



COMPETING VISIONS OF WORLD ORDER: A REALIST-LIBERAL ASSESSMENT OF CHINA-US STRATEGIC RELATIONS

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Abstract

This chapter examines the various aspects of the United States-China relationship, which holds a significant position in the present-day global order. With the world experiencing swift changes due to geopolitical shifts, technological advancements, economic interdependence, and strategic realignments, it becomes integral to predict the future direction of China-US relations. The complex interplay of connections has extensive implications not only for the two countries but also for the entire world. The investigation that serves as the foundation for this study is: What implications might arise from differing political ideologies and governance systems between China and the United States for the long-term prospects of conflict or cooperation in the global arena? Because of the divergent philosophies of the US democratic system and China's Communist Party-led government, there is a chance for ideological contention. The consequences for diplomatic relations, morally problematic policies, international relations administration and ramifications, trade and economic disputes, military and security strategies, cross-cultural and cross-personal relationships, and the ascension of China into the World Trade Organization (WTO). A comprehensive analysis will be conducted through articles, literature, policy documents, and empirical data to oversee ties between the US and China. Liberals and realists will all be used in this chapter. Liberal theories may emphasize the potential for cooperation based on shared economic interests, while realist perspectives may prioritize power dynamics and strategic calculations. This research aims to offer important insights into the possible challenges, opportunities, and outcomes that could mold the evolving relationship between China and the United States in a rapidly shifting global context by investigating various scenarios and applying a theoretical framework based on theories of international relations.

Keywords: Future Trajectory, Global Order, Diplomatic Ties, Ideological Confrontations, Challenges and opportunities

Article Details:

Received on 30 May 2025

Accepted on 22 June 2025

Published on 25 June 2025

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INTRODUCTION

The dynamic relationship between the United States and China. The world is changing quickly due to economic forces, technical reasons, and geopolitical realignments; therefore, the direction of US-China relations becomes critical. This critical connection affects not only the welfare of both countries but also the international community at large, having a significant influence on security dynamics, economic stability, and the structure of the global order. The commencement of the reform era in 1979 marked a significant milestone in China's external relations. The scope of both bilateral and multilateral cooperation has expanded, leading to a reduction in disputes over sovereignty, particularly those about land borders. China's economy has played a crucial role in the process of globalization, acting as both a contributor and a beneficiary. In the year 1989, a turning point in history unfolded. The Soviet forces made the strategic decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, signifying a clear triumph for the United States in the war between dominant powers. Shortly thereafter, in November 1991, the iconic Berlin Wall dramatically collapsed, symbolizing the defeat of communism in Eastern Europe and the weakening of the Soviet Union's hold. Consequently, in December 1991, the Soviet Union ultimately disintegrated, heralding the emergence of a unipolar world where the United States emerged as the only superpower. As a supporter of a unipolar global order, Fukuyama (an American political scientist) identified two events as representative of the Great Powers' politics: the military defeat of Russia in Afghanistan and the fall of the Berlin Wall. According to Fukuyama (2006), this signified the existence of only one superpower, namely the United States. In the aftermath of the global financial crisis in 2008, China's neighboring countries in East Asia have grown increasingly apprehensive, while China itself has adopted a more assertive stance. Concurrently, the United States perceives China as a rival. The Western ideology of capitalism led to a greater willingness among nations.

Russia and China, the other major powers, lacked the resources and capabilities of the US to succeed in achieving political democracy, liberalizing their markets, and aligning with the US-led global order. This marks engaging for me to pose an immediate and significant challenge. The focus shifted away from Great Power competition and towards addressing global issues, specifically following the events of 9/11. This paradigm changes American foreign policy, with a primary emphasis on combating terrorism through the global "War on Terrorism" in Iraq and Afghanistan in response to human rights violations. The main concerns for the US were the threats to its hegemony, including the rise of excessiveness, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation. Interestingly, China was perceived as a significant tactical adversary during this period after September 11, 2001. Instead, most of the Great Powers found themselves brought together by shared threats and growing shared values (Bush, 2009). The mega-changes and mega-challenges of the time are the future of China-US relations. The study highlights areas of agreement for promoting cooperation and offers actions that policymakers may take to manage tensions during times of divergence. Strategic domain problems will continue to be prominent in the U.S.-China relationship. Global Cooperation or Conflict: Consequences of China and stateside States' Differing Political Ideologies and Governance System.

