



# American Strategy and Policy toward China

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This article analyzes American strategy and policy toward China with a focus on the period of the Biden Administration. Its aim is to facilitate a better understanding of how the United States views the challenge from China, to understand how it affects Israel and to make policy recommendations vis-à-vis one of the main strategic issues of the coming decade and, we can assume, beyond.

The article has been written at a time when the rivalry between the major world powers is intensifying and the United States is escalating its actions vis-à-vis China through what it defines as “responsible competition” (in an attempt to avoid dragging the rivalry into dangerous situations—such as military conflict), and also expecting its partners to adopt a policy toward China that suits Washington’s approach. At the time of writing, the United States appears to have consolidated a relatively coherent approach, regarding the threat posed by China and its strategy to contend with this threat, which remained fundamentally unchanged from the first Trump Administration to the Biden Administration. However, this approach’s translation into policy and specific measures in practice, is still being shaped and undergoing changes, especially in light of other political considerations at home, a global reality with many challenges, and the Chinese response to the United States’ measures. In addition, the U.S. is not neglecting military preparations for a confrontation with China and regards 2027 as a year with the potential for escalation regarding Taiwan.

The shock waves of the global power competition are already being felt in Israel, with China’s adoption of a harsh policy against Israel since October 7 and its efforts to exploit the war to damage the standing of the United States—which is Israel’s most important strategic ally. For this reason, decision makers in Israel should pursue continuous, ongoing engagement on the issue, with the aim of updating Israel’s policy toward the two world powers in light of the developments. At the same time, they must recognize that the Chinese challenge is the top US priority, which will dictate policy in the second half of the decade, and that Israel is advised to make sure it remains relevant and a valuable partner for the United States in this context.

*Keywords:* United States, China, Great Power Competition, technology, Israel, Middle East.

## The Development of American Strategy toward China

The Biden Administration, like its predecessor, viewed China as the major challenge facing the United States in the twenty-first century, building around it the concept of Great Power Competition (GPC). Thus, China is defined as the pacing threat for which the U.S. defense establishment must prepare and engage in force building, with the year 2027 regarded as the target for readiness in this area.

At this stage, the United States identifies China as a complex challenge with diverse military, economic, ideological, technological, and strategic dimensions. It also views China as the only country with the intention and the capabilities (economic, political, military, and technological) to challenge the United States and the liberal world order constructed since World War II. Still, the U.S. strives to conduct its relationship with China without being dragged into military escalation, but rather as responsible strategic competition involving cooperative endeavors where needed.

The perception of China as a strategic threat is a relatively new development, from the past 15 years. While the U.S. already viewed China as a security threat at the outset of the twenty-first century (as reflected in statements by presidential candidate George W. Bush in 2000 that China was a “strategic competitor”), it thought that China’s rise could be managed in a way that would minimize the threat and turn Beijing into a responsible actor. These hopes, however, were frustrated by China’s strategic approach in the military and the economic domains. In the 1970s, removing China from the Soviet camp and China’s willingness to maintain constructive relations with the United States, was an immense achievement of U.S. foreign policy, and in the 1980s and 1990s, China-U.S. relations moved forward primarily in the promotion of economic relations and in American criticism of domestic aspects of China (especially following the events at Tiananmen Square in 1989). The leading American approach

during this period was the desire to help China advance and develop as an important actor that would be non-challenging in the international realm, including support of China’s acceptance into the World Trade Organization in 2000.

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As China continued to grow stronger and emerged as an economic power in the 2000s, the United States began to view it in a much more critical light (the establishment of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission in 2000 is a good example for the more critical approach the U.S. began to take). Its focus was on China’s economic conduct, as reflected in its violation of the intellectual property of U.S. companies and the adoption of competition strategies that Washington viewed as unfair and exploitative (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, n.d.). U.S. policy at this time focused on managing China’s rise and requiring it to become a responsible actor that supported the world order and did not disrupt it. At the same time, China persevered with a traditional strategy of “bide your time, hide your strength”; took advantage of the fact that American and global attention was focused elsewhere after the September 11 attacks; and refrained from blatantly challenging the United States. At that time, dealing directly with China’s challenge to US interests was not the main focus of US administrations.

This approach guided American policy during the Obama Administration (particularly during its first term). However, as China increasingly abandoned the approach of “waiting patiently” and adopted an aggressive revanchist policy in

the South and East China Sea, the U.S. shifted to the view that China was both a concrete military threat and a hostile actor, as opposed to a strictly competitive one. The change was spurred by China's moves to seize control of islands, shoals, and atolls in the region of the East and South China Seas by constructing military bases on them, in an effort to enforce its view that the South China Sea in its entirety (the "nine dash line") falls under its sovereignty. It was further reinforced by China's increasing friction with its neighbors and with the United States in maritime and air space of the East and South China Seas.

These measures, in addition to China's accelerated military buildup and more assertive approach in the political and economic domains, led the United States to fundamentally change its approach and to rank China as the leading military, economic, and strategic threat to the U.S. This development was accompanied by hard feelings in Washington and by genuine concern that the United States had erred strategically, neglecting the region of Southeast Asia while focusing on the security problems of the Middle East, and in this way had enabled China to accumulate military power that could challenge the United States in the most central and quickly growing region of the twenty-first century.

As a result, the United States began to enact a policy of diverting strategic focus to Asia (Pivot to Asia) under the Obama Administration, and with greater intensity under the first Trump and the Biden administrations, which identified China (and, to a lesser extent, Russia) as the leading "pacing threat" to the United States and began to take action against it in a wide variety of realms.

The main expressions of China's importance are found in documents pertaining to the national security strategy of the Trump Administration (2017) and the Biden Administration (2022), which were subsequently translated into security policy documents that were also focused on China. Along the way, more focused strategies were developed, such as "the strategy

for the Indo-Pacific region" (The White House, 2022a) and the building of "resilient supply chains" (The White House, 2021b), as well as regional alliances such as AUKUS and Quad-I.

### **U.S. concern regarding the rise of China is anchored in several strategic developments:**

- **Erosion of the relative advantages that established the U.S. as a leading world power.** This erosion has stemmed from focus on the Global War on Terror (GWOt); from the neglect of proper responses to great power rivals, against the background of the fall of the Soviet Union and Russia's relative weakness; from unsatisfactory engagement in preparing the U.S. economy for the challenges of tomorrow; and from the lack of a satisfactory response to China's unfair economic competition.
- **China's increasing strength and power.** China is on the way to becoming the world's largest economy (and has already become the world's largest economy in terms of purchasing power). It has developed broad civilian production abilities, with heavy and light industry including the processing of metal, shipyards, and, in recent years, also the production of automobile and aircraft parts (Cordesman, 2021, p. 29); established operative and quantitative military advantages in the region of Southeast Asia with the construction of military bases in the South China Sea; achieved marked expansion in the size of its navy and its inventory of surface-to-surface missiles; has been engaged in the ongoing quantitative increase of its nuclear arsenal; developed various forms of strategic-economic leverage (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2020, pp. 21 ,17 ,15) vis-à-vis a variety of actors around the world; and is willing to leverage its civilian economic power for the sake of military and security power (U.S. Department of State. n.d.). At the same time, from the American perspective, China also possesses

an important advantage in terms of mining and processing rare earth elements, which are essential for the manufacturing of all kinds of technological products, including advanced weaponry. The United States still has no effective response to China's dominance in this realm (Tracy, 2020, pp. 9,3). In American eyes, China's economic power (as opposed to the Soviet Union) provides it with the economic ability to support the building of a high quality, comprehensive military force, and simultaneously to take advantage of economic influence and leverage on different actors (including partners of the United States), in order to challenge the world order and strive to reshape it.

- **Chinese Aggression.** In America's view, **China is already taking advantage of its power and conducting an aggressive policy, primarily in Southeast Asia**, in the civil, military, and "grey" realms (such as the use of fishing fleets, coast guard vessels, and civilian maritime vessels to create friction). It is also **threatening the use of force against Taiwan, Japan, and the Philippines**, which has been accompanied by ongoing regular harassment of these countries' defense forces in the air and at sea, including military maneuvers in their environs. This is in addition to China's implementation of **means of control and repression** (technology-based) in Hong Kong (U.S. Department of State, 2021c, 2021d), in China itself, and especially in Xinjiang. The United States relates to these actions as crimes against humanity and genocide (U.S. Department of State, 2021a). Moreover, the United States is concerned that China has accelerated its efforts to achieve military readiness for a scenario in which Taiwan is unified with China by force and has specified the year 2027 as the target for achieving military readiness for this purpose (not necessarily for carrying it out).
- **The expansion of China's access around the world**, including closer economic relations with almost all the world's countries. This

access includes the establishment and operation of infrastructure in the realm of transportation (ports and trains) and communication infrastructure based on Chinese technology and knowledge, in a manner that provides ongoing, long-term access to the countries that make use of them and increasing influence on their management, to the point of active coercion. The mounting concern in the United States is that Chinese influence will enable Beijing to neutralize coordinated political and economic measures taken against it, as well as to change the current world order into one that is less liberal and rule-oriented.

