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Charting a Progressive China Policy for the 21st Century

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States is facing a geopolitical dilemma that will force overdue reevaluations of its grand strategy regarding U.S.-China relations. Initial ideas of reforming China and molding the country into a cooperative member of a global framework of liberal democracies have failed and miserably so. As tensions increase with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its officials, the United States needs to take a moment to find a new approach to dealing with China, emphasizing military restraint, diplomacy, and multilateralism.

America's current strategy, regarding U.S.-China relations and the Asia-Pacific region, has involved expanding expensive security commitments with partners in the region; military posturing and exercises in the South China Sea; increased militarized relations with Taiwan; placing unilateral tariffs on China; and implementing an increasingly aggressive anti-China propaganda campaign here at home to villainize the Chinese Communist Party and China itself. Reforming American Asia-Pacific grand strategy offers a more effective and fiscally sustainable posture that can still protect American interests in the region and around the world.

First, by negotiating new norms on freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, the United States can reduce the chance of a significant conflict in the region. Second, the American relationship with Taiwan needs to be revisited since antagonistically protecting and promoting Taiwan's sovereignty is not worth the risk of a major conflict with China. Third, through multilateral negotiations with trusted allies, the United States needs to establish some new, much-needed norms and international laws regarding technology and trade. Implementing these solutions is how the United States will maintain peace with China, American prosperity at home, and American competitiveness in the Asia-Pacific region. Finally, the United States needs to tone down its anti-China rhetoric and focus on domestic renewal and bolstering American soft power abroad instead of focusing solely on tearing down China's global reputation. Otherwise, the United States will put itself in a dangerous Cold War-like scenario that the United States will not be able to reverse.

Biden and Trump: Not as Different as You May Think

Biden Has Continued Trump's Trade War

The Trump administration ramped up the political and economic war on China. For example, the Trump administration placed tariffs on \$370 billion worth of Chinese goods annually.¹ However, Biden is not shifting China-policy in a different direction from Trump's. One hundred days into the Biden Presidency, President Biden has still not relieved any of the Trump-era tariffs and sanctions. Even the newly appointed U.S. Trade Representative, Katherine Tai, told the Wall Street Journal that the United States would not be lifting any tariffs anytime soon.² The current Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, stated that China needed to "produce tangible progress on U.S. concerns before contemplating any further talks beyond the slated discussion scheduled in Alaska (which turned out to be a diplomatic disaster)."³ Like the Trump Administration, the Biden Administration will not take the initiative to engage with China diplomatically; instead, engagement with China will consist of issuing demands and waiting for China to comply.⁴ However, America's militarized foreign policy may explain the ambivalence towards diplomacy and the attraction to military posturing instead.

Biden's Bloated Pentagon Budget

The President's 2022 discretionary budget request includes \$63.5 billion for the Department of State and other international programs; however, this same budget request includes \$715 billion for the Department of Defense.⁵ \$715 billion is an increase of more than \$10 billion from President Trump's \$704 billion Pentagon budget for this fiscal year.⁶ This budget request seems to signal that the Biden administration is ready to pursue a policy of deterring China militarily instead of engaging with China bilaterally and engaging with American partners multilaterally to find common ground and solutions to genuine shared grievances. In fact, in President Biden's discretionary funding request, for the Defense Department (DOD), in bold letters, a point is made to "*Deter China*" specifically the document states,

"The discretionary request prioritizes the need to counter the threat from China as the Department's top challenge." and "*Leveraging the Pacific Deterrence Initiative and working together with allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region....DOD would ensure that the United States builds the concepts, capabilities, and posture necessary to meet these challenges.*"⁷

The Bipartisan Consensus

So even though the days of a sitting U.S. President uttering phrases like "Wuhan flu," "Kung flu," and "China virus" are over, the aggressive policies to "contain China" remain and persist. Instead, these policies are dressed up in a more civil and sophisticated manner, articulated by true political savants. Still, at the end of the day, Biden administration officials want the same thing Trump administration officials wanted, to "contain China" by any means necessary. This containment of China is a bipartisan consensus the same way the Cold War was, which puts the United States in a situation it could ill afford to be, especially in this critical moment in American history in which faith in its domestic institutions have suffered and many Americans are struggling economically.⁸

A Foreign Policy for the Middle Class?

