

ONE

Rivalry and Security in a New Era for US-China Relations

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At the end of the 1970s, the United States of America and the People's Republic of China established formal diplomatic relations, and China, under Deng Xiaoping, adopted a transformational agenda of "reform and opening to the outside world." During the four decades that followed, and despite occasional significant setbacks, the bilateral relationship became broader and deeper. "Constructive engagement" characterized much of Washington's China policy, and Beijing primarily pursued a policy of integrating with a US-led post-World War II and, later, post-Cold War international order.¹ By the later 2010s, however, the relationship had taken a dramatic, negative turn. Beijing had become more pointed in rejecting what it long has depicted as pernicious US efforts to limit China's rise or shape its internal order. Under Xi Jinping, China also had grown more assertive in seeking to influence the international institutions that China earlier had joined without challenging the status quo.

In Washington, many began to see a rising China as a strategic competitor or geostrategic adversary and a threat to the international

order that the United States had led in creating and had long championed. Once-reliable bipartisan support for constructive engagement gave way to calls to confront more forcefully a potentially serious challenge from China.² During Barack Obama's presidency, some Americans began to criticize engagement as a naive failure that did not serve US interests. Although skepticism about engagement was not new, it had been a minority view, mostly held by those at the left and right ends of the political spectrum. By the end of the Obama administration, it was becoming a bipartisan consensus embraced by those nearer the center.³ Analysts, including contributors to this volume, began to assess, or reassess, US-China relations in terms—relative power, conflicting interests, and ideational struggle—that had been infrequently invoked in recent decades.

Donald Trump's election as president in 2016 brought to power a foreign policy team that flatly rejected established approaches to dealing with China. The Trump administration explicitly characterized China as an adversary. Addressing the perceived threat to American interests from China, US policy began to focus on preventing China from narrowing the still-substantial gap in economic wealth, technological prowess, and military power.⁴ The 2020 US presidential campaign and initial statements from Joe Biden and his foreign policy advisers indicate that these concerns will remain central to Washington's China policy. Changes in the US agenda—including pursuit of cooperation with China in limited areas and closer coordination with allies that share US concerns about China and its agenda—do not portend a return to constructive engagement or a reversal of the core elements of the bipartisan consensus for tougher China policies that had emerged by the mid-2010s.⁵

A RELATIONSHIP CREATED AND TRANSFORMED: NORMALIZATION AND THE ERA OF ENGAGEMENT

Viewing the relationship in terms of conflicting great power interests looks, to some extent, like a case of “back to the future.” The Sino-American rapprochement that began in earnest in the late 1970s had its roots in the realist logic of Cold War international relations. The reciprocal opening between the United States under Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger and China under Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai

was fundamentally about countering their common adversary, the Soviet Union, at a time when Moscow seemed poised to gain influence (as the United States sought to extricate itself from the war in Vietnam) and when Sino-Soviet relations had reached a nadir (as was tangibly manifested in border clashes two years before Nixon's path-breaking visit to China). There was no ideological affinity between a regime in Beijing that was in the middle of the Cultural Revolution decade and an administration in Washington that was led by a president who owed his initial political ascent to his anti-communist credentials and maintained a formal security alliance with a Republic of China regime in Taipei still claiming to be the rightful government of all of China. With China's policy of economic autarchy and the US's policy of isolating communist states economically still in place, the beginnings of the trade and investment ties that would come to play so large a role in defining the bilateral relationship were several years in the future.

Against this backdrop, the changes that defined the long era of constructive engagement were remarkable and transformative. In 1979, the United States established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and severed formal diplomatic and security ties with Taipei. The US granted China conditional "most favored nation" trading privileges (now called normal trading relations), and the PRC adopted the first in a long series of increasingly liberal laws to allow inbound foreign investment (for which the United States quickly emerged as a major source). Washington had accepted Beijing's resumption of the Chinese seat in the United Nations (and, thus, the PRC's status as one of the veto-wielding five permanent members of the Security Council) in 1971, and from 1980 onward began to support China's entry into other international institutions.⁶

During the nearly forty years that followed, US-China relations remained generally positive and China's ties with the US, and a US-led and US-backed international order, developed across several dimensions. The prevalent frameworks for assessing the increasingly important bilateral relationship changed as well, moving away from concerns about the international distribution of power that had dominated the pre-normalization years.

The US-China security relationship moved further out of the shadows of earlier conflicts: the direct military hostilities during the Korean War, the more limited and indirect confrontation during the

Vietnam War, and Maoist China's support for left-leaning revolutions in the post-colonial world. With the end of the Cold War, the collapse of Moscow-backed regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union itself, the shared interest in checking the Soviet Union that had been the initial underpinning for warming US-China relations evaporated. Instead, during the 1990s, the US and China focused on new opportunities for affirmative cooperation, with the Clinton administration eventually referring to China as a possible strategic partner. This change reflected the perception that China and the United States did not pose serious security threats to one another. China's growing international role prompted the Clinton administration to undertake some modest hedging efforts, including steps to shore up US Cold War-rooted alliances in Asia in 1996–1997.⁷ But as late as the middle 1990s, China's still-limited capabilities were not yet driving concern about its arrival as a peer competitor for the US.⁸

There were, to be sure, episodes of significant friction and limited-scale crises in US-China relations, including: the cross-Strait confrontation coinciding with Taiwan's first fully democratic presidential election in 1996, when Chinese missile tests prompted the US to dispatch elements of the Seventh Fleet to the region; the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during the NATO-led coalition's intervention in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia in 1999; the 2001 collision of a Chinese air force jet with a US EP-3 reconnaissance plane, leading to the forced landing and brief detention of the American plane and crew; and resurgent tensions during the later 2000s between China and its maritime neighbors—several of them formal allies or close partners of the United States—as China moved to clarify and assert claims in the East and South China Seas. Many of these incidents reflected long-recognized conflicts between US and PRC interests in Asia and demonstrated that both sides were willing to take some risks to protect or advance those interests.

Nevertheless, the overall security relationship remained relatively free of serious or protracted conflicts and perceived threats to fundamental interests. China was still comparatively weak, which limited the relevance of prospective maritime competition in the Western Pacific.⁹ Both sides saw benefits in the bilateral relationship that outweighed conflicting interests. The US military presence and alliance structure in Asia was not fundamentally at odds with Beijing's high-priority interests during a period when China had neither the will nor

the capacity to expand its reach, and when its primary foreign policy imperative was to secure a peaceful and stable international environment in which to pursue economic development, partly through integration with the global economy.

Although Taiwan remained a chronic source of discord in US-PRC relations and, in Beijing's view, a core question of sovereignty and, thus, national security, cross-Strait and triangular relations remained relatively manageable during the long period that followed the normalization of US-PRC relations. Beijing consistently condemned Washington's robust informal support for Taiwan as improper US intervention in China's internal affairs, but Beijing's policy was to tolerate the cross-Strait status quo. China would acquiesce in the autonomy and the de facto independence of Taiwan that US support made possible so long as Taiwan did not drift, or steer, too close to formal independence.

Several steps on both sides further limited the adverse impact of Taiwan issues on US-PRC relations, including: the third Joint Communiqué's provisions on reducing US arms sales (even though the commitment was constrained by the Taiwan Relations Act and accompanied by President Reagan's Six Assurances, which supported ongoing arms sales, frustrating Beijing's expectations); President Clinton's "three noes" policy (which promised no US support for Taiwan independence, Taiwan's membership in states-member-only international organizations, and a "two Chinas" or "one China, one Taiwan" policy); and the George W. Bush administration's pointed rebukes of moves by Taiwanese president Chen Shui-bian that, in Washington's and Beijing's views, threatened to change the cross-Strait status quo and to inflame the vexed issue of Taiwan's international status.

The improving security relationship increasingly was overshadowed by a rapidly growing economic relationship. Beginning from near-zero baselines, bilateral trade in goods and services reached approximately \$150 billion by 2002 and nearly \$650 billion in 2018 before declining as the effects of the escalating Trump-era trade war and the COVID-19 pandemic took hold. In recent years, the US and China often have ranked as one another's top trading partners (and each has been consistently among the other's top few). After the PRC opened to foreign direct investment (FDI) in 1979, the US became a major source, accounting for tens of billions of dollars in accumulated stock by the 2010s. PRC investment in the US, though starting later,

grew rapidly and reached more than one-third the levels of US FDI in China by the middle 2010s.¹⁰

Such statistics arguably understate the significance of the bilateral economic relationship that had emerged. As global supply chains developed in the 2000s, Chinese factories and firms became essential links in multistep manufacturing processes that connected producers across many countries as suppliers and importers of components and finished goods. US investment in China increasingly was for the purpose of providing goods and services to rapidly expanding Chinese domestic markets. Much—though not all—of the US business community became potent supporters of positive and cooperative bilateral relations, influencing policymakers in Washington and in Beijing as well. In China, too, enterprises and elements within the party-state that gained under the policy of opening to the outside world emerged as significant constituencies for economic engagement, including with the United States.¹¹

Economic relations, of course, were not uniformly positive. From early on, the US complained about a changing list of what it saw as unfair advantages for Chinese firms and disadvantages for US competitors. These stemmed from several factors: China's not-fully-marketized economy; its limitations on market access for US firms; its relatively weak protection of US companies' intellectual property; its neo-mercantilist trade policy; its undervalued currency; its extensive industrial policy to foster development of favored and targeted sectors; and its state-linked espionage targeting commercially valuable information from US businesses.

In both countries, the mutual economic opening and integration threatened some sectors and interests, mobilizing critics of openness that ranged from uncompetitive state-owned enterprises and parts of the old-line bureaucracy in China to labor unions and import-vulnerable companies, as well as human rights and environmental groups in the United States. Such factors and forces were not enough, however, to derail the trend toward more extensive and intensive economic ties over many years after 1979. Although significant, such issues were much smaller concerns, especially on the US side, than they would become during the 2010s.

Burgeoning economic ties—as well as muted security concerns—led to interdependence becoming the apparent defining feature of the bilateral relationship.¹² US engagement with the PRC went beyond

facilitating the more open and robust economic ties associated with interdependence to an agenda of integrating China institutionally, supporting its membership and participation in the major formal organizations of the international order. Early in the era of reform and opening, China joined the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. At the end of the 1990s, the US dropped its opposition to China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), marking the successful completion of China's decade-and-a-half quest to join the principal international institution for the global economy.

China entered a wide range of major international bodies from which it had been absent through the late 1970s, from APEC and the Asian Development Bank to Interpol and the International Atomic Energy Agency. The PRC became a party to almost every major global treaty governing issues from trade and finance to nuclear proliferation to the law of the sea and of outer space to climate change and human rights (with the notable exception of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights). Beijing sought, and gained, observer status or similar relationships with institutions where the US had been a key member and where China's membership would be anomalous or seemingly barred by the institution's structure and purpose, including the Arctic Council, the Organization of American States, and the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development.

