

# The US Foreign Policy towards China during Trump Administration

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## ABSTRACT

To analyze the administration's Asia-Pacific strategy, its implementation is addressed, with the Trans-Pacific Partnership as the most essential part. When the PRC strengthened under Xi Jinping, China's aspirations and reaction to Obama's policies were to examine the potential of more engagement and the Sino American relationship as Trump assumed office in 2017. Trump maintained a combative foreign policy against China, eschewing dialogue. Trump's rejection of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which was Obama's most important Asia-Pacific policy, his tariffs on Chinese exports, which sparked a trade war, and his attempt to halt Huawei's 5G network for allegedly being a Chinese spying instruments are all relevant issues. The Trump administration wanted to pursue the same ends as the engagement strategy, but through confrontation rather than engagement; to decouple from China, persuade other nations to join America in opposition to China, and bring about a Cold War-like world; or if US foreign policy had shed its idealism, putting "America First" to reach modest concessions on unfair Chinese trade practices on a bilateral basis.

Keywords: *Foreign Policy, Diplomacy, United State, China, Government, Sino-America.*

## A. INTRODUCTION

Two decades after the cold war, the global world went through an era and time punctuated and characterized by diminishing war and rising prosperity. The lack of vigorous geopolitical competition created opportunities for an increased rate of interdependence and cooperation signaling the onset of globalization. Be that as it may, in the past, multiple and possibly fundamental to that new order have arisen. The eventual collapse of order and the resorting to violence in the middle east, the Russia challenge to the European security order; and a mounting increase in the geopolitics of Asia also being forefront to this. At this pivotal juncture also is the US leadership which has been used mostly as the compass of the liberal international order. As that stands the key responsibility of the US president is to protect the liberal international world order and cultivate the international landscape to give ways to develop a stratagem that enhances cooperation and not competition among willing powers. The US initiates the policy of containment for actors that do not follow the liberal international order.

The evolution of the US foreign policy since the normalization of diplomatic relations in 1979 can be accentuated by an integration and varying degree of containment and engagement, which coincide to a policy of "conengagement" (Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia*, 2011). The conengagement policy entails aspects of both containment and engagement, which is an effort to limit the power of a challenger and engagement which is an attempt by two countries to positively and fruitfully interact and further cultivate a platform of cooperation. Conengagement is both a foreign policy and a chromatic spectrum along which a foreign policy sways in varying degrees of either

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containment or engagement (Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia*, 2011).

Containment was a US policy intended to minimize the spread of communism abroad. Initially orchestrated by George Kennan, emphasized keeping western Europe and Japan out of the sphere influence of Russia by fostering democracy and building fierce open market economies there. The Marshall plan was a typical example of this strategy, in which the US offered economic support to assist the rebuilding of western Europeans economies after the end of World War two. The US offering the Marshall recovery prevented the western European countries from being enticed by communism and falling into the soviet bloc.

From 1949-1969, the US used a policy of containment towards China. The founding of the People's republic of China in 1949 instigated anxiety in the United States. As it thought of it as a protégé of the Soviet Union, Washington feared that China would subvert the Asia-Pacific by attempting to disseminate communist ideologies and revolutions in the region. The United States tried to contain China by placing it in isolation on the international arena. Washington then turned towards refraining from establishing diplomatic ties with Beijing and strong armed regional allies to follow suit, kept the PRC out of the United Nations keeping the Republic of China in the China seat, signed a mutual defense treaty with Taiwan and even stationed troops there. China split with the Soviet in the 1960s which resulted in reassessment in Washington about the China threat. By 1969 the US and China both viewed the Soviet Union as a greater threat.

The Nixon administration removed restrictions on commercial and travel activities between the US and China, ending the trade embargo in 1971 and President Nixon visited China in 1972. The US approach to China shifted again after normalization of relations in 1979. In the 1980's, Washington was generally optimistic about the Chinese regime and their outlook on economy and hoped for intense political reform. They believed that deepened engagement with China would result in the regime being more democratic and willing to partake and conform to the western world order. Washington encouraged more people to people exchanges and cultural exchanges with China.

In the 1980's the three T's of trade, Taiwan and Tibet had turned into an area of tension in the bilateral relations. The era and time of engagement ended abruptly on June 4, 1989, during the Tiananmen protests. After this lock down of this insurgency by the People's Liberation Army, US foreign policy towards China shifted from cooperation to a blend of containment and engagement to be later known as conengagement. The use of this chromatic spectrum of constant shifting between containment and engagement under the duress of globalization allowed the US to decouple human rights issues from economic activities and trade which culminated the support of the US towards China in 2001 to the accession of the World Trade Organisation.

