

BELFER CENTER PAPER

Coherence and Comprehensiveness

An American Foreign Policy Imperative

David Petraeus

Philip Caruso



HARVARD Kennedy School

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for Science and International Affairs

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Cover photo: The flag of the People's Republic of China flies on the U.S.S. Ronald Reagan during a port call in Hong Kong, November 21, 2018. (AP / Kin Cheung.)

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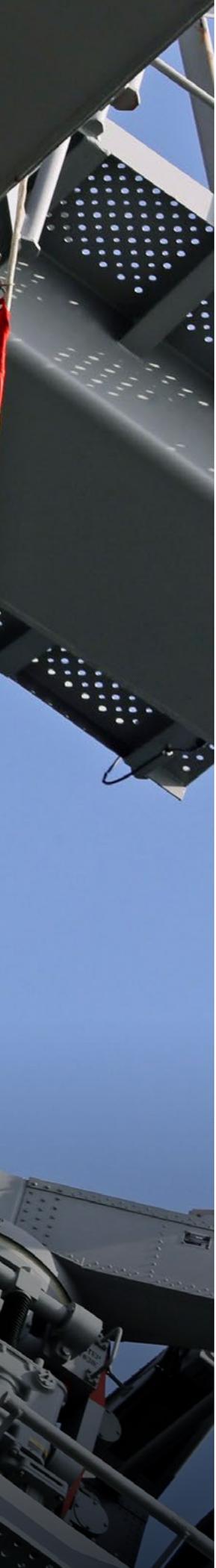
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The flag of the People's Republic of China flies on the U.S.S. Ronald Reagan during a port call in Hong Kong, November 21, 2018.

AP / Kin Cheung



Introduction

Effective American foreign policy is typically both *coherent* and *comprehensive*. It is *coherent* in that it appropriately reflects the United States' most pressing national interests and the priorities assigned to them. And it is *comprehensive* in that it marshals and employs all available tools, leveraging all instruments of national power exercised by U.S. government departments and agencies and, to the extent possible, reinforced by the actions of allied and partner governments, international and non-government organizations, and private sector entities in pursuit of America's policy objectives.

These qualities are advantageous in all American foreign policy activities, but their importance grows in proportion to the scale and complexity of an endeavor—as does the difficulty of achieving them. The U.S.-led western effort during the Cold War, while not without missteps, was an example of a successful American grand strategy whose ultimate success derived in large part due to the coherence and comprehensiveness that characterized U.S. and allied pursuit of it. Conversely, the effort to counter Islamist extremism since September 11, 2001 has been hampered by periodic shortcomings and inconsistencies in these areas (as well as in some of the fundamental policy decisions).

As the United States now confronts the prospect of a multi-faceted and quite possibly generational competition with China—underscored not only by recent Trump Administration public statements but also by the clear emergence of bipartisan support for a firm posture against certain Chinese practices—it is essential that U.S. policymakers take steps to ensure our approach is as coherent and comprehensive as possible. (As we make this point, we offer our hope that the relationship between the U.S. and China, unquestionably the most important in the world, can evolve into one that is mutually beneficial and avoids confrontation.)

The Emergence of U.S. Concerns with China

Multiple factors appear to have prompted the turn in U.S. foreign policy towards China, not the least of which is a sense that hopeful assumptions about certain aspects of China's development have not materialized. Since the U.S. and the People's Republic of China established formal relations in 1972, nearly every U.S. administration has sought to facilitate integration of China into the international system. Underpinning this approach was an assumption that as China became more dependent on international trade and also became more prosperous, it would inevitably become more open, more transparent, and more accommodating to the concerns of other countries. However, there is now bipartisan consensus in the United States that these hopes have not been realized. As former Obama Administration officials Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner **argued** last year in *Foreign Affairs*, "...the record is increasingly clear that Washington....put too much faith in its power to shape China's trajectory."

