

Debate on US China Policy

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Currently, a debate about the country's China policy is underway in the United States, which is the biggest and the most significant debate since 1989. The debate is mainly between the United States' China experts, scholars of international politics and foreign affairs experts, and includes many former government officials. The massive number of reports, dissertations and journals on the topic of whether the China policy of each US government has been a failure since Richard Nixon's visit to China in 1972 has been described as a "tsunami" by some scholars. Two of the main questions being debated are: Is the state of both cooperation and competition in Sino-US relations sustainable? Should the next president adjust or even change the United States' policy toward China?¹ The views expressed in the debate can be roughly divided into those of hard-liners, those of accommodators and those who advocate maintaining the current policy.

Basic Propositions of the Hard-Liners

For the hard-liners, each successive US government's China policy since Nixon's visit to China has two major parts: first, to be exposed to China and to keep strengthening the contact while hedging China's rising national power by maintaining the balance of power in favor of the United States and its allies in East Asia. The United States hopes that by engaging China in

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1 Robert Manning, "America's China Consensus Implodes," May 21, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/future/Americas-china-consensus-implodes-1293821>.

the international system China can become a “responsible stakeholder” in the current system. However, in recent years China’s domestic and foreign policy has run counter to this, as it has been establishing a system of free trade agreements with neighboring countries and new political mechanisms that serve its own interests and marginalize the United States. To the hard-liners, China is challenging the current international system and the United States’ wish to make China a “responsible stakeholder” is delusional.²

In March 2015, the US Council on Foreign Relations released a joint full-length report co-authored by Robert Blackwill, the former US ambassador to India and Ashley J. Tellis, a researcher at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The report, which attracted widespread attention, called for a fundamental change to the United States’ China policy. The basic view of the report was China now is the major competitor of the United States and will still be in the next few decades. It concluded that the United States made a serious strategic mistake at the end of the Cold War, when it optimistically believed that a new world order based on free norms and mechanisms was feasible and China would join this system and benefit from it, even approving the United States’ leadership. In this sense, China’s rise would not destroy the stability of the existing international system; instead, China would contribute to the stability of the existing international order. Thus the United States was not vigilant to China’s economic and military development and took a nonchalant attitude to it instead. Besides, the United States’ attention was paid to “engagement, integration and assistance” and it gave much less attention to ensuring that China would behave responsibly by means of containment. The authors of the report said the United States recognized too late that China has achieved a success beyond the United States’ expectations and that it has provided less cooperation than the United States expected. The United States thus deferred too long in adjusting its China policy. On the contrary, they argue, China’s general strategy at present has two parts: At home China is strengthening its

2 Aaron L. Friedberg, “The Debate Over US China Strategy,” *Survival*, Vol.57, No.3 (June-July 2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2015.1046227>.

control over its society, while overseas China is placating its neighbors and consolidating its international status to replace the United States as the most important country in Asia. In other words, “America’s attempts to engage China into the free international system now result in a threat to America’s predominant position in Asia and ultimately a possible severe challenge to America’s global leadership.” They believe intensified competition between China and the United States will be the new normal for Sino-US relations. “China and America are in an inescapable dilemma,” they said, for America is searching to protect its global hegemony and promote its national interests, while the US hegemony is the most dangerous external constraint to China’s attempts to establish a new order by using its accumulated power to serve its own interests.

They concluded that “America needs a new general strategy that focuses on containing China rather than helping its rise.” The two authors also acknowledged that because of globalization this strategy was not possible, simply because no Asian countries would join in the containment. However, continuing with the current engagement strategy is also impossible, they said. Instead, a fundamental change in the current policy is required so that the United States can strengthen its restraint and balance against China and reduce its cooperation with China. The report proposed revitalizing the US economy; redividing the cooperative programs between the two countries, which means continuing some programs while reducing or even stopping others, such as intergovernmental technical transformation; increasing defense expenditure to develop both defense and attack forces; reinforcing the US Navy’s presence in the Asian-Pacific region and improve its ability to project US power in Asian-Pacific region and surrounding areas; enhancing the United States’ alliance system; expanding the United States’ “rebalancing” strategy to Indo-Pacific region and the Indian Ocean; establishing a new trade arrangement that excludes China, including an indefinite exclusion of China from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP); increasing tariffs on China’s export goods; and opposing any proposal by China for a new international mechanism that may help China’s rise. The report also said that despite the

Middle East riots and the strained relationship with Russia, for the next few decades US presidents should focus on China's rise, as that is the biggest strategic challenge to the United States.³

Professor Aaron L. Friedberg from Princeton University always takes a tough stance on China. In 2014, when South China Sea issue started to become prominent, he wrote *China's Recent Assertiveness: Implications for the Future of US-China Relations*. He argued that China's recent assertive stance was not a fundamental change in its strategy but an adjustment. China now is just more aggressive in seeking to achieve its long term goals. China's tougher stance is a mixed reflection of its arrogance and insecurity and if the United States does not respond effectively, China will implement a "divide and rule" strategy against its neighbors. He believes that China's proposal of "new major countries relationship" is a reflection of this strategy. The same as Robert Blackwill and Ashley J. Tellis, he argues against totally abandoning engagement but he still believes that "only powerful containment of China can maintain the current system and force China to behave responsibly within the system and thus engagement can work." In the past some scholars have advised China and the United States to exercise caution as the two countries seemed on the brink of arm race. However, the arms race already exists. China now has the resources and determination to counter US forces, and it has started to do so. Aaron L. Friedberg approved of the United States' "return to Asia" or so called "rebalancing," but he thought the power was not enough, and this had caused widespread suspicion among the United States' allies and friends. He strongly maintained that the United States must have enough resources to carry out a common strategy with its allies, so that the United States is able to project power in the West Pacific under any conditions, even if China implements "anti-access and area denial." He said that "America's position in Asia is based on its ally system and the ally system in turn is based on a belief that America will come to assist if any