Post the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on US soils, Washington focused its effort on the middle east. Although defense analysts from the pentagon advised and reported that the rise of China was the long-term security concern. The Bush administration heavily made use of realism in its foreign policy. The Bush regime sought to believe that in an anarchical world order, it is sometimes compulsory for the US to flex their military muscle and act alone in the use of military force rather than wait for directives from the UN to invoke collective security. However, the Obama approach to foreign policy was vastly different and from a liberal standpoint. Liberalism highlights collective action undertaken out by multilateral and

international bodies rather than individual nation states. Consequentially the Obama regime preferred consensus-building and engagement in its policy making.

The key component of the Obama administration was the rebalance policy, which prompted for greater diplomatic, economic, and security efforts in the Asia-Pacific. Between the years 2001 and 2011 the announcement of the pivot to Asia was deliberated (Robert G. Sutter, 2013). By the time China had already made significant traction in the modernization of its military and hence asserting its claims of sovereignty over disputed territories in the Asia-Pacific. Relatively undergoing the 2008 financial crisis unscathed which wreaked havoc on the western end particularly on the United States end (Robert G. Sutter, 2013). In this foreign policy it is in partly responsive to the perception that China had adopted a more muscular foreign policy themselves. US diplomacy under the rebalance or pivot to Asia focuses on cultivating the alliances and friendly ties, which entailing expanding its relations with Asia countries like Singapore and India and a stepped-up level of engagement with multilateral institutions.

Relations between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China (PRC) were already very tense even before the COVID-19 crisis, although also during this global pandemic many of the fissures and cracks and limitations of the bilateral relations were highlighted. China's assertiveness on the international stage since the 2008 financial crisis and especially since President Xi Jinping rose to power in 2012-2013 has helped cement a bipartisan consensus in the United States that a tougher and more competitive approach toward the PRC is required (Doshi, 2020). In the past few years, the U.S-China trade war, pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, alleged massive repression against Uighurs in Xinjiang, and increased U.S. and Chinese naval and offshore activities in disputed waters off China's coast have all heightened bilateral tensions (Christensen, 2020). However, the common threat posed by the virus could have provided an occasion for de-escalation of those tensions if both capitals had decided to cooperate to tackle it together and alongside others. Instead, COVID-19 so far has proven only to be a source of current greater friction, rather than greater cooperation, between the PRC and the United States.

The 2019 novel coronavirus has disrupted as much normalcy in normal people to people exchanges and almost twice as a disruption in interstate relations. The covid-19 pandemic is an acute public health and economic crisis that is further destabilizing an already weakened rules-based international system. What lies ahead for Chinese relations particularly with the United States post covid-19 in the international arena is what most of academicians. How the international system takes up mold of an international system at the backlash of covid-19 amidst lessons learnt during covid-19 is a vitality. Upon the outbreak of covid-19 many countries a deeply globalized, deeply interconnected world system had to mostly resort to administering travel bans and prioritize its citizens and national interest putting the notion of positive globalization under duress.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The research draws from International Relations theory in an array of ways. The split between the perspectives of liberalism and realism in IR are discussed, in order to place developments in the Sino-American relationship and US foreign policy within a wider chromatic spectrum of how feasible it is to conduct world politics through a rules-based order of international institutions. The debate has implications for what the US can possess the anticipation to achieve through its foreign policy and is hence deemed appropriate to the topic this thesis explores. The developments in the Sino-American relationship can also propose

certain indications of which perspective are best suited to explaining the contemporary state of world politics; to this end, this thesis might contribute some useful insights for the debate between liberalism and realism in IR. The IR theories also offer concepts and terminology which will be applied where it is deemed to be useful to the analysis and discussion of the Sino-American relationship and US foreign policy. Despite the inclusion of theory, the thesis does not intend to subscribe to one theoretical perspective: but a contingent application of theories to provide a useful basis for the respective contingent foreign policies also however it is not a thesis on IR theory.

Scholars frame out and pinpoint American exceptionalism and *pax Americana* are the cultural mechanisms that justify and legitimize foreign policy decisions, changes and practices. At the end of the cold war many scholars describe the US foreign policy as a liberal hegemon seeking to expand and spread its democratic views throughout its sphere of influence and Huntington describes this as primacy. Stephen Walt, further elaborates on this inherent belief that America is not only exceptional but also better, and that the myopic view of the unipolar moment of America as a sole super power on the dusk of the cold war is quickly fading in contemporary geopolitics as acted upon by globalization (Walt, 2018). Walt argues that the US sees itself as an indispensable nation with a unique qualification granting it the sole ability to spread democracy, democratic views and free market economies to the globe at large hence molding its foreign policy from a top down model with every other nation.