On a May 2nd 60 Minutes interview between host Norah O'Donnell and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, O'Donnell asked Secretary Blinken about China's rise and the threat this poses to the U.S., to which Secretary Blinken responds:

*"It is the one country in the world that has the military, economic, diplomatic capacity to undermine or challenge the rules-based order that we care so much about and are determined to defend. But I want to be very clear about something, and this is important: Our purpose is not to contain China, to hold it back, to keep it down. It is to uphold this rules-based order that China is posing a challenge to. Anyone who poses a challenge to that order, we're going to stand up and defend it."*⁹

Secretary Blinken's response indicates defending the international rules-based order as the priority in U.S. policy towards China; however, current actions do not match the Secretary's statement. On the one hand, the Biden administration talks about China using state funds to bolster key domestic industries and how this bolsters China's competitiveness on the world stage.¹⁰ But on the other hand, the United States government continues to spend 50 percent of its discretionary spending on the military instead of on bolstering America's diplomatic and soft-power capabilities and domestic strength, which would do more to strengthen the American-led, international rules-based order.¹¹ This kind of military-focused budgeting does not protect the American middle-class and help defend the rules-based international order, in fact it will undermine both. This is not the "Foreign Policy for the Middle Class," President Biden so proudly declared when he campaigned for the Presidency.

The Importance of Domestic Renewal

There is a multitude of productive legislation and programs much of the \$715 billion earmarked for the Pentagon could go to instead. Congressman Ro Khanna has commented on multiple occasions on America's bloated military budget. "*We need a fundamental shift in how we address national security issues and invest in climate action and pandemic response,*" said Khanna, the deputy whip of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. "*Those are the issues impacting the security of the American people and will keep Americans safer than spending billions on more deadly weapons.*"¹² The United States does not need to devote more resources to instigating a military confrontation with China in the Indo-Pacific. Instead, America should spend these billions on domestic renewal like investment in building a green energy power grid and moving America's inadequate and archaic healthcare system towards a more modern and universal health care system.

The Military Dilemma

Taiwan Presents an Important Challenge

The Trump era introduced an unprecedented amount of blatant military cooperation and engagement with Taiwan. The "One-China policy" has always been an

American guiding principle in relations with Taiwan since 1971, when China took over Taiwan's United Nations Security Council seat, and Taiwan was removed from the United Nations altogether.¹³ In fact, Trump has coupled intense engagement with Taiwan with the increased militarization of the Taiwan Strait. In fact, President Trump approved over \$12 billion of military aid to Taiwan.¹⁴ If Taiwan requests assistance in defending itself against Chinese aggression, the United States and other regional partners can offer help multilaterally. However, selling more missiles and tanks to Taiwan only increases tensions with China, and makes it more likely that China takes preemptive action against Taiwan. China will start a war to annex Taiwan if they feel the United States is helping Taiwan permanently break away from China.¹⁵ A Chinese invasion of Taiwan is something the United States wants to avoid for the sake of security and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁶ However, the silver lining here is that, according to many experts, Chinese leader Xi Jinping would either have to be pushed into a corner or know beyond a doubt that there was no risk of losing that war.¹⁷

U.S. Interests Must be the Priority

Taiwan is a valuable economic partner, and the United States sees more of itself in Taiwan than the United States sees in China. However, none of this downplays the increasing pressure China is putting on Taiwan. Chinese military aircraft fly in Taiwan's air defense identification zone on a nearly daily basis now.¹⁸ Even though the United States should not kowtow to China's demands regarding reunification with Taiwan, the United States needs to keep in mind America's interests in the region. The simple answer is that it is not worth getting into a war with China over Taiwan. Maintaining strategic ambiguity is the best way for the United States to maintain peace on the Taiwan issue. First, the United States must unequivocally reaffirm the One China Policy. And second, the United States should only approve continued sales of defense-oriented military equipment to Taiwan (so it can defend itself from any potential Chinese aggression) but absolutely no sales of offensive weaponry to Taiwan. The United States should expand its economic ties with Taiwan and encourage American regional allies like Japan and South Korea to do the same and the United States should respect Taiwan's political independence from China. Also, the United States

should maintain the *American Institute in Taiwan* as its de-facto embassy in the country, but only send state- and municipal-level, political and economic representatives to the country, and avoid having any federal-level officials conduct official business with the Taiwanese government. Plenty of U.S. state and municipal level governments have international affairs arms, like the New York City Mayor's Office of International Affairs, the Texas Secretary of State's International Protocol Section, and the California International Relations Foundation, that facilitate international trade and cultural exchange between foreign governments and U.S. municipalities and states. This solution would provide the right balance between guaranteeing Taiwan's political autonomy and preventing the United States from being pulled into a Taiwan conflict by itself.