When US administrations supported China's accession, or access, to these numerous and varied international regimes, they did so largely free of the concerns that would emerge by the 2010s that China was undermining the rules-based international order or setting up potentially rivalrous institutions. For China during the first three decades of the era of reform and opening, the allure was obvious: avoiding potential impediments to a growth strategy that rested significantly (if ultimately decreasingly) on international trade and investment; acquiring indicia of normal state and great power status; and exercising some (albeit, in the near term, modest) influence in shaping the rules of important international organizations and treaty-based regimes.

For the United States, the often-expressed reasons were to steer China toward being a more reliable adherent to, and supporter of, an existing international order that generally served US interests and reflected American influence. Washington hoped and expected that, as China grew in wealth and power, an engaged and institutionally integrated China would be—in the words of George W. Bush's deputy

secretary of state and later World Bank president Robert Zoellick—a “responsible stakeholder” in the international system, doing more to share the burdens of promoting common interests.¹³ Examples of progress in this direction included China’s significant role in the G20, which added China and other emerging economies to supersede the G8 in responding to the 2007–2008 global financial crisis, and Beijing’s pivotal place in the (unsuccessful) Six-Party Talks and other efforts to address North Korea’s nuclear program.

A more expansive and more normative version of this pro-engagement view aligned with constructivist theories of international relations:¹⁴ participation in international institutions and regimes could socialize China into supporting prevailing international norms on issues ranging from human rights (where post-Tiananmen China officially accepted the notion of universal human rights in 1991, and the PRC became an inaugural member of the UN Human Rights Council in 2006) to a liberal international economic order (where China’s accession to the WTO entailed promises of rapid progress toward thoroughgoing adherence to international standards after a relatively brief transition period and without the concessions enjoyed by other developing countries and by economies transitioning from socialist planning).

Some US assessments of China’s expected trajectory went further still, although they reflected the imperatives of American domestic politics at least as much as they represented beliefs about Chinese reality. For example, in seeking the congressional action needed to clear the way for the US to support China’s WTO entry, the Clinton administration argued that China’s WTO membership would foster market-oriented economic reforms, prosperity, and, in turn, political liberalization in China.¹⁵ Versions of these arguments were relatively widespread, drawing in part on theories about the relationship between economic development and political democracy, the trajectory of now-wealthy and democratic East Asian states whose earlier-stage economic models China was partly imitating, and post–Cold War liberal democratic triumphalism.¹⁶

During the first few decades following the normalization of US-PRC relations, when China’s economic and political reforms seemed to go hand in hand (albeit with significant setbacks and occasional divergences), the hope that engagement could promote a more liberal domestic order in China appealed for reasons that went beyond

benevolence or evangelism in American values-based foreign policy. In an era that included the heyday of the democratic peace theory, influential views in US foreign policy circles held that a state's type of domestic political system shaped its foreign policy behavior, and that a more liberal and democratizing China's foreign policy would be more compatible with US interests and preferences.¹⁷

By the mid-2010s, caricatures of these hopeful views would become a central feature of the bipartisan indictment of US policies of engagement and the arguments for a tougher, even Cold War–like US policy toward China.¹⁸ But, from the 1980s through the 2000s, US politicians and leaders felt little pressure to adopt a harder-line, hawkish policy toward China. To be sure, candidates for office from both major parties (including presidential contenders Reagan, Clinton, and George W. Bush) pledged to stand up to China and condemned as too soft the policies of the administrations in power (including the Carter, George H. W. Bush, and Clinton administrations). But, once in office, new presidents and their administrations found that the costs of confrontation outweighed the benefits of maintaining a generally positive relationship that served US interests. The usually low salience of China issues in US domestic politics and the support for good relations with China among influential constituencies (including US businesses) meant that US leaders faced, at most, modest political costs for abandoning campaign pledges to “get tough on China.”

THE NEGATIVE TURN IN US-CHINA RELATIONS

The shift to a more contentious US-China relationship that occurred during the 2010s resulted from both China's pursuit of a more forward-leaning foreign policy under Xi Jinping and an iconoclastic US foreign policy agenda adopted by the Trump administration. More fundamentally, the change reflected an acceleration of trends that had begun earlier, the full impact of which took time to emerge.

A Shift Delayed

When George W. Bush took office in 2001, observers had expected US policy to move toward treating China as a strategic competitor or rival. The incoming administration's National Security Adviser Con-

doleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had put forth plans to transform bilateral ties and to confront challenges they saw from a rising China. Instead, intervening events delayed reconsideration of the relationship for nearly a decade and contributed to the survival of the policy of engagement until the 2010s.

The April 1, 2001, EP-3 incident prompted the new administration to reconsider the implications of a more confrontational approach toward China. More important, the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States decisively redirected the Bush administration's strategic focus to what it dubbed an urgent "global war on terrorism." Protracted major military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as efforts to deal with threats Washington saw elsewhere in the Middle East, North Africa, and South and Southeast Asia, diverted attention and resources from addressing the strategic implications of China's rise. The PRC's support for the Bush administration's counterterrorism agenda and China's cooperation with the US and other G20 states to prevent a global economic disaster during the great recession of 2007–2008 pushed Washington to sustain a cooperative working relationship with Beijing.

The advent of the Obama administration further postponed reorientation of the US's China policy. The Obama team initially sought to preserve the fundamentals of long-standing approaches to China. The administration declared that the US would "continue to pursue a positive, constructive, and comprehensive relationship with China" and "encourage [China] to become a partner for greater international security."¹⁹ Well into Obama's presidency, the US and China pursued cooperation and achieved noteworthy agreements on major issues such as climate change and China's state-sponsored economic cyberspying.

But, partway into Obama's first term, the winding down of US large-scale military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and the diminishing perils of the global economic crisis reduced the imperatives that had delayed a reassessment of the US-China relationship. Long-developing changes in China—and their consequences for US interests—became more salient to policymakers. Both Washington and Beijing began to reassess their ties.

Worries about the challenges a wealthier and more powerful China posed to US interests prompted the Obama administration to announce a "strategic rebalance" or "pivot" that entailed a reallocation of military resources to Pacific Asia.²⁰ Beijing reacted sharply, char-

acterizing Washington's renewed attention to maritime Asia as an attempt to check China's rise.²¹

As China increased efforts to strengthen its control in the region and assert territorial and maritime claims, the US pushed back. Washington reiterated commitments under its mutual security treaties with Asian allies and signaled support for the Philippines' international arbitration proceedings against China over maritime rights in the South China Sea. The US also stepped up and spotlighted naval maneuvers, asserting freedom of navigation rights in waters claimed by China, and called on China to cease island-building activities in the area and to adhere to promises not to militarize the landforms under its control. For its part, China flatly rejected the arbitration proceedings and the tribunal's strikingly adverse decision and criticized what Beijing saw as Washington's overreach and meddling in a region where the United States had no territorial claims. China also continued its build-up of, and on, the contested rocks and islands.²² When Washington and Seoul announced plans to deploy an antimissile defense system in South Korea to protect against a growing North Korean threat, China characterized the move as potentially jeopardizing its own security and imposed punishing economic retribution on South Korea.²³

US-China economic relations were becoming more contentious, as well, and more entwined with security concerns. The Obama administration pushed for agreement on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)—a massive, multilateral trade-plus agreement that would strengthen economic ties among the US, its allies, and others in the region while excluding China, at least in the short run. The US saw the TPP as a framework that would offset China's expanding regional influence, which was poised to grow further as Beijing promoted the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)—an agreement that would not include the US and that lacked the scope and depth of integration of the TPP.

The TPP was essentially the economic complement to the "pivot" or "rebalance" in US regional security policy. In pointed contrast to the Clinton administration's effort to frame China's WTO accession for American audiences as a means to change China and assimilate it into the US-led liberal order, the Obama administration presented the TPP as a contest between the United States and China over who would write the rules of the world economy for the twenty-first century.²⁴ The Obama administration tightened reviews of Chinese invest-

ment in sensitive sectors of the American economy by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) and, while also pursuing diplomatic solutions, responded to cyberattacks and cyberespionage against US businesses by indicting alleged Chinese state and state-sponsored perpetrators.

China also contributed to the negative turn in economic relations. Beijing criticized the TPP as an “anyone but China” pact that sought to isolate the PRC.²⁵ China pushed forward with its preferred initiatives, including the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the BRICS Bank (later renamed the New Development Bank), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (which Washington viewed as a potential rival to existing multilateral development banks and which the Obama administration sought, unsuccessfully, to discourage US allies and partners from joining), and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI—a potentially massive effort to promote infrastructure development and connectivity in the Asian region and beyond).²⁶

An Adversarial Relationship Emerges

By the end of Obama’s presidency, and near the close of Xi’s first term as general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and president of the PRC, it was clear the next US administration would have to manage a more contentious relationship with a more competitive China. When Donald Trump took office in 2017, the downturn in US-China relations accelerated sharply, and the two sides moved rapidly toward addressing each other as adversaries or prospective adversaries. A negative assessment of China—and a turn to more unaccommodating policies—increased during Trump’s first years in office amid mounting frustrations with Chinese policies and behavior.

The Trump administration’s National Security Strategy and its National Defense Strategy explicitly identified China (listed along with, but before, Russia) as a revisionist power posing a serious threat to US interests. Both documents included unprecedented language that forewent the more mixed assessments of bilateral relations found in such documents during previous administrations. For example, according to the National Defense Strategy summary:

China is leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce neighboring countries to re-

order the Indo-Pacific region to their [sic] advantage. As China continues its economic and military ascendance, asserting power through an all-of-nation long-term strategy, it will continue to pursue a military modernization program that seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future.²⁷

When Xi Jinping delivered major addresses in October 2017 and March 2018 boldly proclaiming the CCP's determination to realize the country's rejuvenation and make it one of the world's leading military and economic powers by the middle of the twenty-first century, he was declaring a timeline for ending the era of American primacy that had followed the Cold War.²⁸ As US-China rivalry deepened, economic disputes sharpened with the onset of a disruptive "trade war" in 2018.²⁹ Although negotiations made some progress by late 2019 with the announcement of a "Phase 1" trade deal, the outbreak of, and response to, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 led to escalating mutual recriminations that accelerated the deterioration in US-China relations. To some observers, these fast-unfolding events confirmed their belief that the two countries were entering a new era, reprising the dangers of the Cold War that had defined Soviet-American relations for much of the second half of the twentieth century.³⁰

The timing of the change, and the intensity and swiftness of the downturn in US-China relations, serve as a reminder that unexpected events (as had occurred with the 9/11 terrorist attacks) and personalities of leaders (in this case, Xi Jinping and Donald Trump) affect the nature and timing of outcomes.³¹ Nonetheless, the transformation of US-China relations during the 2010s resulted from more fundamental causes operating at the international and national levels that made the shift from limited competition to more comprehensive rivalry likely, if not inevitable.

