

AVOIDING GREAT POWER WAR PROJECT

The Great Diplomatic Rivalry: China vs the U.S.

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Chinese Communist Party foreign affairs chief Yang Jiechi, left, at the opening session of US-China talks at the Captain Cook Hotel in Anchorage, Alaska, Thursday, March 18, 2021. (Frederic J. Brown/Pool via AP)

Preface

In response to Putin's invasion of Ukraine, the Biden administration has successfully mobilized an international coalition that is imposing unprecedented, comprehensive sanctions on Russia. That effort is all the more remarkable when compared to the diplomatic performance of the U.S. in the two decades that preceded it. As this brutal war has ground on, China has stood firmly behind its beleaguered Russian partner. While the U.S. highlights the international condemnation of Russia's aggression, China notes that this does not include the most populous country in the world, the largest democracy in the world, the leading countries in Africa and South America, and even Israel.

This report is not about current U.S. and Chinese diplomatic efforts to meet challenges posed by Putin's invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing war. Instead, it is an assessment of both nations' statecraft and diplomacy in addressing the challenges posed by the first 20 years of the 21st century—before Putin invaded Ukraine. As such, it provides an instructive baseline against which to judge what



each is now doing. This report also identifies trendlines that will increasingly shape the road ahead. One of five chapters of the “Great Rivalry Report” produced by Harvard’s China Working Group as part of the transition memos provided to the new administration last year, it responds to the assignment to “document what has actually happened in the first two decades of the 21st century.” Using the analogy of the Olympics, each chapter begins with where the two competitors stood in 2000 and traces their paths to where they were in 2020. Comparing their performance in various aspects of diplomacy, this chapter identifies criteria and metrics for assessing various races, assembles the best unclassified data about what each nation has done, and offers our best judgment about relative performance.

Putin’s war in Ukraine is providing a severe stress test for both China and the U.S. At this point, no one knows where it will end. We can be certain, however, that the outcome will profoundly impact judgments about both nations’ diplomatic capabilities in a rivalry that is destined to define international relations in the century ahead.

Executive Summary

The confrontation in Anchorage between China's top diplomats Yang Jiechi and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and the American tag team of Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan essentially said it all.¹ (For those whose memories of the event have faded, it is worth the five-minute detour to watch this [clip](#).) The days when Chinese officials would sit politely listening to lectures from their American counterparts about their country's faults are over. China's patience for instructions from Americans about how China should change its behavior to win the approval of the international community has been exhausted. From now on, as Yang put it pointedly: "The United States does not have the qualification...to speak to China from a position of strength."² To the contrary, as Foreign Minister Wang has repeatedly said: China will now engage the U.S. standing on "equal footing": eyeball to eyeball, without apologies—determined to land as many blows as it takes.

It was not that long ago that Chinese statecraft was guided by Deng Xiaoping's injunction to "hide and bide": keep a "low profile" and "never claim leadership." Then, Foreign Ministry officials were essentially interpreters, referred to by colleagues in the Chinese government as "barbarian handlers."³ Their assignment was to talk to foreign officials in their own language and communicate that they understood their concerns—but make as few concessions as possible. China's goal was to ensure a permissive external environment in which it could pursue its principal agenda at home: stability and economic growth.⁴ And in large part, it succeeded. (In retrospect, it's instructive to consider why so few Americans paused to ask: hide what, why? Or bide until when, to do what then?)

But that was then. Today's Chinese diplomats draw from a new playbook. In large part this reflects how reality has shifted, illustrated vividly in Anchorage.

1 As a member of the Politburo, Yang Jiechi outranks Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

2 "How it happened: Transcript of the US-China opening remarks in Alaska," *Nikkei Asian Review*, March 19, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/US-China-tensions/How-it-happened-Transcript-of-the-US-China-opening-remarks-in-Alaska>.

3 William Choong, "Beware China's 'Barbarian Handlers,'" *The Diplomat*, February 11, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/02/beware-chinas-barbarian-handlers/>.

4 See: Graham Allison and Fred Hu, "An Unsentimental China Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, February 18, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-02-18/unsentimental-china-policy>. Prior to China's shift in focus towards economic development, it was heavily engaged in supporting communist revolutions abroad.

Diplomacy has become a critical component of the “great rivalry” between China and the U.S.—one that will continue to intensify in the months and years ahead.

The contours of this great rivalry are shaped by the statements and rhetoric each side uses to craft a narrative about the other. According to Washington, China is the dominant threat not just to the U.S. but to the world. According to the Biden Administration’s talking points, it is the “only country with the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to seriously challenge the stable and open international system.”⁵ By erecting protectionist barriers to handicap foreign companies in Chinese markets, subsidizing Chinese champions, and directing its security services to steal intellectual property for its advanced technology companies, China is undermining the global rules-based economic order. By constructing and militarizing illegal islands in the South China Sea, sailing its ships into other nations’ territorial waters, flying planes into their air space, conducting persistent cyberattacks on foreign companies and governments, and even provoking kinetic clashes—such as the dramatic incident in which Chinese killed 20 Indian soldiers along the disputed Sino-Indian border—China is escalating the risks of war.⁶ By denying its citizens their basic human rights, crushing democracy in Hong Kong, and pursuing a genocidal policy against Uyghurs in Xinjiang, China’s autocracy is threatening democracies everywhere.

After an initial period in which Chinese diplomats largely played defense, denying American charges, they have now moved to play offense as well. According to their narrative, the biggest threat to global peace and security is the USA. According to Wang and Yang, U.S. rhetoric about a “rules based international order” is a conjurer’s trick. Ignoring the order established by the great powers when they created the United Nations (UN) in 1945, the U.S. is seeking to replace it with a new “liberal rules-based order” in which the U.S. writes the rules and others obey its orders. In that order, the U.S. serves as judge, jury, and executioner. Chinese point to the U.S.-led NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 to force the government to allow Kosovo to secede as a vivid case in point. (This resonates for Chinese who have never accepted U.S. assurances that the bombing of China’s embassy in Belgrade during these attacks was accidental.) As Yang put it, China champions “the United Nations-centered international system and the

5 Antony Blinken, “The Administration’s Approach to the People’s Republic of China,” The White House, May 26, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/the-administrations-approach-to-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>.

6 Steven Lee Myers, “China Acknowledges 4 Deaths in Last Year’s Border Clash With India,” *New York Times*, March 1, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/19/world/asia/china-india-clash.html>.

international order underpinned by international law, not what is advocated by a small number of countries of the so-called rules-based international order.”⁷

Contrary to U.S. claims about China’s flagrant disrespect for the views of the international community, Chinese diplomats argue that the U.S. is the one out of step with the majority of mankind. Who elected the U.S. as spokesman for the world, they ask. In fact, America speaks for a small minority of the 7.9 billion people on this Earth, roughly one fifth of whom are Chinese. In Yang’s words, whether “judged by population scale” or the “trend of the world,” the United States “does not represent international public opinion.”⁸ Before criticizing others, he and Wang suggest Americans should look at their own problems: their human rights abuses and systemic racism, their dysfunctional democracy that saw their Capitol attacked by their own citizens, their military’s cyberattacks on other nations. In essence, they say Americans should read carefully what America’s clearest-eyed critics are saying about their own country.

According to Beijing, the principal cause of “war, chaos, turbulence and numerous tragedies” over the past two decades has been U.S. military aggression. During these decades, China claims it has “never threatened to use military force against other countries, never engaged in military alliance, and never exported ideology.”⁹ In contrast, as Chinese Ambassador to the U.S. Qin Gang described, China “is committed to peaceful, open, cooperative and common development, and works to build a community with a shared future for mankind.”¹⁰

Indeed, Chinese diplomats ask: who poses the greatest threat to global governance? Highlighting the United States’ unilateralist tendencies in the past two decades, China argues that no one has undermined the major international institutions including the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the UN as consistently as the U.S. Noting that these organizations were originally designed with the interests of only “a small number of people” in mind, China is working with others to promote their “reform and improvement” to ensure, as Xi Jinping said at the 2021 Boao Forum, that

7 “How it happened: Transcript of the US-China opening remarks in Alaska.”

8 Ibid.

9 “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin’s Regular Press Conference on April 29, 2021,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, press release, April 29, 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1872574.shtml.

10 Larry Luxner, “Chinese Ambassador Qin Gang addresses strained bilateral ties,” *The Washington Diplomat*, September 27, 2021, <https://washdiplomat.com/chinese-ambassador-qin-gang-addresses-strained-bilateral-ties/>.

there will be no more “bossing others around.”¹¹ In reporting on Xi’s speech at the Forum, the Chinese state news agency Xinhua summed up the bottom line: “Facing a world with growing anti-globalization sentiment, populism, unilateralism, and protectionism,” China has arrived at center stage—and is more prepared than ever to pursue “its own vision of global governance.”¹²

From our review of the diplomatic record of China and the U.S. over the first two decades of this century, we report a number of troubling trendlines. Given where China started at the beginning of the century, it is not surprising that in playing catch-up it has closed the gaps with the U.S. in many arenas. Confronting these facts, especially when they are uncomfortable, is an essential prerequisite to asking what should be done. To begin with our bottom lines up front:

- In a phrase: game on. The era of “hide and bide” is over. China is now determined to compete as aggressively in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy as it does in other arenas.
- For Washington, diplomacy has become a “lost art.” This is a damning charge. But it comes from one of America’s most distinguished diplomats. Currently the Director of the CIA, Bill Burns began as a foreign service officer and rose through the ranks to serve as Obama’s Deputy Secretary of State.¹³ Reviewing what has happened over the past three decades, his bottom line is that Washington has lost this essential art.
- The good news is that China has not yet found it. At the end of the Cold War, many in Washington believed that the world had entered a new unipolar era in which Americans could essentially dictate to others what they “must” do.¹⁴ During the previous administration, as President Trump boasted about America First and bullied allies and adversaries alike, Chinese diplomats could succeed by simply letting Trump undermine U.S. alliances, or by offering easy rejoinders like Xi’s “shared future for mankind.” Nonetheless, where Chinese diplomats have tried to play

11 “Full Text: Keynote speech by President Xi at Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2021,” *Xinhua*, April 20, 2021, <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202104/20/WS607e62d4a31024ad0bab6ba7.html>.