From an American perspective, the main scenario of reference for the evolution of the threat from China is the expansion of Chinese influence and China's transformation into a world power through: **building extensive military power, solidifying influence in Southeast Asia and the Pacific region, and forcing the United States out of the region.** At the same time, concerns are increasing that China could also develop global access and technological and economic leadership as a basis for turning itself into a world power, and use them to undermine American partnerships around the globe and the rule-based world order (Brunnstrom & Martina, 2021).

The American strategy under the Biden Administration was based on **the identification of the coming decade as decisive in terms of a wide variety of strategic developments that will shape the global reality during the current century, most notably in coping with the climate crisis and the rise of China** (The White House, 2022c).

The Biden Administration specified three tenets of the competition with China: **1. Invest, 2. Align, 3. Compete.**

**1. Invest: Enhance domestic power** (investing in the U.S.'s national power to maintain a competitive edge)—on the assumption that the key to long term success lies in **scientific and technological innovation** and taking full

advantage of the opportunity of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (major advances in technology, based on full utilization of big data, artificial intelligence, and machine learning), in addition to strengthening democracy and equality in the United States. The administration identified the building of resilience in American society and the U.S. economy, including the reinforcement of civil infrastructure, the rehabilitation of infrastructure for industrial production, the protection of supply chains, and the development of those chains that are not dependent on China. In the military dimension, the United States is striving to build enduring advantages in terms of quality, quantity, and technology vis-à-vis China (and other rivals), by accelerating the processes of force-buildup, and the development and assimilation of new technologies and tools. The main motivating factor behind these processes is the understanding that whoever develops and assimilates these technologies first, enjoys a major enduring advantage and that it is therefore essential to prevent China from doing so before the United States (National Intelligence Council, 2021, p. 93).

**2. Align: Generating a coordinated policy between the United States and the network of allies and partners who have common interests and goals.** Specifically, the Biden Administration emphasized the importance of **ideological competition** as a major dimension and positioned the United States as the leader of the **struggle between democracies and autocracies**, which, led by China, strive to change the rules of conduct in the international arena. At the same time, however, the Administration recognized that not all its partners hold values that are identical to those of the United States.

**3. Compete: Responsible competition**, which should focus on competing for economic and technological dominance. The Biden administration made efforts to prevent the competition with China from escalating militarily and, at the same time, left a space

for cooperation in essential areas such as contending with the climate challenge, the outbreak of pandemics, and the proliferation of drugs and weapons of mass destruction. In this context, senior members of the administration utilized the term “de-risk” to describe the aim of the various American measures employed in the relationship (The White House, 2024a).

**In the strategic-security context**, the United States under Biden strove to base its activity vis-à-vis China (and other rivals) on several operational ideas (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022):

- **Integrated deterrence**, which represents a connection between all domain American operations and the myriad of U.S. partners. Its aim is to deny the enemy from realizing its objectives, to raise the price of aggression, and to reduce the benefits to the aggressor, while reinforcing the resilience of those under threat.
- **Campaigning**—using a wide variety of tools, alongside allies (exercises, training, and military presence) in a coordinated manner—to reduce a rival’s freedom of action and disrupt its force build up and its ability to employ it effectively.
- **Building resilience**, by increasing the ability of the public, the homeland, and the fighting forces to contend with a variety of challenges (from cyber activity to epidemics and the climate crisis), particularly against enemies actively trying to harm U.S. resilience. The United States also ascribes importance to building the resilience of its partners to contend with these challenges.

At the same time, **in areas that are not purely security-related**, the United States is still at the stage of diagnosing and analyzing the challenge China represents. This includes gaining a deeper understanding of its own dependence and that of its partners on Chinese-dominated supply chains, including in areas that are vital to national security such as rare earth elements and renewable energies. Both the Biden and second Trump administrations are continually



shaping and adapting the specifics of their strategy and policy toward China in these contexts.

However, we can also note other efforts in aspects of non-military competition that are meant to achieve the following goals:

- To delay Chinese technological advancement and even halt it altogether in critical areas, most importantly the design and production of the advanced microchips that are critical for technological progress in other core technological and manufacturing areas, such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and machine learning.
- The disruption of China's ability to build and operate critical infrastructure around the world, with an emphasis on the realm of communication (primarily 5G) and transportation (seaports and airports).
- The disruption of the measures taken by China to acquire technology from the West, with an emphasis on the close supervision of students, research and development personnel, and Chinese companies, to prevent the transfer of technology.
- Increased attention on the social aspects of the competition, particularly China's ability to influence social media in the United States (mainly via TikTok) while also supervising the Chinese networks and closing them to the West.
- Reducing China's economic influence and access—this was the main focus of the first Trump administration policies and, it is reasonable to assume, will characterize his second administration as well. This policy has been referred to as the “trade war” and it included the imposition of large-scale tariffs, declaring China a currency manipulator, and putting pressure on U.S. partners to reduce economic cooperation with China (particularly in the contexts of infrastructure and communications). The Biden Administration continued this approach but focused more on discourse with partners and less on direct pressure on

China, although at the end of his term (May 2024) Biden also announced the expansion of tariffs on China.

## The Components of American Policy Toward China

American strategy in the Chinese context may appear to be coherent and backed up by a variety of strategic documents. However, it still does not contend with the gap between American aspirations and interests on the one hand, and the strategic, economic, and technological reality that has come into being in recent decades on the other hand. Moreover, the process of translating the evolving strategy into policy and actions on the ground can be expected to take a long time and to encounter difficulties, dilemmas, compromises, and the opposition of various actors at home and abroad. At this stage, we note decisions and steps that are already underway, although it is still too early to fully evaluate their effectiveness in achieving the defined goals.

On the one hand the United States is pressured to take swift action because of the combination of the existing Chinese security threat (in the South China Sea, Taiwan, the cyber domain, and with surprises such as spy balloons) that will expand in the future (the Chinese navy, surface-to-surface missiles and rockets, and nuclear weapons), the concrete danger of further degradation of the American technological advantage, and China's growing influence in world economic centers. On the other hand, there are also significant factors restraining the American administration, such as China's deep economic ties with all countries of the world. This includes the two countries' economic interdependence; other important global priorities, such as the war in Ukraine (which itself constitutes a challenge requiring resources and attention, with the potential to change the world order) and the wars in the Middle East, in addition to a desire to preserve a constructive relationship with China on several issues (such as climate change). At the same

time, the economic sector is also signaling a desire to reduce its ties to China. Thus, although 2022 marked a peak in interstate trade (Donnan, 2022), the scope of trade in 2023 plummeted by 16.7% (reflecting a decline of approximately 4% in exports to China and 20% in imports from China, putting them at their lowest level since 2012). These trends remained stable in 2024 (an increase of 1.7% in imports from China in the first 10 months of 2024, and a 30% reduction in exports to China) (United States Census Bureau, n.d.).

In practice, the Biden Administration adopted **a particularly aggressive policy toward China, focusing on imposing diverse restrictions in the technological realm, and establishing a tapestry of military and economic alliances against it, whose overall effect was a reduction of the economic ties between the countries.** Simultaneously, the administration strived to reduce the potential for military escalation, and nurtured channels of communication while continuing cooperative efforts in defined areas reflecting shared interests (such as climate). Senior administration officials referred to these measures as “guardrails,” which were meant to prevent an “accident” in relations between the countries that could lead to the use of force, and to keep both sides on the path of cooperation.

At the same time, U.S. policy toward China has been influenced by the deep rift in American politics. The administration has had difficulty advancing laws allocating essential resources to competition with China (such as a delay of almost two years in the CHIPS and Science Act, which was signed into law on August 9, 2022, although a previous version of the law with bipartisan support was already presented in May 2020), and the United States’ difficulty in furthering policy due to gaps and crises in the functioning of Congress, has cast a shadow over its image and status. It has also made it more difficult to argue the superiority of the democratic system over the autocratic approach, which the administration has deployed as a central element of contending with China. The

apparent consensus regarding the challenge posed by China often fails to overcome the deep political divide and makes it difficult to develop bipartisan policy in Washington.