A CHANGING DISTRIBUTION OF POWER

This movement toward a more adversarial US-China relationship has taken place as the distribution of power in the international system has been shifting. China's rapid rise, and the absence of any other state following a similar trajectory, brought a transition from the post-Cold War condition of unipolarity, marked by the United States'

position as a peerless superpower, to what seems likely to become a bipolar world sometime in the first half of the twenty-first century.³² By the end of the twentieth century, China's military capabilities already had begun to reflect the impact of long-pursued modernization, underwritten by decades of economic growth and aided by selective purchases of advanced equipment from Russia. Equally important, China's expanding capabilities were being harnessed to an increasingly active foreign policy that fed apprehensions in a more attentive United States.³³ While anticipation that China might one day emerge as a rival superpower had motivated the Bush administration's initial intention to treat China as a strategic competitor at the dawn of the century, the significance of China's economic and military rise was unmistakable by the time the US refocused on Asia under President Obama a decade later, and became a central concern in the Trump administration's security policy.

China and the United States began to engage one another on terms characteristic of the behavior of two great powers in a bipolar international system.³⁴ Each was quickly becoming the other's most significant strategic competitor. For both countries, efforts to develop means to counter the other dwarfed what either could gain by recruiting allies.³⁵ The US remained, by a large margin, the post-Cold War world's preeminent military power. China's expanded capabilities clearly separated it from the next tier of powerful states (including Japan, Germany, India, Russia, France, and Britain).³⁶ Consequently, whether China succeeded in forging closer ties with Russia, and whether the US managed to keep its Pacific partners firmly on its side in addressing potential challenges from China, thus seemed unlikely to alter significantly the emerging balance of power between the US and China.

Even if the era of American primacy had not yet ended, shared expectations about a future bipolar order gave the US and China incentives to monitor one another more closely, to compete more widely, and to see the other's gain as its own loss. This perspective helps explain the notable increase during the 2010s in what otherwise appear to be the US's outsized concerns about China's growing role—but still limited military presence—from Africa to the Arctic and China's hypersensitivity to American measures that had begun to respond to those concerns.

As the US and China increasingly focused on the risks each might pose to the other, their attention turned to the geographic area where

the two countries' interests most significantly intersect: maritime East Asia. China saw the American military presence in the region and US policies as an increasingly serious challenge to China's interest in minimizing threats along its periphery, securing economically and militarily vital sea lines of communications (SLOC), and defending (sometimes assertively) its contested claims to sovereignty over landforms and associated maritime rights in the South and East China Seas.³⁷ The United States saw China as a growing threat to its interests in maintaining the credibility of its international commitments (especially security treaties with its allies along China's periphery, several of which have territorial and other serious disputes with China) and upholding principles of international relations and a rule-based international order (including norms concerning the peaceful settlement of international disputes and rules governing freedom of navigation that are embodied in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea—a treaty to which, ironically, China, but not the United States, is a party).

Moves on both sides reflected and fostered a more fraught security relationship. Washington ramped up the frequency of and publicity about US Navy operations challenging Beijing's maritime claims in the South China Sea and its expanding presence on outposts created by its island-building; China criticized these activities as provocations that threatened its interests and complicated its efforts to work with ASEAN states to reduce tensions by negotiating a code of conduct for the South China Sea.³⁸ Several indications that the US would strengthen its support for Taiwan (including increased arms sales) deepened China's concern that Taiwanese political leaders would feel emboldened in rejecting the consensus on "one-China" that Beijing insisted had been forged in Singapore in 1992 (and a version of which the Taiwanese government had accepted before 2016). China's increased economic, military, and diplomatic pressure on Taiwan prompted responses from Congress (including several pieces of legislation urging stronger military cooperation, higher-level official exchanges with Taipei, and stronger US support for Taiwan's international status) and the Trump administration (echoing, in part, earlier statements from then president-elect Trump) that called into question Washington's commitment to abide by its own long-standing "one-China policy" and related support for preserving the status quo in cross-Strait relations.³⁹

The geographic locus of these points of conflict encouraged both sides to take steps that contributed to an especially challenging security environment. With China growing militarily stronger and more assertive and the US becoming more attentive to the Chinese challenge, each side moved to deploy new forces and to plan for increasingly plausible contingencies in which they might engage each other as adversaries, primarily in a maritime domain. Unlike the fixed positions of rival land-based militaries (which characterized the central front in Europe during the Cold War), naval forces, even when not directly challenging one another, operate on patrols, maneuvers, and exercises in areas where units from both sides are present, conducting surveillance, tracking, trailing, warnings, and other actions that increase tensions and the risks of triggering incidents that can lead to inadvertent conflict.

The international system's chronic condition of anarchy also has contributed to more troubled bilateral relations. The absence of an authority that can reliably resolve disputes among states constrains each state to try to provide for its own security. In this context, economic dependence on other states that might pose a serious security threat looks like a dangerous source of vulnerability. Thus, as the US-China relationship moved from a mix of cooperation and limited competition toward rivalry, the focus on absolute gains from their relationship of extensive interdependence (the benefits of "win-win outcomes") shifted toward concern about relative gains (anxiety about "who wins more") and the way unequal economic gains might affect each side's security.

BEYOND CORE SECURITY ISSUES: RETHINKING DEPENDENCE AND INTERDEPENDENCE

As China and the United States became increasingly attentive to the question of relative gains, the negative turn in bilateral relations spread beyond narrowly defined security issues. Especially in Washington, US assessments of various aspects of the relationship were "securitized"—reframed to fit into an overarching narrative that a comprehensive Chinese challenge to American security demanded a comprehensive response.⁴⁰

Technology-related issues, especially the security implications of

advances in electronics, communications, and computers, became a significant factor in US-China relations. The prospect of cyberwarfare increased the intensity and broadened the scope of security competition in a rivalrous relationship.⁴¹ Advanced technologies integrated with weapons and command and control systems created new types of threats to inflict serious damage on enemy targets. They also gave each side incentives to prepare to be the first user in a conflict. With military effectiveness now heavily dependent on information technologies that are more vulnerable than the hardware of the weapons themselves, each country is driven to increase its readiness to act before the other side can disrupt its systems for assessing threats and coordinating military action.⁴² In addition, because each side cannot be sure about the other side's doctrine for cyberwarfare or about the efficacy of new, still largely untested military technologies, both countries have incentives to build larger and more potent arsenals for using blunt force (air, sea, missile, or space weapons) to disable quickly the other side's cyber-capabilities.⁴³

Cyberthreats also blur distinctions between military concerns, narrowly defined, and other security issues: military versus civilian networks; cyberspying that parallels traditional espionage versus that which seeks commercially valuable technology or the means to disable civilian systems; and operations undertaken by a foreign government versus criminal actions by nominally private actors with murky links to the state. Washington's attribution to China of various types of cyberattacks (including but not limited to those targeting militarily useful and security-sensitive content) has aggravated bilateral relations and raised doubts in the US about the wisdom of continued economic and educational engagement that might enhance China's cyber capabilities. Tighter American restrictions on Chinese investment in technology sectors, and on educational and scholarly access in STEM fields, reflected these worries about ever more intertwined security and economic issues.

A more rivalrous relationship also has changed the focus of US economic policy toward China, from traditional issues of trade and investment to concerns about the national security implications of technological competition and the vulnerabilities created by reliance on global supply chains in which Chinese producers are often critical links.⁴⁴ The difficulty the United States and state governments faced in securing adequate equipment for coping with the COVID-

19 pandemic once these supply chains were disrupted deepened such concerns. It also reinforced the already-emerging judgment that US economic engagement with China was helping to make China richer and stronger, and that China's relative economic gains could—ultimately, if indirectly—jeopardize American security.

Washington further tightened restrictions of Chinese investment through the CFIUS review process, including through the Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act of 2018 (FIRRMA), which updated rules to deal with perceived new challenges from China.⁴⁵ Concerns about the security-related risks of economic entanglement with China also gave impetus to the Trump administration's moves against Chinese telecommunications companies, including barring Huawei from the rollout of 5G infrastructure in the United States; trying to persuade US allies to do the same; threatening crippling restrictions on ZTE's purchase of US components; putting Huawei and dozens of other firms on an expanding "entities list" that would prohibit purchases of critical inputs from US sources because of asserted threats to US national security; and moving to bar popular Chinese social media services TikTok and WeChat from US markets, also ostensibly on national security grounds.⁴⁶ With concerns mounting about the unwanted vulnerabilities that deep interdependence creates, the US also moved to toughen restrictions on Chinese nationals' access to US universities' education programs and research labs, on the grounds that access might lead to the acquisition of expertise and information that could give China an economic or military advantage.⁴⁷

Shifting American policies fed China's worries about the implications of its own vulnerabilities, including dependence on US sources for crucial inputs to technologically advanced sectors vital to Beijing's vision for the next stage of China's economic modernization. Washington's actions against Huawei and other PRC companies underscored that the US could and would exercise the leverage China's dependence created. Even if modification of US policy toward Huawei and other Chinese firms were to become part of a US-China trade-plus agreement, it would not lead to a reversal of Beijing's decision to emphasize mitigating China's heavy reliance on foreign, especially American, suppliers for critical components. The heightened emphasis on greater economic self-reliance was underscored in China's 14th Five-Year Plan, which was announced in 2020. Chinese critiques of the US's newly hawkish approach to trade and related disputes portrayed

Washington's moves as yet another example of the American effort to impede China's rise.⁴⁸

The turn toward rivalry and conflict in the bilateral relationship affected even seemingly routine aspects of economic ties. The defining feature of US-China economic relations during the Trump presidency became the "trade war"—an overly narrow term for a quickly escalating conflict over a wide range of economic issues. American complaints and demands were rooted in familiar, in some cases long-emerging, concerns: a substantial bilateral trade deficit; impediments to US firms' access to Chinese markets (particularly in service sectors); shortcomings in China's protection of US firms' intellectual property and allegedly coerced contractual transfers of such intellectual property; Chinese state-owned enterprises' latitude to play by non-market rules; Chinese export-promotion and import-impeding policies (including currency exchange rates); and China's robust industrial policy (particularly in the form of state support for several key emerging technology sectors under the Made in China 2025 initiative and other policies for promoting an "innovation economy").⁴⁹

With the president declaring that trade wars are "good and easy to win," the Trump administration announced a series of punishing tariffs, with rising rates and expanding coverage.⁵⁰ The list of American grievances was vast. Some of it was highly questionable, such as the no longer well-founded charges that China was manipulating its currency's value and a politically charged but economically irrelevant focus on the bilateral trade deficit. Moreover, the US demands presented to China lacked a clear sense of priority, frustrating Chinese interlocutors, and possibly reflecting unresolved disagreement within the Trump administration between those seeking a deal and those who were more interested in decoupling the US and Chinese economies.⁵¹

China responded in kind, with its own tariffs on imports from the United States. Chinese levies and shifts in purchases away from US suppliers focused on politically salient targets, such as Midwestern farmers, who had been crucial to Trump's electoral victory. Beijing also flexed its administrative muscle to clarify that, aside from tariffs, it had other cards it could play, especially actions against US firms doing business in China. The PRC's accelerating efforts to reduce its dependence on US suppliers in response to the trade war effectively, if unintentionally, made the decoupling sought by some in Washington more plausible. In sum, the long-prevailing belief that deepening

economic interdependence was good for both parties and provided crucial ballast to a vital US-China relationship was unraveling.

