
RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA DURING THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY

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ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the 21st century, the distribution of global power changed markedly. The absence of a US strategic vision led to a power crisis, accelerating the tendencies of emerging multi-polarity with many centers of power worldwide. Since President Trump took office in January 2017, the United States has challenged the traditional standards of international relations on many fronts and, in particular, has shifted its approach to China, where geopolitical antagonism trumpeted in its economic interdependence. The growing concern of the United States has weakened multilateralism and globalization, producing significant repercussions and effects on global power relations. In future, Washington and Beijing must strive for shared objectives to unite them to settle discrepancies and establish limits for any conflicts. The U.S. leadership must constantly bear in mind that China is an essential partner, and if both countries fail to cooperate, catastrophic consequences for the globe would arise. Meanwhile, Washington and Beijing must be mindful that any severe conflict between two high-tech nations may significantly alter the globe for everyone.

KEYWORDS: American, Development, Geopolitical, Policy, Trump Administration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap has, in the context of the changing dynamic of major-power relations, attracted international attention since it was published in 2017 and concludes that the situation known as 'the Trap of Thucydides' could very likely lead to war between the US and the People's Republic of China. Compare US-China tension now to what has been recorded by Thucydides in the history of ancient Sparta and Athens, Allison argues that it is "the growth of Athens and the dread that this inspired Sparta made war inevitable." In contrast, some US officials, including Henry Kissinger, still believe that Washington and Beijing, given the existing "complex interdependence" between the two states, will nevertheless be pragmatic enough to continue to work together in their mutual interest and the need to rely on each other to reduce their costs[1].

The future trajectory of US-China relations has become apparent since Donald Trump took office as President in January 2017. Sadly, President Trump's "America First" approach led to the United States withdrawing itself from a significant number of international conventions and a new US strategy to make it less credible to the international community, with the conditional participation in alliance obligations in Europe and Asia. The Trump administration is also inclined to deploy an intellectual confrontation in Beijing, which may enhance Sino-American antagonism and eventually lead to a new Cold War.

This essay aims to examine the causes behind the development in the USA of the concept of "China Threat" and the implications of geo-political competition between Washington and Beijing. More specifically, why has the US altered its position towards China? And how might future Sino-American antagonism continue? The first piece gives a historical summary of ties between the US and China from the 1970s until President Trump came to office. This therefore explains the worsening of ties between the United States and China during the Trump administration. In the third part, the United States is increasingly concerned about China and has finally changed its strategy towards China. After examining the origins and consequences of the concept of "China Threat," the fourth part analyses the possible sequences of Sino-American competition. In the backdrop of global political and economic uncertainty, the essay ends by analyzing the future evolution of ties between USA and China[2].

1.1 A Historical Perspective US-China:

China, being an isolated and undeveloped nation, received very little attention from the United States throughout the 1950s and 1960s. However, at the beginning of the 1970s the Nixon administration recognized, in its geopolitical rivalry with the Soviet Union, that collaboration with Peking would be of use to the United States to "improve the flexibility of US diplomacy." So "Ping-pong diplomacy," the subsequent visit to Peking of US President Richard Nixon and the signing of the Shanghai Communiqué's in 1972 triggered a "China's Constructive Commitment," in which the United States "admits that all the Chinese on either side of the Taiwan Strait have only one China and that Taiwan belongs to China" and "affirms the end goal of the W Both US and Chinese officials at that time knew of their shared geopolitical danger from the Soviet Union and the urgent necessity to establish a new power balance in Asia. As Nixon Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, stated, "Beijing and Washington were in a convenient marriage, later emotionally related, largely due to China's diplomatic capacity."

With the signing of the Shanghai Communiqué's, China's cooperative strategy was set the way for the following five US administrations. In May 1975, President Gerald Ford removed Taiwan's final fighter plane. During his tenure a \$200 million deal for the transfer of intelligence collection aircraft to China was authorized, breaking the decades-long embargo on military technology sales to this Asian country. The Ford Administration authorized the sale of the first two computers after Mao Zedong's death in 1976, ostensibly for oil exploration and seismological testing but also for military reasons. However, the 1976 US election demonstrated that both the Republican and Democratic parties' conservative wings remain split about US policies towards China. Ronald Reagan's anti-communist right wing opposed further normalization with China, mainly because it would force the U.S. to stop official relations with Taiwan and remove its military troops and infrastructure from the island[3].

In the 1990s, the notion of a possible dispute between the USA and China reappeared as the Soviet Union's disintegration reduced concerns of the shared danger and undermined US support for the common objective, thereby suggesting a return to tensions from the 1950s. The first was the fall of communism in Europe, which started with the Central and Eastern Europe uprisings in 1989 with the Soviet Union's dissolution two years later. Second, from the end of 1989, Washington started imposing severe restrictions on China's arms and high-tech imports. The third cause was the bombing by the United States of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999. These developments necessitated a new logical foundation for U.S. policy to China for both President George H. W. Bush and President Bill Clinton.

