to foster collective strength and unity. These alliances, in Kissinger's perspective, serve as essential tools for promoting stability, countering common threats, and shaping a cooperative international order. Truman described the Cold War as a battle between democracy and totalitarianism, but he pragmatically built a coalition that included former enemies like Japan and Germany, rapidly transforming them into Cold War allies. This included supporting West Berlin during the Soviet blockade and engaging Yugoslavia as a tacit ally following its rift with Stalin. One of the most significant innovations was the formation of NATO, a radical departure from traditional U.S. foreign policy and initially opposed even by Kennan. NATO was not part of a grand plan but a response to immediate crises like the Czech coup and Berlin blockade, which demonstrated the need for a formal defense treaty to assure European allies. The Europeans were “completely out of their skin, and sitting on their nerves, and hope must be recreated in them very soon,” as Marshall said.<sup>20</sup> Kissinger argues that NATO was essential to the defense of Western Europe against the Soviet Union, and that it provided a forum for cooperation and coordination among allied countries.

During the Cold War, the United States' most significant achievement wasn't the setbacks it inflicted on its adversary, but rather the positive relationships and structures it established with its allies. It is worth noting that, for the sake of their allies, the US took significant risks in order to protect them from the Soviet threat. Specifically, when the issue of the credibility of extended deterrence in Europe was raised by de Gaulle, they took

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<sup>18</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 237–41

<sup>19</sup> Kissinger, Henry, *Diplomacy*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994

<sup>20</sup> “Meeting of the Secretary of Defense and the Service Chiefs with the Secretary of State 1045 Hours,” October 10, 1948, Box 147, Forrestal Papers, SMML

risky actions. The US changed its nuclear doctrine to a more aggressive one (flexible response), sent thousands of short- and medium-range nuclear weapons to Europe, and stationed over 500,000 American soldiers in Europe to show that American interests are the same as those of its allies. US played a pivotal role in fostering a thriving democratic community from the ruins of a devastated world. This effort helped non-Communist nations withstand Soviet pressure even as Moscow's influence expanded. By exemplifying a society marked by relative freedom and prosperity, the U.S. indirectly prompted Soviet leaders and citizens to question the failings of their own system. These introspections eventually led to the reforms that caused the Soviet Union's collapse. The U.S. didn't triumph in the Cold War solely through direct confrontation; rather, it succeeded by creating a more appealing and prosperous world for those nations that aligned with it, countering Soviet aggression and undermining Soviet ideology in the process.<sup>21</sup> The United States learned that diplomacy was often more effective than military force in achieving its goals. Henry Kissinger conveys the notion that diplomacy requires adept management, encapsulated in the phrase: "Diplomacy is the art of restraining power." In addition, he underscores a pragmatic stance in foreign relations with the statement: "America has no permanent friends or enemies, only interests."

The Cold War was a period of intense ideological and political rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, a conflict that was not confined to the battlefield but also extended to the realm of economics. The Soviet Union's economy boomed after World War II. In the first ten years, it doubled in size, and then doubled again in the next ten! A lot of this new money went towards the military. As Robert Gates, a senior US intelligence official during the Cold War, said: "The USSR proceeded to undertake the largest military buildup in history over a twenty-five-year period, with profound consequences for the international balance of power."<sup>22</sup> This massive military build-up changed the power dynamic in the world.

The United States learned that it needed to have a strong economy to compete with its rivals, recognizing the significance of economic prowess and the importance of economic alliances as cornerstones of national security and global influence in order to strengthen their economic positions. The US allocated 6-8% of its GDP to military preparedness, a percentage that proved sufficient to cripple the economically inferior Soviet economy. The United States was the only country with enough money and, perhaps, a bit of innocence to try the Marshall Plan. The main goal was to bring back confidence, prosperity, and social peace using democratic methods. The idea was to show that even though there were two different ideological worlds, within the capitalist one, nations didn't have to be divided into rich and poor, which was a problem that led to Marxism in the first place. Many years later, Nixon and Kissinger's broader strategy was to use economic necessity along with the opening to China as leverage to prompt the Soviet Union into negotiations with the United

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Kagan, *The Jungle Grows Back: America and Our Imperilled World*, New York: Knopf, 2018

<sup>22</sup> Robert Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 29

States on various fronts. This included limiting strategic arms, negotiating an end to the Vietnam War, and boosting East-West trade.<sup>23</sup>

The Cold War highlighted the differences between centrally planned economies and market-oriented economies. The Soviet Union's centrally planned economy, with government control over production and distribution, proved inefficient as compared to the market-based system of the United States, where prices were set by supply and demand and businesses operated with minimal government interference. The Soviet Union's economy struggled to keep pace with the U.S., leading to shortages of basic goods, declining productivity, and a general decline in living standards. The inefficiencies of centrally planned economies ultimately contributed to the collapse of the Soviet Union and inspired other countries like China and Vietnam to adopt market-oriented systems.<sup>24</sup> The Cold War could have played out very differently. A booming Soviet economy surpassing the US, a unified "new socialist man" overcoming nationalism, and a communist China spearheading global revolution through "wars of liberation," as most US policymakers viewed the Vietnam War could have formed a formidable communist bloc. This, coupled with the lingering economic woes of Western Europe potentially making them susceptible to communism or Soviet influence, might have resulted in a world dominated by the "Communist monolith" rather than the US-led "free world."<sup>25</sup>

The Cold War demonstrated the importance of economic statecraft in achieving strategic objectives. Economic tools, such as trade policies and sanctions, like the U.S. sanctions against Cuba were wielded as instruments of geopolitical influence. As Barry Carter said "there is persuasive historical evidence that sanctions can sometimes be an effective tool for achieving foreign policy objectives". During the Cold War, the United States often used sanctions on its own when it couldn't get support from other countries. This was because the U.S. saw itself as a global leader and felt responsible for taking action. In the early years, there were fewer challenges domestically as people generally agreed on Cold War policies, and the U.S. economy relied less on international trade than Europe or Japan. As time went on, things changed. For instance, when President Kennedy suggested a big grain sale to the Soviet Union in 1963, many weren't enthusiastic, even in the farm areas. Back then, farm income was doing well, and not a lot of grain was being sold internationally. There was a strong feeling that Americans shouldn't compromise their moral principles for money. Fast forward to 1980 when President Carter stopped grain sales to the Soviets as a response to their invasion of Afghanistan. This move was popular in farming states and contributed to Carter's big loss in the 1980 election. The shift in the

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<sup>23</sup> Gaddis, John Lewis, op. cit, p. 68, 95

<sup>24</sup> Andrei Shleifer and Robert W. Vishny, "Reversing the Soviet Economic Collapse", Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, Vol. 1991, No. 2, 1991, p. 341-360

<sup>25</sup> Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), p. 239-240

use of sanctions reflected changes in the world and how people in the U.S. felt about them during the Cold War.<sup>26</sup>

The Cold War was a fight for survival in the eyes of the US. The Soviet Union, fueled by communist ideology, weren't just building an empire in Eastern Europe, but also trying to undermine US allies through subversion and intimidation. American strategists feared war-weary and economically fragile nations would fall prey to communism, with Europe and Japan, key economic and strategic centers, especially vulnerable. The US strategy of undermining communism involved showcasing the superiority of free-market democracies over Soviet-style economies and authoritarian rule. The US also encouraged nationalism in Soviet-controlled countries and US allies, believing that national identities would prove more durable than dreams to create a “new socialist man.” To undermine the Soviet Union, the US supported dissident groups and nationalist movements in Soviet satellites like Poland or allies like China.<sup>27</sup> The US actively discredited the Soviet model through propaganda campaigns portraying the USSR as an "Evil Empire" with a repressive regime and a failing economy. These efforts effectively tarnished the Soviet image internationally and contributed to its eventual downfall.<sup>28</sup>

America's advantage has always been its innovative ideas and its openness. Both superpowers aimed to showcase the superiority of their economic systems, leading to advancements in technology, space exploration, and other fields. Despite the end of the Cold War, the factors that drove American military innovation remained largely unchanged. These factors, which include a focus on minimizing casualties, inter-service rivalry within the U.S. defense establishment, and the openness of American society to immigrants and their ideas, continue to shape the American defense innovation system.<sup>29</sup> USA's openness allows a constant stream of talented people from around the world to come and contribute. When the Soviets launched Sputnik, the US responded by investing heavily in education and research. Interestingly, even during the Cold War, US and Soviet scientists collaborated in some scientific fields. Recognizing the value of openness, the Reagan administration in 1985 prioritized unrestricted research in universities, a policy continued by later presidents.<sup>30</sup>

The Cold War marked a turning point in American foreign policy. Prior to World War II, the United States had largely pursued a policy of isolationism, avoiding entanglement in the affairs of other countries. The combination of the Great Depression and the memory of

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<sup>26</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *International Conflict Resolution After the Cold War*, Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2000, p. 123, 137

<sup>27</sup> Graham Allison, op. cit, p. 231-232

<sup>28</sup> Athanasios Platias and Konstantinos Koliopoulos, *The Art of Strategy* (Athens: Diavlos, 2021), (in Greek), p.132-133

<sup>29</sup> Eugene Gholz & Harvey M. Sapolsky, "The defense innovation machine: Why the U.S. will remain on the cutting edge", *Journal of Strategic Studies* 2021, VOL. 44, NO. 6, p. 854-872

<sup>30</sup> Susan L. Shirk, *Overreach-How China Derailed Its Peaceful Rise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 306

tragic losses in World War I contributed to pushing American public opinion and policy toward isolationism.<sup>31</sup> As an isolationist senator had once put it: “we want America for Americans and Europe for Europeans, and that is a good American doctrine”.<sup>32</sup> However, the rise of communism and the growing threat of the Soviet Union forced the United States to reconsider its position. Isolationism was no longer a viable option in a globalized world. The United States recognized that it could no longer isolate itself from the threats and challenges of the wider world. Instead, it needed to take a more active role in shaping the international order and protecting its interests. This shift in foreign policy led to a more interventionist approach, with the United States becoming more involved in conflicts and crises around the globe. The Truman Doctrine, announced in 1947, marked a turning point, as the United States pledged to provide economic and military assistance to countries threatened by communism. This commitment to containment became a cornerstone of American foreign policy throughout the Cold War.<sup>33</sup> The United States also engaged in a series of proxy wars, supporting anti-communist forces in conflicts such as the Korean War (1950-1953) and the Vietnam War (1955-1975). In addition to military intervention, the United States also used diplomacy and economic aid to promote its interests and shape the global order. The Marshall Plan, launched in 1947, provided billions of dollars in aid to Western Europe, helping to rebuild the economies of war-torn countries and prevent their fall to communism. The United States also played a leading role in establishing international organizations such as the United Nations and the NATO.

The Truman administration's strategy of prioritizing resources and attention in areas deemed vital for maintaining the global balance of power against Soviet expansion offered valuable lessons for managing complex international challenges. It highlighted the importance of clear prioritization and the understanding that not all regions or conflicts hold equal strategic value in the broader context of global power dynamics. The strategy wasn't without its challenges. Distinguishing between vital and secondary areas was complex, and decisions like withdrawing U.S. forces from South Korea led to unforeseen consequences, such as the Korean War. While not without its challenges, this approach proved effective in strengthening America's position in key areas and maintaining its global credibility. Truman's policy was characterized by supporting free nations against totalitarian aggression, as exemplified by the aid given to Greece and Turkey. “At the present moment in world history nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life,” Truman declared. The United States must “support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> U.S. Department of State, “American Isolationism in the 1930s”

<sup>32</sup> Michael Lind, *The American Way of Strategy: U.S. Foreign Policy and the American Way of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 107

<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth Edwards Spalding, “The Enduring Significance of the Truman Doctrine”, *Orbis*, Volume 61, Issue 4, 2017, p. 561-574

<sup>34</sup> “President Harry S. Truman's Address Before a Joint Session of Congress,” *Avalon Project, Yale Law School*, March 12, 1947



George Kennan, the director of the Policy Planning Staff (PPS) recognized the necessity of adaptability in the Cold war, played a pivotal role in shaping a strategy that combined clear strategic objectives with tactical flexibility. The PPS, along with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, identified key areas vital to American security, leading to a strategy of containing the Soviet Union by bolstering Western positions along its flanks. The overarching goal, as outlined by Secretary of State George Marshall, was to restore the balance of power in Europe and Asia, with all actions considered in this context. Kennan understood that it was impossible to have perfect solutions to the myriad of emerging challenges. This understanding translated into fast-tracked initiatives, like the Truman Doctrine. While the Truman administration had a clear vision of a secure and stable Western Europe, the path to achieving this was marked by flexibility and improvisation. Key initiatives, like NATO, were often responses to immediate crises, using available resources and forming new alliances in unique circumstances. The Truman years are remembered as a period of significant policy innovation, not because the U.S. had all the answers, but because of its ability to think strategically while responding rapidly and adaptively to pressing threats. This approach of strategic clarity combined with tactical agility was key to navigating the challenges of the Cold War era.<sup>35</sup>

The United States, under President Truman, adopted a strategy in the Cold War that involved taking proactive measures against the Soviet Union. This strategy required a delicate balance between bold actions to address vulnerabilities and avoiding provocations that could escalate into a full-scale war. This calculated risk-taking infused U.S. policy, because the only way to protect the free world was to make moves that antagonized powerful enemies.<sup>36</sup> The Marshall Plan, for example, was an aggressive move that involved removing Communist influence from Western European governments, which led to backlash in the form of strikes and riots. The Berlin airlift was another gamble, relying on the hope that the Soviets wouldn't attack U.S. planes. These risks were deemed necessary as showing weakness could be more provocative than displaying strength. The U.S. also sought to undermine the Soviet bloc. Initial efforts included offering Marshall Plan aid to Eastern Europe, anticipating Moscow would reject it and lose credibility. The U.S. engaged in economic warfare, restricted strategic materials to the USSR, and broadcasted propaganda into Eastern Europe. However, diplomacy remained a component of U.S. strategy. While Truman was skeptical about reaching a comprehensive settlement with the Soviets, diplomatic engagements were used to de-escalate tensions and assure the Soviets of America's non-aggressive intentions. Diplomatic talks eventually initiated the process of ending the Korean War. If the United States could “create strength instead of weakness,” Acheson remarked, then one day the Soviets would “recognize facts.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Hal Brands and Michael Beckley, *Danger Zone: The Coming Conflict with China* (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2022), p. 69-70

<sup>36</sup> Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*, Robert Beisner, *Dean Acheson: A Life in the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006)

<sup>37</sup> Beisner, *Dean Acheson*, 156; Dean Acheson, “Soviet Reaction to Free World’s Growing Strength,” *Department of State Bulletin*, October 20, 1952, p. 597

The Cold War serves as another compelling illustration of a protracted strategic rivalry.<sup>38</sup> The United States' abundance of resources was transformed into the strategic outcome of victory due to their long-term strategic thinking, in contrast to the Soviet Union's short-term approach. The Americans consciously sought to become more resilient than their Soviet counterparts. The “danger-zone strategy” employed by the United States during the post-World War II era in the Cold War was focused on playing the long game rather than seeking quick victories over the Soviet Union.<sup>39</sup> The goal was not immediate defeat of a formidable opponent but rather the creation of a pathway leading to a more manageable stage of the rivalry. This strategic approach aimed to build advantages over time, ensuring success in the endgame of the Cold War. This strategy entailed a delicate balance between confrontation and cooperation. While the United States maintained its military readiness and strategic deterrence, it also engaged in diplomacy and negotiation with the Soviet Union, seeking to resolve conflicts through dialogue rather than armed conflict. As Truman's presidency came to a close, the U.S. was beginning to see the fruition of this strategy, marking a shift from a point where the Soviets had a credible path to victory to a more favorable position for the United States. As exemplified by the case of Athens-Sparta, long-term strategic rivalry favors the more resilient state and the one whose internal processes consistently reproduce sound leadership. The US political system proved more stable than that of the USSR.<sup>40</sup>

Last, a big lesson is “it's okay to make mistakes and learn from them”. In the Cold War, scientists figured out new things by testing ideas and seeing what didn't work through experiments. What people believed were really just unproven ideas. The U.S. public had to live through the hysteria caused by the “bomber gap” and the “missile gap,” perpetuated by pessimistic, inaccurate “bean counts” of U.S. versus Soviet forces before improved strategic reconnaissance capabilities and more-sophisticated analysis could put those fears to rest. Disagreements about the ultimate end strength of Soviet conventional forces and the size of Soviet GDP devoted to the military pervaded the Pentagon right up until the end of the Cold War. Being flexible and admitting when something didn't work allowed for corrections and trying out new ideas. This approach, with open discussions, taking risks, and learning from mistakes, is deeply ingrained in Western culture and can be a strong advantage in the U.S.-China tech competition. The Cold War also highlights how important it is to let scientists and engineers freely develop their ideas and for the U.S. military to choose the best technologies. These values—initiative, risk-taking, and the freedom to debate—are still crucial for U.S. security today, just like they were during the Cold War.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> James Lacey (ed.), *Great Strategic Rivalries: From the Classical World to the Cold War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016)

<sup>39</sup> Hal Brands and Michael Beckley, op. cit, p.72-73

<sup>40</sup> Athanasios Platias and Vasileios Trigkas, *Unravelling the Thucydides' Trap*, (Athens: Diavlos, 2023), (in Greek), p. 78

<sup>41</sup> Caitlin Lee, “Winning the Tech Cold War”, *Objective analysis effective solutions*, August 17, 2023

## CHAPTER 3

### CHINA'S CONSCIOUS NON-THREATENING STRATEGY OF RISE

#### 3.1 Key factors led to the ascend

China boasts a long history of regional dominance. Similar to Athens in the fifth century BC, it served as the cultural and intellectual center of East Asia for many centuries. Unlike Athens' fleeting influence, China's role as a regional leader endured for a much longer period. Since the 1970s, China's ascent has been facilitated by a fortunate convergence of four key factors:

**Abundance of Natural Resources:** The economic well-being of a nation is contingent upon its economic status, which, in turn, is influenced by various factors such as commerce, trade, and taxation. Every country worldwide relies on essential resources that sustain its economy, whether through exports, trade, or agriculture. Regardless of the form, natural resources play a crucial role in supporting a country's economy, representing gifts from nature. With a massive land area of approximately 9.6 million square kilometers, China is endowed with a wealth of natural resources, including strategically significant mineral reserves. Its favorable geological position has resulted in proven deposits of nearly all essential minerals. As of 2018, China possessed an estimated 85 billion tons of iron ore reserves. However, despite this abundance, the country remains reliant on iron ore imports due to the low grade of its domestic deposits. Additionally, energy-intensive heavy industries play a significant role in China's domestic economy. To sustain its growth momentum, China has increased its primary energy production to around 3.7 billion tons of coal equivalent in 2018. The China coal belt, encompassing Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang, produces not only coal but also substantial quantities of natural gas and petroleum.<sup>42</sup>

China's position as the world's largest consumer of natural resources, coupled with its remarkable economic growth and financial development, makes it a compelling subject for study. Its extensive reserves of coal, oil, and natural gas have established China as a resource-rich nation. China is also a major producer of numerous critical minerals worth an estimated \$23 trillion. In recent years, China has made concerted efforts to secure a steady supply of minerals that are essential for electronic components used in various applications, including military and communication equipment, renewable energy generation and storage. In addition to abundant vanadium reserves, a transition metal used in high-strength alloys for aircraft, batteries, and electromagnets, and graphite, a crucial component of solar panels, electrodes, and various industrial applications, China possesses the world's largest deposits of rare earth elements, including scandium and yttrium, which account for a third of the global supply. China's drive to ensure a consistent supply of

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<sup>42</sup> J. Lan, S.U. Khan, M. Sadiq, F. Chien, Z.A.Baloch, "Evaluating energy poverty and its effects using multi-dimensional based DEA-like mathematical composite indicator approach: findings from Asia", *Energy Pol.* (2022)

minerals is driven by the increasing demand for sophisticated electronic components, particularly in emerging sectors like renewable energy and electric vehicles. By maintaining a strong grip on the production of critical minerals, China can solidify its position as a key player in the global supply chain.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, China's focus on rare earth elements aims to gain a strategic advantage in advanced technologies that rely on these elements.<sup>44</sup>

China's agriculture has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past four decades, achieving food security despite increasing scarcity of water and arable land. This transformation is attributed to a series of agricultural reform policies, starting with the Household Responsibility System (HRS) in 1978. The HRS granted farmers more autonomy over land allocation and labor use, leading to increased production incentives and productivity. Other institutional changes included the liberalization of domestic markets and international trade, which further improved resource allocation, stimulated structural change, and enabled small farmers to participate in the market. These reforms have contributed to a significant reduction in rural poverty and the emergence of a diversified agricultural sector that produces a wider range of high-value commodities.<sup>45</sup>

China's commitment to food security has been a cornerstone of its economic and social development for decades. Despite facing numerous challenges, including limited arable land, extreme weather, and disruptions in the global food supply chain, China has consistently achieved self-sufficiency in grain production. In 2023, China's grain output reached a record high of 695.41 million tons, feeding one-fifth of the world's population with only nine percent of the world's arable land. This remarkable feat is a testament to China's unwavering focus on food security and its ability to adapt to changing global conditions. However, the world's increasingly interconnected food systems have made it more difficult for even the most food-secure countries to remain insulated from external shocks. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict has exacerbated food insecurity worldwide, highlighting the importance of robust domestic food production and international cooperation in ensuring global food security.<sup>46</sup>

While China possesses approximately 2.8 trillion cubic meters of water, its per capita water availability of over 2,000 cubic meters falls well below the global average of 3,776 cubic meters and is only a fifth of the United States' average of 9,459 cubic meters. This assessment of water-stress, based on the ratio of water availability to water withdrawal,