Foreign policy places the president, the state and other foreign policy stakeholders acting on advancing interests as unitary actors rather than myriad of conjunctive and cooperative actors or as a working group. Scholars hence have argued that the presidential doctrine is a direct descent or mirror of a state's foreign policy. A presidential doctrine which is a constant practice of a political ideology which is defined by the international encyclopedia of social and behavioral sciences as a set of ideas, beliefs, values, and opinions, exhibiting a recurring pattern, that competes deliberately as well as unintentionally over providing plans of action for public policy making, in an attempt to justify, explain, contest or change the social and political arrangements and processes of a political community.

It is widely acknowledged that cooperation between the USA and China, the world's two largest economies, is crucial to global peace and sustainability. But as a recent article in *Eco-Health* persuasively argues, US-China cooperation in research and policy is also essential to global health. It is mostly argued by scholars that, international leaders from key disease research groups in both countries stated: "China and the USA are well placed to lead efforts in emerging infectious disease preparedness both from a national interest standpoint, resource availability and a global health interconnectedness perspective" (Fulton, 2020). Therefore, amidst the worst pandemic in recent history, it is profoundly disturbing that this crucial bilateral relationship has been characterized more by allegations than cooperation.

China's government has been working on strengthening and improving their epidemic response capacity for future outbreaks, and the results are visible when comparing the response to SARS and COVID-19 outbreaks (A. B. Gumel, 2004). A study by Wu and McGoogan shows the timeline of the important events for SARS and COVID-19 diseases. According to them, there was a delay in notifying WHO about the SARS outbreak as 300 cases and 5 deaths had already occurred compared to 27 cases and zero deaths in COVID-19.

The first official confirmation for COVID-19 came on December 31, 2019, when the WHO China Country Office was informed about a cluster of 27 pneumonia cases of unknown etiology detected in Wuhan, Hubei province, China (Altakarli, 2020). Investigations began and traced

the outbreak to a seafood market where live bats were sold and believed to be the origin of the virus. The Chinese authorities immediately closed the market on January 1, 2020, as a method to terminate all meat trades, and then started environmental assessment to confirm the association and to prevent further transmission (Wu, Chen, & Chan, 2020). On January 3, 2020, 3 days after the first notification, the national authorities of China reported another 44 cases, while the causative agent was still unknown (Wu & McGoogan, 2020).

Concerned authorities immediately started epidemiologic and etiologic investigations, which led the authorities to identify and isolate a new type of coronavirus on January 7, to report and detect a novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) as the causative agent on January 9, and to make novel coronavirus genome sequencing publicly available for countries on January 10 (Zheng, 2020). The country exerted great efforts to improve their laboratory capacities as well, since the time taken to identify the virus was two months for SARS compared to one week for COVID-19. In addition, Chinese scientists have compiled a massive data set that gives the best available picture of the disease. The advances in viral diagnostic methods, the bioinformatic capabilities to analyze the data, and the speed by which genome sequencing and data were obtained were very helpful in developing diagnostic kits and taking fast precautionary measures.

As of January 22, the total number of confirmed cases had stretched to 581 globally; there were 571 cases reported in China, 375 of which were reported in Hubei province. After many studies in the country reported human to human transmission, and due to the rapid spreading of SARS CoV-2 within Hubei province, the Chinese authorities expanded the range of its preventive measures and announced a lockdown in Wuhan and Hubei province cities on January 24, by closing the airports and suspension of all public transportations to prevent anyone from entering and leaving (World Health Organization, 2020). This proclamation was made one day before the Spring Festival in China in order to reduce the very high population movement at this time, thus reducing the spread of the disease.

In addition, shops were all shut except those providing food and medicine, and very tight restrictions were placed on people to force quarantine. The government also annulled activities with large crowds and adjourned the reopening of schools and colleges by extending the holiday. Moreover, massive disinfection campaigns were launched in public facilities, and education was provided with a focus on populations with higher risk. This large-scale quarantine and social distancing that locked millions of people and cost huge human and economic costs has never been applied to this extent before.