12 “Xi Focus: Xi’s answer to “questions of our time” reverberates beyond Boao,” *Xinhua*, April 18, 2021, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-04/18/c_139889038.htm.

13 William J. Burns, “The Lost Art of American Diplomacy,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-03-27/lost-art-american-diplomacy>.

14 For a discussion on “must” rhetoric, see Douglas J. Feith, “Must-y Cairo Rhetoric,” *Hudson Institute*, June 11, 2009, <https://www.hudson.org/research/6294-must-y-cairo-rhetoric>.

offense, former Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd notes, “China’s standing has taken a huge hit.” In Rudd’s words, “the irony is that these wolf warriors are adding to this damage, not ameliorating it.”¹⁵ After months of what professional diplomats would call malpractice, Xi Jinping has recognized the problem and issued new instructions to the Foreign Ministry. But his recent directive to his diplomats “to create a credible, lovable and respectable image of China” reminds us that Chinese diplomacy remains a work in progress.¹⁶

- The current CCP regime’s founding diplomat, Zhou Enlai, defined diplomacy as the “continuation of war by other means.” The acid test is thus how successful a state’s diplomacy is in getting other states to do what its leaders want.¹⁷ There, China’s performance has, until recently, earned higher marks than America’s. In large part, this reflects the fact that Chinese leaders’ assignments to their diplomats were more achievable. Until the Xi era, at the level of grand statecraft, China sought “breathing space” to allow it to build its economic power at home and abroad. In contrast, during the same two decades, U.S. foreign policy was, as former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates argued conclusively in his book *Exercise of Power*, “overmilitarized.” Symbolically, China’s entry into the WTO in 2001 and conclusion of the two decades with the signing of comprehensive trade and investment treaties with the major economies of Asia and Europe in 2020 provide instructive bookends. The U.S. analogues are two decades that began with the dispatch of hundreds of thousands of troops to Iraq and Afghanistan after the terrorist attack in 2001, and ended in 2021 with the final withdrawal of all combat forces from a losing venture in Afghanistan.
- On the other hand, statecraft also requires execution. At the level of implementation, Chinese diplomats’ ferociousness has become a liability. For example, just three months after China and the EU signed their landmark investment treaty, the deal came to a grinding halt: China responded to EU human rights sanctions by imposing counter-sanctions on five EU parliamentarians, thereby allowing opponents of the deal to persuade Parliament to pause its review of the deal. As Joerg Wuttke, head

15 Kevin Rudd, “The Coming Post-COVID Anarchy,” *Foreign Affairs*, May 6, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-05-06/coming-post-covid-anarchy>.

16 Steven Lee Myers and Keith Bradsher, “China’s Leader Wants a ‘Lovable’ Country. That Doesn’t Mean He’s Making Nice,” *New York Times*, June 8, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/08/world/asia/china-diplomacy.html>.

17 Charles W. Freeman, *The Diplomat’s Dictionary*, 2nd ed (Washington, D.C: United States Institute of Peace, 2010).

of the European Chamber of Commerce in China, put it, “We had seven years of negotiations for the deal. Now it looks like it will take another seven years.”¹⁸

- For a generation, Washington has largely dissed diplomacy: denigrating its significance, disinvesting in its professionals, demeaning the role of continuous conversation and artful persuasion. As Nick Burns, the nominee who waited nine months to be confirmed as U.S. Ambassador to China, concluded in a Harvard report finished before his nomination in which he proposed a renewed “Diplomatic Service for the 21st century”: “The Foreign Service...is facing one of the most profound crises in its long and proud history.”¹⁹ President Trump’s visceral allergy to diplomacy, especially in dealing with American allies like German Chancellor Angela Merkel, became legendary. But it was the president who preceded him who asked disparagingly: who needs George Kennan now?²⁰
- On most metrics of diplomacy, China’s position relative to that of the U.S. has risen dramatically over the past two decades. In hosting summits, one-on-one meetings with heads of state, face-to-face meetings of key cabinet officers in China and other nations’ capitols, numbers of embassies and consulates, numbers of diplomats serving internationally, representation in international organizations, foreign affairs spending, diplomatic training, and positions of leadership in international organizations, China has made great leaps forward.

18 Tom Mitchell, “China’s ‘wolf warriors’ refuse to back down,” *Financial Times*, April 10, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/e4a00ea4-d198-41f1-a527-65f18865a534>.

19 Nicholas Burns, Marc Grossman, and Marcie Ries, “A U.S. Diplomatic Service for the 21st Century,” (Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, November 2020), 3.

20 In an interview with *The New Yorker*, President Obama said, “I don’t really even need George Kennan right now.” See David Remnick, “Going the Distance,” *New Yorker*, January 19, 2014, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/01/27/going-the-distance-david-remnick>.

What Is Diplomacy?

When China established its Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1949, its first foreign minister, Zhou Enlai, answered that question by paraphrasing Clausewitz. As noted above, he defined diplomacy as “the continuation of warfare by other means.” Because in his view “armed struggle and diplomatic struggle are similar,” he described diplomats as “the People’s Liberation Army in civilian clothing.”²¹ To conduct this special form of warfare, Zhou recruited a corps of diplomats to serve as a “civilian army,” and Foreign Ministry officials are still proud to think of themselves in these terms today.²²

Washington uses the acronym DIME to remind itself of the instruments that must be orchestrated in making foreign policy: diplomacy, information, military, and economic. But as diplomats often note, the D comes first. According to the definition we have found most useable, diplomacy is “the established method of influencing the decisions and behavior of foreign governments and peoples through dialogue, negotiation, and other measures short of war or violence.”²³ As such, it is a complex art combining relationships, advocacy, inducements, threats, coercion, and words to advance a nation’s agenda without the use of guns and bullets.

Conceptually, diplomacy includes three marbled layers that can be described as statecraft, architecture, and gardening. Statecraft consists of the fundamental choices a nation makes about its role in the world and the path it chooses to meet major challenges to its survival and well-being. In the aftermath of World War II, the U.S. set out to construct a new world order but soon found itself confronting a revolutionary, expansionist Soviet Union. To meet what it saw as an existential threat, it created a strategy of comprehensive containment on all dimensions short of armed conflict. And thus the “Cold” War began. Having invented what Bernard Brodie rightly called the “absolute weapon,” and after dropping atomic bombs on Japan to end the Second World War, the U.S. faced a fateful choice among options that included: international control, nuclear monopoly, duopoly, oligopoly, and anarchy. At this level of grand statecraft, China’s choice in the 21st century has been to concentrate on building the strongest economy in the world at home. Abroad, it has sought to become the indispensable economic

21 Peter Martin, *China’s Civilian Army: The Making of Wolf Warrior Diplomacy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 15.

22 During a visit of a new military museum in 2019, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying reminded her host that the foreign ministry’s roots are one of a “civilian army.” Martin, *China’s Civilian Army*, 8.

23 Chas. W. Freeman, “Diplomacy,” *Britannica*, December 14, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/diplomacy>.

partner for all other major powers and most minor ones as well. In contrast, for two decades after the terrorist attacks on 9/11, the U.S. focused on a global “War on Terrorism,” ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the attempt to build stable, modern, market-based democracies in the Middle East. In sum, choice in statecraft is foundational. If a state chooses unachievable objectives, even the best architecture and gardening will be doomed to fail.

Building on the foundation of a state’s grand strategy, at a second level, architecture consists of the design and construction of regimes, norms, institutions, and processes to achieve the state’s goals. These cover a spectrum from the UN for international order, to the Non-Proliferation Treaty for nuclear order, the WTO for trade order, the IMF for financial order, and the WHO for public health order. These institutions shape the behavior of states in ways that protect the interests of all parties—but in particular the architect. All of the major post-World War II architecture, from the UN, IMF, and World Bank to the WTO, NATO, and the array of other international agencies and organizations, were constructed in large part by the United States. In most, the U.S. ensured for itself pride of place, with a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, an effective veto on major choices by the IMF, and special rights in the selection of the leadership of the World Bank. But these institutions have proved remarkably effective in allowing not only the U.S. but citizens of all nations on earth to enjoy one of the longest periods without great power war and largest increases in prosperity in recorded history.

The third level of diplomacy is the day-to-day work that the American statesman George Shultz called “gardening”: weeding and seeding, watering and feeding relationships to influence the choices and actions of target states. The contest between the U.S. and China over the origins of COVID-19 pandemic provides an instructive case study.²⁴ After the virus emerged in Wuhan, where in addition to wet food markets China also has a virology laboratory, the U.S. pressed for a WHO-authorized panel of international experts to “fully assess the source of the virus and the early days of the outbreak.”²⁵ Hitting back at accusations that its government was responsible for the virus, China delayed for months despite other nations’ calls for the international organization responsible for global health to conduct an investigation into events in Wuhan. When China

24 For a comprehensive overview of the investigation into COVID-19’s origins, see Katherine Eban, “The Lab-Leak Theory: Inside the Fight to Uncover COVID-19’s Origins,” *Vanity Fair*, June 3, 2021, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2021/06/the-lab-leak-theory-inside-the-fight-to-uncover-covid-19s-origins>.