While President Bush was confident he would continue to build ties with China, he was compelled to make the greatest shift in strategy. In 1989, despite managing to establish a covert line of communication with Deng Xiaoping to continue ties with China, he authorized sanctions on China. Due to the continuous battle between the US elite and the American media and public

opinion, ties between the US and China were very slowly re-established. After a time, however, it became apparent that bilateral ties were uphill as the US refrained from voting in the World Bank and implicitly awarded essential funds to China and Beijing abstained during the vote on the resolution of the UN Security Council on Iraq. But the Bush Administration declared that it is selling F-16 Fighter Jets to Taiwan to win votes during the 1992 presidential race. This step was not enough to earn him a second term, and the key to reformulating US policy towards China was now in President Clinton's hands[4].

President Clinton signed a bill at the beginning of his administration that linked China's recovery of MFN status with a favorable evaluation of China's respect of human rights and nuclear non-proliferation. The bulk of the American business sector rejected this move. Thus Clinton decided in 1993 to give off economic sanctions on China. While the warming of US-China relations with Taiwan has defined relations between the U.S. and China in most sectors during this period, both countries continue to support their strategic partner ships and common interests, such as North Korea's nuclear programme, resulting in renewed US communication with Chinese representatives at all stages and President Jiang Zemin's 1997 visit to Washington. It was obvious that President Clinton was continuously trying to establish positive ties with China, weathering criticism of a group of Congressional Republicans made up of neo-conservatives and religious activists.

President George W. Bush, who saw China both a competitor and a partner at the same time, as Clinton's successor, had a similarly logical strategy for improving ties with China. Aware of China's increasing importance in the world, it emphasized their shared objectives, such as combating terrorism, which enabled both nations, throughout its life, to build co-existence-based ties and co-operation. In accordance with this stance, the United States endorsed China's membership and hosted the 2008 Beijing Olympics to the World Trade Organization (WTO)[5].

After President Barack Obama entered office in 2009, the United States in conjunction with Beijing continued to maintain a constructive attitude. While many thought that China was, by definition, an enemy, Obama's first Secretary of States Hillary Clinton confirmed that collaboration would offer benefits to both nations. But as President Obama came into his second term, conflicting views about Chinese objectives started to be heard and varied conceptions of "China Threat" developed. The anti-communist right wing has increasingly dubbed the Beijing authorities a "new evil" must be destroyed. In their remarks, Chinese officials have continuously tried to minimize China's position in the global arena by using phrases such as "peaceful growth" and China's "lack of cultural DNA" in searching for regional hegemony. This was mainly driven by the tremendous expansion of Deng's military even in 2008, the global recession immediately thereafter, the modernization of its armed forces, and its more stable foreign policy in the first 10 years of the Deng reform. In contrast, the U.S. left, usually cautious of geopolitical politics, has concentrated a great deal on defending human rights and supporting democracy as a priority for international affairs[6].

This has also prompted Washington to view Chinese movements in the perspective of geopolitical and ideological rivalry to neighboring nations and others. As a result, President Obama declared the U.S. "Rebalance to Asia" in 2012 indicating that the US is more dependent on a policy for "containment" in southeast Asia to maintain its balancing of power. For US officials, Beijing is becoming a "possible competitor" rather than a close partner with whom Harvard Professor Niall Ferguson previously characterized the relationship as a "Chimerical." This unfavorable attitude continues to develop since several famous experts predict that China will get to the top of the international system in only 20 to 30 years.

1.2 Chinese Policy Shift:

The grounds for Trump's increasingly hostile attitude towards China may be found in history, which is infused with paranoia as a major motivator of American expansionism. The United States

has constantly created adversaries and expanded and annexed countries, stating that American foes are everywhere and need to fight and destroy them. The fear was further reinforced by Americans' generally low social confidence in other races and ethnic groupings. The lengthy history of slavery in the United States showed that major differences in racial and ethnicity were seen, particularly in relation to African Americans, Asians, Native Americans, Hispanics, Arabs, Jews and other immigrant groups that were not native English speakers[7].

In the 1960s, American historian Richard Hofstadter writes of the "paranoid style in American politics," that is, how US law invents or eagers non-existent risks. This led to events like the "Red Scare" of bolsheviks immediately after the First World War, allegations of Communism after the Second World War in Joseph McCarthy's period, fear of Japan as a superpower in the 1980's and a worldwide war on terror following September 11. In its official papers of the National Security Council of 1950 (NSC-68), the Soviet Union was described as the relentless adversary trying to weaken and destroy the integrity and vitality of the United States, the US' paranoid attitude could also be observed. However, unlike strategists who sought protection in preventive wars in the United States, some experts believed there should be a different strategy. George Kennan, the "containment" strategy creator, opted for current weapons and a proxy race with the Soviet Union and recommended that the U.S. government wait for the collapse of the unhealthy centralized economy of the Soviet Union as a result of its own failings. Aware of the consequences of friction among the two major powers, Daniel Ellsberg stated that the world should be glad that it escaped the Cold War lunacy in his newest book *The Doomsday Machine*. Unfortunately, shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union, it came out that the coming years would re-emerge in American society paranoia and the United States would begin to find new adversaries in other parts of the globe[8].