The tensions that have emerged between the U.S. and China are apparent across the board—in the economic, military, diplomatic, technological, and ideological realms. In the area of trade, an American conviction has hardened that China's rise has been enabled in part by unfair economic practices that Beijing has pursued at the expense of the United States and other industrialized democracies. The Trump Administration has asserted, for example, that China has used tariffs, quotas, currency manipulation, forced technology transfer, IP theft, and domestic subsidies to maximize growth of domestic firms while stifling efforts of many foreign businesses attempting to enter the Chinese market. And non-tariff policies have essentially **excluded** U.S. firms such as Google, Facebook, and Twitter from the Chinese market.

As China has grown more prosperous, it has also increasingly focused its national wealth in ways that threaten to upend the balance of military power in the Indo-Pacific and challenge the underlying tenets of the rules-based order that has guided the region. The specific military capabilities that China has prioritized suggest an intention to neutralize the ability of the U.S. to project power into the Indo-Pacific region and to hold at risk U.S. assets

and bases there, believing that such assets seek not just to ensure freedom of navigation but to limit Chinese activities. According to a recent Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) **report** on Chinese Military Power, “China . . . believes that U.S. military presence and U.S.-led security architecture in Asia seeks to constrain China’s rise and interfere with China’s sovereignty, particularly in a Taiwan conflict scenario and in the East and South China Seas.”¹

While developing the capabilities to combat the United States in an armed conflict, China has increasingly deployed its growing military assets in ways that have heightened tensions not just with the U.S., but with many of China’s neighbors across the Indo-Pacific, including U.S. treaty allies and strategic partners. China has **disregarded** international law and militarized islands it has constructed in the waters of the South China Sea, despite promises not to do so, while making increasingly muscular moves against Japanese-held islands in the East China Sea. The Chinese Coast Guard—recently **absorbed** into the People’s Liberation Army—has also increasingly sought to intimidate its neighbors’ vessels in recent years. And China’s increasingly assertive deployments of its submarines, bombers, and surface vessels beyond the first island chain and into the Indian Ocean, together with the growth of its space and cyberspace offensive capabilities, have further heightened the concerns of countries not just in the region, but beyond it, as well.

The U.S. government has also highlighted international political and diplomatic actions by the Chinese government that appear intended to challenge the U.S. and to undermine U.S.-led international institutions. While some of this may be the reasonable actions of an emerging superpower, it is clear that the Trump Administration sees much of it as more than that. In a speech last fall, Vice President Pence **cited** China’s “whole-of-government approach” to advance its influence at the expense of the United States regionally and globally. Regionally, the Trump Administration has accused Beijing of **undercutting** international attempts to pressure North Korea to denuclearize by **only** selectively enforcing U.S., UN, and international sanctions on the North. China has also consistently worked to supplant the U.S. presence in the Indo-Pacific. According to a recent DIA **report**, “Since at least the 1990’s, Beijing has repeatedly communicated its preference to move away from the U.S.-led regional security system and has pursued its own regional security initiatives in support of what it views as a natural transition to regional predominance.”²

Additionally, China has sought to increase its influence in a variety of regions—including Africa, the South Pacific, and Latin America—ostensibly for commercial reasons, though its actions also signal broad geopolitical ambitions and, in some cases, undermine the integrity of important international institutions. Vice President Pence, for example, disparaged so-called Chinese “debt diplomacy” nourished via Chinese-led **initiatives** such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank that indicate China would rather create alternative international institutions of its own than become a “**responsible stakeholder**” in the existing international system. One can, again, contend that many of China’s actions are merely the actions of a rapidly growing global power; however, the assertiveness of many of those actions indicate a lack of appreciation for the resulting concerns in the region and globally.

The U.S. government has also singled out human rights abuses of what it contends is an increasingly **authoritarian** Chinese government stewarded by the Chinese Communist Party, especially since the elevation of President Xi. Specifically, Vice President Pence was sharply critical of the Chinese Communist Party **crackdown** on organized religion. And at the APEC Summit, he **noted** that the Party failed to observe “certain inalienable rights” such as “freedom of speech, private property, and the freedom of religion” and suggested denial of such rights correlated with Chinese contempt for those rights protected by other nations.