25 Yasmeen Abutaleb, Eric Cunningham, Shane Harris, and Ben Guarino, “Top U.S. health official calls for follow-up investigation into pandemic’s origins,” *The Washington Post*, March 26, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/05/25/us-demands-who-investigation-coronavirus-origins/>.

finally allowed a WHO team to visit Wuhan, it exercised strict controls on the team's access. In the end, the joint WHO-China report recommended taking a closer look at transmission through frozen food, a theory promoted by Beijing that broadens the scope of the investigation to look not only at China, but other countries including the United States. The Chinese Foreign Ministry praised China's "open and transparent attitude." In contrast, after the WHO released its findings, the U.S. and thirteen other nations issued a mandate for further investigation in which they voiced their "shared concerns" about the WHO study, in particular that scientists "lacked access" to crucial data and samples.²⁶ The Biden Administration also tasked the U.S. intelligence community to make its best efforts to clarify the origins of this COVID-19. The report issued in response to this call, released as a declassified version in October 2021, unsurprisingly concluded that there remain unanswered questions, thereby setting the stage for the U.S. to call for more transparency than China will allow.²⁷

I. Statecraft

While the shift towards a more active foreign policy began in the later years of Hu Jintao's tenure, China has become substantially more assertive in protecting what it sees as its core national interests since Xi became China's leader in 2012. At the 2013 meeting of the government's foreign policy leadership, Xi unveiled his new strategy of "Striving for Achievement." As Kurt Campbell, who currently serves as the National Security Council Coordinator for the Indo-Pacific, noted in his book, *The Pivot*, this signaled a "distinctive new era in Chinese foreign policy."²⁸ These changes were driven by a combination of China's gains in Asia's balance of power, Xi's concentration of control, and increased Chinese nationalism.

Prior to the sea change in Americans' views of China, U.S. administrations from Clinton through Obama imagined that they were integrating China into the American-led international economic and political order. Most of the American foreign policy establishment supported this undertaking. Yet according to today's Washington consensus among both Democrats and Republicans, we were all wrong.

26 Adela Suliman, China hits back at Wuhan lab leak 'conspiracy' after Biden calls for Covid probe," *NBC News*, May 27, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/china-hits-back-wuhan-lab-leak-conspiracy-after-biden-calls-n1268704>; The State Department, "Joint Statement on the WHO-Convened Covid-19 Origins Study," March 30, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-who-convened-covid-19-origins-study/>.

27 "Declassified Assessment of Covid-19 Origins," Intelligence Community Assessment, October 29, 2021, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/reports-publications/reports-publications-2021/item/2263-declassified-assessment-on-covid-19-origins>.

28 Kurt Campbell, *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2016), 233.

To quote Campbell again: “All sides of the policy debate erred... The policies built on such expectations have failed to change China in the ways we intended or hoped.”²⁹

As Henry Kissinger has said plainly: every Chinese leader he has met in the last three decades believes that America’s strategy is to “contain” China. The Obama administration’s celebrated 2011 announcement that the U.S. was “pivoting” to Asia only validated this view among Chinese leaders.³⁰ In 2014, two of the world’s most astute China watchers, Kevin Rudd and Brent Scowcroft, each came back from separate, extensive conversations with China’s leaders with identical views of what they called the striking “consensus.” As detailed in *Destined for War*:

“According to both statesmen, China’s leaders believe America’s grand strategy for dealing with China consists of five to’s: to isolate China, to contain China, to diminish China, to internally divide China, and to sabotage China’s leadership... According to Rudd, this is based on ‘a deeply held, deeply realist Chinese conclusion that the U.S. will never willingly concede its status as the preeminent regional and global power, and will do everything within its power to retain that position.’”³¹

The implications for the U.S.-China relationship are clear. As Defense Minister Wei Fenghe put it in a seminar with Xi in 2021, it is Beijing’s view that “containment and counter-containment will be the main theme of bilateral ties in the long term.”³²

If this is Xi’s team’s conception of the challenge, what major choices has China’s grand statecraft made to address it? First, and most importantly, China has sought to build the strongest economy in the world. Second, it has attempted to become the most indispensable economic partner of every major economy and most smaller ones. In essence, Xi has internalized Lee Kuan Yew’s insight when he forecast that

29 Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner, “The China Reckoning,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-02-13/china-reckoning>.

30 In 2011, the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described this shift: “Our post-World War II commitment to building a comprehensive and lasting transatlantic network of institutions and relationships has paid off many times over — and continues to do so. The time has come for the United States to make similar investments as a Pacific power.” See Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017) 151.

31 At the time, Rudd was the Australian prime minister. Allison, *Destined For War*, 151. See also: Wang Jisi, “The Plot Against China?” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/United-states/2021-06-22/plot-against-china>. Wang Jisi writes: “Most Chinese observers now believe that the United States is driven by fear and envy to contain China in every possible way.”

32 Jun Mai, “China’s military must spend more’ to meet US war threat,” *South China Morning Post*, March 8, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3124591/chinas-military-must-spend-more-meet-us-war-threat>.

in the 21st century, the economic balance of power would become more important than the military balance of power.³³

To achieve these economic goals, China has determined to be the best student of the best practices of the most advanced nations. Taking the world as its laboratory, it studies, learns, adapts, and then applies those lessons to advance China's agenda. To ensure that it avoids the "middle income trap," it has not only mastered current technologies, but invested in becoming a technological superpower. As Xi's "Made in China 2025" proclaimed, by the middle of this decade, China is determined to dominate the largest markets in the world in ten frontier technologies including 5G, AI, robotics, electric vehicles, and biopharmaceuticals.³⁴

Taken together, these initiatives are strengthening China's hand to defend what it calls its "core interests" in state sovereignty (so that its power prevents other states from dominating or coercing it) and territorial integrity (so that other states are not able to separate any of its territory from the motherland). But in Chinese strategists' views, this also requires preventing China's isolation by developing thick alignments and entanglements. From championing "developing" nations in economic and climate negotiations, to creating a club of emerging middle powers in the BRICS,³⁵ developing a strategic partnership with Russia, and providing concessional loans to struggling EU and NATO states like Hungary and Greece to ensure that voices for constraint in countering China will be reflected in the choices of these consensual decision-making organizations, China has been actively ensuring that U.S. efforts to isolate it will fail.

Indeed, as discussed in our report on the great economic rivalry, by becoming the indispensable economic partner of all the other major economies, and in particular of key constituencies within these countries, China has sought to ensure that U.S. political claims about "decoupling" remain essentially hot air. Thus, in relations with the major economic power of Europe, China has become a primary market for Germany's most influential industries: automobiles and industrial technology. In relations with the U.S., it has recognized and capitalized on the influence of Wall Street. As a former Chinese intelligence officer once observed, his colleagues

33 Lee Kuan Yew argued "in the old concept, balance of power meant largely military power. In today's terms, it is a combination of economic and military, and I think the economic outweighs the military." See Allison, *Destined For War*, 20.

34 "Made in China 2025' Industrial Policies: Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service, August 11, 2020, <https://fas.org/sqp/crs/row/IF10964.pdf>.

35 BRICS nations are Brazil, Russia, India, and South Africa, as well as China.

envy Goldman Sachs and have not been able to discover how they do it. The “it” is placing their former Goldman leaders as Secretaries of the Treasury whether the administration was Republican or Democrat. These included Robert Rubin under Clinton, Hank Paulson under George W. Bush, and Steven Mnuchin under Trump. In the intelligence officer’s view, “it was no accident” that when Wall Street risk-taking triggered the Great Financial Crisis of 2008, the U.S. government bailed out Goldman and the other major financial firms, or that when the leader of the Trump team negotiated the tariff truce, it required China to open its financial markets for major U.S. financial institutions.

In confronting transnational global challenges from terrorism and proliferation to pandemics, China has emphasized what it calls the “shared interests of mankind,” and acted in ways that demonstrate that it can be a “reliable partner.” And noting the overriding priority the U.S. and Europe have given to climate, which each now calls an “existential” challenge, as the world’s No.1 greenhouse emitter China is using the urgency American and European leaders feel to remind them that without China’s cooperation, they cannot succeed.

American statecraft, in contrast, is more difficult to describe. If the question was “what has the U.S. been trying to do in the world since the end of the Cold War?” the answer is unclear. As the Commission on American National Interests put it, since the Cold War, “lacking basic coordinates and a clear sense of priorities,” American foreign policy has become largely “reactive” and “impulsive.”³⁶ After the collapse of the Evil Empire, many American leaders embraced the leading thesis of the era that declared an “end of history” in which all nations would embrace democracy and peace would reign beneath McDonald’s Golden Arches. As Thomas Friedman wrote in 1996: “When a country has a middle class big enough to support a McDonald’s, it becomes a McDonald’s country, and people in McDonald’s countries don’t like to fight wars; they like to wait in line for burgers.” After Osama bin Laden’s 9/11 attack refocused American minds, George Bush declared a global “War on Terrorism,” and then made America’s most fateful strategic error since Vietnam by invading and occupying Iraq, toppling Saddam, and occupying Afghanistan. The attempt at “nation building” in which these two nations would become stable prosperous market-based democracies fueled two endless, winless wars, contributing significantly to the decline of American citizens’ confidence in Washington. Rejection of the “beltway elite” provided fertile ground in which it was possible for a bona-fide outsider to be elected president.

³⁶ “America’s National Interests,” (The Commission on America’s National Interests, July 2000), 1.