Since President Donald Trump took office in 2017, his approach to U.S.-China relations has included increased pressure via tariffs and trade war pomposity (REUTERS, 2020), and now, with the onset of an unprecedented pandemic, the stage has been set for both sides to cast aspersions on the other (Zachary Cohen, 2020). Against this backdrop, negative views of China have continued to grow, according to a new Pew Research Center survey of Americans conducted in March. Roughly two-thirds now say they have an unfavorable view of China, the most negative rating for the country since the Center began asking the question in 2005, and up nearly 20 percentage points since the start of the Trump administration. Positive views of China's leader, President Xi Jinping, are also at historically low levels (Jeffrey Cimmino, 2020).

Biden outlook model, although the literature on the outlook of foreign policy of Biden towards China is still an ongoing sojourn the bulk framework of it based on emphasizing the return of America and American values of diplomacy on the international arena and specifically with China. The new foreign policy sought mainly to build the foreign policy of the

US on a stiff bedrock of building its domestic policy and reinforcing its domestic challenges like national healthcare which was brought to its knees by the Coronavirus, address its racial segregation issues and transcend its national policy issues to cement a non-bipartisan foreign policy towards china and the global village at large (Bader, 2022). The ideologue of strategic partnerships on economic matters and other areas like climate change and technological innovations will be aspects and factors up for revision and possibly change. The fundamental issues of the alliance system will be tested and revigorated by the US foreign policy with reassuring and reinforcing cooperation with allies in the Asian Pacific that ties were disregarded by the former president Trump administration. The cultivation of multilateralism and multilateral organisations is on the horizon with the new policy which could have a good spell for the bilateral relations.

### C. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Although there is no clear and distinct identification by American policymakers to be realists there are traces of realist assumptions in the coining of American foreign policy towards China. This thesis offers an approach through realist lenses. It is however important not to approach a theoretical tact solely on a perspective that international relations theories are independent of each other. The thesis makes use of overlapping similarities concerning the driving forces of national interests and draws clear distinctions on its differences making use of the already established liberal international order and a constructivist view of transnational and multilateral opportunities and challenges.

The arena of politics and international relations is populated and punctuated by agents, for example, states, human individuals and patterns of behavior, corporations as well as the structures they operate within. These structures can be either international organisations, treaties, or global regions. Kenneth Waltz, considered a structural realist or neo-realist, argued that while states are obliged to take heed of themselves and regard other states as potential threats, they are not inherently aggressive (Wendt A. E., 1987). Rather, it is the nature of the international system or structure that mandates them adjust their perspective in the world in accordance with their perceptions of other states power in relation to their own (Wendt A. , 1992). The theory most utilized theory in foreign policy and foreign policy analysis is the theory of realism. This posits the state as the main unitary actor and rational actor seeking to maximize and expand its national interest and objectives, usually from the standpoint that emphasis on international security.

Organski's view of realism and the power transition theory emphasize the influence of international power constellations (Organski, 1977). The scholar argues that there are two approaches used in the assessment of the liberal international situation, whilst both are merged important to take regard and embrace them as intrinsically different branches of the power tree. The balance of power and realistic views from Machiavelli and Hobbes, as well as modern thinkers, Hans J Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer posit post classical realism to have special focal point and pivot on human nature and the "animus dominandi" (Mason, 1999), recent versions put focus on structure and anarchical nature of the international structure.

Waltz view is that there should be two mandatory requisites for the theory to free flow, the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive. Whenever these conditions are met balance of power in geopolitics is set to prevail. Hence balance of power theory can be surmised to say that relative changes to the distribution of power are often

dangerous. Organski again in the power transition theory makes use of the hierarchical nature and state of the international arena, with a dominant power at the top that creates and sustains the international order. The new power regularly rising the ladder creates a new challenge and risk of conflict (Organski, 1977). According to Anthony Giddens on the nation state and violence, his take on globalization, which he defines as the process of continuing integration of countries in the world. International relations use globalization to reach its end goals. Therefore, it is a catalyst to diplomacy. The dominant power's sole wish would be to maintain the status quo by the already dissatisfying rising power to tackle the idea of power equilibrium (Giddens, 1979).

The risk of war necessitates the argument of this thesis to discuss the Thucydides trap, to assess the predestined collision course of the US-China bilateral relations. Graham Allison, from his book destined for war puts into perspective the risk of an altercation if certain conditions of the Thucydides trap are to be met by the two states. 12 in 16 study cases made by Allison past cases of power transition theory have resulted in conflict and bloodshed, that is to suffice that the risk is more likely for the consequent case studies (Arief, 2016). However, there is deficit in scientific history to account for its realist assumptions, mainly because it is buttressed exclusively on western strategic analogies of military terms and conditions. History is not evenly distributed on regional civilizations and war, hence there are deflects and undertakings of war globalization and interconnectedness and synergies. This in turn culminates conspiracy theories of covid-19 beginnings draconian ways to control it and some of the phases of the trade war.