The South China Sea

China has invested heavily in building military and civilian installations on various islands in the South China Sea. Despite claims to these same islands by various countries, including Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Brunei. The South China Sea is a critical body of water in which a free flow of shipping traffic is necessary for countries in the region to have healthy economies. Ships carrying exported and imported goods between Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas have to go through the South China Sea. In fact, \$2.8 trillion in trade passes through the region annually.¹⁹ The Trump administration substantially increased U.S. military activity in the area. In the Summer of 2020, the U.S. Navy sent two aircraft carriers and several warships to the South China Sea, which is the most significant escalation of U.S. military presence in the South China Sea in years.²⁰ According to officials in charge of U.S. armed forces in the region, operating two carrier strike groups in the Philippine Sea and the South China Sea provides advanced training opportunities for American forces and provides combatant commanders with significant operational flexibility should those forces be called upon in response to regional situations.²¹ These military exercises called "Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs)" do little to dissuade China from building, reinforcing, and staffing military facilities across islands in the South China Sea. According to the Harvard Belfer Center, these FONOPs are operations by U.S. naval and air

forces that reinforce internationally recognized rights and freedoms by challenging excessive maritime claims.²² Many would argue that these military exercises are a necessary deterrent, but reality shows that the increased foreign military presence in the region has just led to more Chinese military presence in the South China Sea.

The U.S. Should Finally Ratify UNCLOS

First, the United States needs to organize a new roundtable of talks regarding freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. America's bold military patrols in the South China Sea have caused great alarm in China, even though U.S. military officials say military activity in the region is in the name of maintaining lawful freedom of navigation and overflight operations.²³ China obviously sees this military activity in the area as threatening to their sovereignty. The way to rationalize China's view on the South China Sea is to picture the Gulf of Mexico, a major body of water in America's backyard, in which a significant amount of foreign trade takes place. It is no wonder the Chinese are nervous about increased U.S. military activity in their backyard. It is in America's interest to reduce military activity in the region. Instead, it should focus on multilateral talks to develop some significant maritime norms and laws in the area. In this case, U.S. policymakers would not have an excuse for conducting provocative military exercises in the region that could escalate dangerously. Others would say China is deterred by American presence in the region, but research from the CFR demonstrates that unilateral actions or restrictions from the U.S. only encourage China to take more bold actions to stake claims of islands in the South China Sea and retaliate against U.S. allies in the region.²⁴

The key here is to avoid a deliberate or accidental war with China. One great way to prove the United States is serious in this regard of international maritime law is for Washington to finally ratify the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).²⁵ If the United States could ratify that U.N. Convention, the United States would show the world it is truly committed to this international rules-based order and that the United States is committed to diplomacy and restraint in the Asia-Pacific Region. The United States can use the UNCLOS as a foundation for negotiations for future agreements. Contrarians would say that the

United States should not appease or have its sovereignty undermined by the United Nations, however, the United States cannot ask other countries to follow international laws and norms if the United States does not respect international laws and norms as well.

The U.S.'s Forward Presence Punishes Partners

Another costly issue straining the U.S. relationship with China, and hurting American partners, in the Asia-Pacific region is American security commitments in the Indo-Pacific, particularly American heavy military presence in South Korea and Japan. The United States spends more than \$7.6 billion on its military presence in South Korea and Japan.²⁶ As of 2016, the United States has 54,000 military personnel, 42,000 dependents, 800 civil-service employees working at 85 facilities in Japan. There are about 25,500 U.S. troops in South Korea.²⁷ Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty requires the U.S. to protect Japan against armed attack and that this security agreement ensures “the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East.”²⁸ However, in recent years, it has become clear that the U.S. truly cannot afford to be the main guarantor of security in the Asia-Pacific region. It is also clear that military commitments and posturing in the region are straining America’s relationship with China and China’s relationship with America’s allies.