Washington increasingly viewed Beijing's economic engagement with other countries in similarly dark terms. The Trump administration, and other US critics, were skeptical about the BRI, Xi Jinping's signature international economic policy, which pushes outbound investment in infrastructure and support for economic development across much of Asia and into Europe. They claimed the BRI was a nefarious strategy to increase Chinese political influence, using dubious tactics they labeled "debt trap diplomacy."⁵²

Although the Xi and Trump administrations engaged in extensive and protracted negotiations on trade and related issues and reached preliminary deals, little progress was made on the core concerns. In part, this reflected mutual distrust. On the American side, long-simmering complaints about China's poor implementation of legal commitments and policy promises on trade and other aspects of international economic relations reached a boiling point. On the Chinese side, there was considerable concern that a mercurial and transactional President Trump would not follow through on any agreement reached, or would pocket any concessions China made and then demand more.⁵³ This concern was exacerbated by Trump-era US decisions to withdraw from, or turn against, major international agreements and institutions—including ones (most notably the WTO) that Washington had long supported and once urged China to join and that US proponents of constructive engagement had seen as pathways to good bilateral relations and China's socialization into a rules-based international order. The Biden administration's agenda of returning to engagement with international institutions promised to ameliorate some of these concerns, but it did not promise, or portend, an end to US concerns about the WTO, complaints about China's economic policies and behavior, or increased nationalism in US economic policies (including in Biden's "build back better" plan for a post-COVID-19 economic recovery).⁵⁴

Growing distrust compounded difficulties anchored in fundamental features of the international order. No economic deal struck between the US and China, or mere retrenchment of the Trump-era trade war and "America first" economic policies, could eliminate the gnawing fears endemic in a more rivalrous relationship between the

two global giants shadowed by the uncertainty inherent in an anarchic international system that lacks a reliable means to enforce agreements.

DOMESTIC POLITICS AND BILATERAL DISCORD

In both the United States and the PRC, domestic politics—which often had been a source of stability and optimism in bilateral relations—have contributed to the deepening rivalry in recent years. Constituencies in the United States that had favored engagement (and, in some cases, expected it to spur political liberalization in China) and constituencies in China that favored international openness and integration lost clout or questioned their prior beliefs.

In the United States, competitive elections create incentives for campaigns to disagree about foreign policy. Consequently, criticism of the party in power and its candidates for being too soft on China had been a recurring trope in US electoral politics for decades. By the mid-2010s, however, growing concern about China's capabilities and goals was increasing the pressure, especially on incumbents, to defend their approaches to dealing with the challenge China seemed to pose to American prosperity and security.

In 2016, candidate Trump promised a much tougher stance. Although such hawkish campaign rhetoric was not unusual, it typically had given way to moderation after a new president came to power. In contrast, the Trump administration adopted policies that adhered to the candidate's rejection of the view that the decades-long approach to relations with China had benefitted the United States. Trump derided the China policy of his Democrat and Republican predecessors, insisting that they had allowed China to take advantage of the United States. A harder-line posture garnered striking bipartisan support in Congress. As the 2020 election approached, and in the midst of a heated debate about assigning blame for the US's failures in meeting the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, the center of gravity in the politics of US China policy moved further in the direction of confrontation.⁵⁵

In China, too, domestic political factors have led to a tougher approach to relations with the United States. In China's authoritarian system, the key driver has been the CCP's concern about its legitimacy.

Popular support and political stability greatly depend on the regime successfully delivering on its promises to improve the quality of life for the Chinese people and to stand up for China's interests on the world stage. The Xi-era leadership's emphasis on themes of national strength and China's pride as a great power have provided room for, and have nurtured, nationalist popular opinion that constrains the regime to avoid perceptions that it is capitulating to Washington. Thus, when US policies impose costs on China that jeopardize continued growth or challenge China's self-defined core security interests, China's leaders have powerful incentives to avoid even the appearance of weakness in the face of American pressure. The regime can and does compromise when it seems necessary or prudent to do so.⁵⁶ But meeting toughness with toughness is the more likely response when the leadership thinks it faces political damage at home for acceding to seemingly humiliating or overreaching US demands.

The politics of COVID-19 in China fit this pattern and have sharpened US-China rivalry. Concern about the public's perception of the regime's response to the outbreak of the disease in late 2019 predictably led Chinese authorities to squelch domestic critics and whistleblowers. But the regime also moved to stoke and sate Chinese nationalist sentiment by responding to charges from the US that the CCP's mismanagement at home and recalcitrance abroad had contributed to the global pandemic, or, more provocatively, that the novel coronavirus was released from a Wuhan laboratory or was the product of Chinese bioweapons research. Chinese sources leveled countercharges about American mismanagement of the pandemic response and, shockingly, accusations that US soldiers might have spread the virus in summer 2019 while participating in sporting events in China.⁵⁷ These and other claims from Beijing and Washington amplified the impact of domestic politics in the downward spiral of US-China relations during 2020.

Domestic politics also shaped China's stern rebuff of Washington's demands for change in Chinese economic policies, its dire warnings about the consequences of congressional and Trump administration moves to upgrade US relations with Taiwan, and its sharp criticism of US operations challenging China's claims in the South China Sea. Such moves partly responded to, and reinforced, domestic political pressures—from an attentive public and from within the regime—to

be firm in reacting to US policies which, in turn, fosters more adversarial relations.

TOWARD IDEATIONAL CONFLICT?

A final dimension of the shift to more confrontational US-China relations is ideational. By the 2010s, hope had faded among those in the US who thought that policies of constructive engagement, the decades-long growth of economic and social ties, and the resulting rise in China's per capita income and related social metrics would lead to a much more liberal or democratic China. The turn to a more authoritarian mode of politics in China under Xi proved especially devastating to such always-questionable expectations. China had, instead, become a great disappointment and a growing worry for those Americans who had embraced liberal-democratic evangelism as a central tenet of foreign policy during the era when the United States had emerged from the Cold War triumphant and peerless.⁵⁸

Defying such expectations and hopes, China had grown increasingly intolerant of what it saw as a US agenda of "peaceful evolution" (whereby China's political order would transform into something more similar, and more palatable, to the United States). Although the criticism was not new, China's denunciations of unacceptable interference in China's internal affairs grew more strident. By the 2010s, PRC officials were more pointedly rejecting as unsuited to China a long list of norms (on human rights, constitutional governance, democracy, and the rule of law) that the United States and others in the advanced industrial world promoted as universally applicable.⁵⁹ Partly in response, previously tentative and ambivalent talk of a Chinese model resurfaced, with Xi declaring that developing countries might learn valuable lessons from China's successful experience, while the BRI and other development-supporting initiatives were increasing the opportunities for Beijing to try to export those lessons to other countries.⁶⁰

US-China ideational conflict has deep roots. The American embrace of Western Enlightenment liberal values, and the belief that political rights associated with those values are universal, long has underpinned a "crusader state" version of US foreign policy. For China, US efforts, or demands, to alter China's political order recall the

painful nineteenth- to mid-twentieth-century period of humiliating encroachment by, and subservience to, foreign powers that impelled generations of Chinese nationalist revolutionaries, including the early leaders of the CCP and the PRC. The clash of ideologies has now again become more salient, in part because it has become entwined with the increasingly contentious great power politics of US-China relations.

Although human rights and other values issues generally had been deemphasized during the Obama administration and the early Trump administration,⁶¹ such issues have been a chronic source of friction in bilateral relations, and the Trump-era's volatile foreign policy at times wove arguments that stressed conflicting values into its framing of China as a rival and revisionist power. In a 2018 speech that was highly publicized in the US and very much noted in China, Vice President Mike Pence characterized China as "employing a whole-of-government approach, using political, economic, and military tools, as well as propaganda, to advance its influence and benefit its interests in the United States" while the US was "building new and stronger bonds with nations that share our values across the [Indo-Pacific] region."⁶² Drawing on its predecessors' Asia policies and expanding their geographic scope, the Trump administration made a Free and Open Indo-Pacific—including an alignment among democratic states along China's periphery—the rhetorical centerpiece of its policy toward a vast region that included the front lines of growing US-China competition. The Biden administration pledged to outdo its predecessor on several of these fronts, placing even greater emphasis on cooperating with American allies in the Indo-Pacific, elevating the importance of democratic values in US foreign policy, and forging a united front with like-minded partners to confront China's human rights violations.⁶³

In Beijing's view, Washington's ostensibly values-based criticism of China's harsh treatment of human rights lawyers, democracy activists, and feminists; its restrictions on internet content and access; its massive detention and forced assimilation of Uyghurs in Xinjiang; and its erosion of the promises of autonomy, democracy, and the rule of law in Hong Kong—along with Washington's Free and Open Indo-Pacific gambit—are part of a comprehensive strategy to preserve US dominance in the region amid relatively declining American power, and to thwart China's return to its rightful role as a great power and preeminent Asian power.

For the Xi-era Chinese leadership, its mission of national rejuvenation requires the preservation of one-party rule and a Chinese political order that the US's values agenda seeks to undermine. As feuding between Beijing and Washington over the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded, conflict intensified on the ideational front. During Trump's presidency, US officials and politicians began to frame the targets of their criticism as the policies and actions of "the Chinese Communist Party"—rather than "China"—in an attempt to challenge the claim that the Party represented the Chinese people and China's national interests.⁶⁴ Under Biden, the US is less likely to embrace the most inflammatory rhetoric targeting the legitimacy of CCP rule. However, there is little appetite for returning to the approach that had delinked human rights issues from other concerns during the era of engagement. Instead, the Biden administration aims to balance its declared commitment to address such issues as Beijing's harsh repression in Xinjiang, tightening restrictions on civil and political rights in Hong Kong, and evaporating tolerance for expression of dissident views among China's elite with a professed preference to rebuild cooperation with Beijing on urgent matters of common interest, most notably the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.