Lastly, the Trump Administration has accused China of mounting a state-led propaganda campaign to sow seeds of division among the U.S. population. The allegation follows Chinese newspaper **advertising** in Iowa—a politically significant state—about its perspective on the trade war that has exacerbated public furor over foreign **interference** in domestic elections. The Chinese government has also **pressured** dissidents and critics, even those living in liberal democracies like the U.S., through Party-funded organizations like the Confucius Institute and the Chinese Students and Scholars Association.

The result of all these developments has led many lawmakers in Washington and elsewhere to conclude that long-term efforts to build a constructive relationship with a China integrated into the international system currently appear more aspirational than realistic.

The Trump Administration Response to China

In its responses to China, the U.S. has not yet implemented a sufficiently coherent, consistent, and comprehensive approach to advance its foreign policy objectives, though it has taken some steps that could be part of a coherent approach. That notwithstanding, it is clear that current and future U.S. administrations would be well-served to take further steps to achieve a more comprehensive and coherent foreign policy that reflects U.S. priorities and acts to achieve them with all available tools.

To be fair, there have been some promising steps in recent years. First, despite various missteps, the Trump Administration has moved to reinforce key political and diplomatic relationships crucial to U.S. foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific. And with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo at its helm, the State Department has improved policy development on China as well as its implementation. For example, at a dinner last fall of G7 finance ministers that was hosted by both Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin and Secretary Pompeo, the two secretaries discussed Treasury-State alignment on U.S.-China policy and expressed solidarity with the G7 regarding the cessation of internal disputes in favor of forming a united front on China.³ The U.S. has also expanded ties with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) by **securing** a joint U.S.-Singapore cybersecurity program for ASEAN nations and **creating** a U.S.-ASEAN Smart Cities Partnership to build modern digital infrastructure. In addition, the State Department has implemented governance **programs** like the \$400 million Indo-Pacific Transparency Initiative to promote shared interests of justice, transparency, and independence.

The U.S. has also begun to resolve some trade disputes and demonstrate the importance of strategic economic relationships that play a key role in addressing China. The U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) is a significant achievement; notably, it includes a **provision** allowing signatories to withdraw from the agreement if any party pursues a free trade agreement with a “nonmarket” country like China. Use of “**fast track**” Trade Promotion Authority on a potential U.S.- European Union (EU)

trade agreement—despite American disputes with European trading partners—has created optimism for progress with that key market and for the prospect of **coordinated** pressure on China. In the Indo-Pacific, the administration has **initiated** trade negotiations with Japan, putting the U.S. on course to alleviate tension with a key ally there. The U.S. has reduced risk to bilateral relations with South Korea with the refined U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement. And at the APEC Summit, Vice President Pence indicated the U.S. is negotiating a **new free trade agreement** with an unnamed APEC member nation.

Working with Congress, the administration has also created initial development and infrastructure investment alternatives to China. It **doubled** U.S. infrastructure financing available under the **BUILD Act** to \$60 billion and has **partnered** with Japan to invest \$10 billion in the region's energy infrastructure. The U.S. has also **partnered** with Australia and Japan to support private investment and development projects, such as the **Pacific Region Infrastructure Facility**, in the Pacific Islands and across the Indo-Pacific. In Africa, the administration has **developed** the “Prosper Africa” initiative to provide quality investment projects and encouraged African leaders to choose U.S. assistance over China. Together, these efforts are important **first steps** to “give the nations of the Indo-Pacific a better option to support infrastructure projects.”