3 Robert D. Blackwill and Ashley J. Tellis, "Revising U.S. Grand Strategy Toward China," Council on Foreign Relations Special Report No 72, March 2015, <http://www.cfr.org/china/revising-us-grand-strategy-toward-china/p36371>.

ally is under the threat or attacked.”⁴ He even wrote *The Sources of Chinese Conduct: Explaining Beijing's Assertiveness*, in which he seemed to regard China as the Soviet Union.⁵

Besides their emphasis on strengthening the United States' alliance system, one common view of the hard-liners is to engage with other newly-developing countries, especially India. Aaron L. Friedberg promoted fostering China's neighbor countries to “make a net” that will “force China to behave more mildly,” and India is particularly important to this. He believes that India's territory, economic capacity, population potential, military power and democracy make it an attractive partner for the United States. The United States only needs to increase its assistance to the major neighbors of China and they will become less dependent on China's economy and search for greater independence.⁶

In recent years, the South China Sea has become a prominent issue between China and the United States. James R. Holmes from the US Naval Academy believes that China will implement long term strategic competition with the United States and Asian countries around South China Sea to “decide whether China is able to unilaterally modify the US dominant world order,” and if China succeeds Beijing will take this as an example and occupy the waters that belong to other costal countries according to sea laws and block the freedom of navigation in regions it thinks feasible. China will also make the sea area within the first island chain the continental sea that is governed by China's domestic laws and during this process the United States' alliance system will become loose. “In a word, Beijing wishes to make America lose its faith in its allies and upset America.” Of course, he also believes that China is a major trading partner of the United States and a nuclear power which means that stopping China's “gnawing”

4 Aaron L. Friedberg, “China's Recent Assertiveness: Implications for the Future of US-China Relations,” June 25, 2014, http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Friedberg_Testimony%20.pdf; “The Debate Over US China Strategy,” pp.89-110.

5 Aaron L. Friedberg, “The Sources of Chinese Conduct: Explaining Beijing's Assertiveness,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.37, No.4 (Winter 2015), pp.133-150.

6 Ashley J. Tellis, “Balancing Without Containment: AU. S. Strategy for Confronting China's Rise,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.36, No.4 (Fall 2013), pp.112-113.

expansion will be a tough challenge.⁷ Denny Roy from the East-West Center in Hawaii stresses the security dilemma between China and United States. He says that the divergence between two countries on the South China Sea issue exposes “the basic problem between the two countries” which is “Beijing wants a sphere of influence but the US refuses to concede, and even if some concession is made a breakthrough in the relationship between two countries is impossible. The growing bilateral trade agreements and other communications help to avoid a war but the security dilemma is not resolved, which is exactly what could drag two countries into a conflict.”⁸

Arthur Waldron from the University of Pennsylvania also takes a consistently hard-line stance towards China. He believes that since Nixon’s visit to China, China’s economic and military development has contributed no benefit to the United States; instead it is challenging the interests of the United States and its allies. Especially since 2010, when it adopted a more aggressive foreign policy, China has started a process to fundamentally change Asian politics and territory and used military power to search for territories away from the mainland. The United States and its allies have neither any understanding of the current situation nor any preparation for it. He argues that the United States’ policy must fundamentally change, and it should cut down on its global military commitments to concentrate on a possible attack by China on its allies.⁹

Also a few scholars have pointed out the ideological divergence between the two countries. They argue that “China’s challenge is not only geopolitical. China is a country that stands against democratic capitalism and free society in ideology. Our next president must tackle the heart of the problem: Chinese communists’ external tough stance comes from its internal

7 James R. Holmes, “Responding to China’s Assertiveness in South China Sea,” June 2014, <http://www.nbr.org/publications/elment.aspx?id=746>. James R. Holmes is the main representative of American scholars who overblow China’s “ocean expansion strategy.” His *Red Star over the Pacific* has been translated into Chinese and published.

8 Denny Roy, “U.S.-China Relations and the Western Pacific,” <http://thediplomat.com/2014/01/us-china-relations-and-the-western-pacific>.

9 Arthur Waldron, “The Asia Mess: How Things Did Not Turn Out As Planned,” *Orbis*, Spring 2015, pp.143-166.

restraint.” They believe that the policy of the US government shows little support for reform in China, its dissidents or internal calls for freedom. The next president should implement a policy that promotes human rights in China.”¹⁰