II. Architecture

Following World War II, as the predominant power with half the world's GDP, the U.S. took the lead in creating blocs of security, economic, and political order—in effect, the operating system for international relations. During the Cold War, after the historic opening to China during the Nixon Administration, the U.S. and China found that they shared a common adversary in the Soviet Union.³⁷ After the collapse of the Soviet Union, America welcomed and helped facilitate China's emergence on the global stage. The Clinton Administration's 1998 National Security Strategy declared without reservation that “A stable, open, prosperous People's Republic of China (PRC) that assumes its responsibilities for building a more peaceful world is clearly and profoundly in our interests.”³⁸ By incorporating China into the world's institutions, the United States hoped that China would become an active participant in upholding the existing international system. This approach was captured by then Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick, who argued that the U.S. should “encourage China to become a responsible stakeholder in the international system,” since “as a responsible stakeholder, China would be more than just a member—it would work with us to sustain the international system that has enabled its success.”³⁹

In a discussion with China scholar David Shambaugh at the turn of the century, Cui Tiankai candidly described China's early approach to multilateral fora: “It was a gradual learning process for us, as we needed to become more familiar with how these organizations worked and to learn how to play the game.”⁴⁰ Since then, Beijing has not only learned how to play the game—but to excel. In the past two decades, the number of Chinese working in international organizations has increased dramatically, and within these organizations its diplomats have worked their way up to positions of leadership. In 2000, Chinese officials headed no UN specialized agency; in 2020, they led four out of 15, while the U.S. led just one.⁴¹ As U.S. contributions to international institutions have declined, China has

37 Graham Allison and Fred Hu, “An Unsentimental China Policy,” *Foreign Affairs*, February 18, 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-02-18/unsentimental-china-policy>.

38 *A National Security Strategy For A New Century*, White House, October 1998.

39 “China's Diplomatic Role in the World,” *NPR*, October 20, 2005, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4966620>.

40 *Martin, China's Civilian Army*, 158.

41 Yaroslav Trofimov, Drew Hinshaw, and Kate O'Keeffe, “How China Is Taking Over International Organizations, One Vote at a Time,” *Wall Street Journal*, September 29, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-china-is-taking-over-international-organizations-one-vote-at-a-time-11601397208>. See also: Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, “China dominates UN by controlling several UN bodies: Report,” *Economic Times*, May 30, 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/china-dominates-un-by-controlling-several-un-bodies-report/articleshow/83080526.cms?from=mdr>.

stepped in to become the largest contributor of peacekeeping personnel among the permanent members of the UN Security Council in 2019 (the U.S. was last).⁴² From its position as the 16th largest contributor to the UN regular budget in 2000, China has surpassed Japan to become the second largest contributor today—behind only the United States.⁴³ And in the UN Security Council, China had exercised its veto only 3 times before 2000; between 2000 and 2020, it vetoed others’ initiatives 16 times, half of those since Xi came to power.⁴⁴

CHINA’S INCREASED MEMBERSHIP IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

China’s membership in international organizations has grown rapidly and steadily since the 1970s.

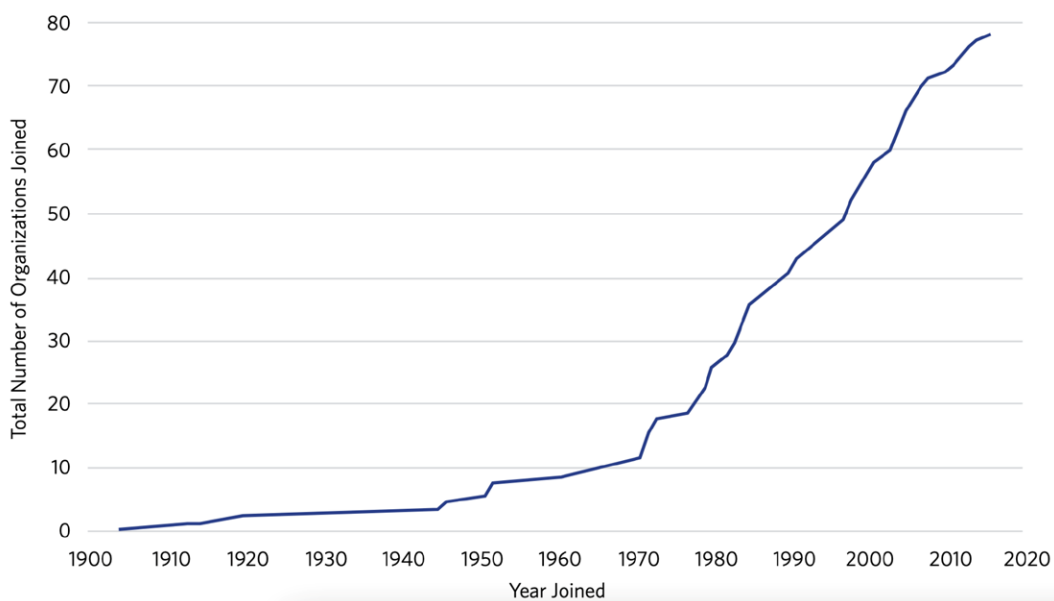


Figure 1. Source: Kristine Lee and Alexander Sullivan, “People’s Republic of the United Nations,” (Center for a New American Security, May 14, 2019).

For decades China adhered primarily to Mao’s principle of “self-reliance.” But as the process of globalization has drawn China into greater entanglement, especially after it joined the WTO in 2001, it has determined to become an active player in global governance.⁴⁵ A passive newcomer to the WTO at the turn of the century, it has since become one of the WTO’s most active participants, bringing 217 cases

⁴² Jeffrey Feltman, “China’s Expanding Influence at the United Nations – And How the United States Should React”; Kristine Lee and Alexander Sullivan, “People’s Republic of the United Nations,” (Center for a New American Security, May 14, 2019). Moreover, as a percent of America’s contributions to the UN regular budget, China’s contributions have risen from 4% in 2000, to 14% in 2010, and 54% in 2020.

⁴³ General Assembly of the United Nations, *Assessment of Member States’ advances to the Working Capital Fund and contributions to the United Nations regular budget, 2000-2021*, <https://www.un.org/en/ga/contributions/budget.shtml>.

⁴⁴ Martin, *China’s Civilian Army*, 158.

⁴⁵ Ross Terrill, “China and the World: Self-Reliance or Interdependence?” *Foreign Affairs*, January 1977, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/1977-01-01/china-and-world-self-reliance-or-interdependence>.

for WTO courts to decide.⁴⁶ In contrast, the U.S. ranks fifth on this count with 112 cases. Beijing's success in pursuing claims submitted to WTO panels has risen from 73 cases in the first ten years of this century to 155 in the second.⁴⁷

In welcoming China into the WTO in 2001, President Clinton famously declared: "This is a hundred-to-nothing deal for America...if we reject it, we will lose economic opportunities we will regret for 20 years, and we'll hurt our national security interests."⁴⁸ Today, very few Democrats or Republicans still hold that view. Nor does one hear much talk about China becoming a "responsible stakeholder."

When Beijing has been unable to increase its influence in existing organizations, it has shown considerable ingenuity in creating parallel organizations in which it plays as dominant a role as the U.S. plays in the major legacy institutions. After years of disagreement over the World Bank's choice of lending projects and frustration with America's refusal to allow China's share of votes at the IMF to increase in reflection of its economic growth Beijing launched its own Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2014. Despite America's best effort to prevent its allies and friends from participating, today the AIIB's 103 members include all the G7 countries except the U.S. and Japan.⁴⁹

China's development banks that provide below-market concessional loans to poorer countries have twice the total assets of all Western-backed development banks combined, including the World Bank. In recent years, they have provided two dollars in development loans and financing for every dollar provided by all other major development banks in the world.⁵⁰ Following years of American withdrawal from multilateral frameworks, in 2020 alone Beijing signed two massive trade and investment agreements with the major economies of both Asia and Europe. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) creates

46 Chuin-Wei Yap, "A China With More Clout Awaits Biden at the WTO," *Wall Street Journal*, January 25, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-china-with-more-clout-awaits-biden-at-the-wto-11611576003/>.

47 China Power Team, "How Influential is China in the World Trade Organization?" *China Power*, July 31, 2019. Updated August 25, 2020. Accessed June 8, 2021. <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-world-trade-organization-wto/>.

48 William J. Clinton, The President's News Conference, March 29, 2020, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-presidents-news-conference-1062>

49 "Quick Facts," Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, accessed September 3, 2020, <https://www.aiib.org/en/index.html>; "AIIB: Is the Chinese-led Development Bank a Role Model?" Council on Foreign Relations, June 25, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/aiib-chinese-led-development-bank-role-model#:~:text=Today%2C%20the%20AIIB%20has%20the,sixty%2Dseven%20at%20the%20ADB.>

50 Gallagher et al., "Energizing development finance? The benefits and risks of China's development finance in the global energy sector," *Energy Policy* vol. 129, 313 – 321 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2018.06.009>.

the world's largest trading bloc, accounting for nearly 30% of the world's GDP.⁵¹ If China's bullying tactics had not halted review of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI), it would have created a bloc with an additional 34% of the world's GDP.⁵² Meanwhile, the U.S. played a leading role in designing and negotiating the TPP in Asia and T-TIP in Europe, but because of domestic politics it was unable to join either.