ASSESSING CONTEMPORARY US-CHINA RELATIONS: INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND RELATED ISSUES

The contributors to this volume address a range of security-related aspects of a newly contentious era in US-PRC relations. They agree that the US-China relationship has become significantly more negative and could get worse. They vary, however, in their assessments of how deep and intractable the conflict is, with those focusing on traditional security issues being, overall, more pessimistic than those who primarily analyze, for example, security-related issues in technology and economic relations.

The contributors also differ over how best to characterize the problems in the bilateral relationship. For some, the troubles in US-China relations reflect genuine conflicts of national interest between a rising China and a relatively declining United States. Others see some version of, or variation on, a security dilemma that, in its classic form, arises when a state hedges against uncertainty about the threats

other states may pose. Faced with uncertainty about other states' intentions, a state builds up its own military capability or allies with security partners. Because other states cannot be sure whether such actions reflect prudent defensive measures or aggressive intentions, they, too, have incentives to base their choices on the more ominous possibility. When a state believes other states should understand that its motives are purely defensive, however, it will find such hedging responses alarming and indicative of malign intent, and it will become more likely to respond in kind, triggering a vicious circle and dangerous spiral. Other contributors assess the US-China relationship partly in terms of ideological differences and possible ideational competition. For these authors, and also for their colleagues who see some form of a security dilemma animating US-China relations, concerns about misperceptions intensifying bilateral conflict loom large.

The first chapters in this volume address the overall bilateral relationship. Charles Glaser argues that increasingly competitive US-China relations can be explained by conflicting interests and China's rising power. In descending order of importance, he identifies Taiwan, US alliance structures in Northeast Asia, regional sea lines of communication, and maritime and territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas. In his account, Taiwan involves incompatible important interests—a core, sovereign territorial security interest for China, and a key international security commitment for the United States. For China, this means a determination to deter Taiwan independence and US intervention, and, ultimately, to unify Taiwan. For the US, it means deterring China from coercing changes to the status quo. Although reflecting conflicting interests, the Taiwan issue also has features akin to a security dilemma in that Beijing sees unification as preserving the status quo of Chinese sovereignty while the US sees unification as altering the status quo of *de facto* independence.

In Glaser's account, China may be seeking to end US hegemony in Northeast Asia and disrupt the US's alliance structure in the region. He sees this as another real, though secondary, conflict of interests, especially if driving the US out is China's goal. Here, too, there are elements of a security dilemma, because Washington and Beijing hold disparate interpretations of whether various moves would preserve or alter the status quo. SLOC and the South and East China Sea disputes are tertiary issues, amenable to compromise solutions and a focus of ideational conflict more than incompatible security interests. They

are important because they can undermine the US's and China's ability to manage disputes over major security issues.

Glaser concludes that a possible US misreading of China's motives needlessly risks escalating US-China competition and conflict. If China's behavior is primarily driven by limited, arguably defensive security concerns (principally Taiwan) rather than more expansive and ideational goals, then there may be more room for cooperation, and the US may have more to gain by eschewing escalated competition and making concessions on issues important to China's security (principally Taiwan).

Alastair Iain Johnston addresses security dilemmas in the context of deteriorating US-China relations. He agrees that uncertainty about other states' intentions is crucial in the origins of security dilemmas, but he argues that it does not adequately explain later stages of an iterative process that he describes as a security dilemma's life cycle. When a security dilemma takes hold, Johnston argues, *declining* uncertainty about the other party's motives leads to spirals of hostility. Each state becomes more certain that it poses no threat to the other, and that the other's behavior is not justifiable hedging. Security assessments in each country become more homogenous, consensus forms, and doubts about the other state's intentions are replaced by strong convictions. What began as a classic security dilemma devolves into a zero-sum competition in which each state sees itself as justified in seeking to redress threats it is sure the other state poses.

Johnston evaluates the contemporary US-China case by analyzing "narratives and memes" about US and PRC intentions found in articles discussing security affairs from major CCP media (*People's Daily* and *PLA Daily*). Building on his prior work with Adam Breuer (which looked at analogous issues in US sources), Johnston finds that China's certainty about the malign intentions of the US has developed more slowly than parallel shifts in US views of China.

Johnston identifies possible warning signs in Chinese discourse that would indicate increased certainty about US hostility, which, in turn, would portend reinforcement of an already-strong consensus in the US that China is a hostile power, fostering the intensely adversarial relations that can characterize later phases in the security dilemma life cycle. Although his chapter provides an account of this possibility in the case of recent US-China relations, Johnston does not conclude that such an outcome is a necessary feature of security dilemmas. He

argues that the trajectory can be reversed if intervening events prompt states to reconsider judgments about each other's intentions, possibly leading them to conclude that the other's agenda is benign.

Jessica Chen Weiss assesses whether US-China relations are characterized by ideological competition between liberal-democratic and autocratic values. She sees twin developments that point to a "systems" competition: in China, resurgent authoritarianism in politics and economic policy under Xi Jinping and a new willingness to present China's experience as a model for others; and in the United States (and other democratic polities), an erosion of liberal-democratic values and institutions at home and a declining commitment to supporting them abroad.

Weiss posits several possible agendas for Chinese ideational influence, ranging from an offensive strategy to spread autocracy to a passive bystander role amid global erosion of democracy. She notes that many assessments in the US, including by the Trump administration, perceive an aggressive Chinese ideological agenda, which leads them to favor policies of containment. Weiss argues that China has pursued a more modest goal of making the world safe for the survival of its authoritarian regime, which does give Beijing an interest in not being a lone, isolated autocracy in a democratic world. China, thus, has a limited but growing autocracy-promoting foreign policy consisting of four principal elements: leading by example (with other regimes attracted by the success of China's model); supporting fellow autocracies in the United Nations and other forums; providing economic and technological assistance—including development aid and tools of digital autocracy—to authoritarian regimes; and shaping opinions overseas, primarily to accept China's narrative on sensitive political issues (including human rights) and—perhaps in the future—to replicate Russian efforts to undermine democracy in other states.

Weiss concludes that US perception, or misperception, that China poses an expansionist ideological threat may become a self-fulfilling prophecy if it drives US policies of decoupling and containment. She argues that this risk can be ameliorated if the US and other democracies perform better at home (and thus have less need to rely on specifiers of global ideological conflict to remain engaged internationally), and if China makes greater efforts to defuse crises and alleviate other states' concerns about its intentions.

Several chapters take a geographic focus, examining aspects of

US-China relations that involve relations with other states. M. Taylor Fravel and Kacie Miura argue that US-China security competition in the South China Sea increased in both scope and intensity following the standoff between China and the Philippines at Scarborough Shoal in 2012. Evaluating the work of scholars and policy analysts, government documents, and speeches by key leaders in the US and China, Fravel and Miura conclude that what began as regional conflict among rival claimants to territorial sovereignty and associated maritime rights morphed into another focal point of US-China rivalry. Both the United States and China came to see disputes relating to the South China Sea as contests revealing intentions that bear on larger issues in US-China relations.

The result has been a downward spiral that has hardened each side's beliefs that the other has hostile intentions. In Fravel's and Miura's assessment, China sees US policy and behavior in the South China Sea as indicating Washington's determination to resist China's rise through a strategy of containment, thwart its acquisition of a larger international role, and prevent China from challenging the US's hegemonic position. And the United States interprets China's policies and actions as proof of a revisionist agenda to dominate the region and to overturn the existing regional order and, perhaps, the larger rules-based international order that developed during the era of American preponderance. Fravel and Miura conclude by emphasizing the growth of broader dangers stemming from the spiral of hostility between the US and China over the South China Sea. They argue that these disputes are exacerbating the risks identified in the literature about the rise and fall of great powers.

The next three chapters turn partly to the roles that third countries play in US-China relations. Michael Green argues that Japan has moved the US to react more strongly to threats posed by China but can also exert a moderating influence on US policies that might increase risks of a US-China military and economic confrontation. Green characterizes Japan's perspective on relations with the US and China as having shifted away from a long-prevalent post-World War II concern with a Thucydides dilemma, wherein Japan worried both that dependence on the US for security against Chinese threats might entrap Japan in US-China conflicts (even as Japan faced its own Thucydides trap in the form of a possible conflict between itself, as a relatively declining regional power, and a rising China), and that the US might abandon

Japan if Washington were to conclude that the benefits of protecting Japan were outweighed by the costs of a resulting conflict with China.

During the 2010s, as China became more assertive in disputed regions of the East China Sea and leveraged economic dependence to coerce Japan and other neighbors, Tokyo's concerns about threats from China predominated. The emerging US-China strategic competition offered opportunities, which Japan seized. Premier Abe Shinzo pursued strategies of internal balancing (revitalizing the economy, increasing defense spending, and restructuring the apparatus for national security strategy) and external balancing (strengthening the US alliance, loosening constitutional restrictions on the military, and pursuing closer cooperation with regional democracies).

Although Trump's views on trade and alliances posed challenges, Abe's Japan cooperated with and influenced the US across several domains of US-China competition: diplomatic (where the Free and Open Indo-Pacific became a central US policy); ideational (where Japan increased support for democratic values and a liberal international order); military (where US-Japan cooperation deepened); and economic (where Japan and the US aligned in seeking to counter China's BRI and to exclude Huawei from 5G development). Still concerned about Japan's Thucydides trap, Abe also sought improved relations with China, and still facing a Thucydides dilemma, Japan must worry about mitigating possible US moves—whether toward Japan or China—that could weaken US commitments to Japan's security.

Victor Cha addresses the implications of changes in US-China relations for North and South Korea, which face constraints as smaller powers in a region where two great powers pursue conflicting interests. Security considerations encourage South Korea to rely on the US for the guarantees an alliance provides against the threat from North Korea and, potentially, from China. At the same time, South Korea's economic dependence on China encourages it to avoid antagonizing Beijing. Seoul's approach has been one of hedging to protect its interests in the shadow of US-China rivalry. Although this approach has been viable (if complicated), increased US-China tensions are making Seoul's policy dilemmas more acute and hedging more difficult. Cha sees South Korea tilting toward China as US-China competition intensifies, putting the ROK-US alliance under stress. As the US more vigorously presses South Korea to choose sides, Seoul may be confronting the limits to its hedging strategy.

North Korea has had more limited options due to its international isolation and dependence on China for both security and economic viability. It must focus on retaining Beijing's backing. When US-China cooperation increases, Pyongyang seeks to minimize a rising risk of abandonment by Beijing. It complains to China about inadequate support and carries favor by more ardently backing China's objectives. When US-China competition intensifies, Pyongyang seeks to strengthen its alliance with Beijing by backing China in its great power rivalry with the United States and by exploiting Beijing's fears that US-DPRK relations might thaw, weakening China's position in the region.