Stephanie Hollings argues that the two dreams, being the America Dream and Chinese Dream have stark differences in approaches, however shown a propensity in ways of the national rhetoric. The US moral compass and exceptionalism views envision themselves as having the global moral force for the holistic benefit of the global community to lead whilst adhering to a moral framework that guides the liberal international order (Michael A. Peters, 2021). Meanwhile China parallels globalism of the US, initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative aims to establish a truly global community of common destiny. The two discrete forms of state-centric approaches to global engagements. The Chinese dream is fortified in nationalistic rejuvenation bidding adieu to a modern history mired in multiple international humiliation and a desire to develop themselves into a strong great power of a peaceful rise and national rejuvenation.

Allison, though, is circumspect in declaring China the new age Athens; might it be a growingly imperialistic Greek city state seeking to economic hegemony? Is realism the best lens through which to view China's present rise? Or is it more reasonable to use another theoretically ideal lens? Specifically, cosmopolitanism, which has a long history stretching all the way back to the ancient Greeks. Another scholar perspective is that the Chinese narrative is cosmopolitan in nature, emphasizing a multipolar world rather than a unipolar worldview, and that the story is based on historical circumstances (Allison, 2017).

The cemented foundation of the theory in principle aims at helping the researcher determine the purpose and direction of writing to support this line of thought and choose concepts and theories to formulate a working hypothesis. By looking at the background and previous foreign policies and temporarily answering the subject matter, the researcher makes use of the concept of multilateral and unilateral approach to diplomacy, the concept of security and cooperation, and the concept of power transition theory. The primary instrument of carrying out foreign policy can be that of diplomacy. Foreign policy influences diplomacy for

countries to undertake on it. Then the diplomacy carried out is for the countries to achieve their sole mandate of advancing national interests.

According to International relations theory of liberalism, diplomacy is comprised of the formulation, organisations and implementation of foreign policy, which offers up the act of foreign policy at three different stages and with multiple relevant stakeholders and contributors. Diplomacy is a state instrument and tool through formal and informal representation which diplomacy is understood as a vital part of necessities of a nation and becomes a main notion in dealing with international issues for their realization of idealism and global peace.

According to K.J Holsti, the process of collaboration is formed from a combination of diversity of national, regional, or global problems that arise and require attention from more than one country. Each government approaches each other with a proposal for problem solving, collects written evidence to justify a proposal or another and ends negotiations with an agreement or base line understanding that satisfies all parties (Holsti, 1970). On the approach to sustenance in the contemporary international arena, cooperation is vital as seen when dealing with global pandemics like the covid-19, global issues necessitate global efforts in attempts to solve and mitigate them. Because of globalization, the development trajectory of science and technology, artificial intelligence and deepened human interactions has no place for isolationism and unilateralism. Hence cooperation and collaborative efforts of countries are carried out at the will and advancement of each country national interests, either bilaterally or using multilateralism and its mother bodies for the benefit of the international community.

## **D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Causes of Trump Administration's Confrontation Policy Towards China**

Prior to the Trump era the bilateral relations of US-China have often had their fair share of downs and had clashes over multiple areas like the South China Sea, the Uyghurs issues, Hong Kong and the Taiwan strait. However, the main notion had been to pursue national interests and ambitions if relations were competitive yet generally showing great signs of stability rather than being confrontational and hostile. Throughout this era of strategic competitiveness, the US enjoyed a commanding lead role in overall national power, despite the existence and reality of a rising China. This is however halted by the Trump era.

Trump era is defined at a systematic level in sowing attempts to slow down China's progress and strong-arm Chinese leaders to become more responsive to American priorities and concerns about its behavior. Prior to the Trump era the general system put in place as a foreign policy had a trajectory and general direction was towards deepening ties using globalization as a relevant catalyst. Trump's worldview of a zero-sum culminated an erratic and unsystematic approach to the bilateral relations instigating the trade war and leaving the TPP which took a heavy hit to the US supremacy and concurrent relations with other countries other than China (Walt, 2018). To avoid a worsening arms race and perhaps even the emergence of a tense, crisis-prone Cold War-like environment in the Western Pacific, the United States, China, and other major Asian powers must accept the realities of the de facto movement toward a balance of power in the region and hence the need to transition to a stable version of that balance.

