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**Illusion, Awakening, Rage, and Response:**  
**The United States Strategic Approach to China**

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On May 20, 2020, the White House released a document titled “[United States Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China](#),” which describes China’s challenge to the United States and the US response strategy. Overall, the document is a direct extension of President Donald Trump’s [National Security Strategy](#) of December 2017, which focuses on the strategic “great power competition.” On May 29, President Trump delivered a speech in which he attacked China’s policy and conduct with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic and to Hong Kong. The President described the United States response and spared no criticism of his predecessors, whose policies, he maintains, enabled China to harm American interests. Although the document and the speech reflect the positions and style of the Trump administration, large portions express positions that are well established in both parties and across the American establishment. The COVID-19 pandemic and the widespread protests against racial discrimination are currently drawing a great deal of attention, but they do not eclipse China’s position at the heart of the US agenda. On the contrary, in the midst of an election year, these developments serve to polarize and radicalize positions, including on China. For Israel, the document and the speech clarify the United States’ view of China – including the narrative, the mood, and the emotional dimension involved in this approach – and explain the strategic context within which Jerusalem must examine and recalculate its policy route with both powers.

In a document titled “[United States Strategic Approach to the People’s Republic of China](#),” released by the White House on May 20, 2020, and even more so in President Donald Trump’s speech on May 29 in the same context, the United States presented the history of its policy toward China, which since the 1970s was based on hope that engagement would lead China to economic, social, and political openness, and to its growth into a responsible and constructive international actor. According to the US, this policy proved to be a groundless illusion and was replaced with a clear-eyed assessment: not only has China not fulfilled this expectation, but it has exploited the aid provided by the United States to undermine and weaken the benefactor. Beyond cold interests, this

description reveals an emotional layer of dashed hope and insult stemming from the sense of being taken advantage of, ingratitude, being misled, and betrayal.

The administration describes China as a challenge to the United States, its economy, its values, its security, and its allies, as well as to the world order that emerged in the aftermath of World War II. The document distinguishes between China's current leadership under the Communist Party, criticizing its "malign behavior," and the Chinese nation, which is respected for its achievements. The document portrays China as an untrustworthy exploiter whose patterns of action include unfair restrictions on the activity of foreign companies on the Chinese market; requirements by US companies to transfer technology; company acquisitions and investments in order to seize advanced technology; broad use of cyber hacking to steal technology; the theft of intellectual property; and the wide-scale use of counterfeits. The United States is critical of China for being a state-run predator economy masquerading as a market economy, and a developed economy portraying itself as a developing economy, in order to elicit benefits it does not deserve.

In addition, the administration regards the Belt and Road Initiative as aiming to reshape the international theater to meet China's needs. It sees it as tainted with corruption, low-quality infrastructure, environmental damage, and questionable loans; and as exacerbating the state of governance and finances in the host countries. Moreover, in light of China's growing tendency to use economic levers for political purposes, the United States estimates that China is using the Belt and Road Initiative to expand its political influence and its military access beyond its borders. Through the use of incentives and threats, China pressures governments, elites, companies, and research institutes to toe the party line and refrain from criticism of China. It decreases trade and tourism with countries where disagreements have flared and interferes with internal legal and political processes in order to mobilize support for its policy and system of government. Its means of influence around the world and within the United States include wide-scale use of the mass and social media, as well as the mechanisms of the Party's "United Front," which work to expand Chinese influence, in part by means of Chinese living abroad. In the realm of security, China employs violent coercion and fear against its close neighbors in the South and East China Sea; employs "military-civil fusion," which gives its military access to civilian technologies and resources, and strives for dominance in the information and global communications industry to enable the Party to achieve information dominance for a variety of purposes.