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<sup>43</sup> Ming Fang, Chiu-Lan Chang, "The impact of oil and natural gas trading and globalization on natural resources management in China", *Resources Policy, Volume 86, Part A*, 2023

<sup>44</sup> Yizhong Sun, Keyan Jin, Deyong Wang, Qingyang Wu, Zhezhou Li, "Revisiting the natural resources-financial development nexus in China: The importance of economic policy uncertainty", *Resources Policy, Volume 86, Part B*, 2023

<sup>45</sup> Huang, Jikun & Rozelle, Scott, *China's 40 years of agricultural development and reform: 1978–2018*, (Canberra: ANU Press, The Australian National University, 2018). p. 487-506

<sup>46</sup> Wang Jiamei, "New food security law enhances China's ability to withstand uncertainties from external market", *Global Times*, Dec 30, 2023

classifies China as the 56th most water-stressed country in the world, highlighting its water scarcity. Despite its seemingly abundant water resources, China grapples with a pressing water crisis that manifests in various regions of the country. This crisis is particularly acute in certain regions, where water supply capacities struggle to meet the growing demand, leading to inadequate access to quality water. The roots of China's water crisis can be traced back to its rapid industrialization, unsustainable agricultural practices, burgeoning population, and increasing demand for higher living standards. The country's dramatic industrial development has placed immense pressure on water resources, with industries consuming approximately a quarter of China's total water use. Agriculture, too, has made significant contributions to the water crisis, with irrigated agriculture accounting for 62% of China's total gross water abstraction and 84% of its net water abstraction. This excessive water consumption has exacerbated the problem, particularly in northern China, where water resources are already scarce. The remarkable economic growth that has propelled China to prominence has also intensified the water crisis. Economic activities, particularly in industries and agriculture, have come at the expense of water resources, with little regard for sustainability. This reckless water consumption has not only depleted freshwater reserves but also exacerbated water pollution, further diminishing the quality of available water. In recognition of the looming water crisis, the Chinese government implemented the China Water Resources Master Plan (CWRMP) in 2002. This comprehensive plan aims to address the water crisis by gathering comprehensive data on the country's water resources, analyzing the current water situation under the growing challenge of climate change, and outlining a 20-year strategic water strategy for the future. The CWRMP aims to improve water management practices, promote conservation efforts, and develop sustainable water use strategies to ensure the long-term availability of freshwater for China's continued development.<sup>47</sup> The Chinese government is currently building the South-to-North Water Diversion Project (SNWTP) in China, the largest of its kind globally, which involves channeling water from southern rivers to supply the arid northern regions. This ambitious initiative, which has been in planning for 50 years and is anticipated to take nearly as long to complete, aims for a 2050 finish. Upon completion, it is set to redirect 44.8 billion cubic meters of water annually to the population centers in the northern, drier areas. The project integrates China's four main rivers – the Yangtze, Yellow River, Huaihe, and Haihe – necessitating the construction of three diversion routes spanning the eastern, central, and western parts of the country. The comprehensive undertaking is projected to cost \$62 billion.<sup>48</sup>

**Demographic Dividend:** Growth in an economy hinges not just on robust and sound policies, but also critically on the availability of a large, healthy working-age population.<sup>49</sup> For four decades, China's demographic profile was exceptionally conducive to economic

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<sup>47</sup> Sarpong, K. , Xu, W. , Mensah-Akoto, J. , Neequaye, J. , Dadzie, A. and Frimpong, O. Waterscape, "State and Situation of China's Water Resources", *Journal of Geoscience and Environment Protection*, Vol 8, No 10, 2020, p. 26-51

<sup>48</sup> "South-to-North Water Diversion Project", *Water-Technology*

<sup>49</sup> Ruchir Sharma, "The Demographics of Stagnation: Why People Matter for Economic Growth," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2016, p. 18-24

growth. In the 2000s, the ratio of working-age adults to senior citizens aged 65 or older in China was an extraordinary ten to one, far surpassing the average in most major economies, which is typically around five to one.<sup>50</sup> China's life expectancy has also increased significantly, from 68 years in 1970 to 78 years in 2021.<sup>51</sup> This increase has been driven by improvements in healthcare, nutrition, and living standards. Over the period from 2005 to 2019, an analysis of China's 31 provincial regions reveals several key findings in terms of healthcare performance: There has been a notable improvement in nationwide healthcare performance including the development of a large network of hospitals and clinics, the training of more doctors and nurses, and the introduction of new medical technologies, primarily attributed to China's rapid economic growth. However, the progress achieved has been more pronounced in enhancing hospital efficiency rather than healthcare quality. Additionally, government subsidies emerge as a significant factor capable of enhancing both regional healthcare quality and hospital efficiency. Concurrently, while marketization contributes to improved hospital efficiency, it is observed that private hospitals, in contrast to their public counterparts, deliver a lower quality of care. Last, a positive correlation exists between regional hospital efficiency and healthcare quality, although establishing a causal relationship remains inconclusive based on available empirical evidence.<sup>52</sup> As far as the improvements in nutrition, China's food system is undergoing a significant transformation, with dietary patterns shifting and nutritional status improving. While urban residents have a more balanced diet, rural residents are catching up. The China's food nutrition–resources–food system has shown improvement in recent decades, primarily due to effective policy efforts.<sup>53</sup> China has made remarkable strides in enhancing living standards for its citizens over the past four decades. Rural residents have transformed their income sources from solely relying on collective action to a more diverse mix, including household earnings, salaries, and transfer income. Per capita housing construction area has significantly increased for both urban and rural residents. Moreover, the proportion of people living below the Chinese poverty line, had fallen among the rural population from 97.5 percent in 1978 to 3.1 percent at the end of 2017, based on 2010 standards. China has dramatically reduced its poverty rate, lifting approximately 740 million rural residents out of poverty. Additionally, employment quality has improved, with the tertiary industry becoming the primary employment channel. These achievements are attributed to China's economic reforms, opening-up policy, and government investments in infrastructure, education, and healthcare.<sup>54</sup> The above factors combined to create an environment in which China could pursue rapid growth and development, propelling it onto the global stage as a major economic power.

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<sup>50</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision*, Online ed., rev. 1 (New York: United Nations, 2019)

<sup>51</sup> "Life expectancy at birth", *World Bank*

<sup>52</sup> Cai Wen Zhang, Yuanhui Yang, "Appraisal of regional hospital efficiency and healthcare quality in China: Impacts of subsidies and marketization", *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences*, Volume 89, 2023

<sup>53</sup> Han Z, Zheng X, Hou L, Xiao N, Deng X, "Changes in China's food security driven by nutrition security and resource constraints", *Environ Dev Sustain*, 2023 Feb 25, p. 1-19

<sup>54</sup> Zhang Huimin, "China's 40 years: Key numbers in changing living standards", *CGTN.com*, December 18, 2018

However, the CCP is aware that such conditions are not guaranteed to persist indefinitely, and that the future trajectory of China's rise will depend on a range of evolving internal and external dynamics.

**A Welcoming Geopolitical Environment:** China's strategic position at the crossroads of Eurasia and the Pacific involves it in five key subregions, granting it significant global influence but also exposing it to diverse foreign pressures. The country is located in the heart of Asia, and it borders 14 other countries. This gives China a central position in the region and makes it a major player in international affairs. China's natural resources are also a major strategic advantage. The country has abundant supplies of coal, oil, natural gas, and other minerals. This allows China to be self-sufficient in energy and materials, and it also gives the country a strong bargaining position in the global market. The country consists of the following regions:<sup>55</sup>

- North China Plain: a large, fertile plain located in the northeast of China. It is the most densely populated region of China, and it is also the country's major agricultural area.
- Loess Plateau: a high plateau located in the northwest of China. It is known for its fertile soil and its distinctive loess landscape.
- Southeast Coast and Shanghai: a highly developed region that is home to some of China's largest cities, including Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. It is also a major center for manufacturing and trade.
- Yangzi Valley: a large river valley located in the southeast of China. It is the home of China's largest city, Shanghai and also a major agricultural and industrial region.
- Sichuan Basin: a large, fertile basin located in the southwest of China. It is known for its mild climate and its abundance of rice paddies.
- Southwest Uplands: a region of rugged mountains and valleys located in the southwest of China. It is home to many ethnic minority groups and a major center for agriculture and forestry.
- Xinjiang: a large region located in the northwest of China. It is home to a large number of ethnic minority groups and a major center for oil and gas production.
- Northeast (Manchuria): a region of forests and wetlands located in the northeast of China. It is known for its production of coal and iron ore.
- Qinghai and the Tibetan Plateau: a region of high mountains and plateaus located in the west of China. It is home to many ethnic minority groups and a major center for animal husbandry and tourism.

This complex territorial makeup has historically made China vulnerable to internal and external strife. However, during the Cold War, Soviet hostility inadvertently benefited China, leading Mao to strategically align with the United States, a decision that transformed China's global role and facilitated its rise as a major world power.

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<sup>55</sup> Robert W. McColl, "Understanding the Geography of China", *Asia society*

**Leadership Committed to Institutional Changes:** The CCP has consistently been authoritarian, often resorting to severe repression to maintain control. However, the nature of its autocracy has evolved over time. During the 1950s and 1960s the CPC forced exclusion of most of the Chinese population from the world of trade which was a major turning point in Chinese history. It had a profound impact on the Chinese economy and society. To achieve this goal, the CPC collectivized agriculture and industry. In the countryside, this meant that individual farmers were forced to give up their land and livestock and join collective farms. In the cities, this meant that private businesses were closed down and their assets were transferred to state-owned enterprises. The collectivization campaigns helped in creating a more egalitarian society, and they did give the state more control over the economy.<sup>56</sup> Under Mao Zedong, China experienced the extremes of one-man rule, marked by a personality cult and erratic policies. The impasse in China's political situation began to resolve with Mao Zedong's death in 1976, and notably shifted when Deng Xiaoping rose to become the paramount leader in 1978. After Mao's death, the CCP gradually shifted towards a more sophisticated form of autocracy. During this period, there was a reduction in the supreme leader's unchecked authority, the implementation of term limits to prevent extended rule, and an emphasis on fostering consensus within the party, particularly in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square incident. The CCP started valuing technocratic efficiency and economic success at local and provincial levels, maintaining strict political control but allowing for more accountability and stability within the one-party system. These changes bolstered foreign confidence in China's trajectory, eased moral concerns about engaging with a dictatorship, and provided a stable political base for China's remarkable economic growth, creating effective institutions crucial for a rising global power.<sup>57</sup> Deng, along with a select group of advisors, recognized that the Maoist approach of economic self-sufficiency and the perpetuation of internal political turmoil was detrimental to China's progress. They realized that in order to salvage and sustain Chinese "socialism", it was imperative to adopt elements of capitalism.<sup>58</sup> This marked a significant turning point in China's economic policies and overall direction.

China differs significantly from the American model of a state where national interests are openly debated and determined through elections. In China, political discussions do take place, but they are confined within the framework of a one-party system where the dominance of the CCP is embedded in the nation's constitution. Since its establishment, the Chinese government has perceived itself as being in constant conflict with both internal and external adversaries. The leadership remains deeply influenced by the collapse of the Soviet Union, which they view as a cautionary tale of the potential downfall of a major socialist state. They are acutely aware that a similar disintegration of the CCP-led system would not only be catastrophic for the country but also likely have dire personal

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<sup>56</sup> Ted C. Fishman, *China, Inc.*, (Athens: Klidarithmos 2006), (in Greek), p. 55-65

<sup>57</sup> Hal Brands and Michael Beckley, *op. cit.*, p. 22-23

<sup>58</sup> Jinglian Wu, *Understanding and Interpreting Chinese Economic Reform*, 2nd ed. (Singapore: Gale Asia, 2014)



consequences for them. This perspective encourages a mindset of "either you win or I win," which is best described by the phrase "You-Die, I-Live."<sup>59</sup>

The CCP is driven by a longstanding goal to restore China's territorial integrity by reclaiming areas it lost during periods of internal chaos and foreign invasions. This ambition dates back to the early days of the CCP's rule: shortly after establishing control over mainland China, the CCP annexed Tibet. In the present, under Xi Jinping's leadership, this vision encompasses a Taiwan that is brought under the control of the PRC. Taiwan, which currently operates as a self-governing entity, is viewed by Beijing as an aberration that cannot continue indefinitely. Xi Jinping has declared that the situation with Taiwan, seen as a prodigal province, cannot be allowed to persist indefinitely, indicating an urgency in Beijing's stance on the issue.<sup>60</sup> However, the passage of time appears to benefit the CCP. As Mao and Xi have declared: "Beijing can wait for 100 or 1000 years for the unification with Taiwan".<sup>61</sup>

### **3.2 China's economic and military rise**

Mao's China emerged into the Cold War as a revolutionary nation, shaping many crucial elements of the Cold War, especially in Asia. At its inception in 1949, the PRC was technologically underdeveloped and deeply impoverished, described by the American strategist George Kennan as "too big, too populous" and "a vast poorhouse" that others sought to avoid responsibility for.<sup>62</sup> Even at the end of Mao's rule in 1976, China was still markedly underdeveloped. However, a blend of fortuitous circumstances and progressive economic reforms gradually transformed China from a state of socialist stagnation to a dynamic, authoritarian capitalist economy. This transformation led to staggering economic growth: from 1978 to 2018, China's real gross domestic product increased by an astonishing 37 times. China currently holds the world's largest economy by purchasing power parity, excelling in manufacturing output, trade surplus, and financial reserves, while also being the top trading partner for over 120 countries.<sup>63</sup>

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Deng Xiaoping implemented crucial measures, such as sending Chinese students abroad for education, fostering international trade, and encouraging foreign investments in China. Decisions that led to the creation of the world's largest middle class and the opening of China to the global community. As a consequence, the connections between China and the rest of the world experienced substantial growth, enhancing the interdependence between China and various regions, particularly the West.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> John Garnaut, "Engineers of the Soul: Ideology in Xi Jinping's China," *Sinocism*, January 16, 2019

<sup>60</sup> "China's Xi says political solution for Taiwan can't wait forever", *Reuters*, October 6, 2013

<sup>61</sup> Patrick Tyler, *A Great Wall* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999), p. 172 "Deng Xiaoping on "one country, two systems", *China Daily*, February 19, 2004

<sup>62</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Memorandum by the Policy Planning Staff", September 7, 1948

<sup>63</sup> Ambassador Mark A. Green, "China Is the Top Trading Partner to More Than 120 Countries", *Wilson Center*, January 17, 2023

<sup>64</sup> Jian Chen, *Mao's china and the cold war*, (The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), p. 278

Deng's vision, replacing communes with family farms and opening China to the global market, made China's "economic miracle". Factories were empowered to produce goods for the market and keep some profits, sparking a period of incredible growth. This economic boom, lifting millions out of poverty, showcased the power of market forces when people are given more freedom and less central government control. Deng's team started with agriculture because it was the low-hanging fruit. There was less resistance from entrenched bureaucracies, and a revitalized agricultural sector would create new customers for state-owned industries.<sup>65</sup> Their approach was gradual, expanding the market piece by piece instead of a complete overhaul. Small businesses were allowed to flourish, but large state-owned enterprises remained under government control. Deng recognized the importance of the strategy of "playing to the provinces", who held significant power within the Communist Party. By giving them more control over profits generated by local industries (fiscal decentralization), Deng created a powerful constituency for market reforms.<sup>66</sup>

Additionally, he managed to impose a new doctrine of "war under modern conditions," technologically modernizing the Chinese army, which he had called "disorganized" and "lazy," combined with reducing numerical strength and a shift towards defense to keep the enemy beyond China's borders.<sup>67</sup> As early as the late 1980s and early 1990s, leaders of the CCP recognized that their ambitions for China's growth and development would eventually clash with the United States' position as the world's leading power. However, Deng Xiaoping understood the impracticality, even the danger, of antagonizing the world's only superpower at a time when China critically needed a stable international environment and access to the global economy. As a symbolic gesture of goodwill towards the US, China considered allowing Fang Lizhi, a dissident scientist who has sought asylum in the US, to leave China for the US.<sup>68</sup> Deng advised against isolation, learning from past experiences that shutting China off from the rest of the world was counterproductive. As Deng commented; "our biggest lesson from the past has been not to isolate ourselves from the world".<sup>69</sup> This understanding led to Deng's strategy of "hiding its capabilities and biding its time." The essence of this approach was to avoid direct confrontation and subtly counter American influence while China built its strength. Deng believed that once China attained parity with developed nations, its capabilities and global role would be markedly different, allowing for a more assertive stance on the international stage. Deng wasn't a fan of western-style democracy despite his economic reforms. Deng saw the American system of checks and balances, with separate legislative, executive, and judicial

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<sup>65</sup> Barry Naughton, *Growing Out of the Plan: Chinese Economic Reform, 1978-90*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995

<sup>66</sup> Susan L. Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993)

<sup>67</sup> Athanasios Platias, Konstantinos Koliopoulos, op. cit, p. 287

<sup>68</sup> Jia Qingguo, "Learning to Live with the Hegemon: Evolution of China's Policy towards the US since the End of the Cold War", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol 14, No 4 (2005), p. 395-407

<sup>69</sup> John Garver, *China's Quest: The History of the Foreign Relations of the People's Republic of China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 499

branches, as causing inefficiency. He believed decisions got bogged down in "endless debate" and implementation stalled. As he said: "The socialist system was more efficient because when the central leadership makes a decision it is promptly implemented without interference from any other quarters." This perspective limited the scope of political reforms under Deng, preventing the establishment of an independent judiciary or legislature.<sup>70</sup> Deng's legacy extends to his approach towards Taiwan and Hong Kong, territories China considers rightfully theirs. He devised the "one country, two systems" formula, allowing these regions to maintain capitalist systems while China remained socialist. This approach showcased Deng's pragmatism. He was determined to reunite these territories with China but was willing to compromise for broader economic and political goals. Last but not least, Deng took a bolder step than other East Asian nations like Japan and South Korea by opening China's doors much wider to foreign investment and trade. This openness attracted international businesses eager to tap into the vast Chinese market. These multinational corporations, in turn, lobbied their governments to strengthen ties with China and even supported China's entry into the World Trade Organization.

During the 1990s and 2000s, China's approach was largely non-aggressive and patient. Buoyed by a booming economy and cautious of engaging in premature conflicts with Western powers, China primarily used soft power strategies. Leveraging its enormous market potential, China managed to gain territorial concessions without resorting to military action such as the return of Hong Kong by Britain in 1997.<sup>71</sup> Hong Kong developed rapidly under UK rule, becoming one of the world's major financial and business centres. Between 1991 and 2019, around half a dozen nations resolved their territorial disputes with China, and approximately two dozen others severed diplomatic relations with Taiwan to establish ties with Beijing.<sup>72</sup> This period of China's "peaceful rise" proved to be highly effective in advancing its geopolitical objectives.<sup>73</sup>

China's entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001 transformed them into a trade giant. This not only calmed anxieties in Asia but also turned the region into a network of economic opportunity, attracting foreign investment and making China the world's manufacturing hub. Even American corporations saw China's rise as positive, endorsing closer ties with Beijing. China further solidified its role as a responsible global player during the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. While supporting sanctions against Iraq, China opposed military action, earning international respect. To further dispel fears of a rising China, they adopted the "Peaceful Rise" (later "Peaceful Development") strategy. This involved settling almost all of its land border disputes with adjacent countries (except for the one with India), offering them free trade agreements, participating in regional and

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<sup>70</sup> Susan L. Shirk, *Overreach-How China Derailed Its Peaceful Rise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), p. 46

<sup>71</sup> In Pictures: The 1997 Handover of Hong Kong from Britain to China, *HONG KONG FREE PRESS*, August 16, 2023

<sup>72</sup> Hal Brands and Michael Beckley, "What Will Drive China to War?", *The Atlantic*, November 1, 2021

<sup>73</sup> Zheng Bijian, "China's Peaceful Rise to Great Power Status," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2005, p. 18-24

global organizations, and mediating the North Korean nuclear crisis in 2003. Through these actions, China aimed to project itself as a cooperative and stable rising power, ensuring a peaceful environment for continued economic growth and domestic stability.