The political beliefs and governance systems that distinguish China and the United States have a big influence on whether or not they will cooperate or clash in the end in the international arena. China has been able to integrate into the global economic system; on the other hand, the more complex and challenging goal of achieving political and ideological integration is currently facing it. Since the United States is the largest obstacle



to the integration of new nations, it must psychologically shift and abandon some of the fundamental diplomatic beliefs it has upheld since 1945. China meantime, incorporates its unique contributions into international political and intellectual structures (Fravel, 2010). Ideological Confrontation

These two nations embody contrasting value systems and ideologies. From the perspective of China's political leaders, the United States is actively seeking to impose its image on the entire world. China, a communist nation ruled by the Communist Party, is certainly seen as a major roadblock to the achievement of US strategic goals. Chinese officials remain consistently vigilant and sensitive to any US initiatives that fall under what Condoleezza Rice (a member of the Republican Party) referred to as "transformational diplomacy," which aims to extend American influence deep into the domestic affairs of other nations (Nye, 2023).

China has a one-party communist system that prioritizes central planning and state control, whereas the US has a democratic capitalist system that emphasizes private industry, individual liberties, and a multiparty system of politics. Conflicts in values and governing strategies may result in ideological differences. A post-war international political and economic system was established when the United States led the founding of the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and other international organizations following the end of World War II. The United States has been spreading Western ideas and institutions globally since the CONCLUSION of the Cold War, taking advantage of this brief "unilateral" moment to promote statements like "the end of history." Currently, as developing countries like China, India, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, and Indonesia gain prominence, the United States requires innovation and strong leadership to restructure the current international institutions, include these newcomers, and provide them with opportunities to contribute positively. Both nations are competing with one another to control the cutting edge in domains like renewable energy, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and clean computing that will shape the twenty-first century. Experts need two conflicting views to evaluate the core principles of the U.S.-China relationship and go beyond ideological caricatures. The United States and China confront global interdependence due to their status as the two most powerful nations on Earth (Yale University 2023).

Trade and Economic Conflicts

Both nations are significant economic powers in the world. China has a mixed-market, state-led economy, whereas the United States has a free-market economy. Trade disputes and economic competitiveness may result from disagreements between their economic models about currency valuation, market access, intellectual property rights, and trade practices. China, the second-biggest trading nation in the world in 2019 and by far the largest among developing nations, has seen a persistent fall in public support for international economic cooperation because of US protectionism (WTO, 2019).

China officially joined the WTO on December 11, 2001, following 15 years of extensive negotiations. The Chinese government saw this as a remarkable opportunity to integrate their economy into the global market and to expedite economic and legal reforms within the country. However, the process of accession was far from smooth due to China's unique position as both a developing and developed nation. While China emphasized its developing country status, Western nations perceived it as a formidable economic force and were concerned about the potential negative influence on their economies.



Consequently, China had to agree to an unprecedented number of conditions and commitments to gain full admission to the WTO in 2001 (Carlos, 2011).

The poor countries have greatly benefited from China's admission to the World Trade Organization (WTO). China purchases more than 25% of exports, while the bulk of the world's top exporters to China are developing nations. It has led the negotiations for accords including the Environmental Goods Agreement, the Investment Facilitation Agreement, and the domestic service regulation. With its newfound status as a developing nation, dedication to free trade, and international outlook, China has successfully promoted consensus-building and balanced the interests of industrialized and developing countries. China has the potential to make a substantial contribution to the organization's reform and renewal. Its WTO membership was a major accomplishment that will keep helping the world economy and the multilateral trade system (Zhou, 2022).

America and China have the two biggest economies on the planet. In absolute terms, the US is first, but since 2017, China has overtaken the US in PPP (purchasing power parity). Both countries' combined GDP as of 2021 represents 41.89% and 34.75% of the world GDP, respectively, in nominal and PPP terms. India's and Japan's GDPs are significantly less than both countries'. There are only these two vying for first place. China's GDP is valued at \$3,982 billion, while the United States leads by \$6,033 billion in 2021, according to IMF projections. The significant economic divide between the two countries to China's population, which is more than four, times that of the US. The US per capita income is 3.61 times higher than China's, both nominally and in PPP terms (World Bank, 2023).