**The Biden Administration’s policy toward China was based on the three formal principles outlined above (invest, align, compete), in addition to a fourth principle that appears in practice to serve as the major policy focus: maintaining “as great a technological advantage as possible” over China (Sullivan, 2022).**

“Given the foundational nature of certain technologies, such as advanced logic and memory chips, we must maintain as large of a lead as possible.”  
U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, September 16, 2022.

## **The Domestic Economic Dimension: Investing in Domestic Power**

Sustaining and enhancing American domestic power was focused on several fields: economy, technology, liberal democratic values, and the building of military power **to meet a challenge from a peer or near-peer enemy. This was in addition to avoiding strategic distractions, such as additional wars in the Middle East. The cornerstone of maintaining American power is strengthening and rebuilding the economy:**

- **Rebuilding infrastructure, extracting the economy from the crisis caused by the Coronavirus pandemic, and advancing the transition to clean energy.** In this context, the Biden administration enacted laws such as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (November 2021), which dealt with rebuilding and improving infrastructure in the United States (including renewable energy, transportation infrastructure, and reinforcing infrastructure resilience); the Inflation Reduction Act (August 2022), which included subsidies for the transition

to efficient energy technologies, electric automobiles, and the like; and the CHIPS and Science Act (enacted in August 2022, after the legislation was delayed in Congress for more than three years), which provides \$52.7 billion in incentives for investment in the chip sector in the United States, in addition to \$20 billion to encourage training and study in the sciences through grants of the National Science Foundation. However, officials in the United States also understand that incentives alone cannot fundamentally change the supply chains and the map of world chip production (Badlam et al., 2022; The White House, n.d.; The White House, 2022b; U.S. Embassy and Consulate in the Republic of Korea, 2022).

- In the eyes of the Biden Administration, socially-oriented budget allocations, and not only investments in infrastructure, were directly related to the country's ability to compete with China, or at least were justified in the name of this competition (Office of Management and Budget, 2021, pp. 10-11). In past administrations, such as the Obama Administration, enhancing America's power was based on the energy independence achieved by the oil shale revolution and the United States' transformation into an energy exporter, as related by National Security Advisor Tom Donilon (The White House, 2013). The statements of the second Trump Administration thus far reflect a desire to return to basing American power on energy independence and the production of oil and natural gas.
- **Building economic resilience and avoiding dependence on China in critical areas**, primarily by mapping supply chains and promoting alternatives to the Chinese components they include, in addition to strengthening cyber defenses. The Biden Administration implemented a broad plan for mapping supply chains in critical realms (which were based on the efforts of previous administrations), including the production

of microchips, energy-rich batteries, rare earth elements and raw materials, and supplies to the medical sector. The Biden Administration understood that China was using underhanded tactics to increase its economic status, to grant advantages to local industries, and to control supply chains in critical areas which require the United States to be vigilant (The White House, 2021b, p. 7, 9, 11).

- As part of the administration's plan, recommendations were developed to expand legislation pertaining to the protection of supply chains; encourage local production and consumption; increase government investments in the development of technologies and production in critical areas; use special tools (such as the Defense Production Act and inspections based on Section 232<sup>1</sup>) to expand local production and defend against imports; strengthen the ability to produce and manufacture essential minerals; expand cooperative efforts on the issue of supply chains; and establish bodies to monitor and take action (a task force) regarding supply chains. It should be emphasized that the Five Eyes intelligence alliance (the United States, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada) undertook a mapping of dependence on China in various supply and trade chains, which found deep and extensive dependence on China, including in areas related to national security (Rogers et al., 2020; The White House, 2021b).
- At the same time, the US administration (during Trump's first term) employed punitive economic measures against what was perceived as the use of unfair means by China in its economic activity (such as devaluing the Yuan exchange rate to encourage exports and limit imports, restrictions on U.S. exports to China, and more). In this framework, the first Trump Administration imposed tariffs and restrictions on the import of products from China to the United States and



declared China a “currency manipulator,” along with additional measures (referred to collectively as a “trade war”). The Biden Administration added trade restrictions and additional tariffs on a variety of products (steel, aluminum, batteries, electric vehicles, medical equipment, chips, minerals, etc.) (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2024).

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### **The Geopolitical Dimension: Making Full Use of the U.S.’ Network of Partners**

The Biden Administration defined the expansion and intensification of cooperative efforts with allies and partners as one of the pillars of its strategy, with an emphasis on competing with China. In this framework, the United States expanded its cooperation with major actors in the Indo-Pacific region, most significantly India, Japan, and Australia (Quad), Indonesia, the Philippines, and South Korea, through both bilateral cooperation and the establishment of multi-actor groups such as Quad and AUKUS. At the same time, the U.S. has launched regional initiatives, such as the IPEF (Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity), which was intended to promote economic relationships with U.S. partners in the region (Arcesati, 2022). In addition, the dialogue with NATO, with the countries of Europe (The Netherlands and Great Britain), and with the European Union itself has been greatly expanded pertaining to the challenges posed by China and the ways of contending

with them (such as the establishment of the Trade and Technology Council).

#### ***Major Cooperative Efforts with Allies:***

- One of the prominent achievements of American diplomacy in this context has been the signing of agreements with **Japan** and the Netherlands regarding limitations on the sale of equipment to China **for producing advanced chips**. ASML, the Dutch manufacturer of chip carving equipment (lithography), has a de-facto monopoly over the production of machines for manufacturing highly advanced chips (using advanced technologies for the production of chips that are smaller than 10 nanometers), and the Netherlands’ acquiesce (and apparently that of the company itself) to impose restrictions on the export of high-end equipment technology to China may result in a significant delay in China’s ability to produce and develop advanced chips. Evidence of this can be found in the fact that China itself regards these measures as an attempt to limit and repress it and is increasing its efforts in this realm (Asia Financial, 2024).
- **India**—The United States has accelerated a variety of cooperative efforts with India, including strengthening economic relations and striving to develop the Indian economy as an alternative to dependence on Chinese supply chains; diverse cooperative efforts in the realm of security; and arms deals worth a total of \$20 billion between 2008 and 2020 (while signing security protocols regarding communication, logistics, and the protection of industries, opening the door to additional progress in the future) (Kaushik & Brunnstrom, 2023; U.S. Department of State, 2025; Vergun, 2023). Both countries established the 2+2 Forum for strategic dialogue between their defense ministers and their foreign affairs ministers. The Trump and Biden administrations also invested in promoting personal relations with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and were also willing to tolerate controversial Indian

measures at the domestic level, without criticism on the part of the United States (such as ending the autonomy for the Jammu and Kashmir districts, and disregarding the adoption of pro-Hindu policies that create friction with Muslim and Christian minorities and with the opposition) (Singh, 2022).

- **Japan is seen** as an essential ally in the contest of China, in the security, economic, and technological fields, especially due to the fact that it, too, is involved in a territorial dispute and military friction with China surrounding the Senkaku Islands (the Diaoyu Islands), over which both countries claim ownership. This dispute also highlights residual tensions from World War II between Japan and China, and the combined effect of which has led Japan and the United States to adopt a common approach, rejecting China's claims for sovereignty in the South and East China Sea, and its attempt to change the status quo in these regions (The White House, 2021b). Concrete examples of Japan's value to the U.S. include:

- From a security perspective, a significant part of the American assets in the Indo-Pacific are located in Japan, including an aircraft carrier group, F35- fighter plane squadrons, and approximately 55,000 troops. Japan also has advanced armed forces (self-defense force; primarily its navy, submarines, and air force) that has been built up in recent years. For this reason, Japan holds critical significance for America's capacity for operational and logistical activity in Southeast Asia (including in the context of a possible Taiwan conflict).
- The advanced Japanese economy is perceived as an important factor in creating an economic block to stand against Chinese economic power and to serve as another prominent element of creating alternative supply chains to those of China (for example, in the field of rare earth elements).

- On a technological level, Japan is viewed as a world power in manufacturing and robotics (including in the realm of chip production), and its support is important in American eyes for maintaining America's qualitative technological advantage over China, and for preventing the transfer of advanced technology to Beijing.
- Japan's own policies are consistent with American interests and it thus helps promote them and create cooperative efforts in the region. Japan has strived to promote cooperation with India, helped establish the Quad, and was responsible for developing the idea of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific, which emphasizes the connection between Asia and Africa, maintaining the rules-based order and the freedom of navigation, and promoting prosperity in the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2024).
- **The European Union**—The United States has promoted cooperative efforts with the European Union and major European countries on a variety of issues related to China, most prominently raising awareness regarding China's influence in Europe and the strategic leverage it is accumulating through control of shipping infrastructure, ports, and communications. In this context, they established the Trade and Technology Council to promote initiatives and a shared policy toward China, as in the realms of rare earth elements and important supply chains (such as solar panels), in addition to establishing a task force to deal with China in the realm of communications infrastructure (Arcesati, 2022). The European Union also lent its support to the effort to diversify supply chains and the technological competition that the United States promotes in the chip sector, enacting the European Chips Act, which includes an allocation of 43 billion Euros to the issue (European Commission, 2022).