Announced by Xi Jinping in 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative has become the biggest diplomatic initiative in the world in the past two decades. Hailed in China as “the project of the century,” it has seized imaginations with its promise of more than a trillion dollars of investment in building the transportation and communication infrastructure that will massively connect China through the nations of Central Asia to the heart of Europe and beyond.⁵³ In the language of geopolitics, BRI is the 21st century reincarnation of Mackinder's “World Island.”⁵⁴ As envisioned by this founding father of geopolitics, the “island” that encompassed Europe, Asia, and Africa would become the epicenter of the globe. As Mackinder declared: “Who rules the World Island commands the World.” With the construction of ports in Pakistan, Greece, and Djibouti, development of high-speed rail lines, and creation of 5G networks that allow information to move at 10 times the speed of the previous generation, China is attempting to link two-thirds of the world's population and one half the globe's GDP in a China-centric undertaking.⁵⁵ Its \$1.3 trillion investment in this initiative is the equivalent of 12 Marshall Plans, after adjusting for inflation.⁵⁶

On the other hand, a number of China's BRI initiatives have failed. Western critics have denounced several of its investments as examples of “debt diplomacy,” highlighting the case of Sri Lanka's Hambantota port, in which China converted

51 Tobias Sytsma, “RCEP Forms the World's Largest Trading Bloc. What Does This Mean for Global Trade?” Rand Blog, December 9, 2020, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2020/12/rcep-forms-the-worlds-largest-trading-bloc-what-does.html>; “Impacts of the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment,” (KPMG China, January 2021).

52 “EU Lawmakers to Freeze China Investment Deal,” *Bloomberg News*, May 19, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-05-19/eu-lawmakers-set-to-freeze-china-investment-deal-politico-says>.

53 “Hearing on China's Belt and Road Initiative: Five Years Later,” U.S.-China Economic and Security Commission, January 15, 2018, https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/transcripts/Hearing%20Transcript%20-%20January%2025,%202018_0.pdf.

54 H. J. Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History,” *The Geography Journal*, 23 no. 4 (April 1904).

55 For more information on BRI, see the Center for Strategic & International Studies' Reconnecting Asia initiative. The director of the initiative, Jonathan Hillman, has also authored *The Emperor's New Road: China and the Project of the Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020). See also U.S. Global Leadership Coalition, “China's Growing Influence: Is America Getting Left Behind?” October 2019, <https://www.usglc.org/media/2018/04/USGLC-Fact-Sheet-Chinas-Growing-Influence.pdf>.

56 Allison, *Destined for War*; Graham Allison, “The New Spheres of Influence,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-02-10/new-spheres-influence>.

the project's large debt holdings into an 85 percent stake on a 99-year lease.⁵⁷ In Kazakhstan, an ambitious dry port and railway system was recently stymied by lack of commercial viability, opaque lending conditions, and accusations of “waste and fraud.”⁵⁸ And in a stunning electoral reversal in 2018, an opposition candidate running for prime minister in Malaysia campaigned against BRI initiatives, criticizing high project costs and their impact on national debt. For the first time in the nation's fifty plus years of independence, the opposition won, ending the ruling coalition's decades-long hold on power.⁵⁹

The brute reality for countries who have welcomed China's BRI investments, however, is that they did not have a better alternative. When Greece sought investors in its declining port at Piraeus or Israel investors in the Tel Aviv light rail, China offered better terms than they could find elsewhere. In an effort to compete with China on this front, or at least appear to be competing, the U.S. passed the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development Act of 2018 (BUILD Act) which established a new agency to overhaul U.S. development finance efforts. But according to the Congressional Budget Office, this will fund increased spending by just \$113 million between now and 2028.⁶⁰ Similarly, at the conclusion of the G7 Summit in June 2021, Biden and partners launched a rival to BRI, the Build Back Better for the World (B3W) initiative—but failed to agree on any specifics about who would do what or where the funding would come from.⁶¹

57 See Deborah Brautigam and Meg Rithmire, “The Chinese ‘Debt Trap’ is a Myth,” *The Atlantic*, February 6, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2021/02/china-debt-trap-diplomacy/617953/>. As they put it: “Our research shows that Chinese banks are willing to restructure the terms of existing loans and have never actually seized an asset from any country, much less the port of Hambantota.”

58 Reid Standish, “China's Path Forward Is Getting Bumpy,” *The Atlantic*, October 1, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/10/china-belt-road-initiative-problems-kazakhstan/597853/>.

59 Dang Yuan, “Malaysia's Mahathir dumps Chinese projects amid ‘new colonialism’ fear,” *DW*, August 21, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/malysias-mahathir-dumps-chinese-projects-amid-new-colonialism-fear/a-45160594>. Mahathir later signaled a willingness to restart BRI initiatives with China.

60 “BUILD Act: Frequently Asked Questions About the New U.S. International Development Finance Corporation,” Congressional Research Service, January 15, 2019, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R45461.pdf>; “H.R. 5105, BUILD Act of 2018,” Congressional Budget Office, July 9, 2018..

61 George Parker, Sebastian Payne, Leslie Hook, and Lauren Fedor, “Biden rallies western allies in global ‘contest’ against autocrats,” *Financial Times*, June 14, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/Of24b0a9-1847-431c-807e-6e249fe7181b>.

III. Gardening

George Shultz, who died last year at the age of 100, frequently compared diplomacy with gardening. As he noted, a successful harvest requires understanding the environment including soil, rain, and sun; selection of crops, seeds, fertilizers and protection from diseases or predators; and then hard work every day to allow seeds to grow into food or flowers. Successful diplomats understand the nations and individuals with whom they are dealing, establish relationships, shape perceptions, provide inducements, threaten punishments, and craft arguments to “win friends and influence people.”

In 2019, China overtook the U.S. with the largest diplomatic network in the world. It now has 276 embassies, consulates, and other posts—just ahead of the U.S.’s 273.⁶² Of the United States’ embassies and consulates with ambassadorial posts, over a year into the Biden administration, more than a third—69—were without ambassadors.⁶³ This was in large part due to individual senators’ decisions to place nominees on “hold”—including the U.S. Ambassador to Beijing, who was finally confirmed after waiting nine months for a vote in the Senate.⁶⁴ By contrast, zero of China’s embassies lack ambassadors.

While in the last decade the State Department saw an exodus of a quarter of its foreign service officers, including 60% of its career ambassadors between 2017 and 2020, China was investing in both the quantity and quality of its diplomats.⁶⁵ Chinese junior diplomats begin with six months of rigorous training before they enter the foreign service, while other than language studies, U.S. Foreign Service

62 Lowy Institute, *Global Diplomacy Index, 2019 Country Ranking*.

63 “Tracker: Current U.S. Ambassadors,” American Foreign Service Association, January 20, 2022, <https://afsa.org/list-ambassadorial-appointments>.

64 Zachary Basu, “Senate confirms Nicholas Burns as ambassador to China,” *Axios*, December 17, 2021, <https://www.axios.com/senate-china-ambassador-nicholas-burns-1244e013-a5f7-441f-a1ce-c5a2dc715948.html>.

65 There have been many reports and articles in recent years detailing the issues facing American diplomacy. See Uzra S. Zeya and Jon Finer, “Revitalizing the State Department and American Diplomacy,” (Council on Foreign Relations, November 2020); Nicholas Burns, Marc Grossman, and Marcie Ries, “A U.S. Diplomatic Service for the 21st Century”; William J. Burns, “The Lost Art of American Diplomacy”; “American Diplomacy at Risk,” (American Academy of Diplomacy, April 2015); “Diplomacy in Crisis: The Trump Administration’s Decimation of the State Department,” (Democratic Staff Report, July 28, 2020); “Transforming State: Pathways to a More Just, Equitable, and Innovative Institution,” (Truman Center, March 2021); Amy Mackinnon and Robbie Gramer, “Study Finds Nearly 1 in 3 U.S. Diplomats Eyeing the Exit Door,” *Foreign Policy*, July 2, 2021.

Officers rarely have six months of training in the course of their full career.⁶⁶ For an ambassador to effectively represent his country to his host, the ability to speak to the people and government of that country in their own language is essential.⁶⁷ Every Chinese ambassador in Washington for the past twenty years at least has had full command of American English. Moreover, Chinese diplomats serving in other major nations, including Germany, Japan, France, and Brazil, also speak that nation's language, and knowledge of foreign languages and regional studies continue to be important selection criteria for China's ambassadors.⁶⁸ In contrast, as the quip goes, Americans are people who can speak at most one language. Moreover, diplomats who cannot speak the language of the nation to which they are assigned understandably find themselves primarily talking to officials and citizens in that country who also speak English—with predictable consequences.

Among the most visible examples of diplomacy are visits by high-level officials. From 1993 to 2000, Jiang Zemin travelled to call on about half the leaders of other countries as President Clinton did: 67 to 133.⁶⁹ But from 2013 to 2020, Xi made roughly the same number of international visits as Obama and Trump combined: 98 to 103. On the other hand, American Secretaries of State continued to rack up many more frequent flier miles than their Chinese counterparts: between 2013 and 2019 traveling to see others 501 times, compared to China's 254.⁷⁰

Of course, diplomatic resources and visits do not automatically translate into better results. Once seen by their fellow citizens as so acquiescent to foreign countries that citizens sent Chinese diplomats calcium tablets in the mail with a note urging them to grow backbones, today China's diplomats declare themselves “wolf warriors.” Diplomats are verbally, and on occasion even physically, violent in defending China

66 Nicholas Burns, Marc Grossman, and Marcie Ries, “A U.S. Diplomatic Service for the 21st Century.” See also: Chas Freeman, “Diplomatic Amateurism and Its Consequences,” October 9, 2015, <https://chasfreeman.net/diplomatic-amateurism-and-its-consequences/>. Freeman writes: “But, in the U.S. foreign service, by contrast with – let’s say – the military, there is no systematic professional development process, no education in grand strategy or history, no training in tactics or operational technique derived from experience, no habit of reviewing successes and failures to improve future performance, no literature devoted to the development of operational doctrine and technique, and no real program or commitment to the mentoring of new entrants to the career.”

67 See Chas Freeman, “Diplomacy as Risk Management,” April 17, 2018, <https://chasfreeman.net/diplomacy-as-risk-management/>. Freeman writes: “It is essential to understand how the native speakers of the language think. That is the *sine qua non* of transnational communication and cooperation.”