Governance and Influence

The United States held a significant role as a global leader, advocating for democratic values, free commerce, and human rights. China's emergence presents a challenge to this leadership as it seeks to assume the lead in international affairs through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative and offers an alternative economic model. However, China's ascent to importance in the world economy and its assertive foreign policy have challenged America's hegemonic status. Beijing's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a shining illustration of its goal to increase its commercial and infrastructural influence worldwide. (Jisi, 2023) The economic aspect of their leadership f with the ongoing trade disputes and technical rivalry, particularly in fields like artificial intelligence and 5G technologies. Politically, China maintains an authoritarian state and places a higher priority on stability and economic growth than the United States (Hauge, 2023).

The worldwide communities and US-China rivalry for global leadership. Countries frequently find themselves juggling ideological disagreements, security concerns, and economic possibilities. This rivalry may cause regional polarization, in which a nation's side is with China or the United States according to their interests. This might break the international consensus on important topics like security, global health, and climate change (Boylan, 2021). There are several dimensions to the US-China competition for global leadership in the political, military, and economic domains. Among other things, this influences alliances, trade relations, and international accords. Recent events have increased awareness of China's growing influence on the world stage and its power geopolitics worldwide. A major diplomatic turning point in China's Middle East diplomatic history has been the reconciliation of Saudi Arabia and Iran. While the United States prefers to engage in clique and alliance diplomacy, confining its connections to Saudi Arabia alone, China maintains positive relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran. China is making diplomatic progress on matters that the US has long avoided discussing because of



this distinction. Furthermore, China's lack of regional biases strengthens its impartiality as a mediator. China may therefore make a beneficial contribution to the global order and provide a real-world illustration of the GSIA's efficacy (Nawaz & Noor 2023).

Additionally, initiatives like the Health Silk, which launched during the global pandemic—illustrate China's proactive involvement in international health cooperation by fostering alliances through collaborative research and development and medical support (Zeng, 2023). These advances show how China approaches global influence in a multifarious way, extending beyond the conventional domains of health, political, and economic diplomacy. China's influence on the global environment is growing as it forges alliances and carries out ambitious initiatives throughout the globe.

MILITARY AND SECURITY ISSUES

There are common geopolitical goals and both nations possess formidable military might. Misunderstandings over territory (like the South China Sea), military alliances (like the United States support for Taiwan), and divergent approaches to security issues (like cyber security and weapons control) can all cause tensions to rise and turn into hostilities or proxy conflicts in a variety of contexts. Intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance (ISR), logistics, command and control, weapons systems, semiautonomous and autonomous vehicles, and other military aspects have all benefited from the United States and China's strong commitment to investing in emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI). Given the present elevated geopolitical tensions in the Western Pacific, experts in the strategic communities of both nations have expressed worry about the possible effects of military AI on future crisis dynamics between the US and China (Easley, 2016).

Technological advancements have raised the risk of cyber-attacks in the public and private spheres, raising serious concerns about cyberwarfare. Cyberwarfare uses military strategy and tactics that are available to a significantly wider variety of individuals globally than nuclear weapons. In response to the threat, a few countries have created their cyber security divisions as part of their internal operations. October 2022 saw eight significant cyber-attacks that targeted government organizations, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. For example, in October 2022, Russia claimed that, as part of its attempts to assist Ukraine, the US was cyber-attacking it (CSIS 2022). COVID-19 is an unconventional danger that spreads with or without aims, negotiations, or intentions. This unconventional threat affects American national security both directly and indirectly. This problem exists both domestically and internationally. Pandemic viruses provide an obvious threat to homeland security as well as national security, regardless of whether they are weaponized WMDs (Girod, 2023).