The intensity of measures with which to challenge China was a point where Trump differed from Obama. Brown and Irwin present another possible basis behind Trump's tariffs, namely that Trump never intended for China to pursue political and economic reforms: rather than



pursue 'a comprehensive deal', Trump was pursuing 'the tariffs themselves' (Thiemo Fetzer, 2021). To this end, an attempt to entirely dismantle, rather than incrementally diminish, 'the supply chains that bound the United States and China together' through extensive tariffs could have been the course taken, in so doing effectively pursuing 'the economic decoupling of the United States and China' (Thiemo Fetzer, 2021).

This interpretation presents the notion that Trump has attempted to enact a decisive departure from the foreign policy towards China of preceding administrations; not finding the liberalization of the PRC to be possible to achieve through the hitherto preferred balance of engagement and deterrence, a zero-sum approach where China is labelled perpetual competitor to the US rather than its eventual partner might have been materializing in the Trump administration. Whilst engagement broke down under Obama and deterrence thus dominated his foreign policy concerning China, his measures of deterrence were not aimed at creating a competitor, but rather at giving China no other option than to soften its state capitalist practices and give the US reins over the rules and norms of international order, to avoid economic decline through being isolated from an American-led regional institutional framework in the Asia-Pacific.

The system of attempting to contain China's rise by deterrence from Trump was also unfruitful. The past administration of Obama's policy was reinforced by the cultivation of other relations in the Asian Pacific as they were on the rebalance Asia or pivot to Asia foreign policy in attempts to contain China's rise. Which was starkly different to Trump's somewhat unilateral approach that was at a system level often referred to as being Isolationist for criticizing other countries for free riding on the US, his vail attempts to build the Mexican-US wall and tighten immigration laws on Muslims and Asian descendant people (Walt, 2018). Thus, severely disturbing the relations that were once favorable to the US.

Trump's foreign policy towards China focused on unilateralism and bilateral negotiations in pursuit of improving the trade relationship with China in a way conducive to the American economy, but his method of doing so was through extensive tariffs which made it unclear what the US intends to achieve. This was courtesy of a disconnect between Trump's economic policies and his administration's attempts to continue deterring China in a manner like the Obama administration, two approaches which were based on different intentions and sought to achieve different goals. Because of Trump's withdrawal from the TPP, it was no longer a means to counter China's growing regional influence, illustrating how the incoherence between intentions within the administration worked to counteract the efficacy of deterring China.

The intensity of Trump's economic policy direction might have suggested to other states China included that the administration wanted a Cold War-sequel divergence between China and the US, and a decoupling of their respective economies; the attempt to recruit European allies in opposition to China's trade practices, as exemplified by the case of Huawei, also reinforced this notion (Friedberg, *Competing with China*, 2018). The trade war was coupled with a confrontation on the issues of human rights and military assertiveness in the South China Sea, an NSS which declared China a competitor, and allegations of discriminatory trade behavior: all this exacerbated the divergence between the US and China that was already becoming apparent through Obama's time in office.

Western scholars' research on Chinese nationalism focuses on public attitudes and foreign policy making. For Chinese leaders, the politics of nationalism are more complicated and have both domestic and foreign targets. President Xi Jinping envisions China and the global community as sharing a common destiny and expects China to play a positive and active

leadership role in global governance. This vision of China's role in global governance, along with China's visible benefits from participation in the global economic system, most notably with the USA, are key factors balancing against the negative feelings Chinese harbor toward the Trump administration for disrespectful treatment during trade negotiations (Sukma, 2021). USA and the China have different political and ideological belief systems. China is an outsider to the global security network, which features a US-led alliance network. These stark differences will be difficult to eliminate in the short term, and for this reason, trade relations increasingly became risky. When these factors become latent, trade issues will be easier to resolve.

In the process increasing global economic benefits would ease trade hostilities, but the slowdown in global growth due to the COVID-19 pandemic limits the ability of both China and the USA to soften in their trade positions. Several uncertainties remain for both countries regarding the role nationalism plays in trade relationships. In the USA, domestic politics are polarized, and there are problems in economic recovery. In China, there are concerns in the process of domestic political development as to whether the Open Door and economic reform policies should continue. Too, there is the question of China's identity as a responsible global actor. Thus, China counteracts US aggression in the trade war, not only to protect its economic interests but also to assert power to international audiences.