Still, Europe is having difficulty developing a uniform policy toward China. Some European countries (Latvia, the Czech Republic, and Poland) are pushing for a tougher approach, while others (such as Greece, Hungary, and Italy) are calling for maintaining economic cooperative efforts with Beijing. Germany and France are also displaying caution regarding measures that would negatively impact this realm and are striving for reduced risks, not economic detachment (Downes et al., 2023; Pollard 2023). This dual approach on the part of Europe has also found expression in visits to China by senior officials, e.g., by figures such as France's President Macron (April 2023) and German Chancellor Scholz (November 2022), which were characterized primarily by an effort to reduce disagreements and to promote a business agenda. During later visits, such as Scholz's trip in April 2024, the parties still sought cooperation, although the tensions between the countries were already clearer (France in the United Kingdom, 2023; McElwee, 2022; Stevenson & Eddy, 2024). Thus, China invested diplomatic efforts in more friendly European countries, such as Hungary (Orban's July 8 visit), Italy (Meloni's July 28 visit), and even critics such as Poland (President Duda's June 24 visit). President Xi undertook a trip to Europe (May 2024) during which he visited Serbia, Hungary, and France, focusing on mobilizing support for China's political and economic relationship with Europe (Euronews with AP, 2024; Fehér, 2024; Reuters, 2024; Vagnoni & Chen, 2024).

- **Creating New Frameworks for Cooperation, led by AUKUS** (the United States, Britain, and Australia) **and Quad** (Japan, India, Australia, and the United States). These frameworks were meant to lay the basis for diverse cooperative efforts and the creation of a regional architecture as a counterweight against increased Chinese power and China's readiness to use coercion towards various countries in the region in the context of local

conflicts (with the Philippines, Vietnam, and small island nations). Thus, whereas AUKUS was originally a cooperative effort in the military realm aimed at upgrading Australia's military force-buildup, with an emphasis on nuclear submarines but also including other elements, Quad was initially meant to serve not as a military alliance, but rather as means of strategic coordination between countries on a variety of issues, including China (Hemmings, 2022; U.S. Department of Defense, n.d.). These frameworks facilitate ongoing, regular discussion regarding major issues related primarily to China, as well as periodic meetings to further them, while also expanding the issues and the areas in which the parties engage. In this context, the partners in the various frameworks are already proposing ideas for their expansion. Thus, AUKUS+ is meant to include other areas of cooperation, beyond nuclear submarines, and Prime Minister Morrison of Australia has already suggested also involving Japan (Scott Morrison, 2024). Quad+ constitutes an effort to expand cooperative undertakings as part of Quad to additional countries, including New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam in the region, and Brazil and Israel outside of it (Panda, 2022).

- **The United States** has also intensified its cooperative efforts with other major actors in the region, including South Korea, the Philippines (although cooperative efforts with Manila has experienced ups and downs during Duterte's presidency), Vietnam (cooperation between the countries was upgraded to a comprehensive strategic partnership in September 2023) (U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Vietnam, 2023), and Indonesia (in November 2024, the two countries marked 75 years of diplomatic relations and committed to expanding the range of cooperative efforts; on the issue of security, both parties committed to conducting a joint exercise in the first quarter of 2025) (The White House, 2024b).

Another component being promoted by the United States through its various cooperative undertakings is criticism of China's domestic policy, with an emphasis on extensive human rights violations against the Uyghur minority in the Xinjiang region (the United States treats these violations as crimes against humanity and genocide), the reduced autonomy of Hong Kong, and the significant intensification of control over the Chinese population by digital means (U.S. Department of State, 2021b, 2021d). Thus, the G7 members states, South Korea, the European Union, and countries in Europe have been critical of Chinese activity in these areas, and in October 2022 the United States led a group of 50 nations (including Israel) in adopting a statement calling on the U.N. to investigate the accusations against China (United States Mission to the United Nations, 2022).

Another aspect of the American campaign against China has been an effort to reduce China's economic clout, notwithstanding the campaign against its technological rise. Under the first Trump Administration, the campaign (dubbed "the trade war") was reflected in its declaration of China as a currency manipulator and the imposition of tariffs on products imported from China through a number of stages since 2018 (affecting a total of \$335 billion in imports from China), as well as an ongoing campaign vis-à-vis America's partners to reduce economic cooperation with China in a variety of realms, with an emphasis on stopping China's momentum in building and operating large national infrastructure projects (ports, large construction projects) in many countries around the world, (including major Western countries), and 4G and especially 5G cellular communication infrastructure. The Biden Administration continued this approach, but initially focused on mobilizing partners as opposed to expanding tariffs on China. However, toward the end of his term (May 2024), the president announced a substantial expansion of tariffs on China in a variety of areas, such as steel and aluminum, chips, electric vehicles, and more.

Another element of reducing Beijing's clout has been the United States' political campaign against China's Belt and Road initiative (BRI). The BRI has been depicted as a measure aiming to lead its partners into a "debt trap," with the goal of China seizing control of strategic assets and most importantly critical national infrastructure and assets that are important to its global access, such as the port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka. The United States also engaged in initiatives to provide alternative sources of finance and investment to developing nations in an attempt to reduce the attractiveness of Chinese investments and promote western alternatives (Written Testimony of Geoffrey R. Pyatt, 2023). Information published on the Belt and Road initiative shows that, since 2018-2019, the scope of new projects it encompasses has begun to contract, but not due to the influence of the American campaign (Clark, 2023).

At the same time, the U.S. also used its influence in NATO and the "Five Eyes" intelligence alliance, to channel these alliances into contending with the challenge posed by China. Thus, several years ago, for the first time, NATO classified China as a threat that must be addressed, and the Five Eyes group decided to devote resources to China and also to coordinate activity regarding China at the political level (despite the reservations of New Zealand). The United States has also intensified its cooperative efforts with law enforcement agencies of allied countries regarding suspicious Chinese activity, particularly the threat China posed to dissidents living outside China, and the growing risk of technology theft and espionage (Perez, 2022).

The Middle East is also an arena of increasing competition between the great powers, as the United States attempts to limit China's influence. The region is characterized by the increased influence and presence of China, which is the main economic partner of most countries in the region (it is the main source of oil to China and a growing market for Chinese exports); the increased use of Chinese technology

(such as 5G in the Gulf and in Saudi Arabia); extensive proliferation of Chinese-made UAVs (technology that the United States has thus far refused to export to the region); and distress in local countries that the United States is aiming to reduce its presence in the region after two decades of direct military involvement. Overall, the United States is actively pursuing its regional partners, especially in the gulf, to reduce Chinese access and involvement in the technological and security realms, and has specifically managed to prevent Chinese military presence in the United Arab Emirates. However, the U.S. is still finding it difficult to persuade its partners to reduce technological cooperation with China, and for this reason, for example, it refrained from supplying F-35 fighter planes to the United Arab Emirates, due to its refusal to curtail Chinese 5G networks in the country (Bo Lillis et al., 2021; Bowman et al., 2021; Reuters, 2021).

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**The United States has recognized the growing possibility for a military escalation with China in the near future. For example, the former Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley stated that, in accordance with the instruction of the president of China, the Chinese military is striving to reach military readiness to conquer Taiwan by the year 2027.**

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### **Establishing “responsible competition” and preventing military escalation in the short-term**

The United States has recognized the growing possibility for a military escalation with China in the near future. For example, the former Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley stated that, in accordance with the instruction of the president of China, the Chinese military is striving to reach military readiness to conquer Taiwan by the year 2027, whereas other senior officials have argued that the target date for Chinese readiness has been moved up, and that the armed forces need

to prepare for war prior to 2025 (AsiaNews, 2022; Kube & Gains, 2023; LaGrone, 2021; Sevastopulo, 2022). Furthermore, the United States articulated that it would not shy from conflict in defense of Taiwan—the Biden Administration made clear its commitment to the defense of Taiwan, and the president himself made an unusual statement regarding willingness to use American force to defend the island in the event of a military escalation (Ni, 2022), even though the president’s advisors were quick to walk back the statement (Parker & Pager, 2022).

