

*INSS Insight* No. 1337, June 21, 2020

**China's Perspective on the Crisis with the United States**

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**The updated document “United States Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China” (May 20, 2020) contends that the United States "underestimated the will of the Communist Party of China (CPC) to constrain the scope of economic and political reform in China" and that China's "increased engagement with the world did not lead to convergence with the citizen-centric, free and open order as the United States had hoped." Such statements bolster the Chinese view, informed by longstanding distrust and suspicion, that the United States seeks to undermine stability and the Communist Party rule in China. Yet even China has been taken aback by the intensity of recent American activity against it, which has included a call to many countries – and, at times, outright demands – not to cultivate their ties with China. China feels that these steps are designed to weaken its standing as a major world power, but in contrast to the past, it feels determined and capable of opposing the American initiatives. To China, Israel is not in the middle of the great power struggle, and its being a firm ally of the United States should not prevent the cultivation of commercial links along civilian lines. While preserving its special strategic relationship with the United States, Israel should understand China's point of view and abstain from unnecessary rhetoric and provocative steps against it.**

An update to the document “United States Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China” issued by the White House (May 20, 2020) brings to the fore the conceptual and political rifts between the leaderships in Beijing and Washington. The Communist Party of China (CPC) leaders are highly critical of the American stance and declared objective of advancing measures that would harm the nature of the regime and society, and above all, the stability of party rule. Above all, the Chinese reject the American perception that "over the past two decades, reforms have slowed, stalled, or reversed. The PRC’s rapid economic development and increased engagement with the world did not lead to convergence with the citizen-centric, free and open order as the United States had hoped." In their view, China has taken great strides along a path of economic and other reforms while preserving strong central rule that ensures Chinese stability; the American approach is deemed "interference in China's internal affairs."

The American document, along with declarations by senior US officials against CPC rule, strengthens China's longstanding political approach of deep distrust and suspicion. This originated with the Chinese civil war (1946-1949), in which the United States backed the Nationalist Party, including with military advisers and supplies. After the Communist victory in October 1949 and the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Beijing fumed as the United States continued to endorse UN membership for the Republic of China, i.e., Taiwan. China balked at two Chinese countries being represented, and only joined the UN on October 25, 1971 after General Assembly Resolution 2758 approved its accession and expelled Taiwan. In China's view, it was the United States that isolated it and, for more than two decades, prevented it from joining the UN and international agencies. Until President Nixon visited China in February 1972 and shook hands with Mao Zedong, the episode that, for the Chinese, epitomized the American attitude was the refusal of US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles to shake the hand of Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai during the 1954 Geneva conference on the Korean War.

Since practical ties were established between the two countries in the 1970s, the distrust and suspicion have been accompanied by envy and admiration, as well as a drive to reach American heights of scientific and technological achievement. Among the urban public there is also a desire to emulate America's culture of materialism, as seen in the demand for American brands that are manufactured in China and can be found in almost every home in the big cities. The bridges built between China and the United States in recent decades are highly varied, a contrast to the Iron Curtain and the alienation that characterized relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. Since China's accession to the UN, the Nixon visit, and subsequently the US recognition of the One China policy and the establishment of full diplomatic relations in January 1979, an extensive tapestry of economic, trade, and academic ties has been woven between the countries, along with mutual desire to exploit these for the advancement of economic growth. In 2019, bilateral trade reached some \$541 billion (US exports: \$123 billion; Chinese exports: \$418 billion). Until the coronavirus era, tens of thousands of representatives of American companies and organizations worked permanently in China. Many among the business and academic sectors in China maintain sweeping ties with American counterparts, and American companies manufacture a significant part of their products in China. Over the last decade, the children of many of the political and economic elite have studied in the United States, including the daughter of President Xi Jinping, who attended Harvard. More than 390,000 Chinese students were enrolled last year in the United States, the largest cohort of foreign students.

In the realm of statecraft and strategy, Beijing has contended over the last 25 years with bilateral crises that occurred under US presidents from both parties. Inter alia, during

President Clinton's term a crisis emerged vis-à-vis Taiwan, which peaked (March 1996) with China conducting a missile test and military drill before the Taiwanese elections, fearing that the island would, under US auspices, take steps to break away in a shift of the One China policy. During the Balkan war, the Americans bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade (May 1999); they apologized publicly and claimed this was a human error, an explanation not accepted by the Chinese. Early in George W. Bush's term (April 2001), a Chinese warplane collided with a US early warning aircraft flying over Hainan Island, and the Chinese pilot was killed. During Barack Obama's presidency, China was accused of currency manipulation that deepened the US trade deficit, and of stealing technologies and commercial secrets. The Chinese human rights activist Chen Guangcheng fled to the US embassy in Beijing, and following negotiations, won political asylum in the United States (April 2012). These and other crises were resolved through pinpoint compromises, upon the conclusion of negotiations that involved the respective leaders. During these years, China faced American pressure to support a tougher policy on the Iranian nuclear file and the ongoing crisis with North Korea, but continued calling for "diplomatic dialogue" and voiced opposition to military alternatives.

The harshened American rhetoric since President Donald Trump took office was not foreign to the senior leadership in Beijing. To the Chinese, "Trade War" sounds like a blunt recasting of earlier confrontations, and they have acted true to form, by buying time and negotiating over the small print of accords, sometimes reopening clauses already in agreement. Nonetheless, it seems that recently China has been surprised by the force and intensity of the American effort, in that contrary to the rhetoric and isolated actions of the past, this time the policy of the United States appears honed, clear, and long term, urging – and even demanding – that other countries not advance their ties with China; challenging "core interests" in the South China Sea, Xinjiang, and Hong Kong; and legislating new laws designed to advance US relations with Taiwan and limit commercial and academic activity with Chinese representatives in the United States and worldwide. The short visit by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Israel (May 13, 2020), part of the American pressure campaign to prevent Chinese firms from winning Israeli infrastructure tenders, was, for the Chinese, another example of American proactivism. The official response, issued by the Chinese embassy in Israel (May 15), stressed that the Secretary of State had struck an old chord about "security concern" in China-Israel business cooperation without producing any concrete evidence in order to harm commercial ties between China and Israel.

The Chinese view such American steps as designed to destabilize China and weaken its status as a leading world power. However, unlike in the past, China feels determined and capable of opposing the American initiatives, mainly through commercial and financial means but also through the widening Chinese influence over international organizations.

The struggle with the United States is long term, having begun well before the Trump era, and it will continue for years thereafter. China will try to stay the course, which entails mainly using diplomatic and economic tools – and, to the extent possible, avoiding war – to achieve its goals, whose bottom line is sovereignty and stability through party rule. Against the background of the global changes forced by the coronavirus crisis, the coming months will reveal the extent to which tensions flare up between the powers, and to what extent ties that have bound them for over forty years frayed.

China is well aware of Israel's deep, strategic ties to the United States. In parallel, the Chinese people's positive attitude toward the Jewish people has been preserved over the years, and within the party and among the Chinese public Israel's image has strengthened as a strong, creative country with unique technological and scientific innovation capabilities. In the Chinese view, Israel is not at the center of the great power competition, and its being a firm ally of the United States should not prevent the cultivation of commercial ties along civilian lines. China itself maintains parallel relationships with Middle East countries that are enemies, such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, distinguishing between political positions and rhetoric on the one hand, and economic and business activity on the other. While preserving its special, strategic relationship with the United States, Israel should understand the Chinese point of view, feel out its areas of flexibility, and abstain from unnecessary rhetoric and provocative steps that are liable to harm the delicate web of ties with China that has been formed in recent years.