Furthermore, despite its seemingly inward “America First” focus, the administration has also acted to assert U.S. national security interests that demonstrate its resolve to China and other adversaries. The U.S. military has **increased** freedom of navigation operations in support of international law and has **planned** and conducted large-scale shows of force to demonstrate capabilities in the region. The U.S. and Australia have pledged to **develop** a joint naval base in Papua New Guinea in response to Chinese militarization of the South China Sea. As a demonstration of military cooperation and joint capability, the U.S. Navy recently concluded major naval **exercises** with India and Japan, and the U.S. has moved to expand **military aid** to its partners. In fact, 2018 U.S. Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to Indo-Pacific countries exceeded that of the past three years combined, and U.S. funding and **support** to the Philippines proved key in its fight with terrorists in Mindanao in the past two years. Importantly, the

U.S. has **funded** the Defense Department substantially more than was the case under the previous administration, as well, thereby increasing the pace of weapons acquisitions critical to power projection in the Indo-Pacific. These various efforts have begun to set the tone for continued engagement in the Indo-Pacific and to shore up deterrence in the region.

In its first 20 months, the Trump Administration also took actions in the Middle East, South and Central Asia, and Eastern Europe that strengthened the credibility of its strategic messaging in the Indo-Pacific. It directed two **strikes** against the Assad regime in Syria after the regime ignored U.S. **warnings** not to use chemical weapons, demonstrating its resolve to take action against behavior contrary to international laws and norms. It augmented U.S. troops whose presence is key to stability in **Iraq**, **Syria**, and **Afghanistan**, delegated decision-making authority to appropriate levels, and removed some restrictions on the use of airpower in active conflict zones—all contributing to enhanced military effectiveness. It further validated its willingness to deter adversaries by **expanding** the Obama-era European Reassurance Initiative, **delivering** lethal anti-tank weapons to the Ukrainian military, and deploying U.S. fighter **aircraft** to Ukraine for the first time in history to promote regional stability. These actions, combined with enhanced U.S. military readiness and public indications of political will to confront China, demonstrated that military aggression is not an advantageous or acceptable path for China to pursue. Altogether, these actions contributed to a sense that the U.S. would not retreat from the Indo-Pacific or cede regional security leadership to the Chinese Communist Party.

More recently, however, these messages were undermined by apparently uncoordinated decisions to draw down forces in **Syria** and **Afghanistan**. When President Trump **tweeted** “. . . it is now time to bring our troops back home. Stop the ENDLESS WARS!” he signaled his apparent inclination for a U.S. military drawdown abroad. Moreover, the Trump Administration has decreased emphasis on security cooperation with partners around the world, having **requested** \$1 billion less year-over-year in Foreign Military Financing for FY19. And the Trump Administration continues to provoke disputes with key allies such as **South Korea** and **Germany** over the costs of maintaining forward U.S. military presence.

The recent implementation of a Trans-Pacific Partnership without the U.S. is also a stark reminder of the lost opportunity to strengthen strategic U.S. relationships and geopolitical influence in the Indo-Pacific region—one that cannot easily or swiftly be addressed by bilateral agreements to regain the ground lost.

In short, U.S. foreign policy with respect to China continues to be undermined by disagreements over trade with economic partners worldwide, diplomatic spats with allies and adversaries alike, and questioning of commitments to critical alliances and strategic relationships—as well as to continued U.S. leadership of the so-called rules-based international order. Hence, although the U.S. has taken some solid steps forward, they fall short of what is needed to focus effectively on the challenges posed by China to the U.S. and its economic partners.

Developing a Coherent Foreign Policy

Given its determination to challenge China, the U.S. must take significant additional steps to develop a truly coherent foreign policy that reflects the priorities it identified in its 2017 [National Security Strategy](#). The U.S. must close ranks with allies and partner nations and purposefully leverage these relationships to forge a unified front capable of influencing and steering China towards a sustainable, constructive relationship with the U.S. and America's partners while deterring provocative military actions and abuses of global trade. Indeed, the U.S. can pursue its interests only by working in concert with allies and other partners on every continent, but most importantly across the Indo-Pacific and Eurasia.