Cha also considers the implications of intra-Korean relations for US-China relations. Skeptical of the view that reduction in tensions related to denuclearization is a win-win for Beijing and Washington, Cha emphasizes that the great powers' interests are not much aligned beyond a shared agenda of avoiding war on the peninsula and defusing risks born of Pyongyang's weapons programs. The US and the PRC continue to disagree about the terms for North Korea's denuclearization and the terms of—and the path to—possible Korean reunification.

In a chapter assessing the danger of a US-China military conflict or confrontation over Taiwan, Scott Kastner argues that the consequences would be severe, and the likelihood of conflict, although low, is rising. As the cross-Strait balance of military power shifts decisively toward Beijing, China's confidence that it would prevail in a conflict rises and the costs to China of a conflict fall, increasing the attractiveness of a military option. Although this should give Taiwan reasons to accommodate Chinese demands, a peaceful outcome might be unachievable because of domestic political constraints in Taiwan (reflecting opposition to unification) or information problems that bedevil international bargaining (in this case, that Taipei and Beijing each might misrepresent and overstate its own resolve and misread the other's redlines) and the difficulty of establishing credible commitments (since a more powerful China cannot ensure that it will honor promises to Taiwan about post-unification arrangements, not least because such a cross-Strait deal would eliminate the prospect of US intervention on Taiwan's behalf).

According to Kastner, Washington faces an increasingly difficult dilemma in deterring China from coercing Taiwan while maintain-

ing fairly good US-China relations. The deterrence side of this dilemma has always been difficult because the US needs to manage the risks of entrapment inherent in an alliance between highly unequal powers, and because many conventional means for demonstrating commitment—such as security pacts or stationing forces—are unavailable in US-Taiwan relations in the years since US-PRC normalization. China faces its own dilemma, seeking to deter Taiwan independence (which becomes harder amid rising Taiwanese identity) and achieve peaceful unification (which becomes more difficult as China's growing power and efforts to deter independence undercut its ability to offer Taiwan credible assurances).

Kastner argues that the Taiwan issue is becoming a more serious version of the security dilemma it has long posed in US-China relations. All sides have defensive/pro-status quo objectives (Beijing in deterring Taiwan independence; Washington and Taipei in deterring Beijing from coercing unification) and offensive/revisionist ones (for Beijing, achieving unification; for some in Taipei, independence; and, for some in Washington, greatly enhancing US-Taiwan relations). Especially in the context of a more broadly adversarial US-China relationship, moves such as Beijing's tougher line toward Taiwan under President Tsai Ing-wen and Washington's Trump-era moves to upgrade ties with Taiwan can serve—and be seen by the opposing side as serving—offensive goals as well as defensive ones.

A final set of chapters focuses on substantive issue areas. Phillip Saunders considers the implications of China's ambitious program of military modernization, which has included: massive investments (including in capacity to fight informatized wars and to address contingencies of conflict with the United States); redefined missions (which include maintaining domestic order, traditional military functions of deterring aggression and preserving sovereignty and security, newer roles in protecting economic development and space and cyberspace interests, and nontraditional security tasks such as disaster relief); and institutional reorganization (with changes in the traditional army, navy, air force, and nuclear missile services, creation of new space and cyberspace units, and coordination with the paramilitary People's Armed Police).

Saunders finds that China's acquisition of military capacity, which can help achieve foreign policy goals, also entails significant costs. Neighboring countries (many of which have territorial disputes with

China) as well as the United States have become increasingly wary of a militarily more powerful China and its use of methods ranging from intimidation backed by its growing military clout to gray zone tactics of coercion to economic and diplomatic carrots and sticks. While a resort to force by China, particularly to resolve territorial disputes, would exact too heavy a diplomatic, economic, and security price, concerns about China's expanded capacity and increased assertiveness have made Beijing's softer tools less effective. Saunders also notes the current limits to China's military capabilities, especially for missions to protect the country's economic interests and its nationals abroad, which would require projecting force over great distances.

Saunders identifies five factors that will shape the future of PLA modernization and, in turn, the security dimension of US-China relations: the regional security environment, domestic political stability (both of which could require China's military to focus on local concerns), China's economic performance (which affects the resources available for military modernization), China's expanding overseas interests (which might lead to a more robust PLA presence abroad), and, most important, US-China relations. Intensified US-China strategic competition would accelerate Chinese investment in advanced weaponry and force projection capabilities, which would further intensify bilateral rivalry, reduce prospects for cooperation, and increase the importance of developing crisis prevention and management mechanisms.

Elsa Kania and Adam Segal examine issues of science and technology in the context of the emerging rivalry in US-China relations. They depict a striking reversal in attitude from the early decades of China's economic reforms and opening to the outside world, when blossoming scholarly and commercial exchanges were viewed as mutually beneficial, to the 2000s and 2010s, when China's growing prowess in science and technology and both countries' deepening security concerns prompted political leaders in Washington and Beijing to worry that new developments (especially in artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and 5G telecommunications networks) would give its principal strategic adversary an advantage.

Kania and Segal describe China's determination to become more self-reliant in key sectors of science and technology to avoid dependence on an unreliable, potentially hostile United States. Articulated in the context of the Made in China 2025 initiative in industrial policy,

this agenda became more urgent when the Trump administration imposed, or contemplated imposing, restrictions that threatened access to critical inputs. Kania and Segal also address the growing American determination to preserve its role as the global leader in science and technology in the face of a perceived challenge from China. This goal has been manifest in growing restrictions on exchanges with China that could help it close the gap, and in incipient efforts that aim to sustain the US lead over China.

Kania and Segal are skeptical that these developments portend full-blown decoupling and the division of the world into distinct science and technology ecospheres. They anticipate a mixed relationship of cooperation and competition, albeit one in which increased mutual suspicion between the US and China constrains scholarly and commercial connections.

James Reilly considers the place in US-China relations of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative—the most prominent international project for China under Xi Jinping. He recounts the US response, beginning almost immediately after the announcement of the “One Belt, One Road” policy in 2013 and escalating under the Trump administration. Washington criticized the BRI as a Chinese global strategy to use “debt trap diplomacy” to advance Beijing's regional interests and global power while undermining the security and sovereignty of host states and harming American interests. Reilly argues that this US assessment reflects a superficial understanding of the BRI and misplaced credulity toward China's branding exercise. According to Reilly, Washington's reaction reflects the CCP's ability to mobilize resources in the service of regime priorities and to put forth effective propaganda rather than any realistic assessment that the BRI will dramatically alter the geo-economic or geostrategic landscape.

In Reilly's account, the BRI is less a coherent grand strategy than a label applied to a vast number of uncoordinated Chinese overseas economic activities, some predating the BRI and others the product of parochial initiatives by local-level actors taking advantage of the opportunities provided by the central government's loudly proclaimed agenda. The sprawling projects grouped under the BRI rubric have encountered serious difficulties, including mismanagement by poorly supervised Chinese participants, insufficient attention to environmental impacts, alienation of local communities in recipient states, and corrupt deals made with insufficient transparency. These trou-

bles have prompted Beijing to undertake major adjustments, including pledges to make BRI projects “open, green, and clean”—promises that will prove difficult to fulfill, Reilly argues, because they will face resistance from Chinese actors who benefited from the initial, free-wheeling approach.

Reilly concludes that US overreaction to an inaccurate perception of a formidable and threatening BRI introduces unnecessary conflict in US-China relations. The US stance may also foreclose opportunities for cooperation that could follow from encouraging China to implement its new commitment to a more responsible approach to BRI projects.

PROSPECTS FOR US-CHINA RELATIONS

Given the array of factors that have contributed to the deterioration in US-China relations since the late 2000s, it seems unlikely that there will be a swift return to a pragmatic, managed competition that focuses significantly on mutual benefits, much less the more optimistic scenarios for cooperation and convergence that were a big part of the discourse during the four decades following normalization. But that does not mean the United States and China are destined to reprise the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, much less go to war with one another, directly or through proxies.

Warfighting remains unlikely, in part because nuclear-armed superpowers face unacceptably dire consequences that deter them from direct military conflict over even fundamentally conflicting interests and values.⁶⁵ Several factors continue to distinguish the current troubled US-China relationship from former US-Soviet relations and weigh against a new Cold War. Restraint is in the self-interest of both the United States and China because of the obvious benefits each can derive from the following: an open, rules-based, international economic order; negotiating limitations on a potentially costly arms race that would do little to enhance security when each side already has a nuclear deterrent that provides a robust buffer against existential military threats; and cooperating on global issues for which the United States and China are pivotal actors with big stakes (such as climate change and the recurrent challenges of global public health emergencies). Unless the costly process of decoupling goes much further than

currently seems likely, the economic connections that long have underpinned bilateral ties will continue to give both sides large material incentives to avoid a reprise of the Cold War division into two largely walled-off camps.

Despite recent trends in the domestic politics of foreign policy in both countries that favor a tougher line toward the other side, still-influential actors and constituencies in both polities are wary of the consequences of further deterioration of bilateral relations. Although the consensus in Washington supporting constructive engagement has crumbled, there is no incipient new consensus that sees a new Cold War as inevitable, much less desirable. Ideational conflict is not destined to move rapidly beyond its current, inchoate state. The US's always-fitful emphasis on values issues in US-China relations, which has been in relative eclipse for most of the past decade, has been rising and the Biden administration embraces this emphasis without the equivocation sometimes evident under Trump. Whether this trend will make disputes over values central to the US's China policy is unclear. And despite the Xi-era turn to promoting a Chinese model and an international "community of common destiny," Beijing is not yet on the verge of offering, or pressing for, something akin to the rival ideology championed by the Soviet Union in its struggles with the United States during the Cold War era.⁶⁶

But objectively strong reasons to moderate hostility may not be enough, and the differences between current US-China relations and those of the Cold War superpowers may diminish. Arresting, let alone unwinding, the downward spiral into deepening rivalry will be difficult. Both countries are likely to remain acutely sensitive to relative rather than absolute gains that affect the risks each confronts and the threats each perceives. To avoid falling behind in a competitive relationship, and to hedge against the remote but highly consequential possibility of armed conflict between nuclear powers, the US and China are likely to invest heavily in military capabilities, increasing the severity of the security dilemma each perceives. If economic decoupling—reinforced by the growing securitization of many issues in US-China relations and accelerated by lessons drawn from the COVID-19 pandemic about the risks of import-dependence—weakens or severs global supply chains that have linked China and the United States, other states will face greater pressure to choose a side in a world that is not only bipolar but also divided once more into rival

camp. The “get tougher” politics of US policy toward China seems likely to constrain political leaders from both parties.