Between 1990 and 2020, China's defense spending saw an extraordinary tenfold increase, a rate of growth unmatched in modern history. Concurrently, Xi Jinping, in order to ensure unwavering loyalty from the military, took decisive action, imprisoning Hu Jintao's generals, Xu Caihou and Guo Boxiong, for life and purging over a hundred senior PLA officers. This move created vacancies in the upper echelons, which Xi filled with his own allies. Then in 2015, he initiated the most extensive restructuring of the PLA since 1949.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, in alignment with his strategic objectives, Xi Jinping consolidated China's civilian maritime agencies and established the world's largest Coast Guard. This move aims to leverage civil maritime forces in a manner that is more manageable than the military while still utilizing them as a tool of national influence. Ultimately, the overarching objective is to bolster China's assertion of its sovereignty rights.<sup>75</sup> The Chinese Coast Guard has become the largest in the world in terms of both the number of ships and overall tonnage. Additionally, it oversees a significant fishing militia. Nowadays the PLA has developed a range of advanced military capabilities. These include anti-ship ballistic missiles and quiet attack submarines, designed to deter American naval and aerial presence in the western Pacific and provide Beijing with strategic autonomy, particularly against Taiwan or other regional adversaries. China now accounts for over half of Asia's total military expenditure. It boasts the world's largest ballistic missile force, the largest navy in terms of ship numbers, and an extensive integrated air defense system. The PLA is strategically preparing for "short, sharp wars" against the United States and its regional allies. This preparation includes reforms aimed at enabling the CCP to potentially execute a successful military campaign against Taiwan. In addition to conventional forces, China is rapidly enhancing its nuclear capabilities, working towards becoming a significant nuclear power, comparable to the United States, by the 2030s. The PLA is also focusing on power projection beyond its immediate region. It is developing aircraft carriers, establishing overseas bases, and enhancing its capacity to project power into the Indian Ocean and eventually globally. A notable indicator of China's naval expansion is that between 2014 and 2018, the number of ships launched by Beijing exceeded the total number of ships in the British, Indian, Spanish, Taiwanese, and German navies combined. This statistic underscores the scale and speed of China's military modernization and expansion efforts.<sup>76</sup>

Over the past decade, Beijing has employed a variety of coercive tactics to consolidate its control over the South China Sea. This includes the construction of artificial islands, which were then fortified with air bases, missiles, and other military installations. China has also exerted control over disputed territories, previously under the Philippines' domain, and

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<sup>74</sup> Dean Cheng, "Xi Jinping and His Generals: Curiouser and Curiouser," *War on the Rocks*, January 18, 2018

<sup>75</sup> Andrew Erickson and Gabe Collins, "New Fleet on the Block: China's Coast Guard Comes Together," *Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 2013

<sup>76</sup> Hal Brands and Michael Beckley, op. cit, p. 14

deployed oil rigs, fishing fleets, and a semi-official maritime militia into the exclusive economic zones of neighboring countries. Xi Jinping, addressing the president of the Philippines in 2017, issued a stark warning: “We don’t want to quarrel with you,” “But if you force the issue, we’ll go to war.”<sup>77</sup> The PLA has also tested Japan's defenses around the contested Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea, engaged in military skirmishes with India in the Himalayas, and issued threatening messages towards Taiwan. PLA officials have bluntly stated that Taiwan would stand little chance in the event of a Chinese invasion.<sup>78</sup>

Reflecting on the entirety of post-Mao China's trajectory we notice that the favorable international climate provided Chinese leadership with the opportunity to modernize the nation, leading to an expansion of freedoms and improvements in the welfare of its citizens.<sup>79</sup>

### **3.3 The successful “Hide-and-bide” policy**

The US-Soviet arms race served as a cautionary tale: focusing solely on military strength against the US can weaken a nation from within.<sup>80</sup> The success of China in postponing a more assertive American response to its rise can be credited in part to its strategic approach. China's prudent foreign policy, often characterized has its roots in the era of Deng.

Deng Xiaoping's policy of "hide-and-bide" played a significant role in mitigating fears of a looming "China threat." This strategy was instrumental in easing international concerns, as it suggested a more cautious and covert approach to China's development and global engagement. Furthermore, China adeptly navigated its relationships with the world's democracies, using economic leverage to its advantage. A notable example was its tactic of playing Airbus in Europe against Boeing in America, threatening to shift its substantial airplane purchases based on the political stances of Washington. This strategy was effective in moderating potential American actions that might be perceived as too confrontational. As China's strategy evolved to become more assertive, the CCP framed any move by the United States towards a competitive stance as a hindrance to bilateral cooperation on critical global issues like nuclear proliferation or climate change. Chinese diplomats often dismissed such competitive approaches as "Cold War thinking," arguing that they would obstruct "win-win cooperation."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Felipe Villamor, “Duterte Says Xi Warned Philippines of War Over South China Sea,” *New York Times*, May 19, 2017; Ely Ratner, “Course Correction: How to Stop China's Maritime Advance,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2017

<sup>78</sup> Paul Shinkman, “China Issues New Threats to Taiwan: ‘The Island's Military Won't Stand a Chance,’” *U.S. News & World Report*, April 9, 2021

<sup>79</sup> Susan L. Shirk, op. cit, p. 23

<sup>80</sup> Shirk, China: *Fragile Superpower*, p. 243

<sup>81</sup> James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China from Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 293–296; Dan Kliman and Zack Cooper, “Washington Has a

This strategy proved to be highly effective. During this twenty-year grace period, China maximized its gains: absorbing Western technology and capital, flooding foreign markets with its products while maintaining relative closure of its own market, placing Chinese officials in key positions within international organizations, and simultaneously building up its military capabilities. All the while, it maintained a façade of peaceful intentions. This approach was a masterclass in leveraging the appearance of mutually beneficial diplomacy to mask a strategy focused on unilateral gain in global politics. However, such a strategy was not sustainable indefinitely. The increasing awareness and response from other global powers, particularly the United States, indicated that a shift in the geopolitical landscape was imminent.

This approach, which emphasizes pragmatism and engagement over confrontation, has been a cornerstone of Chinese diplomacy since the late 1970s. Deng Xiaoping cautioned against flexing military muscle. He emphasized that China, still a developing nation, couldn't compete with the US military for a long time. Regaining Taiwan remained a goal, but provoking the US was off-limits.

The 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, where US warships countered China's missile tests, solidified Deng's approach. China, trapped in a US-dominated world, had to focus on economic growth for internal stability. A healthy relationship with the US was crucial for continued economic development necessary for domestic stability.<sup>82</sup> A significant milestone was China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 which transformed China into the "world's factory," providing a vast manufacturing base for multinational corporations. To counteract anxieties about its growing influence, China actively participated in international organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and supported nuclear non-proliferation efforts. During the Asian financial crisis in 2007, China prioritized regional stability by keeping its currency stable and even cooperated with the US on the North Korean nuclear issue. Additionally, they softened their stance in territorial disputes with ASEAN states, showcasing a more collaborative approach to international relations, becoming less confrontational and less bullying in their relations with the Philippines and Vietnam.<sup>83</sup> During Hu Jintao's presidency China maintained this approach while also taking steps to strengthen its relationship with the United States such as the support to the US-led coalition in Afghanistan following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, demonstrating its willingness to cooperate with the US on counterterrorism efforts.<sup>84</sup>

The U.S. policy of treating China as a commercial rather than a potential geopolitical rival played a significant role in China's rise. This approach persisted beyond the Cold War era, largely because of Washington's confidence in its own global dominance and the belief that

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Bad Case of China ADHD," *Foreign Policy*, October 27, 2017

<sup>82</sup> Warren I. Cohen, op. cit, p. 264

<sup>83</sup> Warren I. Cohen, op. cit, p. 265

<sup>84</sup> Athanasios Platias and Vasileios Trigkas, op. cit, p. 90

engagement with China would steer it towards a more favorable direction in terms of international norms and politics. However, the landscape began to shift following the global financial crisis. Two main pillars underpinning the U.S. policy towards China started to weaken: First, the increasing power of China began to challenge the notion of unchallenged U.S. primacy. Second, China's increasingly assertive and autocratic behavior started to undermine the belief that engagement would lead to positive changes in China's internal and external policies. As a result, the pendulum of America's policy towards China was poised for a significant shift. The CCP began to activate geopolitical concerns that had been dormant, signaling a new era of strategic competition. This change reflected a growing realization in the U.S. that its longstanding approach towards China needed to be reevaluated in the face of evolving realities, both in terms of China's growing capabilities and its willingness to assert its interests more forcefully on the global stage.

### **3.4 US response to China's growing influence**

For over the last ten years, China has been masking a significant economic decline that poses a fundamental threat to its governing body. In the coming years, a gradually unfolding demographic crisis is expected to cause serious economic and political challenges. China's aggressive "wolf-warrior" diplomacy and its contentious actions in various conflict zones, from the Himalayas to the South China Sea, have inadvertently set a strategic snare for itself. This approach has alarmed and started to bring together potential adversaries across Eurasia. Additionally, the CCP has broken a key principle of international relations over the last century: Avoid antagonizing the United States.<sup>85</sup> History leaves a significant imprint, and it's undeniable that Chinese policymakers are aware of the United States' notable history of defeating its major global competitors, including Imperial Germany, Imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union, in addition to various other lesser adversaries.

American authorities did not suddenly realize that China was their top geopolitical adversary. While promoting the idea of China as a "responsible stakeholder" in the early 2000s, the administration of President George W. Bush was simultaneously, yet discreetly, bolstering the U.S. military presence in the Pacific.

The "Asia pivot" strategy under President Obama aimed to counter China's growing influence in the region. It is perceived as a containment strategy in all but name, contrasting with the administration's perspective that it represents a belated adjustment due to previous underinvestment in Asia amid the focus on the war on terror. This strategy involved enhancing U.S. alliances, increasing air and naval deployments in the region, and attempting, albeit not very successfully, to counter China's construction of islands. At a meeting in Hawaii, President Obama announced the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a trade deal with several Pacific Rim countries: Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam, and the US. While China

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<sup>85</sup> Hal Brands and Michael Beckley, *op. cit.*, p. 7

wasn't officially excluded, the TPP's requirements were seen as too strict for them to join. Despite claims the door remained open, the TPP was widely viewed as a US strategy to expand its influence in the region, potentially at China's expense. Obama himself admitted the failure of the "rebalancing to Asia," as it was later renamed, referring to interventions in Libya and Syria, two fronts that diverted attention from the USA.<sup>86</sup> Despite this, up until 2016, the policy of engagement with China persisted, with the White House even instructing the Pentagon to avoid publicly labeling China as a competitor.<sup>87</sup> China views the Pivot as indicative of America's decline, interpreting it as a desperate endeavor by a declining nation to shore up its position while it still can. It is seen as evidence of inward-turning tendencies coupled with assertive behavior abroad. Some Chinese strategists argue that the primary threat posed by the United States is its perceived weakness, which they believe manifests in what they term as 'meddling' in the South China Sea and unnecessary 'provocations,' such as the decision to bolster America's presence in the region by rotating a US Marine force in Australia.<sup>88</sup>

The dramatic shift in U.S.-China relations occurred in 2017 with the arrival of President Donald Trump, who broke away from the previous policy of engagement, ushering in an era of intense competition. Trump's strategy documents were marked by strong rhetoric. In December 2017, his National Security Strategy labeled China as a global violator reshaping the world contrary to U.S. values and interests. Shortly after, in January 2018, the Pentagon's National Defense Strategy declared a long-term strategic rivalry with "revisionist powers" as a primary focus for the U.S. The National Security Council produced reports outlining strategies to prevent the CCP from dominating technological innovation, threatening free societies, and asserting control over the western Pacific.<sup>89</sup> The State Department, mirroring George Kennan's influential "Long Telegram" from the early Cold War era, issued a comprehensive document asserting the inherently aggressive nature of the CCP. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo advocated for a worldwide coalition of democracies to contain China.<sup>90</sup> This represented the most significant shift in U.S.-China relations since President Nixon's visit to Beijing, signifying a change that went beyond mere rhetoric.

The impact of Trump on Xi's China was unfortunate in two distinct ways. Firstly, Trump's unilateral "America first" approach weakened American leadership, removing it as a constraint on Xi's international actions and allowing Xi to assert China's prominence on the global stage with a sense of hubris. The Trump administration's actions reduced US influence in Asia and its ability to shape China's foreign policy decisions. This was evident through its withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), as well as trade disputes

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<sup>86</sup> Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine", *The Atlantic*, April, 2016

<sup>87</sup> David Larter, "White House Tells the Pentagon to Quit Talking About 'Competition' with China," *Navy Times*, September 26, 2016.

<sup>88</sup> Christopher Coker, "The Improbable War" (Oxford University Press, New York, 2015), p.90

<sup>89</sup> Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America

<sup>90</sup> "U.S. Security Bloc to Keep China in 'Proper Place,' Pompeo Says," *Bloomberg News*, October 23, 2019



with traditional US allies like Japan and South Korea. Furthermore, by disengaging from international organizations like the United Nations, UNESCO, and the World Health Organization, the Trump administration inadvertently bolstered China's influence within these bodies. Chinese diplomats assumed leadership roles in numerous UN agencies, promoted Xi's initiatives in UN resolutions, and defended China's interests in forums like the UN Human Rights Council – from which the Trump administration withdrew. During a period when Xi was consolidating power and responding to crises like COVID-19 with assertiveness, Trump's own health struggles and lack of global leadership further underscored China's perceived ascendancy. While Trump may not have deep concerns about Chinese behavior beyond trade, his policies in the latter half of his term inadvertently facilitated harsher measures, often for his own political gain.<sup>91</sup> The US kept increasing its demands due to internal disagreements within the Trump administration and the President's preference for tariffs. China responded proportionally with tariffs of their own and tried to negotiate a solution.<sup>92</sup> Things got worse in May 2019 when the US restricted sales of technology to Huawei and sixty-eight of its affiliates. This decision hurt US businesses and was seen by China as a hostile act aimed at stopping their economic growth.<sup>93</sup> The US actions pushed China to ramp up its own technological innovation efforts, something they had already begun under Hu administration. China's reliance on Western technology, especially semiconductors, made them vulnerable to US pressure. They couldn't trust continued access to the global market. To prepare for the worst, China boosted its industrial policies like the "Made in China 2025" plan and invested heavily in becoming self-sufficient in technology. While the "Made in China 2025" label became unpopular internationally, the underlying goals remained. Many groups in China, like tech companies, military industries, and universities, saw this as a huge opportunity and jumped on board. The surge in new semiconductor companies in China (over 200% increase in 2020) shows the intense focus on this new direction.<sup>94</sup>

The Trump administration surprised everyone by asking Canada to arrest Meng Wanzhou, a high-ranking official at Huawei, a major Chinese tech company. This happened in December 2018 when she landed in Canada. She remained under house arrest for nearly three years. President Xi Jinping learned about the arrest unexpectedly at a dinner with other world leaders, including Trump himself (who apparently wasn't told exactly when it would happen). Despite the awkward situation, Xi continued trade talks with the US, possibly because Trump hinted, he might drop the charges against Meng, similar to what he did with another Chinese company, ZTE, in exchange for a favorable trade deal.<sup>95</sup> However, China retaliated by arresting two Canadian men on seemingly false accusations.

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<sup>91</sup> Susan L. Shirk, *op. cit.*, p. 270-272

<sup>92</sup> Susan L. Shirk, *op. cit.*, p. 273-274

<sup>93</sup> Bob Davis and Lingling Wei, *Superpower Showdown: How the Battle between Trump and Xi Threatens a New Cold War* (New York: HarperCollins, 2020), p. 24-27

<sup>94</sup> Semiconductor Industry Association, "Taking Stock of China's Semiconductor Industry", *SIA white paper*, July 13, 2021

<sup>95</sup> Bob Davis and Lingling Wei, *op. cit.*, p. 307

They weren't released until September 2021, just hours after Meng was freed following a call between President Xi and the new US President, Biden.

Xi Jinping has begun framing the relationship between China and the West as an ideological competition, with Chinese propaganda emphasizing the superiority of China's system while highlighting perceived failures of American market democracy. In response, the Trump administration criticized CCP autocracy and extolled the virtues of Western democracy. President Biden has continued this ideological contest, basing his foreign policy on defending democratic values against authoritarianism. However, this timing seems peculiar for engaging in a values-based competition against China. The January 6 insurrection at the US Capitol, seemingly incited by President Trump, looked like the start of an American civil war, while political polarization in Congress have hindered efforts to safeguard the integrity of American elections. Consequently, international esteem for American democracy has diminished.<sup>96</sup>

With bipartisan support, Biden adopted a strategy of containing China, initially through a trade war that he continued and expanded into technological and ideological realms. He took decisive actions that aligned with his commitment to aggressively compete with China. The Pentagon established a special task force focused on China, tasked with rapidly developing strategies to counter the PLA advancements and coordinating with allies to potentially defend Taiwan. Biden retained most of Trump's sanctions against China and proposed a \$50 billion initiative to strengthen the American semiconductor industry. He also began removing Chinese companies linked to the PLA and CCP intelligence from U.S. financial markets.<sup>97</sup> Legislation aimed at bolstering U.S. investments in scientific research, excluding Beijing from crucial supply chains, and enhancing America's strategic position received widespread bipartisan support. Biden highlighted the ideological battle, framing it as a critical contest between democracy and authoritarianism. He emphasized the importance of collaborating with other democracies in areas like technology, trade, and defense to counter Beijing's oppressive model.<sup>98</sup>

Despite each government's actions, the US is more likely to influence China's foreign policy or economic actions than its human rights record. China's harsh practices like crackdowns in Xinjiang and Tibet, restrictions in Hong Kong, Internet and media censorship and suppression of dissent clash with American values (feminists, critical intellectuals and LGBTQ community) However, China's leaders view strict control as essential for stability. Public criticism and sanctions, typical US tactics, might please Americans at home but backfire in China. Most Chinese, even those who want democracy, dislike outside pressure on internal matters.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Susan L. Shirk, op. cit, p. 313-314

<sup>97</sup> Jim Garamone, "Biden Announces DOD China Task Force," *Defense News*, February 10, 2021; Alex Leary and Paul Ziobro, "Biden Calls for \$50 Billion to Boost U.S. Chip Industry," *Wall Street Journal*, March 31, 2021

<sup>98</sup> Biden's Remarks at Munich Security Conference, February 19, 2021

<sup>99</sup> Susan L. Shirk, op. cit, p. 303-304

### 3.5 Key incidents and policies that shaped the bilateral relationship

On April 15, 1989, a movement began in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, drawing mourners initially and swelling into a mass protest against corruption, inflation, and government overreach. Organized and led by students, their actions were strategic, avoiding confrontation. Originally planned for May 4 to coincide with the historical May Fourth Movement, the death of Hu led to an earlier commencement. Overseas Chinese students also joined in, protesting at embassies and consulates globally. Foreign observers noted growing dissent among Chinese leaders, particularly from the older guard, who viewed the protests as a threat to their authority and socialist ideals. Troops entered Beijing but faced resistance from citizens. A symbolic "Goddess of Democracy and Freedom" was erected in Tiananmen Square, reminiscent of the Statue of Liberty. However, on June 3 and 4, the PLA violently suppressed the protests, resulting in numerous casualties and global condemnation. This event profoundly altered perceptions of China, dashing hopes for a more liberal government. The Tiananmen Square massacre left an indelible mark on the Communist Party of China, staining its reputation irreversibly. The Bush administration expressed sympathy for the students' aspirations urging the Chinese government to avoid violence. When troops began firing on civilians and student leaders were targeted for arrest, while Fang Lizhi sought refuge in the American embassy along with his wife. President Bush responded by halting weapon sales to China and cutting off contacts with the PLA. Bush extended visas for Chinese students in the U.S., despite Deng's criticism of American interference. Sino-American relations were strained, reminiscent of tensions during the Nixon-Kissinger era of reestablishing dialogue. Despite Cold War concerns about pushing China towards the Soviet Union, Bush emphasized the importance of the relationship for national security and resisted calls to recall the American ambassador from Beijing. Fang Lizhi and his family were allowed to leave China in June 1990, and some other prisoners were temporarily released.<sup>100</sup> However, China's official denials of the events at Tiananmen Square were met with global condemnation. Despite sanctions, China swiftly recovered, becoming a pivotal player in the global economy, attracting international businesses despite concerns about its human rights record. By 2007, China had become the leading contributor to global economic growth.

In 1999 China's focus shifted towards developing advanced anti-access and area denial capabilities against the American military after the accidental bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade by a US jet participating in a NATO mission in Yugoslavia. Despite American apologies and compensation for the mistaken targeting, Jiang Zemin, then in power, was profoundly affected by the incident.<sup>101</sup>

In 2001, tensions escalated significantly: On April 1, an American reconnaissance plane (EP-3) conducting a routine mission near China's coast collided with a Chinese interceptor aircraft. The Chinese plane crashed into the sea, and its pilot was never recovered. The

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<sup>100</sup> Warren I. Cohen, op. cit, p. 237-245

<sup>101</sup> Susan L. Shirk, op. cit, p. 142-143

American plane made an emergency landing at a Chinese base on Hainan Island. President Bush and his advisers were taken aback when the Chinese authorities detained the crew, refused to return the plane, and demanded an apology. But afterwards, he offered an expression of regret for the loss of the Chinese pilot and the failure of the American crew to seek clearance before landing on Chinese territory. The Chinese accepted this apology, and the crisis gradually eased. This incident taught President Bush a crucial lesson: China's strength and significance to American business interests meant it could not be disregarded, and its pride meant it would not bow easily to American pressure.<sup>102</sup> However in the summer of 2001 the pivotal event for China was the announcement that Beijing had been awarded the 2008 Summer Olympics by the Olympic Committee. This news triggered jubilant celebrations in Tiananmen Square, symbolizing the end of China's perceived era of humiliation and its return to greatness. However, one issue remained unresolved and that was the human rights. During the Cold War era, Washington often turned a blind eye to human rights abuses in friendly nations, including China. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, concerns over China's treatment of its people became harder to ignore. The Tiananmen Square massacres in 1989 amplified American scrutiny of China's human rights record, leading to protests from nongovernmental organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and the Dalai Lama. Congress demanded regular reports on global human rights, with a keen focus on China's progress, or lack thereof, toward respecting human dignity. The Bush administration recognized the importance of maintaining relations with China, with some arguing that internal Chinese affairs mattered less than cooperation on global issues, meeting concerns of many members of Congress, who remained deeply troubled by Beijing's human rights abuses.<sup>103</sup> For the Chinese government, hosting the Olympics was an opportunity to showcase its wealth, status, and national pride to the world. Billions were spent on infrastructure while efforts were made to reduce pollution and present a modern image, failing to address deeper human rights issues.

The aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in 2001 significantly shifted U.S. focus for nearly a decade, simultaneously increasing the dependence on Chinese diplomatic support in the context of the global war on terror. This shift in focus led to the postponement of more assertive policies toward China. Later, the Obama administration aimed to regain strategic initiative in the region through its "pivot to Asia" policy. However, this strategy was again sidetracked by the emergence of ISIS and the ensuing prolonged conflict in the Middle East. As a result, the challenge posed by China's rise was continually deferred to the future. It was perceived as an important but not immediate issue, overshadowed by more pressing concerns of the time. This situation was aptly summarized by a U.S. intelligence official who said: "China is like that long book you've always been meaning to read but you always end up waiting until next summer".<sup>104</sup> On the other hand, the post-9/11 military

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<sup>102</sup> Warren I. Cohen, op. cit, p. 267

<sup>103</sup> Warren I. Cohen, op. cit, p. 282-283

<sup>104</sup> H.B. conversation with U.S. intelligence official, May 2016; Aaron Friedberg, *Beyond Air-Sea Battle: The Debate over U.S. Military Strategy in Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2014)

engagements of the United States in the Middle East were perceived by Chinese leaders as a "period of strategic opportunity." These conflicts effectively entangled Washington in prolonged and resource-draining situations, diverting its focus and resources away from the Pacific region. This situation was seen as advantageous for China, providing it with a window to pursue its objectives with less American interference or oversight in its immediate sphere of influence.

The global financial crisis of 2008–2009 reinforced this perception among many Chinese analysts. The crisis led to a belief, as observed by an American official, that the United States was either in decline, distracted, or both.<sup>105</sup> "For the first time, a Chinese official said that until 2008 China considered the USA a model of prudent economic governance. Perhaps it was time for the roles to be reversed."<sup>106</sup> This assessment contributed to the view in China that the balance of global power was shifting, or at least that the United States was temporarily weakened, providing additional strategic leeway for China to expand its influence and assert its interests on the global stage. This period was seen as an opportune time for China to make significant strides in its long-term goals of economic and geopolitical expansion.

Following the financial crisis China took the initiative to form the BRICS group (consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) with the aim of creating a bloc of rapidly growing economies capable of making independent decisions without reliance on the United States or the G7. The crisis eroded respect for the United States among many Chinese, as global consensus placed blame on poor regulation of American financial institutions. Western open economies suffered more significantly, while China's relatively closed financial system mitigated its impact. China's swift recovery from the crisis, facilitated by a massive stimulus injection of over \$4 trillion directed by the central government into the economy, earned admiration. This success challenged Chinese advocates of domestic economic and political reforms who had previously looked to American practices as an ideal. As Western market democracies lost appeal and admiration grew for the Chinese model of a state-controlled hybrid economy, it became increasingly difficult for Chinese reformers to advocate for emulating Western capitalism and maintaining close ties with the US.<sup>107</sup> Public opinion surveys reflected a shift, with ordinary Chinese perceiving the US as a declining superpower and China as a rising force poised to surpass America. One survey showed a significant increase in the proportion of Chinese citizens viewing their country as the world's leading economic power, rising from 21 percent in 2008 to 41 percent in 2009.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Jeffrey Bader, *Obama and China's Rise: An Insider's Account of America's Asia Strategy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2012), p. 80

<sup>106</sup> Henry M. Paulson, *Dealing with China: An Insider Unmasks the New Economic Superpower* (New York: Twelve, 2015)

<sup>107</sup> Susan L. Shirk, op. cit, p. 18

<sup>108</sup> Pew Global Attitudes Project, June 17, 2010

The latest major incident between the two countries was the Covid-19 birth case. US Senator Tom Cotton and officials from the Trump administration suggested that the virus could have originated from a leak in a Wuhan laboratory engaged in biological warfare research. President Trump began referring to it as the "Chinese virus." In response, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian alleged that US Army athletes who attended the October 2019 Military World Games may have brought the virus to Wuhan. Tensions escalated further when the Trump administration declined to lift tariffs on medical protective equipment such as masks and gowns imported from China. This strained relations between the two countries to a new low.<sup>109</sup>

A wave of anger surged against Xi Jinping and the Chinese regime in Wuhan, where the virus initially emerged, and quickly spread throughout the nation via the internet. As a Chinese businessman said, "It's an online version of Tiananmen."<sup>110</sup> Local authorities were criticized for suppressing crucial information during the early stages of the COVID-19 epidemic, reminiscent of their actions during the 2003 SARS outbreak. Following Dr. Zhong's statements on January 20 regarding the severity of the virus, Xi Jinping publicly addressed the situation for the first time. He called upon the Party to utilize all available resources to prevent and control the disease, prompting the entire regime to mobilize with remarkable efficiency. This included implementing a complete lockdown of Wuhan and the surrounding Hubei province, imposing travel bans, and isolating infected individuals. Party members and employees of state institutions joined local neighborhood committees to carry out surveillance, contact tracing, enforce quarantine measures, assist patients, and deliver essential supplies. The swift and decisive actions of these individuals were celebrated as heroic. As China effectively managed the pandemic, criticism from the United States intensified, with the Trump administration blaming China for the virus's origin and global spread. This contrast between the two countries' responses bolstered public trust in the Chinese government.<sup>111</sup> During Xi's campaign for a third term at the 20th CCP Congress in fall 2022, he highlighted the significant disparity in COVID-19 death tolls between the United States (over a million) and China (fewer than 6,000), presenting it as evidence of the superiority of the Chinese socialist system over Western democracy. As the pandemic persisted, Beijing sought to enhance its global influence by providing masks, personal protective equipment, and vaccines to other countries. Xi Jinping pledged that Chinese vaccines would be a "global public good" and distributed them to over a hundred countries, particularly in the developing world.<sup>112</sup> China has surpassed the United States or any other nation has done, which has earned it the appreciation of many countries.<sup>113</sup> However, Chinese ambassadors sometimes tied these donations to propaganda campaigns, in order to echo praise for China and Xi Jinping.

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<sup>109</sup> Susan Shirk and Yanzhong Huang, "A Truce in the Trade War Will Save American Lives," *Think Global Health*, March 24, 2020

<sup>110</sup> Susan L. Shirk, *op. cit.*, p. 203

<sup>111</sup> Lei Guang, Molly Roberts, Yiqing Xu, and Jiannan Zhao, "Pandemic Sees Increase in Chinese Support for the Regime and Decrease in Views towards the U.S.," *China Data Lab*

<sup>112</sup> Sarah Wheaton, "Chinese Vaccine Would Be 'Global Public Good,' Xi Says," *Politico*, May 18, 2020

<sup>113</sup> Yanzhong Huang, "Vaccine Diplomacy Is Paying Off for China," *Foreign Affairs*, March 11, 2021

In response to perceived opportunities arising from the United States' engagement in the Middle East and the global financial crisis, Chinese leaders Hu Jintao and now Xi Jinping began to more openly assert China's influence. This period saw China's aggressive maneuvers in the South China Sea and calls for the U.S. to recognize a "new model of great-power relations," which implied an acceptance of Chinese dominance in Asia. Beijing abandoned the "hide and bide" strategy, transitioning to Xi's approach of "striving for achievement." Yan Xuetong noted this shift, highlighting the change from a low-profile approach to an overt demonstration of strength to neighboring countries. "In the past we had to keep a low profile because we were weak while other states were strong," Yan remarked. "Now . . . we are indicating to neighboring countries that we are strong and you are weak."<sup>114</sup> Beijing seized the opportunity to exert military pressure on Taiwan, erode Hong Kong's political autonomy, escalate disputes with neighbors, and engage in confrontational "wolf-warrior" diplomacy.<sup>115</sup> The turmoil in America, especially surrounding the 2020 presidential election and the January 2021 Capitol riot, made China's bold policy approach even more apparent. During a March 2021 meeting, Chinese diplomat Yang Jiechi challenged the notion that the U.S. could approach China from a "position of strength."<sup>116</sup> Xi Jinping articulated this sentiment, declaring in January 2021 that "The East is rising and the West is declining," signaling the end of American hegemony and the dawn of an era dominated by Chinese power.<sup>117</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified the shift in U.S.-China relations that had begun under Trump. The CCP initial attempts to conceal the outbreak and then leveraging the pandemic's chaos to challenge its rivals significantly tarnished China's global image. Reports from both leaked Chinese government documents and independent Western analyses indicated a surge in negative perceptions of China, reaching levels not seen since the Tiananmen Square incident. In the U.S., the proportion of people holding unfavorable views of China increased from 47% in 2017 to 73% by 2020.<sup>118</sup> The 2020 U.S. presidential election became heavily focused on criticizing China. Even after Trump's defeat, the fundamental direction of U.S. policy remained consistent. President Joe Biden, despite previously touting his close ties with Xi Jinping, committed to pursuing "extreme competition" with the CCP.<sup>119</sup> Biden aimed to demonstrate that democracy could outperform Chinese authoritarianism. In his first news conference as president, he depicted US- China relations

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<sup>114</sup> Yan, "From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 7, No. 2 (Summer 2014)

<sup>115</sup> Kurt Campbell and Mira Rapp-Hooper, "China Is Done Biding Its Time: The End of Beijing's Foreign Policy Restraint?" *Foreign Affairs*, July 15, 2020

<sup>116</sup> "China Says U.S. Cannot Speak from 'A Position of Strength,'" *BBC News*, March 19, 2021

<sup>117</sup> Chris Buckley, "The East is Rising': Xi Maps Out China's Post-Covid Ascent," *New York Times*, March 3, 2021

<sup>118</sup> "Internal Chinese Report Warns Beijing Faces Tiananmen-Like Global Backlash over Virus," Reuters, May 4, 2020; Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, and Christine Huang, "Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries," Pew Research Center, October 6, 2020

<sup>119</sup> Demetri Sevastopulo, "Biden Warns China Will Face 'Extreme Competition' from U.S.," *Financial Times*, February 7, 2021

as “a battle between the utility of democracies in the 21st century and autocracies. We’ve got to prove democracy works.”<sup>120</sup>

### 3.6 Chapter: Xi

Since assuming power in 2012, Xi Jinping has centralized authority under his leadership, effectively dismantling the collective leadership model that followed Mao's era. He has taken control of all significant committees, earning the moniker “chairman of everything”.<sup>121</sup> The 2017 Party Congress further solidified his control, with the incorporation of "Xi Jinping Thought" into the country's official ideology. “Xi Jinping Thought”, integral to realizing the Chinese Dream, reflects China's assertiveness on the global stage and Xi's strengthened domestic power, evident in the constitutional amendment allowing his prolonged rule. While maintaining Leninist control, the delicate balance involves deepening market reform and socio-economic transformation under authoritarian leadership. The challenge lies in sustaining economic growth while ensuring Party control and societal grip. China's global ambitions, military modernization, Pacific expansion, and initiatives like One Belt, One Road demonstrate its multifaceted approach.<sup>122</sup> This shift has also been reflected in increased indoctrination across educational institutions and various aspects of daily life. Prominent figures, including business leaders and celebrities who conflict with Xi's policies or image, face the risk of being erased from public discourse. Xi has further consolidated his power by filling key government positions with loyalists and eliminating presidential term limits, effectively ensuring his leadership for life. These moves represent a systematic dismantling of the post-Mao era mechanisms designed to prevent the concentration of power in the hands of a single individual.<sup>123</sup> Under Xi, China has reverted to a more rigid oligarchy, dominated by a leader with virtually unchecked authority. Xi has detached Deng's legacy, which is defined as encompassing three key elements: first, a system of collective political leadership with regular turnover of power at the highest levels; second, an open market economy integrated with the global community; and third, a restrained foreign policy approach. "Xi has abandoned all of them. He is taking China backward.” lamented the Party historians.<sup>124</sup> Despite experiencing the scars of the Cultural Revolution, Xi Jinping models himself after Mao Zedong. While his style of governance differs in some aspects—he prioritizes order and stability over revolutionary fervor and emphasizes centralization over decentralization—Xi has resurrected several Maoist practices. These include fostering a cult of personality, micromanaging various spheres of governance, policymaking by the Party rather than government officials, promoting officials based more on ideological adherence than job performance, perpetuating constant propaganda and education and

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<sup>120</sup> Davis E. Sanger, “Biden Defines His Underlying Challenge with China: ‘Prove Democracy Works,’ ” *New York Times*, March 27, 2021

<sup>121</sup> “Chairman of everything”, *The Economist*, Apr 2nd 2016

<sup>122</sup> John Garrick and Yan Chang Bennett, “*Xi Jinping Thought*” *Realisation of the Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation?*, China Perspectives [Online], 2018/1-2, 2018, p. 99-105

<sup>123</sup> N.S. Lyons, “The Triumph and Terror of Wang Huning,” *Palladium Magazine*, October 11, 2021

<sup>124</sup> Susan L. Shirk, op. cit., p. 31



enforcing the requirement that Party officials maintain close ties with the masses according to the "mass line."<sup>125</sup>

Official media outlets extol Xi's virtues and elevate him to the same level as Mao and Deng. A frequently cited slogan is: "Under Mao, the Chinese people stood up; under Deng, the Chinese people got rich; and under Xi, the Chinese people are becoming stronger." Xi Jinping believes that the decline of Soviet communism began in 1956 when the Communist Party of the Soviet Union distanced itself from Stalinism. He fears of a sudden collapse of Communist Party rule, same to what occurred in the Soviet Union, make him see the greatest risk from within the elite ranks rather than from the masses. He has mandated that CCP members watch a documentary detailing the downfall of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). According to the film, the collapse was precipitated by "corrupt and ideologically confused" Party leaders like Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin, despite overwhelming support from the Soviet public. The Soviet collapse underscores Xi's efforts to bolster the loyalty of Communist Party officials and ensure their unwavering devotion to the Party.<sup>126</sup> In the perception of Chinese leaders, internal threats pose a far greater concern than external ones. The traumatic events of the Tiananmen Square crisis heightened their anxieties regarding the vulnerability of Communist Party rule, particularly as they witnessed the subsequent collapse of communist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Three crucial lessons from the Tiananmen Square incident and the demise of Soviet communism are deeply ingrained in the psyche of China's leadership: the imperative to prevent large-scale social unrest, the necessity of maintaining unity within the leadership ranks, and the importance of securing the military's loyalty to the Party.<sup>127</sup>

When the complete version of Xi's speech was published in the Party's ideological journal, it became evident that he was framing the relationship with the West as an ideological contest reminiscent of the Cold War, contesting socialism against capitalism.<sup>128</sup> Xi asserted that socialism with Chinese characteristics would ultimately prevail over capitalism and wield greater influence globally. The assertive tone of this speech, combined with Xi's prideful boasting following China's successful containment of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, prompted American politicians, both in the Trump and Biden administrations, to frame the relationship as a competition between the two systems: Chinese communist autocracy versus Western market democracy.

Xi Jinping has dedicated himself to reorganizing the military, strengthening the Party apparatus, combating corruption, expanding global influence through the Belt and Road Initiative, alleviating rural poverty, and positioning China as a technology powerhouse. He has achieved this by consolidating control over all aspects of power within the Communist

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<sup>125</sup> Susan L. Shirk, op. cit, p. 42-43

<sup>126</sup> Susan L. Shirk, op. cit, p. 179-180

<sup>127</sup> Susan L. Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 39

<sup>128</sup> Tanner Greer, "Xi Jinping in Translation: China's Guiding Ideology," *Palladium*, May 31, 2019

Party and the government, including the military and law enforcement. To illustrate his hands-on approach, Xi Jinping has assumed the new role of commander-in-chief of the PLA Joint Battle Command and is often seen wearing a digital camouflage combat uniform. Xi has positioned himself as the head of virtually every entity, consolidating control over agencies across various sectors, including the coast guard and cybersecurity, placing them directly under his personal command. Furthermore, Xi has constantly elevated officials and afterwards replaced them by individuals he trusts more. Consequently, few officials feel comfortable providing candid feedback to Xi, including concerning potential adverse effects of his decisions, such as the rapid construction of heavily fortified artificial islands in the South China Sea or the establishment of thought-reform camps in Xinjiang.<sup>129</sup>

As far as his economic view is concerned, according to a particular theory, Xi initially supported market reforms until 2015, when a stock market crash and an attempt to introduce a market-driven mechanism for setting China's currency value resulted in chaos. This experience led him to believe that the state should take a more active role in guiding the economy.<sup>130</sup> Xi's preference for relying on state-owned enterprises and financial institutions stems from his ability to direct them to stabilize financial markets and support his key initiatives, while also steering the economy and pursuing non-economic objectives. He has also mandated that the Communist Party extend its influence into private enterprises to align them with his objectives. Currently, private firms in China are facing unprecedented pressure, exacerbated by domestic challenges and conflicts with trading partners like the United States. This pressure has particularly impacted foreign-owned private firms dominating exports. The share of private investment in manufacturing and infrastructure peaked in 2015 but has been declining since then.<sup>131</sup>

### **3.7 The Ambition**

Chinese leaders recognize, perhaps more clearly than many Americans, the inherently contentious nature of their relationship with the United States. The CCP cannot achieve its goal of establishing a world order aligned with its interests and values without diminishing and ultimately supplanting the existing international system. This perspective is encapsulated by Wang Jisi's observation that many of China's political elites believe it is the United States, not China, that is 'on the wrong side of history.' They understand that China's ascent is inevitably viewed in the United States as a significant challenge to its status as a superpower.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Susan L. Shirk, op. cit, p. 292

<sup>130</sup> Lingling Wei, "A Rare Look Inside China's Central Bank Shows Slackening Resolve to Revamp Yuan," *Wall Street Journal*, May 23, 2016

<sup>131</sup> Lingling Wei, "China's Xi Ramps Up Control of Private Sector. 'We Have No Choice But to Follow the Party'," *Wall Street Journal*, December 10, 2020

<sup>132</sup> Wang and Lieberthal, *Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust*, 10–11; Evan Osnos, "The Future of America's Contest with China," *New Yorker*, January 13, 2020

Initially, China will intensify its efforts to establish an economic stronghold throughout Eurasia and Africa. Facing surplus production at home and increasing protectionist measures abroad, China is aggressively working to create exclusive economic zones. In these zones, Chinese companies will have preferential access to markets and resources. China is striving to achieve technological superiority and extend its digital influence globally. As stated by Xi Jinping, these initiatives aim to render China "invincible," enhancing Beijing's ability to exert control over adversaries and allies alike.<sup>133</sup> Collectively, these actions by China may lead to the fragmentation of the global economy and potentially ignite a new Cold War. Furthermore, China is likely to intensify its efforts to diminish democratic freedoms. The CCP is working to tilt the global balance in favor of autocracy over democracy. It is actively supporting authoritarian regimes and undermining liberal societies, especially as democracies face significant challenges reminiscent of the 1930s.

The geopolitical ambitions of the CCP are clear and have been consistent for many years. The CCP aims to reunify China, assert dominance over the East and South China Seas, and establish regional supremacy as a stepping stone to global influence. The unchanging nature of these goals prompts the question of how China will pursue them. With an understanding of recent geopolitical theories, the CCP recognizes the significant importance of sea communication lines both militarily and economically. Throughout history, the dominant global superpowers have often been maritime nations (Athens, Pax Romana, Pax Britannica, US, etc). Additionally, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) reflects a more ambitious endeavor aligned with contemporary geopolitical theories that emphasize in Eurasia.<sup>134</sup> Described by Xi as the "project of the century," the BRI is a trillion-dollar endeavor aimed at reshaping the economic and geopolitical landscape of Eurasia to favor Beijing.<sup>135</sup> As of 2021, 140 countries had entered into memoranda of understanding to participate in the One Belt One Road Initiative.<sup>136</sup> The BRI utilizes an array of tools, ranging from state-owned enterprises to the expanding Chinese navy, to transform the largest landmass in the world into a stage for projecting Chinese power. "Access to Eurasia's resources, markets, and ports could transform China from an East Asian power to a global superpower," scholar Daniel Markey writes.<sup>137</sup> This strategy gains access to ports and facilities that enhance China's reach into the Indian Ocean and extend the strategic capabilities of the PLA. Beijing also promotes trade with BRI countries through free trade zones and a commercial network of Chinese migrants, facilitated by Chinese cloud computing and other Internet services. BRI seems like a form of Chinese neocolonialism aimed at pulling countries into China's sphere of influence and away from America's. Furthermore, the Chinese investments in port construction may serve dual civil-

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<sup>133</sup> John Feng, "China's Xi Jinping Says Soon No Enemy Will Be Able to Defeat the Country," *Newsweek*, May 6, 2021

<sup>134</sup> Athanasios Platias, Konstantinos Koliopoulos, op. cit, p.89

<sup>135</sup> Liu Xin and Yang Sheng, "Initiative 'Project of the Century': President Xi," *Global Times*, May 5, 2017

<sup>136</sup> "Chinese President Calls for Building Closer Belt and Road Partnership," Xinhua, June 23, 2021

<sup>137</sup> Daniel Markey, *China's Western Horizon: Beijing and the New Geopolitics of Eurasia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 168

military purposes, despite PLA claims to the contrary. Instances of BRI port projects failing commercially, such as Sri Lanka's Hambantota and Pakistan's Gwadar, raise suspicions about potential military use. China currently maintains one overseas military facility, the Djibouti Logistic Support Facility, strategically located at a trade chokepoint connecting the Indian Ocean with the Suez Canal. A primary concern raised by critics of the BRI is the "debt trap" phenomenon, whereby China entices developing countries to borrow funds for infrastructure projects, often in exchange for property rights if they default on loans. Chinese loan terms may include informal collateral arrangements favoring Chinese lenders over other creditors.<sup>138</sup>

While the BRI has multiple facets and objectives, some of which are routine, its strategic essence is to reorient the central Eurasian region towards China's geopolitical interests by avoiding U.S. naval dominance, especially at chokepoints, aiming to face potential negative impacts on its maritime trade and energy security. U.S. Navy's supremacy in crucial shipping lanes connecting East Asia with the Middle East is bolstered by naval access agreements with most countries in the region. Furthermore, the United States retains control over key chokepoints of global trade like the Malacca Strait and is positioned to potentially close them off in times of conflict. It also maintains authority in upholding established maritime regulations, akin to the role previously held by the British Navy.<sup>139</sup>

At the heart of BRI and China's broader ambitions is the quest for technological dominance. The CCP has aggressively pursued a program of intellectual property theft, forced technology transfers, and commercial espionage to accelerate China's rise. Through projects like the Digital Silk Road, Beijing aims to position companies like Huawei and ZTE as leading global providers of telecommunications infrastructure and advanced surveillance technology. China also aims to control the physical infrastructure of the internet, reminiscent of Great Britain's control through its network of undersea telegraph cables.<sup>140</sup> This includes building or acquiring fiber-optic cables and data centers, as well as collecting vast amounts of global data for Beijing's use.