To address China in the Indo-Pacific, the U.S. must seek to strengthen political, economic, and security-based coalitions and relationships with allies and partners like Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, and India. The U.S. needs to resolve various trade disputes with traditional allies and partners that threaten otherwise beneficial and critical diplomatic, security, and economic relationships. This may require accepting trade [deficits](#) with allies like [Japan](#), allowing some allied government economic policies that subsidize and protect specific domestic industries—such as the USMCA's [allowance](#) for Canada's ability to protect its dairy industry with quotas and tariffs—and tolerating or quietly pursuing modifications to protectionist regulation like India's recent e-commerce [rules](#) that make it difficult for U.S. companies to compete. Beyond that, the U.S. should, ideally, return to the Trans-Pacific Partnership to shape the trade environment in which China operates, increase pressure on China to further reform its economy, and open new markets for the U.S.; if a return to TPP is not possible, swift conclusion of bilateral negotiations should be pursued on an urgent basis.

With the assistance of the Congress, the U.S. must also further demonstrate its commitment to mutual defense by more substantially helping to facilitate the modernization of allied militaries and maximizing joint military readiness with regular training exercises. Specifically, this means more training exercises, more arms sales—including enhanced [FMF](#) appropriations by Congress expanded to additional Indo-Pacific countries and implemented by the State

Department under Title 22 authorities—and, for less fiscally capable allies, the **provision** of more U.S. equipment through the **Excess Defense Articles** program. The vastness of the Indo-Pacific and the requirement to maintain a strong presence make the sale and provision of aircraft and naval vessels to allies a fiscally-attractive method to enhance our influence. The U.S. military can also expand its advisory efforts at senior levels to help partner militaries focus on developing capabilities such as intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance that will augment capacities of coalition partners in areas where they face the largest resource constraints.

These efforts should also fill gaps in Indo-Pacific security by strengthening defense relationships with numerous small countries, Pacific Islands, and nations with which the U.S. has not historically had strong security ties but where common interests are emerging. These relationships can be fostered by new rotational force training deployments, invitations to send delegations to RIMPAC and other exercises, and increased **International Military Education & Training** funding. The U.S. should, in particular, expand military relationships with countries like Vietnam and others in Southeast Asia to safeguard freedom of navigation in the South and East China Seas while seeking to dissuade China from overly assertive military behavior. Considering the economic realities (in which China figures most prominently for most of the countries in the region) that many nations must reconcile with their security interests, the U.S. needs to work hard to enlist partners to shape productive dialogue and security partnerships while also contending with economic realities.

A strong relationship between the U.S. and Europe is also of obvious importance to bolstering the international system and incentivizing China to play a responsible role within it rather than undermining or challenging it. U.S. leaders—the President, foremost among them—must bridge the divide that has opened across the Atlantic Ocean by refraining from excessive public criticism of European leaders and by seeking to resolve disagreements through productive diplomatic discourse. We must reduce the divide between the U.S. and key European allies that was so apparent at the Munich Security Conference in February 2019. The U.S. should start by articulating a clear and uncompromising commitment to NATO by emphasizing the strategic value created by the alliance rather than engaging in undue further public condemnation of deficiencies in how much

individual countries spend on defense (as real as those deficiencies may be). The U.S. should, furthermore, demonstrate a commitment to free market values by resolving trade disagreements with the EU that impede stronger economic ties and feed the nationalistic messaging of European opponents of the U.S. Lastly, the U.S. must enlist strong EU support on a joint and focused agenda to incentivize Chinese cooperation with the West on economic, diplomatic, and security issues, especially those in the tech arena as increasing concerns about the integrity of supply chains surface.