One prominent example is the Chinese reaction to the new Japanese and American joint commitment to Taiwan. Japan has begun cooperating with the United States to construct a network of precision-strike missiles and other weaponry called the Pacific Deterrence Initiative. This system is being built along the First-island chain, a major string of islands next to the East Asian continental mainland coast, extending from Japan’s Okinawa islands to Taiwan and the Philippines. China has not taken the news of this lightly. The Chinese Communist Party-backed paper, the *Global Times*, stated in a recent editorial: “*We advise Japan to stay away from the Taiwan question,*” the editorial continues, saying: “*The deeper it is embroiled in, the bigger the price it will pay.*” There is no doubt that Chinese officials, moving forward, are planning various serious pressures against Japan.²⁹

Another prominent example of the consequences of American security commitments in Asia is the placement of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) ground-based missile defense system on South Korean territory. The placement of these missiles is meant as a deterrent to North Korean aggression.³⁰ Still, the Chinese see this as a major security threat due to the THAAD systems’ radar and intelligence gathering capabilities.³¹ In response, China has economically punished South Korea severely for allowing us to place the THAAD System on their territory by restricting all Chinese tourism to South Korea and severely restricting trade from South Korea.³² These kinds of military maneuvering hurt American bilateral relationships with South Korea and Japan and hurt American soft power in the region.

The United States expects its regional partners to commit to security cooperation in the region, but when China carries out various economic and diplomatic punishments to these same American allies, the United States does nothing to alleviate these serious costs to its partners or provide support or compensation to these allies in any way. Continuing this behavior will force American regional partners to make difficult decisions by balancing relationships with the U.S. and China at the expense of the United States. This situation may force American allies to choose sides to safeguard their economic health. This is not in the United States’ interest since China will continue to be a major regional hegemon and will influence a large percentage of trade with countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

Boosting Regional Soft Power

The new conversations on settling the South China Sea issue could be a catalyst for renewing American soft power in the region and take a step back from costly security commitments in the region. Showing leadership on the South China Sea issue could give us the clout necessary to work with Japan and South Korea trilaterally and with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), multilaterally, to bolster American soft power in the Asia-Pacific region. The United States is used to having significant security commitments agreements with countries in this region, but there is now an opportunity for working towards a different approach. U.S. policymakers should host a trilateral summit with South Korea and Japan

regarding China's increasing influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Out of this summit should be formed a new legally binding commitment to tri-lateral military restraint in the contested maritime regions and to promote more economic integration between the U.S., South Korea, and Japan and support each other's economies in the case of Chinese economic sanctions for actions by the U.S., South Korea, and Japan that support each other on security issues. The trilateral economic agreement should emphasize progressive solutions for the middle and working classes of these countries, which have been negatively affected by globalization in the recent past. All future economic engagements should keep this sobering fact in mind. Another way of promoting military restraint in the region is closing American large military installations in South Korea and Japan and pushing these countries to bear the cost of their own security and military affairs, using the American initiated tri-lateral economic agreement as a robust diplomatic foundation. Some may argue that the United States needs to keep bases on South Korean and Japanese soil for their security, however, there are no American forces in either country dedicated to the security of these countries.^{33 34}

Additionally, the money spent on security cooperation in the region could be better spent here at home focused on domestic renewal. U.S. soft power in the region would go a lot further if the United States focused its spending on making the United States as close as possible to the image the United States tries to promote abroad, instead of focusing on projecting military strength; let the United States project cultural strength instead.

The Economic Dilemma

Hubristic Engagement Failed

*"Today the House of Representatives has taken an historic step toward continued prosperity in America, reform in China, and peace in the world. . . it will open new doors of trade for America and new hope for change in China."*³⁵

This statement was one of many hopeful statements made by U.S. President Bill Clinton when Congress approved permanent normal trade relations with China in May 2000. Many American policymakers

believed that normalizing trade relations with China would somehow reform the country into a liberal democracy ready to fit into the international rules-based order. Yet, since 2000, China has not only grown stronger politically and economically but has also become more autocratic domestically and more assertive on the international stage. According to a report by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) titled "What Happened When China Joined the WTO?", U.S. hopes for China's liberalization post-World Trade Organization (WTO) entrance were severely dashed.³⁶ Economically, China gained disproportionately compared to the U.S. In fact, since 1999, China lifted 400 million of its citizens out of poverty (poverty is defined as living on less than \$1.90). Its economy grew from \$1.2 Trillion in 2000 to \$15.6 Trillion today, 13 times its pre-WTO level.³⁷ Since its entrance into the WTO, politically, China has become more authoritarian, not less, because all these economic gains have only legitimized the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).³⁸ The CCP jails dissidents, regulates internet use by limiting access to commerce and social media, and blocks political organizing by tracking and punishing those who criticize the CCP online.