2. DISCUSSION

The trump administration's change in US foreign policy has severely endangered the fundamental basis of globalization: multilateralism. U.S. departure from current trade and policy accords has led the globe into a time of instability in which protectionism and perceptions of the safeguarding of national interests dominate; collaboration and partnerships are marginalized. In particular, the competition between the US and China will have a significant spillover effect on the development of developing economies and global commerce.

In the near term, President Trump's actions will have a favorable effect on the US market in the United States. Specifically, the scarcity of goods from China (including products from US businesses that have moved their assembly lines to China) helps to boost the manufacturing sector in the US and attracts US companies to return to the home and creates growing local jobs. However, the Trump administration should bear in mind that China has strengthened a strategic de facto partnership with the United States in recent decades by resisting a strong Taiwanese lobby which has sought to extinguish the MFN status of the Chinese continent in the United States' Congress which is linked to hundreds of thousands of employment, mainly on the West Coast. Thus, a trade war can be expected to cause serious harm to U.S. local producers who supply China with raw material, transnational companies that transferred their production to China, U.S. interest groups who cannot export products, due to the reciprocal measures taken by Beijing, to the Chinese market and U.S. consumers who will have to pay higher prices. The United States will likewise suffer significant repercussions on the global level. Countries across the globe will view Washington as a major global power less concerned in common welfare and more in its personal interest[9-10].

America's policy changes and China's trade conflict surely will have significant consequences for Beijing. Worldwide, China is increasingly turning to other trading partners to make up for US market loss. President Xi has frequently condemned protectionist measures for infringing WTO standards and interfering with the international order. He delivered a speech in May 2019 at the

2nd International Cooperation Belt and Road Forum in which he stressed that China is fighting the increase of protectionism and is dedicated to building an open global economy. On a domestic level, the implementation of hefty tariffs by the United States would have a significant impact on the Chinese economy, since Chinese GDP growth recorded a record low of 6.6% in 2018. Chinese goods' competitiveness in the U.S. market has also been weakened. More precisely, Chinese goods have grown costlier as labor expenses increase in Chinese industries, partially due to the ageing society created by decades-long "One Child" policy and the deterioration of the environment[10].

China must continue its economic development in the future years in order to preserve economic and political stability. That is why it tried to shift its development strategy from low-end to high-tech production while boosting the Chinese people's buying power. In 2015, the "Made in China 2025" programme was developed to promote Chinese technical preparedness and internationalization of Chinese businesses as well as new markets for Chinese goods along with the "Going Global" strategy and the BRI. At the domestic level, a series of reforms were launched to target government owned enterprises (SOEs), environmental, health and pension standards, "One Child," corruption and the hukou system (family registration), to help the middle class reach a level of revenue sufficient to consume more goods.

3. CONCLUSION

The second decade of the 21st century concluded with significant global developments. Most importantly, the United States' change in foreign policy under the President of Trump has given new dynamics to international relations. Washington has influenced international politics as a team player for decades and has brought together a significant number of nations via their common ideals after World War II. By increasing collective strength, the United States defends both its own interests and the community at the forefront.

The United States has withdrawn from a number of international agreements since President Trump took office and started on a new policy for conditional participation in alliance accords. This self-interest attitude to the biggest power in the world has led to a rising feeling of fear among nations that have been sheltered under the US for decades. In the Wall Street Journal in May 2017, Herbert R. McMaster, second national security advisor to President Trump, and Gary D. Cohn, Head of the Economic Council, stated that America's support could only be expected of those who are strong and ready to promote American interests articulated explicitly. When the US started a trade war with China in 2018, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo encouraged ally countries to demonstrate how ready they were to promote US interests throughout the globe. In the sake of preserving "liberal global order," the United States is undoubtedly at the vanguard of a new group of nations that oppose greater Chinese development. President Trump's trade consultant, Peter Navarro, even termed this a "null-sum game between China and the rest of the globe." These comments by senior U.S. officials indicate that after four decades of constructive commitment an economic "iron curtain" between Washington and Beijing is growing.

Looking at ties between the United States and China during the Trump Administration, we can infer that the Chinese leadership has a far stronger and more steady attitude than its American counterpart. Decision makers in China warned about the dangers of trade war against the world economy, called on all to sit at the negotiating table, accepted U.S. requests on the negotiating table as long as they did not threaten Chinese economic and political stability and abstained against countermeasures by introducing excessive Chinese product tariffs by Washington. When all diplomatic channels had been exhausted, China took a narrower spectrum of responses against the US. Unfortunately, the Trump administration did not seem to grasp the fundamental concept of successful talks, which are not dependent on the strength of the stronger side but on both parties' compromise. In contrast, President Xi is well aware of the critical moment at China now, and he outlined China's position while dealing with the CPC's leaders at the beginning of September

2019: "For the risks or challenges that put the leadership of the Communist Party and the socialist system of China in risk; And we have to win the battle."

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