There are also some who advocate containing China. Prominent among these is John J. Mearsheimer, professor of political science at the University of Chicago. He thinks that China’s peaceful rise is impossible and that the United States should give up the idea China will become a friendly and cooperative partner. He believes that conflict between China and the United States is inevitable. When his book *Tragedy of Great Power Politics* was republished in 2104, he specially added a chapter “Will China rise peacefully?” to reiterate this view, even though it was already well-known. But in terms of how to contain China, he himself holds an ambivalent attitude. In 2001, he advocated that “America should reverse its current policy and adopt all possible measures to slow down China’s development.”¹¹ But the high economic interdependence between China and United States has forced him to admit that “there is no feasible way to slow down China’s economy that brings no damage to America’s economy.” And he has said, “The sharp slowdown in China’s economic growth may damage America’s prosperity... but it will be good for America’s security.” He advocates that the United States should try to “involve as many of China’s neighbors as possible into an alliance similar to NATO,” and opposes China projecting its power into regions such as the Persian Gulf and the Western hemisphere.¹²

There are also former officials among the hard-liners, such as Michael Pillsbury, special assistant for Asian affairs in the Office of the Secretary of Defense in the George W. H. Bush administration. He argued falsely in *The Hundred Year Marathon* that China had a 100-year plan (from 1949 to

10 Dan Blumenthal and William Inboden, “Toward a Free and Democratic China,” May 18, 2015, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/article/toward-free-and-democratic-china/941091>.

11 John J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York: W.W. Norton And Company, 2001, p.402.

12 John J. Mearsheimer, “Can China Rise Peacefully?” *National Interest*, 8 April 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/article/say-goodbye-taiwan-9931?page=show>.

2049) to replace the United States as the world's leader and it is deceiving the world by claiming it does not harbor this aim.

The Propositions of the Accommodators

This school has a very different analysis of the situation and view of China's behavior. They think that China's international behavior is more inactive reaction than active toughness. China is reacting to neighboring countries' provocations, reacting to the deficiencies in the current international order, and reacting to various limitations in international financial system. China's increasing assertive stance toward Taiwan is a reaction to the Democratic Progressive Party winning the election as the DPP is traditionally inclined to "independence"; China's creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and BRICS bank reflects China's natural dissatisfaction with the refusal by the US Congress to approve reform of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the fact that the World Bank and Asian Development Bank are not able to satisfy the infrastructure investment needs of Asian countries; and China's pushing for agreement on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a response to the United States excluding China from the TPP.¹³

Their criticism of "China's stance" is mainly based on China's stance in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. In terms of this problem, Lyle J. Goldstein, an associate professor at the US Naval War College, argues that "generally China's rise is a peaceful process, and people should have confidence in it, considering the record so far. In the past 30 years, Beijing has never targeted any other country to substantially use its military power." No matter in the East China Sea or the South China Sea, he says, China has only used unarmed speedboats to show its claim, which is a clear demonstration of China's "unwillingness to accelerate the crisis." He believes that China has improved its military technology but prefers to "take

13 Harry Harding, "Has U.S. China Policy Failed?" *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.38, No.3 (Fall 2015), p. 100.

considerate rather than hasty measures.” He thinks that “America should practice a more effective engagement strategy towards China” and focus on cooperation in security areas because this cooperation is the basis for peace.¹⁴

In *Meeting China Halfway: How to Defuse the Emerging US-China Rivalry*, Goldstein advises that the United States practice “cooperation spirals” with China. He believes that one side’s concession over one problem would lead to the side’s concession over another problem. From the South China Sea to the Middle East, progressive, peer to peer steps would gradually establish trust and confidence which would ultimately accomplish a more significant, grand concession. He writes in this book that although the United States supported China’s economic development over the past 35 years, it was America’s gunboats in the Yangtze River not China’s gunboats in the Mississippi. Therefore America is responsible for creating conditions conducive to these cooperation spirals. Goldstein also says that “the issue of human rights should not be the main problem in Sino-US relations,” and he advises the United States not to interfere in China’s internal affairs.”¹⁵

Several years ago some strategists and scholars proposed that the United States should reconsider its policy toward Taiwan.¹⁶ Charles Glaser from Gorge Washington University was one of them, and he still maintains that “America should end its commitment to defend Taiwan in exchange for China’s peaceful settlement of the land and sea disputes in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. He thinks that since the Taiwan is the most important problem between China and the United States, the settlement of this problem would increase the possibility of two countries’ cooperating to solve other problems. Because the balance of power in the Taiwan Strait has changed, and Beijing is anxious to achieve reunification, the United States’ insistence on its commitment to defend Taiwan and its strategic ambiguity

14 Lyle J. Goldstein, “Resetting the US-China Security Relationship,” *Survival*, Vol.53, No.2, pp.89-116, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00396638.2011.571014>.

15 Lyle J. Goldstein, *Meeting China Halfway: How to Defuse the Emerging US-China Rivalry*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015, pp.12& 336-338.

16 Tao Wenzhao: “America Think Tank’s Recent Debate over America’s Taiwan Policy,” *Contemporary International Relations*, No. 2, 2012.