Taiwan, officially known as the Republic of China (ROC), is a country in East Asia that shares maritime borders with the People's Republic of China. Taiwan is currently getting ready for the 2024 election, which will be its seventh democratic election. The upcoming election will demonstrate Taiwan's dedication to democracy and the rule of law in the Indo-Pacific area and the rest of the globe. These elections will have a significant influence on Taiwan's future status as it navigates an increasingly unstable geopolitical landscape. President Biden has repeatedly stated since taking office that the United States would support Taiwan if the People's Republic of China invaded the island (Schrivir, 2023). China's propensity for territorial invasion is becoming more and more of a concern as its military might grows. These worries are a reflection of the unpredictability and anxiety that come with changes in power. Since 1949, China has engaged in twenty-three territorial



disputes with foreign nations but has only employed force in six of them. Certain disputes—like the ones with India and Vietnam—were extremely violent. In some of its conflicts, China has been willing to employ force, but it had not taken control of much territory before hostilities began. Furthermore, in seventeen of its territorial conflicts, China has made compromises rather than resorting to force (Fravel, 2007).

INFLUENCE ON DIPLOMATIC TIES

Since the beginning of 1979, the relationship between the United States and China has experienced significant fluctuations, encompassing both favorable and unfavorable developments. On a positive note, the two countries have fostered a mutually beneficial range of connections and engagements across various domains. With Pandemics, terrorism, and climate change, collaboration between the United States and China is essential. Different objectives, strategies, and mistrust, however, might make it difficult to work together effectively, which will affect international attempts to address these problems. As China uses both its soft and strong power resources, it is less likely to terrify its neighbors and other people, which lessens the likelihood that it would incite counterbalanced alliances. Effective tactics frequently combine soft and strong force, as "smart power." For instance, in the nineteenth century, Bismarck employed a soft power tactic to establish Berlin as the most desirable diplomatic hub in Europe after using Prussian strong military might to defeat Denmark, Austria, and France. The United States employed both soft and physical power against the Soviet Union during the Cold War. It follows that China's adoption of a smart power strategy is not shocking (Nye, 2023).

INTERPERSONAL INTERACTION AND CULTURE SWAP

American culture emphasizes individuality, personal freedom, and self-expression; Chinese culture places a greater focus on collectivism, respect for authority, and societal harmony. These two ideas are well-liked and well-acknowledged. Due to the differences in their respective histories, morals, and social mores, China and America have radically distinct cultures. China's people-to-people diplomacy started a new phase with the late 1970s INTRODUCTION of Deng Xiaoping's Reform and Opening-up Policy. Trade with Western nations and foreign corporate investment caused the Chinese economy to take off. After the conclusion of the Cold War in the 1990s, the global landscape underwent a significant shift, favoring China's progress. Given China's vast population and its potential as the largest market in the world, countries such as the US, Japan, and European nations recognized the importance of comprehending China and its growing interest in the international community. Consequently, Chinese people-to-people diplomacy expanded beyond Communist and developing nations, encompassing the entire globe (S Wang, 2016).

US-CHINA Relations, Conflict, Competition, or Cooperation

China and the United Nations Both countries actively participate in several UN institutions and are permanent members of the UN Security Council. While they sometimes compete with one another on issues of human rights and geopolitical clout, they work together on issues related to peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, and sustainable development.

REALIST PERSPECTIVE

Realism, the oldest theory in the field of international relations, considers the future of US-China relations. Realism believes the relations between the United States and China center on power rivalry, balance of power, security challenges, the zero-sum game, and national interest. Realists also correctly observe that despite China's unprecedented growth over the past few decades, the US still maintains a significantly greater level of power (Zaidi,



2020). Even while taking into account universal values and global relevance, American power and national interest should always come first. Changes in policy, from repression to alliances and competitiveness, have defined the relationship between the US and China. The two nations' perceptions of one another have fluctuated between intense friendship and intense animosity. There is strong evidence to support the realistic focus on the significance of national interest and power in the historical context of U.S. relations with China. While various interest groups, political parties, and American leaders may have different approaches and policies toward China, the most important thing to remember is that American interests and power should always come first (Zhang, 2010).

LIBERALS PERSPECTIVE

According to liberal theory, three interconnected elements lead to peace: democratic government, multilateral institutions, and economic integration. Furthermore, liberalism promotes a constructive and forward-thinking vision of humanity, placing special emphasis on the roles and capacities of individuals as the foundation of a country's framework for international relations (Liu & Yang, 2023).

The United States and China actively participate in G20 discussions about trade, financial stability, and international economic issues. Both countries actively participate in trade discussions and disputes as members of the World Trade Organization (WTO). They compete for market access, tariffs, and intellectual property rights protection while working together on certain trade-related issues (Xiao, 2015).