Although the Biden administration’s approach to China policy differs from its predecessor’s in style and methods, significant changes in substance are unlikely, given: the Biden team’s stated agenda in China policy; the constraints imposed by hard-line measures adopted by the Trump administration during its lame duck phase; the new administration’s need to focus on the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery from the economic crisis it has spawned; and congressional and popular support for a more hawkish China policy. In China, recently increased popular nationalism under Xi’s leadership also appears durable. Mounting mutual mistrust and growing ideational conflict could well compound interest-based conflicts and make them more difficult to manage.

History does not repeat itself, but it can rhyme and often resonates. The message is clear: although the United States and China could well be on a path toward a new Cold War with twenty-first-century characteristics, that outcome is neither inevitable nor in the interest of either country. Whether leaders in Washington and Beijing will be up to the challenge of managing their rivalry in a fashion that better preserves international peace and prosperity while ensuring their own national interests remains an open, and important, question.

Notes

1. See David Shambaugh, “Containment or Engagement of China: Calculating Beijing’s Responses,” *International Security* 20, no. 4 (Fall 1996), pp. 180–209; Joseph S. Nye, “China’s Re-Emergence and the Future of the Asia-Pacific,” *Survival* 39, no. 4 (1997), pp. 65–79; Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross, editors, *Engaging China* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999); Thomas J. Christensen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015); Neil Thomas, “Matters of Record: Relitigating Engagement with China,” *MacroPolo*, September 3, 2019, <https://macropolo.org/analysis/china-us-engagement-policy/>.

2. See David M. Lampton, “The US and China: Sliding from Engagement to Coercive Diplomacy,” *PacNet*, no. 63, August 4, 2014, <http://csis.org/publication/pacnet-63-us-and-china-sliding-engagement-coercive-diplomacy>; John J. Mearsheimer, “Can China Rise Peacefully?” *National Interest*, October 25, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/can-china-rise-peacefully-10204>; David M. Lampton, “A Tipping Point in US-China Relations Is Upon Us,” *US-China Perception Monitor*, May 11, 2015, www.uscnpm.org/blog/2015/05/11/a

-tipping-point-in-u-s-china-relations-is-upon-us-part-i/; Kevin Rudd, "US-China 21—The Future of US-China Relations under Xi Jinping: Toward a New Framework of Constructive Realism for a Common Purpose," Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, April, 2015, http://asiasociety.org/files/USChina21_English.pdf.

3. Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, "The China Reckoning," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 2 (March-April 2018), pp. 60–70; Wang Jisi and others, "Did America Get China Wrong? The Engagement Debate," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 4 (July-August 2018), pp. 183–95; Aaron L. Friedberg, "Competing with China," *Survival* 60, no. 3 (June-July 2018), pp. 7–64. See, also, Thomas, "Matters of Record: Relitigating Engagement with China"; Alastair Iain Johnston, "The Failures of the 'Failure of Engagement' with China," *Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2019), p. 99.

4. For a view disputing claims that China has narrowed, or is likely to narrow, this gap, see Michael Beckley, "China's Century? Why America's Edge Will Endure," *International Security* 36, no. 3 (Winter 2011/12), pp. 41–78; Michael Beckley, *Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the World's Sole Superpower* (Cornell University Press, 2018).

5. See, for example, "National Security Agency Review Teams Briefing Remarks as Prepared for Delivery by President-elect Joe Biden in Wilmington, Delaware" (2020). ("As we compete with China and hold China's government accountable for its abuses . . . our position will be much stronger when we build coalitions of like-minded partners. . . . On any issue that matters to the U.S.-China relationship . . . we are stronger and more effective when we are flanked by nations that share our vision." <https://buildbackbetter.gov/speeches/national-security-agency-review-teams-briefing-remarks-as-prepared-for-delivery-by-president-elect-joe-biden-in-wilmington-delaware/>).

6. See, generally, Elizabeth Economy and Michel Oksenberg, editors, *China Joins the World: Progress and Prospects* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1999).

7. See Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford University Press, 2005), chapter 5.

8. See Avery Goldstein, "Great Expectations: Interpreting China's Arrival," *International Security* 22, no. 3 (Winter 1997/98), pp. 36–73. See, also, Thomas J. Christensen, "Posing Problems without Catching Up: China's Rise and Challenges for US Security Policy," *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001), pp. 5–40.

9. See Robert S. Ross, "The Geography of the Peace," *International Security* 23, no. 81 (Spring 1999), pp. 81–118.

10. United States Census Bureau, "Trade in Goods with China," www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5700.html; Office of the United States Trade Representative, "The People's Republic of China," <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/china-mongolia-taiwan/peoples-republic-china>; "Top U.S. Trade Partners," www.trade.gov/mas/ian/build/groups/public/@tg_ian/documents/webcontent/tg_ian_003364.pdf; Congressional Research Service, "U.S. Trade

with Major Trading Partners,” December 18, 2018; Wayne M. Morrison, “China’s Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, and Implications for the United States,” June 25, 2019, Congressional Research Service, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33534.pdf>.

11. See, generally, Robert S. Ross, editor, *After the Cold War: Domestic Factors and U.S.-China Relations* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 1998); David M. Lampton, *Same Bed, Different Dreams: Managing U.S.-China Relations, 1989–2000* (University of California Press, 2001), chapter 7; Erica S. Downs, “New Interest Groups in Chinese Foreign Policy,” Brookings Institution, April 13, 2011, www.brookings.edu/testimonies/new-interest-groups-in-chinese-foreign-policy/; Ka Zeng, editor, *China’s Foreign Trade Policy: The New Constituencies* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2007). On recent, adverse developments, see Daniel W. Drezner, “The Death of the China Lobby?” *Foreign Policy*, July 20, 2010. On domestic politics as determinants of foreign policy generally, see Helen V. Milner, *Interests, Institutions, and Information: Domestic Politics and International Relations* (Princeton University Press, 1997).

12. See, generally, Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, 4th edition (London, UK: Pearson Longman, 2001); Quansheng Zhao and Guoli Liu, “Managing the Challenges of Complex Interdependence: China and the United States in the Era of Globalization,” *Asian Politics and Policy* 2, no. 1 (2010), pp. 1–23.

13. Robert Zoellick, “Whither China? From Membership to Responsibility – Remarks to the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations,” September 21, 2005, www.ncuscr.org/sites/default/files/migration/Zoellick_remarks_notes_06_winter_spring.pdf.

14. See, generally, Martha Finnemore and Michael N. Barnett, *Rules for the World: International Organization in Global Politics* (Cornell University Press, 2004); Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992), pp. 391–425. For a constructivist analysis of China’s interaction with international law and institutions, see, also, Alistair Iain Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980–2000* (Princeton University Press, 2008).

15. “The President’s News Conference,” American Presidency Project, March 29, 2000, www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=58305; “Full Text of Clinton’s Speech on China Trade Bill,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2000; “Premier Zhu Rongji Meets Powell: Cooperation between China, US Conducive to Both,” *Xinhua*, July 28, 2001.

16. Randall Peerenboom, *China Modernizes: Threat to the West or Model for the Rest?* (Oxford University Press, 2007); see, also, the discussion in Jacques deLisle, “Development without Democratization? China, Law and the East Asian Model,” in *Democratizations: Comparisons, Confrontations and Contrasts*, edited by Jose V. Cipurut (MIT Press, 2009), pp. 197–232.

17. See Michael W. Doyle, “Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs,” *Phi-*

losophy and Public Affairs 12, nos. 3 and 4 (1983), pp. 205–35, 323–35; President William J. Clinton, “State of the Union Address” (“Ultimately, the best strategy to ensure our security and to build a durable peace is to support the advance of democracy elsewhere. Democracies don’t attack each other. They make better trading partners and partners in diplomacy.”), January 25, 1994.

18. Johnston, “The Failures of the ‘Failure of Engagement’ with China”; Thomas, “Matters of Record: Relitigating Engagement with China.”

19. See National Security Strategy, May, 2010, <http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/2010.pdf>, p. 43, and “The National Military Strategy of the United States of America,” June, 2015, www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015_National_Military_Strategy.pdf, p. 2.

20. See, generally, Kurt Campbell, *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia* (New York: Hachette, 2016). Although some saw this approach as compensating for the Bush administration’s inattention to East Asia, the US had remained engaged in regional affairs even when its top priority was the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. See Thomas J. Christensen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015).

21. See “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Liu Weimin’s Regular Press Conference on November 17, 2011,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw/s2510/2511/t879769.htm; Chris Buckley, “China Looks across Asia and Sees New Threats,” Reuters, November 10, 2011, www.reuters.com/article/2011/11/10/US-China-asia-idUSTRE7A91CY20111110; Keith B. Richburg, “US Pivot to Asia Makes China Nervous,” *Washington Post*, November 16, 2011; Barbara Demick, “China’s Fury Building over Obama’s New Asia Policy,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 21, 2011.

22. See Jacques deLisle, “Political Implications of the July 2016 Arbitration Decision in the Philippines-PRC Case Concerning the South China Sea: The United States, China, and International Law,” *Asian Yearbook of International Law* 21 (2017), pp. 49–82.

23. See Bonnie S. Glaser, Daniel G. Sofio, and David A. Parker, “Snapshot – The Good, the THAAD, and the Ugly: China’s Campaign against Deployment, and What to Do About It,” *Foreign Affairs*, February 15, 2017, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2017-02-15/good-thaad-and-ugly; Bonnie S. Glaser and Lisa Collins, “Snapshot – China’s Rapprochement with South Korea: Who Won the THAAD Dispute?” *Foreign Affairs*, November 7, 2017, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2017-11-07/chinas-rapprochement-south-korea. On China’s concerns, see Li Bin, “The Security Dilemma and THAAD Deployment in the ROK,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 3, 2016, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/08/03/security-dilemma-and-thaad-deployment-in-rok-pub-64279>. On the vulnerability of China’s nuclear arsenal to US counterforce strikes, see Charles L. Glaser and Steve Fetter, “Should the United States Reject MAD? Damage Limitation and US Nuclear Strategy toward China,” *International Security* 41, no. 1 (Summer 2016), pp. 49–98.

24. President Obama, “Writing the Rules for 21st Century Trade” (“We have to make sure the United States—and not countries like China—is the one writing this century’s rules for the world’s economy.”), White House, February 18, 2015, www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/02/18/president-obama-writing-rules-21st-century-trade.

25. See Guoyu Song and Wen Jin Yuan, “China’s Free Trade Agreement Strategies” (“Most Chinese scholars claim its implementation will have a negative impact on China”), *Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (Fall 2012), pp. 107–19; Mei Xinyu, “TPP No Better than ‘Imperial Preference’” (“Be it launching the negotiations on the TPP, or reaching agreement on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with Europe, all the US’ moves have the intention of maintaining its hegemony in international trade rulemaking while excluding China.”), *China Daily*, October 12, 2015.