President Xi Jinping meets with leaders of the US Congress at Capitol Hill, Sept. 25, 2015.

about what its response would be if conflict broke out in the Taiwan Strait poses risks. The strategic ambiguity applies to mainland China making an unprovoked attack on the island, but how to define “unprovoked attack”? For the mainland, the island announcing “Taiwan Independence” would be an unprovoked attack.¹⁷

Michael Swaine from the Carnegie International Association of Peace has proposed that the two countries implement comprehensive “interadaptation,” meaning the United States openly gives up its intention to maintain its strategic advantage in the West Pacific and accepts a balance of power in Asia, so that China in turn gives up any intention to establish its leadership in Asia. On this basis, the two countries would negotiate on limiting their national defense expenditure and the deployment of troops in the region and reach an understanding on some specific issues that the

17 Charles L. Glaser, “A U.S.-China Grand Bargain? The Hard Choice between Military Competition and Accommodation,” *International Security*, Vol. 39, No.4 (Spring 2015), pp.49-90.

two countries disagree on. He thinks that this would be acceptable to sides because the two countries realize efforts to gain the sole leadership in Asia would be fruitless. He says that to avoid conflicts the two countries “should replace the US military advantage within the first island chain with a balance of power between China and US in terms of regular weaponry.”¹⁸

David Lampton, director of the Department of China Studies at John Hopkins University, has also made it clear that he disagrees with the hardliners’ views. He believes that at their 2013 meeting at the Sunnylands estate in California, US President Barack Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping reached an agreement on “a new type of relationship between major countries” which opened a new “window of opportunity” for Sino-US relations. “Our common starting point for the strategy should be that we will not and should not be enemies. Although competition and difference will naturally continue we can still benefit from cooperation instead of conflicts.” He says each country should focus on their domestic policies, since neither can bear the pain and price of mutual hostility.¹⁹ However, he is still worried about the status quo in the two countries’ relationship: Over the past 15 years, China and the United States have moved from exposure to mild hedging to serious hedging, and then to deterrence. This has led people to talk of threat, will, power, second strike and credibility. These terms are totally different from what people used before. He appeals to the two countries to accommodate each other. He says that, “words of accommodation and compromise should not be used in derogatory sense.”²⁰ In November 2015, at a workshop in Beijing, he proposed that: “America should give China more space in the international system and China should

18 Michael Swaine, “Beyond U.S. Predominance in the Western Pacific: The Need for a Stable U.S.-China Balance of Power,” Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 20, 2015, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/04/20/beyond-american-predominance-in-western-pacific-need-for-stable-u.s.-china-balance-of-power>.

19 David M. Lampton, “New Model of Major Power Relations: A Urgent Requirement for Seeking Substantial Content,” in Huang Ping, Ni Feng(eds), *Annual Report on U.S. Studies (2013): Building Up a New Type of Sino-US Great Power Relationship*, Social Sciences Academic Press, 2013, p. 42.

20 David Mike Lampton, “A Tipping Point in U.S.-China Relations Is Upon Us,” <http://www.uscnpm.org/blog/2015/05/11/q-tipping-point-iin-u-s-china-relations-is-upon-us-part-i>.

be more patient.”²¹

In principle, former national security advisors Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski also advocate that China and the United States should accommodate each other. Kissinger has stated that the United States is still the inseparable member of the current security system but also recognizes that “it is not in the dominant position any longer.” He believes that “America has to show its leadership and play its role not by being the only leader but by being part of the complex world. Ultimately America will share the responsibilities in the global system with the rising great power center.”²² Zbigniew Brzezinski also believes that “China’s rise not only marks the end of Western dominance in the world but also the shift of the global power center to the East.” He argues that, “To increase the possibility of China being a major member of the international community, America should allow China to have a prominent geopolitical position in Asia and acquiesce to China’s leadership in the Asian economy.”²³

The former national security advisor Stephen Hardley also advocates the two countries make concessions to one another. He pointed out in a report for the Lowy Institute for International Policy in November 2014 that the key point of establishing a new type of relationship between major countries is to answer the following questions. Does China really want the United States to leave Asia? Does China really believe that it can improve the relationship with its neighbors when it at the same time continues increasing the economic, military and diplomatic pressure on them to force them into giving up their sovereignty claims? Does China think the current international system is not serving its interests and thus need to be overthrown? Is the United States ready to accept China rising to be

21 According to Lampton’s speech on “Sino-US relationship after president Xi Jinping’s visit to America” at the Social Sciences Forum held by the Department of America Studies of CASS on November 17, 2015. Lampton said, “America should make more room for China in the existing international system, China should be more patient.”

22 Henry Kissinger, “Power Shifts,” *Survival*, vol.52, no.6, December 2011, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2010.540792> (accessed on December 22, 2015).

23 Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Strategic Vision—America and the Crisis of Global Power,” translated by Hong Man, et al., Xinhua Press, 2012, pp.15,181.

on an equal footing with it? Is the United States ready to accept China's development of a "blue-water navy" and its control of sea lanes or not? Is the United States going to persuade its friends and allies to exercise restraint? He hopes that China will answer "no" to its three questions, and the United States will say "yes" to its three questions.²⁴

The Propositions of the School That Wants to Maintain the Current Policy

The former US presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, as well as President Obama, belong to the school that believes the best choice is to maintain the current policy. In this school, economic officials have distinct views, for example, the former Treasury Secretaries Henry Paulson and Robert Rubin wrote that "the biggest threat to China's economy in the future is the possible end of America's economic prosperity. Accordingly, China's biggest threat to America's economy is the possibility of China's economic stagnation. If the two countries can solve their own problems well and achieve economic success, then the economic insecurity that leads to frictions between the two sides will be eliminated, their confidence in the future will be strengthened and the constructive relationship between them will be improved." They argue, the United States' rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific strategy will solve many of the problems that trouble the relationship between the two countries as the interdependence between them will deepen. China will increase its investment in the United States, which will to create job opportunities for Americans help the US economy grow and the trade imbalance will be corrected. At the same time, China's economic growth (and military development) will slow down.²⁵ Another former secretary of the treasury, Larry Summers also believes that "our current goal should still be

24 Stephen Hardley, "America, China and the New Model of Great Power Relations," November 5, 2014, <http://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/america-china-and-new-model-great-power-relations>.