The U.S. must more closely embrace the developing world, as well—beyond the Trump Administration’s recent outreach in the Indo-Pacific and part of Central America—by offering economic and political alternatives to Chinese incentives while highlighting the virtue of the western-led international system. For example, the U.S. could emulate Japan’s historically effective outreach articulating “**quality infrastructure**” investment that brings multiple factors—environmental and social impact, debt sustainability, safety, local employment and technical expertise— to bear in its projects and partnerships with other countries. U.S. development programs like the BUILD Act are valuable initiatives in the effort to counter China in the Indo-Pacific, but with additional appropriations from Congress, the U.S. must apply them more broadly to Africa, Asia, and Latin America where Chinese development has expanded. Moreover, the U.S. must enhance the capacity of the U.S. Export-Import Bank, which performs numerous functions key to development finance. By expanding infrastructure development programs in tandem with mutually beneficial trade agreements, the U.S. can cement long-term economic relationships in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

To reinforce these relationships, the administration must deploy a robust and fully resourced State Department that can exert U.S. influence around the world on issues core to U.S. interests. This engagement is crucial to build consensus and emphasize Western values relative to the authoritarian Chinese Communist Party that has repressed its citizens, violated human rights, and eschewed numerous international norms. Diplomatic outreach is also paramount to resolving minor disputes with partner nations and acting as a bulwark against continued Chinese pressure on Taiwan. The Administration should shore up diplomatic capability by filling vacancies at State with experienced regional experts as expeditiously as possible, attracting a new generation

of high-quality foreign service officers, and empowering them to engage counterparts on a range of issues on which China has taken center stage. Together, these efforts can help ensure viable alternatives to the inexorable spread of Chinese economic and political influence.

For the U.S. to compete with a “state capitalist” government like China—in which the government maintains strong influence and, in some cases, significant control over the business activities of state-owned enterprises and private companies abroad—it must build strong partnerships with the private sector and leverage it to maintain U.S. influence abroad. The BUILD Act created a new development finance institution (DFI) called the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, which will “crowd-in” private sector investment in developing countries by lending to private sector projects, providing insurance or reinsurance, and providing technical assistance.

This is a good step in the right direction; however, the U.S. government must partner further with DFIs in allied countries to coordinate joint projects and bring more resources to bear in developing countries where competition with Chinese investment is most significant and most important. The U.S. government must identify profitable projects of interest to the private sector, aggressively seek out private sector partners to implement these projects, and protect against local corruption while executing development. It should stimulate investment in small and medium enterprises thus far neglected by China. And the U.S. government must help U.S. technology and telecommunications companies as they seek to sell their products abroad. If China is unwilling to reduce its subsidies and government support to private companies working on 5G technology—a key issue in the U.S.-China trade dispute—the U.S. government can help set 5G standards, further fund 5G technology development, and coordinate the 5G rollout in the U.S., while offering the technology to apprehensive allies as an alternative to Chinese companies such as Huawei and ZTE. In addition, the U.S. government must reduce regulatory barriers to private sector companies in allied countries and work with allies and partners on joint industrial base challenges to remove Chinese components from U.S. and allied defense supply chains.

Lastly, the U.S. government must partner with the private sector—in addition to the Commerce Department’s recent draft **export controls** on sensitive technology—to properly safeguard intellectual property and critical infrastructure from theft, cybertheft, and attack. These actions will reduce vulnerabilities and deliver business opportunities to U.S. and allied private sector companies.

U.S. leaders must also invest more at home by financing infrastructure projects that enable greater productivity, promoting sustained innovation, maintaining a strong national defense, and encouraging political compromise in ways that showcase the virtue of democratic governance. The U.S. must strengthen its core economic foundation by renewing its infrastructure, bringing fiscal deficits under control, and developing a rational immigration policy to meet the **needs** of various U.S. sectors from agriculture to technology. The U.S. must also continue and advance its technological leadership by improving education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, and by investing in research and development in key areas such as artificial intelligence, robotics, aerospace, renewable energy, biotechnology, and pharmaceuticals. In addition, the U.S. should ensure military readiness to fight the wars of the future, including in space and cyberspace, to maintain effective deterrence against Chinese aggression. Notwithstanding the ramifications for U.S.-Russia relations of the U.S. withdrawal from the Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaty, now that the decision has been made, the U.S. can counter Chinese intermediate range missile threats by developing **capabilities** of its own. And by reaching across the aisle to resolve political differences rather than pursuing divisive politics, U.S. leaders of all political orientations can make the most compelling case for other countries to follow the U.S. lead. While this is obviously a very substantial and ambitious list of endeavors, pursuing them will further the most important elements of U.S. foreign policy by ensuring strong domestic foundations for engagement overseas.