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, or APEC, serves as a platform for promoting economic cooperation among the countries in the Asia-Pacific area. Although they may compete for supremacy in the area and have different economic objectives, the United States and China have discussions on trade liberalization and economic integration. Both nations may actively engage in talks about regional security, conflict avoidance, and confidence-building initiatives in the Asia-Pacific area through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) are aware of the collaboration between the US and China on things like pandemic response and healthcare development. Through this platform, they work on a variety of security-related concerns. However, there may be a rivalry in the future about funding and leadership roles. China and the United States are important players in these organizations, actively participating in discussions about global financial stability, development projects, and economic policies. They could compete with each other for supremacy in these establishments. The United States and China exhibit a combination of cooperation and competition during joint military exercises. They work together to address global issues while simultaneously pursuing their national interests and vying for influence in various spheres of international relations, particularly in the Asia-Pacific area, where their strategic goals occasionally collide (Urata, 2007).

They emphasize collaboration and mutual benefits between states, highlighting the role of non-governmental groups and entities in promoting international affairs' stability and growth (Jintao, 2006). After the CONCLUSION of the Cold War, the US engagement paradigm underwent a significant transformation due to China's increasing economic growth. As China emerged as the world's second-largest economy, its rapid growth became indispensable for American businesses (Michael, 2023). The primary economic component of this approach was the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which aimed to exclude China rather than engage with it. The objective was to encourage other countries in the region (Graaf, 2018). China has demonstrated a remarkable ability to resolve most of its territorial



disputes over the past three decades, despite its ongoing conflicts with other nations (Shiping, 2016). This will also enhance China's role in reshaping the international order, where it will have significant influence as a rule-maker rather than a rule-taker. Some elements of the partnership will encompass a win-win situation. The pivotal inquiry revolves around the ability of the US to adopt a mindset of "cooperative rivalry" (Nye, 2023).

FINDINGS

The historical context of the United States-China relationship, in particular, the change from a bipolar world during the Cold War to a unipolar one after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Things like the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan demonstrate how the United States has become the sole superpower. The key takeaway is that China now has the second-largest economy in the world and it is developing rapidly. The fight for political, economic, and ideological dominance has intensified because of China's stronger economy, which has also given the nation a bigger geopolitical influence and more complicated relationships with the US. The complex dynamics of cooperation and strategic competition in US-China relations emphasize how difficult it is to protect American and alliance interests against China's economic rise. The fundamental driving force behind the relationship is said to be the struggle for hegemony over ideas and resources. Prospects for ties between the United States and China suggest two dissimilar courses: rising antagonism and strategic partnership. The global implications imply that both nations' decisions would have a major influence on the entire system. By highlighting the importance of decisions, deeds, and strategies in determining how China and the US interact with the outside world. It suggests that finding a balance between collaboration and competition will determine whether the world order becomes more harmonious or split. The chapter provides a thorough examination of the relationship between the US and China, recognizing its nuance, historical roots, and potential global effects of the choices these two giants make in the years to come.

CONCLUSION

The complicated dynamics between the two countries strategically positioned U.S.-China ties. Economic was progress propelled by China's amazing transformation from a country with a primarily rural population to the second-biggest economy in the world. This increased China's prestige locally and globally, as well as its political weight in the international arena. As a result, protecting the interests of both the United States and its allies proved to be extremely difficult. Escalating the struggle between China and the US for ideological and economic hegemony as well as political supremacy and to properly grasp the possible courses that the important bilateral relationship between the United States and China may take, one must have a thorough understanding of the historical contexts, geopolitical objectives, economic links and complexity of global governance. China has declared its desire to have a larger role in East Asia, even as the United States has promised to support its Asian allies. However, another, more plausible path entails strategic cooperation and restrained competition. Both nations understand the devastating consequences of a full-scale conflict and are heavily dependent on one another economically. If negotiations continue in this direction, agreements to lessen conflicts, foster mutual respect for one another's spheres of influence and advance more robust international governance structures. Whether or not these global powers contribute to a more harmonic or fragmented world order will depend on how well they strike a balance between cooperation and competition, as well as how much they share a commitment to



global stability. For years to come, the path taken will influence economics, geopolitics, and the fundamentals of international relations.

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