25 Henry Paulson, Jr. and Robert Rubin, "Why the United States Needs to Listen to China." *The Atlantic*, June 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/06/the-blame-trap/392081>.

common development and prosperity.”²⁶

Not long after the Robert Blackwill and Ashley J. Tellis’s report was published, Jeffrey Bader, the former senior director for Asian affairs in the National Security Council, released an article titled *Changing China Policy: Are We in Search of Enemies?* refuting their argument. He pointed out that making East Asia, currently a stable, orderly and economically vigorous area, another conflict zone is not in line with the United States’ interests. The Sino-US relationship has never been easy to tackle but cooperation between the United States and China is the basis for global economic growth. He pointed out that China has firmly committed to maintaining the nuclear non-proliferation system, and two countries have reached an agreement on reducing their greenhouse gas emissions and developing clean energy, the fight against the Islamic State terrorist group is also in line with China’s interests, and unlike the former Soviet Union, China has completely integrated into the global economy. China and the United States do disagree on the South China Sea, and the United States has made diplomatic and military moves to assert its presence in the waters, but China has never tried to expel claimant countries from the islands they have occupied and never disrupted commercial shipping. But the United States isn’t seeking to accommodate China at any cost and it has strengthened its alliance system to protect its own and its’ allies’ interests.²⁷

The former deputy secretary of state James Steinberg and senior fellow in Foreign Policy at the Brookings Institution, Michael E.O’Hanlon, point out in their book *Strategic Reassurance and Resolve* that “if the policy of engagement can be implemented more effectively and more considerately, the Sino-US relationship can actually improve.” Because of China’s increasing national power and its importance to the US economy, the United States cannot force regime change in China. They put forward that the two

26 Larry Summers, “The World—including China—is Unprepared for the Rise of China,” November 8, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-world--including-china--is-unprepared-for-the-rise-of-china/2015/11/08/70aa6c70-84ab-11e5-8ba6-cec48b74b2a7_story.html.

27 Jeffrey Bader, “Changing China Policy: Are We in Search of Enemies?” <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2015/06/22-changing-china-policy-bader>.

countries should “make mutual reassurances” about all kinds of significant problems, which will allow both sides to make a series of policies “to avoid the Thucydides trap.” From the United States’ perspective, it should reassure China about its military expenditure, military modernization, crisis management, nuclear weapons, military use of space and cyberspace. Of course, just like the title of their book, reassurance must be accompanied with “strategic resolve,” including the United States’ economic and military development, diplomatic resources and sustainability of its domestic system, to ensure the credibility of the United States’ security promises. And the Obama administration’s “rebalancing” strategy is a “symbol of America’s resolution to support its security promises.” They also say in their book, that the United States doesn’t convince China of its’ friendliness. In some cases, the United States doesn’t openly broadcast it will exercise self-restraint because it is afraid of domestic criticism that it is making “one-side concessions.” In other cases, the United States’ statements lack corresponding actions, which makes its words lack credibility. Steinberg and O’Hanlon also believe that the idea of enhancing mutual trust through all kinds of official and unofficial mechanisms is good, but the design of the mechanisms could be better, because these dialogues can only build mutual trust between the specific participants instead of the larger group that take part in foreign policy-making, which includes the public, media and the military. The two authors also advise specifically that China should not increase its military expenditure anymore when it is close to half the United States’ national defense budget.²⁸

Thomas Christensen, a professor at Princeton University and a former assistant secretary of state, talks about his experience of handling the Sino-US relationship during the George W. Bush administration in his recent book *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power*, including the process of strategic dialogue initiated by the two countries. He also points out that the two great Pacific powers are tightly connected with each

28 James Steinberg and Michael E.O’Hanlon, *Strategic Reassurance and Resolve*, Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. iv, 7, 68, 113.

other in a regional and globalized system and both sides benefit from each other's growth and stability. From The United States' perspective, the worst scenario in China's case is not its rise but its stagnation, even crumbling from within, and the later would cause severe economic and security outcomes. He clearly disapproves of the view of those "pessimists" such as the US political scientist John J. Mearsheimer and points out that "the Sino-US relationship is far from a zero sum game." The objective of the United States and its allies, "should not be containing China but influencing China's choice to transform China's nationalism ambitions into cooperation instead of threat." He suggests that "the biggest challenge for America's future generations of diplomats" may be urging China to improve its foreign policy so it is "confident but not aggressive." He thinks that the United States' policy is still to encourage China to accept the idea of being "responsible stakeholder" in the international system