The vast discrepancy in policies and approach to the bilateral relations has multiple of factors to it and highlights a key of fundamental issues regarding the two parties. The President Trump's administrative policies, the beginning of the 21st century went through considerable changes in the distribution of global power. The lack of strategic apparition by the United States has resulted in a power crisis, which in turn accelerates the trends of new multipolarity with several power centers in the world. Since President Trump took office in January 2017, the United States has been challenging the established norms of international relations on many fronts and shifting its policy toward China that signals geopolitical rivalry amid their economic interdependence (Walt, 2018). The ever-increasing anxiety of the United States has undermined multilateralism and globalization, generating profound consequences and impacts on major-power relations around the world.

### **National Level**

The national policy and level of analysis during the Trump era has taken heed of the huge amount of domestic issues that were and still are unaddressed. Foreign policy is built upon a good strong foundation of domestic public policy. The Trump period was punctuated by a weakness in domestic policy and general distrust and displeasure towards national leadership. Issues of falling life expectancy, racial segregation deeply embedded in the constitution, still having the highest income inequality, twice as much healthcare prices which was highlighted during the covid-19 era and a strained the domestic systems. The black lives movement which the president Trump publicly criticized did not help his course either. Although Trump and his predecessors as the likes talks so much of indigenous technological and infrastructural developments to date there has been not one mile of fast rail or speed trains.

Trump remaps the National Security Strategy to ultimately view and perceive China as a rival rather strategic competitor. The NSS had a clear Hobbesian outlook where individual states are thought of as competing for advantage pitted against each other, a clear mercantilist approach to the bilateral relations. NSS 2017, these competitions require the US to rethink the policies of the policies of the past two decades with rivals and their inclusion in international

and global commerce would turn them into benign actors and trustworthy partners (The ChinaFile Conversation, 2017).

Deducing and referring to China as a clear challenger to American power, influence and interests as well as American security and prosperity. In Europe, however, unlike the United States, no dominant school of thought has emerged treating China as the new archenemy in a structural global conflict. Unlike America's, the European Union's relationship with China is not focused on geostrategic containment and decoupling. Instead it wants to develop a reciprocal primarily economic and technological interdependency between Europe and China based on reciprocity and jointly agreed principles and rules. In order to achieve this, the European Union needs to be united and conflict capable, equipped with the required legitimacy, and acquire the necessary industrial or technological resilience.

In the USA, President Trump has pushed to wean the country off foreign sources of oil and other natural resources and has promised to bring manufacturing jobs back to the Rust Belt and other areas. Both agenda items have led to economic nationalist and protectionist steps and to the weakening of the US-China trade relationship. In this context, Trump and other high-level administrators have used xenophobic rhetoric to blame China for US economic ills. The rhetoric ramped up at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and in the year of a presidential election campaign (Patricia Sabga, 2020). For the Trump administration, the pandemic was an opportunity to further blame China for domestic economic problems long in the making. Initially surprised at the high tariffs imposed on its goods, China has stood up to US pressure, in part owing to its identity of being historically marginalized and its desire to continue to grow economically and politically on the world stage.

Trump's America first policy also focuses on preserving US dominance through increased defense spending and expansion in military cooperation with Asian allies. The implications these policies have on relative power distribution has witnessed a lot of constellations. The extent to which the US-China bilateral relation is economically intertwined as catalyzed by the process of globalization is highly interconnected. The evolution of US-China relations during the past 2 decades has unfolded not only in the shadow of anarchy, but at a time when the distribution of power in the international system was shifting. China's rise, which accelerated after the mid-1990s, initiated a transition away from the post-Cold War condition of unipolarity marked by America's position as a unrivaled superpower (Ferguson, 2019).

That transition pointed towards a bipolar world emerging sometime in the first half of the twenty-first century, a world in which China and the United States would comprise a distinctive pair whose great power capability set them apart from all others on the global stage. Nor does bipolarity or multipolarity for that matter indicate symmetry in the composition of the capabilities of the great powers. During the Cold War, for example, the Soviet Union failed to match the capabilities of the United States, especially in terms of economic strength and the quality of advanced military weaponry.

### **Personal Interest**

The Since Trump's presidency took place started in 2017, United States initiated a reduction on its global role and participation. The country has withdrawn from various trade partnerships, trade agreement negotiations, defense treaties, and it has also shifted from its traditional allies; some scholars have described Trump's strategy as an "offshore rebalancing". Trump stated that American foreign policy should be reduced and only focused on three core

national interests: “fight against terrorism, renegotiation of trade deals and a new emphasis on America’s military power”.

The present American strategy has a domestic approach instead of an international one, contrary to what has been witnessed in the past. This strategy makes emphasis on the American middle class, which, according to Trump, has been deeply injured by globalization. Given the dramatic alteration in the American foreign policy and its lack of clarity, Trump’s administration is representing the highest level of uncertainty to be seen in the world order since the end of the Cold War.