The U.S. must also acknowledge great power competition as it exists and manage tension, rather than stoke it, by forging a strategic dialogue with China. The U.S. should hold firm with respect to our vital national interests while avoiding provocative actions with China. Instead, we must strive to resolve disagreements with China before they metastasize into military conflict or all-out trade war, while ensuring that China clearly recognizes the

interests of paramount importance to the U.S. This requires regular communication between U.S. and Chinese military officials, economic policymakers, trade representatives, diplomats, and other senior leaders. The U.S. should carefully modulate its rhetoric on China to encourage cooperation rather than conflict, while again conveying firm resolve. Strategic communications must be part of a coordinated campaign—with involvement by all relevant U.S. and allied stakeholders—to maximize transparency, prevent uncertainty, and convey clear messages to Chinese leaders.

Finally, in order to maximize cooperation with China through strategic dialogue, the U.S. must simultaneously maintain its currently firm stance on Chinese trade, foreign influence, and military activity while providing economic, political, and military “off ramps” that allow the Party and its leaders to avoid erosion of their domestic support. Ultimately, the U.S. must emphasize that China’s smoothest path to continued growth and prosperity leverages shared interests to forge a productive relationship that benefits both parties. These interests include global economic growth, mitigating climate change, promoting maritime safety and security of key shipping lanes, countering extremism, preventing nuclear proliferation, protecting intellectual property, and combating piracy on the high seas. To align U.S. and Chinese policy toward global economic growth, the U.S. must underscore the benefits of China continuing market-driven reforms that have served the country well since its opening in 1978. To that end, China should end unfair subsidies to Chinese industries, remove non-tariff barriers to foreign businesses (including unneeded licensing and regulatory requirements), and stop forcing technology transfer by foreign businesses. Additionally, as the world’s largest economies, the U.S. and China share a unique power to coordinate efforts to mitigate climate change and the destabilizing aspects of it that dialogue can best enable. The U.S. should also create a mechanism to facilitate multilateral engagement between China, the U.S., and U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific to open lines of communication that will ensure stability vital to Chinese economic activity rather than destabilizing military activity.

The U.S. and its partners should advocate for all militaries, including the People’s Liberation Army, to operate according to rules of engagement that **mitigate risk** of military confrontation rather than intensify it. And the unique diplomatic and political influence the U.S. and China share in the international

community position both nations to work together against the growing threat of extremist activity in Southeast Asia and beyond. Through such dialogue, the U.S. and its allies can pursue core objectives and protect vital national interests while minimizing risk of unnecessary escalation that poses harm to both sides.

Conclusion

In today's ever more complex global environment, the U.S. can achieve its objectives only by leveraging its strength through a coherent foreign policy that employs all tools available. To formulate and execute a coherent, comprehensive foreign policy that responds to the challenges posed by China, the U.S. must reinforce and deliberately cultivate productive relationships with our allies, partners, and fellow nations with shared interests. The U.S. and its partners must offer attractive political, economic, and security alternatives to China's influence in the Indo-Pacific, Africa, and beyond. Simultaneously, the U.S. must maintain a productive strategic dialogue with China that will communicate clearly significant U.S. concerns and also help American leaders understand Chinese interests and objectives. Together, these efforts can help dissuade China from what the U.S. sees as unacceptable behavior, reduce uncertainty and risk of miscalculation, and, hopefully, encourage and enable China to become a constructive participant in the international system. The goal, after all, is that the most important relationship in the world, that between the U.S. and China, should be mutually beneficial and constructive, not a zero-sum game.

Endnotes

- 1 Defense Intelligence Agency, *China Military Power (January 2019)*, p. 9.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 According to a source briefed by administration officials, these events occurred at a dinner on 11/30/2018 at the G20 Summit.



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