Kenneth Lieberthal, the senior director of the Department of Asian Affairs of the National Security Council during the Clinton administration and a researcher at the Brookings Institute, clearly belongs to this school, too. In 2012, he and Chinese scholar Wang Jisi co-wrote a report on China and the United States' strategic distrust, which gave a profound analysis of the mutual distrust between the two countries in all aspects, and pointed out that the increasing strategic distrust between China and the United States them may severely damage their relationship. In August 2014, when China and the United States kept quarrelling with each other on South China Sea issue, he and Jeffrey Bader together with Michael McDevitt, a retired naval officer and a senior fellow at the Center for Naval Analyses (CAN), published a long article on the website of the Brookings Institute to clarify their views of on the South China Sea disputes. They believe the disputes need to be analyzed and judged in a broader context, and said that US policymakers should pay attention to how they handle the South China Sea issue, in order to achieve the following goals: easing tensions, preventing the use of force by each side, guaranteeing the legitimate rights of the international community, and encouraging all claiming countries to reconcile

and maintain good relations and the credibility of all sides. “America should neither regard the South China Sea issue as the beginning of a cold war with China, nor should it regard the issue as the core strategic issue in Sino-US relationship.”²⁹ Michael McDevitt also advocated in a report for the Center for Navy Analysis issued in December 2014, that the South China Sea issue is the main strategic issue in the Sino-US relationship. He advised the United States not to practice a policy of intimidation. In other words, it should not announce policies that it has no intention of backing up with actions. The United States’ South China Sea policy should not be overwhelmingly against China; on the contrary, the United States should not only criticize China’s behavior but also its own and its allies’ behavior if justified.³⁰

In her testimony before a Senate panel, Melanie Hart, the head of China policy at the Center for American Progress, said ever since Nixon the policy of engagement towards China by successive US presidents has “brought lasting peace and economic prosperity for all Asia-Pacific nations, including America,” which was “the greatest success of America’s foreign policy since the end of the Second World War.” She said that now Chinese leaders were attempting to use China’s increasing national power to build an international environment in its favor, which provided both opportunities and challenges for the United States. She said, some observers were blind to the new opportunities for cooperation between the two countries, and due to the emergence of new challenges, they believed the relationship between the United States and China was hard to handle, and regarding China as a strategic competitor they argued that the policy of engagement should be abandoned. She declared, their views misleading, and said she believed that the basis for the relationship between the United States and China hasn’t changed. She offered her own interpretation of China’s tougher stance in recent years: On the positive side, she said, China’s tougher stance showed

29 Jeffrey Bader, Kenneth Lieberthal and Michael McDevitt, “Keeping the South China Sea in Perspective,” <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2014/08/south-china-sea-perspective-bader-lieberthal-mcdevitt>.

30 Michael McDevitt, “Assessing U.S. Policy in the South China Sea,” December 10, 2014, <http://www.amti.csis.org/assesintg-u-s-policy-in-south-china-sea>.

that “China was more and more willing to play a leading role outside the circle of highly industrialized countries,” for example China has played a key in tackling climate change issues, the Iran nuclear issue and the North Korea nuclear issue, among other things. However, China’s tough stance has also had a negative effect on the United States’ interests and the current international system. The Obama administration’s China policy was a wide-eyed engagement policy of *realpolitik*, a policy that used the methods of classification and special issue with special analysis. This engagement policy was making breakthroughs in areas where the two countries have shared interests, but was making slow progress in areas where they do not have common interests. She advocated that the United States should keep its current momentum in cooperation and enhance its efforts to solve the divergences between the two countries: “If the capability of resolving difficult problems cannot be demonstrated more specifically, then these problems are very likely to corrode and damage the positive cooperation between the two countries.”³¹

The well-known expert on Sino-US relations, Harry Harding, a senior professor at the University of Virginia, also belongs to the school that wants to maintain the current approach. He neither agrees with the hard-liners’ views nor the view of the engagers because he thinks it difficult to reconcile the differences with China. His view of the Sino-US relationship is anxious but at the same time prudently hopeful. He thinks it very possible that the next US president’s China policy will be adjusted in the direction of being tougher, and thus the risk of conflict will increase. He has said that in the United States, positive views of Sino-US relationship are declining while negative views are increasing. He also points out that a consensus is taking shape that the future of the Sino-US relationship will depend more on the United States’ economic situation than China’s. A more successful

31 Melanie Hart, “Assessing American Foreign Policy Toward China,” Testimony Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Subcommittee on Near East, South Asia, Central Asia, and Counterterrorism, September 29, 2015, http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/092915_REVISIED_Hart_Testimony.pdf.

and confident United States can be more at ease with China's rise, which is also the theme of the president of America Council on Foreign Relations Richard Haas's monograph "Foreign Policy from Domestic Sources." However, Harding believes that Sino-US relationship is still hopeful, the spiral deterioration of the two countries' relationship can be stopped, the cooperative areas can be cultivated, and the competition between the two sides can be limited within positive competition. Because both sides' policymakers are rational, conflicts are unlikely to happen between the two countries, he believes.³²

Scott Harold from the Rand Corporation advocates enhancing military exchanges between China and the United States. He thinks that there are certain risks within the exchanges, but the benefits to the United States outweigh the risks. While the United States wants bottom-up exchanges but China insists on top down. Thus a combination of the two may be better. Although exchanges between the two military sides have many limits, many exchange activities can still be carried out. The exchanges will not be smooth all the time but they will ultimately help to improve the relationship between China and the United States.³³

Basic Views

First, the United States is a country of great diversity. Thus it is very natural for people to have different views on the same issue, especially on such a complicated issue as the United States relationship with China. Since Nixon's visit to China 40 years ago, US society has reached a relative consensus with big debates held at the end of the 1980s, and the early and late 1990s. The debate now has a clear node, the year 2010. Since the global financial crisis in September 2008, China's economy has maintained rapid growth and in

32 Harry Harding, "Has U.S. China Policy Failed?" *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.38, No.3 (Fall 2015), pp.100-119.

33 Scott Harold, "Expanding Military Contacts to Enhance Durability: A Strategy for Improving U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relations," <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/asp/summary/vol16/16.harold.html>.