In addition to concerns regarding military escalation, the projected costs of which will be immense in terms of the scope of casualties and the damage to the U.S and global economy (a war game conducted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies simulating the first campaign of the war shows how bloody and expensive it is likely to be), the U.S. recognizes that cooperation between the two major world powers is important to contend with global challenges such as global warming, in which China plays a central role, and to prevent additional erosion to pillars of the world order such as arms control agreements (Cancian et al., 2023).

The American approach reflects an understanding that the U.S. is not presently prepared for hostilities in Southeast Asia in a manner that would be acceptable in terms of cost and overall result, and that it must engage in rapid force-buildup in the area in order to be so. At the same time, China, too, is engaging in comprehensive force buildup and improving its overall capabilities and readiness. Accordingly, the United States has adopted several approaches to prevent escalation, reducing its likelihood and containing flashpoints (what is known as creating guardrails), or at least delaying it:

- **Publicly calling for “responsible competition,”** the essence of which is to prevent a process of rapid descent into hostilities and while still engaging



in cooperation in select areas—even in a reality of strategic competition between the powers. Thus, The United States attempted to promote cooperative efforts regarding climate and other issues, such as the smuggling of Fentanyl from China to the United States (while China is trying to create a link between the issues of competition and cooperation and to prevent them from being dealt with separately). At present, it is difficult to determine whether the American undertaking will succeed in leading China into the United States' preferred "comfort zone" in which the countries can compete aggressively in a few realms while cooperating in others (according to U.S. interests). Both powers appear to be focusing on shaping the overall rules of play between them according to mutual actions and responses.

- **Creating a secret high-level channel**, which is meant to reduce tensions in relations between the countries and to allow them to discuss different strategic issues, to create strategic clarity, and to avoid increasing the tensions between them. The goal of this activity is to create guardrails in the relationship between the two countries to serve as impediments to a serious and uncontrolled escalation in U.S.-China relations. This secret channel was established after a crisis in relations following the downing of a Chinese balloon that had been airborne over the United States; it was headed by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan for the Americans and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. According to media reports, this channel has been essential for reducing tensions between the sides, for presenting important issues, and for kickstarting a process of thawing the relationship, which resulted in a summit attended by Biden and Xi in November 2023 and in continued discussion between the political echelons (Sevastopulo, 2024).
- Fast tracking processes of force buildup to improve readiness for war in Southeast Asia, such as comprehensive reform to the structure

of the Marines, whose implementation was accelerated in 2024 to improve war readiness (Eckstein, 2023; Macander et al., 2022; Rogan, 2022). The Pentagon is also accelerating the implementation of lessons from the fighting in Ukraine and closing significant gaps in the capacity and resiliency of the U.S. industrial base and the production required to support protracted and high intensity war against a peer enemy (Easley, 2023).

- The improvement of military readiness in order to deter China from engaging in opportunistic actions or military escalation. This was done by increasing the military presence in Southeast Asia, including exercises with partners in the region, "freedom of navigation" operations by American ships and regular flights in disputed regions, most notably the South China Sea (which China regards as under its sovereignty).

In any event, China appears to have identified Washington's apprehension with respect to military escalation in the Indo-Pacific region and to be striving to exploit it. Thus, China continues to issue bellicose statements regarding Taiwan, to increase its military presence around the island, and to maintain a regular schedule of military exercises in the area. It is also conducting maritime and air exercises with Russia (primarily in regions north of Japan), along with increasing the harassment of Taiwan's security forces by conducting incursions in the region, in the air and at sea, on a daily basis. At the same time, China appears to be demonstrating increased concern regarding American activities in the South China Sea, including freedom of navigation operations by the U.S. Navy in areas in which China claims ownership. These activities may be seen by Beijing as a preferred flashpoint with the U.S. than an escalation regarding Taiwan.

## Maintaining America's Technological Advantage

Maintaining the American technological advantage was a guiding principle stressed

by the Biden Administration in its competition with China, as it is perceived as a major American advantage over China and a key to economic, military, and national power in the foreseeable future.

The Biden administration and numerous researchers **have identified technology as a major driver of the Fourth Industrial Revolution**, which is expected to fundamentally change the world economy, through the integration of big data, artificial intelligence, and machine learning into economic and social activities in the coming decades (see Appendix: The Main Areas of U.S. Focus in the Realm of Technology). Accordingly, the administration believed that whoever succeeds in controlling advanced technologies and assimilating them as quickly as possible will enjoy an “early adopter” advantage and a dominant strategic position, and it was decided to prevent China from doing so. The administration, among other things, feared that civilian technology would fuel the build-up of Chinese military forces—and identified a deep connection between these realms in China (known as Military-Civil Fusion)—and was concerned at the measures taken by Beijing to put civil and dual-use technologies under state and military control (U.S. State Department, n.d.).

This principle was a common thread throughout the Biden administration’s strategy vis-à-vis China, and the U.S. was willing to take aggressive measures in that regard, which included a series of measures aimed at **negating the access of Chinese companies to advanced technologies**, with a focus on the “chip war”—**an attempt to strip China of access to advanced chips**, which are perceived as the main factor facilitating technological development.

Thus, under the authority of the American Department of Commerce, Chinese companies are prevented from acquiring the ability to purchase advanced chips (primarily those used to train artificial intelligence, such as Nvidia A100), from accessing technology for the development and planning of chips and

for machines for engraving advanced chips (particularly those smaller than 10 nanometers), and from accessing diverse services related to such chips. The restrictions in this realm are so sweeping that all American citizens are prohibited from engaging in providing services or support to Chinese companies dealing with these technologies, including those employed in Chinese or foreign companies. The American administration also explored more severe measures to circumscribe China’s ability to engage in technological advancement and to require that American companies receive authorization for every transaction involving the provision of cloud technology services to Chinese companies (Kaur, 2023). Toward the end of its tenure, the Biden Administration issued far-reaching guidelines regarding the trade and export of chips intended for training artificial intelligence, which defined the yearly quota for advanced chips that every country is permitted to purchase, except for countries approved in advance by the United States, in addition to additional conditions and exclusions (Bureau of Industry & Security, 2025).

At the same time, through the use of other authorities, the United States has terminated access to the American market for Chinese communication companies associated with the PRC, which had been involved in building communications infrastructure in the United States and around world (such as Huawei and ZTE). These companies posed a risk of the transfer of extensive information about the West to China. The United States also tightened its control over Chinese citizens studying and working in the United States—mainly by the FBI (in testimony before Congress, the director of the FBI claimed that, in the Chinese context, “a new investigation is opened every 10 hours” (Conte et al., 2021; Dilanian, 2022)—and monitored the attempts by China to gain access to American companies possessing patents or sensitive technologies (for example, those related to submarine operation) (FBI, n.d.).

At the same time, the substantial American measures in the technological realm do not appear to have prevented Chinese companies from advancing in the field of artificial intelligence, and the advanced language model of the startup Deepseek demonstrated advanced performance at a much lower price than the competition, leading to a market shakeup (Baptista, 2025).

## Conclusion

The United States is employing substantial and comprehensive efforts to compete with China. These efforts include the buildup of military capabilities and readiness, recruiting partners and influencing their policies, as well as focusing on maintaining the U.S.' leading position anchored in technological leadership.

Of all the American activity thus far, the distinct emphasis of the Biden Administration appears to have been on undercutting China's technological advancement and on strengthening American capabilities in the field, with a willingness to take especially aggressive measures, even at the price of undermining the relationship between the countries.

The United States under Biden also strived to recruit partners and allies against China, but understood the precarious position of most countries vis-à-vis China. Therefore, the U.S. was focusing on areas of common interests and preferences, such as preventing the forced transfer of technology, creating alternatives to economic dependence on China, and criticism of various human rights violations (a gap exists between the U.S. and various partners on the subject of human rights, as partners in Africa and the Middle East typically refrain from joining American criticism of China on the subject). Although the United States does not anticipate that its partners will sever their economic ties with China, it does emphasize the need to prevent dependence on China or excessive Chinese influence (for example, involvement in

large infrastructure projects, with an emphasis on ports).

In this context, even though the United States did not explicitly specify red lines for its partners with regard to China, it appears that actions that provide China with a technological or military advantage (such as giving the Chinese military access to seaports or advanced communications networks in the country) will be perceived by the United States extremely negatively.

At first glance, the second Trump Administration is not expected to fundamentally change the American approach to strategic competition with China, as it was formulated and promoted in the first Trump term (2017-2021), including the implementation of severe measures against China in the economic and technological realms. Still, it can be assumed that the new administration will show different emphases and a different style regarding competition with China, including preference for bilateral negotiations, a reduced emphasis on cooperative efforts with partners regarding China, a greater emphasis on increasing U.S. domestic power (such as lifting the restrictions and regulation of technology companies and increasing oil and gas production over renewable energy sources) and the extensive use of economic tools (such as tariffs and tolls).