China is strategically leveraging infrastructure projects, loans, and trade deals to gain resources, markets, and political influence from Southeast Asia to Southern Europe. This strategy includes building overland supply routes to bypass potential U.S. naval blockades during wartime, particularly for vital imports like oil and food. It acquires strategically important assets being sold in Africa and Asia, with an emphasis on critical infrastructure (such as ports, airports, road and rail networks, telecommunications networks, energy resources (e.g., oil fields), various types of mines, storage and distribution networks and logistics). Practices that are characterized as "neo-colonial" in Africa.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Susan L. Shirk, op. cit, p. 231

<sup>139</sup> Christopher Coker, "The Improbable War" (Oxford University Press, New York, 2015), p.148-149

<sup>140</sup> Jacob Helberg, *The Wires of War: Technology and the Global Struggle for Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021)

<sup>141</sup> Elizabeth C. Economy and Michael Levi, *By All Means Necessary: How China's Resource Quest is Changing the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

The CCP is actively working to position China as a formidable institutional superpower. Traditionally, America has exerted significant influence globally through its involvement in a wide array of international organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Taking a cue from this, Beijing is methodically working to increase its clout in key international bodies like the World Health Organization and the UN Human Rights Council. It is doing this by leveraging its economic might and strategically placing Chinese nationals in influential positions. China is also playing a leading role in organizations that govern emerging technologies and internet management. In some cases, it has established its own institutions, like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, to centralize its role in global governance. The state press agency in China explains that gaining influence in these international institutions is a way to "create a favorable environment" for the emergence of China as a "great modern socialist country."<sup>142</sup> On the ideological front, while China may not aggressively propagate its political model worldwide like a traditional Marxist regime, its actions indirectly promote autocracy.

Made in China 2025 (MIC2025) represents Xi's ambitious industrial strategy, with a primary focus on positioning China at the forefront of global innovation-driven advanced manufacturing, with artificial intelligence (AI) and quantum computing as its cornerstone technologies. Xi Jinping emphasizes the importance of innovation in this era of intense international military competition, asserting that "only the innovators win."<sup>143</sup> The Chinese government has established clear targets for the domestic production of core components and materials, aiming for 70 percent by 2025, along with sector-specific goals such as reaching 80 percent by 2025 for electric vehicles and batteries, mobile devices, and high-performance computers. These targets underscore China's determination to reduce its dependence on foreign technology, ultimately aiming to displace American producers once China develops domestic alternatives and potentially surpassing the US and other advanced economies altogether. The imposition of American sanctions, particularly the technology embargo affecting Chinese firms like ZTE and Huawei placed on the Entity List, has reinforced Xi's resolve to achieve the objectives outlined in MIC2025, particularly focusing on enhancing self-reliance in critical technologies such as advanced semiconductors and AI.

China's comprehensive strategy combines the geopolitical theories of Alfred Thayer Mahan, emphasizing the necessity of a powerful navy and control of the seas, with those of Halford Mackinder, who highlighted the strategic importance of the Eurasian "heartland."<sup>144</sup> This grand strategy not only aims for regional dominance but also uses a wide array of

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<sup>142</sup> "Xi Urges Breaking New Ground in Major Country Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics," Xinhua, June 24, 2018; Daniel Kliman, Kristine Lee, and Ashley Feng, *How China Is Reshaping International Organizations from the Inside Out* (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, 2019)

<sup>143</sup> Elsa Kania, "'AI Weapons' in China's Military Innovation," Brookings Institution, April 2020; Julian Gewirtz, "China's Long March to Technological Supremacy," *Foreign Affairs*, August 27, 2019

<sup>144</sup> Toshi Yoshihara and James Holmes, *Red Star over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute Press, 2018)

tools to pursue diverse military, economic, diplomatic, and ideological goals on a global scale. Ultimately, this strategy may necessitate intense competition or even direct confrontation with the United States. From Beijing's perspective, the current global order, dominated by the United States and relegating China to a secondary role, is not a historical norm but an exceptionally unacceptable deviation. This order emerged post-World War II, at the end of China's "century of humiliation," a period marked by division and exploitation by foreign powers. The mission of the CCP is to correct this historical trajectory and restore China to its preeminent position. In 2014, Xi Jinping articulated this vision, referencing the long-held Chinese aspiration of achieving a great national rejuvenation, a dream dating back to the 1840s. "Since the Opium War of the 1840s the Chinese people have long cherished a dream of realizing a great national rejuvenation," said Xi in 2014. Under CCP rule, China "will never again tolerate being bullied by any nation."<sup>145</sup>

The CCP is embarking on a monumental endeavor to redefine the principles of the international order, both within Asia and globally. China's ambition extends beyond merely becoming one of several superpowers in the world. Instead, it aspires to be the predominant superpower, envisioning itself as the central force in global geopolitics, much like the sun is at the center of the solar system. Under CCP leadership, Xi declared, China "has stood up, grown rich, and is becoming strong." A country that the West had once hoped would follow its democratic example was now "blazing a new trail for other developing countries" to follow. Beijing was already moving closer to "center stage" in world affairs. By the 100-year anniversary of the People's Republic in 2049, China would "become a global leader" in "composite national strength and international influence"; it would build a more "stable" world order in which China's "national rejuvenation" could be fully achieved.<sup>146</sup> Two hundred years after the Opium Wars, which marked a period of humiliation and decline for China, the nation will reclaim its former glory and ascend to the pinnacle of global power.<sup>147</sup> Beijing's ambitions extend beyond mere regional dominance; its strategy also encompasses achieving global power and ultimately, global supremacy. Chinese state media and party officials have articulated that a China growing in power cannot comfortably fit within a world order dominated by the United States. Fu Ying, a prominent foreign policy figure, described this existing system in 2016 as a "suit that no longer fits."<sup>148</sup> Xi Jinping envisions creating a global "community of common destiny," which he metaphorically describes as "all under Heaven being one family," under the paternal guidance of the CCP.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Xi Jinping: The Governance of China I, (Shanghai Press, February 17, 2015)

<sup>146</sup> Xi Jinping, Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, *Xinhua*, October 18, 2017

<sup>147</sup> "Commentary: Milestone Congress Points to New Era for China, the World," *Xinhua*, October 24, 2017

<sup>148</sup> Fu Ying, "The U.S. World Order Is a Suit That No Longer Fits," *Financial Times*, January 6, 2016

<sup>149</sup> Daniel Tobin, "How Xi Jinping's 'New Era' Should Have Ended U.S. Debate on Beijing's Ambitions," Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 2020

“Empires have no interest in operating within an international system,” writes Henry Kissinger. “They aspire to be the international system.”<sup>150</sup> That’s the ultimate ambition of Chinese statecraft today.

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<sup>150</sup> Henry Kissinger, *op. cit.*, p. 21

## CHAPTER 4

### ONGOING STRATEGIES IN US-CHINA RELATIONS

#### 4.1 Economic (In)dependence and Cooperation

##### 4.1.1 The economic (in)dependence

China leads the global market in several manufacturing sectors, notably in producing household appliances, textiles, steel, solar panels, and basic drones. This dominance is largely due to low labor costs and substantial government subsidies, allowing Chinese companies to produce goods at lower prices. Additionally, China boasts the largest e-commerce market and mobile payment infrastructure in the world, and is actively developing and implementing a digital currency. In the realms of internet software and communications equipment, China holds considerable market shares. This success is partly attributable to the Chinese government's restrictions on foreign internet and telecommunications companies, providing a protected domestic market for Chinese giants like Alibaba, Tenu. In high-tech industries that involve applying advanced scientific research (like pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, and semiconductors) or engineering and integrating complex components (such as aviation, medical devices, and system software), China holds a smaller portion of global markets compared to the United States, Japan, or leading European countries. The primary reason is China's centralized research and development (R&D) approach, which, despite being effective at allocating resources, hampers the free exchange of information and the critical thinking essential for groundbreaking innovation.

The global community has not witnessed such a significant decline in productivity from a major power since the Soviet Union's downturn in the 1980s. While the Soviets faced unique challenges, such as dwindling oil revenues and excessive military expenditures, China, despite having some distinct advantages like a market-driven private sector and an expanding middle class, is experiencing a similar issue that once plagued the Soviet Union. This problem centers around state-led investments accumulating in unproductive segments of the economy. Although China's private sector is vibrant and innovative, it is hindered by an oversized and inefficient state sector that, on balance, is more detrimental to economic value than beneficial.<sup>151</sup>

During his presidency, Trump initiated the most intensive and continuous application of punitive tariffs against China since World War II. The U.S. administration imposed the strictest investment and technology restrictions since the Cold War era, aiming to hinder Huawei's growth and dissuade global reliance on Chinese 5G technology. In response to BRI, the U.S. Congress established the International Development Finance Corporation with a budget of \$60 billion. In multiple areas, U.S. policy became sharp, even

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<sup>151</sup> A point made well in Barry Naughton, *The Rise of China's Industrial Policy, 1978 to 2020* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2021)



confrontational. The United States imposed sanctions on CCP officials engaged in the destruction of Hong Kong's political freedoms in 2019–2020. The State Department declared that China's program of mass incarceration, forced sterilization, and systematic abuse of the Uighur population amounted to genocide.

In the current adversarial global environment, China's reliance on foreign technology and resources could turn out to be a critical vulnerability. Efforts by Washington and its allies to target key Chinese industries exemplify this. For instance, they are attempting to severely impact Huawei's operations by restricting its access to high-end computer chips. Similarly, the Chinese aviation sector faces significant challenges due to U.S. and allied restrictions on essential components like jet engines and avionics. The imposition of American tariffs has also put pressure on China's export-driven economy, a fact acknowledged by Xi Jinping as having a considerable effect.

This vulnerability is further highlighted by China's heavy dependence on imports for critical materials and technologies. China imports about 70–80 percent of its oil, computer chips, high-end sensors, and advanced medical equipment, and up to 90 percent of its sophisticated manufacturing machinery. These dependencies present multiple potential pressure points that China's rivals could exploit, adding to the strategic challenges faced by Beijing in the current geopolitical landscape.<sup>152</sup> This dependence is China's "Achilles' Heel."

China's aggressive approach to accumulating global data is quite revealing of its broader strategic ambitions. After Xi Jinping assumed power in 2013, he likened data to the oil of the industrial age, recognizing its immense potential and declaring that control over big data technologies equates to control over developmental resources and strategic advantage.<sup>153</sup> Following this declaration, Beijing has established itself as a leading global data authority. It has done so by implementing stringent measures that isolate Chinese data from international access while simultaneously acquiring data from other nations. New legislation mandates that all companies operating within China store their data locally and provide the CCP with unrestricted access and control. This regulation makes it challenging for foreign companies to even transfer data-related communications from China to their main offices without explicit permission from Beijing. Consequently, major technology firms like Apple and Tesla are being compelled to establish dedicated data centers within China.

In parallel, China is aggressively gathering data from other countries, employing tactics such as hacking into multinational corporate databases and purchasing foreign companies. This approach is a clear display of China's mercantilist strategy to dominate what is arguably the most critical resource in the contemporary world.

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<sup>152</sup> Nina Xiang, "Foreign Dependence the Achilles' Heel in China's Giant Tech Sector," *Nikkei Asia*, January 31, 2021

<sup>153</sup> Matt Pottinger and David Feith, "The Most Powerful Data Broker in the World Is Winning the War Against the U.S.," *New York Times*, November 30, 2021; also Jonathan Hillman, "China Is Watching You," *The Atlantic*, October 18, 2021

China's advancements in global network infrastructure, including telecommunications and satellite systems, could have enduring impacts due to the significant costs associated with replacing such infrastructures. When countries opt for Chinese technological systems, they often find themselves in a situation of dependency, as switching away from these systems involves substantial financial and logistical challenges. This dynamic can be viewed as a strategic maneuver by China to counteract its own encirclement in the economic and geopolitical arenas. By integrating countries across Eurasia and beyond into its technological ecosystem, China aims to mitigate the constraints it faces due to its geopolitical position and economic challenges. Essentially, this strategy is about creating a network of technological dependencies that can serve as leverage, allowing China to navigate and potentially overcome the limitations imposed by its current global standing.

Despite occasional disapproval of U.S. politics during the Cold War, U.S. allies were more concerned about the threat of Soviet dominance. In the present, China's aggressive economic tactics, confrontational diplomacy, and human rights violations have sustained the possibility of forming a free-world alliance. A significant majority of thought leaders in Europe and Asia, nearly 75%, are in favor of joint efforts to lessen economic reliance on China. By late 2021, most European Union member states had imposed restrictions or outright bans on Chinese companies in their telecommunications sectors.<sup>154</sup>

Recent developments indicate a precarious but stabilized relationship between the U.S. and China. Following the San Francisco summit between President Biden and President Xi in late 2023, both countries have agreed to resume military-to-military dialogues and cooperation on several fronts, including countering fentanyl production and addressing AI-related risks.<sup>155</sup> The Biden administration has emphasized "de-risking" rather than decoupling from China, aiming to reduce economic dependencies without severing ties completely. This approach has been mirrored by efforts in Europe and Asia, where nations are increasingly critical of China's policies but remain economically intertwined with the Chinese market). U.S.-China trade and investment ties remain robust, with substantial interdependencies, a dynamic evident in the continued significant U.S. investments in China and vice versa.<sup>156</sup>

China's economic growth has slowed, and domestic challenges such as the fallout from strict COVID-19 policies and a cooling property market have added pressure.<sup>157</sup> However, China continues to invest heavily in achieving technological self-sufficiency to mitigate the impact of U.S. restrictions on technology exports.

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<sup>154</sup> "Mapping the Future of U.S. China Policy," Center for Strategic and International Studies

<sup>155</sup> Scott Kennedy, "U.S.-China Relations in 2024: Managing Competition without Conflict", *CSIS*, January 3, 2024

<sup>156</sup> Ryan Hass, "The "new normal" in US-China relations: Hardening competition and deep interdependence", *Brookings*, August 12, 2021

<sup>157</sup> Patricia M. Kim, "The US-China relationship in 2024 is stabilized but precarious", *Brookings*, January 12, 2024

### **4.1.2 Cooperation**

The world's two largest economies U.S. and China together, representing 40 percent of global GDP, have an obligation to drive collective action, for the benefit of people and economies around the world.

China currently holds a nearly 18 percent share of global GDP, solidifying its position as the third-largest trading partner for the United States, following Canada and Mexico. Reciprocally, the United States holds the position of being China's largest trading partner. This economic relationship is vital, with American exports to China and Chinese investments in the United States playing a significant role in supporting American employment. Furthermore, American businesses stand to gain advantages through access to crucial inputs, enabling them to reduce production costs, enhance competitiveness, and foster additional job creation. Despite these economic ties, a longstanding issue has been the lack of a level playing field for American workers and companies when competing with counterparts in China. The PRC employs unfair economic practices, ranging from non-market tools to impediments for foreign firms and coercive measures against American companies. These practices have had detrimental effects on American workers and businesses. In response, the United States has consistently raised these concerns over the past year through various channels, including Working Groups and direct diplomatic engagements.

The 2023 member survey conducted by the U.S.-China Business Council indicates a notable shift in corporate strategies, with a significant portion of companies expressing intentions to reassess their investment plans and resource allocations. This survey marks the highest percentage of companies considering relocating some of their operations out of China since 2016. These emerging trends carry implications for China, underscoring the importance of the country pursuing structural reforms and ensuring equitable treatment for foreign firms. Beyond merely attracting increased foreign investment, such reforms can play a pivotal role in addressing inefficiencies and vulnerabilities stemming from China's economic practices, particularly at this crucial juncture in its economic trajectory.

The United States' foundational economic robustness assures that it faces no existential threats from robust economic competition, be it with China or any other nation. This strength enables the U.S. to actively explore new opportunities and effectively navigate challenges. Within this framework, the U.S. has formulated its economic strategy towards China. Contrary to the idea of decoupling from China, the United States recognizes the potential harm such a move could inflict on both economies and the broader global landscape. Instead, the U.S. aims to foster a mutually beneficial economic relationship with China, emphasizing cooperation on global challenges. The overarching priority remains national security, and economic tools will be judiciously deployed when necessary to safeguard the country's national security interests and uphold human rights, as highlighted by Secretary of the Treasury Janet L. Yellen during her address at the US-

China Business Council's 50th Anniversary Dinner in Washington, DC. Overall US policy summarizes in the following:<sup>158</sup>

- The US and China will continue to work together to manage their economic relationship responsibly.
- The US will press China for greater transparency on its economic policies and policymaking.

In the end both sides recognize that as long as there is excessive geopolitical risk, the global economy and therefore their interests are affected. No one is interested in investing if war is imminent.

#### **4.1.3 Trade disputes and negotiations**

The United States and China are the world's two largest economies, and their trade relationship is quite complex. The costs of conflict between China and the United States far outweigh the current causes of dispute in their economic relationship. These costs would be both direct, in terms of short-term losses of growth and employment, and indirect, in terms of long-term damage to the world trading system, diminishing investment and efficiency.<sup>159</sup> Cooperation between the two countries is essential to maintain global economic stability.

From the part of China, Chinese officials demonstrate their allegiance by issuing warnings to foreign organizations that diverge from the Party's prescribed norms regarding nomenclature and maps. For instance, China's Civil Aviation Administration issued warnings to thirty-six international airlines that listed Taiwan as a separate country, instead of as part of China, prompting most of them to comply. Similarly, the Zara fashion chain and Marriott International issued apologies for similar errors. Additionally, the Gap clothing chain apologized to China for selling a T-shirt featuring a map of China that omitted Taiwan.<sup>160</sup> The same happens in professional sports. When the general manager of the Houston Rockets basketball team expressed support for Hong Kong protesters in a tweet, China Central TV banned broadcasts of NBA games for one year, and the Rockets lost their streaming contract with Tencent. This led to criticism from American fans regarding the NBA's attempts to manage the situation. Global clothing companies faced a similarly challenging dilemma concerning Xinjiang cotton. In response to American sanctions over forced labor of Uighurs and other Muslims, these companies ceased using cotton sourced from Xinjiang, which produces a significant portion of the world's cotton supply. Research by foreign NGOs indicated that the Chinese government mandated

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<sup>158</sup> U.S. mission China, "Remarks by Secretary of the Treasury Janet I. Yellen on the U.S.-China economic relationship", *U.S. embassy & consulates in China*, December 18, 2023

<sup>159</sup> Ha Jiming and Adam S. Posen, "US-China Economic Relations: From Conflict to Solutions—Part I", *PIIE*, June 2018

<sup>160</sup> Simon Denyer, "Gap Apologizes to China over Map on T-Shirt That Omits Taiwan, South China Sea," *Washington Post*, May 15, 2018,

Uighurs and other Muslims, who had completed re-education programs, to work in cotton fields and factories across China.<sup>161</sup> As a result, companies like H&M and Adidas pledged to boycott Xinjiang cotton. In response, the Chinese government initiated a national boycott of these global brands,<sup>162</sup> leading to a surge in sales for Chinese brands like Li-Ning and Anta.<sup>163</sup>

In order to stimulate economic growth while preserving internal stability, the Chinese government resorted to suppressing dissent domestically and implementing protectionist measures. It pursued aggressive economic expansion overseas, seeking to secure resources, markets, and influence, notably through the BRI. High-profile political figures in the United States, like Mitt Romney in 2012 and Donald Trump in 2016, pledged to confront China's trade policies. As Donald Trump declared, more graphically, “we can’t continue to allow China to rape our country.”<sup>164</sup> The response to China's policies extended beyond trade. Between 2008 and 2023, China faced almost 15,000 new trade barriers globally.<sup>165</sup> Several countries withdrew from BRI, and many Western nations began securing their telecommunications infrastructure against Chinese influence. Severe technological restrictions were enforced by the U.S. and its allies, particularly affecting major Chinese tech companies by cutting off essential components like semiconductors. Now, numerous countries are actively working to reduce their reliance on Chinese supply chains, with some, like Japan, even incentivizing their companies to leave China. As a result, China is losing the previously unhindered access it had to global markets, technology, and capital. The era that once propelled China's rapid ascent, characterized by deep economic globalization, is waning, creating significant challenges for the country at a critical juncture. Even trade deals became competitive weapons: The U.S.-Mexico-Canada trade pact, signed in 2019, effectively prohibited its signatories from signing separate free-trade agreements with Beijing.