For the U.S., not only were the political hopes for China disappointed but also the economic gains for the United States. In the CFR's report, results show that the American economic benefits of China's ascension to the WTO were mixed at best.³⁹ American consumers do broadly benefit since Americans can now buy cheap Chinese-made goods, and American corporations benefit by selling their goods to the world's largest middle class: China's. However, a dire consequence of Chinese economic dominance has been the loss of millions of American manufacturing jobs to China.⁴⁰ This phenomenon has had devastating political and societal effects here in the United States, from increased income inequality to political polarization. When it became clear to U.S. policymakers that China was not behaving as intended, U.S. policymakers began to make plans to "contain China."⁴¹ This containment strategy involves both unilateral economic and political tools to keep China "in check," and maintain American geopolitical hegemony. Much like the military provocations in the Asia-Pacific region, the aggressive economic policies implemented to "contain China" are significantly straining relations between the two countries and are hurting Americans.⁴²

Shaping the Tech Future

One pressing economic issue is in the realm of technology. The United States and China are in heated competition on many fronts in the technology world, including in Artificial Intelligence (A.I.), 5G technology, and advanced semiconductors. With the importance of the technology sector in the global economy increasing, the United States can see decoupling in trade and technology beginning to accelerate between China and the United States.⁴³ China is also leveraging its control of the global supply chain to give its companies a significant advantage in pricing.⁴⁴ Also, China has been proposing global technology standards that would not only displace the U.S. but also restrict freedom around the world.⁴⁵ For example, a recent Chinese proposal advocates for standards that facilitate top-down internet controls, severely restricting the free speech of journalists, activists, or anyone who opposes a government.⁴⁶

Suppose the United States wants to make sure its values of human rights, democracy, and individualism remain current in the world. In that case, it must work multilaterally with Western allies to create new international technology standards that China cannot undermine. The United States should advocate for a new global technology standards body, combining the current three (International Organization for Standardization, the International Telecommunication Union, and the 3rd Generation Partnership Project, or 3GPP).⁴⁷ The United States would help structure the organization to include major American allies in Europe and Southeast Asia as chair members. China would also get a chairmanship in the organization. Right now, the divided nature of the technology standard-setting organizations is to China's advantage, so combining them into one global organization then putting significant government funding into sending representatives from all American technology businesses large and small to advocate for the U.S. tech sector, and American values, is the way to go here to ensure the United States maximizes its voice in setting global technology standards for the foreseeable future.

At the center of the trade war with China are the concerns about China's discriminatory economic policies. Domestically, China has practiced severe economic discrimination that distorts its domestic market and hurts foreign competitors. There are serious grievanc-

es regarding the unlimited subsidies from the Chinese government to Chinese State-Owned Companies and how this practice distorts competition in China and on the international market. Chinese subsidies and other discriminatory practices like forced technology transfers are a significant point of friction for the United States and other developed countries and trade blocs that do business in China like Japan and the European Union. The Obama and Trump administrations, to differing degrees, tried to place unilateral tariffs on China to curtail China's unfair trade practices, but few countries support the United States' tactics.⁴⁸ In fact, all these tariffs and counter-tariffs could disrupt the global supply chains, slow global growth, and undermine the rules-based trading system.⁴⁹

The U.S. Should Work with Partners

The World Trade Organization (WTO) needs to be the central tool to resolving U.S.-China trade tensions. The United States, the European Union, and Japan should multilaterally introduce new trade rules at the WTO that standardize the appropriate amount of protectionism in a country. According to the Brookings Institution:

*"The WTO is the only global set of trade rules, which both reflect core U.S. values, such as non-discrimination, transparency, and rule of law, and form a baseline on which to build global support to critique and push back against Chinese economic practices."*⁵⁰

If the United States shows the world, it is committed to following the rules-based trading system and encourages all disputes to flow through the WTO trade adjunct body; this will give the U.S. the leverage necessary to force China into compliance and make them a more fair-trading partner. There is no need for aggressive unilateral economic punishments that strain relations, just diplomacy and multilateral negotiations through the existing international system to resolve shared grievances.