## The Significance for Israel

**Strategic competition between China and the United States will continue to constitute a formative global driver in the decades to come.** It is a dynamic feature of the evolving international system yet its specific manifestation may change over time, and may also engender serious crises between the world powers to the point of military clashes. The dynamics of relations between the great powers will include attempts to influence and cajole global partners as well as rivals, regarding political, economic, technological, and regulatory processes that occur in a variety of dimensions, including space, cyber, and at sea.

The competition between the powers is already influencing various aspects of Israel-U.S. relations, as the latter exerts ongoing pressure on Israel to tighten its control over Chinese activity in the country and to prevent a Chinese foothold in areas related to national security (for example, national infrastructure such as ports and communication). As part of its response, Israel established an advisory committee to examine foreign investments in the country and launched a dialogue with the United States on technology (which is supposed to promote common interests and approaches). This has occurred despite the fact that the economic relations between Israel and China continue to be characterized by a high level of mutual trade (despite a decline in 2023), as Chinese-manufactured cars have become more desirable in Israel in recent years, increasing the scope of trade.

The growing competition appears to have led China to adopt a tougher policy toward Israel, primarily as a means of undermining the United States. Thus, China chose to adopt a hostile policy toward Israel during the Iron Swords War. In addition, it has been a harsh critic of Israel, publicly supports the Palestinians and Iran, and helps Hamas whitewash its current pariah status (by hosting a summit for internal Palestinian conciliation on the subject). It has also enabled a wave of antisemitism and anti-Israelism in the tightly controlled Chinese social media (on social media in China itself and on TikTok).

Israel was thrust to a prominent role in the U.S.-China rivalry when the US Congress adopted measures against TikTok, demanding its sale to an American company or the cessation of its operation in the United States. This stemmed from the United States' concern that the app was serving as a conduit for Chinese influence and espionage in the United States. President Trump has ordered the Justice department not to implement the law for 75 days and gave an additional 75 days afterwards in order to facilitate a deal to sell the company.

Some opponents of the boycott against TikTok have argued that Israel is behind it, due to its accusations that the social network promotes an anti-Israel narrative during the war in Gaza and Lebanon (King, 2025). It is clear that China and its supporters do not hesitate to place the blame for congressional actions at the feet of Israel and Diaspora Jewry, and seem to consider continuing the attacks on Israel and its supporters as a measure with no real cost.

## The Technological Dimension

**From the perspective of the United States** (as reflected in the Rand Institute's 2020 report), **Israel is an attractive target for China** because it is a hub of technological entrepreneurship that China covets and because the Israeli tech ecosystem has few, if any, regulatory obstacles to impede Chinese investment in the sector. At the same time, in Washington's view, **technology is at the core of the competition between the powers at the present** (Efron et al., 2020) and will therefore remain a constant point of interest for the United States' regarding Israel-China relations in the coming years.

Israel's willingness to allow Chinese investment in the Israeli high-tech industry—even in areas that the United States identifies as essential to its national security (biotechnology, cyber, artificial intelligence, and sensors), and including Chinese (and Russian) companies that are now subject to American sanctions or perceived by the US as a threat (Huawei)—raises concern in the United States, even though their activities are insignificant in relation to Western investment in this sector (and most of them have reduced their activity in Israel markedly). Moreover, some in the United States hold the opinion that China may strive to improve its technological ties with Israel as a way of countering the increasing American pressure on China in the technological field.

**In the past, the United States has shown that it is willing to take far-reaching measures against Israel when it identifies the transfer of technology with military uses that could**

**harm America** (the Harpy and Falcon crises). Recently, the United States took resolute measures against its partners in the Middle East by imposing supervision of the export of advanced chips to countries in the Middle East (such as AMD and Nvidia), out of concern that they could seep into China (Nellis & Cherney, 2023).

The technological domain currently lies at the core of American interests. It is therefore likely that should the U.S. perceive a threat to its national security emanating from Israeli-Chinese ties, that it will again adopt a particularly resolute approach, although it can be assumed that Washington will seek constructive discussion with Israel before using coercive measures. The aggressive American action against Israeli cyber companies (NSO, Candiru) that violated human rights by spying on American civilians, attests to America's willingness to adopt a resolute approach against Israeli companies when they are perceived as harming American interests.

## The Bilateral Dimension

**Israel is fundamentally connected to the United States**, which is Israel's only reliable ally in the political and security domains, and Israel's only strategic partner in technological developments. From an economic perspective, the United States is Israel's main trade partner and an important destination for Israeli exports (for goods: \$14.2 billion in 2024, approximately one-quarter of overall Israeli exports; for services: approximately \$22.9 billion in 2024, accounting for approximately one-third of all service exports), as well as a main source of investment in Israeli companies. The United States also provides Israel with \$3.8 billion annually for defense acquisitions from the United States.

These connections are an expression of the tight fabric and close connections between Israel and the United States at every level, which enables the parties to share information on their interests and goals, to conduct joint or

coordinated activities, and to adapt policy measures and manage disagreements as they arise. In addition to the political components, ongoing positive connections between the populations of both countries are also relevant, with Israel enjoying a continuously positive public image in the U.S., although this image is eroding and reflecting greater polarization between conservatives and liberals in the country (especially after the war in Gaza).

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**The American defense establishment views Israel-China relations with great suspicion due to the historical record of Chinese-Israeli relations. The emphasis is on the fact that it was Israel who provided advanced military technology (like the Harpy UAV) to China, attempted to export advanced command and control technology (the Phalcon airborne early warning and control system) in a deal that was halted only after intense American pressure, and who is suspected of providing additional military technology to China in the 1990s.**

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In this context, it is worth noting that **the American defense establishment views Israel-China relations with great suspicion** due to the historical record of Chinese-Israeli relations. The emphasis is on the fact that it was Israel who provided advanced military technology (like the Harpy UAV) to China, attempted to export advanced command and control technology (the Phalcon airborne early warning and control system) in a deal that was halted only after intense American pressure, and who is suspected of providing additional military technology to China in the 1990s. These issues led to a serious crisis in relations between Israel and the U.S. in 2005, as well as to the reshaping of the bodies engaged in defense exports in Israel as a result of an American demand. Against this background, it can be assumed that the United States will continue to carefully observe Israel's conduct in controlling technologies and military equipment to ensure that they are



not provided to China (Tyler, 1992; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2004, pp. 200-201).

On the other hand, as Israel's third largest trade partner (after the European Union and the United States), China is an important actor for Israel, particularly from an economic perspective. In 2024, Israel imported \$15.9 billion dollars in goods from China (including Hong Kong) and exported to China approximately \$4.2 billion (Central Bureau of Statistics, n.d.). In recent years, Chinese companies have become significantly involved in the construction and operation of transportation infrastructure in Israel (trains, ports, etc.) (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021). In the course of 2024, the importance of Chinese companies to the Israeli economy increased further, due to sanctions that Turkey imposed on Israel and the cessation of Palestinian employment in Israel. As a result, Chinese construction workers became critical for the building sector, and the significant increase in the importing of automobiles from China to Israel (accounting for approximately one-quarter of all cars bought in Israel during this period, a fourfold increase of the Chinese share of the market since the third quarter of 2023, and a 30-fold increase since the first quarter of 2020), which is only expected to increase in 2025 (Shayb & Carzone Technologies, 2024). Despite the closer economic ties, Israel's relations with China are not actually close. China is one of the most prominent critics of Israel in the international arena and a major partner of Israel's enemies, especially Iran.

**In conclusion, Israel's bilateral relationships are oriented distinctly toward the United States**, whose strategic importance for Israel is infinitely greater than that of China, despite the latter's increased global economic influence over the past decade. Accordingly, the United States' high expectations of all its partners—to adopt a cautious approach toward China and to refrain from steps that will harm America's position in its strategic competition with Beijing—could be accompanied by more intense

prodding, cajoling and persuasion, but also by an attempt to draw Israel into policies more aligned with the U.S. through carrots rather than sticks.

## The Security Dimension

In the security dimension, the United States is, without question, Israel's most important ally. The Israeli security system relies to a large degree on American weapon systems and platforms, most of which are purchased using the extensive \$3.8 billion in annual American aid, or at least partially manufactured in the United States. American involvement in the region and Israel's cooperative efforts with the United States help promote Israel's security in the region directly and indirectly. The deep security connections and Israeli dependence on the United States (regarding aspects of air to surface munitions, for example) was laid bare during the Iron Swords War, when the United States stood beside Israel, providing it with large amounts of weaponry, but also limiting certain arms shipments due to policy disagreements between the two countries.