2010 China's GDP surpassed that of Japan to become the second-largest economy in the world. China's strong performance in its foreign trade and foreign exchange reserves astounded the United States so much that some US scholars heralded it as a "wake-up call" for the United States. According to some international organizations' estimation, it is just a matter of time before China overtakes the United States to be the world's largest economy.

In his 2011 State of the Union Address,

Obama called it "the sputnik moment for our generation,"³⁴ which clearly revealed the United States' anxiety. Since then, the political and academic circle and the media in the United States have constantly discussed how it should handle

China's rise. The former secretary of the treasury, Larry Summers issued an article in November 2015 in which he stated "the world was not ready for China's rise yet."³⁵ There is no doubt that mentally Americans are not ready for China's rise and they have not yet adapted to China's rise, and are anxious about the possibility of the United States losing its sole superpower status. Previously, although China's economy had grown rapidly, ordinary Americans still felt there was a large gap between the two countries and America's preeminent position was assured. Although, Nixon admitted the United States' power had declined and raised the idea of "five power centers," he still believed that Americans did not know how to be the second in the world or even how to be tied for the first place. Now there is realistic possibility that China's GDP could catch up with and even surpass that of the United States and Americans are having difficulty accepting that. This kind of psychological anxiety is one of the basic reasons for the United States'

This kind of psychological anxiety is one of the basic reasons for the United States' changing view toward China and the Sino-US relationship.

34 The White House, "Remarks by the President in State of Union Address," January 25, 2011, <http://whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/01/25/remarks-president-state-union-address>. Zbigniew Brzezinski also writes in the book that many are worried about China quickly surpassing the United States and becoming the most important superpower in the world by 2010, but such overreaction reminds him of the previous example of Japan. See *Strategic Vision—America and the Crisis of Global Power*, p.15.

35 Larry Summers, "The World—Including China—Is Unprepared for the Rise of China."

changing view toward China and the Sino-US relationship. That is not to say there is no difference between the two countries, since differences obviously do exist, but such anxiety only magnifies the differences and overestimates their severity, besides, such sentiments will not quickly disappear. Still, China needs to develop and the United States and the world must adapt to that. But China too, needs examine itself. The comparison of the two countries' national power is far more than just GDP. There are still big gaps in many aspects between China and the United States. Even if China's two centenary goals are achieved (doubling China's GDP and per capita income from the 2010 level by the time the Communist Party of China celebrates its centenary in 2021, and raising it to the level of developed countries by 2049, the centenary anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China), China is still a moderately developed country according to Deng Xiaoping's previous estimation. China's large size has both advantages and disadvantages, thus we have to take a comprehensive view of ourselves, be patient, calm and low-profile, always remember to be modest and prudent, and guard against arrogance so that the outside world is allowed to adapt.

Second, since the end of the Cold War, debate has continued over the so-called theories of a "China collapse," "China threat" and "China's responsibilities."³⁶ However, there are voices advocating that the United States should adjust to, accommodate and compromise with China. The members of this group are tightly connected with China's increasing national power and its rising influence over international affairs. Some US scholars have realized that China will play a growing role in international affairs with its increasing national power, and that China's asking for more international space is reasonable since its original international space can't satisfy its needs any more. Its growing power naturally leads to growing responsibilities, a point raised by Robert Zoellick, the deputy secretary of state in the George W. Bush administration, 10 years ago. China's growing power and responsibilities require growing space, which many American

36 Refer to Wu Shengqi, "America Think Tank's Debate over Its China Policy", in Tao Wenzhao (ed.) *America Think Tank and America's China Policy After the Cold War*, Social Sciences Academic Press, 2014.

policymakers and scholars seem reluctant to admit. One typical example is that the US Congress repeatedly delayed IMF quota reform, only approving it after more than five years. President Obama is not willing to give China more space as well: he has criticized China for being a “free rider.” China’s proposals to provide more public goods for the world, such as the AIIB, have also been regarded as a challenge to the current international order. Not only does Obama disapprove of them he has also urged the United States’ allies not to participate. But as China’s national power further increases, the public goods provided by China will contribute more to the world, especially benefiting people in developing countries. The United States increasingly needs to cooperate with China in global governance, so its engagement with China is being more widely acknowledged by American society.

For China, one thing is clear: its rise is not for the purpose of replacing the United States as a hegemonic power.

For China, one thing is clear: its rise is not for the purpose of replacing the United States as a hegemonic power. In fact, the international situation in the 21st century doesn’t allow for a new hegemony because economic globalization and the democratization of international politics are the trends of the times and each country is striving to participate in the making of international rules. China is just one of them. The 21st century is a time for mutual benefit. Thus compromises, adjustment and accommodation are the norm, since a country has to sacrifice some of its subordinate interests to defend its core interests and significant concerns.

Among the three schools of thought outlined above, the hard-liners are clearly different from the other two schools, while the differences between the engagers and the school of maintaining the current policy are of a degree but not of a kind. However, there are also few prominent doomsayers in this debate, such as David Shambaugh, who wrote an article titled “The Coming Chinese Crackup.”