An additional necessary move in dealing with the economic tensions between the U.S. and China is decoupling some of America's and China's manufacturing and technology relationships. The United States needs to make significant strides in decoupling be-

cause this is the only way the United States can have the leverage necessary to push China to fully integrate into the global economy and comply with WTO rules in the future. If too much of America's manufacturing capacity is dependent on China, then the Chinese will have the upper hand in multilateral negotiations since Chinese officials could point to a lack of alternative developed manufacturing bases. Critics would argue that decoupling of this magnitude would aggravate Chinese officials and strain tensions. However, many do not realize that China is actively shifting away from being the "world's everything factory" and is moving towards being "the world's electronics factory." China's "Made in China 2025" campaign promotes this effort of making China a hub of manufacturing higher-end products that are higher up on the value chain.⁵¹ Thus the U.S. decision to move the bulk of American manufacturing capacity out of China is just helping China along with its desired transition.

The United States should launch a series of multilateral governmental and private sector talks between U.S. officials, western corporate leaders, and the ASEAN to begin decoupling America's manufacturing capacity from China and moving this capacity to Southeast Asia and some capacity back to the United States. If the United States can do both of these things, it can significantly reduce economic tensions with China and also bring some much-needed manufacturing capacity back to America and invest in domestic renewal. The domestic renewal will help alleviate the pressure on American policymakers due to some of the negative economic consequences of globalization.

From "Better Dead than Red" to "China Virus"

China as the New Soviet Menace

The final dangerous development from the Trump era is the extreme anti-China rhetoric that has grown to Cold War type levels. During the Cold War, the U.S. government turned anti-Russian propaganda up a notch to the point it became a pervasive part of American culture. Movies, television shows, and everyday vernacular became part of the propaganda ploy against the Soviet Union. "Better dead than Red" was a popular phrase during the McCarthy era in the

United States.⁵² Now the new phrase is "China virus." Anti-Russian propaganda from the Cold War era is eerily similar to what U.S. policymakers are now trying to push on the American populace regarding China. Anti-China sentiments may be one of the last bipartisan issues in Washington. American political leaders drew on the rhetoric of anti-communism to motivate the Cold War. U.S. policymakers and China hawks are cementing the idea of a dystopian bi-polar world in which the world has two choices: a global authoritarian Chinese system, and a free American (Western) system. Just like the Cold War, U.S. policymakers are now defining the responsibility of its citizens; making sure the populace is fully engaged in a potential total war with China. The biggest push here is unequivocal support for military strength abroad to deter the "China menace."

Pushing Policymakers into a Corner

CNN Journalist Fareed Zakaria made a great point in a discussion at the Harvard Belfer Center regarding a "post-pandemic world." Zakaria described the reckless discourse regarding the Soviet Union and Communism in the Cold War era.⁵³ The virulent anti-Communist and anti-Soviet propaganda of the 1950s may have been the catalyst for a string of devastating and tragic decision-making during the Cold War, from bloody police action on the Korean peninsula to orchestrating coups in Iran and Guatemala, to launching the Bay of Pigs invasion, to escalating the war in Vietnam to funding devastating civil wars in the 1980s in Central America. Being "soft on Communism" was the ultimate sin in American politics. Meaning every President since the end of World War II, until the Berlin Wall fell, faced significant pressure to confront Communism and contain it. The intense anti-communist public sentiment and subsequent political climate forced President Johnson's hand and propelled America's entrenchment in its failed war in Vietnam.⁵⁴ A war that undermined and destroyed President Johnson's War on Poverty, thus his legacy.

The United States is about to make the same mistake regarding China. The intense China rhetoric in Washington, whether it is the forceful and selective focus on Chinese human rights violations, China's rumored debt-trap diplomacy in Africa, China's regional military actions, or China's economic practices. All of this selective focus will force U.S. policymakers

into a position where they must respond militarily or else be perceived as hypocritical or “soft on China.” The United States must avoid the absolutist Cold War scenario with China at all costs.

Changing Public Opinion

Unfortunately, the anti-China rhetoric is starting to affect public opinion. According to a poll conducted by Gallup in February 2021, 79 percent of Americans surveyed reported an unfavorable view of China; this was the highest percentage Gallup had reported since September 1979.⁵⁵ A study conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs finds that 55 percent of Americans say that the development of China as a world power is a critical threat to the United States, as do majorities of Republican (67 percent) and Independents (53 percent) and a plurality of Democrats (47 percent).⁵⁶