At the same time, **China's force buildup is meant to contend with and neutralize the relative advantages of American weapons**. This creates the potential for the provision of weapons to Israel's enemies and rivals by two powers (Russia and China), which develop weapons and other capabilities (space, combat intelligence, electronic warfare, and cyber) to neutralize the qualitative advantages of the weapons on which Israel relies to maintain military superiority.

**American influence in the Middle East is for the most part a stabilizing force that is aligned with Israeli interests in the region, although it appears that China's presence and influence** (especially civil and economic influence, but possibly also military in the future) in the Middle East is continuing to increase steadily. The more this trend continues, and China also implements its plans to integrate the Middle East as part of the "Belt and Road initiative" and

“the maritime Silk Road” and to strengthen its military presence in the region, the more the competition may create constraints on Israel’s regional policies or challenge America’s ability to reduce malign influences in the region.

At the same time, Israel may find itself becoming an increasingly valuable target for espionage attempts by China or Russia seeking technological and strategic intelligence, as part of their competition with the United States. Both may seek to acquire advanced Israeli technology and to gather information about the operational use of advanced American military technology by Israel.

Overall, it is in Israel’s security interest that the United States continue to be a prominent actor in the Middle East, and that U.S. fatigue with the region and its policies of reducing its military presence in the Middle East in recent years, do not lead to a significant decline in American influence. On a positive note, America’s willingness to invest significant military efforts in assisting Israel in the Swords of Iron War (including the mobilization of partners in the region to thwart the Iranian attacks on Israel) and recruiting a coalition to secure shipping routes in the Red Sea (with partial success) show that the U.S. commitment to Israel’s defense, was indeed ironclad. In addition, it appears that China’s influence is expected to continue to expand due to its growing importance to the economies of the countries in the region, and that the United States understands the need for policies and action to counterbalance China and to strengthen its partnerships in the region.

In light of Israel’s interest in maintaining American influence (particularly in the realm of security) in the region, the role of China and the changes it may cause to the security architecture in the region must be analyzed in greater depth. One prominent example of such changes is the United States’ interest in promoting a defensive treaty with Saudi Arabia, which would anchor the kingdom in the American sphere of influence

and reduce Riyadh’s gravitation toward China. A U.S.-Saudi deal has significant implications for Israel, including in context of normalization with Saudi Arabia.

## The Regional Dimension

The Middle East and North Africa has been under U.S. dominance since the 1980s, when the United States worked to reduce Soviet influence and to establish a security architecture that emphasizes safeguarding the supply of energy to the West. It entails American security dominance among most major actors and American willingness to use force on behalf of its partners in the region or to act to remove threats against the regional security architecture.

The standing of the United States and the security architecture it created were weakened over the past 20 years due to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the “global war on terror”; its apparent lack of support for its partners in the Middle East during the Arab Spring; and the nuclear deal with Iran, which was largely perceived negatively in the region.

On the other hand, over the past two decades, China has increasingly expanded its influence and its foothold in the region, becoming the main economic partner of most countries in the Middle East, and particularly of rich oil exporters. China’s importance to these countries may grow even more over time as climate change is expected to cause the West to reduce imports of oil and natural gas from the region, while making exports to China much more essential.

The overall impact of these trends, indicate that Beijing’s influence in the Middle East is growing, while that of the United States is declining. As noted above, Israel has an interest in maintaining American influence in the region, at least in the security context; however, it must prepare for changes in the contours of regional interests and partnerships, as Chinese influence continues to increase and the competition between the great powers intensifies.

## The Implications of the Swords of Iron War

During the Swords of Iron War, the Biden Administration employed various means across the Middle East in support of Israel. The U.S. president was quick to pay a visit to Israel at the beginning of the war, instructed two aircraft carrier groups to the region for an extended period in support of Israel, warned Israel's enemies not to take advantage of the situation or attempt to escalate ("Don't!"), and ordered the quick provision of a large quantity of military equipment to Israel in order to support and supplement its fighting abilities. After the Houthis joined the fighting and attacked shipping routes in the Red Sea, the United States established a coalition to protect these routes, it attacked targets in Yemen to degrade the Houthis' ability to target ships, and employed U.S. capabilities to disrupt and deny attacks against Israel originating from Yemen. Moreover, the United States was instrumental in the forging of an additional security coalition that aided Israel to counter the extensive Iranian attacks in April and October 2024, during which hundreds of U.A.V.s and missiles targeted Israel. The U.S. also deployed a THAAD battery to Israel to aid in intercepting them (Taylor et al., 2024).

America's backing of Israel caused tension between the United States and most of the international community, which distinctly sought a quick end to the war and a ceasefire, whereas the United States and Israel were of the opinion that doing so should occur only after Israel achieved its military objectives, including a deal for the release of hostages. Notwithstanding disagreements between Jerusalem and Washington on some issues, America's backing of Israel in the international arena remained strong, despite mounting criticism of President Biden at home and abroad (Bateman, 2024).

On the other hand, China has adopted a blatant anti-Israel position and has exploited the situation to level harsh criticism at the United States and Israel. During the first week of the

fighting, China already came to the conclusion that Israel "has crossed the line of self-defense... and must stop the collective punishment of the residents of Gaza" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, 2023). In this framework, China was fiercely critical of Israel, providing public backing to Iran, referred to the Israeli hostages as "detainees," and demanded that Israel halt the fighting without presenting relevant terms to the other side (such as abiding by UN Security Council Resolution 1701 regarding Hezbollah and the release of hostages by Hamas). Moreover, China appears to have given free rein to Israel critics on its highly state regulated domestic social media and on TikTok, in a manner that created a tidal wave of criticism and antisemitic expressions toward Israel and Jews (Lavie, 2024b; Gering & Dayan, 2024). As part of China's activity, it also hosted Hamas representatives for reconciliation talks with the Palestinian Authority on July 21-23, 2024, which concluded with the Beijing Declaration regarding the establishment of a "temporary unity government," while also giving legitimacy to Hamas (Lavie, 2024a).

America's extensive efforts to aid Israel seemed to serve Washington's vision of a regional security partnership focused primarily on contending with the Iranian threat; it also showed that the United States is willing to back up its partners in the region, and Israel in particular, in their times of great need in a manner that helped raise its credibility as the main security partner for many in the region (although its involvement has also drew criticism of its support of Israel and its willingness to "ignore" the human rights violations that it ostensibly carried out). American measures also sought to support the expanding the Abraham Accords, with an emphasis on Saudi Arabia, although the latter displayed a lack of desire to do so during the war.

At the same time, China has positioned itself at the head of the parties denouncing Israel and supporting the Palestinians in general and Hamas in particular; stated in the International

Court of Justice that the Palestinians have the right to engage in “armed resistance” against Israel (The Times of Israel, 2024); and even though the Houthis closed an important maritime trade route and seemingly harmed Chinese interests, China did not seem overly active in stopping their actions. Overall, China acted in a way that positioned it as supporting the political approach of the Arab countries that mainly wanted to end the war. China is also expected to view itself as harmed by the expansion of the Abraham Accords and to increase its support of Iran as a way of balancing this trend, while also striving to create a security architecture in the Middle East (“common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security”) that integrates Iran, makes the role of the U.S. redundant, and pushes it out of the region (Sun, 2024).

Overall, both powers saw the war as a way to promote their approach and their interests in the Middle East, and it is not currently possible to assess which of the two will eventually improve its position in the aftermath of the war.

Nonetheless, Trump’s return to the White House, and his distinct desire to reduce American military involvement in the Middle East, could undermine the ability of countries in the Middle East to rely on the United States in terms of security, and expose them to U.S. pressure in economic and security contexts. At the same time, China can be expected to continue to expand its economic ties in the Middle East, such as through cooperative efforts in the development and production of electric vehicles (Saudi Arabia and Egypt). It is therefore difficult to determine whether the U.S. and China’s conduct during the war will fundamentally change the longstanding trends of their involvement and influence in the Middle East, especially in light of the high uncertainty added by President Trump, who on the one hand is courting Gulf and Saudi investments in the United States, and on the other hand consistently strives to reduce American security involvement in the region.