The collision of leadership styles is part and parcel of the strategic competition. The person-centeredness of foreign policy action and formal authority govern the leadership style applied. The clash of these opposing styles not only creates or deepens conflicts in the direct relationship, but also erodes the basis of trust between the affected states. This may even create openings for third states, and opportunities for gains if they seek a balance between the leadership styles and their protagonists. This competition of leadership styles creates a disadvantageous context that makes it difficult to find viable solutions for overarching issues and global problems, for example in climate protection or arms control.

Era of Trump and the character of Trump earned him the name of the “Twitter President” which was heavily characterized by erratic behavioral patterns and responses to not getting his way in the bilateral relations. Trump had a pessimistic view of US-China relations which had led to a shift in geopolitical tactics. Although the foreign policy and level of analysis focuses on the state as the unitary actor the Character of the state shaped and had the foreign policy moulded off his character. Trumpism refers to ambiguity and uncertainty and does not have a common or standard definition. In fact, unlike most of his predecessors, Trump is a president with no prior political or military experience. His strong affiliation and main taproot with the world of business and media has had a tangible impact on his understanding of the world. The president’s worldview is transactional and business-oriented based of his vast experience as a businessman in Wall Street before his sojourn in politics. In fact, Trump does not champion an erudite worldview. As Stephens puts it, Trump’s ‘America First’ agenda ‘draws on populist, isolationist instincts’ since it is based on his renunciation of globalism and adherence to nationalism.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The evolution of the US foreign policy since the normalization of diplomatic relations in 1979 can be highlighted by an integration and varying degree of containment and engagement, which coincide to a policy of “congagement”. The congagement policy entails aspects of both containment and engagement, containment which is an effort to limit the power of a challenger and engagement which is an attempt by two countries to positively interact and further cultivate a platform of cooperation. Congagement is both a foreign policy and a chromatic spectrum along which a foreign policy sways in varying degrees of either containment or engagement.

The Obama administration’s proposed policy of increasing US engagement with the Asia-Pacific region, guided by the question of whether the administration was changing away from the strategy of engagement with China or not. In order to evaluate what the intentions of the administration’s Asia-Pacific policy, the policy’s fate in its application is discussed, with emphasis placed on the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership as the most important element of Obama’s Asia Pacific policy. As the PRC supposedly grew under the leadership of Xi Jinping,

China's ambitions and its response to the policies of the Obama administrations were in order to explore the prospects of further engagement and the state of the Sino American relationship as Trump took office in 2017.

Trump pursued a more confrontational foreign policy towards China, foregoing the engagement strategy of the past. The relevant issues concerning Trump's foreign policy direction towards China and the Asia-Pacific region include Trump's rejection of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which was the most important component of Obama's foreign policy towards the Asia-Pacific; the tariffs introduced by Trump on Chinese exports, which triggered economic competition in the form of a trade war; Trump's attempt to halt the development of Huawei's 5G network for allegedly being a means of Chinese cyberaggression; Chinese assertion of its sovereignty over peripheral territories, which sparked uproar in Hong Kong prompting Trump to sign legislation in support of protestors; and most recently, the American and Chinese response to COVID-19, which aptly illustrated the growing adversity between the two great powers.

The Trump administration wished to pursue the same ends that the engagement strategy did, only transforming China through confrontation rather than engagement; to decouple from China, persuade other nation-states to join America in opposition to China, and in so doing bring about a world reminiscent of the Cold War; or if US foreign policy had shed its idealism, putting "America First" to reach relatively modest concessions on unfair Chinese trade practices on a bilateral basis, with no intentions of forcefully engendering the broader transformation of China. Aspects of all these concerns found expression in the policies of the Trump administration, leading to competition reflecting an inconsistent mixture of interests. This reveals that the Trump administration had not found a consistent and clear replacement with which to guide US foreign policy towards China now that engagement was no longer a viable strategy.

On his road to campaign President elect from the Democrat camp Biden acknowledged his democrat values and how they would shape up his foreign policy stance towards China. But putting aside his bipartisanship and putting forth his nationalism and advancement of national interests after being elected president he termed that China is the US strategic competitor. His predecessor's stance towards China was irrational and uncoordinated and he would engage more with China and has the determination and will for multilateralism and takes heed of globalization and internationalism. These aspects of change are anticipated to be into category groups of stable factors and changeable factors, which are being revised and corrected by the current Biden administration.

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