This same study by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs also evaluated American views on “engagement with China” versus “containment of China.” The research shows that with more negative views of China being propagated by the media and policymakers, and a subsequent greater sense that China’s rise is a threat to the United States, Americans are reconsidering the previous consensus on engagement with China. Since the Council first asked the question in 2006, Americans favored pursuing a policy of cooperation and engagement with China. Now, however, Americans are split on this issue; 47 percent of Americans favor cooperation and engagement, while 49 percent say the United States should focus on limiting the growth of China’s power. Trump’s China virus rhetoric, trade tariffs, and sanctions on Chinese officials have turned up the temperature of anti-China sentiment, which affects the attitudes of average Americans and, consequently, the treatment of Asian-Americans. According to a report by the Washington Post: Bethany Allen Ebrahimian and Shawna Chen of Axios noted,

“Pre-pandemic, Trump’s frequent inflammatory language about China sometimes cast the entire country and its 1.4 billion people as an enemy, rarely drawing distinctions between the Chinese Communist Party, China the nation, Chinese companies, or Chinese people.”⁵⁷

Another related unintended consequence of this shift in public opinion is the increase in hate crimes against Asian-Americans. Anti-Asian hate crimes increased 150 percent in 2020.⁵⁸ Words matter, and this rhetoric has had terrible consequences for an innocent minority here in the American homeland.

Cold War Rhetoric Misses the Mark

There is no question that Chinese officials have committed severe human rights abuses against the Uyghurs and that China’s current economic policies are harmful to the global rules-based trading regime. However, turning China into an all-encompassing global menace will hinder vital U.S.-China cooperation on major global issues like public health and climate change. Additionally, it will cause a major overreaction in U.S. foreign policy or, worse, force China to become more aggressive and assertive on the world stage than it normally would like how China has expanded its island claiming campaign in the South China Sea as a result of increased tensions and military activity from other countries in the South China Sea.⁵⁹

Instead, the United States needs to see the reality of the global landscape, and that issues with China should be addressed on an individualized basis. Individualized, meaning the U.S. government should deal with any economic and political disagreements it has with China separately and stop trying to amalgamate all of America’s disputes with China into one existential threat. It is also important for U.S. officials to keep negotiations, debates, and disagreements with China at a political and official level instead of recruiting the general American population into a cultural war with China.

Inflamed Rhetoric Endangers Asian-Americans

To combat growing Sinophobia in the general population, Biden administration officials should introduce new creative ways to create mutual understanding between the two countries’ populations. The Biden administration should advocate for the creation of more cultural exchange programs, at more grade levels, between the U.S. and China, in which Americans, subsidized by the U.S. government, can travel

to China, and see the country for themselves and young Chinese citizens, backed by China, can also do so vice-versa. This type of exposure may be what is needed to help dispel the pernicious stereotypes about the Chinese people and help distinguish between normal Chinese citizens and Chinese officials and the CCP. The Chinese people do not democratically choose their leaders, so they should not be villainized when their government has disagreements with the American government. The same way the Fulbright program and the Peace Corps are critical to U.S. foreign policy, a new program designed to humanize the Chinese in the eyes of Americans, through educational exchange, could prove quite useful in relaxing these increasing tensions. It is also up to everyday citizens and individuals in the foreign policymaking world to continue to make clear distinctions between the CCP, its officials, and the people of China.

Conclusion

The United States has had a long history with China, from the Boxer Rebellion to their brief conflict during the Korean War to the normalization of relations in 1978.⁶⁰ However, it was permanently normalizing trade relations with China in 2000 that has had the most impact on current U.S. policies towards China.

With China growing economically and asserting itself on the world stage and the United States winding down its War on Terror and experiencing difficulties at home, paranoia about China's rise has begun to take hold in Washington. Policymakers in Washington have been taking an increasingly confrontational stance against China, and public opinion has swiftly followed this antagonism. The United States must take a moment to evaluate its military and economic policies in East-Asia and choose a more pragmatic and sustainable path forward. Continued American global engagement depends on keeping in mind what is in America's interests to stay competitive on the world stage; endless war and conflict should not be in that equation.

The foundations of soft power, diplomacy, and multilateralism are already here, and it is about time the United States use them to their fullest extent. As French President Emmanuel Macron said at the Atlantic Council: "the number-one priority in relations with the new U.S. administration" is clear: to boost "re-

sults-oriented multilateralism."⁶¹ America's partners in Europe and East Asia are on board, so it is time for America to choose this pragmatic path forward to stay competitive with a rising China by prioritizing economic and civil prosperity at home while promoting military restraint and multilateralism abroad. Peaceful and prosperous co-existence with China is possible if America chooses the progressive path forward.

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