68 Sabine Mokry, “Chinese Experts Challenge Western Generalists in Diplomacy,” *The Diplomat*, August 15, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/08/chinese-experts-challenge-western-generalists-in-diplomacy/>.

69 William J. Clinton: *Presidential and Secretaries Travels Abroad*, Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute, United States Department of State. For an estimate of Jiang Zemin's foreign visits between 1993 and 2000 (exact data is unavailable), see: “China Overtakes America in Presidential Diplomacy,” *The Interpreter*, June 9, 2021, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/china-overtakes-america-presidential-diplomacy>.

70 China Power Team, “What Do Overseas Visits Reveal about China's Foreign Policy Priorities?”

with “fighting spirit.”⁷¹ Their efforts, however, have often been so crude and clumsy that they have been counter-productive.⁷² One of China’s leading wolf warriors, the ambassador to Sweden, was summoned by Sweden’s foreign ministry over 40 times for his combative rhetoric in the course of just two years.⁷³ In September, when it was announced that he would be leaving his post, Swedes expressed “relief” at the news of his departure.⁷⁴ Across the Atlantic, China’s ambassador to the United States shocked attendants at a meeting hosted by the National Committee on United States-China Relations, when he told them: “If [the U.S. and China] cannot resolve our differences, please shut up.”⁷⁵

As wolf warriors across the world hone their battle calls, views of China have grown increasingly negative.⁷⁶ A 14-country Pew Research survey showed that between 2018 and 2020, unfavorable opinion of China “soared” to new heights. Indeed, a “majority” in every one of the surveyed countries had an “unfavorable opinion” of China. This includes, as the graph below shows, 81% of the population in Australia, 74% in the UK, 85% in Sweden, 73% in Canada, and 86% in Japan. In 2020 alone, these numbers reflected an uptick in negative views by 24% in Australia, 19% in the UK, and 15% in Sweden.⁷⁷ By contrast, for the United States, the Pew Research Center’s poll in 2021 showed that the change in administration led to a steep rise in favorability ratings, with a jump from 34% to 62% of respondents who viewed the U.S. positively since Biden took office.⁷⁸

71 For an overview of the “wolf warrior” label and examples of it in practice, see Martin, *China’s Civilian Army* and “Why China’s Diplomats Snarl at ‘Wolf Warrior’ Label,” *Washington Post*, December 10, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/why-chinas-diplomats-snarl-at-wolf-warrior-label/2020/12/09/f80a6a7a-3a69-11eb-aad9-8959227280c4_story.html. On one occasion, Taiwan accused two Chinese officials of beating up one of its diplomats in Fiji, see Kathrin Hille, “Taiwan accuses Chinese officials of beating up diplomat in Fiji,” *Financial Times*, October 19, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/53d687cc-f194-4a4e-b0c8-edd45dd293ad>.

72 “On average, about 10 percent of MFA speeches before 2012 were combative and hostile. In 2019 and 2020, more than 25 percent of MFA speeches were hostile in nature. The year with the fewest hostile speeches in Xi’s presidency — 2017 — is about on par with the most hostile year (2008) before Xi’s presidency.” See Yaoyao Dai and Luwei Rose Luqiu, “China’s ‘wolf warrior’ diplomats like to talk tough,” *Washington Post*, May 12, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/05/12/chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomats-like-talk-tough/>.

73 Martin, *China’s Civilian Army*, 215.

74 Gregers Moller, “China’s Ambassador to Sweden is Leaving His Post,” *Scandasia*, September 28, 2021, <https://scandasia.com/chinas-ambassador-to-sweden-is-leaving-his-post/>.

75 Jimmy Quinn, “New Chinese Ambassador Snaps at U.S.: ‘Please Shut Up,’” *National Review*, 9/10/21, <https://www.nationalreview.com/corner/new-chinese-ambassador-snaps-at-u-s-please-shut-up/>.

76 According to China’s Ministry of State Security-affiliated think tank, anti-China sentiment is at its highest since the Tiananmen crackdown. See: “Exclusive: Internal Chinese report warns Beijing faces Tiananmen-like global backlash over virus,” *Reuters*, May 4, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-china-sentiment-ex/exclusive-internal-chinese-report-warns-beijing-faces-tiananmen-like-global-backlash-over-virus-idUSKBN22G19C>.

77 Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, and Christine Huang, “Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries,” Pew Research Center, October 6, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/10/06/unfavorable-views-of-china-reach-historic-highs-in-many-countries/>.

78 Richard Wike, Jacob Poushter, Laura Silver, Janell Fetterolf, and Mara Mordecai, “America’s Image Abroad Rebounds With Transition From Trump to Biden,” Pew Research Center, June 10, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2021/06/10/americas-image-abroad-rebounds-with-transition-from-trump-to-biden/>.

Increasingly negative evaluations of China across advanced economies

% who have a(n) ___ view of China

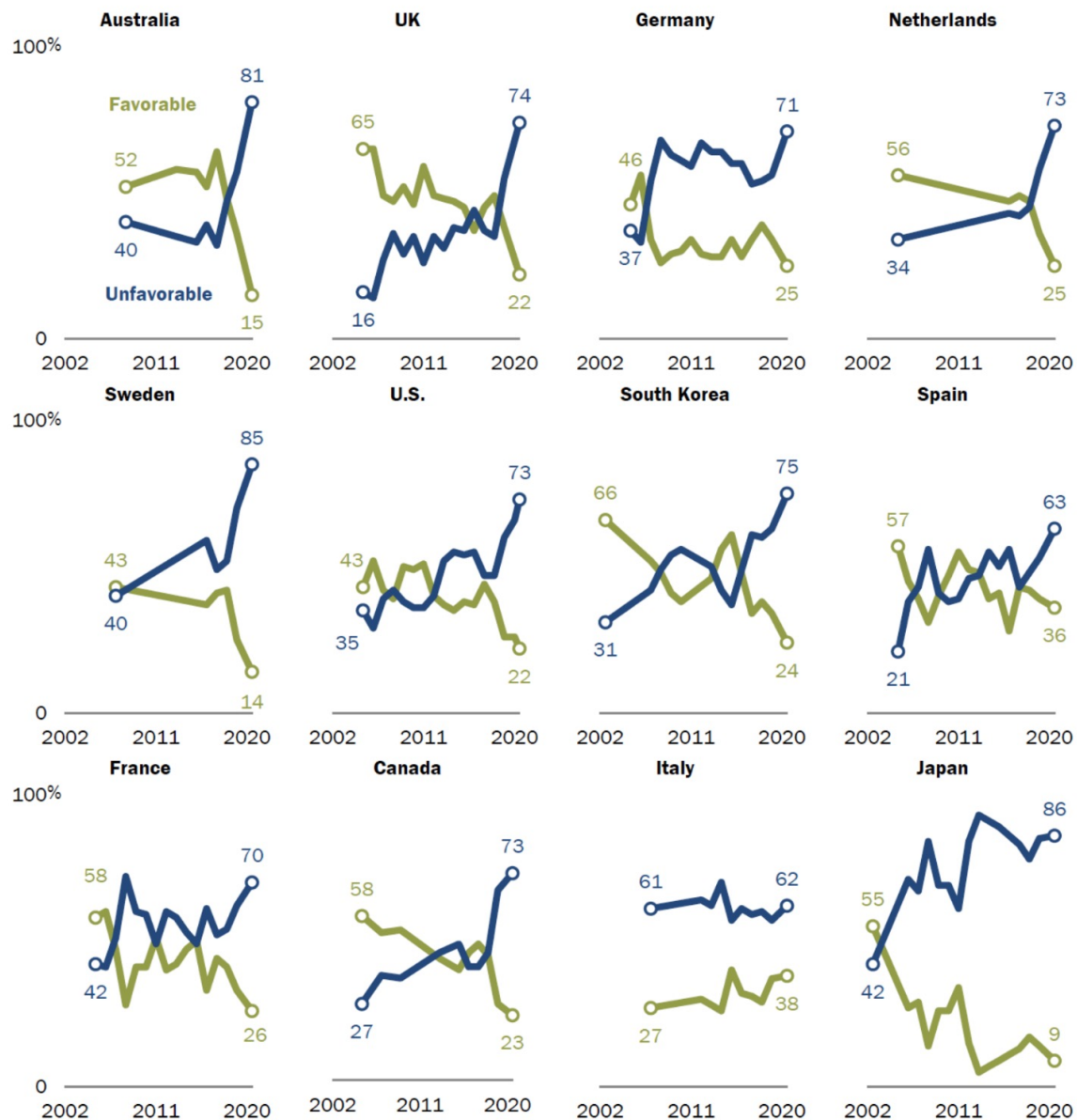


Figure 2. Source: Laura Silver, Kat Devlin, and Christine Huang, “Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries,” Pew Research Center, October 6, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/10/06/unfavorable-views-of-china-reach-historic-highs-in-many-countries/>.

Surveys and polls from numerous institutions around the globe corroborate the Pew Center’s findings. When asked which side they would align themselves with if forced to choose between the U.S. and China, a majority of those in ASEAN countries said the U.S.⁷⁹ This view is prevalent even in Africa, where countries receive much more aid and concessional loans from China than the U.S. As a recent survey of 18 African countries reports, “positive views of Chinese influence have

⁷⁹ Sharon Seah, Hoang Thi Ha, Melinda Martinus, and Pham Thi Phuong Thao, “The State of Southeast Asia: 2021 Survey Report,” (ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, February 10, 2021).

slipped from 65% in 2014 to 60% in 2020.”⁸⁰ One third of the respondents in that survey said the U.S. serves as the best model for development, followed by China with 23%.