Upon assuming office, Trump promptly exited the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a trade agreement that his predecessors had viewed as a strategic measure to counterbalance China's influence. He initiated trade conflicts not just with China but also with some of America’s closest democratic allies, while simultaneously expressing open disdain for longstanding alliances. Trump's actions fundamentally altered the dynamics of U.S.-China relations, a change that received widespread support in Washington. Under the Biden administration, the ban on purchasing shares of publicly traded companies associated with the Chinese military, initiated during the Trump era, remains in effect. Furthermore, there is a proposed bill in Congress seeking additional restrictions. The US-China Business

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<sup>161</sup> Helen Davidson, “Xinjiang: More Than Half a Million Forced to Pick Cotton, Report Suggests,” *The Guardian*, December 15, 2020

<sup>162</sup> Angeli Datt, “The CCP Hand Behind China's Xinjiang Cotton Backlash,” *The Diplomat*, April 29, 2021

<sup>163</sup> “Chinese Sportswear Brands Report Sweeping Business Performance in H1 of 2021,” *Global Times*, September 6, 2021

<sup>164</sup> Jeremy Diamond, “Trump: ‘We Can’t Continue to Allow China to Rape Our Country,’” CNN, May 2, 2016

<sup>165</sup> *Global Trade Alert*

Council has highlighted that the regulation of outbound capital flow represents an unprecedented move in American history of 250 years.<sup>166</sup> On the other hand, Xi maintains that he advocates for cooperation and emphasizes that the government pursues mutually beneficial outcomes, rejecting the American concept of "competition." In prominent international forums such as the World Economic Forum in Davos, he articulates China's support for globalization, open trade, and free markets, positioning Chinese policy in contrast to American protectionism.

Nowadays, U.S. is China's largest trading partner on a single-country basis, while the Association of Southeast Asian Nations has recently surpassed the EU as China's largest trading partner on a regional basis. For the first three quarters of last year, China's exports to the U.S. fell by 16.4%, while imports dropped by 6% during that time. Russia was the only major country or region in the Chinese customs agency's report that showed growth in both exports and imports for the first three quarters of the year from a year ago.<sup>167</sup>

As of mid-2024, trade tensions between the U.S. and China remain high, with new developments continuing to shape the landscape. Recently, China requested the World Trade Organization (WTO) establish an expert panel to resolve disputes over new-energy vehicle (NEV) subsidies under the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which China argues are discriminatory and violate WTO rules. This move underscores ongoing friction in areas like green technology and industrial policy.<sup>168</sup> Additionally, President Biden's administration has maintained and even expanded tariffs on Chinese imports, particularly targeting strategic sectors such as lithium-ion batteries, critical minerals, and semiconductors. These measures are part of a broader strategy to onshore critical supply chains and reduce dependency on China. The European Union has also launched investigations into whether Chinese electric vehicles benefit from illegal subsidies, potentially leading to further trade restrictions.<sup>169</sup> Both countries continue to seek alternative markets to mitigate the impact of these trade disputes. The U.S. has seen an increase in imports from the EU, Mexico, and Vietnam, while China has boosted exports to Russia and various Southeast Asian nations. This realignment of trade relationships highlights the complex and evolving nature of global supply chains.

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<sup>166</sup> Kate O'Keeffe, "U.S. Should Restrict Investment in China Due to Security Concerns, Panel Says," *Wall Street Journal*, November 17, 2021

<sup>167</sup> Evelyn Cheng, "China's exports and imports drop again in September", *CNBC*, October 13 2023

<sup>168</sup> Yin Yeping and Feng Fan, "China asks WTO to set up panel on US NEV subsidies dispute", *Global Times*, July 15, 2024

<sup>169</sup> Philip Blenkinsop, "EU to investigate 'flood' of Chinese electric cars, weigh tariffs", *Reuters*, September 13, 2023

## 4.2 Military and Security Concerns

### 4.2.1 "Too late"

The implications of the current geopolitical situation are significant and real. General Douglas MacArthur, in 1940, summarized the essence of failure in war with the phrase "too late."<sup>170</sup> This encompassed delays in understanding the lethal intent of a potential foe, in preparing for conflict, in rallying allies, and in standing united with partners. He warned that it would be a monumental strategic blunder for America to miss seizing a crucial opportunity. MacArthur's cautionary words turned out to be prescient. His forces in the Philippines, along with other American forces in the Pacific, suffered defeats early in the war against Japan due to unpreparedness. This historical context gained renewed relevance in 2021 when the U.S. military intelligence chief for the Indo-Pacific region echoed MacArthur's words, this time referring to a rising authoritarian challenge from China. Despite reluctance to compare the threat from China to the Cold War with Moscow, Adm. Studeman said the scale and breadth of the danger is "absolutely awesome and it has every dimension we saw in the 20th century." China, he argued, is not simply seeking to become a leading world power but plans to surpass the United States and become the world's most powerful state.<sup>171</sup> The United States now finds itself at a pivotal juncture in its rivalry with China, a period marked by an escalated risk of war and where the choices made will significantly influence global politics for the coming years. Another "vital moment" has arrived, and it is imperative for America to prepare adequately to avoid repeating past mistakes.

China's increasingly aggressive maritime activities in Asia cast doubt on the notion that it was integrating peacefully into the existing western Pacific order. The country's extensive land reclamation projects in the South China Sea, referred to by a U.S. admiral as a "great wall of sand," contradicted the idea of China evolving into a responsible global player.<sup>172</sup> After about two decades, the extent of China's military expansion had become a source of significant concern. Prominent research institutions highlighted that the U.S. military advantage in key regions like the Taiwan Strait was diminishing.<sup>173</sup> Frank Kendall, the Under Secretary of Defense in 2014, emphasized the urgency of this challenge, stating that American military supremacy was facing threats of a magnitude not seen in many years. He stressed: "This is not a future problem. This is a here-now problem."<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Ed Imperato, *General MacArthur: Speeches and Reports 1908–1964* (Paducah, KY: Turner, 2000), p. 122

<sup>171</sup> Bill Gertz, "U.S. Pacific Intel Chief: Coming Chinese Attack on Taiwan Could Target Other Nations", *Washington Times*, July 8, 2021

<sup>172</sup> Prashanth Parameswaran, "U.S. Blasts China's 'Great Wall of Sand' in the South China Sea," *Diplomat*, April 1, 2015

<sup>173</sup> Eric Heginbotham, Michael Nixon, Forrest E. Morgan, et al., *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015)

<sup>174</sup> "China Challenging U.S. Military Technological Edge: Pentagon Official," *Reuters*, January 28, 2014,

## 4.2.2 Arms control

The United States and China have experienced fluctuating dynamics in their military and arms control relations. Historically, the U.S. Navy has intensified its freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea to challenge China's expansive claims. This has been accompanied by increased arms sales and military support to vulnerable frontline states. Despite these efforts, collaborative endeavors focused on Taiwan's security and the stabilization of the western Pacific have lagged behind the depth of cooperation seen between the Pentagon and NATO allies, which has been cultivated through years of joint training and combat operations.

A significant development occurred in November 2023, when U.S. President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to restore military-to-military contacts, a decision that led to a series of meetings at the Pentagon in January 2024. These talks, co-chaired by Michael Chase, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for China, Taiwan, and Mongolia, and Maj. Gen. Song Yanchao from the Chinese Central Military Commission, focused on enhancing defense relations and addressing regional security issues. Furthermore, the U.S. embassy said that the two sides "committed to maintain this strategic channel of communication and to pursue additional high-level diplomacy and consultations in key areas."<sup>175</sup>

Despite these positive steps, tensions and differences remain. China is actively working to avoid strategic isolation. It has formed a close partnership with Russia, another state with a revisionist, autocratic government known for its aggressive stance and ability to attract adversaries. This alliance has surpassed the expectations of many Western analysts in terms of its economic, technological, diplomatic, and military collaboration. A key aspect of this partnership is an implicit understanding between Beijing and Moscow to maintain peace along their historically contentious border. This agreement allows them to focus their efforts on challenging the United States and its allies across Eurasia and beyond. The declaration of an unlimited friendship between Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin on the cusp of Russia's invasion of Ukraine highlighted the tensions in global security, emphasizing the simultaneous pressure on power dynamics in both Europe and Asia. While China and Russia have historically faced challenges in maintaining a consistent alliance, their shared opposition to U.S. and democratic values currently unites them.<sup>176</sup>

The resumption of U.S.-China military dialogues and arms control talks represents a crucial step towards stabilizing bilateral relations. While immediate breakthroughs are unlikely, these discussions are essential for establishing the structural and institutional

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<sup>175</sup> Shizuka Kuramitsu, "China, U.S. Restore Military Communications", *Arms Control Association*, March 2024

<sup>176</sup> Andrea Kendall-Taylor and David Shullman, "China and Russia's Dangerous Convergence: How to Counter an Emerging Partnership," *Foreign Affairs*, May 3, 2021; Hal Brands and Evan Braden Montgomery, "One War Is Not Enough: Strategy and Force Planning for Great-Power Competition," *Texas National Security Review*, 3, no. 2 (Spring 2020): 80–92



processes necessary for crisis management and strategic stability. Continued engagement and mutual efforts to understand and address each other's strategic concerns will be vital in preventing an arms race and maintaining global security.<sup>177</sup>

### **4.2.3 Nuclear Non-Proliferation**

Due to the inevitable consequences of mutual assured destruction, engaging in a war where both the US and China unleash their full nuclear arsenals would result in the annihilation of both nations. Therefore, their primary interest lies in avoiding such a catastrophic conflict. That is the reason why the US has extensive nuclear cooperation with China, which is governed by a civil nuclear cooperation agreement, renewed in 2015.<sup>178</sup> Both countries recognize that prevailing through conventional warfare is unlikely as it could escalate into a nuclear confrontation. The fear of Mutual Assured Destruction leads to alternative methods to avoid direct confrontation, which could result in total devastation. Therefore, the United States has extensive nuclear cooperation with China, governed by a civil nuclear cooperation agreement renewed in 2015. Both the United States and China are nuclear-armed and their arms control and non-proliferation policies are closely watched by the international community. The United States has an extensive nuclear arsenal, with over 5,000 nuclear warheads, while China has significantly fewer, with around 500 operational nuclear warheads as of 2023. However, China's nuclear capabilities are rapidly expanding. According to a Pentagon report, China's stockpile is expected to exceed 1,000 operational nuclear warheads by 2030.<sup>179</sup> China has consistently expressed its support for the international arms control and nonproliferation framework. In a December 2020 conference, Fu Cong, Director General of the Department of Arms Control of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, affirmed China's readiness to bolster non-proliferation policy dialogues and collaborations with all nations, including the incoming U.S. administration. More recently, China's Ambassador for Disarmament Affairs, Li Song, elaborated in an October 2022 statement to the United Nations General Assembly that Beijing has actively engaged in and contributed to advancing the international arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation process. While the Chinese government has reportedly halted its direct involvement in nuclear and missile proliferation, Chinese entities have continued to engage in such activities. The U.S. government has raised concerns about loopholes in China's export control system that facilitate these illicit transfers. Despite China's claims of non-proliferation compliance, evidence suggests that Chinese entities continue to supply sensitive technologies to countries of concern, including Iran, North Korea, Syria, and Pakistan. The U.S. government has engaged with China on these proliferation cases, urging stricter enforcement of its export control measures.<sup>180</sup> Last but not least, the United States has raised concerns about China's military modernization and its development of

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<sup>177</sup> Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, "China-US Nuclear Arms Control Talks: A Much-Needed First Step", *The Diplomat*, November 13, 2023

<sup>178</sup> "U.S.-China Nuclear Cooperation Agreement", *CRS Report*, August 18, 2015

<sup>179</sup> Seong Hyeon Choi and Minnie Chan, "China will have over 1,000 nuclear weapons by 2030, exceeding US predictions, Pentagon report on PLA expansion says", *SCMP*, October 21, 2023

<sup>180</sup> "Chinese Nuclear and Missile Proliferation", *CRS Report*, October 24, 2023

hypersonic and nuclear weapons and other advanced technologies, which started in 2018.<sup>181</sup> It should be noted that technological innovations, such as IT, make it difficult to verify agreed-upon control agreements of nuclear weapons between the USA and China, thus creating difficulties in equipment agreements and conditions of insecurity and uncertainty, resulting in continuous equipment competition.<sup>182</sup> The human factor should be involved in every decision-making process regarding the use of military means. In January 2024, after the meetings at the Pentagon—the first formal encounters between the U.S. and Chinese militaries since January 2020—the dialogue continued to address these concerns. The discussions aimed to enhance transparency and establish robust verification mechanisms to manage and mitigate the risks associated with advanced military technologies and strategic stability.

While cooperation from China and Russia has been instrumental in deferring Iran's nuclear ambitions for at least a decade, the proliferation of nuclear weapons and materials, particularly in North Korea and Pakistan, significantly heightens the risk of nuclear terrorism. China and the US are uniquely positioned to address these challenges, especially if they collaborate and can persuade Russia to join their efforts. Resolving proliferation threats posed by North Korea and Pakistan not only reduces the risk of nuclear terrorism but also mitigates the potential for state-level proliferation in nations like South Korea and Japan.<sup>183</sup>

China's nuclear modernization efforts, while still modest compared to the U.S. and Russian arsenals, have significant strategic implications. The Biden administration has made engaging China in arms control talks a priority to prevent a destabilizing nuclear arms race. Recent high-level discussions, including those between Jake Sullivan and Wang Yi, have stressed the importance of nuclear transparency and the establishment of robust crisis communication channels.<sup>184</sup> In the realm of arms control, China has emphasized its no-first-use nuclear policy and seeks U.S. acknowledgment of mutual nuclear vulnerability. These issues are pivotal for China, as they align with its strategic interests in ensuring a balance of power and preventing U.S. nuclear coercion. However, the U.S. remains hesitant to adopt such policies, citing concerns over potential non-nuclear strategic threats from China.

#### **4.2.4 Regional security issues**

Along its borders, the CCP has unresolved territorial disputes with several countries, ranging from India to Japan. Additionally, Beijing lays claim to about 90 percent of the South China Sea, a region of significant commercial importance on the global stage.

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<sup>181</sup> "Biden concerned over Chinese hypersonic missiles", *Reuters*, October 21

<sup>182</sup> Athanasios Platias and Vasileios Trigkas, op. cit, p. 103

<sup>183</sup> Graham Allison, op. cit, p. 258

<sup>184</sup> Daryl G. Kimball, "The US and China re-engage on arms control. What may come next", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, November 15, 2023

Chinese authorities maintain a firm stance on these territorial issues, indicating an unwillingness to compromise. This rigid position was highlighted in 2018 when Xi Jinping, addressing U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis, asserted that China cannot afford to lose "even one inch of the territory left behind by our ancestors."<sup>185</sup> This statement underscores the depth of China's commitment to its territorial claims and the challenges this poses for regional and international diplomacy. China's territorial claims in the East and South China Seas, which extend hundreds of miles beyond its borders, blur the lines between asserting sovereignty and a broader strategy to dominate East Asia. The CCP aims to establish an "Asia for Asians" doctrine. This concept envisions a regional sphere of influence where China holds the primary position of power, with external actors, particularly the United States, relegated to peripheral roles. This objective reflects China's strategic intent to shape regional dynamics in a way that consolidates its supremacy in East Asia.<sup>186</sup>

Tokyo is a hated historical enemy that currently administers the Senkaku Islands, which China claims and calls the Diaoyu Islands. The U.S.-Japan alliance is pivotal to America's containment strategy in East Asia. Weakening Japan and straining its alliance with Washington could appeal to an encircled PRC. Xi has established a modus vivendi with the late Prime Minister Abe, characterized by a respectful but not warm relationship, evident from their awkward handshakes during public appearances. However, concurrently, Xi has directed the escalation of Chinese maritime and air pressure to challenge Japan's control of the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. In response, the Japanese government has strengthened its defense ties with the United States. In 2023, Chinese government vessels were spotted in the contiguous zone around the disputed islands for a record 352 days, with a total of 1,287 ships involved, setting a new high since record-keeping began in 2008. This continuous presence underscores China's determination to assert its claims.<sup>187</sup> Moreover, China announced plans to keep ships near the Senkaku Islands for 365 consecutive days in 2024, further intensifying the maritime dispute.<sup>188</sup>

In the summer of 2021, India moved tens of thousands of additional troops to the border, while also studying how it might help Washington choke off China's maritime supply lines in a war.<sup>189</sup> For India, worries about China's power at sea, and not just in the Himalayan region where China and India share a disputed border, have contributed to a wider awakening. U.S. officials began publicly referring to India as a keystone of their counter-

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<sup>185</sup> "Xi tells Mattis China won't give up 'even one inch' of territory", *Reuters*, June 27, 2018

<sup>186</sup> Hal Brands and Michael Beckley, op. cit, p. 12

<sup>187</sup> Takahashi Kosuke, "China Sets Record for Activity Near Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in 2023", *The Diplomat*, January 4, 2024

<sup>188</sup> Mari Higa, "China steps up warnings to Japanese military aircraft near disputed Senkaku Islands", *Stars and Stripes*, February 6, 2024

<sup>189</sup> Sudhi Ranjan Sen, "India Shifts 50,000 Troops to Chinese Border in Historic Move," *Bloomberg*, June 27, 2001

China strategy.<sup>190</sup> Both India and the United States have recognized the strategic challenge posed by China's assertive actions, which threaten their respective national interests and the broader regional stability in the Indo-Pacific. While the official joint statement between the two countries refrained from explicitly naming China, Indian Defense Minister Singh's candid remark during the press briefing, stating that India and the US are aligned on strategic issues "including countering China's aggression," underscored the shared concerns over China's behavior. Although Singh's directness was unusual, the absence of any clarification or retraction of his statement indicates the depth of the strategic partnership between the two nations. Moreover, both India and the US reaffirmed their unwavering commitment to fostering a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific, emphasizing their support for partnerships such as the Quad.<sup>191</sup> The strengthening security partnership between India and the US has been evident in several ways, as highlighted during the fifth India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in New Delhi. These advancements include the elevation of the US-India Strategic Dialogue to the level of Prime Minister and President, fostering regular dialogue and consultation on a broad spectrum of security and strategic matters. Additionally, India's designation as a "Major Defense Partner" provides greater access to advanced US defense technology and cooperation, enabling India's modernization efforts, exemplified by the ongoing negotiations for a commercial agreement between General Electric (GE) Aerospace and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to manufacture GE F-414 jet engines in India.<sup>192</sup> Building on their shared democratic values and mutual concerns over China's assertiveness, India and the United States have embarked on a deepening security partnership. This newfound camaraderie is evident in the increased frequency of joint military exercises, including a high-altitude drill in India's northern Uttarakhand state that drew a rebuke from Beijing. The partnership extends to the acquisition of armed MQ-9B SeaGuardian drones from the US, a move that could bolster India's military capabilities and interoperability with American forces. Both nations are united in their vision for a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, a shared aspiration that underpins the strength of their alliance. US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan aptly highlights the essence of this partnership, emphasizing the "shared value systems" and "common interests" that bind India and the US together.<sup>193</sup>

The South China Sea is a crucial maritime region with significant economic and strategic importance.<sup>194</sup> China has been asserting its claims to nearly all of the South China Sea, including through the militarization of disputed islands and waters. The United States, along with its allies and partners, has countered China's actions by conducting freedom of

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<sup>190</sup> Ken Moriyasu, "India and Vietnam Will Define the Future of Asia: Kurt Campbell," *Nikkei Asia*, November 20, 2021

<sup>191</sup> Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, "India-US 2+2 Strategic Dialogue Keeps Indo-Pacific in Focus", *The Diplomat*, November 20, 2023

<sup>192</sup> "Joint Statement: Fifth Annual India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue", *Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Government of India*, November 10, 2023

<sup>193</sup> John Reed and Demetri Sevastopulo, "How India is slowly moving into the American orbit", *Financial Times*, June 23, 2023

<sup>194</sup> Marvin Ott, "The South China Sea in Strategic Terms", Wilsoncenter, May 14, 2019

navigation operations in the region and upholding international law.<sup>195</sup> This ongoing dispute has the potential to escalate into a major conflict. Taiwan is a self-governing island democracy that China considers a breakaway province. China's envious stare towards Taiwan stems from its thriving economy, particularly in the arena of semiconductor manufacturing. TSMC, headquartered in Taiwan, is the world's largest contract chipmaker and reigns supreme in the global semiconductor market, holding a 58.5 percent share in the global pure-play wafer foundry business.<sup>196</sup> Its microchips fuel a plethora of electronic devices, from smartphones and laptops to automobiles and industrial machinery. The company's prowess and production capacity render it an irreplaceable player in the global electronics sector. On April 2020, Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe asserted during a rare phone conversation with U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin that Taiwan is an integral part of China, and this status is immutable. Wei emphasized that mishandling the Taiwan issue could negatively impact Sino-U.S. relations, as mentioned in a statement released by the Chinese defense ministry.<sup>197</sup> The United States has maintained an arms sales relationship with Taiwan and committed to its defense, which has been a source of tension with China.<sup>198</sup> China has repeatedly threatened to use force to reunify Taiwan with the mainland as China's President Xi Jinping has said "reunification" with Taiwan "must be fulfilled", and the possibility of conflict remains a significant regional security concern. Despite the ongoing tensions between China and Taiwan, a significant portion of Taiwanese people remain relatively unconcerned about the possibility of war. A 2021 poll conducted by the Taiwan Public Opinion Foundation revealed that only 35.7% of respondents believed that war between the two countries was inevitable. This suggests that a majority of Taiwanese people are not overly worried about the prospect of military conflict with China.<sup>199</sup>

### 4.3 Structuring Strategic Alliances

#### 4.3.1 US allies

Beijing's vision for regional dominance in Asia likely differs from the overt physical control the Soviet Union exerted over Eastern Europe during the Cold War. It's improbable that China intends to engage in widespread military conquest across the continent. Instead, the CCP aims to use a combination of allure and pressure to reorient the economies of maritime Asia towards Beijing, rather than Washington. The strategy involves ensuring smaller nations are suitably respectful towards the CCP and diminishing America's capacity to form alliances, maintain a regional military presence, or exert influence that could challenge China's interests close to home. As Zbigniew Brzezinski noted, a Chinese

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<sup>195</sup> "U.S. Navy Destroyer Conducts Freedom of Navigation Operation in the South China Sea", 03 November 2023

<sup>196</sup> Taiwan's TSMC opens overseas office to supervise fabs in U.S., Japan, *EBAT*, April 04, 2023

<sup>197</sup> "Taiwan is part of China, Beijing tells U.S.", *Reuters*, April 20, 2022

<sup>198</sup> David Vergun "Official Says U.S. Committed to Taiwan's Defense", *U.S. Department of Defense*, Nov. 17, 2022

<sup>199</sup> David Brown, "China and Taiwan: A really simple guide", *BBC*, 6 April, 2021

sphere of influence would be one where the primary consideration in Asian capitals is Beijing's perspective on various issues. This approach indicates a more subtle, yet potentially effective, method of establishing regional preeminence.<sup>200</sup>

When the U.S. and China renewed their diplomatic relations in the 1970s, it appeared likely that the U.S. would eventually distance itself from Taiwan. However, the U.S.-Taiwan relationship has not only survived but strengthened, particularly under the pressure from China. The U.S. increasingly acknowledges Taiwan as a sovereign entity in everything but official recognition, supporting this approach by bolstering Taiwan's military capabilities. Both the Trump and Biden administrations have facilitated visits by American officials to Taiwan. In 2020, Congress enacted legislation mandating U.S. support for Taiwan's integration into international organizations. Additionally, the Trump administration authorized nearly \$20 billion in arms sales to Taiwan, including equipment like missile launchers, mines, and drones, designed to thwart a potential amphibious assault. The strategic importance of Taiwan has been emphasized in U.S. military planning under both Trump and Biden, with U.S. officials affirming unwavering support for the island and implying a forceful response to any Chinese military aggression.<sup>201</sup> Despite a shift in the military balance in the Taiwan Strait favoring China, both Taipei and Washington are firmly committed to their positions and prepared for potential confrontations. Securing control over Taiwan ranks as the foremost objective in China's foreign policy agenda. Reportedly, this endeavor is so significant that approximately one-third of the budget of the PLA, China's military force, is dedicated to preparations for potentially reclaiming the island.<sup>202</sup> China could use Taiwan as an “unsinkable aircraft carrier” to project power into the Pacific, blockade Japan and the Philippines, and fracture U.S. alliances in East Asia. Not least, successful aggression would eliminate the world's only Chinese democracy, removing a persistent threat to the CCP's legitimacy. Taiwan is the center of gravity in East Asia—and the epitome of a place where China's leaders might think that near-term aggression could radically improve their country's long-term trajectory vis-à-vis the United States.