26. See Office of the United States Trade Representative, “The United States in the Trans-Pacific Partnership,” www.ustr.gov/about-us/press-office/fact-sheets/2011/november/united-states-trans-pacific-partnership; Xue Litai, “The Role that US Plays in Asia,” *China Daily*, November 24, 2011, www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2011-11/24/content_14151883.htm; John Ross, “Realities behind the TransPacific Partnership,” China.org.cn, November 18, 2011, www.china.org.cn/opinion/2011-11/18/content_23953374_2.htm; Natalie G. Lichtenstein, editor, *A Comparative Guide to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank*, 1st edition (Oxford University Press, 2018).

27. “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America,” 2018, www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf, p. 2; See, also, “National Security Strategy of the United States of America,” December, 2017, www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf; Kate O’Keeffe and Siobhan Hughes, “US Defense Bill Aims to Counter China as Rivalry Deepens,” *Wall Street Journal*, August 1, 2018. US strategic assessments prior to 2017 expressed concerns about China’s growing power and the need for the US and its partners to respond but indicated that the US continued to welcome China’s rise as a responsible power. The 2017 National Security Strategy and the 2018 National Defense Strategy express no such hope.

28. Xi Jinping, “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era: Delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China,” October 18, 2017; “Speech Delivered by Xi Jinping at the First Session of the 13th NPC,” *China Daily*, March 21, 2018.

29. See Chad P. Brown and Melina Kolb, “Trump’s Trade War Timeline: An Up-to-Date Guide,” Peterson Institute for International Economics, March 13, 2020, www.piie.com/blogs/trade-investment-policy-watch/trump-trade-war-china-date-guide.

30. See, for example, Minxin Pei, “COVID 19 is Finishing Off the Sino-

American Relationship,” Project Syndicate, April 29, 2020, www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-america-relations-after-covid19-pandemic-by-minxin-pei-2020-04; see, also, Evan Osnos, “The Folly of Trump’s Blame-Beijing Coronavirus Strategy,” *New Yorker*, May 10, 2020; but see Robert S. Ross, “It’s Not a Cold War: Competition and Cooperation in U.S.-China Relations,” *China International Strategy Review*, June 19, 2020, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42533-020-00038-8>.

31. Although arguments based in international relations theory and pointing to structural forces and long-term trends do much to explain the end of the Cold War and demise of the Soviet Union, considering the roles played by Mikhail Gorbachev, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and others is also necessary to understanding what happened and why. For general discussion, see Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, “Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In,” *International Security* 25, no. 4 (Spring 2001), pp. 107–46.

32. Øystein Tunsjø argues that a bipolar order does not require equivalence in the capabilities of its two leading states. It requires only a wide gap between their capabilities and those of the next tier of powerful states. By this standard, China in the mid-2010s had drawn close enough to the US to create the conditions of a bipolar order akin to that which existed with the US and the Soviet Union in the 1950s. Moreover, Tunsjø argues, there is little likelihood for powers to approach China’s capabilities and usher in a multipolar world. Whether or not one agrees with Tunsjø’s assessments of the current situation, the broad trends he identifies are evident and have consequences for US-China relations. By 2015, nominal exchange rate calculations of GDP placed China’s economy at roughly two-thirds the US economy and three times the size of the next largest economy, Japan’s. By purchasing power parity measures, China’s economy is substantially larger relative to that of the US and other developed countries. See Øystein Tunsjø, *The Return of Bipolarity in World Politics: China, the United States, and Geostructural Realism* (Columbia University Press, 2018); see, also, Yan Xuetong, “Why a Bipolar World Is More Likely than a Unipolar or Multipolar One,” *New Perspectives Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (July 2015), pp. 52–56; Yan Xuetong, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers* (Princeton University Press, 2019).

33. Michael D. Swaine and M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s Assertive Behavior, Part Two: The Maritime Periphery,” *China Leadership Monitor* 35 (Summer 2011), pp. 1–34; Andrew Scobell and Scott W. Harold, “An ‘Assertive’ China? Insights from Interviews,” *Asian Security* 9, no. 2 (May 1 2013), pp. 111–31; Jacques deLisle, “Troubled Waters: China’s Claims and the South China Sea,” *Orbis* 56, no. 4 (Fall 2012), pp. 608–42; “Stirring up the South China Sea (I),” *Asia Report*, no. 223 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, April 23, 2012), [www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/223-stirring-up-the-south-china-sea-i.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/223-stirring-up-the-south-china-sea-i.pdf); “Stirring up the South China Sea (II): Regional

Responses,” *Asia Report*, no. 229 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, July 24, 2012), [www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/229-stirring-up-the-south-china-sea-ii-regional-responses](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/229-stirring-up-the-south-china-sea-ii-regional-responses). For a view that questions these claims, see Alastair Iain Johnston, “How New and Assertive Is China’s New Assertiveness?” *International Security* 37, no. 4 (Spring 2013), pp. 7–48.

34. Some assessments went further, seeing not just the prospect of a bipolar order but a potentially more disruptive power transition. Power transitions theory emphasizes the attention a rising challenger and a dominant power pay to one another, although it mainly addresses motivations for launching a war by the dominant power (to forestall the arrival of a competitor) or the challenger (to overcome the dominant power’s resistance to its rise). See A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (University of Chicago Press, 1980); Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Cornell University Press, 2000); Ronald L. Tammen, *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century* (London: Chatham House Publishers, 2000); Graham T. Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017); cf. Lawrence Freedman, “Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?” *Prism* 7, no. 1 (2017), pp. 175–78, http://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_7-1/15-BR_Freedman.pdf?ver=2017-09-14-133601-573.

35. As during the Cold War, allies are neither necessary nor sufficient for dealing with a rival top-tier power in a bipolar system. China’s support of the Soviet Union early in the Cold War augmented Moscow’s international role, but Soviet security depended on the Soviet regime’s military might. China’s shift to supporting the US in confronting the Soviets after 1970 augmented the US’s ability to deter Soviet adventurism in Europe (as did the contributions of America’s NATO allies), but the US’s capacity to secure its vital interests ultimately depended on the outsized American military contribution.

36. See Tunsjø, *The Return of Bipolarity in World Politics*, especially chapter 4.

37. See Avery Goldstein, “US-China Interactions in Asia,” in *Tangled Titans: The United States and China*, edited by David L. Shambaugh (Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), pp. 263–91.

38. See Wei Fenghe, “Speech at the 18th Shangri-La Dialogue by Gen. Wei Fenghe, State Councilor and Minister of National Defense, PRC,” *PLA Daily*, June 2, 2019, http://english.pladaily.com.cn/view/2019-06/02/content_9520790.htm.

39. Richard C. Bush, “A One-China Policy Primer,” Brookings Institution, March, 2017, www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/one-china-policy-primer-web-final.pdf; Jacques deLisle, “United States-Taiwan Relations: Tsai’s Presidency and Washington’s Policy,” *China Review* 18, no. 3 (2018), pp. 13–59.

40. See Evan S. Medeiros, “The Changing Fundamentals of US-China Relations,” *Washington Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2019), pp. 93–119; Michal Kranz,

“The Director of the FBI Says the Whole of Chinese Society Is a Threat to the US – and that Americans Must Step up to Defend Themselves,” *Business Insider*, February 13, 2018, www.businessinsider.com/china-threat-to-america-fbi-director-warns-2018-2; “Remarks by Vice President Pence on the Administration’s Policy toward China,” White House, October 4, 2018, www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-administrations-policy-toward-china/; “Attorney General Jeff Sessions Announces New Initiative to Combat Chinese Economic Espionage,” US Department of Justice, November 1, 2018, www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-jeff-sessions-announces-new-initiative-combat-chinese-economic-espionage.

41. The emergence of technology as a key arena of US-China rivalry is reflected in institutional adjustments on both sides, including the growing importance of US Cyber Command; restrictions on US companies selling technology and software to China; China’s establishment of a Strategic Support Force in the PLA to prepare for electronic, space, and cyberwarfare; and enhanced moves by party and state bodies to control the civilian internet.

42. These features of technology’s role in military capacity reinforce institutional preferences in the military for offensive warfighting doctrines, in part by fostering beliefs in the initial advantages of the offense, and aggravates security dilemmas. See Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Cornell University Press, 1984).

43. See Avery Goldstein, “First Things First: The Pressing Danger of Crisis Instability in US-China Relations,” *International Security* 37, no. 4 (Spring 2013), pp. 66–68.

44. See “IP Commission Report: The Theft of American Intellectual Property: Reassessment of the Challenge and United States Policy,” National Bureau of Asian Research, February, 2017, www.ipcommission.org/report/IP_Commission_Report_Update_2017.pdf; “How China’s Economic Aggression Threatens the Technologies and Intellectual Property of the United States and the World,” White House Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy, June, 2018, www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FINAL-China-Tech-Technology-Report-6.18.18-PDF.pdf; Kathrin Hille and Richard Waters, “Washington Unnerved by China’s ‘Military-Civil Fusion,’” *Financial Times*, November 8, 2018, www.ft.com/content/8dcb534c-dbafe11e8-9f04-38d397e6661c?kbc=8b82f4f1-6fdf-4fe1-91db-99cac1802016; “Assessing and Strengthening the Manufacturing and Defense Industrial Base and Supply Chain Resiliency of the United States,” US Department of Defense, September 2018, <https://media.defense.gov/2018/Oct/05/2002048904/-1/-1/1/ASSESSING-AND-STRENGTHENING-THE-MANUFACTURING-AND-DEFENSE-INDUSTRIAL-BASE-AND-SUPPLY-CHAIN-RESILIENCY.PDF>.

45. Incipient concerns of this type led the US Congress to create the US-China Security Economic Review Commission in 2000, with a mandate to consider whether engagement with China might be jeopardizing American

security interests. See www.uscc.gov/about. But the effects of such concerns on the US's China policy were limited when the top US strategic priority was the global war on terrorism. A growing push in the US for reciprocity in all areas of the US-China economic relationship also reflected the perception that China was benefiting disproportionately. See Elizabeth C. Economy, "China's New Revolution," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 3 (May/June 2018), pp. 60–74. See, also, Jennifer M. Harris, "Writing New Rules for the US-China Investment Relationship," Council on Foreign Relations, December 12, 2017, www.cfr.org/report/writing-new-rules-US-China-investment-relationship; Brock Erdahl, "Restoring Reciprocity to US-China Relations," *International Policy Digest*, April 15, 2018, <https://intpolicydigest.org/2018/04/15/restoring-reciprocity-to-u-s-china-relations/>.

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