The US and China have both been losing popularity in the democracies, but the US is still well ahead

% of those polled in each country who have favourable views...

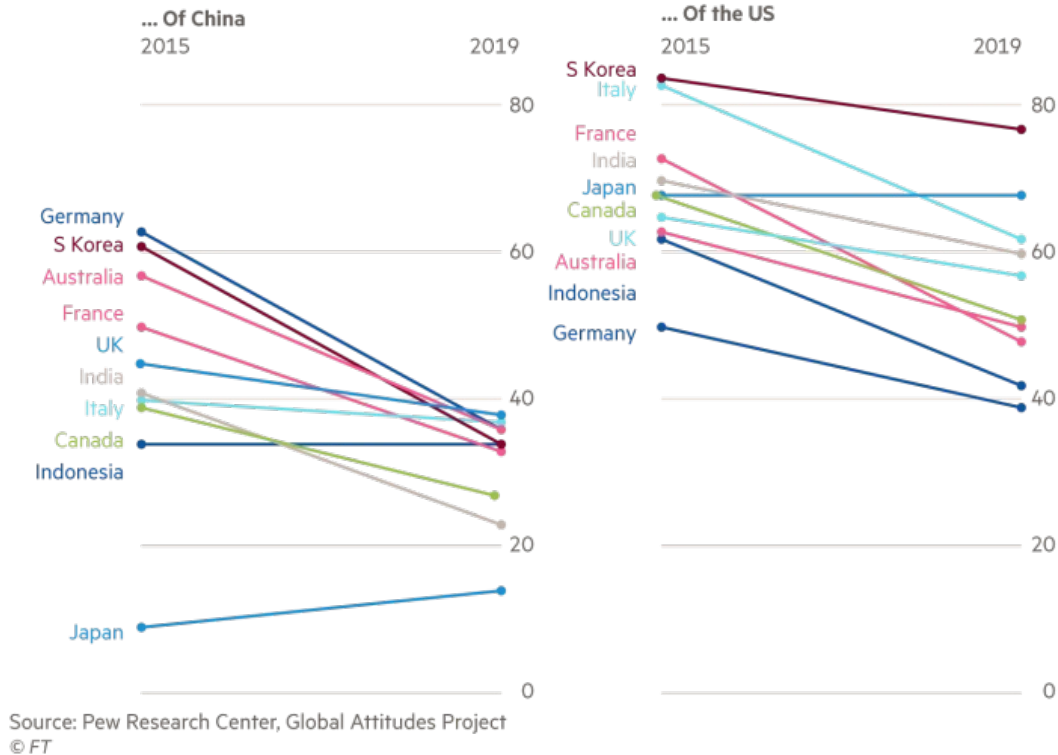


Figure 3. Source: Martin Wolf, “The world falls apart as the US withdraws,” Financial Times, July 7, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/7309b1bd-9d91-4eb5-a75c-a29d191367de>.

Despite Xi’s warnings to diplomats to “get a grip on their tone” and craft a new “trustworthy, loveable, and respectable” image of China, these low ratings are unlikely to budge soon.⁸¹ As China pursues a more aggressive strategy abroad, the diplomats’ assignment to make this palatable to others becomes increasingly more difficult. For example, if China’s objective in contesting the current line of demarcation along the Sino-Indian border is to seize additional disputed territory, then it is hard to imagine any diplomacy, however masterful, that could make this tactic “loveable” for Indians or their neighbors.

80 Edem Selormey, “Africans’ perceptions about China: A sneak peek from 18 countries,” Afrobarometer, September 3, 2020, https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/migrated/files/africa-china_relations-3sept20.pdf.

81 “Xi Jinping calls for more ‘loveable’ image for China in bid to make friends,” *BBC News*, June 6, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57327177>.

Favorability ratings are often cited as metrics for a country's "soft power." According to Professor Joseph Nye, soft power refers to "the use of positive attraction and persuasion to achieve foreign policy objectives," primarily by getting other nations to "want what you want."⁸² The comprehensive "Soft Power 30" report analyzes polling data from 30 nations across five continents. It measures soft power in terms of a nation's "cultural appeal," the reputation of its higher education system, attractiveness of its economic model, and its level of digital engagement with the world.⁸³ In the most recent edition of this report in 2019, the United States' score of 77.8 led China's 51.85 by over twenty points. The U.S. was among the top five of the nations included in the report, while China rounded out the bottom five.⁸⁴

But the extent to which a nation's citizens' preference for American TV shows or Hollywood movies, or its younger citizens desire to study at an American university, can be translated into influence that allows the U.S. government to get what it wants from other countries remains complicated. As Nye acknowledges, the effects of such attraction often have "a diffuse effect, creating general influence rather than producing an easily observable specific action."⁸⁵ As a case in point, U.S. efforts to spotlight China's repression of Muslim minorities in Xinjiang and get others to join it in naming what is happening there as "genocide" has so far managed to enlist just 7 nations.⁸⁶ Despite its much lower soft power ratings, China has nonetheless succeeded in persuading 53 other countries to sign a U.N. Human Rights Committee letter that praises China's "remarkable achievements in the field of human rights."⁸⁷

Unquestionably, citizens' views of other countries have a significant impact on its leaders' willingness to cooperate with the U.S. rather than China. Souring views of China among Australians, for example, coupled with growing concerns about China's military presence in the Indo-Pacific, provided the background against which Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison signed onto the major new defense pact, AUKUS, with the U.S. and the U.K. in September 2021. Looking ahead,

82 SoftPower30, "What is Soft Power?," <https://softpower30.com/what-is-soft-power/>; Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), Preface.

83 Jonathan McLory, "The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power," *Soft Power 30*, 2018.

84 Ibid.

85 Nye, *Soft Power*, 15.

86 In addition to the US, parliaments in the UK, France, Canada, Netherlands, Lithuania, Czech Republic, and Belgium have recognized China's actions in Xinjiang constitute genocide. Roseanne Gerin, "Belgium, Czech Republic Legislatures Pass Uyghur Genocide Declarations," *Radio Free Asia*, June 15, 2021, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/uyghur/genocide-declarations-06152021171101.html>. See also: "French lawmakers officially recognise China's treatment of Uyghurs as 'genocide'," *News Wires*, January 20, 2022, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220120-french-lawmakers-officially-recognise-china-s-treatment-of-uyghurs-as-genocide>.

87 Yaoyao Dai and Luwei Rose Luqiu, "China's 'wolf warrior' diplomats like to talk tough."

alliances and partnerships will continue to be a critical factor in the competition for influence. Here Washington's inheritance from earlier eras gives the U.S. a huge lead. It has defense agreements with 54 countries, while China has only one.⁸⁸

The most significant outlier in this picture, however, is Xi's extraordinary success in creating an increasingly thick alignment between China and Russia that is operationally more consequential than the much more publicized "strategic partnership" between the U.S. and India. Former national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski warned in 1997 that the nightmare for U.S. strategists would be an "alliance of the aggrieved" between China and Russia, "united not by ideology but by complementary grievances."⁸⁹ Few noticed his admonition. The thought of an entente between Eurasia's two great powers has for the most part struck the Washington establishment as outlandish.⁹⁰ While there can be no doubt that their values and cultures differ starkly, defying long-held convictions, and against huge structural differences, Beijing and Moscow have steadily drawn closer together to meet what each sees as the "American threat."⁹¹

Chinese and Russian national security documents now call this a "comprehensive strategic partnership" that shapes all areas of the relationship.⁹² The two nations coordinate their positions in the UN Security Council (where they vote together 98% of the time), the BRICS summits, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.⁹³ Economically, China has displaced the United States and Germany to become Russia's top trading partner. It has also become the top buyer of Russian oil. With completion of the Power of Siberia pipeline in 2019, China became

88 Martin, *China's Civilian Army*, 9.

89 Graham Allison and Dimitri K. Simes, "A Sino-Russian Entente Again Threatens America," *Wall Street Journal*, January 29, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-sino-russian-entente-again-threatens-america-11548806978>.

90 Ibid.

91 This led Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats to warn in 2019 that "Moscow's relationship with Beijing is closer than it has been in many decades." See Dan Coats, Director of National Intelligence, "Annual Threat Assessment Opening Statement," Statement to the Select Committee on Intelligence, United States Senate, January 29, 2019, 7.

92 Although a proper stock-taking of China's diplomatic approach in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine is beyond the scope of this paper, it is clear that any doubts about the durability of the China-Russia partnership can be put to rest. Since the war in Ukraine began, China has affirmed that its ties with Russia have "no ceiling," amplified Russian disinformation on the war, including on "neo-Nazis" in Ukraine and the U.S. as the "empire of lies," decried Western sanctions, and abstained from every vote at the UN condemning Russia's use of force. While China has so far avoided taking extraordinary actions to help Russia evade economic sanctions, it has also announced its intention to "deepen" energy cooperation with Russia and urged its companies to "lose no time" in seizing opportunities in Russian markets. It remains to be seen what this stance will mean for China's relationships with a Western world remarkably united in its opposition to Russia, and for China's standing as Putin's "stink" continues to spread, but for now China has chosen its side.