Maritime Asian countries, particularly Japan, are responding to Chinese pressures in the region with significant military enhancements. Since the end of the Cold War, Japan is undergoing its most substantial military expansion. For ten consecutive years, Japan has increased its defense budget and plans to deploy missile launchers and advanced submarines along the Ryukyu Islands. These strategic placements aim to limit China's access to the Pacific Ocean.<sup>203</sup> This military buildup is a direct countermeasure to China's

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<sup>200</sup> Hal Brands and Michael Beckley, op. cit, p. 12-13

<sup>201</sup> Michael Crowley, “Biden Backs Taiwan, but Some Call for Clearer Warning to China,” *New York Times*, April 8, 2021

<sup>202</sup> Paul V. Kane, “To Save Our Economy, Ditch Taiwan,” *New York Times*, November 10, 2011

<sup>203</sup> Felix Chang, “The Ryukyu Defense Line: Japan's Response to China's Naval Push into the Pacific Ocean,” Foreign Policy Research Institute, February 8, 2021; Ken Moriyasu, “U.S. Eyes Using Japan's Submarines to ‘Choke’ Chinese Navy,” *Nikkei Asia*, May 5, 2021; Makiko Inoue and Ben Dooley, “Japan Approves Major Hike in Military Spending, with Taiwan in Mind,” *New York Times*, December 23, 2021,

ambition of breaking through the "First Island Chain," a strategic line of U.S. allies and partners in the western Pacific. Japan's actions suggest that any attempt by China to breach this chain would be met with substantial resistance. The U.S.-Japan alliance has increasingly focused on countering China's influence. Successive U.S. administrations have stated that the alliance extends to the disputed Senkaku Islands, indicating that a conflict between Japan and China over these islands could escalate into a U.S.-China confrontation. Japan has reinterpreted its constitution to enable its Self-Defense Forces to more actively collaborate with the U.S. in potential conflicts. Japanese military assets frequently accompany U.S. forces in the region, and American F-35s are training on Japan's modified aircraft carriers.<sup>204</sup> Significantly, in 2021, Japan agreed to work closely with the U.S. in case of a Chinese attack on Taiwan. Japan's deputy prime minister declared that such an attack would be a direct threat to Japan's survival.<sup>205</sup> Additionally, Japan has taken a lead role in countering Chinese economic dominance, notably by maintaining the Trans-Pacific Partnership after the U.S. withdrew in 2017. From China's perspective, Japan is not a minor, vulnerable foe but a formidable regional adversary, strongly supported by the world's leading military power.

The nations surrounding the South China Sea, though not as powerful as China, are actively developing their military capabilities and forging strategic alliances to counter Beijing's influence. Vietnam, for instance, is enhancing its defense by acquiring mobile anti-ship cruise missile batteries, Russian attack submarines, state-of-the-art surface-to-air missiles, new fighter jets, and surface ships equipped with advanced cruise missiles.<sup>206</sup> These acquisitions enable Vietnam to target ships and aircraft within a 200-mile radius of its coast, covering a significant part of the South China Sea and even reaching China's substantial military base on Hainan Island.<sup>207</sup> Additionally, Vietnam is deepening its ties with the United States, demonstrated by hosting U.S. warships and strengthening bilateral relations.

Singapore, to the south, has become a key military ally of the United States in Southeast Asia, albeit not formally bound by a treaty. The city-state provides a base for U.S. maritime surveillance aircraft, swift littoral combat ships, and other Pentagon resources. In response to regional tensions, Indonesia significantly boosted its defense budget, with a 20% increase in 2020 and an additional 16% in 2021.<sup>208</sup> This financial commitment facilitated the purchase of numerous F-16 fighters and new surface ships equipped with long-range anti-ship cruise missiles. In March 2021, Indonesia signed an agreement with

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<sup>204</sup> Dzirhan Mahadzir, "U.S. Marine F-35Bs to Embark on Japan's Largest Warship," USNI News, September 30, 2021

<sup>205</sup> "Japan Deputy PM Comment on Defending Taiwan if Invaded Angers China," *Reuters*, July 6, 2021

<sup>206</sup> Birch T. Tan, "Understanding Vietnam's Military Modernization Efforts," *The Diplomat*, November 25, 2020

<sup>207</sup> Michael Beckley, "The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia: How China's Neighbors Can Check Chinese Naval Expansion," *International Security*, 42, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 78–119

<sup>208</sup> Jon Grevatt, "Indonesia Announces Strong Increase in 2021 Defence Budget," *Janes*, August 18, 2020

Japan to acquire defense equipment and collaboratively develop islands in the South China Sea, which are also claimed by China. Following incidents of Chinese maritime encroachments, Indonesia announced plans in May to expand its submarine fleet and acquire new corvettes.<sup>209</sup> Furthermore, Jakarta adopted a firm stance against unauthorized fishing or drilling in its waters, occasionally demonstrating its resolve by publicly destroying confiscated Chinese fishing boats.

On the eastern side of the South China Sea, the Philippines has experienced fluctuating policies under President Rodrigo Duterte, oscillating between conciliation and opposition towards China. Initially seeking economic benefits from China in exchange for compromising Philippine sovereignty, Duterte's strategy shifted due to the lack of expected gains and growing discontent with Beijing. In 2021, Filipino Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. openly expressed his frustration with China's aggressive actions. Despite this, the Philippines has been enhancing its military capabilities, increasing air and naval patrols, engaging in joint military exercises with the U.S., and planning to acquire BrahMos cruise missiles from India.<sup>210</sup> The Trump and Biden administrations have also provided more concrete assurances of U.S. support to the Philippines in the event of armed conflict.<sup>211</sup>

Australia, having faced and endured an economic pressure campaign from China in 2020, emerged more resolved to fortify its nation against external influence. Australian leadership has largely moved past the hopeful but unrealistic notion of balancing ties between the U.S. and China, acknowledging that not aligning with Washington could lead to a subordinate relationship with Beijing. As a result, Australia is undertaking its most significant defense upgrade in recent history. This includes expanding its northern bases to better support U.S. military assets, investing in long-range missiles, and countering Chinese influence in the strategically crucial islands of the South Pacific.<sup>212</sup> In 2021 Australia entered into a notable agreement (AUKUS) with the U.S. and the U.K. to develop nuclear-powered submarines using American technology. This deal is set to transform the Royal Australian Navy into a formidable presence in both the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, further consolidating the strategic alliance among these three English-speaking nations in their collective stance against China.

The growing apprehension about China's rise has steadily nudged India closer to the United States over the past few decades, with recent years seeing an acceleration in this trend. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasized "In every sector of India's

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<sup>209</sup> Koya Jibiki, "Indonesia Looks to Triple Submarine Fleet After Chinese Incursions," *Nikkei Asia*, May 30, 2021

<sup>210</sup> "Philippines Beefs Up Military Muscle in Wake of Alleged Chinese Aggression in South China Sea," ABC News, April 21, 2021

<sup>211</sup> Bill Hayton, "Pompeo Draws a Line Against Beijing in the South China Sea," *Foreign Policy*, July 15, 2020

<sup>212</sup> Keith Johnson, "Australia Draws a Line on China," *Foreign Policy*, May 4, 2021



forward march I see the U.S. as an indispensable partner.”<sup>213</sup> In 2017, India played a key role in revitalizing the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which had been inactive for around ten years. Demonstrating its strategic shift, the Indian Navy has been coordinating with Vietnam, patrolling the South China Sea. India is also bolstering its defense by setting up missile launchers on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which could serve as a critical point for blockading Chinese trade in a conflict scenario, and is constructing ships equipped with some of the world's most sophisticated anti-ship missiles.<sup>214</sup> While the principle of non-alignment remains influential in Indian political thought, it is increasingly seen as impractical in the current geopolitical landscape. India is now engaging in a strategic triangulation, leaning more towards the United States to balance the growing threat posed by China.

In addition to bilateral agreements, the United States has developed institutions for multilateral security cooperation and mechanisms for regional collective security (security regionalism). Examples include QUAD, FIORC, and AUKUS. QUAD is a dialogue group of four countries: the United States, India, Japan, and Australia. The group was initially formed in response to the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, but it has since expanded its focus to include security issues. FIORC is a Five Eyes intelligence-sharing agreement between the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. AUKUS is a trilateral security pact between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. The pact was announced in 2021 and is focused on sharing technology and capabilities related to nuclear-powered submarines.

### **4.3.2 The enemy of my enemy is my friend**

China is encircled by twenty countries and is bordered by historical adversaries in every direction: Russia to the north, Japan to the east, Vietnam to the south, and India to the west. Among its neighbors are seven of the fifteen most populous nations in the world, four nuclear-armed states, five countries that have engaged in warfare against China within the last eighty years, and ten countries that currently lay claim to parts of Chinese territory. Additionally, China's geopolitical landscape is significantly influenced by the presence of the United States, which, through its network of alliances, strategic partnerships, and military deployments, effectively makes it a neighboring power in Asia. A rising China thus faces a high probability of being encircled and defeated, unless it can somehow escape the fate that has befallen self-aggrandizing Eurasian states in the past.

Under the current paths and leadership of Russia and China, it seems unlikely that the United States can effectively drive a wedge between them. Attempting a "reverse

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<sup>213</sup> William Mauldin, "India's Narendra Modi Emphasizes Security Ties in Address to Congress," *Wall Street Journal*, June 8, 2016

<sup>214</sup> Abishek Bhalla, "Indian Navy Ends Jam-Packed Year with Vietnamese Navy in South China Sea," *India Today*, December 27, 2020; "Anti-Ship Version of Supersonic Cruise Missile Testfired from Andaman Nicobar Islands," *New Indian Express*, December 1, 2020; Tanvi Madan, "Not Your Mother's Cold War: India's Options in U.S.-China Competition," *Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2021

Kissinger" strategy – trying to separate Putin from Xi using diplomatic maneuvers akin to the U.S. outreach to China in the 1970s – is not feasible. The dynamics of Sino-Russian relations today don't have the volatility that characterized their relationship in the late 1960s. Moreover, any attempt to gain Moscow's favor through geopolitical compromises could destabilize Europe at a critical moment. Similarly, significantly reducing the U.S. commitment to NATO to concentrate solely on Asia would create substantial weaknesses in America's global strategy and risk losing the support of European democracies crucial in countering Beijing. In the short term, a policy of dual containment might inadvertently strengthen Sino-Russian ties. However, recalling a different Cold War strategy, President Dwight Eisenhower believed that applying maximum pressure, rather than active engagement, might eventually strain the Sino-Soviet alliance. He theorized that intense pressure would force the weaker partner, Beijing, into an uncomfortable dependence on Moscow, leading to tensions. Eisenhower's approach was to wait for the opportune moment when the alliance would start to crumble under the weight of its own difficulties, rather than actively seeking to break it up from the outset.<sup>215</sup>

The dynamic between Germany and Japan prior to World War II, where these historically hesitant and mutually distrusting nations benefited from the global unrest and strain caused by each other's aggressive actions, mirrors the current relationship between China and Russia. Their alliance is advantageous in that it prevents the United States from focusing its efforts entirely on either of these major power rivals. This Sino-Russian partnership could become even more consolidated in the near future. If Russia continues to face prolonged international isolation due to its invasion of Ukraine, it may become increasingly reliant on China, both economically and strategically. Conversely, if China encounters a more robust containment strategy led by the U.S. and its allies, maintaining stable and productive ties with Russia will be crucial. It's becoming increasingly conceivable that the separate challenges posed by China and Russia to the U.S. could converge into a unified front, forming a more aligned autocratic axis across a substantial portion of Eurasia. This potential development poses a significant strategic challenge for the U.S. and its allies, as they may need to address a combined threat rather than two distinct ones.<sup>216</sup>

The war in Ukraine has fostered a closer relationship between China and Russia. While China appeared to maintain neutrality, it effectively sided with Russia by refusing to acknowledge the word "invasion" and abstaining from UN votes critical of Russia's actions. It's possible that Vladimir Putin manipulated Xi into seemingly endorsing the invasion through a lengthy joint statement just weeks before the conflict began, pledging unwavering friendship. The bond between Xi and Putin, rooted in shared ideological beliefs and antipathy toward the West, stands despite the historical conflicts and mistrust between China and Russia. It's doubtful that many other top Chinese leaders share the same enthusiasm for aligning closely with Russia, as past Chinese administrations have

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<sup>215</sup> Gaddis, John Lewis, op. cit

<sup>216</sup> Hal Brands and Michael Beckley, op. cit, p. 39-40

been hesitant to do so. Moreover, China previously enjoyed a friendly relationship with Ukraine, being its largest trading partner.<sup>217</sup> China's energy security is bolstered by Russian gas transported through pipelines, bypassing US control of sea routes. Recognizing the vulnerability of seaborne energy imports to US naval blockades, China prioritizes its ties with Russia. Additionally, the Russia-China alliance reinforces the credibility of China's nuclear doctrine, particularly in the event of Taiwan or South China Sea crises. China's rapid nuclear expansion may prompt it to seek shelter under Russia's nuclear umbrella. Xi Jinping's March 2023 Kremlin visit underscores their shared desire to strategically counterbalance US influence, driven by their perceived US threat.<sup>218</sup>

Lately, in order to mark the 75th anniversary of Sino-Russian diplomatic relations, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited China and agreed with President Xi Jinping to deepen their strategic partnership while scolding the United States for a series of moves that they said threatened their countries. In a 7,000-word joint statement on "the deepening of the comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation entering a new era," the two leaders outlined their positions on a range of topics, including economics, space, defense, Ukraine, and Taiwan.<sup>219</sup>

Finally, we observe a setback in Europe regarding the fresh start in relations with China. The combination of severe repression in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, assertive wolf warrior diplomacy during the COVID pandemic, and aggressive behavior in Asia has led to a noticeable cooling of relations. This chill intensified significantly after China declined to condemn Russia's actions in Ukraine. The Xi regime's actions have provoked a significant backlash in Europe at a time when the Biden administration's policies and Russia's actions in Ukraine are strengthening traditional ties between Europe and the United States. The majority of people in European countries now hold negative views about China and Xi.<sup>220</sup> While Europeans have long been concerned about China's human rights violations, their economic interests differ as China is EU's largest trading partner. Many of them have participated as partners in the BRI, with countries like Greece, Portugal, Hungary, and various Eastern European nations hosting significant infrastructure projects funded by Chinese loans. However, in March 2021, the EU-China relationship took a turn for the worse when the EU, along with the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, imposed sanctions on Chinese government officials implicated in human rights abuses in Xinjiang. This marked the first instance of Europe levying sanctions on China since the Tiananmen crisis of 1989.

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<sup>217</sup> Susan L. Shirk, op. cit, p. 288

<sup>218</sup> Athanasios Platias and Vasileios Trigkas, op. cit, p. 117-120

<sup>219</sup> "Putin and Xi deepen partnership and scold the United States", *Reuters*, May 16, 2024

<sup>220</sup> Laura Silver, Christine Huang, and Laura Clancy, "Negative Views of China Tied to Critical Views of Its Policies on Human Rights," Pew Research Center, June 29, 2022

#### 4.4 Climate change and global health

The United States and China are the world's two largest emitters of greenhouse gases, accounting for over 40% of global emissions as well as the world's green tech powerhouses.<sup>221</sup> Scientists have cautioned that once greenhouse gas concentrations reach 450 parts per million, we could experience a significant 3-degree Fahrenheit rise in global average temperatures, resulting in catastrophic consequences. Acting independently, neither the US nor China can adequately address this gradual but alarming crisis within their own borders. Despite being the world's top two carbon emitters, if either country were to completely eliminate its carbon emissions while other nations continued their current practices, the impact on the global climate would only be delayed for a few years. Recognizing this reality, Presidents Xi and Obama collaborated on the US-China agreement that paved the way for the 2016 Paris Agreement, the international treaty on climate change which overarching goal is to hold “the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” and pursue efforts “to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels”.<sup>222</sup> The increasing role of China in global climate governance since the adoption of the Paris Agreement, particularly highlights its growing influence on climate policy in the global South. China has been actively shaping climate adaptation strategies for developing countries, which is significantly impacting the politics of global climate governance. China is using its enhanced soft power to prioritize adaptation in multilateral climate negotiations, promote a technology-centered approach to climate mitigation, export its development model, and advocate for large-scale afforestation as a nature-based solution to climate change. This strategy involves increasing climate financing, technology transfer, renewable energy development, and adaptation infrastructure in the global South, contributing to some extent to the transition towards a low-carbon global economy. However, China's leadership is reinforcing incremental, technocratic, and growth-focused approaches in global climate governance. These approaches may not fully address the broader and more systemic issues in climate policy.<sup>223</sup>

In recent years, there have been some signs of progress in U.S.-China climate cooperation. In 2021, both nations pledged to collaborate on reducing methane emissions, a powerful greenhouse gas. However, for the past two years, the proposed reduction plan failed to materialize. In 2023, China has released a long-anticipated methane reduction strategy, indicating a step forward in its efforts to forge a new climate agreement with the United States. There is optimism that a new US-China climate agreement could be on the horizon. It is a “golden opportunity”, said Li Shuo, the incoming director of the China Climate Hub

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<sup>221</sup> Lisa Friedman, “U.S. and China on Climate: How the World's Two Largest Polluters Stack Up”, *The New York Times*, July 19, 2023

<sup>222</sup> United Nations, “Paris Agreement”, 2015

<sup>223</sup> Jianfeng Jeffrey Qi, Peter Dauvergne, “China's rising influence on climate governance: Forging a path for the global South”, *Global Environmental Change* Volume 73, March 2022

at the Asia Policy Institute.<sup>224</sup> In their joint statement on 7 November 2023 after the meeting between US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry and China Special Envoy for Climate Change Xie Zhenhua the two countries, apart from their commitment to the Paris Agreement pledged to work together to achieve its goals. The two countries agreed to accelerate their cooperation on Renewable energy, Methane emissions, Circular economy, Subnational cooperation, Forests, and GHG and air pollutant reduction synergy. They committed to submit economy-wide 2035 NDCs that include all greenhouse gases. They also invited countries to a Methane and Non-CO2 Greenhouse Gases Summit at COP 28 and looked forward to the first Global Stocktake under the Paris Agreement.<sup>225</sup> However, there are still significant hurdles to overcome. China is still heavily reliant on coal for its energy needs, and the United States has been slow to phase out fossil fuels.<sup>226</sup> The two countries also have different approaches to climate finance, with the United States emphasizing market-based mechanisms and China prioritizing government-led investment.<sup>227</sup>

Global health is another area where the United States and China have a shared interest in cooperation including a long history of collaboration on infectious disease research. Both countries have the resources and expertise to lead global efforts in EID (Emerging infectious diseases) preparedness. The USA has been the largest donor to global health in the world while China has also expanded its national infrastructure for EID preparedness and has several WHO collaborating centers. Historically, the United States and China have had different approaches to studying the ecological and evolutionary aspects of infectious diseases. From 2000 to 2007, US researchers published 43% of the papers on this topic without Chinese involvement, while Chinese researchers published only 2.2% of papers without US collaboration. However, this trend has shifted, and from 2010 to 2017, the figures were 36% and 8%, respectively. Assuming this trend continues, the United States and China could be expected to publish around 30% and 15% of the world's ecological and evolutionary infectious disease research in the next decade. Nevertheless, despite this progress, integrated studies incorporating strong ecological and evolutionary components remain limited.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> Amy Hawkins, "China releases methane plan as hopes rise for new climate agreement with US", *The Guardian*, Wed 8 Nov 2023

<sup>225</sup> Office of the Spokesperson, "Sunnylands Statement on Enhancing Cooperation to Address the Climate Crisis", *U.S. Department of State*, November 14, 2023

<sup>226</sup> Hui Zeng, Chao Zhang and Xiaotian Fu, "From Coal to Renewables in China: Solving the Water Stress-Power Plant Mismatch", *World Resources Institute*, February 6, 2020

<sup>227</sup> Janet Peace and Jason Ye, "MARKET MECHANISMS: OPTIONS FOR CLIMATE POLICY", *Center for Climate and Energy Solutions*, April 2020

<sup>228</sup> Tierra Smiley Evans, Zhengli Shi, Michael Boots, Wenjun Liu, Kevin J. Olival, Xiangming Xiao, Sue Vandewoude, Heidi Brown, Ji-Long Chen, David J. Civitello, Luis Escobar, Yrjo Grohn, Hongying Li, Karen Lips, Qiyong Liu, Jiahai Lu, Beatriz Martínez-López, Jishu Shi, Xiaolu Shi, Biao Xu, Lihong Yuan, Guoqiang Zhu & Wayne M. Getz, *Synergistic China-US Ecological Research is Essential for Global Emerging Infectious Disease Preparedness*, *EcoHealth* 17, 2020, p. 160–173

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the tensions between the two countries, with the U.S. blaming China for the outbreak and China accusing the U.S. of politicizing the virus. The two countries have also been at odds over the WHO's handling of the pandemic, with the U.S. accusing the WHO of being too close to China and China accusing the U.S. of trying to undermine the WHO.<sup>229</sup> However, in recent years, the two countries have cooperated on vaccine development and distribution. They have pledged to donate billions of doses of COVID-19 vaccines to developing countries.<sup>230</sup> (The U.S. has pledged to donate at least 1.1 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine doses for global use before 2023).