## Recommendations

Based on this above analysis, it appears preferable for Israel to find a way to maintain and enhance **its strategic alliance with the United States, and to maintain positive and constructive relations with China**. Still, **Israel must recognize that there is no substitute for its strategic alliance with the United States:**

1. There is no substitute for the strategic support which the U.S. provides to Israel against international pressures. American aid provides a considerable share of the military force buildup budget, the IDF almost exclusively uses American aerial battle platforms and munitions or produces Israeli ground battle platforms in collaboration with American manufacturers. In addition, the image of strong Israeli ties with Washington serves as a “diplomatic force multiplier” for Israel and as a source of power in the regional and international arena. The U.S. is also Israel’s top trading partner. The strength of the bilateral relations was on full display during the Swords of Iron War, when the United States supported Israel politically, deployed American forces to intercept threats to Israel, and threatened Hezbollah and Iran against expanding the war at its outset.
2. **Israel must recognize the deep change underway in the United States regarding China** and the fact that the issue is one of rare American bipartisan consensus. Should Israel fail to meet Washington’s expectations for adjustments in its China policy (such as during the end of the first Trump Administration and the beginning of the Biden Administration), or become embroiled in a confrontation with the United States regarding China—**an issue that lies at the core of U.S. national security**—Israel may encounter a harsh, sustained negative response; experience long-term cracks in the bilateral relationship; and provide an opening for those who seek to do harm to the U.S.-Israel relationship.

However, the importance of the strategic relationship with Washington does not necessarily require alienating Beijing, due, among other things, to the latter's rising influence in the international arena, its ability to do damage to Israel directly and indirectly, and **China's role in the Middle East, which is expected to grow**, with increasing influence on a variety of countries and processes in the region. In light of these trends, as well as China's importance to Israel as a trading partner, it is preferable that Israel has open and constructive lines of communication with Beijing. Still, it also appears to be necessary to recognize the fact that China was the one who chose to worsen its relations with Israel during the war, as part of its overarching desire to smear the United States, and that the ability to maintain a constructive relationship with Beijing was hampered as a result.

Although many countries in the Middle East (such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Turkey) are jockeying for a flexible position in between the two powers (a hedging strategy) and trying to leverage it into strategic gains, especially vis-à-vis the United States, such a strategy would be ill advised for Israel. Flirting with China will most probably not result in meaningful gains for Israel from the U.S. or China, but rather could increase the erosion of its special relationship with the United States.

Therefore, **Israel should attempt to find a "U.S. favored middle ground policy" in conducting itself between the powers.** This position should be characterized by the **strengthening of strategic relations with the United States, in addition to fruitful, de-risked, and better controlled economic relations with China.** The policy should be based on the following principles:

1. **Understanding and acknowledging the (changing and evolving) red lines of the world powers.** For the United States these are primarily the transfer of military or dual-use technology to China

(either intentionally or due to negligence), allowing China to have significant physical or technological access in Israel, and the absence of effective controls on Chinese activity in the country (although it can be assumed that American demands of Israel will be broader than only these red lines). From China's perspective, the expectation is for the continuation of a good economic relationship (including investments in various realms of infrastructure, albeit on a more limited scale) and refraining from measures (concrete or declarative) that are perceived by China as provocative or directed against it.

2. One major aspect of the new policy, should be an in-depth analysis of the preferred way to develop Israel's economic relations with China, in the age of great power competition. As the technological-economic battlefield between the powers becomes more clear (though dynamic), Israel can understand which are the less sensitive technological areas and focus on them to further develop Israel-China relations (agro-tech, for example).
3. **The designation of an inter-governmental body responsible for developing policy regarding China and implementing it vis-à-vis the public, the public and private sector, and provide it with the ability to issue guidance to the different relevant agencies and regulators.** The current situation, in which different regulators and stakeholders can adopt diverging policies and guidelines regarding Chinese involvement, is untenable and requires overarching policy guidelines to produce a coherent and sustainable policy.
4. **Regular engagement at the political and professional-bureaucratic level on the status of the great-power competition.** This would require continuous information-gathering and analysis of the subject, deeper cultural and strategic understanding, and the creation of a regularly updated



knowledge base for decision makers. Leading this mission should be a senior level official, with authority and responsibility in the matter. It is also desirable to establish direct, ongoing dialogue on the subject of great power competition with the United States on various channels (policy, intelligence, economic channels) to improve the situational awareness and decision-making processes. It would also be prudent to establish professional channels for ongoing discussion with Chinese officials and other Chinese elements (such as academia).

5. **Israel should seek to Integrate itself into the United States' initiatives to increase the resilience of supply chains, especially in the tech sector.** Israel has an opportunity to show that it is a valuable and active partner in the initiatives and in technological cooperation that the United States is promoting as part of its strategic competition with China. This could enhance Israel's political, economic, and technological value to the U.S., and provide some stability to the current turbulence in special relationship between Israel and the United States.
6. Still, **there is no certainty that the strategy of finding a "U.S. favored middle ground" would be tenable over time.** The dynamism of the competition between the powers could make it difficult to remain between the two, and a crisis between the powers (for example, surrounding Taiwan) could force Israel to choose a side. In this situation, **the default is to take the side of its strategic ally, the United States** (to the degree possible, concurrently with developing trade relations with China), as any other choice could come

at a high price in terms of Israeli national security.

7. **It is essential to strengthen the system for controlling exports and screening foreign investments in Israel**, primarily in realms not under the direct responsibility of the Israeli Defense Ministry (which has various ways of preventing mistakes in the security realm). Should Israel's policies of export controls vis-à-vis China be viewed in Washington as partial and not taking into account U.S. concerns, there could be negative repercussions for Israel's image in any administration.
8. It is advisable to promote unofficial dialogue (such as Track 2) with Americans (academics and government) to **better understand the United States' expectations of Israel**, America's red lines, and the ways Israel could be valuable to the U.S. in the context of great-power competition. A similar dialogue with Chinese partners would also be advised to gain better insight into Chinese attitude to the competition, and also with European and international actors in order to learn about different approaches to China and about the diverse perceptions of, and responses to, the competition.

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## Appendix: Main Realms of Technology from a U.S. Perspective

The United States regards various technologies as sensitive and important for its strategic competition with China. The specific technologies that are viewed that way, changes over time depending on the bodies responsible for assessing it. Thus, we can find different lists of sensitive technologies produced by the different bodies dealing with the issue.

The most focused list of security-related technologies was published as part of the National Defensive Strategy and includes the following realms:

1. Advancement in the realm of weaponry, including weapons against targets in space (counterspace weapons), hypersonic weapons, advanced chemical and biological weapons, and new emerging capabilities in the realm of delivery systems and payload.
2. New uses for AI, quantum science, autonomous systems, biotechnology, and space science (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022).

An extensive list of emerging technologies was compiled by the U.S. Department of Commerce, in accordance with the requirements of two laws enacted in 2018—the Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act (FIRRMA) and the Export Control Reform Act (ECRA). The list contains 14 technological families (some of which received more extensive detailing of sub-technologies) (Rafaelof, 2021; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2022):

1. **Biotechnology**, including nanobiology, synthetic biology, genome and genetic engineering, neurotech.
2. **Artificial intelligence and machine learning** technologies, including:
  - Neural networks and deep learning (brain modelling, time series prediction, and classification).
  - Evolution and genetic computation (genetic algorithms and genetic programming).
  - Reinforcement learning.
  - Computer vision (object recognition and image understanding).
  - Expert systems (decision support systems and teaching systems).
  - Speech and audio processing (speech recognition and production).
  - Natural language processing (machine translation).
  - Planning (scheduling and game playing).
  - Audio and video manipulation technologies (voice cloning and deepfakes).
  - AI cloud technologies
  - AI chipsets
3. **Chip** technology, including systems-on-chip (SoC) and Stacked Memory on Chip.
4. **Position, navigation, and timing** technology.
5. Technology related to the **hyper-sonic realm**, including algorithms for flight control, propulsion technologies, thermal protection systems, and specialized materials.
6. **Advanced computer systems**, including memory-centric logic.
7. **Data analysis** technology, such as visualization, automated analysis algorithms, and context-aware computing.
8. **Brain-computer interface**, including neural-controlled interfaces, mind-machine interfaces, direct-neural interfaces, and brain-machine interfaces.
9. **Quantum technology** – Quantum computing, quantum cryptography, and quantum sensing.

10. **Robotics**, including microdrones and microrobots, swarming technology, self-assembling robots, molecular robotics, robot compilers, and smart dust.
11. **Technology in the realm of logistics** – mobile electric power, model and simulation, total asset visibility, and distribution-based logistics systems.
12. **Advanced materials** – Adaptive camouflage, functional textiles, and biomaterials.
13. **Manufacturing technology** – Additive manufacturing.
14. **Advanced surveillance technology** – Such as faceprint and voiceprint technologies.

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## Notes

- 1 Special investigations conducted by the Commerce Department for the purpose of examining the influence of imports on national security. During the tenure of the Trump Administration, numerous investigations were conducted in this area (for the first time since 2001) as part of the attempt to strengthen local production, regardless of China (Bureau of Industry and Security, n.d.).