93 A recent example of China and Russia's alignment was in July 2020 when both nations vetoed two resolutions regarding Syria and blocked a French national envoy from being appointed as special envoy to Sudan. See Jeffrey Feltman, "China's Expanding Influence at the United Nations – And How the United States Should React."

the second-largest market for Russian gas, just behind Germany.⁹⁴ While most Americans have discounted Sino-Russian military cooperation, as a former Russian national security adviser has correctly noted, it has now grown to become “the functional equivalent of a military alliance.”⁹⁵ Russian and Chinese generals’ staffs now have candid, detailed discussions about the threat U.S. nuclear modernization and missile defenses pose to each of their strategic deterrents. While for decades Russia was careful to withhold its most advanced technologies in arms sales to China, it now sells the best it has, including S-400 air defenses. The two countries share intelligence and threat assessments and actively collaborate on rocket-engine research and development.⁹⁶ And more recently, China and Russia are collaborating to compete with America in a new era of space competition.⁹⁷

China is also cultivating closer relations with Iran, which it recently said is a candidate to become another “comprehensive strategic partner.”⁹⁸ While the U.S. and Israel have been doing everything they can to strangle Iran’s economy, China’s willingness to defy U.S. sanctions to buy record amounts of oil (at below market prices), sell arms, and create a cross-border payment system that circumvents the purview of SWIFT (the system that facilitates financial transfers around the world) has been brazen. In 2021, after a half-decade of negotiations between Beijing and Tehran, China announced a 25-year, \$400 billion strategic and economic deal that clears the way for Chinese investments in various sectors of the Iranian economy, including energy. Defending the sweeping new partnership with China, one Iranian diplomat put it frankly: “Every road is closed to Iran. The only path open is China. Whatever it is, until sanctions are lifted, this deal is the best option.”⁹⁹

94 Graham Allison and Dimitri K. Simes, “A Sino-Russian Entente Again Threatens America.”

95 Graham Allison, “China and Russia: A Strategic Alliance in the Making,” *The National Interest*, December 14, 2018, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/china-and-russia-strategic-alliance-making-38727>.

96 Graham Allison and Dimitri K. Simes, “A Sino-Russian Entente Again Threatens America” and Graham Allison, “China and Russia: A Strategic Alliance in the Making,” *The National Interest*, December 14, 2018, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/china-and-russia-strategic-alliance-making-38727>.

97 Andrew E. Kramer and Steven Lee Myers, “Russia, Once a Space Superpower, Turns to China for Missions,” *New York Times*, June 15, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/15/world/asia/china-russia-space.html>.

98 For a discussion on the importance of this developing relationship, see Lucille Greer and Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj, “China and Iran announced a new economic and security partnership. That’s not as alarming as it sounds,” *Washington Post*, April 1, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/04/01/china-iran-announced-new-economic-security-partnership-thats-not-alarming-it-sounds/>. For an overview of China’s diplomatic levels and definitions, see “Quick guide to China’s diplomatic levels,” *South China Morning Post*, January 20, 2016, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/1903455/quick-guide-chinas-diplomatic-levels>.

99 Farnaz Fassihi, “Defying U.S., China and Iran Near Trade and Military Partnership,” *New York Times*, July 11, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/11/world/asia/china-iran-trade-military-deal.html>.

Conclusion

When asked to identify America's most outstanding recent success in architecture and gardening, most observers identify the agreement that halted Iran's advance towards its own nuclear weapon. By aligning every nation in the "P5+1"—the U.S., China, Russia, the UK, France, and Germany—the U.S. forced Iran to negotiate not just with America but with all great powers. By creating a secret, complementary bilateral channel to resolve issues that could not be negotiated in the larger group, the U.S. demonstrated that it was still capable of concluding secret agreements secretly arrived at. By negotiating an agreement that forced Iran to accept an unprecedented level of intrusive inspection, and to reverse its nuclear advance to a point that it would never be closer than a year to a bomb, the U.S. achieved a remarkable success.

On the other hand, because of the depth of toxic partisanship in American domestic politics, a Democratic administration found it impossible to win approval for this treaty in the Senate. Instead, the U.S. was forced to settle for an Executive Agreement rather than a treaty—leaving it vulnerable to the decision by a successor to withdraw. And that, of course, is precisely what happened when Trump took office in 2017.

The lessons this taught both American allies who had worked so hard and made so many compromises to reach the agreement, as well as adversaries whose leaders had paid a significant price in constraining their own programs in order to conclude a deal, will be long lasting. One can hear echoes of other nations' reactions just beneath their official rhetoric in the current attempts to limit greenhouse gas emissions. While their leaders are calculating what they are prepared to pay to reach an agreement with the U.S., they are also taking into account the reality that the best the U.S. can offer is an Executive Order by an administration that may be replaced in 2024 by someone who shares Trump's views on climate. Toxic politics, the division of power among the branches of government, and deep societal divides between Republicans and Democrats have resulted in the United States having to engage in diplomacy while denying itself some of its most effective diplomatic instruments.

After the U.S. victory in the Cold War that led to the liberation of Eastern Europe and reunification of Germany within NATO, and the creation of a grand coalition that successfully defeated Iraq during the Gulf War, as the Commission on American National Interests report cited above concludes: U.S. foreign policy largely lost its way. Illusions about an end of history followed by endless wars in the Middle East and unrealistic ambitions about building stable democracies out of the barrel of a gun “sucked the oxygen out of the political environment,” in the words of former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of State Colin Powell. Diplomacy atrophied.¹⁰⁰ As Robert Gates has explained more clearly than any other recent leader, the military instrument became “a first choice rather than a last resort.”¹⁰¹ The consequence, as Bill Burns explains in his analysis of “The Demolition of American Diplomacy,” is that it will take years to reform the State Department, and even longer to regain America’s influence and reputation.¹⁰²

Moreover, as American diplomacy has been discounted, Beijing has been elevating its diplomats and the role of diplomacy. Yang Jiechi’s appointment to the Politburo at the 19th Party Congress in 2017 signaled unambiguously that diplomacy matters. Xi’s celebration of China’s civilian soldiers as “an important part of our Party’s magnificent history of struggle” has allowed them to stand tall.¹⁰³

After a storied career in the Foreign Service that included serving as Ambassador to South Korea and the Philippines, Steven Bosworth became Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1998. As he told the story, since he was new to university leadership, this consumed most of his waking hours—leaving him little time to think about Asia. Thus in 2009, when President Obama appointed him as the U.S. Special Envoy for North Korea, he made an initial two-week trip across the region meeting with prime ministers and presidents. He returned in a state of shock. The trip was, he as he put it: a “Rip Van Winkle experience.” In his words: in the “olden days”—by which he meant before 1998—when a crisis or issue arose, the first question Asian leaders always asked was: What does Washington think? Today, when something happens, they ask first: “What does Beijing think?”¹⁰⁴

100 “Ideas and Consequences,” *The Atlantic*, October 2007, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/10/ideas-and-consequences/306193/>.

101 Gates, *Exercise of Power*, 8.

102 William J. Burns, “The Demolition of U.S. Diplomacy,” *Foreign Affairs*, October 14, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-10-14/demolition-us-diplomacy>; William J. Burns, “The Lost Art of American Diplomacy.”

103 “The Tip Sheet. China: policy, politics, econ & tech,” *Trivium China*, May 18, 2021, <https://mailchi.mp/f0a3143d9160/caught-in-the-crossfire?e=a6b4941996>.

104 Graham Allison, *Destined for War*.

Reflecting on his own career, China's former State Councilor and special representative to chair the Strategic Track of the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue, Dai Bingguo recalled how rapidly life for Chinese diplomats has changed. "Before the 21st century," he asked, "which major country would agree to enter into a strategic dialogue with China like they do today? None of them! They looked down on you and thought you weren't qualified to enter into strategic dialogue with them."¹⁰⁵

As China's ambitions grow, it will find itself facing more difficult challenges at every layer of diplomacy.¹⁰⁶ As in the economic, technological, and military rivalry, in the diplomatic rivalry, China will find that the road grows steeper. With the Biden administration committed to restoring the best of American diplomacy from earlier periods, the U.S. will also be a more formidable competitor. While U.S. credibility will be more difficult to restore (a third of Europeans still believe Americans "can't be trusted" after electing Trump),¹⁰⁷ in Biden's first year in office, the U.S. rejoined the Paris Agreement and the WHO, hosted a Summit on Climate and on Democracy, held an in-person meeting with the other members of the Quad, launched a new security pact with Australia and the U.K., and invited heads of state from Japan, South Korea, Australia, India, and Germany to Washington.¹⁰⁸ Some of this could be reversed if the administration were to change, however, there is now a solid bipartisan consensus behind vigorous competition with Beijing on all fronts. In sum, as in the other realms of this great rivalry, in diplomacy the watchword for both the U.S. and China is: game on.

105 Martin, *China's Civilian Army*, 184.

106 Shivshankar Menon argues "In the near future, China will have a limited global expeditionary capability to project power and will be able to militarily dominate parts of its own periphery. This could lead to a militarization of China's foreign policy, as has occurred in the United States." See Shivshankar Menon, *India and Asian Geopolitics: The Past, Present*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2021), 314. See also Prophets of an "end of history" who forecast a future in which all nations would embrace democracy and peace would reign beneath McDonald's Golden Arches. As Thomas Friedman wrote in 1996: "When a country has a middle class big enough to support a McDonald's, it becomes a McDonald's country, and people in McDonald's countries don't like to fight wars; they like to wait in line for burgers."

107 See Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard, "The crisis of American power: How Europeans see Biden's America," European Council on Foreign Relations, January 19, 2021, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-crisis-of-american-power-how-europeans-see-bidens-america/>. For more information on the details of U.S. involvement in Asia, see Kevin Rudd, "The Decade of Living Dangerously: The Impact of U.S.-China Strategic Competition on Asia," Asia Society Policy Institute, February 26, 2021, <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/decade-living-dangerously-impact-us-china-strategic-competition-asia>.

108 Lindsay Maizland, "Biden's First Foreign Policy Move: Reentering International Agreements," *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 21, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/bidens-first-foreign-policy-move-reentering-international-agreements>

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