The United States, for its part, presents its policy as a late awakening to the challenge posed by China and as a response to it. In light of the rethinking of its policies of previous decades, it has adopted a competitive approach and is willing to risk greater

friction in protecting its vital interests. Its new approach is presented as a return to “principled realism” – sovereignty, liberty, openness, the rule of law, fairness, and reciprocity – and as the drive to achieve a broad partnership within the United States itself and with allies and partners around the world to counterbalance China’s efforts. Now that the United States has had enough of China’s empty commitments (the document includes close to 30 references to false promises and unfulfilled commitments), it intends to base its policy on the test of China’s actions, not its words. The Chinese narrative, especially the one highlighting the decline of the United States, and the discourse disseminated by the Communist Party, are perceived as a threat to the United States and its values and constitute a target for US action. The United States is geared toward reciprocity, stopping Chinese coercion of its partners, and exerting pressure where quiet diplomacy has failed. However, it also leaves a door open for sincere and productive cooperation with China in order to advance common interests.

In the practical realm, the document enumerates directions for action against the theft of trade secrets, hacking, economic espionage, the protection of US infrastructure against foreign investments and interference, threats to supply chains, and the influence of foreign agents on its policy. An effort is underway to educate the American public and raise public awareness regarding the Chinese Communist Party’s efforts to influence the United States, to employ means of screening Chinese students attempting to enter the United States on false pretenses, and to reduce the dangers of China’s talent recruitment programs abroad. To protect the security of information and communication, the United States is striving to develop secure standards with its allies and partners. Through enactment of FIRRMA (Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act) and the CFIUS (Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States) supervisory commission, efforts are underway to supervise foreign investments and protect American innovation from foreign access to advanced technologies, such as hypersonic vehicles, quantum computing, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and other fundamental and emerging technologies.

The United States strives for superiority in innovation in key realms, such as fifth generation communications, and works vis-à-vis its partners to establish collaborative export controls, in light of the clear military applications of these realms. The document goes on to provide details regarding the promotion of trade agreements with China and the response in the realms of security and foreign relations, which include the development of strategy for the Indo-Pacific, freedom of navigation, human rights, and freedom of religion.

For Israel, the document and the speech contain a number of beacons to guide its policy in relation to both superpowers. Above all, they are a reminder that in recent years **the**

United States has made a historic turn and changed the course of its policy toward China that has evolved since the 1970s. Hence, Israel cannot rely on the continuity of its own policy from the last decade, after this fundamental change in the great power relations. *First*, it must recalculate the route of its China policy, which includes the United States as a major element. Although the goal remains to strengthen relations with the United States while making the most of the economic benefits of China, the road there requires significant adjustments. *Second*, just as the United States, whose knowledge on China far exceeds Israel's, has woken up and realized that its assessments regarding China were mistaken, Israel must humbly re-examine its own assumptions and assessments on the matter. *Third*, the nature of Chinese activity in American eyes is an important basis for understanding possible direct Chinese challenges to Israel itself. In this context, Israel is advised to develop an independent reference outline about the Chinese challenge, based on local knowledge, which must be developed with professional knowledge from around the world and not only from the United States. Using this reference, it will need to prepare for the challenges and increase public awareness of them throughout the Israeli public. *Fourth*, just as the United States is striving to decouple itself from China in certain areas, and simultaneously to continue and even intensify its trade with China in other areas, refraining only from defense and dual-purpose exports to China is no longer sustainable. Israel should make adjustments to its policy, redefine for itself the boundaries of what is permitted and what is prohibited, and hold a proper and respectful discourse on the subject with both superpowers. *Fifth*, when the United States reaches out to partners and allies to advance joint standards for technology and communications, Israel must be quick to join such partnerships and combine its innovative abilities with the efforts of the free world. *Sixth*, in this context it makes sense to move with the United States from a prohibitions discourse ("what Israel shouldn't do with China") to a partnership discourse, in which Israel and its principal ally will explore new ways to join forces for the mutual good, such as a strategic innovation alliance.

Finally, Israel must not ignore the deep emotional aspect of the United States policy on China. When China is viewed as untrustworthy and ungrateful to the United States, these feelings also tarnish Israel when it appears to be taking China's side, even if only symbolically. When it comes to Chinese contexts, Washington presumably will examine not only Beijing but also Jerusalem, not by its promises but by its actions. In terms of words, Israeli official praise for the New Silk Road and visions regarding Israel in this framework are not particularly unusual, but in the United States they are heard as echoes of Beijing's mouthpieces. Israel must make a conscious effort to engage in public diplomacy on this issue both in Israel and in the United States and to prevent further serious damage to support for Israel there, against the background of the strategic great power competition.