His ideas in this article violate his long-held view and were also disapproved of by the majority scholars in the US political and academic

circles.³⁷ Still, a few scholars, such as Dan Blumenthal and William Inboden from the America Enterprise Institute have echoed his sentiment arguing that “China is more fragile than many people imagine.”³⁸ Third, how to deal with each other is a new and difficult question for both China and the United States. Some US media have said that the United States has never encountered a country like China.³⁹ Henry Kissinger also admitted that China’s rise was unprecedented “and China’s challenge is far more subtle than the Soviet Union.” The main problem with the Soviet Union was a strategic problem, while the problem with China is whether two civilizations can coexist with each other in harmony. This represents a new challenge for the United States since it has little experience of cooperating with a well-matched “adversary”; The key problem for China is whether it can manage its rise as a great power and carry out its domestic transition.”⁴⁰ The Sino-US relationship is no doubt a difficult problem for China because dealing with United States in its current position is also a new experience for it. Until the end of last century and the early years of this century, China was still a typical developing country that need only “act on international conventions” and be engaged in the current international system, making it easier to deal

37 David Shambaugh, “The Coming Chinese Crackup,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 6, 2015. About a month after David Shambaugh published his article, I had a talk with him. In the conversation he said that there is a huge difference between the United States east and west coast’s views of Sino-US relations. When he went to the west coast, people all said Chinese were welcomed there and Chinese investments were also welcomed as they created job opportunities for them. It seemed to me that he was trying to modify what he said previously. I didn’t meet any experts of China studies who approved of his talking about “China’s coming collapse.” After President Xi’s successful state visit to America in September, he wrote in a positive tone that “the 2015 Obama-Xi Summit must be judged a success. The reasons for the troubles in Sino-American relationship are real and run deep, and not easily resolved. Progress was made, trust was built, and the two great powers on the planet have stabilized their relations.” He said, “The visit sent a message to the world that the two major powers were trying to cooperate with each other on a range of issues.” His opinions at this time were very different from his views in March. I thought that he was trying to compensate for the negative influence of his article published in March. See David Shambaugh, “Finding Common Ground,” *China and US Focus Digest*, Vol.8 (October 2015), pp.9-11.

38 Dan Blumenthal and William Inboden, “Toward a Free and Democratic China: Overhauling U.S. Strategy in Asia,” *The Weekly Standard*, No.34 (May 18, 2015), p.20.

39 Bob Hawke, “America Media: America Has Never Met A Country Like China,” translated by Qiao Heng, *Global Times*, June 21, 2014, http://mil.cnr.cn/wqzb/fwgc/201406/t20140621_515702005.html.

40 Henry Kissinger, “Power Shifts,” *Survival*, Vol.52, No.6, December 2011, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0396338.2010.540792>; “A Conversation with Henry Kissinger,” *The National Interest*, September/October 2015, pp.12-17.

with the United States. After the financial crisis in September 2008, while still a developing country the gap between China's economic aggregate and other developing countries, even the other members of BRICS, became wider. China became the second-largest economic entity in the world, only China and the United States have the economic scale of over \$10 trillion, which means that China is no longer an average developing country in many aspects. However, China is still developing within the current international system but it is clear the need to reform and better the international system is becoming increasingly urgent. China still enjoys many public goods of the current system especially in the security aspect, but it is also beginning to provide more public goods for neighboring countries and the international community. The economic interdependence between China and the United States is deepening and their cooperation in global governance is becoming more and more extensive, and fruitful. But in regional order, the competition between the two countries is growing more obvious, not to mention the differences between the two countries' social systems and ideologies. In the history of international relations, there has never been such a great power relationship as that between China and the United States. In conclusion, the relationship between China and the United States is becoming more intricate and harder to deal with. Moreover, this situation will continue and the interdependence and competition between the two will intensify. Therefore, think tanks in the United States and China should consider carefully how the two countries can get along with each other, how they can adjust to and accommodate with each other, so as to gain experience gradually. The fruits of better implementing engagement as Swaine and Steinberg have both suggested may not be realized immediately, but such an approach should be encouraged as it would benefit both countries and the world.

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Fourth, although the calls for the United States to change its China policy are quite strong, it's actually almost impossible for the United States to make big changes in its policy toward China. Aaron L. Friedberg from Princeton University reluctantly admits that “powerful, influential groups and individuals are still deeply devoted to keeping as good as possible relationship with China and oppose any measures that they believe may cause a loss to them, a fact that makes it very difficult to mobilize any support for the hard-line policy.” Although increasing attention is being paid to China around the world, there is no desire to fully compete with China, and the policy of containing China causes people to worry there will be a war. In such a conflict all sides would be impaired and “among them China’s Asian neighbors have reason to worry about the greatest loss.” He thus believes that under the current political and economic restraints the only feasible strategy is to keep engagement while enlarging and enhancing it at the same time. This is not a perfect strategy but it is the best choice that policymakers can adopt in reality.⁴¹

The debate, of course, is still underway. In 2016, a US presidential election year, the candidates of both parties will likely adopt a tough stance and say some inordinate and extreme words against China, as has been the case in the past. But the United States needs to follow the general trend and cooperate with China on the bilateral, regional and global levels and in more areas including global governance. Two recent cases best illustrate this. One is the agreement that was reached on a peaceful political settlement to the Iran nuclear issue after more than 10 years of negotiations; the other is the Paris Climate Summit concluded an internationally legally binding document. The cooperation between China and the United States was indispensable to both of these achievements. As the saying goes, facts speak louder than words, those two significant facts speaking far louder than any eloquence of the hard-liners. 🌐

41 Aaron L. Friedberg, “The Debate Over US China Strategy.”