There is also scope for collaboration on anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism, including addressing illicit finance risks associated with cryptocurrency. Recognizing the shared threat posed by illicit finance and fentanyl trafficking, which has become the leading cause of death for Americans aged 18 to 49, the United States and China are actively collaborating to combat these issues. By issuing joint statements, participating in international forums, and holding virtual meetings, the US and China are demonstrating their commitment to combating illicit finance and fentanyl trafficking. In November 2023, President Biden and President Xi agreed to resume bilateral cooperation on counternarcotics, with a focus on disrupting the flow of precursor chemicals used to make fentanyl. The Treasury Department and Chinese economic policymakers play a crucial role in driving this collaboration forward. Together, the US and China can make a meaningful contribution to addressing these global challenges.<sup>231</sup> Furthermore, both nations have expressed a willingness to deepen their collaboration on health security. For instance, a video call in September 2023 between Loyce Pace, Assistant Secretary for Global Affairs at the U.S. Department of Health, and Cao Xuetao, Deputy Head of China's National Health Commission, underscored the importance of translating high-level agreements into concrete actions. This collaboration aims to strengthen global health security through regular communication and joint efforts in areas like chronic disease prevention and pandemic preparedness.<sup>232</sup>

#### **4.5 Lessons learned from past interactions and strategies**

If the United States has learned anything during the past thirty years, it is that no amount of diplomatic engagement will get the CCP to fundamentally change how it sees the world. War is less likely to happen “by accident,” or due to poor communication, than it is to happen as a result of a calculated Chinese decision to strike.<sup>233</sup> Options for managing crises are also constrained. China has often shown ambivalence towards confidence-building

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<sup>229</sup> Srinivas Mazumdar, “What influence does China have over the WHO?”, *DW.com*, April 17, 2020

<sup>230</sup> “China pledges US\$ 100 million towards equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for lower-income countries”, *Gavi.org*

<sup>231</sup> U.S. mission China, op. cit

<sup>232</sup> Wang Xiaoyu, “Officials call for deeper China-US health collaboration”, *Chinadaily.com.cn*, November 15, 2023

<sup>233</sup> On the rarity of “accidental war,” see Marc Trachtenberg, “The ‘Accidental War’ Question,” paper presented at Center for International Security and Cooperation, March 2000

measures such as significant military exchanges, emergency communication hotlines between top leaders, and established protocols for naval and aerial operations in close proximity. This hesitation stems from China's reluctance to give the impression to Washington that crises can be effectively controlled or mitigated.<sup>234</sup>

Even in this challenging context, diplomatic efforts remain important. Collaborative work on areas of mutual interest between the U.S. and China, like climate change mitigation, could potentially ease the growing tensions. Regular interactions with high-ranking Chinese officials are crucial for the U.S. to clearly communicate its stance on critical issues such as Taiwan, avoiding public disputes while gaining insights into the workings of a typically secretive government. In case of unforeseen incidents, like a maritime collision in the South China Sea, having established communication channels can help prevent the situation from escalating. Additionally, it's strategically beneficial for the U.S. to maintain an open stance towards dialogue. This approach helps in not alienating key partners who might be reluctant to be drawn into a direct conflict between the U.S. and China.

The most significant accomplishment of the U.S. during the Cold War was not its confrontations with the enemy, but rather the constructive partnerships it forged with allies. This approach of building and nurturing alliances will be crucial in the ongoing competition with China. The peaceful and victorious conclusion of the Cold War was in part due to America's ability to recognize and respond appropriately when the Soviet Union began to pull back and initiate reforms in the late 1980s. The Reagan and Bush administrations skillfully employed a combination of strategies – maintaining geopolitical pressure, engaging in high-level talks, offering public commendation, and promising improved diplomatic and economic relations – to sustain the Soviet Union's momentum towards change. It's also important to note the value of foresight in diplomacy: Richard Nixon's historic outreach to China in the early 1970s was possible because he had contemplated such a move for years.<sup>235</sup>

The essential lesson from the early Cold War for the U.S. is to maintain realistic expectations in its dealings with China. Given China's handling of the recent pandemic and its history of exploiting such crises, it's unlikely to be a significant partner in preventing future health emergencies. Moreover, it would be a critical mistake for the U.S. to allow China to condition cooperation on climate change or other issues on American concessions in security matters.<sup>236</sup> Such an approach, especially with the limited time available, could be disastrous. While diplomacy can play a supporting role in America's competitive strategy against China, it must not replace the strategy itself. If diplomacy overshadows proactive measures, the U.S. risks facing significant challenges.

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<sup>234</sup> Jacob Stokes and Zack Cooper, "Thinking Strategically About Sino-American Crisis Management Mechanisms," *War on the Rocks*, September 30, 2020

<sup>235</sup> Richard M. Nixon, "Asia After Vietnam," *Foreign Affairs*, October 1967

<sup>236</sup> Alex Ward, "Ben Rhodes is Worried About Joe Biden's Climate Change and China Policies," *Vox*, April 23, 2021

Americans will never place their trust in a communist regime that restricts fundamental freedoms for its citizens. Taiwan's transition to democracy heightened ideological tensions in the region. Washington opts to maintain ambiguity regarding its response in the event of conflict between Taiwan and the People's Republic. Despite America's status as the world's most powerful nation, it cannot dictate the actions of others. To foster a productive relationship with China, American leaders must first address domestic issues and focus on shared interests. There may be reason for optimism in the fact that the existing international order, largely shaped by the US, has contributed to China's prosperity and influence. China has a vested interest in preserving this order, particularly in the face of disruptions from figures like Trump. Sustained economic growth is crucial for the CCP's hold on power, making Chinese leaders receptive to arguments that align with international norms rather than solely American interests. China's active participation in UN peacekeeping and restrained use of its Security Council veto demonstrate occasional displays of responsible behavior.<sup>237</sup>

Another reason to avoid targeting autocracies collectively is to prevent the formation of a comprehensive alliance between Russia and China. If China and Russia align their strategic actions against the United States across Europe, the Western Hemisphere, and Asia, it would significantly heighten security risks for the US. By delineating Cold War-style divisions between democracies and autocracies, the United States inadvertently facilitated China's closer relationship with Vladimir Putin's Russia, exemplified by China's pro-Russian stance of "neutrality" during the conflict in Ukraine. Historically, China and Russia maintained a somewhat restrained relationship due to mistrust along their lengthy border. While Russia supplied military equipment to China and engaged in consultations and joint exercises, there was an informal agreement not to openly criticize each other. However, the personal affinity between Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin has brought China and Russia closer together. In February 2022, just before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, their joint statement was defensively framed, emphasizing the superiority of their respective versions of democracy. It is crucial to learn from past mistakes, particularly the tendency in the 1960s to treat China and Russia as a unified ideological bloc rather than as countries with distinct interests.<sup>238</sup>

Historical trends demonstrate a clear pattern: the leading power in pivotal technologies tends to dominate the corresponding era. For instance, Britain's establishment of a global empire was largely enabled by its early mastery of steam power, iron production, and telegraph technology, innovations that gave it a significant edge over other nations. Similarly, the current dominance of the United States is rooted in its technological leadership, initially in industries like steel, electronics, aerospace, and chemicals, and later in information technology. China, recognizing this pattern, is now striving to gain the upper hand in the next generation of critical technologies such as artificial intelligence,

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<sup>237</sup> Warren I. Cohen, op. cit, p. 298-301

<sup>238</sup> Susan L. Shirk, op. cit, p. 314



telecommunications, quantum computing, and synthetic biology. By leading in these areas, China aims to surpass its global competitors and exert its influence over other nations.

A key strategy would be to establish an informal economic coalition aimed at both isolating and outperforming China. A historical precedent for this was set during the Cold War, when the U.S. brought together the world's leading democratic economies into an elite network for trade and investment. This group shared technological advances, combined research and development resources, and created integrated supply chains, allowing each country to focus on its own areas of strength. They also collaborated on export controls to limit the Soviet Union's access to strategic materials and advanced technologies. The collective impact of these joint efforts greatly surpassed what the U.S. could have achieved on its own, effectively outpacing the Soviet bloc.

The United States now faces the task of forming a new economic alliance of free-world nations, with the primary objective of countering China. The bloc would continue to engage in trade with China in many areas, potentially even reducing tariffs on Chinese goods of lower value. It also differs from the type of economic unilateralism seen in the Trump era. Instead, this strategy calls for a reimagined form of globalization, fostering closer ties between the U.S. and its allies. This enhanced integration aims to diminish China's economic influence and strategically decouple in critical technology sectors and resources. Such alignment would rekindle the vision of a seamless, liberal economic order, but with China on the periphery. These agreements would build a multilateral front against Chinese influence and shift strategic supply chains away from Beijing's control. While the U.S. may still promote a global, rules-based trade system as a long-term goal, the immediate priority should be on leveraging power dynamics in international relations. Digital anti-imperialism involves attacking the core of Beijing's technobloc as well as competing at the periphery. To date, much of the U.S. policy debate has focused on how to prevent countries, particularly in the developing world, from adopting Chinese technology in 5G telecommunications. The challenges here are real: When Secretary of Defense Mark Esper told one international gathering not to rely on Chinese tech in 2020, a rejoinder from the audience: "Are you offering an alternative?" drew laughter and applause.<sup>239</sup> Therefore, a critical aspect of this strategy involves swiftly establishing production networks within the free-world for vital resources currently controlled by China, such as rare earth elements and emergency medical supplies. The collaboration within the Quad to manufacture COVID-19 vaccines is a prime example of how a temporary coalition can rapidly create alternatives to Chinese products when motivated by a strong sense of urgency. This forum, initially focused on maritime security, was quickly adapted to combine U.S. biotechnology, Indian manufacturing capabilities, Japanese funding, and Australian logistics, aiming to distribute 1 billion vaccine doses to Southeast Asia.

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<sup>239</sup> Rob Schmitz, "U.S. Pressures Europe to Find Alternatives to Huawei," NPR.org, February 15, 2020

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION**

The Cold War, a geopolitical struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union, defined much of the 20th century. Recent years have witnessed the emergence of a new era of great power competition, particularly between the United States and China. This has led many policymakers, scholars, and analysts to draw parallels between the current US-China relationship and the dynamics of the Cold War. By examining the lessons learned from the Cold War era and their applicability to the US-China Cold War, we can gain valuable insights into navigating this complex geopolitical landscape.

Since the end of the Cold War, China has pursued a strategy aimed at establishing itself as the dominant power in Asia, while simultaneously pushing the United States out of the region and challenging its global hegemony. This behavior is to be expected from a rising power like China, which is experiencing rapid economic and military growth.<sup>240</sup> China's economy dwarfs that of Russia, being ten times its size, and its military expenditure surpasses Moscow's by four times. Unlike Russia, which predominantly leverages its military prowess and energy resources for global sway, China possesses a more extensive range of instruments of power. This enables it to compete with the United States and its allies across multiple geopolitical spheres. However, China today faces significant economic challenges, including a slowdown and demographic pressures from the One-Child policy. The CCP regime is under increasing pressure with a projected reduction of nearly 200 million in the working-age population by mid-century. The China of the 2020s differs from the Soviet Union of the 1940s, although Xi Jinping exhibits distinctly Stalinist tendencies. Moreover, unlike the Soviet Union, which was not facing a significant economic slowdown, China finds itself in such a situation today.

History never repeats itself, but it does sometimes rhyme, as Mark Twain noted. Familiar patterns reappear even though historical contexts may vary. Examining history is especially enlightening in assessing the current positions of both China and America. The United States' triumph in the Cold War was partly attributed to its conviction that it was aligning with the course of history. The significance of history lies in how a nation's interpretation of its past can significantly impact its trajectory into the future, while politicians may harness historical narratives to reshape contemporary global dynamics. This sentiment underscores the importance of realism in diplomatic engagement, a key lesson from the Cold War. The United States and the Soviet Union navigated their rivalry with pragmatism, managing crises and advancing mutual interests through diplomacy. Similarly, in the current US-China dynamic, realism is paramount. Diplomatic engagement

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<sup>240</sup> Athansios G. Platias and Constantinos Koliopoulos, *Thucydides on Strategy* (London-New York: Hurst-Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 84-101

is essential, but the US must maintain realistic expectations about China's willingness to fundamentally alter its worldview or governing philosophy. The CCP's historical narrative and strategic ambitions are deeply rooted, requiring the US to combine engagement with deterrence.

The Cold War highlighted the strategic advantage of alliance building. The United States formed and maintained alliances to counter the Soviet threat, combining resources and coordinating military operations with allies. In the context of the US-China rivalry, alliance building is equally crucial. The US must strengthen partnerships with allies and like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond to counter China's growing influence and assertiveness, enhancing its strategic position and promoting a rules-based international order. Nations that have prospered under the American-led global order are starting to recognize the potential dangers of a Beijing-dominated system, while China's efforts to expand its influence in different regions are being met with an increasing pushback from a growing coalition of adversaries.

During the Cold War, the US often treated communist regimes as a monolithic bloc, which inadvertently strengthened alliances between them and fueled anti-American sentiment. In dealing with China, the US should avoid this mistake. And remain vigilant about China's recent overtures toward Russia. It's crucial for the U.S. to closely monitor the evolving relationship between Russia and China, recognizing the potential strategic implications of their partnership. Strengthening NATO and fostering robust alliances are essential, as the US cannot afford to confront significant adversaries on multiple fronts simultaneously. By maintaining a nuanced and informed approach, the US can better navigate the complexities of modern international relations and protect its global interests. Instead of collectively targeting autocratic regimes, the US should adopt a nuanced approach, understanding and addressing the distinct interests and motivations of individual countries.

Technological leadership was a critical advantage for the US during the Cold War, particularly in aerospace, telecommunications, and information technology. In the current US-China context, maintaining technological leadership is essential. China has prioritized technological innovation as a key driver of its strategic goals, including advancements in military technology such as hypersonic weapons and AI, and initiatives like the Digital Silk Road. Beijing aims to establish the world's largest navy, air defense, and missile capabilities, deploying new warships at a rate not seen since World War II.

Collaboration within multilateral frameworks was vital during the Cold War, with the US and its allies working together in organizations such as NATO and the United Nations to address shared challenges and promote stability. In the US-China context, multilateral cooperation remains essential. By working with allies and like-minded countries, the US can amplify its influence, pool resources, and address global challenges such as climate change and pandemics.

The strategic rivalry between the US and China is marked by a complex mix of competition and cooperation. Although both nations admit to being strategic rivals, they have been worried about the potential consequences of this rivalry. The most likely scenario is that China and the United States will seek to find common ground on certain matters while maintaining disagreement on others. The US and China describe their relationship as "neither friend nor enemy," recognizing the efficiencies and rewards of cooperation. Major wars between powerful nations have become increasingly uncommon due to the escalating costs and diminished benefits of warfare. However, the complexity of modern geopolitics doesn't eliminate the possibility of conflict. In the nuclear era, restraint and internal balance are critical, with the US uniquely positioned to pursue innovation-driven economic growth. Efforts to undermine the opposing regime would only escalate tensions without providing strategic benefits to either China or the United States.

Historical patterns reappear, and the US-China relationship echoes past great power dynamics. In order to understand politics and guide leadership decisions, the US must navigate this rivalry cautiously, avoiding structural determinism and leveraging classical realism. Classical realism emphasizes the importance of prudence (sophrosyne) as a fundamental virtue and a key attribute of leadership. However, while classical realism underscores the significance of prudence, it cannot guarantee that leaders will always act with it. Nonetheless, by rejecting structural determinism and overly rational explanations, classical realism provides a suitable framework for understanding politics and offers valuable insights for leaders.<sup>241</sup> The post-9/11 era and subsequent US interventions illustrate the shifting focus towards China, with recent global crises potentially offering China an opportunity window. Following 9/11, we observed a brief divergence with certain anti-terrorism initiatives before the United States redirected its focus towards a growing China. However, it wasn't until approximately a decade later—marked by Barack Obama's pivot to Asia and Donald Trump's trade war—that a significant change in U.S. grand strategy ultimately took place. Referring to the interventions in Libya and Syria, Obama mentioned two fronts that diverted the United States. On April 14, 2024, following the attacks in Israel, we see a resurgence with the involvement of Iran and the United States.<sup>242</sup> This raised the question: Is there a possibility of an opportunity window for China? It seems that the US responded with prudence, asking Israel to calm down and deploying military assets to support Israel's defense while avoiding further escalation. President Biden directed the deployment of aircraft and ballistic missile defense systems to the region, which helped intercept most of the incoming drones and missiles. The US emphasized its commitment to Israel's security while urging restraint and coordination among G7 leaders for a united diplomatic response. The administration's approach aimed to support Israel's defense while avoiding further escalation.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Athanasios Platias and Vasilis Trigkas, "Classical Realism and the Rise of Sino-American Antagonism: A Review Essay", *Political Science Quarterly*, July 19, 2023

<sup>242</sup> "Iran's attack on Israel", CNN, April 15, 2024

<sup>243</sup> Statement from President Joe Biden on Iran's Attacks against the State of Israel, Statement from the White House, April 13, 2024

In a Cold War scenario, the United States confronts China, a nation that serves as both a rival and a partner. While the boundary lines were clear with the former Soviet Union, they are not so with China.<sup>244</sup> Americans have enjoyed economic, political, and security supremacy as the top player in a unipolar world since the collapse of the Soviet Union marked the end of the Cold War. However, they are struggling to come to terms with the prospect of losing that position. Concerns about national decline emerged with the onset of the global financial crisis, and recent episodes of dysfunction in American democracy, such as the Trump administration's mishandling of the COVID pandemic and the Capitol insurrection on January 6, 2021, have further eroded confidence. The looming presence of China as a formidable contender has intensified their apprehension. Nevertheless, prematurely labeling China as an enemy could prove to be a fatal miscalculation, potentially fueling a self-fulfilling prophecy and paving the path to war.<sup>245</sup> Since 2017, U.S. administrations from both the Republican and Democratic parties have designated China as the foremost threat of the 21st century. American policymakers are actively devising strategies to uphold the nation's supremacy in economic, military, and diplomatic domains. In Washington D.C., phrases such as "great-power competition" and "long-term rivalry" are commonly heard, with "marathon" often used as an illustrative metaphor.<sup>246</sup> President Biden has framed this challenge as follows: "Future historians will likely dedicate their doctoral theses to the question of which prevailed, autocracy or democracy."<sup>247</sup>

In summary, the Cold War's lessons provide a valuable framework for navigating the complex US-China relationship, emphasizing realism, alliance building, nuanced diplomacy, technological leadership, and multilateral collaboration. These principles are essential for managing strategic rivalry and promoting a stable, prosperous global order. By understanding and addressing the distinct interests and motivations of individual countries, the US can prevent unintended alliances between China and other autocratic regimes. Maintaining technological leadership and collaborating within multilateral frameworks remain crucial. The United States must navigate this rivalry with prudence, an approach vital for promoting a stable and prosperous global order in the face of an evolving geopolitical landscape.

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<sup>244</sup> Susan L. Shirk, op. cit, p. 1

<sup>245</sup> Susan L. Shirk, op. cit, p. 301

<sup>246</sup> Uri Friedman, "The New Concept Everyone in Washington is Talking About," *The Atlantic*, August 6, 2019

<sup>247</sup> "Remarks by President Biden in Press Conference," March 25, 2021

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